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Adventure

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2 Complete Novelettes

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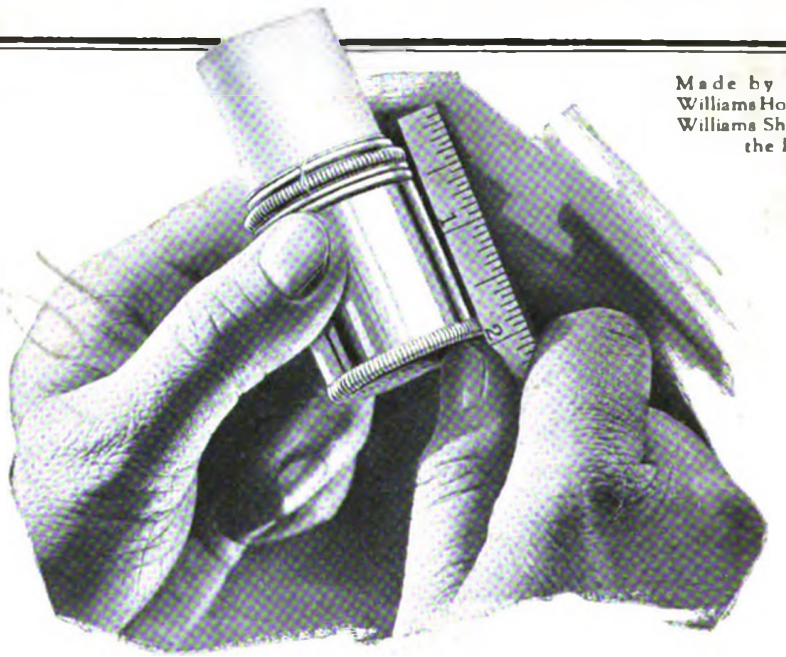

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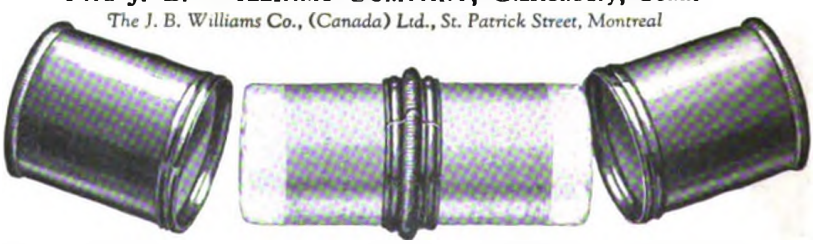

Williams Doublecap Shaving Stick

Adventure

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Contents for September 10th, 1924, Issue

"Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.

(Continued on next page)

(*Continued from preceding page*)

One New Serial, Two Complete Novelettes

"GOLD," said the Anzac to the Yank. "But a gang of Myalls came out of the lava holes and chased us away from it with spears. Will you go back and help me find it?" The Yank would, because he had "GO-FEVER." J. Allan Dunn's three-part story of Australia begins in the next issue.

HELD up, robbed of seven thousand dollars, his cattle killed, outlawed, *Dick Williams* still had the nerve to stick to his ranch and dam. "POWER," a complete novelette of the West, by E. S. Pladwell, in the next issue.

"*THE PLUMBER*" goes overseas to win the war in France. "A HEARTY MEAL," a complete novelette by Leonard H. Nason in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

***Adventure* is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**

Adventure

September 10, 1924
Volume XLVIII No 4

Dead Red Ants

by Joel Townsley Rogers

A Complete Novel—

Author of "The Fool-Killer," "Mail for the Whirlwind," etc.

ONCE was a night of white moon, the night when on Admiral Towne and Jack Skiff the terrible form of Stone Doane came crawling from out deep ocean waters. Once was a night of rain, the night when death first struck at Admiral Towne. Nights of white moon and of rain. So came the night of rain——

Heavily came the black storm over the late twilight sky. Northwestward up the river, over the city, smoky nimbus clouds rolled headlong, curtaining the ultimate purple light of day. When the cloud-fringe had reached Washington Monument the lower Potomac already threshed with rain, and when it was above the white mosque-like dome of the Naval Observatory, the monument could not be seen. Afar and away was thunder, like the hoarse, insensate barking of rustic dogs.

Admiral Towne smelled the storm wind blowing up. A belated sea-plane, flying far inland, beat southward over the city. At first sound it was out of sight. Steep through clouds it dived, and a thousand feet up leveled out in sight. The wind held it motionless. It buzzed like a great angry bumblebee against a window-pane, beating interminably against the impassable wind. Cloud past cloud enwrapped it. Admiral Towne, who had earned his aviator's wings, stood and stared at the misty ship.

Like a kite the sea-plane strained without motion, while clouds scurried about it. Swiftly it swooped down, seeking a less stormy level. So steep it dropped with its deafening roar that it seemed in a second about to crash on the city street.

"*Hurooml Hroom! Hroom!*" screamed its terrible song.

In the last tenth-second, not fifty feet above Towne's head, it leveled, and fled down Connecticut Avenue with incredible velocity. Between the walls of buildings, over the crests of storm-quivering trees, across Lafayette Park and the White House, it went like a cannon-shot. It rocked in pockets of wind.

Then the black rain, the south brought up, swallowed it. For a time the admiral thought he heard, out of that rumbling storm, her faint *hurroom-hrooming!* yet. Now she must be over the Potomac. Now nearing the Anacostia flats. That faint cry was the soughing wind. The southeast night, which had devoured the sea-plane, bellowed hungrily. Again it bellowed, showing teeth of lightning.

Was it Jack Skiff flying so cunningly in that boat which the storm had eaten? Skiff was a coward, thought Admiral Towne; Skiff's heart was dead in him, and he would never fly, like a hawk of foul weather, through the thunder and the rain.

Towne remained standing on the avenue long after all sound of the sea-plane was gone. In the boat's sharp dive toward him Admiral Towne had clearly seen, painted on the war-gray bow, the insignia of a large ant in brilliant crimson. Some old sea-planes still carried their war-insignia. Towne recalled there had been a patrol-squadron flying from the Irish coast which had borne the painted battle-sign of a red ant with its pincers opened.

Meditatively Admiral Towne wiped his forehead, wiped his gray-streaked beard. How swift and dark those wings had passed over him, like the wings of the Shadow Angel which brings death! The sight of that battle-sign in the sky recalled to old Admiral Towne memory of a woman to whom he had brought death.

IN THE Army and Navy Club Towne halted a few minutes. He called up the Anacostia air station, asking about the boat which had flown over him.

"Cable flying with a civilian," the officer of the day informed Towne. "Yes, sir, they came in O. K. Made a power landing in the rain. Yes, sir, she's an old boat—used to be on the Irish patrol."

Towne emerged to resume his swift walk up Connecticut Avenue. The threatening rain held off. Towne trusted he could beat it out, though black clouds covered all the city by now, and the rain had advanced as far west as the Capitol.

Whorls of wind tossed down the streets, with a curious, strained *huf! huf!* like the angry inhalations of some huge, black, mammoth monster. Little cyclonic vortices of dust and rubble caught the tall form of the admiral, flapping his uniform about him. He found it difficult to catch his breath, for continually the unseen hand of the wind snatched the very air away from his face, leaving a stifling vacuum.

He strode more rapidly. At Dupont circle he turned off obliquely on to the dark, leaf-roofed stretch of New Hampshire Avenue. The thunder swooped down, growling and muttering. Towne could with difficulty make out houses half a block away. Street lamps had not yet been illumined. Over the avenue sturdy elms were interlaced in an almost complete canopy, so that the whole dark avenue looked like a tunnel, with its end that dreadful place of immortality where it is hoped no admiral will ever go. Apparently on this dark avenue Admiral Towne walked alone.

Sharp, loud bullets of the rain began to splatter on the leaves overhead. Towne stopped to look at his wrist-watch. The hour was almost seven-thirty.

Furtive motor-cars with curtains drawn, isinglass windows shimmering opaquely, fled past him down the street. No human being could be seen in them. Like great dark leaping lizards they rushed away. And then, on that silent and untraversed avenue, somewhere behind Admiral Towne arose the rapid tapping trot of another storm-threatened pedestrian, hurrying frantically and breathlessly from nowhere into nowhere. Though the admiral turned around, as any sensible man does when he walks alone at night and hears another man behind, he could see no one.

A cat suddenly leaped from beneath Towne's feet, and scurried across the sidewalk. The man heard the rapid scratching of its claws; and then it was on the grass of a lawn. So black was the night the bewitched feline shape had no color, but seemed black like the night. Heavily, all about, old trees groaned. Piercing through the tree boughs above, upon Towne's face struck the first hot pellets of the rain.

The footsteps of that unseen man, who had been hurrying frantically behind, were no longer audible. He had by now arrived at some safe refuge from the rain, or he was creeping on silent tiptoes, or he was running on the padded grass beside the walk. Only a few rods ahead of himself Admiral Towne saw lights beaming from the house of Jack Skiff, where he was

expected. The night seemed to be left to the rain and to him.

Abruptly from the overloaded roof of leaves the deluge of rain poured down. Thunder smashed the avenue from side to side, with salvos of echoes. The rain poured fully, as water from a bottomless bucket. The tall admiral put his arm across his eyes, bowed and temporarily blinded by this crashing flood of black water.

Thunder bellowed again. On an oily spot of the cement walk Towne's foot slipped and he staggered to the side. In this instant the false step undoubtedly saved his life.

Staggering with his head bent, his arm before his face, a terrific blow smashed down on Towne's forehead and upraised arm. A blow like the cracking of the world. In the piercing flashes of pain shooting through his brain, in the sudden giddy crumpling of all his limbs, Towne thought it was the tall thunder which had struck him. He reeled aside, crashed through a hedge, and fell prone on flooded grass, giving a loud cry.

It was even as he toppled, and all his strength knocked out of him, that Towne realized his blind fists, thrusting out in instinctive protection against a repetition of that murderous blow, had brushed against shrinking human flesh. And there was like the whisper of the black wind the whisper of murderous exultation—

"The Red Ant!"

WHAT was it? What was this whispered word about the Red Ant, who assuredly was dead, if death is anything?

The rain was warm over all Towne's body. It laved him to perpetual consciousness, exploring each nerve with warm, seeping trickles. As he lay there, face-down in the soggy grass, the admiral felt time slacken and stand still above him, so that a second was forever. Strangely sharpened and alert, his senses perceived each pulsation of the rain, each infinitesimal creaking of the night. He heard distinctly the separate rain drop which battered the thin grass blade. He heard the quiet ant burrowing deep underground.

All his senses were incredibly keen, yet his limbs made no more response to his desire than if they were paralyzed. He would have been helpless at any blow struck down on him again. Admiral Towne had seen dead men in many battles, and he thought that dead men must feel as he felt now, lying without motion but intensely conscious upon the grass within the rain.

Slowly his forehead began to throb with a regularity like a clock, and Towne felt that his whole skull was being alternately filled with tides of blood and emptied. His right arm, which had broken the force of the blow upon his temple, beat with a heavy pain. It was not death then which had struck him, for in death there is no pain.

It was not a minute that he lay there, nor a half of that. Then Admiral Towne heard down the street a curious halting sound. *Slip-klop! slip-klop!* that uneven sound pattered, irritating and inexplicable. Towne thought it must be the hurried footsteps of a man who ran with one foot on the sidewalk and one on the grass. Yes, it was a man running toward him. Out of the nowhere and the night, running haltingly toward him through the slopping rain. Sharp on the walk, and muffled on the grass, Towne heard that uneven thud of running feet. He writhed in his struggle to get up.

Over the grass toward him the padded footsteps came. A strong, steady hand pressed on Towne's shoulder. The admiral quivered over his whole length. He felt blood surge back through his body. He pulled himself to his knees and hands, shaking his buzzing head, trembling with nervous exhaustion. Rain washed down his nose and leaked into his beard.

The man of the limping footsteps was kneeling beside Towne. The fallen man heard harsh gasps, and a kind of repressed groaning.

"Alive!" gasped the man of the limping footsteps.

Towne's cap, which had fallen from his head, was clamped in place with sudden force. Rain which had collected in it cascaded before Towne's eyes.

"Well, it's Admiral Towne! You're hurt! What's happened, sir?"

The admiral shook his head. He was still crouching on palms and knees, his head hanging a trifle, the very picture of a shaggy Irish wolfhound. He shook the giddiness from his eyes and brain. Slowly he turned his face around, to stare at the man who knelt beside him.

Close to Towne's face in the rainy darkness, intently observing him, was a man with a round head, with thin round nose, strong round jaw and inward-bitten lips. The head showed both strength and intelligence. The man had doffed his hat. His face streamed with beads of rain.

Where Towne had seen this man before he could not quite remember. He had an obscured memory-image, sharp but fading, of a rolling midnight ocean, of guns which belched and shook and reeked, of search-lights stabbing restless waters. A memory-image of this same strong head, this same stern visage, crawling piratically up out of the restless midnight waters on to the plunging deck of a ship.

The man of the limping footsteps had a way of looking which was almost diabolic. As Admiral Towne thrust his face forward to observe more closely, he perceived the man's eyes were not alike. One eye was dark and half-closed, and blinked repeatedly against the rain; while the other eye was pale and hard and blue, and was opened wide. The dark, blinking eye was fixed on Towne with some anxiety. The pale eye stared over Towne's shoulder at some darkness beyond, filled with a large vision of nothingness.

"Who are you?" muttered Admiral Towne.

"You are all right, admiral?"

"Who are you, man? —— take me, I know your face!"

"Why, sir, I'm only the chief clerk in your bureau," said the man quietly. "You know me, sir—Stone Doane."

"Oh, yes, Doane. Of course, Doane. I hadn't noticed before, your eyes— Well, by George, for a moment I had a curious fancy— Thank you! Thank you, Doane. Just let me feel my legs a bit. Of course I remember you—you're the fellow who limps."

In lifting Admiral Towne up, Doane had staggered. One leg seemed somewhat longer than the other. Stone Doane offered his shoulder for support, but old Towne waved him off.

"You're the cripple, not I. I'll stand on my own pins."

"I'm not a cripple," Doane muttered.

"I didn't mean it that way."

"What happened, sir?"

Admiral Towne shook his head. He slapped and pinched himself all over.

"Some —— thug must have tried to lay me out. By George, he gave me a crack! Struck me without warning. Smashed me down without a word."

"What could have been the idea?" asked Doane.

"Can't imagine. But let me lay my hands on him!" threatened Towne, catching at Doane's shoulder to steady himself. "Let me lay my hands on him, and I'll break every bone in his neck!"

"What did he look like, sir? You'd better tell the police at once."

Admiral Towne drew back in alarm.

"Didn't see the fellow at all," he said. "No, sir, no police! Every snipe newspaper fellow would be running after me. I don't want anything of that sort. Don't say anything about this, Doane!"

"Well, sir——"

"Not a word!"

The admiral tugged angrily at his wet beard, that dark reddish-gray beard which had made him famed as "Beaver" Towne on every sea which floats a battle-ship. He straightened his broad shoulders. Except for a contusion on his temple and a numbness in his right arm, he seemed to have suffered no evil from that blow which had struck him down in the stormy night.

The heavy shower was cracking up and rolling off in thunder. Trees still dripped, and floods rushed down the gutters of New Hampshire Avenue. The air was fresh and clearer. It cut deeply at rain-soaked bones.

"Odd I didn't recognize you at first, Doane," said Towne. "I've been at my office, working late. A little tired from that, I suppose; and that infernal crack knocked things out of me for a minute. But I remember you as the fellow who limps. Odd I didn't recognize you."

"I'd not expect you to recognize me, sir," said Stone Doane with proper humility. "I'm only a clerk. If I can help you now——"

"No. No, thanks. My legs are probably better than yours. Only a step more for me to go, to Commander Skiff's house there. I'm all right. You'd better hurry on home yourself, young man, and strip off that wet gear, or you'll catch pneumonia."

"I've been in worse water than this, sir," said Stone Doane, turning his head a trifle, so his pale, hard eye was on old Towne. "And I'm not yet drowned."

"Born to be hanged?" suggested the admiral with a deep laugh. "Well, take care of yourself, young man!"

Doane watched the admiral as he strode sturdily along, a tall and arrogant old sea-king. Then Towne turned left into the gaudily lighted doorway of Commander Jack Skiff's house, not at all conscious, surely, that he was threatened with the uttermost evil.

STANDING erect and motionless, heels pressed together, his head set back confidently on sturdy shoulders, Doane watched the admiral arrive at his destination and disappear. Then he stooped, and limped about the walk and the lawn where Towne had fallen, searching to see if he could find the bludgeon which had beaten the strong old man down.

He straightened up abruptly. He had heard light steps pattering up behind him. A small, thin man was halted there at his shoulder.

"Excuse me—wasn't that Admiral Towne?" the man asked timidly.

The pale left eye of Stone Doane was closed, and with one half-opened eye he looked the interrogator over. Doane was standing in shadow, so darkness was over all his face. He saw the man, but the man would not see him.

The newcomer had his hat off. Uneasily he tugged at it. It was a ragged old cloth hat, and all his other clothing was ragged and old. About his meager bones it hung loose as a scarecrow's, a long black overcoat over a suit of limestone gray. The clothing was heavy now with rain, and dripped a puddle about the man's cracked shoes, giving forth an abominable steamy odor. He looked as if he had been hauled freshly from the bottom of Davy Jones' locker.

"Wasn't that Admiral Towne hurt?"

"Why do you want to know?" asked Stone Doane, staring with his one half-shut eye down at the little man.

He saw a narrow, brown countenance wrinkled up with anxiety and timidity. On the man's uncovered head a bald streak was eaten as if with mange, giving him altogether a scurvy and unwholesome air. He was crouching before the erect, retracted form of Stone Doane, apparently expecting he might be beaten, but intending to run for it before any blow could hit him.

"My name is Ormeega," the small man explained in a timid voice to Doane. "I'm a reporter. You say something about an accident to the Admiral Towne——"

"I said nothing," denied Stone Doane curtly.

"Did he have a heart stroke, or did a hold-up fellow hit him?"

"I wasn't anywhere around," said Doane. "I don't know anything about it."

"I want to write up something for my paper," Ormeega complained. "This Admiral Towne, he's some important fellow, not so? I hear the admiral is in trouble with what you call the Department of Navy. Do you know——"

"Who are you, anyway?" asked Stone Doane. "Your voice doesn't sound like an American's."

"I write for the newspaper," explained Ormeega with a deprecatory gesture. "What you call a journalist. Is it true Admiral Towne——"

"You'd better ask the admiral himself to tell you anything you want to know about him," suggested Stone Doane. "But before you ask him, I might tell you that the admiral hates to be bothered with newspaper reporters worse than he would hate to be shot. He's a terrible tempered old fellow, and you'd be lucky if you got away from him with the hide still on your bones."

Stone Doane moved forward, pushing Ormeega out of his way.

Ormeega looked after Doane as the bureau clerk, with a slow, modulated limp, walked south down New Hampshire Avenue. Street lamps by now had flashed on. Through circles of flickering yellow light, through interstices of great blackness, Ormeega watched Stone Doane strolling away. The slow *slip-klop!* of his uneven stride was no longer audible, but Doane's form could still be seen as far as Dupont Circle. The reporter was not sure if Doane was really lame, or had merely adopted an affected swagger. Because Doane had stayed in darkness till his back was turned, Ormeega had not once seen Stone Doane's face.

At Dupont circle the receding figure of Doane, walking with that slight and almost unnoticeable limp, met and merged with another slowly pacing figure, walking the contrary direction. Passing each other, those two figures became one in silhouette. Then Ormeega could see two figures of men once again, one progressing with a slight

unevenness farther south through the circle park, and the other coming down New Hampshire with an easy, rolling amble. The man who was approaching Ormeega seemed larger than Doane. He likewise rolled a little as he walked, in the easy waddle a policeman uses on his rounds.

As the policeman approached, Ormeega moved onward. The lights in the house of Commander Skiff were all burning gaily. Commander Skiff himself was entering his house by the back door.

IN THE Skiff house no one noticed the accident which had befallen Towne, or rather, the marks of the murderous assault which had struck him down. Towne's daughter, Patricia Skiff, was not a nursing sort of woman. She had been reared by her father to understand that no accidents short of the loss of a head, or at least an arm, were deserving of any remark.

The admiral entered the house wringing wet, squeezing driblets of water from the skirts of his coat and the slack of his pants. A telephone message to his club brought a valet in a taxicab with an outfit of dry clothing.

"Jack is outside, working on his car," Patricia explained to her father. "He's nervous about the steering-gear."

"That fellow is nervous about everything," growled old Towne. "Jack's like a woman. I'd rather have you than him beside me, Pat, in case of a fight."

Patricia twisted her lips. She knew her father was not satisfied with the courage of Jack Skiff. Courage was a virtue the hard old man rated above all.

"It's a sort of shell-shock," she apologized. "It comes from those old flying-accidents. You know Jack didn't use to be that way."

"Some flaw was in him, or he'd never have cracked," said Towne grimly. "Sea, land and air, I've had forty years of the Navy. And I'm still able to command a line of ships in battle."

Patricia said nothing more. She was a firm, determined young woman, like her father, courageous and somewhat taurine. For her husband she had no real sympathy or understanding. It was her instinct to defend him outwardly against the whole world, even her father. Skiff was her man. A strong woman, Patricia liked to think and have the world think that a strong man had taken her.

Towne and his daughter had discussed the weaknesses of Jack Skiff often enough before. She kept silent about some particular manifestations of those weaknesses which, had the admiral been aware of them, would have made him even less tolerant of Skiff. A wife must often keep silent out of respect to herself.

While the admiral was upstairs in Skiff's bedroom, changing into his dry clothing, Jack Skiff entered the house by the kitchen door. He went up to Towne. A bit watchfully he stood in the doorway while old Towne, always angry at being caught without the full vesture of his rank and dignity, hopped about the floor, thrusting his legs into his pants.

Skiff was without coat, his shirt-sleeves rolled up. He showed his arms, covered with black packing-grease to the elbows. Indeed, he still held in one hand a heavy monkey-wrench.

"Fixing the car," was his diffident greeting to his father-in-law. "I see you were caught in the thunder-storm. Luckily I managed to keep dry."

The reason for that might have been found in a rain-dripping rubber coat which he had cast on a kitchen chair on entering the house.

Old Towne glared up, his eyebrows gnarled. He snapped his suspenders over his shoulders with vicious twangs, and stamped his feet into his shoes.

"I'm a sailor, sir," he retorted bruskly. "We sailors don't worry much whether we are wet or dry."

Jack Skiff tried to grin, but his lips trembled. Times aplenty before the admiral had poured on him these small, cold sneers. Continually they irritated him, without giving cause for quarrel. Skiff lived in dread of the day when the fiery old sea-king, losing himself in sudden wrath, would name him coward in front of a rank of his own men, or in presence of a group of his fellow officers. Jack Skiff knew that such a day must come, and a shame not to be lived through. Naturally, anticipation of it did not help to give him courage.

Commander Skiff was a thin, tired man with an unusually large dome of head, which was sparsely covered by fine brown hair. The low voice of him and the posture of him, the stooping backbone of him, spoke

of a complete weariness. The tremendous excitements of the flying service, together with continual exhausting contacts with a militarily ambitious wife, had utterly worn out a nervous energy which was too intense, had burned at too high a heat to long endure.

"Saw a sea-plane flying straight down the avenue this evening," said Towne, "running wind for leather before the storm broke. It was as pretty a piece of level-headed flying as I've seen. I knew you weren't piloting the ship."

"Must have been George Cable. I taught him once," said Skiff with a spark of spirit. "I've forgotten more about flying than he ever knew."

"You have forgotten about everything," said Admiral Towne with bold scorn.

Jack Skiff, without more speech, watched Towne pulling on his uniform coat. He moved slowly down the wall away from the door, approaching a window which, some six inches ajar, let in the cool, rain-washed evening air.

"You'll have to give Cable a court-martial for low flying," said Towne, tying his cravat before a mirror. "I'm sorry for it."

Jack Skiff didn't say anything. He was edging close to the window.

"It's a shame that a good man must be punished for pretty flying," said Towne, "while some yellow sand-hoppers who call themselves fliers are hiding on shore safe from the rain."

Admiral Towne bent to the mirror to examine a blackhead. Well satisfied with his ruddy, arrogant countenance, he vigorously buffed his nails. Abruptly he bent to brush his trouser-legs with his hand.

In that instant as he stooped, a pistol-shot banged over his head. It shattered with a shivering smash the bureau-mirror, from whose silver surface the image of Towne had in the instant dropped away. It is even possible that the shot intended for Admiral Towne caught in the mirror his image not yet entirely faded away.

THAT cracking pistol-report was first. The mirror crashed in crazy splinters. Its backboarding ripped. Plaster-dust burst from the wall behind. Then the window at which Jack Skiff had been standing shattered. On the ground without the window, fifteen feet down, was a thud, and then another thud. Jack Skiff shouted loudly.

Running frantically up the stairs, Patricia Skiff found her father and her husband both apparently unhurt. A tableau almost motionless was before her eyes as she staggered in the bedroom door. Admiral Towne leaned back against the bureau, half-sitting on it, about his stern head the smashed mirror forming a frame. Slowly from a case he pulled forth a cigaret. Jack Skiff leaned back with trembling against the wall, flattening himself against it. His shaking right hand, all black with grease, reached cautiously toward the broken window.

This was the tableau as Patricia Skiff broke into the room. Then Jack Skiff had slammed open the broken window, and was staring forth into the darkness. Admiral Towne walked slowly across the room toward the window, blowing long puffs of smoke from a cigaret which was burning rapidly. Patricia threw her arm about Jack Skiff's shoulders, steadying him.

"He shot from the window!" shouted Skiff.

"Who shot?" asked old Towne, knotting his scowling brows.

"A hand!" said Skiff loudly. "I saw it! You saw it, Pat?"

Skiff was shaking in the knees. His voice was sick with nervousness. Heavily he leaned on the window-ledge for support. His pale, frightened eyes turned to his wife.

"I thought I saw—" she said in doubtful affirmation, though in truth she had seen nothing at all in the window.

"Is there any man outside now?" asked Towne quietly.

Towne thrust forth his head. The rain had cleared away. The air was cool and clean. The full dark night had now come, and Towne could see nothing. Outside the window was no balcony, surely, and no ladder. The side of the brick house offered a straight, sharp descent to the sod fifteen feet below, without crevice and without foothold.

Dark lawns below stirred with a few bushes. A man, evidently a policeman, was running hurriedly in the street. But here on the lawns at the side of the house was no man at all, as Admiral Towne had known.

"It would take an ant to climb up here," said Towne.

Jack Skiff peered wanly forth. Patricia had crooked her hand in the bend of her

husband's arm. She pressed him close, feeling the continual shivering of his body.

"I swear I saw that hand!" Skiff gasped. "It shoved a gun in the opening of the window. I swung that monkey-wrench I was carrying. See, I smashed the window! You heard me smash the window, Pat?"

The woman nodded with assurance.

"You see, I smashed the window," reiterated Jack Skiff vaguely.

The trembling increased in his thin frame. The tall old admiral turned to the wan face which was staring out the window with him. His nostrils slowly dilated, and he sniffed. Skiff's breath betrayed him.

"You've had a drink or two," said old Towne quietly.

Jack Skiff pulled his head in. He leaned against the wall. With soft words Patricia Skiff, never more afraid than the boldest man, tried to calm him. His excited, dilated eyes searched the floor at his feet.

"Am I seeing things?" Jack Skiff muttered.

Abruptly he stooped, and from the floor picked up something between his thumb and forefinger. Skiff's mouth moved. With a gesture of vindication Jack Skiff thrust his hand before Towne's eyes.

"A live red ant!" he said. "There's no mistaking it. I can feel it pinch. How did a live red ant come in this room, if not through that open window?"

"I told you an ant might have crawled up this smooth wall," said Towne, staring close at the dilated eyes of Skiff. "But I've yet to live to see the man who could do it."

"Well, here the ant is."

"Quite a fellow with the pistol, that ant is," said Towne with undue gentleness. "I'd not need a monkey-wrench to kill it."

From Skiff's shaking hand Towne seized the writhing little creature. Its pincers fastened in the tough skin of his thumb-pad. It curved its abdomen and writhed its thorax, struggling for life. The admiral did not feel. Deliberately and thoroughly he crushed the tortured red ant between his fingers, till it was nothing but a little dirty ball.

"That for the red ant!" said Towne.

"It must have crawled up the side of the house," insisted Skiff, not yet recovered from his trembling daze.

"What difference how it came in, up the house-wall or on your sleeve?" asked old Towne quietly. "A miserable red ant is nothing to worry about, Commander Skiff, alive or dead."

Patricia Skiff clung closely to her husband, watching him with an anxiety which she betrayed by no least sign either to him or to her father. She had felt the fear before that some time, as suddenly as this, Jack Skiff's reason might give way. At times, surely, there was a demon in him, and he was not altogether a man.

LOUD and sharp tattooing clattered on the front door. Two steps at a stride Towne went down the stairs, followed by his daughter and Jack Skiff. A patrolman stood in the doorway, within his hand the baton with which he had been rapping. On his cap and badge his numeral showed. He was Officer Seventeen.

"Heard a sound like a pistol-shot, sir!"

"Yes," said Admiral Towne, drawn up straightly, wrapped in an unpiercable dignity. "Yes—yes—yes. A burglar—that is, you see, it must have been. He shot at me."

"What, sir?"

The drawn, anxious face of Jack Skiff peered over the admiral's shoulder. His wife still stood beside him. Her strong arm patted his arm.

"A burglar at the window," affirmed Towne, with a trifle of lift in his inflection. "Yes, you see, he must have shot at Skiff or me."

"Did you see him?" asked Officer Seventeen, staring all about him into the tenantless dark, listening keenly for footsteps on streets where no man walked.

"I saw him!" cried Jack Skiff. "I saw a hand!"

"What did he look like, sir?" asked Seventeen eagerly. "Ah, from what you say, I'm a-thinking it might have been 'Long Tom' Mulligan, who ended a hitch in Trenton yesterday. We got word he was in the city. It would ha' been like Long Tom, to shoot without a word. Now this fellow, did he have kind of a long face?"

Jack Skiff just stood blankly, staring out into the night. He seemed to be dreaming of something far away. After a tiny silence Admiral Towne answered.

"Something like that," he said.

"And did he have brownish, kind of mud-colored hair?" asked Seventeen.

"Likely enough."

"And was there a tattoo mark of an anchor and a mermaid on his arm? And did he have a great splotchy birthmark on his back?" asked Officer Seventeen, waxing more and more excited. "And was his right leg shot away, so he had to use a wooden stump?"

"I didn't see," said Admiral Towne.

"Well, you've identified enough, sir. It couldn't have been anyone else but Long Tom! We've been a-watching for this. Well, sir, before the hour is over we'll have your fine shooting burglar behind the bars!"

"I haven't identified this man yet, officer!" said Towne.

"Ah, but it's the same fellow. When we catch him you'll know him," said Seventeen confidently. "Now, sir, I understand Long Tom was at the window?"

He walked around the house, flashing a pocket torch. The admiral walked with him, and Jack Skiff, dragging his steps a little, followed them behind. The ground was sodden yet with the heavy rain. The grass had grown lush in the young Summer; it was long and somewhat unkempt. Underfoot it formed a soggy carpet which took the impress of no footprints.

Beneath the broken second-story window Officer Seventeen halted. His electric torch made pale circles round and round on the ground. At this portion of the house the first story had no window. There was only a straight, smooth brick wall fifteen feet up to the window where Jack Skiff had said he saw the hand and the pistol. This wall had, as Admiral Towne knew, no cornice, ledge or hand-hold. The very ant which could have crawled up it would have been a very cunning ant.

"Long Tom must have used a ladder," said Seventeen.

His torch caught the glitter of glass shards from the broken window. Against the house-wall was a muddy, grassless strip of earth, on which puddles of water had formed. Buried in the mud so deep its handle stood upright, Seventeen found the monkey-wrench which Skiff had used to break the window.

"Commander Skiff hurled that at the burglar," Towne explained.

Officer Seventeen also found an automatic pistol, a heavy weapon of .45 caliber. It lay on the grass two or three yards away from the house.

"That's the boy!" he exclaimed, as he picked it up by the barrel to preserve any finger-prints on the butt. "Some cannon!"

The wet, slushy grass showed no marks of feet. On the muddy strip of earth beside the house, however, was the print of the toe of a man's shoe, which had so slipped and twisted in the mud that no clear mark remained. Close beside this imprint was a hole of perhaps an inch in diameter gouged three inches deep in the mud. Officer Seventeen sank to his knees, and flashed his light on it.

"There you are!" he exclaimed. "Just as you said, Admiral Towne. It was Long Tom Mulligan, all right. There's the mark of his peg leg, as clear as a signature and ten finger-prints!"

"How did a one-legged man climb up that wall?" asked Towne drily, bending to examine the circular print.

"That I can't say," admitted Officer Seventeen frankly. "But first we'll catch our man, and then *he* can tell us how he did it. Isn't any use figuring about it. Oh, Long Tom, he'll tell us all about it. Don't you believe he won't tell us when we begin to persuade him."

"Third degree, huh?" asked Towne. "I want you to go slow with this man you suspect, Officer Seventeen."

"You can't go fast enough with that kind, sir," asserted Seventeen. "He's a bad lot. You're an officer, sir, and you know you've got to be hard with tough eggs. I've been in the Navy myself, sir, and I've served under you on your own ships, sir, though you'd not remember me. And if you'll excuse me saying it, sir, you aren't no lily."

"I'm no lily," admitted Admiral Towne, bowing his grim head.

"Well, we got to be hard with fellows who would shoot you down at sight, and no word spoken," said Seventeen. "If you don't get them, they'll get you. Don't you worry, sir, that Long Tom'll have another chance to take a pot-shot at you or any other man so long as he lives. And don't you worry he's not the fellow who done it. There's his signature, the mark of his peg leg. And no mistaking it."

"I want you to go slow," repeated Admiral Towne gravely. "I haven't identified any man in particular."

He turned his dark and gloomy glances on Jack Skiff. Skiff repeatedly, for no particular reason, shook his unhappy head.

His tongue ran over his lips, wetting them. He said nothing.

"You're going to press this charge against Mulligan, aren't you, sir?" asked Seventeen with some anxiety. "If we catch him and build up a case against him, we don't want it to fall through because you'd refuse to prosecute."

Admiral Towne didn't answer immediately.

"I've told you only that a shot came from the direction of the window," he said at last. "I don't know who held the gun. I don't know why. I don't know anything about it."

"But you can identify Mulligan?"

"I can identify no one," said Towne.

WALKING back to the front door, Officer Seventeen examined curiously the automatic pistol which he had found lying on the grass beneath the window.

"One of the regulation service kind," said Seventeen. "Here you can see it stamped in the steel: 'Model of 1911, U. S. Army.' Wicked and murdering weapons they are, though I'd take a .38 any day for straight shooting. I wonder where Long Tom Mulligan picked it up?"

"I fancy it would be hard to prove where that gun came from," said Admiral Towne. "They were manufactured by the hundreds of thousands during the war, and they are easy enough to get hold of."

"There were millions of guns made," Skiff broke in, clearing his throat with a swallow. "They're all as alike as a swarm of ants."

The three men had by now got to the front door. They halted just inside it, having been met by Patricia Skiff.

"George Cable telephoned and asked if he could come over after dinner," Patricia informed her husband. "Mr. Cable is the crack flier," she explained to Admiral Towne. "I find him rather amusing."

"Oh, I've flown with him," said Towne.

Officer Seventeen had his cap under his arm. His little eyes twinkled. He was examining the gun.

"Well, gents," said he, "you tell me these guns are all alike as a swarm of ants. Now, I don't know whether ants are all alike, my eyes being too big and clumsy. Maybe they are. Maybe they aren't. Ants seem to know the differences, even if we don't."

"What about the gun?" asked Towne bruskly.

"Well, sir, maybe we can trace this here gun right to Long Tom Mulligan," said Officer Seventeen. "You see—I guess maybe you knew it already—every gun has its own particular serial number. Now, let's read the serial number of this gun. This gun says: 'U. S. Army Property, No. 833,412.' You can see, it's stamped right in the steel. There's no faking or changing that. That's a fairly new gun."

"A serial number tells you nothing," said Towne grimly.

"But you see, sir," Seventeen explained, "the Army or the Navy, they keep a record of every gun. I guess you know that already. All I need to do to find out what officer bought this gun is to look at the record. Then I can find out from the officer who bought it what happened to it next. If Long Tom used it, then he got a-hold of it somehow."

Jack Skiff knit his brows.

"I had a pistol," he said. "You know I had a pistol, Pat."

His wife nodded.

"And I guess if you looked, you'd find a serial number on it, sir," suggested Officer Seventeen.

"I was thinking," said Skiff. "And it seems to me that this must be my gun. Let's see, I have a record of it some place." Skiff brought out a wallet, and searched through it for a card.

"Number 8739," he read. "No, that must be my watch number. And this must be a telephone number. But here's a number, 833,412. That's the number of my gun. What's the number of the gun you have, Officer Seventeen?"

"Where did you last see your gun, sir?" asked Seventeen.

"I think it was in the garage," said Jack Skiff uneasily. "Yes, I'm sure it was in the garage," he said. "I remember I saw it there just before I came indoors."

Out through the night the three men plowed to the garage. Of course they didn't find Jack Skiff's gun where he said he had left it, for it was his gun which had been lying on the grass, and which the police officer now held.

"Well, now to get Long Tom Mulligan," said Officer Seventeen.

"I don't want you to be hard on this man," warned Towne again. "Absolutely

I will refuse to identify him. You aren't going to arrest an innocent man on suspicion, without any corroborating proof?"

Officer Seventeen scuffed his feet. A dark flood of color swelled up his cheeks, and he swallowed.

"When I was on a ship that you cammanded, sir," he said to Towne, "I was hauled up to mast before you on suspicion. And you said the word, sir, that clapped me in the brig. You didn't ask for a lot of proof, sir."

"Ah, I had forgotten," said Admiral Towne. "I suppose you are right. Sea law is sea law. What had you done?"

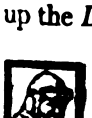
"It doesn't make any difference now, sir. But I'm willing to say I was guilty," admitted Seventeen. "So is Long Tom Mulligan, you can bet on it."

Admiral Towne shook his troubled head.

A half-hour later that night three police officers burst into the home of Mr. Mulligan, who but a few days before had been himself a serial number in Trenton pen. Long Tom Mulligan was sitting in the kitchen of the home his wife had toiled to keep intact for him on his return. On Mulligan's lap was his first-born son, who had come to life while Mulligan was in Trenton pen. Mulligan was smoking the tobacco of freedom. He was laboriously, word by word, reading the Help Wanted columns of the evening newspaper, though no Help it is true seemed to be Wanted from one-legged ex-soldiers who had done time in Trenton pen.

"Diddle-daddle!" said young Mr. Mulligan, junior, as he tried to eat his toes. Thereupon there crashed into the home of Long Tom Mulligan three police officers. They snapped the irons upon his wrists, and smashed his head a couple of times in goodfellowship, and hauled him off to jail. That is the only place for one-legged ex-soldiers who have done time in Trenton pen.

It is possible that after twenty hours in jail, Long Tom Mulligan, late of Trenton pen and soon of Atlanta pen, was quite willing to confess he had attempted murder on Admiral Towne, or to confess he had blown up the *Lusitania*, in order to get some sleep.



THAT audacious and wild aviator, Lieutenant George Cable, dropped in at the Skiff house later in the evening, after dinner when Admiral Towne had gone. It seemed to Commander Skiff that Cable had acquired the habit of dropping in a great deal since he had met Patricia Skiff. It must not be altogether a desire to see his senior officer, for sometimes, coming home from those evenings of fantastic debaucheries to which he more and more inclined, Jack Skiff had found the junior officer with Patricia alone.

"The admiral saw you flying low over the city this evening, Cable," said Skiff irritably. "Right down the Avenue, he told me, below the building tops. You'll get a court for that, you know."

Cable made a rueful face.

"I was flying with a civilian from the bureau, a fellow name of Stone Doane," he said. "Had to come down to beat out the storm. We were scraping the dust off the street, I can tell you! I saw the old man. He was standing on the Avenue with his mouth open like he was going to eat us. I guess we gave him a scare."

"It would take more than you to scare the admiral," said Commander Skiff surlily. "I think he's made of pig iron clear through. He expects every one else to be as stolid. My ——! My ——! A man has nerves!"

George Cable was a young man of tall and generous build. A white scar made by fire, a scar large as a man's hand, was over his cheek. This was partially concealed by a thin dark beard. He had an arrogant and confident manner. Patricia Skiff at times thought that Cable in general air and looks resembled her father. And she was more than ordinarily fond of her father.

"I have no nerves," he announced calmly in reply to Skiff's statement.

"Wait till you have seen what I have seen," prophesied Jack Skiff, not without cruelty. "Wait till you come to a big crash, and you'll see how strong your nerves are. You'll smash yourself yet, Cable!"

"If I do, and die of it," said George Cable, with a certain air of hardihood, "my bones won't groan."

Patricia Skiff told Cable of the shot which had by a flash missed killing Admiral Towne. Word of that attempted murder must come out, and it was better that it come first through her.

"— a burglar at the window," she said. "If my father hadn't stooped in the instant— Well, the police are sure they know the man. It seems it was a notorious burglar, who shoots without giving warning."

"I was in the room myself," said Jack Skiff, growing excited. "I had a monkey-wrench in my hand, and I biffed it at the window, but I missed the fellow who had done the shooting."

"This fellow was outside the window?" asked Cable, who seemed not clearly to have followed the narrative of the event.

"There were only the admiral and myself in the room. Even Pat wasn't there. I remember well she came up afterward."

"I see."

"She came almost on the instant," explained Skiff. "Didn't you, Pat?"

The woman nodded soothingly. She caught Skiff's hand and stroked it.

"I suppose you caught sight of the fellow running off across the lawns?" Cable asked.

His eyes burned with little points of fire as he applied a match to a cigaret.

"We didn't see him," said Skiff, growing more excited. "We looked out the window, and he was gone. The police, though, know who it was."

"That's good," said Cable.

Commander Skiff violently rubbed his head. Through the thin brown hair which covered it, on his skull, could be seen a dreadful ragged scar. He was nervous and timorous as an old woman, thought Cable. It seemed strange to realize that this trembling man had earned his Congressional Medal, had once, in the air and on the land, been bravest of the brave. The heart was gone from him now, and he was hardly all of a man.

"You didn't try to follow him yourself?" asked Cable.

"Follow him! Why, he might have been lying out there in the dark to shoot us again!" Skiff cried. "Would you have followed him?"

"I certainly would have!"

"You'd have been a fool."

"I'd have done more than follow him," said George Cable, his glances straying to Patricia's handsome face. "When I saw that fellow at the window, I wouldn't have jumped away and thrown a monkey-wrench at him——"

"How do you know I jumped away. You weren't there."

"I assume you jumped away," said Cable with a trace of insolence. "That fellow'd not have scared me! If I'd been you, commander, I'd never have given him a chance to get away. I'd have gone right out the window after him. I'd have gone right after him, and smeared him up, gun or no gun!"

"Gone out a second story window!" echoed Skiff loudly. "You'd have cracked your neck."

"How did this fellow get down himself? And how did he get up in the first place?" asked Cable.

"I don't know," said Skiff, trembling with irritation. "I wasn't standing down below, boosting him up on my shoulders."

"I'd have gone out the same way he went down," reaffirmed George Cable, flicking an insolent ash to the floor. "Let me catch any fellow trying to break in on me, and I'll go after him! I'd not let him buffalo me. I'd not be scared of him!"

"Oh, you'd do wonders," cried Skiff, shivering with nervous anger. "You'd do everything. Tell me I didn't have nerve enough! Tell me I was a coward!"

The maid came in to announce there was a reporter at the door, seeking information about the attempted burglary.

"Go ahead and tell this newspaper fellow I was scared to death!" cried Skiff, near to tears, and writhing in his excitement. "Tell him what I know all you young fellows say, that Commander Jack Skiff has turned yellow!"

"I never said that, sir," George Cable denied sturdily.

"Jack, Jack!" cautioned Patricia, seeing the wild dilation grow in her husband's eyes, seeing a pallor creep over his strained face.

"A reporter at the door," reiterated the maid. "A little snipe. His name is something foreign, like Ormeega. He wants to ask Admiral Towne about the bu'glar 'at tried to kill 'im."

"Send the fool away!" commanded Patricia sharply. "Tell him the admiral isn't here any longer."

"That's what I told 'im," said the maid stolidly. "But he says he can see the admiral in the window."

"Perhaps the fellow thinks I'm the admiral," suggested George Cable, not without an expression of flattered vanity. "We've been mistaken."

He went to the hall-entrance, and shouted to the front door:

"The admiral has gone! There's nothing to learn anyway! Ask the police!"

Jack Skiff had arisen. He held to a chair-back for support, shaking with spasms.

There was no blood in his face. What had brought this shivering fury on him is not certain. It might have been a word or intonation in Cable's speech. It might have been seeing how the luminous dark green glances of Patricia lingered on George Cable as he moved confidently about.

"Even she says I'm a coward!" cried Skiff, panting deep, his lips trembling. "You talk about me together. I know. Don't you two look at each other that way! I'm no fool! No coward, neither. I've flown where you wouldn't fly, in my time. I've won the Congressional Medal! Now you two sit and laugh and whisper about me. I'm not a coward! I'll show you!"

"Oh, Jack! George hasn't said anything at all about you. He was only telling you what he would have done."

"He's brave enough shooting off his mouth before women," cried Jack Skiff, almost sobbing. "But let him see a fellow crawling in to kill him——"

George Cable clumsily arose. His cheeks were hot. He avoided the detaining hand of Patricia Skiff, and felt for the cap and coat which had been flung on the divan beside him.

"I'd just as soon you'd not come back!" said Skiff.

"You'll be sorry, sir."

"Are you threatening me?" asked Jack Skiff, his voice suddenly choking in his throat. "Are you making threats?"

"No, sir, not at all, sir," declared Cable stalwartly. "I'm not a man to make threats against anyone, sir. But what I'd do, I'd do."

"Oh, you're a bold one! You're no coward. You can swagger, and make the women think you're a hero," said Skiff uneasily. "Say I'm a coward! By ——! I've been braver than any of you in my time!"

"I'm no coward, sir, and I'm not threatening," said Cable, pacing slowly toward the door. "You're my superior officer, and I have respect for rank in the service. I meant that you'd be sorry, sir, for flying off the handle in this hot way against a man who's never been anything but a friend to you. We're in the outfit together, and we're all too near death all the time, Commander Skiff, to worry about who is a coward and who isn't, and about what the women think of us."

Jack Skiff swallowed.

"*She* thinks I'm a coward," he whispered "She tells the admiral, and he tells the rest of you."

"We've never discussed you, sir."

George Cable slapped his coat across his arm. Patricia Skiff went with him to the door. When she returned to the living room, she found Jack Skiff sprawled face down on the divan, shuddering convulsively and sobbing with a thin, choking pain. Tenderly the woman knelt beside him, for, as she loved strong men, she pitied the weak.

BEHIND a lilac bush which grew close to the door the reporter Ormeega was still waiting as Cable emerged from the house. In his long, black overcoat, almost to his ankles, Omeega was like a figment of the night, and could not be seen. The bearded young lieutenant whom he saw bid farewell to Patricia Skiff resembled old Admiral Towne in general appearance and bearing, and Ormeega continued his confusion of identity.

"Oh, admiral!" he whispered.

Cable did not hear. Wrapped in memories of the recent scene, Cable was striding swiftly south on New Hampshire Avenue. So fast he went that only by trotting could Ormeega have caught up to him. The reporter hurried after the tall form of him who he thought was Admiral Towne. Ormeega was curious to find out where the man was going, and wanted a chance to speak a word to him.

He did not have a chance to speak that word. After a block, Cable imperiously held up his hand, summoning a taxi. Ormeega ran. When he got within speaking distance, Cable was already inside, and the cab was under way. With a final swift, padding spurt and a flying leap, the little man in the black overcoat landed on the back of the taxicab, his feet securely planted in the rim of a spare tire, There he clung, flattening his cheek against the sleek, cold back of the cab.

His arms were wiry and tough, and he had no fear of falling off. Yet he did not enjoy his free ride long. When the cab halted at a crossing intersection, a hand caught at Ormeega's collar. He was jerked loose from his handhold to fall full length, and slide upon the street. The cab went on.

"Stealing rides, my boy, don't help pay for gasoline," said Officer Seventeen. "Up

with you! Get your face together, and paste it back on."

The burly officer surveyed his captive with malicious eye. Ormeega had seen the policeman before that night. He cowered up like a hedgehog, his head deep-sunken down in the neck of his baggy black overcoat.

From head to foot with squinting, cunning eyes Seventeen looked Ormeega over. The policeman reached out a hand to haul Ormeega's hat on straight. He tucked in a bit of ribbon which was dangling from a pocket of the black overcoat. Easily, yet with some force, he gave a poke to Ormeega's middle.

"I thought at first you was a boy," said Seventeen. "A man you are, if not a man grown. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Then he linked arms with Ormeega, and walked him to a box to telephone for a patrol.

The ambitious Mr. Ormeega spent that night in jail, in a cell not far from the hot, sleepless room where five policemen were putting the third degree—God knows what are the first and second—to Long Tom Mulligan. It was not until his police-court appearance the next morning that Ormeega was released. No newspaper man is ever punished for minor violations of the law, as Officer Seventeen should have known.

The next morning, too, Long Tom Mulligan—the one-legged ex-soldier late of Trenton pen—was released. Two overzealous police officers had been watching the home of Mulligan the previous evening; and they were reluctantly forced to testify to a perfect alibi, that Mulligan had been in his home at the hour some person unknown tried to kill Admiral Towne.

ONCE was a night of white moon, the night when on Admiral Towne and Jack Skiff the terrible, half-naked form of Stone Doane came up from out the deep ocean waters. Once was that night of rain, the night when the Ant first struck at Admiral Towne.

Nights of white moon and of rain. But on the night George Cable fell down to death there were both moon and rain.

Pale rain streaking down within the moon-drenched night, from out the sky which showed a thousand stars. The round, pallid moon shone like a great dead fish-eye, spotted with luminous canker, with a bright rottenness. No cloud flurried across it. But still the rain fell, like a fetid exhalation from the dead fish-eye of the moon.

And men were laughing. And the bare arms and bosoms of women were smoothly gleaming like polished snow-apples, fragrant as the fruits of paradise. Musicians, cynical and perspiring, played songs of love, arousing youthful amorous yearnings in hard and cunning old hearts. Patricia Skiff, whom George Cable had held dearest among women, was dancing on that night with gold-braided British sailors, idly stirring her green plume fan against her breast as the east wind stirs the smooth and shining sea. She had never, we may believe, been happier in her life.

The music sparkles. The rain strikes across the moon in arrows. A man thinks:

"This is the hour I die. O God, God, how deep is death, which drops emptily away from beneath my feet as I fall forever toward it!"

There is poor George Cable lying on the sodden grass like a rag cast aside to rot. Beneath the moon, within the rain he lies, his arms wrapped about his head, his neck twisted up, his back broken, just as he was found by the newspaper man Ormeega.

That rain which comes from the white and cloudless moon is an augury of disaster. Deep-sea sailors know that. And Stone Doane, Admiral Towne, Jack Skiff, George Cable, were all of them deep-sea men. Yes, old Skipper Death, who sails on many an ocean, has been a deep-sea man, too.

The moon and the ghostly rain were augury. No one took for augury, however, the red ant found on George Cable's dead face. Rain drowns ants; and beneath the moon that night there must have been many of them drowned.

TO HIS death Admiral Towne sent George Cable. If that was more than an accident, if he wanted Cable to die, he adopted a strange method. Towne had no means of knowing that on this night at certain hours Stone Doane would be in a particular place, and Jack Skiff and the newspaper man Ormeega would be each in his particular place. He had no means of knowing the mental functions of Officer Seventeen. Even Admiral Towne, who was in his own way very

intelligent, could by no possible divination prevision that infinite complexity of chances which in the aggregate is called Fate—that infinite complexity which determines that men shall be born, and the manner of their living, and how they shall be struck down.

In the white-moon night the rain was falling over Washington. Light and thick it fell from the sky of a thousand misty stars, without splashing, without pattering, without thunder and without sound. In utter silence, and slinkingly, the rain crawled down from the clear, moonlit sky. A man who walked abroad in it could hardly be aware of it till his clothing was soaked, and cold rain rivulets were seeping down his skin.

On that most drowning night of June a ball was given at the British embassy in honor of a naval mission. All the sea captains in the capital must be there, full-dressed, sworded, with flat cocked hats, with ribbons of honor, with enough gold braid on the crew of them to sink a battleship, with their women looking very beautiful. Your sailor has an eye for women; he garners the best of the land.

Admiral Towne came late. He halted at the entrance door beneath the porte-cochère for a moment, shaking rain-drops from his cape. His big gray Navy car slid away, out through the tall iron gates of the embassy grounds, to where Connecticut Avenue gleamed like a straight canal of oil. Towne breathed deep of the warm Summer rain. He ran his fingers through his dark beard, and straightened his chest, and clamped his fist on his sword pommel.

The sound of music and clattering voices rolled merrily from the door. The admiral saw George Cable strolling within, on his arm Patricia Skiff. For all the large white scar upon his face, which his beard did not entirely cover, Cable was a handsome man. Patricia Skiff looked up at him with eyes which did not hide her admiration. Against her deep breast her green plume fan stirred. She also was handsome. Admiral Towne loved her.

For a moment yet the admiral paused, contemplating others of those clouds of glittering pink, blue or silver women who floated within. Towne was a widower of some years' grace, and he retained yet the sailor's eye, the eye for fine women. Now the music was finished, and the dancers drifted apart.

As he set his chest more straightly and swung back his cape on a gleam of braid and ribbons, a light touch made Towne's elbow shiver, and he knew that some one had crept up there behind him, for he heard a voice whispering timidly—

"Oh, Admiral Towne!"

Towne heeled on the flash. With narrowed eyes he stared out at the moonlit rain, at the night which shivered within a mist of street lamps. At the tall iron gates policemen were standing, and on the sidewalk beyond the fence were a crowd of curious watchers. Government clerks and other small fry, striving to obtain sight of the revels of the proud and great.

The man who had spoken, the man who had touched, was not there to be seen. The touch had been so like the touch of fog or wind, the voice so small and thin, that both might have been illusions of the mysterious night. Deep-sea men know well that there are bodiless wraiths whose voices are, even as had been that voice, inaudible to all save fated men—the touch of whose hand, though it grip with cold trembling the living heart, is not as the touch of men.

"Admiral Towne, if your honor please."

From out of where came that voice, which was as a word remembered? All men have their sins to be forgiven them. Even admirals, though their gold-leaf glitter, though their bulging shirt-fronts be white as the very sun, have deep stains on their hands. Yes, even admirals who have dealt the law of war, who have unloosed the cannonade, who have been in their furious hours cruel to men and unleal to women, remember some voices which they do not like to hear whispering from the moon and rain.

Then Admiral Towne, searching for that still, small voice, looked down. There at his elbow he saw this crouching and apologetic little man, this journalist Ormeega. The shadow of Towne, cast before him by the light from the door, was braver and larger than this furtive, huddled man.

How Ormeega had got by the policemen guarding the tall iron gates is not clear. Perhaps he was so small and unimportant that in his long black overcoat he had crept by them unnoticed, mistaken for a shadow in the white rain of the night. Perhaps he had just stared his way by, or flashed a card, as newspaper men do when dealing with policemen.

In all his life Admiral Towne had never seen this man before.

Towne made a brusk, impatient gesture, which was like the threat of a blow. Warily Ormeega dodged down a step. There he cowered, looking even smaller and more contemptible. An apologetic air, any expression of humility or cowardice, always violently enraged Admiral Towne. For cowards, for the meek, he had no patience in this life or after. His very enemies he preferred to have men as bold and strong as he, heroes to struggle against him in a glorious saga of victory. As the approach of the newspaper man had startled Towne, he was rendered twice angry.

"Admiral Towne, if you please."

Towne glared down. Again Ormeega whispered pleadingly—

"Admiral Towne, if your honor please."

"And what if my honor doesn't please?" growled Towne with bitter wit. "What do you think I'd be, you utter fool, if my honor pleased to be the queen of Holland, and not Admiral Towne?"

Ormeega began to feel his way backward, to crawl farther down the steps, as he saw in Towne's countenance and posture the arising of a furious anger.

"I try to get to speak to you at your office and other places," muttered Ormeega, in his excitement and frightened confusion clipping his words with a sharp foreign accent. "I ride on behind you a taxicab the other night. Now I get you here, and I want to ask you a question. Only one little question——"

"What is this impertinence?" bawled Admiral Towne.

"I'm a reporter, and I got a right to ask questions. That's my business—that's my right."

Admiral Towne violently despised all newspaper men, for often they had misquoted and calumnied him. A delusion that he was a kind of god—delusion not rare in old men who have wielded power—made him furious at being questioned by a common fellow—questioned by a cringing newspaper fellow in a long black overcoat and with dirty cuffs.

"Another one of these newspaper fellows to write lies about me, huh?" the admiral roared. "In what dog's kennel were you whelped, that you come here to question me?"

"I try to get you at the Skiff house and your office. Now I get you, and I want to ask you one little question——"

"I have nothing to say to fellows like you. Get down!"

Admiral Towne waved imperiously down the steps, as if with a fierce sweeping gesture he would hurl the reporter down to earth, would hurl him down to eternal damnation. There loomed the great angry admiral, towering on the height of the steps above the huddled, wary little reporter. The admiral's beard writhed as his mouth worked in soundless anger. His chest was out-thrust, his hand was on his sword.

"*Huf! Huf!*" he breathed, as again he gestured Ormeega down to the Unutterable.

A braver, stronger, taller man might have with good reason been terrified of the angry old fellow, and have gone away. But for the moment Ormeega held his ground. He had tightened his soul, he had bound it with brass. An implacable obstinacy, like the obstinacy of an ant which holds its pincers hooked past death, was in his black button eyes.

"I want to ask you one question," he reiterated, gasping thinly. "Who was it shot at you the other night in Commander Skiff's house, and do you know why he did it?"

Admiral Towne was plainly startled. He looked with renewed appraisal at the diminutive man before him. Thus passed a second in silence. At last, searching all his black memories, Towne was sure that never had he seen this man before, as Ormeega's question had made him at first suspect.

"If I knew, do you think I'd give him a chance at me again?" he roared.

Ormeega pulled forth a bit of dirty paper. Briskly he scribbled something.

"So you expect to be attacked again?" he asked, more courageously.

"Let some one try it!" swore Admiral Towne. "I don't know what you want. Do you know?"

Ormeega fumbled at the buttons of his black ulster. He cringed, for with a movement the shadow of the great black admiral had fallen over him. His eyes fastened on Towne as if hypnotized, and he was impotent with fear of that taurine man who loomed over him.

"You clear out, before I have you clapped behind bars!" threatened the admiral. "Infernal snooper! By George, isn't a man safe

anywhere from your impertinences? Don't whine! Don't shiver so or, by my soul, I'll lay you flat on deck!"

Step by step the frightened reporter stumbled down to get out of reach. Abruptly, angered by this sign of timidity, Towne leaped after him, growling deep. A party of Japanese naval officers were disembarking from a car which had rolled up under the porte-cochère. They obstructed Ormeega. Otherwise, since he was quick and light, he probably would have got away. He fell into the midst of the little brown men, and tripped over the skirts of his long overcoat. Then the strong hands of old Towne grasped him by the collar and elbow. With a grunt and breathless squeal he was projected into a bush, shivering with rain.

"You —— worm!" shouted Towne, advancing toward the fallen man, while the startled Japanese backed away with gestures of great politeness. "I hope your neck is cracked! Let the ants eat you!"

Ormeega's overcoat had flopped over his head, blinding him. He struggled like a cat in a sack. His head emerged, and he clutched at the bush, which showered heavy globules on his bald head. Admiral Towne had advanced from beneath the shelter of the porte-cochère, so that for an instant on his angry face were the wan luster of the moon and the beating of the rain.

"Guard! Sentry! Officer!" shouted Towne. "Throw this fellow out!"

From the iron gates a policeman hurried. His bulky body was wrapped in a black rubber cape, shiny as a hippopotamus' hide. His face streamed with the pale rain. As Ormeega struggled to his feet, the policeman's heavy hand clapped down on his abject shoulders. And that enterprising journalist was hustled off out the gates, well away from the sacred British soil of the embassy grounds.

"I got a right to be there," he kept expostulating to the policeman. "I'm a British citizen. I'll report this to the ambassador."

"That's what they all say," retorted the policeman.

Shaking himself like the huge gruff dog he was, Admiral Towne proceeded through the door into the midst of the music and women. For a little while he was troubled, wondering where it had been before, if ever, he had heard that still, small voice which had spoken to him out of the rain.

THE above might be passed over as an incident in the life of one of the great, whom newspaper men pursue to madness—an incident not at all important to the life of Lieutenant George Cable. Yet the ant which gnaws the root deep underground may cause the tall oak to topple, and thuswise other great catastrophes may occur.

Looking at it as a chain of consequence, it is possible—so deviously and intricately does the mind work, even the mind of an admiral—that the reporter's question about the unexplained shooting of a previous night caused Admiral Towne to think of Jack Skiff. And thinking of Skiff, it seemed to him not best that George Cable should be seen too much in the company of Patricia. Thus came the resolution which caused the admiral to send Cable out into the night, and to what devils lurked there in the rotten rain.

Towne was conversing with a British officer. Sir Geoffrey Duke he was, a Captain in the Royal Navy and a distant cousin of royalty. Duke had a red face which continually beamed, with happiness so set his face seemed always on the point of cracking.

"I notice that young fellow Cable is going around quite a bit with your daughter," said Duke. "A handsome young fellow. I knew him when he was stationed on the Irish Coast. Women have always been attracted to him."

Admiral Towne despised domestic gossip. If persons were noticing that Patricia and Cable were much together, he had better stop it. At an early moment Towne drew his daughter aside, and asked her—

"Where is Skiff?"

"He was feeling tired," said the woman lazily, waving her fan against her deep breast. "He was lying down when I left. He asked me to have George Cable bring me."

The truth was Jack Skiff had not been tired, but drunk. Patricia Skiff had long learned to lie in protection of him, particularly to her father.

"Tired!" snorted Towne. "You say he asked to have Cable bring you?"

"Yes."

"Cable's been seen a great deal with you, I understand."

Patricia flushed. Her eyes went otherwhere. She did not reply, for she was somewhat afraid of her father.

Admiral Towne called up the Skiff residence, and got the maid on the phone.

"I understand Commander Skiff is feeling ill," he said. "Is he up? I'd like to speak to him."

"Commander's better now," replied the maid. "He got up and went out for a walk."

"In the rain?"

"He said the rain would cool him off," replied the telephone.

In the ballroom Admiral Towne sought out Lieutenant Cable. He found the tall young man in the midst of a group of aging matrons, who languished on him with their eyes. Totally arrogant and confident, Cable was narrating to them some of his exploits in the air. He was a bold young man, thought Towne, the picture of what he himself had been at twenty-eight.

"Cable, I want to show Sir Geoffrey here some sketches of a model air-station which I have had prepared. You'll find them on the desk in my office. Mind fetching them?"

The glances of George Cable sought Patricia Skiff.

"I'll hurry back," he told her.

"Don't hurry," said Admiral. "By the way, Mrs. Skiff wants to be home early. I'll send her by some one, or take her myself. You might bid her good-night now. Thanks for the trouble you took in bringing her."

"Trouble, sir! Why, I would——"

With a gesture Towne cut Cable short.

"Oh, I know it's always a nuisance for you young fellows to chaperon the wives of your brother officers," he said with quiet significance. "Mrs. Skiff has told me how courteous you are. You won't need to bother with taking her home."

The eyes of Patricia Skiff appealed to her father. His word was still her law. She made no objection. The shoulders of Cable were slumped down. Dejectedly he thrust his hands in his pockets. He was clever enough to see Towne's intent.

"Plans for a model air-station," repeated Towne. "You'll find them on the desk in my office. Show them to Sir Geoffrey if I'm not here."

Admiral Towne felt that the suggestion of scandal which had been in Sir Geoffrey's words was by his action thoroughly destroyed. Sir Geoffrey Duke still beamed broadly and ruddily. He screwed a monocle into his laughter-cracked face.

George Cable took the hand of Patricia—that brief and slipping intimacy of the fingers was all—and went out into the night which was filled with moon and rain.

PERHAPS Admiral Towne or Jack Skiff knew more than they pretended of that red ant which was found on George Cable's dead face, and perhaps Stone Doane knew. Sir Geoffrey Duke knew something, the journalist Ormeega knew something, and so did Officer Seventeen know something. All together they knew enough to hurl an insane assassin like a burning meteor down through the infinite blackness of heaven.

Perhaps they knew; and perhaps the fiend was caught who did that thing to poor George Cable. There awaits him the time when he shall stand in a ring of seven high officers of war, to hear them name the dawn when he shall hang. Though the night is misty and white, surely that dawn will be a time of neither moon nor rain.

Let the Erineys, the snake-haired Furies, the avenging Fiends which howl in the vast wastes between the stars, which streak earthward on the huge whirlwinds of night—let the terrible Avengers be loosed swift on the track of the murderer of poor George Cable! As that man was a devil, there are greater devils. And as he slew, he will be slain.

The huge whirlwinds of night will yawn beneath him. Tossed between chaotic nadirs of the wind, the foundations of darkness will crumple beneath him, and to the bottomless fire he will spill, burning with a long trail of flame from the topmost towers of the night!

And it will be for the red ant which he, in hideous mockery, placed on George Cable's dead face that the murderer will die. The soul of a dead red ant will consume with fire his body. A little red ant—an asp killed Cleopatra. But the murderer who put an end to poor George Cable was not so great a beauty as she.

However terribly the serpent Furies bring that fiend to his appointed ends, they will not help brave George Cable. No breath of the Avengers will breathe life again into his nostrils. The hottest fury of the Retaliators can not reheat his clay. Nothing will bring back to him the bold hours, the soft love of women, the hail and farewell of comradeship, the exaltation of war, nor

anything at all of the riotous good life which was his.

For him the hour is done, the life, the loves, the wars are done. The hour is done and overpassed, and he lies on the grass in the rain beneath the white moon, with a broken back.

TWO elephantine white blocks, the twin Navy and Munitions Buildings, lie at the edge of Potomac Park, west of Washington Monument and the ellipse. Behind those two long white buildings a level parkway, interspersed with some trees and cut by winding motor roads, stretch down to the tidal basin and the river. On pleasant evenings continual streams of pleasure cars pass by those two tremendous white structures; but there was no one at all passing on that night of rainy moon.

Lieutenant Cable came to the dark middle entrance of the Navy Building in a taxicab. He disembarked, paid the man, and ordered him to wait.

"I want to get some important papers," he said. "I'll be down in a few minutes."

Swinging his shoulders, his cape wrapped well about him, Cable strode to the door. After hammering on the glass panels, a sleepy watchman admitted him. To the watchman the taxi driver heard Lieutenant Cable speaking—

"Some important papers— Admiral Towne——"

Then Cable was inside the building. The watchman had closed and locked the door again. The taxi driver waited while a policeman walked slowly around a corner, and went out of sight. The driver knew him: He was Officer Seventeen.

A man in civilian clothes came stumbling down the street. He was hatless, and soaked with rain. His shoes were muddy. He hurried up to the taxi driver, wiping his damp, thin hair with a nervous hand. The driver noticed a ragged scar upon the man's large head.

"Taxi! Can you take me up New Hampshire?"

"Waiting for a fare, sir."

"I've been out walking, cooling off my head. I've walked ten miles, and I'm tired out."

"Can't help that, sir, Waiting for a gent."

"You take me!" said the man, a snap coming into his tone. "Your man may be all night in there. I'm Commander Skiff."

"Can't help that, sir," said the driver, leaning over to spit on the wet street. "I ain't taking orders from no generals or corporals— Well, sir, that's different, sir. Much obliged."

The taxi driver pocketed the bill given him. Jack Skiff clumped inside.

"I'm tired," he said, his head dragging, "tired out. Go slow, driver! I feel a little dizzy. Do you notice the street seems to be rocking a little?"

"I guess you had a shot or two, mister," said the driver, leaning back his head. "Cooling off your head, hey?"

"I wish you'd drive up Connecticut by the British embassy," said Jack Skiff. "What time is it? I want to see if—somebody is still there."

THE watchman had locked the entrance door behind Lieutenant Cable.

"Nobody around this time of night ever," apologized the watchman. "I was taking a little snooze. You got to work for your living, I bet, admiral—why, I thought at first it was the admiral hisself."

"Nobody in the building now?" asked Cable quietly.

"No, sir. Not a soul."

"I won't be long."

The watchman settled himself in his chair for another short sleep. Cable ran up the wide central staircase two steps at a time, and vanished into the wan dark.

OUT of the silence which lay upon this place, the silence of the great tomblike office building, the utter silence of the rain-washed streets, there came one cry. The cry of a man in his utter fear, seeing death upon him:

"Let go of me, you fiend! Almighty God, I'm falling!"

The watchman slept on. There was no repetition of sound. The door remained impassably locked. If a thing went through those plate-glass doors, it was only the soul of Lieutenant Cable, creeping into the empty night.

"YOU see now, I must have been a quarter of a mile away," Officer Seventeen told his story, "as far as I could run in a couple of minutes. I hadn't seen nothing on the street except a taxicab,

or nothing at all. Then I heard this one yell, like a man was scared to death. I stopped, and then I run back. Around the corner I saw the Navy Building. Something was lying on the grass in front of it, and a man was bending over. When he see me, he give a yell to me."

Upon a plat of sward before the building's face this dark figure was lying as Seventeen came in sight. Bending above it was another figure which must have been the figure of a man, though it was as of a man or glass or mist, opaque and pale in the white rain night. The pale bending figure shouted clearly as Officer Seventeen, running heavily came in sight.

The policeman crossed the street, leaped a low iron-pipe railing, and padded over the wet grass plat. The bending figure arose. Officer Seventeen saw that it was a small, crouching man in a stone-gray suit too big for him. He had been almost invisible against the white building face. Upon the ground a black overcoat had been discarded. Officer Seventeen recognized the newspaper man Ormeega whom he had arrested on a previous night.

"What's happened here, Cap?"

There on the ground was a man in the gilt-braided blue dress-uniform of the Navy. He lay crumpled up in peculiar distortion, with his head bent toward his groin, and his arms locked fantastically behind his head.

"God help us, he's dead!" whispered Seventeen.

The journalist was huddled up, his back hunched, his hands buried within the breast of his clumsy coat. Lines of terrific pain were clawed in his face. He tried to take a step, and fell against the bulky form of Seventeen.

"The admiral is dead!" he cried. "Admiral Towne is dead! His big, strong neck has snapped like a match!"

Officer Seventeen stooped, overcome with awe. This bearded face, white with the old fire scar, was not the face of Towne. It was far less old and hardened, though now in the first implacability of death it was twisted up rigidly in a look of anger and hate.

"No, no," said Officer Seventeen. "I've seen the admiral when he was laughing and when he was mad, and I've seen him when you couldn't tell at all how he was feeling, and likely I'll see him dead. But this isn't Admiral Towne."

Ormeega's legs crumpled under him. He collapsed to the grass. He put his palms before his face, and wept. The thin rain fell on him, and he rocked back and forth, sobbing weakly.

"His back is broke. Poor fellow, he must 'a' died when he hit. What happened, Mr. Ormeega? Did you see it?"

"I go by," whispered Ormeega weakly, letting his head drop almost to his knees. "I walk along the street. I am—over there."

He pointed across the street. Officer Seventeen nodded without looking up. He was examining the figure which lay on the grass.

"An ant!" muttered Seventeen. "A dirty red ant! Ugh!"

"I am over there," continued Ormeega in squeaky tones. "I see this man come to the window. All at once he screamed. Oh, he screamed loud! Then he dropped down. Down, down, out of the window he dropped. He hit on his back, and his arms went out. I ran up to see."

"Which window did he fall out of?"

"Up there."

Ormeega pointed up the building face, where a half-thousand windows darkly shone, rain-glistening, reflecting the luster of the moon.

"A window up there," he said, "way at the top."

"Third floor, huh?" said Seventeen. "Straight up; it must have been that window. Do you think he got dizzy like? Or did he throw himself out like he was going to kill himself? Or did somebody give him a shove?"

Ormeega shook his head.

"All the windows are dark, I see," said Seventeen. "Did you happen to notice whether there was a light in the window this poor fellow dived out of?"

"I think—there was," said the journalist after a reflective silence.

He tried to arise, but half-way to his feet fell back again. He sucked in his breath. Back and forth he rocked, holding to his ankle.

"You've hurt yourself, my boy," said Seventeen.

"It is no matter."

"You can't stand up."

"I ran so fast when I saw him fall," he whispered, sucking inward his bitten lips. "I wanted to see, to get the news. I thought

it was the admiral. There, I tripped over that pipe-railing. I think I must have broken my ankle."

Officer Seventeen pulled forth a knife, and cut the lacings of the dilapidated, soggy shoe away. His merciless fingers kneaded Ormeega's swollen ankle. The small man panted, and his hands clawed at the ground, but he did not cry out.

"I thought I saw you was hurt when I came up," said Seventeen. "Your ankle's not broke, you only turned it. A little bit more of this Dutch scrubbing, and you'll be all right. You feel that? I bet you do!"

"It's bettter," said Ormeega, struggling to arise. "You see, I can stand on it now. Maybe if I hadn't stumbled I might have done something to help—*him*."

"There was nothing you could have done," said Seventeen, shaking his head. "This poor fellow died when he hit the ground."

[redacted] THEN the two of them stood at the center doors of the great white, silent building. In the shiny glass of the doors, reflected darkly, they could see their images mirrored by the pallor of the moon. The rubber raincoat of Officer Seventeen whispered as his arms moved. Ormeega had drawn on again his long black ulster. The policeman lifted up his stick and clattered on the glass.

An old watchman came creeping and shuffling to the door. Sleepily he stared out. Recognizing the police uniform, he obeyed Seventeen's bellows, and unlocked the door. Then the two of them, Seventeen and Ormeega, were in the dimly lighted lobby.

"Lots of trouble tonight," the watchman complained. "What do *you* want?"

"I want to go up to the twenty-first window from the right, on the third floor," said Officer Seventeen.

The watchman consulted a floor plan.

"That would be in Admiral Towne's office," he said.

"No," he corrected himself. "The admiral's office is on the second floor. On the third floor, right above it, that's the office of Chief Clerk Doane. Lieutenant Cable, he's been up in the admiral's office, and I been waiting for him to come down."

"Cable?"

"That's who. He's a pleasant young cllow with a beard."

"God rest him!" said Seventeen, making a sign with his fingers. "I've seen his name in the papers many a time, and he must have been a fine young man."

"He's best of them all!" said the old watchman thinly, with a gesture of pride. "He's never had a crash in all the time he's flown."

Officer Seventeen turned to Ormeega, who was cowering behind him.

"This man says that poor fellow was on the second floor. You're sure you saw him fall from the third?"

"Absolutely!" exclaimed Ormeega. "I'd stake my life on that."

"Would Lieutenant Cable have been in Mr. Doane's office on the third floor?" asked Officer Seventeen of the watchman.

"Stone Doane and Mr. Cable, they're good friends," said the old watchman. "Often Mr. Doane has gone flying with the lieutenant. But tonight the lieutenant told me he was going up to the admiral's office."

"You heard him go?"

"He went up the stairs," said the watchman.

"Did he stop at the second floor, or go on up to the third?"

"Well, I sat down to kind of doze," said the old watchman defensively. "I heard him running up the stairs."

Officer Seventeen looked all around in the dimly lighted lobby. Corridors like deep, endless caves stretched away from the entrance door.

"Anybody else in this building?" he asked.

"Not a living soul!"

"No man could get in or out without your knowing it?"

The watchman laughed with shrill derisiveness. He looked about him for a place to spit.

"Don't you think I know how to keep my watch, young man?" he cried in his cracked voice. "I did sentry duty under General Grant, forty years before you was born."

Officer Seventeen telephoned for the coroner, and after him Ormeega communicated with his newspaper office.

"Fallen out a window— Cable his name is, I think—a flier— Maybe it was suicide, and maybe not," his excited voice whispered.

Then he hung up the phone.

"They say for me to get the facts. Get all the facts," he stammered to Officer Seventeen. "What shall I say about it?"

"It will be a feather in both our caps, my boy," said Seventeen; "if we get all the facts clear and straight. A man doesn't fall out a window, unless he goes dizzy all of the sudden, without there being something somewhere behind it all."

They went up the dim stairs, the police officer, and the trembling old watchman, and Ormeega creeping cautiously behind, most fearful of them all. Tears leaked down the shriveled cheeks of the old watchman.

"George Cable dead! Young George Cable dead!" he continued to moan with each dragging step. "Ah, there're few such fine lads made any more."

Officer Seventeen motioned him to silence. Yet why, he did not know. This building was empty, not a rat squeaked.

They were on the third floor now, and they crept down a long black tunnel of a corridor. On one side were rows of doors with frost-glassed windows, through which a pale moonshine gleamed. The stony hush of the empty building seemed to command a reverential silence. This was a sarcophagus and a tomb.

Then the watchman touched Seventeen's arm, motioning him to stop. They were before a door beyond which was the twenty-first window. Through the frosted glass of this door a bit of dimmest moonlight, too, shone.

Officer Seventeen turned the knob softly and went in.

AT FIRST it seemed to the three of them that no man was here. But still and without speech they kept themselves, peering strangely about the empty places of the room, for the great hush and the night had overawed them all. There was no sound; and in that utter soundlessness there screamed an infinity of little silences. The silence of furniture which creaks in the night. The silence of faint rain on the closed window panes.

Silences which they themselves created as they watched and listened. The silence of the old watchman's creaking limbs. The silence of Officer Seventeen's rubber coat, whispering about him with his hushed breath. The silence of Ormeega's worn old shoes, slipping and slipping along the floor with the caution of a cat.

And there was another silence, the slow silence of a man's breathing, which was not the gasping breath of those three men who listened and watched in the pale dark. What? Surely a man's breathing. There was a man in that room. He sat beneath shadowy moonlight.

A man was sitting at a flat-topped desk, with his back to the windows, and his head fallen forward on a mass of scattered papers. Deeply he breathed. His head stirred regularly. Occasionally his hands, spread out before his head upon the desk, twitched with nervous reaction, as do the hands of a man when he sleeps heavily. There those three intruders saw him sitting, with his head fallen forward toward them; and a bit of the last moonlight lay over his face.

Officer Seventeen made no step, but his arm slowly reached with a whispering rustle toward his pistol-holster. Silently and warily, utterly afraid yet utterly fascinated, little Ormeega crept inch by inch over the floor toward the desk where this silent figure was sitting. *Shuh! shuh!* he softly dragged his feet.

The man did not move. He slept on. His cheek lay on the desk so his face was turned to Ormeega. His shoulders rose and fell. Spasmodically his outstretched hands shook, and the fingers clutched.

Close to him, daring hardly a breath, Ormeega crept. Dim light from the outer moon was on that motionless, shadowed face turned to Ormeega. Then Ormeega saw that the man's left eye was open. One pale eye was peering from between narrowed lids.

There was no word, and no awakening. Lured by terror uncontrollable, the little black-clad man who had crept up bent his head and stared, face to face, at the man bowed over the desk. Ormeega felt that he should see and know, though it might be his death.

Of a surety that eye was open. From a shuttered lid the gleaming half-moon of it was peering coldly and malignantly at Ormeega. It did not blink at all, but shone as a cold stone may shine. Steadily it lingered on Ormeega, neither opening wide nor closing altogether. Ah, cold and crafty was that evil eye! Ormeega knew then what horror shines in the eyes of devils, and that eternity is very long.

And as yet there was no stirring of that immobile face which lay on the desk-top, turned to Ormeega. It looked at the black-clad man, and through him, till Ormeega

felt that he was not. He felt that he was nothing, and that a wind passed through his bones.

Cloud drifted over the night without, and over that face came a darkness.

Abruptly Ormeega stretched forth a finger, drawn by a horror which almost made him scream. Against that unwinking eye he put his finger, touching the cold eyeball. The tip of his finger froze. For a moment he felt the heart within his breast congeal, and his strength fade away beneath him. There was nothing human in this touch, and at it the man had not moved.

Frantically, tripping over the tails of his funereal coat, Ormeega scrambled back, and the devils of the darkness reached out for him with laughter.

"I see you! I see you!" he screamed insanely, shattering the infinite silences of the room.

The room was drowned in white light. Light flooded every corner. There stood Officer Seventeen by the door, his pistol drawn. His eyes blinked rapidly. The old watchman had backed against a wall. It was he who had pressed on the electric switch.

"Why, it's Mr. Doane!" the old man shrilled.

Stone Doane lifted up his head from the desk. Both of his strange eyes, pale and dark, were opened. Heavily he slapped his hands on the desk, rustling a mass of papers.

"I must have fallen asleep," he said, looking slowly from Ormeega to Officer Seventeen, and last at the old watchman. "What time is it?"

STONE DOANE had got up. He limped toward Officer Seventeen.

"Why, no," he said in response to queries. "There's been no one in the office at all. And the windows have been closed all evening. You can see for yourself they are locked from the inside."

The eyes of Officer Seventeen followed Stone Doane curiously. He knew Doane by sight, having seen him around the city often in company with George Cable. Ormeega, too, was watching the lame young man. He recognized in Doane's walk the same slow limp he had observed in the walk of the man, whom he had accosted close to Skiff's house on another night of rain. On that dark night Doane's face had been in shadow, and Ormeega had not seen it clearly. Now that the electric light glared full on it, Ormeega saw that it was not the face of a man whom he remembered, either for good or evil.

"I've been working on a little contraption, a safety device for air-planes," said Stone Doane. "I've been at it since office closed this afternoon."

"What time did you fall asleep?" asked Officer Seventeen.

"I remember my eyes went back on me. I don't see so well as I used to," said Stone Doane. "That must have been about eleven. I switched off the lights and closed my eyes for a minute to rest them."

"It must have been more than a minute. My watch shows after midnight now," said Seventeen.

"As late as that?" said Doane.

"No man has been in this room?"

"Why, no," said Stone Doane.

"Not Lieutenant Cable?"

"Not George Cable, nor any one."

"These windows haven't been opened at all?" asked Seventeen.

"I closed them against the rain," said Stone Doane. "You can see they are locked from the inside."

"Suppose a man came in here while you were asleep?" suggested Officer Seventeen.

"I would have waked up."

"But you might not have heard him."

"That wouldn't have been possible," said Stone Doane.

"Well, we three came in, and we've been here almost a minute," said Officer Seventeen triumphantly. "And you still slept on like the dead."

Stone Doane limped to a window. He unlatched it, and jerked it open. The rain had ceased, and with it the white moon had gone.

"I would have waked up at any sound," said Doane, "or if you had been dangerous."

Doane thrust his head forth into the cool night air, staring down. On the plat of dark sward below this window a little group of men had gathered. Beside the curbing stood an ambulance. Now several of that little group of men below stooped, and they lifted something from the ground, and they staggered with it.

"What has happened down there, officer?" demanded Stone Doane in a voice of lively curiosity.

"That's the doctor and the coroner's men," said Officer Seventeen. "They are

a-carrying off George Cable. Poor fellow, he's a dead one."

"George Cable!" shouted Doane, turning with a gesture so terrible that his outflung hand struck near the face of Ormeega. "George Cable dead!"

"Ah, sir, he's gone."

On the floor by the window Officer Seventeen picked up a little bit of ribbon to which Ormeega had pointed attention. It was a bit of pale blue ribbon, studded with white stars, and at the end of it hung a Congressional Medal of Honor. Seventeen turned the medal over, slowly reading the engraving on the reverse—

"John Skiff, U. S. N."

"I wonder how Commander Skiff could have lost that," said Stone Doane. "He'd not part from it for his life."

THE music dragged late past the middle night at the British embassy ball. Tired old officers drowsed around, mopping their heated faces, and the cheeks of elderly matrons sagged until they became jowls. Young officers and the dew-cheeked girls drank heavily and without caution. The laws of Volstead touch not the British embassy.

Sir Geoffrey Duke, that ruddy, beaming English captain, yawned repeatedly and hugely, as though he would swallow his own cheerful face. He pulled at twin thin yellow mustaches which drooped down his mouth like walrus tusks. He wandered about, avoided by the young girls, asking everyone:

"Have you seen Towne recently? Towne was going to show me some sketches. He sent this young chap Cable out for them."

"I think the admiral left to take his daughter home," a hurried young man informed Duke. "He said something about dropping back later, if he had time."

"He keeps jolly good watch over that daughter of his," said Duke, blocking the hurried passage of the young man with his red, shining face. "You ought to have seen him flare up when I mentioned she has been dashing around a good bit with this young chap Cable. On the other side during the war, I remember, she used to go around with a young cousin of mine, a chap by the name of Stone Doane. What's the matter with the woman's husband? He's never with her."

"I don't know anything about that," said the hurried young man, knowing Sir Geoffrey's fondness for female gossip, and anxious to get away to where a brace of bright eyes awaited him. "Commander Skiff just came in, I think."

"Oh, Skiff's here?"

The hurried young man departed, seeking a woman probably younger, and to his immature eyes more attractive, than was Sir Geoffrey Duke. Duke sought for Commander Skiff, and found him at last in a room set aside for smoking.

"Hullo, hullo, Skiff. A bit late, what? Not too late, though. The best of the young girls are just getting warmed up."

Jack Skiff regarded Sir Geoffrey hazily. A devil of evil resided in his brain this night, and his skull seemed cracked apart.

"I didn't think I'd come," muttered Skiff at last. "Riding up the avenue a while ago, I saw the party was still on. Everything looked happy and gay, so I went home and dressed. It makes me sick!"

"What makes you sick?" asked Duke, laughing redly, polishing his monocle. "By the way, you must have just missed your wife. Young Cable brought her here. I understand the admiral has taken her home."

"Oh, ——!"

"What's the matter, Skiff?" asked Duke, beaming anxiously.

"I've lost my ribbon," Skiff muttered dully.

"What ribbon?"

"I'm a Congressional Medal man, you know. I can't find that thing now."

"Did you have it on when you came?" asked Duke, much perturbed, but continuing to smile like a blithe Edam cheese.

"I don't know," said Skiff laboriously, shaking his troubled head. "I can't think. I don't know whether I wore it, or whether I looked for it while dressing and couldn't find it."

"Well, it's not of much value," said Sir Geoffrey Duke. "I have a bushel of such trinkets."

A troubled uneasiness was on Jack Skiff. His hands trembled. In this smoking-room liquors had been set out, and on entering Skiff had been liberal with his thirst. At times the pain of an old wound troubled Jack Skiff; his head throbbed as an anvil throbs beneath hammers. When those times of pain came on him he could not

think clearly, neither to reason nor to remember; and the countenances of all men were shadowy to him.

Sir Geoffrey Duke talked with a tapping of his monocle on the rim of a glass, *tink! tink! tink!* His face receded and grew large to the vision of Skiff as he reclined in a leather chair, and sometimes the face disappeared entirely, leaving only a broad laugh surrounded by an aurora of ruddy cheeks.

"—a beautiful woman—" Sir Geoffrey Duke was saying idly.

Who was a beautiful woman, wondered Skiff. He knew many women. He thought that the Englishman was talking about his wife, Patricia. Yes, it was about Patricia that ruddy Duke was talking.

"Your wife reminds me in more ways than one of a woman who used to be a great favorite on the London variety stage," said Sir Geoffrey. "Do you remember her? All the young officers went after her. She made things gay for chaps back from the front. A jolly girl. She had a lot of tricks. What was her name now? Where do all the old girls go? Strange, as quick as that—" Duke tinked his glass— "She disappeared. Nobody knew what had become of her."

"I don't know what woman you mean," said Jack Skiff.

Thought of women brought up many images to Skiff. His pale, melancholy eyes fastened on Duke's face. He endeavored to supplement what he could understand of the Englishman's sharp, pointed vowels and dragging periods by watching Duke's lips. *Tink! tink!* the monocle emphasized meaningless sentences. And Sir Geoffrey continued to beam like the full harvest moon.

"I was just telling a chap I first met your wife during the war," he said. "It was in London, with Stone Doane——"

"Who is this Doane fellow?" asked Jack Skiff unsteadily, sitting up to stare at the cold, smiling eyes of Duke. "His name is not unfamiliar. Stone Doane?"

Sir Geoffrey beamed, and shrugged.

"Who is he?" reiterated Skiff, suddenly irritated, feeling his hurt head cracking, wiping his lips to dry away a senseless foam of anger.

"Oh, a chap," said Duke, smiling gaily.

"I didn't think he was a forsaken angel," said Skiff obnoxiously. "I say, who is this Doane? Do I know him?"

"He knew your wife," said Duke, beaming and sipping a glass.

Jack Skiff thought the Englishman said something about a wise husband knowing his own wife. But Skiff did not understand clearly. In the heavy pains which pressed about his head, Jack Skiff was impassioned with crazy thoughts. He wanted to thrust forth his tongue and make a gargoyle face at the monocle-tapping Englishman. He wanted to tweak that placid red nose, which scarcely wriggled as Sir Geoffrey talked. Most of all Skiff wanted to lean over and give an abrupt, vicious jerk at the pale blond mustaches which trailed down on either side of Sir Geoffrey's eternally smiling mouth, yelling—

"Take off the Summer furs, you grinning limey!"

Then for a long moment Jack Skiff believed he had done as he wanted to do, that he had actually delivered such an insult unparalleled and unmotivated to the pride of the British fleet. His will had not been strong enough; he was always intending deeds never accomplished. And a saving grain of reason remained to him even in his darkest hours. What he had thought of doing was senseless and insane, this grain of reason told Skiff. All men would have thought him crazy. Likely he was crazy, thought Jack Skiff, as were all men. Admiral Towne crazy with his adoration of coarse bull courage. George Cable crazy with the air. This ruddy Englishman crazy with his constant sunshine face.

"Stone Doane is a cousin of mine," explained Sir Geoffrey. "He's an American. He was with our forces early in the war, and then he transferred to yours. You may have met him there."

"I don't remember," muttered Jack Skiff, shaking his tired head.

They arose and walked to the door. Tired, disheveled young girls and their arrogant, soldierly escorts were drifting out into that night from which the rain had ceased. Silence had come over most of those chattering young voices, and the color gone from the young girls' cheeks. Duke was a sailor, and he loved young girls as a man past his heat and youth does love. He had seen the color go from many cheeks.

"Good night, Daddy Geoff!" called one impish girl with taffy hair.

She blew the ruddy Englishman a kiss, never imagining, it is sure, that this portly

grizzled-head knew any of the desires of youth. Sir Geoffrey smiled grimly after her, pulling his dyed blond mustaches.

"So many pretty little things!" he said. "D' you ever think, Skiff, how many more we miss than we can ever know?"

Jack Skiff bent his eyes to the floor. He was sensing, rather than seeing, the smiling expressionlessness of the Englishman's unchanging face.

"I've been trying to think of the name of that variety girl I was speaking about," said Sir Geoffrey Duke. "The sort of woman you know once in a lifetime, and think you'll never forget. Yet here her real name has gone from me, though Stone Doane might know it. I remember now her stage name—she called herself the Red Ant."

Jack Skiff looked up.

"Did you know her?" asked Duke.

After a long pause Skiff shook his head.

"No," he said slowly. "Perhaps Admiral Towne knew her. I think I've heard him speak of such a name. And I think he told me that she's dead."

POLICE officers searched the Navy building in the morning. They searched Stone Doane's office, and the admiral's office below. Early as they arrived, Doane was already there, bending over his desk as he patiently drafted sketches of his air-plane safety-device.

"Up late and early," said Officer Seventeen in greeting. "How did you sleep?"

"Like the dead," said Stone Doane wearily.

Prompt on the gong of nine clerks filed into the offices. They spent the next fifteen minutes as a rule in preparing their faces for the day's work. But this morning they gathered in little knots, newspapers under their arms, and whispered with high, hushed voices. There were the words in black beneath their arms—

FAMOUS FLIER FALLS TO DEATH

The four immediate stenographers of Stone Doane passed half the morning in leaning well out of the front window, staring down at the greensward plat. On it nothing, not a dint, not even a bent grass stem, marked where George Cable had fallen. But the four women seemed to gain a morbid excitement out of gazing at this narrow strip of green.

"Miss Russ!" Stone Doane would call. "Please get back to your desk!"

At that the four girls, none of whom was named Miss Russ, would pull in their long necks, and turn their indignant heads, and walk with swaying dignity to their typewriters. Viciously, with high-lifted fingers stabbing at the keys, they pounded off machine-gun barrages of words, glaring at Doane with poison in their looks, muttering as the keys clattered that they would see their congressmen. The names of the four girls were Reese, Ross, Race, and Rice; but Doane had never learned to distinguish them. They all answered to the name of Russ.

The police officers found nothing in Doane's office which explained in the least-wise the strange death of George Cable. The medal and the bit of ribbon which Officer Seventeen had picked up on the floor there the previous night were returned in due course to Jack Skiff. Only the journalist Ormeega was bold enough to suggest investigation of the reason that trinket had been there. The policemen were not interested.

In Towne's office on the floor below, however, the police officers, entering early in the morning, before any one else was in the building but the watchman and Stone Doane, found a window flung wide open. And half on a chair, half on the floor, they found the blue cape of George Cable, as though he had flung it off his broad shoulders in haste as he rushed from the door to the open window.

"He must have run right across the room and dove out," said Officer Seventeen. "It's plain enough this fellow Ormeega didn't see right when he claimed poor Cable fell from the floor above."

The officers were still in that room when Admiral Towne entered. Black hurricane was gathered in Towne's scowling brows.

"Don't tell me this was suicide, gentlemen!" he said, with hoarse, trembling voice. "By the holy, let me lay my hands upon the dog that did it, and I'll tear out his heart."

"Ah, such words don't help much, sir," Officer Seventeen respectfully reproved. "Though we all know, sir, you are a brave and terrible man."

Officer Seventeen was exploring the window-ledge. He asked for a magnifying-glass, and with the glass examined the wooden sill.

"What do you expect to find?" growled old Towne.

"Well, sir, here's a little tuft of wool that's caught on a splinter of the sill," said Officer Seventeen. "A tuft of dark wool, that came from some man's coat."

From his breast-pocket he drew carefully a folded bit of paper, and opened it, placing in the fold that almost microscopic bit of dyed wool.

"Do you think that came from Cable's coat?" asked Towne, suddenly keen, bending over to see.

"That is to be found out, sir."

"What's that?" asked Towne, staring at the bit of paper which Seventeen held so carefully. "Looks like a dead ant."

"A dead red ant, sir," explained Officer Seventeen. "I found that little fellow on poor Mr. Cable's face. There's a tiny bit of dark wool in its pincers, too, you see."

Admiral Towne bent his head close. He snorted suddenly, with surprize or indignation, and from the folded paper the dead ant and the bit of dark wool were blown away. Officer Seventeen caught them on his hand, and folded the paper about them, and put the paper carefully back in his breast pocket.

"Mummery!" said Admiral Towne.

But the sight of the dead red ant had left him curiously agitated.

TEN years ago, when man was young as a fledging dove in the air, daring timidly the lowermost strata of space in little puttering planes of canvas and bamboo, clumsy and frail as kites, Jack Skiff had been king of the air.

"Dizzy" Skiff he had been then—the first of those innumerable "Dizzies" who are the admiration and awe of every flying unit. He had broken the altitude record of six thousand feet, and the endurance record of three hours, and the speed record of ninety miles, till his name had gone around the earth, and he had become altogether a terror and a boast of flying men.

Now in these terrible new triumphs of the air, when ships shot up on the wings of rockets eight miles into space, when they cruised a day and a half on end without coming once to land, when they flew two hundred and fifty miles the hour with speed almost invisible, Jack Skiff had no place. Other Dizzies were on the front pages of newspapers. Other Dizzies rolled with insolence before the eyes of women. Other Dizzies grew vaunting drunk, and consumed themselves with tremendous nervous holocausts, and bandied insults with admirals, and were altogether the terrors and boasts of flying men.

Thirty-four is an age no longer young, a fact learned most quickly in the flying service. And Jack Skiff had had the heart knocked out of him.

His head hurt him, and often he was very tired. Often by day or night his head swelled and seemed to crack apart along its sutures. Then acid ate into his brain, and Jack Skiff was not altogether a man. In the night when that pain came on him he would snap his teeth and cry. Once his wife Patricia had found him during a night thunder-storm in a clothes-closet. He was flat on his face, an armful of woman's gowns piled over his head, and he was whimpering like a puppy.

In the old days of his tremendous glory Jack Skiff had come to a dreadful crash. Many men, who have known a less dreadful destruction, are now pushing up the daisies, or their bones rot under the water. Cunning surgeons, experimenting in the plasticity of the flesh, had picked up bits of Jack Skiff, and joined them together as a chinamaker joins a broken bowl, so that his heart beat in him again, and his brain thought and agonized. They were good and wise men, those surgeons. Yet had they been wiser and not so good, it is likely those cunning surgeons would have achieved a greater humanity by letting the broken bowl be broken. In all those bits they cunningly put together, there was a shard, a part of Dizzy Skiff which they could not replace. And without it at times he was hardly a man at all.

In his secret night-sweats now hour without end Jack Skiff spun down to that dreadful crash again and over again. Forever through horrible nights down, down he whirled through emptiness, with the rocking ocean rushing up to smash him, with the universe teetering insanely above and then below him—*swish! swish!* the empty winds drop away; the crazy earth jerks right and left; the ocean knots its stony waves and leaps upward dizzily— Kick the locked rudder-bar, strain at the wheel, throw away the goggles which will smash out your eyes! Set your muscles for the terrific impact of dissolution.

In those night-sweats, forever and forever hurtling down in those terrific spins,

came never the final crash. And often, threshing his hurt head upon his bed, Jack Skiff prayed to what gods he knew for that oblivious crash to come, and all to be ended.

Particularly during thunder-storms in the heavy heat of Washington Summer those agonies rose in him. Only gambling, and utter drunkenness, and women of easy love could soften those deliriums. All the stories whispered about Jack Skiff's loose living are quite true. In his last hour he was unsteady with drink, and he passed to the debtors' paradise of death owing many of his brother officers pledged debts of honor.

Those gambling-debts were wiped off to the account of profit and loss. And to the account of profit and loss, we may suppose, was wiped off the memory of Jack Skiff by the many gay, insolent daughters of laughter who had known him.

There is a decent way to go to Sheol, as any gentleman knows, and any gentleman who cares to go that way may go there with good luck. It is probable that Jack Skiff was hardly decent about it. He lacked that discrimination in choosing vices, in yielding to them, which is the essential of gentility. Pray God may each of us be within our sins still to the last a gentleman!

Jack Skiff was hardly decent about it. Some things his wife heard, stories about Jack Skiff and women of the town, white or tan. Some things she saw. That is, as any gentleman who goes the road to Sheol knows fully, not the gentlemanly thing. But Jack Skiff had been a man when the heart was still in him, the terror and the awe of flying fools; and because of that much should be forgiven him.

As surely as if before his eyes, as before the eyes of the Babylonian, upon the wall of consciousness the hand of God had written, Commander Jack Skiff knew the manner of his taking-off. He would die at the end of all the nightmares by a crash down to the earth. Wide once more would split that old anguishing wound upon his head, and his bones would splinter like thin goblet stems, impaling his quivering flesh. All his body would be smashed apart, each nerve an agonizing particle. This sensitive flesh which was his life and consciousness would be less than the dung upon a fallow field, and the ants which burrow under earth would make their nest in it.

This, Jack Skiff believed and knew, was the senseless "*Mene, mene, tekel*" of his fate, a foredamnation pitiless and unjust. Already, though his heart beat and his brain thought, Jack Skiff knew as dead ghosts know the horror of his taking-off, and all the unutterable pains of dissolution.

Admiral Towne, bold and terrible and strong, a bellowing lion of a man all his life long, held Jack Skiff to be an utter poltroon. The terrible admiral, though, had never been consumed with the infinite pains of death; and like most mature, healthy men he deemed he would live forever.

It was thus that Admiral Towne had been able to see the countenance of Stone Doane on that night of black rain, and his heart not at all trembled. Yet when Jack Skiff saw Stone Doane in the evening clear, he was frightened to a sharp cry—

"You came up from the black water!"

THE storm flags flew in late afternoon. They were calling the seaplanes in. Jack Skiff, who commanded the air station by the Potomac, had seen a cloud the size of a man's hand far in the west, and he ordered up the flags. Men on the beach, pilots and mechanics, grumbled and spat at the smooth river.

"Air as smooth as a girl's cheek," said one young ensign. "What's the matter with that fellow Skiff?"

"Once he seen a flea hopping through the air before his nose," growled a weathered chief. "He thought it was a cloud over the whole infernal sky, and ordered us to batten down for hurricane."

"The Army is still up," said the young ensign bitterly, looking over to the neighboring land field. "They fly in any weather. By Judas, I'd as soon push a baby carriage as fly under Skiff!"

"He's yellow," said the chief scornfully. "Never was a Chinaman half so yellow."

Mechanics in bathing-suits, with little round white hats set cockily on their curls, waded breast deep in the warm river-water. They caught the wings of sea-planes taxiing to the beach, summoned home by the recall flags, and slipped two-wheeled trucks beneath their keels to haul them up on shore. They were shouting to each other and splashing water. One sturdy fellow came staggering up the submerged incline out of the water, carrying the pilot of a seaplane on his shoulders. The pilot leaped

to the runway and stamped sullenly up the beach, violently slapping his thigh with his soft leather helmet.

"Not a bump in the whole sky," he swore. "What in the name of the blank and rotten sun is the idea of the recall flags? What has got into Skiff now?"

"He heard somebody sneeze and he thought it was thunder," the young ensign said with a grin.

"Wait till the admiral gets here! You'll see those recall flags come tumbling down for a crash, and the flying-flags go zooming up again."

Down on the concrete runway near the sleek brown river carpenter's mates were working over the hull of a flying-boat. A civilian limped restlessly about them, giving occasional curt directions which he enforced with gestures of authority. He moved idly around the boat, inspecting control-wires and tail surfaces with one squinting eye, feeling them with deft punches of his finger.

"That's the fellow from the bureau who's always coming down to fly with Mr. Cable, isn't it?" asked the weathered old chief. "Great friends they seemed to be. What's his name—Doane?"

"Stone or Doane," said the young ensign. "Cable always called him Stone. This fellow, whatever his name is, has rigged up some sort of a jigger that's supposed to take away all danger of burning up in the air."

"Some fool contraption invented by a ground-hog!"

"More likely to kill a man than save him," agreed the young ensign.

"It takes a fellow from the bureau to invent ways for killing off good men," growled the old chief. "It takes a fellow like that every time."

"The admiral is keen for Stone's, or Doane's, idea, whatever it is," said the ensign. "They're making quite a thing of it. See, a couple of newspaper men have come down to write something about it."

"That sad-looking little fellow in the black overcoat?"

"He's one of the newspaper men," said the ensign.

"He looks like a little rat that somehow has wiggled into an elephant's hide," said the old chief. "His clothes flop around him like that. Look how he struts around as if he was something. I bet the wind would *swoosh* right out of him if you told him he had to go up in the air."

The carpenter's mates who had been working on the flying-boat gathered up their tools and moved back. Mechanics clambered up and cranked the propeller. The engine snorted and roared. The wheels of the truck on which the boat rested strained against their chocks. A terrific wind blew back from the shining circle of the invisible blade. A sailor's white hat danced down the beach. Caught in the blast, men behind the boat cowered low and scurried, their blue dungarees whipped taut about their bodies.

"Look at that fool reporter!" laughed the ensign. "He'll lose his hold in half a minute, and go sailing off like a kite. Hi, you!"

The little man in the black overcoat, the newspaper man Ormeega, had been caught by the propeller-blast. He snatched at a stabilizer strut at the back of the flying-boat, and clung fiercely, his toes barely dragging to the ground. His long black coat billowed out behind him, his baggy gray suit flapped like a gusty sail, betraying how meager was his body. Roaring currents of air streamed against him. If he himself did not blow clear away, it seemed his clothing must. Grimly he bit his lips. Eyes closed, he clung with terrific and immitigable resolution to the strut at arm's reach about his head.

The ensign ran forward, shouting. Before he had gone more than a step or two, Ormeega lifted himself by the arms, till his feet were well off the ground. When he had drawn his chin up level with his hands, he swayed his whole body like a pendulum, and suddenly let himself go. He swung sidewise out of the propeller-stream, and scrambled away along the beach.

"Strong arms that little fellow has," said the young ensign.

"Not much of a body to lift," said the old chief disparagingly. "But he's a light enough fellow on his feet, and quick that way."

The engine having turned up satisfactorily, a mechanic in the boat's cockpit cut the switch. The loud howling of the engine died, and the silence afterward was thin.

Jack Skiff came out of his office and walked along the beach. Stone Doane was then in a hangar, and Skiff did not see him.

It is certain that for years Skiff had not seen Stone Doane with his conscious eyes.

With an air of caution verging on timidity Jack Skiff approached the flying boat. Anxiously, his hand patting the gray sides like a nervous woman's hand patting a sullen poodle, Skiff went over the boat's keel and flying surfaces. After that perfunctory and useless examination, he gave an abrupt order to have the boat trundled into her hangar.

SENTRIES at the gate and along the beach snapped to the "present" as a large gray Navy car came rolling into the station. The officer of the day hurried to report to Commander Skiff that Admiral Towne had arrived. Riding with Towne in the gray car were Sir Geoffrey Duke and Towne's daughter, Patricia Skiff.

Old Towne was grumbling and muttering in his beard. Sweat engendered by the hot, hushed late afternoon had seeped into that grizzled beard till it was damp and twisted awry. This gave the good, brave admiral a peculiarly malignant look, as if from before his hidden countenance a mask had partially slipped off.

Towne clambered out, and strode to the runways, till the muddy Potomac water was lapping at his shoes. When the mechanics on the beach and in the water saw the great admiral they fell into abrupt and utter silence. One or two of the apprentice seamen, fresh from training-school and terrified by sight of so much flashing gold braid, tried to salute even as they waded far out to receive the inward taxi-ing boats. Their arms smacked clumsily above the water.

"Never mind! Never mind that!" Admiral Towne bawled, terrifying the apprentices more than ever. "Pay attention to your duties! Don't gawk at me! I'm not a square-headed hippopotamus!"

Some of the young fellows tried to grin. Sir Geoffrey Duke, who had waddled with much puffing after Towne down to the river-edge, enlarged his continual ruddy smile, screwing a monocle in his face.

"Cheerful young chaps," he said.

"I've been an apprentice myself," said Towne grimly, "in days when the Navy was the Navy. I've taken all the kicks that came, and I've given some."

"Not an Annapolis man, then?" asked Sir Geoffrey.

"No, sir! From the ranks," said Towne emphatically. "Apprentice boy, seaman, chief, and warrant, and up through all the commissioned grades, I've earned every inch of this gold stripe."

Sir Geoffrey surveyed the gold stripe with beaming respect. Towne looked down at the Englishman, and in his pride spoke more unreservedly about his personal history than was his wont.

"My father was a rich man," he said. "He left a large fortune when he died. But I was never coddled. I fought my way. He sent me into the Navy to make a man of me. I liked the service, and the service liked me. So I stuck."

"You have a private fortune, then?" asked Sir Geoffrey, with the respect a good Englishman feels toward property.

"Quite considerable," said old Towne drily.

"Your daughter is your only heir?" asked Sir Geoffrey, with the honesty with which a good Englishman discusses property.

"She and her husband," said old Towne. "He'll spend it some day."

His brows gathered in a frown, and he muttered something unintelligible. He was thinking of that time, it is likely, when his old bones should be laid away in his country's flag to rot, when Jack Skiff, whom Admiral Towne despised as an utter coward, should have usufruct of his money.

Commander Skiff came hurrying along the beach and down the inclined runways to greet the admiral. In a bit of wind which was puffing up, the headache which had been bothering him seemed to lighten and cool. Skiff was afraid of his father-in-law. Fear was greater than pain and gave him control of himself. There is a certain tremendous pride which arises from being captain of a ship, which is equaled by no other pride. This air station was Jack Skiff's ship and he was skipper on it.

"What's the occasion of the recall flags, sir!" bellowed Towne. "The air is as smooth as a silk quilt, and I never saw a finer day. Why are your sea-planes all coming in, sir?"

Assaulted by his burly anger, Jack Skiff slipped as he hurried down the slick concrete slope. His arms waved wildly for balance, and he attempted to salute even as his feet shot forward from beneath him and he skidded along on his back, Sir Geoffrey Duke laughed loudly and sharply.

Admiral Towne stepped hastily a foot into the river brink, to avoid being bowled over by Skiff's feet. As Skiff caught himself on his hands, and scrambled up, the admiral stamped vigorously out of the water, shaking his leg repeatedly and cursing with deep-sea oaths. He hopped about on one foot, his ankle crossed over his knee, wringing water from his trouser-cuff. Sir Geoffrey Duke laughed sharply again. Immediately the furious glares of old Towne smote him. Sir Geoffrey subsided. He bent his head to brush a mote of dust from his coat-lapel, hiding his smiling beneath his nose.

"What is the reason of this recall in clear weather, Commander Skiff?" bellowed the admiral, angrier than ever. "No flying yesterday because of rain, and today because of sun. What weather do you need? Do you fly only on a night when the moon drips dew and —— is frozen over?"

Jack Skiff swallowed.

"Lieutenant Cable, sir—" he began.

"Do you expect the whole Navy to halt all activity when a man falls down?" asked Admiral Towne, his beard quivering. "By George, sir, if the Navy sat down to bawl like women every time a man dies, the tears would founder all our ships upon the seas!"

"I wasn't going to suggest that, sir," said Skiff with a gasp. "I meant to say that any experienced pilot could tell you bad weather is likely to come up. For myself, I don't like the looks of the sky."

"And what is wrong with the looks of the sky?" inquired the admiral with bold sarcasm. "Is it too blue? Is it too high? Or is the earth beneath the sky too hard for you, Commander Skiff?"

"The weather bureau reports a storm coming up from off the Capes."

"By the holy, the weather man isn't yet admiral of the Navy! I would be obliged if you would hoist your flying-flags, sir, and break out your ships again."

Although the sun was hot and bright, and the wind almost motionless, there might be hurricane yet within the calm evening. Something threatened beneath the brassy sunset which was more than a cloud and a little rain. In the smooth, hot day men cast black shadows as they moved about. And they moved slowly, as if weighted by great invisible chains.

"I WANT to try out this Doane boat," said old Towne. "Is it ready?"

"Some men have been working on a boat," said Skiff. "I ordered it back in the hanger. Shall I call a pilot?"

"I'll take it up myself," said Towne.

"Not alone, sir?"

"Do I need one of your half-grown sky chauffeurs to pilot me, sir?" roared Towne, irritated by a mistrustful quality in Skiff's voice. "Do I look sick? Do I look like a woman?"

There stood old Admiral Towne, almost six feet of him, firmly planted on the pillars of his brawny legs. His deep chest heaved with snorts. He lifted off his hat to scratch his bald head, wrinkled and freckled and scaled red by the sun. Then his heavy hand rumpled up his damp, grizzled beard, twisting it and pulling it apart till it stood forth from his chin like two ram's horns.

A strong man he was, one of the strongest of men even yet, with iron in his hard old hands. The only man over fifty to pilot a plane alone. The only wearer of gold stripes in all the service willing to go below a battleship's decks and have a fight out with fists against any strong man of the fireroom gang, according to the ancient law of the ocean. There he stood, old Admiral Towne, old Beaver Towne, from the Mediterranean squadron to the Asiatic fleet the most appalling skipper of ships on the sea. A viking, a berserk, a bold tiger of war.

"Do I look like a woman? Do I look sick?" Towne had scornfully asked Skiff.

"No, sir," said Jack Skiff, lifting his melancholy eyes to the admiral.

But Jack Skiff thought to himself that the bigger they are, the harder they fall; and no strength can save them from that.

"Order out the boat, sir, if you please," said Towne. "I'm not afraid of smooth air. No, nor of any storm, either."

Jack Skiff's lips twisted down, and he knotted his hands before him. Now he was afraid that Admiral Towne, flaming with contempt, would name him as a coward. Before Patricia, before Sir Geoffrey Duke, before the pilots and mechanics who whispered while they watched, before his whole crew of officers and men, Towne would name him as an utter craven. Jack Skiff waited for that word.

Towne's beard trembled, and he muttered without words. Yet for this time he said nothing.

The flying-flags were run up rapidly. At Skiff's order mechanics pushed out from the hanger that flying-boat on which, earlier in the afternoon, the carpenter's mates had been working under Stone Doane's directions. The boat rolled down to the water. On the sleek brown surface it floated like a fat duck, its broad, stub wings slapping at the water. Men in the river pulled the truck from underneath the boat's keel, and it floated clear.

"You have looked over her controls, Skiff?" asked the admiral.

"I think they are all right. If you're not sure, sir——"

"Oh, I'll trust your eye," said Towne easily.

He never bothered with the condition of a boat; that was the mechanics' job. Let such timid fellows as Skiff feel all the tightly twisted control-wires to see if a fine strand had broken, and waste an hour searching for rust in the hinges of flippers and rudder—Towne took a boat as it came to him, and so he flew it.

"Come on with me, Captain Duke," said Towne, beckoning imperiously. "I'll give you an hour that you will remember."

For the first time the broad and beaming smile disappeared from the countenance of Sir Geoffrey Duke. He scrambled hastily up the runway, and still farther back, as though he feared he would be embarked by sheer force in the flying-boat.

"Not for all the national debt!" Duke exclaimed with great determination. "Not for anything would I fly in that boat with you!"

"What is the matter with the boat, or with me?" asked Admiral Towne, smiling hardily.

Beside the pilot's seat a dummy was arranged at Towne's direction, a sad stuffed canvas creature with a determined smile on the wide crescent of its green lips. Out of dirigible or plane or kite, many times it had been hurled overboard down through the empty air. It had been smashed to fine particles of lead and sand, to shreds of canvas and sawdust fibers. Though nothing else remained of it, through all those horrors it had kept unendingly its wide green smile. It had been christened Alice, because of that sweet lady of the old song who "smiled with delight."

Admiral Towne climbed from the runway on to a wing of the boat, and along the wing's edge into the cockpit. He unloosed his collar, he put on goggles, he gripped the wheel, he spat into the river. Mechanics in bathing-suits cranked the propeller, and leaped from the boat. With a leering flick of the flippers, Towne headed from the beach, and down the smooth brown river.

Straight down stream close to the shore he headed against what small wind there blew. The ripples of his wake surged up on shore. Sir Geoffrey Duke industriously brushed from his sleeve two water drops hurled back on him by the propeller-blast.

"I'd not fly with Towne in that boat, not me," the Englishman reaffirmed, beaming on Skiff with his meaningless expression of jocularity.

"Did it look to you like those elevator wires are worn?" asked Jack Skiff, glancing out of a corner of his eye at Duke. "When he pulled the flippers up and down as he shoved off, I thought I saw a shine like a new break——"

"Don't know anything about the confounded boats," said Sir Geoffrey.

Patricia Skiff had emerged from the motor-car. She came up to the men, linking her arm with her husband's.

"This business gets on your nerves," muttered Jack Skiff, a shudder passing over him. "Of course, the mechanics are all careful fellows; and the boats are made to stand strains. You could lift a house from its foundations with one of those control-wires. But if a wire breaks when a man is in the air——"

"Why should it break?" asked the woman calmly. "You worry too much, Jack."

"There were some queer things happened during the war," said Skiff excitedly. "You know it. Good pilots killed themselves. And when we fished up pieces of their planes, at times it looked as if the control-wires hadn't snapped, but had been cut nearly through."

"It would be bad, say, you know, if these wires broke?" asked Duke.

"A man crashes," said Jack Skiff with a shudder.

He shook his head viciously, for a sharp agony stabbed through his brain, and for a moment he could see nothing.

THE flying-boat slogged heavily down the smooth water, weighted by Towne's bulk and the hundred and fifty pound dummy. It left a wide triple furrow behind it. Down the river

bank, parallel with Towne's course and close to it, a little man was running with all speed. Commander Skiff was reminded of a country dog which tears furiously after railroad trains.

"Odd chap," commented Sir Geoffrey.

"A newspaper fellow, I think," said Skiff.

The long black overcoat of Ormeega flapped about his shins as he ran along the bank, at times tripping him to a stumble. His hat blew off, and his mange-streaked head was uncovered. The reporter kept his eyes on the river at his right side as he raced south down the shore, vainly trying to equal the increasing speed of the plane which skimmed along the sleek water.

The flying-boat had got on its step, and swiftly the forepart of its keel sliced the water's surface. Its wings trembled taut against the air; the boat gathered speed to lift above the river. In that moment, as it arrowed close to the shore along the top water, there chugged out from the bank a little gasoline dory, intent on crossing the river. It cut directly athwart the flying boat's course.

A turning then would have settled the plane's tail down in the water again, and her gathered speed would have been broken. Straight to the course Towne kept his boat, and straight across the course snorted the dory.

The three men in the dory seemed sure that this swift winged thing, skimming toward them at seventy miles an hour, would turn aside. They did not know that the wheel was in the hard grip of Beaver Towne, who in all his life had never turned aside from off a course determined. Not his own destruction would swerve him, and not theirs. Calmly one of the three men in the boat focused a camera, to snap a picture of the sea-plane heading on.

Ormeega, running furiously down the shore to watch Towne's flight, had been a hundred yards outdistanced. Stumbling often, he kept doggedly on, though the flying-boat now was going over a hundred feet a second.

The wires between the boat's wings sang. Her engine whined a loud song. In rainbow speed her propeller whirled, an invisible circle of death which caught the light of the horizon sun. The three men in the dory took an easy breath, for the swift plane was still two hundred yards away. When they took breath again, the winged boat was upon them.

Watching from the runway that boat, skimming down the river, Commander Skiff gave a low groan. His knees crumpled beneath him and he staggered against the shoulder of his wife. He waited to hear the splintering echoes of such a crash as years before had cracked his reason.

The three men in the dory stared with strained, frozen faces. Even yet they did not believe this thing. Used all their lives —as city men are—to having other men watch out for them, avoid them and be tender of them, they waited for this bulleting ship to swerve, until it was too late for flying-boat or dory to swerve.

Immobile the three men sat, struck to stone within the split-second of destruction. And if they smoked cigarets, the cigarets still burned from lips too stiff to loosen them. And if they clicked camera bulbs, or scratched their noses, or yawned, they were petrified in those petty gestures. They had no time for heroic posturings. Their eyes did not move. Their eyes were salt and stone, fastened with bright horror on the hurtling bow of that winged ship which in a hundredth second would smash them as a man's hand smashes flies.

They saw the gray, blunt bow loom up above the chuckling water, and behind it the grim countenance of Admiral Towne, bearded and red; and behind his head the quivering linen wings, and the loud-screaming engine. The countenance of Towne was hardened and expressionless, yet a curious twist was on it, as if laughter rose from his bearded lips. Then the round gray bow of the flying boat lifted steep up from the water's breast, a gray lightning bolt to smite them.

"—— blast you, I'll sue you!" shrieked one of the three men, leaping up.

Along the shore behind was another shout. Ormeega lifted up his arms and fell face first, uttering a loud and unintelligible cry.

A shadow passed over the dory, and a streaking wind. The setting sun was blackened. Six inches above the heads of the men in the dory the flying-boat's dripping keel swished. Towne had vaulted them, and soared steep into the air, by the time the last of the three had leaped from the dory into the muddy river.

As a horseman hurdles a barricade,

Admiral Towne had leaped over. Straight up he zoomed, circling in ascending spirals toward the blue evening air. The roaring of his motor died away.

The little man on shore lifted up his face as the roar of the motor lifted and passed away. He stumbled farther along. In the water close by the bank three men were splashing frantically, churning and gasping as they reached for the dory's gunwales, trying to keep their clothing dry. That last could not be done, for from bed to surface the Potomac is a wet river.

"I'm drowning!" screamed one of the men to Ormeega, turning a despairing countenance.

He flung up his arms and swallowed water. Then his head disappeared beneath the brown tide. Though Ormeega was a strong swimmer, and the men who struggled in the water were not far from the river bank, Ormeega made no motion to help. He crept back with a frightened air till long grasses, and then some trees, hid him from the water. Behind the trees, in the long marsh-grasses he crouched, watching the three floundering men with a malignant grin.

Black as shoe-buttons gleamed his eyes. He had recognized one of those men in the water as Officer Seventeen, and another as that policeman who, a few nights before, had hustled him out of the embassy grounds at order of Admiral Towne.

One of the flounderers felt the muddy river-bottom beneath his feet. The water was not above thirty inches deep. The policeman stood up, and hauled his comrades up by their shoulders. Cursing largely, spitting water from noses and mouths, the three men waded to the shore.

"The admiral tried to kill us!" said Officer Seventeen bitterly. "He saw us plain enough, but he tried to kill us. Ah, he's a terrible old man. There was murder in his face, if I know what murder is."

DRIPPING a wet trail, clasping their arms about their shivering bodies, the three men passed by the covert where Ormeega lay in concealment watching them. They walked up the bank toward the air station. At the station boundary a sentry met them, and led them down the beach to Commander Skiff. Officer Seventeen saluted, and made his complaint.

"Commander Skiff, did you see that? The admiral, he almost killed us. It ain't right that we should be scared half to death. And I'd be obliged if you would tell the admiral so, sir, with my respects."

"The admiral had the right of way," said Skiff. "You cut across his course."

"He hasn't any cause to kill three men over a right of way!"

"If you had kept your heads, you'd not even have got wet," said Skiff without sympathy. "The admiral knew what he was doing. He always knows."

Though he made this assertion without qualification, Skiff was aware well enough that a man may know fully what he is doing, and not know how his deed shall end. Regarding this instance of Admiral Towne, had the flying-boat's controls failed to respond by the hundredth of a second, or had one of those toughly interwoven wires snapped, there would be four mangled men down in the river in the wrecks of the flying-boat and the dory. Admiral Towne had taken a quick chance with death, and he had won. So Skiff said that Towne had known what he was doing.

There comes the disastrous instant, however, when controls, slackened or jammed or frayed away, do not respond to the swift and urgent hand. Then the man who has taken the quick chance, no matter how strong or how bold or how cunning he may be, no matter how well he always knows what he is doing, is named with departed ghosts.

It is not safe, thought Commander Skiff, to take the quick chance in order to frighten men who have cut across one's course.

A boat from the station had gone out to retrieve the dory. With engine running still in gear, it chugged around in enlarging circles off the shore.

"What are you fellows doing here?" asked Skiff, staring one after another at the three shivering men.

"Fishing," explained Officer Seventeen, in an aggrieved voice. "We've been out fishing."

"Any luck?"

"Not yet," said Seventeen.

"Not looking for a man, are you?" asked the commander, his eyes narrowing sharply. "I suppose you know this station is a Navy ship. You have no authority on board it."

"No, sir, I'd never try to get a man here," said Seventeen. "The three of us was just out fishing."

Their dory had been brought to the

beach. The three soaked and shivering men embarked, and the dory spluttered westward over the river toward the docks of Washington.

The beach crew had all been dismissed for supper, save for the two mechanics of the boat which Admiral Towne was flying. These men squatted on their hams at the water's edge, waiting to receive the boat when it should alight and come taxi-ing home. A Marine sentry slumped up and down the shore, his rifle held lazily, muzzle down, beneath the crook of his arm. Patricia Skiff and Captain Duke moved away; they settled themselves in the big gray motor-car which had brought them to the station. Gaily they whispered together. And of their gaiety or of their whispering Commander Jack Skiff felt himself to have no part.

Gulls dipped. A black gull and two white gulls floated and dipped, wing down and wing up, upon the smooth, hushed air which comes with the early evening. The sun had gone beyond the War College, beyond the river-rim. Violet strands of darkness entangled the eastern sky.

Commander Skiff turned abruptly from the beach. He entered the sunless gloom of a hangar. In the spider shadows of that lofty hall Skiff's eyes, not yet enlarged to the quiet gloom, saw at first no man. Darkened planes crouched helter-skelter over the hangar floor. They were like dragons, like huge flying reptiles, crouching in a bog and battening on some prey seized during their terrific forays through the air. Wing to wing they nestled, shadowy and still.

Then Commander Skiff beheld, through the door of a little workroom at the side of the main hangar, a man standing back toward him at a welding-bench. The man's head was bent. He worked with a flame. In one hand something writhed. Skiff walked curiously and a trifle cautiously toward the workroom door. This man was not in uniform; he was not one of Skiff's men. Yet a gesture of his shoulders, or the intent set of his round head as he bent toward the flame he was holding, was to Commander Skiff a posture at once strange and reminiscent.

Jack Skiff stood in the doorway. He saw that the man was applying a soldering torch to a long length of flying-wire. The blue flame spouting from the torch outlined the man's head.

"Who are you?" asked Skiff, vaguely troubled. "What are you doing here?"

The man slowly turned his head. On Commander Skiff for an instant rested a pale blue eye. It passed through Skiff as an eye passes which does not see. Then the man turned completely. He laid down his tools, and he limped a step forward.

"My name is Doane——"

Huge shadows of obscured memory passed over the mind of Jack Skiff. Shadows they were, and he tried to seize them. He felt the immediate present dissolve about him, as sunlight dissolves in fog.

"Doane?" he repeated. "Stone Doane?"

He was transported to an ocean on which white moon was shining. He smelled the smoke of powder, and all about him was the roar and clatter of battle. Men were crouching at their guns, laughing and cursing and whining eagerly, with the hushed throatiness of angry dogs.

Two long submarines, struck by clean hits, burst apart. The ocean, glittering beneath the white moon, spouts up. The backbones of the great iron sharks crack. Bow and stern they rear above the moon-mirroring black ocean, while men cling to them, and drop into the water. An insolent bugle, small and clear, begins to blow. With last titanic defiance there is lifted from the stern of one ship a white battle-flag with a black cross. Little sounds drift up, hushed and slow over the water. Then all disappears, all sounds cease. The ocean washes.

And out of that moon-struck, whispering ocean Jack Skiff saw coming up on to the deck of his ship the indomitable face and strong body of this man Stone Doane, with his evil eye gleaming diabolically, and blood dripping from it.

"I remember you!" cried Jack Skiff, all unnerved as he beheld this man limping toward him. "You came up from the water!"

The arm of Doane was extended. Skiff did not move, either to advance or to retreat, but he felt his whole body tremble with dark memories. The hand of Stone Doane came slowly down upon his shoulder.

"I see you remember me," said Doane.

HIGH up within the darkening air, the men and the woman on the beach saw the boat which Admiral Towne was flying begin to bob. It lifted and slashed down its nose again, as if Towne

rode a bucking horse toward the distant planets.

Then abruptly its nose dived sheer downward, and did not lift nor level out again. On one wing the boat fell over, and sideslipped a thousand feet down through whistling space. It caught and held its altitude a moment, poised and motionless in the calm, dark air. Then it swept down on the other wing. Three arcs its flashing wings cut in long downward swoops, wing after wing. For a moment it tightened up, perpendicularly to the earth, and whipped in tight spirals on the axis of its tail.

From the watch-tower on the hangar's roof a lookout, watching with glasses, shouted loudly, so his cry was heard clear over the beach—

"He's out of control!"

Officers and men, from mess-hall and quarters, came tumbling out and down to the shore. They gathered in silent knots, close by the river's rim. Each man was straining up on tiptoes, holding his lungs, tightening his fists against his breast. There was nothing a man here on earth could do, yet each man lifted as if he would spread forth angelic wings, and soar upward to help that man who in the high air was fighting his fight alone.

"Almighty! His elevator controls have broken!" whispered a young ensign. "He hasn't got a prayer!"

With wing up and wing down, perpendicular to the earth, the flying-boat cut about on the axis of its tail, as if it were boring a cylindrical hole down through the still air. Then from that sharp, upended spiral again the nose of the boat fell off, and it swished down in another arc upon one wing.

"He's trying to use the rudder to bring him down," said the young ensign. "He'll never do it. He'll fall into a spin."

"Then it's good night," said an old chief.

The elevator, or the flippers, which direct a ship up and down, had for some reason failed. Without elevator the ship must fall steep down, and whip over into a spin. From that there could be no arighting. But on its side, as the boat was dropping, the normally vertical rudder became horizontal. It acted partially as an elevator to break the sweeping arcs in which the boat swished down.

"He's fighting hard!" said the young ensign.

"He'd fight through anything."

"But he's out of control now!"

"He's still playing with the rudder."

Patricia Skiff stood up in the motor-car. Her face strained upward. She said nothing. Once, when a young girl, she had watched Jack Skiff spinning down to such a crash. Seated beside the woman, Captain Duke adjusted his monocle.

"Clever work," he said, plainly not comprehending the desperate straits into which Towne had fallen. "I almost wish I had gone up with him."

Down in long swoops, with a *swish! swishing!* of wings which could clearly be heard in the silent and windless evening, the flying-boat whipped on alternate wings. It had dropped all of five thousand feet, and was not a thousand feet above the station and the river. Towne had cut the engine switch. The propeller turned over slowly, forced to revolutions by the gigantic pressure of the air.

Like a terrific hawk the clumsy boat arched on its left wing clear inland. It disappeared behind the hangar roof. The man in the glass-enclosed watch-tower on the roof shouted. He lifted up his hand as the crowd on the beach turned to watch. Was he signaling a crash? There was no sound. Suddenly the watchman dropped down, flat on his face on the tower-room floor.

The flying-boat had fallen on its right wing. Riverward it whistled sideways down over the hangar roof, not three feet above the watch-tower. It swept toward the beach and the sleek brown river.

The great shadow of the helpless ship loomed large over the beach. For a long tenth-second the crowd which stared up at this falling three-ton weight stood like stone. Then men broke and ran from underneath.

With its right wing steep down, the cockpit of the boat had been visible from below as it swooped down over the hangar roof. The hands of Towne could be seen, violently pulling the wheel toward him and thrusting it away, striving to get response from the elevator controls. His countenance was grimly set to the last. He had thrown away his goggles.

Once more for an instant Towne caught with the rudder the downward speed of the boat, and broke it. It caught, and held for an eye-flash, losing speed. It straightened out clumsily on level keel. For that

instant its velocity was almost totally lost. It skidded slowly across the beach, not more than thirty feet up, its wings sagging, but hesitating to drop. Above the heads of the scurrying men on the shore it hung suspended, a gray, threatening mass in the air. Its bow slowly skidded outward to the river.

Again Towne brought the boat steep down on its right wing. As it dived sidewise a wing pontoon caught at the surface of the smooth water close inshore. All speed was lost. The hull revolved in a half-circle on the pivot of the wing. Then it smacked down. Waves washed up the runways.

Even as they stumbled pellmell from the blow which had threatened to crush them, men looked over their shoulders. They saw the flying-boat riding easily in the wash it had created. The boat was safe. The seams in its hull were hardly loosened. There was not a strut broken. Towne had done that cunning and almost impossible feat—without elevator he had sideslipped to a safe landing.

The great admiral stood up, waving an arm. His beard had blown wide. It stuck like a bramble-bush out from his ruddy cheeks.

"Send out a boat!" he shouted. "Don't make me wait all night!"

The men who went out to fetch him, it is likely, were more terrified than he. Behind his wind-strewn beard there was a trace of laughter.

"He didn't only land it safe, but he landed near the beach!" gasped the young ensign in terrified admiration. "What a man he is!"

Pilots looked at each other. There was not a man of them, with all the youth in them, who could have done that feat.

"Smooth water is blamed hard to see," grumbled the Admiral. "I thought I had ten feet more to drop. Give me those ten feet, and I'd have landed without a ripple. My eyes aren't what they used to be."

When mechanics went over that flying-boat to determine what had been the trouble, they found that the broken elevator-wires had been almost cut away. So nearly cut that the least strain had been enough to sever them. There were the cuts, clean and sharp, steel-glittering, close to the lower surface of the elevator.

"Those cuts were made with nippers, sir," gravely reported the chief in charge of the inspection. "Nipped as cleanly as an ant nips a blade of grass."

Admiral Towne said nothing. His eyes looked about the beach, at his daughter, at the smiling face of Sir Geoffrey Duke, at the sober face of Stone Doane. He did not see Jack Skiff. Now the darkness had come, and to his old eyes all faces were shadowy. A chill had come with the evening. He threw a cape about him.

"Oh, Doane," he said. "I'm sorry, is that you?"

"I'm here, sir," said Stone Doane in a low voice, limping back a little into the darkness.

"I'm sorry I didn't have opportunity to try out your invention, Mr. Doane," said the admiral. "Next time you can go up with me, and I'll wear a parachute. I think that would be better."

"As you like it, sir," muttered Doane.

He retreated, limping uneasily away from the glances of Patricia Skiff, which had fallen on him. He felt her glances follow him as he walked haltingly away through the twilight.

WHEN the time came to go, they searched around for Jack Skiff. He was not in his office, nor had he been seen on the beach. In a darkest corner of the hangar Admiral Towne found him at last.

Skiff was crouched upon the cement floor, with an armful of brown canvas engine-covers pulled over his head. At the touch of Towne's arm upon his shoulder his whole body stiffened. Towne pulled the canvas away, and put his hand upon the head of Skiff. Beneath that large, firm hand Skiff moaned, and at the sound of Towne's voice he screamed aloud. Admiral Towne drew back. In that moment he had the idea that Jack Skiff might be insane.

"Commander Skiff!" he said sternly. "What sort of a spectacle are you making of yourself? You're captain of this ship!"

It is quite possible that the horror of Towne's fall, the expectation of his crash, had weakened the strained mind of Skiff beyond all recovery. Surely Admiral Towne never saw him a sane man again.

"Take your hands off the wheel! I'm falling! I'm falling!" Jack Skiff sobbed, groveling close to the hard floor.

"Get up! Come with me!"

"Take your hands off me, you dead man! You'll not drag me down to crash with you!"

Patricia Skiff came running through the gloomy hangar, where the flying-ships slept like sullen dragons in the dark. She knelt beside Jack Skiff, and took his head upon her lap.

"This man is mad and lunatic!" said Admiral Towne harshly. "I've thought he was a coward, but he's insane!"

"Please don't talk," the woman begged "It has come on him again. He's afraid. You never crashed as he did. You don't understand."

Her deft hand stroked the head and face of her husband. He trembled on the floor, slowly nestling nearer to her, like a wounded dog. He was trying to stifle his voice, but groans came.

"You're here, Jack," the woman whispered softly, all her woman's pity in her voice. "Nothing has happened. You're all safe. Don't let it hurt you."

Admiral Towne bent over. His face was dark. For weakness he had not any sense of mercy.

"How often has this happened before?" he asked harshly.

"Several times," the woman admitted unwillingly. "It seems to come on him oftener."

"And he's a Navy officer!"

Five or six men, officers and mechanics, were approaching curiously and timidly over the hangar floor. Admiral Towne was revolted to think that Skiff's crew should see him in his shame. Violently he waved his arm, ordering them back.

"Get to your duties!" he shouted. "Snap to it, or I'll have the pack of you up for a general court!"

Towne straightened his shoulders, breathing deeply. With his foot he touched the groaning man upon the floor, and felt Skiff shudder.

"This man is supposed to lead ships into battle," said Towne bitterly. "By the holy, Pat, I would rather have you, a woman in skirts, at my side! What if he crashed once? Is this Navy a kindergarten, and am I to kiss and put liniment on hurt fingers? There are other men who have crashed. And the whole muster of them have less cowardice in their dead ghosts or their living bones than this fellow."

No more than her father did Patricia Skiff have understanding of the soul of Jack Skiff. But Jack Skiff was her man, and for her own honor's sake she must defend him. She turned on her father.

"Please leave us," she whispered.

"You'd think that Skiff himself had been up there where I was," said old Towne furiously. "Did my hands tremble? Did I lose my head? I did not groan and whine like a sick dog when I was near to dying. Now, up with you, Skiff, and stand like a man! Up with you, or by the holy, I'll smash you on your head so you'll remember!"

Jack Skiff sobbed. He clutched at Patricia.

"You're hurting him," said Patricia.

"That coward!" said Towne with his bitterest sneer. "He is a coward. I name him a coward now. And whenever I see him, I'll name him an utter coward! He'll not, this coward, take the salute from brave men again, nor give commands to them!"

Patricia looked up. Before the sternness of her eyes Admiral Towne was set back. But an utter fury was in him. He clenched his fist.

"I'll make his name a name that men will laugh at—that coward!" he said hoarsely. "By the holy, he lies there to shame me and every brave man in the service! Give me strong, bold men to fight against me, and in their time I'll give them mercy. But this coward would turn when he was fighting beside me, and he would bring a whole fleet to defeat."

"Please leave us," reiterated Patricia.

Admiral Towne turned, and stamped wrathily out of that lofty, gloomy hangar. He knew that some of the crew had learned of the hysteria of their commander. Old Towne was ashamed, he was utterly ashamed, of such a scurvy fellow.

RIDING back from the air station toward Washington in the big gray car, a grim silence fell upon Admiral Towne. Beside him sat Sir Geoffrey Duke, beaming like the full horizon moon, pulling his pale straws of mustaches. Towne huddled with his great hands dragging between his knees. What monstrous thoughts ran in his head Sir Geoffrey could not determine.

"I was telling Skiff the other night," said the Englishman, "that your daughter

reminds me in more ways than one of an old wartime favorite of the London variety stage. A jolly Spanish girl she was. Skiff says he never knew her. Odd, for I thought all men knew her."

Admiral Towne sat silently. He seemed not to hear.

"Perhaps you knew her?" said Sir Geoffrey, smiling his amiable smile. "Her name I've forgotten. But on the stage she was called the Red Ant."

Still on Towne lay the silence. Long after the echo of the Englishman's voice had ceased, long after he had ceased to think about the woman, Admiral Towne shifted his seat, and spoke.

"I knew her," he said harshly.

"A jolly girl," repeated Duke with a renewal of his animation. "She dropped from my sight. So many girls, you know—yet she was a beauty. I wonder where she is now, and what doing."

"That I can't tell you," said Admiral Towne from the depths of his morose reflections.

"You knew her well?"

"Well."

"And now she's gone," said Sir Geoffrey sadly.

"She's gone," said the grim old admiral. And then, with a hardening of his jaw, he added. "She was shot as a spy. I had her shot."

"Eh!" cried Sir Geoffrey, and his monocle popped from his eye. "She was a jolly girl! A spy?"

The dark night wind rushed by them, *whush! whush! whush!* on crying, invisible pinions. Spots of street lamps flashed light on Admiral Towne's merciless face, and then the darkness came again. The big gray car had crossed Anacostia river now, and rushed northwestward up Pennsylvania Avenue toward the great white Capitol.

"A cunning spy," said Admiral Towne gravely. "Drunken officers made her their confidant—you know what men are with a woman. She told the secrets they blabbed forth to our enemies. So much for a ship sunk, so much for a regiment destroyed, she took her pay like a —— dentist. There are many men under the sod, and many good ships under the water, because of the secrets that woman used. Once she set a trap for me, to send me down to sleep with Kitchener."

"She was a pretty creature," said Sir Geoffrey with a sigh.

"A pretty woman means no more to me than that!" said Admiral Towne with a hard snap of his fingers. "I caught her."

"And she was shot?"

"That was the sentence your own British court gave her. I have no doubt it was carried out."

There came again the silence. The two old sea-kings sat back in the cushions, drowned in memories.

"A jolly girl," said Sir Geoffrey again. "There were many men keen for her. I remember my cousin, Stone Doane."

"Curious," said Admiral Towne, "that it was through Doane I caught her. I presume, though, that he knows nothing of that to this day."

WHEN the darkness had come completely over the sky, and in the hangars at the air station pale-yellow lights were lighted, Commander Jack Skiff arose from the floor. His wife put her arms about him, but he shook her off. She followed him as he stumbled forth, walking south down the river-bank.

"Where are you going? Jack!"

He did not answer her. At times she saw convulsive shudders seize his body. At the southern limit of the station he did not respond to the salute of the sentry. He pushed by, and stumbled on down the river-bank.

"Where are you going, Jack?" Patricia Skiff called again.

She hurried after him, past the curious and sneering sentry, and tried to link arms with him.

"I'm a coward," cried Skiff with a strangling gasp. "I'm no good. Did you hear *him* say he was going to have me broken?"

"Now come back here, Jack! My father won't do anything to you. You don't have to fly. You don't have to stay in the Navy. This is a big world, and there are things enough to do in it. Don't run away in this fashion like a silly child. Every one will think you are crazy."

"Maybe I am crazy," muttered poor Skiff. "Won't you leave me alone?"

He snatched his arm from hers, and stumbled forward in a half-run down the weedy river-bank. Patricia halted, irritated by his womanish unreason. When he saw that she did not follow, he settled to a walk

again, slumping along with his shoulders bent, his hands in his pockets.

By the spot on the river-bank where Patricia had halted was a little copse of trees and clumps of tall marsh-grass. She saw the marsh-grass stirring, though there was no wind at night. Out of that nest of grass uprose a man.

Curiously she surveyed him. She had no fear, for she was both brave and strong. And this man was small, not so tall by inches as she. He wrapped a long black coat about him. He had his hat off as he approached, showing a head with white bald patches in the dark hair.

"What do you want?" asked Patricia.

Jack Skiff was pushing his way down the bank. He was perhaps fifty yards away. At sound of her voice he turned and stood, watching her.

The man in the black overcoat approached cringingly. His black, shiny eyes looked beseechingly up at her. The woman stood her ground. The man reached out an arm and touched her on the sleeve with a caressing motion.

"I like you," he said, with a curious foreign accent.

Patricia Skiff understood then that the man had thought she was a deserted mistress pursuing with unheeded pleading her lover down the river-bank. He was offering her consolation, this rat of a man. His eyes pleaded eloquently to her, his hand caressed. Bah! Patricia Skiff was as revolted as if an unclean dog was wiping its paws on her.

She swung back her hand, and with all force smashed her fist across Ormeega's face.

The little man in the black overcoat toppled backward, completely overset. In a flash he had scrambled to his feet again. His shoulders crouched as he circled warily toward her. Smiling victoriously, Patricia again lifted up her hand. Then she saw that the little man had drawn forth a pistol.

"Don't you do that to me again," said Ormeega warningly. "You don't try that again, my pretty lady!"

"You don't dare to shoot!" cried Patricia boldly. "You come a step nearer, and I'll knock you into the river!"

Though he had halted down the river-bank, and could see and hear all, Jack Skiff had not moved. He made no step now, but stood with his hands in his pockets, slumped over in an attitude of utter dejection. Then Patricia Skiff, who had never loved him but had always pitied him, felt even pity leave her. No injuries, no madness, no horrors undergone, could pardon him that he, her man, did not rush even against death in defense of her, his woman.

His inaction was the absolute cowardice, it was the unforgivable.

"Don't you hit me, for I can shoot like blazes," said Ormeega warningly.

"You come a step nearer," said the woman defiantly, "and I will—kill you!"

An amazon she was, holding her fists boldly threatening. In her posture, in her angry glances, was much of the formidable terror of old Admiral Towne. She was not a woman to flinch at anything. Her bearing overawed Ormeega, furious and desirous as he was. He was thoroughly terrified by the bold anger in her face, and he remembered the hands of old Towne, which on a whiter night had gripped him, the heart of old Towne, which on a blacker night had stood up against him without faltering.

The little man in the black overcoat made a curious whining noise low in his throat. Patricia Skiff took a determined step toward him, menacing with her fist, and Ormeega hurriedly stumbled away.

The little man was walking down the river-bank, warily watching her over his shoulder. Patricia was tempted to call again to Jack Skiff, telling him to come back. But this little man in the black overcoat would think she was pleading to an indifferent lover. The woman's pride could not endure the appearance of such humility. She was a woman for bold men to seek, and bold men had sought her. She had no need to hurry after Jack Skiff, beseeching his companionship and love, like a common drab in the dusk along the river-bank.

Jack Skiff had failed her in her woman's need. He had stood apart, and made no motion to come to her assistance. It was not madness, it was not delirium which had held him bound, but an utter cowardliness. He was a coward without excuse, as her father had named him. Contemptibly he had failed her, who was his woman.

Yet a certain relenting, a certain maternal solicitude, and all the memory of the nights when in his weakness Jack Skiff had turned to her and cried, stirred the breast

of Patricia Skiff. Almost she felt herself the man, and Skiff the woman; and for his womanliness she felt compassion.

"Come back for dinner!" she called. "It will be waiting, Jack."

The little man in the black overcoat had walked down the river-bank as far as Skiff. Patricia saw them stand facing each other. Clumsily the little man put away his pistol. The two men seemed to be talking, and their heads inclined together, as if they, two timid and unmanly creatures whom a woman's courage had shamed, found consolation in the association of humility and cowardliness. Little outcasts of the bold and furious world of battle, they stood and whispered in the dusk, shivering together.

After awhile they moved on. Into the darkness down the river-bank they went, whispering and trembling together. The woman hesitated. When the darkness lay upon the two of them, upon the man who had been her husband, and the little imbecile who had wished to be her lover, she turned, and went the other way from the way they went, back to the station.

She would not see Jack Skiff again.

IN HOT noon, as he was seated in his office at the Navy building, there came a woman to Stone Doane. At first, when she stood hesitantly in the doorway, Doane did not recognize her; but she reminded him of a woman who was dead. Then Doane knew that the woman who entered his office was Patricia Skiff.

The women clerks in the office, pert and shallow creatures, were eating their luncheons of ham sandwiches and bananas. They silenced their chatter. They forgot to chew the food within their mouths, staring with slack lips at this handsome woman. They had never known a woman to speak to Mr. Doane before, and he had always seemed to them a man who disliked women.

Miss Race looked at Miss Rice, and Miss Ross at Miss Reese. They lifted their eyebrows and tossed their heads. After all, men are men. Even Stone Doanes have their women somewhere in the background, in the evenings and nights that they live between their hours at office.

Stone Doane had arisen, casting down his head, fumbling for a paper-weight on his desk. He did not look at Patricia, but juggled and fumbled the paper-weight in his palm, as if he would estimate its heaviness to a milligram.

"Last night I thought I recognized you at the station," said Patricia in constraint. "I have heard your cousin, Sir Geoffrey, and my father speak about you. Didn't you know me yesterday, or have you forgotten me?"

"No, I've not forgotten."

"Why didn't you speak, then?" asked the woman. "Why haven't you let me know all this time that you have been here?"

"What was the use?" asked Stone Doane bitterly.

"I don't know why——"

"I'm no sort of man to be interesting to a woman," said Stone Doane. "I thought you had forgotten me."

"You have always interested me, Stone," said Patricia, coming more closely up to him. "I never gave you reason to think I would ever forget you."

He looked covertly up at her, under the edges of his eyes. A flush spread up to his cheekbones.

"I got banged up in the service," he said. "I'm a has-been, not worth burying. That's the reason you never saw me—after that last time."

"I waited, Stone, after that last night."

"You married Skiff."

"But before that I waited."

"I'm sorry," he said. "You overestimated me. I never was worth waiting for."

They sat, facing each other. Stone Doane had bent his head down again. He put his left hand over his eye, and only half his face was visible.

"I got banged up," Doane reiterated miserably. "Not much of a story. I was doing submarine patrol with the Navy off Ireland, you remember. George Cable was in that outfit. I knew George. He was my best friend, We were in a squadron that called itself the Red Ants. We took that name from a variety actress who used to be popular. She reminded me a good deal of you, that Red Ant."

His voice drifted off. He did not lift his face.

"I've heard George Cable say the same thing," said Patricia.

"We all knew her," said Stone Doane. "Poor George, I thought he'd never crash. I got mine early. It was during the night. You see, I had spotted two submarines, and

I dropped down to bomb 'em. I was too low, and the explosion got me. It knocked me out of the air, and I was banged up. That was about all for me."

"Was that the night Jack's ship picked you up, with my father aboard her?" asked Patricia. "My father was telling me about that last night. He only recognized you recently."

"Skiff's destroyer came along," Stone Doane nodded, "with the admiral. I suppose those two subs had been laying for the admiral. I was hanging to a pontoon, floating on the water, with a leg broken and an eye torn to shreds. Then Skiff's boat came up. It got one of the subs, or perhaps both. The destroyer threw me a line, and I pulled myself on board her."

"My father has told me about that," said Patricia. "He likes you." Then, with a sorrowful cry, she asked, "You were badly hurt? I saw yesterday evening that you were limping."

"An eye out, too," said Stone Doane with an air of shame. He summoned resolution, and with an air of defiance lifted his face to her, as if to show the worst and have it over. "Ugly, you can see. This thing is glass."

"Oh, what a pity!" she cried.

"Made a messy looking thing of me," said Stone Doane morosely. "No one would ever know I'm the same fellow. Do you wonder I've hid out?"

"I would know you anywhere. You have imagined things. That is hardly noticeable at all," Patricia added in a brave lie.

"Skiff recognized me yesterday evening, and the admiral the other day," admitted Stone Doane more hopefully. "Perhaps I'm not so entirely changed. But why at all should you remember me?"

"Why shouldn't I?" she asked with half a sigh.

Perhaps she had cared more for him than ever he had cared for her. Young soldiers think of death and killing; they have no true hearts left for love. But women think of their soldiers, and remember casual words spoken long after the speaker is dead or has forgotten.

"I'm only a clerk now," said Stone Doane apologetically, "doing a stenographer's work. George Cable used to give me chances to fly with him; but I could never get back into the service again, all shot to pieces as I am. I'm not the smart young aviator any more that you knew, Mrs. Skiff, proud of myself and the dizziest of the Red Ants."

"Why not call me Pat?" the woman suggested. "You should have let me know you were in town. It was foolish to try to hide yourself this way. Why, it has been five years since you dropped out of sight, and never a word at all."

"Well, you married Skiff," said Stone Doane again.

"It was because he needed me," said Patricia gently.

About the need which had been Stone Doane's neither he nor the woman spoke. Unlike Jack Skiff, he was not a man to demand sacrifice from a woman because of any need of his. Patricia understood now that he wished no pity, that pity would be abhorrent to him. It was not pity she felt for him.

"It was better I dropped out of sight," insisted Doane, "and never came back. I wasn't worth anything. You see, you married Skiff."

After a long silence the woman spoke, twisting the narrow ring on her finger.

"I married Jack," she said. "Yes, that's true."

Then she leaned forward, her hands upon her knees. Her fingertips touched Doane's knee. He looked deep into her eyes, and wondered. And for a moment it seemed that the years would drop away from between them.

"We are still young," said the woman inanely, dropping her glance first.

Stone Doane spoke thickly.

"I've known about you," he said. "I've heard of you through George Cable. He never knew I had been a friend. He was fond of you, too."

"I suppose that may be," said Patricia sadly. "And I fond of him. He was a man like a brother to me."

"My best friend," said Stone Doane harshly. "Who would have thought that poor George Cable would have fallen that way to his death, while a man like me lives on? What is the use of it?"

Patricia Skiff tried to speak of little memories again, and Stone Doane, confused and ill at ease, did all he could to second her. At times they even joined in vague laughter. But there stood two shadows between them, the shadow of George Cable dead and the shadow of Jack Skiff living. In this time there was a part of youth which they

could not recapture, and they were strangers to each other.

A SILENCE came again. Looking at Patricia covertly and uneasily, Stone Doane was reminded once more of that woman who had called herself the Red Ant. One other name for her, Bella, had been known to Stone Doane.

In many physical traits—the look of her tawny hair, the abrupt sidewise flash of her glances, her bold gestures—the actress had reminded Stone Doane of the girl who was then Patricia Towne, even at the time he had known both women. So close was that similarity that on first seeing Patricia entering his door, Stone Doane had been stricken with a memory of the woman who was gone.

The actress had not been so fine a woman, to be sure, as the admiral's well-loved daughter, and Stone Doane had loved her with a left-handed love. In ways the Red Ant had been a low animal. An animal, but she had been precious and sweet to young officers furiously seeking joy during their brief respites from war. War is animal, too. Women such as the Red Ant are a part of war. Perhaps not the least part. In their strange arms the soldier finds the consummation of life and an indifference to death. Their love is without sentiment and without regret. Tomorrow and yesterday are, with all the lovers of them, as one thing to those women.

Stone Doane was remembering now the last time, save once, that he had seen the actress Bella, the Red Ant. It had been after his accident, when Skiff's ship had brought him to shore. The Red Ant had come through the hospital, bringing flowers to wounded men. Those flowers, Doane afterward learned, had been bought with blood-money. They had smelled sweet to the wounded, and brought them the breath of Spring, though they were sanguine red.

In his bandages the woman had not recognized Stone Doane at first. Then, when he made a gesture and spoke a word, she had bent above his face. Stone Doane remembered her curious laughter well, the fleeting shadows in her green eyes.

"Ah, it is the young sailor who flies," she had said, forgetting his name.

Even then, drunken with many memories, she had forgotten his name, though he and she had loved with a left-handed love.

"I got a pair of subs," Stone Doane had boasted. "Bombed them, and held them till a destroyer came up."

And Bella had sat down by his bed, staring at him with a fixed look in her large green eyes. A bouquet of narcissi stirred deeply against her breast.

"Was anything found from those submarines, young sailor who flies?" she asked with strange intensity.

"They found a dead man floating on the water," said Stone Doane, laboring with pain. "And in his pocket were papers from a spy. But they will get that spy," said Stone Doane. "They will get that spy."

He had drifted into unconsciousness, and the face of Bella, of the Red Ant, receded into the mists which roll past Lethe. He had never seen her again until she had tried to flee from London, and had been caught and brought back to meet her death. Then Stone Doane saw her on the day she died.

It had been a curious thing that Stone Doane had witnessed the shooting of the Red Ant. Of her attempted flight, of her trial, even that she had been suspected, he had not known. All that had been kept secret, known only to the grave, grim men who execute the laws of war. It had been arranged that she should disappear.

On a day when he was convalescent and able to drag about on sticks, Sir Geoffrey Duke had suggested to Stone Doane:

"A spy is being shot at the Tower this afternoon. There won't be many witnesses, but I can get you a pass."

Stone Doane had gone to witness, with a chosen few, the execution of that woman whom so very many bold men—including surely Sir Geoffrey himself and Admiral Towne—had admired. She had amused thousands, she had played to packed houses. It seemed an act of insolence that her supreme scene should be a death nameless and ignored, with scarcely ten men to look on.

Ah, she was a beautiful thing, with her round, sleek limbs, with her tawny curls thick and almost as short as a setter's, with her swift manner of peering at men from the edges of her large green eyes. Lavishly and tempestuously for many men she had cast her whole soul into those bewitching, amorous glances. She had been altogether a lure. The man indifferent to her was as great a dolt as fool the man who lost his heart to her.

On the variety stage, rousing war-tired audiences to applause and sudden thunders of laughter, she had been known as the Red Ant. To Stone Doane her name was Bella, nothing more. It is the word for beauty and for war.

An actress she had been, and the toast of drunken subalterns in the cabarets, and the godmother of a flying-squadron, and the *petite amie* of a cabinet minister, it was said, among many other men. She had wined high, and she had danced. She had known the spotlight. Love had been generous to her. All the exaltations of life had been hers. She had given gay hours to many young lads soon to perish. And now she was to be shot as a spy.

Eight broken soldiers, one-eyed, or toeless, or gas-burnt, stood in a line to raise their rifles against her breast. This woman, this actress, this Bella who was to be shot as a spy, had talked gaily to them, and laughed. She had asked the eight broken soldiers—stiff-kneed, or shell-shocked, or tuberculous—if they would like to kiss her. She had asked them that, for she had known many men, and she had learned that to men she was forever a seduction and a passion. The eight broken men had stood silently, with their rifle-barrels cold and frozen in their fists.

Then this Red Ant had hummed a little tune, the song of the French marching men. Stone Doane to this hour—himself a broken soldier now, and many long years between—remembered one line of the song she had sung—

"Aux Doleureuses, c'est le nom du cabaret——"

Humming this, she had taken a step—she had been left unbound—as if she would cast from her the coarse, gray prison-gown, and ravish the merciless eyes from those eight war-shattered soldiers with the allurement of her loveliness. Entering on this desolate scene, Stone Doane had felt the woman's eyes upon him. To him who had loved her her green eyes cried. A gesture of her hand tossed her life and soul at Stone Doane's feet.

Was a woman not more worth fighting for than a cotton flag? She had cast her life to him, who was a fighting man. She knew him, her lover. She had seen in him, who watched her in her last hour, a hope of life. How the heart hopes! Stone Doane had not moved his finger, no, nor spoken. But he had known then the great and abysmal sickness of his life.

Perhaps—and we may think it more than likely—the woman Bella, the Red Ant, had not actually recognized Stone Doane. Many men she had known, and one not more than another, but all like shadows which drift across the glass. In this dark place, in her utter and desolate hour, her terrified eyes could not see clearly, though she held to the last a pretense of laughter. Only the shadow of Stone Doane she saw, and had not known him from another, nor remembered one hour of those which had been dear to him.

"Friends, I want to say," she had begun in her queer Spanish voice. "I want to say that all which I have done I have done——"

Ah, Stone Doane had loved that voice! Again she gestured toward him.

What! The rifles speak. The word has gone unsaid. The broken soldiers turn away their faces.

Over Stone Doane's blurred vision passed her tragic spirit like a wind.

OF THIS woman now Stone Doane was thinking as he sat with Patricia Skiff. He had known the both of them at the same time, the wanton and the maid. Likely, thought Stone Doane, musing memories over, it had been always his desire for Patricia which had lured him in the false countenance of Bella, of the Red Ant. Likely, he thought, he had endeavored to be faithful to Patricia in his fashion.

A man does not know about that. If he is a bold man, he loves many women Which one the best, he does not know. Each one is herself alone, and no woman can compensate for another. Stone Doane was thinking now that he loved Patricia.

"I have come to you to ask your help as a man, and as a friend," said Patricia, breaking at last the long silence which had come between them. "It is a matter about which I can't speak even to my father. You can help me."

Ah, she had struck the right note there. Doane's shoulders straightened sturdily. He was not a man to desire pity, but to show he could give help.

"Jack has gone," said Patricia, fumbling in her pocket-bag. "I haven't seen him since yesterday evening. Some time during the night he must have come home, and changed into old civilian clothes, and gone

away again. In the morning I found this."

She extended a scrawled sheet of paper toward Doane, motioning him to read. He glanced down it. The paper said:

I'm not going to stay to have myself blasted as a coward before all the men I've known. I am one of the weak ones, though I am not to blame. Things have always been against me, and I have suffered, I think, more than any one understands. I have tried to live up to your and your father's ideal of me, and I have been brave. I earned my Congressional Medal. But I am high-strung, and I never belonged in the Navy, and you never understood me or had real sympathy for me. I know there are other men like me, and I can manage to live and enjoy myself without this continual strain over me. I will not have them call me a coward! It is better for me to go away than for me to stay and have them break me. Remember me, for I have suffered.

JACK.

Stone Doane read this over twice. He handed it back to Patricia.

"A remarkable letter," he said drily.

"He was all upset yesterday evening," said Patricia defensively, seeing the contempt in Doane's expression. "He thought my father was going to crash. He didn't know what he was doing. I can't even speak to my father about any of this, for father would do things in a hard way."

"There are about thirty first personal pronouns in that letter," said Stone Doane, with his sneering masculine judgment.

Patricia told him something, as much as she could in respect to her own honor, concerning the mental aberrations of Jack Skiff. Doane listened in silence, all his pity for the woman, and none for Jack Skiff. Much of what she told him he knew already. The word about a man's courage is whispered on the wind, and the wind blows far.

"Now I am sure he will do nothing rash, but likely something foolish," said Patricia. "All upset as he is, he may do something that will bring shame to him or us. He is so helpless without me," she said, tears starting in her eyes. "Sometimes he is hardly a man at all, and I must be man and wife and mother to him."

"What would you like me to do?" asked Stone Doane.

His judgment of Skiff was stern and merciless. Not through death would he forgive Skiff for marrying Patricia. That poltroon, clinging like a fungus to a tree. Clinging with his sickly fears and cowardliness to a woman fit to be the mate of a half-god. Many obscenities and villainies Stone Doane would have forgiven, but not that a man should bare his cowardice to a woman.

"He must be found, and brought back where I can watch him," said Patricia piteously. "You see I can't tell even my father about it. He would have Jack branded as a deserter, and he would be hounded everywhere. That mustn't happen, for he is so easily terrified. You can find Jack, for you are a man, and are clever and strong. What would you do, Stone, and where would you go, if you were trying to hide out from all your past, and begin things again?"

Stone Doane could reconstruct from the memory of his own emotions the mental sinuses of a man who is trying to hide. Doane himself had found a partial oblivion in doing the routine clerk's work of a Government department, his immediate associates four shallow-pated women so alike in their stupidity that he could not distinguish them apart by intelligence or sight or name. He had gone far from all that he had been, closing the door of the past. Yet in one way he had held to that past: He had remained with the Navy, and close to the flying he had loved.

Thinking it over, using all his reason, Stone Doane realized that a man never really hides away from all his past. He may change his name, but in some way, by the initials or the sound; he holds to a part of the name which has been his. He may change his face or his habitat, but he is the same man, and he does things as he is used to doing them. He may put the utter ocean and half the world between him and his past, yet some day he comes creeping back. In the dark he comes creeping back, to peer at the shadow of the thing which he has been. Or if he creeps back never, he takes a drink and falls to boasting in Tegucigalpa or Harbin, saying:

"I was so and so, did such and such. I was Dick Roe, who killed my man in Little Falls, Vermont, twenty years ago."

Police officers know those yearnings of the hiding man, of the hunted man, all the yearnings to make his past life live, and by those yearnings they bait their traps. The hiding man holds as if with a rope to his lost past, desperately hoping to retrieve it at some future day. He holds as if with a rope, though that rope be used to hang him.

"Skiff has been a sailor," said Doane. "Though he is afraid of the air, he has never been afraid of the water. If he wants to

hide, he'll go where seamen gather on some waterfront, that is sure, and try to ship out before the mast. Has he ever mentioned, more than any other, some place where he has wanted to go?"

Patricia reflected, rubbing her palms slowly together in the fashion of a man.

"He has always wanted to go to Spain," she said. "He collects all kinds of books about Spanish travel. Sometimes he has spoken of going there to settle down when he was retired from the Navy, or when father dies and I come into my money."

"You'll buy him a castle in Spain?" asked Doane scornfully.

"He has always spoken of Spain," she continued musingly. "Of Spanish cities and Spanish wines. Yes, and of Spanish women," she added with quiet bitterness. "He has always been weak for women."

"Brave men as well as cowards may be that," said Stone Doane.

"He has never been to Spain," said the woman, "but he has always spoken of Spain as some men speak of Heaven."

He will be lucky if he gets to any Heaven, thought Stone Doane.

HOURS long all the hot afternoon Stone Doane tramped along the waterfront of southwest Washington, along the docks from which boats sail out for Baltimore and the Roads, for Savannah and the Bahamas and Tampico. Farther yet an adventuring boat may go, to golden Spain which lies beyond the dawn.

That he might find Jack Skiff skulking his outcast way along this waterfront was only a judicious guess on Doane's part. Doane made inquiries up and down the waterfront, and all men shook their heads. The time had come past sunset, and the early darkness was gathering, when Doane encountered a rolling seaman with gold rings in his ears. This man had a face brown as old oak, and keenly twinkling eyes.

"Aye," said the brown seaman, pointing with his thumb, "there's my bark that's brought a cargo over—the *Bella Hormiga*. I tramp by way of the Azores and the Caribbees. We're loaded up again, and tomorrow we sail back for Spain."

The brown sea captain spoke English with a cockney slice. His wrinkled blue eyes sparkled like the noon ocean. He told Stone Doane that his name was McHugh, one of the wandering, unnationalized men of the sea.

"Half my —— crew has deserted me," he said, looking at Stone Doane's sturdy shoulders with appraising eye. "You're not thinking of shipping out, young man, to Spain?"

At the end of a rotting, weedy pier Doane saw the square- and for-and-aft-rigged ship which McHugh pointed out. She was a little sailing tramp of the ocean, wracked by tempest and foul weather. Her gray sails and barnacled hull were apparently in their last stages of decay, ready on a puff of wind to crumble into dust. On her stern she flew the gold-and-blood flag of Spain, a flag strange enough now on any water.

"Some one aboard her?" asked Stone Doane.

"O aye, a man aboard, and with him a new recruit he picked up on shore."

"I'll look around."

The brown sea captain waddled off. Stone Doane walked sturdily aboard the bark. No man was visible on her decks, but Stone Doane knew there must be some man on guard, and some man watching him. He thought he had glimpsed the doors of the forecastle hatch closing quietly as he came aboard. Doane opened the hatch doors, and started down into the gray-swimming dark. This was the hold where the crew was quartered. A reek of oil and pitch came up from the black hold, and the more repugnant reek of a narrow place in which men have been closely confined.

But there was no voice or movement of a man. Doane thrust his head down, calling—

"Oh, Commander Skiff! Oh, Captain Skiff!"

No answer came. Yet Stone Doane knew well that there below a man or men were hiding, and that his voice was heard. He felt hushed human breathing stir in the black and stagnant air of the hold. He felt the silence strike him in the face.

"Oh, Commander Skiff! Your wife has sent me for you!"

And again the silence answered him. It shivered on him from the dark. It was the abysmal silence of fear, the silence of cowering things. Stone Doane knew that the shadow of his body, blocking the graying twilight from the hatch doors, was a shadow of dread to the frightened men skulking down below.

Doane had no fear of anything. He felt his way forward down a ladder stairway into the bottomless dark. The grayness was all about him, hot and thick. Thick was the fetid odor of human beings, their breath, their sweat; it was ingrained in the very wooden walls of the room. And thick with that human odor was the odor of spilled whisky.

Doane squinted his eye. Tiny bunks were set about the hold, four of them, doubled. Backed up against the farthest wall, pressing their bodies flat against the ultimate unretreating bulkhead, Stone Doane saw two men. He walked slowly up to them, feeling his way with his hand outstretched. One of the men cried out. Then Stone Doane's hand reached and seized the shrinking shoulder of Jack Skiff.

"Commander Skiff! Commander Skiff!" said Doane in loud chiding. "Have you forgotten what you are, sir? You, an officer and a gentleman!"

"I'm not Skiff!"

Yet even in the blackness it was plain this man was Skiff. His breath was thick with whisky, and it was plain he was half-drunken. He tried to summon up a certain boldness. He glared at Doane with rolling head.

"You'll not take me back!" cried poor Skiff. "I'll not go back to hear *him* yell at me and damn me for a coward! I'll not go back to crash——"

"Your wife has sent me for you, Skiff."

"She is going to make me fly and crash myself!" cried Skiff with a high gasp. "By ——, she'll make me wreck myself! They all want me to crash. Were you watching Towne fall down? They'll do that thing to me. But I'll get mine when they do it! I'll smash my head in two! I'll be a dead man——"

"There are worse things a man may be than be a dead man," said Stone Doane harshly. "Remember that, Commander Skiff."

"I'll not go back to crash! Not ever! Don't send me back to that!"

Skiff clung to Doane's strong arm with his two thin, clutching hands. He leaned his head upon Doane's sleeve, and shook with sobbing. Doane was repelled at that touch. The man was drunk.

"What do you expect to do?" Doane asked.

"I'm going to sail away to Spain," babbled Skiff, trying to seize Doane's hand. "This man has got me a berth. I'll sail clean out of this life into Spain. There I'll be buried."

Jack Skiff must have thought many times before of the course he was now set on following. In his night terrors he had visioned this complete renegation. Already, no doubt, he had vision of dark Spanish dream-women; and from his consciousness and recollection the face of Patricia Skiff was fading. Life is yet to be lived, in Spain or other ports beyond the dawn, for cowards and broken men.

"And what happens to Commander Skiff when you are buried in Spain?" asked Stone Doane contemptuously.

"Let him be forgotten."

Slowly Stone Doane shook his head. "That can not be," he said. "Shake yourself out of this, Skiff, and sober up. You're an officer and a man. By my life and every fiend, I'd rather see you utterly smashed to death, and feel your blood on my hands, than let you run away from all you owe as a drunken, utter coward!"

"Don't take me back!"

"It must be done."

STONE DOANE glanced sharply at the other man within the little hold. A little man he was, not above five feet high. Stone Doane recognized him as that man who called himself Ormeega. Stone Doane had known him by another name.

"Don't try to run!" he said.

Ormeega was flattened against the bulkhead wall, and sliding cautiously away from Doane. His hands were clutching, straining at the wall like spiders in the gloom.

"It has been a dark night or two since I've see you," said Doane sharply. "Stand where you are!"

There were three of them in that black hole, a space so small that a tall man could span it with his arms. Their breath stirred in soft heaving. Their eyes watched. There were three of them, and two of them were utterly afraid.

"Stand where you are!" cried Stone Doane with a triumphant and terrible cry. "I want to speak to you!"

"About what?" whispered Ormeega, choked by the menace of Doane's hands.

"About a woman."

"There are women—," Ormeega began to whisper.

"And there are women. That is true. But this is about a woman. Wait!" shouted Stone Doane, so loudly his voice struck heavily as thunder through the black and narrow hole. "Wait! Your face comes back to me."

Ormeega swallowed. The gulping sound was plainly audible. And there were his two lean hands clutching and slipping like spiders along the dark wall.

"Do you remember a woman who called herself the Red Ant?" asked Doane, bending over cunningly. "A woman—she was shot."

Ormeega made no answer to the question. His black eyes shone.

"Wait!" commanded Stone Doane again. "There was a man with her, on the stage with her. He did clever climbing-tricks. He called himself—the Black Ant."

Swiftly Ormeega slid away, but Stone Doane leaped. Then in opposite corners they crouched, and Doane leaped once more, and missed. In the stinking blackness was the hoarse heaving of their breath. They spoke no word after. But there was the sound of poor Jack Skiff shouting to them from a topmost bunk, and there was the sound of their feet quickly scuffling for footholds on the floor, and there was the sound against the outer hull of quiet twilight water.

The little man was quick, and Doane's lameness was a chain upon him. A hidden coil of rope wound round his ankle like a snake. The last light had faded out of doors, and there was not the glimmer of one star striking down through the hatchway. In the sounding dark swiftly they feinted like shadows.

Once Doane caught at a brushing arm, and he held an empty coat within his grasp as Ormeega dodged beneath his arm. Once he felt a missile hurtle past his head, and heard it clump with a leaden sound against a bulkhead wall.

Then in the darkness his left hand closed, and he had a man's throat tight in his grasp. Mercilessly he squeezed, forcing that head back against a wall. His blind eye could not see; he turned his head, raising his right fist to strike a hard blow home.

Ormeega clutched a pistol barrel. Before Stone Doane could bend or stoop, the iron butt of that heavy weapon smashed down on the forefront of Doane's skull. He crumpled up in the dark, and all this world went from him.

WHILE Admiral Towne was seated at dinner that night, there came a waiter to him, whispering, "A policeman wants to see you, sir." And said Admiral Towne, briskly wiping his beard, "Bring him in."

Officer Seventeen came in, and sat down across the white cloth.

"I have some things to tell you, sir," said Seventeen, "that you may be hearty glad to know. We'll have the man soon, sir, and we know all about him. I wanted to tell you, sir, as I thought the doings of these last few nights might have made you a little unsettled and afraid."

"Not me afraid!" said old Towne.

"Well, sir, we'll soon have your man."

Admiral Towne laid his great fists upon the table-cloth. His eyelids narrowed over glances stern and hard.

"Some old lover of this actress, this Red Ant whom I had shot for the spy she was?" said Towne.

"I don't know, sir, about that."

"Tell me what you do know."

"Well, sir, you remember that little red ant I found dead on Mr. Cable's face?" said Seventeen. "It looked queer its lying there, when a man had fallen down. Like some one had laid it there—see? Like some one had stooped down and laid it there. And there was this curious little fellow stooping over Mr. Cable. A dead ant mayn't mean anything, since ants are all around, and there must have been many of them drowned on that night in the rain. But in the pincers of this ant was a little tiny bit of dark cloth. Like the kind of shreds that gather in a man's pockets. It was all as if a man had taken that ant from his pocket, and had killed it, and laid it down smooth on Mr. Cable's face."

"A bit of dark cloth?" suggested Towne patiently.

"A little tiny piece," said Officer Seventeen, "not so much as you could hardly see. And there was another tiny shred caught by a splinter on the window-sill of your office, sir. But that one came from Mr. Cable's suit, as the chemist told me. It proved plain that Mr. Cable had dropped out of your window, though this little fellow swore on his life it was Mr. Doane's window. Now you see how he lied?"

"About the dead red ant," Towne reminded.

"Yes, sir. The little tiny bit of cloth in

its pincers didn't come from Mr. Cable's clothes, and it didn't come from yours, or Mr. Skiff's, or Mr. Doane's. I thought of all of you, sir, for it was a curious thing. But the chemist told me that the little shred the ant had bit was black. Not navy blue, but black. Then I thought of a man I'd never have thought of before, and I remembered this little fellow I had seen.

"On the night after you were shot at through the window, sir, I caught this fellow riding on the back of Mr. Cable's taxi. I hauled him off, and he was dirty looking, sir. Two things I noticed most particularly about him. And one thing was that a foot of his was muddy. I noticed that, sir, because there had been just one shoe print in the muddy strip beneath the window."

Admiral Towne nodded.

"And the second thing I noticed," said Officer Seventeen, "was that he had a little bit of ribbon sticking from his pocket. It was a light blue ribbon with white stars, the kind on medals of honor. I didn't think about that, sir, since no theft had been reported. But then, sir, that little fellow showed me a piece of that same ribbon on the floor in Mr. Doane's office on the night George Cable died. It was as though he had dropped it there, sir, for me to see. I didn't think about that at the time, since I'm not quick at thinking."

"Most men are that way, Officer," said Towne, nodding encouragingly.

"But I think hard, though I think slow!" said Officer Seventeen. "On that first night I didn't think, because this little fellow said he was a newspaper man, and the judge, he let him off. And the night George Cable died I didn't think, because I kept feeling that Mr. Doane had done it."

"When did you begin to think, Officer?"

"Well, sir, when I found out this little fellow wasn't any newspaper man at all, but a sailor off a Spanish bark. And he had lied to me and the judge. Then the chemist told me that the cloth was black I had found in the pincers of the dead red ant. I begin to think at once of this little fellow."

"What was this little fellow's name?" asked Admiral Towne, resuming the eating of his dinner.

"He calls himself Ormeega."

"A Spanish word," commented Admiral Towne.

"What does it mean, sir?"

"It means—Ant."

IN THE black hold of the *Bella Hormiga* there was no sound of words. But there was the sound of night water slapping and lapping at the rotten hull. And there was the sound of Ormeega breathing, and strangling his breath. And there was the sound of Stone Doane groaning in great spasms, and threshing on the floor. Ormeega danced well clear of those insensate, threshing fists. Though no light at all was in this utter hole, the pale and sightless eye of Stone Doane, wide opened, took a gleam.

"You've killed him!" sobbed poor Jack Skiff. "You've killed a man!"

"You're in on it," Ormeega shivered.

"You did it!" cried Skiff with a low scream.

"He's not dead yet," gasped Ormeega. "A terrible ——! He almost got me."

"What will we do?"

"Why, chuck him into the river."

"What?" whispered Skiff.

"Tie lead to him—chuck him into the water. In the morning we will be out."

"He's a living man!"

"Listen, you white fool," gasped Ormeega, striving to conquer and regulate his strangling breath. "I'm a man like you. A yelling coward. But there are things to do. Here, take a drink of this. That's it. Again!"

Skiff cowered back against the sidewall in an upper bunk. He drank fully the raw, woody whisky. Now a heat burned through him, and he could not feel his limbs.

"That puts the blood in us, us cowards!" said Ormeega exultantly. "It makes us like the demons. It makes us afraid of nothing. We can steal women and win battles. Call us cowards. But twice at night I filled up on this stuff, and struck at that great walrus Towne! Call me a coward! I'll show them! Bring on your great tough thugs! I'll knock them down!"

He swung his fists. In the great dark Skiff felt the movement of those thin, flashing arms. Skiff, too, was drunk. Through the blackness minutes passed as raindrops from a glass.

"Who are you?" whispered Skiff, feeling for vision.

"You have heard of a woman, the Red Ant?"

"I think—I don't remember."

"Oh, she was a woman!" cried Ormeega,

with half a sob. "Big, strong—a tremendous heart. Do you love a woman?"

"Why, there are women," whispered poor Skiff.

"Like all men I loved her! She had been my woman to me back in Spain, and me her man. Listen! We played in great shows. Thousands of people knew us. She was the Red Ant, and like an ant she could roll and spin. She made people laugh. They clapped their hands and cried, 'Oh, the funny Red Ant!' Even on the nights the Zeps came over, people laughed. I was the Black Ant. I could climb. Straight up the rope, or even up the smooth scenery, I could climb. There was no trick. I did it. My hands are strong, my arms. I was the Black Ant, and I climbed like an ant. But nobody ever looked at me. They looked at Bella, who was so beautiful and so funny. I was glad, for she was my woman to me, and me her man.

"Listen! You know, a man goes hungry. Everybody spends millions. A man thinks he would like some loose change, too. Bella says, 'The young fools of soldiers like me. They will tell me all they know, and we will have money.' So she smiles at the young soldiers, and she lets them drink. They say, 'Will you be my sweetheart? Tomorrow I die.' Then Bella laughs, and she asks them, 'When do the ships go? And where are the regiments? And tell me all you know.' Soon she knows more than anybody. The young soldiers laugh and kiss her, and they go out to die.

"Wait!" cried Ormeega, as he felt Jack Skiff stirring in the darkness of his bunk. "Listen! It is war. The strong, brave men are laughing at us, us cowards. They say we are no good. They say they are the beef-eaters. But, you see, we fool those strong, brave men, and we send them out to die. We get money, so much that you would never think of it. We ride around in swell cars, and we give flowers to the soldiers in the hospitals. We know how they got there. We think, 'This fellow was in that ship we sunk.' And we think, 'This fellow was in that regiment we smashed.' So we are better than all the strong, brave men, we cowards."

In the fury and excitement of his narrative Ormeega had fallen more and more from English. Only parts of his speech were understandable to Jack Skiff, lying writhing and drunken in the dark.

"But she had a lover, too, among the Germans," whispered the thin voice which came to Skiff from out the dark. "A man who once, long ago, had seen her dance in Spain, and had loved her. Kind letters the Red Ant had written to him, for she was kind to all men, and loved them——"

Jack Skiff, stirring from his drunkenness, heard the cracking of knuckles, as when a man grinds his hands in pain, and he heard a groan.

"She wrote letters which he kept," gasped Ormeega. " 'Thy Bella, thy Red Ant,' she signed them. *'I am the chooser of the slain!'* she wrote him. On that German's drowned body Admiral Towne found the letters, when deep the submarines had gone down, and the dead Germans were drifting on the ocean underneath the moon. Her name became known to Towne and he thought about many things, and many things were made clear.

"Even then all is not lost, for she is beautiful, and many great, fine men know her well. Oh, many great men whose names you'd never think of. And these men, they say, 'We will put the beautiful Red Ant off in prison, and when the war is forgotten she will come out, and make us laugh and love us again.' These great men say that. But Towne, he says, 'She is a spy, and men died because of her. Yes,' says this terrible Towne, 'many of my good men have died because of her. And I will lift the lid of ——, and I will turn my guns on London Bridge,' says this demon Towne, 'if this woman doesn't die as my good men died!'

"He did not think how beautiful she was, or of how she made all people laugh. He didn't care for her green eyes that so many of the young soldiers had loved, or for her curly hair. He yelled, 'She is a spy! Let her be shot!' "

"You were a spy?" whispered Jack Skiff, struggling to arise.

"I was a spy, as I tell you," said Ormeega simply. "What can we do, we cowards? We can not fight."

Jack Skiff uttered a great groan.

Now the man upon the floor was stirring, and threshing again, and striving to lift up his bloody head. Ormeega watched him warily.

"We are cowards," said Ormeega with a shudder. "We can not fight. But heat us with this stuff—here! fill your teeth with

it—and we are braver than the toughest of them."

Shaking in every bone, Skiff took again the proffered drink. His eyes were drowned in curtains of fire. He heard a steady *throb! throb!* through all the caverns of his ears, and did not know if it was the washing of the night water on the old oak strakes, or if it was the swell and ebb of his heart.

Ormeega stepped up the ladder-stair, and peered cautiously forth.

"We can not dump this fellow yet," he said. "There's a policeman standing down at the beginning of the dock, and he is watching this way."

"I SAW this great Towne first in the night of the rain," whispered Ormeega, resuming his story. "I had stolen a great big pistol like this from your garage, when you weren't watching and your back was turned. I tell you this, because I know you hate that Towne and he hates you.

"I knew he would be coming down the street, for I had listened and learned. I hid behind a hedge. Listen! The thunder cracks and the rain pours. There is his step, tramp!—tramp!—tramp! like he takes long jumps in running. Oh, my heart trembles! Oh, my eyes burn! Oh, I want to turn and be sick upon the grass! There he is coming. I see his shadow. The thunder cracks all the house windows, and the rain is like the ocean. I can not shoot, for everyone will hear, and another man is walking on the street. This is the hour I wait for. This is the hour I, a coward, wait for through all these years! I tremble, and my heart burns up so I can't swallow. The night is like this place. Nobody can see nothing. I swing up that big pistol, and I crack it down with both hands. Oh, harder than I hit this one on the floor! Then he falls, and I cry, 'Little friend, don't forget the Red Ant!'

"I hide in the shadows," said Ormeega, speaking more and more swiftly. "And this demon Doane comes along. He lifts up Towne, and he is all right. Nothing has happened, though I struck the blow to kill him. Then I come up to Doane like a stranger, and I say I am a newspaper man and I want all the news.

"When Doane and a policeman have gone away, still I wait. I hide in the dark, all in the rain. Then I see a light in a window upstairs. I get a clothes-pole, and I set it in the mud, and I climb up. I can climb like anything. I go up like an ant. First I reach up my hand and throw a tiny red ant in the little open window for good luck, and so he will remember me. And then I look, and I see him. I shoot, *bang!* And nothing happens. A policeman comes, and Towne is staring out the window, and I think he is like the devil himself."

Only a part of all this Skiff understood. Ormeega's words tumbled shrilly, and he was shaking, and half the words were Spanish.

"And I come back, and I see him go away in a taxicab," said Ormeega. "I run and hold on hard to the back. Then a policeman takes me away. Three times I try to get him on that night of rain," said Ormeega bitterly. "Three times, and—nothing!

"Yesterday, even, I hear the strong, brave fliers say, 'This is the plane Admiral Towne will fly.' And I ask one of those fliers, saying, 'I am an ignorant newspaper man. Suppose something would happen?' And the flier says, 'Nothing will ever happen. But if this wire,' he tells me, 'broke, then Admiral Towne would smash. He would come down and smash, and nothing short of the angels up above could save him then.' I listen to that smart young flier who thinks I am such a fool. And when the wind starts from the engine, I grab hold behind that airplane, and I lift myself up and cut that wire almost in two. At first I think the smart young flier has seen me, for he runs after me. But nothing happens. He is pig-headed and blind, like all these strong, brave men. It is us, us cowards, who see things.

"And the admiral goes up. I run along to watch him. At first he is going to smash into a boat, but that doesn't happen. Then he drops down, down out of the sky like a leaf in the wind. I think he will smash all up, and nothing will be left of him. And I think perhaps he will go crazy, falling so high up. But then he comes down, and nothing happens. The angels up above have saved him, as that young flier said."

Jack Skiff groaned. He stumbled out of his bunk to the floor, feeling about in the vast dark. His hands touched nothing, yet there was a moving thing which made his foot recoil. It was the face of Stone Doane, groaning in his arousing consciousness. Warily Skiff felt about him, till his finger tips touched finger tips which were also

feeling. His hand retracted, and he felt that other hand retract, both utterly cowardly and terrified together.

Yet a passion wracked Jack Skiff, and a hatred which shook him like ague. On an empty bunk his hand found the whisky bottle. He swigged at it, till his heart grew too large for his breast.

"You were the fellow, then, who cut that wire?" he whispered with trembling fury. "The —— fiend who made Towne tumble down! Oh, God, will I forget it?"

Ormeega, hidden somewhere in that mote-swimming black, was too excited to heed Skiff's words or tone. He whispered on with straining fury.

"Yet again before yesterday I go for Towne like an ant goes for a great buzzing beetle! It was the night when the rain was coming underneath the white moon. I see Towne going up the steps to the dance. I creep up behind him, and with my gun I could kill him now. But then the policemen would kill me; and I am too great a coward for that. He—*he* knew I am a coward, and he turned on me and threw me out.

"Yet I waited, and I saw him come out. Or I thought it was him, for he was big and strong, and he had a beard, and was dressed like the Navy. When he got into a taxicab, I ran and grabbed hold behind. Down we rode to the big white Navy building. There he went inside, and I could not follow. But I knew where was his office, for I had taken pains to find out all things. And you came walking by, and the taxicab went away with you, so I was left alone. There was all the wet rain falling, and only the white moon to see——"

"George Cable!" cried Jack Skiff with a loud voice.

"But, you see, I think it is the admiral. I know where is his office, right on the second floor, and what window. I throw off the big black coat, and I am in a light gray suit that looks like the stone. Nobody can see me from very far away, no more than they can see a little patch of mist crawling up the building, Oh, it is easy climbing up, for I am like an ant, and I can hold to anything. I press my face against the rough stone, I dig my toes in tiny cracks, and I slide up to where I will see Admiral Towne!"

Jack Skiff stumbled against a bunk. He was searching the elusive voice of the speaker of the dark. It flew and fled about him like a crazy bat, now soft and low, now high and winging, piercing, screaming.

"I stick my head over the window!" cried that shrill, wild voice from out the utter dark. "He is just coming in the door. I have no time to shoot. Like a tiger he rushes across the room to me, and I hear his breath go *ha-ha! ha-ha!* I am never so afraid in my life, and I tremble all over. I curl my toes tight in a stone crack, and I cling tight to the building face! There!" cried Ormeega, in high frenzy. "He leaps at me with never a stop, and just as he thinks he will lean out the window to take hold of me— What! You should feel these fingers. They are strong. I grab his shoulder, and jerk him out, so fast is he coming at me. I hear him cry, 'You ——! Let me go!' Then he falls past me with his head down, like a man dives into water. I hear loud the crack of his neck as it hits the ground!

"I tremble and tremble, and try to hold tight," said the shrill voice of Ormeega, sinking to whispering. "I am never so afraid in my life. I go down the wall. I creep, and my bones are sick, for I feel the terrible gray ghost of that fellow coming up to tear me off the wall! I tremble so that half-way down I slip, and my ankle is like broken. Then I put a dead red ant on his face and I think as I look at his neck that is all twisted up, 'Make him laugh now in ——, Bella, Red Ant.'

"But a policeman comes up, and says, 'No, this is not the admiral. This is only a man.' Then I cry, and I know he is a ——"

THROUGH the pits of the black again Jack Skiff was seeking the elusive form of the speaker. A fury of drink was in Jack Skiff now, as with a passion black like the night he sought out this cunning murderer. Yes, in bottomless Gehenna he would seek for this abysmal fiend.

"You killed brave George Cable, you skulking insect!"

"What?"

"I'll put an end to you!"

"Don't touch me!" screamed Ormeega.

"I'll put an end to you, you murdering coward!"

Like bats they rushed about, blind bats within the night. The night stank. The night cried. There were shrill and insane

screams from the rushing coward whom Skiff's sightless hands felt out for.

Skiff was mad, was utterly insane with the horror of this unseen fiend who fled from him through the darkness. His blind hands touched on flesh. Against the wooden bulkheads he crashed, reeling with terrific hate.

"I'll kill you with my hands, you crawling ant, you coward!"

Suddenly Skiff burst into terrible laughter which shook and shivered wildly in the black hole. He laughed as men laugh who are drunk with death, as bold men who charge to war. Craven that Jack Skiff was, he had once felt the fury of giant courage, and he had been a man. In this most dreadful and diabolic pit he was a man again, a soul to terrify the lowest fiends.

"Don't hurt me! Don't kill me!" came the screams from the dark.

Whence? Here? Above? Below? Like bats the two men invisible whirred and rushed, gasping in thin squeaks.

Skiff stumbled against a body on the floor. Stone Doane, only partially conscious yet, was sitting up. He groaned loudly. His hands struck up to protect his head, and touched the hands of Skiff. The hands of Ormeega also Doane must have touched, for there lifted Ormeega's voice in one piercing scream. Lunging forward at that cry, Skiff found the swaying body of Stone Doane as a barrier in between, and one of Stone Doane's hands had seized his ankle like a knot.

Stone Doane, arousing in the utter dark to that bedlam of swift feet and wild, sharp screaming, to the hands which touched and shrank, to the rush of unseen bodies leaping—Stone Doane must have believed in this moment of delirium that he was sinking into Phlegethon beyond the shores of death.

Swift there was a leaping scuffle up the ladder-stair, like the pattering of a panicky rat skittering rapidly. The doors of the hatchway were banged wide, letting down a dull streak of purple shadow from the deep and starless night. Ormeega, the Black Ant, had fled up from out the hold. Out of that spider den where death stalked him he had fled up and away. His swift, lean body leaped across the shadow of the night. Skiff wrenched his foot free from the grasp of Stone Doane's fingers, and he leaped after.

From the dock against which the bark lay were rising the shouts of men. The shouts of bloodhound men baying the view-halloo. An electric torch winked, and men were running heavily. Their dark bodies loomed, their feet clattered like a pack of horses.

Around him and around Ormeega looked in rabid fear. He skidded and dodged over the deck like such a crazy ant as he had named himself. Arms and legs flashed out as he ducked, and shied, and veered about superstructure and hogshead upon the deck. Skiff's teeth clicked triumphantly. He bore down swiftly on that cowardly lunatic, and his hands reached forth to take a strangle-grip.

Even as his hands would close, the meager body leaped upward and rose above him. Ormeega was dangling in the air over the deck, suspended by his arms, curling his feet safe up from Skiff's reach. He had jumped and caught a loose rope end. Rapidly, hand over hand, he climbed up toward the crosstree of the mainmast.

Dizzily up into the night black and high he climbed, his thin legs kicking, his body spinning, his hands hauling him in swift jerks. He dangled on a spider rope against the high emptiness of the purple night.

Jack Skiff forgot the horror which lurks in all high places, and the terrific pains of death. He found a rope ladder running up to the crosstree. Lightly he climbed up it, as sure and deft as a lemur, as sure and deft as if a score of years had blown away, and he were again a brave young midshipmite. He climbed parallel to, and below, the jerking, twisting form of Ormeega.

Then Ormeega had swung himself to the yard. He sat on it, his back to the water, his face toward the mast. He edged his way rapidly outboard toward the tip. Skiff clambered boldly to the yardarm. He sat facing Ormeega. Upon his hands in little leaps he neared the man who crouched at the very outboard tip. Ormeega sobbed shrilly. Vacantly he stretched forth his hand for the swinging spar of the mizzen, but missed it by ten feet. Like a cornered rat he began to emit sharp squeals as the hand of Skiff reached out for him; and like a cornered rat he showed his sharp teeth.

A cry from the deck below struck Jack Skiff. It was the voice of Towne, the loud and terrible voice of Admiral Towne. For a moment from his dizzy perch Jack Skiff looked downward. For the first time he was aware of his elevation. A giddiness set all

his wits to swimming. Hard and far was the deck below. Wind shook the slender yard, and it shook Jack Skiff like a sere leaf. The black outboard water flickered with crimson spears of lights. Craftily it lapped.

Oh black angels of the terrible deep air! Had he been lured up here on high by this cunning, creeping fiend to fall, and break his skull, and feel death's pains again?

The empty night shook all about Jack Skiff. The wind blew. The mast trembled. In all that shivering emptiness, clinging to the tip end of a straw between deep chaos and the nadir, the brain of Jack Skiff cracked in him.

"Not an inch nearer!" whispered Ormeega shrilly, squealing with sickened fright. "An inch no more! Back up, or I will shoot!"

Then Jack Skiff lifted himself from his hold on the frail yardarm, and both his hands stretched out as if to pluck Ormeega from the air. Veritably he hurled himself through the air toward that squealing, cowardly fiend. He hurled himself through utter emptiness as a hawk hurls, when it folds its wings and dives toward the strike.

"Shoot, and be —— forevermore!" he shouted in a wild cry.

The blast of lead struck him full, tearing a great hole in his breast.

THE Black Ant looked downward from his perilous seat, and saw the dim forms of men upon the deck. Over all they swarmed. One man with pirate countenance, with gold rings in his ears, lifted up his fist and shouted clearly—

"That's the man who calls himself Ormeega!"

And rose Admiral Towne's terrible voice in reply—

"Take him alive!"

The rope ladder shivered and pulled. Strong men with strong hands were climbing up to the mainmast yard. The mast trembled at their weight.

From the doors of the forecastle hold Stone Doane was staggering. Out of that black pit he came as from the doors of a tomb. Black blood was spread from his scalp down over his face. Up he looked, straight up at Ormeega. And though there was no light of moon or stars in this purple night, the Black Ant saw Doane's sightless eye gleaming like a cursed and evil eye.

To the yardarm with both hands Skiff was still clinging. His legs and body dragged below, but he clung tightly on his forearms, his breast pressed against the sheeted spar. His fingers trembled convulsively. His eyes were closed tight. His blood soaked in the canvas of the yard. In his throat sounded the death rattle.

Still he clung with his last strength. And on his face—the Black Ant saw it clear—was a look of giant laughter.

The dreadful countenance of Admiral Towne appeared above the level of the yard. He clutched the spar, and swung to it. The Black Ant took one look about him. Deep and calm was the water. He was an ant, and he could swim as well as climb and run. While the iron hand of Towne reached out for him above the head of Skiff, Ormeega leaped far out, and down into the river.

He never knew, did that Black Ant, why on the dying face of poor Jack Skiff was that look of giant laughter. Jack Skiff had cheated the great Fates who had doomed him to a crash. When his arms released their hold, when he slipped from the yard, his spirit was on the wind whence no ghost falls, and he could die no more.

THEY will bury brave Jack Skiff with all the heroes of the sea. The bugle will blow, the rifles ring. And marble angels with folded wings will weep above his grave.

NOW the water laps. The black tide flows. Oars dip. Boats chug around on the sleek water. *"Fut! fut-fut!—fut—fut!"* they gasp like old consumptives. Search-lights streak along the black water; flash-lights and lanterns glean it fine. Deep and deceitful is the water. Those wan lights pick up many a bit of driftwood, and old buckets and decayed cabbage-heads from the produce boats. But not the head of that cunning swimmer swimming for his life. Not the scald-head do they betray of that fiend who murdered poor Jack Skiff.

Whistles blow from boats along the shores. *"Whoo! whoo! whoo!"* they wail across black water.

This was the thick and windless night, when there was neither moon nor rain. But a mist gathered.

"I'll not lie down to sleep again while that skulking ant is free within the night!" swore old Admiral Towne. "I'll get him before he has chance to try at me again.

I'll break out a flying-boat, and hound him over the water!"

With two police officers in his big gray car he rushed to the air station southeast of Washington, across weedy Anacostia River. The officer of the day routed forth a sleepy crew of mechanics. Into the deep hangars they went, where flying-boats brooded like dismal dragons. They picked out that same boat in which, on the day previous, Towne had nearly crashed to his destruction. They trundled it down to the water. On the abysmal black river it floated clear. About it the dark water rippled.

"I'm going out looking for a man swimming," said Admiral Towne, as he got himself into flying gear. "Don't expect me till he's found."

"We thought we saw a swimmer close on shore," said the officer of the day. "The sentry hailed him, but we didn't see anything. There's a police-boat out there looking for him now."

And a police-boat churned and *fut-futted!* swinging in close to shore, flashing a light, calling—

"Have you seen any one?"

"No! Nothing!" replied the officer of the day.

Dull-yellow lights had been lighted along the beach. Green and red lights sparkled in the quivering water. Against the yellow lights upon the beach big insects hurled themselves with clapping and humming; but within the colored lights of the water were no things seen, stammering insects or black ants floating down with the tide.

Admiral Towne climbed into the flying-boat. Against its thin hull the river rustled and broke. The shadow of its wings spread over the water. Out from the shore the police-boat spat its course away, seeking farther for the swimmer in the night. Admiral Towne put great round goggles before his eyes. Upon his back was strapped a pack which gave him the appearance of a huge hump, of a caricatured deformity. The propeller whipped the windless air. Then Towne opened up the throttle. Across the black water, into the absolute dark, the flying-boat forged, curiously heavy. It threshed within a wake, wallowing in an arc.

Upon the shore men watched, and saw the flying-boat, churning over the smooth black. Then the motor *hroomed!* taking up the burden of its jubilant, winged song. It skimmed swiftly, and without a break in motion was singing through the air close above the quiet and invisible water.

Upon the shore, fists resting in the pockets at their hips, men watched the darkened boat gather its speed, and take off from the water. Down the beach the officer of the day ran, shouting, and the mechanics took up his cry.

"Stop! Stop him! There's a man holding to his wing!"

But there was no stopping now that black, screaming boat which hurtled through the air close above the sleek surface of the water.

By his arms a meager man was hanging to a pontoon float on the outer end of a wing. His feet and his whole body trailed behind him, and he dripped a stream of water. Out of the black river he had come. Swimming softly in the darkness close to shore, he had caught and clung to that dangerous handhold as the flying-boat put out from shore. The Black Ant, whom all men hunted, had lifted himself from out the drowning water upon the pinions of his enemy.

It seemed the man's arms would crack with that terrific strain, that he would lose his grip, and fall and smash upon the water's face. But he was an ant, and he could cling and climb. He was pulling his body to the wing pontoon now, about which he wrapped and interlocked his legs. And now he was lifting himself to the wing, hand and arm, and knee and foot. Now he was crawling on the wing inward to the cockpit, where Admiral Towne sat all unconscious, his strong hands on the wheel, staring down over the cockpit's edge at the tar smoothness of the river. Cunningly he crept along the wing, clinging to strut after strut, while the air swept past him like a hurricane.

He was not shaken, he was not blown off. Sure-footed and with pinching grips he clung to his holds. For he was the Black Ant, and he could cling and climb.

Then that flying-boat, flying close above the water, passed out of all sight within the dark; though on the shore excited men could still hear the dulled *hurooml hroomingl* of its engine.

HIS head far over the cockpit's edge, Admiral Towne was scanning the dark and sleek water underneath his keel. It passed below in a swift streak, like a black film on a black screen. There were

boats, and there were floating things, and there were quivering lights, and again there was the black water. Admiral Towne jerked up his head. Into the seat beside him a man had crept, and a pistol-muzzle dug deep into the flesh about Towne's heart. The swimming fiend he had been seeking in the river down below, the hunted man, the mad killer, the Black Ant, sat like death there at his side.

Knee to knee, and thigh to thigh, cheek to cheek and jowl to jowl, death sat there at the side of Admiral Towne. Death had the mighty admiral, hip and thigh.

Loud and clear above the engine's screaming, Towne shouted, his grim eyes never flinching nor his hands stirring—

"Don't shoot, you fool, and don't try anything! We'll both die together!"

Ormeega sneered. The finality of fear had eaten out his heart, and of nothing more could he ever be afraid. There is no courage like that utter fear, and heroes tremble at the fury of it.

Up steadily the admiral pulled his boat. The invisible water dropped below, as if within a sleepy dream the world itself dissolved. There was nothing to mark that slow lift upward, save the mounting needle of the altimeter. Ormeega kept his pistol pressed close against Towne's heart. His hand did not tremble. He gave a cruel dig, and nodded down the river. Beyond the night, beyond the dawn, lay somewhere down there the outer sea, and Spain beyond the sea. What crazy dreams were in the Black Ant's eyes!

"You don't need to be afraid!" bellowed Towne, pressing his mouth near.

He darted a glance at the lips of Ormeega.

"I am not afraid," those pale lips formed.

Death was all close to Admiral Towne, but he and old Skipper Death had been shipmates before. On many an ocean they had sailed, and they had tossed within the air together. Of nothing was old Towne afraid. But his ghost would count it a bitter shame if this mean and craven murderer brought him low. Though drowned in bottom Lethe his ghost would howl against the shame of that. He reached down his hand.

Ormeega laid his mouth close to Towne's ear.

"You get me safe, or I shoot!" he shrieked shrilly. "Don't play no tricks, you ——! Maybe I shoot anyway!"

Three thousand feet up they were. Washington sparkled like a white crown below. A high wind blew from the sea.

"Don't play no tricks!" cried Ormeega in shrill terror.

Into Admiral Towne's face he stared. Those shrewd old, hard old eyes were squinted cunningly, and there was a laugh in them, and a mercilessness which cracked Ormeega's bones. Though he did not know how or why, the Black Ant knew he was betrayed. Though this strong man was at his trigger hand, Ormeega knew that he was betrayed, and lost and forever damned.

"Don't play no tricks!" he shouted in third warning.

From beside Ormeega Towne shot downward. Straight down he dropped upon the flash into the bottomless winds below. The bottom of the boat had opened like a trap, and Towne's seat had catapulted underneath him, hurling him downward like a thrown stone.

It was a device of Stone Doane's invention, a contrivance to hurl a pilot rapidly from a burning ship, free and clear of all flame.

Five hundred feet below Towne's parachute, strapped to his back, caught its fill of wind, and billowed open. Upon the bosom of the night Towne drifted, like a spirit disincarnate. His body swayed gently through long arcs. Down past him the masterless boat he had left dived headlong, with the white face of Ormeega flashing like a stone.

Once again in his drifting through purple space Towne and the ship passed. Ormeega, in his incomprehensible madness at this blind ship which like a bird whirled him down and around through the shrieking night, had seized the wheel and strained with it tight to his breast. The elevator was pulled back, and the downward hurling of the flying-boat was for an instant halted. It swung upward to a screaming loop.

A little instant old Towne, swinging from his parachute harness, was close to that whirling, looping ship—a man suspended in heaven. Ormeega's eyes, bursting with maniac fear, strained on that quiet and almost motionless figure suspended in the night. And he gave a cry, but no word could be heard.

MEN watching on the earth saw Towne catapult from that black, humming plane which streaked along on high, and saw the great white circle of his parachute flap lazily, its curved

wing open. Down past the man who hung within the sky the masterless boat toppled, with motor screaming full on. Suddenly the flying-boat swept upward for a loop, up and over with its astounding roar.

It did not level forth, but swung up again. Within the sky it pinwheeled in long loops, rising to the loop with motor straining, falling over on its back with a loud scream. There was no stopping it.

"The —— fool has grabbed the wheel," said a young ensign on the beach. "He'll loop until his wings crack off, or she catches fire and burns."

Swift as the word flame had leaped from that doomed ship within the sky. It caught from the roaring engine on the oil-soaked wings. Three times again the ship looped, and fire enwrapped it tail and wing. Three times it looped, somersaulting. And on the sky in trailing fire were written three long spiral O's, as when a penman practises with a pen.

Down past the wide-bellying parachute which carried Towne, the ship of flame came like a meteor, dragging behind the long trail of its burning. For the moment its wings outstretched, and it was like a moth no man has seen. Down came the Black Ant cometing from the sky. And though already his body must be a cinder, the Black Ant seemed a strange and lovely moth, flying down from Heaven on wings of wavering flame.

THE "CONGO"

by Eugene Cunningham

TRAVERSING the Guanacaste region of Costa Rica, the rider jogs over broad, grassy prairies like those of Texas, but dotted with thorny scrub-jungle and groves of the tree which gives this section its name. This *guanacaste* bears a small, insipid fruit in a cotton-lined pod, seemingly very attractive to monkeys. The little animals swarm there, their cheeks ludicrously swollen with the fruit, holding sham-battles with the pods. Red monkeys, gray monkeys, parti-colored monkeys. Between them and the parrots and gaudy, pirate-beaked macaws, the day is seldom silent. The monkeys' noise, however, is only a shrill, peevish or excited chattering; the ear soon grows accustomed to it.

But when above the high pitched monkey-squabbling rises—for all the world like a fog-horn drowning the cries of scavenging gulls —a short, hoarse, coughing bellow, half like the voice of an angry, pawing bull, half like the hair-lifting sound that comes from a circus animal-tent when the lions are hungry, *then* the inexperienced traveler looks uneasily about and hitches nearer his gun-butt. Toward twilight, when the sound is most frequently heard, the husky voices blend into a nerve-tensing chorus. The deep, booming roars take on with fading light a sinister accent. It is not jaguar; not *leon*. If the voyager knows this much, the mystery is the more nerve-racking.

He may even see the author of the amazingly loud, sullen roar, without realizing it. The *congo*, as the native names the animal, is not infrequently glimpsed for a moment in some lofty tree-top near the trail, though for his vocal exercises he seems to choose the far jungle-depths. A squat baboon, coal-black, deeper of chest, thicker in each dimension, than the monkeys with which he sometimes feeds, and seemingly faster at travel upon the tree-top ways of monkeydom. Even if one catches the *congo* in full song, it is hard to believe the testimony. It is too much like finding a fox-terrier equipped with a Number Ten lion-roar.

Cap'n Jenks

by S.Omar Barker

Author of "The Guide Hound."

A DARK figure crept silently to the cover of a small boulder not twenty steps from the picket-line of Sargento Amador's thirty-horse detachment of federal cavalry, former *rurales*, camped for the night in a pocket of the Sierra Madre Mountains not far from Arispe. It moved, clumped down close to the earth, like a round, belegged chunk of rock somehow come to life in the weird-shadowed Mexican night, yet so totally and stealthily silent that the drowsing sentry not fifteen steps away was undisturbed. Then, so softly that for a moment Maguín, the sentry, thought he had fallen into a dreaming sleep, there arose from the dark shadow where the figure crouched unseen, the clear, tiny notes of an American bugle call — *Ta-ta-ta-te-tetetete* — three times repeated.

Some of the horses raised their heads inquiringly and stirred a little uneasily, but most of them paid no attention. The sentry came wide-awake and listened. Not only was the call a strange one to him, but it had also a quality of vague unreality about it. Its tone seemed to come to his ears thinned out by distance, and yet every note was as clear and distinct as if it had arisen close at hand But for the slight movement of the horses, Maguín would have sworn the strange call had been part of a dream.

Then it came again, and this time the sentry's bewildered ears placed the sound definitely in the shadow of a near-by boulder, yet told him no bugle could be played so softly that close. Nevertheless he clicked the bolt back on his Mauser and called a quiet challenge into the night. For answer he had only the great sweeping soundlessness of the vastly shadowed, rock-strewn hills crouched under winking stars.

From the boulder-shadow that concealed him Joseph Jenks, whom the boys on the Hoop E ranch back above the border had nick-named "Cap'n" Jenks, peered expectantly, not toward the sentry, but back and forth along the picket-line of horses. His eyes, become keen to the darkness, searched for the movement of a horse's head blazed peculiarly from a star between the eyes down to a spreading of white splotches on the nostrils. His ears strained anxiously for the sound of a familiar, nuzzling nicker. Both eyes and ears were strained in vain, for no horse of that thirty-odd gave answer to his call. Those heads that had gone up were raised only in momentary questioning of the peculiar noise, and among all not one showed more than a three-inch flash of white in his face.

Cap'n Jenks' heart dulled in disappointment. Apparently Dickie was not there or he would have answered. The man had

come to the end of a long trail only to find his search fruitless.

Three weeks before, while he had driven "Choto" Sam Winsor's sick wife to El Paso in Sam's decrepit flivver, a buyer of horses for the Mexican government had come in his two-foot sombrero and tight fancy breeches to the Hoop E ranch. Señor Capitán Peralta had spot-cash money in his pockets and his government needed horses. Old George Peck, owner of the Hoop E, had overdue notes at the bank and needed money. And because he had horses, too, both broken and bronco stuff, he had sold nearly all of his punchers' strings to the Mexican, keeping only enough for fence riding and to form a nucleus for new strings to be broken in from his dozens of husky young broncs on the range.

Among those driven south by Peralta's *peones* was Dickie, the slender, splotch-faced bay which, while he belonged to Peck, had been Cap'n Jenks' pet and favorite mount for years. Cap'n Jenks, like his namesake, that famous officer of Horse Marines in the old time song, had fed his horse good corn and beans, petted him and taught him a hundred pretty tricks. He had lavished upon Dickie all the lonely affection of a reticent, socially timid nature. The boys thought Jenks was "queer," a bit locoed, but to Dickie that lank form, topped by an uncombed stack of taffy-blond hair, represented the nobility of mankind. Rarely have man and horse loved each other as did these two.

Jenks had wanted to buy him, but Peck had made the rule that his punchers should ride his horses and not their own; and if Jenks bought Dickie he'd have either to take him out of his string or else ride on to some other ranch. So long as he stayed he could have the horse for his exclusive use and handle him as he pleased, but old George Peck wasn't going to start selling favorite "hosses" to his punchers. Nossir! So Cap'n Jenks had stayed and treasured Dickie as his own.

When he had returned from El Paso this last time, delayed by a dozen minor and half as many major breakdowns, he had found his pony gone. When the boys told him, he went directly to Peck about it.

"Yup," said the old man. "Yer baby was gittin' old anyway, and the Mex took a fancy to him. Said he wanted him special fer a sargint friend of his, and offered me double money, so I let him go. Whut yuh snufflin' about?"

For Cap'n Jenks' mild, blue eyes had filled with tears at the thought of his Dickie getting shot to pieces in Mexican cavalry.

For answer this usually most timid of men had cursed old George Peck briskly, drawn his time, bought a pony from Choto Sam Winsor, the squatter, and had ridden south. With a quiet, almost animal directness, he had followed by track and by questioning the trail of the army buyer's herd down to the border, then across, and on into the comparatively peaceful north end of Sonora.

From a Mormon settlement he had obtained food and information. By shrewd and careful questioning and deduction he learned that this particular herd of horses had been assigned to a cavalry patrol in this same Arispe region where the rebels were only a few small, marauding dozens. Then he had located Sergeant Amador's camp in a hidden mountain pocket. It was the only federal cavalry detachment in the district, and he had felt certain he would find Dickie on its picket-line.

NOW both eyes and ears told him Dickie was not there. He had heard the click of Maguín's rifle and his quiet challenge, but he had a whole-souled contempt for Mexicans—both as to marksmanship and what he called guts. In the hope that Dickie might not have heard his first calls and still might be somewhere along that picket-line, Jenks twisted his mouth up at one side, pursed his lips and tootled through them again a perfect imitation of First Sergeant's call on a bugle —"Ta-ta-ta-tee-tetetete"—three times. He had taught Dickie to throw up his head, answer and come running to him whenever he heard it.

He made the call louder this time, and Maguín, locating the strange sound certainly, though not understanding it at all, spanged a rifle bullet into the dark with sufficient accuracy to ream a small, swift hole through the left hand Cap'n Jenks had raised to his listening ear. The bullet went through clean, glanced from the boulder behind him and went whining off into the dark. The horses snorted and stamped nervously, and Cap'n Jenks suddenly found

his stomach the sole obstacle between the end of a rifle-barrel and the smooth, hard surface of a boulder.

Maguín, trained in the service of the *rurales* to act quickly even if at random, had made a lucky guess, and Cap'n Jenks' opinion of at least one *soldado Mexicano* went up about three notches.

The shot had aroused the camp, and several tousled soldiers came running, one of them carrying a flash-light. In a jiffy they made the *Americano* prisoner and were marching him to a little tent where a light had just been lighted. Cap'n Jenks wondered whether they would shoot him or hang him, one or the other of course. These —— Mexes—that's the only way anybody ever got killed in their measly wars—taken prisoner and then murdered. Cap'n Jenks said nothing and made no resistance as they shoved him along. His hand was beginning to hurt him like the ——, and his face twitched with the pain.

To his astonishment instead of ordering him shot at daylight, Sergeant Amador, a chunky, genial looking chap with a close-cropped black mustache, started asking him questions in fairly intelligible English.

Who was he?—Ah, Capitán Jenks! An American officer then, but what in the name of —— and eight hound-dogs would an American officer be spying on the *cavallería* of the friendly Mexican government for?

Jenks explained that he wasn't a real captain—that was just his nickname.

Well, that made it different. Still he was an American, and the sergeant insisted with the assistance of many interjected "how-you-call's" that he had no desire to injure any American—not that he was fond of them, these gringos—no, no, no, no! But *Los Estados Unidos* was selling his government guns and cartridges and horses and saddles, and he wouldn't offend the big neighbor up north, no, not for the pleasure of—how you call?—spanking a dozen gringos!

Cap'n Jenks, tongue-tied by his natural timidity as well as the uncertainty of his position, stood without answering and the sergeant suddenly changed his tone.

"*Por vida de mi esposa!*" he thundered, "For why you no speak nothings? Eef you ees come to spyin' on *mis rurales* for thems —— dirt' rebels I make you too full holes for keep out sun. I don't care eef makes me to fight ever'body—Junited State'—Tex' Range'—ever'body! Me——" He pounded his thick chest. "Me, Sargento Amador, office' for Presidente Obregon—got 'fraids for *nada!* Whatsmata? No speak English? Steal horse—horse-thief maybe?"

"Who's a horse-thief? I come after my own hoss, durn yer hide! I'm goin' to git him, too!"

Cap'n Jenks' mild eyes fired up a little but deep in his heart he knew the jig was up.

"A-ah! You sink we are steel you horse? No, *señor!* Thees horse ees buy with cash mon' *dinero!* Capitán Peralta, she's a——"

"Sure," interrupted Cap'n Jenks, "I know you bought 'em— bought 'em from old man Peck—but that don't keep Dickie from bein' my hoss!"

And then, once started, Cap'n Jenks told his captor just how it had all happened, even to the burned-out connecting-rod that had delayed him getting back from El Paso. Sergeant Amador listened, impatiently at first, and then with interested attention.

"*Caramba!*" he exclaimed at last, alternately grinning and pounding his fists together. "By the name of ten —— and *todos los Santos*, why are you not say so before you make speak? Ees white face horse—too —— fine horse with—how you call?—red color? Ees horse which make trot like—how you call?—rock a babee good-by? Ees——"

"Sure! *Si, señor!*" interrupted Cap'n Jenks. "That's Dickie! You got him?"

"No," the sergeant said it ruefully. "I did got him but nomo'. Capitán Aragon she's a-steal 'im—she's a-was my *capitán*, but she's a-steal my horse, she's a-steal fo'ty mens, she's a-turn-rebel, she's a-ride away and leaves me too much mad for such kinda —— office'! Thutty mens make stay with me—*leales*—true solj'. That's-a ten day now since Capitán Aragon is a-go be rebels. Putty soon Aragon she's make big bonch new rebels for fights. She's a-raise ——! *Ay! que Dioques!*"

"Looky here!" Cap'n Jenks turned his back to the dusky Sergeant, showing his manacled hands, one of them oozing blood from its wound. "Untie my hands! You've got a new so'jer, that is, if you're gonna chase up that there captain which run off with my hoss. I'm goin' with you till we get him!"

The sergeant let out a low whistle when he saw the wound.

"*Sacramento!*" he spluttered. "For why on names of *todos los Santos*, you not make speak for tell me ees get wound'?"

Swiftly he untied the American's hands, cursed at the guard for not telling him, and proceeded to delve into his saddle-bags for bandages. He talked volubly and half-intelligibly as he worked:

"Ees putty good man, Capitán Jank, for stan' with wounds on hand and says nothings! Ees putty good man, *Señor Americano*, for comes too far in strange countree just to look 'im for one leet'l *caballo* horse! Ees make putty good solj' for *Mexicano* army, Capitán Jank! Me, office' for Presidente Obregon ees make you *caporal ayudante* for Sargento Amador. Tomorrow we make looks 'roun'—fin' dam' rebel we shoot 'im for peegs! We get you horse! You got one horse youse'f now?"

By the time Cap'n Jenks' wounded hand was properly bandaged an agreement had been reached. The gringo, if the Mexican would agree to instruct his men to be careful not to shoot Dickie in battle, would join the outfit and stay with it until Dickie was his once more. Together they would lurk in the hills to take the renegade captain and his rebel troop by surprize. They would be outnumbered—well, at least they had the impetus of strong purpose to give them strength. Cap'n Jenks wanted his horse. Sergeant Amador to capture his former commander and gain for himself a captaincy.

Not only would it be a feather in his cap, but he knew he might thus regain at least half of the recent deserters for the Government. It was not that they had deserted Obregon's forces so much as that they had simply followed their *capitán*. With him once captured—and executed probably—they would be only too glad to be counted back into the loyal service rather than shift leaderless as rebels, or to be shot for their brief desertion.

"Presidente Obregon, she's a-make me *capitán* for sure Miguel eef ees brought in thees *chivo capitán* alive, 'live for hangin'! Maybe makes just *teniente* eef kill 'im in *batalla*. We bring 'im in alive like *gallo* rooster!"

He called a soldier and sent him up the draw after Jenks' horse, and the two turned in.

NEXT day they shifted camp and sent out scouts to locate the rebel captain and his troop. They reported that at noon, snooping along the hills above the village of San Joaquin, they had seen at least a hundred horsemen, among whom they could recognize many of their former comrades, come swooping suddenly into the village. Not a shot had been fired, and in apparent certainty of their security the rebels had established what seemed to be a permanent camp. There were a few tents and picket-lines with more than half a hundred horses stationed on the sage flat just west of the village, according to Gregorio. It had looked as if Capitán Aragon intended to settle down, and that he felt sure he would be undisturbed.

Sergeant Amador swore vividly in Spanish, and then, as if in deference to Cap'n Jenks, whom he had designated his first corporal and "adjutant," tried a few special blazes in English, the chief import of his words being that San Joaquin was the village in which lived Erslinda Gonzalez, his *novia*, upon whom that six kinds of a billy-goat rebel, Capitán Aragon, had at times cast amorous and covetous glances. That settled it. This was a war for constitutional government, of course, but *por vida* —— there were some real reasons for fighting now: A white man wanted his horse, the sergeant his promotion and most important of all, the enemy was trying to steal his girl! *Caramba!*

Sergeant Umberto Amador was nobody's fool. He had served in both the *rurales* and Obregon's regulars long enough to know something of the relative fighting-strength of thirty men as compared with three times that number. Nevertheless he resolved to give his deserting captain-rival some stinging hint of his presence.

When the shadows of night had lodged like a fantastic array of dark-skinned ghosts in the hollows of the boulder-strewn hills he broke camp silently, and with his own tent torn into muffle-wrappings for their horses' hoofs, led his little company stealthily to the brink of broken hogsbacks that stretched up from the little *placita* of San Joaquin.

The village lay half-silent, like a restless sleeper, in the midst of its clumpy cottonwoods. Few lights could be seen, and only now and then came, strangely clea

but unintelligible, the sound of voices; or perhaps the throaty *gr-woof* of a dog as some night-owl rebel soldier passed too close to his master's dooryard. A small fire flickered where the wall shadows of the low *adobes* merged into clumpier shadows of sage and mesquite just west of town.

Amador smiled to himself. It was that thoroughly foolish yet almost universal custom of Mexican sentries watching in the night, of building little fires for their own comfort and cheer, forgetting the advantage it offered to spies. He had for days strictly forbidden sentry-fires for his own men, but he knew that Captain Aragon, trusting in his superior numbers, would think such a precaution unnecessary.

Aided by the flickering little light Amador could make out shadow clusters that were horses, and grayish spots that might well be a tent or two. Obviously some semblance of a camp had been established here, though he knew well enough that most of the men would be lodged as "guests" in the village.

Leaving all the horses with two men two hundred yards back in a hollow between two ridges, Amador scattered his men with rifles here and there behind boulders, back of small rises and benches, securely hidden but where they could command good shooting views of the camp and part of the village. The hills circled about a third of the village, lying mostly to the north. Eastward were tree-lined roads and ditches. South lay the irrigated farms of the villagers. To the west a little stream tumbled out of a narrow cañon and turned sedately into slow-flowing *acequias*. Back farther it had twisted hither and yon following the weird breaks of a tortuous ravine strangely splotched with little side cañons, meadows and benches.

Amador knew the country foot by foot. He sent Maguín and another rifleman to hide at the brink of the cañon's mouth. With Cap'n Jenks at his side he stretched out back of a little table-top boulder a little back up the hill from most of his men where he would be able to watch them, himself unseen as were they, from the village and flat below.

As dawn drove the gray shadows back up the crooked cañon, the sergeant raised his rifle, aimed carefully at the figure of a sentry busy replenishing his blaze, and fired. His bullet fell short, but the shot was his signal to Maguín. Back at the mouth of the cañon two rifles answered the crack of his own. One of their bullets spattered into the fire, upsetting a pail of steaming water upon it. In a second the camp was alive with excitement. One sentry fired at random back toward the hills. Another ran for the walls of the village. In a few minutes he returned, reenforced by a dozen or more men, and half as many came alive from the camp itself. Their rifles were ready for action, but their eyes searched the silent hills and saw nothing.

Then again came the *spat! spat!* of the two rifles up on the cañon wall. One man went down. Half of the others dispersed toward the village and half shot off their guns toward the sound of the two lone rifles. The hills remained silent again; not a movement where lay the sergeant's men. Yet before the frightened rebels could withdraw to the shelter of the houses the two rifles piped again and once more a man —only one—went down. Back on the hill Maguín grinned at his companion.

"Well, well, Paco," he said in Spanish. "What makes you miss them?"

Paco looked his disgust.

"It is you, son of a demon," he snorted quietly. "You that miss them!"

Maguín chuckled. He knew well his perfect marksmanship and it delighted him to see his companion miss.

Every soldier had disappeared into the village. Two picket-lines of horses, deserted in the midst of feeding, were pawing restlessly. Maguín, obeying the previous orders of his chief, raised his rifle again. Its spatting echo against the hills was answered this time by the heart-breaking shriek of a mortally wounded horse, and one of the animals on the picket-line went down, creating a great commotion.

Farther around north Cap'n Jenks, straining his eyes for a glimpse of that familiar white nozzle, saw and heard. Anger flamed in his heart. He seized Amador's shoulder.

"Look here!" he said huskily. "Did you tell them to shoot them hosses?"

"Shut up!" said the sergeant quietly. "For sure Mike I tell 'im! Shoot one horse. You not like? No—me I do not like 'im too, but ees war! Putty soon mens come out for get 'im horses, maybe attacks up

cañon, then we get 'im. If not comes out Maguín shoot 'im one mo' horse. Then ees come out sure!"

As he spoke men began sneaking out toward the picket-line of horses. Amador levelled his rifle and nudged Cap'n Jenks.

"Now! Zam!" he said.

Twenty-eight rifles cracked almost in unison following his shot, and the tumbling and scrambling about of the men down below testified to the effectiveness of the volley. But they did manage to get most of the horses herded into the village, and as they went Cap'n Jenks saw Dickie's bald face among them. If Amador had not laid a restraining hand on his arm, he would have jumped up and run down the hill.

"There he is! There's Dickie! See? Don't let 'em shoot while he's there!"

"Nev' min' 'fraids for that!" smiled the sergeant. "Ees my orders."

SURE enough there was no random shooting into the horses, as Amador had promised. When they were all out of sight in the village except the half a dozen bodies lying still or nearly so where they had fallen Amador became restless. They might all slip out to the south he said. Might even take Erslinda with them. That —— *cobarde Capitán!* He might even just lie quiet in the village, and they would have to attack after dark had come again. However, he motioned those men who could see him to wait quietly for developments, and they passed the signal along.

He had hoped they would make a rush up toward the two rifles at the mouth of the cañon, where he and the rest of his men would have had a good lot of open space for shooting into them. Still the plan had not been so bad thus far. He had licked them, wounded and killed several with never a moment's danger to himself and his own men. Perhaps, after a while, they would come out again for another dose. Well, he had it ready.

Cap'n Jenks was not so calm.

"How're we gonna git that there hoss?" he insisted. "He's there! I see him! How're we gonna git him if you make us lay like a lot of sheepherders up here in the rocks?"

With some difficulty Amador persuaded him that he should be patient, but when another half-hour had passed without any developments, Cap'n Jenks slipped silently away, and before the sergeant could stop him, he was crawling like a slow-moving snake down among the boulders toward the village. One Mexican raised his rifle and looked questioningly at his commander, but Amador shook his head. He tried to motion Jenks to return, and cursed in a whisper when the other refused to heed him.

"*Tonto! Tonto!* Ees beeg —— fool!" he muttered. "Ees go down get kill for joost one —— leet'l *caballo!*"

But he let him go and watched his inch-by-inch progress nervously.

So intent was he upon the fool move of the American that the figure of a man had emerged from the village and come slowly fifty feet from the sheltering walls before he saw him. When he did his rifle came up instinctively, but he did not shoot. For high over his head, knotted on the end of a crooked stick, the rebel carried a white flag. So it was surrender! Cap'n Jenks, crawling some thirty steps down the hill, saw it, too, and stopped, waiting.

The man came on slowly, nervously, advancing toward the hill, yet apparently dubious of his destination. Obviously he had not volunteered for the job. When he was as close to Amador as Cap'n Jenks, though off to one side, a revolver popped and a bullet spurned dust from a rock close to his feet. He halted a moment in terror, and then, apparently knowing flight to be hopeless, he started waving his white flag frantically as if to call especial attention to its peaceful nature. Amador, who had fired only to get his attention, now called to him to proceed, and the emissary came on up the hill toward the voice with rapid, frightened steps.

The sergeant was nobody's fool, but elated at the prospect of a wholesale capture, he forgot caution for a moment and stood up to receive the white-flag messenger. Instantly a rifle cracked over toward the cañon and its bullet sizzed on a rock a few feet above him. It was a warning from the faithful and watchful Maguín, who, from where he lay, could see suspicious movements in the village, movements that belied the peaceful mission of the white flag. His rifle was his only means of communication with his commander and he used it judiciously.

Almost simultaneously with the spang of his bullet there was a sudden commotion

down at the village and a single figure came running from the walls and out across the flat. One glance told the watchers that it was a woman; another told Amador it was Erslinda, his *novia* herself. She was waving her arms, motioning to them to stay back and calling "No! no! no!" loudly.

Hardly had she advanced a hundred feet across the flat when a horseman dashed suddenly after her. Every watcher on the hill was startled by the familiarity of that dashing rider and his horse. To the Mexicans it was the man whose figure and bearing so surely identified him. To Cap'n Jenks the man might have been the —— himself. The horse he was spurring at break-neck speed after the running woman was a slender bay, star-faced with the white running down in splotches on his distended nostrils! It was his own Dickie!

Twenty-seven hiding men on the hillside cocked their rifles, not one remembering in the excitement of the moment their sergeant's orders not to risk shooting when they might hit a star-splotched-faced bay: The American's horse. All they saw was their renegade captain, and all they thought was "treachery." Amador himself pushed the truce-flag carrier aside and tried to shoot. But before a single rifle could speak the rider had overtaken the girl, and to shoot might mean her death.

Swooping down upon her like an eagle upon a helpless, fleeing lamb, Capitán Aragon, superb in horsemanship, as he was insolent in daring, seized the screaming girl and swung her to the saddle before him, pulling the running horse up shortly to turn him back to the village. The speed and daring of it caused every watcher on the hill to catch his breath in paralyzed amazement, while suddenly, back at the village a hundred armed men, forgetting themselves in their excitement at their captain's audacious sally, showed themselves at the tops of walls and flat-mud roofs where they had lain in treacherous ambush.

To his frenzied amazement Capitán Aragon never succeeded in turning his horse. Half-way around Dickie halted stone-still, his ears pricked and listening. From the top of a boulder near the foot of the hill there came the clear, strangely attenuated but piercing notes of an American bugle-call:

"Ta-ta-ta-te-tetetete! Ta-ta-ta-te-tetetete! Ta-ta-ta-te-tetetete!"

Three times over it came to Dickie's thrilled ears like a joyful, unbelievable summons. And by the time Cap'n Jenks had screwed up his lips and started the call again, Dickie had nickered, thrown up his head and come, Capitán Aragon, Erslinda and all, on a dead run up the hill to his master!

Amador, leaping down the rocky slope, followed by his now reckless men, reached Cap'n Jenks almost as soon as did the delighted Dickie, and quickly made Aragon his prisoner. And well that he did, too, for Cap'n Jenks had forgotten the captain, the woman who had risked her life to warn them, where he was—everything—but that soft, nickering nose nuzzling into his hand as Dickie told him how glad he was to be his again.

IT WAS two days later that Sergeant Umberto Amador, commander and hero of the village of San Joaquin, with Capitán Aragon and half a hundred renegades as his prisoners, Erslinda his bride, and everybody his friend, bade Cap'n Jenks an unwilling farewell.

For not only had he and Dickie brought him the *capitán* — a live and valuable prisoner—but so amazed and confused had Aragon's men been at the turn their clever coup had taken, that most of them surrendered without resistance. They knew Sergeant Umberto—he would rather have then reaffirm loyalty and be transferred than to order their execution. For the *capitán* his feeling would be different. A few—rebel organizers from the old revolution—made brief resistance and then fled to the south and escaped.

"Caramba, hombre!" the victorious sergeant stormed when the American insisted that he must be on his way back. "Eef you ees stay till comes the *General*, Presidente Obregon ees make you real for sure *capitán*—maybe general! *Por vida de mi esposa*, why ees—" A sudden idea came to him— *"Mira!"* he continued, "the gov'-mint ees buy thees horse for cash mon' *dinero*—you ees can not take 'im back—you ees can not leave 'im—ees make oblige to stay here with 'im and us! See?"

Cap'n Jenks grinned uncertainly. He had an idea the sergeant was joking, but he would see. He pulled out his pocket-book and peeled off some bills.

"I ain't aimin' to steal him," he said.

"Here's what your government paid fer him."

For answer the dusky sergeant came suddenly to attention, saluted and then extended his hand, not for the money, but for a sturdy, heart-felt grip. His black eyes were actually misty.

"All right, Capitán Jank! Ees goodby my fran'! Ees—how you call?—bes' luck for you always!"

He took off his marksman's medal and pinned it on Jenks' coat. Cap'n Jenks blushed, shook his hand and turned to the door.

OUTSIDE two soldiers, Maguín and another, waited to give him safe escort north. Between them stood Dickie, hero horse of the *Americano*. Gravely Cap'n Jenks mounted. Then, hat in hand, his stack of yellow hair glinting in the sun, he puckered up his face and tootled the clear, tiny notes of a bugle march. And Dickie, proud of his master, reared on his hind legs and pranced solemnly in martial time up the old mud-walled street of San Joaquin, cheered by a hundred friendly *vivas!*

The Victor
by Dale Collins

Author of "In Defiance of Euclid," "In the Depths," etc.

ARCHIPELAGO RUBBER, with the best intentions in the world, sent its brightest young men to the East to study production on the plantations. When these bright young men returned they knew a great deal about the business and other things, and were of increased value to the corporation. When they did not return the East had taken them, but Archipelago Rubber did not understand that.

In accordance with the dispensation of his Board, Peter Burney had stepped ashore at Maccalengleng three hours before. He wore a Palm Beach suit, and as he walked between the gray-blue rubber-trees he told Sam Reid, the plantation manager, many things with the candor and confidence of twenty-two years. He talked of a girl with eyes as blue as the sea, of Harvard, of System, of Big Business, of his Dad, and the East.

"The way I size up the East is, it needs waking up, and some pep put into it," said Peter Burney. "There's labor in any quantity—cheap and good; the natural conditions are fine; there's any amount of room for increased production. The only catch is that the East's grown dull and sleepy through the centuries. It's like a worn-out old man—wants a dose of monkey-gland, I'd say. But the West'll soon change that. We haven't been hustling in these parts long, but we've made a change already. Can't say I'm crazy about being away from home, but a fool could see there's

a ton of things could be done out here."

Sam Reid—grizzled, slovenly and drink-warped—heard him and spat carefully. He was not impressed. This was another of the bright young men. They left him cold after a quarter of a century in the East. They came out full of this kind of stuff, and presently they went away again and he stayed on at Maccalengleng where every mosquito carried fever and every bottle a more perilous disease. They came and went—these smart young men—but he remained, like part of the plantation, absorbed by it as if the rubber had congealed about him.

And they held him in contempt because he was of the East and didn't care what they thought and knew them for young fools. Also, they didn't like him because he had forgotten how to part his hair and how to be nice and polite and tactful and make pretty speeches.

But he got the rubber out of Maccalengleng, and that was more than they could have done.

"So!" said Reid, and spat again.

This talk riled him, as did the cocksure young man who was weak as a babe. Well, the fool would learn presently. With grim and bitter satisfaction the elder man looked forward into the months of disillusionment.

And Peter Burney said his say with youth's cheerful arrogance, seeing Sam Reid as a wreck who didn't amount to anything. Burney was full of dreams and ideals and enthusiasms and hungers, and though he knew it not was already reacting to the influences of Asia. In his own mind he condemned Reid and Maccalengleng along with the East. All these things needed pep put into them. Burney had pep.

Presently they went up to the veranda, where Reid drank a gin and Burney a limeade, the one sprawled out and comatose, the other alert and upright.

Before their eyes the gray-blue rows of rubber-trees marched down to the glassy sea, flanked on either hand by the living jungle. Two Malays drowsed in the shadow of the house; insects burred; lizards stared with jeweled eyes; the sun blazed down upon the world with intense, palpitating light.

"It fairly gets my goat—this East!" said Burney. "It's numb and lifeless and crusted with age. For all its fertility it's barren. Nothing happens here. Life doesn't get along. If a man were big enough he could shake up this East!"

Reed took another gin.

"Yes," he said dryly, "if he was big enough."

A flush stole into Burney's smooth face, his amiable mouth hardened and his eyes were aglow with the reflections of youth's dreams. He was vaguely aware of conflict with an intangible but powerful presence, and he rejoiced in the sensation. In a flaccid and exhausted world, too occupied with birth and decay to live, he at least was vigorous and virile.

THE night was heavy on Maccalengleng, the darkness being so deep and thick that it had a substantial quality. A flare on a drifting sampan out on the unseen water gained the effect of burning in the heart of solid gloom. It was very quiet because the noises of the jungle seemed to weave into the silence and become part of it, so that the ear was not conscious of any sound at all. The stars were as holes in the night's mass, letting in hints of glory from a place beyond.

For two years and eleven months in the evenings Peter Burney and Sam Reid had sat in their chairs on either side of the table on the veranda, and in that time nothing had happened—nothing of which they were actively conscious, nothing that had borne the appearance of importance. Through the days they had worked in broiling heat, slept, bathed and had the evening meal.

Reid had been following this routine for as long as he could remember, and he had not changed. The sea, the rubber-trees, the jungle, the sweep of sky and the steaming heat had not changed either; the Malays and the stone gods looking down on the village had not changed. But Peter Burney had.

He spoke no more of putting pep into the East, nor of Harvard, nor of the girl with eyes like the sea, nor of his dad. He had come to the knowledge that letter-writing was a trial when the sweating arms stuck to the table. He did not drink limeade. Youth's dreams and enthusiasms and appetites had been his enemies and had betrayed him into the grasp of the East.

Reid had the satisfaction of seeing that he had been right on that first day when he had spat. The degeneration had been

rapid. Without lifting a hand he had been avenged upon the young man whose first quick glance had judged him to be a waster and a good-for-nothing, and with justice.

Burney lifted his glass, lapped at the gin, shivered because there was still fever in him, and spoke, his mouth softer now and weaker, less likable.

"Well, why should I go back?" he asked, continuing their discussion. "There's something in all this gets a man!" He waved his hand out at the mystery of the night. "There's color and glamour in this—it's the life I was cut out for. They told me I'd be glad enough to get home! Rot! This is the little place I've been looking for—out here, out East! A man lives out here, takes his time, dreams along. It's warm here—like —— at times—but I don't know—it's a miracle.

"Supposing I went home to an office-desk—could I stick it after this? Sleet and cold and snow—automobiles, sky-signs and hustle—I wasn't planned for that! Out here a man's a king over subjects—back home I'd be a slave! I'd be chased round and on the run every day and all day just to earn a crust. It isn't worth it, Sam, and that's ——'s truth!"

The manager made no comment beyond smiling darkly while he gloated over the completeness of his vindication. But Burney did not need an answer. He was thinking aloud. How the old wreck judged things did not matter.

"Go home?" Burney swept on. "Go home to what? To slave, to moil, to strive, to kill myself! And out here I've got everything I want—peace, quiet, prosperity, power. A man could live to be a hundred out here, and never know what the misery of life meant after he'd beaten the fever. A little bit of trading or planting—I've got enough for that—and he could live in luxury. To the —— with Archipelago Rubber! Why should I kill myself for them?"

"That's right," Reid agreed carelessly. "Why should you?"

"Let's have a drink on it!"

Burney tipped the bottle dexterously despite the fact that his hand trembled. His face was flushed, for he had had more gin than was good for him—more that night and more on previous nights. The tropics had sapped him, the monotony had blunted him. He was not the same young man who had landed at Maccalengleng. There were moments when he was dimly aware of this; but consolation and a means of quieting these qualms were available in the bottles on the storeroom shelves.

"Well, you'll have to be sure positive before three weeks are up and the steamer comes," said the man who did not care, triumphing over his critic of yesteryear.

"I'm all that now," was the answer.

They lay in silence, which was broken only by the drumming of Burney's fingers upon the arm of his chair. Reid was inert, being twenty, twenty-five, years past that stage.

"You were over at Njo-Angat's *kampong* again today?" he questioned at last.

The younger man stretched with elaborate unconcern.

"What if I was?" he countered; and then abruptly, because it was lonely on Maccalengleng and a man had to have a confidant, the truth came tumbling out in a torrent:

"Tell you, Sam, I've fallen for that daughter of his, Sali. Say, she's wonderful! She's like a little golden saint. She doesn't seem colored. I put no account to colored girls, but this one—well, she's different. All said and done, her skin's no darker than yours, and her heart's clear white.

"She's—oh, ——! What's the use of trying to express these things?—she's the living symbol of all that's most fascinating in the East. She's calm and grave and quiet and polished; she's incomprehensible; she's the lovely riddle of all woman; she's still and sweet and soft. I want that girl like I never wanted anything before."

He broke off panting.

"She loves me," he resumed, his voice falling into an odd singsong, "and I'm going over to Panjoeng with her when my time's up here, and I'm going to trade there, and we'll be happy and forget the world, forget everything except our joy. There's no escape from these things. They happen. It would be folly and worse than folly to run away. It is fate!"

He made a gesture of acceptance which was Oriental in its resignation. Burney had gone East when he was young and fluid, and his soul had been easily shaped by the mold of his environment.

"That's so," Reid agreed, sucking his

mustache, and then— "You'll be happy at Panjoeng, eh?"

"Yes!" said Burney, and swore to emphasize the statement, for he had experienced a sudden twinge of doubt before the dry question, as if he were sliding down an inclined plane to he knew not what and yet was powerless to stop his descent and careless of its consequences. Memories flooded to him, and fears assailed him.

To clear his brain and steady his nerves he took a stiff gin. The effect was magical. Doubt died. He saw with crystal clarity that he was right, and that it was a mercy of Fate that had shown him his path.

There was no sense in fighting and struggling. Life was a stream, and humanity no more than troubled flotsam upon its surface. It was his good fortune that he was being swept into a peaceful backwater where it was always afternoon.

He thought of Sali, and she was as a star—distant, unreadable, almost beyond attainment and yet brought within his grasp by his magical chance of love which broke down barriers of race and creed. He felt exhilarated and was possessed by the fancy that he was one with the whole living night.

The man on the other side of the table drank again and smiled bitterly; and yet as he looked out at the East a strange expression passed across his face, a look of respect and dread.

The triumph was so complete, so easily gained.

THOUGHT was not a good occupation for Sam Reid. He was nearing fifty and had nothing much to look back on, and nothing to which he could look forward. And yet he found thought hard to escape from, and it was for this reason that he was devoting his concentrated attention to the liquid contents of the storeroom.

Reid was often drunk, but he went on a proper spree about once in twelve months, and always when he had been thinking. These debauches of his were lonely and terrible festivities, embarked upon deliberately and viciously, not enjoyed but terribly thorough.

He stood in the dimly lit storeroom, wearing only his pajama trousers. A lantern flung upon the wall a shadow caricature of the caricature of a man. His gray mustache, his gray hair, emphasized the pity of him.

Swaying, he drank from a bottle and flung it to one side. It struck the wall and shattered into tinkling fragments. What remained of its contents made a dark smudge on the split-bamboo floor.

Sam Reid swung about and faced out through the open door which gave on to the veranda. With the stupid dignity of a drunken man he raised a thin fist and shook it at the night.

"You!" he snarled. "You!"

Wrath, hatred and fear were in his eyes.

Reeling away from whatever he saw in the darkness, and spitting oaths, he dragged down another bottle. Two more fell with it, and his feet were wet with liquor. To and fro he swayed, a ghastly figure of license, with his black shadow for company and his mind swamped in a sea of spirits. He sang, he shouted, he danced—now out on the veranda, now back in the storeroom. The frightened Malays beneath the house shivered, saying the *tuan* had run amuck in his own fashion.

His feet were cut with broken glass, his stomach revolted with excess, but Sam Reid did not care. He was a broken man with no escape save this. Thought could not follow him into this sanctuary; the East stood outside the portals and was forgotten.

The sensation of escape filled him with pride in his strength. He smashed and kicked and wrought havoc in a paroxysm of destruction, as if seeking to accomplish the ruination of his surroundings that they might match himself. He was astream with liquor, awash with it. It was a horrible carnival, this of Sam Reid's alone in the big, dark house which looked down over unseen battalions of trees to the unseen sea.

Two hours later Peter Burney returned from the *kampong* of Njo-Angat where no white man should have been. He was surprized to see that the veranda was in darkness, and as he drew nearer he became aware of an atmosphere of calamity and collapse, so that his heart throbbed uneasily beneath the fingers of foreboding.

"Reid," he called, "Reid!" and broke into a run.

There was no answer, and the black house crouched against the stars like a sulky monster.

At the head of the steps leading up to the veranda he struck a match. The light

blazed brightly in the still air, revealing. with impish delight, the aftermath of Sam Reid's party. The manager lay at full length upon the floor, and about him was scattered an amazing array of bottles, some broken though still uncorked but all empty. The boards were dark with stains, and the air reeked. Reid lay like a dead man, his arms flung out above his head, and either hand clutching a bottle.

For a second Burney stood aghast, an oath taking shape on his lips; and then he realized that Reid was not dead but drunk, for his shoulders were moving in the heavy breathing of intoxication.

A wave of wrath swept the younger man. Falling on his knees, he gripped the manager with rough hands and shook him this way and that, maddened by the thought of the reckless waste which had been involved in the orgy.

The sharp motion brought Reid to his senses, and he sat upright in the darkness.

"Here—here—" he mumbled, "what you mean, heh? Wake me up middle of night!"

"I'll wake you up, you hog! What have you been doing? Tell me that, will you?"

Reid coughed and snorted and then answered with dignity:

"Certainly, m'boy, I tell you, yesh! I've helped meself to party while you were out courting—every man hish own amusement! I like the liquor, yesh! I've drunk and I've drunk, and I'd be drinking still if there was so much as another drop to drink in thish house!"

"*What?*" gasped Burney, astounded and appalled.

But, having made his announcement, Reid had collapsed again.

The other rose to his feet, his hands clenched and the blood pumping through his head. He wanted to break things, and most of all to break the head of the greedy old sot. Drink—that vital part of the East's life—there wasn't a drop of drink left, and there he was marooned on Maccalengleng with no prospect of getting any more. The thought was unbearable, and murder was in his heart. He had been pillaged, plundered, and the thief lay before him too drunk to fight.

"You ——!" said Peter Burney, and proceeded to express his candid opinion of Reid; but Reid did not hear him, having fallen asleep again.

There was nothing else to be done. He was duped in every way—despoiled of his liquor and also robbed of his revenge because the evil-doer was incapable of offering defense.

"In the morning—boss or no boss—I'll punch you into jelly!" vowed the young man when he had inspected the storeroom and found that the drunkard's boast was justified.

For the first night in more that two years Peter Burney drank plain water, and it failed lamentably to quench his thirst. His nerves missed the accustomed stimulant, and he lay wide awake for hours on his bed, looking out through the mosquito netting at the great stars.

No one, he argued with himself, could say that he was a drunkard—not like that swine, Reid—but a man got into the way of taking alcohol in the East, and it hurt to be without it. He was wretched. The sentinel palms against the sky maddened him, the drone of the mosquitoes was like the chanting of fiends, and the glamour of the tropical night was not for him.

When sleep finally overpowered the troubled mind its conquest was the more complete for being long delayed.

Sam Reid had not dwelt twenty-five years in the archipelago without acquiring certain powers, and one of these was the capacity for making a rapid recovery. With dawn stealing over the Eastern sea he was astir, and the first thing he saw by the pink-and-pearl light was that he had gained his junior's hatred. This did not trouble him—for the hatred of one held in contempt is a slight thing—but he had no desire to have life made uncomfortable. Accordingly he was busy.

His task was accomplished, and he was toying with a breakfast of a mangosteen and a banana when Burney appeared on the veranda.

The young man's face was grim, and there was no greeting on his lips for the tousled, untidy wreck who sat at the table.

Reid met his angry eyes calmly.

"I got off the chain last night," he said. "I suppose you figure I shouldn't have been so liberal with myself?"

Burney's face portended the coming storm, and he took a step forward.

"You're sober now, and I'm going to make you pay for last night's work!"

But Reid sat at ease in his chair after one

quick movement—a movement which resulted in the appearance of an automatic pistol, the chilly eye of which regarded Burney with cold disfavor.

"If I hadn't been twenty years in the East I'd fight with my fists," said Reid with a little gesture of apology, "but as I have been I'm not much of a man and so I've got to windward of you. I've cleansed this house of firearms this morning—all save this one. You'd better behave yourself, or I'll fill you that full of lead you'll sink into the ground.

"I'm a peaceful man, but I'm tired of you. For three years I've stuck it, but I'll not stand it any more. I'll have no jumped-up kid talking to me. I'm boss here, and I'll drink as much as I want.

"Twenty-five years I've been on Maccalengleng, and what's life got for me if I can't have a burst when I feel so inclined? I tell you, I forgot the empty misery of life last night, and that's a relief I'll not forego out of consideration for you or any one. When you've been East as long as me maybe you'll understand!"

He spoke with an air of finality, and Burney knew that he was mastered by reason of the weapon and the bitter experience which was the lot of his opponent.

His anger was displaced by an unanalyzable feeling of hopelessness and despair. The night had sapped his energies, and the morning reviver which he needed so badly was not to be had. A shiver ran through him as he looked at Reid and understood how little life meant to him.

Calling a boy, he ate in savage silence, haunted by the feeling that he had surrendered weakly because there was not a decent drink. The man should have been punished, and he was escaping, though doubtless he had a sufficient punishment in his own misery.

Burney was nauseated by Reid's presence, hating him because he was a wreck, a waster, a drunkard and a thief of other men's rights.

And Reid looked at him with open dislike, because he was a smart young man out from the home office and no stronger than a kitten.

FOR twenty days and twenty nights the two lonely men dwelt on the raw edge of hatred, speaking but little and brooding in the company of their own thoughts. The danger of violence had passed, for the heat and the absence of stimulants had left them without energy, so that all they wished to do was to avoid each other and sulk and sleep when the opportunity offered.

In Burney's heart remained gnawing anger which spread like a canker worm, so that the peace went out of his life and the lotus was bitter in his mouth. He found himself at war with everything in the sunny world, from the suave Malays to the green things of the jungle. There was nothing to which he could turn for aid to recapture that rosy glow which once had dimned his eyes to the fact that he was a stranger in a strange land of which he was a little afraid. His eyes, seeing clearly now, discovered the truth, and he sickened for home. Even Sali seemed less delicious.

But when the steamer came it would be all right, he told himself. The steamer would replenish the storeroom, and then the dream would be resumed, effortless and soothing, sweeter than the breath of the poppy. But a man needed a drink to steady his nerves.

Upon the evening of the twentieth day with the steamer due upon the morrow, calamity overtook Peter Burney in the form of a second act of baser pillage by the man who hated him because he was young and better-educated and had not learned the East at the cost of twenty-five years of life.

Having broken the nose of the grave Njo-Angat who told him the news of this event, Peter Burney set out for the plantation house to slay his boss.

But as he tramped back between the hot walls of jungle with the calm stars looking down on him and the presence of Asia breathing from the purple hills and from the purple sea something snapped in his brain. He felt suddenly helpless and hopeless, cold and lost; he felt like a child that has strayed into a dark place and is beset by the knowledge of evil.

The beauty of the night disgusted him, as the beauty of something diseased and unclean. He was miserable and disillusioned, but even while he blamed Reid for his state he walked the more swiftly, fearing lest his just wrath should be swallowed up in other emotions, the cause of which he did not comprehend.

The manager sat upon the veranda; but he rose as his junior entered; for he saw by

the whiteness of his face that he had discovered the position. Reid's hand rested on the pistol butt, and he smiled beneath his draggled mustache because now his victory was finally won and the jeerer had been reduced to an object pitiable and to be mocked by all the world—the man who had failed in love.

"If I said what I think of you," said Burney, crouched on the topmost step, "it'd burn you up! You! You call yourself a man—and you'd go behind my back and steal the heart of the girl you know I love! You——!"

But the night was hot, and the elder had no desire for a scene or prolonged argument.

"I'm boss here," he said, "because I know the East. I want to tell you something—I've got that girl because she's the cutest Malay I've ever seen, and there's not much in life for me. But I don't make the mistake you did—I don't figure I've got her heart. I've bought her—that's all. She was going to the highest bidder; one white man or another meant nothing to her. She's a low-caste Malay!

"Great stars, man, you don't think you're dealing with something white? I know the East, I tell you, and I know how much of her love Sali is going to give to me, to you, or to any other *tuan*. But there's not much in life for me, and so I shall be content!"

He broke off, sucking his mustache; and Burney, who had intended to be so fierce, stood silent, because he saw Reid as a poor prisoner in a dark jail—in a jail to which he clamored to be admitted, insanely and without understanding.

"You're young," Reid said slowly, "but me—I've been twenty-five years out here, and I'm entitled to all I can get!"

He taunted the young man who was his enemy because he saw that the pride had gone out of Burney and that he was in the dust. To Reid's mind came the picture of the arrogant young man who had landed in a Palm Beach suit. He smiled, but although Burney saw all this he found no protest because he was broken.

Reid shouted the girl's name, and she came out of the night from around the corner of the veranda, and at a word from him in her own language sat down beside him cross-legged upon the floor, not looking at the boy who had been her lover, not looking at her master, not looking at anything their eyes could see, but at something in the night invisible to them.

Peter Burney stared at her, and for the first time noticed the flatness of her features, the childish smallness of her body and the brownness of her feet. But his most vital discovery was that he saw her as if she sat a long way off in another world in which he had no existence.

A flush of shame and chagrin stole into his tanned cheeks, and he hastily averted his eyes. Then a savage laugh choked his throat, and his hands opened limply.

"Take her—Reid—take her!" he cried, and went unsteadily across the veranda to his room like a man who had been stunned and suffers all the pains of rebirth. And after an interval there came from within the sound of trunks being dragged about.

Sam Reid nodded his grizzled head as he gloated on the vanquishing of the self-righteous.

"That's taught the puppy!" he said to his pipe.

THE big Dutch steamer lying off Maccalengleng flung up a plume of steam against the sunset sky, and a breath later a grunting hoot reached the beach, urging the boat to be quick since the darkness stalked the world and there was a channel to be negotiated before the highway of the sea was reached.

"Now, sir!" said the officer in the stern.

Peter Burney hesitated, and suddenly extended his hand to his late manager.

"No ill-feeling, Sam," he said jerkily. "I guess I'm not much fitted for this life out here." His face darkened. "I'm glad to see the last of the vile place!"

With one comprehensive glance he swept the rising slopes with their dull mantle of rubber-trees, the house and the far hills.

"I know," said Sam Reid without emotion. "I been here twenty-five years!"

Their hands clasped, and a moment later the boat was clear of the beach and Burney had started on his long voyage home to the offices of Archipelago Rubber. Every fiber of his being was a-thrill with relief, joy and anticipation, as if he went out to high adventure. His mind—freed from the oppression which had been upon it was working clearly now, and the first effect of this was to cause him to strike his knee and shout an oath. The boat was a hundred

yards from the shore, and the light was fading.

"Say, I've got another word to speak to Mr. Reid," he cried. "I've just got on to something—something I should have seen long ago. I've got to go back; I've got to thank him!"

His voice rose high with excitement.

But the phlegmatic Hollander in charge shook his head.

"It is not possible," he grunted in a tone which admitted of no discussion.

Burney sprang to his feet and looked back over the stern. Along the beach the shrunken, white figure was receding into the shadows which came more quickly there.

"Sam—I understand now—I see it now, Sam!" Burney yelled. "They won't let me come back to tell you; but thanks! Thanks! Thanks!"

The cry was heavily burdened with feeling; but the distance between boat and shore had widened, and it seemed that the lonely figure on the beach had not heard. And yet Burney fancied that he had seen a hand raised in acknowledgment, though he could not be certain because, for some reason, his eyes had misted over and his head was spinning. He continued to shout his gratitude, and the boat went on.

Sam Reid had heard right enough.

"What's he understand? Nothing, the puppy!" he snorted, and walked more briskly.

The quick night had come before he reached the house. On the veranda sat Sali and her father. Reid nodded to the old Malay and, passing into the office, returned with a roll of guilder notes which he handed to him.

"Take her away, O Father," he said in Malay, "and marry her to one of thine own people!"

Njo-Angat rose obediently, his daughter's hand in his, and mumbled that the *tuan* was great and wise and good, that the peace of Allah would be upon him and that there was no other god.

Sam Reid paid no attention, but when he was alone he raised his clenched fist and shook it at the night of the East which possessed the world with wanton witchery.

"Bah!" he cried. "Bah! That time I beat you—just that time I beat you!"

A smile of triumph was born on his face, and he stood erect, a proud man, a victor, though for twenty-five years he had been enslaved.

WITH ALL DUE RESPECT

by J. D. N.

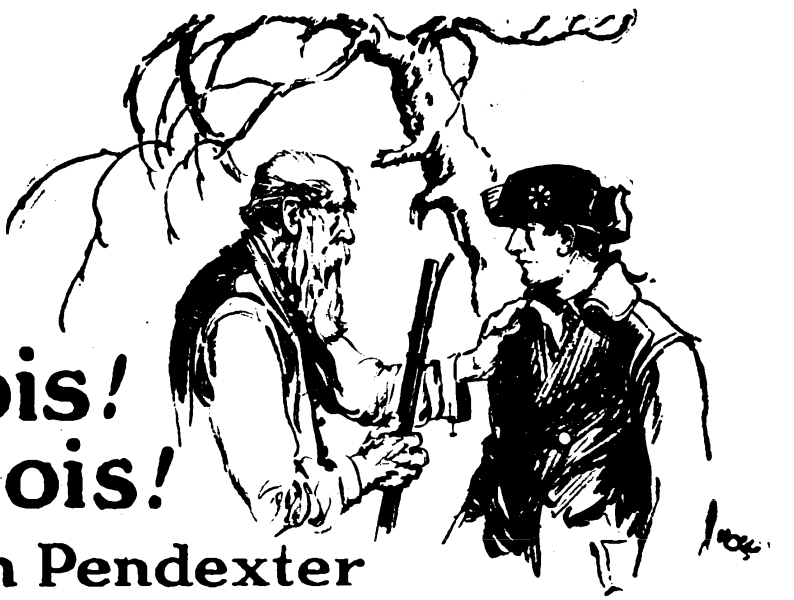
RESPECT for one's elders is a praiseworthy custom, which, nevertheless, may be carried too far.

On Raga, in the New Hebrides, it has become quite bad form to let one's parents die. Of course, it is rather difficult to keep them alive if they fall out of a tree and break their necks, or meet a shark while they are swimming about in mid ocean, and exteme old age is also responsible for many casualities.

Even so the respected parent must not die, he must, on the contrary, live more vitally than ever, and the practical-minded indigenes have found a perfectly simple solution to this awkward problem. They go to the next village or a neighboring island and buy a child of the desired sex, whom they adopt—as their father, mother or grandparent as the case may require. The child is given the deceased's name, rank and precedence. He is treated with every mark of respect formerly accorded the real relative—at least when the occasion calls for ceremony.

This makes for astonishing confusion among relatives, and it drew from one visitor, come from another island, the scornful comment:

"Raga! Oh, that is the —— place where they marry their granddaughters!"



Iroquois! Iroquois!

by Hugh Pendexter

A Five-part Story — Part Four

Author of "Rifle Rule," "The Long Knives," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

IN 1764, eleven years before the colonies dug up the red ax with England, I had been brought to the Canajoharie district of New York by my Uncle David Whittlesey. Here I learned to know the Indians as brothers, and the Mohawk leader, Joseph Brant, as a friend.

Best of all I knew Horace Martin, self-styled "last of the macaronis," who forever prated of the decline of manners in these times. His incessant tirades earned him the nickname "Mad" Martin.

Not until 1774 did Martin tell me that he had a daughter.

"You—married!" I cried out in surprize.

"My wife was of Seneca-French blood. She died when Nancy was born. Nancy I left in Montreal with her grandfather. Now she is coming to me," he explained.

A few days later Nancy Martin arrived. She was a strange mixture of white and Indian, lapsing at will into the tricks of either race, and knowing the customs of both.

One morning my uncle gave me a beautiful new rifle, with a secret compartment in the stock, and in a few words told me that there was danger of war.

To my inquiries he replied:

"Donald MacDonald, the Johnstown Highlander, is traveling around and talking loud. Sheriff White is sending a man named Newberry up and down the river to threaten the settlers. But our Tryon County Committee of Safety will stop their tongues."

His words were borne out by Peter Bolduc, a French-Canadian trader who arrived a few days later.

"Tell your uncle," he warned me, "that a call has been sent out for a Continental Congress to meet on September fourth in Philadelphia."

I hastened to the Martin house and learned from Nancy that in case of war the Indians might very easily side with England. As she was a member of the Wolf clan, Nancy knew many of the Indians' secrets.

The next day I had a fight with the drunken Newberry for insulting Nancy, and knocked him down, breaking his jaw.

This grievance, added to Donald MacDonald's hatred for me and my uncle, because of our siding with the colonies against the king, soon brought a warrant for my arrest.

"You'll not be long in jail, Benajah," my uncle told me.

"Let him try to make trouble and we'll make an example Tryon County law-breakers will long remember," cried MacDonald.

Outraged to the bottom of my soul, I set out, leaving my uncle behind, for the jail at Johnstown.

However, I stayed in jail but a short time. Nancy came to Joseph Brant, and told him that I was a member of the Wolf clan, because I had been adopted by a Wolf woman for saving her son. It was this relationship which freed me, although I had not been legally adopted by the clan.

On our way home Nancy told me that Captain Robert Welles had written her father, and that he was moving to Cherry Valley.

Long after Nancy had moved away, in the Summer of 1775, I came home one day to find a note from my uncle saying that he was trailing Long Gentry, the renegade.

I was terrorized when I heard that following my uncle was another renegade, "Injun" McFee. Here was a real danger: My uncle was between two enemies.

A few days later, following my uncle's trail, I found him murdered. The little black book in which he kept the names of the Committee of Safety was missing.

Leaving my uncle to be buried by friends and

urged on by them, I started again to hunt down the murderer.

Going cautiously through the woods, I heard a commanding question:

"Who are you?"

I halted.

"Richard Claus," I improvised.

Satisfied that I was really a Claus and a king's man, my questioner told me that he was Long Gentry.

I covered my surprize, and learned that Sir John Johnson, who ruled Johnstown, was aiding his own family to get into Canada and would go there himself in time. It was the Johnsons in Canada, who with money were pushing the Indians to depredation on the whites.

After Gentry took all my money, he suddenly drew from his pocket a little book: My uncle's.

"Here read this," he said.

Slowly I read off the names, until, Gentry leaning over the book and off his guard, I leaped upon him. In a few mad whirls he carried us both into the river, from which I rose, his knife in my hand and his blood coloring the water.

On regaining the bank, I stared into the eyes of Peter Bolduc.

We dragged Gentry's body to land and searched it. In his pocket I found a paper on which was a message in cipher, which read, when translated:

Waiting to receive Shawnee belt with two axes from Unadilla.

The message was from Sir John Johnson and was to be delivered to Guy Johnson in Canada. What his plans were, I had no way of knowing, and decided that I must start out for Unadilla where was to be held the council of the clans.

On the way we met several Indians, whom we suspected were carrying a black belt to the council, and who allowed us to pass in the Indian paths. After that a friendly Oneida called Tall Rock, accompanied us to within six miles of an Indian town, when he suddenly disappeared.

Farther on our trail, we met a white man who was attempting to steal jewelry from an Oneida woman. I earned the thanks of the woman, when I forced him to hand back the trinkets he had taken and drove him away. Later, however, we came to a small encampment of white men—renegades—where I was recognized.

"He's the one as made Enver chaw dirt," said one man, with a show of hostility.

And my explanations of Enver's licking were hardly over, when one of them recognized Long Gentry's gun. With a brief and pleasant falsehood that Gentry had sold it, Peter Bolduc saved us further embarrassment, and we left.

Across the Susquehanna we met friends, the Sliters, who were overjoyed at hearing of the death of Gentry. The Sliters were confident that Joseph Brant would never head a band of Indians who would do the bidding of the British.

As Peter and I were going through the woods, Tall Rock suddenly came upon us. In a moment we learned that the Oneida woman, whom I had saved from ignominy was his wife, and that he craved something to do as a reward for me. Knowing that I had only to say the word and he would do anything, I sent him back to see if the Indians I had met on the road were carrying a black belt, and to get it for me.

In the hush of the forest we waited hours, until, without warning of his approach, Tall Rock again stood before us. Into my hands he slipped the black belt, and then disappeared.

The hue and cry along the river warned us that the theft had been discovered, and that we must be on our way.

By daybreak we were miles away and had found a hiding-place, where Peter buried the belt. The rest of the day was spent in sleep.

Satisfied that we were no longer followed, we set out again that night for Unadilla to learn what we could of the procedure at the council of Indians.

At one place we saved the Cully family from a party of renegades headed by my enemy, Newberry.

At Cherry Valley we found the Martins and MacDonald, who was trying to find out from Nancy the tenor of the Indian feeling. After my unsuccessful attempt to arrest him in the name of the Tryon County Committee of Safety, he hurried from the valley, probably to carry what news he had to Guy Johnson in Canada and to send a scout to Sir John at Johnstown.

Nancy told me that Joseph Brant was going to England and that as he would be there during the Winter, there need be no fear of an Indian uprising.

Thus, with my fears allayed, I returned home, and put the affairs of the farm in order.

Two weeks later I was a member of Daniel Morgan's riflemen and was off to starve and freeze in Benedict Arnold's expedition against Quebec.

CHAPTER IX

AS IT HAPPENED AT TORLOCK'S

THAT wonderful, hopeless anabasis! I can still feel the awful chill of those Winter nights when we huddled below St. John's Gate, little dreaming it was opened and guarded by one sleepy sentinel; and when we fought past the first and middle barriers and then were cooped up and made prisoners. I can still see those who were quick enough to risk life, fleeing across the serrated ice in St. Charles Bay, while the others of us were cast into prison. The only bright spot in that dreary picture is the day we were herded on transports to sail south and be exchanged for British regulars. The rest of my northern memories are made up of misery of body and soul.

How keen the disappointment when we anchored three miles south of Governor's Island and learned the British had won the battle of Long Island, and that there would be some delay before we could be landed! That weary period of waiting aboard the prison-ships is relieved by one bit of color—the September night when New York burned.

For twelve hours my stagnated mind

was keenly awake and storing away the minute details of that dramatic picture, when the malevolent glare mounted to the zenith and brought noonday to our decks. I have but to close my eyes to bring the sailor back to my side and to behold him excitedly pointing out a light that looked no larger than a candle. I can hear a prisoner, who knew the city well, cry out—

"It is the 'Fighting Cocks,' an old and famous tavern east of the Battery, that's on fire."

I can feel the wind blowing southwardly into my face. The sailor points to a second fiery flower, blooming gustily up the North River and is saying it must be near "White Hall," a Broadway tavern. How the dark night vanished as the flames roared southward! How redly glowed a large church-steeple below White Hall and gave a baleful climax to the wave of fire, washing through the more flimsy structures!

This is the substance of what I brought back from the terrible northern faring. The great bulk of it is recalled as one half-remembers some disordered dream.

The recollection of suffering from cold and hunger, and interminable street-fighting, and men escaping across two miles of the heaped-up ice and treacherous air-holes is relieved by the pleasing view of the island of Orleans, passed on the homeward voyage under the convoy of the frigate *Pearl*. Then there is the anchorage off New York and the overwhelming disappointment, and the burning of the city. And lastly, that sweet day when shallops set us ashore at Elizabethtown Point. In bold relief stands out the burly figure of Daniel Morgan, tripping and sprawling, as, first to land, he fell his length.

Once we were in America again we found we were lost. There were many mental hazes to emerge from. For a year we had been cut off practically from all intelligence. We were somewhat like blind men who recover their sight in the midst of a dark forest. We were good for nothing until we could know what had happened during our absence, and how we stood.

The enemy had been forced out of Boston even while we were trying to escape from Dauphin jail only three hundred yards from St. John's Gate and the Plains of Abraham. While we were lost in that northern cold Congress had voted to build a navy of five ships. We had to add the word "Hessians" to our vocabulary before we could understand what the townspeople were talking about.

The most glorious news of all was the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Yet the lesson it taught was rather hard to learn at first; namely, the putting aside of colonial jealousies and the acquiring of the habit of thinking in terms of nationalism. The struggle for the Hudson was being bitterly waged, with the British successful and Washington falling back through the Jerseys.

Of intimate personal interest to me was the flight of Sir John Johnson through the dark forests to Sacondaga, thence to Canada. He broke his parole by escaping. While we were held in the Canadian jail we knew my old friend Joseph Brant had been the rage in London. Now he was back in Canada and it was said he was making his headquarters at Oghwaga, and that many of the Mohawks who had gone with him and Guy Johnson to Canada were with him on the Susquehanna.

Roofs were white with frosts again, as they were when I went home to visit my uncle's grave. But somehow the thought of traveling up the valley was very painful. I knew Tryon County and Albany were fearing the coming of Carleton to seize the city, and cut off the valley of the Mohawk. But this dread of invasion did not become a fact, and other events inclined me to service on the Delaware.

In vain had Washington ordered General Lee at Northcastle to join him with some seven thousand men. Waiting for Washington to be ruined, and fully expecting to succeed him in supreme command, Lee ignored all orders and spent his time writing the letters he believed would hasten our commander's downfall. This treachery did more for British arms than anything the enemy had accomplished since leaving Staten Island. But when Lee was captured by the enemy's dragoons some four miles from Morristown Great Britain did America an excellent service.

So my heart was with the ragged army on the Delaware. I made my way there and joined the forlorn hope. A dismal December for America! Strangely enough the only ray of hope broke through the sullen clouds in the northern sky. Carleton decided the season was too late for a successful campaign, and he withdrew to Canada.

This retreat permitted Schuyler to send seven regiments to our relief. But what with the shrinkage of Lee's forces after his capture, and the going home of short-term men, the troops under General Washington were all too few.

Then followed the glorious nine days. Beginning on Christmas eve, and extending through two hundred and sixteen wonderful hours, the turning-point in the war was passed, and our chief had immortalized himself. Only nine days, but each was filled with the brilliancy of Washington's genius. It was within such a brief period of time that Washington established the foundations of America.

It was my privilege to participate in the first audacious stroke, the capture of a thousand Hessians at Trenton when Cornwallis believed he had us securely trapped. As a result we held Morristown, the key to the Highlands of the Hudson and the road to Philadelphia.

A wound kept me an invalid for much of the Winter, but as there was no fighting until the end of May, I missed nothing. When we heard of Burgoyne's advance from the north to take Albany, and of St. Leger's proposed raid down the Mohawk, I longed to be in the valley, fighting beside my old friends and neighbors. Then came the sad day when the news of Oriskany filtered through our lines. True, that engagement on the little creek spelled disaster to St. Leger's expedition; but, oh, the sorrow for me in that list of the dead!

The work of our Committee of Safety was ended, for nearly all its members fell in that death-grapple on the Oriskany. Youths and old men I had known from childhood met a bloody death in the deep ravine two miles from the mouth of the creek. I had passed over the very spot where the savages lay in ambush when I sought the murderer of my uncle. My grief on learning that Herbert Vischer was among the slain made me a weakling for many hours. Poor lad! Dear lad. And I verily believe my Uncle David would have fallen there had he lived until that cruel sixth day of August.

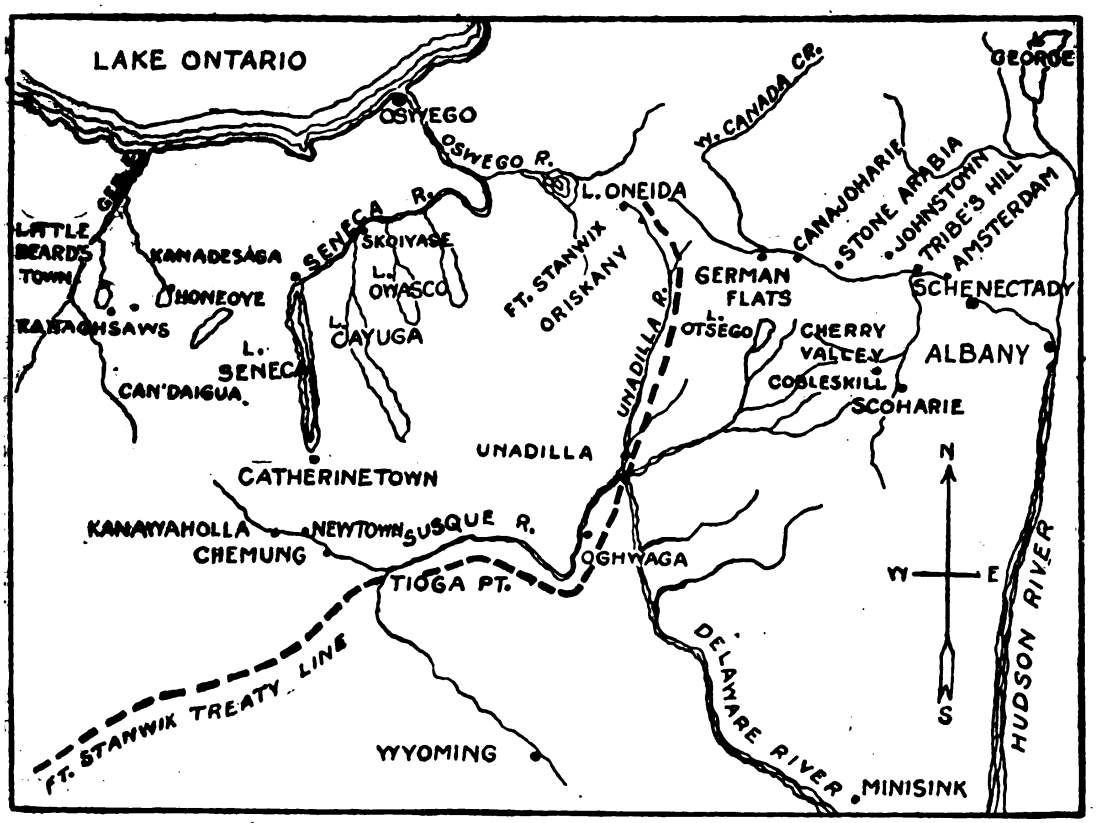
From my knowledge of the Iroquois I feared Oriskany would be the spur to send them against the entire border. The Senecas, who held the two military chieftainships in the Long House, had suffered very severely. And it was not in the blood of the Keepers of the Western Door to leave a score unpaid. My only kinsman was dead and many of my friends, yet I planned to go north and stand with the valley people.

Then came the surprize-attack on Wayne near Paoli Tavern in September. My *orenda* must have been sleeping very soundly, as only the thickness of my blankets saved me from death. The bayonet lunged at me by a man of the Fifty-Second was deflected, and yet inflicted so severe a wound that for many weeks I remained at the mouth of that mysterious valley of shadows. I was incapacitated for fighting until the following Summer.

THE Spring of 1778 found me recovered and in Albany on my way to the valley. The town was seething with rumors, a fresh crop springing up over night. Brant was back on the New York frontier bound on bloody business. For several months he had been gathering his forces at Oghwaga and Unadilla. Thus far he had killed no settlers and had seemed contented with collecting horses and provisions, and securing white recruits for the Johnsons and Butlers. The terrified border rightly believed this bloodless raiding was but a prelude to red work once Guy Johnson and John Butler came to the Susquehanna.

The settlers came off Bowman's Creek. Along the Mohawk planting was neglected and the people were "forting" themselves. The young men who had not gone away to join the army, like myself, were withdrawn from farmwork to make up spying bands. These were ranging to the Oneida Carrying Place and down below Cherry Valley. Frequently one of these small bands returned to German Flats and the Canajoharie district lacked a man. Such tragic disappearances were seldom explained: For the dark forest was an excellent repository for grim secrets.

In dwelling on the venturesome calling of these scouts, I suddenly discovered I was weary of the rank and file, and hungry for the independence and danger of the forest. I had suffered much from wounds, scanty food, and the like, and it gradually grew upon me that my life depended on a return to those vast corridors where pigmy men stealthily prowled through the twilight under the unbroken roofs.



The town of Schenectady retained many of the frantic fugitives, while others, having no intention of returning to their abandoned farms, pressed on to Albany and across into the Vermont country, where the people were still refusing to come under the jurisdiction of New York. Petitions for troops were many, but Washington must have men.

At one time Brant was on the Charlotte, within twenty miles of Cherry Valley. Colonel Samuel Clyde sent word to Albany that if the Mohawk chief attacked the Cherry Valley settlement he would be opposed by less than three hundred men. Springfield settlers were convinced any hour might see their homes in flames, and were seeking the dubious safety of Cherry Valley.

I secured a ride with a carter as far as Schenectady, and before the fifteen miles were finished I was heartily tired of the fellow's melancholy prophecies. He had absorbed much of the horror of the fugitives, and yet remained at work because of the profits. At Schenectady I bought a fair horse from a man who vowed he was leaving the valley never to return.

I planned to ride up the river as far as my home, before offering my services as a scout. It happened that a man galloped into town over the Scoharie road, and that I saw him when his horse dropped dead. This incident sent my plans a-glimmering. The fellow was hatless and coatless, but what attracted attention and collected people around him was the collapse of his lathered mount. We who were the first to reach him and pick him up were horrified to hear him shout:

"Brant's at Cobleskill! My God! Think of it! He's there with four hundred hellions! Burned nine houses! People burned alive in their houses! Killed sixteen of Colonel Ichabod Alden's troops that was setting off to garrison Cherry Valley!"

"You're a —— liar!" shouted a citizen, brandishing his fist. "You know there ain't any Injuns so far east! You know you're a —— liar! You know they don't dast come so near to Schenectady! And you'd better say so mortal quick."

But this citizen's face was flabby and gray even as he denied the fellow's wild words; and by the time he had finished he was edging away, and, I doubt not, taking to flight over the Albany Road.

The fugitive stared at us dully, then turned and looked down on his poor horse. Another man fiercely accused him:

"You know you're lying. Think you can make us believe the border's buckled back as far as the Scoharie Kill? You come ranting here, scared to death because you saw your shadder, and try to scare our women and children."

I believed the fellow was beside himself with fear and had grossly exaggerated. Each day saw men bringing in ghastly stories which they believed to be facts, but which they had received second- or third-hand. I advanced and gently said:

"Calm down. You're safe here. Just tell us what you saw. Tell nothing you didn't see."

"I didn't count the Injuns," he began.

The crowd laughed in hysterical relief. A woman called out—

"Didn't see them, neither."

He did not seem to hear the interruption, and continued:

"I was working in my field when the trouble began. First thing I knew the land seemed filled with Injuns 'tween me and the settlement. I squat behind some bushes. I didn't count the Injuns, there was so many of 'em. They was everywhere all at once. The houses busted into flames. I see folks screaming at the winders as their roofs was burning. I see a woman drop her baby out the winder. I didn't see no one leave a cabin. There was nineteen families of us, and the homes of six was burned, and I saw 'em burn.

"I saw the Injuns gitting the hosses and beef-critters together. What they couldn't drive off they killed. You go down there, mister, and you'll find dead hosses and cows and sheep scattered all over the fields. After the Injuns went out of sight with the stock the militia come in and went north to cut 'em off. Then I heard the firing of a lot of guns.

"While I was gitting a horse to ride here I see men come running back. They was the militia. They said they'd lost sixteen men. They brought in some wounded and some of the dead. With my own eyes I see Cap'n Patrick and Leftenant Maynard! Now any one else calls me a liar is going to have trouble. I've suffered 'nough."

"I believe this man is telling the truth," I cried out. "Either that, or he's crazy."

To the fugitive I said:

"Do you know which way Brant went?"

"When I see 'em they was traveling west over the Cherry Valley road. If they stuck to it and don't stop at Torlock's they'll be in Cherry Valley by now."

Torlock's was a group of half a dozen cabins twelve miles southeast of Cherry Valley. It had become a nest for a lawless element claiming to be Tories, but accused of killing and robbing indiscriminately wherever there was no open fighting. I prayed the Indians might halt at Torlock's to feast and carouse. I prayed they would have trouble and be much delayed in driving their horses and cattle over the rough road. For now I knew where I should exert myself as a forest spy.

The chance spectacle of a horse running until he dropped dead had decided that. Brant was playing a cat-and-mouse game with Cherry Valley, and when he bared his claws many poor people would be killed.

MY HORSE made excellent time over the Scoharie road to the High Dutch church, where it joins the Cherry Valley road. I met fugitives fleeing from the Scoharie, and learned that others had fled along the Albany road. I overtook others, those who had been the first to run away and who were now returning. At the church I saw several families with ox-wagons and pack-horses frantically bent on reaching a point of safety, although the country was quiet enough now. A man trying to tie all his household effects on one poor beast paused long enough to yell at me—

"Want to be killed, you fool?"

Without waiting for my answer, he abandoned his task to climb on his horse and gallop away.

"The Indians are far from here," I told a woman, who hurried up over the middle Fort road, dragging two children by the hand.

"Oh, lord! Oh, lord! Don't say that!" she wailed. "They're coming! They're everywhere! We're all going to be killed by that —— Brant and old Butler!"

The children began to scream and it was with difficulty that I quieted them, I pointed to the upper Fort, just above the church, and asked the woman why she did not take refuge there if she feared another attack.

"I was in there when they burned Cobleskill," she wearily explained. "We forted when we saw the smoke. I saw three

hosses, running up this road, white with lather, poor creatures! Ten miles they'd come from Cobleskill. They knew what Injuns mean! But you call that a fort? It ain't strong enough to suit me. I quit it and started for the middle Fort. And I knew that wa'n't stout enough. So I turned back, and here I be."

The three forts on the Scoharie were earthen works, enclosing several stout dwellings and strong enough to repulse any ordinary Indian attack if not set on fire. The poor woman had seen stray horses, running in the road. She had started up the creek. Then, as the danger lessened, she became more afraid and now was frantic to make Schenectady. I urged her to take her time and walk slowly, and assured her she stood in no peril. I do not think she sensed much of what I said, for her gaze was wild, and the last I saw of her she was walking up the Schenectady road, a child on each side.

And I had seen soldiers run away in a frenzy of fear, then turn back and coolly charge to their death against hopeless odds. For fear is a disease which no man can truthfully say he may not suffer from at some time.

In strong contrast to this woman was an old woman with snow-white hair and a deeply wrinkled face. She came around the church with tottering steps, carrying an ax in one hand and bush-scythe in the other; and her ancient eyes gleamed with the lust for battle.

"Where are you going, grandmother?" I asked her.

"My son's come in from Cobus Kill," she told me, using the old name. "They burned his house and took his oxen and two horses. I'm going to Cobus Kill to stop such works."

It would be a long time before her slow steps covered the ten miles, but I knew she would make the distance. And were I one of Brant's Mohawks, I should prefer facing a white man than to face her blazing wrath.

I passed her and rode up the Cherry Valley road. Near Cobleskill I met three men who had been scouting west nearly to Torlock's. But they could not say whether Brant had stopped at Torlock's or not. In turn they questioned me and displayed suspicion when I announced my intention of hurrying on.

One of them asked:

"What you want to go after Brant for? Be you John Young, mister?"

"I'm not. I never heard of him."

And I explained how I had been in Washington's army throughout a long campaign. They were curious to know more about my wounds, and it was plain they contemplated taking me back to the Scoharie as a suspicious character. I opened my hunting-shirt and disclosed the ragged scar where the bayonet all but let out my life. Then I gave my residence and the names of many Mohawk neighbors.

"So David Whittlesey was your uncle," said one after I had finished my defense. "I've seen him several times. I never heard nothing but good of him. Men, I believe this fellow is what he says."

After they had agreed my record was clean and that I might ride on, I asked:

"But this John Young. What of him? Who is he?"

"If you'd been up here 'stead of with the army you'd know something about him," was the grim answer. "He's one of the men Brant has working for him. At Unadilla and Oghwaga most of the time. He and a man named McGinnis was sent down there by Guy Johnson to take orders from Brant. The two are —— Tories, who turned against their old neighbors. He was seen at Catskill recently and we believe he'll be passing through here to overtake Brant. We want him, bad. Him and McGinnis. Mister, we've told you all you'll see at Cobleskill. Fields speckled with butchered stock. Settlers trying to find the bones of the dead in the burned cabins."

"I shall not stop long at Cobleskill. I'm making for Cherry Valley. They'll be needing scouts there before snow flies."

"Then keep clear of Torlock's. Nothing but rake-hellions there."

Thanking them for their warning, I shook the reins and rode on. At Cobleskill I rested and watered my horse and talked with an old man who was too feeble to help in searching the ruins. I saw what the fugitive in Schenectady had said I would see. Sheep, cows and horses were dead in the fields.

The old man was hungry to tell what he knew of the attack, and from his talk I assumed the militia had got ahead of Brant and had laid an ambush. Brant discovered the trap and while holding their attention

sent a band to attack them in the rear. I believe from subsequent knowledge that had Brant wished to press his advantage he could have killed more of them. When I mentioned Torlock's my gossip became incoherent in his abuse of the spot.

I leisurely continued my journey, sparing my horse for a time of peril, until the low western sun stretched my shadow a long distance behind me. Then turning off the road I passed through a fringe of bush-growth, and picketed my mount in a wide patch of dry grass. My own supper consisted of hard biscuit, reminiscent of the Kennebec and Dead River country, when I lived three days on one of the flinty things.

After sundown I heard the clumping of hoofs pounding along from the east. I stole to the edge of the road and crouched among the bushes. Three riders came clattering through the dusk. A horse stumbled and nearly threw his rider, causing the trio to slow down. One of them was in a very merry mood and laughed delightedly. The man, who was nearly thrown, was resentful and swore violently.

"Never mind, John, your neck's still whole," growled the third man.

"Maybe he's saving it for a rope," suggested the merry one; and he began laughing again.

"Don't you worry about my neck, Scott. Keep yours as far from a halter as John Young keeps his and you'll die of too much rum. If this —— nag ever gets me to the Susquehanna, I'll stick there till this business is going all one way. The —— beast picked up a stone."

He dismounted to examine the horse's hoofs. The third man said regretfully:

"Too bad you had your ride east for nothing. But won't Cap'n Brant expect you to stay in these parts till your man comes?"

"I don't give a —— what the Mohawk thinks, or expects," was the savage reply. "I take my orders from Colonel Johnson. He said nothing about my hanging around Catskill and the Scoharie settlements till I get my neck stretched."

Then plaintively as if put on his defense, he added:

"How was I to know the man if I saw him? Goes by the name of Herty. Yes. But be I s'posed to prowl around the settlements, asking every man I meet if he's Herty? No one but a —— Injun would send a white man on such business. I'll have no more of it."

The laughing one hooted in great delight. The other seriously declared:

"Not so blind at that. It's easy to pick out a stranger in any settlement. And you know your man's younger 'n you and will be a stranger anywhere on the Hudson or west of the river. But the chances are he's already at Torlock's. Maybe Brant has picked him up there."

"If he has he's welcome to him. The game is easy enough without him. Bringing him in for that end of the work is foolishness."

"Ha! ha! They don't trust you, Young," laughed the facetious one. "They don't seem to trust any one. Job divided into three parts like 'all Gaul.'"

Young was now in the saddle, and away they rode, leaving me to think new thoughts, and to wonder if my eavesdropping might not be turned to a profit. I slept but poorly that night and had my unwilling mount in the road long before sunrise.

Torlock's was on the north bank of the Cobleskill, and lying between two little streams flowing south into the kill. My road crossed the first of these streams a short distance from the kill and soon brought me to three cabins. Farther along and near the creek were other cabins. The settlement appeared to be deserted. Then I heard voices ahead, loudly shouting in chorus. I had scarcely drawn abreast the first cabin when some one inside called on me to halt and dismount. A long rifle-barrel slid over the window-sill and accelerated obedience.

"Name and business," the unseen demanded.

"Step out here where I can get a squint at you," I parleyed. "I'm keen to know who stops a man doing the king's business."

"He'll be some one John Young knows, father," broke in a woman's voice.

The rifle barrel wavered, and the man was asking—

"Be you a friend of John Young?"

"I never saw him, but he'll be glad to see me, I think."

The woman was seized with a coughing-spell, but finally managed to say:

"John was expecting to find a man east of here, father. This will be him."

"You come looking for Young?"

"Of course! Pull that gun inside."

"I've done my part. It's for t'others to make sure," decided the man; and the rifle was withdrawn.

He was a tall man, and when he appeared in the doorway he had to stoop well forward. One hand held the rifle and the other kept combing a very long beard. He wore a coarse shirt and overalls and was barefooted. As he stepped clear of the doorway the woman, her features wasted by disease, came after him, coughing spasmodically.

"Lucky you ain't dead in your tracks," said the man.

"Most lucky for you that I'm not. What's your name?"

"Bimis." And his voice was quite meek. "This's my darter. The men say I'm like the Mohawks. I keep the eastern door of Torlock's."

"Show me the door of a tavern. I must eat and rest my horse before I look for John Young."

"We ain't got a reg'lar tavern. But quarter of a mile ahead is a long house where you can eat and sleep. John Young's there now. I'd ask you to stop here if my darter didn't have the misery in her lungs so bad. Got any hard money?"

"Very little. I am keeping it."

"What's your name?"

"Herty."

"Why'n —— didn't you say that in the first place?"

And he lowered at me in great disgust and leaned his rifle against the logs. Then padding closer, he slyly whispered—

"Young, Parel, and Scott is up at the long house now, cel'brating and waiting."

"Celebrating what and waiting for what?"

"Well, —— my liver! I ain't to be trusted, be I? Or be you trying to make game of me? Cel'brating the burning of Cobus Kill settlement. Waiting for you."

"Burning six houses and running off some stock isn't much to cheer about. His Majesty expects bigger doings than that."

"You're finicky to please, mister. Likeso, His Majesty. But you be patient and we'll soon have something you both may think is worthwhile."

I moistened my lips, for the words came hard, and asked—

"Cherry Valley?"

He nodded, and laughed and showed his snaggy teeth. The woman behind him opened her mouth as if to cry out but said nothing. There was much misery in her thin face, and she was finding no cause for merriment in her father's words. Bimis continued:

"Brant swung clear of here and camped his Injuns couple miles beyond where they could feast and dance. Most the men went along with him. He's recruiting for the Royal Greens. He bought all our hosses. There's going to be some fine fiddling in the Susquehanna Valley and on the Mohawk."

"He's taking his horses and recruits to Unadilla for Colonel Johnson and Colonel Butler to find when they come," I informed him.

"Love the ——!" he admiringly exclaimed. "That comes of having book-l'arning and sitting next to the Johnsons and Butlers! Of course we knew you was close to 'em, or you wouldn't 'a' been sent here. I'll trot along with you. Young'll be powerful pleased you've come. Hope the jugs ain't empty; but it's the first time Brant's slung a red ax and the boys are sorter whooping it up a bit."

I tried to make myself believe that Brant would not pause to attack Cherry Valley while hampered with the livestock, and that the settlers would have too many spy-guards out to be surprized. The fact remained, however, that Brant had taken scalps at Cobleskill without any warning preceding him.

The woman was seized with another spell of coughing and I paused long enough to give her my aunt's recipe for using slippery elm. The poor creature was not used to being considered and was wiping tears away as she nodded her thanks. Her father dug his toes impatiently into the dirt and warned:

"We'd best put our best foot for'ards. Jugs may be empty. They're master hands at cel'brating when they git started. You'd better say you asked me to show the way. Then they won't think I'm nosing in."

I SWUNG on to my horse and walked him up the road, Bimis keeping a few feet ahead, eager to be at the rum, yet finding my company necessary as a passport. Having adopted the name of Herty, I wondered what talk I was supposed to take to Young. From the talk in the road I assumed Herty must be coming up the river from New York, else

Young would not have waited for him in Catskill.

The men in the long log house abruptly ceased their tavern-song as I rode up to the door and dismounted. Bimis glided inside and announced—

"I've fetched the man called Herty."

There was an overturning of stools and a scrambling to the door, and I doubt not that Bimis seized the opportunity to quaff heavily of the rum. The three men were flushed with drink but not much muddled. One of them, a short thick-set fellow with a round boyish face came close and demanded—

"Are you Hiram Herty?"

I was glad to know my first name and hoped it was not a trap. I nodded my head and stripped off the saddle and turned the horse loose to feed on the strip of grass along the kill. Young stared at me thoughtfully.

"Well, come in, and have a drink," he invited. "I looked for you at Catskill. Must have passed you in the dark 'tween here and there. I'm John Young."

I followed him into the gloomy room and stood my rifle in a corner and with a show of gusto tilted a jug. Young said:

"This is Parel, this is Scott. Friends of mine. Picked them to help in our business."

I expressed my pleasure in meeting them, all the time wondering what "our business" consisted of.

Scott was about my own age and dissipation had worn grooves in his face. When under the influence of an impulse, I believed, he would risk all and laugh while doing it. He was smiling broadly as we shook hands, and the expression of his eyes denoted a thoroughly reckless spirit. Parel was older than the other two and had considerable gray in his coarse hair. He had lived much outdoors, for his skin was like tanned leather. He had lost the use of the left eye, and the lids were almost closed over the dead optic and gave him a very sinister cast of countenance. He said nothing as we clasped hands.

Scott boisterously insisted on another cup of rum to grace our meeting. Parel stared at me from his sound eye in a manner that was almost disconcerting. Young reminded me of a chubby boy, his clean shaven face being fair and rosy as a maiden's.

As we drew up to the long table I felt suspense in the air. Young and Parel were studying me. I feared they mistrusted me, although there was nothing yet to corroborate such a suspicion. I was relieved when Scott gave a possible explanation of their bearing by laughingly telling me:

"Never 'spected to see you in that sort of a rig. Look like a —— Yankee rifleman."

"I'd stand a fine chance of getting up the Hudson and out this far on the Cherry Valley road if I wore a red coat. Bought these clothes from a man fleeing east from the Scoharie."

"I believe that was wise," slowly decided Young, yet keeping his round-eyed gaze on me. "Here, you Bimis; get some food together. Touch one of those jugs again and I'll cut your throat."

The threat might have been good-natured abuse, but the way Bimis scurried from the collection of jugs proved he was much afraid of soft-spoken John Young.

"Well, Mr. Herty; what's the word?"

Not knowing what was expected of me, I shrugged my shoulders and answered—

"No time to talk—yet."

And I glanced at Bimis.

"Oh, he's all right. But we'll eat first."

"How far is Captain Brant ahead of me?" I asked as Bimis began frying meat at the open fire.

"Probably as far as Cherry Valley. But you're to work with me, says Colonel Johnson."

"Of course. But that's no reason why I shouldn't overtake Brant and have a talk with him."

Young and Parcel exchanged quick glances. Scott leaned back and closed his eyes and laughed softly. Young pleasantly reminded me:

"We are to work from here. Time presses."

"Captain Brant took all the horses from here. I don't know about you fellows, but I need a good horse. He can get all the horses he needs from Catherine's Town."

This reference to the home of the Montour woman, three miles from Seneca Lake, and her lively trade in horses appeared to surprize the three men. Even Scott stared at me intently. Young observed—

"For a stranger in this country you seem to know quite a bit about the Injun towns."

"You never need leave New York or

Philadelphia to know the history of the Montour women, madame and her granddaughters, Queen Esther and Catherine," I carelessly reminded.

Young nodded, and agreed they were known from Canada to the Carolinas. Then he added:

"But it's not so well known that Catherine is breeding horses. We must wait here till Thornty comes. If your nag isn't fit by then we'll get you another. Waste of time to chase after Brant."

The name was new to me, and I could not imagine what we were to do after the fellow's arrival.

"When will Thornty come?" I asked.

"Any day. Any hour," replied Young.

The ensuing silence was ominous. Parel was not a talkative man, but Young and Scott at least had been gay and voluble enough until I arrived. Now Parel and Young were gravely silent. Scott was grinning and chuckling, and his way of glancing at me suggested amusement over something which concerned me. Very few words were said while we ate the meat and some bread. Then I rose and picked up my rifle and stepped to the door, saying—

"I'll stroll around a bit."

I could hear them rising to their feet, and without looking back, I added—

"I'll leave my horse here."

"Good feeding," declared Young. "Bimis will show you the sights."

Scott renewed his laughing, and I suspected Bimis was to watch me until the trio were satisfied on some point. Bimis kept behind me as I walked along the road toward his cabin. I halted and stared at the cabins, and saw only some women and children and a few old men, who went indoors as I came along.

"Where'll you go next, mister?" asked Bimis. "Better not stray too far as Thornty may come any minute."

Convinced he was spying on me to see I did not attempt to leave the settlement I continued to his cabin. Bimis' daughter was outside, and I joined her and asked about her cough. She had procured some slippery elm and was anxious to try it. As her diffidence wore off and we continued our talk, her father seated himself in the doorway and leaned against the casing and fell asleep.

"Why ain't father back where they're drinking?" she asked.

"I'm afraid he's watching me. John Young acted queer."

"But you're the man they've been waiting for?"

"Of course. But they began to act queer when I wouldn't talk business before your father."

"Young's a queer man. Parel's a ——, Scott's a fool, but very brave. You go back and talk. All Torlock's settlement has been talking. Scott told all about it when drunk. Mebbe t'others would if he hadn't. Father's safe. He's one of those to go along and help git it."

I was like a man who, after losing himself in the thick woods, had stumbled into a path. I purposed following the path, knowing it must emerge somewhere.

"How many men does Young figure are needed for the job?" I asked.

"Well, they say it'll fill two barrels; and silver's heavy. Mighty little I ever saw of it so I can't judge. But it can't be carried in barrels to the Sacondaga. And if it's packed in it'll have to be divided up among quite a body of men, to my thinking. But of course you've made all plans for that part of it."

"We sha'n't use oxen and a cart," I assured her.

She smiled wanly and fought back a coughing-spell, and went on—

"To dig it up and git it up where the canoes are waiting on the Sacondaga may be easier than finding a chance to talk alone with William, Sir John's slave."

"To talk with William alone will be the hardest part of the job," I quickly agreed.

The thick wood along the mental trail was beginning to thin out. First must come a talk with William—and I remembered him well as a most faithful servitor—then two barrels of silver were to be dug from some hiding-place. It was plain as my face that William was to tell where we were to dig. In doing this he would be acting on some one's orders, presumably those of his former master. The blind path had led me into a clearing.

Sir John never paused to take any silver plate with him when he broke his parole and fled to Canada. Had I gone up the valley instead of down to the Scoharie Kill, I undoubtedly would have heard some rare story of treasure-hunting, and would have learned that much digging had disfigured the Johnson Hall estate.

I talked further with the woman and learned she had no bias whatever against the Americans. Apparently she trusted me, for she did not ask me to consider her talk as being confidential. I do not think she was a partisan for either side. I found myself believing that so far as she was concerned, the war might be raging on another planet.

Catskill on the Hudson was outside her world. Her father had brought her to Torlock's the year before from one of the trading-towns on the upper Susquehanna; and her life had been spent in a very narrow portion of New York among natives and rough whites. She was much younger than I had supposed, the ravages of her malady, hard work and exposure having prematurely aged her. Bimis awoke with a start and glared at me wildly for a moment, then rubbed his eyes and urged:

"We'd better be hoofing back. Thornty may come any time."

Regretting I had forgotten to question the women about this character I picked up my rifle and led the way up the road. Scott was snoring in a corner. Young and Parel were on the grass outside the cabin, smoking. They eyed me curiously as I strolled up and threw myself on the dead grass beside them. As Bimis sneaked inside the cabin I asked Young—

"How many men were you figuring would be needed for the job?"

His gaze quickened, and he answered, "I've been wondering. I never tackled one just like it. What do you think?"

Parel removed his pipe and turned his head so his sound eye could bear on me. I frowned and pursed my lips; then answered:

"If we take more'n we need we'll increase the danger of being caught at it. Just what two barrels will weigh I don't know." Parel's good eye opened wide and half-closed. "And we can't go by weight," I thoughtfully added.

"Much depends on the shape and size. If it was melted down it would be simple."

Young's round face became cherubic, and his entire attitude changed. Leaning forward and speaking with jocose severity, he demanded:

"Why'n —— did you play off and keep your mouth closed like a clam? It seemed queer to me and Parel. Even that young sot inside noticed it."

"I wasn't told it was to be talked before Bimis and t'other settlers. Never much of a hand to gabble. How long do we wait for Thornty?"

"Until he comes," growled Parel. "Unless you can make the nigger talk."

"William won't talk to any one but Thornty or McDonald. McDonald's too well known to go back there," said Young. "Thornty's the man to learn where we're to dig, and I'm the man to see it's delivered to the canoes."

This left but one rôle, and I confidently completed—

"Land it on the Sacondaga and I'll guarantee delivery in Canada."

Young nodded and lazily remarked:

"Of course. Else you wouldn't be trusted for that part of the work. But I still think the best way would be through the Long House to Oswego."

"Sacondaga," I insisted.

Parel pulled out his knife and fell to whittling a pine stick, and muttered—

"The best way would be to melt the —— truck down and keep it."

Young glared at him angrily, and I fancied signaled for him to cease such talk. Parel grunted—

" 'Course I was only fooling."

The tension was relieved by Scott staggering to the door. His hair was hanging over his haggard face and through this veil his eyes gleamed maliciously. Leaning against the door-frame he stared down at me and muttered—

"So that Bimis fetched him back all right."

Young leaped to his feet and cursed him for a drunken fool. Scott steadied himself and with great quickness whipped out a knife. Parel gave a short yelp and bounded like a wildcat to his feet and flung himself on Scott and bore him over backwards on the cabin floor. I would have followed, but Young seized my arm and shook his head. We could hear Parel talking rapidly in a low voice. Then he was asking—

"Has that got into your drunken head?"

"Let me up, Parel. How was I to know what happened while I was asleep? I say, let me up. You're making bad friends."

"Up you come. Your knife's in the corner. But remember, I'll slit your weasan' if you blab any more fool talk."

Young released his hold on my arm and remarked—

"Have to be mighty careful, you know."

"Of course. One should be very careful. But I don't see that young man's value. Surely he's not fit to take to the Mohawk, where we'll have to work by stealth, and perhaps make a running fight of it."

"He'll be sober enough when we ride north. He shows bad now. That's the rum. But if it comes to a fight, whether he's drunk or sober, he's the first man I'd wish to have with me."

"This isn't to be a fight. We dash in and out and before any one knows what we're after. When we want fighting we can pay a return visit."

This sentiment appealed to him, and his round face was wreathed with smiles when Parel came from the shadowy doorway and took his place on the grass. Scott did not join us, but we could hear him shaking the jugs inside.

THAT afternoon wore away slowly. Each minute I was expecting the man Thornty to appear. Fearing to be caught with an empty gun I refused to join Young and Parel in a shooting-match. Young was a poor shot, but Parel's one eye sent the lead with deadly precision. I spent much of the time lying flat on my back with my hat over my face; and all the time I was trying to discover a way of escaping from the place.

Bimis remained to act as cook. Scott returned to his bunk and did not get up until late in the afternoon. He was very sullen and ugly, and was ill from the liquor. He vented his spleen on Bimis, who stood in deadly fear of him. Parel watched him closely, but Scott did not seem to observe it. I noticed he did not speak to Parel although he talked briefly with Young. The one-eyed man watched every move he made. Near sunset Parel began drinking again, but strangely enough Scott refused. Young obviously was growing worried. His round face grew very grave as he glanced from one man to the other.

While supper was cooking and Young was making his twentieth trip to a spring back of the house I whispered to Young—

"Those two don't like each other."

"The wrong two to be at odds," he murmured. "Parel's smelling trouble. It looks bad when Scott refuses the jug. If they start fighting, crack one on the head while I lambast t'other. They mustn't fight here."

I walked to the spring and waited for Scott to refill and empty the dish. As he finished and gave me the dish he said—

"I don't like your ways, mister."

"Why should there be any black wampum between us," I asked. "I haven't rolled you on the floor and made any threats."

His pupils contracted to points of madness and for a few moments his speech was scarcely articulate as he softly mouthed curses. Securing better control of himself, he panted:

"He'll pay yet! S'pose he could 'a' held me down if I hadn't been stupid from rum?"

"You look to me to be a most proper fighting man," I truthfully answered. "I'd hate to have your hatchet out against me."

He grinned sardonically and repeated:

"I don't like your ways, mister. For one thing you know too much about Injuns for a man who ain't lived among 'em. But that can wait. I've got other fish to fry."

Early that evening I announced my intention of going to bed, and one side explained to Young the atmosphere of the cabin did not suit me. Young frankly conceded:

"Can't blame you. I must stay and keep them apart. If it wasn't for the work ahead I'd leave them to cut each other's throats. Go to the Perkins place next door. Only the old man and his wife there. All four boys went away with Brant. They'll put you up."

I picketed my horse in the grass back of the Perkins cabin and then called on the couple and asked for a chance to spread my blanket. The man, crippled with rheumatism, was not cordial in his bearing. His wife said no word but walked behind the curtain that divided the room and did not appear again. Perkins pointed to the floor and growled:

"More blankets on the boys' beds if yours ain't enough."

With that he hobbled behind the curtain, and I had the greater part of the cabin to myself.

I arranged my blankets and noisily removed my moccasins and tossed them aside. In a few minutes I put them on. For an hour I remained on the floor. From behind the curtains came the heavy breathing of the Perkins man and woman deep in sleep. I stole to the door and gently opened it and thrust out my head.

A light still streamed through the end window of the log cabin. I had hoped the three men would drink themselves insensible, thus permitting me to lead my horse by the place and up the Cherry Valley road. But someone was moving about and I would have returned to my pallet had not a sharp voice held me. Only two words, yet they spelled a tragedy. "Stop that!"

Trailing my rifle, I glided to the building and crouched under the window. By degrees I elevated my head until I could gaze inside. Young sat at the end of the table, his back to me. He had a pistol in his hand. A short distance from him and facing each other were Parel and Scott. Both were leaning slightly forward and glaring at each other. Parel's blind eye was toward me, and I could see the lids open and close. He was in the act of shaving off a slice of venison, and held the long butcher knife in his hand. Scott appeared to be sober and was watching his enemy closely. One arm rested on the table, the other was out of sight.

"He said it," slowly announced Parel, the three words being separated by several seconds.

"Stop it, I tell you!" warned Young. "You're both drunk. Drunken talk doesn't count. We have Sir John's business to do."

"I'm not drunk now, John," softly corrected Scott, but never shifting his gaze from Parel's strained face.

"I tell you we have Sir John's—" anxiously began Young.

"Sir John can go to ——!" said Parel in the same slow, ponderous manner of speaking. "All England and all the rebels can go to ——! He—said—it. That's the only thing in the world that counts with me."

Scott tilted his stool back, maintaining his balance by the one hand, resting on the table and grinning viciously taunted:

"I say it again. What'll you do about it?"

With a terrible screech that caused me to jump violently, Parel lunged with the long knife across the table.

As he started the attack, Scott pushed his stool backward and fell on his back. But as quickly as the stool tipped, Scott had barely hit the floor before Parel was vaulting over the table. Scott, flat on his back and still grinning, made no attempt to rise, but fired with a long pistol while Parel was in the air. Parel was dead when he landed on his intended victim.

"Oh, my ——!" cried Young, half-raising his pistol and then lowering it.

Scott scrambled to his feet and tossed his empty weapon on the table and stared down at the dead man for a few seconds, and demanded:

"Well, I said it. What'll you do about it?"

The sound of horses approaching from the east sent me scurrying behind the cabin. Peering around the corner, I made out two horsemen passing along the road between the Perkins place and the cabin behind which I was hiding.

As they rode up to the door I stole forward and spied on them.

"Inside there!" called out one of the riders. "Who fired that shot?"

"Who are you?" called back Young.

"Thornty. Who fired that shot?"

"Scott. He's just killed Parel. Who's that with you?"

"The man you've been waiting for. Hiram Herty."

SHRILL insane laughter from Scott drowned out any words Young may have uttered. Scott was still laughing when I gained my horse back of the Perkins cabin and led him down to the creek. The wild merriment pursued me as I completed the crossing and stood on the south bank of the Cobleskill. As I walked my horse along the bank, planning to cross and regain the Cherry Valley road, I could hear men shouting excited queries. They were outside the cabin—all but Scott. He remained with the dead man, laughing and laughing in a high strident note. I could hear Young screaming:

"Tricked! By ——! You two ride back as you came. I'll ride west!"

And I let my rested mount have his head, and I shook the reins and had recrossed to the north bank before Young could secure his horse. Then I was galloping through the night toward Cherry Valley.

CHAPTER X

AFTER TWO YEARS

THE valley of Cherry Creek was as quiet and peaceful as an old English town as I halted my horse in the woods back of Mr. Dunlop's school. For some reason

best known to himself Brant had passed it by in his retreat from the Cobleskill raid. In latter years I have heard it said, and have seen it printed, that the Mohawk chief planned to attack but from a hill saw children playing at soldiers, and at the distance believed they were soldiers and stole away. It's hard for me to believe that the great Mohawk was fooled by children playing; or that soldiers would have deterred him from attacking. Surely he knew he had whipped Alden's forces sent to garrison the valley settlement, and as surely did he know they had not reached the valley ahead of him. And there was to come the time when their presence would not hold him back.

Canada and the Delaware intervened between my two visits to the valley, and yet I could not see that the settlement had grown much. The western sun was sliced in half by the green forest roof, and men and women were coming from their work. The men were carrying arms, and if few houses had been built in the last two years the population had increased, I decided. This would be explained by the pouring in of fugitives from Springfield and the clearings scattered down the valley.

As I slid from my horse careless steps sounded behind me, and a voice singing a pathetic little refrain in French. I knew the singer before he showed himself, and my hands were outstretched in greeting as he broke through some cherry-bushes.

"Peter Bolduc! Don't you know me?" I cried as he came to a halt.

He carefully deposited a bark-basket on the ground and stared at me for a moment, then joyously exclaimed:

"Certain! Young *m'sieur!* The face is in the shadow, but no darkness can hide the voice!"

And the good fellow embraced me after the impulsive fashion of his people. Stepping back he softly said:

"But is it you, *m'sieur*. Or your ghost?"

"You've crushed my arms," I laughed.

"Foot of a fox! Certain. No such bone and muscle on ghosts! Alas! that you should come when I have trapped a pigeon! No, no. I do not mean that. I would say it is sad, *m'sieur*, you should come, after these many months, at a time when sorrow is in the settlement."

"Two years I've been away," I muttered, my throat aching with fear. "There is sorrow here?"

"M'sieur remembers M'm'selle Martin?" he gently asked.

"Not her?" I whispered.

"Her little grandchild. The one she adopted. Little Big Paws. It is for him I spend a night and day to trap the bird."

"The little bound-boy, who ate her cakes," I murmured, sorrowing for the poor child and because I knew Nancy Martin would be sorrowing.

"It is very sad," sighed the trader. "It makes the heart ache. But perhaps it is best. M'sieur Dunlop says it is God's will. Peter Bolduc is only a trader; he does not know. He does believe some one, somewhere, owes a great deal to the little boy. Perhaps the good God will pay the debt. The child was never well nourished except as *m'm'selle* fed him. He had a sickness and could not live. Come."

He led the way to the valley road and crossed it, and entered some clean timber. A short walk took us to the edge of this and to the beginning of a circular opening, fresh with thick new grass. Many of the settlers were there and forming a circle around a new grave—pitiably small—on a grassy slope. Kneeling beside it, with her head bowed, was Nancy Martin. She was dressed in white, but her hair was drawn back and braided in the Seneca fashion. She saw nothing of the people.

It was a very old Iroquois custom, and a very beautiful one, the Little Sister of the Wolf was about to revive. A woman near me muttered to a neighbor that she did not believe in pagan burials, yet the idea of a child being bound-out to an indifferent master had not appealed to her as being heathenish. And what could be more symbolic of tenderness than this freeing of a bird over the grave at dusk. Perhaps my intimacy with the people of the Fifth Fire had tinged my thoughts thinly with red: For this ceremony of releasing a bird to blaze the trail for the dead to follow to a happier life always appeals to me as being as genuine as any prayer priest or missionary can offer.

Leaving my horse to feed on the new grass I worked closer and took up a position behind the girl. Beside the grave were a few home-made playthings and a pile of little cakes. The girl did not indulge in wailing and lamentations, as a red mourner

would have done, but I could see her slim shoulders shake as with bowed head she heard the whispered words of Bolduc. Placing the basket beside her he retired.

For the time at least she appeared to be Iroquois at heart, for in a low soft voice she addressed Little Big Paws as if he could hear her. And yet she spoke as a white mother would speak and not as a red woman. There was no suggestion of ritual in her few words.

"Oh, little boy, your hard times are ended," she said. "You were a very little boy to come to sorrow. God must be very good to you and make you very, very happy. And you'll not forget your little grandmother."

The rest was inaudible and smothered by weeping. Blindly she fumbled for the basket and opened it over the grave.

Up flew the bird, circling high until the last rays of the sun found it and gilded it most wonderfully.

I withdrew that she might not see me. She stood up and threw back her thick braids and looked blankly at the people for a moment; then said:

"I am a white girl. I am going home to pray to the white God."

I remained on the slope while she walked through the gloaming and while the people scattered to their homes, the armed men bringing up the rear. Bolduc touched my arm and he jerkily muttered:

"*M'sieur;* my old heart is broke. If my Oneidas saw me they would put petticoats on me and tell me to watch the kettles. So much sadness! Yet the long trail will have no briars and thorns for his small feet. *M'sieur* goes back to the settlement?"

I shook off his hand and motioned for him to leave me. He understood and I remained alone, sitting by the little mound, my rifle thrown aside. The dusk deepened as I was held there, trying to think it out. There was my uncle, there was Herbert Vischer, here was this little boy. And there were many others I had known and liked —all traveling the long trail. And were evil men, Long Gentry and his ilk, powerless now to work harm, but I could not believe they walked Little Big Paw's trail.

"Are you an Iroquois to stay beside the dead?" asked a deep voice.

I lifted my head and in Mohawk answered—

"It is you, Joseph Brant."

And I glanced about, expecting to see a ring of his Mohawks.

"I watched from the woods," he told me in English. "The people of this settlement were at the muzzles of my guns, but I sent my men away. I saw you when you came with the trader. Before you grew to be a man you came to my house both at Canajoharie Castle and at Fort Hunter. Your uncle was a good man. You better go away from here."

"Good God! You're about to attack the settlement?"

"No. Not yet. The people are safe for five days. Perhaps longer. But for five days they are safe. Go and tell the people to go away. I have left Cherry Valley alone, and they still send their spies to Tunadilla. Some day fire will burn this valley. It is war. Tell the little Seneca to take her foolish father and go away. They are safe at all times—from the Iroquois.

"But soon there will be men with me of your color, who are more cruel than Mohawks. Thayendanegea can be in only one place at a time. Tell the Wells and Campbells and the others to go away. They say you killed the white man who killed your good uncle. That is good. But remember, you do not carry my roadbelts now. Go away."

By the time I got on my feet he was vanishing through the darkness toward the western woods, where he had watched the burial of a white child after the ancient custom of the Long House.

SECURING my horse, and with never a thought of danger, I slowly made my way to the settlement. Peter Bolduc was waiting for me and met me in the straggling street, and told me I was to stop with him at John Moore's. There were lights in the meeting-house, and he explained that it was used by incoming settlers, and was resorted to at night by some families of the settlement for greater security against attack. Work on the fort ordered early in the Spring by General Lafayette was progressing rapidly. If the Indians held back until that fortification was completed, the trader believed, the settlers could repulse an assault.

I had no thoughts of war. I removed the string of white wampum from my neck. It had survived two campaigns and northern

imprisonment. Handing it to Bolduc I requested him:

"Give this string to Miss Nancy. Unless you've told her she doesn't know I am here. She will say when I may see her."

"It shall be as request, *m'sieur*," he gravely promised. "I deliver the wampum once I see you traveling to Moore's house."

I led my horse down the street by the home of the weaver and was greeted most heartily by Mr. Moore. But when we sat down to the supper table I displayed a poor appetite for a forest man. Before the meal was finished the trader came in and took his place, and found time to say—

"Tomorrow morning."

The evening was spent largely in questioning me concerning my experiences. Neighbors came to listen, and never did a man have a more attentive audience. One result of my talk was the partial conviction of my hearers that the war must be won where General Washington fought, and that to weaken his army by supplying border garrisons would be playing the game to the enemy's liking.

When I had finished a rather long recital Moore smacked his fist on the table and declared—

"I can see clearer than ever that we must not only spare men for the army, but that we must depend on our own efforts to hold the frontier."

I astounded them all by informing them:

"Joseph Brant came to me as I was alone where the child is buried. Brant and I knew each other on the Mohawk. He told me to tell you all to go away. He says that for five days this settlement will not be attacked. After that you stay here in peril of your lives."

"Well, —— his impudence!" roared a settler. "And you've waited till now to tell us that murderer is within gunshot!"

"He said he had sent his men away, and I believe him. I do not think he's within several miles of here now. He said you had five days, and Joseph Brant does not lie. He as much as said that Johnson's Royal Greens' will be more bloodthirsty than the Indians."

"Likely talk after what he done at Cobleskill!" jeered a woman, her voice hot with suspicion.

"He could have killed me," I listlessly replied. "He sent me here to tell you all to move off the creek."

"Young man, it strikes me you're rather thick with Brant," said a second man.

"None of that, Thomas," warned Mr. Moore. "Whittlesey and his uncle were members of our committee. He has fought two years and has suffered much. Brant has known him from a boy up. One thing's sure: We must hurry and finish the fort so we can fort ourselves securely, or move away."

"No Brant, no Johnson, no Butler can drive me off this crick!" shouted Thomas.

Others expressed the same determination. Moore raised his hand and said:

"I'm staying along with the rest. But I do wish our women and children were back east."

"At Cobleskill, where they'd 'a' been killed," cried the woman.

"Then at Albany," said Moore. "But we mustn't feel hard toward Whittlesey."

"The friend of Brant's!" the woman angrily retorted.

"I carry none of his road-belts," I spoke up. "He reminded me of that much. My visit here was to offer my services as scout. I am used to woods-work. I will receive no favors from Brant and his Mohawks. Yet he was good to me when I was a boy and before this trouble came."

There was some muttering aside as neighbor talked with neighbor; then by a common impulse they began departing. Mr. Moore was embarrassed by the neglect of two men and one woman to bid me good night. The trader angrily exclaimed:

"Foot of a fox! After what young *m'sieur* has done! Down at Tunadilla, at the Oneida crossing, and in the army!"

"These are evil times. People are afraid. Cherry Valley is more isolated than any other settlement on the frontier. And I did talk alone with Brant. It's natural some should be uneasy, even suspicious. If I find the settlers do not want me here I'll go away."

"The people are frightened, and that makes a few of them unreasonably suspicious," agreed Mr. Moore. "We want you to go away, but to go on a scout for this valley. That woman who spoke so strongly, and one of the men who showed he was suspicious, came here a day ago. Left all they owned in Springfield. They've spread alarm among some of our people. After you've made a scout they'll feel friendly enough."

"*M'sieur* speaks in the tone and manner of a chief," applauded Bolduc. Then sorrowfully: "But the war-kettle will soon boil over again as it did at Cobleskill. It would be wise for this settlement to follow Thayendanegea's advice. For I tell you, *Messieurs*, before the Long House hangs the ax in the loop at the back of the belt again, this upper valley of the Susquehanna will be given back to the wilderness, and the Scoharie Valley will be destroyed."

"Prophet of evil!" said Moore in grim humourousness. "Is there any thing else of bad luck that you're seeing?"

"But yes!" cried the Frenchman. "I see every settlement on the Mohawk, west of Schenectady, bleeding and in flames."

Mr. Moore laughed, albeit a bit uneasily I thought. He fell to cross-examining me on the Delaware campaign while Bolduc stood at the window. After a while Bolduc inquired, without turning from the window—

"How long since the moon rises in the south?"

My chair tipped over as I jumped up to stand beside him. Mr. Moore was almost as quick despite his lameness. On the southern horizon was a faint glow, such as the moon throws off when hiding just below the skyline.

"Cabins burning!" hoarsely whispered Moore.

"It's down near the Charlotte," decided the Frenchman. "For the last few days the settlers have been crossing the Susquehanna and following up the Charlotte to Harpersfield, bound for the Scoharie and the Albany road. Before the Summer ends only Tory cabins will be left standing south of this valley."

"And Cherry Valley?" muttered Moore, wiping the sweat from his face as he glared at the stain on the southern sky.

"I have already spoken," reminded the trader. "This settlement will burn some time."

"Not if Colonel Alden ever comes with his militia to reenforce us!" passionately cried Moore. "We'd be fools to think that by drawing back we could improve our lot. If we fall back to the Scoharie, then that becomes the frontier, with the red ——s crowding us as close as ever. If we flee to Albany, then we drag the frontier that far east. No! We'll hold this line against all the Johnsons, and Butlers, and Brants this side of ——!"

That was a good talk, the speech of a chief, and I said "Yo-hah" in the proper place. We watched until the sinister glow died down and night repainted the southern horizon with ebony. Mr. Moore went outside and returned to say others had seen the red splotch in the sky and that double sentinels were posted far down the valley. Then the trader and I retired to the loft and slept. Brant had given the settlement five days: I feared no attack until that period of time had passed.

WE BREAKFASTED early and I walked toward the Martin cabin. The greater number of men and women I met greeted me cordially, but there were a few who lowered at me, and I knew I had been discussed and that my presence was not relished by all the settlers. Brant had talked with me and I still lived. The badly frightened feared I was pretending to run with the hares while secretly hunting with the hounds.

Nancy Martin stood in the doorway, her hands extended. Her small face was saddened, yet her smile was genuinely glad.

"I've come to take back the white wampum," I told her as I held her slim hands. "My *orenda* says it's a very strong guardian when worn around the neck."

"I'm so glad you're here. Peter Bolduc told me you were near me yesterday when the pigeon showed Little Big Paws the way. He had a sickness. He wasn't very strong. We couldn't save him. It hurts me to talk about him. Come in."

Her father had been warned of my coming, and had his hair brushed high *à la macaroni*, and tied with a knot of fresh ribbon. But the glory of his silk breeches must have succumbed to the assaults of time, for he was wearing nether garments of coarse stuff that fitted poorly.

He strutted forward a few steps, his cane held upright at arm's length from his body, his ridiculous round small hat held under his free arm. He shifted his cane to his left hand and gave me greeting, saying:

"I'm glad to see you, Benajah. —— only knows what the world is coming to when Horry Martin must attire himself like a plow-boy in welcoming his friends! Well, thank ——! there's none of the fellows of the old mode here to see me. Ah, lad! To think when you were last here I was prating about New York! It was the

one dream left that made life possible. The prisoner's last hope of escape.

"Benajah, that road is forever blocked to Horry Martin! He can sustain himself no longer even with a delusion. The striped ones went two months ago on Lady-Day. The spotted ones gave out last year, at Michaelmas. No tea! No civilized breeches! The last of the macaronis has turned woodchopper in appearance!"

"Why, sir, you are far better dressed than Washington's army," I told him. "Compared with the men who came back from Canada and who survived Valley Forge, you are a great beau. Nor do I see that Miss Nancy is shining in silks and satins."

His gaze wandered to the linsey-woolsey gown his daughter was wearing, and he shook his head mournfully, and muttered:

"Who'd 'a' thought it when my appearance on Broad Street, as I sauntered to the Queen's Head, or on the Broadway as I emerged from the King's Arms, packed the street with envious imitators."

To divert his mournful thoughts I told him of the burning of New York. The news seemed to cheer him up a bit, for he cried:

"Blaze me, lad! But a proper wardrobe, with no place to display it, would be almost as great a hardship as this poor life here. I heard a neighbor complaining this morning that you still held fast to Brant's friendship. You are wise. It is good. I would like to see Joseph Brant. He knows I was a friend of Sir William. If there's any tea on the Susquehanna he would see that I had it."

"Oh, my father! My father!" softly cried the girl.

"And 'Oh, my daughter! My daughter!' to dare criticise your parent," he sternly rebuked and straightening his thin figure.

Then he slumped forward, and the hand holding the long cane trembled, and he was peevishly complaining:

"The new generation is sending us to the ——! A father can not lament the lack of tea without being corrected. Why shouldn't I miss my tea? This isn't Horry Martin's war? He's had no quarrel with king or colonies."

And his voice shaded off into mumbling and maundering.

His was an evil malady that no fair words could discourage, and I signaled for the girl to ignore it. We talked of the war, that is, I did. Nancy listened eagerly. I would not have believed her father heard me, if not for some occasional query. He was curious to learn of the Hessians—their sartorial appearance. After I had mentioned the surprize-attack on Wayne and my fortunate escape from death, he lifted his head to remark:

"Used a bayonet, eh? Then he was only a common soldier. I suppose it was too dark to note the uniforms of the officers. Very smart, but not original, I fancy."

I repressed a grin for the sake of the girl. She questioned me about Cobleskill, but Mr. Martin displayed no interest. His remark about Brant told me they knew about my lonely meeting with the Mohawk, but she did not refer to it. I suspected my visit was making her uneasy. She talked hurriedly as if to prevent her father from breaking in with his inconsequential remarks.

So I left them; rather, took leave of Mr. Martin, for Miss Nancy followed me outside. After she had closed the door she said:

"He's sadly broken. He's not to be judged by what he says now, Benajah."

"Of course not," I declared. "He's found his world upside down."

Then I gave her Brant's message. She shook her head, saying:

"We won't profit by it. We will go only when the settlers go."

"You all have five days. After that depends on Brant's whims. The people should surely go before snow flies. There are some here who do not like it because I talked with Brant. Perhaps you'd better not be seen talking with me."

"Father isn't popular," she frankly confessed. "They try to excuse it in him by saying he is old and notional. Only trifles count with him now, Benajah. And yet we know he must have been a very gallant man, or else my mother would not have married him. And, Benajah, there are some here who do not like me. I can't blame them. They know my mother was half-Seneca. The Indians talk to me when they won't talk to any one else. So you won't contaminate me by talking with me."

"I'll see you when I get back from a scout. Now I'll take my wampum and be going."

From her slim neck she removed the white string and threw it over my head.

"About yesterday; I'm sorry," I told her as I turned to go.

"He is all right. Times are hard for little children," she bravely replied.

The next moment she had turned and had darted into the cabin. And times were hard for brave little women; girls young in years yet carrying the responsibilities of maturity.

I was depressed and moody as I walked back to the Moore cabin to get my rifle, an excellent single-shot. Some Canadian was carrying my double-barrel. I often wondered if he ever discovered the secret hiding-place in the stock. My gloomy reverie was broken into by the hearty greetings of Samuel Campbell and Samuel Clyde. Both had distinguished themselves at Oriskany and had been old friends of my uncle. They had not been at Moore's house the evening before, but their cordiality proved they did not share in any neighbor's suspicions concerning me. Both were pleased to know I was to serve as scout and both were anxious to hear the details of my talk with Brant. When I had repeated, almost word for word, the Mohawk's warning, Colonel Clyde said:

"I've had it from other sources that Walter Butler plans to raid us and that Brant has been holding off. Butler has great influence over the Senecas, and the Senecas were heavy losers at Oriskany. Brant doesn't like the idea of serving under Butler. But we'll be attacked. In my judgment we'd best all move back East if we can't get a strong garrison."

"Forting the settlements will never keep the savages away," insisted Colonel Campbell. "If we could send an expedition through the Long House and tear it down and burn all their houses and crops, it would be time and men well spent. Think of the waste and the uselessness of the Canada expedition! If the same energy had been used against the enemy at our very doors we could sleep in peace."

My experience in the Delaware campaign had prejudiced me against sending any large number of soldiers to the frontier. The war would be won where General Washington fought. But there was sense and truth in what Colonel Campbell said, I believed. At least we could spare enough men to keep the Iroquois from swarming to the Delaware and Hudson if we could spare them for the northern tragedy.

Colonel Clyde promptly viewed our dilemma from another angle and insisted Arnold's expedition was a mistake and that to repeat it would gain us nothing. To destroy the Long House would be to unite all the Iroquois in a life or death stand which we would find different from their occasional predatory raids.

"They're fighting now for plunder to even up the Oriskany score," he concluded. "But burn the roof of the Long House and they'll be fighting for their homes."

When I left them they were warmly arguing the point.

Peter Bolduc was waiting for me, and the sight of his sun-baked, weather-stained face sent my spirits up. He dashed my hopes by saying he was to scout to Richfield, near the head of Schuyler's Lake while I was risking my scalp down the valley.

"Between here and Schenevas Creek you may find the trail of Tall Rock, the Oneida," he added. "He is a good man in a fight, or on a scout."

"Will he fight against the Iroquois?" I asked, for I was very doubtful on that point.

"The men of the Rock People will fight anything that wants to fight, *m'sieur*," Bolduc assured me. "A year ago Tall Rock lost his squaw. White Indians chased her. She jumped into the Tunadilla and was drowned. The Oneida has one desire. Already the villains at Tunadilla know it is not good to walk in the woods alone. Several of their scalps have been found near the village. At night they have heard the Oneida's war-cry close to their cabins. Good traveling, young *m'sieur*, and a safe return. Another time we may take the same path. *Certain*."

THE warm June day found me below Schenevas Creek and with no discoveries to report back to Cherry Valley. The trail of Brant's Indians driving the livestock to Unadilla was plain enough to follow in the dark. Bushes were trampled flat, thus greatly widening the original path. At night I could stretch out my hands and feel the broken ends of tender boughs where the cattle had snatched a mouthful while being hurried south.

A little below Valkenberg's farm I had my first thrill, although there was no danger in it. In pressing through some low bushes, I all but pitched headforemost over

the bowed figure of an Iroquois warrior.

Regaining my balance and raising my ax I glared at the motionless form and demanded—

"Are you alive or dead?"

"Let the ax bite deep. I have no women to dance for my dead. Tall Rock will be a ghost and hunt for the woman for whom there is no dance."

"A friend does not strike a friend," I said, dropping beside him. "Has the Oneida forgotten the white man Whittlesey?"

He slowly lifted his head and stared at me intently. Then we both stood up and he gave me his hand, and said:

"The white man the Oneida paid. But there was no white man near with a good heart when the woman died. There were five white men, and marks are cut on the trees near Tunadilla to tell their friends that three of them are dead. They died but they could not give back Tall Rock's woman."

"Let us sit down and burn tobacco," I urged.

And I squatted on the ground and filled my pipe and lighted it and gave it to him. He held it, but did not smoke.

"There is a woman in Cherry Valley, whose mother was a Seneca. Newataquaah shall dance for the dead woman."

He smoked a few puffs. Taking the pipe and smoking, I said:

"Continue to listen; for the smoke yet ascends. Little Moccasin shall dance for the dead woman. Let Tall Rock think of the two men who have not paid with their scalps. Three have paid?"

"They paid very slow," he muttered, his fierce eyes flashing. "They were very hard to kill. Tall Rock only had a small knife."

I shuddered. The Oneida woman had preferred drowning to capture by the five beasts. She had suffered but little.

But the infuriated husband wreaking his revenge on his helpless prisoners! It was a sickening thought, even though they deserved death.

When I came through the bushes, he doubtless had assumed I was a white Indian, therefore his enemy. And yet he had not lifted his head. Love-making among the Iroquois in those far-off days of my youth was unknown. Two mothers arranged a match. The young couple knew nothing about it until informed they were to marry. So, the kindling of affection, and its flaming into passion, was unknown to them. But affection grew out of marriage; and now Tall Rock was missing his woman and was indifferent to life. But what had tipped the scales and had withdrawn him from his path of revenge was the knowledge he had no women to observe the Dance for the Dead. This ceremony was a duty he owed to his wife's ghost.

My promise that Nancy Martin should go through the ancient ceremony rekindled his spirit.

"Little Moccasin will dance for my dead?" he insisted, to make sure.

"A little time ago she released a bird over a child's grave. She will dance."

His shoulders lifted and squared, and he hissed—

"There are two men alive who must die."

"Good. Now the Oneida talks like a chief. Now let him tell me where Thayendanegea is?"

"Moving north between Otsego Lake and the Tunadilla."

This was startling news, and I scarcely could credit it with the broad trail of horses and cattle making down the valley to Unadilla.

"I followed the path to this place. It still goes on," I reminded him.

"He sent men with the cows and horses. A few men. His warriors now follow him north."

I was instantly convinced that Cherry Valley was Brant's destination, and that he had marched his whole force south with the livestock to fool our scouts.

"Let Tall Rock stay here and keep his ears open. When there are not too many red hatchets flying through the air a Seneca woman of the Wolf shall dance for the dead woman. His white brother must travel fast to reach Cherry Valley ahead of Thayendanegea."

The five days of grace were up, twice five days. I raced to Valkenberg's, and without stopping to visit the farmhouse and ask leave, I took a canoe and desperately paddled up the creek. The last stage of the journey was made on a horse found in a small clearing. My heart thumped in mighty relief when I glimpsed only the orderly chimney smokes streaming into the blue heavens.

But that some evil news had preceded me was evidenced by the empty streets, as I flogged my tired mount among the cabins.

Colonel Campbell opened his door and stepped out, gun in hand. Other doors opened, but some only part way. The settlement was very quiet.

"Brant's making around Otsego Lake to attack us," I called out.

Colonel Campbell came to me as I dismounted and quietly informed me:

"Brant attacked Springfield yesterday and burned it. He killed eight men and captured fourteen. It's lucky most of the people came here at the first alarm. We'll make as good a fight as we can." This he said in a low voice. "But Brant has five hundred with him. If only Colonel Alden's regiment would come! But leave your horse and come inside and eat."

I remained in the cabin only long enough to bolt the first meat I had tasted in twenty-four hours. I went to the Martin cabin and on the way observed that the meeting-house was accommodating many settlers. Men with guns were at the windows, and armed men stood around the building at intervals, to guard against attacks from the eastern woods as well as from the north. A dozen men were working on the new fort and as many more stood on guard. Only a small portion of the settlers outside the settlement had come in, and there were some sixty families thus isolated. I had no hopes of a successful defense should Brant strike.

Mr. Martin was alone. He was querulous and not over-glad to see me. For that matter I do not think he cared to see anyone. His greeting was:

"Nance has left me. No breakfast. No nothing. ——! But Horry Martin has come to hard times when the simplest of food is denied him!"

"Where has she gone?"

"I don't know. Out in the woods, I suppose. Some fool came in during the night and awoke every one by yelling, 'Indians'!"

"Brant's burned Springfield and killed eight people."

"Aye? Poor ——! They were free to go back to civilization and preferred to be killed in this atrocious country! Horry Martin yearns to go back East and can't. Such sad irony!"

And, having started pitying himself, he suddenly found he wished me to remain as his audience.

I left him unceremoniously to find the girl. If the van of Brant's warriors came upon her, and should they be men who did not recognize her, she might be slain to prevent her from spreading the alarm. Instinct directed me to the ridge north of the town, and there I found her.

"The poor people!" she sighed on meeting me; and she seemed to have forgotten I had been absent on a long scout. "It all seems so needless. So cruel! If the white men would only keep away from the Long House when they feel they must make war on each other!"

"I've come to take you back home. They may break through the woods at any moment. They might not know you as Newataquaah, but only as a white girl trying to warn the settlement."

"There's no danger," she muttered, turning to stare toward Springfield.

"Your father is weak for need of food. He hasn't had his breakfast."

"Poor father! At least he can eat."

And with that she gave me her hand to help her down the rough slope, although she was as sure of foot as I. As we walked back to the settlement, I remembered my promise to Tall Rock and briefly stated his dilemma.

"I will dance for his dead wife," she promptly said. "A year has passed. It is time. Then he will mourn no more."

She seemed no larger than when I tucked her under my arm in the maple orchard to stop her from pursuing Newberry, but she seemed much older than the passage of three years would warrant. I remained out in front of the cabin while she cooked and served her father's breakfast. But Brant did not come that time.

INSTEAD of approaching the valley he swung aside to destroy the six cabins of Andrustown, six miles southeast of the German Flats. Thus far in the red campaign Brant seemed to be actuated by a desire for plunder rather than for human toll. It was Peter Bolduc who brought in word of Andrustown. To me he said privately:

"M'sieur Whittlesey, you know what comes next? Not Cherry Valley, but——"

He hesitated and I completed—

"The German Flats!"

He bowed and said:

"There is much good scouting between here and the Mohawk. I can recommend it, *m'sieur*, for your favorable consideration. *Certain.*"

"We will start at once," I agreed, keen to tread the forest floor in his company.

The German Flats, however, was not destined to feel the next blow. Even while we were being deceived by Brant's presence near the Mohawk, Colonel Butler with seven hundred Iroquois, mostly Senecas, and four hundred whites, consisting of the Royal Greens and recruits collected by Brant, was moving from Tioga Point to destroy the most populous and prosperous, and, at the same time, the weakest in defense of all the inland settlements. The horror of Wyoming came as a thunderclap and appalled the whole frontier.

Brant had persisted in confining his attacks on the New York frontier, where his people had been wronged in land-deals, and where he could take reprisal on those who survived the fight on the Oriskany. He was not present at Wyoming, when, for the first time, that community felt the hot breath of war, searing the valley. A new landmark was established, "Queen Esther's Rock," where the savage Montour woman, horribly enraged by the death of a son, killed a day before the battle, sang her terrible war-song and murdered fourteen helpless prisoners arranged in a circle around the rock.

I have seen the rock. Not much to look at if one did not know its horrible history. It shows only a foot and a half above the ground and is about five feet long and nearly as wide. It is largely composed of quartz and much of it has a reddish color, and the superstitious today say it is stained with blood and can never be made clean.

With such a fearful warning one might expect the remaining settlements of the frontier to empty themselves to the Hudson. But such was not the case. Men and women viewed their rude homes, and the love of land conquered fear. Petitions for troops, however, poured in from all isolated quarters, but the first continental forces to be sent to the frontier arrived in Cherry Valley on the twenty-fourth of July, and consisted of troops under Colonel Alden.

When the soldiers came they found the meeting-house turned into a garrison and crowded with men, women and children. Refugees from down the valley and from neighboring settlements had filled all cabins. For six weeks prior to Alden's coming, life in the valley daily grew more confined until all but the scouts, a few hunters and Nancy Martin were virtually prisoners.

Never had I witnessed greater expressions of joy than when the troops came in. Rations of rum were generously provided the soldiers. Joyous as children on a long deferred holiday, the inhabitants walked eagerly about the village, and the men ventured to their neglected fields. Reverend William Johnston on the twenty-sixth preached a heartening sermon from—"Be of good cheer and play the man for our people, and the cities of our God, and the Lord will do what seemeth Him good!"

Nancy Martin continued sad of face. I told her:

"We are safe now. With the troops here Brant will keep away."

"They still burn tobacco to Hawenneyu," she reminded. "Thayendanegea said we should all go away. He meant it. He has not forgotten us."

While the troops were completing the fort, Bolduc and I scouted ahead of Captain Ballard and his sixty men to Butternut Creek, and brought back much livestock and fourteen Tory prisoners. Ballard marched his prisoners to Albany, and Bolduc and I found active employment, scouting ahead of other bands. Six of us had a brush with the Indians at Richfield and killed one of them. This was the first Iroquois I had seen slain. It was on this scout that we all but captured Joseph Brant himself. We knew the house where he was stopping and rushed to surround it in the early morning, but he had fled, leaving the breakfast smoking on the table.

For two months life was the same: I was always leaving for or returning from a scout. One day the Martin girl gravely informed me she had danced the Dance for the Dead. This meant she had commenced at dusk and to the accompaniment of her own singing had performed the ceremony until near morning. The shade of the departed was supposed to be present and participating in the dance.

On my next trip down the valley I found Tall Rock near Valkenberg's farm and gave him the welcome news. He became a new man even as I looked. His period of mourning was finished. The last rites for his squaw had been observed. No longer did he lurk about the farm, hoping to meet me and receive the welcome news. Whereas he had been as one chained, now he was

free to roam widely; and I was with him the night he painted and oiled and arranged his hair, and prepared to take up the hunt for the two white men awaiting to be punished.

THE German Flats daily expected to be attacked. When the hour was about to strike it was only by luck that John Helmer, one scout out of nine sent to Unadilla, escaped from an Indian ambush and managed to reach the flats and give the alarm. So close was the race that the scout arrived only sixty minutes ahead of Brant's mixed band of Tories and Indians. Helmer's warning, however, gave the people time to take refuge in Fort Herkimer and Fort Dayton, occupying opposite sides of the Mohawk. When Brant attacked in the early morning he managed to kill two men, loitering outside the defenses, and to burn the settlement and carry off much of the livestock. But he could not take the forts.

Although only twelve miles separated us from the German Flats, it was twenty-four hours before we learned of the raid. Immediately the settlement was seething with excitement and preparations to withstand the enemy. Alden's troops were occupying the fort. The settlers very sensibly wished to move into that defense and fort themselves as had the people at the flats. But Colonel Alden assured them he had enough scouts out to give timely warning of the enemy's approach, and the poor people remained in their cabins. In truth, they were more strongly forted before the soldiers arrived than they were on the eve of disaster. Heretofore they had relied on themselves; now they were depending on the garrison.

Peter Bolduc wore a long face when he met me after the bad news was received. He abruptly said:

"*M'sieur*, I am worried. Do you know what I fear?"

"That Brant is coming here at last."

"——! That is something certain. We *know* that. I said *fear*. It is this: Colonel Alden and his men do not understand the ways of the savages. Thayendanegea has written the lesson in blood and flames several times, but the garrison has not learned it."

"Scouting-bands are out," I reminded him. "Very soon I shall take to the woods."

"But scouting-bands can not stop the Iroquois from coming here. What if I come in tonight with the fatal word? What will I find?"

"Every one but the sentinels asleep."

"Head of a turtle! Worse than that, *m'sieur!* I will find the officers quartered outside the fort. Tonight they will go outside to sleep. It is very bad. The settlers can not go into the fort to sleep. That is worse."

If I had felt dubious as to Alden's qualifications as a frontier commander, I had consoled myself with believing he would put up a good fight when the enemy came. After all, it was for us who knew Cherry Valley to keep watch away from the settlement and not for the garrison to carry a fight to Brant. I was much depressed after the Frenchman left me, and found myself wondering what would be the fate of the settlement did a messenger arrive at night only an hour ahead of Brant's raiders. The speculation made me shudder.

For several days and nights I was in the forest, scouting between Brant and the valley. I discovered no hostile purpose to report. By degrees the tension in the settlement lessened. I heard one man say Brant would never attack the place because it was garrisoned. I heard some of the soldiers boastfully assure the settlers they would be glad to come to grips with Brant. To grips with the Mohawk chief! When he struck it would be with the unexpectedness of a lance of lightning. But as the days passed and we still lived, other matters dulled the edge of my fear.

Since early in September Governor Clinton had been urging the destruction of Unadilla and Oghwaga, Brant's base and source of supplies. It was not until after the German Flats had been destroyed that this move was made. The expedition was made up of five hundred riflemen and a few Indians; and as it started from Scoharie under Colonel William Butler we of the valley were not called upon to take any part.

From Nancy Martin, who roamed the woods alone despite all that was said, I learned that Tall Rock, the Oneida, was one of Butler's red scouts. Oneidas and some of the Onondagas were continually visiting the settlement and securing food. The girl talked with these and learned things the visitors would tell none of the other settlers.

Bolduc did not trust the Onondagas, but when they vowed their friendship to us we could not treat them as enemies. What few wandered into Cherry Valley, or came deliberately to spy on us, represented their nation as being divided. And deeply did they lament in the Martin girl's hearing the dead council-fire at the old town of Onondaga. I believed they were indifferent to the outcome of the war, as long as the Long House remained intact and the ancient fire was once more rekindled. But already the Eastern Door was torn from its place and its Keepers were fled to the enemy.

Unadilla was burned. Oghwaga was burned, some two-score good houses. Thousands of bushels of corn and a Winter's supply of vegetables were destroyed. Large quantities of domestic fowls were killed, and the invaders lived very high. Half a hundred horses and as many beef-creatures were brought back. Proceeding up the east side of the river as far as the Scotch settlement the riflemen destroyed all that could be of help to Tory or hostile Iroquois. Whenever a Tory's house was reached it went up in flames: A reversal of Brant's practise. The town of Cunahunta, between Oghwaga and Unadilla, also was burned.

On the sixteenth day from the time of its start from Scoharie the expedition was back. It came about that the reason our riflemen met with no resistance was because the Indians had departed for the Delaware just prior to Colonel Butler's arrival. While our forces were burning crops and stout houses, Brant was burning and killing in the Minisink settlements. He found Oghwaga in ashes about the time the riflemen returned to Scoharie. A rare game of hide-and-seek.

I considered this raid on Brant's headquarters a very successful maneuver. Bolduc was a pessimist, and shook his head and complained:

"But, *m'sieur*, the riflemen should have garrisoned Oghwaga. Then of help, yes. *Certain*. But to burn and come away! That will not hold the Iroquois back. They have no corn and must starve? No, no. They will come to take corn and cattle from us."

It was hard to please the trader, but in this instance he was right and the expedition served no lasting purpose.

Thus was ushered in bloody November. That month and the preceding July will always mark the apex of red atrocities in frontier history. And it is a peculiar fact that the two terrible events should occur on that section of the frontier border which, up to the time the Long House spewed forth demoniacal hate, was the least secure and yet the least harassed of any portion of the western settlements in North America. I had fought two years and had been twice wounded in the defense of our wonderful new country, and I was to find my introduction to red savagery, exceeded by white savagery, in this scarlet month of November.

Whether our preacher's text— "The Lord will do what seemeth Him good," or the burning of tobacco to Hawenneyu, brought about that terrible payment, I am not theologian enough to say. But I do believe that my dear uncle would have argued that we are free agents, and that we are supposed to use our God-given mental talents, and should not have permitted the officers to sleep outside the fort, nor to have ignored the lessons taught by the smoke of burning cabins tarnishing the sky. We had eyes and would not see.

CHAPTER XI

THE SMOKE ASCENDS TO HAWENNEYU

EVEN while we of Cherry Valley were deciding all danger was over until the next Summer, Fate was swooping down on us. Preliminaries to a climax are often noisy and confusing: The blow usually falls in silence. Our spies from Oghwaga way—and we depended especially on Tall Rock, the Oneida—brought us assurance that Joseph Brant was about to lead his band into Winter quarters at Niagara. The season was getting late, and there were no supplies for him at Unadilla and Oghwaga. Even Peter Bolduc believed the report. Nancy Martin informed me in the strictest confidence—as the settlers were suspicious of her woods-wanderings—she had been told by an Onondaga, a follower of Brant, that the settlement would not be attacked until after another snow. She believed the Onondaga, and I believed her.

This respite from fear was short-lived, however. Fate began stalking us in the person of Walter Butler. He escaped from Albany, fled through the Long House and

joined his father at Niagara directly after the Wyoming massacre. His flight and its connection with the bloody blotch about to be made on frontier history was not to be foreseen, unfortunately. I was still optimistically of Nancy Martin's belief that we were free from trouble for another six months, when I took the trail alone for a long scout down the valley. The day I left Cherry Valley Bolduc started for the Oneida country. He expected to learn the latest news from Indian Interpreter Dean, who, on Governor Clinton's orders, was soliciting the active allegiance of the Rock People.

The scattering settlers I found still clinging to their farms assured me none of the enemy was north of Ouleout Creek. They had scouted that far very carefully and frequently. I believed my work was to be very tame, and I wished I had delegated it to another while I accompanied the trader. Yet from habit I used great caution in working down the valley. Only at night did I dare resort to a canoe. I passed Valkenberg's farm in the night and reached the mouth of the Charlotte without incident.

On no scouting trip had I less concern for the safety of the settlement than now. I was relying on Tall Rock's report above all others that Brant was leaving the country. Then I all but walked on to a man with a bloody head and had treed myself before I could be conscious of any physical reaction.

The man was in the trail. He wore moccasins, as did almost all our pioneers, coarse, long breeches and a "warmus," or sleeveless garment over his shirt. He was lying face down and had one arm curved around the top of his head. The other arm was at his side, as if he had reached for a weapon even while endeavoring to ward off a blow. His gun, if he carried one, had been taken away by his slayer. The blood from the mortal wound was fresh, and I believed I could have prevented a tragedy, or have contributed myself as a second victim, had I arrived a few minutes earlier. Now, all this did I observe without realizing I had noted anything. The details came to me after I had taken to a tree.

Dropping back behind another tree I began the primary border tactic of encircling a suspicious focal point to learn what influences had cut the circumference of the circle. Either the slayer was close by, planning to add my hair to his belt, or had departed before learning of my approach. So, my eyes had two bits of business: To locate the fellow if he were trying to ambush me, or to discover his trail if he had fled. If the latter he would make back to burned Unadilla to display his scalp to Indians lingering among the ashes of the destroyed town.

I started due west from the body in the trail and felt my way slowly in completing a half-circle which would bring me due east of the dead man. I swung out, and then in, and crossed the ancient path and it was not until on the eastern arc of the half-circle was my painstaking rewarded. It was only the gold and brown of a detached maple leaf standing on edge. But the leaf should have been lying flat.

Dropping to my knees, for the November light was poor at the best, I made out the faint impression of a moccasin track on the forest mold. It came from, instead of returning to, Unadilla. I had located the point where the slayer had entered the circle. Casting back over my entrance from the north, I could recall no signs of a man entering the circle from that direction. True, I had not been looking for any such signs, but had they been there my forest gaze surely would have recorded them. Recollection failing me on this point, I assumed the man had come from outside the trail to meet his death, and that the remaining half of the circle would reveal his murderer's trail.

When I judged I was abreast of my starting-point on the west side of the trail, I halted. One-half the circle had been completed. Some small woods animal scurried away on my right. I turned in that direction to seek the reason of his tarrying so long and came upon the carcass of a freshly killed deer. Instantly I endeavored to reconstruct the tragedy. The settler had come from the south and had killed and butchered a deer. His slayer's trail was waiting me in the north segment of the circle. The settler had gained the trail—

Then my reasoning revolted. The man had not taken the deer into the trail. Only if suspicious of danger would he have left the meat. If warned of danger, he ought at least to have made a fight, discharged his gun: Whereas he was dead before a weapon could be snatched from the belt. Then again, the deer was freshly killed—and I had heard no rifle shot. Ignoring what might be purely negative evidence—for

the woods were close and sound was muffled —there remained the important question: Why did the man leave his kill if he had not scented danger? And if he sensed danger why did he take to the path? He had packed along none of the meat. If something had excited his suspicions, or fear, why was he caught so completely off his guard as to be unable to fire his gun? I sat down at the foot of a big oak and mulled it over.

Then I gently turned over the carcass and examined it. The deer had been killed by two arrows: One through the throat and one just back of the left forward leg. There were no arrows, but the wounds were unmistakable.

Men often whistle when startled into a line of thought; but not in the Iroquois country. Now the tragedy read: An Iroquois scout shot a deer and had been aroused from his task of cutting up the carcass by the careless approach of some settler. The Indian had hidden by the trail and had killed the white man. I entered upon the remaining half-circle. Now I moved slowly, searched most carefully.

The whereabouts of the Indian was the vital problem; life hinged on my learning that. If he had departed I must prove it by finding his return-trail. As I searched the forest floor for signs of his having left the circle, I was surprized by not finding any trace of the white man entering the circle. This was of minor importance so long as the white man was in the trail, and yet lesser mysteries are not relished by woodsmen. I came to the old path without having found any signs of red man or victim. Allowing that the white man had followed the ancient path, I tried to put aside the fact that the minutest scrutiny failed to reveal his passing.

The path was narrow and worn deep and hard, but only a most careful scout could pass it without brushing against the tips of bush boughs and, where the leaves of hardwood trees had fallen, leaving some trace underfoot. If the white man had been so careless as to give notice of his coming, why had he moved so circumspectly?

I entered on the last quarter of my circle, extending from the regular trail to where I had first treed myself. My *orenda* warned me I would soon find the slayer, yet I reached the spot where I had commenced the circle with no discoveries except that single, faint impression of a red moccasin and the slaughtered deer. The stupendous truth burst in on my intelligence with the unexpectedness of Iroquois axes, shattering a cabin-door at midnight. The man in the trail had not entered the circle in which I had found him. This was sheer idiocy. I had only to crane my neck to see the unfortunate. But it was my first reasoning, rather, conclusion, that was in fault. The astounding truth soon conquered my mental gropings; and I drew my ax and leaned my rifle against a tree.

I stole to the path. I held my breath as I edged over the last few feet and stood near the head of the prostrate figure. Here was another discovery; and it fitted in with my last reconstruction of the whole affair. I was positive the left arm had been half-curved around the head. Now the elbow stuck out at one side and the hand was under the chin. Possibly a muscular contraction of a man just slain. The top of the head was smeared thickly with blood, too much bleeding for a scalp-wound, I thought.

I squatted on my heels within three feet of the silent figure and gave particular attention to the hair. It was much coarser than that of the average white man's. Then I glimpsed the snaky glitter of a small black eye between half-closed lids.

HE LEFT the ground as if possessing the leg muscles of a panther, and I met him in midair. He grunted and I growled from the force of the impact, and our legs entwined and we fell on our sides. His right hand gripped a knife, but my left hand had seized the wrist before we fell. Nor did I have a chance to use my ax as his long fingers were clamped around my wrist. I held the advantage as his knife-hand was under us and my ax was uppermost. He struggled mightily to turn me over, so he might wrest his weapon clear and use it. From a boy I had been learning red wrestling tricks and matching them with the white man's ruses, I held him anchored on his right side.

Hissing like a snake he dashed his head into my face and snapped with his teeth. With a convulsive effort prompted by the pain from an all but broken nose, I lunged my right arm upward. His grip on my wrist did not weaken but I could move my hand a trifle. I was holding the ax well toward the end of the handle. I jerked my

hand forward a few inches. The edge of the ax almost touched the bloody skull.

He squirmed most desperately and sought to drag my arm down, but my bunched arm-muscles gave me a leverage he could not lessen. I held my advantage and, with the next flirt of the hand, broke the skin on his head. That bite of the ax, insignificant in itself, caused him to forget his cunning and misuse his strength. He released my wrist and grabbed for the ax-handle, but I had been waiting for that move; and I killed him there in the path without our positions changing more than a few inches.

My first move when I realized I had won the fight was to scuttle back to my rifle and scan the surrounding timber. The fellow appeared to be alone. Had he believed friends were near, he would have called for help. After a while I returned to the trail and noted how he had drawn his long hair forward and had smeared it with blood from the deer. I gave him credit for being a very brave man to attempt such a decoy.

I took time now to observe him as an individual, and was much agitated to discover beneath the war-paint on the ghastly convulsed features that he was a Mohawk, called in English Thomas Lebanon, named after Dr. Wheelock's school which he had attended. He was older than I, but we had roamed the woods together, excellent hunting and fishing companions. And he had known me from the first glimpse and had endeavored to kill me.

I carried him from the trail and left his knife gripped in the dead hand. Doubtless the clothing he wore had been taken from some poor settler, and to learn the identity of the victim, I examined the pockets. I found nothing beyond a slip of paper wrapped in a piece of cloth. The ground was too hard and the time too precious for me to give burial, but I covered him decently with brush and weighted down the whole with fallen timber to discourage the wolves. It was a horrible experience, and yet he meant to kill me while knowing I was Benajah Whittlesey. Joseph Brant would not have acted thus.

On examining the paper I found written on it:

Captan John, or Deseronto
about 500 left here october 23 for Karightongegh. They said that Karightongegh shall be burned. Sayenqueraghta is the leader. Mary Degonwadonti, or Molly Brant.

It would have been a simple task for an enemy spy, even a clumsy white, to have killed me at his leisure as I stood there, staring at the message. Molly Brant, Sir William Johnson's red wife, had fled to Onondaga early in the war and was now believed to be living in some Seneca town. Her mention of the influential Seneca chief—Old Smoke, we called him—satisfied me she had written from the Seneca country.

Thomas Lebanon's possession of the paper suggested Captain John had passed it on to Brant by the Mohawk, whom I had killed before he could deliver it. If Brant knew of a large band of Senecas coming, he would delay his departure for Niagara. But whether Brant remained on the border, or went into Winter quarters, there was the half a thousand Senecas to be reckoned with.

Never had I made such time in reaching Cherry Valley as I did after reading Molly Brant's message. My news was stale.

Peter Bolduc was back from the Oneida country a day ahead of me and had brought important information from Indian Interpreter Dean. I found Bolduc at Mr. Wells' house, and his news was, if anything, more sinister than mine.

Walter Butler, still smarting over his arrest and imprisonment in Albany, had started east from Niagara and had met Brant, bound for Winter quarters, on the Genesee. Young Butler had with him not only a large number of Senecas but also a detachment of his father's Rangers. And he carried orders for Brant to serve under him. Brant had no liking for Walter Butler, and it galled him to serve in a subordinate position. Yet the two of them were coming east to strike another blow at Tryon County before snow fell.

Molly Brant's letter corroborated this news, and evidenced that the Seneca messenger, having missed Brant on the way to the Susquehanna and failing to find him at the ashes of Unadilla, had entrusted the letter to Thomas Lebanon for delivery.

Colonel Alden spent much of his time in the Wells home and slept there nights. While Bolduc and I were comparing experiences, a messenger arrived from Major Cochran, commanding at Fort Scuyler. This man brought Dean's warning as transmitted to Cochran. It was the same as Bolduc had learned at first-hand. Major

Cochran made a thorough job of it, for, besides sending word to Cherry Valley, he notified the three forts on the Scoharie. After the messenger continued on to the fort, I spoke aside with Bolduc and anxiously asked—

"What does Colonel Alden think of it?"

The Frenchman threw out his hands in a pantomime of disgust, or despair, and answered:

"He says it's probably a lie. At the most it's much exaggerated. He believes his garrison is strong enough to whip any prowling band of Iroquois."

"Maybe, if they were Morgan's riflemen. What do the people think?"

"*M'sieur*, it is strange. But the people seem to think there is less danger than when Brant was raiding the frontier alone. Snow will come soon, they say. The Indians will be half-hearted in any attack they may make, because the snow is near, they say. But the Oneida scout who brought the word to M'sieur Dean, says Butler will come with eight hundred men.

"Six hundred of these are Iroquois, mostly Senecas. Fifty British troops and a hundred and fifty Tories make up the number. The Oneida claims he sat in a war-council where it was decided. In our garrison we have two hundred and fifty men—with the officers sleeping outside the fort. Foot of a fox!"

"But it's not known they come to attack us. Young Butler may wish to raid down the Mohawk."

"Here. It is here the blow will fall. *Certain*. They must come up from Tioga Point. This is the largest settlement near the head of the east branch of the Susquehanna. Make no mistake, M'sieur Whittlesey. They come to attack Cherry Valley."

Yet I hoped for the best; hoped for a thick blanket of snow. The Frenchman's words troubled me, however, and made me afraid. I went to the Martin cabin and was glad to find Mr. Martin taking his nap. I asked Miss Nancy for her opinion.

She told me!

"It's coming, Benajah. The people will not go away. Tall Rock, the Oneida, came yesterday and tried to talk to Colonel Alden and tell him that Butler and his Senecas and Brant and his Mohawks and Onondagas are at Tioga Point——"

"There already?" I cried.

"They surely are there. The Oneida, pretending to be against us, was at the Point two days. He says it's decided to strike Cherry Valley."

"Where is Tall Rock now?"

"On a scout."

Inside the next twenty-four hours General Edward Hand paid us a flying visit, and his coming did much to bolster up the courage of the people. Early in October, it was believed, he contemplated withdrawing our garrison. But now he heard the various reports with much gravity. Molly Brant's letter impressed him. He delighted the settlement by deciding:

"I'm returning to the Mohawk at once. I will have Colonel Klock bring, or send, another two hundred men here."

Naturally we were much heartened by this promise and our fears dropped away. With the troops increased to four hundred and fifty, and reenforced by the settlers, we were confident Cherry Valley would never be a repetition of Wyoming. General Hand departed and promptly sent back word that Colonel Klock would join us on November ninth. At the time we received this assurance, Colonel Klock was only twenty miles distant. November ninth dawned and we eagerly waited for the stout two hundred men to break through the forest wall. But the day passed and Klock failed to arrive.

ON THE ninth Bolduc started on another scout to the Oneida country. Colonel Alden quieted the people by sending a sergeant and eight men on a scout down the valley. Our concern was quickened by an express from Fort Scuyler, warning us that a large force was on its way from Tioga Point and would fall on the settlement at any moment. Colonel Alden refused to believe this bad news and insisted that the scouts down the valley would bring back word in time for us to fort ourselves. Then again, Colonel Klock was bound to arrive at any hour.

The people wanted to move into the fort, but, as he had ruled before, the commander refused them, insisting the settlement was amply protected from a surprize attack. I had planned to scout north and locate Klock, and urge upon him the necessity of haste. I now decided I could do the most good down the valley whence must come the enemy. I set out several hours behind the sergeant and his men. The courage of

this scouting band can not be questioned, but its behavior on the trail bore out Bolduc's assertion that the soldiers were not used to Indian ways. Only riflemen should have been posted on the frontier.

I moved swiftly, and the sergeant and his men must have proceeded slowly, for by dusk I began smelling smoke. It was rank and thick. Half an hour later I paused on a low, fire-swept ridge and looking down through the gaunt, blackened stumps saw a big fire. It was such a one as children might make in Maytime after dragging the boughs, used in banking the farmhouses for Winter, into the field. I could see no figures walking between me and the fire, and I had no intention of approaching it. If any enemy were within a mile of the blaze he would be closing in. The fire was a trap. I followed along the western slope of the ridge until south of, and out of sight of, the flames.

It was very dark. Stealthy rustlings in the dead leaves at the foot of the slope sent me climbing. The *swish* of feet in the leaves, carpeting the crest of the ridge, brought me to a halt. A considerable body of men was moving north, passing above and below me.

The horrible realization that the settlement was soon to be attacked left me weak and helpless for a few moments. From the peak of many years I can look back and know that while I feared it might be attacked, and shared the uneasiness of the settlers, I had not visioned it as something that must happen. The actuality of those confident, scuffling feet above and below me was overwhelming. Men think of death as something impersonal. It happens to all and yet remains unreal to the individual until that supreme moment when he *knows*.

Inexorable fate was hurrying north. The settlement was doomed. But so strong is the God-given habit of hope that after a bit I got myself together, and remembered the nine men at the fire. One of them, or I, would get clear to spread the alarm up the valley. Surely by this time Colonel Klock had reached the village with his two hundred troops. Cherry Valley should have the one chance.

I started traveling in the direction of the fire, still between the hostile lines at the foot and along the top of the ridge. Directly ahead of me a voice called out in the Seneca dialect—

"A big fire burns. Our young men will surround it."

I discharged my rifle in the desperate hope the sound would carry and warn the sergeant's band.

"Who fired that gun?" sharply called a voice from the top of the ridge.

The Seneca ahead of me made no answer, and I knew he was stealing back to investigate. I drew myself up into a naked tree, but did not dare attempt to reload. I heard the soft *pad, pad* of moccasins below my perch; then men were exchanging low words, and from the occasional rustlings, as a foot found a patch of leaves, I knew the slope was being carefully searched. There was a slight chance that few, if any, of the enemy would be between me and the fire, if I kept to the middle of the slope and started at once. The Seneca had come from that direction and was some distance beyond my tree. If I could make it a race until ahead of those on the crest of the ridge, then I might cut over the top and down the eastern slope and carry the alarm.

A long drawn-out "*Ah-h-hum*" sort of howl, dropping a note near the end then exploding in a terrific, high-pitched screech, made me draw up my legs and stick to the tree. It was the war-cry of the Iroquois. A white man far ahead began bawling:

"They caught them! Caught them all! Regular nest of them!"

Again the war-cry pealed out in the darkness. From up the ridge a man shouted—

"Make any fight?"

The answer came:

"No! The —— fools were all asleep!"

That wild war-cry told invaders and Benajah Whittlesey the whole story. Nine men out on a scout had gone to sleep around a big fire and had awakened prisoners. Bolduc's bag of talk held truth. Brave men ordinarily. Good fort-soldiers, but helpless when coping with the stealthy ways of the red man. To leave the tree while Tories and Iroquois on all sides were exchanging talk would invite capture. The Iroquois made boasts in all dialects except that of the Oneidas. White men talked more ferociously than did their red allies.

Some of the men passed directly beneath me, all anxious to reach the fire and see the prisoners.

"There was a gun fired up here," I heard the Seneca say.

"One of our white brothers fired it," suggested another warrior. "They say they will cook the white men until they tell how many men are at the white town."

"Sayenqueraghta knows no man of the Hodenosaunee fired the gun," insisted Old Smoke.

He had commanded the Senecas at Wyoming, and was a great leader because he allowed no trifling victory to divert him from a set purpose. Now he was determined to learn who discharged a rifle.

"If a white brother fired the gun let him speak," he called out.

None of the others, however, seemed disposed to solve the mystery. There were nine prisoners awaiting to be put to the question.

The steps below quickened, and I heard white men swearing lustily as they bumped into trees. I waited until I believed all had passed north of my tree. Then I slipped to the ground. Barely had my moccasins touched the dry leaves before a gun banged a few rods down the slope, and I heard the heavy ball smash into a tree. Then the Seneca was crying:

"Ho! A fox is here! They say we must catch him."

And he added the hunting call of his people to bring some of his warriors back to the chase.

ALL day the sky had threatened rain or snow, and it was black in the growth. I made up the ridge, the noise of my feet in the dead leaves furnishing a night trail the Seneca could follow. But if the forest floor betrayed my position, so did it keep me advised as to the pursuit. I gained the top of the ridge and suddenly the treacherous carpet ended and I was noiselessly treading the floor of an evergreen growth. This advantage extended well down the eastern slope, and I hoped the chief of the First Fire would weary of pressing the hunt at haphazard.

That he would send out small bands to cut me off from reaching Cherry Valley went without question. However, that was a danger reserved for the morning's first light. I prayed it would not snow and reveal my trail. Reaching the foot of the ridge, I started as near northeast as I could figure it, planning to travel until dawn before swinging back toward the settlement.

With no stars to guide me I depended on my sense of location, and the gray dawn found me too far east. Perhaps it was a lucky error, for after climbing a tall tree on a hill I counted twenty Indians west of me. They were scouting along the edge of a blow-down, and I knew the country was being thoroughly combed. That day was one of the most miserable I ever endured. The physical suffering was nothing, but the conviction that the black wings of death were about to flutter over the valley plunged me into unsuspected depths of torment.

In the afternoon I commenced working to the west. Old Smoke's hopes of catching me must have been extinguished, for, although I grew more reckless as the short day began to darken, I saw no signs of the enemy. Completely exhausted I fell on my face in an evergreen thicket. I had been on my feet a day and a half, and had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours.

As I remained there in the first dusk, trying to breathe fresh strength into my long form, a partridge lighted near me. I slowly drew my ax and threw it clumsily enough, but the range was short. The cold of the raw, gray day was biting deep into my bones now that I had ceased my exertions. Reckless as to consequences, I dressed the partridge and in the shelter of the evergreens kindled a small fire and crouched before it with my blanket, all but hiding the blaze. Dry fuel had been obtained from a pine stump, and I fed the flames until my breeches and leggings were scorched. I started to broil the bird, but devoured it when it was barely warmed through.

When I finished, only the feathers and bones remained. I tried to go on and found my legs were weak. I kept the fire burning and rested with my feet to it for another hour. Then I started for the settlement.

TO BE CONCLUDED

Vengeance

by Jack Oppenheimer

THE big man opened his eyes and blinked into the darkness of the cabin. With the least possible motion he turned to see the luminous dial of the cheap alarm-clock that stood on the shelf across the room. Five o'clock. He lifted himself on one elbow and stuck his head out of the bunk.

"Hey, Dinky, you lazy bum, get out."

From the other bunk across the room there came a rustle of tight-drawn blankets and a low, nasal, unintelligible whine.

"None o' that now," said the big man. "You act like one o' them actresses 'cause you got a bent back-bone and a shape like an old crabapple-tree. Get out."

"You big bully," whined Dinky Bloom. "Why don't you get out yourself, Tim?"

Big Tim Lounsberry moved luxuriously in his blankets.

"I'm a gent o' leisure and a son o' rest, I am. Not a little rat like you, all bent up. Hard labor for that back-bone o' yours. Maybe it'll straighten you up like a man."

His answer was a snore. Big Tim reached into the darkness and picked a boot off the floor.

"Sleep, will you!"

He flung the boot across the room. *Thud!*

"Ow! Lay off, will you? I'm gettin' up. Don't larrup me; you hear?"

There was a bump of stocking feet on the floor, and the cripple sat up on his bunk with a yawn and groan.

"There'll be plenty of spittin', clawin', livin' pelts in the traps today. Its colder'n I ever knew it to be," said Big Tim. "Mind you kill 'em 'fore you loosen the iron, else they'll eat you, you little camel."

"Ain't no camel," wheezed the cripple. "What's the matter with you going and looking after the traps today?"

"Told you once. Think I'm going to tramp miles in this cold? I'm boss here, and I ain't the working kind o' boss. You get out or I'll show you why."

The little man gazed into the darkness in the direction of his partner's bunk and swore softly under his breath. His features were convulsed with rage and hatred. He stroked the hump between his shoulders gently and rocked his poor, crippled body from side to side. It was fortunate for him that Big Tim could not see across the hut.

"What're you so quiet about?"

Big Tim wrapped his blankets tighter about him.

"Make it snappy," he added, "and throw your blanket over here before you go."

"What you need is a nursemaid," jeered the cripple. "Somebody to feed you your bottle."

"I'm delicate. I got to look out for my health," agreed the big man sarcastically.

He brought his fist down on the side of the bunk with a bang.

"Get started, you hear?"

"Goin'," whined Dinky. "Goin'."

He had donned his boots and his furs and was just pulling on the mittens when Tim called:

"Let the mut out. I ain't figgerin' to get up soon."

Dinky pulled the mittens off and groped his way to a little door on the floor of the hut. He pulled it open and was immediately embraced by a small and hilarious dog.

"Cut it," commanded Dinky; but he liked it just the same.

Here was a living creature that appreciated favors. Dinky had dug the hole under the hut and put the trap-door in the floor.

The little dog trotted over to Tim Lounsberry's bunk and attempted to lick its master's face. Tim brought a big fist down on the side of the dog's head, and it collapsed in a moaning bundle some five feet away.

Dinky paused sharply at the door.

"What you want to do that for?"

He hadn't seen what had happened, but he sensed the meaning of the dog's whine.

"You mind your own business," growled his partner. "It's my dog."

There was a scrape of wood as the door opened and shut. Dinky Bloom had gone to inspect the traps.

ALL day long through the bitter, cutting cold Dinky Bloom crept over the snow-covered slopes, propelled by an incongruous shuffling motion of his body. All day long he brooded on Big Tim Lounsberry and clenched his teeth together with rage.

He had met Big Tim down in town. A drunken brute, feared and hated, but Dinky had little choice. He was weak of body, and the physically handicapped did not find trapping a paying trade. He needed a partner, a good, strong partner who would tend to the traps while Dinky sat in the hut and prepared the skins.

Dinky could prepare skins. They fetched more money than those of the other trappers; but his physical handicaps made him little sought after as a companion in one of the huts for the long Winter. Therefore he had built a hut of his own, and if his line of traps had not been so extensive as those of the other trappers his better prepared skins had fetched him a bigger price, and he had managed to make as much money as any of the other men.

Of late, however, pains in his body had been recurring more frequently. The last Winter there had been days when Dinky was obliged to remain in his bunk; and they had been the coldest days when food for the animals is scarcest and trapping best. So Dinky had determined to get a partner for himself, a big, husky partner who could drag in the kill and leave the skinning and curing to Dinky.

Big Tim had seemed the very man if only Dinky could separate him from whisky. Tim himself seemed willing, almost anxious, to be so separated. He was broke. He had no hut, no traps, no paraphernalia. The best he could expect was to spend the Winter with some other trapper who would pay little for hard work.

Then Dinky had suggested to him that they go into equal partnership, Dinky to contribute hut, traps and skill, Big Tim to do the heavy work and promise not to get drunk. And Tim agreed.

When Tim arrived at the hut late in the Fall he brought a barrel with him.

"What's the barrel for?" Dinky had asked.

"It's empty. We can use it for water when the brooks freeze. Put some snow in the barrel and let it stand near the fireplace," Tim explained.

"But what's the top on for?"

"Oh," said Tim glibly, "I'll knock the top out pretty soon."

For a time Tim behaved well, and Dinky thought that he had struck the ideal condition at last. Here was a hard-working partner. It looked as if the two of them would have well-lined purses next Spring.

Then the snow came. It snowed and snowed and snowed. The mountainside changed. Trees shrunk in size as the snow piled up at the base of their trunks. Roads became obliterated. Dinky settled down for the long, lonely Winter.

Tim bethought him of his barrel and rolled it into the hut one stormy morning.

"Why," said Dinky, who was watching him, "it seems to be heavy."

"It is," answered Tim.

He seized a hatchet; and as Dinky thought he was going to knock the top off he bent over and hammered out a plug in the side of the barrel. Instantly the smell of strong, raw whisky flooded the little cabin. Tim placed a wooden spigot in the hole left by the plug.

Dinky stood watching the proceedings in

amazement. His somewhat slow brain failed to realize the meaning of the all-pervading aroma.

"Whisky!" he gasped at length.

Big Tim came out under his true colors.

"Whisky!" he laughed, rocking his big body back and forth, his hand placed on his hips in an attitude of bravado. "You little worm! Did you think you could separate a man from his liquor? Look at me! I'm Big Tim Lounsberry, and I drinks my liquor straight. Not by the glass, not by the bottle, not by the jug, but by the barrel. Get that! By the barrel. And another thing. I ain't doing the work round here no more."

He stooped; and, applying his mouth to the spigot, he took a long drink.

"Think I'm going to slave for you? I'll stay here and do the skinnin', my pretty little prima donna."

Dinky had known it was useless to argue. Swiftly he grasped the hatchet and flung it at the barrel. In his haste he threw the blunt end first, and it bounced from the side of the barrel with a harmless thud.

Then the rage of Big Tim had mounted, and he had beaten Dinky till the latter was nigh to pulp. Dinky still bore those bruises on his body and the pain of them in his soul. Every day he had been obliged to tramp across the country and inspect the traps.

Never had there been a day like this one. It began to snow, and a gale rose. The snow cut Dinky to the marrow. The cold ate through his furs, and his entire body began to shiver. His teeth chattered with rage and hate.

The old pains began to shoot into his back. They would get worse. He knew they would. He couldn't stand weather like this any more. Soon he would sink in the snow, unable to walk.

"Not that, not that!" he murmured.

All thoughts of the man in the cabin were gone now. His mind focused upon this new peril. He must hold out until he could again reach the cabin. He had gone over but half the traps. Big Tim would beat him if he came in without the skins. The big fellow was drunk no doubt; he had been drunk for the past two weeks. Liquor seemed to give him cunning. He knew if skins were missing; he knew. He had known once before when Dinky in a gust of rage had turned back without completing the rounds.

On that occasion Tim picked the little man up and held him high at arm's length.

"If you do that again I'll kill you," he had said with a sneer, and tossed Dinky through the open door.

Fearful, Dinky toiled on. It was better to die in the snow like a man than to die in the humiliating clutches of a bully. Dinky no longer felt the cold or the snow cutting at his face. Great drafts of passionate hate filled his soul. He drowned in it. It made him pant; it caused his blood to run warm and perspiration to stand on his brow.

"I'll kill him," he muttered. "I'll kill him when I get back."

Then came pictures, fearful pictures, of Big Tim. Dead! All in a huddled heap! Big Tim broiling on a spit while he, Dinky, a hunchbacked devil with a pitchfork, poked him to see if he was done.

"Gad," he groaned, and wiped the snow and ice from his beard.

His breath felt hot between his lips, and his throat was dry.

"I'm sick," he wheezed. "Must have a fever."

He put a handful of snow into his mouth and felt it melt with great relish.

"Tastes good," he thought. "Tastes good;" and he ate another handful.

In some way he cleaned out the traps. Once he let a small animal escape because he did not recognize what kind of a creature it was. He took it for the dog, the little puppy that Big Tim beat. They were both alike, Dinky and the dog, only the dog could keep his self-respect. It was a dog's lot to be beaten by his master.

Dinky waved his gun aloft. He shouted till the silent trees replied, echoing and reechoing.

In some way he dragged the carcasses of the animals with him. In some way he started back, still mad, still shouting, his soul still black with rage, swearing strange oaths that he would kill Big Tim upon his return.

The pains had increased now. His backbone was a knife of pain, cutting him in half. His lungs felt heavy; he could hardly breathe. The blood throbbed through his temples, and little red spots danced before his eyes. He sank to the ground and lay there panting.

This would be the end of Dinky Bloom.

"Died in the snow," they would say in town next year. "Died in the snow. Guess that back-bone gave out on him at last. Lucky stiff, Tim Lounsberry. Got all the pelts for himself."

At that thought fire ran through Dinky's veins. He hadn't thought of that before. If he died Big Tim would get all the skins. All the skins. He was shivering from cold, but his hate steeled him. He tried to stand up, but failed, tumbling into a twisted, moaning heap.

He must get on, he must get on. It was imperative not to die. If he died that bully would get all the skins. All the skins. He'd kill Big Tim first, then he'd die. That was it. Die later, after he had killed Tim.

With an effort Dinky raised himself upon his hands and knees and began to creep. Slowly, slowly he crept, but he gained ground. The cold was intense. His blood seemed to freeze in his veins. Still he crept onward. He couldn't stop. If he stopped Tim would get the pelts, all the pelts.

After each short distance he stopped and lay still, resting with panting breath. The cold would creep, slowly, insidiously, over him, numbing his body. It could not numb the brain. Always the thought of the pelts that would fall to Tim's profit should he die kept Dinky moving.

How he played with the cold! How he fooled death! He let the icy fingers creep round and round him. Then he would think:

"Tim'll spend it on whisky and women, and I'll be in the grave. Gosh, how he'll laugh in his beard! Little dwarf! Cripple! Camel! Rat! Up! On, on!"

The creeping would begin again. Every movement was unfelt. He would have to look at an arm or a leg to see if it was moving. He was numb. The cold no longer hurt him. Even the fingers in his mittens felt like leather when he rubbed them, one against the other.

"Little dwarf! Cripple! Camel! Rat!"

Onward, onward! The cabin was not far away now. Neither was death. In sudden panic he stopped to inspect his rifle. It was loaded. He made heroic attempts to cock the hammer. No use. His fingers were numb.

He banged his hand against the stock of the gun. Sharp pains shot along his arm. Buzzings, pricklings of pain came upon his hand. At last one finger moved. It was enough. The hammer came back with a click.

The stiff lips pulled painfully back in a horrid grin. He was ready now. The cabin was in sight. Just a little longer, just a little farther!

Again that awful, slow progress. The misformed body, now creeping, now rolling, but ever getting nearer to its goal. The eyes hard-set, wide open, glaring with a light that must have scorched the very snow. The breath coming in gasps, shorter, shorter.

Now the cabin door was within his reach. It was closed. He clawed at it. No handhold anywhere. No ledge to supply a grip. He beat the snow with his hands until he could again feel the blood throb in them. Then he pulled the knife from his belt and inserted the blade under the door.

Slowly, inch by inch, it opened. It was dark inside, for night had long since come upon him. He crept into the hut. All was silent. He listened for the breathing of his enemy. He heard nothing.

"Can't hear any more," he thought. "Must be pretty near gone. Got to make it snappy."

He raised his gun carefully and took aim in the general direction of Big Tim's bunk. One moment of hesitation to steady his shaking hands, and he pulled the trigger. There was a report, a flash, and Dinky fell on his back, thrown down by the recoil of the gun.

But he had seen. On the floor, so near him that he could touch it by stretching out his hand, lay Big Tim's body. The gun-flash had shown his face, purple and horribly twisted.

"Cheated!" moaned Dinky. "Cheated again! The D. T.'s got him before I did."

Something tugged at Dinky's gloves. Something licked his face. There was a hilarious panting of breath. Dinky crept to his bunk and lifted himself into it. A small form cuddled down next to him. The elixir of victory flushed Dinky's veins as a moist, warm tongue licked his face.

"His dog," he gurgled joyously. "His dog loved me better'n him. What a man! Even his dog hated him."

And Dinky Bloom slept.

Black Honor

Georges Surdez

A Complete Novelette

Author of "The Bridge," "When the Sun Sat Down," etc.

MESNARD awoke suddenly.

He had fallen asleep on the canvas chair, propped against the veranda railing of the commander's bungalow, after an unusually heavy dinner. He found himself dimly conscious that something had gone wrong. He arose, stared up and down the semi-obscurity of the veranda, paced its length several times, seeking for the cause of the noise that had brought him from full sleep to absolute clarity of mind.

Before him, pallid in the moonlight, the yard of the Say Post was outlined, forming a perfect square with his bungalow as one side, the Spahis barracks another, the stables and the east protecting wall of mud, the third and the last. Nothing there, save some six feet away from the railing, asleep on the sand, his house-boy. Over by the Spahis lines, great fires were blazing, shining redly against the somber sides of the row of huts. And from there came a burst of voices, a repetition no doubt of the uproar that had awakened him.

The white man smiled.

Strange, he thought, the feeling of impending fatality the most natural noises produce upon a man when awakened out of a sound sleep. He passed his hand over his face, felt the small lump of a mosquito bite, and again smiled. The petty, almost comical, details of his life made him subconsciously long for excitement. It was difficult, after the exciting existence of column warfare which had been his and that of his men for months, to settle down again to the routine of the outpost, with only a quiet patrol now and then for distraction. Probably the Spahis found life dull also, hence the quarrel which was evidently in progress, for the voices grew louder.

Henri Mesnard fumbled in his coat pocket, for papers and tobacco, and rolled a cigaret. Smoking leisurely, he leaned on the railing, and looked absent-mindedly at the Spahis. He could discern the sharp black outlines of their bodies against the red flames, and the high-lights on the rounded muscles bulging their black skins.

Splendid men, these native cavalrymen, he again told himself. He could ask anything of them. Against the well-handled riders of Samory, they had compelled the admiration of even the hard-bitten commanding colonel, who knew soldiers, white, black and yellow.

"Comparable to the light cavalry of the First Empire," the officer had said, and Mesnard, whose greatest interest in life was his work, his men, glowed over the compliment. And he was happy to feel that the praise was well-deserved.

Naturally, he reasoned on, it could not

be otherwise. These were picked men, almost without exception sons or relatives of various *Famas*—kings—of the Sudan, inheriting fighting-instinct and pride of race, which, after all, are the two main qualities in a warrior. Discipline, they had. It had proved no easy task to whip them into an homogeneous whole, but Mesnard was satisfied the task had been well done. His sole regret was that the climate of the region, murderous to horses of other lands, made it impossible to mount his men as well as they deserved. The mounts were *kumrah*, native horses, sturdy beasts, but small in size.

Man for man they were superior to the *Tirailleurs*—Native Infantry—the physical requirements being higher. The *Tirailleurs* in some cases were impeded by members drawn from tribes far from warlike, who affected the morale of the whole. Not so with the Spahis. One of his men was a direct descendant, proved by scrolls, of the famous Askia Soni Ali, who had ruled the northern Sudan at the time Columbus, in his three tiny hulks, set out for the Unknown.

Lieutenant Mesnard stretched, decided to go to bed, and turned toward the door of his bedroom.

As he did so, the clamor of the men redoubled, and again he faced the line of fires, two hundred yards distant. What was going on there? He felt loath to interfere: Blacks have a way of quarreling loudly, of heaping abuse upon one another, and then settling down amiably to normal conversation.

There is nothing so detrimental to prestige as ridicule, and Mesnard felt he would cut a ridiculous figure, should he arrive on the run to find a mere palaver going on. He glanced at his watch; it was lacking twenty minutes of nine, and the men had a full right to be awake. He felt sleepy, owing to a four-hour hunting trip in the nearby bush, but could not expect that others should share his mood.

He tried to guess the reason for the trouble, and immediately surmised—cards. Negroes take quickly to all sorts of gambling, and cards had become a passion. The majority could not play the more complicated games, but all could play a sort of *bataille*, a French game which requires no skill. The pack is divided into two equal parts, and the play consists of the highest card taking the next, Ace beating King, King winning over Queen, and so forth. Mesnard—although regulations were against allowing black troopers to gamble—had found it impossible to control them, and had tacitly permitted the games, as other officers had been compelled to do.

Of late, trouble had arisen, although Mesnard could not understand how any one could manage to cheat at this most childish game. The steady winners belonged to a small clique, four men, who were at the same time the sulky members of the detachment. They were led by a large Tukuleur, Sani Diallo, who although brave enough in battle, was a pest in barracks, a whining, work-shirking private who could keep neither himself nor his horse well-groomed.

This man's voice, Mesnard could recognize, and he was not surprized. Whenever anything went wrong he could usually locate Diallo in the midst of the uproar. But the fellow's opponent this time was of different caliber. Mesnard heard Matar Bo, corporal, shouting in clicking Mandigo. Matar Bo was a good man, wearer of two medals, and on the list for promotion to sergeant, providing he re-enlisted when his discharge came in two weeks. Mesnard did not draw a favorable conclusion from a quarrel between these two; it was bad to have the good element pitted against the worst in a gambling fray.

He was about to awaken the serving-boy, and send him to request quiet, when he heard the clicking of steel on steel, and the unmistakable sound of a saber being drawn from the scabbard. He knew that such a gesture always went to its logical conclusion with these men, and that, blades once bared, there would be bloodshed, unless he interferred.

He vaulted the railing, and ran swiftly across the yard, his light sandals making no sound on the spongy turf. As he ran, he saw two struggling figures about which others were hovering; he heard shouts of anger, a cry. Although it took him scarcely thirty seconds to arrive at the spot, all was over when he elbowed his way through the silent men.

A bloody saber in his hand, his cheeks bleeding from scratches, Matar Bo, the corporal, stared at him. At his feet, immense in the ruddy light, lay Sani Diallo, evidently quite dead, his jaw relaxed, his tongue lolling out of the corner of his mouth. On the thick lips, faded to a rosy gray, pink bubbles formed and burst.

The lieutenant's premonition had been right; there had been fatality in the air.

DURING that time when Mesnard knelt beside the prone man and investigated the wounds with careful fingers, no one spoke. Matar Bo, mechanically, had wiped the saber clean on a rag offered him by a companion. His eyes were dulled, he appeared like a somnambulist. Mesnard could see that he felt no horror at his act, for the black had seen death too often. Also that he did not realize the importance of murder in the white man's eyes.

The lieutenant reached out for the saber, which Matar Bo relinquished, still silent.

"Whose saber is it, Matar Bo?" he asked.

"Diallo's."

"How did it come in thy hand?"

Matar Bo spread his hands wide, shook his head.

"He go kill me. I take it and kill him," he said.

"Why?" insisted Mesnard, vaguely hoping for a sound reason.

Matar Bo looked away uneasily, shuffled his feet in the dust. Five or six feet away, thinking himself hidden from his superior's eyes, behind the back of another private, a man reached down and picked up something. Mesnard, now white-faced and furious, stepped forward and brushed the hand away with his foot.

As he had thought there was a deck of cards.

"About that?" he said.

"Yassah," some one replied.

Matar Bo was shaking now. The fierce rage of killing once passed, the reaction had set in. He seemed to realize from the lieutenant's anger that he was in for a bad moment. The Spahi had no idea how far the matter of punishment would be pushed. Between killing one of Samory's riders and killing a private enemy he drew little difference. His contact with white men had extended over several years, but always his relations to them had been that of private to officer, and killings among the Spahis were not common enough for him to know that death was the penalty.

Mesnard, to assert his rank, drew a bench close, sat down, and rolled another cigaret. His perturbation must be disguised. A cool head is the mark of a man. He was afraid he would reveal his emotion. Of all his men, he liked Matar Bo more than any other.

"Corporal," he said, slowly, "tell me what started the fight."

Matar Bo hesitated, then was stubbornly silent.

"The man who kills a man will be shot, according to the law," said Mesnard. "Thou art in a bad mess, Matar Bo. It is best to talk."

Matar Bo opened his eyes wider. Shot! That was what Mesnard had said; Mesnard, whose life he had saved, who had obtained medals for him. And over the death of a worthless man like Diallo!

"Diallo and I play cards, lieutenant. I do so—" here Matar Bo gestured to illustrate the shuffling— "then I give cards. We play. I win. Them others win."

He indicated the men behind him, who approved by motions of their heads.

Mesnard understood; they had pooled their money, and bet it all on one game.

"You won," agreed Mesnard. "Then what was the palaver over?"

"That be one game. Another game: Diallo he do so with cards—" again the shuffling movement of the fingers— "I no like him. I look good. Another man he give Diallo other cards——"

Yes, it had been Diallo's fault. Also the reason for his constant winning had been revealed. Diallo switched the decks, replacing the one he had shuffled with one already prepared. Rather clever for a native, Mesnard thought. Then he recalled that the Spahi had spent two months in a hospital in Kayes, and probably some kind white private had initiated him into the higher knowledge of cheating, as practised among the troopers.

"And then?" he urged.

"I no pay money, lieutenant. And I keep other money. Diallo say I no pay this game, I give back money of other game. See?"

Mesnard nodded. Diallo, being found out, had, with typical lack of shame, asked for all bets to be canceled, including the fair game with the crooked. There had been reason for Matar Bo's anger.

"I say, 'No,' " went on the corporal, "He say, 'Yes.' I say, 'No.' He grab my face——"

He indicated the scratches, still bleeding.

Mesnard knew the hurt a black's hands could inflict. Though never striking with

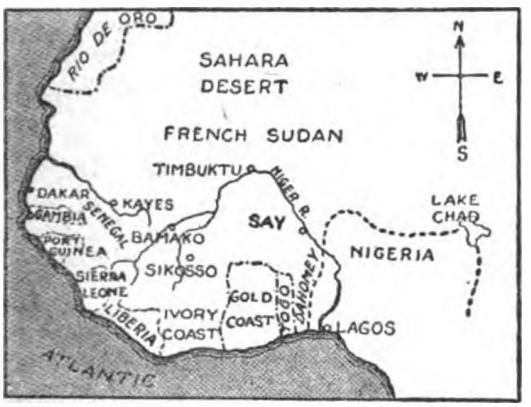
clenched fists, they can draw blood with the side-blow of their open hand.

"Then I flog him back," Matar Bo went on. "I be strong past him——"

This was an acknowledged fact. In bare-hand fighting, Matar Bo did not have an equal in the detachment, probably not in the entire squadron of Spahis.

"He take saber, flog me for arms, for head, everywhere—" Matar Bo concluded with a helpless gesture.

It is possible that Mesnard would have hushed the killing, had he been sure of silence on his men's part. He knew well



that in this case, departure from regulation was warranted, that unless the episode became officially known, other colonial officers would approve of his action. But Diallo had friends.

The members of the clique that had gathered about the body, the accomplices in the deck shifting, were those who knew the most about army regulations, and the limit of a subaltern officer's power. They were the worst soldiers in his outfit. To get away from hard service, they pretended to be ill, often were assigned to hospitals. There, they came in contact with white men who were not officers, who did not appear to comprehend that the prestige of the French in the Sudan would be fatally attacked by revelation of the inner weaknesses of some of its members. There, the blacks learned to become what is known as "sympathy workers."

Mesnard realized there was no hope to dismiss the case without trial. The friends of Diallo would talk, the talk would slowly make its way to high quarters, and an investigation would be held.

He was confronted with the painful necessity of acting coldly toward a man to whom he owed his life, a man he esteemed. But Matar Bo had killed, Matar Bo must be punished.

The lieutenant stood up—

"Thou art under arrest, Matar Bo."

The corporal saluted.

"Thou wilt go to the lock-up and stay there until I can send thee to Kayes."

"Kayes?" repeated Matar Bo.

"Yes. Thou must be judged."

"I savvy," Matar Bo accepted. "It is so. Sani die. Matar Bo go die, too."

"Perhaps not," said Mesnard. "But the trial must be held."

Again Matar Bo saluted, then turned, and with his accustomed dignity walked in the direction of the guard-house. The lieutenant knew he would obey, and did not have him escorted. The corporal disappeared, the sound of a closing door echoed back. And Mesnard faced the others.

"The cards will be burned," he said. "No one else will be punished for tonight's doings. There has been trouble enough." He looked down at Sani Diallo's huge frame. "Pick up this man, and lay him on his cot until morning."

Two men picked up the body. One of them, Tanena, looked down into the dead man's face, then up at the white man.

"*Sani kpa-re. Matar Bo morho kpa-re,*" he said. "Sani is dead, Matar Bo has killed. I savvy."

"Fined three days pay," said Mesnard. "No one asked for thy speech."

Tanena, who had been Diallo's friend, scowled, but was silent.

SANI DIALLO was buried the next afternoon. More than once Mesnard wished that the rest of the affair could be arranged in as simple a manner. Sani Diallo was causing him trouble, even after death. Matar Bo was in the guard-house, under official arrest. The lieutenant had decided to keep him in Say for a period, not wishing to detail three men for the special guard-duty necessitated in the convoy of a man guilty of a serious crime. At least, that was the reason he gave himself for his inaction. When the men whose time of service expired in a few days went north, they could take charge of Matar Bo. The truth was that he hoped something would occur to take the case out of his hands, that Matar Bo would escape.

But he soon realized that the black had

no desire to escape. He probably believed that his lieutenant would not have wished him to, and had accepted his fate with resignation, and even a hint of cheerfulness. It was Matar Bo's way, the inbred fatalism of his race. The Spahi would lie in the doorway, with the sentry yards away, basking in the sun. And all he did was roll cigarets and smoke, smoke the tobacco supplied him by the lieutenant.

Mesnard had been compelled by duty to make a report of the crime to the superior commander. In return, he had received a laconical official note, doubtless hatched by a listless clerk, informing him that he could send up his man for trial when convenient. The authorities did not appear thirsty for the slayer's blood.

But at the same time the white man had dispatched several letters to various friends in army circles, exposing the facts of the case. The answers were discouraging.

A smoldering discontent reigned among the black troops at that particular period. Emissaries from Samory were at work, especially among the non-coms, promising huge rewards, glorious fighting and high command in his armies to deserters. The religious note was sounded loudly, and occasional desertions took place. North of Nioro, a section of *Tirailleurs* had rebelled against a white man, an officer, and even had fired shots at him before being brought to terms. The court martial in Kayes was making examples: Men were shot, or condemned to many years in the labor gangs. Mesnard knew what the latter would mean for Matar Bo. The gang leaders were low-class blacks, who would be glad to have Matar Bo under their scope. His life would be a hell of humiliation, and he would revolt.

The days passed, and the time became short for the departure of the leave-men northward. Mesnard knew that he would have little excuse to delay matters further. And, on that last night, he made a great resolution.

He placed one of the leave-men on guard over Matar Bo. And, when he himself went out at two in the morning, he found the sentry absent, as he had expected. Mesnard knew his men, knew when they could be trusted, and when they could not. Constant observation had rendered him almost a mind reader, as far as black men were concerned. He knew where the sentry had gone; to the native section of Say, with the rest of the men who were to leave, for a last spree among people he had known during his stay. Not a drinking bout; they were all Moslems, but one of those long conversations, semigrunted, scarcely articulate which the Spahis loved.

With his own key, he opened the lock, pushed the door open. A snore informed him that Matar Bo's conscience did not bother him. He found the lantern, scratched a match. With a glow full on his face, the corporal awoke.

He sat up sheepishly, rubbed his eyes, and grinned, his toothy, infectious grin.

"I go Kayes now?" he asked.

Mesnard drew up a stool, sat down.

"No. Thou wilt go in the morning," he replied.

"Yassah."

After a considerable pause, Mesnard cleared his voice, and spoke again—

"I have had news from Kayes, Matar Bo, and I am told that thou wilt surely be shot for killing Sani Diallo."

"And then, there be no more Matar Bo," said the corporal with finality.

"That's just it. Listen: Thou wilt be shot unless thou canst go away before morning. Now, I want thee to understand one thing: I'd like to see thee get away. I'm not speaking as thy lieutenant, Matar Bo, but as a white man who fights, to a black man who is also a warrior; to a friend."

Matar Bo's eyes glistened with pleasure.

"I hear," he said.

"Now—" went on Mesnard—"if a friend instead of a lieutenant had come to see thee, that would mean he held the key to the guard-house. That key could be left in the door. After the friend left—well, if Matar Bo wanted to go away badly enough——"

Matar Bo saluted.

"I savvy!" he exclaimed. "But lieutenant no do that, eh?"

"No. Lieutenant will send thee north in the morning, and has come to say good-by to thee. I will go hunting in the morning before the detachment leaves for Kayes."

"Then, Matar Bo says good-by now."

"Yes," agreed Mesnard. "Good-by—and all that happens is written."

Without another word, he left, pulled the door behind him. He turned, when halfway across the yard, and saw that Matar Bo had blown out the lantern. And, strangely enough, that night, Mesnard fell

asleep in a better mood than he had been in many days.

At daylight, as he dressed to go on the intended hunt, he caught sight of a large iron key hanging where the guard-house key usually hung. He could not refrain a smile. Matar Bo had been precise to the end, had brought back the key after using it. Before long, the man who was accustomed to take the prisoner's morning meal, ran in to report Matar Bo escaped during the night. With business-like manner, Mesnard went out to investigate.

The corporal's progress was traced to the mud wall which he had climbed, coolly borrowing a ladder from under the noses of the stable-guards, who were not presumed to be asleep.

"That's over," sighed the lieutenant.

He would probably never see Matar Bo again. They had crossed each other's path in the immense Sudan, and now were separated. Life—or as the Arabs said: *Mektoub!* Mesnard wrote a report of the escape. He felt not the least remorse. The sentry had richly deserved the fine that for appearances' sake, the officer had been forced to inflict.

But at the last minute, when the downcast Spahi was mounting his horse to leave, his term of service ended, Mesnard made up his loss from his own pocket. Never had he spent money with greater pleasure. It was to Matar Bo that he owed his presence at Say, instead of lying under a worm-eaten wooden cross at the foot of a *baobab*-tree.

WEEKS later, Lieutenant Mesnard, accompanied by a Spahi, was hunting antelope, eight or ten miles from Say.

Under the strong sun the undulating grass took on various subdued tints, grays, yellowish greens, forming a fashion of multicolored carpet. On the green bushes grew violently-red flowers, and the smell of the rich earth was strong. Mesnard had sent the Spahi into the tall grass of a clearing. Firmly seated in the saddle, he waited the opportunity to shoot. He used a long-barreled sporting rifle, which he preferred to the old Gras carbine of the government. The Spahi, accustomed to the work, turned the antelope, and brought it, leaping back, within thirty feet of his chief.

Mesnard pressed the trigger; the shot resounded, sharp and clear. Before him, he saw the animal falter, then resume the swift pace. Mesnard joined the Spahi and picked up the trail by the *"rougeurs"*—the splotches of blood—scattered along the way. The antelope had not gone far, three hundred feet, and now lay crushed down in the grass. The Spahi dispatched the animal with a dagger. Mesnard dismounted.

As he bent over, a muffled shot resounded. And a lead slug, after grazing the negro's hand, somehow ricocheted and severed the chin-strap of Mesnard's helmet. An inch further and the bullet would have gone through his neck, severed the jugular vein. The Spahi wrapped a rag around his bleeding hand.

"Where did that come from, Yeliman?" asked Mesnard.

The Spahi indicated a knot of trees, to the west, which screened that portion of the horizon. True enough, the lieutenant could see the straggling smoke of the discharge still suspended in the air. Black powder, trade gun, he surmised. He brought up the muzzle of his rifle, and waited. He knew that the sniper, after firing his shot, would shift his position. More than likely he would slide downward to a lower branch. In spite of the thick foliage, Mesnard caught a glimpse of a white *boubou*, aimed quickly and fired.

The man tumbled to the ground.

Mesnard reloaded his rifle, mounted, and with Yeliman, proceeded toward the spot where the fellow had fallen. There had been but one shot, and he presumed the man to be alone. The thought of a foe lying helpless in the thicket was distasteful to him. And if the rifleman were alive, he might obtain information. Having acted on impulse, he was soon sorry for his foolhardiness. As he and the Spahi neared the bushes, small arrows flew toward them. Yeliman ducked low upon his horse's neck. And Mesnard brought his horse around, and fled. He knew that the tips of the arrows had been dipped in a vegetable poison. At first, one felt only the sting of the wound, then a vague numbness which grew into a sharp burning pain. This was followed by a sensation of cold, shivering—and death within a few minutes.

Five hundred yards away, well out of range of the bows, he drew rein, turned in the saddle and rattled a half-dozen shots aimlessly into the bushes, accompanied by flattering remarks concerning the natives.

"No good, eh?" Yeliman remarked, doubtless referring to the arrows.

"No good!" assented the lieutenant.

"That no be Samory man!" the Spahi went on. "Samory men all catch rifle—no arrows."

"Who are they, then?"

"Sellibes men. Oussou men."

"We're at peace with Oussou. Why should he wish to attack us?"

"Why? I no savvy why. But I see 'em. Oussou men."

Mesnard had perceived nothing, save the first *boubou* cloth in the tree. In the chaotic horizons of the rolling bush the white man falls far from the degree of accuracy attained by the negroes. And Yeliman said the snipers were Sellibes.

Although he would have faced rifles for the sake of his sole distraction, hunting, the thought of being struck by a poisoned shaft would keep him within the four walls of Say. Even now, his overstrung nerves made him imagine bowmen in every tree, every bush. He shamelessly abandoned the dead antelope to the jackals, and galloped his horse toward the Post, where he arrived panting and exhausted.

The immediate danger over, he took stock of the situation.

Fama Oussou, his nearest neighbor to the south, was chief of the native village of Boutou, a considerable aggregation of huts. Oussou was a senile, weak leader, who nevertheless held the respect of his subjects. That he was in friendly relations with the leaders of the partisans of the black chief, Samory, and with the hostile natives of the fortified village of Sargadje, farther south, was well known to Mesnard. But his inability to do harm had been so obvious that the lieutenant had not disturbed him. According to native ideas, the attack had been a formal declaration of war.

Mesnard, diplomatically, sent a messenger to the chief, demanding an explanation, saying that he believed some mistake had been made. That unless Oussou himself brought an apology, he, Mesnard, with his Spahis, would come and take him away and send him to be exiled in Kayes, while his place at Boutou would be taken by another *Fama*, nominated by the French.

The messenger came back shortly. Oussou sent an ultimatum: Mesnard was no longer allowed to send his Spahis near Boutou. And himself would be in danger if he came too near that village. To show that he meant what he said, Oussou had caused the messenger, an ex-slave usually employed in the cultivation of the fields, to be beaten severely.

There must be a grave reason for a man of Oussou's known meekness to suddenly break the tacit peace that had reigned for so long. Boutou had been considered so safe that the Spahis went there for provisions, chickens, eggs. Not only did this uprising of the Sellibes cancel Mesnard's pleasure rides but it hit severely at his supply of provisions.

The lieutenant made inquiries among the Spahis to find out if any insult had been offered Oussou. Apparently the cavalrymen had behaved well when within his village. But Mesnard did not believe them altogether. The blacks, in spite of admirable qualities, were not above telling white—and black—lies to clear themselves. Their religion permits them to lie to save themselves from being beheaded. They often behave as if in danger of death, so Mesnard had discovered.

Three days went by, and no apology came. Further delay would be an admission of weakness.

On the morning of the fourth day, Mesnard decided to act. At the head of the major portion of his men he rode northward, away from the general direction of Boutou, seemingly bent on a reconnoitering expedition elsewhere. That he was observed and followed, he had no doubt. But he was not attacked. Before his twenty odd Spahis, the Sellibes hesitated. To come near enough to use their arrows, they must step within the range of the carbines, and, what they dreaded far more, the sabers. But as he rode, Mesnard felt an uncomfortable contraction in his back; he seemed to feel the tip of a shaft between his shoulder blades.

But none came. He ordered a halt in a large clearing where several trails crossed. Fires were lighted, a light meal prepared and eaten.

When the move forward was resumed, Mesnard sent his men to the right and left, into the bushes, to drive the spies northward, along what was presumed to be the intended route of the Spahis. Then, keeping only Yeliman and two other privates with him, he quietly turned into a side trail, after having given orders to his men to keep the watchers interested until sundown.

The progress in the morning had intentionally been slow. Mesnard and his men now covered the distance at a smart clip, passing opposite Say, although they could not see the town, hidden as it was by two miles of thick bush. Yeliman knew the network of trails, and led the way. At half-past two in the afternoon, they saw, by the cut made by the trail in the bush, the palisades of Boutou lying below them in a depression.

The village formed an oblong, was composed of two central streets, running north and south, intersected by other streets, cutting each other at what the natives conceived to be right angles. The huts were high, roofed with straw, shooting conical crests above the green foliage of shrubbery which appeared everywhere in the village. The place could be entered by four gates, one at each of the points of the compass. At the foot of the trail followed by Mesnard was the east gate.

Before this gate, a skinny, reddish-black native was squatted, evidently a watchman, for he had a musket across his knees, and was fast asleep. Yeliman overpowered him without much disturbance, stretching him unconscious with a carbine butt applied under the chin.

Mesnard's plan was a simple one—to kidnap Oussou. A bold attack with all his men, on the village, would have been unsuccessful. He would have lost a half-score dead at least. With his present scheme, he hoped to gain control of the situation without fighting. A deft stroke, boldly delivered, would be more impressive than a sanguinary success. The chief, as is always the case, was the backbone of the rebellion. If he were in French hands, the uprising would die a natural death.

He glanced down the street before him. It was fairly well kept, bordered by rows of bushes protected by spiny hedges. He wondered at this sense of the decorative; the negroes did not usually consider beauty. Not a person in that street. He sought the roof of Oussou's palace, a hut larger than the others. Then he lifted his hand. Although small in size, the horses could furnish a fast gallop for a short period.

Yelling at the top of their lungs with a formidable clinking of spurs and stirrups, Mesnard and the Spahis rode down the first street, slid around the corner into another lane. Women and children ran into their huts, uttering shrill cries. A yellow dog barked. A few men appeared, but before this terrifying vision of red coats and flashing sabers, imagining no doubt, that these four would be followed by the Say Detachment of Spahis, they deemed discretion the better part of valor, and also disappeared from view.

Before the *Fama's* hut, Mesnard slid to the ground, and revolver in hand, leaped up on the eighteen-inch elevation which served as a veranda. He made for the doorway. In this opening stood a huge black, naked to the waist, with a sword in his hand, evidently the king's personal attendant, and as unmistakably recently awakened from a restful slumber.

Mesnard struck him beneath the jaw with a sharp, upward blow of his gun barrel, and he slithered to the floor.

And the lieutenant plunged into the semi-obscurity of the hut. At first, dazed by the change from the ardent sunlight of the open street, he could see nothing but a swirling, formless mass of bodies, emitting grunts, squeals and screams, according to sex, age and inclination. The smell however was not easily forgotten. A sort of coughing exclamation drew Mesnard's attention.

"Yeh — yeh — yeh — " Oussou cackled, awakening from his siesta.

Mesnard knew, that even though the other occupants of the hut were women, should they close in upon him he could not come out unscathed. Native women have a strength that compares well with the average white man. And so he hastily grasped the old man's bony shoulder and hustled him toward the door, in a scarcely majestic fashion, prodding him in the ribs with the barrel of his revolver.

A last shove, and Oussou tripped over the prone form of his body-guard, stumbled uncertainly for a fraction of a second, then fell sprawling on his royal stomach, in the dust outside, where Yeliman promptly added to his perturbation by seating himself on his back.

Mesnard freed the old man and drew him to his feet. Oussou, not quite clear-headed, nevertheless understood the danger from the bare blades all about him, and protested his peaceful intentions.

"Tell those men to draw back!" said the white man, in dialect, pressing the cold snout of a revolver against his temple.

The inhabitants had rushed up and

filled the street, threatening, armed with bows and spears, and several trade muskets. The elderly chief bade them march back for his sake. And they drew back thirty feet.

While Yeliman held the revolver in place, Mesnard drew the *Fama's* hands behind his back, tied his wrists with a stout cord, the other end of which was tied to a saddle. To make the capture secure, he threw a noose over the black, wrinkled neck. A playful tug, and Oussou was aware that an over-quick move on his part would lead to prompt and final strangulation.

Over and over again, Oussou repeated—

"The peace—the peace—yeh, yeh, peace!"

"Yes, peace!" agreed Mesnard. "Tell thy men to bring all their weapons here."

The old man hesitated. Mesnard tightened the rope.

"Yes, yes, *Fama* of the Spahis!" Oussou assented.

He spoke. One by one, the Sellibes warriors came forward, deposited quivers, bows and guns on the ground. Mesnard ordered his Spahis to break the bows and arrows and smash the gun butts. When a man hesitated, Oussou, prompted by the noose, scolded him.

The lieutenant, his task completed, was about to mount, when Yeliman pointed at the lines of shrubbery.

"Bush there—bad! Poison—" he said.

Mesnard drew close, and examined the plant; the *strophantus* bush. The poison used on the arrows is made from a decoction of the T-shaped beans. He picked up one of the arrows and looked at the layer of *strophantus* that had dried to a varnish-like consistency. Yeliman explained that the specimen he held was not dangerous. But, he said, holding up another freshly prepared—

"This is bad."

Destroying the immediate supply would not prevent the blacks from using poisoned weapons.

Nevertheless, Mesnard gave his order.

"Oussou, bushes are to be cut down and brought here."

"Yes, yes," Oussou agreed.

He translated to his men, who set at once to work. One of the Spahis volunteered to guide the cutting in the distant part of the village. For half an hour, Mesnard waited, listening to the sound of blades chopping on wood. At last the bushes were heaped in the central place of the village.

"Firewood," ordered the lieutenant.

The natives went to work with resignation. Some were even laughing. Under Mesnard's direction the straw roof of one of the larger huts was brought down, spread out. On this, the *strophantus* shrubs were piled, surmounted by the heap of broken weapons. Mesnard drew a box of matches from his pocket. They were Government matches, and not of the best quality. But the first match struck fire and was applied to the straw. A tiny red tongue of flame licked the bottom of the pile, crackled, grew. An initial wisp of white smoke, followed by a thick black cloud, rose, and the mass went up in a blaze.

It was a strange procession that rode out of the north gate of Boutou on that afternoon. A dirty-faced white man, helmet crammed down over his eyes, behind him, three Spahis covered with dust, and in the center of the group, a white-wooled frightened old man with a rope about his neck, and wrists fastened by another long cord to the white man's saddle. Further behind, accompanying their husband and father into exile came twenty or thirty women of varying ages, the flames of Oussou's youth, and the embers of his decline, with a horde of small children, the presumed heirs of the *Fama*. And still further back, the villagers, wailing mournfully and shuffling up a tremendous cloud of reddish dust. After trudging several miles, these last turned and went back to their kingless village.

To allow the women to follow in comfort, Mesnard slackened his pace, and rode like a conqueror, amidst a herd of semi-naked humanity.

He lifted a tiny pick'i'n to his saddle to spare her the rough going over the rocky trail. She soon ceased to roll globular, frightened eyes, and grabbed at the brass buttons of the white man's tunic, at the gold watch-chain emerging from the breast pocket. He gave her a bit of chocolate. Emboldened, other children scrambled alongside, giggled; and better humor prevaded the procession. Oussou, thinking to take advantage of this relaxation of hostility, moved his head dolefully, whined, pleaded that the neck rope should be removed.

Surely, seeing him so old and feeble the white *Fama* with the two gold stripes would not feel the need of so much care. But Mesnard had seen old and feeble negroes slip away into the bush. He did not intend to lose Oussou.

Three-fourths of the way to Say, dusk came. Mesnard ordered branches cut, tied into bundles. These were lighted, and the party marched on, illuminated by fifty torches.

Mesnard was puzzled. All well and good; he was bringing Oussou back with a noose about his neck. But equations had a manner of shifting in this unsettled territory. And he wondered why Oussou had broken the peace.

OUSSOU was placed in the guard-house, with trustworthy men as sentries, one beneath the single window, two more at the door, with loaded carbines, and strict orders. As for the swarming harem of the *Fama*, he assigned several abandoned shacks beyond the Spahis lines for their residence.

After dinner, he put on his medals, wore his dress-sword at his side, and went to the office, where he prepared for Oussou's cross-examination. For himself, he provided an easy chair, for the old man, a low stool. These seemingly puerile details had importance in an interview with a native.

The stage set, he sent for the *Fama* of Boutou.

Oussou appeared under heavy guard, six Spahis with side-arms and carbines, wearing the tall helmets, dusky giants resplendent in the red-and-blue uniform, and impressive under lantern light. That Oussou was meek, was evident. He perched on the precarious stool, while Mesnard stretched leisurely in the big chair. This gave the white man the appearance of perfect ease, and the native a physical constraint that had instant effect upon his limited mentality.

In a dry, impersonal voice, Mesnard inquired of Oussou his name, his approximate age, an official business which frightened the old man. After the brief questioning, Mesnard leaned forward gravely, pointed a finger at the chief and spoke rapidly in French:

"Oussou, you are accused of attempted murder on the person of a French officer. You broke the truce that has existed between the French Government and the Sellibes."

He turned to Yeliman, who could interpret—

"Tell him."

Oussou knew enough French to gather the general meaning of the phrases. Yeliman, with his limited knowledge of French and the difficulty of the chief's dialect, was of little help. But this was a part of the cross-examination.

Oussou replied in his own tongue: That he was sorry, that he regretted his ill-advised action, that he had been compelled by popular demand, to act.

"Why?" Mesnard demanded sharply.

"He no savvy," said Yeliman.

"Tell him, that unless he can give a reason, he will be sent to the Great Commander in Kayes. Another *Fama* will take his place in Boutou, and never again will he see his village."

Oussou did not give the Spahi time to translate!

"Master, white man, listen! If thou had not sold my people to the Djerbas, I would never have done what I have."

"What are you saying——"

"I ask nothing better than to be at peace with thee, as well as with every one. But my people became angry when thy Spahis took their brothers and sisters to be sold as captives."

Mesnard started.

"Art thou sure?" he asked, in dialect. "Sure that my men took thy people to sell to the Djerbas?"

"Yes, *Fama* with the two stripes," replied Oussou, with all the signs of truth on his wrinkled face. "No less than four youths and five maids have been taken within the last three moons."

"By my Spahis?"

"Yes."

Mesnard sat back, astonished.

"Oussou," he said, kindly, "if thou hast spoken the truth thou wilt be permitted to return to Boutou, and I will make thee and thy people presents to compensate. But—" his tone changed—"if what thou hast said is a lie——"

"I speak the truth," said Oussou stolidly.

Mesnard regarded him steadily, then nodded.

"I believe thee," he accepted. "Wouldst know the Spahis who took the captives?"

"Yes. I have seen them several times. Each time they said it was thy wish they fulfilled. So, we were angered, for did the French not tell us that though captives could be kept for toil, they could neither be bought nor sold? And were not thy men taking people to be sold? Visit the Djerbas

villages, ask the workers in the *lougans*—fields—and they will speak as I do."

It was certain, that before the arrival of the French, the old chief had made a steady commercial profit from the sale of his subjects. But he managed now to simulate sorrow.

Mesnard turned to Yeliman—

"Tell the Spahis to form in line in the courtyard, right away."

The Spahi left, returning before five minutes to say that the lieutenant's order was executed.

"Take the lantern, Yeliman. And thou, Oussou, follow me."

Outside, the Spahis had formed in line, some in uniform, others in their *gandouras*, the flowing garments worn when off duty. Yeliman held the lantern up to the first man's face.

"Is that one of them, Oussou?" Mesnard asked.

"No," said the *Fama*.

They proceeded down the line.

Before Tanena, Oussou halted, and pointed with a bony finger—

"He is one."

Mesnard was not surprized. He ordered Tanena to fall out, and placed him under guard. In turn, Oussou picked out three men, all members of Sina Diallo's clique, who had chosen Tanena as their new leader after the death of the Tukuleur.

These men were brought under guard to the office, where Mesnard resumed his seat. What the Spahis had done, they had done deliberately, for among the first things taught them was the fact that they were not to regard any captive as their own, to be sold for their profit. In the fighting field, the selling of natives as slaves by black troopers might have been more lightly dealt with—the men could not in a day forget ancient customs. But the kidnaping, in peace time, of the members of a friendly tribe could not be tolerated. The very security of the French depended upon prompt action in such a case.

"Thou hast taken people from Boutou to sell to the Djerbas villages, Tanena," said Mesnard coldly. "Oussou, here, says it is so."

Tanena stared at Oussou insolently—

"He lies."

Mesnard decided to bluff:

"The Djerbas have admitted buying from thee. Some of the people thou didst sell are here. Wilt thou still say, no?"

"If lieutenant savvy, why talk?" said Tanena, an argument not devoid of logic.

Mesnard turned to the others—

"Thou, and thou, and also thou, helped Tanena?"

They assented.

"We will pay Oussou the money," suggested Tanena. "For we still have it."

Oussou nodded vigorously. He was not averse to making a little profit from an accomplished fact.

"The money will be given to me," said the lieutenant. "I will buy back the captives and send them to Boutou."

Oussou could not conceal his dejection. He would have preferred the silver pieces to the return of the blacks. He had several hundred subjects. He did not possess enough silver.

Mesnard addressed the Spahis—

"How many times have I told you that no man or woman may be bought or sold?"

"Many times," agreed Tanena.

"What have I said would happen to the Spahi who did not do as I said?"

"That he would be sent away, and not allowed to be Spahi any more," Tanena said.

"Tomorrow, thou and the three thieves here with thee, will be sent away!"

"Then we be Samory men!" Tanena threatened.

"You be what you want. Samory will be taken by the French, and all his men will suffer. You are not good men for Spahis. You are good men for Samory. Savages!"

Tanena's eyes flickered. He was a thief, a disorderly private, but he was not a coward. He spoke:

"Hear me, lieutenant. Thou dost say: 'Black who fight for me, for French, he is good man. Black fight for Samory, he be savage.' And all time, he be same man. I no savvy. Samory man be savage? Then I be savage, too."

There was more than a fragment of truth in the negro's statement. But Mesnard could not alter existing facts and beliefs.

"Oussou—" he addressed the King of Boutou—"tomorrow thou wilt see how the French treat men who sell blacks for slaves."

THE trumpeter sounded attention. The Spahis, in dress uniforms, but on foot, formed a double line in the center of the yard. The bare swords, held firmly in black fists, scintillated in the sun.

The white officer, alone mounted, was facing them. Standing in serried ranks before the bungalow, and along the front of the stable lines, were the families of the Spahis, and the inhabitants of Say, to whom the gates had been opened for the occasion. Oussou, on a camp-chair, surrounded by his wives and children, wore a new straw hat and a red loin-cloth, gifts from the lieutenant. By the gate were the women and children of the guilty Spahis, waiting to share the fate of their masters, not through compulsion, but from choice.

The door of the guard-house opened, and the four prisoners filed out, escorted by two Spahis. The slave-dealers were in uniform. from the boots to the white helmets. In the open, facing the line of Spahis, Tanena and his men halted. Mesnard made a short speech, simplifying, for native understanding, the customary formula.

Then followed an embarrassed pause.

"Go on, Yeliman," ordered Mesnard.

Yeliman, who had succeeded Matar Bo to the rank of corporal, did not appear to relish the task. He lifted his hand, struck the nearest man's helmet from his head. Then, taking hold of the coat buttons which had been loosened for the occasion, tore them off, as he did the red stripe which marked this man as a first-class private. With these he struck the man in the face. Then—and this was where Mesnard had changed the usual procedure—he took the negro's garments from his body, one by one, until he left him completely naked.

This was repeated for each of the remaining three, Tanena being the last. Though the pagan native thinks little of nakedness, the Moslem is as prudish as any white man. When he has reached manhood it is a matter of dignity to keep himself covered. Tanena, alone stood his ground defiantly, stared back at the spectators, and appeared to take the matter lightly. But Mesnard, watching him, knew, that of the four his suffering was the keenest. He was proud, and his pride was bleeding The other men instantly crouched under the derisive shouts of the assembly.

For a few minutes, Mesnard allowed the exposure to continue, then signaled to a group of privates, who approached the guilty men, clubbed carbines in their hands. With precision and vigor they applied the butts to the backs of the naked troopers and drove them toward the gate. The Spahis broke ranks, joined the chase, and did not stop until the fleeing men and their families were well outside the vicinity of the Post.

All but Tanena. He walked straight under the blows, never flinched. Instead of running, he swerved, that he might pass before the white man.

"Lieutenant, I go. I be Samory man—" said Tanena.

"Go in peace, Tanena." Mesnard turned toward the Spahis. "Let him go now. He has paid for his slaves."

Tanena grinned, and walked calmly toward the gate. There he turned and waved his hand mockingly at the Spahis.

"Stay, white men's dogs!" he said.

THE era of trouble that had dawned for Mesnard, had been duplicated in the general situation of the colony. The Almany* Samory, the Malinke leader, the Sudanese Napoleon, had been driven back by the Combes and Archinard Columns, into the Kong region, which lies north of the Ivory Coast. There, the Malinke had created a new empire which bid fair to equal his former domains. Djimini, Diamala, Bondoukou, all were under his rule.

To dislodge him, was no easy task. The French thought, that after the many defeats inflicted upon him, Samory would realize that it was only a question of time before he would be beaten anew, and that he might prefer to accept protectorate peaceably, to retain nominal power, his wealth, and a feeling of security for the future. Disguised or open, Samory did not want a master. But, negotiations would give him time to gather a new army, so he negotiated as much as was desired of him, promised, smiling blandly on the envoys. But while he smiled, he prepared to make a stand. Underhanded, but marvelously efficient aid was granted him from the south, ammunitions, funds. While talking went on, the French marked time, and Samory grew stronger.

One of the agreements drawn up between the French and the Malinke gave the first, the city of Bouna. With more trustfulness than wisdom, Captain Braulot, with one hundred *Tirailleurs*, marched in to occupy it, only to find a horde of warriors, under Suleyman, one of the Almany Samory's ablest leaders. Suleyman refused to give

* Contraction of the Arabic: Amir el Moumenine, Commander of the True Believers.

up the town, and Braulot, whose forces were too weak for a bold stroke, turned back.

Some distance away, he met with Samory's brother, Saranke-Mory, who was followed by eight thousand men, one-fourth being cavalry. Saranke-Mory was apologetic for Suleyman's behavior. He suggested that Braulot come back to the city with him, to see how Samory compelled his unruly vassal to obedience. Braulot believed him and acted upon the suggestion. Before the walls of the town, Saranke-Mory joined with Suleyman, and Braulot was surrounded. A war-horn resounded, and the firing began. Braulot and his lieutenant were killed, as were the *Tirailleurs*, and their heads struck off.

This ended the negotiations. But, throughout northwest Africa Samory's followers increased. The *Fama* of Sikosso, Babemba —who was to the little *Fama* Oussou what the King of England would be to the King of Montenegro—who had fifteen thousand warriors and several fortified towns, threw his lot in with Samory. Originally, Babemba had been friendly with the French, but Braulot's massacre, unpunished for a considerable period, changed his attitude. Logically, his place was with Samory. Neither of the two native leaders had invited the Europeans to the Sudan.

Trusting to Babemba's former protestations of loyalty, Captain Morisson narrowly escaped massacre. This prodded the French to activities against Babemba. The column would have a double objective: To destroy the new enemy, and join the French forces at Kong City in prevision of a new offensive against Samory.

Henri Mesnard received orders to join the column, under formation at Kayes, with his detachment. He received the news gladly, for the dull existence and petty affairs of the Post were palling on him.

At Kayes, the French forces, hampered by lack of materials, were due for a long period of inaction. Various near-mutinies among black troops took place, but Mesnard's Spahis, weeded of the dissatisfied element, stood firm. Foreseeing that Sikosso would not fall before cavalry and infantry, the commander of the column requested artillery. So that eight cannon followed the unit on its way south.

As far as Seguene the French met with no serious opposition.

It was not until Kinian village was attained that Mesnard heard the first bullets of the new conflict.

But the combat was neither prolonged nor serious. The village was guarded by a few hundred warriors, the majority without firearms. Babemba, expecting the real attack at Koumenkou, had drawn up his forces before that place. Two eighty-millimeter cannon were unlimbered, a few shells fired which set fire to the east side of Kinian. The charge was sounded, the *Tirailleurs* swarmed to the attack in open formation, in three successive waves that rolled back the scattered natives in confusion, while a half-squadron of Spahis, fifty sabers, followed the main road at top speed to occupy the outskirt of the little aggregation of huts.

Mesnard was second in command of this unit, under Lieutenant Barsac.

YELIMAN had passed him in his eagerness to advance, and was perhaps fifty feet ahead of the group. Mesnard saw him rein his horse with violence. The animal remained quivering in the center of the road. Yeliman turned bewildered frightened eyes on something which lay on the ground before him. Mesnard rode slowly to his side, and glanced down in his turn.

The naked, headless body of a woman lay in the yellow dust. The hands and feet also had been cut off. The sight was gruesome and disturbed the white man more than he would have admitted.

"What is it, Yeliman? What does it mean?"

"Fetish!" said Yeliman. "Woman kill to make Babemba win!"

Mesnard had heard of the superstition. The sacrifice of a woman, not a slave, was presumed to be propitious to warlike actions. Laid across the path of an oncoming enemy, it would, if disregarded as a warning to turn back, cause the defeat of the newcomers. That the Spahis more than half-believed this was evident from their behavior. Much as he disliked the performance, the lieutenant urged his horse forward. The animal, smelling blood, was difficult to manage, but at last picked his way gingerly over the corpse. Yeliman followed, and the entire detachment. Then only did Mesnard order the body removed, and thrown into the bush.

The streets of Kinian were deserted.

Here and there the body of a warrior, struck by a stray shot or shell fragment, lay in the dust. A carrion bird had already lighted upon one of these, and perched on a bare, black chest peered up at the passing Spahis. Mesnard crossed at top speed, hoping to catch up with the rear-guard of the enemy. He was rewarded in some measure. Four or five riders were sighted, disappearing around a turn in the road, and were overhauled. Two were killed, the others taken prisoner, save one who escaped by plunging boldly into the thicket. Yeliman approached his leader:

"You savvy that man?" he asked. "He be Tanena."

"Tanena, the Spahi?"

"Yassah. I see him good."

Sikosso had long been reputed as a refuge for deserters and cast off members of the native troops in French Service. It was due to the presence of these men that discipline, remarkable in native troops, was evident in Babemba's cohorts. Mesnard was somewhat doubtful, believing that Yeliman's uncultured but fertile imagination had deceived him, but the new corporal pointed to one of the dead men, and the lieutenant recognized a former member of his own detachment, one of the men who had been thrown out with Tanena.

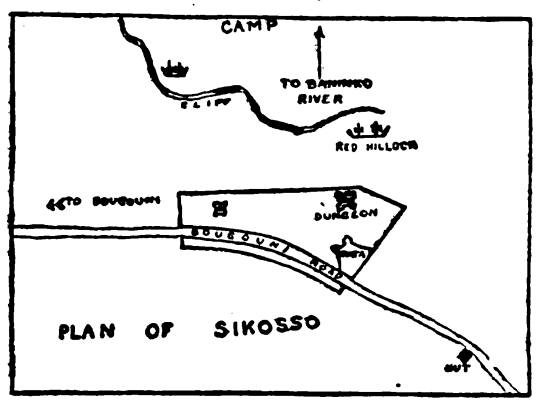
"Yeliman, tell the men if they take Tanena, to bring him to me. I will pay a reward."

Thus, Mesnard was offering cash for a human being, the crime laid at Tanena's door.

The following four days were busy days for Mesnard. Babemba, appalled by the cannon, which he dreaded out of all proportion to the capacity for harm in bush-warfare, had withdrawn his troops to Sikosso, leaving only a swarm of horsemen to harass the French in their advance.

The region north of Sikosso is cut with a network of small streams, called *marigots*, which weave in and out of great marshes. The riders of the *Fama* knew where the solid soil lay between these. And the Spahis did not. Casualties were few on either side. The enemy never made a genuine stand, and it was more a game of hide-and-seek than an armed conflict. Mesnard, covered with slime from the frequent falls he suffered on unguarded rushes, nevertheless enjoyed this work, when he thought of the strenuous and dangerous times ahead, under the walls of the city, where the sterner business of the campaign would be carried to a conclusion.

Two miles north of Sikosso flows the Baninko, a stream fifteen yards in width, flowing between high banks. The natives had destroyed the only bridge, and Mesnard was forced to seek a ford, which he located



after some time; an unpleasant period spent under constant fire from the riflemen strung out on the southern side. From the Baninko, an easy slope leads to a plateau, which he crossed to attain the groups of riders visible at the further extremity. But here again, he was forced to be cautious. The horsemen had been left to attract him within range of other natives, hidden behind the boulders of the southern slope. Mesnard dismounted, formed a protecting cordon of Spahis, and awaited the main body, upon the arrival of which the riders disappeared. Mesnard led his men to the brink of the plateau facing Sikosso. This brink formed a cliff, which ran parallel to the city.

He saw before him a formidable panorama.

Sikosso was built in the center of a *cuvette*, a deep land-depression. It was the largest African city he had ever seen. The outside walls formed an irregular enclosure of nine miles. This enclosure, twenty or more feet high the greater part of its length, was presumed to be at least thirty feet thick at the base. The crest of the wall formed a rough redoubt, with protected posts for riflemen.

Across the hundreds of earthen huts, he could see the *diomfouton** which enclosed Babemba's ultimate retreat, rising its distorted walls above the huddled roofs. To the right rose the top of another stronghold, a tiny fortress in itself. At the northeast

*Fort.

corner of the city, rose a third pile of walls, a fashion of squat tower, which was called, the Dungeon.

And in these streets, criss-crossing Sikosso, moved countless natives. The sun caught everywhere on rifle barrels and steel blades. The Bougouni road, which ran through the fortified place on the southern side, was lined with the camp-fires of reinforcements, probably men sent by Samory to help his recent ally against his foes.

And Mesnard wondered whether the artillery would be able to pierce breaches through these massive walls, wondered whether the storming parties could be successful in the desperate struggle that was certain to follow the entry into the enclosure, if the breaches were actually made. Only the future could tell, and Mesnard could not read the future.

Behind him, the French had established camp, had thrown up earth-works facing the east and west, where the counter attacks of Babemba were most likely to occur. Two field-guns were placed on a position which was immediately denominated the "red hillock." And the first shells were fired upon the Dungeon. They seemed sufficient for the work at hand. The first spurt of brown earth thrown up by the shocks was followed by the yellow smoke of the explosion, and an immense cloud of shattered mud. From the various exits of the Dungeon the defenders fled, carrying confusion into the thick masses of defenders in the streets. Firing shrapnel, another battery came into action. As if by magic, the streets emptied, even the Bougouni road was deserted. Through field-glasses Mesnard could see arms and garments left behind in the hurried exodus to the safety of the huts.

The bombardment went on until nightfall. In the morning the walls were shelled. And it became evident that it would take some time to open the three gateways through which the storming parties would pour.

Two weeks passed; two weeks, during which the Spahis were constantly on the move. The French were not numerous enough to surround the city, and the defenders could come and go as they pleased. The cavalry of Babemba, skirting the plateau to the east, came up behind the French lines, making their watering place, the Baninko River, insecure. Every convoy, that went to and fro to bring water to the camp had to be escorted. The camp itself was attacked several times and, on one occasion, almost taken. It was a peculiar situation, impossible of existence save in the strange warfare of the colonies: The besiegers, besieged; attacking a city and defending their own camp against tremendous superiority of numbers.

Mesnard, the day before the scheduled storming of Sikosso, was suddenly informed that he was to take command of a group of Djerba auxiliaries, brave and well mounted but without the cohesion of his own troops. He had no chance to protest—an order is final. So, he was compelled to turn his own men over to another lieutenant, including Yeliman, who grumbled aloud what Mesnard had thought but did not voice.

And, with the news of the transfer, came the instructions assigning each unit its particular work during the attack of the morning. The two most important missions assigned the Spahis did not concern Mesnard: The protection of the camp against a sortie during the rush when the bulk of the infantry was streaming through the holes opened in the walls by the cannon; and the covering of the left flank of the attacking units.

Mesnard had a mission of his own, which he did not relish, not because it was more dangerous, but because it would take him a considerable distance from the actual scene of the main action, in the hills to the east. He was to block the road to the forces of Babemba, when they attempted to retreat along the Bougouni road.

In the scant time allowed him, Mesnard tried to instil confidence into the Djerbas, who had followed the French in hope of plunder, but did not seem desirous to risk a hand-to-hand conflict with the desperate fugitives of Babemba's army. Their leaders talked boldly, but Mesnard sensed the dread lurking underneath the resounding phrases. He preferred his Spahis, who conserved their energy for action.

He was probably as much to blame for the events that followed on the next day as the Djerbas. Men who are not trusted by their chief, will not trust him. Mutual regard was needed for concerted action, and Mesnard, try though he did, could not gain confidence in the auxiliaries.

At five in the morning, the *Tirailleurs* descended the slope and formed on the level ground below, facing each of the three breaches. Daylight had not come yet. Bayonets were fixed, belts tightened. There

was no talking. Everything was prearranged. It was believed that Babemba, deceived by paid spies, did not expect the final blow until three days later.

Mesnard led his men through the bush to the wide trail that led from Sikosso to Segue, followed this road southward until it turned toward the city, struck east across the hills as the sun was rising.

Behind him sounded the bugles of the *Tirailleurs*, very clear, though dulled by the distance, and immediately the pounding blows of the artillery punctuated the rattle of rifles. The columns were launched. Mesnard cursed his luck at being deprived of the spectacle. At this moment, he could imagine, the *Tirailleurs* had gained the walls, and were finding out whether the breaches were practical for penetration. The opponents were feeling each other out on the very margin of Sikosso. The thrill of seeing the bayonets of the storming parties within the city proper had been taken from him.

He saw the way clear before him, the Bougouni road winding between two rounded hills. The Djerbas had clutched their swords, clutched their pistols and carbines. Mesnard was compelled to smile: Lucky for him there were no warriors here. The Djerbas would have turned at the first shot!

He crossed the road, entered the bushes, picked out a position between two clumps of trees, where he could draw up his men and have the highway under the muzzles of his carbines. No matter how much he disliked his task, it must be done well. The fugitives must not be allowed to pass.

Suddenly he felt his left leg grasped, fingers around his wrist. Before he could free himself, he was pulled off balance, thrown to the ground, crushed down by the muscular frame of a negro, while in his ears resounded the crackling of a hundred carbines. He struggled valiantly, in silence, but his strength was as nothing to that of his opponent. Then the native was helped by a second. His hands were trussed tightly, drawn back until his shoulder-blades almost cracked under the strain.

"Here—here!" he called out.

What were the Djerbas doing!

THE Djerbas had fled in the direction from which they had come.

When Mesnard saw Tanena, he was composed and showed no surprize. The black, although he had attacked the lieutenant and captured him, still regarded him with respect. That he was satisfied was evident, but there was no scorn in his face.

"Greetings, lieutenant," he offered in dialect.

"We meet again, Tanena."

Tanena seemed embarrassed, at a loss for words. Manifestly, Mesnard's calm impressed him.

"Thou art going to sell me, too, Tanena?" the white man asked.

Tanena gestured negation, mutely.

"Then thou art going to kill me?"

"I no savvy now," said Tanena. "Maybe yes, maybe no."

Loath though he was to bargain with the ex-Spahi, Mesnard decided not to neglect diplomacy. That Tanena held the whip-hand, there was no doubt. Mesnard left it to others to carry off with superb defiance a situation such as he found himself in. He knew Tanena.

"Let me go now, Tanena, and I will give orders to keep thee safe. If I am killed, Yeliman and the others will know it is thou —and will not forget."

Tanena pondered for a moment.

"No," he said, shortly.

"Then—what?"

"I no savvy now," Tanena said again. "When I savvy, I speak."

Upon this, Tanena entrusted Mesnard to another native and himself collected the men who had taken part in the ambush, sixty at least. He gesticulated, evidently giving orders. The men mounted, save Tanena and two others, one of whom, the lieutenant saw, was the survivor of Sani Diallo's band. They formed in a compact group, gained the road, and trotted their horses toward Sikosso.

Tanena returned to Mesnard, and, whether from respect for the white man or force of habit, saluted.

"We go in mountain," he said.

Mesnard was helped upon his horse, Tanena and the other two mounted, and they ascended the steep trail that led to the hill upon which the lieutenant had intended to conceal his Djerbas. As they rose higher Mesnard could see the bush, gray-green in the sun, sweeping down to the west, and in this bush, many riders of Babemba, some in groups, others scattered. On the reddish track of the road, he perceived the horsemen that had just left Tanena. Passing them, coming in their direction, a single

rider, whom they appeared to recognize. Also, three miles off, the banana-plantation that Mesnard had noticed on the outside of Babemba's stronghold. Bluish smoke rose over the green crests. The attacking party had forced its way to the foot of Babemba's walls. In the fact that his race was winning, over there, the white man found some consolation.

This emplacement chosen by Mesnard as a hiding-place, had appeared from below to be merely a well-protected spot with sufficient grass for concealment. Upon close inspection, it proved to be depressed in the center. And there Mesnard saw a hut, built of clay, the roof covered with turf identical to the surrounding soil, on which the grass grew as strong and green as on the ground. This hut had but one door and no windows, and, Mesnard rightly concluded, was to serve as a prison until Tanena decided upon his fate.

He wondered why the black hesitated to kill him; the thought of possible torture occurred, which he quickly dismissed. The time to worry would come soon enough.

Tanena indicated that he should enter, then showed him a sort of bed, made of branches piled between four short posts. Mesnard obediently lay down. On the threshold one of Tanena's followers built a small fire, which caused the white man to shudder once more, with a vision of red-hot saber blades applied to the sole of his feet, or plunged into his eyes. But he was mistaken. The man took from a bag strapped to his saddle, a piece of meat, stuck a pointed stick through it, and held it over the flames.

Mesnard had not breakfasted heavily that morning, had contented himself with a cup of coffee.

"Tanena, I want to eat," he said.

He had expected a refusal. Instead, the former Spahi took a portion of the meat, placed it on a layer of clean leaves, salted it. Then, morsel by morsel, he fed Mesnard, with the point of a knife.

"Untie me," the lieutenant suggested. "You are three, I am but one."

Tanena declined to do this, although he did procure water when the white man had finished his meal.

"How didst thou know where to find me?" Mesnard asked curiously.

"I had a man watching thee, lieutenant, one of the bearers. The man slipped through the French soldiers and came to me. And I knew thou wouldst come here."

Tanena, in fact, had been with Mesnard on a previous campaign, and probably reasoned he could have but one aim in straying from the camp, to choose the best spot to cut off the retreat of Sikosso's defenders.

"What are you going to do with me?" Mesnard insisted.

Tanena consented to explain:

"If the French do not take Sikosso, all that will be done to thee will be done by Babemba. He will be glad to have a white man in his hands; he has lost many men of his own."

"Good. Babemba will kill me if he lives," agreed Mesnard. "And if Sikosso falls?"

"Then I do—myself."

The white man approved with a nod.

"I see," he said. "But how wilt thou know if Sikosso has fallen?"

"Sikosso may be seen from here——"

"Wilt thou take me outside, Tanena. I want to see what happens."

Tanena agreed, and Mesnard was allowed to sit against the west side of the hut.

Sikosso lay before him, and the fighting was still going on, or so the detonations revealed. But the struggle was within the city itself now, for the cannon had ceased.

As an undertone to the firing, came an immense clamor, formed of all the shouts and screams of the combatants, an unprecise formidable roar. Outside the gate that was within Mesnard's field of vision, he could discern the movements of a group of Spahis, not from their uniforms, which at that distance were not to be distinguished from those of Babemba's men, but by the orderly aspect they presented as they swept forward from one spot to another.

The crowd by the gate was evidently hard pressed from the rear, for the Spahis were having a hard time keeping them back, and occasionally the mob seemed to spill into the open road. Very soon, Mesnard saw bayonets glinting, and knew that the infantry was through, having crossed the entire town. This spelled the beginning of the end for Babemba. Mesnard was aware that Tanena shared this belief. The black stood up, and ordered the white man to do likewise, then pushed him within the hut. The two men on guard stayed by the door, in the open.

"What now?" wondered Mesnard.

The ex-Spahi's purpose was soon revealed.

With a sudden blow, he knocked the white man's helmet from his head, then reached out for the buttons of his tunic. Tanena was degrading him! That simple revenge showed that the white man's ways were still a closed book to the negro. Tanena thought, that by tearing off the officer's buttons, he was humiliating him, as he had been humiliated! That the action, shameful in one case, could be meaningless in another, had never entered his head.

Tanena, with set face, passed from the buttons to the sleeves, ripping the gold stripes from their loops, then, with buttons and stripes, he smote Mesnard across the face. The lieutenant winced, not from shame, but from pain. Tanena had put unnecessary vigor in the action.

Then Tanena drew a long, straight-bladed dirk from a sheath slung over his back. Mesnard expected the last blow. Instinctively he closed his eyes. He felt a tug at his arms, and heard the sound of ripping cloth. Tanena wanted to take the tunic from the lieutenant's back, and not wishing to release his arms, was cutting it off.

"What art thou up to now?" Mesnard asked.

Tanena did not reply, but having shoved Mesnard to a sitting position, roughly removed his boots and stockings. Then he grasped the trousers at the bottom and pulled. Mesnard, in his underwear, was allowed to stand up. The dirk came into action again, and Mesnard, save for the rope about his wrists, was naked.

Throughout the operation, Mesnard had been certain that the worst of the experience was yet to come. And he was right. Tanena intended to make the white man go through the identical trial he had undergone in Say. He picked up a carbine, swung it, and brought the butt down sharply on the lieutenant's shoulders. Tanena was muscular, and had struck hard. Mesnard, though vigorous and wiry, felt his knees give way. Tanena did not spare him. More blows stretched the officer, face down, half-conscious, on the earth floor.

Tanena picked up the goat-skin filled with water, and allowed the contents to trickle on the naked man. Mesnard shuddered, and stirred. The negro gently brought him to his feet again. The lieutenant looked at him defiantly, but his usual mocking good humor had vanished. Tanena, with all the marks of enjoyment, swung the gun again, and again knocked Mesnard to the floor. Again, he picked him up, and relaxed into a grin. Mesnard remained silent.

From the direction of Sikosso, the firing was rapidly nearing the hut. There was fighting not far off, on the road. Mesnard, though half-stunned, heard the French advancing and prayed for them to hasten.

Tanena had changed his method. He tapped the white man's spine steadily with short, choppy blows that brought Mesnard's first groan. The black paused and stared at the lieutenant with mock sympathy.

"Art thou hurt, lieutenant? I stood more than that at Say!"

He punctuated his remark with several blows and then went on:

"Though Sikosso falls, and Babemba is taken, thou'lt not be free. Naked, before my horse, thou wilt run, before all the fleeing soldiers of the *Famal* Thus it was done to me. Thus it will be done to thee."

Tanena was speaking in Mandigo, but Mesnard could comprehend the general meaning. And his helpless horror grew. The sun was death to a white man. Sometimes, even a few minutes without a helmet, caused sunstroke. He had seen men die, who neglected to cover their heads in battle. Exertion, such as he would be compelled to give, would be death. Tanena had his revenge.

Again Mesnard went to his knees. The last vestige of pride left. He cried out.

Very near a rifle shot sounded, followed by another. Tanena, surprized, went to the door, carbine ready. Mesnard saw him suddenly reel back, saw him stagger halfway through the hut, recover, and dropping his carbine, reach for his sword, a long, slim blade, which lay naked on his discarded *gandoura*. His fingers gripped the hilt, he straightened up, but the newcomer, who had pushed him aside, was upon him.

Matar Bo, in leopard-skin gaiters, white *gandoura* and turban—but the same gigantic Matar Bo who had always been at hand when needed. It was as it should be: Tanena would be faced by Matar Bo.

According to orders, Matar Bo had attended the lessons given by white non-coms in the use of the saber. Tanena had not, and fought now in the same headlong fashion of his brothers in color. Matar Bo swung his blade in a wide circle, a perfect *moulinet*, dazzled Tanena with a half-dozen feints, and struck him a blow in the side of

the neck that cut deeply. The blood welled. And Matar Bo, who held no false conception of sportsmanship, took advantage of Tanena's dazed condition, sliced at his shoulders, at his arms, and, pouncing forward, point leveled, ran him through the stomach.

When the saber was withdrawn, Tanena fell to his knees. He shook his head striving for strength to get and renew the fight.

His mouth dripped blood, blood oozed from his shoulders, from his neck, down his chest, curling in tiny rivulets.

"*N'kari,*" he said. "Kill me."

And Matar Bo killed him.

MATAR BO cut the cord binding Mesnard.

"Dress!" he said.

Mesnard slipped into his torn garments. Matar Bo went to the door and looked out. He came back, smiling.

"Lieutenant, door is open now."

Mesnard nodded. He did not have the strength to reply. Matar Bo always was there when Mesnard needed him. It had been so in the beginning, would be so to the end. But Matar Bo felt that his presence needed explanation. He shifted from French to Mandigo, from Mandigo to French, with intervals of Bambara dialect.

When Matar Bo left the Spahis he had traveled eastward. Not being a *dioulla**. Not being a *lougan*† there was only one occupation for him—fighting. There were only two factions worth fighting for: The French, who gave men decorations and good money: Samory, who gave men high command, and far more money. Samory offered him the leadership of a number of riders.

And Mesnard, who had not understood Tanena, understood Matar Bo. Which all goes to show that judgment is often a matter of likes or dislikes. Truly, he admitted, Matar Bo was not a traitor. Matar Bo was a mercenary soldier, a paid partisan, such as had lived in Europe in the Middle Ages. He sold his sword. That was quite respectable, when a man has no fixed ideal. Matar Bo was a soldier of fortune.

No, Matar Bo went on, he had not killed Frenchmen. Being under Saranke-Mory, he had seen Frenchmen slain, but out of regard for his former leaders had taken no part in the Braulot massacre.

"Yes, I be with Saranke-Mory at Oua, when he kill plenty English soldiers," Matar Bo went on.

Oua, across the Black Volta, in British Territory, Mesnard recalled, had been the scene of a fierce encounter between Saranke-Mory and a British force under Captain Cramer. The British had been defeated, and abandoned two cannon, and had sought the protection of the French—Captain Scal—detachment in the vicinity.

"Why thou come to Sikosso, when thou dost not fight the French?" asked Mesnard.

Why? Matar Bo had been sent with reinforcement. Though not fighting, he could do lesser tasks, such as lead troops on the march. He had known that Tanena had a spy following Mesnard, and had suspected something wrong when Tanena had left Sikosso, where it had been learned, whatever secrecy had been ordered, that the French were to storm the city in the morning. He had followed. Awaiting developments, not daring to attack three men, he had seen Mesnard, bound, but seemingly in no danger, seated outside watching the fight in the city. Then Mesnard had gone within, and Matar Bo had waited, intending to tell the Spahis when they arrived, where Mesnard was, even at the risk of being recognized and arrested.

Mesnard had cried out, Matar Bo had fired twice and killed the two men on guard.

"Is the city taken?" asked Mesnard.

"All but Babemba's *tata,*" replied Matar Bo. "And soon that goes too."

"I hear a French trumpet on the road, Matar Bo, let's go!"

MATAR BO pointed to the white helmet.

"Riders in bush savvy thou art white man!" he warned.

Mesnard removed the headgear. Matar Bo wound one of the dead men's turbans about his head, and slipped a white *gandoura* over his shoulders. Mesnard realized the wisdom of this; he would have to cross the bush from the hut to the road. On the way, he might encounter hostile riders.

Matar Bo led the way out, and mounted his horse, a black beast larger than the average native horse. Mesnard likewise mounted.

"Bend thy head so, lieutenant," Matar Bo suggested. "And thy hands—so." He grinned. "Today is one time when white man must look black."

* Trading native. † Field laborer.

"Yes," replied Mesnard. "And one time when black man fight like white."

High command under Samory had seemed to give Matar Bo a new dignity. What a shame, thought Mesnard, that owing to iron-clad rules concerning gambling quarrels, a man like this should be lost to the French. Matar Bo had just killed three men, and was a hero. Before, he had killed one and was a murderer because he could not plead self-defense in a gambling quarrel.

They found the trail which led into the woods. On all sides appeared fleeting riders in white, running away from the fallen Sikosso. And, four hundred yards away on the Bougouni Road, the Spahis trumpet resounded again, a clear call, calling back the riders. The cavalry was about to go back to the city.

Mesnard lifted his head, spurred his horse, and tore through the undergrowth, intent on joining the French. Behind him came Matar Bo, crying out for him to conceal his face. And, seeing two men riding toward the French, the fugitives looked closer, saw the white face beneath the red scarf of the turban.

Though beaten, the natives were not cowed. Here was a white man upon whom they could avenge their humiliation.

Matar Bo saw them.

"Hurry, lieutenant," he called. "Matar Bo is behind thee."

What followed was a nightmare vision to Mesnard. He was conscious of Matar Bo fighting behind him, protecting him. Weak from the beating he had received from Tanena, he rushed forward for safety. Shots cracked. The mad pursuit kept on. Ahead was the open road, and Spahis, with a white man, a captain.

"Lieutenant—watch out——"

Mesnard turned. Matar Bo was swaying in the saddle.

"Matar Bo—go die—" the negro said.

Behind Matar Bo were four men, ardent, well-mounted. And Mesnard, who had been fleeing a second before with the fear of death upon him, faced them now, and before him, they fell back. The white man had a sword in his hand and fought like a demon. Two of the riders were satisfied to flee, while in the road, the Spahis, perceiving the group, made for the spot.

Matar Bo had fallen and lay face down.

The lieutenant faced the white officer who had come up to him.

"Mesnard! What the ——"

"I'll explain later," said Mesnard, kneeling beside Matar Bo.

A Spahi had dismounted. It was Yeliman.

"It's Matar Bo. He was a Spahi!" Yeliman said.

The captain rode close, looked down at the scarred cheeks of the dead man, shrugged, and said:

"A Spahi, eh? Fighting with Babemba? Those blacks have no sense of honor."

Mesnard looked up, was about to speak. Then he saw that the captain was a novice in the Sudan. A strange contraction crept into his throat. His eyes prickled and something very near tears streaked the grime on his face.

"Help me, Yeliman," he said.

And together, the white man and the Spahi lifted Matar Bo to the saddle.

NO SENSE of honor? No, not according to the white man's code. According to their own, yes. What is manhood save the strong friendships and the strong hates, save the blows given and received, and blood paid with blood. It has developed into other lines, but the elemental equations are still there.

In his *tata*, all hope gone, the *Tirailleurs* over-running the rooms, fighting with the last of his followers, Babemba was proving that honor, even in the white man's sense, was not foreign to him. The French had won, he would make their victory complete. A captain goes down with his ship. Babamba, *Fama* of Sikosso, fell with his city. He gathered his women and children into the last room of the *tata*, locked the door.

When it was burst open by the maddened *Tirailleurs*, even they, maniacal from the blood-letting of that red day, paused before Babemba's deed. He had killed, with his own hand, his children and his wives. There was a vanquished *Fama* in Sikosso that night, but that *Fama* was dead, and those of his blood would never own a master he had scorned. And, scattered in the courtyards, in the huts, on the walls, in the banana plantation, at the Dungeon, three thousand black warriors were dead, proving conclusively that in military virtue, in soldierly honor, they had lessons to accept from no one.

And when the red sun matched the drying pools in Sikosso, Matar Bo, Spahi and Samory man, was laid to rest, facing the east.

Pass Until Midnight

by Clements Ripley

Author of "Enough Rope," "Ain't That Our Luck," etc.

I SEE by the last Bluebook that General James Everett is retired. Yeah, a fine officer that it was an honor to serve under, and a grand old man.

But I wonder, when they had him stuck up there in Washington with a swivel chair under him instead of the meanest horse he could find in the stables, and medals all over him like fleas on a dog, did he ever think of the time he was "Cannon-Ball Jimmy," with a battery of red-necked field artillerymen to command, and him the only thing on top of the earth that they feared.

I'll bet he ain't forgot them days, and I'll bet there ain't a one of them wagon soldiers that ever come on the carpet before him that's forgot them either.

Not that he'd put a man up before a court for a breach of discipline. That wasn't never his way.

"In my battery," he says, "we wash our dirty linen in private. I'm capable," he says, "to handle such matters as come up without the outside assistance of a bunch of men who know nothing about them. I talk to 'em," he says.

And he done it. Holy mackerel, there was a man with the gift of tongues! There's some will r'ar back and holler, and there's one or two I've seen that would curse, but he done neither. He'd sit back in his chair and he'd smooth the back of his head with one hand, and, "Private Jones," he'd say, or "Smith" as the case might be, "it has come to my attention——"

And from there he'd go on, smooth and easy, till the skin would rise up and blister on your face and you'd feel the gobs of blood sweating out of the back of your neck. There wasn't a man in the battery wouldn't rather do a month in the mill than take a bawling-out from the Old Man. It was so he run his battery, and what I mean, he run it good.

There wasn't nobody didn't know that if the field artillery was the cream of the service, we was the cream of the field artillery. We'd been through three campaigns in the Islands, and had cleaned 'em up, like you might say single-handed, although naturally the cavalry and infantry hogged the credit, like always.

But we knew, and the rest of the service knew, if they'd admit it, what our record was when we started back to the States. It was our own doing, too, and not the smallest bit of luck connected with it. Like I've told you often, the field artillery don't have no luck, only bad luck; and that was why, five days outa Manila on our way home them Navy gobs had to go and mess up the engines of the transport.

There wasn't nothing for it but to put into Foochow for repairs, which is one of

them stinking Chino towns, and not a ball-game or a decent theayter even in the place.

Even so, when we found out we'd be there better than three days there was some of us put in for pass to go ashore and see what was to be seen.

The Old Man was good that way, and a guy that had excellent character could get permission to do pretty near anything so long as he behaved nice and got back on time. At that there wasn't hardly a guy in the battery didn't have excellent character, any other kind getting you the rough edge of the battery commander's tongue, which, believe me, it was something to keep away from.

I put in with the rest and got my pass on the second day, it being read out by the first sergeant at the morning formation. Just as he was ready to dismiss the battery the Old Man come on deck, and we snapped to attention.

"I want to speak to you men that are going on pass," he begins. "In the first place I don't want to hear of any of you getting into trouble with the Chinese. I'll not be bothered," he says, "with sending a patrol around to the police station to get some man out who's had no more sense than to get himself arrested. Second, your pass is up at midnight. Every man is to report on board ship at that time. And any man that doesn't—" he stopped and looked at us—"any man that doesn't, I'll talk to, and he'll wish he was in a Chinese jail."

I figured to myself that I'd report in before midnight if I was conscious, and if I wasn't I wouldn't never bother to come to.

"Now go ashore," he says, "and have a good time."

"Dismissed," says the top sergeant, so I shined up my shoes and put on my new hat and went.

Well, there wasn't much to see, only a bunch of Chinos, and I got sick pretty quick of walking around them twisty streets, so I commenced to look around for a bar where I could maybe watch a game of pool, when I run on to "Slim Jim" Kelly that was number one operator on our signal detail.

SLIM was a tall, long-legged, black-headed harp with a wicked blue eye and a face like on the collar ads. He wore his hat on one side like it was stuck there with chewing-gum, and his favorite line was—

"I made a hit with her all right."

He was all dolled up like Astor's pet horse, with a pair of breeches he'd had cut special for him by the battery tailor, and the smell of him would knock you for a row of garbage cans.

"Judas Priest, Slim!" I says. "Who done it to you?"

"Done what?" he asks.

"The gas attack," I says. "Them things is prohibited by the rules of land warfare."

"Oh, that," he tells me. "I got my hair cut, and the barber put some of this here poo-poo water on it to make it smell nice. This here was a swell barber-shop, where all the high ranking officers goes."

"Well," I comes back, sniffing at him, "I'll bet there ain't none of 'em any ranker than what you are this minute."

"That's because you ain't got no refinement," he remarks. "This here's an elegant smell."

"For a militia general," I admits, "it might be. But it's a —— of a handicap for a red-neck artilleryman."

"Huh!" he snorts contemptuous. "You don't know class when you see it. When you want a hair-cut you go down and let the stable sergeant run the horse-clippers over your roof."

"Well," I says, "it comes cheaper and gives me a perfume more suitable to my service."

He didn't have no comeback to that one, so he changed the line of march.

"Say," he asks me, "didn't I hear you say you talked Chino?"

"Some," I admits.

It was true, like I said, and I can still sling it some, though rusty on it now. It was a girl in Tientsin taught me, the time of the Boxer mess.

"I don't talk only a coupla dialogues," I goes on. "You see, there's pretty near as many dialogues as there is Chinos. If you was to say, 'John catchee chow," in Peking they'd make you all right, but in Canton——"

"As you were," he cuts in. "Your stuff is good enough for me. Leave it to me to talk girl in any dialogue. All I want you for is to help me get in."

"What is this?" I asks. "A female cemetery, where you got to pass an examination in modern languages?"

"Can the comedy," he directs. "This here is a swell Chino society girl I'm gonna introduce you to."

Just then I got another whiff of perfume.

"What do you aim to do?" I demands.

"Chloroform her? Or do you figure on fooling the sanitary inspector into thinking there's a drain busted loose?"

"Nemmine that low-life talk," he says. "Just because you was raised up in a stable——"

"What's the plan of campaign?" I butts in.

"By the right flank," he snaps, and leads the way into a bar.

"Now," he says when we'd sat down, "we can talk."

"Talk ain't what I craves right now," I tells him. "That stuff you got on you is like high explosive—the more powerful in effect from being confined. What I seem to need is them great open spaces you hear about."

"But listen—" he starts.

"If I gotta listen, give me something to take my mind offa my troubles," I cuts in.

"Sham Su," he says to the waiter. "It's a Chino drink," he explains," that gives you more for your money than anything I've saw yet."

I recollected that the last time I tried it was in Tientsin, and it give me half the provost sergeant's shirt and ten days in the hoosegow, but I was game for anything that would make me forget Slim Jim and what he had with him for a minute.

"Here's the idea," Slim explains while I was practising to see how long could I hold my breath. "There's a girl I seen——"

"I knew there was," I says. "What you got against her? She must'a' done you awful dirt."

"Lay off the low comedy," he growls. "This here's a high-class Chino society girl. I was ashore yesterday with a message for the Old Man, and I seen them carrying her around in a palanquin, like they have for the regular touch-me-nots in Manila. I give her the eye."

"I'll bet you did," I says. "What did she do with it?"

"What would she do? She give me a smile, like they all do."

"There was one in Manila done more than that," I reminds him with a mean grin. "She give you the laugh."

Slim he give me a nasty look.

"If you're looking for trouble—" he commences.

"I don't have to," I counters. "I known as soon as I smelled that stuff on your *cabeza* that trouble was just hunting me up. What about this Chino girl that give you a smile?"

"I followed up the palanquin and found out where she lives," he goes on. "Boy, howdy, she's a dream! Great big slanty eyes, and——"

"Get down to cases," I interrupts. "Where do I come in, if any?"

"Her old man's a high-ranking mandarin," he says. "President of the Laundrymen's Union or something like that. Them kind is liable to be a sorta particular about who calls on their family. I want to go down and see her tonight."

"Does she know you're coming?" I asks, dubious.

"No, unless she could maybe guess I would."

"She'll know all right as soon as you get to windward of her precinct," I assures him. "Only she'll probably think somebody got careless and blowed out the gas."

"What I want you to do is to go down with me," he says, not taking no notice of my mean crack, "and talk enough Chino to get me inside the house. Explain that my intentions is all right and leave the rest to me."

"My intentions is to leave it all to you," I decides. "I don't aim to mix up with no mandarins; and besides," I reminds him, "we got a date to report to the ship at midnight, and believe me I ain't going to miss it."

"Aw, come on," he urges. "We'll have plenty of time to get back to the ship. Besides, you never seen the insides of a swell Chino house."

"I seen the insides of the orderly room once or twice," I says, "with the Old Man at bat. That's excitement enough for me."

Just then the waiter brought the drinks, white-looking stuff that you'd think was gin—until you got it inside you.

"Here's how," I remarks.

Hot dog, boy, they hadn't forgot how to make that Sham Su none since them Boxer days. That shot must'a' been saving up its kick ever since then. I could feel it clear to the ends of my fingers.

"Better come," persuades Slim. "Maybe she's got a sister."

That Sham Su works fast. I begun to wonder if maybe I wasn't passing up something.

"Well," I says, cautious, "I don't aim to get into no jams nor nothing."

"Ain't I told you these is swell society people?" Slim demands. "This ain't no chop-suey joint."

"That being the case, I'm on," I agrees. "When do we start?"

"Not until dark. Better have another shot."

"I'll not answer for the consequences," I says, getting higher every second. "With another shot of this stuff in me I'd loot this town and dump the City Hall into the bay. With two more, I'd walk up to the Old Man without saluting. Show me the Chino house I can't get into."

"Wait till dark," he tells me. "There's plenty of time yet. We don't want to kill nobody."

"Speak for yourself," says I, for the stuff was working good. "Let's go see can we find a bunch of cavalry and clean up on them by way of passing the time."

But Slim he was dead set not to take no chances of missing his date, and he wouldn't take up none of my suggestions for a little amusement.

He wouldn't move a foot until dark, so we sat there talking of this and that until the drink begun to die out of us. Then we took another jolt apiece and got on our way.

We walked for maybe half a mile, through a mess of little twisty streets, more or less lit up by paper lanterns, and crowded with Chinos. There was shops along the way where you could buy anything from a dried eel's gizzard to a cage full of white rats, and there was more different kinds of smells than you could figure out in a million years. It's a funny thing in the East how a raft of pretty bad smells will go together to make one kinda nice one. I got to thinking it over, and the Sham Su in my inside and the colors of the lanterns, and the sights and sounds was all mixing together, kinda mysterious and interesting in my head, when we come to a long stone wall with a twisted, painted, wooden gate in it that Slim said was it.

I tried the gate. It was locked.

"Now what'll we do?" he asks.

I looked at it and scratched my head, and the more I looked and got to thinking of what might be inside the more curious I got to see.

"If we bang on it," he says, "like as not we'll disturb the mandarin, and he'll be sore, and we'll never get inside at all."

The wall wasn't over seven feet high at most. Our battery wall-scaling team had gone over eleven feet in twenty-five seconds at Manila, beating the infantry by five seconds and the cavalry by three.

"Gimme a boost," I says, "and when I'm on top I'll give you a hand up."

We done it like I said, and in a coupla shakes we was both straddle of the wall.

"Sitting pretty," remarks Slim, and I'll say he was right.

IT WAS plumb dark by this time, with no moon; but down below you could make out here and there a kinda faint white shape that would be one of them big white flowers like they had in the palace gardens at Peking. Somewheres off to the left there was the sound of a tiny little trickle of water falling into a pool, and every few seconds a little wind would rustle across, and you could hear the flowers bend and sway, and when that would happen you'd get the scent of 'em so heavy you could taste it on your tongue.

But just when I was taking time to admire it all Slim he touched me on the shoulder and pointed away to the right, where there was a sorta dim black mass that wasn't more than a blur in the dark.

"The house," he whispers.

"Let's go," I says, and we dropped inside.

"Skirt the wall," he suggests. "Likely when we come to the house we'll find somebody that will put the girl wise we're here."

We started, keeping one hand on the wall so as not to lose touch. It was slow going, pitch dark, and we was feeling our way through the creepers and vines, trying not to make no noise, when suddenly without a bit of warning I run my hand on to something that was alive.

It give a sort of a startled grunt and jumped up.

I didn't have no time to think; just done the first thing that come to me. I made a flying tackle in the dark and brought it down.

"Holy mackerel!" gasps Slim behind me, all excited up. "What you got?"

"I should know," I comes back, keeping my grip careful. "Feel him over and find out."

Slim crawled up past me, breathing hard, and messed around in the dark for a second.

"Hot dog!" he exclaims. "We're in luck. It's a Chino. I got him by the pigtail. Ask him can we see the kid."

Right on the word the Chino let out a yell.

It wasn't only half a yell at that. Slim got him by the throat, and choked the rest of it back into him.

"Ease up on him," I says, my end, which was the feet, beginning to flop, weak and like he was all in. "That ain't no nice way to behave. Besides, a dead Chino ain't no good to us."

Slim seen the reasonableness of it and

done so. Then was where my being able to sling the language so good come in.

"No make noise," I says. "Shut up."

He got me all right. There wasn't a yip out of him, though Slim claimed afterwards that it was because he kept his hand so tight on his throat.

" 'Melican soldado," I explains. "Wanchee see one piecee girl, b'long this place. One piecee girl have got?"

"No got," he says.

"Slim," I suggests," squeeze his neck once, easy. Like as not it'll help his memory."

"One piecee girl have got," I insists when he commenced to goggle. "Me see one piecee girl come topside this place."

"Ease up, Slim," I directs, "and let him answer."

"Have got," he admits when he got his breath.

"Fine," I says. "You bling me 'longside one piecee girl you catchee one dollar."

"Say," butts in Slim, "whose girl is this anyhow?"

"Are you talking Chino to this bird, or am I?" I asks him, which held him for a while.

"No can do," says the Chino.

Slim understood that much of the language. When I finally made him let up on the guy's throat he wasn't able to do nothing but waggle his hands feeble-like.

"Can do," he gasps. "You come 'long me."

"All right," I says, and we started, me swinging on to the Chino by the pigtail so there wouldn't be no misunderstandings in the dark.

We struck into a path, and a minute later we was at the house. There wasn't a sign of a light anywhere, but the front door was open and we slid inside.

Like I said, it was black as your hat, and you couldn't tell what sort of a dump it was except for that regular Chino smell; joss sticks and scandalwood and sorta close and mysterious. To tell the truth, it made me fell kinda nervous.

"Hold on, Slim," I whispers. "We got to keep our line of communications open. How about me waiting here?"

He'd been kinda growling and grumbling for fear I was aiming to butt into them amours of his, and this struck him about right.

"Good dope," he agrees. "If she's got a sister I'll send her down to talk to you."

"The Old Man'll do all the talking that's called for if we ain't in by midnight," I reminds him. "Don't forget that."

"Who, me?" he says, sarcastic. "What do you take me for?"

"Well," I advises, handing him the pigtail, "you'd best swing on to this. I got a swell idea this Chino ain't what you'd call *simpatico*. "If I hear you sound off I'll go into action, and vise versus."

They went off down the hall, and I must'a' waited there for maybe ten minutes. It was so pitch dark you couldn't tell your left from your right, and I didn't dare move for fear I'd fall over something and put the kid's old man wise which would crab Slim's act.

Once I thought I heard somebody talking, away off some where in the house, but I listened again and didn't hear nothing. All the time there was that heavy Chino smell, and I was beginning to get kinda jumpy when I heard somebody coming down the hall, shuffle-flip, shuffle-flip, in them soft shoes they wear.

"Hey," I says, kinda nervous.

"All lite, no makee noise," whispers a voice, which I recognized for the guy we had captured in the garden.

It sure was a relief to know it was him, and the fact that they come back for me made me figure he was friendly.

"You come 'long me," he whispers.

"Where to?" I wants to know.

"This no good place," he explains. "By'm-by maybe come boss-man. No good. I show you more good place."

"Well," I says to myself, "that listens reasonable. This guy's got the right idea."

"All right," I says, and I followed him, walking as quiet as I could.

It seemed like we went for miles, up step and down, and through little passageways, the joss-stick smell getting stronger all the time. It come to me that if I was to lose track of him I wouldn't never find my way out again in a million years.

Just when I was set to tell him I wouldn't go no further he stopped and opened a little door. We stepped inside.

"You fliend all lite," he says. "You wait here. You got gun?"

"Judas Priest, no," I says. "What would I want of a gun?"

"All lite," he reassures me. "Catchee this."

"This" was a knife about a foot long. He closed my hand on the haft of it.

"Good night!" I says. "What for this?"

"Boss-man velly bad man," he explains.

"By'mby s'pose he come one time. He chop you all up, li'l bitsa pieces. S'pose you got knife, you chop boss-man. What you think that?"

"I don't think a —— of a lot of it, I'll tell the world," I admits.

"What for boss-man wanchee chop me?" I asks him.

"No likee stlanger."

"Gosh!" I thinks. "What would he do if he was right sore on a guy?"

"S'pose you hear some noise one time, you chop first," the Chino advises, and with that he begun to move away, shuffle-flip, shuffle-flip, towards the door.

Believe it or not, I could feel every separate hair on the back of my neck come to attention.

"Hey, wait!" I sings out; but before I could get a chance to make it stick the door shut and he was gone.

I stood there in the dark, gripping the haft of that knife and listened to the cold sweat drip offa me on to the floor, and it didn't take no time at all to figure out who was going to be A.W.O.L. when the chopping started.

"Attention, feet," I says. "To the rear, march."

As cautious as I could, but not wasting no time by the wayside, I slid over to the door.

It was locked.

Hot dog, boy, what sweating I'd done before wasn't nothing to what I done then! I pulled and I yanked and I shoved, and I couldn't get no decent foothold on that board floor, and the door never give an inch. I give it up and sneaked around looking for a window, but there wasn't no more window to that room than a fish has got fur.

Finally I give that up, and felt my way all over the room, figuring that maybe I'd find something that I could barricade the door with; but the place was as bare as a bald head.

It began to look like there wasn't nothing to do but set down in a corner and wait for the main guy to come in and start chopping.

By that time the Sham Su had pretty well died out on me; and the more I set there in the dark, hanging on to that knife, the slimmer it looked. Here I was, an educated bird that had took all the trouble to learn to talk Chino, and now look at the —— thing. By this time I had doped it out that the guy that had brought me there had meant to double-cross me all along, and that most likely the boss-man was just waiting to finish up his rat's nest soup or something before he come in with a cleaver to amputate me all up.

"And suppose I do beat him to it," I mourns. "They'll find me in the morning and shove me into the hoosegow, and I'll miss my date on board ship with the Old Man.

"Ain't we got fun?" I says to myself, and was just figuring out wouldn't it be better to let him knife me and get it over with, when I heard somebody coming cat-footed down the passage towards my room.

I gripped on to that knife until I bet I wore finger-marks in the handle, and held my breath. The door opened, slow and cautious, and somebody sneaked in. Then it shut again.

"Judas Priest," I thinks to myself, not daring to breathe, "here goes nothing. The main squeeze has finished his chopping act with Slim, and he's figuring on an encore."

IT MIGHT have been five minutes or it might have been five hours I squatted in the dark, listening for him to move. Once I thought I heard somebody breathing, but I couldn't be sure, and I wasn't taking no chances any more than I had to.

Finally and at last when I was so nervous I was just about to give a yell and end it all, I heard a floor-board creak.

"On the way," I says to myself. "If anybody's going to chop it might as well be me," and an inch at a time, with my knife ready for business, I began to creep around the wall towards where I judged the sound to come from.

I don't have no idea how long it took me. I started at one corner and crawled to the next, and not finding nothing there, I went on.

It was when I come to the third corner without meeting up with nobody that I like to laid right down and passed out cold, for it come to me that he was playing the same game as me.

Here we was, the two of us, each chasing the other around the sides of that room, and it was only a question of which one was going fastest and could make the least noise. And him having passed three corners, the same as me, he might have turned around to head me off.

There's a little black book called "The Field Service Regulations." Some of you Johns that think you're field artillerymen because you know the difference between a

shell and a shrapnel might have heard of it. Anyways one of the best things it says is—

When in doubt do the unexpected.

"Now," I says to myself, "this bird will figure that I'm either following him around the wall, or turning back to head him off. What he won't figure is that any guy with brains between his ears would be out in the middle of the floor.

"And that's just where he'll be wrong," I goes on, feeling more cheerful and taking the knife between my teeth. "Let's go."

Getting there was nervous work, but finally and at last I made it and then set myself to listen and see could I locate him.

Once I was setting there, dead still and not making no sound at all myself, it didn't take me long. First I heard a faint click, like a knife-blade against a wood floor. Then come a scratch of cloth against the wall a little further along, and by that I knew which direction he was traveling. I could keep track of him by the little sounds a man is bound to make, no matter how quiet he tries to be.

He went clear around twice, and nervous as I was I couldn't help kinda grinning to myself when I heard him stop and try to figure it out. The more puzzled he was the better I felt, and I begun to be pretty cheerful when I heard him start round again, until it suddenly come over me to wonder what time it was.

Boy howdy! I'd been through some things that night, but they wasn't nothing to what I felt then. It must be close to midnight, I figured—maybe later; and when I thought of the Old Man I begun to sweat big gobs of blood.

"Judas Priest," I thinks, "this ain't getting me nowheres. I gotta get outa here, and that right speedily."

I listened to him making his circuit, and thinks I—

"Next time he passes my left flank I'll jump him and get it over with."

I got my knife ready in my hand and braced myself for a quick attack, edging far over enough towards the wall so as to be able to slip it into him when he passed. Then I crouched there and waited, listening.

"The Lord be good to the Chino that furnished this here cutlery," I says to myself as I heard him coming. "It's going to come useful."

He come nearer and nearer, and kinda faint and gradual I begun to notice something I hadn't spotted before. A second later I was sure; and, scared spitless like I was, I like to busted out laughing.

It was the smell of the poo-poo water on Slim Jim Kelly's roof.

Well, it was funny how I felt, all weak and kinda gone in the inside of my stummick, and yet wanting to laugh at the idea that the guy that I'd spent so much time getting ready to puncture was Slim Jim himself.

I didn't dast to move or speak, for he was close onto me by this time, and I was scared that if I done anything sudden he might be startled enough to try to croak me before he knew who it was. I had to sit there and let him pass me before I dared to move. I felt like the time a gun busted in the battery, and when the smoke cleared away I knew I was alive but hadn't had time to take inventory and find out was I all there.

Finally and at last I judged there was enough distance; and, "Slim," I whispers, easy and cautious, "Slim!"

He whirled around like a cat, and I could hear the air whistle in betwixt his teeth.

Then, kinda quavery and faint, he says—"Oh, it's you, is it?"

"Don't make no noise," I whispers. "Of course it's me. Who the —— did you think it was?"

"Search me," he says; "but anyway I got a knife and a half I aimed to stick clean through him."

"Did that Chino stick you in here?" I asks.

"He did, with this knife, in case I was to meet up with the mandarin——"

"—who didn't like strangers and was careless about who he chopped up," I finishes for him. "Did he tell you that too?"

"He did."

"Well, the dirty bum! And if it hadn't been for you being all smelled up like a Polack wedding——"

"Nemmine that," he cuts in, pulling out a watch with a radium dial. "It's a quarter past eleven. Man, we got to get outa here."

"Don't I know it?" I comes back sarcastic. "Anybody'd think I locked the door on purpose."

We tried the door. It had been locked again after Slim had entered.

"What'll we do?" he says, dancing up and down. "This ain't getting us nowheres."

I had an idea.

"Listen," I whispers. "By the look of things we was supposed to knife each other in the dark. If the guy that framed this thing thinks we've done it, he's going to open that door. A coupla bodies is a whole lot easier to drop down a manhole or something in the night than in the day-time, and he won't wait till morning."

"I getcha," agrees Slim. "We'll put on a noisy fight and sham dead. Once that door is unlocked it'll take a whole laundry full of Chinos to stop me on my way to the ship."

"But say!" he suggests. "Suppose they don't open the door."

"I'll set fire to this shack," I tells him, "and if we burn up with it we'll be luckier at that than if we report back late."

"Well," he admits, "it might be you're right at that, but we'll give the other a chance first. All set?"

"Let her go," I says, and he did.

It was the awfulest-sounding scrap you ever heard. There was yells and cuss words and groans; and we flopped around on the floor and like to kicked the side of the wall in, and then done it all over again. Them that had ringside seats, if any, sure got their money's worth of racket.

Finally and at last Slim give a horrible screech and flopped down on the floor, and a second later I groaned and done the same thing.

It must 'a' been about five minutes we laid there, and then, just when I had about decided that the whole thing was a frost, I heard 'em coming, shuffle-flip, shuffle-flip, along the passage. Then the door opened, and somebody lit a light.

They chewed the rag for a few minutes in some dialogue of Chino that didn't mean nothing to me, and then one of them shuffled away again, I expect to get some help to drag us out. The other set the light down and come over to where we lay, not daring to breathe.

First he fussed around Slim a minute, and then he come over an' give me a poke in the ribs, me just laying there, though it was some of the hardest work I ever done.

Then he begun to mutter to himself in Chino. Thinks I:

"If he gets them feet of his within quick reach of my hand he'll get a surprize."

I thought he'd never come up around my head, but finally and at last he done it. I reached out one hand and jerked the feet out from under him, and he hadn't no more than hit the floor, kerwallop, than Slim was setting on his head.

"So far so good," he says. "Now what?"

"Tie him up and make a get-away," I says. "I hear the Old Man a-calling me."

But it seems the room was as bare as your hand. There wasn't a thing to tie him with.

"I got it!" exclaims Slim. "Get aholt of his pig-tail and drag him over to the door. If he makes a yip, yank the head off him."

We pulled him over to the door like he said, and a second later Slim pulled the Chino's head up to the jamb and slammed the door on his pigtail.

"There," he says, tying a knot in the end of it so it wouldn't slip through, "that'll make real estate of him till somebody opens the door. When I was a kid I got the seat of my pants caught that way once, and I know."

"This ain't no time for reminiscences," I tells him. "We gotta get outa here."

"On the way," he agrees. "But which way?"

"One's as good as another to me," I admits after studying it over for a second. "Let's go to the right and trust to luck."

We didn't dare use the lantern, so we blew it out and started down the passage, feeling our way along in the dark, leaving the Chino snubbed up to the door-jamb.

"——!" I says after we'd gone a little ways. "We done a smart trick."

"What's that?"

"Left them knives in there. I got a idea we're gonna need 'em before we get through."

"Believe me I am," says Slim, "if we meet up with the bird that done us that dirt."

"Well," I points out, "it ain't no use regretting it now. I'm outa that room, and I aim to keep on going.

"That is I did aim to," I adds, for just then I banged into a solid wall, "but right here this passage ends. We'll hafta go back."

"Must be a door," suggests Slim. "Let's have a look."

"Yeah, that's it," he says a minute later. "Here's the latch."

"Wait a minute," I whispers. "How do you know what's behind there?"

"Wait, ——," remarks Slim with his hand on the latch. "With the Old Man

waiting on the other end? Forget it. We gotta get outa here."

He swung the door open.

"Now you done it," I says, for the room was a blaze of light and full of Chinos.

THERE was maybe half a dozen of 'em in them blue pajamas they wear, squatting on the floor and goggling at us standing in the doorway; but the thing that took my eye was one old-looking one with long, straggly whiskers that sat in a straight-backed chair at the other end of the room, and never batted an eye when we come busting in on them.

He was all dressed up in a long coat of yellow silk with a little round cap on his head; and he looked us over, slow and contemptuous, without even bothering to take his long, silver-stemmed pipe out of his mouth.

"Glory be!" says Slim, staring at him. "I'll bet it's the mandarin."

He took his pipe out slow, and blew a little cloud of smoke.

"Yess," he says in as good United States as you or me, only kind of hissing; "yess, it iss the mandarin."

It didn't faze Slim.

"Then how do you get outa here?" he wants to know.

"How did you get in?" he asks, slow and dignified.

When he had first spoke there was something familiar about his voice that I'd been trying to place. Now I looked closer at him, and what took my eye was a string of purple marks on his throat, like as if somebody'd been choking him.

"A-ha!" I says. "I'll bet you know how we got in."

"Yess," he admits, "I know how you got in."

"And you know what kind of a game you tried to put over on us," I goes on, getting mad, "and you know now that it fillivvered."

He smiled, but it wasn't a smile that would give you any encouragement to grin back at him. You might say he done it from the teeth out.

"Yess," he admits again, "my little plan wass a failure. But I have others."

"You better plan right now to tell us how to get outa here," snaps Slim. "We ain't got no time to waste."

"Oh, no," says the mandarin in that slow, quiet voice that it made me creepy to hear. "That iss not one of my plans."

"What the ——," Slim begins; for on the word the old bird lifted his hand, not more than a coupla inches, and two Chinos slid in between us and the door, each of 'em with a knife sticking out of his sleeve.

"Later we shall decide what to do," he remarks, and looked outa them long, slanty eyes like he was thinking of something a thousand miles away.

I looked around, thinking fast. On a little table next my hand there was a tall, blue vase.

"We gotta get outa here now," I says, and with that I grabbed the vase and swung my arm back.

It wasn't much help against a knife, but it was better than nothing and our only chance of getting back on time.

Then was when his Nibs showed the first signs of life. One second he had been looking off into space, like he was dreaming of them dear dead days back in the laundry, and the next he was down out of his chair, hopping around like a terrier that you're teaching to beg for a hunk of meat.

"Wait!" he hollers. "Oh, wait, pleass! Stop!"

It come so sudden that it had me on the run. I just stood there with the vase in my hand and stared at him.

"Do not smash it," he begs. "It is very fine jar. Han jar. Very old."

It was like falling down a coal-hole and coming up with a million dollars.

"Show us the way to get outa here," I suggests, still holding the vase where I could use it if needed.

"Oh, yess. Right away," he says, breathless.

"Otherwise I'll wreck this dump," I clinches it, looking around for more vases.

But Slim had him an idea.

"I aint gonna leave here without something to show for my trouble," he announces. "Hey, guy, how much is it worth to you to get your vase back?"

"Forget it, Slim," I says. "Your trouble ain't started yet if we don't connect with that ship by midnight."

He pulled out his watch.

"It's only half-past eleven." he says. "We got time to get us a souvenir or two."

"That being the case," I agrees, "you sound reasonable."

I turned to the mandarin.

"Like to get your vase back?" I asks him, making out like I was going to drop it.

"Pleass," he hollers. "Whatever you want. In the next room is much money. You take what you can carry."

"If there was time," remarks Slim, "I'd sooner have a knock-down to your daughter——"

"But since there ain't," I butts in hastily, "you go in the next room and get the mazuma, and I'll stay here with the vase. If you ain't back in two minutes one very old Han jar goes blooey. There's another vase over there," I adds, "that I can easy make a direct hit on from here."

It didn't take no two minutes. In half of that time Slim was back with a sack that he could scarely tote.

"All set," he says. "Let's go."

The mandarin done the guiding himself, not taking his eyes off the jar for a second. At the gate I give it to him. He give us a nasty look and ducked inside.

"Gosh!" I says when the gate slammed on him. "That's one thing that might have turned out worse."

"Yes," agrees Slim, "we might have missed reporting back on time."

"Which reminds me," he goes on, "that we ain't back yet. Gimme a lift on the end of this sack."

It must 'a' weighed a hundred pounds.

"Judas Priest!" I says. "What you got in there?"

"Money enough to buy the city of New York," he answers, "with enough left over to get a decent meal in a hotel there. We're multi-millionaires, but that won't get us nothing with the Old Man if we're late. Come on."

How we toted that sack as far as we did I don't know. My arms was pulled clean out of their sockets and my tongue was hanging out after half a mile, besides which we had to go slow on account of resting every little ways.

"Looka here, Slim," I says finally and at last. "We ain't never going to get to the ship by midnight at this rate. This being a millionaire ain't what it's cracked up to be. Let's dump the stuff in a doorway somewheres and beat it."

Slim looked like he was as sick of carrying it as I was, but he kinda hated to give it up.

"Lots a time," he says, pulling out his watch. "It ain't only half-past eleven."

"Great snakes!" I hollers. "You said that an hour ago,."

He looked close at the watch. Then he shook it and held it to his ear.

"My ——!" he says. "It's stopped!"

I dropped the sack and flopped down on it.

"Slim," I moans, "when you was fixing to carve me up back there, why didn't you go ahead and do it?"

He didn't say nothing. He just sat on the sack, staring straight in front of him with his shoulders humped up and his mouth open.

"Well—" he comes to at last—"we're into it now."

"You ain't never made a brighter remark," I tells him, "since the clever crack you made to the minister when you was four years old."

Like it happened we was setting right outside the bar of a swell-looking hotel.

"Here!" I says. "We're overdue anyhow, and we'd just as well be hung for a sheep as a goat, like the feller says. If I'm slated for a swaray with the Old Man I'm going to have a jolt of something to help me on my way."

"Just what I was thinking," agrees Slim.

We lugged the sack into the bar and dumped it on the floor, whilst we lined up and got a shot apiece of red-eye.

It was a swell hotel, like I said, and the barkeep was a white man.

"Fifty cents, Mex," he says, looking us over, cold and suspicious.

Slim hoisted the sack up onto the bar.

"Take it outa that," he says, swelling his chest and sticking his hat on one side.

"The old guy tried to wish off a lotta laundry tickets on me," he yells me while the barkeep was opening the sack, "but I seen this sackful of hard coin and grabbed on to it."

By this time the barkeep had undone the string and was looking the stuff over kinda funny and like he didn't know what to make of it.

"Don't be afraid," Slim tells him. "Take what you want. I ain't the kind of a guy that counts my change."

He looked at us, cold and fishy, for a second and then slid the whole thing, sack and all, under the bar.

"You owe me about fifteen cents more," he says, short and ugly. "There might be thirty-five cents worth of money in that

sack. I ain't got no time to bother to count it."

"What?" yells Slim, and he was half-way over the bar before he got the word out.

The bar-keep grabbed ahold of a bung-starter.

"Just keep your shirt on," he warns him. "Them 's cash,' and it would take a wagon-load of 'em to buy you a suit of overalls."

"Them laundry tickets," he goes on, wiping off the bar with one hand and holding the bung-starter with the other, "them laundry tickets you was talking about was probably bills of the Bank of China."

Slim's jaw dropped till you could hear it click.

"——'s delight!" he says. "Gimme a short pencil and some pink paper and I'll make enough money in fifteen minutes to buy the Statue of Liberty."

"Yeah," I tells him, "and give the Old Man fifteen minutes alone with us and he'll have enough skin offa the backs of our necks to make her an overcoat. Come on," I says, "and get it over with."

THERE was a kind of a swell rolling in and when we got to the ship it was buck-jumping around something fierce. The first person we seen was the top sergeant, hanging on to the rail.

"Good morning," he greets us, mean and sarcastic. "We'd just about give you up. The battery commander's just come in, and he's waiting to receive you in the orderly room," he says. "If I was you I'd treat him nice. He had a rough time on shore, and with this —— ship rolling around his supper ain't sitting pretty."

The Old Man feeling good was a mean proposition to go up against when you had something on your conscience; but the Old Man feeling ugly— Wow!

I could hear Slim's knees knocking together as we come to the door of the orderly room, and I could hear it above the rattle of my own teeth at that.

"Come in," growls the Old Man, and we come.

He was setting at his desk facing us, and from the looks of his face I judged the Top had been right when he'd said he had a rough night.

We shut the door after us and come to attention with a snappy salute.

"Well," starts the Old Man, quiet and gentle, smoothing the back of his head, "it had been brought to my attention that——"

He stopped sudden and begun to sniff the air. Then he turned a kinda gray-green and sniffed again.

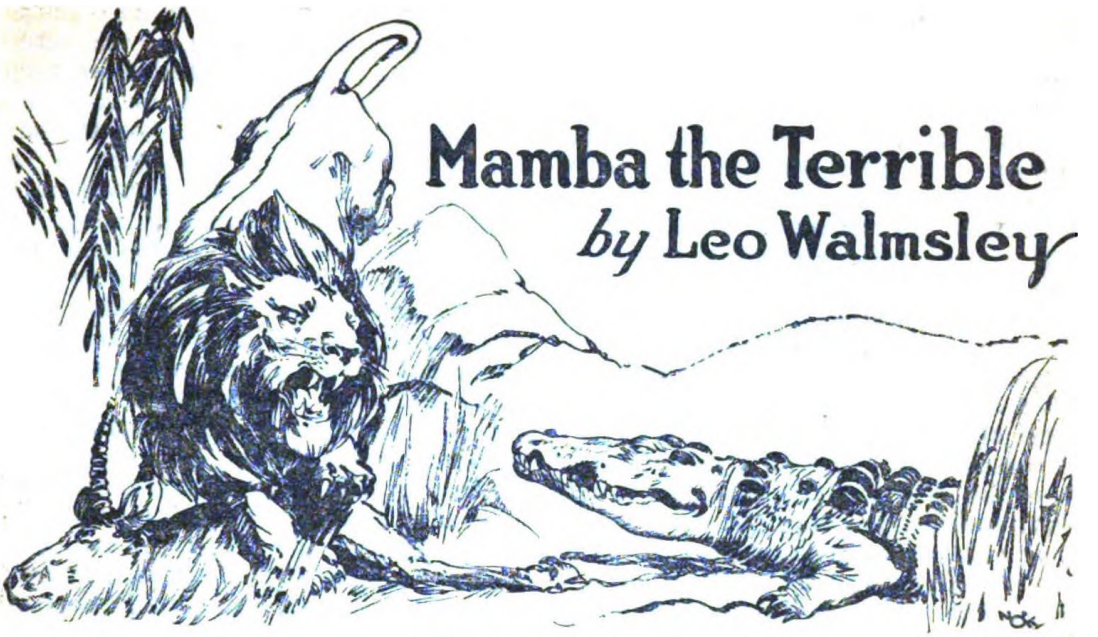
"Great guns," he hollers. "What's that smell?"

"Sir," says Slim, in the miserablest tones I ever heard out of a human, "I believe it's my hair, sir. It's some stuff the barber put on it, sir."

Just then the ship give another roll. The Old Man put his handkerchief up to his mouth, and his eyes looked like they'd pop out of his head.

"My ——!" he says, kinda choking. "Get outa here quick, the two of you. And stay——"

He kinda groaned, and we slid for the door; and that, so far as I know, is the only thing Cannon-Ball Jimmy Everett ever started that he didn't finish.



Mamba the Terrible

by Leo Walmsley

Author of "Sir Mellivora."

MAMBA the Terrible lay on a crescent of sand at the river's edge, his great tail lapped by the water, his head just nicely placed between two shadow blotches made by the foliage of a tall mahogany, bending outward from the bank. Mamba liked to feel the hotness of the sun on his head; also to have at least one portion of him in the safer of his two elements so that he might take to it quickly if circumstances thus advised.

High up in the tree, a troop of green monkeys played, screaming and chattering so that the whole riverside echoed with noise. They were never still for a second: From branch to branch they chased each other, leaping, swinging, wrestling, mock-fighting, using up so much energy that the other inhabitants of the jungle, wisely spending the hot hours of the day in rest, might well have marveled that such foolish creatures could exist.

But Mamba never stirred. One might have thought him dead. Even his eyes, wide-opened and full of liquid color, were motionless, and gave no indication of the purposeful little brain that lay behind in that flat, tapering, iron-plated skull. From his position he could not see the monkeys, although at times one of them would run out on the thin river-arching branch which supplied the shadow blotches, and do acrobatics not six feet above him. He was aware of them, however, grimly aware.

He knew precisely how distant that amazing gymnast was from his jaws. Doubtless he knew precisely how many monkeys there were in the troop. Not a sound or movement of them that was not registered and pondered upon within that devilish brain of his. One monkey snapped off a dead branch, and after playing with it awhile, thought of some fresh trick, and dropped it so that it fell with a *thwack* on the tip of Mamba's snout. Not by the slightest tremor or flicker of eye, however. did he betray annoyance. Mamba in truth was waiting—and in the art of waiting no animal is more accomplished than the crocodile. He had already waited three hours for those monkeys to cease their playing. He was prepared to wait another three—or more.

And so, while the brown waters of the great Wami lapped his tail, and the sun mounted higher and higher, reached its zenith and then began to shape a downward, western course, he lay on the sand, immobile as a stranded log; until at last a sudden silence fell upon the noisy ones, and a sudden alertness, as if some danger had made itself manifest. They stopped their mad gamboling. Each sat down on its haunches, and peered about with eyes intent, sniffing the air most eagerly. Then, as if by a plan already arranged, they spread out along the branches, each halting at a point where it

could command a portion of the jungle adjacent to the tree. The troop was about to drink.

Now all inhabitants of the jungle, even such foolish ones as the monkeys, know that drinking is the most perilous incident in their day; that at no other time is caution so essential. There was not a member of the troop, young or old, whose nerves were not at this instant tuned to every vibration of light, sound, or smell that the jungle air contained; and the one who now began to descend the ladder of swaying branches looked as if each rung he touched transmitted an electric shock.

It was a male—full-grown—and evidently one of the fathers of the troop, for it was clearly taking upon itself the risky job of seeing that the drinking-place was safe. Soon it had reached the lowest branch, a broken one, whose end stopped abruptly near the bank margin of the sand and about a yard above it. It halted there with its tail stiff and erect, while it jerked its head from side to side. Then very lightly it leaped to the sand, halted again, and after a tense pause began to walk very gingerly toward the water's edge.

One would think that even from the top of the tree, the youngest member of the troop would have recognized Mamba as a crocodile and, in spite of his immobility, as a very live one. But the monkeys, as all the jungle folk know full well, are fools. How could they be otherwise when they spend all their lives in play? To that reconnoitering monkey, Mamba was evidently nothing but a piece of driftwood cast up while the river was in flood. Crocodiles as enemies had never come into its experience. What it feared was the leopard —the traditional enemy of its tribe—and the eagle.

And Mamba remained quite still. The monkey stopped at the water's edge, a full six feet away, and, crouching down, took a quick lap. The water was very shallow there however. The monkey's tongue stirred up the mud. So it moved higher, still cautious, still with its tail erect, still jerking its head from side to side and upward to catch any message from the sentinels overhead. But the troop was satisfied that the coast was clear, and impatiently was waiting for a sign from him that they might come and slake their throats, so hot and dry from continuous screaming.

Nearer, still nearer did it approach the waiting crocodile. The water was getting deeper. At last it crouched down again, took a lap, looked up and drank more slowly. And then like an explosion the giant tail of Mamba, the Terrible, shot up from the water and the reptile pivoted on his hind feet, swung completely round with terrific speed and force. An elephant would have lost its balance in the shock and utter suddenness of that sweeping blow. The monkey was caught in the arch of the tail. Screaming hysterically it was swept up, and over the sand, and down to the water again. And as it splashed, Mamba as suddenly stopped dead, swung round his head, with jaws agape, and snapped——

Foolish, heedless, reckless is the monkey— But there is not upon the earth a creature of such lightning agility. Crack went Mamba's dripping upper-jaw upon the monkey's shoulder, and you would have waited, with breath held back, to hear the horrid clench of teeth in flesh. But there was no such sound. All in that fraction of a second the monkey tightened every one of its rubber-like muscles into steel-hard knots, and let them go—and as a bullet shoots from the barrel of a gun, so did that marvelous creature shoot from the reptile's very maw—up and down again—to the sand, and then with an energy treble-charged with fear, it leaped at the overhanging branch—held with its little hands, and swung up to safety.

Noise! The noontide screaming of the troop was a veritable whisper to the tumult that ensued—for monkeys possess an imagination, and the escape of one was the escape of every one. Never had such a shouting and screaming been known by that riverside. The very leaves seemed to tremble to it.

But Mamba heard it not. Hungrily, expectantly, confidently he had wasted five good hours for a meal that might not come his way again for many days, and as he paddled fiercely along the bottom of the great Wami River terrible indeed were his thoughts.

BY SUNDOWN Mamba had traveled a couple of miles from the spit of sand, not so quickly as he might have done, of course, for he had searched every likely pool on the way on the off-chance of finding a fat barbel in the mud, and had lain for fifteen minutes at the edge

of a papyrus-clump while a young water-buck hesitated in the adjacent jungle, knowing not whether to drink or to wait for its parents first. Apparently it decided on the latter course. At any rate it gave Mamba no opportunity for easing the pains of hunger that gripped his internal economy.

And Mamba *was* hungry. For a space of two weeks he had eaten nothing but a few small fish. Fish, in the ordinary course of events, would form his staple diet. One's brain reels to think how many fish had gone to build up the sixteen-odd feet of his tremendous bulk. You can not eat fish and still have them however. The best stocked river in the world would soon be fishless with a creature like Mamba fishing there.

So to all intents and purposes was the Wami, or at least that part of it ruled over by Mamba the Terrible. His reputation had also traveled across the veld, and for the past two months the antelope had preferred to do their drinking at one of the river's numerous tributaries, which though shallow and extremely dirty was certainly more safe.

Only the water-buck remained faithful to the river itself. These, however, have such an instinctive fear of the crocodile, such a marvelous knowledge of their habits and of all their subtle hunting tricks that it is rare indeed they come within the reptile's dietary, and Mamba would never think of waiting for one unless it happened to be a calf, or one run down by hunting dogs.

He had come now to a sharp elbow in the river, where the water was sluggish and deep and formed a broad, triangular pool. Across this he paddled, with the top of his skull and his wicked little eyes just visible, and then although convinced there was nothing moving in the jungle on either side, he pushed his way into the papyrus at the apex of the elbow and came to rest.

A month ago, this was as likely a spot for pulling down a drinking antelope as any on the river. Three yards down-stream the papyrus gave way to a tongue of mud, pitted with the spoor of countless animals, gazelles, eland, zebra, giraffe, rhinos, lions even; all old, however, and brick-dry. Here, six weeks before, Mamba had actually killed a giraffe, seizing it by the snout as it drank, and holding on until at last it fell on its knees and was drowned. Three other crocodiles drawn by the scent of blood had come to his assistance, had helped him to drag the great carcass to a certain sunken cave a hundred yards down-stream, and had been permitted a whole leg between them for their trouble. Mamba was never generous!

But now there was no sign of living creature by the drinking-place, nor on the tortuous path which led from it through the jungle to the veld. Above in the trees, however, was perched a cormorant, who, seeing Mamba, croaked a bitter protest and finally took to his wings, doubtless concluding that if there had been a fish in the pool before, it would be barren henceforth.

By this time the sun had set, and the purple twilight was rapidly turning to night. Mamba knew the chances of a kill were very slender. The moon would rise soon. That would make matters worse. Yet here there was a prospect of sorts, and he settled himself among the papyrus, his head and shoulders just visible above the water, the whole of him deadly still.

The shadows darkened. The stars peeped out. The night life of the river-side awakened; frogs, cicadas, crickets drowning the soft swish of the river in a chorus of noise. Great bats flitted among the trees. Owls hooted ghostlily, and from the veld the hyenas called like lost souls.

Suddenly from the river there came a mighty splash and a queer gurgling sound. Mamba trembled slightly—but he made no noise. Hippos did not interest him, he sincerely hoped, however, that this one would not take it into its foolish head to land on the spit of mud. That would spoil everything. His hope was gratified. The hippo was bound up-stream, for he knew of a patch of maize at this hour unguarded by its human owners; where an excellent meal was to be obtained for the simple breaking down of a fence.

The night wore on. The moon rose, gibbous yet so clear it soon bathed the veld in cold, blue light, and traced out the foliage and the tall river-trees in gleaming silver. A beam stole through the papyrus and sparkled in Mamba's eyes, making them glow like coals against the black velvet of the water.

He did not like that beam. He moved slightly and seemed as if he were about to give up his vigil and take to the river again. But at that very instant there came from the jungle the sharp beating of hoofs, a sudden crash, a scream, and just as suddenly a

silence—broken quickly by a hoarse cough, and a crunching—terrible to hear.

As if his spinal cord had snapped Mamba stiffened. A short silence followed. Then came the crunching again and a roar that made the very ground vibrate, the "kill" roar of a lion. And Mamba did not wait to hear more. Already his keen nostrils had scented the smell of blood; already his whole being thrilled with the passion of his hunger. He began to move slowly, but with an incredible noiselessness, out of the papyrus—across the spit of mud—then up the bank to the jungle path.

And there in a broad pool of moonlight the lion stood, with head held back, limbs trembling with rage; a frightful snarl upon its face; on the ground in front of it the still quivering carcass of a water-buck, from which the blood flowed out like molten metal, casting exquisite patterns on the moonlit earth.

The lion saw Mamba. It crouched down, the snarl still on its face, its tail switching the grass behind it. But it did not spring. It knew too well the futility of attack. Unless it could reach the reptile's belly with its claws, or get in one quick and accurate bite behind the neck, it might just as well pit itself against a rock. Besides, it knew the usefulness of the tail, the action of that upper jaw, more quick and efficient than its own. No, the lion wished for no fight—but it had no desire to lose a well-earned supper. Laying its forepaws on the water-buck and burying the claws deep, it began to shuffle backward through the jungle.

Mamba was up to the ruse however. He moved quicker—and suddenly he rushed, closing his jaws on the buck's trailing hindquarters, locking them, and simultaneously planking his feet well down upon the earth braced himself for the shock.

Now the lion was a magnificent one—nearly mature—in perfect condition, but it would have taken at least another couple of its strength to have dragged a water-buck and a sixteen-foot crocodile through the jungle. It held against the first shock, however, and actually gained a foot with a quick tug which momentarily dislodged the reptile from its hold. Yet it was no real gain; in fact, an older, wiser, and less hungry lion would have made the best of the bargain there and then by biting off a sizable portion of meat, and leaving the rest to the thief. Instead of which it did a very fatal thing.

It lost its temper. Regardless of all caution it let go of the buck, crouched back, and sprang, alighting with hind paws upon the buck, fore paws neatly spread upon the reptile's shoulders in such a way that a swift dip of the head brought lion's mouth and reptile's neck into perfect alignment for the bite. And the lion did bite, its incisors actually pierced the skin—its tongue tasted such blood as it never had before.

But that was all. Mamba, the Terrible, wriggled—like a man with a bit of fluff tickling his spine—threw the lion off its balance—and then, without even troubling to loose his hold on the buck, swung his body outward and brought his tail crashing back like a giant steel spring, catching the lion across its belly and whipping it, stunned and helpless, into the jungle.

Very slowly then, reptile and buck began to move rearward, the latter's head, as it caught on a branch or stone, jerking in a grimly life-like manner: And the moon glinting among the foliage shone in Mamba's eyes, and on the pink margin of his jaws, creating the impression that he was leering. A frightful thing to see.

IT IS not every day in the life of a crocodile that a lion provides a water-buck for dinner, and one evening a week later found Mamba the Terrible as hungry as he had ever been. He had hunted the river six miles up and as many down. It seemed to him there was not a fish in it larger than a trout—saving, of course, the tiger-fish who were too quick for him and were perhaps just as much to blame as he was himself for the general shortage.

On this particular evening a thunderstorm had broken, and the rain falling in sheets made it more improbable than ever that the antelope would come to the river bank.

At dark he crept on to the crescent of sand where he had missed the monkey, and came to rest as before. But this time he was not motionless. His tail was jerking from side to side—his sharp claws scratched little hollows in the sand. He was ill at ease. Shortly he started to wriggle toward the bank, and after a nervous pause, he climbed it, and found himself on the path of a water-buck heading through the jungle veldward. He followed it.

At last he was clear of jungle, at the edge of the open bush. Never in his whole life had he been so far from the river before; the

river which had seen his birth, his very sanguinary youth, his even more sanguinary maturity. What was he about? I doubt whether he knew himself—that he was conscious of anything but a vague sensation that he had embarked upon a great adventure—that he was leaving the river behind him forever.

The short veld grass was soaked by the rain. The ground itself was not too hard for his feet, so accustomed to mud. For a while he wandered about aimlessly, as if he were finding it difficult to comprehend the novelty of his surroundings; as if, in his mind, there were fear-thoughts trying to stifle the new-born impulses, that had gripped him and were urging him back to the river.

But this hesitancy soon passed. He found a clear-marked path shooting out through the bush at right angles to the fringing jungle, and suddenly as if the path were as familiar to him as the gravelly bottom of the Wami, he set out along it at a speed, with a determination, that would have left no doubt in your mind that Mamba the Terrible had indeed forsaken his native hunting-ground, and was bound on a tremendous enterprize.

Now the veld for many miles surrounding the great Wami River is level as a table-top. It consists for the major portion of open bush, relieved here and there by little plains or *vlei*. It is ideal country for game. But thoughts of hunting, for the time being at any rate, were not in Mamba's mind; in fact, the first animals he encountered—a large troop of zebras—caused him to lie up on a patch of long grass, where he stayed until they were out of hearing. Game—away from water—was of no use to him. His teeth were not made for tearing live flesh—merely for holding. It is the habit of his tribe to depend on certain biochemical processes for the disintegration of their bulky foods. The giraffe, for example, was not devoured until three days subsequent to its decease.

All things considered, the speed of Mamba the Terrible was prodigious, and more wonderful still was the silence with which he traveled along—even when the path gave out, and he was forced to make his way through grass and bush. Time after time he surprized small herds of grazing antelope, who, alert enough against other beasts of prey, little expected to find a crocodile in the middle of the veld.

Once he got right into the middle of a herd of eland—creatures as big and weighty as an ordinary ox—and they were so terrified that one actually ran right over him, giving him a mighty kick on the side of his head, that would have instantly killed anything but a pachyderm. More by instinct than anything else Mamba snapped his jaws—but they encompassed nothing but air, and he didn't worry to use his tail.

No—the great reptile had no time or desire for hunting. Some greater purpose was in his mind. He wanted water—a new home—a place where that colossal strength and cunning and ferocity of his might win something worth while. True, in the whole of the Wami there was not a single crocodile dare dispute his right to a hunting beach; not a male who dare challenge his right to a wife. Yet what was this autocracy worth if he had to go hungry for weeks on end!

And the strange thing is he knew not whither he was bound. It was just as if a magic lamp were running across the veld in front of him—guiding him—luring him ever onward to the pools of promise, pools of infinite sunshine—infinite food—infinite delight. And all through that night he traveled, never resting once. And just as the eastern sky was paling, and the veld began to glow with that mystic light which precedes the tropic dawn, his muzzle pushed into a wall of dripping papyrus, his hot, tired feet felt the delightful gurgle that comes from liquid mud, and Mamba knew his journey was at an end.

THE Pool of Matumbas, although not large enough in the opinion of His Majesty's Colonial Survey Office to merit the name of lake, is nevertheless a sizable stretch of water, and contains such inexhaustible quantities of a particularly delectable species of fish, that its name is famous throughout the Territory.

The fish are caught communally, the natives walking into the water with great rolls of bamboo fencing, which they arrange in the form of a great V its point to the beach and its legs wide spread. Into this V the fish are driven, trapped, and borne to the shore, where they are split, sun-dried, smoked, or allowed to reach that state of decomposition so appreciated among certain tribes, where palates are, to say the least, dainty.

Now the curious thing about Matumbas

Pool is that it contains neither crocodiles or hippos; although it is obviously big enough and rich enough in food to support a very large population of the former. The reason possibly is that it is shallow, and the ground around it is comparatively high and never flooded, even in the height of the rainy season.

The fishing therefore had none of those terrors usually associated with the African lakes. The natives will go in well over their waists in water and think no more of danger than you or I would in our bathroom.

But Mamba the Terrible had arrived at Matumbas Pool. No one witnessed his arrival. The inhabitants of the village—so easily do they earn their livelihood—are lazy and rise late, when the cold mists have been dispelled by the sun, and they rarely fish before midday. And Mamba was too wise to make his presence known while they were busy on the banks. He was familiar with human beings of course. An X-ray photograph of his stomach would have revealed clear evidence of this in the shape of sundry wristlets and metal ear-rings: Souvenirs of a year spent in the higher reaches of the Wami—before the natives took to firearms, and caused him to avoid that hitherto productive hunting-ground like the plague.

He had a very great respect for human beings had Mamba. Besides, he was far too clever not to realize that he had found something too good to be spoiled for want of a little tact.

Food! Never in all his experience had he encountered anything to compare with it. In places the fish were packed in almost solid walls. He had but to raise his upper jaw—and close it again—snap—a mouthful every time! It took him exactly fifteen minutes to fill the emptiness of a week's starvation. Then very leisurely he paddled across to the deepest portion of the pool—found an island of his favorite papyrus—thrust just the tip of his muzzle and his eyes out of the water—and sank into that blessed state of semi-unconsciousness which in the reptile tribe goes for sleep. Later, when the natives started to fish, he sank down and rested at the bottom, but he rose again at sunset, took another easy meal and rested as before.

And so for two weeks Mamba lived in the Pool of Matumbas without detection, and if the natives did grumble that their catches were becoming slightly less bulky, there was not among them one who guessed the reason.

Mamba by this time had learned the habits of the fishermen. They always fished at the same place—immediately in front of the village; they invariably fished at the same time—when the sun was directly overhead and the water agreeably warm. He had adjusted his habits accordingly, feeding in the early morning and late evening, spending the dangerous midday hour in the mud at the deepest part—which, however, at this time of the year measured but four feet. Yet the water was muddy and he felt secure—so secure, in fact, that even with the shouts of the men throbbing through the water he would not stir.

Now it happened one day that the fishermen, disgusted that their previous catch had been so poor, decided to try the very part of the pool where Mamba rested; and out they waded into it, unrolling their bamboo fencing as they went, but as yet making no noise—thinking to reserve all that for the shoreward drive. A tall, thin man bore the end of one of the rolls. The rest walked at regular intervals between him and the shore.

He went slowly, picking his way in with one foot at a time to avoid any thorn branches that might be lying in the mud. At last he had nearly reached the last turn of the roll. The water was lapping his arm-pits. Out went his right foot for the final hold—and then there came from him a sudden shout—a shriek—a high-pitched scream and a frightful gurgle—as his head sank down and the water bubbled into his open mouth.

Now in all justice to Mamba let it be said that he had not deliberately sought to bring about the death of that man. But when a dozing crocodile, unsuspecting of danger, suddenly feels the pressure of a human foot on the back of its head, one may expect that something rather drastic will occur. Mamba, in fact, was just as startled and as frightened as the man. He held on—simply because it seemed the only thing to do. He was bewildered—beside himself with fear. But not for long.

Mamba, on the upper reaches of the Wami, had learned a lesson he was never likely to forget. He left go of the man's leg—swung round carefully, so as not to cause too much stirring of the water,

paddled a yard or two and halted, allowing himself to sink as deep into the mud as possible. And then he waited—knowing well that trouble of a sort he did not care for was coming his way.

The man, whose lungs fortunately contained sufficient air, floated up. In spite of his smashed leg he got his head out of water and began to swim for the shore. His companions, however, had fled—and stood watching him—terrified—from the banks. He went under again—bobbed up—and would have gone down finally had there not suddenly splashed out from the shore a short, bronze-skinned, heavily-bearded man, clad in well-laundered khaki shirt and shorts.

And to that Englishman the native certainly owed his life.

Smith was his name; a civil engineer, engaged on road construction a couple of miles from the pool.

Mr. Smith had come to Matumbas to buy fish, which accounts for the fact that at the precise moment of Mamba's startling appearance he was an extremely angry man. After all one doesn't expect to pay a rupee each for fish, when they are as plentiful as at Matumbas Pool. Such however was the price the fisherman had asked him, and Smith swore—and said he would report them to the district commissioner, and do many dreadful things.

After the rescue incident, however, Smith was not swearing. He sat in the shade of a mango-tree, smoking his pipe and occasionally smiling. The natives had quite changed their attitude toward him. They offered him fish by the ton—he need not pay more than half the price previously asked. But all he said was:

"You want that mamba killed, eh? You wait—you wait."

An hour later one of Smith's porters, hot and steaming, came back from the road camp with a small, wooden box.

Smith's smile broadened as he opened it, and spent a careful five minutes adjusting its contents.

"Now I want little boat," he said. "Row out to that deep part."

The boat was fetched round to the landing place. Smith and one of his own natives got in, and gingerly the boat was maneuvered to the spot where Mamba the Terrible had made his dramatic appearance.

"You think here?" said Smith to the native.

"Yes, *bwana*. Mamba here truly."

Smith raised the little parcel, from which a long white cord protruded. He put one end in his pipe. It spluttered and began to smoke. Then very carefully the white man put the parcel into the water, and as it sank shouted to the native:

"Shore—*upezi sana!* Shore—*upezi sana!*"

Mamba felt the little parcel drop gently into the mud beside him. He could not see it of course—the water was too thick. It did not worry him much however; not even when his sensitive hearing-apparatus detected a queer sputtering noise. He squirmed perhaps six inches—that was all—and buried himself a little deeper. He was expecting serious trouble—something far noisier and more obviously dangerous than this.

Splutter—splutter—splutter——

Smith on the bank still wore that imperturbable smile of his. He turned to his porter—

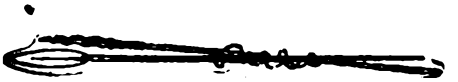
"Those boys coming *mara-moja?*"

"Plenty boys come," the native answered. "I tell them—plenty fish—no pay."

"Good!" said Smith, and the next second a cone of water like a waterspout shot out from the deep part of the pond—followed by a *bang* that shook the very ground. A tumultuous splashing—a ring of waves that broke like ocean surf upon the shores of the pond—a reverberating echo of the *bang*—and all was still.

"Now for the crocodile," said Smith—and this time with a ringing laugh. "And now for free fish—look at 'em—look at 'em, boy!"

On the surface of the water there floated belly upward almost every fish the far-famed Pool of Matumbas contained; and like an island in the middle of a silver-gleaming sea—the shattered carcass of Mamba the Terrible.



Wonderful Air

A Complete Novelette by F. R. Buckley

Author of "Appearances," "Flor De Garfield," etc.

"IN SHORT," said Doctor Henry W. Rogers, in the crisp, clear manner of one summing up a simple but long-extended argument for the last time, "in short, this nuisance has got to be stopped, sheriff, or I'll know the reason why."

Mr. William Garfield opened his antique blue eyes.

"Are you quite done talking?" he inquired.

The sleekly shaven jaw of the doctor twitched hastily.

"I——"

"Yes, I know," said Mr. Garfield, rising from his ancient cane chair and waving a hand. "You could go right on chatting until this new patient of yours gets here on Number Seventeen; but what I mean is—have you finished the useful part of your discourse? Have I got all the facts? Have you stated your complaint in full? Because I am now thinkin' of makin' a reply unto you, and if there's one thing I hate more than another, it's bein' interrupted. In fact, I won't stand it. This is a hot afternoon, an' it's Saturday, which means that a gang of bankrupt cowpunchers will shortly descend on me to eat canned fruit; an' if this new patient is like all the others I'll have a couple of dozen trunks to toy around with. In spite of all this, I aim to answer you; but I want a clear track. Have I got it?"

The doctor smiled. Considering that he was two feet taller than Mr. Garfield, and about forty years younger, the smile was rather more nervous and placatory than might have been expected from a man so well-dressed and confident, confronted by an officer so mild and so shabby as the sheriff of Three Pines; but contact with old Bill was likely, somehow, to have a weakening effect on the self-esteem.

"Yes," said Dr. Rogers.

Mr. Garfield stumped over to the doorway, entrusted his entire weight of ninety-seven pounds to his peg-leg, and leisurely surveyed the landscape. It was two o'clock; and the prairie, which stretched from the foot of the porch steps to the Rio Grande, danced and shimmered in the heat. On the crown of a little rise of land to the east, there hung a dust-cloud, from whose center, along the white ribbon of trail, a dozen black dots were emerging at a speed which betokened galloping; and from far away to the northwest there sounded through the still air a faint, thrice-repeated whistle. Barring derailments and gopher-holes respectively, Number Seventeen and the punchers from the outlying ranches would reach Three Pines simultaneously; and, having decided that these arrivals lay a good ten minutes in the futur , the old sheriff stumped slowly back and faced his visitor.

"You claim that this James Madison, aided an' abetted by the three Cole boys, and accompanied by various other persons unknown, has been makin' a noise on the trail near the Risin' Sun ranch-house," he began.

"I state that on three separate occasions, these ruffians have galloped past my sanatorium, yelling like Indians and firing revolvers in the air! And I——"

"Are you going to talk, or me?" asked Mr. Garfield.

The doctor shrugged his exasperation.

"You come to me," resumed the sheriff, "an' you make the above statement, an' you demand that for makin' the aforesaid noise near the Risin' Sun ranch-house, I should arrest this Madison, and the three Cole boys, an' all the persons unknown, an' presumably put 'em in jail for fifty or sixty years each. You make this demand in an insolent and a bossy manner, an' when I tell you it can't be done, there bein' no law against makin' a noise—in fact they got a perfect right to do it——"

"Have they got a right to disturb the sleep of a dozen patients, nervous and ill?"

Mr. Garfield combed his gray whiskers reflectively. There was a certain peculiar red light in his eye.

"Well, the trouble there," he said, "is that these boys know, as well as you do, and I do, and everybody else around here does except the womenfolks—that as a matter of fact, there ain't any nervous or ill patients at the Risin' Sun. There's a bunch of rich people with mean dispositions, which they're payin' you to call illnesses an' coddle. You needn't trouble to argue. They're well enough, the whole gang of 'em, to ride all over the country, breakin' fences an' stampedin' cattle, an' insultin' all an' sundry. Naturally, they don't want their sleep disturbed; but then on the other hand, these boys want their fun. An' strange as it may appear, the law of the State of Texas is behind them, an' not behind you."

"In other words," snapped Dr. Rogers, "you, the sheriff, uphold a gang of bandits against a peaceable colony of——"

Mr. Garfield held up one hand.

"One moment," he begged. "That word 'bandits,' now. Have you any proof that this Madison, the three Cole boys, and the other persons hereinbefore mentioned, are bandits?"

"Why, it's the talk of the county!"

"The talk of the county," said Mr. Garfield regretfully, "makes mighty poor evidence. I shouldn't advise you to go around sayin' things like that, Mister Doctor; you might get into a kind of trouble that'd surprize you. An' you better shuck yourself out of that notion about my upholding anybody against anybody else. I uphold the law—that's all. If I upheld any private party, moreover, it wouldn't be you. I don't like you, I don't like your sanatorium, I don't like the peolpe in it, an' particularly I don't like the way you've treated Doc Brewer."

"The eminent prospector-medico?"

"Yes," said Mr. Garfield, abandoning his unbiased attitude and beginning to breathe heavily through his nose, "the man who was a miner until he'd fought through the Civil War in my regiment, an' who got himself educated into a doctor afterwards, an' doctored this whole countryside for forty years—until you came along with your fake hospital an' your fashionable manner, an' your twenty dollar fees, an' took all the payin' part of his custom away from him. All right! But say—I wonder what you'll do when some day they bring you one of his other patients—some cowboy that's been shot full of red-eye and lead and then rolled on by a horse—and who ain't got any money?"

"This is unendurable!"

"You're right," said Mr. Garfield, "though I misdoubt we're alludin' to different things. Well—I ain't here to lecture you, beyond this, which you've needed for some time, you and your crowd. Three Pines Valley ain't your property, nor that of your tired millionaires, an' so it won't be run for your benefit. Nobody asked you to buy the Risin' Sun place; nobody's askin' you to stay there. Nobody cares much about you anyway; an' if you don't like the valley, nobody's goin' to prevent your goin' somewhere else. In the meantime, the less you try to run things in general, an' this office in particular, the better."

Doctor Rogers had become extremely pale. Mr. Garfield, on the other hand, had developed a slight flush under his weather-beaten tan. The thought of Nathaniel Brewer, M.D., chipping rocks on Bald Knob while this fashion-plate stole his practise, was sufficiently infuriating. And then again, after a month's futile search for evidence connecting Madison and the Coles with any one of the robberies of which they

were notoriously guilty—it was not soothing to be ordered to arrest them for making a noise.

"Now," asked the sheriff, moving over to the shelves behind the counter, and beginning to collect canned goods, "is there anything else?"

Dr. Rogers swallowed something.

"No," he said, meaningly. "Not now."

Mr. Garfield failed to react to the meaning. He continued to separate apricots from peaches without looking up.

"However," continued the doctor, "there will be more heard of this. Don't imagine otherwise. One of my patients is a personal friend of the governor——"

Now Mr. Garfield straightened himself. There was a can of pears in his hand; and on his face a peculiar expression, which the doctor at first interpreted according to his hopes.

"Get out," said the sheriff in a low voice.

"What?"

"Get—out—of—this—store!"

The interpretation of the expression had evidently been a mistake; but Dr. Rogers was not a man to be put down. As his whole visit to Mr. Garfield had proved, he had exceedingly clear, not to say exaggerated, ideas of his rights.

"I shall certainly do nothing of the kind! I am waiting for the train, and——"

"Wait outside."

"This is the railway station——"

"You're wrong," said Mr. Garfield, coming slowly from behind the counter, and poising the can of pears on the palm of his right hand. "This is my store and sheriff's office. I let people who behave themselves wait in here—that's all. When you get outside, you'll find a plank lyin' on the ground by the side of the tracks. It's got 'Three Pines' painted on it in white letters. That's the railway station. Now you get out and stand on it."

"Why——"

"Out!" roared the old gentleman, raising the can of pears for a throw; and he was obeyed.

WHILE the hungry, thirsty, talkative and exuberant boys from Stony Springs, the Bar M, the Circle S and the Flying W rode up, dismounted and invaded the cool interior of the store, Dr. Henry W. Rogers stood upon his rights in the blazing sun, wishing urgently for a revolver wherewith to shoot the horned toad which he was mistaking for a tarantula.

"Why, Bill, old perennial geranium-vine," caroled "Pie-Face" Lammermoor, "you ain't sad, are you?"

"His brow," said "Two-Toes" Trotter sympathetically, "is all creased up like a dude's pants. What's the matter, Bill?"

Mr. Garfield's right hand still clasped the can of pears.

"If you don't sit down," he observed, "your brow's goin' to be dented like a dude's hat. I have been annoyed. I am still annoyed. Nobody who's more'n five dollars in debt can have any more credit."

There was a wail of agony.

"Who's been annoyin' him?" demanded Two-Toes Trotter, remembering an unpaid balance of twelve dollars and eight cents. "I want his blood! Aw, Bill! Say, I don't feel well, Bill. I need vitamines. Honest, Bill, I——"

"Suppose you go over to the Risin' Sun, if you're so sick," said the sheriff. "That's a sanatorium. This ain't. Try stickin' them a bit."

There was a silence.

"Oh," said Pie-Face Lammermoor, "he's been here, has he? That Rogers guy?"

Struck by a sudden idea, Two-Toes Trotter waddled bow-leggedly over to the window which gave upon the railroad tracks.

"Here he is now! In the very act of importing another freak! Hey, let me out of here! I'll——"

It was at this moment that Number Seventeen arrived, bell clanging, steam roaring, and engineer shouting ribald remarks to the cowboys, who with one accord rushed out of the store in Mr. Trotter's wake. Usually, the engineer, a rare visitor from the outside world, was a social favorite; but today he received little attention. Mr. Trotter had voiced a threat to knock the injurer of his credit for a row of stethoscopes, and for the first minute after the train had ground to a halt all hands were busy restraining him from carrying out his intention. Only that morning, Two-Toes had strained a shoulder rescuing a Rising Sun patient who had chosen to dismount in the midst of a wild longhorn herd; the patient had called him "me man" and given him a dollar; and, taking one thing with another, a hectic few minutes was enjoyed by all.

"Lemme up," said the injured party at last. "I'll be peaceable. Lemme see the new nuisance."

He was permitted to arise from under Pie-Face Lammermoor and "Bud" Estes; and, after removing a quantity of alkali sand from his mouth, joined them in staring at the young man who, assisted by two porters, was climbing carefully out of Number Seventeen's one parlor-car. Having reached ground level, this new arrival leaned upon a cane, and, with great deliberation, started toward the doctor.

"You mean to tell me," said Two-Toes Trotter, as Dr. Rogers rushed fulsomely forward, "that that guy's an invalid?"

There was no answer. Everybody else was asking the same question; though, not having Mr. Trotter's provocation to rudeness, everybody else was doing the questioning in silence. Cane and slow motion aside, in fact, the newcomer to the Rising Sun certainly did look remarkably stalwart. The previous arrivals had been exclusively of the rotund, pouch-eyed type, wearing expressions of extreme peevishness. This chap was tall, with rather noticeably broad shoulders tapering down to a slim waist-line and long legs. His face was rather square in shape; and, though inclined to be pasty in complexion, would have been pleasant but for a certain look of haughtiness.

"If he's sick," said Mr. Trotter, "I'm dead at the very least. And to think of me punchin' cattle an' bein' denied credit all this time, by mistake! It ain't right. Hey, there, buddy!"

The young man, who had just shaken hands with the doctor, turned and regarded Two-Toes.

"How do you do?" he inquired gravely.

For a moment, Pie-Face Lammermoor feared that the haughty expression was going to result in a rebuke to Two-Toes' familiarity, and prepared to take a violent and sudden grip of that irritated gentleman's red-checked shirt. However, his fears were groundless.

"My name," said the stranger, "is Carstairs. George Carstairs."

"Mine's Emanuel Trotter," said Two-Toes defiantly.

"I am glad to meet you," said Mr. Carstairs, looking over the top of his head.

The doctor interrupted.

"How did you find your journey?" he inquired solicitously. "You're not overtired, I hope? The heat——"

George Carstairs sighed.

"I should like to rest in the shade a little, before we start wherever we're going," he said. "Is that a store, over there?"

"It's—it's not far to the Rising Sun," suggested the doctor hastily.

"It's five miles and a half," remarked Two-Toes Trotter disinterestedly, and addressing no one in particular.

Mr. Carstairs' eyes rested on him for the fraction of a second. In that fraction of a second it seemed to Two-Toes that the young man smiled; and, with the clumsy good nature that was characteristic of him except under unusual circumstances of exasperation, Mr. Trotter smiled back, broadly and unreservedly. Before his grin was fully developed, however, the face of the young man before him had recovered its habitual look of weary pride—if, as now seemed doubtful, it had in fact ever lost it. Two-Toes' grin died away.

"I think," said Carstairs to the doctor, "that I'll rest in the store a few minutes. They seem to sell mineral waters. Perhaps—possibly—these gentlemen——?"

He looked from the sarsaparilla sign on Mr. Garfield's store to Pie-Face, Two-Toes, and the knot of men behind them, and expressed the rest of the sentence with a careless wave of the hand.

"Not me, thanks," said Two-Toes Trotter, whose mouth was so parched with alkali dust that the mere thought of a drink almost made it water. There was a murmur of refusal from the other men.

Carstairs nodded to them, turned away, and, leaning upon the doctor's arm, climbed slowly up the steps of the International Emporium.

"Those men — ordinary cowboys — impossible to associate—" floated back fragments, in Rogers' mellifluous tones.

The group of Stetsons and vivid shirts left outside in the brilliant white sunshine drew closer together.

"Think he'll need to rest long?" asked Fatty Parsons of the Flying W. "I wanna get out of the heat, an' we can't go trailin' in there after them."

"He'd think we'd changed our minds about the fizz-water," said Tom Lear. "Gosh, if he'd only put it some other way."

Two-Toes Trotter sighed.

"You wouldn't think that the look on a

guy's face could quench thirst, would you?" he asked pathetically. "Yet that's what it done to me. He's a funny sort of duck, ain't he? I don't know——"

"Yeah," said Fatty Parsons. "Seems kind of nice, in a way, but——"

"Yeah, only——"

There was a puzzled silence.

"He only brought two trunks," some one put in for the defense.

Another silence.

"Aw, well, shucks," said Pie-Face Lammermoor, "what's the odds? What we takin' this guy so serious for? We'll never see him. Me, I'm goin' inside. We was there first, an' I'm not goin' to fry for any man. Come on."

PASSING into the darkness of the store, they came, suddenly, upon quite a dramatic incident. Their eyes were still blinded by the sudden change from the brilliance outside; but suddenly they heard the voice of George Carstairs remark in a tone of peculiar sharpness—

"I shall be obliged, Dr. Rogers, if you'll apologize to this lady at once."

The punchers standing around the doorway started and stared; but for the moment, try as they would, they could see nothing. "Wee Willy" Williams, from the Circle S, actually endeavored to scrape the blackness away from his sight with his fingers.

"You don't understand," came the voice of Rogers. "Her brothers——"

"I understand quite enough," said George Carstairs. "You have been exceedingly rude to this lady in my presence. I haven't the honor of knowing her, but I can't lend countenance to such a thing. You will either apologize forthwith, or I shall take the next train back to Longhorn City."

"Oh, please don't bother," said a girl's voice. "It was nothing, really."

Two-Toes Trotter heaved a sigh of relief. He still was unable to see very well, but he knew that voice. It was Mary Cole.

"I am waiting, doctor," said Carstairs, after a brief pause.

"Well," said Rogers, with a short laugh, "of course, I didn't mean to offend Miss Cole; and of course, I'm sorry if I did."

"Yes, and of course," observed Mr. William Garfield, "you would have apologized, even to the extent you have, without being blackjacked into it by fear of losin' one of your weekly grafts, wouldn't you? Now, listen to me, Dr. Rogers. I won't order you out of my store—again—right now, because you're with this young gentleman, an' I've taken a fancy to him. He'll always be welcome."

"Thanks," said George Carstairs; and there was something in his tone, and in his glance around the dingy old store, which checked Mr. Garfield in mid-stride.

"He—er—well—but—in short," said the sheriff, looking at the young stranger in a hurt way, "that is, I mean that you, Rogers, can stay clear away from here, hereafter. Now, that's my last word to you. And I think you said you wanted the bacon in a jar, Mary, my dear?"

The eyes of the punchers in the doorway were clear by this time. They noted with considerable interest that Mary Cole was blushing as she gave Mr. Garfield the remainder of her weekly grocery order—and in a way which could—of course—be explained by anger at whatever rudeness Rogers had offered. Moreover, the expression of Mr. Carstairs' face when he looked at her, as he was looking at her now, was sympathetically interesting to Wee Willie Williams, who was courting a girl in Longhorn City, and knew what it felt like.

"I really think," said Dr. Rogers, "that we had better be going."

"Very well," said George Carstairs, absently. "Good afternoon."

Mary Cole turned from the counter and extended her hand.

"Good afternoon," she said, "and—thanks."

The doctor and his patient departed; Mary Cole was assisted by a dozen willing hands to load her purchases into the ramshackle buckboard which belonged to the ranch she shared with her three brothers, and she departed in her turn; and then, at long last, Two-Toes Trotter and the rest of the gang lowered themselves into their accustomed places on the board floor of the Emporium.

"Well!" said Two-Toes heavily.

Mr. Garfield leaned over the counter and smiled.

"You can have another two dollars and ninety-two cents' worth, Trotter," he said genially. "For some reason, I feel better than I did."

Two-Toes eyed him glumly.

"Say," he inquired, "have you got any line on this bird Madison yet?"

"No."

"Is he still hangin' around Mary Cole the way he was?"

"I guess so. Say—did you notice that boy stand up to that pale-pink son-of-a-gun of a Rogers? Oh, what a mean skunk! Sneerin' at the girl about her brothers—right here! An' tellin' me that that boy's got heart-trouble. Say, you know who the kid is? He's the only son of that Carstairs widow in Los Angeles—the oil-man's widow, you know. And do you know all I think ails him? I think his mother's spoiled him. That's all. I seen a similar case——"

Two-Toes Trotter ambled over to the counter and selected a can of peaches.

"If he goes on lookin' at Mary Cole the way he was just now," remarked Two-Toes, "somebody else'll have a try at that same game."

"What same game?"

"Spoilin' him."

"Who will?"

"Jim Madison," said Two-Toes, looking Mr. Garfield in the eyes as he reached for the can-opener.

"And for a good, messy job of man-spoiling," he added, as the rest of the gang crowded around clamoring their orders, "I'll back Jim Madison, Bill, against any widow extant."

II

A WEEK passed; quietly, sunnily, and peaceably after the manner of weeks in Three Pines Valley; and then, with an unexpectedness that was positively shattering to Mr. Garfield and the punchers celebrating the end of the week at his store, Number Seventeen was held up, two miles beyond Geogehan's crossing. It was not a particularly sensational hold-up; there was no shooting, save for a couple of rifle-bullets sent as warnings down the sides of the train; the money loss was not large; yet Mr. Garfield's mouth set in its grimmest lines as he received the news over the telephone.

"How many of them?" he barked, reaching out for the gun-belt which hung, ever-ready, near the cash register. "Six? All right. Get your horses ready, you lot of lummoxes. No, I'm not calling you names, conductor. Which way did they go, you fool, you? Oh. All right."

The sheriff hung up and pulled the buckle of his belt tight.

"Is it Madison and the Coles at last?" demanded Tom Lear, with a tinge of regret in his tones.

"That's what we're going to see," said Mr. Garfield, taking up the telephone again. "Gimme 70. They're masked. They've started towards Dead Man's Gulch, but unfortunately for them—Hello? Jake? I want Jake Henson. Jake Henson, the deputy sheriff, you idiot! Well, then, fetch him. Garfield talking . . . I say unfortunately for whoever it is that's pulled this little stunt, too many people's been tryin' the Dead Man's Gulch line of escape recently, an' this time, I'm ready for it. An' if it comes down to trouble, I wouldn't advise any of you boys to hold your hands on account of having known the Cole boys when they were straight . . . Hello, Jake. Bill Garfield. Number Seventeen's been tickled. Yes. Have you seen Madison or the Coles around town? No, I thought not. Well, get a posse an' stop the other end of the Gulch, same's we— What?"

The old sheriff listened to impassioned remarks.

"Listen," he cut in at last, "I don't care whether there's any men there or not. I say I don't care. You get a posse together somehow, an' be there. That's all. Good-by!"

And so it came to pass that George Carstairs, Esquire, taking a gentle and ambling ride on a gentle and ambling pony, as part of the curative regime of the Rising Sun sanatorium, was accosted by a wild-eyed man on an even more wild-eyed horse, who emerged from nowhere in a cloud of dust and ordered the invalid, in the name of the People of the State of Texas, to drop his own business, stick spurs into his horse, and follow.

"But—" protested Carstairs.

It was perfectly obvious to the naked eye that here was a tenderfoot, who would most likely be more of a hindrance than a help on the business of that afternoon; but the eyes of Marty O'Donnel, being full of perspiration and alkali dust, could scarcely be described as naked. Moreover, he was not in a mental condition to draw distinctions between Easterners and Westerners, or between sick men and well.

He had been sent out, by a roaring and threatening Jake Henson, to raise part of a posse in a countryside depopulated by the Saturday holiday. His quota was two

men, and, under the circumstances, anything with a horse and a pair of trousers counted as one.

Already he had recruited Solly Myers, the cook of the Circle S. Now he interrupted Mr. Carstairs' remarks by grabbing the bridle of the gentle and ambling pony, and actually towing this second conscript fifty yards. At the end of this distance, he loosed the rein; but, simultaneously, he flung out his spurred right heel in such a manner that the ambling pony uttered a sharp, indignant neigh of pain, and darted forward like an arrow from a bow. After his comfortable fashion, he was bolting.

"Attaboy!" gasped Marty O'Donnel. "Keep it up!"

He was a little in advance now; and anyhow, the mild sunshine of late afternoon was beginning to shade into dusk; so that he could not observe the change which had come over the face of George Carstairs. At first, the young man's mouth, framed by cheeks which, being just the least trifle fat, jounced with the violent motion of the horse, had been open, as if to shout protests the moment it was supplied with sufficient breath. It was now closed—firmly; and moreover, the recruit's eyes, which at the beginning of the ride had stared ahead with wild alarm and anger, had now narrowed into an expression which might have been taken as announcing a desperate determination to stick this outrage to the end.

Had the hold-up occurred even a little earlier in the day, the end would have come at the Bar M ranch-house, where Jake Henson was waiting with the three other men he had been able to gather. But the hunting of criminals by night is no joke; and now the rising of the evening mists was giving urgent warning of the coming of night. As soon as he saw Marty O'Donnel and his companion in the distance, the deputy waved an arm, inviting them to follow; and, with a sharp word to his little command, galloped off ahead in the direction of the northern end of the pass connecting Three Pines Valley with the outer world.

"Ah, shucks," said Marty O'Donnel, and spurred to catch up.

The comfortable pony under George Carstairs, involved for the first time in his life, in a racing event, drummed the prairie more frantically than ever, and arrived on a level with the leading contingent, only a few seconds after Marty's wiry cayuse. By the time he had achieved this feat, however, it was really quite dusk; and George Carstairs was entirely out of breath. One looking at the invalid's face, however, might have doubted whether he was in a frame of mind to make any protest now. Though he was deadly pale, and was holding his left hand, now that he dared detach it from the bridle, against the left side of his chest—the young man's eyes were shining. He actually seemed to be enjoying himself.

"Where we goin', Jake?" demanded Marty O'Donnel. "Say, for Pete's sake! Is this all there is of us?"

"We're goin' to block up the other end of the gulch," snapped Jake Henson. "If this is all of us, it ain't my fault. Me an' Bill Garfield've had this scheme worked out ever since the guys that held up the Acacia Bank got out of the valley this way. No fault of ours if you boys are somewhere else when wanted."

"Who is it this time?"

"Unless I miss my guess," said Jake Henson, pointing across the darkening flat to where Bald Knob towered over the gulch, and swinging his pony's head toward his objective two miles away, "it's Jim Madison an' the Coles. Bill Garfield's goin' to push 'em up the gulch, an' they're goin' to run bang into our arms."

There was a brief silence as the little posse flew ahead.

"I'd just's soon shoot that Madison as not," said Solly Myers reflectively, "but—them Cole boys—it seems a pity. That's their ranch-house ahead, ain't it? Ah, right on their own doorstep—an' their sister waitin' for 'em at home."

"I don't care what the Cole boys used to be," snarled Jake Henson with a rage that showed he did care very much indeed, "Madison's been at 'em since then. There ain't one of you doubts Madison'd shoot to kill, eh? Well, the Coles are his shadows these days. If you don't shoot, they will."

"I—don't—believe—" began Marty O'Donnel breathlessly.

"You don't believe!" cried Jake Henson. "Listen!"

From behind the rock rampart which formed one wall of the gulch, there had come a single shot. Now, as a sudden yell of pain cut through the still night air, it was followed by half a dozen others; then by a regular fusillade.

"Come on!" cried Jake Henson, drawing his Winchester from the gun-bucket. "We'll just get 'em! Come——"

Marty O'Donnel drew his right-hand revolver; and as he touched its butt, he thought of his recruit—for the first time since he had recruited him. Come to think of it, the guy had looked like a dude, rather. Might not have a gun, or anything. Marty had two and was generous. He turned in his saddle, feeling for his left hand holster.

"Say—" he began; and then, dropping the revolver he had held out, and wrenching his pony violently to one side with a pressure of the knees, he caught George Carstairs in his arms just as the young man swayed, groped blindly before him and pitched forward.

"Hey!" yelled Solly Myers as the cayuse and the Rising Sun pony came to a halt, locked, immediately in front of him.

His warning was too late, however, and his horsemanship too poor, to avoid a collision. The next instant, three horses of the five which composed Jake Henson's posse had fallen. Solly Myers, suffering the fate which always seems to overtake those who are not to blame, slipped into unconsciousness as a lashing hoof flicked him on the forehead; and Marty O'Donnel, unhorsed and with George Carstairs in his arms, stood cursing on the grass while Jake Henson and his sole remaining assistant galloped on toward the mouth of the gulch.

"Stand up, will you?" snarled Marty O'Donnel, "I got to— Hey, stand up!"

He loosed his burden and then, with another muffled curse, caught it again. The darn tenderfoot had fainted or died or something; and while Marty struggled to lay him down, the question of whether the perpetrators of Number Seventeen's hold-up should be caught red-handed or never caught at all, was decided beyond dispute.

LOOKING up as he deposited the unconscious Carstairs on the ground, Marty saw, through the haze now lit by the rising moon, half a dozen dark figures emerge, on horseback, from the shadow of the gulch. Almost instantly, there came the sharp crack of Jake Henson's carbine, followed by the fainter, thicker sound of a revolver.

Marty's horse was standing, shivering as it sweated, near at hand. Drawing the one gun that remained to him, Marty did a flying mount; and, as a dozen shots rang out ahead, flew through the gray mist toward the battle. He could see somebody grappling with somebody else; but he dared not try a long shot. The grapple was soon over, anyhow. A third horseman rode up to the two who were struggling; Marty saw his arm rise for a blow with the barrel of a pistol; and, praying that this might not be one of his allies going to the rescue of the other, fired two shots at sixty yards' range.

He missed; the pistol-barrel fell; and Jake Henson, recognizable by the rifle which showed in his suddenly upraised hand, toppled out of the saddle. Cursing, Marty tried one more shot—in vain; and then a wreath of mist swept across the scene. When the one-man reinforcement rode up, the battle was over, and the field deserted save by Jake Henson and Willie O'Brien, the other deputy; who lay, one stunned, the other shot through the right shoulder, with their horses grazing near.

"You cowards!" gasped Willie O'Brien, trying to raise himself on his good elbow. He succeeded; got to his knees, and stood up, swaying. "Where were you, O'Donnel, you dirty Free-Stater?"

Marty, raising the blood-stained head of Jake Henson, looked up at his compatriot.

"You call me that," he said through his teeth, "and by ——, I'll put a bullet through your other shoulder, you slanderin' mick. That tenderfoot went an' fainted on me."

"Ah, shucks!" howled O'Brien. "Wait till you hear Bill Garfield on that tale! If you'd 'a' bin here, we could ha' got the whole gang clean—two of 'em had their guns empty; we'd ha' been five to four. An' while you held back, they reloaded an' wiped us up!"

Jake Henson was beginning to moan with the pangs of returning consciousness. Marty O'Donnel left him and stepped over to O'Brien.

"Here," he said, holding out his revolver, and speaking in a voice that trembled with fury, "take this an' shoot me through the shoulder, too; an' then I'll start an' beat the face off you."

But before Willie could either refuse or take advantage of this equitable offer, there was a clatter and stumble of hoofs on the loose stones on the entrance to the gulch; and, a moment later, the main posse came into view, Old Bill Garfield riding at its head, with Pie-Face Lammermoor on one

side, supporting him, and Tom Lear on the other.

The moon was out again, the mist-wisps had cleared away; but the two men standing on the battlefield of five minutes ago did not need to see the expression of pain on the old sheriff's face to know that he was badly hurt. His failure to ride as usual, alone and a couple of yards ahead of his men, advertised serious injury well enough.

So did his voice—now a mere cracked whisper—when he spoke.

"Where are they?"

There was a silence.

"Where are they? Speak!" demanded Bill Garfield.

There was no denying him.

"Why, they—they got away," said Marty O'Donnel. "There was five of us but—we raked in some kind of a tenderfoot—he looked all right, but he blew up, an' so three of us were delayed, an'—they knocked Jake Henson out, an' shot Willie, an'——"

"Shall we start after 'em, Bill?" demanded Two-Toes Trotter.

Mr. Garfield shook his head.

"Too dark. Too much start," he whispered. "In another county by this time, anyhow. No—evidence on 'em—by this time—any way."

Willie O'Brien sat down heavily on the grass.

"I don't feel—so good," he complained. "I'd like—to get this hole—stopped up—somehow."

"Who was this tenderfoot?" asked Bill Garfield weakly.

"That Carstairs kid, I guess," growled Pie-Face Lammermoor. "Tall, was he, Marty? Good-lookin' guy?"

"Yeah. He's lyin' back there."

Mr. Garfield licked his lips.

"We'll—go pick him up," he said, "an' take—him—an' the rest of us—to Cole's ranch-house. He oughta be — welcome there."

"Why, Bill, you don't think he delib——"

THE sheriff seemed not to want to talk any more. He merely shook his head, leaned heavily on Tom Lear's shoulder and nodded toward the ranch-house windows, which glowed redly through the night. He did not speak again until, seated in a big arm-chair in the dingy living-room belonging to the men who had certainly, but not provably, shot him, he had watched George Carstairs brought in by Marty O'Donnel and seated upon a couch the other end of which was occupied by Jake Henson.

Mr. Henson, bandaged to the eyes, and face drawn by the pain of a blinding headache, immediately arose and went to the other side of the room. The whole male population of Three Pines Valley stared at the new-comer in their midst, under the yellow rays of the hanging oil-lamp.

"I guess it was straight stuff, all right," whispered Mr. Garfield.

Carstairs looked, in fact, only too genuinely ill. He was deathly pale; his eyes looked hollow in the downcast light; his hands were trembling.

"Yeah," said Jake Henson slowly, "but myself, I don't think much of a guy that can't stand a little horseback ride. Kind of lets his fellow-bein's down."

George Carstairs got to his feet weakly, and faced his accuser. Pie-Face Lammermoor noted that the young man's eyes met Jake Henson's without wavering.

"It's not my fault if I'm—a wreck," said the man by the couch. "You don't think I like to be compelled to—stand this sort of talk from you, for instance, do you?"

Mary Cole, coming in from the kitchen with a basin of cold water and a roll of linen bandage, stopped in the doorway and looked from one of the standing men to the other.

"I'm not sayin' it is your fault," said Jake Henson. "But I claim that if you're really as unable as you claim, you oughtn't to be takin' up space around here. You're no use, an' you're liable to get good men killed off—like tonight."

Carstairs winced and was about to reply, when his defense was taken off his hands.

"How dare you!" said Mary Cole, setting down the basin and confronting the big deputy.

Mr. Henson stared at her.

"You," cried the girl, "a big brute with a body like a horse! What sympathy have you got for anybody that's weak? You get a bump on the head, and think you're hurt. And you dare to mock some one who's hurt every day of his life."

"Why, miss——"

"I'm not arguing about it," said Mary Cole, kneeling and turning back the sleeve from Mr. William Garfield's wrist. "I'm simply telling you to leave him alone—or get out of this house. You may be hunting

my brothers for something they've never done, but I'm mistress here still! Does that hurt, Uncle Bill?"

Jake Henson shrugged and smiled.

"Oh, all right," he said, with a contemptuous look at Carstairs. "Still—I'd have thought more of him if he really had faked that faint so's we wouldn't catch your brothers. That's what we thought he had done at first, an'——"

"Shut up, Jake," whispered Mr. Garfield.

Suddenly Mary Cole had risen from her task of washing a bullet-wound in the old sheriff's left wrist. At first, it seemed as if she were looking at George Carstairs, waiting for him to confirm or deny this suggestion. Carstairs thought so and shook his head as he sank back to his seat on the couch.

"Somebody'd better take him home," began Pie-Face Lammermoor compassionately; and then ceased as his eyes, following the true direction of Mary Cole's gaze, fell upon the door of the ranch-house.

It had opened silently, and in the aperture was standing a man chiefly noticeable for his neat black mustache and for a certain devil-may-care expression which sat well on his handsome face.

Instantly, even as he gave vent to a gasp of surprize, Pie-Face reached for his gun. Half the other men in the room, with amazed exclamations of "Jim Madison!" reached for their discarded gun-belts. Only Mr. Garfield in his chair, and Mr. James Madison, in the doorway, seemed unmoved.

"Why, good evening, gentlemen," said the latter. "Good evening, Miss Mary."

He stepped into the room. A moment later, the three Cole boys—Ernest, Fred and Arthur—followed him.

"Quite a relief to find it's only Mr. Garfield and his friends, eh, boys?" said Mr. Madison. "Riding up, you know, and seeing all those horses outside, we were almost afraid robbers might have swooped down on Miss Mary. Not that there's much to steal, eh, boys—but there are so many bandits around these days. Don't you find it so, Mr. Garfield?"

Mr. Garfield did not answer; though, judging by a certain sudden twitch of the lips, he might have smiled had he not been in such pain.

Of all the hard-breathing men in the room, Jake Henson was the first to break the silence.

"I suppose," he said slowly, "that you wouldn't mind if I examined your revolvers, would you?"

Mr. Madison looked surprized in his turn. He communicated this emotion, with arched brows, to the three brothers of the girl who now stood with clasped hands behind old Bill Garfield's chair.

"Why, no," said the newcomer, drawing a gun from an elaborately hand-carved holster. "Certainly I wouldn't mind."

"Then I don't want to," said Jake Henson. "You wouldn't mind if I frisked you for a bunch of stolen currency, either, would you? And you can produce a lot of people to swear you've been with 'em all afternoon, can't you?"

Mr. Madison, from being merely surprized, now glided into a condition of suspicious annoyance.

"Certainly we've been out riding with some friends of mine from Prairie Dog, all day," he said. "But what does the rest of this mystery mean—stolen currency? Are you accusing us of participation in the train-robbery of this afternoon?"

The audacity of it made Mr. Henson flush, brought a gasp from Two-Toes Trotter and caused a repetition of the twitch which at present was Mr. Garfield's smile. As twitches go, it was rather a grim one.

"No," whispered the sheriff, "we don't accuse you of anythin', Madison. Not a thing. But—don't do it again."

"What?"

Mr. Garfield opened his eyes.

"I say, 'Don't do it again,'" he remarked, in a rather stronger voice. "You mightn't be so lucky next time. That guy over there on the couch might not faint, an'—throw things out of kilter."

Carstairs rose as all eyes turned on him again. He noticed particularly those of Jim Madison—they were bright and black, and seemed to hold a mocking expression.

"I think—I'd better go," said the patient from the Rising Sun faintly.

"You go with him, Pie-Face," whispered Mr. Garfield. "Show him the way an'—see if you can't hurry the doctor up. I'm hit in the chest too, I guess. I don't feel so good."

In the doorway, Carstairs turned and hesitated. It was peculiar, considering that what had happened was not his fault, that he should feel ashamed; that he should feel

that this mockery of the posse and the sheriff, by the handsome man with the black eyes, was a reproach to him personally; but somehow he did feel it.

"Shall I—shall I send Doctor Rogers?" he asked diffidently.

"No!" shrieked Mr. Garfield, suddenly aroused. "Doctor Rogers! Doctor Hyena! Doctor Coyote! He's the cause of all this! Take him away, Pie-Face! Go fetch Doc Brewer!"

III

AT HALF past four the next afternoon—to put a surprizing matter in the fewest possible words—George Carstairs revisited the Cole ranch-house. Dismounting, he tied his pony to the porch-rail with a complicated but inefficient hitch, ascended the veranda steps with his customary deliberation, knocked on the living-room door and, while waiting for some one to answer, found time to be mildly surprized at himself.

He had been assured, from his earliest youth upward, that contact with the common people—meaning persons with less than fifteen thousand a year—was unpleasant and to be avoided at all costs. He had believed this. Furthermore, he still believed it, and the events of last night had given him excellent reasons for the belief. And yet here he had ridden ten miles, against the almost tearful protests of his doctor, to assure a girl whose brothers were dangerous criminals that he didn't deserve the opinion which had been expressed by that low fellow, Jake Henson. It was perfectly ridiculous; and yet——

The door opened from within, just about as softly as, last night, it had been opened from outside; and, to George Carstairs' extreme annoyance, the same person appeared in the aperture.

"Why, well, well, well! Good afternoon!" said Jim Madison. He turned away from the door to distribute the good tidings. "Miss Mary! Oh, Mary! Arthur! Fred! Here's another visitor! Shall I ask him in, or are we all going out on the porch?"

"Oh, the porch," said the voice of Mary Cole.

The girl herself appeared; and at this moment, by a strange coincidence, the weak heart which had caused Mr. Carstairs' presence in that part of Texas, and which had not troubled him in the least during the ride over, suddenly began to comport itself in a most alarming manner. After a tremendous thud, it seemed to decide upon a protracted strike; then, changing its mind, proceeded to work time, time-and-a-half, and double-overtime simultaneously.

"Good afternoon," said Mary, smiling and holding out her hand. "I hope you're quite well?"

Had anybody else asked that question, under any other circumstances, he would have answered that he was very far from well; he would have sat down hastily, as he had often done before with far less cause, and have looked wildly around for one of the doctors who had been his constant companions since he was twelve years of age. But he could not do that immediately—he felt compelled to bear up and take the hand which Mary Cole extended. And when he had done that, he felt, for some strange reason, entirely all right again.

Arthur and Fred Cole emerged from the house with nods. Jim Madison, stepping forward in the pause, added a mocking inquiry.

"Yes, yes," he said, "do tell. How are we this fine afternoon?"

"I'm very well, thanks," said George Carstairs, smiling at the girl. "I—er—just rode over——"

His eyes still on Mary's, he trailed off into an embarrassed silence.

"It does you credit," cut in Mr. James Madison in his courtly way. He laid a caressing hand on Carstairs' lapel and, gently but firmly, turned the young man to face himself. The black eyes were mocking. "Would you believe that of all those who honored my friends' roof with their presence—uninvited—last night, you are the only one—except myself—polite enough to drop over and say 'Thank you' today? I hear that Mr. Garfield, that excellent old man, is too badly hurt to leave his bed, but it does seem——"

A surprizing bright flush appeared suddenly on George Carstairs' cheeks. In another man, it would have been the forerunner of winged words; and perhaps would have produced them, even from the tenderfoot, had not Arthur Cole lounged forward and cut in. Like his brothers, he was a big, slouching fellow, on whose good-natured face there had begun, lately, to brood a certain sullenness which did not suit his style of beauty.

"Suppose you shut up, Madison," he suggested. "He wasn't talking to you."

"I——"

"Yes, I know all about that," said Arthur Cole, "whatever it is. Only don't be rude on my porch, see? Carstairs wouldn't let that coyote of a doctor be rude to Mary, here, and I'm going to return the compliment."

Evidently this was not the outbreak of hostilities between the two men. It was merely a continuation.

"I'm in the habit," said Madison slowly, "of saying pretty much what I choose."

Cole took his hands out of his pockets.

"Among that bunch of bums in Prairie Dog, you may be," he returned, "but you'd better get out of the habit, here."

"And yet," grinned his adversary, "you were pretty glad that that same bunch of bums was ready to swear you'd been out riding with them, yesterday—weren't you?"

"Hush, you——"

"Yes, hush!" sneered Madison as Arthur Cole's tanned face turned livid and his eyes shot a glance of terror at Carstairs. "Hush yourself, then, or I'll say something you'll like still less—instead of just remarking, as I was when interrupted, that we had expected at least a visit of thanks from Mr. Henson."

Carstairs felt, rising within him, an unregenerate desire to ask if this was why there had been such a long delay in the opening of the door; and, having done so many peculiar things that day already, he might even have put the question, but for another interruption—this time from Fred Cole, who sprang up suddenly from his seat at the far end of the porch.

"Jim!"

"What?"

Generally, Mr. James Madison's manner expressed, above everything, a perfect peace of mind; and by its lazy insolence to the world at large, indicated a conscience entirely at rest. But it is the split seconds that betray a man; and if such evidence were meat for the courts, Madison might have been well and truly hanged for his reaction to that sudden calling of his name. In an instant, he had forgotten Carstairs; and, as he spun around on his heel, his face dropped its smiling mask, and his right hand dropped from its hold on Carstairs' coat lapel to the butt of his own pistol.

"Jake Henson *is* coming! There he is—right over by those pine-trees!"

There was a deadly silence; and then:

"Why, so he is," said Madison in a tone of mocking interest. "So he is! Well, well! Politeness isn't dead in the land, after all!"

But apparently Jake Henson had not come on an errand of politeness. He dismounted at the ranch-house in grim silence, failing entirely to reply to the greetings which Mr. James Madison called out cheerfully at a range of twenty yards; and, on gaining the level of the porch, he opened his visit with a suggestion that "Miss Cole"—whom he had known as Mary since they had been children together—might advantageously find some occupation in the rear of the house.

"Oh, Jake——"

Jake looked at the girl.

"It's all right, Mary," he said in a gentler tone. "All the official business I've come on is to take—this—this invalid back where he belongs."

The unusual color in Carstairs' cheeks spread suddenly into a burning flush.

"You needn't trouble yourself," he began, indignantly. "I——"

"Oh, needn't I?" snarled Jake Henson. "With that pet doctor of yours callin' up an' threatenin' to report Bill Garfield to the governor, an' the legislature, an' the President, an' everybody else, if you weren't fetched away from here? Listen—I've left Bill Garfield with only a Mex to watch him, an' him delirious, so's he won't lose his job through you—an' believe me, you're comin' right back on that horse."

"But—why?" asked Mary Cole wonderingly. "Why is he not to be here?"

Jake Henson looked away from her—into the face of Jim Madison.

"That's one of the things I'm goin' to tell—this gentleman," he said through his teeth, "if you'll be so good as to go, Mary."

"It seems to me that you are exceeding your authority in a very dangerous manner," began Madison silkily.

"Mary," repeated Jake Henson, in the tone of one who can bear very little more without explosion, "will you please go away?"

"Go ahead, dear," said Arthur Cole.

He took his sister in his arms, kissed her, and opened the door of the living-room. The door closed upon her sobs.

"Now, look here," said Jake Henson. "You-all tickled that train yesterday."

Fred Cole's big fist clenched apprehensively. Arthur Cole's teeth cut cruelly into his lower lip. Only Jim Madison seemed unmoved by the direct accusation.

"One moment," he said, smiling and ticking off his points on his fingers. "Have you come over with a warrant, and are you saying this as a preliminary to arresting us; or are you saying it to explain your very rude snatching away of Mr. Carstairs from our midst; or are you just being dangerously rude for fun?"

"I——"

"Well, answer the question one after another, if you find it simpler," said Madison. "First, are you over here in your official capacity—with a warrant?"

"No!"

"You're over here as a private individual, then? When you say we robbed that train, you're just saying it for the pleasure of making an unpleasant remark?"

"I'm saying it before I warn you of somethin'," said Jake Henson through his teeth. "One of you fired a straighter shot than you knew. Old Bill Garfield's pretty likely to die—hear that? And if he does die, I'm here to tell you that you'll hang—all four of you! Where's your other brother, Cole?"

"What's that to you?"

"Nothin'," said Jake Henson coldly, "except that I hope he's tried to get out of the valley. If he has, he's saved me one-third of an unpleasant job. Because I've got all the passes guarded, an' any one of you that tries to make a break for it, is goin' to be shot on sight."

The big deputy stared at Madison with vicious satisfaction.

"I wouldn't go over to Prairie Dog an' do any patchin' work on my alibi, either, if I was you," he said. "I dunno who your friends over there are, an' I guess you're not goin' to tell me; but you won't communicate with anybody, from now forward, without bein' watched."

"Without a warrant?"

"Yes!" roared Jake Henson. "Without a warrant!"

"Quite unofficially?"

"Yes! Unofficially!"

Like dark lightning Madison's hand dropped to his belt. Within a tenth of a second, the muzzle of an automatic pistol confronted the pit of Jake Henson's stomach.

"Then let me tell you," said Jim Madison, "that I don't like this unofficial business. Let me tell you that while nobody has more respect for officers of the law than I have—which is why it's so silly for you to accuse me, or any of us, of shooting that old fool in Three Pines. I don't like you personally, Henson, and in your private capacity I'm perfectly willing to blow your head off. You've given me enough cause! This man here heard you accuse me of train-robbing. Men have been shot for less!"

Arthur Cole caught at Madison's gun-arm.

"You stand away!" snarled the older man. "Don't you try pulling a gun, Henson! Remember what I said!"

"Go ahead, then — shoot!" said Jake. "Go on, you oily skunk! Go ahead, you tub of sheep-grease!"

IT SEEMED as if Mr. Henson's flow of provocative invective would end only with the final tightening of Madison's finger on the trigger; but then, perhaps that was the effect Mr. Henson wished to produce. It seemed impossible that a man who was doing so well with his tongue should have any intention of abandoning that weapon for the cruder one of his fists; and so, when between one choice epithet and another, the deputy suddenly swung his fist in a drive, so fast as to be invisible, to Madison's jaw, the blow was entirely unexpected. And, had it landed another half-inch to the left, it would have been final.

As it was, Jake's knuckles missed the knock-out point; and Madison, dropped like a bullock, had yet enough sense left to hurl himself forward at the deputy's knees. The next instant both men were rolling on the ground. Henson's gun, jerked from its holster by the violence of the fall, skittered across the porch boards to George Carstairs' feet. He did not pick it up. For the first time in all his life faced with a scene of violence, he stood paralyzed.

Madison, clawing out, had snatched up his automatic pistol; now Jake Henson, catching his wrist, twisted that member and shoved it backward until the wicked flat gun, released by nerveless fingers, flew ten feet away and buried itself in the loose sand near the porch. His elbow in his adversary's throat, he swung his left hand

upward for the knock-out blow he had missed before and—failed again.

At the crucial moment, his supporting elbow slipped; and the man under him, in an agony of pain and rage, kicked so violently as to throw the big man clear over his head. The next instant, Madison was on top; and Jake Henson, his head lolling back over the edge of the top porch step, was fighting to tear away the hands that clutched his throat.

The eyes of Madison, rolling wildly in search of something wherewith to end the combat before his own shaken strength gave out, fell, obviously, on the revolver at George Carstairs' feet. At the same instant, Jake Henson saw the peril. With a terrible effort, he loosed the crushing grip on his throat.

"Shift that g——" he gasped, before the grip closed down again.

Shocked out of his trance, Carstairs bent; and in that instant, Madison presented his side of the case.

"Touch it—and I'll—kill you!"

To Fred and Arthur Cole, it seemed that he reached for the revolver as he said it; but in the mind of George Carstairs, an eternity of indecision elapsed between the words and the grab for the weapon which lay shining dully within reach of his hand. He had time to move it—to have kicked it away, if nothing else; and in a fragmentary interval of time, he put to himself all the sides of the case.

He did not want Jake Henson to be hurt; he wanted the big deputy to conquer this politely insolent ruffian who was so obviously leading the Cole boys into crime, and their innocent sister into grief. Yet—Madison threatened violence; and by years of education, George Carstairs knew that the slightest show of violence would be the end of him. He hesitated—and then Madison had the revolver in his hand.

With a sudden cry of horror, which was echoed more shrilly by Mary Cole as she rushed on to the porch, the man from the Rising Sun stepped forward to catch the upraised arm and undo the damage he had done; but it was too late. For the second time in two days, a revolver barrel crashed down on Jake Henson's head. The big deputy gave a groan and lay still.

Gasping and torn, the victor arose.

"You cowards!" cried Mary Cole, kneeling by Jake Henson. "You cowards! Why didn't you help him?"

Her brothers stared at her dully. Carstairs bit his lip. Madison, wiping blood from his face with a pale lavender silk handkerchief, paused in the process and stepped up to the girl.

"Are you asking your brothers why they didn't help this—this animal who came over expressly to accuse them—and me—of robbery, and perhaps murder?"

"I—" began the girl furiously; and then, turning from the adamantine hardness of those black eyes, blazed out at Carstairs:

"You! You could have kept this—this beast from getting that pistol——"

Madison's hand gripped her arm and swung her around to face him.

"Listen to me, Mary, my dear," he snarled. "You don't seem to know which side of this game you're playing on. You're supposed to be with me—and your brothers — against everybody else — see? You'd better remember it. This lump on the ground here was against me. You see what it got him. This other fellow was wise to obey me. So will you be!"

Arthur Cole tore the gripping hand from Mary's wrist.

"You're making yourself at home here, aren't you, Madison?" he asked icily.

"Have you any objection?"

"Yes!"

Madison blazed into sudden fury, the more terrible for its contrast with his usual calm. For the moment, he seemed transported—insane with rage.

"Then keep your objections to yourself!" he roared, pointing a quivering finger in young Cole's face. "Don't you forget yourself enough to dare me, you young pup! I'm no fool for you to try your fine feelings on! I've got you where I want you, and that's—right under my thumb! I tried you out on small jobs, didn't I? I myself didn't pull any of those picayune robberies you tried your hands out on! No, but I can prove 'em on you, and you know it! Now, then. You listen to what I say, and don't make me listen to any of your stuff, or something'll happen you won't like. You're in it now, and there's only one way out—and that's forward, and you'll go forward the way I lead you."

Arthur Cole gave a low growl, and his big right hand clenched again—not, this time, in apprehension. Instantly Jake Henson's

revolver, in the hand of Madison, leveled itself at him.

"Yes?" asked Madison, a tinge of the old mocking smoothness returning to the voice which had sounded, for some seconds, like the growl of a wild beast. "Really?"

George Carstairs, half fainting, holding himself upright with a desperate grip of a porch-pillar, was behind Madison as the bandit crouched forward over the leveled gun. And now, staring dazedly at the scene before him, the young man felt himself pushed toward the porch steps, and heard Mary Cole whispering urgently.

"Go — ride, for God's sake," she was saying. "He'll kill you for hearing what he's just said. Go!"

Carstairs resisted; but for the moment, the girl's strength was greater than his. He stumbled blindly down the steps; and at the sound, Madison turned.

"Come here, you Carstairs!" he hissed; and leveled the revolver again. "Come here, you——"

"Ride!" shrieked Mary Cole.

Swinging to the saddle of the comfortable horse, choked and stunned by the thundering of the heart which, it seemed, had climbed into his throat, Carstairs caught a glimpse of the girl wrestling with the arm that held the gun, and, though he was assured, in his own mind, that his own death from natural causes was but a few seconds distant, made an attempt to dismount again, and go to her assistance.

Then, as for one agitated instant, Madison got his arm free, the revolver cracked, and a heavy bullet raked across the flanks of the comfortable horse. The next instant, George Carstairs, clinging, half-unconscious, to bridle, mane, saddle-horn—anything—was twenty yards away, the maddened horse flying like the wind.

The next instant after that, Jim Madison had wrenched himself loose from Mary Cole's grip, vaulted into the saddle of his own wiry cayuse and, revolver in hand and face set for murder, had started in pursuit.

IV

NEVER before, in the whole course of his life, had the prospect of violent death loomed on the personal horizon of the man who was now fleeing from it—and winning, so far, by a bare hundred feet. Last night had been his nearest approach to the realization of such a possibility; and this realization had been interrupted by his fainting-spell. Now, as he heard the thunder of Madison's pony behind him, there leaped into his mind a knowledge that he, the delicate heir to five millions, could be shot like the poorest and most healthy cowboy, and that he most certainly would be, if the desperado behind could accomplish the feat.

This realization, and a sudden sound, just over his head, like a bad-tempered bumble-bee in a very great hurry, made him feel considerably worse than he had felt before the battle with the bandits the night before; but this time, though the golden-lit landscape, with its range of evening-blued hills, swayed and reeled before him—he did not fall from his saddle. He knew that would be fatal. His only chance of surviving, after what he had heard on the Cole porch, lay in his clinging to his saddle; and, regardless of the heart he had nursed for the last fifteen years, to his saddle he clung.

Two more shots cracked; two more bullets droned past him—one a yard to the right, the other two feet to the left. Then, behind him, the sound of pursuit ceased. Had Madison given it up?

Another pistol-shot—and another; the humming swish of the bullets scarcely six inches from his cheek. Another—and George Carstairs' hat, charged to his mother's account in a great Los Angeles store, leaped off his head and fluttered away with two holes in its crown. Madison had just paused to improve his marksmanship. Seven shots—that meant that he had two revolvers, and there were still five cartridges left in the other.

Desperately, Carstairs flogged the neck of his horse with his bare hand. As he did so, he heard the sound of galloping resume behind him; and, ignorant of the fact that his pursuer had, instead of the two six-shooters he had deduced, one automatic pistol which, having fired seven shots, was now empty, the fugitive thanked Heaven devoutly for the cessation of the target-practise.

It was the first time, in an existence which had given him everything he wanted without effort, that George Carstairs had experienced the emotion of gratitude. And as he experienced it, the comfortable horse put his foot finally and completely in a gopher hole, neighed agonizingly, spun

around the pivot of the trapped foreleg and fell with a crash that sent his rider coasting three yards across the sand.

Madison, a hundred yards away, gave a yell of triumph, and spurred his horse. Carstairs, rising, dazed, heard the yell and saw the red light of the setting sun glint on the barrel of the empty pistol. Like a hunted animal he glanced around; perceived, behind him, a thicket of gray shrubbery which promised concealment in the gray light of approaching dusk; and plunged into it. Twigs lashed his face cruelly; and when, stumbling over stones that shifted, he caught a branch to steady himself, thorns cut deeply into the soft palm of his hands. He was going up-hill, too, his lungs a ball of fire, his heart a sledge-hammer, his knees trembling with exhaustion.

"Come out of that!" yelled the voice of Madison, far behind him and, it seemed, far below.

A random shot from the fresh-loaded clip of the automatic crackled through the branches twenty-five yards away; there came the sound of distant but blood-curdling curses, followed by the crash of branches behind the passage of a man. As a matter of fact, Mr. James Madison made no more crashes than that one. After a first moment of blind, unreasoning rage which made him yell, shoot and shove his way two yards into the bushes, he realized the perfect futility of trying, however urgent the reasons for murder, to find a victim in the two square miles of sage-brush that covered the slope of Bald Knob.

It was getting dark, too; anyhow, a guy with a weak heart would most certainly die negotiating that tangled up-hill desert; and in any case, Carstairs would be too late, now, to interfere with the plans Mr. Madison had formed. Extricating himself with difficulty from the grip of a chaparral wreath which had embraced his legs, the bandit shot the injured pony, mounted and started back at the best of his speed for the Cole ranch.

Meanwhile George Carstairs, convinced that his enemy was but a few yards behind him in the scrub, struggled upward through the sage-brush, and through a darkness now nearly complete. He did not expect to live; in fact, after he had been tripped and flung down half a dozen times, he was extremely uncertain whether he was still alive or not; but blindly, desperately, he kept on going.

And after an interminable period of time, he came to a clearer space which was not all stones. There was a fire in the midst of this space, and a sort of tent, near which a horse was standing. And over the fire, busily engaged with a long-handled frying-pan, sat an old man who at first appeared to be Mr. William Garfield. He had, however—as was visible when he rose suddenly, the frying-pan still in his hand—two genuine legs, and a white goatee beard instead of a peg-leg and whiskers.

"Why, what in the name of the seventeen proslavery martyrs—" began Nathaniel Brewer, M.D., surveying the mass of blood and rags which was advancing toward him.

"Help!" croaked George Carstairs. "Help!"

There were two flapjacks in the frying-pan, browned to the exact point of perfection; but Doctor Brewer dropped them and the frying-pan incontinently on the ground. As Carstairs, no longer supported by his own knees, sank into a half-sitting, half-prone position on the rocks, the old gentleman hopped into his tent; and, in a few seconds, hopped out again with a large black bottle. Drawing the cork from this with his teeth, he knelt and presented the mouth of the bottle.

Carstairs made a feeble motion of horror.

"No!" he gasped. "Doctor's orders! Kill me!"

The man who was holding up his head gave a click of disgust.

"Teach me something about medicine, eh?" he demanded; and simultaneously, having jammed an exceedingly horny thumb into the corner of his patient's mouth, he administered his prescription by force.

Carstairs, striving to cough as four fluid ounces of exceedingly powerful whisky burned his throat, found himself gagged and his nose held by vise-like fingers. Perforce, he swallowed.

"Yes, I should think so," said Doctor Brewer, releasing him. "My lord! First time I ever knew anybody to refuse that cure!"

"My—heart," said Carstairs weakly.

This was the first drink he had ever taken; and, lying with his head on Doc Brewer's arm, he was wondering with considerable interest when the symptoms to be expected after such a large dose would begin to show themselves. At present, he was not dying as predicted by various doctors; nor had

he any desire to dance, fight or weep. He felt drowsy, and his breathing was easier—both natural results of rest after incredible exertion.

"Did you say something about your heart?" inquired the old man.

He was standing up as he spoke; and at this moment, he became the subject of a very peculiar illusion. It seemed to George Carstairs that, before an answer could be given to this question, Doctor Brewer disappeared into thin air; and then gradually reappeared in quite another place. He seemed to be transferred, with a short interval of invisibility, to his old place on the other side of the camp-fire; and to have returned, without visible motion, to his former occupation of tossing flapjacks in a frying-pan.

"I say," he demanded, as Carstairs, bewildered, sat up and pressed a hand to his forehead, "did you ever play football?"

"Wh-what?"

"Football! It's all right—don't look so alarmed. You're on the top of Bald Knob, and I'm Dr. Nathaniel Brewer, and you've just slept for nigh on two hours. You now need nourishment, so I took the liberty of tossing a small rock at you. What I was asking is, did you ever play foot-ball?"

"No!"

"Ever wrestle? Box? Fence?"

"N—no. I——"

"Do you mean to tell me," demanded this extraordinary doctor, pausing in his manipulation of the frying-pan, and scowling across the fire, "that you have never played any violent game?"

"Why—er—not since I was a little boy."

"Ha-ha!" shouted Doc Brewer, in such a tone of triumph that the hobbled horse by the tent started violently. "Ha-ha! And which did you break at this violent game—your collar-bone, your arm, or your leg?"

"Why—it was football, and I got my kneecap——"

"It's all the same thing! I knew it!" cried the medical flapjack cooker. "Alonzo, did I tell you so, or did I not?"

The horse, thus addressed, looked at its master as if sharing George Carstairs' conviction that Mr. Brewer was a dangerous maniac and without comment resumed its search for grass-blades.

"And then they say," remarked the old man, quite unmoved by this reception of his excitement, and reaching for a coffee-pot as he spoke, "that the younger generation is the wolf's palace, not to say the hope of the future. Ah, me. Come and have some coffee."

However puzzling the circumstances, the coffee smelled excellent. Carstairs rose and walked, rather unsteadily, over to the fire.

"I'll bet you're as stiff and sore as you'll ever want to be," said the doctor, pouring out a black fluid into a tin cup. "However, your heart's perfectly all right. Of course, I knew there never was anything the matter with it soon's I realized who you were, and where you'd come from."

The young man took a sip of the coffee. It was, roughly, of the consistency of treacle, and approximately as bitter as the best grade of gall.

"My heart's trying to jump out of me right now, from the mere exertion of standing up," he said indignantly.

"What else do you expect?" howled Doc Brewer. "You've never been allowed to move at more than a slow walk since you busted that collar-bone—kneecap, I mean. You're high-strung—you've got what we call a nervous heart and you've been told you're in a bad way, and filled full of drugs and what not, most likely, an' never taken any exercise, physical or emotional, and you wonder that you're all out of training! That's perfectly good coffee, by the way, so don't try to spill it. Same with all those other folks at the Rising Sun. Not a sick man among 'em. Just people who've sat perfectly still until they've started to feel miserable—an' that Rogers guy is making a fortune out of them. Have a flapjack."

AS HE accepted the half-inch-thick slice of indigestibility across the fire, Carstairs abandoned his first theory that the old man opposite to him was a lunatic and began to wonder whether the excitement of the last twenty-four hours had not unhinged his own brain. How, unless his mentality had been turned entirely upside down, could he be sitting here, in rags, on the top of a mountain in Texas, eating and drinking things which he had always regarded as poisons, and permitting a perfect stranger claiming a medical degree to tell him he was perfectly well—while, as a matter of fact, he was a sick man who had been subjected to the most outrageous treatment by——

His thoughts left the subject immediately in hand, and focused on the terrible

period which had followed his visit to the Cole ranch. Somehow, the terror of his flight, and the agony of his rush up the hill through the brush, seemed very hazy to him. But two things stood out like great red splotches on his memory—hatred of Jim Madison, and hideous shame at the figure Jim Madison had made him present, before Mary Cole. Nothing could excuse this latter, except his physical condition; and, savagely, he defended his disability.

"You disagree with a great many eminent specialists, Doctor——"

"Brewer. Nathaniel. Yes, I do. You see, your mother hasn't paid me to say that you're unfit to engage in dangerous sports. You're not my only son, and so if you break your collar-bone or kneecap, I don't figure you'll surely be killed next time. When you appear before me, having run two miles up a hill, and say you've got a bum heart, I listen to it with a stethoscope and simply tell you that you haven't. Have some more coffee."

Carstairs' mouth fell open as he looked at the positive old man.

"You seem to know a whole lot about me, and—everything!"

Doctor Brewer's eyes twinkled as he sank his teeth into his fourth flapjack.

"Listen," said he. "For the last month I've been up on this mountain ridge, pretendin' to prospect, since your friend Rogers came an' stole my practise. I haven't been into the Valley except once—early this morning, to fix up Bill Garfield—since you came. Now, I'm goin' to tell you what I've figured out, an' you can be my witness with that old doubting Thomas when he's well enough to listen. He thinks he's some little old *Sherlock Holmes*. Him! Ha-ha! He told me you were here, and who you were, while I was bandagin' him. He didn't seem to think much of you, by the way. Have a flapjack.

"Now, from just what he told me, I figured out what I've been sayin' to you. From his description, an' also from the fact of Rogers acceptin' you, I guessed there wasn't anythin' really wrong with you. And from his story about the way you stuck up for Mary Cole, in his store, I figured you weren't the kind of guy who just pretends he's sick for fun. So probably your mother was to blame—you being the one and only. And I've heard of cases before where a chap was invalided for life because his ma was scared he'd be killed. Usually after he's got laid kicking by a full-back, or a bean-ball, or somep'n. So that was simple.

"But what I want you to bear witness to is that I also figured out who chased you up this mountain. It was Jim Madison. And he did it because he was jealous of you an' Mary Cole. Now, don't interrupt me! Wait! I am now goin' ahead into the future. Bill Garfield got unconscious before I could tell him this, an' Jake Henson was blubbering like a calf over him, so you remember it. That picayune train-robbery Madison and the Cole boys pulled off the other night was nothing. Some day soon, there's going to be a *real* one. Madison 'll pull it with his real gang—yeah, he's got a bunch of experts hidden around somewhere—and then he and they'll fly the coop, leavin' the Cole boys to take the blame.

"An' if I had to be exact, I'd say that the thing they'll pull will be a hold-up of the ore-train that goes through here on Sundays. See? They call it an ore-trrain when they call it anything, but it's from the gold mines beyond Gold Creek, and the ore's gold-dust. Everybody in the Valley knows it these days—and you can bet Mr. Madison knows it better than anybody. Why, he might pull the trick tomorrow!"

"It's Sunday today," said George Carstairs.

The omniscient doctor looked slightly disconcerted. He paused with a pannikin of coffee half-way to his lips.

"Oh, is it?" he inquired. "Well— Well, anyhow, Jake Henson'll be keeping an eye on things. I told him, tears or no——"

"The last I saw of Henson," said Carstairs, staring into the heart of the fire, and wondering why his voice sounded so distant and strange, "he was lying on a porch in—an—unconscious."

"What?"

Carstairs repeated the information. For some reason, it seemed rather funny to him this time, and he smiled broadly at the coffee-pot. Nice hot, strong coffee certainly did make a fellow feel fine inside.

"What are you mumbling about?" demanded Doctor Brewer. "Speak up! Jake Henson knocked out? Again? Who did it?"

"Ma'son."

"Madison! When? Why? Was Henson arresting him? Or was Jake hanging around

Mary Cole, too? Hey, what's the matter with you? Why, you're drunk!"

This was an insult; and moreover, it recalled an earlier insult. He stared haughtily at the doctor.

"I certainly am not drunk," said George Carstairs in a remarkably clear voice. "And what's more, I am not in love with Miss Cole. Certainly not. Why should I be? And I won't sit at the same camp-fire with a man who hints that such a thing is possible."

Owing entirely to the stiffness occasioned by his recent efforts, rising was rather a complicated process; and, once he was on his feet, the earth seemed a long way off. However, there was no need for Doctor Brewer to laugh while rolling himself a brown cigaret. Carstairs walked away from the old man; and, at a distance of ten yards from the camp-fire, seated himself on a rock.

Evidently this rock was on the edge of a declivity that extended clear down to the railway. For across the black floor of the Valley, whose roof was the spangled stars, there crawled, before the young man's eyes, a short snake of lights, evidently representing a train. In the stillness of the night he could hear the roar of its wheels and, as it approached a cluster of lights which probably stood for a village, could hear its whistle and bell.

It did not stop at the village. Evidently an express. Probably the very ore-train Doc Brewer had mentioned before he became insulting.

The old man had followed from the camp-fire and was standing just behind the young one, puffing his brown cigaret and for some reason chuckling to himself. Carstairs, however, paid no attention to him. Suddenly, with a surge of rage that made his heart beat violently, he remembered what Brewer had said about the possibility of Madison's robbing that train. He wouldn't do it, so soon after the other robbery, of course; but—if only he did, and he, Carstairs, could be anywhere around! His heart-beat increased another twenty per cent. as he imagined himself catching Madison red-handed; beating him to a pulp; sending him to jail for ten—twenty—fifty years; and showing himself to Mary Cole as he really was—or at least, as he felt tonight. Not that he was in love with her——

The doctor, behind him, gave a sudden gasp.

"The train's stopped!"

It had—in the middle of a long black stretch between the lights of the village it had passed, and those of another, perhaps four miles ahead. Carstairs caught his breath and stared. Out of the stillness there came, tiny but unmistakable, the sound of four shots.

"The hold-up!" shrieked Doc Brewer. "Where's my horse? Alonzo, you fool, come here. Where's my saddle? Bill Garfield and Jake Henson laid out— There'd be a couple of thousand dollars for catching those beggars! Stand still, you fool horse, or I'll cinch you in two! What do you think of them for clever ——, pulling this trick so soon after the other? You nuzzle me again, an' I'll— 'Course, everybody'll be thinking they're safe for a while yet, an' won't be half-watching! If I get as much as one thousand in a lump, I'll be able to live like a human bein' until this Rogers lad blows up. Thank —— I'm ready. Good-b— Hey, get out of my way. What you think you're playin' at?"

Gently, but firmly, with the impenetrable serenity of a sleep-walker, George Carstairs, appearing out of the darkness, had taken the bridle of the pony, and placed one hand on the doctor's chest as that excited gentleman prepared to mount. He now applied, with a pleasant smile, a shove which wrenched Mr. Brewer's foot out of the stirrup, and sent him staggering back a yard or so.

"You're too old for this business," said George Carstairs genially. "But I'm all right. You can have the reward. I just want James Madison, Esquire. Don't rush me, doctor. For years I haven't punched men when I wanted to, because I thought I'd drop dead, and——"

Dr. Brewer hurled himself forward and made a wild grab for the revolver whose butt, protruding from a saddle-holster, shone in the firelight. But again a hand, firmly implanted on his chest, impelled him backward; and before he could recover and advance again, the young man whom he had fed, diagnosed and filled with whisky was in the saddle.

"Good-by, doctor!" he called back as the pony, stimulated by a heel in the ribs, started for the beginning of the valley trail. "I'm off to make up the arrears!"

Doctor Brewer snatched up the coffee-pot and hurled it; but it fell short. He

threw two rocks and missed; he ran after the pony, but the lead was too great; and finally, as George Carstairs clattered off over the rocks of the descending moraine, the old gentleman clenched both hands in his scanty hair and, looking wildly up at the stars, devoted himself passionately and conscientiously to the occupation of swearing.

V

THERE is, proverbially, a special Providence that watches over drunken men and fools.

As the Bourbon, first stimulated into action by the warmth of the camp-fire, continued the work it had so suddenly begun, George Carstairs became more and more entitled to membership in the first class of *protégés;* and at that very moment Jake Henson, who had arrived at Stony Springs Ranch with a violently aching head, was most emphatically placing him in the second. So perhaps Providence was deceived into giving Carstairs a double share of her attention. It is certainly difficult, by any other explanation, to account for his having taken, on a dark prairie that was perfectly strange to him, the one direction which would bring him face to face with Jim Madison, as the latter rode away from the scene of the train-robbery.

Strictly speaking, "face to face" does not describe the meeting. The night was too dark for the recognition of features to be possible, in any case. "Shoulder to shoulder" is a more accurate statement of the facts; and, to be exact, it may be added that the shoulders involved were those of the ponies. In other words, Carstairs, riding blindly, at a gallop, through the night, cannoned violently into his enemy; knocked him over; fell on him; and, just as Madison raised his well-known voice in the first words of a stream of Billingsgate, knocked him completely out with a purely accidental drive of the knee into Madison's solar-plexus. The bandit, halted in the midst of a tremendous activity of arms, legs, and tongue, gave a sudden hiss like that of a punctured balloon, quivered all over and lay perfectly still.

"Hey!" said George Carstairs, rising in alarm. For a moment he was under the influence of his early training. "I haven't —hurt you, have I? I say—I say!"

There was no answer; and in the silence that ensued, the Bourbon contributed its advice. What if the chap was knocked out? He deserved that, and a good deal more. And if he had been concerned in this train-robbery he should jolly well get a good deal more.

Carstairs blinked, as if to force his eyes to penetrate the darkness. By this time, they had become sufficiently accustomed to the obscurity for him to make out the dark masses of the ponies; which, having risen from their roll on the grass, were nosing each other in apology for the clumsiness and ill-temper of their masters.

What was that Brewer had said about ore? Oh, gold-dust. Yes. That would have to be carried on the horse. No use searching a man for heavy stuff like that. Yes—and here it was; a soft leather bag with a heavy metal rim around its opening, and four or five locks. Carstairs squeezed the leather between his fingers and felt the unmistakable stiff give of a flexible steel lining.

"Gold!" he remarked to himself; and his heart gave a bound and thud which would most certainly have sent him, only a few hours before, hot-foot for medical aid.

Now he did not even notice the phenomenon. On the contrary, he aggravated the offense against his weakness by stooping, catching hold of Mr. James Madison by the collar, and actually endeavoring to lift that hundred-and-seventy-pound dead weight to the back of a horse.

This, however, proved to be impossible. The handling of an unconscious man is quite a trick, even for a strong man who is strictly sober. The weight is considerable, and the shape of the burden is extremely awkward. Unexpected legs and arms trail on the ground, bump the lifter in the nose, or trip him up.

After experience of each of these disadvantages, George Carstairs, very much out of breath, sat down by his fallen foe and, while waiting for him to regain the power of motion, tried to realize what had happened.

In the first place, was this himself? And was this floppy object on the grass really the terrible Jim Madison of the afternoon? And if so, how did it come that he—he, George Carstairs—had overcome this dangerous person? Mutely he asked these questions of the Southern Cross; but the stars, though glimmering their fullest comprehension, provided no answer. And George was in no condition to evolve one.

The man at his side grunted and moved.

"Where the blazes—?" he muttered in a hoarse, breathless voice.

Before answering, Mr. Carstairs reached over and removed the automatic pistol from Madison's belt. With a reckless disregard for politeness, he then shoved the muzzle of this weapon against Mr. Madison's ribs.

"You're here, with me," said the widow's only son. "But if you try any funny business, you'll be with the angels in about ten seconds."

There was an extraordinary remark for a pillar of Los Angeles society.

"What—you think—you're doing?" asked Madison, jerking himself into a sitting position. "Why, you young——"

"Get up, and get on your horse," said George Carstairs.

"I'll see you——"

The bandit leaped up and grabbed for his holster.

"No," said a rather dreamy voice from in front of him, "it's not there. It's pointing at you. Get on the horse."

"What for?"

"Because I can't lift you there, and you've got to be taken to Three Pines. You're arrested."

With a hoarse bellow of fury Madison leaped forward. Instantly the entire world appeared to resolve itself into blue flame and sickeningly sweet-smelling smoke; and something red-hot and rapidly-moving hissed away into the beyond with a square half-inch of the bandit's left ear.

"Get on the horse!" repeated the voice as dreamily as before. "I assure you I wouldn't mind pulling this trigger again in the least. It's easy."

"I won't!"

"You will! And before I count three!"

No more than his captor did James Madison, in the daze following a solar-plexus punch, believe in the actual reality of what was going on. If he and George Carstairs had been forced, at that moment, to give their opinions, they would have agreed in supposing themselves to be dreaming. From Madison's point of view, however, it was a dream that had to be humored. Until such time as he woke up, it would obviously be well to do as the dream-man with the pistol ordered.

It was in this frame of mind, though with a growing apprehension that this nightmare might, after all, be sober reality, that he rode slowly ahead of George Carstairs to Three Pines. Once, when they came in sight of Bill Garfield's International Emporium and Sheriff's Office, signified by a light far ahead, there flashed into Madison's mind a realization that all this really was true—that he really was captured, no matter how impossible the circumstances might seem, and that he really was being conducted away from freedom, and toward fifteen or twenty years in jail. He turned around suddenly, to gage the chances of escape—and found the muzzle of his own pistol covering the back of his neck quite steadily, at a range of about two feet.

FIFTEEN minutes later, with the pistol actually in contact with his spine, he found himself facing the sheriff in person—being handed over to the law. It was true!

"I've brought this man here for robbing a train, Mr. Garfield," said George Carstairs to the old man who, suddenly awakened, stared at them in paralytic amazement in the light of his bedside lamp. "There's a big bag of gold-dust on his horse, outside."

It was as Mr. Garfield, never too astounded to attend to the duties of his office, reached under his pillow for the revolver which, in sickness or health, he kept there, that Madison fully awoke to his position. And his awakening served effectively to rouse Carstairs. Hitherto it had seemed impossible to the young man that he was actually responsible for the capture of the ruffian. Accident had done it—just accident.

But when Madison, his eyes full of a new frenzy, suddenly turned around and leaped towards the door, there was not the slightest accident about the swing of the pistol-barrel that caught him on the side of the head. It was a deliberate and well-aimed blow; and Madison, staggering under it, sank huddled and powerless into Mr. Garfield's own personal cane chair.

The sheriff's jaw dropped. He stared at Madison. He stared at Carstairs; he looked back at Madison, and then again he transferred his gaze to the extraordinary figure in the doorway. For once in his life Mr. William Garfield was completely at a loss. He too experienced and dismissed the conviction that he must be dreaming.

"Say, don't you want to do anything

about his accomplices?" demanded the blood-stained scarecrow who a few days before had been pitied in that very store as a poor, genteel object. "There really has been a train-robbery. There really is a bag of gold-dust outside. If you'll keep this chap covered, I'll fetch it in."

Slowly Mr. Garfield crawled out of bed and tried to stoop for his peg leg. The triumph of mind over matter, however, was not quite complete; and, as one of his wounds protested with an agonizing shoot of pain, he sank back on the bed.

"Get it for me," he whispered; and then, in a stronger tone, to Madison, "Who was with you?"

"Nobody!"

It was unfortunate for him that he sought to give his assertion emphasis by jumping up; because George Carstairs, on such short apprenticeship to scenes of violence, was unable to distinguish threatening movements from the innocent variety. And so, as he passed on his way to Mr. Garfield's bedside, the young man turned and punched Mr. Madison on the nose with the force attainable only by men who think their lives are in danger.

The demoralizing effects of a bang on the nose are notorious. Following a punch in the solar-plexus, and a stunning blow over the head, the effect is quadrupled at least. Madison, sick and dazed, and with two remorseless guns confronting him, broke down entirely.

"Who was with you?"

"The Cole boys——"

"Ah," said Mr. Garfield, "and who else?"

"Nobody else!"

"You lie!" said George Carstairs.

Dimly he remembered what Doc Brewer had said.

"Yes—yes. There was 'Red' Higgins from Prairie Dog, and, and——"

He babbled half a dozen names. Mr. Garfield's jaw dropped farther at each one. Finally, with a bellow of rage, he came to the same conclusion as Doctor Brewer had reached.

"You skunk! Working the old two-gang trick, eh? Draggin' those Cole boys in to cover up the real bunch! By the ghost of Sam Houston, I'll see you get the limit for this. Was there any shootin'?"

"No!"

"You lie again," said George Carstairs. "I heard it on the mountain."

"Who did it?" snarled Mr. Garfield, getting his leg after a desperate effort, and strapping it on.

"The Cole boys!"

A chill clutched Carstairs' heart. Mary's brothers—murderers! In his agony of mind he took one sudden step forward toward Madison. He had not the slightest idea of offering further violence to the battered wretch in the chair; but Madison did not know that. He cringed and howled. With any other threatener he would have kept some shreds of his morale intact; but he did not understand this young man who was half-dead one minute, and a murderous desperado the next; he had no idea what George Carstairs might do next.

"Don't hit me again!" he therefore howled. "No—they didn't do it. It was Red Higgins. He killed the engineer, the fool, and——"

"Oh, he did, did he?" said Mr. Garfield. "An' which way did he go, after this amusin' trick?"

"Answer!"

"L-Longhorn City. But if he knows I didn't blame it on the Coles, he'll kill me!"

"He won't have much chance of that," said old Bill Garfield in a pain-strangled voice as he dragged himself over to the telephone. "Hello. Hello. Hello, operator. This is Bill Garfield. Get me through to Ben Pokeson, in Longhorn City, this instant. None of your long-distance tricks. —— how I feel! Give me that number. . . . . Hello! Hello! Ben? Ben Pokeson! I don't care if he is asleep . . . Hello—Ben? Say, Bill Garfield speak—ouch—speaking. Never mind what I'm groaning about. Hold-up of train here—engineer killed. Murderer's name Red Higgins. Yeah, I know he's a respectable bootlegger. Benedict Arnold was a soldier. He's comin' to Longhorn City, an' you arrest him—see? That's all. And then phone me. Don't you fail!"

The old man, groaning heavily in the silence which held the store, wiggled the hook and called another number.

"I want Jake Henson," he said when the Stony Springs ranch-house answered. "Hello. Hello."

He turned.

"What are you tyin' him in the chair for?" he demanded of Carstairs, who was busy with the prisoner and a lariat off the wall. "Can't you watch— Hello. Jake Henson? I want Jake Henson! What

do I care if he's hurt? I'm dying. Wake him up. Hello, Jake! Why didn't you come back here? I don't want any explanations. Listen. Madison and a gang have held up a train. I've got him. I— What are you shrieking about? Well, you can your joy and come over here within five minutes. He's got a lot of pals to be arrested. Yes, the Cole boys. An' others. Well, hurry!"

Scarcely had he replaced the receiver when the bell whirred in a furious call. After a moment of resting his forehead weakly against the wall, Mr. Garfield took heart of grace and answered it.

"Oh, it's you, Rogers, eh?"

From the instrument, clearly audible in the store, came sound of shouting.

"I don't care if you get fifteen governors and twelve millionairesses and fifty lawyers!' roared the sheriff in return. "It's up to you to look after your cripples—not me. Fetch 'em all on, since you've sent for 'em. As it happens, I do know where the boy is—he's here. Yes, you can speak to him. But don't you talk to me like that any more!"

Turning, in the grip of a dizziness caused by his emotion, Mr. Garfield perceived Madison, still sitting in his chair; and an extremely hot, dishevelled, and furious version of Nathaniel Brewer M. D., standing in the doorway.

"If that Carstairs person's here," said Dr. Brewer through his teeth, "I should like a few minutes chat with him."

"Why—" said Bill Garfield, staring around the store.

"Where is he?" howled Dr. Brewer while Dr. Rogers, at the other end of the phone made sounds of impatience into the transmitter.

Mr. Garfield shut up this latter by jamming the receiver back on its hook.

"Why, he must have gone——"

Madison spoke mockingly.

"Yes! He's gone over to warn your dear little friends, the Cole boys. And I'll bet you go after him—and them! I'll bet they stand trial with the rest of us! But I'll——"

Mr. Garfield stood perfectly still, staring at him.

"Brewer," he said at last. "Give me my hat and trousers and belt."

"You get back into bet! I'll——"

"It shall never be said," remarked Mr. Garfield, swaying where he stood, "that I showed any favoritism. Get me my hat and——"

THERE was a very great deal more argument before he won his point. In fact, by the time the sheriff, hatted, belted, bandaged, dressed and accompanied by Dr. Brewer, had started, leaving Jim Madison in a perfect tangle of handcuffs on the floor—George Carstairs had arrived at the Cole ranch. And while Bill Garfield was being further delayed by the arrival of Jake Henson, and the despatch of that incredulous deputy to Prairie Dog—Carstairs, on the porch where he had been so humiliated that afternoon, was pushing away, with a certain desperate calmness, a revolver which Arthur Cole had shoved into his ribs as he climbed the steps.

"Stand still, mister," said Arthur, "an' don't wriggle. You're interruptin' us at a most inconvenient time."

"Don't be a fool," said George Carstairs.

A match flared, in the hands of Fred. The barrel of the revolver dropped.

"Why, it's that dude! But what the ——'s he been——"

"Don't talk so much!" snapped Carstairs, thrusting his way into the living-room.

A faint scream greeted him. Mary Cole, weeping bitterly as she stood among the debris of half-packed war-bags, and all the mess of imminent departure, clasped her hands to her breast as the young man entered and took one involuntary step forward. Ernest Cole, standing under the dim oil-lamp that lit the room, dropped the saddle-bag he was packing and pulled the girl behind him. With the other hand he drew a revolver.

"What the ——?"

He paused as his two brothers, guns in their hands, followed Carstairs into the room.

"You'd better drop all this stuff," said the scarecrow tensely, "and get out of here with what you stand up in. I don't know how much time you've got, but——"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Madison's arrested, and that he's squealed and that you'll all be in jail before morning, unless——"

"Who arrested him?"

"I did!"

It was a tribute to his appearance that there was no sound of incredulity. Instead, Arthur Cole, springing forward, raised his

arm as if to strike the man before him.

"You did, you——"

"Yes, and I ought to be arresting you, you fools! I'm putting myself in danger of jail to warn you—for your—your sister's sake. If I did what I felt like, I'd give the whole three of you a thrashing, and arrest you afterwards, for making her so——"

"You'd give us a thrashing!" screamed Ernest Cole. "Why, you're the dude that—I'll punch your face in!"

Perhaps, in the excusable ingratitude of the moment, he would have done it if suddenly George Carstairs had not leaped at his throat, hit him with both hands and knocked him down. Perhaps even after that Arthur Cole and his brother Fred, coming to Ernest's assistance, might have carried out his threat, had not a heavy chair, snatched from its place against the wall and hurled like a chain-shot, caught them both in the legs and bowled them over like nine-pins.

It was pure luck that the clumsy missile hit them at all; but Providence was still awarding that double portion of her attention to George Carstairs. She even enabled him, when Fred Cole, blind with rage, arose, to find the exact spot on that gentleman's chin which would incapacitate him for further fighting, without making him unfit to ride.

"Get up, you fools!" cried Carstairs. "Get your horses and get out! Bill Garfield's coming!"

He did not know that he was speaking the truth; in fact, he believed himself—another first time in his like—to be lying. But the words had the desired effect.

The two brothers who were now on their feet stared at him wildly but with the resentment dying out of their eyes; and Fred Cole, still prostrate, endeavored to gather his legs under him for flight—not revenge.

"You're—not a bad scout, at that rate," said Ernest slowly. "Though I can't figure——"

"Who's asking you to figure? I'm asking you to go—get out—ride away! Do you want me to kick you out of that door? There's no time——"

He made a sudden step toward Arthur.

"No—no. We're going. Mary, sweetheart——"

The two brothers kissed the sobbing girl, who clung to them.

"I'm awful sorry we got into this, Mary," said Arthur, in a voice that seemed to indicate tears somewhere under his rough exterior. "Hard on you, old girl. Fools. Better in future. Come on, Fred! Buck up!"

"Hurry!" urged Carstairs. "Hurry!"

"Shake hands," said Ernest sullenly, and thrust out his great paw.

Arthur, with a crushing grip, and Fred with a dazed squeeze and a look of incredulity, followed his example. With Fred in the middle they passed out through the door, stumbled down the dark porch steps and a moment later, amid a wild drumming of hoofs from the rear of the house, were gone.

"Good-by, Mary!" one of them shouted back, his voice a mere pin-point of sound in the dead silence.

At the words, the girl burst into a storm of tears.

"Good-by!" she tried to call, though the men to whom the little cry was addressed were well out of hearing—two hundred yards away, galloping at top speed along the cattle-trail that led north. "Oh, my dear boys!"

Mr. Carstairs' celebrated heart, which had given him no trouble throughout the previous proceedings, now once again performed its favorite stunt of standing still and then starting off again at a gallon a minute. But, as on several previous occasions, he totally disregarded it. He was too intent on comforting Mary Cole. His method of doing this—strange in one who had never before laid hands on a woman in his life—was to put one arm, totally devoid of coat or shirt except in the form of tatters—around her shoulders, and to draw her face up against his shoulder.

"They'll be all right, my dear," he said, wondering why, all of a sudden, he should begin to feel so extremely tired. His eyes seemed bent on closing; and, no matter what efforts he made to keep them open, they blinked and smarted. "They'll be all right—and so will you. Now, then. Now, then. It's all right."

Still the girl sobbed. Mr. Carstairs, gazing at the hanging lamp in a dozing and hypnotized manner, found himself yawning. He endeavored to make up for this rudeness by something extra-special in the way of comfort to the girl in his arms. An idea would be to kiss her, just where that ringlet curled behind her ear. He carried out this idea without opposition.

"Mary," he said, having done so.

The girl looked up at him. For some reason the sight of her blue eyes, swimming with tears and seeming like pools a thousand miles deep, made Mr. Carstairs conceive the project of kissing her on the lips. He did this, too.

"Don't worry, or be afraid, darling," he then heard himself say, "I'll—look after you—until—they come back. And after—if you'll let me. Now, then. Now, then. It's all right."

With which extraordinary remark, he patted the girl reassuringly on the back, yawned again; and, with a muttered apology that was absolutely unintelligible, walked over to a vast red plush couch and collapsed on it. Mary Cole, after a violent start of terror, heard him begin to breathe in the heavy, regular manner expressive of deep sleep; and, wide-eyed, amazed out of even her tears, stood for perhaps a minute, alone in the middle of the floor, staring at this astounding lover.

She was in this attitude when Mr. William Garfield, supported under one arm by his physician and with a revolver cocked menacingly in the other hand, staggered into the room.

"Where's your brothers?" demanded the sheriff hoarsely. "Gone? Then where's that Carstairs?"

Following the direction of the girl's fascinated gaze, the old officer took in the disorder of the room, and the bizarre figure on the red plush couch.

"What in the name of Sam Houston's been goin' on here?" he roared.

Mary Cole looked at him.

"—I—I think—he asked me—to marry him," she faltered.

The revolver fell from the sheriff's trembling hand. He stared at the girl, and opened his aged mouth for speech. Then he stared at George Carstairs, now snoring with the complete abandon of a man who has crowded twenty-five years of activity into twenty-four hours, made a faint sound like a choke on a cherry-stone and closed his mouth again.

After this he turned to Dr. Brewer, whose own jaw had dropped to the limit permitted by anatomy, and spoke, very weakly.

"Lay me down alongside of him, doc," said Old Bill Garfield. "He's—my prisoner —an'—I don't feel —well—myself."

VI

WITH regard to Jake Henson it may be said that he had an exceedingly busy night and by no means a pleasant one. After locking the furiously silent Madison in the railroad tool-shed, he had to collect a posse, for one thing; and, having saved time by calling exclusively on married men, who he knew would be at home, found himself with one which performed its duties efficiently, but entertained—and expressed—the lowest personal opinions of himself.

Then again, there was quite a pretty little fight during the arrest of "Slick" Saunders, who insisted that he was merely a harmless agent for agricultural implements and endeavored to prove it with a Winchester rifle. Fortified with the consciousness that in serving the law he was also accomplishing his personal revenge, however, Mr. Henson remained quite serene until, arriving at the International Emporium with his handcuffed prisoners, his posse and a vast hunger, he found that promised land in possession of perfect strangers.

The posse and prisoners, horrified at the apparition of a woman seated dictatorially in Mr. Garfield's own chair, backed out of the store much more rapidly than they had entered. Mr. Henson, his duties as an official overcoming his personal inclinations, stood in the doorway and attempted a nervous "Good morning!"

"Ah, at last," said the voice of Dr. Henry W. Rogers. "Here is the deputy sheriff. Now, Henson——"

Jake, rolling an eye rendered desperate by lack of coffee toward the speaker, perceived that two other men were seated on the counter. One, a grave person in a dark suit, was totally unknown to him. The other was Peter Fells, who, after a youth spent riding the range around Three Pines, had fallen to the estate of a lawyer in Los Angeles. Though dressed in a cutaway suit and gray trousers, old associations had proved too much for Peter. He was engaged, in a most messy fashion, with a can of No. 1 apricots; over which he nodded gravely at the deputy.

"How, Jake," said the eminent lawyer. "My, you've grown!"

Dr. Rogers and the lady—who had risen from the old cane chair—now spoke together.

"Where's Mr. Carstairs?"

"Oh, where's my boy?"

To Dr. Rogers, the reply would have been, quite simply, another question as to how in the name of his Satanic Majesty he, Jake Henson, was to be expected to guess riddles without any breakfast; but the presence of the lady complicated matters. She looked like a nice lady, too. Evidently young Carstairs' mother.

Again Jake rolled a desperate eye around. He had a vague memory of Bill Garfield's having said something about the Rising Sun invalid the night before—something connected with Madison's arrest. Maybe Madison had killed the boy. The situation was awkward.

"Why, ma'am," he began, sparring for time; and at this instant, rolling his eyes some more, he chanced to perceive, through the open door, an aged man riding toward the store on a lame pony.

That was Bill Garfield's horse—but Bill Garfield was not in the saddle. It was Doc Brewer—but nevertheless, the day was saved.

"Why, I don't know, ma'am," said Jake, "but here's a man who's liable to tell you. I've been out all night myself—over the other side of the county. I'll send him right in."

With this for excuse he hastened to meet the advancing doctor.

"Is Bill all right?" demanded the big man in a voice that trembled.

"Yeah."

Jake Henson wiped some beads of perspiration from his brow.

"Then there's a bunch waitin' in there," he remarked as the interested posse trailed up for the news, "lookin' for that Carstairs guy. D'you know anythin' about him?"

Dr. Brewer swallowed something. He also looked ahead at the store, and seemed to lick his lips.

"Somebody waiting, eh?" he asked gently. "My esteemed colleague Dr. Rogers, among others? And the boy's mother? Yes? Yes, I do know something about him. I should be obliged—" his eyes wandered over the posse—"if you gentlemen would be present while I——"

They needed no second asking. A motley crowd, dust-stained, hungry, but intensely interested, they crowded into the store after the doctor, removing their hats as Mrs. Carstairs rushed forward.

"Oh, tell me the truth!" she cried. "Is he dead?"

Dr. Brewer shook his head.

"No, ma'am. He is not dead. On the contrary. I——"

"Cut it short," cried Rogers. "Where is he, then? And where's that old fool of a sheriff? I've got a rod in pickle——"

"My dear Dr. Rogers," asked the old man, "will you do me the favor not to interrupt me? I didn't interrupt you when you pronounced this lady's son a physical ruin, or words to that effect. Now you return the compliment while I tell her——"

"Well, do cut it short, doc," said the apricot-eating lawyer on the counter. "What's the boy been up to?"

Dr. Brewer peered at him.

"Why, if that's you, Peter," he said, "so far's I understand it, he's spent the last twenty-four hours in riding about six miles, running up one mountain, riding down the same mountain, arresting one desperate criminal single-handed——"

"What's this foolishness?" demanded Dr. Rogers savagely.

"—winning one knock-down-and-drag-out fight with three able-bodied Texans," continued Dr. Brewer, ticking off the items on his fingers, "and getting engaged to be married."

Peter Fells nodded. He did not seem in the least surprized.

"That all?" he asked. "What did you do—give him a drink?"

"Yes—and told him," said Dr. Brewer, dividing a glance between his rival and Mrs. Carstairs, "that he had nothing the matter with his heart, and never had had; and that nobody would tell him otherwise, unless either they wanted to keep him at home in the evenings—or to make money out of him."

"You insinuate—" began Rogers, perfectly livid.

"Oh, I forgot one other thing," said Dr. Brewer, turning to Peter Fells. "He's under arrest for assisting in the escape of three fugitives from justice."

The lawyer paused with an apricot halfway to his mouth.

"What?" he demanded slowly. "Him? George?"

Mrs. Carstairs, in the midst of the silence, clasped her hands.

"You're a doctor?" she wailed. "What have you done to him to make him——"

Nathaniel Brewer, M. D., cast a lightning glance around the thunderstruck faces of the posse. Yes. They had learned their lesson, all right. They were his from now on. He could afford to be sarcastic.

"Why, ma'am," he said, "I've done nothing for him. Professional etiquette would forbid my doing anything while he was under the care of another doctor."

Rogers flushed. Peter Fells was overheard remarking audibly to the governor's secretary that he'd always known there was nothing the matter with the boy.

"Unless I am mistaken," said Dr. Brewer, "here he comes now, on my pony, which he has already ridden lame. As I was saying, ma'am—all the credit must go to Dr. Rogers. His prescription, as I recall it, was the air of Texas. Two hundred dollars a week—but worth it."

The old doctor strolled out on the veranda, and, while waving to the approaching Carstairs, who waved back—raised his wrinkled old nose and sniffed. But not at Dr. Rogers and all his works. Oh, no! By no means!

"Wonderful air!" said Doc Brewer, sniffing again. "Wonderful air!"

THE OLD TIMERS

by Walter Trumbull

CALM eyed they gazed on peace or strife,
Serene and unafraid;
For they were gamblers all—and life
The stake for which they played.

They watched Fate spin the wheel of earth,
And sat into the game,
Content to get their money's worth
And take luck as it came.

They didn't use a lot of breath
In talking of the soul;
But they rode knee to knee with Death
And raced him to the goal.

The first to give, the last to beg,
They spoke the things they felt.
Their home was where they drove a peg
To hang a cartridge belt.

They saw existence as a joke
Where each must find his fun,
And, smiling, viewed it through the smoke
Of sudden crashing gun.

Bright as a flame their courage flared;
They walked the world in pride;
And at the end they only cared
Not when, but how they died.

THE CAMPFIRE

A Meeting Place for Readers ~ Writers *and* Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

WHAT'S back of fire-building? There ought to be some interesting answers to this interesting question.

Philadelphia.

Why does an outdoor man, when he pulls up for the night, always build a fire? In short, "Why does a man build a fire?" He may have been out of coffee for a week; maybe he has no grub to cook; his clothing may not need drying; the night may be sweltering hot and he just about tired out, but he will hunt for an hour, if it is necessary, to gather material to build that fire. Why does he do it? Does he sense a sort of companionship or protection, possibly handed down through many an ancestor, or might it be a religious act commemorating the evening sacrifice in the dim, dim past? Please explain. I'll say right here it has got my goat.—FRANK HARDING.

IN ACCORDANCE with Camp-Fire custom S. Omar Barker rises to introduce himself although it is not his first story in the magazine.

Beulah, New Mexico.

If there were no other reasons, joining the "Camp-Fire" would be honest pleasure because my amigo Big Jim Harriman is in it and because another friend—who, however, is not even aware of my existence—Bill Adams, sits among you. Though I am a stranger to *Adventure*, most certainly *Adventure* has long been otherwise to me.

IF BEING born in the bear and cougar haunted mountains of frontier New Mexico; reared in the midst of swart Mexican-Americans; spending half of my boyhood in the saddle and half in the woods with a rifle; growing up to be a high-school teacher with an eye to youthful comradeship; serving Uncle Sam as a far-flung Forest Ranger and later as a Sergeant in the Engineer Corps over where there is said to have been quite a war some five years ago; returning with a fight to make for health; assaulting (often vainly) the editorial offices of nearly every magazine in the country in an effort to sell the effluvia of my typewriter; wrangling publicity for the Las Vegas, (N. M.) Cowboy's Reunion; escaping matrimony for well nigh thirty years; and finally landing a dog story in *Adventure*—if all of these can be called adventures, then I may claim in all justice to be a member of that great brotherhood who answer the lure when it finds them.

If these be not adventures then I should be obliged to tell you about the ghost wolf of Borracho Cañon, or about the time I climbed a tree from a dead bear, or the way I managed to see Paris, A. W. O. L. while—supposedly at least—licking the Hun. As it is I'm going to assume that I've kicked in on that phase of it and talk about something else.

BROTHER HARRIMAN'S note in the January 20th number interests me. I have lived in a mountain lion country all my life and I have yet to hear one of them scream except when wounded. Further, I have never heard a single real woodsman of this section say that he has ever heard one. Now in this section we assume that mountain lions are panthers and we do not believe that they scream hereabouts. But I most certainly would not therefore advance the proposition that they do not scream anywhere. If I have any primary principles in regard to other people, the first one is the granting to them of the privilege of a totally different experience and therefore totally different opinion. If Harriman hears 'em scream, they scream, and that's all there is to it. I strongly suspect that ours here have always been so well fed on fresh venison, horse meat and scenery that they literally didn't have anything to holler about—so they didn't.

As for animals thinking—my dog *thinks* I'm quite somebody and certainly that's thoughtful of him. The trouble, as our psychology prof used to say, is that he lacks judgment. Certainly there is a dividing line, however wobbly, between man and animals, but when it comes to the argument Big Jim suggests, I'll hole up with Harriman every time rather than burrow with Burroughs.

Now truly I'm glad to talk with you folks and lest you think I'm a first cousin to Tennyson's leetle river I'll stop and say:

Hasta luego,

S. OMAR BARKER.

ANOTHER opinion on bull-fights, and I'm glad to learn that at least in Mexico horses are no longer butchered deliberately by wholesale so that spectators can enjoy the edifying spectacle of fifteen feet of entrails dragging while a blindfolded horse is ridden up to be gored again. My first and last bull fight was in Madrid, a very good one, but twenty years ago. Without the gored horses (no one can show me any sport or decency in that phase of it) I think I could have appreciated the beauty, skill and daring of the rest of it.

Has Spain, like Mexico, reformed as to the horses?

Though bull-fighting may not be the best opportunity, Mr. Sparks' plea for a real effort toward our better understanding of our Latin-American neighbors ought to be heard by all of us.

Alton, Illinois.

So much behind bull-fighting as an institution that we Americans do not know, for example the fact that the *corrida* operates under the most exacting sport rules in existence. These rules have been handed down for generations and are learned by Spanish boys almost literally with their ABCs. Any infractions of the rules certainly are embarrassing to the *toreadors*, for a Mexican crowd can, I believe, "give 'em the razz" much more efficiently than an equal number of people in any other place in the world. Remember, then, that the fighters must live up to a set of rules "as long as the Moral Code"—and then remember that there are no rules for the bull!

DON'T labor under any misapprehension about a bull's courage and utter brute ferocity either. Two days before I reached Vera Cruz a fight was held between a bull (which had been rejected from the big fights in Mexico City because it was not fierce enough) and a full grown wild jaguar. It took the bull just eight minutes to get the jaguar and the bull wasn't seriously hurt. In the middle of the ring or in the pens they don't look bad, but when you are sitting right on the edge of the "shady side" and El Toro chooses to engage the toreador right under you and fifteen feet away you realize that these black devils are the most efficient high-powered fighting-machines ever bottled up in animal form, with their evil tempers exaggerated to the nth degree. To face them unarmed is, I believe, the most hazardous sport we have in the world today.

ARE bull-fights in themselves right or wrong? *Quien sabe!* It's the analysis of the mental reactions of the spectators which most interested me—the psychologial effect on myself and the rest of the audience of twenty-two thousand. Right and wrong in sports depends on custom and the mental make-up of the people enjoying the sport, doesn't it? And something else which is rather nebulous and hard to express. For instance, an American audience will go crazy over a prize fight fought cleanly between well matched opponents who follow the rules laid down for the sport. But they would hiss a fighter who fouls, and in cases where men were not well matched would stop the fight if the beating got too bloody.

So in the *corrida* the sport to my mind depends on the *cuadrilla* and the bull. Given a Gaona and six bulls such as we had in Mexico City on the day re-referred to and it is magnificent. Given a second rate *cuadrilla* or "*un toro malo*" and I don't think one can see the sport even though he sees it through Latin eyes. I don't think even though bull or *cuadrilla* were "*poco, poco*" could it get by and be the excruciating show that it is. It must be the best, or it *is not*. And I believe that your present generation of bull-fight fans feels this way about it. Certainly to the extent that when a bull won't fight he is killed summarily and without incident by demand from the audience. And when a bull won't fight he ought to be killed.

IT'S the bloodiness that gets the average American and many Spaniards. I believe that if one has the slightest feeling of nausea at the sight of blood he is so prejudiced that he can see nothing beyond the blood. And of course the horses. But here I have a good word for you. The technique in Mexico has been changed somewhat in demanding a very high skill from the *picadors*. They must protect their horses to the greatest possible extent, and a *picador* who wilfully allows his horse to be gored without giving it protection to the best of his ability and strength is about the most *persona non grata* with the fans that you could imagine. Time after time the *picadors* hold the bull at spear's length thrashing crazily to get at the horse with only disappointment for his efforts. Feats of strength almost unbelievable with the crowd madly cheering! Result? Six bulls, and only one horse killed by a black-and-white demon who drove every one out of the

ring. And the horses are taken off stage to die now.

Further, the *picadors* are demanded for only the shortest possible time—seldom two minutes. The greatest time is given to the *matador*, who, by the way, works at least twenty-five feet in front of his *cuadrilla* and sharply resents any intrusion. The *matador* now usually performs the part of *banderillo* and this part is most fascinating. Can anything in any sport surpass that second of suspense when the black fury charges the *banderillo*—when those cruel *cuernas chicas* shave the silken clad thigh—and then when a sigh escapes the miltitude as *el toro* emerges, bawling and plunging, with the *banderillas* placed with mathematical precision and perfection!

AND last but far from least—*el matador*. Picture a slender, beautifully built young man, tapering sharply from a pair of shoulders like *el toro* himself to the cleanest-cut limbs our sprinters could boast, clad "as the lilies of the field" in about three thousand dollars worth of golden raiment, *kneeling* in front of that bloody, beastly crazy-mad horror—the bull! A slight and ineffably graceful movement of the body—an inch, perhaps—as the holocaust passes. Magnificent! Then the "*Hail Hail*" with a challenging stamp of the foot as the bull is called to the death. A carefully aimed sword—a last fierce charge—the *espada* sunk to the hilt—the last charge ending with the head of the horror actually at the *matador's* feet! And then, ah, then! Twenty thousand souls gone wild! Color beyond imagination as *zerapes* wave and hats, canes, coats are thrown to the ring. Wild music as *el matador* bows before the Presidential box! And then, encore!

PHYSICAL reaction? Perhaps those of Spanish blood are cold, perhaps cruel, certainly not squeamish about bloodshed, and I wonder if it's not because they are hardened almost from infancy by the *corrida*. Most boys of the higher class are taken from the age of three on. Good? Again, *quien sabe?*

Personal reaction? I was invited to attend this fight by a Spanish gentleman of the highest class who further honored me by requesting his *señora* to accompany us. (And this *was* an honor, as Spanish ladies still appear in public accompanied by only their most immediate family.) And honestly, whether right or wrong, I enjoyed every minute of it more than any sport I have ever witnessed.

This letter is long and it is the opinion of only one person, but there is a thought behind it I want to pass on to you. This: In Mexico the large proportion of the population is a class lower in social status than anything we know here. They hate us Gringos with an unending hatred, and worse right now because they are always in favor of "The Revolution," and this class feels that we defeated the last one. Then comes the middle class. Not nearly so large a proportion as ours and not nearly so sound and fine. They are neutral to Gringos—will gouge you and maybe insult you if they can get away with it—but darn decent on the whole and human too. And then the high class citizen. Nearly pure Spanish—over eighty per cent. of the big business men of Mexico are Spanish born or born in Mexico of pure Spanish blood. They are gentlemen in every sense of the word, and gentleman "to the manner born." This is the class that wants our help and cooperation and, even more, our friendship.

I, PERSONALLY, have never met more charming people any where. I found that just a little sympathy, just a little of seeing things through their eyes meant so much to them, and frankly, to me also. They are our neighbors—let's every one of us who is in position to do so make them our friends. It's so very much worth while from every standpoint.

It may be that what I have written on *el corrida* is worth second thought. Thus, John Citizen may consider the bull-fight entirely beyond the pale, while Juan de Español considers it the greatest of all sports. John Citizen and Juan de Español see *el corrida* together and friend Citizen finds that by, maybe, deviating slightly from the straight and narrow path of his own self-made ideas, he sees *el corrida* as friend Español does—enjoys the fight and will "tell the world" so. He has taken the first step, and if this step can be followed collectively by our John Citizens wherever possible the results will be so very, very worth while.

Mexico is almost at the turn of the road. Today it is a country of contrasts—the oldest of the old and the newest of the new, the richest alongside the poorest, the most colorful next to the most drab. When the turn comes it must be a turn toward saner government, more education—higher civilization for every one. And we can help mostly through a lot of sympathetic friendship.—DICK SPARKS.

IN CONNECTION with Joel Townsley Rogers' complete novel in this issue the question was raised whether admirals ever really rise from the ranks. Here is a paragraph from a letter from Mr. Rogers:

New York City.

Admirals may rise from the ranks. I recall seeing Jackson, who was my skipper on the old *Virginia* eight years ago (sunk she is now, a target in Tangier Sound for the big guns of the new ships), I recall seeing Jackson wearing a rear admiral's stripe a couple of years ago. To rise from the ranks demands only that a man rise to be ensign. From that grade he goes up with men from the Academy according to his number, until the grade of lieutenant commander, when the plucking board weeds out the unfit. It is harder to rise from the ranks, but by no means an unknown thing.

And here is something quoted in the same general connection, from another letter bearing on the subject. The Joel Rogers mentioned was a great-grandfather of the author.

The oldest man to earn his flying wings in either the Army or the Navy is Captain Noble Edward Irwin, U. S. N., known otherwise as "Bull" Irwin. During the war Captain Irwin was at the head of Naval Aviation. Under him the qualified naval aviators of the service increased from a bare hundred to two thousand odd. They patroled the coast from Chatham, Mass., to Key West from a score of stations. They patroled the North Atlantic, the Irish sea, and the Mediterranean from stations in Italy, France, England and Ireland. They formed the great night bombing squadron which was

prepared, at the time of the armistice, to send flocks of Handley-Pages over Germany and bomb Berlin from the map. After the armistice Irwin, then over fifty years old, earned his gold wings as a Naval aviator, going through the entire course prescribed for every student, and qualifiying with honors.

Captain Irwin, then an ensign, was the only officer wounded at the battle of Manila Bay, when Dewey cracked the Spanish sea-power. He holds yet records made at Annapolis for lifting hundred-pound weights, and other Herculean feats of strength. He comes from a fighting race, which has captained every war of the republic and of the colonies. His grandfather was a captain of cavalry in the Mexican war, Joel Rogers.

Joel Townsley Rogers, it might be added, is editor of *Book Chat*, a magazine of independent literary criticism, that, oddly enough, deserves the adjective "independent" as well as the adjective "literary."

SOMETHING about the Wounded Knee Massacre from a comrade who knows some of the originals of characters in Thomson Burtis' aviation stories:

Port Arthur, Texas.

Last Summer I had the pleasure of hearing a real old-timer discuss that affair. He is at the present time a "high ranker," in fact he is one of the best known and best loved cavalry officers in the United States army. He was in command of a cavalry platoon at the battle of Wounded Knee and I would mention his name but I have not his permission but I feel assured he will back up what I say if it comes to a show-down. He said "That's all a mistake about the trade-guns. I saw them fanning Winchesters. I know they were Winchesters for I took one of them away from an Indian and they weren't all men fanning them."

I hope this will be of some interest to the bunch.

I am acquainted with *Capt. Kenney* I think, as I was at "Camp McMullen" and, although a cavalryman, had the pleasure of riding the "Border Patrol" with some of Burtis' friends.—HOMER E. CARRICO, Capt. (ORC) Hq. 156 Cav. Brig.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom Jack Oppenheimer rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Brooklyn, New York

Your Camp-Fire fellowship intrigues me. What a large circle it must be that gathers round the crackling logs of fact and fancy!

THERE is little that I can say about myself. I am still too young to have experienced any great adventures, but now and then I roam about a bit, and the result is usually the forming of an interesting acquaintanceship and then perhaps a story. My roamings are usually confined to the city, but then, New York is a lode-stone for the adventurous.

I am acquainted with a man who has but one arm, and is in spite of that handicap a mighty cheerful fellow. He lost the other arm in a machine shop accident some eight or ten years ago. During his convalescence following the accident he began to read *Adventure* and has been a steady reader ever since. I often wonder whether *Adventure* can not be credited for a large part of his cheerfulness. Surely its pages must have taken him from the first bitter reflection of his impediment into fairer worlds than his. No doubt it has achieved the same result in many other cases of a similar nature.

I hope that in the future I shall be permitted to spin a yarn now and then, and that the other members of the fellowship will spin some for me that may haply be much better than the tales I tell. You see I am a selfish fellow, and while I like to write good stories I'd much rather read them.—JACK OPPENHEIMER.

HE HAS to have his little josh, does Bill Adams. But, as I get his argument, while he maintains that the man who ships on a steamer can not be a "sailor" for the simple reason that a steamer generally has no sails, he is entitled to be called a seaman.

This letter was in answer to one of you who wrote him in reply to one of his statements at Camp-Fire.

All right, old son. Keep your shirt on, as we used to say when I was liddle. My innocent remarks appear to have caused a ripple amongst some of the now-a-day boys. One of them kindly offered to come out here and put a head on me, and doggone him, what did he say it for if he didn't mean it? I trained down to 189 and a half pounds all for nothing. Well, well! I met every train for a month, and he ain't showed up yet.

As regards the matter of the now-a-day sailor (*who* said he *was* a sailor? *Does* he know hausline from amberline?) and the old sailor, every one knows the rhyme about "Said the Tin-Can Sailor to the Old-Time Tar."

What we birds like best of anything, better'n salt horse, beer, or a long-haired chum, is just nuthin' but a bit of argumint. If a man don't like to argue, just for the sake of it, he will never succeed at sea. This is why, no doubt, the Liverpool Irish packet rats were the best *sailors* ever made.

All joking apart, I know something of steam, having a steam ticket myself. I've been in charge of a watch or two in steam. Steam is right enough in its way. But—it lacks the fascination of sail. It is not *sailoring*. It's steaming. As far as the Navy goes—well if you like to call them thar things *ships*—go to it.

I think my argumint was that men who were not familiar with *sail* were of necessity not *sailors*. How in heck *can* they be? I did not cast any aspersions upon their strict morality. They ought to be a nice lot o' perlite young men. They have got every inducement. My old pals never had the chance. They were rats, sheer and simple. They lived much like rats, were treated like them, and perished like them—in as far as any respect was held to them from the average shore-going citizen.

How would you Johnny Ducks like to go round Stiff (that's Cape Horn, you know, where it's sort

of windy and at times kind of chill too) for twelve dollars a month? No nuthin' but horse and moldy biscuit? *That'd be going to sea*, plain and—simple, no frills.

You, yourselves, much as you glory in your big battleships, would surely prefer to stand up face to face and hit your enemy square instead of shooting at him when he was down below the horizon and you couldn't even get the satisfaction of seeing him spin over.

Now-a-days ships be ——.

I refuse to live in the present. I will abide amidst the shades of the old-timers—Palmer, Waterman, Cressey and such as they who took the clippers out in ninety days to the Golden Gate. And for the navy—well, like you, I do prefer the old-time way of fighting.

Now lads—have another ice cream sody and charge it to me. Please. No ill feelin's. Breast the bar—I mean the counter, sons. Please, lady, we prefer it pink. The bosun he done swallowed a marlinespike. Give him some rum. There ain't none? No rum? Well, well, that's too bad. Bos', you better swallow another marlinespike, old son. Times is changed since we was young, and tonics is different.—BILL ADAMS.

WHILE his story in this issue is not his first in our magazine, Leo Walmsley follows Camp-Fire custom and rises to introduce himself:

South Kensington, London.

Age 30. Youngest son of J. V. Walmsley, artist, and born and bred at Robin Hood's Bay, romantic fishing village on wildest part of Yorkshire coast. Ancestry vague but undoubtedly decent—there being Irish in it. Educated first at local elementary school. Bad at all subjects save geography. Could point out Timbuctoo on map of Africa at age of seven, knew population of New York at age of eight. Love of natural history developed somewhere about there. Adventure lust after reading "Swiss Family Robinson." Climbed the famous Ravenscar Cliff for cormorant eggs at age of twelve. Was attacked by parent birds on ledge 200 feet above the sea. Great fight. Birds nearly won. After this collected stamps and cigaret cards for several months. Ran away to sea at age of 13½. Never got there, however—thanks to police. After return to parents did not sit down for three days.

AT FOURTEEN, to every one's surprize, won a secondary school scholarship. Lessons interfered seriously with cliff climbing, field natural history, fishing and shooting but undoubtedly were of value. Some knowledge of chemistry, physics and higher geography acquired before leaving school at age of eighteen. At nineteen started writing on geology and marine zoology for local paper, *The Whitby Gazette*. In 1914 these papers were published in booklet form and in same year came appointment as Curator of Marine Biological Station, Robin Hood's Bay. Also the Great War.

Enlisted as Tommy in Royal Medical Corp August, '14. Tired of smell of iodine by Christmas and transferred to infantry. Commissioned few months later but, greatly realising what a rotten job the infantry man's was, transferred to Royal Flying Corps, believing that there at any rate was a gay life if a short one.

Qualified as Observation Officer Christmas, '15, and sailed on Boxing Day for German East Africa, a most glorious piece of good fortune. Two and a half years of splendid adventure. Flew over whole of German East and across the Big Lakes, over Nyassaland and Portuguese East Africa, all big game districts and famous for their natural history. Gathered a rich store of experience—flying, hunting and observing wild animals, also a Military Cross (reason unknown) and four mentions in dispatches. Crashed in jungle on six occasions. On last was pinned under wreckage of machine soaked in petrol for half an hour while a bush fire crept from half a mile to within fifty yards of the wreck. Rescued by natives in nick of time. Six months hospital and end of flying career.

POSTED home and Air Ministry Propaganda Department. Lectured for Air Ministry all over country and to the Armies in France. On demobilization took up writing and lecturing as a career. This life too slow however, and in 1922-3 went out as naturalist and hunter with film expedition to Timbuctoo. Company went smash while expedition in middle of Sahara. Sold up equipment and got back across desert to coast. Worked passage home on Norwegian tramp, landing home broke. Got married. Interviewed editor English magazine, set out for honeymoon in Pyrenees. Bought donkey and traveled through wildest part of mountains for three months. Since then working very hard, chiefly short stories of African animals and adventure. Traveled also in Egypt (to Khartoum), South Africa and most countries of Europe. Home in Chelsea, London, but only in it six months of every year. At present in Italy studying Americans and hoping to earn sufficient money to visit U. S. A next spring. Delighted always to help any reader of *Adventure* with information on any of the countries mentioned above, but make no claim as an authority on anything.—LEO WALMSLEY.

A 1923 letter comes out of our cache—about big gold ingots:

Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Saw the answer of Mr. Young to the query as to big gold ingots, which brings to mind the largest one I ever saw.

It was in the eighties, the Harqua Hala mines were producing at their best, and I happened into the express office in Phoenix just after the stage from this gold camp had come in with the shipment for the monthly clean-up.

The ingot or bullion came in a nail-keg and I saw it opened by smashing in the head, upending it and lifting the keg off. It was in the shape of a cylinder, one end flat and the other spherical as though cast in a round bottom iron pot. In diameter and length it comfortably filled the keg. Its weight was about 400 pounds and its value about $87,000. It would have taken a husky lad to have packed it away.

ANOTHER clean-up from these mines was cast into smaller bars, say about 100 pounds each. The stage was held up and the gold taken, and the robbers tied it on to their mounts, but even in that sized bars it was too much to get away with successfully. The posse followed them and, burdened

as they were, escape was impossible. The gold was cached or perhaps lost in crossing the Gila River. At any rate the posse brought in the robbers —I saw one of them neatly drilled through the forehead, lying in the jail yard, but being dead, they could not tell where the gold was, and, to my knowledge, it was never recovered. If it had been in the one big chunk, no horse could have carried it off and it would have been safe. The mining company thought so, hence the big ingot.—H. F. ROBINSON.

THE clipping referred to in the following letter stated that 6,000 persons in Los Angeles, chiefly small store owners or the proprietors of small businesses, who had failed to pay their license fees for the first quarter of the year and who owed the city a total of $50,000, would be arrested within three days unless they took immediate action. It will take some of our lawyer comrades to answer the question as to imprisonment for debt. Paying a license fee doesn't prohibit one from earning a living; I don't get that point. As to local laws in violation of the Constitution, well, they get away with it in local anti-weapon laws. Even a license fee certainly curtails or infringes the right to have and to bear arms guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States; a citizen too poor to pay the fee is thereby deprived of this right. But what is the Constitution between politicians? And if a local police force and the politicians responsible for it can't or won't suppress crime, why shouldn't all righteous and intelligent citizens try to fix things with a law that can't be effective and, even if it could be would only make the crooks use other weapons instead? Passing another fool law is easier than making police forces and politicians effective for the public good.

Santa Monica, California.

I was drafted in the Army at the beginning of the war and stationed in Camp Merritt, N. J., and after discharge made my home in Nyack, N. Y. I was raised in the Middle West and when the family followed me to Nyack of course they brought allong my 30-30 and my S. & W. 44, all unconscious of a fool law like the Sullivan law. But luckly nobody reported the fact and, when I moved to California a year after, I had the rifle and revolver well hidden in the household goods.

WHY is it that the citizens of this glorious country have to suffer for the petty laws set up by the States, countries, cities and towns in direct opposition to the Constitution of the United States? The State of New Jersey is crammed full of the most abominable laws that I have ever had the pleasure to run against and the main reason I came to California was to escape the injustice of the sky-blue laws that exist in most of the Eastern States, gotten up and past by some misguided reformer that gets more pleasure in meddling in other people's business than in their own.

Unfortunately this city and other cities in the southern part of this State are becoming infested with the same petty stuff. I suppose it is brought about by the influx of the numerous Easterners that can not change their old habits, as shown from a clipping enclosed clipped from the Los Angeles *Express* of May 3, 1924. Since when have they started to impress people for debt? That is all it amounts to. Also I don't think that a city can force a person engaged in business to pay a license as I think that it is against the Constitution to prohibit a citizen from making or earning a livelihood.

Thanking you in advance for any information that you can give me on this subject.—F. D. STANFIELD.

THE following article by Harry W. Frantz in the Omaha *News* of May 17, 1924, comes to us from our old comrade E. F. Test:

"All aboard for Mexico, Panama and Buenos Aires!" You may hear this cry in the railway station in New York or Chicago before many decades, if plans now in formation are realized.

THE project for a Pan-American railway, to connect New York with Buenos Aires, which has been slowly developing since the first Pan-American conference in 1890, has taken a new lease of life.

The governing board of the Pan-American union, acting under instructions from the fifth Pan-American conference, held at Santiago last year, has just reorganized the Pan-American railway commission. Its personnel now consists of eight distinguished engineers and practical railway men of the United States, Mexico, Chile, Brazil and Argentine. The commission, or at least a majority of it, probably will meet in Washington this summer to discuss progress so far made in realizing the dream of an intercontinental railway, and to adopt new plans to encourage its completion.

THE policy of the Pan-American commission, which is advisory in nature, has for three decades been to encourage construction in regions where railways were required, but with a view to their possible incorporation later in a through system.

The route originally planned was estimated at 10,116 miles in length from New York to Buenos Aires. Of this total the units now completed total 6,569 miles, leaving 3,547 miles to be built.

The only great uncompleted sections are between Guatemala and the Canal Zone, 600 miles between the Canal Zone and Lake Titicaca, 2,820 miles; and a stretch in southern Bolivia less than 200 miles in length, which will be completed within one year.

AN EMINENT Argentine engineer, Juan Briano, a member of the commission, has suggested the desirability of a route east of the Andes. It would have the advantages of lower grades, would penetrate new areas of vast economic importance, and would be better adapted to year-round travel.

The Pan-American route, over 10,000 miles in length, would be the longest railway line in the

world. The Trans-Siberian line, from Leningrad (Petrograd) to Vladivostok, is 5,500 miles long. It was first planned in 1870, construction began in 1891, and was completed in 1902 at a cost of $175,000,000.

Here is Mr. Test's letter. You'll remember that years ago he argued at Camp-Fire for a Pan-American railway.

Omaha, Nebraska.

Here's Banquo's ghost again. It will not down. As you will see Mr. Frantz does not mention the line (proposed) to Rio de Janeiro, through or near the Valley of the Amazon, forming a junction in Colombia with the proposed Buenos Aires line.

AS TO Juan Briano suggesting the desirability of route east of the Andes, I believe that honor quite belongs to me. I spent several years in the Zone working up sentiment in favor of it and since my return to the U. S. have been working it up with influential men and my efforts have received complimentary mention more than once in *Adventure* and by leading home (U. S.) newspapers.

The proposition I made was to complete the gaps, regauging site of the railroads in North America to the zone, using the Panama R. R. as part of the Line and from thence through the Isthmus over to South America and running South *east of the Andes*, connecting with the Argentine R. R. system at or near La Paz in Bolivia to Buenos Aires (with a branch line through or near the Valley of the Amazon to a connection with the Brazilian lines to and from Rio de Janiero) connecting at Buenos Aires with the railroads to Santiago and Valparaiso, Chile, on the Pacific Coast.

THE distances mentioned by Mr. Frantz are too great. "As the bird flies" the latitudinal distance from New York to Buenos Aires is about 5,500 miles. To this must be added the distance between longitude 70 degrees to 75 degrees to longitude 40 degrees to round the Brazilian coast and thence southward to Buenos Aires by sea, say 1,200 to 1,500 miles, making it 7,000 miles from New York to Buenos Aires. By land the distance from New York to New Orleans is 1,372 miles, from New Orleans to Panama by water 1,427 miles (I think these are sea miles) and through the Canal to Buenos Aires some 3,000 miles or more. Total, 5,799 miles.

From New York to Laredo on the Rio Grande is about 2,100 miles. From Laredo to Panama about 1,800 and from Panama through the canal about 3,000. Total 6,900 miles.

From Chicago to Buenos Aires via New Orleans it is 5,327 miles and about the same distance by land from Omaha to Buenos Aires. So you will see, if my estimates are anywhere correct the land route is much shorter than the sea route from New York in time and distance.

Look at the map and see what a long distance it is around the Coast of Brazil by sea and how much shorter it can be made by land.

AS I remember the railroads were completed (by a narrow gauge) to Corinto in 1918 and Nicaragua expected to construct a line from Lake Nicaragua to the Costa Rica boundary and thence by completed line (narrow gauge) to Limon, C. R. about 200 miles from Colon.

Using the Panama R. R. as part of the Line with general headquarters of the road at Colon or Panama, it would soon become the world route, making these cities two of the principal cities of the earth with corresponding effect upon the nations through which the proposed line will operate, it also being a powerful factor in increasing the world made traffic of the canal.—E. F. TEST.

THERE is, heaven knows, no intention of making Camp-Fire a place to listen to people's genealogies. We all have them and each fellow's is as long as the next fellow's and, if we could get at all the facts for hundreds of thousands of years back, just as good as the next fellow's. If at the tail-end of his genealogy, say the last two or three centuries, a man finds good stock back of him, he's likely to feel proud and haughty. Why? *He* didn't have anything to do with it. His job is to make himself worth while—himself and his posterity. If his ancestry is good (which doesn't mean that wealth or titles have to be mixed up in it), it is, if anything, an obligation laid on him to make himself at least as good as the stock that produced him. If his ancestry is bad, it's up to him to start his line on the up grade.

But genealogies have a way of making history very real and vivid—a convincing though limited cross section sliced back through the years. Here's one sent in because of some connection with General Sam Houston. Also with Buck Taylor, who has been talked about among us at Camp-Fire. I've omitted some of it to save space, but even so, it runs us back through U. S. history with flashes of a sort of intimate bird's-eye view.

The original, authorized namesake of General Sam Houston, the great liberator of Texas, has been discovered in Philadelphia.

IT APPEARS that about 1776 William Taylor, who claimed to be a descendant of titled ancestors, and his wife Margaret, had emigrated from England to the United States on account of political persecution, and made their home in New York City.

In 1778 they had a son, Coleman H. Taylor. This son eventually became a surgeon and was said to be among the first in his profession to successfully extirpate a woman's breast. He accumulated a large property in the neighborhood of the old Astor House, but after his death in 1819 a will was produced by his former housekeeper, a Mrs. Cooper, leaving the estate to her unconditionally.

In 1780 another son, John, was born to William Taylor and his wife. Before reaching his majority John adopted the sea as his profession and finally became master of a packet plying between Liverpool and New York. He later made his home in

Marietta, Pa., where he married and in 1815 had a son who was called Jacob Nicholas Taylor.

HIS widow subsequently married a wealthy stock breeder named Noble, after whom Noblestown was said to be named, but her son by her former marriage, Jacob Nicholas Taylor, was so treated by his step-father Noble that in 1835, when twenty years old, he ran away from home and went to Texas, where he enlisted under the banner of General Sam Houston to help liberate Texas from the oppressive yoke of Mexico and its military dictator, General Santa Anna.

Jacob Taylor later became a close companion-in-arms of General Houston, whose own parents had originally settled in Pennsylvania, and was eventually appointed one of Houston's staff officers with the rank of captain.

As an instance of General Houston's impetuosity and temper, Captain Taylor used to relate in after years that, when the Texan army was hurriedly marching to San Jacinto to engage the Mexican forces, a foraging party had confiscated a mule belonging to an old woman. The old woman kept following the troops; screaming—"I want my mule! Give me my mule!"

The disturbance finally reached the ears of General Houston, who frowned in sudden anger and shouted to Captain Taylor, "By ——! Give her all the mules, but let the army move on!"

In recognition of his services to Texas in her war for independence, Captain Taylor in 1838 was granted one-third league (one mile) of land in Limestone county. He was also given a bounty of $1,000 in gold. The land in time became very valuable, but through the manipulations of a lawyer the descendants of Captain Taylor were never benefitted.

IN 1840 he went to New Orleans, married and had two children. One of these children later became known as Buck Taylor, "the king of the cowboys." Captain Taylor's wife died in 1850. While residing in New Orleans he joined the Masonic order and reached a commanding position in the Grand Lodge of Louisiana.

In 1856 he married the then reigning belle of St. Louis—the beautiful Sarah Thompson. Anna Thompson, a sister to Sarah, had married Samuel Barnhurst who owned an umbrella plant in Philadelphia, and resided with her husband in the famous Barnhurst mansion, which for nearly a century was one of the principal landmarks of old Francisville. This mansion was torn down a few years ago to make room for a new public playground.

After this second marriage Captain Taylor made his headquarters at the celebrated Planters Hotel in St. Louis and in 1858 published the "Sketch Book of St. Louis," a standard reference book for many years.

HE WENT to Philadelphia in 1860 and when the Civil War broke out offered his services to the State. Because of his former army experience Captain Taylor was appointed a recruiting officer, with headquarters in Philadelphia. He recruited over one thousand men who were sent to the front and subsequently went himself as captain of a company he had organized. Before he resigned from the army he was acting as brevet major.

In 1864 he published "Taylor's Railroad Map of the United States and Canadas, with Plans of the Principal Cities." This map, for the region west of the Mississippi, showed the then proposed railroad, overland, mail, telegraph, stage, wagon and emigrant routes to the gold mines and Pacific. It was recognized as the standard railroad map of the United States for twenty years.

In 1865 he published a splendidly executed engraving of "The Temple of Solomon; taken from the celebrated model erected by Councillor Schott, at Hamburg." It is of particular interest to the Masonic fraternity and a copy was placed in the Masonic Temple on Broad street. Captain Taylor, Mount Moriah Lodge of F. and A. M., rose to the position of Past Master. He died in 1871.

It is from this ancestry that Samuel Houston Taylor is descended. He was born in Philadelphia in 1862 and named with the particular approval and recognition of General Sam Houston, who gave the child a solid gold cup engraved with his name and a solid silver framed picture of the general, which was surrounded by silver stars to commemorate the "Lone Star State"

Samuel Houston Taylor has been acting color sergeant in the Second Regiment: assistant superintendent of a nationally known detective agency; reporter for the old Philadelphia *Press* and the Philadelphia *Times;* writer of various technical articles for trade papers; assistant general sales manager and general advertising manager of a large metal manufacturing corporation and during the World War trade chairman in Liberty Loan campaigns and first assistant in War Chest and War Savings Stamp drives for the Government.

Philadelphia, Penna.

Noting in a daily paper that nearly one thousand Poles and Russians are to be landed in Philadelphia this week, as a direct descendant of English born ancestors who settled in America nearly 150 years ago, I am in hearty sympathy with *Adventure's* campaign to restrict or decrease alien immigration. —SAMUEL HOUSTON TAYLOR.

DON'T forget that most of our original cover paintings are for sale to the highest bidder. To the reader making the highest offer each painting will be sent express collect one month after the magazine bearing it appears on the news-stands. Minimum bid, ten dollars per cover.

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons, etc., runs in the last issue of each month.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.

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4, 5. Islands and Coasts. In Two Parts
6, 7. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
8. Australia and Tasmania
9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
10. New Guinea
11. Philippine Islands
12. Hawaiian Islands and China
13. Japan
14—17. Asia. In Four Parts
18—25. Africa. In Eight Parts
26. Turkey
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Standing Information

Personal

READERS have been asking for the autobiographies of "Ask Adventure" editors; and those staff members who believe that a few words about themselves will promote better acquaintanceship all around, are responding to the request. The order in which these autobiographies are printed doesn't signify anything. They are withdrawn from the file at random:

South Carver, Mass.

Unfortunately this can not be addressed to "My A. A. readers" as have some of those who have

followed this same trail before me, since the writer is a very recent acquisition to *Adventure*, and it remains to be seen whether the new department which it has asked me to handle is an asset or a liability. Incidentally, if it is a venture for *Adventure* magazine, it is both a venture and an adventure for me; but I am looking forward to it with much the same keen anticipation that comes to him who approaches a plumb new country.

There is a natural hesistancy in talking about one's self; yet other associate editors can be heard calling, "Come on in; the water's fine!" so here goes: I was born in Massachusetts and spent many of my younger years in Maine, where a taste was acquired for hunting big game—deer, caribou and moose. At the opening of the Spanish-American War, with two companions I was in northern British Columbia headed into the Peace River district on a hunting and prospecting trip, drawn there because the maps of that country in those days were a total blank with the exception of the words "Unexplored" printed invitingly across large areas. Afterward there naturally came Alaska.

Two years later found me riding the range for various cow outfits, mostly in Southern Colorado. In those cow-punching days it was a common thing to have two to five thousand head in the day herd.

Later there was a ranch and cattle of my own on the headwaters of the San Juan River, having ventured into that country on the promise held out by a chance acquaintance that there "could be found the biggest grass in the finest country that laid out of doors anywhere." Being inclined to stray anyway, it came natural to take in the desert country and the cliff ruins of northern Arizona and New Mexico as well as that country in southern Utah which has been so delightfully fictionized by Zane Grey.

Well, I found the range and the grass much as represented by my chance friend; yet in 1906, through fate or whatever you wish to call that mysterious force which moves men in pawn-like fashion about on the chess-board of Life, I found myself working as a Forest Ranger on one of the newly created National Forests (then Forest Reserves) just subsequent to their transfer from the Interior to the Agricultural Department. The present Governor of Pennsylvania was Forester; and A. B. Potter, that very practical stockman, was just then formulating the grazing regulations of the service and applying them to the ranges on the National Forests of the West. Incidentally his work at that time stands today with remarkably few changes, a monument to his sagacity and foresight. The policy of grazing administration then initiated has completely changed the complexion of the Western range.

But to go back; becoming interested in the work, ranch and stock were sold, holding back only the best of my saddle string, and I stayed with the service. Graduated from ranger to deputy supervisor, then to supervisor, and had charge at different times of three National Forests in southwestern Colorado, after having served an assignment on special detail in pretty much all over Colorado and in New Mexico. In 1915 there was a transfer to Montana and supervision of a Forest there until October, 1923.

Now I am back on Cape Cod, where, like my ancestors, I am trying to make a series of cranberry bogs show a margin of profit—one which will permit two strapping sons to complete their college training. I reckon the above can be branded as *some* "reversion to type" after having been more than twenty-five years west of the Missouri. Although plumb interested in the growing of the succulent cranberry, I am free to confess that it would come a whole lot easier if I could only figure some way to herd the darned things from a saddle.

Finally there is a small building, overlooking a section of bog and a beautiful sheet of lake water, which building is called the "corral." Here at odd times, surrounded by a few choice game heads and some silver-mounted riders' equipment, I am striving to introduce what I believe to be plumb new material into some Western stuff I am attempting to write, with the hope that it will interest some editor to the point where he will think he can see a profit in it.

These are the bare facts boiled down to the allotted space. The editor may insist that he meant just what he said when he wrote me to take all the space needed; but it's a cinch he was not serious. Anyway if you can read between the lines you may sense the many adventures which the trail of those ramblings just naturally had to cross, and which in some small way perhaps qualifies me to occupy a very humble yet proud position on the staff of *Adventure*. I shall be glad to answer your questions on Forestry in the United States to the best of my ability.—ERNEST W. SHAW.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

The Koran

A BOOK which is as much the law in a Mohammedan court of justice as it is the revealed religion in a Mohammedan mosque:

Question:—"I would be very grateful to you if you should take the time to write me of the Mohammedan religion, what it embodies, etc. Also, where might I obtain a Koran as I understand that that is their Bible?"—H. DEWITT, Jersey City, N. J.

Answer, by Mr. Holt:—I should explain, perhaps, that it is not correct to look upon the Koran as a Mohammedan Bible, or rather as the Bible alone; for this reason: Among the Mohammedans of Morocco—and the Mohammedans generally—there is no code of civil and criminal law beyond that which is embodied in the Koran. Among Christians the Bible is the religious and moral law, which is quite distinct from, and has nothing to do with, our civil and criminal law. Among the Mohammedans the reverse is true, as their civil and criminal law all emanates from the Koran and the Koran is both the source and the final court of appeal.

This is what makes the Koran such a mightily important book to the world. If it were only a

religious code it probably would have no more active influence upon modern civilization than our own religious code has. Any lawyer who argued a case in a Christian court with the Bible as his text-book would no doubt be thought crazy, because our civil and criminal laws have become so widely separated from their religious source that all connection between them is now ignored. But the Koran, as I say, is not only the Mohammedan religious code, but a civil and criminal law by which the daily, the hourly, life of the "True Believer" is regulated. Any one, therefore, who studies the Koran merely as a religious code—viewing it as a code which has no more effect upon the daily life of the Mohammedans than the Bible has upon the daily life of the average American citizen—will make a serious blunder and will utterly fail to grasp its significance and power. If it is studied as the basic law code—religious, moral, civil and criminal—of a greater number of people than accept the Christian Bible, its interest will be heightened.

REMEMBER, too, that most Mohammedans can neither read nor write. Most Mohammedan schools teach only the Koran. Children learn to repeat verses of the Koran, and this constitutes their education—moral and civil at the same time. Remember in fact, that all Mohammedan thought emanates from the Koran. This will give you a more proper conception of the dynamic power of "the Book," as it is called.

The best English translation of the Koran is that of George Sale, and a reprint of the Sale edition with an introduction by Frederick M. Cooper, can be obtained from A. L. Burt Company, New York, for a dollar.

I feel that, in order to play fair while at the same time I may perhaps be encouraging you to enter upon what should be an intensely interesting line of study, I should caution you about accepting without consideration the innumerable commentaries, analyses and observations by Christian writers which you will no doubt encounter. I do not for a moment doubt the good faith nor the learning of such Christian commentators; but I do sincerely doubt the ability of a Christian religious writer to deal with another religion without prejudice. I would hold the same to be true of a writer of any other religion commenting upon the Christian Bible. Religion never has been unprejudiced and probably never will be. In the many Christian commentaries on the Koran which I have read, I have yet to find one which does not in one way or another condemn or cast ridicule upon the Koran.

The explanation of this is very simple, of course: If one believes that the Christian religion is the only true religion, and that all other religions are false, it is quite impossible to write a fair commentary upon another religion, because the very foundation of it—belief in it—is lacking. Assuredly we would not expect a favorable commentary upon the Christian Bible to be written by a Mohammedan or any member of other non-Christian sects.

Please let me emphasize that I am not in any way questioning the motives of the commentators on the Koran, but merely their ability to write an honest critique; this can be written, of course, only by a Mohammedan himself. Still, to me it seems only fair—and assuredly it is intelligent—for us constantly to keep in mind when reading a text-book of another religion, the fact that although *we* may not believe in what we are reading, there are millions—hundreds of millions—of people who can conceive of no other religious faith.

You ask me to tell you of the religion, "what it embodies," etc. Comprehensively it embodies the Koran. If you will read that you will have viewed all of the foundations of Islám. Then you will no doubt find it interesting and instructive to read the many commentaries not only by Christians, but by Mohammedan writers.

You will find much of interest in a book entitled "The Moors," by Budgett Meakin (published by McMillan Co., 1899). Book 2 of this volume deals entirely with the religion. You will find Book 1 interesting also, as it deals with the life of the people. Meakin has two other books which you may find of interest: "The Moorish Empire" and "The Land of the Moors." Meakin was an American, but lived in Morocco for many years and became very sympathetic with the Moors, so that you will find him mighty fair-minded.

Other volumes which may be of interest to you are "The Barbary Coast," by Albert Edwards (Arthur Bullard), "Morocco of Today," by Eugene Aubin, a Frenchman. (You should remember that France managed to secure Morocco as a protectorate). And possibly you would find something of interest in my own book, "Morocco the Bizarre."

I shall be very glad to give you any further information I can and to hear from you if you care to write. Perhaps I should add, lest this letter be misunderstood, that I am intending to make no comparison between religions; my thought is that any belief which is the main-spring of life for some hundreds of millions of people should be considered—if it is considered at all—with an unprejudiced and open mind.

The Makuas of Portuguese East Africa

THE subjoined monograph has been printed in leaflet form on hard paper. The leaflet may be obtained free from the "Ask Adventure" expert responsible for it: namely R. G. Waring, Corunna, Ont., Canada. Don't expect any response unless you enclose addressed envelop and return postage:

OF THE native tribes inhabiting the coast districts of Zambezia, Mozambique and Nyassa are the Makuas. Physically they are much inferior to the Zulus of South Africa and the warlike Masai of British East Africa.

Of medium stature, the men are thin and wiry with a flat, broad nose and usually the possessors of an excellent set of teeth, of which they take special care, using a new toothbrush daily, whittled out of a piece of vine. The juices of the vine contain a dentifrice which imparts a polish and whiteness equal to anything the white man can devise.

On the other hand some branches of the Makua tribes file their teeth to a sharp point. This feature gives them somewhat of a ferocious appearance and denotes the meat-eaters, since the Makua as a race may be said to be vegetarians, subsisting mostly on ground-nuts (peanuts), manioc, fruits and dried fish.

Various modes of hair-dressing prevail. With the young men the head is usually shaved with the exception of a tuft left on top in imitation of the crested guinea fowl, one of the wild game birds of the district. Others again leave two tufts, one on each side of the head. Some shave the head entirely. The latter course is not generally adopted by the older people, but is becoming universal.

The men sometimes wear ear-rings, often only one. These are usually large and of the size of a silver dollar. A piece of reed or bone two inches long is substituted by some.

Their dress consists of a breech clout. Bangles of copper and brass complete their ornaments.

Spears and knives are their weapons of offense. These are of various shapes and sizes, ranging from the broad-bladed, short-handled stabbing-spear to the barbed, double-barbed and hooked variety of the throwing type; in fact every species of spear that their ingenuity can devise for the creation of mortal wounds, whether it be for man or beast.

The knife or dagger is about twelve inches long with a needle point for about three inches, when it suddenly widens out to a two-inch blade to the hilt. The scabbard is made from two pieces of wood, carved to fit the blade, with a projecting loop to suspend around the waist-cloth, the whole firmly bound by closely wound brass wire.

THE dress of the women consists of a piece of cotton print extending from the waist to the knees. The head is shaved clean. Their ornaments are beads and bangles on the wrists and ankles. With the married women a silver button or star is riveted on the left nostril; and a small ring is suspended from the nose, sometimes replaced by a short piece of bone.

The most noticeable feature of their adornment, which serves to impart a particularly savage aspect to their countenance, is the large ear-rings worn. The lobes of the ear are prepared for the reception of these rings in childhood, by means of stones grooved to fit around the hole in the lobe, the size being gradually increased until the maximum is reached, which is about three inches. This is often carried to an extreme, and cases occur where the lobe has split into two pieces and elongated to such an extent that they touch the shoulders with a slight inclination of the head. The victim of such a misfortune is rendered doubly hideous.

The ear-rings are made of solid disks of wood three-quarters of an inch in thickness, diameter as above. These are made an intense white by the application of a paste made from manioc. A circular ring of ebony wood is sometimes used and with the women who have Swahili or Arab blood, silver filigree rings—or rather boxes, since they contain beans which give a rattling noise with every movement of the head. These boxes are of the same size as the solid disks above.

One would hardly expect to find in the women of a savage race a desire for a velvety skin. Yet such is the case. A white paste prepared from the juice of a plant, which when applied dries like whitewash —which it resembles—is the preparation. Its application is to the face, not the hands, and the effect produced is that of a white mask, making a strong contrast against the black skin.

The women pursue their ordinary vocations without any comment or ridicule from the men. With the older women the treatment intensifies their hideousness, and a moonlight vision of this effort of woman's attempt at eternal youth would be quite sufficient to shake a strong man's nerve unless he be initiated.

As with most African races so with the Makua, the women are the hewers of wood and drawers of water. They are the food providers, doing all the work of cultivating the *machambas* or gardens; plant and harvest the crops; gather the wood and carry the water, whilst their menfolk hunt and fish or loaf around the hut. Along the shores of the tidal creeks and rivers they may be seen in scattered parties of twos walking knee-deep, drawing between them a square of muslin cloth, in which they catch quantities of a small mollusc, similar to a shrimp and esteemed as a great delicacy among them.

The easy and erect carriage of the women is probably due entirely to water-carrying. From girlhood this is one of their daily occupations. Often some considerable distance from a water-hole, usually on the edge of a swamp, they can be seen with their earthen jars, containing five to six gallons of water, balanced on their heads.

Their diet, varying with the seasons, does not admit of much variety in cooking, and in the fruit season cooking may be said to be almost dispensed with. The women never eat with the men, and never until the men have first been fed. When there are several to eat, a large wooden bowl of food is placed amongst the group, when they proceed to help themselves in handfuls. This is accomplished in a leisurely manner, accompanied with a good deal of conversation and banter. Each takes sufficient at a time to make a good mouthful, and if the food happens to be not quite firm enough, the water is squeezed out of it and it is rolled around in the hand a few times. The meal is then finished with a drink of water from a coconut shell. There are no set times for eating.

THE number of wives a man may possess is limited to his wealth in produce, goats or money. Since the advent of the white man the native money, consisting of cowries or shells, has been displaced by Portuguese copper reis—five hundred reis being equal to fifty cents.

A wife is usually bought from her parents at about the age of twelve to fourteen. The price paid for her is arranged according to the standing of the party, but the average would not exceed five dollars in barter or cash. It is also an understood thing that the purchaser is bound to support his father- and mother-in-law, and make annual presents of cloth. If dissatisfied with his choice the wife is promptly sent back to her parents.

Many of the natives confine themselves to one wife, with the exception of the chiefs, the more powerful of whom have as many as fifty wives, whilst the petty chiefs—or *munyes* as they are called —maintain from three to ten.

Infidelity is not regarded in the sense that any form of punishment should be meted out. There seems to be no fixed system, and much depends on the nature of the individual man. In isolated cases the wives have been killed or beaten with a *sjambok*, but more often than not no notice is taken.

The huts are both round and oblong. Some are plastered and others made of reeds woven together. The round huts are, however, seldom met with. Always isolated, they indicate in every case that its occupant is a widow woman too old to work and

consequently too old ever to hope for another husband.

The framework of the oblong huts is made of stout *mangal*, a species of red ironwood, impervious to the attack of the white ant. The poles are roughly trimmed of their knots and placed in holes, dug by means of a sharp pointed stick, the hands being used to scoop the earth out.

If the hut is to be plastered, then a lattice work is woven with one-inch sticks held together by a material almost like lace leather, which it resembles. Its native name is *kikoy*, and it is obtained from the inner bark of a tree, peeled off in large pieces, dried and put away for use. When required the material is soaked in water, and then cut into strips.

There is only one source of supply for the adobe. The giant ant-hills furnish this. These hills sometimes attain a height of twenty feet above ground with a diameter of fifteen feet, tapering to a needle-point, so as to shed the rain. These hills dot the landscape all around and are to be found in forest and plain. The working of the ants, during which it is supposed a slime is thrown off their bodies, turns this earth and sand into a composition which is so hard that a pick-ax makes but very little impression on it. In its natural color it is a blue-gray.

The women plaster the hut and carry the *matacca*, as the material in these hills is called. When sufficient has been collected, water is brought, and three or more women will mix up a portion by tramping and when ready for use carry it by handfuls to the work. No tools whatever are used. The finishing process is accomplished by dipping the hand in water and smoothing down.

THE roof is a heavy thatch made of palm leaves, or a long species of wire grass. The palm leaves are tied together in long strings before being placed on the roof, the whole being made secure by interlacing on the lattice work of the roof. The floor of the hut is next treated with the *matacca* and pounded. The doorway—there are no windows or other openings—is usually a small hole with movable section of lattice work. This is drawn across the opening at night to keep out that greatest of African sneaks, the hyena, who is credited by the natives with being particularly prone to attack a sleeping victim.

The staple food of the people is manioc, a vegetable which in some respects resembles a yam or sweet potato. This is often cooked with *meilho fino* after being reduced to a flour in a large wooden mortar with a pestle. Enormous quantities of smoked fish are consumed, and fruits in their season. Among the wild fruits are the pineapple, orange, mango, pawpaw and cashew.

Special mention must be made of the cashew. From its fruit is distilled a powerful spirit of a very intoxicating nature, and when under its influence the natives become dangerous. When freshly made it has a somewhat insipid taste and is more or less harmless. With two or three days' fermentation it undergoes quite a change, and in the drunken orgies that follow, the scars and slashes of spear and knife testify to the savage ferocity aroused.

Of the many varieties of superstition and witchcraft prevalent among these people that of the "tiger man" easily surpasses all.

The word "tiger" or *tigre* is the Portuguese name for the leopard, which are very numerous in the district. The natives believe that the medicine-man can for the time being or at his pleasure transform himself into a leopard, consorting with them in the bush and assuming their habits, even to the skin and claws. The paraphernalia used on this occasion consists of a leopardskin, a human skull tied around the neck, pieces of wood painted with red stripes and a small bag of herbs and sundries tied around the waist. On the fingers of each hand are tied small curved knives to imitate the tiger claws. Thus attired, the medicine-man proceeds on his mission and is not seen again until his deed is accomplished.

The unfortunate selected for the vengeance of this cunning rascal is usually a person who has incurred the displeasure of his or her chief, or any of the head men. The medicine-man is consulted, and it is announced that "tiger medicine" is being made. Much speculation is rife as to who the victim will be, as he is entirely innocent of the fate which may await him. The fact that the tiger man is abroad instils every one with the utmost fear, and since his operations are extended sometimes into three weeks before his opportunity comes, the tension of the people can be imagined. At last the time comes and the victim is found dead, generally near his own hut.

The attack is never made in daylight, unless the party is alone. The opportunity more often comes at night. All unsuspecting of the death that lurks near, the victim perhaps leaves the hut to replenish the fire. The tiger man, ever alert, sees his chance and with a leap is on his man. The curved knives do their work in the throat, great care being taken that the work is complete.

On the finding of the body the next morning, the claw-marks, together with the carefully prepared foot-pads of the "leopard" around the spot, indicate that the tiger man has claimed his victim.

Notwithstanding repeated attempts on the part of the white officials to break up this form of witchcraft the natives still cling tenaciously to it. The capture of one medicine-man with his paraphernalia and his subsequent punishment did not deter them from it.

To illustrate one case, in which the vengeance of the witch-doctor was carried out at the instigation of a chief named Matappa, a friend of the writer, returning to Europe, gave away two pairs of old shoes to an old man and woman of Matappa's clan. Matappa, hearing of it, became very jealous and immediately issued his instruction to the tiger man. Both man and woman fell victims, their dead bodies being found next morning along a native path with the usual telltale marks.

THE practise of witchcraft is undoubtedly carried on among these people to a larger extent than appears on the surface. Those that are not the recognized medicine-men of the tribe sometimes possess and use in secret, herbs and plants, poisonous and otherwise, to obtain special objects which they have in view.

The only form of music among the Makua is the drum, with here and there a one-string violin of the crudest type. The drum is made in five sizes, and at a large dance the whole five are generally used. Shaped from a piece of wood, hollowed out and tapering at each end, they are played with the palm of the hand and fingers.

The two smallest sizes are of pedestal or egg-cup shape, with the skin stretched over the top and

pegged with wooden pins. These are played with sticks. The heads of the drums are made from the skin of a large lizard.

The tuning-up of the various drums is accomplished by fire. Each instrument is subjected to the heat of the flames several times before the proper tone is acquired.

When all are ready the drums commence slowly at first, gradually expanding in volume until at the end of fifteen or twenty minutes the drummers may be said to have reached the zenith of their powers. Then the din is indeed terrific. Freely perspiring in their efforts to encourage the frenzy of the dancers, they continue to the point of exhaustion and often beat in the head of the drum in the excitement that ensues. At this stage the process of retuning is gone over again, and if there be other drummers at hand they take up the duties.

The drum is also used in other ways, particularly in that of signaling. By this means the natives are able to send calls to one another, or from village to village. It is also used in the case of anniversaries of the dead. A certain time after the decease of a near relative one of the family takes a large drum, starting at sunset, and at half-minute intervals beats a funeral dirge throughout the night until sunrise.

The violin, if such it can be called, produces in the hands of the performer not more than four to five notes. To be capable of rendering these in their proper order seems to be quite an accomplishment possessed by very few indeed. When correct from the native standpoint the result is a dirge far from soothing and terribly monotonous, the performer being looked upon as a genius.

The body of the instrument is made from a bowl-shaped gourd, hollowed out and dried. The top on the flat side being removed, a piece of lizard skin is stretched across the opening, pinned around with wooden pegs. The bridge is a piece of bamboo half-round. The string is braided in three strands of a special kind of hemp vine, wound around a wooden key.

The stem is a round stick passing entirely through, surmounted with a rude carving representing a head. These instruments are never used at the dances, but are brought out when visitors arrive.

THE dances are many, celebrating different festivals and customs, one in particular lasting for three days and nights without cessation except intervals for meals. This dance signifies the coming of age of a marriageable girl, the daughter of a chief. The countryside from far and near is advised, and all gather at the village for the festival.

The girl herself, who has been shut up in a hut for the past month, is not allowed to participate. During this time she has not been allowed to see the face of a man, and the time has been passed in instruction as to her duties in the marital state. An old woman acts as instructor. The noise of drums emanating from the hut denotes that the period of her instruction has ceased.

Only girls and women are allowed to participate in the dance. The men are the spectators. But two dancers occupy the ring at the same time, when they try to outvie each other in their contortions and snakelike movements, increasing with the fury of the drums, until both retire exhausted, when the best performer is rewarded with some beads, the number depending on her merit. Two fresh girls take their places, and this continues for the three days.

The moon dance is celebrated, as its name indicates, with the new moon; the details are quite unprintable.

On the other hand there are dances so tame and quiet in their character as hardly to merit the name. These are open to all, young and old of both sexes, who form two lines facing one another and alternately march to a slow, monotonous chant backward and forward, no drums being used on this occasion.

The witch-doctors perform several dances of an entirely different nature. They decorate themselves with the skin of the civet cat or leopard, or any other wild animal. Around the head is a piece of rawhide cut from the mane of the eland or waterbok, adjusted so that the long hair hangs around the eyes. On the wrists and ankles are strings of dried hollow gourds, round in shape, containing some small pebbles. In each hand is a rattle, also made from a much larger gourd. Thus equipped, the witch-doctor enters the ring with a special drummer. His bracelets rattle, keeping tune to the drum, as he imitates the crested guinea fowl with head and leg movements to correspond; then, now crouched, next erect, grunting and clucking according to the other creatures he is imitating, his actions are most weird, doubly so in the moonlight of an African night.

THE native doctor is a distinct personage. The foundation of his ability is, however, attributable to potent charms. In the case of a snake-bite, which is very common, a charm in the form of a bangle made from a species of woven grass is obtained from him and worn on leg or arm, according to the location of the bite, and always above the wound. These charms are supposed to be infallible, as they naturally would be since there is no question that ninety-nine per cent. of snake-bites are from a non-venomous variety, and although causing pain and swelling, the writer never knew of a fatality arising therefrom.

In the case of a man who had been badly mauled by a leopard, who was brought to my hut, I was not allowed to touch him until the native doctor had first treated him. With several wounds, one of which was particularly severe, to be treated I naturally expected a long-drawn-out performance, but to my surprize the treatment was completed in a half-minute.

Saliva from the doctor's mouth, injected into the wounds through a piece of porous vine, was the remedy. The patient was then turned over to me. Somewhat in doubt as to how to deal with the patient so as to allay any superstitious fears on the part of the spectators—who, should the man die, would most likely blame the white man's medicine—I had no course open to me except boldly to undo the treatment already received, by washing the wounds thoroughly with permanganate of potassium.

This operation was watched with interest, interjected by murmurs of approval or dissent, and when finally fixed up he was sent home, where he began quickly to show signs of improvement, his most serious wound healing completely up. However, at the end of the fourth week blood poisoning set in from a claw-mark in the heel, and the man died as the end of the sixth week.

On another occasion, on sending for a certain man

for work, he was reported sick. The second summons after the lapse of a day or so brought no better results. The third time the messenger was instructed to bring him in to the station for treatment. He came with a rather poor imitation of stomach cramp and a wobegone expression on his face, made for the purpose. Considerable contortions of the body were added to convince the white man.

The native, however, is a poor imitator. He is either sick or well. There are no half-way measures, and their efforts at shamming are sometimes ludicrous.

Ascertaining his symptoms, I told the man a medicine would be given him that would prove whether he was ill or not. If well the medicine would be bad and make him "plenty sick," and if really sick he would be cured. Procuring some Eno's Fruit Salts, I proceeded to mix it in his presence so that he should witness the effervesence, anticipating that this would be quite sufficient to break down his sham.

This turned out as I expected. The man suddenly assumed a new lease of life and tried his utmost to break away. Needless to say, he departed to work without further trouble, thoroughly impressed with the power of the white man, who could "make water boil in a glass without fire."

I was at one other time a witness to "some medical treatment" meted out to a man who had several broken ribs. One of the leaders of a party of four men carrying a load, he stumbled and fell, the pole which supported the load striking him with the above result. He was carried into the station.

Whilst waiting for the arrival of my medicine-chest to render first aid preparatory to sending the man out to the nearest Portuguese medico, two natives, who had evidently been studying the situation, formed an idea that the trouble could be easily cured. The man was drawn up with pain into a semicircular position and lying on his side. Straightening him out, amid shrieks and groans and placing him face downward, these two stalwarts proceeded to tramp in a circular movement around his back with the idea as I afterward learned of curing what they thought was nothing worse than a "kink in the back."

ON THE death of a person, no semblance of grief is felt. It seems to be taken as a matter of course. The mourners, who are always women, are hired. On arrival at the hut of the deceased they do not enter, but, standing in a group outside, wring their hands and keep up a continuous wail for half an hour.

The corpse is sewn up in a fiber cloth of their own weaving, or if near enough to a "Banyan" store, a piece of white cotton is procured. When ready for burial the mourners again put in their appearance; the same wailing and wringing of hands is gone through as the corpse is carried away suspended in a hammock-like construction on a bamboo pole, followed only by such men as are necessary to dig the grave.

The body is interred the same day in the vicinity of the hut. A secluded place is selected in the bush, or alongside a native path. A hole is dug about four and one-half feet deep. An excavation is then made at the side and the body is placed there. The grave is then filled in, the layers of sand being interspersed with small branches. This method of burial protects the corpse from being disinterred by wild animals. The only outward emblem of a grave is a broken plate.

Nothing of a definite nature could be obtained of their religion or any form of spiritual belief. I made repeated efforts to ascertain whether any form of worship or a belief in a god existed. I found nothing that would indicate any form of religion or worship, spiritual or otherwise, and could form no other conclusion than that they were heathens. Missionaries had never been amongst them. The few missionaries that are scattered in Portuguese East Africa—and they are mostly confined to the vicinity of the small Portuguese settlements on the coast—are Roman Catholics.

THE language of the **Makua** is difficult for a European to acquire, owing to the gradations and inflections of tone. Perhaps the best way to illustrate this inflection of voice so prevalent in this language would be to say that when the speaker desires to lay special stress upon an adjective, he does so by means of prolonging the final syllable to an immoderate extent. Thus a small child would be *muana, muankaui*, but an extremely small child would be *muana muana kaui*iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii.

The interjections are most numerous and varied and consist equally of the following words and of an amazing amount of vocal inflections, which not only import great expression into the language as a whole but serve to increase its not very striking flexibility.

Really (you don't say so!): ***Queh.***
Good gracious: *Komati.*
Remonstrance: *Kôoo.*
Wonder, admiration: *Ehéee.*

The phrase *auisiaga*, if followed by the adverb, *bâhi* ("enough") is practically a form of oath which serves to convince a doubter as to the veracity of any statement made.

Thus if the statement, "*Kahoneriga nzana vinjene*," ("I was very ill yesterday") is doubted—which doubt would take the form of the delicate expression, "*Uêta zenyu*," meaning, "You are a liar"—the *bona fides* of the original allegations would be sufficiently supported by the sufferer drawing the fingers of his right hand across his wind-pipe, flicking them smartly downward and ejaculating, "*Amaijâ bâhi*," meaning, "On my mother," or words to that effect.

Like most of the African dialects spoken by Mohammedan tribes, the Makua tongue is rich in complimentary phrases, although some, if not most, are borrowed from other languages, particularly Swahili and Portuguese. They are for the most part as follows:

Good day: *Maskomoso.*
Same to you, thank you: *Havarê.*
Very well, thank you: *Salimini.*
And how about yourself: *Kahiki nyûo.*
Is all quite well with you? *Muahaua nua kumi?*
All is well: *Zihave Zikuni.*

The form so constantly heard in the district of Mozambique, "*Mua passâre zai?*" is too clearly an importation from the Portuguese to admit of any doubt; its equivalent in that language being "*Como tein passada?*" ("How have you been?")
For "good-by" the Swahili word *quaheri* is general.
—R. G. WARING.

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Bicycling, Coast to Coast

IT CAN be done readily in three months or a little over, by an experienced man:

Question:—"Being advised by the doctor to get out of doors all or part of the time for at least a year, I have decided I would like to see some of the country while I am about it. I was considering a trip to the west coast or at least as far as the Missouri. Either walking or cycling; I have a very good wheel. On trips through the countryside hereabout I do not tire easily.

What do you suggest in regard to the following inquiries? Walk or ride? What is hitch-hiking? Any firearms? Describe camp equipment and quote prices if possible. One or two days' grub sufficient? Clothes to be worn? Extra clothes?

If bicycle is suggested what should I carry for spares? Any lock or lamp?

Should pack be carried on carrier or back or both?

How much money should I have after my equipment has been procured?

Should I put up at farm-houses or camp 'on my own'? What do you suggest as to routes, places of interest, etc.? Would you take a camera?

Is there any way in which I could earn money on the trip? Would you stop to work a few weeks here and there? Can you advise me about labor conditions on the west coast or in the Middle West? Any further information will be gratefully appreciated. If this is published in 'Ask *Adventure*' please use name of 'FRENCHY.' "—Portland, Me.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—I should say go on the bicycle. It gives fifty instead of fifteen miles a day, and with luggage carrier enables you to carry the same weight in light outfit. From Portland you have fine highways westward, or you could go *via* Portsmouth, N.H., westward, or to New York City and *via* Washington; many routes. Personally I'd go through Crawford Notch, *via* northern New York, Buffalo, north or south side of Lake Erie (best roads south side) as far as you wished, even to San Diego, Calif.

Hitch-hiking is pretending to walk, but begging rides from people who have earned their own autos and pay their own way.

Outfit: A canvas tarpaulin, say 16 by 7½ feet (14 by 5 would do), waterproofed, with loops along the sides and ends, every 2 feet (3 on end) to tie up or bundle up, making lean-to, and other tents. A good woolen blanket. Any of several aluminum cooking-outfits. Clothes, stockings (Army breeches, shirts) good shoes, pair of light shoes to wear in camp (change of shoes, that is). Matches in water-tight can. Food, six or eight pounds.

Learn to cook before starting; and make short (week or so) *practise* trips before making big jump, to get outfit shaken down and practise and study equipment. There's really not much difference between three days' run and three months' run straightaway. But one must have outfit right to start with. Don't carry anything on person.

Cost of Whole Outfit: Tarp, say $10. Cooking-outfit, $3 to $5 (look over Aluminum Cooking Utensil Co., New Kensington, Pa., catalogue of camping-outfits). Carry a tray to eat off of—comfort, some style! Water canteen—two quarts.

Good idea to have a good lamp on bicycle, one you can use in camp at night—also, running nights. Carbid is good—a Deitz Boy Scout lantern for kerosene is mighty fine at night. Can fasten in luggage, but on side over from grub.

Firearms: Unless you want to bother with a .22 rifle, no.

Fishing-Tackle: A light outfit, jointed casting-rod, reel, line, varied hooks.

Your expenses may run to a dollar a day. I've traveled thousands of miles with never more than five or ten dollars—foot, bicycle, etc. A few ten-dollar bills in money-belt, scattered around, might be useful. You can go to San Francisco for about $100, more or less. It's done in a Ford for $100.

Where health is involved, don't hesitate, save to be sure your project is what you need. Nerves, lungs—outdoors is wonderful; but don't overdo, and don't worry. Loaf along, rest often, look the country over.

I'd say take camera; yes, a vest-pocket size; smaller are the cheaper. Take a lot of pictures. They'll be immeasurable memory trophies later. And work here and there as you find jobs, in woods, on roads, farms, villages—as you need to or enjoy. Perhaps even round trip on Great Lake freight out of Buffalo. Or even one-way trip to Duluth or Chicago—ship wheel.

Hunting on the Upper Amazon

BETTER than the fishing:

Question:—"I would like to find out about Brazil and Argentina. How are the hunting and fishing along the upper end of the Amazon River, and what are the languages spoken in Brazil and Argentina? Do you think that a young fellow about eighteen could make a living down there? Have had quite a bit of experience in handling cattle."—R. E. HEATON, Azusa, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Barbour:—Hunting on the upper Amazon is good, though full of hardship. There are jaguars, pumas, wild boar, ocelot, alligators, jungle deer and lots of duck, etc. Fishing is not so good, as most fish in warm tropical rivers are soft, sluggish and hardly fit to eat.

Spanish is the language of Argentina, Portuguese that of Brazil. In the interior there are very many Indian dialects, but the official language of the country is usually understood.

I think that a fellow eighteen years old would be taking a big chance to go to South America unless he had some capital behind him. The risk would not be so great in Argentina. Stay out of the Amazon country unless you are used to very great hardships and your system can withstand tropical fevers, also unless mosquitoes and other insect pests do not bother you too much. The Amazon country is not a very good place for a white man at best.

"ASK Adventure" editors are appointed with extreme care. If you can meet our exacting requirements and qualify as an expert on some topic or territory not now covered, we shall be glad to talk matters over with you. Address F. K. NOYES, *Adventure*, New York.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

SO MANY requests have come in from readers for copies of songs of the pioneer days that in self-defense I print two of the most popular of them in this issue. Neither is in any sense a real song of the folk. Both were sung by character actors on the stage and owe their wide distribution to this fact, though both have lived on until their stage origin has been well nigh forgotten. Unlike true folk songs, neither "The Days of 'Forty-Nine" nor "Joe Bowers" is found in widely differing versions; the different texts vary from each other only in a few words or in the absence of a forgotten stanza.

The date of composition for "The Days of 'Forty-Nine" is unknown. It exists in sheet music dated 1876 in the Sutro Branch of the California State Library, but it was known and sung earlier than this. I print a text sung to me by Jim Desmond, one of the last of the famous "whitehall boatmen" of San Francisco, as he remembers hearing it in the '70s.

The Days of 'Forty-nine

(Text of Jim Desmond)

Oh, here you see Old Tom Moore,
A relic of former days;
A bummer, too, they call me now,
But what care I for praise?
For my heart is filled with the days of yore,
And oft do I repine
For the days of old, and the days of gold—
The Days of 'Forty-Nine!

I had comrades then who loved me well,
A jovial, saucy crew;
There were some hard cases, I must confess,
But still they were brave and true.
They would never flinch when in a pinch,
They would never fret nor whine,
But like good old bricks they stood the kicks
In the Days of 'Forty-Nine.

There was New York Jake, a butcher boy,
So fond of getting tight,
And whenever he got on a spree
He was spoiling for a fight.
One night he ran against a knife
In the hands of Old Bob Kline,
And over Jake we held a wake
In the Days of 'Forty-Nine.

There was poor Lame Jess, a hard old case,
Who never would repent.
Jess never lost a single meal,
Nor he never paid a cent,
But poor old Jess, like all the rest,
Did at last to death resign,
For when in his bloom he went up the flume
In the Days of 'Forty-Nine.

There was Roaring Jim—he could outroar
A buffalo bull, you bet!
He would roar all day, and he'd roar all night—
I believe he's a-roaring yet.
One night he fell in a prospect hole—
'Twas a roaring bad design—
And in that hole he roared out his soul
In the Days of 'Forty-Nine.

Of all the comrades I have met
There's none for me to boast;
They left me here in misery
Like some poor wandering ghost.
And when I go from place to place,
Folks call me a traveling sign—
"There goes old Tom Moore, he's a bummer sure
Of the Days of 'Forty-Nine."

The second song, "Joe Bowers," I reprint from "Johnson's Original Comic Songs—Second Edition," a paper-covered songster published in San Francisco in 1860. I have retained the curious spelling of the original.

Joe Bowers

My name it is Joe Bowers—I've got a brother Ike;
I come from old Missouri, yes, all the way from Pike;
I'll tell you why I left thar, and how I came to roam,
And leave my poor old mammy, so fer away from home.

I used to love a gal thar, they call'd her Sally Black;
I axed her for to marry me, she said it was a whack;
"But," says she to me, "Joe Bowers, before we hitch for life,
You'd orter have a little home to keep your little wife."

Says I, "My dearest Sally, oh Sally, for your sake,
I'll go to California, and try to raise a stake."
Says she to me, "Joe Bowers, oh you're the chap to win,
Guv me a buss to seal the bargain," and she threw a dozen in!

I shall ne'er forgit my feelins when I bid adieu to all;
Sally cotched me round the neck, then I began to Bawl;
When I sot in, they all commenced—you ne'er did hear the like,
How they all took on and cried, the day I left old Pike.

When I got to this 'ere country, I hadn't nary red,
I had sich wolfish feelins I wish'd myself most dead;
But the thoughts of my dear Sally soon made these feelins git,
And whispered hopes to Bowers—Lord, I wish I had 'em yit!

At length I went to minin', put in my biggest licks,
Come down upon the boulders jist like a thousand bricks;
I worked both late and airly, in rain, and sun, and snow,
But I was working for my Sally, so 'twas all the same to Joe.

I made a very lucky strike, as the gold itself did tell,
And saved it for my Sally, the gal I loved so well;
I saved it for my Sally, that I might pour it at her feet,
That she might kiss and hug me, and call me something sweet.

But one day I got a letter from my dear, kind brother, Ike—
It come from old Missouri, sent all the way from Pike;
It brought me the gol-darn'dest news as ever you did hear—
My heart is almost bustin', so, pray, excuse this tear.

It said my Sal was fickle, that her love for me had fled;
That she'd married with a butcher, whose *har* was orful red!
It told me more than that—oh! it's enough to make one swar,
It said Sally had a baby, and the baby had red *har!*

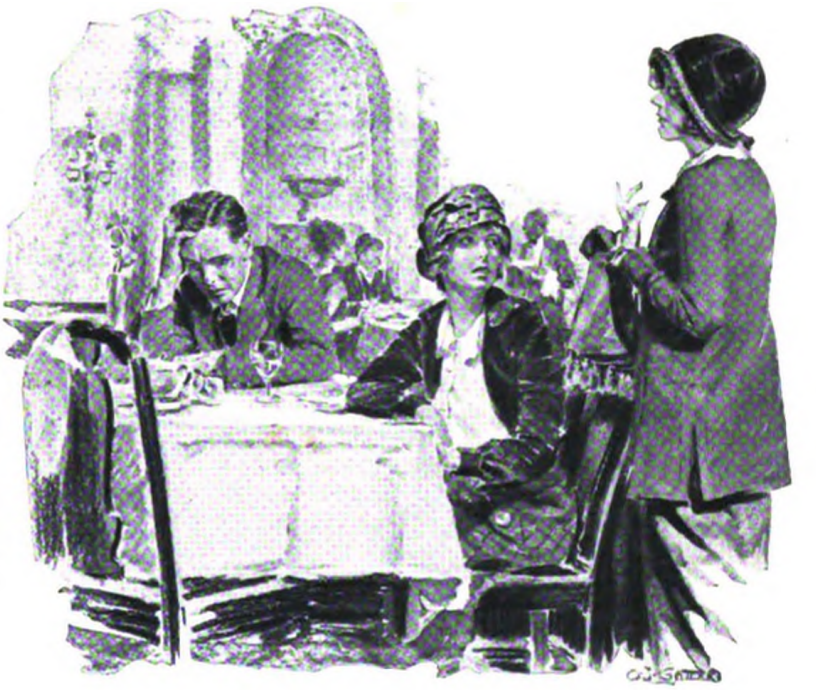
Now, I've told you all I could tell about this sad affair,
'Bout Sally marryin' the butcher, and the butcher had red *har*.
Whether 'twas a boy or gal child, the letter never said,
It only said its cussed *har* was inclined to be a *red!*

SEND all contributions of old songs, and all questions about them, direct to R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Avenue, Berkeley, California. DO NOT send them to the magazine.

Engaged to two girls—he invites them both to dinner! . . .

. . ."Little celebration —lucky dog have two Queens of Sheba," said Martin.

And to himself, "Oh, hell!"



"Swell room!" chirped Leora.

Madeline had looked as though she intended to say the same thing in longer words.

He was ordering, with agony. While he wondered what "Purée St. Germain" could be, and the waiter hideously stood watching behind his shoulder, Madeline fell to. She chanted with horrifying politeness:

"Mr. Arrowsmith tells me you are a nurse, Miss—Tozer."

"Yes, sort of."

"Do you find it interesting?"

"Well—yes—yes, I think it's interesting."

"Do you come from Zenith, Miss—Tozer?"

"No, I come from—just a little town. Well, hardly a town—North Dakota."

"Do you find the contrast to North Dakota interesting?"

"Well, of course it's different."

"Tell me what North Dakota's like. I've always wondered about these Western States."

"I don't think I know just how you mean."

"I mean what is the general effect? The *impression*?"

"Well, it's got lots of wheat and lots of Swedes."

"But I mean—I suppose you're all terribly virile and energetic, compared with us Easterners?"

"I don't— Well, yes, maybe."

"Have you met lots of people in Zenith?"

"Not so *awfully* many."

He sat alone and helpless while she again turned on Leora and ever more brightly inquired whether Leora knew this son of a corporation lawyer and that famous débutante, this hat-shop and that country club.

"Well—" She dismissed Leora and looked patronizingly at Martin. "Are you planning some more work on the what-is-it with rabbits?"

He was grim. He could do it now, if he got it over quickly. "Madeline! Brought you two together because— Don't know whether you cotton to each other or not, but I wish you could, because I've—I'm not making any excuse for myself. I couldn't help it. I'm engaged to both of you, and I want to know——"

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