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A. A. Proctor
EDITOR

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A Story of Windjammer Days

The SEA WIFE

By BILL ADAMS

SHE was a hard looking woman, if ever there was one. A stony faced woman. I don't know how old she was. One did not somehow think of age in connection with her. Certainly she was not young. But she was quick on her feet, nimble; and her eyes were sharp as the eyes of those sea birds that follow a ship for weeks together in the cold south latitudes. I think that she was a rather little woman, short statured and not broad in her build. Yet, looking back, I always see her as tall and very square and solid. A tower of strength. The moment that I first saw her, her thick, curly, close clipped hair and her strong competent hands struck me as unwomanly. There was no color in her face. The sea had long ago washed all color from her. There were no feminine doodads about her; no bracelets, necklaces, lockets; no adornments whatever save for the narrow gold band upon her wedding finger.

Sometimes I laughed at her. Sometimes I despised her. Sometimes I was furious with and hated her. But all of that behind her back, of course.

There is among sailors an old saying, an ancient proverb, that says, "A woman and a dog are out of place in a ship."

There is nothing about dogs in my story, unless it is that I and those young sea apprentices and those sniggering seamen were dogs.

For my part I had always held that a sailor who married was a fool. Of what use to marry when a man must leave his woman ashore and see her perhaps for a few days only between long voyages? To take his woman with him a man must be a captain, of course. Why, a woman had better be locked up in a convent than confined with her man in the cramped after quarters of a ship . . .

I was just in from a long voyage in a ship that had been to several of those ports in which a sailor has no inducement to spend his money. With a big payday in my pocket I had decided to have a good time ashore for a month or two; and, having dispatched my baggage to the railway station, had set out for it afoot. After those long months at sea the thought of a walk was good.

My way lay along the docks and as I passed ship after ship I looked pityingly at the mates on their decks. I was feeling like a lad let out of school, and would not have changed places with any one on earth.

But when I came to almost the end of the docks I saw a ship such as one seldom saw even in the days before steamers had come to drive sail from the oceans. She was deep loaded and, except that some of her sails were not yet bent, was evidently ready to go to sea. She was so grand, so trim, so shining that she fairly took my breath away. To get a better look at her I crossed her gangway and went up to her poop. From there she looked finer yet, far finer. No longer was I a jig-along holiday maker, but a sailor with his every sea instinct awakened, so delighted was I at her beauty.

I had been but a few moments on her poop when the chartroom door opened

and a slightly built, sharp featured man stepped out. There was a frown on his face. He looked harried. Until I spoke he did not notice me. At the sound of my voice he turned.

"Are you needing a mate, sir?" I asked.

"You only came in from a long voyage yesterday," he said after he had looked at my papers.

"I was planning on taking a long holiday ashore, sir, until I saw this ship," said I, and I could see that my words pleased him.

"All right," said he. "We go to sea in the morning. I'm going ashore till noon. I'll leave you in charge of her."

"I'll have to go get my things, sir," said I.

"Very well. Be back as soon as you can," he replied; and added, "I guess no one will run off with her meantime."

When I had fetched my sea chest and had stowed it in the mate's cabin I went up to the poop again. Except for the cook, in his galley, there was no one about. With no regrets for my lost holiday, I lighted my pipe and, seated on the taffrail, scrutinized my new ship. Usually when a ship has been in port for even a

few days only her decks are a litter of confusion and dust. But the decks had been well swept and every rope was neatly coiled.

"The skipper's a mighty particular man," thought I. That suited me very well, for I'm a particular man myself, with a liking for having everything shipshape. I had no doubts whatever of my ability to get along with my new master.

Presently I saw a gang of brassbounders coming along the dock. Eight of them there were. Several were husky lads who it was easy to see must be about out of their apprenticeships. With the exception of a little fellow who was too young to have been at sea for more than a voyage the others were sturdy seamanlike looking boys.

"Well, here's the old devil!" said one of the elder apprentices when they came to the gangway.

"Aye! God help poor sailors," said another.

"And save 'em from Ma Torrey's bounty," exclaimed a third.

The apprentices were just gone into the halfdeck when the chartroom door opened again and a woman stepped out. She saw me at once.

"Are you looking for some one?" she asked, with a look on her face, with a tone in her voice, that told me that, whoever I might be, she disapproved of my loafing on the poop.

"I'm the new mate, ma'am," I replied, none too pleased to find that there was a woman aboard and, as I spoke, a babble of talk came from the apprentices' halfdeck.

"If those boys are aboard it's time to be getting the rest of her sail bent," said the woman, and went back into the chartroom and shut the door after her.

"Well, I'm damned!" thought I. "Who in thunder asked *her* what ought to be done?"

And then in a little while it occurred to me that I might as well set the apprentices to work and make a good impression with my new skipper. They were all talking at once, and laughing, and passing girls' pictures 'round, when I came to their door.

"You fellows get down to the sail locker," I ordered. "We'll start in and finish bending her sail."

One of the older boys spoke up.

"We met the skipper on the dock, sir, and he told us we needn't turn to till afternoon," said he.

"Get down to the sail locker," I repeated, for I never yet met one of that breed who wouldn't try to lie himself out of a job if he thought he could get away with it.

I was by the gangway when the skipper returned.

"I told those boys they needn't turn to till afternoon, Mister," said he.

That was how the woman put one over on me the first time.

The steward called that dinner was ready and, as I entered the dining saloon at the skipper's heels, the woman entered from their cabin.

"This is the new mate," said the skipper.

She gave me a curt nod and we sat down to a meal that passed in silence.

After dinner a second mate joined the ship. By evening we had finished bending sail. The crew came aboard, and a little while later a tugboat took us out to anchor in the river; all ready to go to sea on the morning tide.

Supper passed in silence, not so much as a word from the skipper or his wife.

First thing in the morning the tug took us out to sea. The breeze was fair, so that she soon dropped us, leaving us to run through the Downs under sail.

THERE was a good deal of traffic in the Downs; inbound sailing ships waiting for a shift of wind to take them up the North Sea; steamers bound in and out and, as usual, plenty of coasting craft. We set the topsails, but left topgallantsails and royals fast.

"As soon as she's out of the thick of the traffic we'll give her more sail, Mister," said the skipper.

The skipper had scarcely spoken when the woman came on deck and looked aloft.

"What's the matter, Benj?" she asked. "Why don't you give her some sail?"

"I'll give her more sail as soon as we're out of the jam," he replied. "There's no sense in worrying all these steamers."

A big passenger liner was coming up astern. Ahead of us, one on either bow, were two cross channel boats; one just coming in from France and the other just starting over. At the speed we were making neither would need to alter her course to give us the right of way.

"Steamers!" exclaimed the woman. "What's the idea of wasting a good fair wind for steamers?"

"I'll give her more sail in a few minutes," said the skipper. "Those cross channel boats run on a time schedule. I don't want to bother them."

"You'll have a steam kettle passing us pretty soon," said the woman, noting the liner astern. "What's the matter with you, anyway?"

It was easy to see that the skipper was not enjoying having his wife trying to boss him in front of me.

"Mister Mate," said the woman, friendly as pie. "Don't you reckon we ought to put more sail on her?"

What the devil could I say? I did the only thing I could. I pretended not to have heard. But having his wife ask my opinion was too much for the skipper, as she doubtless had known that it would be."

"Loose the topgallants," he ordered.

With topgallantsails set, the ship started off at a great clip. Each of the cross channel boats had to alter her course to keep clear of us.

"You're in a hell of a hurry, ain't you, Torrey?" shouted the skipper of a sailing ship as we ripped past his anchored vessel. The skipper scowled, but the woman was smiling.

We were not yet clear of the shipping when the woman said:

"Give her the royals, Benj. Let's make a good start."

"A good start don't always mean a good finish," he retorted. But she kept at him till he ordered the royals set. Then, with the ship under full sail, the liner dropped astern fast.

"She's a dandy fine ship, but damn having a sea wife aboard," said the second mate to me.

Once we were well out in the channel the woman went below and I saw no more of her that day except at meals. You know how it is when a sailing master and his mate sit down to a meal. No talk except about the ship's affairs. You might think that with a woman at table things would be different. They were different. There was no talk at all.

On the second evening at sea the woman came on deck again. I was standing down at the lee side of the poop. Captain Torrey was by the taffrail to windward. She joined him there.

"Benj," said the woman, after studying everything aloft and alow for a few moments," there's a gasket loose on the main royal yard."

"I guess she don't miss much," I thought.

A loose gasket was doing no harm. After eight bells I'd send an apprentice aloft to make it up. The apprentices and foremast hands were taking the brief leisure that falls to a sailor in the second dog watch. There was no sense in disturbing them now. It's always a custom to let the crew have the second dog watch to themselves when possible.

"There's a gasket loose on the main royal yard, Benj," repeated the woman.

"All right. It isn't hurting anything," he replied, and I moved out of hearing.

In a few minutes the skipper called me.

"Send one of those boys aloft and have that gasket made up," he ordered.

That was the way of it right along. For so long as the woman stayed below there was peace. But each time that she came on deck she would look all over the ship from those keen searching eyes of hers, and very often she would find some little inconsequential thing that was not just as it could be; a rope not neatly

coiled, or a tackle with a half turn in it; a fragment of yarn or of canvas in some corner where the brooms had missed it. The skipper did not want anything amiss of course, and neither did I. But we were not fussers.

I was always about as easy going as the next man, and the woman's ways did not trouble me much at first. In fact, for a time, I thought it rather a joke. But it was not long before she took the joke out of it for me in a way that made me hot under the collar. Coming to the poop one evening when the skipper was below, she immediately saw what I had been watching for some time. A ship was abeam of us, and sailing the same course. We were passing her rapidly. She would soon be out of sight astern.

"Benj, come up here. There's a ship abeam," the woman called down the chartroom companionway.

The skipper came up, took a look at the other ship and said—

"We're running away from that fellow."

"Tell the mate to sweat the ship up, Benj," said the woman.

"He's sweated her up in the first dog watch already," replied the skipper.

"Well, have him sweat her up again then," insisted the woman in a tone of voice that implied that I had not half attended to my job.

"Let the crew have their dog watch to themselves," said the skipper.

"What's a crew for? To loaf while there's a ship trying to pass us?"

"That hooker couldn't pass us if we took half our sail off," he retorted.

But she kept at him till he called me and told me to sweat up all over again. Men and apprentices muttered and looked surly while they dragged on sheets, halyards and braces, without gaining so much as an inch on any one of them. As for me, I was no longer amused. I was furious.

Later that night, while keeping my watch alone on the poop, I cooled off and decided that I might as well be philosophical.

After that the woman was unable to find anything whatever amiss evening by evening. I took mighty good care to forestall her. She had me trained, as you might say. I was no longer the easy going mate that I had been. And that the crew was getting to dislike me did not bother me at all. Anything was preferable to being bossed by the woman.

We had gone to sea on a Monday morning. On the following Sunday evening I was by the apprentices' quarters when the steward came forward and looked in on them.

"One o' you boys is wanted at the cabin door," said he.

"The same old jig!" exclaimed one of the apprentices. "Who's going aft for Ma Torrey's bounty?"

One of the younger boys went to the cabin door and returned in a few moments with a plate on which were eight small slices of cake.

"Hell, there isn't enough for a toothful," sneered one of the boys.

I had had my supper in the saloon a little while ago. There had been some very good cake, and I had said to the skipper's wife—

"That's a fine cake, Mrs. Torrey."

"You don't get cake like that in many ships," Mrs, Torrey replied, and I knew at once that she had made it herself.

I thought it rather decent of her to put it on the table, for it was made from material taken from her own private stores and had nothing to do with the stores furnished by the owner. She might well enough have kept it for herself and the skipper, and I should not have considered her close fisted. A sailing master gets small enough pay, heaven knows, and one does not expect him to furnish delicacies for the mate out of his own pocket. As for giving some to the apprentices, there was no reason at all why Mrs. Torrey should have done so. They lived on the coarse and none too plentiful fare supplied by the owners, but that was in no way any concern of hers or of the skipper's.

I felt like telling those young cubs

that they ought to be grateful instead of grousing. But it was none of my business and I held my peace.

AS THE voyage progressed I sometimes found myself detesting the woman because of the way in which she pried into everything on deck, and at other times I found myself half liking her. But I could not bring myself really to like her. There was such a lack of femininity, such a total absence of womanliness about her. She was so cold, so frigid. Every Sunday evening when she sent for one of the apprentices and gave him a plate of her self-cooked delicacies she did it in such a strange stiff way that I very soon came to understand their dislike for her. It was not so much because of the small amount that she gave, but because of the stiff, unbending way in which she gave it. She never spoke; just handed the boy the plate; just looked at him from those stony eyes, as though she could not speak; as though she were tongue tied. I wondered why she bothered to give them anything, for except on Sunday evenings she ignored them.

When we had been a month at sea we began to paint ship. Then was when I had my full dose of Mrs. Torrey. I had no sooner set the hands to work on the bulwarks than she appeared on the poop, where the skipper was walking up and down. She took one look at the panels, where the crew was painting.

"Benj," she called, "there's not enough Prussian blue in that white paint. It'll be turning yellow before it's been on any time at all."

The skipper didn't argue. He called me and told me to have all the men's paint pots taken forward and the color remixed.

When the bulwarks were done and I started the crew on the deckhouses, nothing would do but that samples of the color must be brought up to the poop for Mrs. Torrey to see. I fooled round for most of the forenoon before I had just the shade that suited her. Men and apprentices all saw how mad I was and were grinning behind my back. That night, when the skipper and his wife were gone below, I damned her roundly to the second mate.

After the painting was all done things went along smoothly enough for a time. Then there came a morning when the skipper did not appear on deck or at the breakfast table. I was wondering what was keeping him when Mrs. Torrey called the steward and ordered him to take the skipper's breakfast to him in their cabin. The skipper was sick.

It was my watch on deck that forenoon, and the second mate's watch below. When he came from his breakfast and started toward his room I called him.

"You can't turn in yet," said I. "The Old Man's laid up. You'll have to stay round till nine o'clock and take the chronometer time for me when I take the longitude sights." So he lighted his pipe and waited round the quarterdeck till I should be ready for him.

At a few minutes to nine, just when I was going to call the second mate, the woman came from the chartroom with the skipper's sextant in her hand.

"Mr. Mate," she called. "Stand by to take the chronometer time for me."

There was nothing for it, of course, but for me to do as she ordered. While she took the sun's altitude, I marked down the chronometer time each time that she called stop. When she had taken the customary three sights she said:

"All right. Now I'll take the time for you, Mister."

Grinning like a Cheshire cat, the second mate went to his room while I took the sights with the woman's assistance.

After Mrs. Torrey had taken the sun's meridian altitude at noon, and had worked up her sights, the position in which she placed the ship corresponded exactly with the position in which I placed her. As far as navigation was concerned it was pretty evident that the ship could get along quite all right without the skipper.

"The confounded old sea wife!" thought I. "Why doesn't she wear a pair of

trousers and make a job of it?"

For four days Mrs. Torrey's navigation agreed with mine. But on the fifth day she placed the ship some thirty minutes farther to the eastward than I placed her. Provided that she is not too close to any land, a matter of thirty minutes one way or the other does not necessarily matter a great deal in a sailing ship. But we were not very far from Cape San Roque, and if my position was correct the ship was too close in.

"I'm afraid you've got an error somewhere, Mrs. Torrey," said I. "I'm going to have to alter her course to the eastward."

The woman gave me a sharp stony look and stepped to the speaking tube that led from the taffrail down to the skipper's cabin.

"Benj," she said, "the mate puts her thirty minutes farther west than I do. What y' going to do about it?"

I just caught the Old Man's reply.

"Tell the mate to come to the tube."

"Mister Mate," said the skipper, "I guess the ship's all right. Hold her to her course."

There I was, a certificated mate, being overridden by a woman who had no certificate at all! It did not worry me, however. If the Old Man chose to risk piling his ship up, it was none of my business. If she did pile up there would be a court of inquiry later, and I should be exonerated.

On the following day the Old Man was all right again, and he and I did the navigating as usual. And I'm blessed if I didn't find that the woman's position of the previous day had been correct, and mine wrong! I was mortified clear to my toes. The eldest apprentice had been at the wheel at noon of the day before, had caught on to what was happening, and had spread it all over the ship, of course. Not only the second mate laughed at me, but all hands were tittering behind my back.

Things went along for a couple of weeks or so. I was on the jump all the time, with my eyes wide open to see that I left nothing that the woman could pick holes in, men and apprentices grousing because I had become more fussy than ever; the second mate alternately grinning at, and commiserating me; and always that uncommunicative pair to face at every meal.

So far we had had nothing but fine weather. I was beginning to wonder what the woman would be like when we met with dirt. I began to wish for a good stiff blow and a heavy sea.

"The old devil'll shed some of her mannishness then," I thought, picturing her in the acute discomfort of a ship in heavy seas.

It was night when at last the wind freshened and a sea began to make. The woman never came on deck at night. Early next morning a big sea came over the rail while the steward was on his way to the galley. It knocked him down and washed him round. He couldn't get up. One of his ankles was very badly hurt. I had to have two of the men help him to his room.

From that day on Mrs. Torrey set and cleared the saloon table, and did the dishwashing. It kept her off the deck, and I was glad of it. But I came to dislike her more than ever. The ship was pitching wildly to a high sharp swell, and rolling very heavily with the wind from dead aft. A man could not have been more stoical in the utter discomfort. Had she ever complained, or even lost her footing, I'd have liked her better.

It was on a Friday night that the blow began. Saturday was the day on which Mrs. Torrey always did her baking for Sunday.

"Well, the apprentices'll get no bounty this Sunday," I thought.

I was never more mistaken. How she ever contrived to bake on the little stove in the steward's pantry was beyond me. But she made a fine gingerbread cake, and the apprentices had their share as usual.

"If she's a woman, I'm seven different sorts of Dutchmen," I told the second mate.

ON MONDAY the steward was able to go back to work. It was cold as misery on deck, with rain falling in sheets, and sea and sky desolate. I was alone on the poop when the chartroom door opened and Mrs. Torrey came out. She had on a pair of gumboots, a sou'wester and a long oilskin coat. Untroubled by the wild motion of the ship, she walked to the taffrail and stood there, studying everything aloft and alow.

Bowles, the youngest apprentice, came up to take the wheel. He was a slip of a lad of sixteen, and a general favorite with all hands.

All hands had been called on deck during the night and there had been no sleep for any one since. It was easy to see how weary Bowles was. As he passed by me, shivering, I wondered what his mother would say if she could see him now. His mother had been down to the dock to see the ship off on the evening that she pulled out to the river. But I didn't say anything. When a youngster goes to sea he must take his medicine. There is no place for softness among men at sea.

Bowles had been at the wheel for a minute or two when Mrs. Torrey came to me.

"Can that boy handle the ship in this weather?" she asked.

"He's all right," I answered.

I thought that she would start an argument that would end in having some one else sent to the wheel. But she merely said—

"If he can, he must, of course."

And then I understood that it was not Bowles of whom she had been thinking at all. It had only been of the ship. At that moment I detested her more than ever before.

The wind moderated a few days later. The sun came out. The long skylight above the saloons was opened once more.

I had often glanced down into the after saloon, which was the private domain of the skipper and his wife. The bulkheads were hung with paintings. There were pictures of flowers, and of trees, and one of a pool in which cows stood knee deep. Now as I glanced down I saw Mrs. Torrey seated at an easel, on which was a half finished picture. Brush in hand, engrossed with her painting, she looked more womanly that I had ever seen her.

It was one of the serene cloudless days so common to the South Atlantic. There was just wind enough to give the ship steering way, no more. Not a white cap was to be seen from horizon to horizon.

In the middle of the forenoon I noticed a buntline hanging tight on one of the sails.

"Bowles, get aloft and overhaul that buntline," I ordered.

The crew was on hands and knees, holystoning the main deck; and, glad to escape from that monotonous work for a little while, Bowles jumped up and climbed into the rigging.

I was halfway up the ladder, on my way to the poop, a moment later when a scream rang from aloft. Almost simultaneously there was a loud splash in the water alongside, and from the deck a shout—

"Man overboard!"

Men and boys were instantly on their feet, racing for boat falls and braces.

With the second mate in her stern sheets and four men at her oars, the boat pulled hither and thither for half an hour or so in a useless quest. Bowles never came to the surface.

When the ship was on her course and the men were back at their work again I went to the poop whence the skipper gazed gloomily over the empty sea.

"Who was it?" he asked.

I told him. He went below, but was back in a moment to sit in the chartroom with his face buried in his hands.

Alone on the poop, I glanced down into the after saloon again. The woman had not moved. She was sitting with her hands in her lap, staring at the picture before her.

"My God!" thought I, for well I knew that she must have heard that chilling cry of terror from aloft and the instant commotion that followed.

On Sunday evening five days later I was standing close to the door of the apprentices' quarters when an apprentice who had been relieved at the wheel came forward and went into the halfdeck.

"What do you suppose?" I heard him ask his fellows. "Ma Torrey just asked me who it was that was lost overboard five days ago."

The woman had not even cared enough to ask who it was that had been lost!

I was still there when the steward came forward to tell an apprentice to go aft to the cabin door.

"Tell her we don't want any more of her damned bounty," said one of the boys, but the steward had already turned away and did not hear.

In a few moments the skipper's whistle sounded from the poop. Then, seeing me, he called—

"Tell one of those boys to come aft."

"What's the matter with you fellows?" asked the skipper when an apprentice came to the quarterdeck. "D'ye want Mrs. Torrey to wait for you all night?"

I saw the boy take the plate from the woman's hand. I heard him mumble an embarrassed, unwilling thank you. I saw the old stony look on her face, colder than ever it seemed. I saw her turn wordlessly back to the cabin. And when in a few minutes I saw the eldest apprentice come from the halfdeck and toss the contents of the plate over the side I did not blame him at all.

That night we picked up a strong fair wind, and for the next few days we ran south at a great clip. Then the wind left us, during the dog watch, and by midnight we were becalmed. There was not a breath of air. The sea was level as glass. No moon. No stars. When morning came sea and sky were dark and sullen. The calm lasted all day. Night set in, eery and black. The sort of weather that makes a shipmaster keep a close eye on his barometer. But the barometer was steady and, despite the murkiness of the night, there seemed no reason to take any sail off the ship. In silence and in darkness she lay under full sail; her canvas hanging flat from idle spars. No swell at all on the sea. No block chattering. No rope creaking. The sort of night on which one hears every footfall, every voice, from one end of a ship to the other.

At four bells, ten o'clock, of the first watch, the skipper went below.

"Watch the barometer closely and call me at once at the least sign of any change," he told me.

Another hour passed, with me going regularly in and out of the chartroom to look at the barometer. Six bells, eleven o'clock, had just struck when I went in once again. The barometer needle had not moved; but, now, as I stood looking at it, it gave a sudden downward jerk and jerked instantly up to a point slightly higher than its former position.

Running from the chartroom, I shouted—

"Handy, the watch!"

I was not yet at the speaking tube when a blinding flash of lightning illumined ship and ocean with a lurid flare. Heavy raindrops pattered. At the moment that I bent above the tube a crash of thunder from directly above the mastheads drowned my voice. While it yet reverberated, the skipper was up; and I was leaping down the poop ladder shouting—

"All hands on deck!"

Before I could reach the halyards to lower the first sail away the wind was on her with a blasting roar. I heard the second mate's exclamation as he dashed by me. By a second flash I saw the running crew. But they did not run far. Before the Second or I had thrown a rope from its pin the full force of the wind came and the ship was down, with her lee rail deep in the sea and water washing to her lee hatch coamings. No man could stand without holding fast to something. In the dazzle of the now incessant lightning I caught glimpses of fallen men struggling in the lee water, and heard cries of fear. Just audible in the crashing reverberations of the thunder, I caught the skipper's order to let go the topsail halyards.

Within the space of a minute, the

royal, topgallant and topsail halyards were let go. But not one of the yards lowered. Held by the fury of the storm, every sail remained at its masthead; with the ship still held hove down and trembling, helpless to rise.

A high sail ripped, then another, another, another. Then, with royals, topgallantsails, and all her upper staysails beribboned, I looked for the ship to come up. But still she remained upon her beam ends.

I saw the skipper gesticulating. His words were lost. Thunder reverberated. Wind roared. Blocks battered on masts. The sea was making fast. Already, sprays blew over her in sheets. While rising swells surged under her, she lifted sluggishly, with a sickening slow motion.

AS I made my way toward the poop I caught the skipper's desperate order—

"Cut away!"

To cut away the masts was now our only hope.

With ax and maul, the second mate, the carpenter and I made for the weather rigging.

As ax and maul came down upon them the screw boxes cracked like shells. A moment more and masts, yards, sails, ropes, backstays, shrouds, lay in a crazy tangle in the lathering sea to leeward.

"My God, the cargo's shifted!" yelled the second mate in my ear; for with all her tophamper gone she still lay down and showed no slightest sign of righting.

The lightning ceased, abruptly as it had come. The thunder died. The wind's roar, and the roar of the ever rising sea, remained; and the loud groaning and complaint of the wreckage beside her.

Once more I went forward to carry out the skipper's order. With men and apprentices all ordered to the poop, the Second, the carpenter and I fought our way to the lamp locker. While every instant expecting the ship to turn over beneath us, we filled two canvas bags with seal oil and, having pricked the strong canvas full of sail needle holes, hung them from bow and from stern.

"It's no damned use. Oil bags can't save her!" the second mate shouted to me.

And I knew that he was right. Yet oil bags might help her to last till the dawn. That was our one hope now, for to get the boats away in that blackness, in that wreckage strewn sea, was impossible.

The night dragged by. Again and again invisible seas lifted their heads, and raged ravaging across her canted decks. With every blow they gave her I looked for the end. With each slow dip that she took I looked for her to rise no more. Once, long ere the dawn was due, a sailor cried:

"The boats! Why don't we get to the boats?"

It looked then as though the crew might get out of hand. But next minute a light showed in the chartroom. The woman was come up. She was lighting the chartroom lamp. All hands could see her. She moved slowly, with deliberation; holding the globe steady in one hand while applying the match with the other. Having set the globe in place, she sat down. There was no sign of fear in her, only that old familiar stony look.

As though silenced by the woman's presence, the crew fell quiet.

Toward dawn the wind lulled a little and I heard some one, a young apprentice perhaps, or perhaps an old sailor, sobbing. You can never tell who will do what at those times.

The woman stepped to the chartroom door and looked out. The skipper stood beside the door.

"Do you think we can save her, Benj?" asked Mrs. Torrey.

And then I heard that sobbing sound again, and how I hated her! It was only the ship that she was thinking of; not at all of those young apprentice lads, or of those frightened seamen.

The skipper made no answer. The woman returned to her seat. Time dragged on. Dawn came at last, and showed a black, windswept, empty ocean under a black, windswept sky.

Just as I returned from seeing the boats provisioned the woman came out. She stood close to me.

"It's too bad to lose a fine ship like this." she said to me in a lull.

"Damn the ship!" I muttered.

Dawn was full when the skipper gave the long awaited order to get the boats away.

"Look alive, Mister. She'll be gone any minute now," said he. That the ship had not long since gone to the bottom was no less than a miracle.

The two quarterboats were fine strong craft. There was a third on the top of the forward house, but it was older and less seaworthy. Yet, since to get away the boat upon the ship's high side was impossible, it must be used.

"Mister Mate," said the skipper, "you'll take the after boat with the cook, steward, carpenter and apprentices. I'll take the second mate and the men in the other."

The woman stepped up.

"I guess I'll go in the after boat, Benj," said she.

And the skipper nodded. Could it actually be that rather than stand by her man, rather than take a chance with him in the old forward boat, she was thinking of her own safety only and coming with me?

For a moment the skipper and his wife held each other's hands. I turned away.

In a few minutes both boats were clear, each with one of the oil bags in her. And then in a few minutes more my boat was alone, for to keep together in that driving rain, among those foam crested rollers from which spray blew in continual clouds, was impossible.

Seated beside me in the stern sheets, the woman gave no apparent sign of fear and watched interestedly while the carpenter rigged and set out a sea anchor and hung the oil bag over the stern.

When sea anchor and oil bag were out, I served food.

We were very far from land, almost a thousand miles. For seven apprentices and three grown men, and the woman and myself I had a beaker of water, a large box of hardtack, and a case of canned milk. Forty-eight cans of milk. Four cans apiece. I judged that a can should last one person for two full days. Eight days ought to bring us to Cape Town, for we were in the region of the westerlies and could count on them to favor us; provided that we could live through the present gale, which I was confident we could.

That day passed with the boat's head held to the wind by the sea anchor, and the crests about her kept comparatively smooth by the seeping oil. There was no talk, or attempt at talk. Carpenter, cook and steward sat in the bows; the boys amidship; the woman and I in the stern sheets. The stores, in charge of the carpenter, were stowed forward in the bow locker, where also were a supply of blue flares, a lantern, a five-gallon can of coal oil half full, and the other customary supplies for an open boat at sea.

Shortly after nightfall the wind eased, and I ordered the sea anchor and oil bag taken in; and the sail set with two reefs in it. We went through the water at a good speed then, and my hopes were strong.

Having divided the boat's crew into two watches, I put one in charge of the carpenter and ordered him and his watch to lie down and get some sleep. They lay in the boat's bottom, which, with spray no longer coming aboard, was reasonably dry.

"Mrs. Torrey," said I, "you'd better lie down and try to sleep." But she shook her head. I could see her face by the light of the lantern at the masthead. It was as it had ever been, stony, indifferent.

"No more heart in her than in a piece of rock," thought I, and wondered how the skipper was faring in that old boat of his.

With my eyes on the compass, with the woman beside me, I steered into the eastward darkness while my watch kept a sharp lookout, hoping to see some ship's lights. Toward midnight I again urged the woman to lie down and try to sleep. But she still declined.

"Well, there's one thing about her anyway," thought I. "She doesn't do any butting in here."

At two in the morning Chips and his watch relieved us, and my watch and I lay down. Mrs. Torrey lay down then also.

I had slept but a little when Chips awoke me, cursing horribly.

The can containing our lamp oil supply had been capsized by the boat's motion. The greater part of our hardtack was ruined; a soggy, oil soaked mass.

The woman's voice came to me.

"A bad start makes a good finish," said she. And then I remembered the skipper's words when we were running through the Downs. "A good start don't always mean a good finish."

Inwardly cursing, I blamed Mrs. Torrey for all that had befallen.

On the following day I cut the allowance of hardtack. Allowing a biscuit and a half to each, per day, there would be barely enough to last us seven days. Seven days should fetch us to Cape Town.

That second day passed with the boat sailing at a good clip, and no cause for any immediate worry. At nightfall Chips took the tiller while I and my watch lay down to sleep. The woman also lay down and was soon asleep. Evidently she had decided to consider herself as being in my watch.

Rain falling in my face wakened me. There was no breath of wind. Not an air. The sail hung flat, slatting to the boat's roll.

Foreboding came to me. Did the calm last, we might be in serious plight.

Morning came and there was still no wind, nor any sign of wind. The swell died down as day progressed. By midday the boat was motionless upon a dark and motionless ocean.

The day and the night passed. Another morning came. Not a breath of air. Not a ripple. No catspaw on the cold gray water.

On that third morning I cut the food allowance again, not hardtack only but milk too, now. It must be one biscuit a day for each, and half the former quantity of milk.

ON THAT third morning Mrs. Torrey refused her share of milk. Her face, never anything but colorless, looked paler than usual. Her eyes were harder, stonier than ever.

"You must take your share, Mrs. Torrey," I told her. She refused blankly.

I knew then that fear was turning the sea wife's mind; the fear that, save when we had left the ship, she had hitherto hidden so well.

The fourth day passed just as had the day before it. For two days the woman had eaten only a biscuit a day. I gave her share of the milk to the youngest apprentice, who was beginning to show signs of weakening.

While I was on watch during the fourth night the wind came. But it came from the eastward, a strong breeze dead in our teeth. Stars gleamed between hurrying cloud expanses. That unfavoring night was bright and clear.

On the fifth morning I cut the allow- of milk still lower for all save the youngest apprentice. And on that day the woman left her place in the stern and sat among the apprentices.

During the fifth night, while I slept, the cook broke unobserved into the milk supply, and was not discovered by Chips till he had devoured the contents of two full cans. I lashed his wrists together and secured him to a thwart. The head wind blew all that night, and all next day.

On the sixth morning Mrs. Torrey refused her full share of hardtack, and took only a mouthful. She was gaunt now. But the hard look was gone from her face and a strange quiet look was come to it.

"Mad as a hatter," thought I.

The seventh dawn was hopeless as the sixth. We had made only some hundred and fifty miles. And on that seventh morning one of the apprentices broke down and began moaning. His moans wakened the woman, who had slept late.

She rose and sat by him. She put an arm about him, and drew his young head down on her breast.

"The woman's coming out in her at last," thought I, and wondered if it would save what was left of her reason, or bring back what of her reason she had lost.

On that seventh night I bade all hands lie down, and took the tiller to keep watch alone. The woman lay at my feet. Lashed by the mast, the cook wailed continually. I gagged him. There was no other way that I could stop his noise. Late in the night I heard the woman's voice.

"Delirious," thought I. "My God, if she gets to raving too!"

I bent over her and, hoping to steady her, set a hand on her arm. Her lips moved. She spoke again, but louder now; so that I heard her plainly, while she talked in her sleep.

"Benj," said Mrs. Torrey. "Benj, please shut the door and go away. Don't tell me. If it's one of our boys lost overboard I just can't bear it."

Then at last, all in a flash, I understood the sea wife! I knew now why she had not left her easel when Bowles was lost, knew why she had not dared to ask for those five days! The whole thing became, in that amazing instant, an open book to me. I knew now why she had chosen to come in the boat with the boys, and why she had refused her share of food. Of a sudden I was looking backward through the long years of her sailing with Benj. Years of heat, of cold, of storm, of peril, and of hardship; self-chosen years in which she had denied herself all those soft comforts that a woman loves, that she might be with her man. Years of patient saving from the pittance of a sailing captain's pay; years of looking forward to retirement from the sea at long last, to a home on the snug safe shore. Years of soul wearying monotony, the monotony only a little broken by the painting of pictures to hang in the shore home to be; by interesting herself in the ship, and learning all the secrets of a sailor's calling. Years of seeing crews come and crews go; of seeing young hungry apprentice boys and being unable to help them. Years of knowing that she must not, that she could not, unbend.

Years through which, as Sunday after Sunday came, she had given the despised and hard spared bounty from her own poor private store, not daring to speak lest she speak too much, not daring to show in her eyes what lay in her heart. Years of iron discipline on shipboard, where each must do his part and no softness may be.

Morning came, and I gazed down at Mrs. Torrey's white face.

"I'll make her eat today," I thought. But when I tried to do so, when I set food to her lips ere any other in the boat was yet wakened, she pushed my hand away.

"No. My boys come first," said the sea wife, and tottered to a thwart among the sleeping apprentices.

That day the youngest apprentice wandered. All day she held him tight, and stroked his hair and smiled into his starved young face. Starving herself, she held a can to his lips and trickled the milk between them.

On the eighth night, when the cook, too weak now to need gagging, lay whimpering in the boat's bottom, while Mrs. Torrey yet held the youngest apprentice clasped in her arms, I saw a light and burned a blue flare. A blue flare answered me.

Before midnight we lay alongside a ship bound in to the Cape. A light in her rigging illumined our boat. Two of her people jumped down to help us aboard. They took the woman's arms first, but she pushed their hands away. Not till the last of the boys, not till cook and steward and carpenter were gone, would she let them lift her to their deck. I followed, and saw the skipper and mate lead her off, half carrying her, to a cabin.

Having taken Mrs. Torrey to a cabin, the skipper came to me.

"Yes, sir," I told him. "There was another boat. The skipper's boat got clear with the second mate and the hands."

When I came to the deck next morning none of my people was awake. Seeing me, some sailors nearby started to cheer. But I silenced them instantly.

"It was the woman brought us through alive," I told them. "If she hadn't been there I'm afraid we'd all of us have gone under."

Day passed with the ship tacking hither and thither, seeking the skipper's boat. Another night came and passed, with blue flares burning often and with double lookouts set.

Next morning Mrs. Torrey appeared for a few moments. She was but just gone below again when a cry rang from the lookout at the foreroyalmasthead. Telescope in hand, I hurried to the masthead, accompanied by the mate.

"Bottom up, sir," I said, when I had seen the faraway boat. And then I came down to where the skipper waited me by the fore rigging.

"My God!" said the skipper, when I had told him. "My God, who's going to break it to her?"

The boat was about a quarter of a mile away, in full clear view, when Mrs. Torrey came on deck again. She saw it at once. She stood gazing at it for a few moments, then turned and walked slowly below. No word, no gesture from her.

For the rest of that day barely a word was spoken from one end of the ship to the other. Eating dinner at the saloon table, the skipper, mate and I ate in silence.

Mrs. Torrey stayed alone in her cabin. The steward took dinner to her there and when he went for her tray came back with it just as he had taken it; nothing on it touched. But at supper she came to the table and ate with us. No one spoke. Once her eyes met mine, but she looked beyond me, right through me, without seeing me at all. The old stony look was back again. She was the same Mrs. Torrey with whom I had come through the Downs. And before the meal was done she rose and returned to her cabin.

With nightfall the sky grew beclouded. The wind began to moan. They took sail off the ship. Night settled in, dark as pitch.

Leaning over the ship's side, the skipper looked down to the port of Mrs. Torrey's cabin.

"Her light's out," he said. "Pray God she's sleeping."

But at about ten o'clock, while the skipper and I were on the poop together, she came on deck, She walked to the taffrail and stood there, gazing into the dark night. Presently the skipper went to her.

"Won't you try to get some sleep, Mrs. Torrey?" he asked.

Mrs. Torrey turned and looked into the skipper's face.

"Thank you," she said. "I'll sleep later."

The mate came back from taking sail off the ship. The skipper went below. Out of sight of Mrs. Torrey, the mate and I stood side by side. We didn't talk. By and by the mate moved to where he could get a view of the other side of the poop.

"She's gone below at last," he said, rejoining me.

At midnight the second mate took charge of the deck and the mate and I went below.

When the skipper and mate and I came to the breakfast table next morning the steward asked—

"Shall I take breakfast to her cabin, sir?"

"No. Let her sleep," said the skipper. "Sleep's the best thing for her now."

The forenoon passed. Just ere midday we saw the land ahead.

When we came to the saloon for dinner the skipper rapped gently on Mrs. Torrey's door. No answer came. He rapped again, and still no answer came. He beckoned me.

"You go in," whispered the skipper. "You take her some dinner."

The skipper opened the door. I stepped in.

Mrs. Torrey's cabin was empty. The sea wife had gone to her man.

OVER THE RIVER

By HAROLD LAMB

A Story of the Cossacks

KOUM sat on the oven. He wore only a shirt, and his powerful bare legs hung down the side of the oven, which felt pleasantly cool. The big Cossack was sewing up a tear in his breeches, pushing a bodkin methodically through the soft leather and stopping work at times to sing in a voice that reverberated in the walls of his small hut.

It was a hot afternoon, and both the Cossack and the hawk on its perch beside him were drowsy. There was nothing to do until the evening meal.

The hut was comfortable enough, with its thatch roof keeping out the heat. A gallon jug buried in the sand of one corner held plenty of cool river water. Dried fish hung from a roofbeam, with strings of onions and some pungent herbs. A fine saddle covered with red morocco leather stood on its peg, and to the wall beside it were nailed skins of the white and black steppe fox, with sables and wolves. Boots, firewood and a sack of barley occupied the other corner.

Over the head of his cot Koum had

placed a picture of the wonder working Saint Nicholas, framed in gilt and imitation silver. On a long shelf beneath it, with some tallow and a tin of powder and bullet mold, lay the Cossack's most prized possession—a bagpipe.

This bagpipe had belonged to a fellow Cossack of the war encampment, whose bones had dried in the grass long since. Koum remembered vaguely that this brother had been an outlander from some island in the Western Ocean. All kinds of men had joined the brotherhood of the Cossacks in these first years of the 19th Century—after the wars that had raged like grass fires over Europe. Tartars, Gypsies, even noblemen, had become Cossacks.

The bagpipe, with its sack of soft black leather and its polished pipes ornamented with carved beasts' heads, had whiled away long hours for Koum. He had a musical ear, and he drew strange melodies out of the droning wail of the pipes.

Koum lived alone in this hut. He hunted over the steppe, with its herds of wild horses, its black nosed buffalo and small antelope. He found lesser game, wild pig and waterfowl along the deserted river, and his nearest neighbors were the Turkoman clans across the river. Koum was careful to keep his distance from these neighbors.

"*Crei-il*" shrilled the falcon, moving along its stick.

"Not time to eat, little warrior," muttered the Cossack. "Don't you see the sun?"

Ruffling its feathers, the bird gazed at the white sand, its eyes half open. Koum yawned and scratched his shaven head, from the center of which a long scalplock hung. Then he reached out his arm for his sack of tobacco. Abruptly his hand stopped, outstretched in the air.

Down the gully he heard his horse neigh. Koum knew the habits of his animals as well as his own, and his *kabarda* was no spoiled stable horse, to make a fuss in the shade in midafternoon.

Thrusting his legs into his breeches, Koum wound a shawl scarf round his hips and caught up his musket from the wall. Without delaying for boots or kalpak, he ran out of the door.

"*Crei-i-il*" screamed the hawk, clawing at its cord.

Koum had built his hut in one of the *balkas*, or wooded ravines, that led to the river. In this gully below the level of the steppe he had wood and some grazing for his animals, and his hut could not be seen from the plain.

Leaping up steps cut in the clay bank, Koum came to a nest of boulders under the branches of a tall poplar—his lookout post. His eyes went swiftly over the miles of rolling crests covered with high brown grass, and he muttered in astonishment.

A hundred paces away a woman was riding on a spent horse. And Koum had never seen a woman like this in the steppes before. Her long skirt trailed down over her boots and she seemed to have one leg curled around the saddlehorn. A ruffled cape covered her shoulders, and the hood had been drawn up over her hair. Moodily she swung her whip against the flank of her sweat stained mare.

Behind her followed a man without a hat. He wore a blue coat short in front and long behind and much bedraggled, and his head hung on his chest. Far behind the two a bearded postilion limped, leading a shaggy pony overburdened with bundles.

Once in Sarai on the Volga, Koum had seen noble people like these two, with white skin, riding around in carriages. They were Muscovites—Russians—and he could not think what they were doing here, beyond the frontier, in the wastelands. They could not be hunting, because the only weapons they had were two great pistols carried in holsters on the man's saddle. Still the Cossack could not let them stagger along like this without water.

He walked out from his shelter, and the woman screamed.

Koum stopped, embarrassed. He did not know how to address such people.

"Hi, noble born," he called out, "where are you going?"

The man, who at first had drawn out a pistol, seemed relieved. Urging his tired horse up to the Cossack, he began to talk all at once in the Muscovite speech. Koum could make out only that God had sent a calamity upon them, and they were lost. But Koum looked at the woman. She was shorter than the Cossack girls, and white as clean linen, with two spots of red on her cheeks. She had fine eyes, and even in her weariness she showed her beauty.

"Well, don't fear, noble born," he said cheerfully. "Here is shelter, and how can you be lost?"

He led the way down a path into his *balka*. It surprised him that the gentleman should dismount stiffly, holding to the saddle, and go over to untangle the lady's skirt from the saddle, and lift her to the ground. She went into the hut and sat down on the bed, without greeting Saint Nicholas.

Koum offered them cool water from his jar, but the gentleman shouted, and presently the servant came in with two silver cups gritty with dust. They drank a little water, when the servant who had been lugging the packs from the pony hastened up with a bottle of brandy.

"My house is your house," said Koum, bowing. This was the customary greeting of the Cossacks to a guest.

Filling the two cups with brandy, the Muscovite handed one to his lady, and she sipped at it, while he gulped his. To Koum's surprise they did not offer any to him—although they must have seen that he had no brandy. The man seemed to feel better, because he stared round the hut and began to talk loudly to Koum.

All the Cossack could understand was that the visitor was a count—Dolbruka—and an official accompanied by madame his wife on his way to Uralskaia, a frontier post.

"Uralskaia—how far? Tomorrow?" he shouted, angry because Koum could not make out what he wanted.

"Don't be a fool," remarked his wife. And she spoke quietly to Koum, choosing words that he knew.

They had been traveling with Russian soldiers down the Ural in flatboats, when she had asked the count to ride for a day along the shore, to exercise the horses. They had wandered from the river, and in trying to get back, their servant had led them more astray. For two days they had made their way over the steppe, with only these few packs they had brought along. Finally they had come to this little river and had found a place to ford it.

"May the dev—" exclaimed Koum. "Did you go over the river?"

"Yes," said the countess, flicking at her skirt. "The country was bad—worse than before. Then the Cossack rode after us."

"A Cossack?" muttered Koum, who had seen no familiar face for a month.

"Like you, but finer, quite an intelligent man. He spoke French, and told us we must turn back quickly, at once. He said it was dangerous, because the—pagan Moslems were watching us and perhaps they would rob us. So we went back at a gallop. And when we reached the river again we saw the pagans following after us. They were dirty and they fired off their muskets. Then the Cossack laughed and said we must ride on, very quickly, until the sun set. He said to go straight toward the setting sun and not to turn back, and he would stay at the ford to play a game with the insolent pagans who wanted to rob us. So he stayed behind to shoot at them, at the ford. We heard the guns going off for some time. It was terrible, and we had no water, and only Christ's mercy saved us from being followed again by the pagans. Do you understand, Cossack?"

HE UNDERSTOOD very clearly what had happened. He could see the three ignorant Russians scrambling over the salt steppe, the Turkomans' country. Until the watchers of the herds noticed them, and a group of the wild tribesmen rode after them. He could see the strange Cossack holding the narrow ford with his musket, until they were safely off.

He wondered what had happened at the ford after that. But he knew that the Russians had been saved not only from being stripped to the skin but from torture for the man and slavery for the woman.

"Tell me, noble born," he muttered. "Where is it, this ford?"

The Russian shrugged her comely shoulders.

"How can I tell, Cossack? One place is like another. We were lost. But now—" she smiled comfortably—"surely you can show us the way to Uralskaia."

Koum looked about him helplessly. He felt ill at ease, talking to these strangers, who knew so little of the steppe and who paid no attention to good Saint Nicholas in his gilt frame. Even while he pondered them, the woman spoke rapidly to the man in a queer staccato and he answered with a word or two of the same language. Koum had never heard French before—the polite speech of the Russian court.

"Look here, gracious lady," he observed, when she had finished. "Why is it that the count and his man did not stay to drive off the Turkomans? They had two pistols."

"Eh, what?" The gracious lady frowned. "How could I ride unattended in this place?"

Koum did not know. He had never beheld so beautiful a woman. Above her stately head even the bright picture of the saint looked dull.

"This dog must be humored," she said to her husband. "He must guide us back to the villages. Lord, he is as uncouth as a Tartar, but the hut is clean. We can sleep here tonight."

But she spoke in the French that Koum did not understand. The Countess Ileana had never met Cossacks before today, yet her intuition judged Koum's character quickly. And she made the strongest possible appeal to him.

"We are your guests—" she smiled—"and we thank God that we found your house, because tomorrow you will guide us to Christian people where we shall be safe."

Slowly Koum shook his head.

"Impossible," he said.

The Russians stared at him.

"Eh," cried the count, "we will give you silver."

"Listen," said Koum, "silver has nothing to do with it. You don't understand, noble born. I must ride toward the river at once. Wait!"

Pulling on his boots of soft leather, he hastened from the hut down the *balka* to the water's edge. Running a few paces through the rushes, he caught up a line and tugged at it. A flurry at the other end of the line—and he pulled it in, to find a young sturgeon hooked and already weary of fighting. Killing the fish and drawing it carefully from the hook, Koum hurried back to his guests.

"Here is something for food," he explained hastily. "There is barley in that sack, and if you want game, you will find pheasants snared up in the brush beyond the trees—there. Do not stir out of the *balka*—this place. If I do not come back before the first light, mount and ride. Your horses will be rested. Go away from the rising sun, and go quickly. You will not find Uralskaia, but you will come at sunset to a Cossack *stanitza*, a frontier village—"

"But we could not find a village," cried the woman, flushing angrily.

"How can't you? There will be tilled fields, cattle—the herd girls will see you. Anyway, light a fire, and they will come to you—"

"Nay, you must come." The countess hid her annoyance, and her fine eyes became imploring. "I—I will not be safe without you."

Koum's great hands gripped his girdle. It seemed to the Count Dolbruka that a little money offered to the Cossack would make him reasonable. So he felt in his pocket and held out a piece of gold. "For you—more at Uralskaia," he said.

"May the devil fly away with you!" roared Koum. "Cross yourself and spit twice, and pray to Saint Nicholas to save your hide!"

Shaking his head, Koum strode out.

Running down the *balka* he disappeared, and came back presently astride his white horse. Dismounting, he caught up the saddle, flung it on the horse, thrust on the headstall, and picked up his black coat and lambskin kalpak. He had brought back with him a dead pheasant, taken from a snare. This he tied on the perch of the screaming falcon, and filled the bird's water cup.

Into his saddlebag he put a full water bottle and some black bread and garlic. He slipped the strap of his musket over his shoulder, picked up the powder horn and doffed his headgear a second before the holy picture, muttering a prayer.

"Ask *him* to show you the way," he grunted to the Russians.

As he was turning away, his eye fell on the bagpipe. He remembered that in spite of all the good Nicholas might do, his hut might be burned to the ground within a few hours, and he picked up the bagpipe, tying it with the bag behind his saddle. Then he leaped into the saddle, snapped his whip and was off up the *balka*.

"*Bras de Dieu!*" cried the count. "What an animal! Well, he has left us."

The woman listened to the thudding of hoofs that dwindled into the distance. Silence returned to the ravine and this silence held for her a dread of things unknown and unseen.

"You were a fool to offer him gold," she said.

The man poured himself another glass of brandy. He too was afraid of this endless plain and the dry mist that hung over it.

On its perch, with red eyes, the falcon gripped its meat with a claw and its beak ripped flesh from between the feathers.

But Koum, as he headed his horse along the back track of the travelers, had forgotten about the gold and the angry eyes of the countess. He was only anxious because he had been delayed so long in starting out. It was already late in the afternoon.

How could he explain to the Muscovites that the Turkomans would follow their trail unless held back by something? The count and his man could not fight, even for their lives. But it would be a sin to let such a fine lady fall into the claws of the tribesmen.

He must find the Turkomans, if they had crossed the river, and find out what had happened to the other Cossack.

So he rode on at a fast canter that ate up the ground, with his eyes searching the skyline hidden in gray mist. He soon was conscious that the trail quartered widely, wandering in and out of the gullies.

"A fox," he muttered to himself, "would go straighter than those Muscovites. Well, it's as God wills."

AN HOUR later Koum was nosing about like a dog in a crisscross of trails. The tracks of the Muscovites had brought him to the river again, some six miles from his camp. Here the clay bank shelved down steeply to a broad, shallow stretch, strewn with sandbanks and rocks.

On top of the bank stood a kind of bastion of worn limestone, and here Koum found signs of the other Cossack—scattered bullets and sprinklings of powder grains, and the scratches of iron heels on the soft stone. There were dark stains of blood, surrounded by innumerable drops, and some bits of sheepskins. In a sandy depression where a man had lain, stretched toward the river, he found a Cossack kalpak of clean white lambskin with a red felt crown.

"Eh," Koum said to himself, "that was *his*, and he did not take it away with him."

Behind the limestone ledge he found the hoof marks of a shod horse that had been tied to the branches of a stunted tamarisk, and had plunged and circled about without being able to break away.

"He tied his horse here," Koum thought, "and went up to the stone to shoot at the Turkomans. He stayed there a long time. After that he fought hand to hand, scattering blood."

Along the sandbanks by the water lay

a network of tracks—made by the horses of the Christians and the unshod ponies of the tribesmen. Koum mounted his own horse and circled back over the plain behind the limestone bastion. Here the tracks told a clear story.

The three Muscovites had come up earlier in the day, at a walk. And a solitary horseman had followed them at a gallop—riding the same animal that had been tied to the tamarisk. Then the travelers had ridden off in the direction of Koum's hut; but the strange Cossack had never left the river.

And still there was not a single body upon the scene of the fight, not even a knife or strap on the ground. If the Turkomans had killed the Cossack, they would have stripped him, and perhaps amused themselves by disfiguring the body with their knives. They would not have carried it off with them.

Koum pulled at his mustache gloomily. The worst possible thing had happened. He understood now why the Turkomans had not pursued the Russians. The Cossack had held them so long at the ford—and perhaps had wounded so many of them—that they had not killed him here. They had carried him back, a prisoner. And now they would string him up somewhere and torture him slowly, before going to sleep.

Well, the count and his lady were safe. He thought that all he had to do would be to ride back to the hut, guide the noble born, and have a smile from the lady, a gold piece from the man and a good debouch at Uralskaia.

Instead, he rode down to the ford.

The first thing he saw on the other bank was a twisted dead branch with a fork projecting toward him, like a claw lifted out of the sand. A sign of ill omen. Koum grunted dismally, and spat twice as he passed the branch, being careful to ride well around it. The tracks of the Turkomans also avoided it.

"Eh, was it for them, the sign?" he wondered, "Nay, it must be for the other Cossack."

Still he was uneasy, and he watched attentively for further signs. A raven flew across overhead, and Koum held his breath. But it did not croak. So he could not make up his mind whether the signs were good or bad.

He put his *kabarda* into a long gallop, for the plain was as level as the sea here, with only scattered white salt beds glimmering in the strong sunset glow like mirages, through the beds of dry rushes and dark saksaul. The Turkomans and their captive had disappeared. Koum put the whip to his horse and sped on. He must get near enough to the tribesmen before dark to see their fire.

For two hours he rode due west. Behind him the gorgeous colors of the sunset flung up to the lofty sky, as if great glowing banners had been cast aloft by the hands of the unseen gods. The whole steppe seemed to be no more than the floor of an immense empty chamber whose wall had been painted with fire. The figure of the solitary Cossack was a black speck crawling across space.

Rising in his stirrups to ease the cramp in his knees, Koum talked to his horse.

"Hi, brother, art thou weary? The eagle flies over thee—hasten! Hey, brother, the wind passes by thee, and says to thee, 'Come!' "

Urged on by the Cossack's voice, the Turkoman bred racer changed from canter to gallop and back again, untiring. For a few moments the plain grew brighter, and the eastern heights shone with an orange fire, that changed swiftly to blood color. As if a veil had been drawn behind them, the plain darkened around the horse and the Cossack when the sun went down. And a blue haze spread from the foot of the heights, up toward the summits. Then the light vanished and a tracery of stars gleamed overhead.

But Koum reined in the horse and let him breathe. He had seen what he sought—a dark group of horsemen ascending the bare foothills among larger masses of cattle and sheep.

The Turkomans were riding into their *aul*.

Never before had Koum been within sight of the *aul*—the dwelling place of the clan. It stood upon a low plateau under the foothills, cut up by the dried beds of streams and rock strewn gullies. As the Cossack walked his horse forward he made out, in the starlight, some rude domes topped by long poles from which streamers of rags hung. These were tombs, and around them bunched innumerable sheep and cattle.

Beyond, he could see torches moving between low huts and walls whitened with lime. From time to time a strident voice shouted, or a horseman trotted by. The *aul* was awake and astir.

Koum knew what lay yonder under the mantle of starlight. A deep well, and a pool of filthy water. A tomb of some holy man, guarded by a handful of mollahs and dervishes. Perhaps three score families of Turkomans in their flat clay dwellings and horsehide tents—the men robbers and slayers by choice and heredity, the women of less account than the horses. Sharp eyes and sharper weapons on the watch, suspicious of each other but merciless to strangers. Koum remembered that his own horse had come from this *aul*, having been acquired by a hand-to-hand fight in which he had slain the Turkoman who owned the horse.

By the sounds and by the subdued glow of small fires, he thought that the tribesmen were eating. As yet he had seen no trace of the captive Cossack. But the torture would come after the eating. And from this torment Koum must release the prisoner, if it could be done.

How it might be done Koum did not know. He had one musket and a tired horse, and there were probably a hundred muskets and swords in the *aul*. If he were seen, they would drag him down like wolves. He could not think of any plan.

But he could rest the *kabarda*. It might have to carry double, later. Dismounting, he tied the horse in a dark gully and looked around him cautiously. Near at hand camels were dozing, grunting and bubbling. And the black dome of a tent stood by them. Koum walked over to the tent quietly and listened. After a moment he sniffed and moved closer to the entrance gap.

A strong, sourish smell came from the tent which seemed deserted. The Cossack bent his massive body and went in. He traced the smell to a side where goatskins and leather sacks lay piled. He picked up one of the skins which gurgled cheerfully under his hands.

Pulling out the peg that served as a cork in one leg, he tilted up the skin and tasted the liquid in it. As he had thought, it was *kumiss*—the fermented mare's milk that served the nomads for wine and food. Koum drank deep.

Then he sat down on a sack. He had a little time, and it would be bad luck to leave the skin half empty after tasting it. He drank again and felt refreshed. There was quite a bit of *kumiss* in the skin, and when Koum had finished he sat still. His head hummed, but he could hear some one approaching the tent. His eyes had become accustomed to the darkness, and when the visitor stooped through the entrance, he made out the slender figure, the tight fitting garment and white hair veil of a young girl.

Presently she stopped, with a hiss of indrawn breath, and Koum thought she had heard or smelled something strange. So he sprang up, groped for her, grasped her shoulders and yowled in her ear.

"*Shaitan, khanum—mumtaz khanum!*—Woman, I am a devil—I love you, woman!"

The girl wrenched herself away, darted from the tent and began to scream when she was a little distance off. Koum also left the tent, going the other way, back to his horse. No one would pay any attention to a girl's outcry, but the Cossack chuckled as he reflected that the next day the mollah would probably be called in to write a prayer against a black seven-foot Tartar devil that waylaid women. Then he tried to think of a plan, but could not.

He guided his horse up a little rise near the graves, so he could look into the *aul*.

And when he did so the shaven hairs bristled on his scalp. The torture had begun.

A GREAT fire lighted the center of the *aul*, where there was a little clear space before the tomb. A lance length in front of the white wall of the tomb a heavy stake had been planted in the ground, with a crosspiece fastened to it and upon this cross the captive Cossack had been tied with his arms stretched out. He had been stripped to the girdle and his long white body glinted in the firelight.

Round the fire a dark mass of tribesmen sat on the ground, shaggy heads moving restlessly.

"*Yah huk—yah hak; yah huk—yah hak!*" the wailing of a dervish went on like a tireless drum, and already some of the heads began to sway in time to the chant.

As soon as the mood seized them, the Moslems would start upon the Cossack with their knives, or perhaps heated irons. Once Koum had seen a victim of such torture—a man with empty eye sockets who ran from side to side in the plain with hoarse cries coming out of his open mouth, while his hands tore at his bleeding stomach. The skin of his stomach had been slit open and sewed together again very skilfully and what had been put inside the slit Koum never knew. But the vultures were hopping around the dying man . . .

And Koum felt the chill of fear in his blood. In another moment they might start with the knives, and here he was out of reach. He caught the strap of his musket. A lucky shot would save the other Cossack from his agony.

But the bullet might miss—and Koum did not want to wipe out a Cossack like that. He thought of spurring his horse into the *aul*, trying to reach the man and cut him loose. No chance of that. They would both be roped, dragged down.

A strange thing had happened. An hour ago Koum had not been able to think of a plan. Now a dozen plans buzzed and sang in his head. He would pretend to be a ghost coming out of the graves. He would play a ghost march, to draw the attention of the Turkomans. Then he would steal away—creep round behind the captive Cossack and cut him free. Aye, he would even let the Cossack know that aid was coming. While he mused, Koum took up the bagpipe.

An unearthly cry rent the night, echoed by a wailing moan. It was as if all the devils of the winds had come together, out of the sky. The howling of wolves, the roaring of trumpets and squealing of pigs could not have made such sounds.

In the *aul*, men scrambled to their feet and peered into the darkness. The dervish ceased his howling.

After a minute Koum put down the bagpipe. It was time to change his place. But a new sound caught his ear—a bellowing and rushing of hoofs. The wailing of the pipe had stampeded the cattle sleeping in the nearby fields.

He trotted down from the hillock toward the dark shapes that rushed past. A horseman galloped out of the darkness, shouting, and—seeing the Cossack—swerved toward him. Koum heard the rasp of steel drawn from a sheath, and saw a bearded face snarl in triumph.

Beneath him, the *kabarda* braced itself, and the two horses came together. The Turkoman slashed at his ribs with a curved knife, but the Cossack slipped to the far side of the saddle. The long arm of the tribesman in its wide sleeve swung past harmlessly, and Koum gripped the other around the waist with his right arm.

Swiftly the Cossack's left arm shot behind the Turkman's head, his fingers clamping upon the bearded chin. With his shoulder under the other's knife arm, Koum wrenched with all the strength of his back. He pulled the man's chin half around, cutting off a wild cry.

The Turkoman groaned and tried to strike down with his knife, then kicked at his horse to urge it on. But he was anchored in Koum's arms, which

wrenched at him again and a third time. Bones crackled and suddenly the Turkoman's head became limp in Koum's fingers. His neck was broken, the spine snapped clear.

Panting, Koum looked to right and left, and lowered the big body in its greasy sheepskins to the saddle, catching the rein of the other pony as he did so. Leading the dead man's horse, he urged his own beast at a walk across the fields, until he came to some white boulders and a stunted tree.

Here he tethered the restless horses, and squatted down to stare over the ground on all sides. A few sheep galloped past, and on the knoll he had quitted ten minutes ago, dark figures moved slowly. Searchers were looking for the source of the demonaic music.

Koum chuckled silently, and lifted the dead Turkoman to his back by one arm. He loosed the strap of his musket and laid it against a rock. Guns were no use in the dark—only got in the way. But he kept the bagpipe in his free hand.

Slowly he made his way not toward the mound but to the *aul*. In the starlight he looked like some humped, eight-legged creature dangling horns before him. Circling refuse heaps, he crept along the wall of a hut, and waited until a group of men walked by. Then he went forward hastily in the shadow of an alley.

"Now they will find a sign," he muttered under his breath.

Carefully he lowered the Turkoman to the ground and pulled his legs straight. Then he stretched the dead man's arms to each side, and stopped to listen. A harsh voice called from a roof top.

"*Hai*, Yussouf, has aught been seen?"

Another voice mumbled a response, and Koum heard a step behind him. Without looking up, he fitted the wind tube to his mouth and filled the bag. A dim figure stooped over him, staring down at the dark mass crouching on the ground.

"*Y'allah!*" The newcomer muttered. "O God!"

Koum's bagpipe skirled and wailed, filling the alley with sound. The inquisitive Turkoman leaped high and ran. Koum's pipe shrieked in triumph, and into its madness, Koum wove snatches of a song—a staccato march known to all the Cossacks. Now the prisoner would know that a friend had seen him.

Almost at once Koum ceased playing the pipe and hastened into the protecting shadows of the alley. Behind him silence reigned. But he knew that men would come into the alley cautiously, to behold the devil who made the wailing music, and they would find the dead Turkoman. The path he had taken led into the deeper gloom of trees, and Koum made a half circle before coming out into the starlight. He could no longer see the firelight reflected on the high dome of the tomb, but he saw that he was standing in a small graveyard and judged that he was behind the tomb itself.

In the direction of the alley he heard an outcry and angry shouts. Taking off his kalpak and tucking it through his girdle, he moved forward cautiously to the corner of the tomb.

By shifting his head a little he could look out into the cleared space. The fire had been allowed to die down, and by the glow of the embers he could see that most of the Turkomans had left the place. Those who remained were talking uneasily, their attention upon the tumult in the alley. Boys ran by with newly lighted torches.

Twenty feet away from Koum stood the cross facing the other way. The prisoner had not changed his position—only his head moved slowly from side to side. Koum could not see his face. Between the cross and the fire, within arm's reach of the captive stood a tall tribesman with a sword and knife in his girdle.

Now was Koum's chance to cut the other Cossack free. Not much of a chance, but the only one he would have.

Slowly, he slid around the corner of the stone tomb. He kept erect because he knew that anything crawling along the ground would catch the eyes of the men out there more quickly than a man moving slowly on his legs. He was flat against

the wall, edging toward the shadow cast by the cross.

For a moment he was in full view of the squatting Turkomans, and he would have been seen if any one of the dozen round the fire had looked carefully at the wall. He took another step. Another. He had six feet more to cover, when a boy galloped by the fire, waving a torch. Koum's head buzzed, and he held himself motionless. Still, not a man looked at him.

Stepping into the shadow of the cross, he moved forward a pace—touched the stake and stood against it. He could hear the other Cossack breathing quickly. Did the prisoner know he was there? Koum dared not whisper a word.

He felt along the back of the crosspiece. The wrists of the Cossack had been bound to it with hemp cords. Carefully Koum drew out his knife.

The tall tribesman in front of the cross spoke suddenly. "*Yok, chambla, yok.* It's bad, no good."

No one responded, and the Turkoman yawned, and turned his back, picking at his nose. Koum touched the other Cossack on the ribs with his knife blade. The prisoner stiffened, planting his feet. Then, swiftly, Koum cut the hemp cords, pressing his dagger's edge into the wood.

The cords dangled over the cross bar, but the other Cossack held his arms motionless as before. The big Turkoman had turned suddenly, staring behind the cross and sniffing loudly. He had one blind, white eye, but the other glared into the shadow, and he started to draw the curved knife.

In that instant the Cossack upon the cross moved. His right arm thrust down. He caught the Turkoman's sword hilt and ripped the blade clear. As the tribesman struck with the knife, the Cossack thrust the point of the curved sword beneath his beard, and the Turkoman staggered back screaming.

"*Y'allah—al—*"

The Cossack whipped round the post, glanced once at Koum, and stumbled against the wall of the tomb.

"Lead!" he cried.

Cries of amazement went up from the fire as the watchers beheld the cross empty and their comrade wounded. Koum ran behind the tomb and stopped, hearing the clash of steel at his back. The Cossack had turned at the corner to strike at the first tribesman to leap after him. Twice he struck, knocking the pursuer's sword down and slashing his head.

"This way!" Koum called to him.

Instead of heading back into the graveyard and the trees, Koum ran clear round the tomb coming out into the alley where the throng had gathered about the dead man.

"Put this over your hide," he told the Cossack, slipping off his lambskin coat. The black garment covered the man's white skin, and the Turkomans in the alley only saw two dark figures walk across and disappear among some tents. Meanwhile the pursuers at the tomb were shouting for torches to search the cemetery.

"I can't run," whispered the Cossack. "Leg hurt."

"No matter." Koum put his arm under the other's shoulder and walked beside him, heading down toward the rocks where he had tied the horses. "Luck's with us."

As he sighted the tree and the waiting beasts, he saw torches coming out of the tents through which they had run. He did not ask the prisoner if he could ride—he would have to stick to the saddle. He gave the Cossack his own horse, mounting the Turkoman pony himself.

They walked the horses at first, then struck into a gallop, down the slope, until the *aul* and its torches were far behind. Then Koum chuckled and reined in. The Cossack beside him heard a sound of blowing and presently a demonaic wail split the darkness.

When Koum had finished his parting salutation to the Turkomans they galloped on, heading toward the river. Koum knew that a whole regiment might chase them in vain in the darkness, and they could swim the river when they

came to it. His head felt warm and comfortable, and once or twice he snored unexpectedly. Then he settled back in the high saddle, and sighed . . .

HE WOKE suddenly when his pony stumbled. Straightening himself in the saddle, he felt to see if his musket and bagpipe were safe; then he stretched and yawned.

"How is it?" asked the Cossack beside him. "Are you still drunk?"

"How, drunk?" demanded Koum.

"Soused, playing hide and find in the *aul*. But you saved my hide for me."

"As God lives, you son of a dog," Koum rumbled, "I haven't taken a glass—" he thought of the *kumiss* sack, and remembered vaguely playing the bagpipe to distract the wolves back yonder.

The other Cossack nodded. He was a tall man, a good man with the sword, Koum reflected.

"Perhaps not a glass, but you've had a jugful somewhere, *bratik moi*. When you were behind the stake you were breathing fumes like a cellar. No wonder the Turkoman smelled you out. Fire would have caught on such a breath. Look here—didn't you know they were looking for you?"

Koum was silent, trying to remember just what had happened at the *aul*.

"The guard in the watchtower saw you riding up at sunset," went on the other Cossack. "They were searching for you down below. I heard them tell of it. When you played that music of yours, they all ran to the spot. They put me on the stake and lighted a fire, as bait to draw you in. I called to you, twice. Didn't you hear?"

"Nay," Koum shook his head. It seemed to him that the plan he had made to fool the Turkomans had not been so fine, after all. And he began to feel angry, because his head ached and crawled as if lice were biting his brains. He peered from side to side. By the cold feel of the air the night was more than half gone. Ahead of him lay the river, and the outline of the far bank looked familiar. "Look," he cried. "You've brought us back to the ford again. The Turkomans will look for us here."

"Well, they're not here," the Cossack answered casually. "And I left my kalpak over in those rocks."

"Your kalpak! By God, don't you know I was riding back to my *choutar* to see the beautiful lady before she goes off. She's like the moon."

"She may be that, but I heard her say to her husband that we Cossacks were animals."

"That's a lie, you foster son of a hog!" Koum began to snort, because it seemed to him that this Cossack was mocking the lady.

"Don't get your hair up. The countess is fair enough, but if we go back to your *choutar* she'll make more trouble for us. Better sleep here—"

"May the dogs bite you!" The hot blood rushed into Koum's head. "I'll sleep where I like. I am Koum, the Zaporoghian. Aye, the Tartars beat their foreheads on earth when they see me, and the man doesn't live I can't put down with my hands."

"Well, Koum," said the other Cossack, "I'm Gurka, the sword slayer, and I could cut you open like a hare—"

"Death to you!" Koum howled with rage. He jerked his horse up to Gurka and struck out with a heavy fist.

The blow caught the Cossack on the shoulder, turning him half round. It cast his weight upon his injured leg, and he groaned and fell from the saddle. Still holding to the sword he had brought from the *aul*, he got to his knee, panting.

"You fool," he muttered. "Go down to the river and cool off your head. Don't come back until you've soaked it well, and then I'll cut your hide for you if you want."

Koum had dismounted and drawn his long knife. But his throat was afire with thirst, and he ran down to the water's edge. He stretched himself out on the stones, sucking in the cold water. Then he thrust in his head several times.

He walked back slowly, wiping the water from his eyes and wringing it from his scalplock. All at once he remembered that Gurka had been hurt, and he felt ashamed because he had struck at him.

Gurka was standing, leaning on the scimitar.

"Well," he said sternly, "what now?"

"I did not think—forgot your leg was bad. We won't fight. We'll bed down over there, back of the rocks. It's true what you say, Gurka—these Muscovites cause too much trouble. So we'll wait until they are gone. Only I was not drunk. Saint Nicholas looked out for me."

Gurka laughed and turned to his saddle.

"Then he did wonders."

This pleased Koum.

"Aye, he's like that." Swinging himself into the saddle, he sheathed his knife and fumbled for tobacco. "We'll have a pipe, eh, *kunak?*"

As he filled the clay pipe, he reflected admiringly that Gurka was a fine Cossack—had cut down two men with three strokes of a blade after being trussed up on a cross. And he thought of everything, made plans as easily as Koum could spit.

Although it was cold and Koum wore only a shirt, he felt warm and comfortable. His enemies might be within hail, but he wasted no thoughts upon them.

It was good to have a *kunak*, a real comrade to talk to. And after his sip or two of mare's milk and the fast ride over the steppe, Koum felt well content with the day.

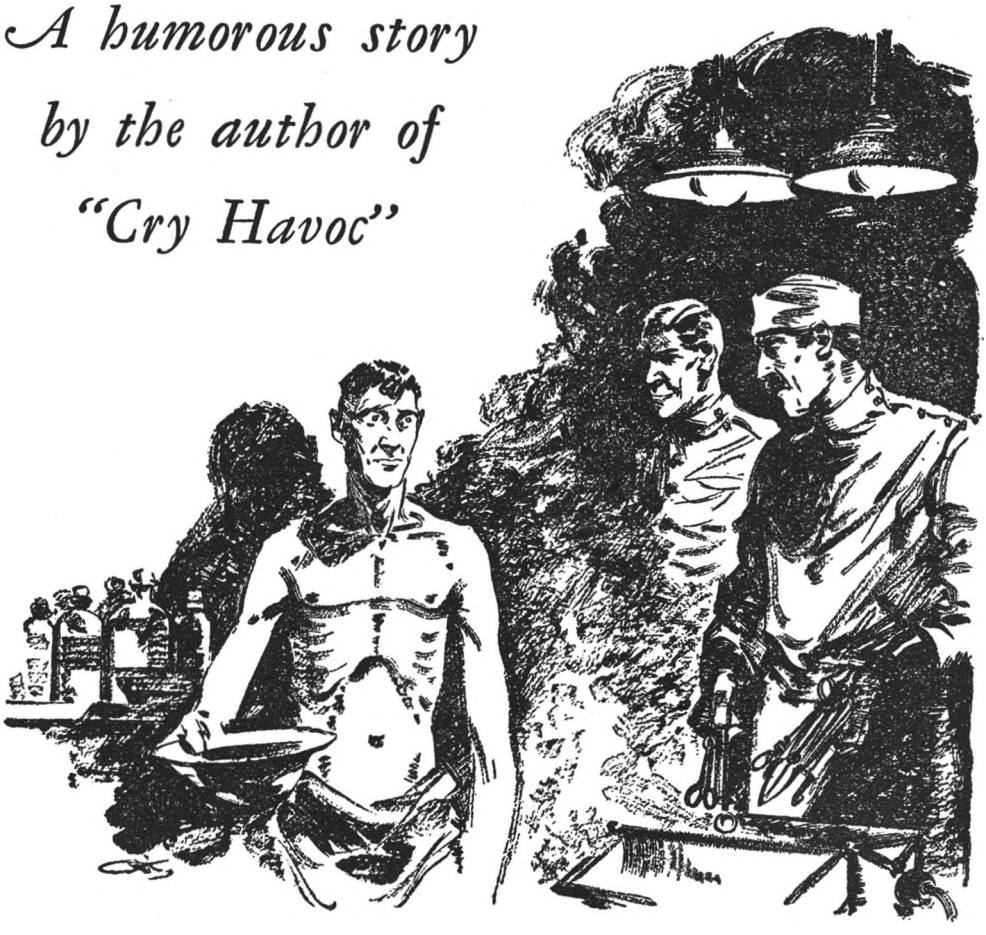
GLOUCESTER YOUTH

By

HARRY KEMP

The joys of home are sweet, God knows,
  And the shade of the dooryard tree;
But how can a young man stay at home
  When there are ships at sea?
There'll be plenty of time for settling down—
  The thing that's important now
Is a full rigged ship with all sails set
  And foam about her prow!

A humorous story by the author of "Cry Havoc"



The WOUND STRIPE

By REDVERS

"DOCTORS!" said Spike Molton contemptuously, and spat violently into a receptacle thoughtfully provided for just such emergencies, by the Canadian Legion Club.

"Doctors looks like human bein's and if you pinched 'em they'd feel like human bein's, but—" he paused to emphasize his point—"they ain't human bein's at all."

"Oh, come now, Spike," remonstrated Jack Dayley, Medicine Hat's single reporter for the town's lone newspaper. "Don't try to tell me doctors aren't human. Why I know some really nice fellows in the medical profession."

Spike's cockney features clouded in contempt.

"Well, you don't know doctors like I do. They're just like meat that's gone in a sausage machine, what goes in meat and comes out sausages. Doctors goes to med-

ical school like human bein's, but when they comes out—just like sausage. They ain't human, and yet ain't animal, and they ain't—well, they ain't what they look like. Now if I got what I deserved after shedding blood for my country I would be enjoying a good pension from the government. But when I applies for it the doctor waves me away and says—

" 'But that's not a wound, me man.'

"I looks at 'im and says—

" 'It was a German give me that.'

" 'A German?' he says, and laughs loud. 'A German,' he repeats and then pushes me out of the room, and me with an 'ole three inches long in my stummick."

"Why, I didn't know you had been wounded, Spike," said Jack.

"Ho, yes I was, and it was a German what done it. I earned my wound stripe the same as anybody else, but the doctors all said I didn't deserve it. But I knows what I knows," he finished significantly.

Jack scented a story.

"Come on, Spike." He grinned. "Tell us what you had to do with doctors that makes you hate them so."

Spike looked reflectively at his empty glass, and Dayley, knowing by experience what he was expected to do, did it.

"I never had much to do with doctors till I joined the blinkin' army," the little cockney began as he drained his beer, "and the only way I want to see a doctor again is when I die and go to heaven, and when I gets there I'm going to ask St. Peter if I can't look after the gate for awhile. If he says yes, I'm going to take over the gate and just wait until a doctor comes along, and when I sees he is a doctor—"

"But how will you tell that, Spike?" interrupted Jack curiously.

" 'Cause all doctors wears a sort of smirking, satisfied, know-all-about-you look. And when I see he is a doctor I'll say—

" 'Well, me man, what are you complainin' off?'

"The doctor'll look at me an' say—

" 'I have just died and want to go to heaven.'

" 'Ho!' I will say. 'An' how do you know you are dead? You aren't dead at all, really, nothin' the matter with you. Just been drinkin' too much, and going out of nights.'

" 'But,' he'll say, 'I *am* dead.'

" 'Dead are ye?' I'll answer back snappy-like. 'All you need is to 'ave your chest painted with iodine and a couple of number nines an' then go back to duty.' "

Spike's face became almost beatific as he dwelt on this blissful state of affairs.

"Yes, sir, I'll just do the same to every doctor what comes along, and believe me—"

"Now, Spike, start right at the beginning and tell us about the doctor," pleaded Jack.

Spike came back to life with a start and stared once more at the newly emptied glass. But Jack was firm.

"No more till you tell the whole story," he said.

With a sigh Spike quietly subsided into his chair again . . .

II

EVER since birth [he began] I've been sufferin' from weak kidneys. It 'as been a very very painful affliction. Mind you, I don't look sick, and I don't want any sympathy, but us men must bear our afflictions, and that was mine.

When Tubby and me enlisted in the army I told the doctor about my kidneys and I says—

"Doctor, I want to fight; nobody knows 'ow I am dying to fight for king and country, but it can't be, it can't be," I says.

"And why?" says he.

So I tells 'im about my weak kidneys, but he didn't believe me. He didn't believe me, and what made it worse was that when Tubby was examined he complained of weak kidneys too.

Mind you, I wanted to fight. No man wanted to fight like I did, but no man can fight with a weak back. But the doctor

made us. Blacksmiths they are—just blacksmiths, and after this I always goes to a chiropractor where I gets sympathy for my afflictions.

Tubby and me soon found out that the local undertaker was our officer. And he sure plagued us.

One day, for nothing at all, he got us sentenced to seven days confined to barracks. Do you know what that means? No, you don't, never bein' a soldier. Well, it meant that we 'ad to get up at four A.M. and clean pots and pans for breakfast, sweep the parade ground, clean out the huts, sprinkle creolin in places no decent man would go, and then at the end go and drill the same as everybody else. It was terrible. I never worked so hard in my life, and me with weak kidneys too. After two days of this Tubby and me were bursting with revenge and needin' a rest awful bad.

One morning we sees a line of men without tunics going across to a place marked with a red cross.

I looks at Tubby and says—

"And what punishment are those men adoin'?"

"Punishment?" he says. "They ain't bein' punished; they're reportin' sick."

"Sick?" I says.

"Sick," says he.

"And what happens if you report sick?" I asks.

"Well, you get a nice day's rest in hospital with a pretty nurse and lots to eat."

"Ho," I says, and puts down my wheelbarrer.

"What's the matter?" he asks.

"I feel faint and dizzy," I says.

"You do?" says he. Then he puts his wheelbarrer down and looks at me sharp-like.

"It's funny," he says, "but I feel faint too."

"You do?" I yells. "Well, don't you feel like I do, or I'll—I'll—you queered my pitch once by 'avin' weak kidneys like me, when I joined the army."

"Well, what can I have?" he asks.

We thinks it over awhile and it ends up with me havin' weak kidneys an' Tubby because he is long and thin, decides on tuberculosis.

We goes over to the corporal and tells him we're sick. He looks at us sharp-like, then grins fiendish and says:

"Sick, are you? I suppose it's been carryin' them heavy wheelbarrers around what did it?" His voice is soft and lullin' and I sees we 'ave made an impression, so, faint-like, I says—

"Yes, Corporal."

He coughs into his hand hard for a minute or two and then says to Tubby—

"And you got tuberculosis, 'ave you, Clayton?"

Tubby looks sort of sick and whispers—

"Yes, Corporal, I has. In fact, I had a bad attack just now."

"You did?" he says. "Well, I'll take you to the doctor." And on the way over he keeps on coughin' into his hand queer-like.

At last I says—

"Are you sick, too, Corporal?"

He looks at me sharp, and then seein' I means it, turns solemn and grips my hand hard and says:

"Yes, Molton, I am sick, but I haven't the heart to tell the doctor. So many are goin' sick and near the point of death with hard work that us corporals are nearly the only ones left."

We are up to the place where the doctor is now, and I am sort of dreamin' of a pretty nurse takin' my hand and holdin' it, when I notices all the men that are goin' sick.

It's funny you know, but all those men looked as fit as anything. But sickness is a funny thing. Them that look sick usually aren't, and them that don't look like it, die quick.

All of a sudden somebody calls—

"Private Molton." I looks up, an' my corporal is standing in the doorway still chokin' or coughin' into his handkerchief.

I goes with the corporal into a big tent, and at the end is a soldier like myself with a red cross on his arm. Red Cross! It should 'ave been the skull and crossbones, that's what it should 'ave

been. There's an officer there too, a big, tall, healthy lookin' man who ought to 'ave been a butcher or a blacksmith in civil life.

The corporal walks up to him and salutes, coughs into 'is 'and and says—

"Please, sir, Private Molton was sentenced to seven days C.B. and worked fine yesterday, but this morning while carrying a wheelbarrer and seein' the sick parade he was taken suddenly faint."

"Ho," says the doctor, and scowls at me. "Faint, is he?"

"Yes, sir," I says weak-like. "I've 'ad weak kidneys since I was born, an' they seems to 'ave been hurt."

"Weak kidneys, eh?" He comes over and pokes me under the chin sharp-like. "Stick out your tongue," he yells.

"But it ain't my tongue, Doctor. It's my kidneys," I explains.

"Stick out your tongue," he yells again.

So I sticks out my tongue and he takes a wooden board and puts it down my throat. It chokes me, and then I am sick, real sick.

He stands off lookin' at me while I chokes and gurgles, and then he yells—

"Take your clothes off."

I takes 'em off, and he yells again—

"Jump up and down."

I jumps up and down and then he slaps me on the chest and near knocks me over, and says—

"Say ninety-nine."

"Ninety-nine," I gasps.

He slaps me again and yells—

"Say it again."

"Ninety-nine," I yells, for he didn't hit me on the chest that time but somewhere else.

He keeps slappin' me and I keeps sayin' "ninety-nine" until my whole body stings terrible. Then he turns to the man with the red cross on him and says—

"Paint him with iodine."

"Where?" says he.

"All over," says the doctor.

The corporal is coughin' somethin' terrible by now, and this man rubs me with iodine. My skin bein' all red from the doctor's slappin' it stings awful, and I cussed and yells, but he keeps right on puttin' it on as if he was paintin' a house.

When it's finished, the doctor looks at me, all yellow from iodine, and then turns away and chokes. After awhile he says—

"Now give him the number nines," and the man makes me take two little white pills.

"This will take the pain away," says the doctor. And I believes him. I believed him—I really thought he believed I was sick.

After I takes the pills the doctor looks at me and says:

"Put your clothes on and go back to your wheelbarrer. You'll be all right now."

"But doctor," I says, "I 'ave had these kidneys from birth, sir—"

"Listen," he says, and wags his finger at me. "I tell you that I'll bet you'll never report sick again. That's how good a doctor I am."

Stingin' all over with iodine, I goes back to my wheelbarrer and begins to work.

The corporal stays behind to look after Tubby. I feels sort of funny now and I thinks maybe it's the sun, so I sits down on my barrer to think it over. Then along comes Tubby.

He is lookin' very pale and queer too.

"Did he send you back to work too?" I asks. "And you with tuberculosis?"

"He did," he growls short-like.

I begins to feel something's wrong.

"Did he paint you with iodine too?" I asks.

"He did," Tubby growls, and then groans and grips his stummick.

I begins to feel funny there too and I stands up so I could stand it better, for what with the iodine outside and the number nines inside I ain't feelin' so good.

"Did he give you two white pills?"

"Yes," says Tubby, and he grabs his stummick again and holds it.

Then all of a sudden I realizes that that doctor didn't think we was sick at all, when we are. I feels like I am goin' to die, so I sits down gentle on the wheelbarrer and groans.

When the corporal comes back and sees us, he laughs somethin' awful and I realizes then and there that the doctor has doublecrossed us.

TUBBY and me never reported sick after that. It wasn't because we weren't sick, 'cause we was, but there ain't no use reportin' sick unless you gets sympathy for your afflictions, and we knew we wouldn't from him.

We went to France soon after that and poor Tubby and me was worked to death.

I don't even know 'ow my pore weak kidneys ever stood the strain.

Our lieutenant 'ad it in for us too. An undertaker he was, so we 'ad both the medical and the undertakin' perfession both 'oping to get us in their clutches.

One time I 'ad to go sick 'cause I 'ad scabies. You people don't know what the scabies is, and it is better you don't. Some people nowadays just calls it the plain itch. But, anyway, I 'ad the scabies and of course I 'ad to go sick with 'em and as soon as the doctor saw me enter the billet he stood up with blood in his eyes.

"I thought I gave you enough the first time to stop your trying this trick again," he shouts.

I looks at 'im cold-like and says—

"I'm only 'ere because the sergeant made me be here."

"The sergeant?" he says, thunderstruck.

"Yes, sir," I says, "the sergeant looks at me, and says 'There is only one person you are fit to associate with,' he says, 'and that is the doctor.' So here I am, sir."

Everybody in the billet starts to laugh at that, and the doctor went all red with anger.

"You're only fit to associate with me, eh? And what have you got?"

"The scabies," I says meek-like.

He looks at me, and grows redder and redder, and then he curses something terrible, while I has a hard time keepin' a straight face.

Finally he gives me a tin of salve and sends me back to medicine and duty.

But I was wise by this time, so I tries out the salve on Tubby tellin' him it's good for chapped hands.

It burns him frightful and I sees the doctor is just tryin' to get his own back, so I just puts it into my haversack and keeps it.

One day when we're behind Hill 70 in the front line, I am walkin' along the trenches tryin' to keep out of the way of the sergeant who wants me for a workin' party when I passes the battalion dressing station.

Just as I was going past I saw a suit of underwear hanging out to dry. I looked at it and notices it is just the sort of underwear that no soldiers wear, but is a sort of silk and shiny. I looks at it long and deep and finally says to myself—

"That must be the doctor's underwear."

I thinks again and says to myself—

"Wouldn't it be nice if I rubbed that ointment all along the seams of the underwear and then when the doctor puts it on and he begins to sweat the ointment burns his skin, like it is supposed to do mine?"

Well, I laughed right out loud at the very idea and then I peeks into the dugout an' believe it or not, but the doctor is sound asleep with all his clothes on in a bunk.

This must be another suit, thinks I. Why, the blighter must 'ave two suits of underwear. So I grabs it and runs down a side trench where I sits on a box and gets out the ointment and rubs it careful down the seams.

When I had used up all the tin I puts the suit back and beats it back to Tubby.

All the rest of that trip in the line Tubby and me goes down every day to

the dugout tryin' to see the doctor hoppin' around with his hide burnt off him. But it never happens.

At last I goes to his batman and says—

"Say, don't that doctor ever change his underwear?"

The servant looks at us mournful-like.

"Yus, he does, the blinkin' fathead. He actually makes me wash his underclothes every week or so. Why, we had hardly got in the line when he says, 'I have worn this soot two weeks now, Taylor, and I insist upon a change.' 'But I ain't washed your last soot,' I says. 'Well, wash it,' he says, 'and wash it at once.' So I washed it, and then he hears that we are goin' to be reviewed when we gets out of the line so he saves his clean suit for that."

"Ho," I says, and looks at Tubby.

"Oh," says Tubby and looks at me, and then we both quietly walks away.

And it was the general no less who reviewed us. He wanted to compliment us on capturing Hill 70. He made sure he stayed away until we captured it, though.

We had to use spit and polish for days before, too. It's somethin' terrible trying to get cleaned up for a review, and the C.O. even got us sent to the baths so we wouldn't be movin' in the ranks so much, huntin' for cooties.

It was a fine bright day, and warm. The colonel, the major, the doctor, all were mounted on horses right up in front, while Tubby and me stood in the front rank awaitin' for the general and the salve.

As usual the general was late, and the hot sun beatin' down soon had us all sweatin' bad.

The doctor sat very nice and steady on his 'orse at first, but after awhile he gets restless and starts to scratch hisself here and there. Then the horse starts to cut capers, and of course that was where there was the most salve.

The general arrives at last and we are called to attention, and the officers all at the salute.

The doctor's left hand of course is holdin' the reins and his right hand up to his cap.

The general starts to gallop up just when the doctor takes his hand from the salute to scratch himself.

The general sees it, and yaps somethin' to the colonel, who turns and shouts—

"Will you kindly keep at the salute, Captain?" The doctor chokes and goes red, and raises his hand again.

Tubby and I laughs ourselves sick and tells everybody else.

The doctor's 'orse starts to prance and again the captain takes his hand down to scratch himself. His face is all red with sweat and he is in terrible anguish. The general sees the captain's hand go down, and again says somethin' to the colonel.

The C.O. is red with rage and yells right across the parade ground:

"I told you to stay at the salute, Captain. Just because you're a doctor, don't think you haven't got to obey orders."

The poor doctor goes redder than ever. By now the whole battalion knows what the trouble is, and cackles and laughs are heard all around the parade ground.

What with the captain tryin' to scratch himself and the general sore as a boil, and the men all laughin', the review is sort of gettin' out of hand.

The colonel goes over and says somethin' to the captain in a low voice, and even while he is talking the captain drops his hand and scratches himself again.

The colonel chokes, then he curses the captain somethin' awful and orders him off the parade ground. The doctor scratches again and spurs his horse and gallops off. Of course he has to pass us, and just as he gets alongside a voice that sounds like Tubby's shouts—

"And how do you like your medicine, Doc?"

He pulls the horse in and glares down at me, while I look at him as innocent as a child.

"Get off the parade ground!" yells the colonel, and the captain spurs his horse

and gallops off, still scratching himself and cursing terrible.

I heard afterward he had to use all the vaseline for miles around to get soothed.

OF COURSE, Tubby and me never dared to report sick after that. In fact, we was even scared to get wounded for fear of what he might do to us.

Our lieutenant made it even worse, for he and the doctor got together and started to sympathize with each other. And that didn't help us none, for he put us on every working party there was and near slaved us to death.

My poor weak kidneys began to give under the strain, and I says to Tubby one day:

"I got to get sick. I simply got to. I'd rather stand them blinkin' pills than I would all this work."

Tubby agrees with me, 'cause neither one of us is fond of work, especially carryin' barb' wire through the mud with Fritzie machine guns a-poppin' you.

But at the same time every time I thought of reportin' sick with that doctor waitin' for us it sort of stopped me.

"If I could only get hold of somethin' that the doctor simply would 'ave to treat me gentle with," I says to Tubby one day, "by gosh, I would take a chance; but there ain't any doctor book around the country that we can get advice from."

We thought of all manner of diseases, but when we looked 'em over none of 'em seemed good enough to take a chance on. I has a horror of gettin' wounded too, so you see it places us in a sort of embarrassin' position.

One day, we goes up to Ypres where the English had tried to scare the Germans and not succeeded very well.

Our outfit moves into the line and goes over the top. They called it the battle of Messines, but they should have called it the battle of mud pies, 'cause the mud was so thick and gluey you could 'ardly move.

We goes over the top one mornin' and takes Fritzies' front line trenches and goes on still farther and captures his second lines.

We gets into the second lines after a lot of hard work and with the German barrage behind us, I sits down in the trench to take it easy.

It has been hard work, real hard work, and I thinks gloomily of the long walk home. That's the worst of advancin', you always got so far to go back to your billets.

Tubby and me sits down and smokes nice and easy, when our officer heaves into sight.

As soon as he spots me he grins fiendish-like and calls—

"Molton, come here."

I groans, for I knows darn well he didn't mean no good.

"Molton," he says sharp-like, "we have captured a very nearly invaluable prisoner, a doctor he is, and we want to send him back right away and you are going to take him."

I looks at the officer and then I looks at the big black smoke of the German barrage which we has to go through, and feels sort of sickish, but I smiles and says—

"Yes, sir."

We starts down the trench and comes on a German officer, a nice lookin', smilin' chap; even I sort of smiles at him. He has a red cross on his arm and of course I knows he must be a doctor.

"Hullo, Canadian," he says in English. Then he turns to the officer and says, "Is this my escort?"

The lieutenant nods. He peeks at the barrage we has to go through, smiles again, grim-like, and of course I has to smile back.

"Tough luck, mate," I says, "but I don't want to die any more than you do."

He grins and I turns to the officer and says, quiet-like, 'cause I knows there is only one chance in a million of our getting through—

"Will we start, sir?"

"Yes," he says, "and be quick."

So I goes over to the Fritzie doctor

and gives him a cigaret, and we both start to climb out of the trench. I like the looks of the German, 'im bein' a nice blond haired chap, and quite companionable. I slipped once and he even helped me up.

We gets closer and closer to the German barrage and as I looks at that barrage and figgers it out, it seems damn foolish to me. If we try to go through we gets killed for sure, and if we don't try, I get pinched for disobeyin' orders.

I looked at the barrage again as we gets closer and closer, and the noise is simply awful.

Finally I grabs the German by the arm and pulls him down in a shellhole just made and with no water in it.

I goes through his pockets, but he hasn't got much money. Only some pictures of his wife and kid, which I gives back to him.

He has a nice pair of boots I likes though, but I decides to wait till we get through the barrage before I takes them. He seemed pleased when I handed back his pictures, so when I motions him to sit down and hands him another cigaret, he is quite companionable.

After lookin' at that barrage again and figgerin' out that I didn't want to die just yet, I leans over and shouts—

"Look here, Fritz."

"Yes?" he says.

"There ain't no use us gettin' killed by goin' through this blinkin' barrage, is there?"

"No," he says.

"Well, then lets sit here till your friends stop gettin' mad at us," I says, and starts to smoke, moody-like.

He sits there watching me for awhile and then says—

"You seem worried, my friend."

"Yes, I am worried," I says, "'cause I am going to get pinched when I get back for disobeyin' orders."

"Disobeyin' orders?" he says, polite.

"Yes," I says. "You see that officer ordered me to take you right back and here we are takin' it easy."

"But," he says, "we would be killed of a surety if we went through that barrage."

I laughs hollow-like.

"Orders is orders," I says, "and believe me, that officer wants to get me."

He thinks awhile an' then smiles sudden, and says—

"Well, you can do like they do in our army and report sick as soon as you go back."

I laughs sarcastic-like.

"Yes, report sick with a doctor just prayin' to get me," I says.

"Is the doctor after you?" he asks, startled.

So I tells him the whole story, and when we gets to the review he laughs fair to split his sides.

After awhile he settles down and thinks it over. Suddenly he turns over and pulls me toward him.

"I have it," he says. "I have it."

"Have what?" I says.

"Have a way to beat that doctor. Now, listen, and I'll give the symptoms."

I listens as he goes on.

"You see, I am a doctor in the German army and know that there are certain things that a doctor can't tell, so if a man comes to me and says he has a pain here—" pointing to his stomach—"I got to take his word for it. Now I'll tell you, my good friend, the symptoms of something that will make the doctor think you are really sick, and he will send you to hospital and everything."

"By gosh," I says, "that's real good of you, Fritz." And I turns over so I won't miss a word.

Then he says:

"You go up to that doctor and say you have a dull pain here—" and he points to his stomach—"and then say you have been gettin' chills and sudden fevers, fevers that leave you as quick as they come, but gettin' worse all the time, and that doctor will then see that you are really sick and will give you an easy time of it."

Well, sir, I couldn't believe my luck, but as he insisted on it, I thought I'd

try it. So as soon as the barrage lifted, me and the Fritzie walked back to our own lines where I hands him over to a friend who gives me a shot of rum.

Right away I pounds on the battalion medical post and steps in, lookin' sort of tired and weary.

The doctor looks at me and scowls somethin' terrible.

"Ho," he says, "an' what do you want?"

"I'm sick," I says.

"Sick of workin'," he says, "and believe me, when I get finished with you you'll be sick of gettin' sick."

I looks sort of afraid and says—

"But I am sick, Doctor, really sick this time."

"What's the symptoms?" he asks.

So I tells him. He looks sort of incredulous at me and I nearly grins. For already I sees a nice white bed and a nurse holdin' my hand.

He takes my pulse and my temperature and asks me questions, and I still sticks to my story.

"Well, by gad, I really believe you *are* sick, Molton," he says sort of kind-like, "so I'll send you to hospital."

I nearly jumps with joy. I really had slipped it over him then. Sure enough, an orderly takes me back and I goes to hospital.

I gets a real nice nurse to put me to bed and they hang a board at the end of it and everything is fine. And all the time I am laughin' to myself to think how I slipped it over the doctor, and of pore old Tubby strainin' away tryin' to win the blinkin' war.

After awhile I gets hungry, so I says to the nurse—

"Hey, sister, don't I get somethin' to eat?"

She looks at my chart and then at me and says—

"Not till you have 'ad your operation."

"Operation!" I squeeks.

"Yes, your operation. Didn't you know you have to have your appendix out?"

[There was a long and dreadful silence, while Spike Molton watched to see if Jack Dayley were going to laugh, but as that gentleman managed to keep a straight face Spike went on.]

They pulled out my appendix, me who never had a stomach ache in my life, and hated to have a doctor touch me.

O' course I had to go back to the battalion again, after three weeks, and what I says is, that that there German wounded me, just the same as if he had stuck a bayonet in me, and I claims I am entitled to a wound stripe and a pension, for I lost my appendix and I never 'ave really enjoyed my beer ever since.

Wives and Tortillas

By JOHN NEWMAN PAGE

I HAD eaten six *tortillas* in a hopeless endeavor to keep pace with my host, a Huichole Indian of the Mexican Pacific Coast state of Nayarit, but refused the seventh.

"Please to eat four more!" my Huichole host urged me.

There was insistence—almost command—in his guttural voice.

"Why four more?" I inquired. "Possibly I could manage one more, but four—"

"Because—" he leaned toward me and his lowered voice took on a tone of entreaty—"you have eaten six. If you eat not four more, you will insult four of my wives."

I looked about the single room of the malodorous Huichole *choza*, searching for a clue to my host's meaning. Four of his five wives were glowering alternately at me and at their lord and master, while the oldest and fattest wife was smiling happily. That should have enlightened me, but didn't.

"I do not understand," I expostulated. "I have already eaten one more than I wanted."

"Had you not eaten it," my host explained, "all would have been well, for you would then have accepted one *tortilla* from each of my five wives. But the sixth *tortilla* was the second from my first and least desirable wife, so you must please to eat four more. Thus you will have had two from each of my wives and there will be peace. Otherwise—"

"*Muy bien*," I acceded with a sigh. "It's bad enough to have trouble with one wife, let along four. Bring on the *tortillas*."

Relief and gratitude appeared instantly in my host's expressive black eyes. He spoke briefly in Huichole to his sulking wives and they brightened up. Wife No. 2 came with *tortilla* No. 7 while wife No. 1 shrugged her fat shoulders resignedly. Her moment of triumph had passed, but serenity had been restored to the humble Huichole household.

The conversation for the remainder of the simple meal, consisting only of *tortillas* and hot chocolate, centered on the troubles and privileges of Huichole husbands.

Every male Huichole, my host informed me, is permitted as many wives as he can find room and *tortillas* for. Should the problem of maintenance become vexatious, the solution is simple—the troubled husband sells or trades one or more of his wives. A young and comely wife may bring as much as a yoke of oxen, or even a small field of corn, whereas an old or a lazy wife may be traded for a dog, a goat, or a pair of leather sandals.

Huichole wives have few privileges, but jealously insist upon their observance. If they are five in number, their husband must eat five, ten or fifteen *tortillas;* each must be permitted to wash her husband's clothing in her turn, and so forth.

I was a guest at several Huichole homes while in Nayarit, but after that first experience I always counted my host's wives before partaking of his *tortillas*.

A Novelette of the

MURGATT had been playing roulette all night. Only a few were left about the wheel now—a couple of pearling lugger skippers, the second mate of the freighter *Zealand Maid*, and a junior engineer out of a tramp. There was also a sporty looking Sydney man, wearing the brim of his hat turned up on one side and down on the other. He answered to the name of Spaden, being aboard the *Zealand Maid* as a passenger.

George Murgatt belonged on Trepang Island. His uncle owned the place, and the trading company there, as well as the land and buildings occupied by Louis the Frog as barrooms and gambling quarters. People had looked askance at young Murgatt during the evening. They knew Beach Town was no place for him. His presence at the roulette wheel had caused considerable restraint during the night. And Louis the Frog was worried because the youngster had been losing steadily.

His last five dollar note in his hand, Murgatt thoughtfully regarded the roulette layout before placing his final bet. He waited to see where Spaden would place his money. Spaden had been winning as steadily as Murgatt had been losing.

The old Chinese behind the wheel was rolling the little ivory ball between his palms, his black little eyes under white eyebrows watching Spaden.

"All down?" asked Chin Lee. "Plenty time. You bet, I spin 'em."

"Roll it, you!" growled the Sydney man. He was holding a gold piece between thumb and finger, delaying his bet until the ivory ball was going round in the bowl of the wheel.

The pearling skippers had placed their bets, both avoiding numbers, but playing the red. The second mate had a Mexican dollar on a combination, and apparently

ROULETTE

By CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE

South Seas

intended to risk no more on that roll. But Spaden would not bet until the ball was in motion. He was playing some kind of system, concealing it by not using it at times, so the others could not catch on by watching.

Chin Lee reached a hand to a little shelf under his board and wet the tips of his fingers on a wet sponge in a tiny brass bowl. Then, with a gesture of skilful grace, he snapped the ball into the runway about the spinning disk of numbers.

Spaden threw his gold piece on No. 4. The second mate placed a Mexican dollar on 4. Spaden placed another coin on No. 9. The second mate promptly followed that bet with a dollar.

Spaden reached into a pocket for more gold coins and laid bets on 6, 8, 3 and 2.

Murgatt reached forward with his banknote and got it down on 2.

Spaden jumped up from his cane seated bamboo chair, swiftly shot out both hands and gathered all of his six coins from the oilskin, number covered layout.

"You got to stop trailin' my bets!" he cried angrily. He swung round and glared at young Murgatt.

"I hope you don't think my last fiver'd keep you from winning," said Murgatt with a smile.

"You been losin'—and you keep off my bets," retorted Spaden.

The breeze drifting in from the beach began to slide Murgatt's paper money off of 2. He put a pearlshell weight on it, and was about to say something more to Spaden, when the Sydney man thrust forward his thin face and in a louder tone insisted—

"Don't you try to twist the tail off my luck, Yank!"

"Take it easy," soothed Murgatt. "I'm not a Yank, though I grew up in the United States. But I'm a Sydney bloke. Like yourself, I was born in Sydney." He grinned good naturedly.

"I don't care where you was born!" retorted Spaden. "You're too smart-like to suit me. I don't want no toffs follerin' my play. You lay off, or—" He checked

his speech abruptly, as the second mate laid a hand on his shoulder. He turned to see who was interfering with him, and then went on to the mate, "Wot's this to you, chum?"

Murgatt caught a strong odor of trade gin from the ship's officer. He was pleasantly drunk. He reached forward with a powerful and sun seasoned hand and lifted the down turned brim of Spaden's hat; then in a hoarse growl intended for a whisper, the mate said:

"Don't go off your nap. That's young Murgatt you're talkin' to. His uncle owns this blinkin' island—the tradin' company here—the ships and docks and pollywogs on the reefs. And when the Old Man shoves off, this Murgatt will be the owner. You can 'ave sense, even if you ain't got brains, Spaden." Then he balanced himself and, when on an even keel, strode majestically away toward the bar, having forgotten his Mexican dollars on the roulette board.

Spaden grasped Murgatt by an elbow and drew him away toward the bar.

"Ow, so you're Murgatt? My mistake. Wot do you say we 'ave a wet? Let the chinkie go to the devil. Good enough's good enough, I say."

Murgatt went along. It would not be long before daylight. The bloom was off the night and he was sleepy and tired. He knew he should be abed before sunup. Beach Town was no place for the heir to Trepang Island—not with Donald MacKenzie for an uncle.

Spaden paused at a zinc topped table not far from the bar, where the second mate, having hurled a slug of brandy down his throat, balanced himself on one foot in preparation for launching himself at them across the floor. Somehow, he lost stays and went about on the wrong tack, rolling heavily, put his helm over and before he could check his way, went hard aground on a pile of empty gin cases near the veranda. He broke in two in the middle and sank by the head, promptly going to sleep.

LOUIS the Frog, short, squat and aproned, his black hair slicked down with coconut oil, appeared in a doorway behind his bar, and squinted disapprovingly at Murgatt and Spaden. But his voice was smooth and friendly when he spoke.

"So, George, you feenish de play? You lose plenty?"

"Not enough to worry about, Louis," replied young Murgatt.

"A leetle is too much," said Louis. He gave a cold glance to Spaden as the Sydney man reached the bar. A Chinese came drifting down from the far end to serve two men.

"Don't you cry in my beer about it, Louis." Spaden laughed. "You win when a gentleman loses, don't you?"

"I was spik," said Louis, without looking at Spaden, "about your oncle, George. He not lak' to hear you lose money in my place. He be mad at you—he be mad at me. I pay heem rents. You lose too much, I lose my business, hey?"

"I've been losing my own money," said Murgatt.

Spaden flipped a gold coin on the bar, and the drinks were served.

"Your oncle—she's come back pretty quick, hey?"

"Expect him today or tomorrow with the *Island Trader*—she's due back from Sydney now."

"Maybe it's more better you stop play de wheel, hey?"

Murgatt grinned.

"Aw, Louis, I ought to have a chance to win back some of what I've lost." He sipped his *picon*, and then went on. "The Old Man wants me to knock about a little and get familiar with things. I've only been here six months, Louis, and everything's pretty new."

Louis nodded.

"Drinkin' and gamblin' in Beach Town, George, you do not do when the Old Man is here, no. I am not a fool. You do dees when he is away. You act like dees, he will kick you back to America, my head he will knock off. Annesley knows. He do not lak' what you do here—he say it to me."

"Oh, blast Annesley!" said Spaden. "Wot's the good of you talkin' to the young gentleman 'ere about the manager? The Old Man dies, Annesley's got Mr. Murgatt 'ere for a boss, ain't he? And this is the chap to cotton to, Louis."

The Frog disregarded the Sydney man. But to Murgatt, he said warningly:

"Annesley is not your friend, George. He will do the tellin' to your oncle, and you be—what you call?—in the soup."

"Oh, Annesley won't put me in bad with Uncle Donald," said Murgatt.

Louis sliced the air upward with his hands.

"You will see what you will see." Then something at the far end of the long bar drew his attention and he waddled away, the bamboo floor creaking under his heavy feet.

"Now look 'ere," began Spaden confidentially, his wary eyes on the departing barman. "I knowed who you was all the time. I made a row with you just because I wanted a private word, and it looked better the way I done it. I 'opes you don't take no offense."

Murgatt was a little surprised.

"Something private? What are you driving at?"

Spaden jerked a thumb in the direction of the snoring second mate.

"'Im! Beginnin' to foller my play—winnin'. I didn't want that." He winked with expressive furtiveness.

"You mean you wanted to get away from him?"

"It's this way," explained Spaden. "'E knowed I was winnin'—and the chinkie at the wheel knowed. I wanted to quit, so when you bet on wot I was down on, I made a row with you, so the mate and the chinkie would think you was the bloke I was mad at. Do you twig it?"

Murgatt shook his head.

"Why jump me to get rid of that mate? He was too far gone with gin to be much bother to you."

Spaden laughed quietly, finished his drink, and began with renewed interest to make himself clear. He slapped a trouser pocket, and gold pieces rattled musically.

"I've been winnin', eh?" he demanded.

Murgatt nodded.

"I only just got on, after watching you play three nights, that you've got a system. And I'd say it works. Were you afraid that mate out of the Burnett-Phillips freighter would crack your system?"

"No. 'E ain't got no brains. I didn't want 'im to see too much. I come 'ere as a passenger in his ship, *Zealand Maid*, and we're sailin' tomorrow. I want to fix up a deal with you, chum, so we can clean that wheel. I'll come back—but you can be winnin' while I'm away. It ain't safe for me to win much more."

"Not safe? Why, nobody can find fault if you win by playing a system."

Spaden winked at a row of gin bottles ranged on a shelf behind the bar.

"You kick a dog too 'ard, and 'e'll bite," he remarked. "Did you notice that the Frog give me the cold eye? 'E don't like me by 'arf. And 'e ain't mad because you're losin'. It's me 'e's mad at—for winnin'." He chinked his gold again. "And the worst of it is, 'e's got a suspicion I can win when I ruddy well like."

Murgatt waved an incredulous hand.

"Oh, just because you've had a winning streak. System or no system, you can't win when you want to."

Spaden leaned forward and pushed his thin, deeply lined face close to Murgatt's.

"No? You say not? Think I'm takin' the trouble to tip you off, when I don't know what I'm talkin' about? And did you stop to see wot number won'? No! Well, I was down on six numbers, includin' 2—and you followed me on 2. It won. That's wot I didn't want the chinkie to notice. It looked like you and that second mate knowed wot I did. And that'd cost me a pile of money!"

Murgatt whistled softly.

"2 won! How the devil did you know 2 would win?"

"I didn't. I likewise bet on 6, 8, 3, 9 and 4. But I was down on 2—and it won. Am I right?"

Murgatt nodded, thoughtful.

"You can win—all the time?"

SPADEN spat on the floor with disgust and made sure the second mate was asleep.

"I'd be a fool to win all the time. Besides, I can't—but I can win when I want to. Wot more would anybody be askin'?"

"That's a corking system," said Murgatt eagerly. "But what were you saying about going away in the *Zealand Maid*—while I won on your tip?"

"Just wot I said. We split fifty-fifty on all winnings. Only don't win too much. That wheel won't stand too big a strain at one time. You've got to win on a percentage—win one night, heavy, and lose the next—not quite so heavy. That's the ticket. Keep pullin' down on your winnin's so the chinkie won't know 'ow much you're takin'—and let 'im know when you've lost for a night. We've got to work it clever. Now me, I won near a thousand quid—five thousand blinkin' dollars—but Chin Lee thinks I'm a'ead only a couple of hundred. There was a big crowd at the wheel around midnight. The chinkie don't know where the winnin's went."

"But he must know the system you're playing? And if I use the same system—"

"I ain't playin' no system. I only makes it look so. Wot I'm playin' of is—a crooked wheel!"

Murgatt opened his weary eyes wide.

"Oh-ho! You've seen some—"

"Mind your eye!" cautioned Spaden swiftly. "It ain't a 'ealthy thing to know. The Frog'd shoot me in the back. That's why I'm takin' a boat ride away tomorrow. All I want is my split on wot you makes while I'm away. I'll come back in a month or so, and split wot I wins with you. The trick is, play every night, and just keep gainin', that's all. A steady profit, and we can work the game for years. Is it a go?"

"Certainly it's a go," declared Murgatt gladly.

" 'Ow much did you lose tonight?"

"About five hundred."

"Got the money to play tomorrow night?"

"I can get it. But my uncle's coming back, and—"

"That blinkin' uncle of yours sleeps nights, don't he?" demanded Spaden.

"Yes, but Annesley, the general manager, might tip the Old Man that I was gambling steadily—and I'd be cut out of his will."

Spaden wagged his head sadly.

"Don't you worry about Annesley! 'E thinks he's a toff—a bloomin' aristocrat. But 'e ain't nothin' but a penny counting clerk. I was thinkin' to tip 'im off on this game, but 'e's too 'igh and mighty to suit me. So I sees you been losin', and that's why I picked you for a chum."

"Annesley'd never go in with you on a gambling deal."

"Granted! Now, then, 'ave you noticed that Chin Lee wets 'is fingers on a sponge, sometimes, before 'e spins the ball?"

Murgatt assented.

"That's when he shifts the regular ivory ball for a ball that 'as a steel center. Six numbers on the wheel have magnets under 'em—and one of the six numbers wins when the steel cored ball is used. Now the way I plays is to lay a bet on from five to ten numbers every time. That makes everybody think I'm playin' a system. When the Chinkie wets 'is fingers—and shifts the ball, either 6, 8, 3, 2, 9 or 4 will win. But I play some other numbers, too, to blind the Chinkie. Of course, 'e won't make one of those numbers win if other players get down on 'em 'eavy. 'E watches to see big plays on other numbers before 'e switches the steel ball in for the magnets."

Murgatt smiled in comprehension, eyes partly closed, as he realized the significance of Spaden's disclosures. The young man reached for the pad and pencil which was used for signing chits by those who had credit at the Frog's bar. Then he said softly—

"Write those numbers down for me, Spaden."

"No, no!" objected Spaden. "That'd give me away—to be makin' figures for

you. We don't know who's watchin'—you put 'em down so you can't lose 'em, and write a chit on the pad there for a round of drinks. And mind, now—6, 8, 3, 2, 9, 4."

Murgatt's fingers shook a little as he hastily got the numbers down in a little notebook, verified them and pocketed the book. Then he wrote out a chit slip for a pair of drinks and thrust the little pad across the bar and called for the Chinese at the far end.

"I'm on," said Murgatt.

The barman served the drinks, and young Murgatt departed from Beach Town.

II

AS MURGATT climbed the steep and winding path from the beach flats, the stars were beginning to pale. Halfway up to his bungalow, where there was no foliage on the brow of a level spot, he had an open view of the sea and sky.

The swells whispered on the island's fringing reefs. The shore for miles in two directions was marked by the white of gentle combers wetting the coral sand, making pale luminosity in the moonlight. The fuzzy palm trees showed their tops in black blotches. The ship's lights twinkled, like tiny villages adrift in the case of tramp steamers, like deserted hamlets in the pearling luggers, where even anchor lights were neglected.

"6, 8, 3—2, 9, 4!" he whispered, as he surveyed the scene for a minute. "Spaden has certainly given me just what I need."

The great warehouses of the MacKenzie Trading Company lay along the beach like sleeping monsters, their thatched roofs striped by the bamboo frames which held the *nipa* against tearing winds. Native babies cried in the little Malay village beyond Beach Town. A dog barked. A fighting cock complained with a throaty crow against the delay of the sun. Somebody was blundering about with oars on the sandy boat beach—that was probably the second mate of the *Zealand Maid* trying to get out to his vessel.

Murgatt laughed softly and resumed his climb. But he stopped as he approached the little clearing before his bungalow. There was a light in his living room.

"Something queer about that," he told himself. "Rivi has been told not to wait up for me—and especially not to keep a light burning to draw insects."

He advanced hastily across the open space. Against the background of the inner glowing light, he saw a figure rise on the veranda. By the turbaned head it was Rivi, the old Malay servant. But Rivi did not hail his master. Murgatt knew that something out of the ordinary had happened, for Rivi had his hammock on the back veranda, and never waited up.

Mounting the steps, Murgatt saw another figure rise from a chair in the light of the living room. The man moved toward the open door. He was Annesley, the veteran general manager of the trading company.

"Hello!" said Murgatt. "Hope nothing's wrong to bring you over to my house at this hour."

"Nothing special," said Annesley.

He was fully dressed in white, even to his straw hat, which he always wore evenings in place of a big sun helmet. His tone was cool, though he tried to be casual. He remained standing in the doorway, and Murgatt detected restrained annoyance.

"It's a lovely night."

"You mean it's a lovely morning, George."

"You can go on to bed, Rivi," said Murgatt.

The Malay had kept back in the shadows, avoiding the yellow brilliance which streamed through the doorway and one of the open *kajangs*. Rivi moved away, muttering to himself, as if he disliked being dismissed when his young master was facing hostility.

Annesley backed a little, to make way. Murgatt passed him and entered the room. He turned and faced the manager, who took off his hat, ran a hand over his

graying hair and cleared his throat harshly. A thin faced man, mostly jaws and forehead, his skin deeply tanned and lined, his high straight nose had a challenging tilt as he regarded Donald MacKenzie's nephew.

"Aren't you a bit late getting to bed, considering the fact that your uncle's due today with Captain Clary?"

Murgatt hesitated a moment. He frowned, took off his coat and threw it on a chair.

"Oh, the *Island Trader* won't be inside the reef until afternoon," he replied lightly. "I can have all the sleep I need before then."

Annesley carefully fitted his hat to his head, using both hands. His face was twisted into a grimace of angered annoyance.

"You gambled again tonight, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Murgatt. "Took another flier at the wheel. I've got to win back some of my losses."

"And lost more."

Murgatt swung swiftly.

"How do you know?"

"I was down there around midnight. Kept out of your sight, but I saw enough to know you were losing."

"How long has it been your job to spy on me?"

"I'm responsible to your uncle for your conduct, even if you are going to inherit the business. I'm general manager—and I haven't been with your uncle for more than thirty years without knowing what kind of a row I'm in for when he finds you've been mixing with the riff-raff of Beach Town and losing money night after night while he's been away at Louis the Frog's."

Murgatt laughed.

"Losing! That's what the Old Man'll raise hell about. That's one crime he can't forgive—losing money. I'll bet that if I could show him I was a sixpence ahead of the game, he'd overlook a week of gambling."

"Do you think your Uncle Donald paid for your education in the States since you were in kilts, to have you knocking about Beach Town—losing hundreds of dollars, or pounds, at roulette?"

YOUNG MURGATT shut his teeth together while he glared at Annesley. Then—

"If you tell on me, you'll have an answer to your question."

"Where'd you get the money you lost tonight?"

"It was part of what you let me have."

"I don't believe it. You said you were cleaned out when you begged me to loan you a couple of hundred two days ago."

"I found some money in one of my working coats. And I had a winning streak with it. I'm down to five dollars. And as for Beach Town, I ought to get acquainted with what goes on at Trepang Island if I'm to inherit the property. Louis the Frog pays rent for his buildings to sell liquor, to run a gambling place—and Uncle Donald collects that rent. And I'd like to hear you go down there and tell those sailors that they're riff-raff. You'd ruin some of Uncle Donald's profits. Louis the Frog turns in a mighty good income to the MacKenzie Trading Company."

"That's an outrageous way for you to talk about your Uncle Donald."

"I'm talking about what you call riff-raff," retorted Murgatt. "I've only been here six months, and I know that Louis the Frog earns as much a year for us as one of our best steamers. You've raised the rent every year on the gambling rights of this island. More money! Not more morals. And just remember that the Old Man's health is uncertain—he's eighty-two."

"You mean, of course, that you're likely any day to be my boss?"

"You know what I mean. And I always thought you were a pretty canny man, Annesley. Hell, don't make a row with me over a few dollars I drop at the Frog's wheel."

"Few dollars!" flamed Annesley. "I'll say that you've got your finances on a

liberal scale, when you can refer to a couple of thousand that you've lost like that!"

Murgatt grinned amiably.

"I'm only half Scotch. And my losses are worse than two thousand. I've dropped a thousand of my own savings, along with the two thousand you've loaned me."

He walked to the doorway. The sky was beginning to burn to the eastward and the lamp was losing its strength.

Annesley whistled in disgust.

"Look here," began Murgatt, more agreeably. "You and I ought to get along all right. You won't lose anything. I'm getting a pretty good allowance, and I can have you paid back in about six months. I want another five hundred dollars—for one more crack at that wheel, tonight."

"No!" said Annesley decisively. "George, you've got to stop it. And you ought to have sense enough to see that I'm thinking of your interests when I tell you that. Don't kick a fortune aside for this silly madness! If you keep on, your uncle will change his will—and dump you back in Sydney." He put a hand on Murgatt's arm pleadingly, and full of concern.

Murgatt put out a hand.

"Just five hundred more. Come on!"

"Not a cent. And I want to say that I wasn't spying on you tonight. I went down to look up the skipper of the *Flying Fish*—he loaded his schooner with a bill of goods, and overpaid a couple of pounds. But he sailed right after dark."

"I'll pay you in full in a couple of days—in full, remember."

"Why don't you quit this gambling? You've got to. Have you gone off your nap so far that you've forgotten that your uncle gets back today?" protested Annesley.

"Just listen to me," pleaded Murgatt frantically. "I've just been playing that wheel long enough to work up a system. Got on to the thing only an hour or so ago. I tell you I can win back all I've lost. That's all I want."

"The poorhouses—and jails—are full of men who had a system to beat roulette."

"But I *know* this will work. It's as good as money in the bank!"

"Yes. I have a picture of Chin Lee watching you break his bank—one of the slickest chinkies between Amoy and Cape York."

"I can beat him," insisted Murgatt. "I can start with my last fiver and beat him. But I want a bigger range of capital to work this racket, so I want—"

"I don't care a damn what you want, you won't get it, George. I've let you have two thousand dollars—out of the safe. I've been a fool. My funds are all in bank in Sydney, but technically I'm short—I'm an embezzler. The Old Man hates a cash balance that's cockeyed worse than he hates the devil. You know that I sat up three nights with the books tracing a shortage of nine shillings that cropped up in remittance to Sydney. And here I am with two thousand dollars out of the office cash."

"You can put a personal check into the cash box," persisted Murgatt.

"A check! For missing money—that belongs to Donald Mackenzie? What would I use cash for in such amount here at Trepang? Tell him I let you have it to gamble? No. I'll have a devil of a time to explain a personal check, but if he goes over my funds, I'll have to cook up a yarn—and take the gaff."

"Oh, he won't count up on you for months."

"He's likely to demand all the available cash the minute he comes ashore from the *Island Trader*, because you know well enough that he's bought the steamer *Fremantle* at Port Lecky on this back trip with Clary. That means he's probably paid out a lot of money in Sydney, and may want cash on hand remitted to the bank. You know that we're ready to load Clary in twenty-four hours after he's pier-side, and he'll sail at once. Every pound and penny may have to be counted through your uncle's fingers—and I've let you gamble away two thousand dollars in company funds." Annesley, as he talked, walked up and down the veranda,

gesturing to drive home his arguments.

"Just you steady down a bit," soothed Murgatt. "If things are as bad as you say —and I didn't realize they were as bad— I'll do some gaff standing myself. But I want five hundred dollars some time before dark tomorrow night."

"You won't have it!"

"I told you I had a system," argued Murgatt. "I've got something better than a system. In fact, I've discovered that Louis the Frog and Chin Lee are running a crooked wheel, and I—"

"Nonsense!" exploded Annesley.

"I tell you I know. There are magnets; the winning numbers were given to me by a friend—that is, one of the numbers is bound to win under certain circumstances, so—"

"You're talking sheer balderdash!" Annesley took off his hat, put it on again, and then made for the steps.

"Just a minute!" insisted Murgatt. "A chap named Spaden—a smart gambler from Sydney—came in with the *Zealand Maid*—discovered what was going on, and—"

"Spaden! Why, that chap's been a jailbird! He's one of the most notorious criminals in Australia. Do you mean to tell me that you're going to let him get you involved with him in some criminal game in Beach Town, and leave you with your head in the bag?"

"He isn't going to be around Beach Town while I'm beating the wheel. He's sailing with the *Zealand Maid* today. I'd never gone in on the thing if he was to be here, but all I've got to do—"

"What's he going away for, if he knows how to beat Chin Lee's wheel? Are you soft in your head to listen to a slimy crook like Spaden—and gamble on his advice?"

"I can tell in twenty minutes if his information is accurate. That's all I want to be heeled with cash for. If the thing works, I can mop up."

"Why didn't you win last night with this inside tip from Spaden?"

"He didn't dare tell me until almost daylight."

"Then he had a good reason for keeping it away from you all night, George. Now, this has gone far enough. Not another word of this shady business. It was bad enough for me to let you have company cash, even to gamble, but to take money from the safe so you could follow advice from this Spaden, I'd be—why, I'd be criminally involved — and probably jailed." Annesley paused for a minute on the top step, to shake a warning finger. "If I hear one more word of your gambling, I'll quit my job for good. My contract's not been renewed, anyway. And if I quit, I'll tell your uncle the reason. I've had thirty years of service with the company, and I'm damned if I'm going to be put in trouble by a youngster like you— even if you do inherit the business."

"Don't be a fool, Annesley! All I need is a little capital to pull myself out of this hole I'm in."

But without any reply, Annesley strode across the clearing and made for the path which led to his own bungalow, partly hidden by a shoulder of jungle that grew out on the side of the hill.

Murgatt watched for a minute, then let his tired eyes rove out over the sea, which was already aflame with color from the gorgeous sunrise. He scanned the horizon to the southward. It was from that quarter that the first smoke of the *Island Trader* would be visible, bringing home the aged owner of Trepang Island.

The *Zealand Maid*, far out beyond the pierhead, began to get her anchor. The Blue Peter fluttered from her foretruck. She was Sydney bound—and Spaden should be aboard.

Murgatt turned and left the veranda. The sunlight was too strong for his sleepy eyes.

III

AT THREE o'clock in the afternoon the *Island Trader* came ramping up over the southern horizon. Her red funnel and her white bridge awnings showed first from her smoke smear. The sunlight began to twinkle from her brasswork. Then she took shape as a

gray and potbellied matron with a bit of white apron showing from her forefoot as she lifted to kick a swell aside.

Annesley watched her through an open *kajang* of the private office. He considered that sixty years before Donald MacKenzie had started business with a schooner he had bought from the underwriters while she lay on the beach of New Guinea with her holds full of water and ruined trade goods. And that steamer was only one of the delivery wagons of the MacKenzie Trading Company, earning her own cost every round trip. Captain Clary, her master, had told Annesley more than once that MacKenzie was not driving her with steaming coal, but with his own heart's blood.

From where he stood Annesley had a view of the single pier, loaded up with bales and sacks and casks, with brown men making a mountain out of the cargo the *Island Trader* would swallow like some starving sea beast on a raid. From the nearby counting rooms he could hear the click and clatter and bustle of clerks getting the lading papers ready. Chinese *schroffs* clicked at abacus boards, adding machines mowed through columns of figures, and typewriters hammered out lading lists.

But Murgatt had not shown himself during the day. His uncle would expect him to be on the job. Annesley had reached a point where he refused to worry about anybody but himself. He turned and glanced at the clock on the big steel safe, took a pair of binoculars from his desk, and returned to the open *kajang* to keep close watch on the approaching steamer.

In time he could make out with the glasses three figures under the bridge awning; one was almost naked, brown, and wearing a turban—the man at the wheel; one was a figure in white at a bridge wing, bent over a pelorus, taking bearings to check the steamer's position for the unbuoyed channel through the reef break; the other paced nervously on the bridge, a red cummerbund about his waist—Donald MacKenzie.

"He didn't buy the *Fremantle* at Port Lecky," whispered Annesley. "That's Captain Clary with him—and Clary was to take the new steamer back to Sydney for docking. Now, why the devil didn't the Old Man buy that steamer?"

He lowered the glasses and frowned. For several minutes he remained with his eyes shut, resting them, and pondering. When a Malay came through the front door with a long board, and went on with his repairs to a section of the floor, Annesley roused himself.

"Pagi," said the manager, "you no done finish when Old Man come this side, you stop your damned hammering and get out."

The brown carpenter paused a minute, hammer poised in midair, and blinked upward.

"*Ai, tuan,*" he answered.

"Oh, blast your *ai tuanning!* You never do what you're told."

The manager gathered his sun helmet off a rack as if he were plucking fruit from a tree, and hurried down toward the pier. He got aboard the ancient tugboat as she cast off to go out and meet the steamer.

Captain Clary was backing his engines by the time the tug was alongside, well out in the harbor. He hated the tugboat and her Malay *patron.*

"Never you mind takin' a line now," he bawled. "See that ladder on the starboard side? Take the Old Man ashore, and come back with that damned mine sweeper of yours so as to hold my stern against that current that hits me after I swing. And you use a hawser that won't break, like it did last time, or I'll kick your backbone out and use it for a walkin' cane!"

"*Ai, tuan,*" called the *patron* meekly. He spat betel juice from the pilot house, threw his wheel over and started for the starboard side of the *Island Trader.*

"What about the *Fremantle?*" Annesley called up to the bridge.

"What's the price of fried fish?" countered the red faced skipper, his cap down over one eye. He waved a hand to the

forecastle head and bellowed, "Now then, Bosun, I told you to fairlead that line past the port bitts. You shift that, or you'll sleep tonight without your ears!"

"You're in a hell of a fine temper," shouted Annesley.

"And you'd better tie your hat down," replied Clary. "When you're done listenin' to what you're goin' to hear, you'll think you're in a gale of wind."

At the bottom of the accommodation ladder the tugboat found a frail old figure holding to a briefcase with one hand and a small bag with the other. His white beard twitched with his jaws as he chewed something, and his blue eyes regarded the approaching tug with hostility. He gave Annesley a nod, then reached forward the bag. But he refused to part with the briefcase.

"Mind that you don't let me fall in. There's fourteen thousand pound in this."

"Then you didn't buy the *Fremantle*, sir?" asked the manager.

"I didna'!" snapped the Old Man. "She's been gnawin' her anchor chains off this last eight months at Port Lecky, and as we stop in on the way back, she'd got a charter and was awa'."

"But I thought you were to buy her in Sydney," said Annesley as the tug churned away for shore.

"And so I was. But I listened to Clary in Sydney, and he said they was askin' five thousand pound too much for her, but if we boarded her at Port Lecky, and planked down the cash, we'd get her on the cable of her local agents. She was gone awa', I'm tellin' you. That's why I've fourteen thousand pound here in the pouch—losin' bank interest."

"Captain Clary's a fine skipper, but no business giant," said Annesley. "If the Sydney agents knew you were interested, they'd never accepted a charter until you'd seen her at Port Lecky."

"Oh, I'm no hurry. I'll have her yet. Copra'll have to go up, and coal down, before she'll show much profit. It's young George I'm thinkin' of. By the time he's learned enough of the business, with Clary on her bridge, by five years, with our new groves bearin', she'd have profits in her belly. But she'd need new engines."

MacKenzie leaped ashore, cast an approving eye on the cargo ready for the *Island Trader* and led the way up to the private office.

"Where's George?" he demanded, as he took off his hat and dropped into his chair behind his desk, still clinging to the briefcase with its treasure.

ANNESLEY turned and looked at Murgatt's desk in a surprised way.

"He must be around somewhere. I sent for him before I went out in the tug."

"Where was he when you sent for him?" insisted MacKenzie. He had caught the note of embarrassment in the manager's voice, and noted the attempt to avoid giving a direct answer to the first question.

"I think he was down in the sheds checking copra."

"Think! Don't you be knowin' where he is?" The Old Man took a big brown envelop from the briefcase.

"No, sir. I don't." Annesley's voice was tart.

"You don't need to be so snappish," said MacKenzie. He chuckled. "Poor Clary! I'm afraid I worried the teeth out of him on the way up from Port Lecky. Ah, well, I'll have the *Fremantle* yet—and at a price less her last freight money, too. She's turnin' a profit for me, even if she's got a cargo. If she should crack her shaft, say, I'd be another five thousand pound off the askin' price, as is, where is." He leaned back and sighed, rubbing his hands over his white hair.

Pagi, bearing a box of nails, entered through a corner *kajang* and, being so intent upon his carpentering problem that he was unaware of MacKenzie's presence, drove a nail with lusty hammer strokes.

MacKenzie clapped his hands to his ears.

"Pagi, get out! Never mind that last piece of board now."

"*Ai, tuan,*" Pagi escaped through the rear *kajang*.

"I'll find out where George is," said Annesley, as he made for a door opening to one of the counting rooms.

"Ah, weel, if he's so ambeetious about checkin' copra, don't trouble him. That's the speerit I like—to have cargo ready, even if his uncle's back hame."

But Annesley went out to the clerks and spoke to a Chinese boy who was singing away in a low tone from a list, while an old yellow *schroff* clicked the figures on the swanpan.

"Here, you, Charlie Soo. Trot up to Mr. Murgatt's bungalow and hurry him this side. You know—no more sleep—Old Man come." Annesley returned to the private office.

MacKenzie, his lips pursed, and one eye shut, was glaring at a calendar on the wall. He turned and transfixed the manager with the open eye.

"Why should George be sleepin'?" he demanded.

"Sir, I don't know. I'm sorry you heard me." He went to his own desk and sat down to arrange some sheets of paper that fluttered under a weight.

"It's your job to know. You're in charge. Georgie's like any other employee. Have you na' deescipleen?"

"You'll have to do your own disciplining of your relations, sir."

"Na doubt," said MacKenzie. "Open the safe." He examined the contents of the brown envelop hastily without removing any of the banknotes.

Annesley stepped to the big safe, held his head a little to one side so as not to cut the light off from the shell paned windows, turned the combination and swung the steel door open.

"Put this on the middle shelf, so it'll be handy. I'll be takin' it back aboard the *Island Trader* when she sails tomorrow. It's the *Fremantle* cash. And while you're there, fetch me the copra book with Barclay's account."

"Barclay!" exclaimed Annesley. "Why, you went over his accounts before you left for Sydney. Didn't you see him there?"

MacKenzie put on his glasses.

"Aye, I saw him."

Annesley, the brown envelop in his hand, hesitated for a moment. Then he put the precious packet in the safe and carried the copra book to MacKenzie. The Old Man wet his thumb on his tongue and began turning pages.

Annesley nervously kept glancing slantwise through an open shutter which gave a view of the hill path up to Murgatt's bungalow.

"I've fired Barclay," said MacKenzie, still turning pages.

"Fired him! Why, he's one of the best men with copra in Sydney. He's been getting an average of ten per cent. over the going rate for our best sun dried quality—and on a falling market. He's been doing well."

"Too well—that's what I fired him for. Too well—for Barclay. Do y' mind, Annesley?" MacKenzie slammed the book shut and pushed it away from him. "He's been sellin' about foor ton a month of my best copra for his own pocket—and some of the money he makes that way he cracks on to the price he pays us so his reports look good."

Annesley was astounded at the news.

"How could he sell four tons a month from your warehouses—without being short in his stocks? Our shipping weights and his sales weights always tallied, and—"

"It'd be a big mouse hole that foor tons a month of copra would slip through," interrupted MacKenzie. "Our scales are all right, but he's short weighting his buyers. So I stopped that, and you don't need to be worried about losin' Barclay, while—" He checked his words abruptly as a shadow fell across the floor.

George Murgatt stood in the open doorway.

IV

"GLAD you're back, Uncle Donald!" exclaimed Murgatt, as he advanced toward MacKenzie's desk with outstretched hand.

"Aye, lad!"

They shook hands. MacKenzie peered at the youngster. He was cleanly shaven, his black hair was wet, and his cheeks were inclined to excessive color, for he had made haste down the hill.

"How's the copra weighin' gettin' on?" The Old Man's eyes were smiling.

Murgatt grinned. He shot a questioning glance at Annesley, as if seeking a hint on how much the Old Man had been told.

"Not very well, sir—today. To tell the truth, I haven't been hurting myself with work while you've been away." He climbed up on his desk and swung his feet.

"Oh, well, I've na doubt you'll make up for it while I'm back, lad. I'm a hard driver, and it'll do you no harm to ease off a bit now and then. What you learn's more important than what you do."

"He's learning fast, sir," said Annesley. But his glance to Murgatt was not so friendly as the commendation.

"I've just got out of bed, Uncle Donald," said Murgatt.

"Eh? What's that? Bed?"

"That's a damned fine way for you to let me down, after I've tried to cover up for you," growled Annesley. He walked over to the safe and began getting out books, which he piled on his desk.

"Are you two fightin'?" demanded MacKenzie.

"No," retorted Annesley. "I've enough on my hands without spending my time fighting with your nephew."

He went back to the safe and brought out a sheaf of papers clipped together, and began sorting them. He stood with his back to MacKenzie.

"Oh, tosh!" said the Old Man. "The two of y' fightin'! That's no way to run the business. It can't go on. You'd better come along with me back to Sydney tomorrow and help me buy the *Fremantle*. Your nerves have a bit of an edge."

"It's my fault, sir," confessed Murgatt. "I've fretted Annesley while you've been away. I've been going it a bit strong over in Beach Town, and he's been worried for fear you'd find it out."

MacKenzie frowned.

"Beach Town! Are y' gettin' thick with that worthless lot of larrikens? You, who's to be owner here? Lad, that's dangerous."

"I told him to keep away from the riffraff at Louis's Place," Annesley exploded. "And I won't be responsible for him, sir—not for one minute."

"The Frog's, eh?" said MacKenzie. "That's the worst! Not that he don't show us a good profit, but I've my doubts aboot his preenciples. Do y' mean to tell me, Georgie, you've been dram takin' at the bar?"

"Not enough to do any damage, sir."

"Enough to keep you in bed daytimes!" retorted MacKenzie. "I don't want y' comin' hame nights sloshed. It'll na do!"

"I've just been knocking about enough to find out what goes on there," protested Murgatt. "It's time somebody kept tabs on Louis. And I can't say I've found anything very wrong, so far. The seamen expect to get their liquor, they lose a little money gambling, but if Louis didn't give 'em what they want, they'd be in chink joints hidden away up in the groves, so—"

"And have you been playin' at cards—to find out what's wrang at th' Frog's?" asked MacKenzie.

"I've gambled a little, yes, sir."

MacKenzie shook his head in horror.

"Gamblin'! My own sister's son. Your mother would not want to be hearin' the like. It's on her account that I brought y' here. Don't y' know that cards are the devil's work? MacKenzies never ha' risked their siller on cards. It's not the matter of the few shillin's you might lose—it's the preenciple o' the thing."

"I don't think I'll be much of a loser, sir," said Murgatt. "In fact, I'm of the opinion that Louis will be glad enough to have me stop."

"There's no money in cards—for the MacKenzies!" declared the Old Man.

"I mind a cousin o' my father's, who went off for a soldier, and he lost two months pay wi' cards—all of forty shillin'—and had to go shoot himself. There's no money in cards for the clan, I'm tellin'."

"Yes, sir. I understand that," admitted Murgatt.

"There's a special lot of selected copra in Shed 9 that needs weighing," said Annesley to Murgatt. "Will you go down there and see to it? It's for the French soap company, and it's got to move with the *Island Trader* tomorrow, or they'll cancel."

"Very good," said Murgatt. He got down from his desk and turned to his uncle.

"I'm feenished wi' you—for the noo," said the Old Man.

He drummed with his fingers on the desk as he watched the young man start down toward the copra sheds. Annesley busied himself by putting books back in the safe. The *Island Trader* was up to her pier and unloading in a frenzy of haste.

"You should ha' kept the youngster in hand, Annesley," said the Old Man. "I left y' in charge."

"Are you going to be wanting anything out of the safe, sir?"

"Na. Lock it. I've no stomach for conseederin' anything till the morn'."

ANNESLEY pushed the steel door shut and the great bolts shot into place. Then the manager went to his own desk and arranged the clipped sheets he had left.

MacKenzie rose, a little wearily.

"I'll be goin' down to see Clary a minute. He's a bit put oot about the way I barked at him. I'm gittin' old, I'm afeard."

"There's an important matter I want to take up with you tomorrow, sir," said Annesley.

"What'll it be?" asked the Old Man.

"I don't want to bother you now. But I've been getting ready for a decision, for several weeks, so if you're going out I'll have the carpenter in again to finish off that job, so he won't be hammering here in the morning."

"Deecision!" said MacKenzie. "There's no deecision that I know aboot, except that you're to come back to Sydney with me, leavin' with Clary tomorrow."

"I'm going to Sydney, yes, but not to buy a steamer, sir."

"Are y' daft?" asked MacKenzie. "What else'd I be askin' you to come along to Sydney, but to feenish off the matter of the *Fremantle?*"

"I am going to quit your service. We neglected to renew my contract when it expired—and I'm as well satisfied."

MacKenzie's eyelids fluttered. He opened his mouth—and shut it. He moved back to his desk and leaned against it.

"Tosh!" he exclaimed. "Quit my sairvice! Is it because of the youngster's makin' trouble for you while I'm away? Man, don't be a fool!"

"George has never obeyed my orders. I've tried to shield him and he uses that fact against me to fool you. I find myself caught in a family row. Besides, George'll be owner here when you're gone, sir—and that means I'll be done anyway. He has no use for me. I'm going to look for a new berth." He threw his batch of papers down on the desk before the old man. "There are my consolidated reports for all departments."

"Don't you know, Annesley, that you're in my will for a life job with the company?" demanded MacKenzie.

"That's very kind of you, sir—you're aware that I know it. But with George in control, it's not worth much. Anyhow, I wouldn't work with him nor under him. He's not going to be a dependable man—I mean I couldn't depend on him to carry out your wishes, will or no will, in regard to me."

MacKenzie's eye was caught by a check pinned to the top sheet. He bent and fingered the paper.

"What's this check?" he asked.

"It's my own check for two thousand

dollars, on my bank in Sydney. It squares my cash account with my general balance."

MacKenzie sat in his chair and drew the papers near him. His eyes took on a glitter of anger.

"What'd you be needin' two thousand dollars out of the safe for?"

"Captain Kenley of the *Flying Fish* loaded for the account of his owners, and in the absence of an order for the stuff, I could not let him have credit for two thousand dollars he was short of cash. He's making a run to the eastward to that new group being opened up, and he loaded more than he had money for."

"Are you and Kenley using my trade goods to build up a business in competition with me—in this new group of islands you're talkin' of?" demanded MacKenzie angrily.

"It may be that Kenley did fool me when he said he was loading for the account of his owners. But it was not until he had sailed that I suspected he might be taking a flyer for himself, so—"

MacKenzie slammed a fist down on his desk.

"You're playin' a hole-in-the-corner game with my capital, Annesley! And Kenley's operating on his owner's schooner and crew bill. If you two want to go into business, why don't you charter a schooner in Sydney, load there, and not take advantage of my steamer costs to get goods this far. And if Kenley turns a profit, his owners'll never hear of it—what they'll hear about is contrary winds and a put-in somewhere to stop a leak. After thirty years do you think I'm a softie to listen to such tosh? So that's what you mean by a new berth—you and Kenley gettin' rich on the capital of others!"

"That's not true, sir," protested Annesley. "Your profit on the deal is thirty per cent. and—"

"Damn the thirty per cent! It's the preenciple o' the thing! Kenley's owners are one of my best customers, and you know it. Now I'm in the poseetion of helpin' one of their scamp skippers to go into business to compete with 'em in their own ship—and on a credit my general manager provided. I'll not accept your check! I'll bring a charge against you of being short in your accounts. Not, mind, for puttin' you in jail, but to prove to Kenley's owners that I'm not cuttin' their throats with their own knife!"

"I'll be ruined if you do that," objected Annesley.

"I'll be ruined—in the trade—if I don't!" retorted MacKenzie.

"Then I'll tell you the truth," said the manager.

"Eh! Have you been lyin'?"

"Yes, sir. I'm forced to come into the open. That check of mine has nothing to do with Kenley or the *Flying Fish*. He loaded here the other day and paid in full with a draft on his owners."

"Then what the hell's all this rigmarole?"

"I lied to protect George. I've let him have, since you left, two thousand dollars out of the safe. He gambled it on the roulette wheel. I was willing to loan him out of my own pocket, but I didn't have the cash. It's all the same—there's the money. I'll stand the loss myself."

MacKenzie reached for the check and tore it to bits.

"You'll stand no loss, Annesley. He'll pay his own debts! Two thousand dollars gambled away—by a MacKenzie! Na, the Murgatts! I'm wrang!"

"I'm sorry," said Annesley. "Of course, I knew George would pay me back—in time. But it's just as I told you when I said I was going to quit. This is something I don't intend to trouble with any more. I'm sailing tomorrow aboard the *Trader* when you've verified my cash. Here are the office keys." He laid them before MacKenzie on the desk, picked up his sun helmet and walked out.

MacKenzie, his chin down on his shirt, glowered at the calendar on the wall, heedless of the crunching of Annesley's shoes as he went up the gravel path toward his bungalow.

V

ANNESLEY was roused from sleep by a sound which he could not locate at first. It seemed to be on the coral path outside. But as he sat up in bed and listened, there seemed to be nothing disturbing. The *Island Trader* was loading with a night shift of natives. The donkey engines wheezed and the tackles creaked and the Malays shouted. He laid back again, settling himself to sleep.

In a minute he sat up again. There was a scratching outside his latticed window. The moonlight made a ladder of luminous bars on the floor. He threw back the mosquito net.

"Annesley!" It was a cautious whisper from the veranda.

"Who's there?"

"Murgatt. Don't make a row. I don't want your houseboys in on this."

Annesley climbed out of bed.

"What time is it?"

Murgatt pulled the bamboo lattice aside and entered through the opening, clumsily. His hat fell off, and he backed against the wall.

"I've kept away from the Old Man," he exclaimed. "He's pretty mad, I suppose."

"I wish you'd keep away from me, too," said Annesley crossly. "Now he'll think you're in my house to cook up some way to hide your goings-on."

"He won't know anything about it," growled Murgatt. "I'm here to fix things up for you."

"You can't fix things for me. I've quit."

"Quit? Did he kick you out?"

"No."

Annesley struck a match and lighted the lamp at the head of his bed. He paused to listen. His houseboy was moving on the rear veranda. He told the servant to go to bed, that he would not be needed.

"Then what'd you quit for?"

"So I won't have to be bothered with you any more."

"You're crazy with the heat!"

"I'm crazy with your gambling, and being fool enough to let you have cash." Annesley stood by the lamp and surveyed the young man with disgust. There was a strong odor of trade gin.

"That's just what I'm here for—to fix things up." Murgatt began to dig into a trouser's pocket.

"You go and fix things up with your uncle."

"Oh, yes? I got out of things pretty well by his thinking I'd only lost a little at cards. I want you to let things ride that way." Using both hands now to sort out what he had taken from his pocket, Murgatt swayed a little, unsteady on his feet, his head bent to see in the dim light of the shaded lamp what he was about.

"What've you got there?" asked Annesley in astonishment. He leaned forward scanning the packet Murgatt was unfolding.

"Something for you. Something you need."

"That's money!"

"Sure it is. I came to pay you off. Don't I owe you two thousand dollars? Aren't you short in your cash? You got to have it—and I made it my business to get it." Murgatt moved toward the little table to get better light.

"Where in the devil would you get the money to square your account with me?"

"None of your damned business."

"Oh, yes, it is."

"Never you mind where I got it. You'll have it in the safe before Uncle Donald finds you're short. That'll be good enough for you."

Annesley was silent for a moment, as Murgatt began to lay one banknote after the other in a pile, counting them off. It was apparent from what the young man said that he was not aware of the fact that MacKenzie already knew of the shortage.

"You've been gambling again," said Annesley. "Those are Bank of England notes—twenty-five pounds."

"I took one more whirl at the wheel—and I won. Told you I would."

"Where'd you get the money to start?"

"I had five dollars left. I broke it, and started with small bets. I played the numbers Spaden told me to—and his dope was right."

"Nonsense! Spaden has loaned you that money—and that means he has you by the nose."

"Spaden's gone. He sailed with the *Zealand Maid* yesterday morning."

"Then you've borrowed from friends in Beach Town."

"I have not. Even at that, I've friends in Beach Town who'd stand by me better'n you have."

"Then you *did* borrow this money."

"I tell you I didn't! I won from Chin Lee. Spaden was right when he tipped me that the wheel was crooked."

Annesley gave a snort of disgust.

"Spaden has turned mighty soft if he knows where he can make money with a crooked wheel, and he turned the information over to you—and sails away."

"He made good, didn't he?" demanded Murgatt, as he waved a hand at the banknotes on the table. "What more can anybody ask? He didn't want to spoil a good thing, but he's coming back to give the wheel a proper trimming. Nothing mysterious about that. He's a canny man, that's all. And I don't intend to overplay the thing, either."

"Say, damn it all, George! You don't mean to tell me that you followed the advice of that blackleg Spaden—and made a winning at the wheel."

"You heard me, Annesley. Look at sixteen twenty-five-pound notes. They're real, too. Four hundred pounds. Two thousand dollars, and the exchange rate in your favor, because though I'm half Scotch, I'm not splitting any pennies with you. Call it interest."

ANNESLEY moved forward and counted the banknotes, more for an excuse to spend the time thinking than to verify the amount before him. Finally, he turned and faced the young man.

"Why don't you bring this to the office in the morning, give it to your uncle, and tell him all about it?"

Murgatt laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"That's the last thing I'll do."

"But if you explain that you borrowed it from me. You're not a loser now at gambling, and you can tell him you've quit. You said yourself yesterday that he'd overlook the business, if you could show you were ahead."

"He'd warn Louis not to let me play again. He might stop Louis from running a wheel—and I don't intend to lose my chance to mop up on what Spaden told me."

"You may have won, tonight," objected Annesley. "But if you did, Louis and Chin Lee are probably in a crooked deal with Spaden to get you in so deep. What their intention would be, I don't know, but most likely they believe that when you inherit the property here, that you'll be heavily in debt."

"How can I get heavily in debt, winning?"

"You won't go on winning."

"Want to get in on a good thing, Annesley? I can show you how we can work together—"

"Don't talk such guff to me! Anything Spaden would cook up would be something to run from. I tell you, there's a plot of some sort. They've let you win—yes. But you're not done yet with Spaden. He told you he was coming back, didn't he?"

"He did. Don't you worry. All I'll lose will be my own winnings; that'll be velvet. I'll lay off when Spaden gets back, and he takes his turn at the game."

"All right," said Annesley. "I'll accept this money. I don't want to put you in the position of having to admit to the Old Man that you used two thousand dollars out of the safe to gamble with—and that I was fool enough to let you have it."

"Thinking once for me—and twice for yourself?"

"I'm not thinking for myself," declared Annesley angrily. "It makes no

difference what kind of a row I have with the Old Man—I'm all the more determined to quit on account of this crooked deal you're in with Spaden."

"Then you won't tell the Old Man how deep I've been in?"

"I can't help myself if he makes an investigation and compels me to tell the truth," evaded Annesley. "I won't lie for you, George, and I'm warning you now. Go on with this crooked game, and you may be worse than in debt; you may be in jail."

Murgatt picked up his hat.

"Any time I can do anything for you just let me know. I don't believe you'll quit."

"You'd better get to bed and sleep off some of that gin before the Old Man's up and asking you where you've been tonight."

"Oh, he's asleep—good and tired," said Murgatt, as he pushed aside the lattice to get out on the veranda. "I made sure of that before I went to Beach Town. So long—" He disappeared on the veranda and walked round to the front steps.

Annesley sat down on his bed and stared at the banknotes. He scowled, puzzled.

"That's damned queer," he whispered. "If he intended to come up here and pay me off, why didn't he get dollars from Louis? Why twenty-five-pound notes? Why, I don't believe Louis would have such denominations—sixteen of 'em."

The manager turned his head to listen. His ears had caught the sound of broken coral being crunched by feet. That meant somebody was coming up from the beach, because there was no broken coral above his bungalow; and Murgatt should be going up the hill on a soft earthen path.

Annesley rose swiftly. He started for the living room, but turned back to blow out the lamp. Then he hastened to the front veranda and peered down over the tops of the flowering shrubs that were on lower ground in front of his quarters. In the moonlight he recognized Murgatt's figure, lurching unsteadily downward toward the waterfront.

"He isn't going home—to bed!" breathed Annesley. "Now, where the devil can he be bound for? Back to Beach Town?"

Annesley watched. He saw Murgatt continue down the zigzag path to the flats. He turned left from the office buildings and took the path to the landward end of the pier. He disappeared among the cargo workers. Presently his white figure crossed the gangplank. There came the sharp rattle of a chain as it was unhooked and dropped to an iron deck. Murgatt was going to sleep aboard the *Island Trader*.

Standing on the veranda, Annesley continued to turn over in his mind the peculiar fact that Murgatt had paid his debt with twenty-five-pound notes.

"There's something fishy about this business," Annesley told himself. "That wheel isn't crooked—or if it is, why should Spaden tip Murgatt? Who the devil would think that the youngster could clean up on the numbers Spaden gave him? It takes a fool for luck!"

He walked up and down the veranda, hands behind his back, head bent in thought. In a few minutes he stopped and suddenly struck his hands together.

"I've got it! Murgatt managed to borrow those notes from Captain Clary. That's it! Crooked wheel—and winning on Spaden's tip about the winning numbers! Nonsense! Fool luck might win on any numbers, yes. But Louis the Frog wouldn't be paying off with a fistful of twenty-five-pound notes. That's Clary feathering his own nest with the youngster. Out of the ship's safe of the *Island Trader*. More company funds . . ."

VI

ANNESLEY breakfasted on his veranda. There he had a view of MacKenzie's nearby bungalow. But the Old Man did not appear before ten o'clock. Then, with his cane, he came sauntering down the hill. He stopped before Murgatt's quarters, hesitated as if inclined to make a visit and find out if the

young man were still at home, but turned again and continued down the path.

Annesley timed his own departure so as to meet MacKenzie where the paths joined. And behind the manager his houseboy followed with a pair of packed bags. At the junction of the paths, the former manager had to wait for the Old Man to come past a clump of mango trees. And as MacKenzie came into sight, he stopped, put his straw hat on the back of his head and stared.

"Ha' you not been down to the office yet?"

"No, sir. I've not been to the office since I left last night—since I left you there."

"No? And why not?"

"Because I resigned yesterday. I left my office keys."

MacKenzie grinned.

"More tosh! Did y' na sleep well?"

"Slept well enough, sir."

"Y' need na be so huffy because y' had a mind to quit. After thirty years wi' me, y' should ha' more sense. I may be mad mysel', noo and then, but I bite na heads off."

"I've made up my mind," persisted Annesley.

"Ah, you'll be of a new mind before tiffin time." MacKenzie surveyed the houseboy with the bags, waiting, a little ahead now down the hill.

"That remains to be seen, sir."

"Wheer's yon boy bound for wi' the luggage? Aye, I know—you're goin' on to Sydney wi' me to buy the *Fremantle*."

"I'm going aboard the *Island Trader*, yes, sir—after you've passed my accounts. If you're still intending to go to Sydney, I'll be glad to have your company; but I must insist that I'm at the end of my service with the firm."

MacKenzie laughed and shook his head. He put a hand on Annesley's arm.

"Ah, come on! You'll be over your mad afore ever we sight Sydney Heads."

Annesley walked along with him.

"I'm bound to get a new berth."

"I've a picture of you getting a new berth in Sydney, the way things are now. You stick to Old MacKenzie. After thirty year, I'm not lettin' you quit. But I'll not fight ye, mind! I'll take your report sheets and let you settle up. Not another word aboot it until we're in Sydney wi' a friendly glass between us, man."

"Have you seen anything of George, sir?"

MacKenzie chuckled.

"It's as well that he's kept awa' from me. I've been thinkin' things over, the night. For a matter of a couple of thousand dollars, I'm not minded to make trouble. It's his money—even it's from the safe—that he's been losin'. Of course, such flibbity-gibbity business has got to stop. It's not the MacKenzie way, and it'll hurt the business to have George goin' on so. He's canny enough to see that; but I don't want to fight him."

"No, don't fight him," said Annesley. "He'll come to his senses if you give him time."

"I'm glad to hear y' agree with me," said the Old Man.

He got out his keys and approached the door of the private office, which was between two wings of general offices. The Chinese clerks were busy at their work, visible through the open *kajangs*.

Annesley followed MacKenzie inside and opened outward the shell paned shutters, kicking aside bits of wood and shavings where Pagi had left a litter the night before.

"Well, what'll we do first?" asked MacKenzie as he laid aside his hat and cane and seated himself at his desk. He rubbed his hands together.

"Check up on the cash on hand and compare with the figures of the total of my consolidated report, sir." Annesley stepped to the safe and rolled the combination knob.

MacKenzie put on his glasses.

"Will you send a boy down to the sheds for George? He ought to be here if you're closing things up, just to hear how things are. I'm to leave him in charge while I'm in Sydney."

Annesley opened the steel door wide. Then he lifted out the metal box which

held the cash and laid it before MacKenzie on the desk.

"Yes, sir—I'll send for George. But first, I want to tell you that the shortage in my cash can be met. I've got the money."

"Oh, don't bother your head about the shortage. I'll make it up myself. It's a nuisance, but I'll simply charge George's salary and allowance in advance. He'll have to pay me back, mind."

"That won't be necessary, sir. I got some money back last night that I'd loaned from my own pocket. Want to clear my own affairs up, too."

"All right," said MacKenzie. He unlocked the cash drawer, using the key from the bunch Annesley had surrendered the day before.

PAGI, who had been lurking behind the building, came in through a rear window, carrying a hammer.

Annesley turned.

"Now, look here! If you're going to do any more damned nailing, I'll kick you out."

Pagi protested in Malay that there was only one small piece of board to go into place in the corner—and the board was cut.

"Then use screws, and keep quiet," said Annesley. "You've been a week at that little repair job. Get done with it. No hammer!"

"Let him feenish off and clear the litter," said MacKenzie. "Anyhow, I want George here."

"He's aboard the *Island Trader*—I'll send for him."

"I thought he was weighin' copra."

"I thought so, too. But I saw him go aboard the steamer this morning." He took a packet of banknotes from his pocket and smoothed them out on the desk.

MacKenzie peered forward, a little startled.

"Twenty-five-pound notes! Where'd you be gittin' the like?"

"Yes, sir. Sixteen of 'em. That makes my cash more than even, sir."

"Weel," said the Old Man, still staring, puzzled. "If you're lendin' money at that rate hereabouts, you're in the bankin' business. Who'd be owin' you foor hundred pounds—and have that kind of money?"

"It's a private matter, sir."

"Be as private as y' like," said the Old Man tartly. "But answer my question. You were settlin' with a personal check last night. Now you're slappin' big notes aboot, and such-like don't grow on bushes at Trepang Island." His eyes blazed as he regarded Annesley with suspicion.

"I presume you've a right to know, sir. You're forcing my hand. I told George he'd better attend to this himself, here in the office, before you."

"George! What's George got to do with twenty-five-pound notes? And if you had to meet the shortage with a check yesterday, why didn't George gi' y' these sixteen afore I got here?"

"He didn't have the money then."

MacKenzie rose from his chair.

"Didn't have it! Wheer'd he be gittin' four hundred pound through the night?"

"He told me he won it gambling at the Frog's."

MacKenzie sat down again, rather limply.

"Don't be tellin' me the like o' that, man. It's na' the truth."

"I doubt it myself, sir. He came up to my bungalow some time before daylight, and paid me off. But I don't think there's anything wrong about it. Really, it's none of my business where he got the money."

"Nothing wrang! Man, it's *my* business. He'd no be winnin' such money at cards—unless I'm daft. If he's that good at gamin' I'll let him take a year awa' from his job. Man, that's profit!"

"He didn't get it gambling," said Annesley. "That was just to smooth me over. We could check up on him, but I didn't want to do that, and make a liar of him. Besides, I'm done here, and what

business is it of mine how he paid the debt?"

"I'm tellin' y' it's my business! Send for the Frog."

"Don't do that," soothed Annesley. "I can't take my oath on what I suspect, but hasn't Captain Clary got in his ship's funds plenty of cash of this sort?"

"You mean the lad—stole from Clary's safe?"

"No, sir. But Clary would lend him money to get him out of a hole."

"Not company cash. Clary knows me too well for such."

"I didn't mean it that way, sir. The skipper could let George have it—from private funds. Clary hasn't bothered to draw his pay for several months, and he'd probably square his ship's funds by coming here for his backpay."

MacKenzie nodded.

"It might be that way. But I don't like it. First, you lie to me wi' a yarn aboot the *Flying Fish*, and now Clary's turned pawnbroker!"

"You begin to understand why I'm quitting," said Annesley. "I went after George rather hard. But what could I do with him when I saw he wasn't sober?"

"Y' mean he had a couple o' drams in him?"

"Not enough to do him any harm. I noticed he had trade gin on his breath, and he's probably got a fine head on him this morning. That's why he went back to the ship—to keep out of your way, sir."

"Fetch me from the safe the envelop with the *Fremantle* money—that foorteen thousand pounds."

"Yes, sir." Annesley went to the safe. Pagi was down on his hands and knees, scraping up sawdust and shavings. "Done! Never mind the mess. Get out, Pagi."

"*Ai, tuan.*"

Annesley reached into the safe. Then he swung the door wider to have a better light. He turned abruptly to MacKenzie.

"You opened the safe after I left yesterday afternoon?"

"I did not," said MacKenzie.

"I can't find—that envelop."

The Old Man got to his feet.

"It'll poke your eye out. I saw you put it on the shelf. The envelop's dark. Open your eyes, man." He moved over beside Annesley and stooped a little to peer in.

"It's not there, sir."

The Old Man straightened and looked at Annesley over the glasses.

"What's this?" he demanded.

"It's gone."

"Go on—get it out!" ordered MacKenzie.

Annesley moved some of the books about and fumbled, reaching in to the back of the shelves, searching out the space where the cash box belonged. He backed away, squared his shoulders and faced MacKenzie.

"It's not to be found."

"Foorteen thousand pound!" said the Old Man weakly. "And—Georgie payin' you with such notes as are on my desk—afore daylight!"

"Oh, George had nothing to do with this," said Annesley. "I locked the safe in your presence, and opened it again now. George couldn't get into the safe. You must've come to the safe after I left, took that envelop out and left it in your desk."

He hurried across the room to MacKenzie's desk.

"Stop, Annesley! No nonsense! I never went near the safe."

"That safe did not unlock itself," said Annesley. "There's something wrong. Even if George did take that money, he's not fool enough to come up to my house with those banknotes and pay me. No, sir—we'll find that George's all right. He got the money some other place."

MacKenzie grabbed his hat from the hanger and, as he passed his desk, gathered up the sheaf of twenty-five-pound notes.

"Stop that tongue clackin' and come along to the ship. And mind y' lock the safe!"

VII

MACKENZIE and Annesley were at the open doorway of Captain Clary's navigating room under the bridge before he was aware of their presence aboard the steamer. He swung from his desk in his swivel chair, pencils over both ears, his white hair sticking up like a cock's comb. He pushed his glasses up on his forehead and stared. His red face took on a deeper color.

"Mornin', Skipper," said MacKenzie.

Clary rose, then turned and slapped a hand down sharply on some papers that began to flutter in the breeze.

"Good morning, sir. Wasn't expectin' you—so early—"

"Well enough I know that, Clary," said MacKenzie. "I hear George's aboard."

"Yes, sir. Somewhere in the saloon. I'll send—"

MacKenzie held up a hand.

"I'll do the sendin'—when it's time. Has he been dram swillin'?"

"Why, not that I'm aware, sir," said Clary, now openly abashed. He glanced at Annesley and showed contempt, as if he blamed the manager for having betrayed Murgatt.

"You're damned well aware of it," said MacKenzie. "You're harborin' him aboard here—drunk. Aware my eye! What'd he be usin' the ship for a hotel for but to blind my eye?"

"When did I get any orders to keep George out of the ship? And with all due respect to you and your head bookkeeper, sir, what the hell are you jumpin' down my throat for about George? Should I kick him out of the ship? Do you expect me to sniff his breath and bust a lung runnin' up the hill to tell you?"

"No, not exactly, but—"

Clary put on his cap, as if it gave him moral support, and broke in sharply:

"Not exactly is just that, and not one more button on or off the cook's coat, sir! You've spies enough, I take it, without puttin' me on the job!"

"Weel, I was just—"

"Well, you just stop it, sir!" said the skipper. "I'm no office jumper. And if your nephew has both legs hollow, and fills 'em both with booze, blame his grandfather, not me."

"His grandfether was na a drinkin' man."

"Maybe that's what was the matter with him. And if I'm to be treated like a new stoker that's been arrested for bigamy in Bombay, take the ship."

"Whoosh, man! Dinna go crazy!"

"I'm crazy now," said Captain Clary. "What with this *Fremantle* business, and you comin' aboard me like a crosseyed bailiff, I've no more temper left than a Saturday night saw."

"Wheer's the ship's cash?" said MacKenzie.

Captain Clary's head snapped back. He turned to conceal his renewed astonishment, and drew from the open safe a tin tray without a top. He slammed it on his desk.

"Y' need na break the fixin's," chided MacKenzie, as he began to riffle the banknotes with a thumb and finger, while Annesley leaned against the door casing.

"Ha' y' got twenty-five-pound notes—in quantity, mind?"

"I don't know," said Clary curtly. "What if I have? Is this some new kind of a charade?"

MacKenzie slipped into the swivel chair and swung it round to bring his eyes to bear on the skipper.

"Did you loan George sixteen twenty-five-pound notes?"

"I did not, sir."

MacKenzie seemed to wilt deeper into the chair. Annesley gave a hissing whistle and looked concerned.

"Then did you loan him money from your own pocket, if not from the ship's funds?" persisted MacKenzie eagerly.

"I loaned him no money. And the ship's funds are in order to the last brass farthing, if that's what you're driving at. If you like, you can have the lot—with the proper receipt for same—and put it where the monkey put the nuts." Clary

glared across at Annesley, as if convinced that the manager was behind the trouble.

MacKenzie ignored the skipper's remarks.

"There's cash missing from the office safe," said Annesley to a porthole.

"Eh?" exclaimed Clary.

"Foorteen thousand pounds," said MacKenzie.

"E-eh!" squeaked Clary.

MacKenzie nodded sadly.

"I wish you'd lent the youngster the money, Clary."

Clary pushed his cap to the back of his head, and bent down to look into the faded blue eyes.

"And how in the hell could I be givin' George fourteen thousand pounds out of the office safe, mister?"

"I dinna mean the like," said MacKenzie. "Sixteen twenty-five-pound notes is what I'm speakin' aboot."

Captain Clary opened his eyes wide and leaned back from peering into his owner's face.

"I never was good at riddles. What's in the wind?"

"Send for George," said MacKenzie.

"You're whistlin' I'll send for him!" declared Clary. He went to the other side of the ship and passed out through the doorway which would prevent any disturbance of Annesley.

"It looks bad," said MacKenzie.

"Don't worry, sir. You'll get your money back. It'd be bad enough for you to lose it, but it'd be worse for me, even though my responsibility was at an end."

"Nobody's raised the p'int," said MacKenzie.

"You don't have to, sir. I'm not going to leave Trepang Island until this matter's cleared up."

CLARY returned, his jaws set. And close behind him Murgatt appeared. He was freshly shaven. His hair was wet, as if he had put his head into a bucket of water. He was buttoning his shirt at the throat. And his sleepy eyes were troubled.

"Morning, Uncle Donald."

"Mornin' yoursel'. Wheer were you the night?"

"I slept aboard, sir."

"Y' did. You were dram swillin' in Beach Town, were y' na?"

"I went to Beach Town, yes, sir."

"I told y' as much the noo. Swillin' gin not fit for scourin' tanks wi'."

Murgatt gave Annesley a hard look.

"Who said so?"

MacKenzie ignored the question.

"The *Fremantle's* money's gone from the safe."

"No! That can't—"

"It can! What was y' doin' wi' sixteen twenty-five-pound notes this morn—afoor daylight?"

Murgatt swung to Annesley.

"So you spilled everything on me!"

"He defended ye!" declared MacKenzie.

"I don't want any of his defending!" Murgatt turned to Clary. "Where are the bags that Annesley sent aboard?"

"Next door in the smoke room, locked up."

"What do you want of my bags?" demanded Annesley.

"Want to look into 'em," replied Murgatt.

"Stop such-like!" ordered MacKenzie, as Clary passed out on deck and began unlocking the door to the little smoking room.

Annesley's face betrayed his fury. When he spoke again he used restraint.

"Why should my bags be searched? The office safe was locked when I left yesterday, and—"

"You're sailing this afternoon with the *Trader?*" asked Murgatt.

"I don't have to answer your questions, but I'll tell you that I'm not going until the missing cash is found," retorted Annesley.

"You can bet you won't," declared Murgatt, as Clary, who had apparently given no heed to Annesley's objection, brought in the two bags.

"Explain where you got Bank of England notes last night," said Annesley.

"I told you I'd won 'em gambling, didn't I?"

"That's to be proven," said Annesley. "And until it is, I don't intend to have my bags opened."

Clary pointed to the bags.

"Open 'em! You're a passenger aboard here—and I'm master of this vessel. We'll start findin' that money right now! Not that I say you've got it, but it's a start."

"Aye, open 'em," said MacKenzie. "Mind, Annesley, you're not accused. You'll be cleared."

"Put it that way, I don't mind," said Annesley. He unlocked the bags and invited Clary to lay the contents out.

There was nothing incriminating among Annesley's possessions. He repacked carefully in silence, while Captain Clary looked on, smoking reflectively, apparently disappointed that Annesley was not proven a thief.

"Wheer did you get that cash—them sixteen?" asked MacKenzie of Murgatt. "It's na good to say y' got it gamin', if y' did na, lad."

Murgatt was shaky. He turned from the open doorway, sadly, and hesitated for a minute, lips twitching, before he replied.

"No, sir—I did not win at gambling last night."

"Ah!" breathed MacKenzie, leaning forward quickly. "Then wheer?"

"Come back to the office, and I'll tell everything," said Murgatt. "And I want you, too, Captain Clary."

MacKenzie got to his feet and sighed. He led the way to the pier, head down, hands behind his back.

"I'll send a boy for the bags," said Annesley. "I'll sail if the thing's cleared up, Clary—but not until." He followed Murgatt ashore, and Captain Clary trailed behind them.

MacKenzie was at his desk by the time Annesley arrived with Clary at the office. Murgatt was sitting in a chair, downcast and silent.

"Now, then," MacKenzie began sharply, "the truth, George!"

"I borrowed the money from a man named Spaden, sir."

Annesley grinned and waved a hand.

"Send for Spaden," said the Old Man.

"He sailed with the *Zealand Maid*," said Murgatt. "Before you arrived in the *Trader*."

"Then why did na you pay Annesley what you was owin' him for your gamin' losses before I got back here from Sydney?"

"I didn't want to pay Annesley then," said George sulkily. "I needed what I borrowed from Spaden to win what I'd borrowed and get ahead of the game before I cleared my accounts."

Annesley stepped forward and confronted the young man.

"Did Spaden give you—lend you—more money than you needed to clear with me?"

Murgatt hesitated. He looked up from his chair, meeting Annesley's eyes with hostility.

"What is it to you, Annesley?"

"Nothing much," said Annesley, "except that I believe you have more of Spaden's money on you. I've been searched—now I demand that the extent of Spaden's loan be settled—and I demand that you be searched."

Murgatt got to his feet.

"All right," he said. He began emptying the pockets of his white coat. He laid the contents on his uncle's desk, while Annesley watched with the others.

The manager then stepped to the desk and picked up a small notebook from Murgatt's effects and began to examine its pages.

"Keep your hands off that book!" protested Murgatt angrily. He snatched at Annesley's hand, but failed to grasp the book.

The manager thrust Murgatt away and offered the book to MacKenzie.

"Look at the last entry—there, sir."

THE Old Man put on his glasses and held the book aside for the strongest light. His mouth twisted into a mirthless grin that held back angry words. There was a ferocious glitter in his eyes as he

stared back over his glasses at Annesley.

"What do you make of it, sir?" asked Annesley.

MacKenzie tossed the bit of paper aside.

"It's all I need," he said. "Open the safe and bring me my private file."

Murgatt had stopped clearing his pockets, and looked after Annesley. Captain Clary edged in nearer to the desk of MacKenzie, trying to get a sight of the slip which the Old Man had examined.

MacKenzie unlocked the steel box and took from it a document which he folded across the middle and thrust down into a coconut shell used as an ashtray for cigars. He struck a match and ignited the paper.

"What're you starting up that bonfire here for?" demanded Clary. "Want to drive us out with smoke?"

"I'm burnin' my will," said MacKenzie.

"Hey?" yelled Clary. "You mean you're cuttin' the youngster off for somethin' he's got in a notebook? This is none of my pie, but you'd better wait for proof before—"

"I'm tellin' y' it's time I made a new will," insisted MacKenzie.

"Don't you let anybody pull your nose!" bawled Captain Clary. "This is all the say-so of Annesley, and I wouldn't trust—"

"Clary!" interrupted Annesley sharply. "Don't waste your breath about how you'd trust me. There's been fourteen thousand pounds taken from this office safe, and there are numbers written down—"

"I don't care a damn for the multiplication tables all laid out in a row and a battleship's crew eatin' Sunday dinner off 'em!" roared Clary. "What I want to know is what all this has got to—"

"Here!" said Annesley, as he held Murgatt's notebook open before Clary's face.

"Read those figures: 683—294."

Captain Clary stared at the page angrily, but he made no attempt to verify them. Instead, he glowered at Annesley.

"What the hell good t' do if I did read 'em—backwards and for'ards?" he demanded.

"Those numbers are the combination to the office safe. Can you get that through your thick, sea going head? The combination—and the safe's been opened and fourteen thousand pounds missing," said Annesley.

Captain Clary backed away a little, pulled his cap down low over his eyes, threw his head up and regarded Annesley with savage contempt.

"My sea going head, is it?" he demanded. "Never you mind my head. All you do is let your breath make a squeaky noise in your gullet!" He pushed the cap on the back of his head now, spat on the palm of a hand, and with his shoulders and fists thrust forward, he began to walk slowly toward Annesley. "My sea going head is thick—yes! But why in the hell shouldn't George Murgatt have the combination to the safe—as well as you?"

"Because he never has had it," retorted Annesley. "I did not want any responsibility divided when George came here last year, and I requested that Mr. MacKenzie keep the combination secret between us. Can you understand that?"

Captain Clary's mouth opened as he grasped the meaning of George Murgatt having the figures of the combination in a book—with the *Fremantle* purchase money missing from the safe. He let his hands fall to his sides, and turned to young Murgatt.

"I—I begin to figure that things look bad, George," he said sadly.

"Not so verra bad, Clary," said MacKenzie.

Annesley whirled and looked at the Old Man.

"Not bad!" cried the manager. "What do you mean, sir? You know George has no business having those figures in—a book."

"I mean this," said MacKenzie. "It's true you asked me not to tell George the combination, but I did tell him."

Annesley, astounded, backed up against a desk, staring at MacKenzie.

"But there's somethin' wrang enough," said the Old Man.

"What in the name of Hanrahan's black bull's wrong about it?" demanded Captain Clary. "If you gave the youngster—"

"This is wrang," persisted MacKenzie. "Wheer'd Georgie get them twenty-five-pound notes last night—to go sneakin' up to Annesley with?"

Captain Clary leaped at MacKenzie's desk and slammed a hairy paw down upon the top, making the smoking coconut shell jump.

"I can answer that question, Mr. Donald MacKenzie! When you want to know somethin' like that, I'm the man. Ask me—and the answer you'll get is as good as anything you've got in your bank, sir."

"You know naught about it," said MacKenzie. "You tell it me on the ship that you neither loaned nor gave Georgie the banknotes. Was you lyin' to me, Clary, when y' said it?"

"I was not," said Clary. "I neither loaned nor gave, as I said. I never lie—about money. But what I did do was swap to George British banknotes for two thousand dollars in American money which he handed over to me a little before midnight last night aboard me. And I'm askin', with all due respect to you as my owner, what the bloomin' hell is wrong about that?"

MacKenzie's face brightened, and his lips began to form into a grin.

"Where'd you get two thousand dollars?" Annesley demanded from Murgatt.

"I got 'em from you, Annesley—but I didn't lose 'em gambling, as you thought I did. You could buy a suit of clothes with what I lost at the wheel in the Frog's place—but you thought you had me in a trap, didn't you, Annesley? Well, you walked into the trap with both feet, I'm sorry to say. Wanted me kicked back to Sydney, and out of the will, and blamed for stealing from the safe—"

"I don't know what you're talking about," declared Annesley, in a shrill voice. "This talk of a trap—what're you driving at?"

Captain Clary stepped between them and faced Annesley, a fist under the manager's nose.

"I can answer that little question, too, mister!" he bawled. "This is my mornin' for answerin' such for you—and you ain't goin' to like the answer, neither!"

"I wish you'd keep out of my business," said Annesley.

"You hark at me!" roared Captain Clary. "I've been in your business most of last night, and I know a hell of a lot more about it than you do yourself—me and my thick sea going head."

"Most of last night!" repeated Annesley. "How do you mean—?"

"I been usin' my wireless man aboard the *Island Trader*—me and George Murgatt. And we was talkin' to the skipper of the *Zealand Maid*, by radio, and a man named Spaden aboard her as passenger!"

ANNESLEY staggered back against his desk. Then his body seemed to freeze. The lines in his face appeared to grow deeper, and his head sagged forward a little, weakly. His eyes were upon the thin line of smoke rising from the coconut shell on MacKenzie's desk.

"What's this aboot the *Zealand Maid?*" asked the Old Man. "I want no trouble with the Burnett-Phillips people, Clary. Mind you involve none of their officers—unless ye've good reason."

But Clary gave no heed to the Old Man. Instead, the captain went on talking to Annesley.

"And Spaden coughed up. He had to—because we scared him with jail. Besides, the second mate of the *Maid* saw Spaden talkin' to young Murgatt. Drunk, he was, at the time, and he didn't know what was said between the two at the Frog's but Spaden coughed up that you'd paid him to give numbers to Murgatt that would win at the chink's roulette wheel. Spaden didn't know the numbers were a safe combination—but Murgatt

did. And he knew that you were the only white man on the island who could hand out such figures to Spaden."

"Eh, what's this, noo?" demanded MacKenzie. "A gambler, spewin' my combination aboot in a dram bar?"

"Only to get me in a bad jam with you, sir," said Murgatt. He turned to Annesley. "You knew last night that the British banknotes I gave you were none of the *Fremantle* money—but you saw that you could make my uncle believe I'd lifted money from the safe. You already had that *Fremantle* money out of the safe, and you only sent your bags aboard the steamer this morning so they'd be searched, and you'd have your skirts cleared. You knew you could get that fourteen thousand pounds at any time you wanted it—even if you sailed with Captain Clary tonight and came back months later. You dig it up—and dig it up now, Annesley."

Annesley brushed something away from before his eyes. He moved sidewise and got into his chair.

"Damn Spaden!" he muttered. "I might've known he'd never stand up under me."

"I'd say you'll have to make a new will —with George in it, sir," said Clary.

"I didna' burn the will because Georgie was in it," said MacKenzie. "I burned it because Annesley was in it, and I knew he was wrang. But wheer's that *Fremantle* foorteen thousand pounds?"

Annesley rolled his chair back and reached down to one of the lower drawers in his desk. He took out a screw driver.

"Before I locked the safe yesterday," he began in a dull monotone, "I put the *Fremantle* envelop you'd handed me under the hole in the floor. Take up the last repair board Pagi used screws on. I wanted to get it up without using a hammer."

"Man!" cried MacKenzie. "Y' must ha' been daft! To be hidin' awa' my money on me—and you cared for in my will!"

Annesley drew a hand down his face.

"It's been going on for a couple of years," he said quietly. "I was afraid you'd die and I'd be out. Then when you made George your heir—well, I wanted him out—off the island—out of your will —anything to get rid of him. Barclay and I have been in together to pile up capital by cheating here and there. But when I heard you'd fired him in Sydney, I knew I had to get out, will or no will, because Barclay'd be bound to squeal on me, or bleed me, if I managed to stay on, even with George disinherited."

"But you didn't know," said Murgatt, "when you told Spaden to give me roulette numbers that were the safe combination, there'd be any fourteen thousand pounds in the safe—the *Fremantle* cash."

Annesley shook his head.

"No. At that time, I intended to have money short in the cash box, which your uncle would think you'd taken to gamble with. That would finish you with him. But when I had the *Fremantle* cash in my hands yesterday—and Spaden had told me you had his numbers in your notebook—I thought I could hang the *Fremantle* theft on you; keep it myself—get it later. I never dreamed that you knew the combination. But paying me in pounds last night—well, I thought you were done for with your uncle."

Murgatt nodded understandingly. Clary shook his head in disgust. MacKenzie walked across the room and put a hand on Annesley's shoulder.

"After thirty year! You'd smash my love for my ain kin! Man, I'd never believed Barclay, nor my Georgie here, that you was wrang. But I'm feelin' sa gude that the laddie was na gamin' and drinkin', that I'll na be harsh wi' y'. I'm an old man, and easy to fule—the noo— but Georgie here, I'm proud he's a real MacKenzie. And you there, Clary! When I comes blusterin' aboard y' this morn, y' pulled my leg. But y' was workin' with the laddie to save him. Ha, man! Thot's the kind o' speerit! You'll be kept ashore now, to mind all the ships for us. Georgie, tak' the boord up and let's have a look at the cash. I'm all in a sweat to have a look at that foorteen thousand pound!"

HIS OWN AFFAIR

A Story of India Today

By NEGLEY FARSON

HE WAS sent out as a correspondent, and he came out with the best of intentions, as so many people do to Hades and the Far East. He was a little ashamed of them now; they had let him down so often; and whatever few he had left he did not know himself—they were buried so deep beneath the shell he had cultivated.

Not yet forty, and bitter as the devil, it gave him a sardonic pleasure to know that from Bombay to the Khyber he was known as a British renegade. Like biting down on a sore tooth. To know that the Yacht Club detested him—it was satisfaction itself to know that they could not feel lukewarm about him—he was making things hot for them. Hardly a day passed wherein something did not happen which suited his book.

A twist here, a quip there, and home went a cable that made them sizzle and sit up. Sooner or later they would have to kick him out of the country, and then—Well, he didn't want to look too far into the future, but it would be nice to walk down Piccadilly once more when the leaves were out in Green Park. And to be deported, sent back home—for telling the truth!—that would be the best joke of all of it.

What a finish to five years!

They discussed him in the Yacht Club:

"It's our fault, I tell you," said a government official to an I. C. S. man. "If we'd taken that fellow in, instead of turning our backs on him, we could have soon brought him round. What that fellow's aching for is companionship—his own kind."

"His own kind!"

"Well, you know what I'm driving at. A man can't go on out here like the Archangel Whatisname—suspended between heaven and hell. If we don't take him then the others will."

"Where's he now?"

"Up at Dalapur."

" 'Strewth!"

"That's what I'm talking about. We—er—had to go in for a certain amount of—ah—retaliations up there. Stop the thing before it got too much for us."

"I know; an unfortunate business to say the least of it. But still, the British public is not a damned fool."

"The British public, my dear fellow, is four thousand miles away; besides that it's even more than you said it wasn't—and Rodd knows it."

Rodd knew it, all right.

"Am I to understand—" he was heckling the auxiliary major in command at Dalapur—"that I am not allowed to send my dispatches from here?"

The major, who had been wired of Rodd's descent upon him, merely nodded.

"But that's suppression of the news."

The major explained that there were some fifty Europeans, twenty native police and seventy native soldiery holding the railway station and post office they were in on the outskirts of Dalapur. There were over twenty thousand people in the bazaar. The police had learned through their spies that the bazaar meant to attack the railway station that night.

"If I let you send a telegram out of here," said the major, keeping a strong hold on himself, "every word you say will be relayed immediately to the bazaar by the telephone clerk. They will know how weak we are. Sorry, but you will have to restrain yourself."

"Tomorrow then?"

"If we are alive tomorrow—well, that's another day. Come and see me then."

Again it suited Rodd's book perfectly. Suppression of the news! Always a good club to hit them with. And then, ostracized by the officers—he would have given his soul to have been invited to have a drink from that whisky bottle—he was forced to fraternize with the troops. Tommies, if you knew how to handle them, were trusting souls and always talked unguardedly. From a *chi-chi* railway clerk he got a graphic and entirely uncensored account of the last two day's events. The *chi-chi*, far more venomous against the dusky section of his ancestry than any white man could have been, gleefully used the adjective.

"These benighted Wogs," he began, and to Rodd's hungry ears the story of a lifetime, the story he had been waiting for, unfolded itself.

IT HAD started with a riot, he learned, the previous afternoon over the attempt of the congress-wallas to cut down some toddy palms in furtherance of Mahatma Gandhi's prohibition crusade. They had stoned the local police superintendent and district magistrate who tried to interfere. The police had been "forced to fire". Then the mob had run amok, raided the police *choki* inside the bazaar, dragged out two unfortunate native constables—and burned them alive.

Then the *chi-chi* surpassed himself. With every other word an adjective he described how two motor buses with machine guns on top, and full of native troops, had been sent into the bazaar to retaliate. According to the narrator, there was a white police sergeant in each bus, one of whom evidently did not like the job; but the other, a chap named Binkey—apparently already famous in those parts—had been admirably keen on it.

"Pop-pop-pop! Never saw such revolver shootin' in your life! Knocked 'em over he did just as if they was coconuts!"

The number of dead, said the railway clerk, would never really be known, because the Hindus would drag them off in the streets and burn them covertly later.

"What I says is," concluded the *chi-chi*, flattered by the fact that Rodd was taking notes of this, "we've either got to rule or get out. If a mob like this once gets out of hand there's no stoppin' 'em. There'll be bus patrols going in there all day tomorrow. Take my advice and get them to let you go in with one—go see for yourself."

It was a suggestion for which Rodd thanked him cordially and for which, later

at the railway club, he asked permission to be allowed to pay for a dozen rounds of warm beer.

He stood before the major again the next morning. "Well?"

What he was really saying in every line of his smiling arrogance was, "You see I'm still here, still alive; now what are you going to do about it?"

The attack had not come off; but the major, who had spent a tortured night, eyed Rodd as if he were now wishing it had. Calamity itself would be welcome if it could rid him of this newspaper man.

"You can send your stories now if you want to. I must, however, request you to let me see them first."

He made no mention of a telephone conference he had held during the night with Bombay in which the harassed Home Member had told him to handle Rodd with kid gloves—"Don't give the blighter a single weapon to hit us with; he's clever as all get out—" and the conclusion of the talk which was that if Rodd's wires were too scandalous they would kill them under the Indian Posts and Telegraphs Act, in Bombay. The major did not tell Rodd that!

"Thanks." Rodd smiled. "I'll send nothing but the facts. But first I'd like to have permission to go with one of the patrol buses into the bazaar—want to see what it looks like."

The facts, thought the major ruefully, were quite bad enough—especially when relayed to a populace four thousand miles away which had no comprehension whatever of the background of this scene—and what was behind this wish to enter the bazaar? Still, kid gloves was the order. The major got up.

"Right. We have two going in now—send them every hour. There's a native magistrate in each to give the legal order to fire if the mob should get nasty. I'm afraid you'll be the only white man going in with them this time. And of course, you realize you go on your own responsibility?"

Rodd smiled. The buses were two ramshackle contraptions which had obviously seen better days in their dusty passenger service between the railway and bazaar. Stuffed in each, with rifles between their knees, were fourteen native soldiers—Dogras—with their odd, parrot beaked turbans. On the front seat of the first sat a skinny Mohammedan magistrate in red fez. On the second squashed a fat Hindu. The *jamadar* of the Dogras came to a sharp salute.

"You'll get your name in the papers," the auxiliary major told him laughingly. "This gentlemen writes for the British press."

The *jamadar*, innocent of the major's subtle dig, bared two rows of magnificent teeth and gave Rodd another sharp salute. Rodd squeezed in beside the Hindu magistrate and the buses rolled away.

DALAPUR, on peaceful occasions, was a southern India mill town with a colorful, odorous bazaar and pleasant European lines where the mill managers and executives led their lives in shaded stone bungalows nestling in the restful seclusion of mimosa and gold mohur trees. The railway was two miles from the town. And as they trundled along that dusty road Rodd began to write his cable in his mind.

He, too, had had a bad night. It was not the fear of attack that had kept him lying awake on the railway platform all night, gazing at the stars; it was loneliness. Other men, white men, were sprawled on their sleeping bags all around him. In fact, the shotgun of one juvenile executive kept constantly jabbing into his back. They spoke to him of course; but with too much politeness. One of them even went so far as to offer him a drink. But his manner could not hide that it was in compliance with the proprieties and, although Rodd would have given his soul that moment for a stiff three fingers of whisky, he politely refused. The gesture made, they did not bother more, and he lay there and listened to them talk.

"Indian masses—common people—got to stay here and protect them from their

own kind. Look at old Day here (evidently the district magistrate) the way they trust him . . . Hindus trying to do in the Mohammedans . . . England's duty to fulfill her obligations out here . . . Hindu lawyers . . . Hindu money lenders . . . Stick here until they're fit to govern themselves . . . When you've taught people to look up to you, you can't let them down . . ."

"What sheer, utter blah," Rodd muttered to himself.

The old, old White Man's Burden stuff again. From Madras to Malaya it had been dinned into his ears for five years. What was so sacrosanct about lack of pigmentation?—just as many white blackguards as there were brown ones. (And he ought to know!) If the very institution of the sahib hadn't given the poor Indian such an inferiority complex there wouldn't be any color line. The French didn't know one . . .

And then this jingoistic imperialism—Kipling stuff—he was getting earfuls of, like puffs of smoke, from the major and his adjutant in their comfortable railway car-cum-bedroom on the siding.

"Jolly well got to shock 'em—establish funk from the start . . . Got those machine guns posted on the two roads? Well, cheerio, here's how—" The fizz of a siphon, sound of ice dropped in a glass . . .

Rodd licked his dry lips now as they drove toward the bazaar. He hated to think what he wouldn't give for a good stiff shot of whisky right this minute. He couldn't find his servant in his haste to leave Bombay, rushed up here without even a fresh change of clothes; no blanket roll, no ice box, not even his shaving tackle. He knew that the Hindu magistrate beside him was puzzled to see a sahib in such a grimy state—perhaps he was thinking that he was not a sahib!

Well, he wasn't, in the conventional sense of the word. He was off sahib stuff, anyway; it was long, long out of date. Just another way of saying stuffed shirt.

On the outskirts of the bazaar they stopped to examine the still smoldering ruins of the courthouse the natives had pillaged the previous day. From something in the fat Hindu's eyes as he regarded them Rodd got the hint that the fat magistrate was not altogether displeased.

"Must have handled them pretty savagely," he suggested to the magistrate, "to make the bazaar run amok like this?"

The Hindu started, and then slowly nodded his head. Under Rodd's seductive sympathy he hinted that there were several things in this affair which would not stand the light of day. The white police sergeant, for instance (evidently the estimable Binkey) had shot two small boys. One of them was the only child of the Hindu headman in the bazaar. Of course, Mr. Day, the district magistrate, was furious about it and had demanded an immediate and thorough investigation of Sergeant Binkey's conduct the previous day; but still—the children were dead.

Rodd shrugged.

"No wonder the bazaar feels wild about it. They have a score to settle, I should think."

The magistrate nodded.

"You see, sir, it might have been an accident—but that is very hard to explain to people when they are very excited."

He mentioned the presence of some fifty *badmashas* in the bazaar, mostly bullies from the local physical training schools, who were nothing better than a band of professional assassins.

"I greatly regret that duty takes us in there today."

Rodd, despite the life he had been living, felt much the same way. There was a tang about it, of course, which appealed to him; but what chance would twenty-eight Dogra rifles, a couple of unarmed bus drivers and two magistrates have if the bazaar should decide to turn ugly. It suddenly came to him that if anything did happen the only white man inside that bazaar of twenty thousand would be himself!

BUT still, twenty-eight rifles were twenty-eight rifles—and this crowd was cowed. Sergeant Binkey had obviously "established a funk". Rodd fancied he saw a shudder run through the bazaar at the approach of the first patrol. A queer fancy, perhaps, because as they turned each corner the narrow little dirt street became instantly deserted. Its denizens scuttled into doors and alleyways like fleeing game.

Yes, Sergeant Binkey had certainly done a good job—too good, perhaps. All the narrow little shops had their boards up—always a sure sign of trouble in the East. And a little child that rushed out to drive its pet deer off the road was screamed at from behind a dozen lattices —as if it were risking its life!

Terrific color stuff for the story he would write. There was something fearfully pathetic about it, the way these people were being debased. White Man's Burden, eh?—as interpreted by Sergeant Binkey. Well, let him see how all this would look in print.

But in the twisting copper bazaar, behind the Street of the Story Tellers, the inhabitants appeared to pluck up heart. As the two buses were halted there outside the gruesome ruins of the still smoldering police *choki*, an earnest group of about a dozen obviously frightened natives emerged from an alleyway. At their head walked a desperate figure with outstretched hands, weeping violently.

"The father," said the magistrate.

The man's tearful eyes searched the first bus, apparently looking for the white face of the figure he knew would be in authority; and then, seeing Rodd, came directly along to him. Fear had obviously been banished from this man by utter desperation, and as he held out his supplicating hands, almost touching Rodd's face, he clenched them and shook them.

"What's he want?" Rodd asked the magistrate.

"He wants to know why you killed his child."

"I—?" The "you" part of it suddenly struck Rodd—he was a white man! It was not any particular white man that had killed this child—it was *the* white man. There was no way of disowning it! What were apparently the magistrate's attempts to explain that Rodd had nothing to do with this case were brushed aside by the frantic figure as if they were so much stuff and nonsense. And at one juncture he gave the fat Hindu such a look that that worthy shut up as if a knife had been stuck into him.

"What's he saying?"

"He says," translated the magistrate surlily, "that his child was merely playing on the balcony."

There was nothing that could be said to that. Explain that it must have been an accident? Yes, but with the feelings of the bazaar in the state they were in this was hardly the time to attempt it. Also—it did not suit his book.

"Tell him to drive on," said Rodd suddenly, indicating the driver.

The driver honked his horn, the first bus moved away; but the one they were in gave a lurch, a convulsive tremor—and stopped. At the same instant the radiator cap blew off and a volcano of scalding water and hot steam spewed over the spectators.

There was something funny about it at first. Rodd grinned at the childish excitement among the Dogras behind him, the bellows of alarm the cascade had brought from the natives. But then he began to realize that there was something not quite so funny about it; the bus had obviously lost the one thing that gave them safety in that bazaar—its mobility.

He kept his fears to himself, but he could see in a few seconds that the crowd was also becoming aware of it. The mass of people was larger now; much larger. And the first layman interest in watching the badly scared driver trying to crank up again was turning into muttered asides and sudden departures of soft footed figures, who immediately returned again —with more people.

They were bolder. One red turbaned creature with diseased eyes and a mouth

that was the most obscene thing Rodd had ever seen in his life, shoved his way close to the bus and grinned in Rodd's face. If, thought Rodd, he was ever called on to pick a character for a movie—a brute to represent vice, lust, and utter bestiality—this was the one. Obviously a *badmasha*. The thought did not comfort him.

Neither did the way he noticed the fat Hindu magistrate had suddenly gone flabby after the few words the *badmasha* had spoken to him.

This was a tight place.

THE Dogras were professional. Their *jamadar* had fallen them out, and they stood in two protective files beside each of the two buses, waiting orders. Rodd noticed that as they eyed the massing crowd their eyes had that round, expectant stare of a man who is watching a deadly enemy moving down on him. And from time to time they looked toward their *jamadar* for orders.

But *whose* orders?

Rodd, looking at the *jamadar*, saw that he in turn was looking at the two native magistrates. Those two gentlemen had met in a space about halfway between the two buses and were arguing and gesticulating. Evidently, they could not make up their minds what to do. And while they were arguing, with each swift second, the situation was growing worse.

From his position in the bus, where he was still seated, smoking a cigaret he had lighted not so much from desire as in effort to appear casual, Rodd could see that the dirty little street behind and ahead of them was jammed with silent, hesitating, yet menacing figures.

Then some one shouted.

It broke the spell of the *jamadar's* observance to discipline, at any rate. Jerking his eyes away from the two wrangling magistrates, he barked a sharp command, which, to Rodd's consternation, resulted in the first bus suddenly moving off, accompanied by the first detachment of Dogras on each side of it, to the open space of a little square ahead. Apparently a better spot, in the *jamadar's* professional opinion, to fight it out if things came to that.

That was all right, thought Rodd quickly, thankful that at least there was one man in this mess with some decision in him. But that halved their strength. Incidentally it left himself and the fourteen other Dogras in the worst fix he had ever been in in his life. The balconies of the narrow little copper bazaar were almost hanging over them. Another shout like that from a *badmasha*, and the mob would be all over them. Whatever had to be done must be done at once—and quickly. Looking into the snarling faces bearing down on him, he met a glare of concentrated hate, so malevolent in its intensity that it no longer left any doubt as to the danger they were in.

But it was not that which moved him. It was something he saw in the native sergeant's face: a look of mute supplication—and *trust!*

"Sahib," it seemed to say. "You know what to do—*do it!*"

Trust!

He hadn't felt that way since he was a boy! That tremendous exaltation! Good Lord—what divine exaltation! After all these years . . .

But he did not jump or shout. Instead Rodd stepped down leisurely from the bus and walked to the two still arguing magistrates.

"Look here," he said calmly. "I'll take over." Then, pointing to the fast disappearing detachment up ahead, "Tell those fellows to come back."

Turning, he found the native sergeant at his side, who, as Rodd made a sign to him to recall the others, saluted and blew a sharp blast on his whistle.

And what a salute! Bang went his heels together. That was the stuff. Pukka! But—what about this ruddy motor bus?

Making everything he did appear as casual as possible, as if, say, this breakdown had been in Piccadilly, Rodd lifted the seat of the bus in search for some rope. He discovered a few rotten lengths of conventional clothes line, and smiled as

he thought of what an extremely useful purpose it would serve. A few double lengths of this hitched around the front axle and then to the first bus—done deftly and quickly—and this tight fix was solved. He would walk with the Dogras beside the bus.

But when the other bus backed up to them and the fumble fingered drivers at last managed to tie the tow rope, the thing snapped. The driver of Rodd's bus had left his brake on.

Rodd refrained from cursing him, as that would betray how disappointed he was to the now extremely menacing mob. Instead, as if it was quite a natural thing, he walked across to the biggest and toughest *badmasha* he saw confronting him and asked him for some rope. A native student who spoke English translated this request, at which the mob openly jeered.

"Yes," said the student solemnly, "we bring you rope." At which the *badmasha* departed.

But something in the haste of his departure made Rodd believe it was not rope he was going for, that it would be suicidal to remain where they were one instant longer than was necessary; and then, suddenly, the brainstorm of a life came to him: Why not push the bus?

"Here, you—" he beckoned to the Dogras— "lend a hand."

His words may have been unintelligible but the wiry little soldiers got their meaning at once. Grinning, seven on each side, they began to shove the bus along. The others, in military formation, walked beside them at intervals that covered both flanks. Every step meant one nearer safety. Every second Rodd was waiting for the shout he knew would set the mob on them like a pack of wild dogs. And just as they reached the edge of the square it came. The following mob which had kept the respectful distance of about one block behind them was now closing in.

It was neither a run nor a walk—just a strange progress of those in front trying to push back—and the great shouting mass behind shoving them on. Rodd saw a flash of light inside his skull—something like a shell burst—and realized that some one had hurled a rock down which had hit him on the head. His crushed topee lay in wreckage at his feet. He didn't know how badly hurt he was; another stone, crashing through the glass of the windshield, gave him other things to think of than that. He made a signal to the *jamadar*, shouted, and held up his arm for the front bus to halt.

For an instant the *jamadar's* salute as he stood there for orders thrilled him with sheer delight. The clash of metal as the Dogras fixed bayonets made him tremble. This was it!

"Tell them," Rodd said to the Mohammedan magistrate, "that if that crowd comes past that place there we'll fire." He pointed to the painted entrance of a little Hindu shrine.

At the magistrate's translation the *jamadar* barked an order to his men. For a wavering second the eyes of the mob showed white and frightened before the rifles; then they came with a rush—and Rodd nodded.

THE major was pacing up and down.

"Damned if I know what to do in this case; you had no business to be there—yet if it hadn't been for you, we probably wouldn't have any bally patrol left. *Pushing* it—good Lord! What a brilliant idea!" He turned and glared at Rodd. "Know what the *jamadar* said to me? 'We were in a tight place, but the sahib found the solution.' He thinks you're great stuff."

"Does he indeed?"

Rodd was staring dumbly at his typewriter on which after an hour's sweating he had written merely one unfinished sentence.

"Course," said the major, "you won't let us down and mention that it was not an officer who gave that order to fire—bad enough to get away with this shooting as it is. You know what the British public is."

"Ha!" Rodd gave a harsh laugh. "For heaven's sake, don't think I'm proud of it, damn you—shooting people like that. What I want to do is write this so that the great and pure minded British public will understand *why*."

"That's the stuff," said the major. "Have another drink. Say when."

Damn it, damn it, thought Rodd; he could never write this—there was something so *personal* about it. And the major congratulating him! He looked at the one sentence he had managed to extract from the typewriter.

TROOPS FORCED FIRE RIOTOUS
MOB DALAPUR THIS AFTERNOON
ORDER PREVENT FURTHER—

Yes, he muttered to himself, there's only one word to describe what would have happened if that mob had had half a chance; and he added it—

SLAUGHTER

As to the reason why he should suddenly let his paper down, turn diehard, start writing this White Man's Burden stuff and probably lose his job as a result of it, well—that was his own affair.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SPIRIT SCREEN

By JAMES W. BENNETT

OUR usual American attitude of amusement, not untinged with contempt, when conversing with our Chinese laundryman, can be paralleled by the Celestial in his own country toward the foreigner.

At the very outset, our external appearance appeals to the average Chinese as being immodest. In our men's clothing, we expose the chest—or so our V-necked waistcoats seem. Our snugly fitting trousers and coats appear to him to be the heights of the ridiculous and of the uncomfortable. His clothing must be loose. The fact that his long skirted robes hinder rapid motion does not trouble him. He is unsympathetic to the briskness of the foreigners which invariably appear febrile . . .

As for the low necks and short sleeves worn by the foreign women, such a display he condemns as nothing less than brazen.

Our ignorance of his customs—those rituals which are exceedingly complicated—adds to his low estimation of us. If we invite him to our home and do not place his chair facing the south, he is insulted. If we visit his home and he brings us the tea of farewell, he is scandalized, should we unwittingly pick up the cup at the beginning of the interview and sip it.

If we are unwilling to spend half a day, exchanging polite phrases and pleasantries over a business deal that should take twenty minutes to complete, we find that the deal has fallen through.

The Chinese will not be hurried!

Equally, our ignorance of his speech—and after many years in China the foreigner will continue to make terrific gaffes—is not accepted with the least charity. Even the lowliest coolie, who may not comprehend the dialect of a peasant coming from the next province, will listen with magnificent scorn to the halting efforts of a foreigner who tries to make known his wishes.

Many Occidentals have so despaired of learning Chinese that they fall gratefully into pidgin, a hybrid speech containing words compounded of Portuguese, Chinese and English.

"My want-chee top-side chop-chop," means "I want you to go upstairs in a hurry." "Maskee," means, "Never mind doing that, now." "How fashion?" or "What thing?" are simple interrogations. "Sit-down-gooso," is pidgin for a domestic duck, while "Wil'-fly-gooso," is a wild duck. "Mon-kee," is the word for soap—derived from a popular brand of soap sold in the Orient with a picture of a monkey on the wrapper. "Go catchee one piecee shirtee, sockee, coatie, pantie—" is self-explanatory.

The Chinese look with wonder but not with admiration upon the foreigner's inability to put up with hardships to which the Oriental is so accustomed. The house-boy can not comprehend the "foreign missie's" aversion to flies embalmed in the food. Or why we Westerners shun the hot sun of Summer, protecting ourselves against sunstroke by cork lined topees. The Chinese will walk bareheaded in the full glare, only occasionally unfurling a paper fan and holding it daintily above his shaven cranium. He is apparently toughened—even in his better class hotels—to the onslaughts of the smaller carnivora that hide in the bamboo framework of a bed and come out during the night, to bite and bite and bite! He is accustomed to his bed being springless and only thinly padded. His pillow is of porcelain. Its only concession to comfort is an aperture for inserting the ear. He is immune to claustrophobia and will permit himself to be unmercifully crowded by his fellows on boats and trains. He seems to prefer the overwhelming nearness of his countrymen.

On the other hand, despite his immunity to discomfort, he finds the foreign cult of exercise little short of insane. He can not understand walking for its own sake and not to gain some definite objective.

Such strenuous outdoor games as golf and tennis, which are voluntarily engaged in and to which no pay is attached, cause him to lift his shoulders in amused and contemptuous bafflement. True, the younger generation in China has begun to take up athletics—particularly in those regions where there are foreign schools. But these antics are looked upon by the conservative element as part and parcel of that deplorable foreign influence and are still incomprehensible.

Summed up in a phrase, the Chinese are in possession of a racial superiority complex.

Continuing

Monsieur le Falcon

BY ARED WHITE

LIEUTENANT COUNT OTHO of the ancient house of Donau-Walden was awakened to the fact that a plot was on foot to disgrace him, deprive him of his rich estates in Lombardy lately won back from the French by brilliant Austrian victories—awakened by a note secretly handed him by the Fräulein Teschen, high in favor with Premier Thugutt's dread Black Cabinet, the core of the Austrian espionage system. The note informed him that his cousin Ferdinand was being groomed to head the house of Donau-Walden because Ferdinand was free of French blood; while he, Otho, was French on his mother's side of the house. And now that Bonaparte's star was in the ascendancy, anything French was hated and feared in Vienna.

Despite his warning, Otho heedlessly

fell in with the plans of the Black Cabinet by challenging to a duel a Russian subaltern, who had been detailed to flirt with Otho's young wife. On the morning of the encounter both the Russian and his second fell upon Otho, who would have been killed had it not been for the intervention of his faithful servant, Plobo.

A short time after the affair, which ended in the death of both the Russian and his second, summons came from Colonel Vekuss, Thugutt's right hand man in the Black Cabinet, ordering Otho to the palace. There he learned that the facts of the duel were known—that he was liable to public disgrace for the part that his servant Plobo had played in an "affair of honor" between gentlemen.

Vekuss heard Otho's version of the affair, then told him coldly that only one alternative offered itself: that he, Count Otho, must go to Paris as a secret emissary of the Austrian Empire; let himself pass for dead in Vienna against the indefinite time of his return to insure better the success of his dangerous mission.

Otho suspected this as another move in the plot Fräulein Teschen had warned him against, but perforce had to accept. He agreed; received instructions to contact one Major Moskolz, an Austrian agent in Paris; and forthwith dropped his title and name, assuming the pseudonym of Monsieur Le Falcon.

In Paris Otho called upon Moskolz, who gave him much needed funds. Then the Austrian spy mysteriously dropped from sight . . .

With the passage of time, Otho's situation became desperate. And to stave off actual starvation, he took a position with a company of French players, where his familiarity with amateur theatricals stood him in good stead. He quickly became famous for a burlesque of Bonaparte, at the moment said to be on the way back to France from Egypt.

One night as Otho was making up for his impersonation of the Corsican, Duvane and Londeau, the proprietors, came rushing into the dressing room.

"Stop!" cried Londeau. "The act can not go on!" And at the cool question in Otho's eyes he explained, "The Corsican is back—he is in his box!"

LONDEAU had come tearing in, bursting with excitement, to verify the news. He had seen it himself—the general entering the foyer with three of his staff, all in full uniform. As Londeau spoke there was a swelling crescendo in the theater. It developed into an ovation that lasted many minutes.

"*Mon Dieu*, all is lost!" cried Duvane and Londeau in one voice. Londeau went on in high excitement, "It is because the general has heard of the insult and comes to see for himself. Oh, my good friend Le Falcon, you are ruined!"

"And my poor theater!" wailed Duvane. "But my friend Le Falcon, you are the clever man. Is there not some way you can make the apology, or that you can appeal to the vanity of the terrible general?"

"Surely, my friends, the Corsican has some sense of humor," Otho replied smilingly. He shrugged. "But if he has not—well, at least he can not send me to the guillotine for showing him his own absurdity as a poseur."

Otho was contained as he faced the audience. He even looked coolly about among the boxes for Bonaparte as he presented his successive characters. He saw Bonaparte, a vague figure in an upper box, surrounded by members of his staff and shielded from public view by heavy portières, a precaution to protect himself from possible royalist or Jacobin bullets. Otho, every faculty alert for the moods of his audience, sensed a growing uneasiness astir in the theater as he approached the last figure of his masquerade. There was a coolness, a tension, as he finished with Thugutt. Napoleon's staff officers started a sporadic applause at the caricature of the Austrian premier.

But the silence became oppressive while Otho sat with his back to the audience, deftly making up for the rôle of Bonaparte. Otho preened himself with a steady hand.

Any turning back now from the challenge of Bonaparte's presence was the furthest thought from his mind. Such an evasion would be unthinkable weakness, sheer cowardice. The eyes of all were upon the general's box as Otho rose, unperturbed, to strut audaciously across the stage, hand thrust in coat. The audience turned to him. Some hissed, others raised the cry "Outlaw him!" Disapproval grew into an ominous uproar. Otho stood glowering at them in his best imitation of the Bonaparte martial stare, a pose he had garnered from portraits of the Corsican, waiting for the outbreak to pass.

When the commotion failed to still itself he raised his hand for silence. Since disapproval ruled the whole gathering, he decided upon a sop to the Corsican's vanity, a ruse for the benefit of Duvane and Londeau. Slowly the demonstration died down, the audience paused to hear. When he could make himself heard, he shouted in a deep, throaty voice, scowling a touch of impudence into the gesture—

"But what have you permitted those Austrians to do in my absence, Citizens!"

The effect was electrical. It startled Otho momentarily out of his rôle as he saw the power of that mouthy phrase of Bonaparte partisans. The audience flew into an uproar of applause. Those who had been noisiest with their hisses rose in their seats to cheer the Corsican. While the flash of nationalism spent itself, Otho strode from the stage with a heavy pulse. Bonaparte's popularity had proved itself. Duvane, his tortured face suddenly flaming with joy at the turn of events, embraced Otho joyously.

"Oh, *bon Dieu*, but you are the genius, Le Falcon!" he cried. "Nowhere is there another who could have turned such a calamity into glorious success. *Bon Dieu*, Monsieur Le Falcon, but your matchless skill has saved us from ruin!"

"On the contrary," Otho replied icily, "it is French stupidity makes all that noise in the theater."

Londeau pattered up to kiss Otho and wring his hands. Others of the troop gathered about in felicitation. Le Falcon was the artist of matchless presence of mind. He had performed a miracle. They smothered him with congratulations. When the demonstration abated, M. Duvane proposed champagne at the nearest café. Champagne without stint for the three friends, Duvane, Londeau and Otho. They were leaving the theater, arm in arm, Londeau chirping a lively air, Otho somber and silent, when an officer in the uniform of the artillery stepped up bruskly.

"Which among you is the Citizen Le Falcon?" he demanded.

"I have that honor, Citizen Lieutenant," Otho replied coolly.

"Permit me to announce, Citizen Le Falcon," rejoined the officer, "that I am directed in the name of the republic to place you in arrest."

Duvane and Londeau gasped. Otho bowed slightly and smiled assent.

"But, Citizen Lieutenant, let us explain," protested Londeau. "Our good friend Le Falcon meant only to praise your general. Ah, for that we will vouch since we heard him plan what he did."

"My general," said the officer dryly, "is able to distinguish silly ridicule from praise, my friends."

He took Otho firmly by the arm and escorted him to an awaiting carriage, ignoring the lively pleas of Duvane and Londeau. Otho went in silence, without protest. But as the carriage sped off just short of a gallop he was gripped by an unseating fear. Was there a charge behind his arrest more serious than that of offending the mighty Corsican? Had the agents of Fouche finally penetrated his masquerade?

"You have not told me why I am placed in this humiliating position, Citizen Lieutenant," he reminded the officer in a voice of unconcern. "Perhaps it is that I have offended the vanity of your general?"

The lieutenant gave a biting laugh.

"You speak as if that were no offense, Le Falcon!" he retorted. "*Sang Dieu*, citizen, but I would prefer to face a charge of highway robbery at this minute. Please

to remember that my general may charge you with sedition if he chooses; and you may guess his humor when he commands your presence at his chamber immediately!"

CHAPTER X

BONAPARTE'S HUSSAR

THE home of Bonaparte, a solemn, massive building of stone on the Rue de la Victoire, had more the atmosphere of a military headquarters than a private residence when the carriage brought Otho and his officer escort there soon after midnight. Towering Dragoons, men who must have been especially selected from the ranks for their stature, walked post with drawn sabers along the sidewalk and covered all approaches to the house. It was only after many challenges and inspections of their faces by dark lantern that Otho and the general's lieutenant landed in the reception hall.

Inside the house, Otho was immediately aware of a high tension permeating the place. Officers and civilians conferred in small groups, their heads very close together, their words inaudible. The civilians were men past middle age whose dress and faces suggested personages; the officers were of high rank.

Otho was hurried through these rooms and given a seat in a small ante-chamber. As hours of tedious waiting multiplied, he saw that his own case played a small part in whatever business was in the air tonight. The hurrying of feet, the clanking of spurs and sabers, the constant procession of excited functionaries, entering or leaving the house, told of some unusual activity. For a man proclaiming himself home for a brief respite from campaigning, Napoleon was keeping late and busy hours, Otho thought.

He shortly mastered his own alarm and found refuge in a cool nonchalance while he awaited developments. Whether he must face charges of being an Austrian agent or merely the wounded vanity of Napoleon Bonaparte was a situation he would meet as best he might once it was brought squarely before him. He was conscious of comfort in his own ability to master his feelings. There was no gaging one's own mettle until put to the test, he reflected. But so long as he possessed himself in the face of grave danger, his faculties would be alert for the turns of events, as they had been against Perov and Kurz on the Danube.

A very young officer, with pink cheeks that were mottled by ugly saber scars, summoned Otho shortly after three o'clock.

"The general commands your presence, Citizen," the officer announced sharply.

A slight smile was Otho's response as he rose, bowed stiffly and followed the aide into a second and larger ante-chamber. His whole bearing seemed to say he might lose his liberty, even his life, but never his poise. At passing on into a large, brightly lighted room he looked about coolly for the Corsican. There were three officers and one civilian in the chamber. Two of the officers sat stiff as pokers, arms folded, and barely glanced at Otho. The civilian, a thin, studious looking young man, was busy with quill and ink at a small writing table. The third officer, an insignificant little fellow in a rather faded green uniform coat, was bent close over a litter of documents on his table.

The prisoner was left standing in the center of the room. Some minutes passed before the little man at the desk looked up abruptly and spoke.

"You are the impudent fellow that mocks me at the Théâtre Française?" he demanded, in a level, authoritative voice.

Despite all his assurances, Otho was shaken momentarily out of his poise. It was not the charge, nor the incisive quality of the voice, but the sudden realization that the little man he faced was Napoleon Bonaparte. It was not the Bonaparte he had visualized, nor the man whom he had portrayed at the Théâtre Française. From his study of the man, from his hatred of the ogre, he had formed a positive picture. A swaggering

fellow of military build, glowering eyes and taut, cruel mouth.

The man he faced now was scrawny, even insignificant of stature. Seated at the large walnut desk, he appeared a boy rather than a man. Beyond all things he had thought the general of the French a man of mature years. Before him was a very young man, little more than his own age and at a glance seemingly barely out of his teens.

BUT the momentary impression of insignificance and immaturity which had startled Otho faded swiftly. Otho was conscious of a second impression in which the Corsican appeared to gain stature as by magic. And out of that thin, sallow face, framed in long black hair, he now saw only two very level, very searching blue eyes fixed upon his in keen appraisal. They seemed to have a peculiar quality of penetration, like the rays of a lantern turned into a dark corner.

"Your pardon, Citizen General," replied Otho, recovering himself. "I did not identify you at once. But replying to your query, I am the gentleman who presents an act at the Théâtre Française."

"*Pardieu!* But for an actor," snapped Napoleon, "you have an inordinate amount of effrontery. Do you understand that such conduct amounts to political agitation, and therefore is nothing short of treason against the republic?"

This charge steadied Otho's faculties. He met the steely blue eyes unflinchingly and smiled with a tantalizing serenity.

"As the General pleases." He bowed. "Though, of course, I had no such intention."

"More impudence!" exploded the general. He jumped to his feet and walked directly in front of Otho. "Do you realize that I can have you sent to Vincennes for this—or hanged if I but say the word?"

Otho's smile hardened and he bowed stiffly.

"It would serve me entirely right," he said easily, "if I have made the mistake of judging the General above such petty reprisal because of an offended vanity."

Napoleon flushed; his eyes snapped and he opened his mouth to speak, without speaking. He stood a moment glaring at Otho, then turned on his heel and returned to his chair.

"You are something more than an actor, Citizen Le Falcon," he said.

"Even an actor may have some qualities, Citizen General."

"Yes, especially so if he is only playing the part of an actor!" Bonaparte rejoined sharply. He launched several questions in quick succession. "Are you an *émigré*? Are you a royalist in the service of Provence? How long have you been an actor? Tell me promptly!"

Otho replied calmly:

"I am what I appear to be, Citizen General. As for my experience as an actor, it began before I was out of the nursery."

Napoleon sat with his eyes fixed upon Otho through a brief silence.

"When I had you brought here, Citizen Le Falcon," he announced in a milder humor, "I had two thoughts in mind. One was that if I found you an insolent mimic who had been making me ridiculous while I was away fighting for France, I should make an example of you, exactly as I intend to do with those scurrilous editors who lampoon me. The other plan was if I found you a man of parts, I might have some more useful service for you than a paid clown at a poor theater. If I am not mistaken you are capable of better things. But first let me ask you how you would relish service for our republic, a service, let us say, that might bring you to some degree of personal discomfort and danger?"

"May I beg the Citizen General to be somewhat more specific?"

"Services as a soldier, Monsieur Le Falcon, a soldier of France in this hour when France demands much of those who have her interests at heart."

"The General tempts me sorely," Otho replied with a sardonic smile. "France's need must be very great if the Citizen General-in-Chief of our armies must per-

force take up his time with the duties of a recruiting corporal!"

Bonaparte's voice cracked like a whip.

"I will not tolerate another instant of your buffoonery, Le Falcon! You dare to impose upon my patience. I asked you a question. Now answer it!"

"It is the duty, Citizen General, of every man to serve his cause to the last drop of his blood!" Otho's voice shook with fervor as he said this. But his mind was upon his own duty to his emperor as he spoke. "There is no sacrifice I would not make at the call of duty!"

"Spoken like a soldier!" cried Bonaparte, his keen eyes catching the spirit behind the words but never sensing its hidden import. "You shall have your opportunity if you find yourself equal to the mission I have for you. I have sore need of a man of your abilities at the present moment when Paris is filled with ominous plotting."

OTHO bowed very low. He feared to trust his eyes to Bonaparte's keen search in that moment when a thought was crystallizing in his mind. What an opportunity for service to the Austrian crown. He looked up, every faculty alert.

"The Citizen General will remember that I lack training as a soldier of France. I have been told that the profession of arms is an exacting one of many learned details; therefore I would be of no value."

"Nonsense! A man is a soldier by disposition or he is never a soldier. In my army I must use men of many abilities. You have suggested certain possibilities of the highest value. Since, in my judgment of a man, you have the qualities of a soldier I will commission you a brevet sub-lieutenant in my Hussars, if you wish to serve me. Let me ask if your control of disguises is such that you can enter a house as one man and leave it as another?"

"That is the simplest of tasks, Citizen General. But of the Hussars, I know nothing."

"Did I ask you two questions?" Napoleon's eyes burned annoyance. "The only other duty you will have is to control your tongue in my presence. I have no time for information I do not seek. Another question, now: Do you know that Paris is a hotbed of intrigue and treason? That France is besieged on every frontier and facing a dire crisis which must be met effectively and at once?"

"Answering both the Citizen General's questions at once, I will say that those things are common knowledge."

"Poorly answered! There is an undertone of arrogance in your voice I will not tolerate, Le Falcon. You must learn to submerge your personality if you are to serve me. Are you willing to put every ounce of your worth into saving France from chaos?"

"With the utmost of my devotion, General. That has been my one and only aspiration for some months past."

"That's better—somewhat better. You have heard of the General Augereau, I have small doubt?"

"His name is well known to me since the campaigns in Piedmont, my General."

"Yes, an excellent division commander, a man of great personal valor. Perhaps the ablest swordsman in France. Yet rather sluggish of wit, and therefore a ready tool of these slimy politicians who have him under their thumbs at the present hour. Well, you shall match your wits against his. Time presses, so I must make quick decisions."

Bonaparte paused, leaned back in his chair, his gaze fixed upon Otho in final appraisal. The nervous drumming of his slender fingers on the desktop was distinctly audible in the silence that fell upon the room. Otho found himself fretting at the buttons of his waistcoat. There was a disconcerting quality in those penetrating blue eyes that sent his own eyes to the floor. As Otho succumbed, Bonaparte turned abruptly away.

"Bourienne, I'm starving," he snapped impatiently. "Have something brought in immediately."

The man addressed dropped his quill and jumped out of his seat as if he had been prodded by a lancet. Silently he

crossed the chamber, disappeared briefly, and returned to resume his quill. The general had plunged back into the litter of reports on his desk. His alert mind seemed to catch the meaning of a whole page at a single glance. As he finished a report he would thrust it to Bourienne with a terse word or phrase of instructions. Otho was left standing, seeming to have been forgotten. A huge dark hulk of a man slipped into the room bearing a steaming tray of food. He arranged it at one side of the general's desk: a chicken, salad, bread, grapes and coffee. Bonaparte gulped down a glass of coffee and began bolting chicken and salad. He ate furiously, and might have been thought a starving man except that he continued to read the reports on his table. In the midst of his meal he paused and looked up at Otho, then at Bourienne.

"I have decided, Bourienne," he announced, between bites. "Take the Citizen Le Falcon to General Berthier at once and see that my ideas are carried out in detail."

Bourienne, responding with his wonted precipitation at sound of his master's voice, hurried Otho without ceremony from the Corsican's presence into the chamber of Bonaparte's military detail chief. Berthier turned from a staff conference with alert eyes at sight of Bourienne. He appeared a much older man than his chief, and by odds the more a soldier. He was calm, level eyed, self-contained. His voice was low, firm and considerate as he asked the others to leave the room immediately. Otho thought his presence was almost soothing after the ordeal of the restless little Corsican.

"This is the Citizen Le Falcon," said Bourienne in his dull, cold voice, when they were alone. "It is the wish of the general-in-chief that he be assigned to the case of General Augereau, with which you are so familiar. The general entrusts the details to your care. Citizen Le Falcon is to be breveted a sub-lieutenant of Hussars, for special services only."

Berthier wasted no time either in studying Otho, or in other preliminary. He outlined Otho's duties bluntly, but with an exact knowledge of what was desired by Napoleon.

"You will require no uniform for the time being, Le Falcon," he said, speaking slowly but with a soldier's decision. "You will gain contact as soon as possible tomorrow with General Augereau, whom you will find at the Council of Five Hundred. You will present yourself to him as Lieutenant Dolmet, who served him in Italy. He is a man of faulty memory so that your imagination will serve you well enough in reminding him of pleasing incidents that flatter his vanity. It pleases him to think it was his genius that beat the Austrians, that he was the nurse-at-war for General Bonaparte, his commander. Work into his confidence and he will invite you, beyond doubt, to his rendezvous on the Rue Saint Antoine where you will meet some very interesting characters. Report their plans to me as promptly as you learn them. They are up to some great mischief of which the general-in-chief must be informed within the three days to come, for reasons that I will not explain at the moment. I hardly need caution you of the extreme discretion that must be used."

"It is very clear, Citizen General," replied Otho.

"You must remember," Berthier added, in the same official voice, "that in these hours, when many rascals play for high stakes, the residence of General Bonaparte is observed by many adroit spies. You will be followed, doubtless, and by expert eyes. We are not so certain that the prefect of police himself is above such activity. Therefore you will need to depend upon your skill at disguise, of which I have been informed by the general-in-chief, who makes quite a point of your possibilities."

"Not even the Citizen General Berthier would suspect the rôle in which I will present myself to General Augereau," said Otho, a cryptic smile at the corner of his lips, a subtle undertone of mockery in his voice.

"Then, if you succeed," Berthier re-

joined, "there is little reckoning your future, Citizen Lieutenant. Great events depend upon the next few days, events far greater than you might imagine. Fortunate is the man who is given your chance to serve our general-in-chief in this critical moment. Your means of doing this, I need not say, are left entirely to your own resources."

Otho caught the note of finality in Berthier's voice. He drew himself up at salute, a carefully simulated French salute. The mockery in his eyes deepened, a symptom of his thoughts that he would not have trusted to the presence of Bonaparte.

"I shall not fail," he said resolutely.

CHAPTER XI

AUGEREAU BAITS A TRAP

THAT component of the new French government known as the Council of Five Hundred, representatives of the masses in enacting needed laws and launching reforms, was in an uproar when Otho presented himself the next morning for a carefully planned interview with General Augereau. Half a score of deputies, aflame with passion, were clamoring to be heard. Charges and counter-charges were being hurled at the chair. The pale young man who sat in the presiding chair craned his neck first toward one, then the other, in an effort to hear what all were saying, but with no effort to restore order or decide who was entitled to speak.

The majority of the deputies were huddled in intense groups, debating among themselves. From the Council of Ancients had come strange proposals this morning, to further inflame the minds of the overwrought deputies. General Bonaparte was to be given command of the army in Paris; the sessions of the two Councils, even of the Directory, must be moved to St. Cloud because of chaotic conditions in Paris.

There were impassioned charges in the air of a pending military *coup d'état*, counter-threats of another uprising of the red handed Jacobin rabble to overthrow the government, rumors of a royalist intrigue to seize the reins for bourbon hands.

The Directory was charged with being in sympathy with the royalists, the Council of Ancients with being in league with the army. Every one in power who had an articulate enemy was charged with being a part of some dark, sinister intrigue to unseat the people's government and strip the power from the Council of Five Hundred.

Otho listened for some time to the uproar. The chaos was music to his ears. It confirmed his belief that this outlandish experiment of government by the governed was falling apart of its own vicious futility. Complete chaos was now in process. From the ruins would rise majestically the throne of France, and people would cry out in joy that they had been saved at last from corruption, incompetence, pillage and murder.

When he had had his fill of the noisy clamor, Otho sent a carefully prepared note to General Augereau, a note intended to arrest the interest of the general even in the midst of the agitation that engrossed the Council's attention. General Augereau responded almost eagerly. As he came into a small antechamber set apart for private meetings of deputies with constituents and henchmen, Otho saw that he had a familiar type of soldier with whom to deal. Though Augereau wore the robes of a deputy over his gaudy dress uniform, he needed no epaulettes to stamp him as a blunt, outspoken fighting man. His face was square, heavy, abrupt, his mouth a severe, taut line, his eyes cold and straight.

"Who are you that you send for me?" the general demanded.

"Is it possible that the Citizen General has forgotten his loyal and devoted servant of the campaign in Italy?" Otho parried suavely. "Such men as Lieutenant Dolmet flattered themselves that they were fixed in your memory."

Augereau's eyes relented.

"Yes, yes, of course, my son," he ex-

claimed hastily. "In these busy days one sometimes forgets for a moment his closest friends. I trust you enjoy good health and fortune? It seems to me you have grown thinner since Lombardy."

"A few pounds, no doubt. But I came to inquire of the General's circumstances. Those who know and love the General are very solicitous of his circumstances and anxious to learn if they can be of service."

General Augereau did not catch the subtle indirection in Otho's words, an indirection that was a point of honor in Otho's code. The general's eyes kindled and he motioned Otho to a chair. But before accepting his visitor fully he asked many questions. These Otho answered promptly, taking care to play adeptly upon Augereau's inordinate vanity. It was an honorable subterfuge, he argued, to utilize the weaknesses of his emperor's enemies, so long as he did not resort to open, direct deception.

"Those who have seen the General in battle," Otho baited him finally, "know that he is a man to follow. Is it not a duty for all men to follow their masters in these dark days—if they but know how they can be of service?"

"That is the spirit of the old army, my Lieutenant," replied Augereau. He bent his shaggy head close to Otho's ear. "It is refreshing to a true soldier's ear to know of such sentiments at a time when so many young upstarts are following the fortunes of that slick political clown, Napoleon Bonaparte."

"A charlatan—a menace to the peace of Europe!" Otho thrust back with a bitterness he had no need to simulate. "There is no service could suit me better than one aimed against that Corsican rascal, Citizen General!"

Augereau looked about sharply, a shadow of fear flitting across his somber face.

"Not so loud!" he cautioned. "It is no longer safe to speak such thoughts too freely. But tonight, at eleven, my Lieutenant, if you will come to my apartments on the Rue Saint Antoine, you will learn much to interest you. In the meantime, I must concern myself with my official duties. Adieu."

A GRIM silence had settled upon the cafés. Otho, making the rounds to listen, heard little. Men talked in tense whispers. The appearance of a stranger at an adjoining table sufficed to silence even those whispers. Intriguers had their spies everywhere, some one complained. It was hardly safe to think, much less to put one's thoughts in words. Jacobins had out their silent listeners, militarists and royalists their tricky shadows. Fouche's secret police were everywhere and in the service of every camp, it was suspected. The government sat uneasily. The question in men's minds was whose hands would topple that republican house of cards.

Otho moved eagerly from place to place. There might be a chance now to come across the Hungarian major. He placed at his lapel, at the proper angle, a small sprig of fern, a secret identification to Austrian agents who might chance to see him. But his quest had no better results than before. At an hour when the emperor's best agents should be everywhere in Paris, he could find no slightest sign of their existence. At a moment when he had invaluable information, he could find none to whom he might deliver it.

From time to time he smiled to himself. The toxin of excitement was burning in his blood. Destiny had placed strange opportunities within his grasp. He would work out the emperor's cause himself. The turn of events might place it in his power even to destroy that Corsican ogre. Bonaparte would never be able to escape the wrath of the king. Once Provence mounted the throne, Bonaparte inevitably mounted the guillotine. All the kings and emperors of Europe would demand it. Then, for Otho, a return to Vienna, the gratitude of Francis, the restoration of his estates, a place in the court—perhaps even as aide-de-camp to

his Majesty, the Emperor of Austria.

Promptly at eleven o'clock he arrived by cabriolet for the rendezvous with Augereau. The police had not crossed his trail nor was he longer in fear of shadows. His Hussar commission would protect him from Fouche's agents. Of royalists he need have no great fear, and as for the Jacobins, he intended staying away from their haunts under the gutters of Paris.

Five men were gathered in the Augereau salon. Blinds were drawn, shutters closed, doors shut. An armed orderly paced the hallway in restless vigil. General Augereau introduced Le Falcon to the five at once. They arose as one man, bowed solemnly and sat down. The question of Otho's acceptance seemed to have been settled before he came. For some minutes they exchanged idle pleasantries in dull tones; the weather, the theater, the situation in Italy and on the frontier. Otho noted that they were middle aged men, who addressed one another as monsieur in place of the conventional citizen salutation of the day. One of the five detached himself presently and addressed the others.

"We are here to save France, messieurs," he announced in a voice vibrant with feeling. "That, we have agreed, can be accomplished only by centering power in the hands of some one strong enough of brain and character to command the nation. Messieurs, I have thought deeply since last we met. There is but one such man. I need not name his Majesty, the Count of Provence, who is rightfully even now Louis XVIII, King of France. But before—"

"But yes, messieurs!" cried a second man, leaping impulsively to his feet. "Monsieur Le Montier has spoken my thoughts. The king, of all men, can save our beloved France, and we must act with decision, at once."

Le Montier turned a withering look upon the intruder. Le Montier was a tall, thin man, of aquiline features, restless black eyes, thin, bloodless cruel mouth. His broad sloping forehead was that of a dreamer, his square, bony jaw that of a resourceful and merciless adversary in any cause.

"Please to restrain your impulses, Monsieur Etienne," he rebuked. "You are not now called upon to stir the emotions of a rabble. We are here for sage council among ourselves."

Etienne flushed scarlet and sat down in confusion.

"As I was about to say when interrupted," Montier continued, "before we can hope to restore France, we must draw the teeth of the dragon. In a word, messieurs, we must manage to place the command of the troops of Paris in safe hands. Otherwise, what will happen with that desperate intriguer Bonaparte at the helm of our army when he knows the first act of Provence would be an order to the hangman!"

"Bonaparte must die—and at once!" exclaimed Etienne, leaping again into the situation.

"How extraordinarily profound," sneered Le Montier. "If words would kill, or your bare proposal, our problem would be solved at once. But how, in the name of justice, are we to dispose of him when he keeps himself hedged in by Mamelukes, aides-de-camp, Hussars and secret police? Even at the theater, an aide sits in front of him and one at either shoulder, while a Dragoon guards his back."

M. Lissop, a stooped, emaciated little man with a sour smile spread across bilious features, rose. All eyes centered upon him as he stood rubbing the palms of his hands together.

"I have the excellent plan, messieurs," he announced in an oily voice. "A great banquet shall we organize in honor of the returning hero who has abandoned his comrades to the burning sands of Egypt while he comes to Paris to seek his own fortunes." Lissop's ugly smile became a cruel smirk as he passed an insinuating look from one face to another. His voice dropped to a raucous whisper as he unfolded the dire climax of his plan. "My own chef shall arrange to season one dish to the devil's taste."

LE MONTIER weighed this trick briefly, then silently nodded assent. But before a poison plot could be put to a vote of the quintette, General Augereau injected his own claims.

"Thoughts of assassination are not to my liking, messieurs," he announced severely. "I am a soldier, and as a soldier I have killed many men with my own good blade, but none with a thrust through the back."

"The interests of our beloved France," rejoined Le Montier acridly, "demand such subtlety as may meet her needs. Surely Monsieur the General does not expect Bonaparte to meet him in duel."

"Far from that," snapped Augereau. "I know him too well for the slimy politician that he is. There is not a man who has served me a year who is not his master with the sword. But I wish you to remember, messieurs, that I have first cause of grievance against this Corsican. I will fight him with his own weapons—the weapons of politics. I will turn upon him the wrath of the Five Hundred, whose sympathies I now possess."

"The risk is too great," retorted Le Montier. He snapped his fingers. "If we temporize with this ingenious monster, we will wake up one morning to find him the master of France. Then what will become of us and our opportunities? What prospect will you have left then, my General, of succeeding to command of the armies of France?"

Augereau snorted in contempt.

"You who do not know Bonaparte," he said, "credit him too highly. Do I not know? Was it not I who nursed him through the war in Italy? *Peste*, but what a task that was! He came to us knowing nothing of war. My first thought when I saw the puny upstart was to wring his neck. A vain little cock who could do nothing but crow. But I swallowed my pride at having such a man placed over me in command. I am a soldier, messieurs. I do not question orders—no, not even when I knew that he had gained his command in reward for marrying a mistress of Barras. So I planned his campaigns and fought them for him—and the Austrians were in defeat before I returned to Paris to nurse my wounds.

"Need I remind you that I would have been one of the Directory, except for that Corsican's jealous reports of me to those politicians? He poisoned them against me, sent his aide-de-camp to Paris to watch me—he who should have been filled with gratitude for the victories my abilities had won for him! Who has a better right than I, therefore, to pay my respects to him now that I am not bound by his orders, now that he is the common enemy and I a deputy of the people?"

Augereau worked himself into a passion as he delivered himself of these grievances. He stood glaring at the others, as if defying them to reply to his charge. Le Montier was impressed but unconvinced.

"We do not question your judgment, my General. But you have not told us how you will get rid of Bonaparte."

"That is simple enough," bellowed Augereau. "When he comes to take his oath of office as general-in-chief of the forces of Paris, there are those who will shout charges of treason against him. They will bring him face to face with the charge that he plots for his own selfish power. In the midst of these charges, I will rise, myself, and raise the cry against him!"

Augereau paused, thrust his jaw forward and pounded a table with his ponderous hand.

"I will raise the cry of outlaw! In a thrice he will stand condemned. The Council will outlaw him as one man—and then this scheming Corsican will face the guillotine if he fails to escape from France. It can not fail!"

The others sat in silence, under the spell of Augereau's passion. The general folded his arms and stood like a statue, an indication that he was not to be shaken out of his decision. Le Montier leaned over to a whispered conference with the others. This continued for many tense minutes.

Le Montier finally turned back to Augereau.

"We are agreed, Monsieur the General," he said politely, "that your plan is magnificent. But we would inquire if you have reckoned with the fact that the Corsican's own brother presides in your Council. What might—"

"A weakling," Augereau cut him off. "Lucien Bonaparte has no following in the Council. My voice will beat him down. At sound of my charge he will retreat under his desk. Remember, gentlemen, I am a soldier, a trained commander. I have reckoned every factor, weighed my facts well. I am in control of the Council. The troops of the Directory will be at St. Cloud—and in an emergency those troops will accept my orders. They are sworn to defend the government—not to protect outlawed upstarts. Come, messieurs, the hour grows late. Let us agree."

Another whispered conference brought the others to their feet. Augereau's plan was accepted. They sealed the decision in champagne. Le Montier was delegated to convey the decision in strictest secret to trusted agents of the Count of Provence. M. Lissop was empowered to assure representatives of the people that a stable government was in the making. The others were to organize clandestinely among the Councils of Ancients and Five Hundred, reporting to Augereau all disaffections and new developments. They ended their evening in a toast to a new order in France and departed to their awaiting cabriolets.

CHAPTER XII

VIVE LA RÉPUBLIQUE!

BONAPARTE was in the palm of his hand. Otho told himself that on the night of the third day following the plot at Augereau's. He was alone in a comfortable billet on the Rue de la Victoire, near the Bonaparte residence. As he drew off his new Hussar uniform and warmed himself at the fireplace, he brought his hand before his eyes and slowly closed it until the nails bit into his palm. Thus, before the end of tomorrow, would he see crushed that Corsican ogre.

Bonaparte was to take the oath in the morning. A brief ceremony before the Council of Ancients, an appearance before the Council of Five Hundred, and Bonaparte expected to find himself confirmed as commander-in-chief of the army in Paris. Once given that power he would be in position to launch militaristic intrigues that might even place the supreme command of the whole French army in his hands, even over Moreau who was in command on the frontier.

The Ancients doubtless would accept him. But once the Corsican stepped unsuspecting into that hornets' nest of the Council of Five Hundred, he would meet his doom. There could be no escape. Once the Council had outlawed him, there were troops on hand, if they be needed, to enforce the edict. Those troops were loyal to the Council. Otho had confirmed this in his own way by discreet inquiry of officers and men. The terrible cry of outlaw, once it had been voted into effect by the Deputies, would turn the bayonets of a battalion upon Bonaparte if he attempted debate. Its power to rouse the passions of all Paris had been proven too often to admit of question.

Instead of turning in for rest, Otho sat through what was left of the night, his mind busy checking events of the past, exploring the future. The whole situation was one to warm his heart. Failure was out of the question. Barras and Sièyés, strong men of a weak Directory, secretly favored the Count of Provence. The royalists counted the leading men of the Ancients in their favor. Fouche had closed the Jacobin club, forced the adherents of red terror to cover. With Napoleon out of the way and some such trusted soldier as Augereau in command, the armed forces would rest in safe hands through the *coup d'état.*

The Corsican suspected nothing. Otho chuckled to himself at this. Berthier had received Otho's vague reports on Au-

gereau without question. Through the day, Otho had been used as a trusted courier, carrying notes to high officers. Since those messages were lightly sealed he had pried into several of them to verify their contents. Mere notes of invitation to breakfast with Bonaparte. A social gesture, prior to taking the oath of allegiance. The Corsican sat on a powder keg, one that would explode in a few hours, and sensed nothing but a proper setting for his own vain ceremony of command. Augereau was right. An upstart, a creature of rotten politics, a pet of blind statesmen, one who would pay the usual bitter penalty of his impertinences.

Paris had been steeped in somber silence through these past three days. Even the badinage of gamesters at the Palais Royal was restrained. Men of affairs no longer gathered in cafés but were driven to guarded meetings behind locked shutters. But mutterings of dissatisfaction with the government were to be caught here and there as citizens passed along the street. It was pictured in their faces, in the sullen silence of the theater crowds, it permeated the very air of Paris. Any government that offered them security, that reduced lawlessness, intrigue, corruption, uncertainty, would be received with shouts of joy. Provence, proclaimed King of France, would be hailed a savior once he set down a firm foot.

At nine the next morning, Otho hurried to St. Cloud in highest spirits. The stupid Corsican had provided him a front seat for the final scene of this happy drama. Otho's allotted mission was to mingle with the deputies, take their pulse, and report anything of serious consequence to Berthier when that general arrived shortly before noon with Bonaparte's martial party.

Otho was alarmed at first to find that the feeling against Bonaparte had burst into open flame. Since Berthier had a score of agents there to listen, there was danger that warning of the revolt might turn the Corsican back from his impending proscription. The charge was openly bandied about that Bonaparte came with the secret intent in his heart of overriding the legislature, effecting a *coup d'état*, and seizing the government. But the passion grew so hot, the threats of reprisal so intense, the voice of every one so united, that Otho saw there was no escape for his enemy. Even if Bonaparte did turn back from the volcano, its wrath would follow him swiftly to the Rue de la Victoire.

A ROLL of drums announced the arrival of the generals. Otho saw Bonaparte ride up to the hall of the Ancients, beside him Berthier, close behind Murat, Lefevre and Lannes, all in brilliant dress uniform. The Corsican tossed a salute to the troops in the distance, the troops of the National Guard, legislative bodyguards, a mere battalion of Grenadiers. The party dismounted, ascended the steps, presented themselves before the Ancients. Bonaparte was escorted forward. Otho saw that he was deathly pale, very ill at ease, as he faced the body and began to speak. The Corsican's words came with an effort. He floundered through inept phrases. A murmur spread through the Ancients. It grew to an uproar as some one rose to demand that Bonaparte make himself clearer. The little man stiffened, flushed and raised his voice.

"The republic is without a government," he shouted. "The Council of Five Hundred is divided against itself. There is only you, the Council of Ancients. It is for you to take steps. Speak! I am here to carry out your measures. Let us save liberty. Let us save equality!"

A bristling figure shouted a defiant interruption from the floor.

"What about the constitution?"

"The constitution! You have torn it up. Not a soul respects it any longer. I will speak out. Since my return I have been surrounded by intrigues. Every faction has approached me. Men who arrogantly proclaim themselves the only true patriots have urged me to hurl the constitution aside!"

"Name them! Name them!"

A dozen voices shouted at once. Order broke its moorings. Bonaparte's voice was lost as he attempted to reply.

"Cæsar! Cromwell! Tyrant! Outlaw!"

Bonaparte's face turned purple, his eyes blazed defiance. He shook a palsied fist at the agitators.

"Hypocrites—intriguers!" he retorted. "I will abdicate from power the instant the republic is free of danger—the god of war and the god of fortune is with me!"

Otho saw Bourienne catch his general by the sleeve. The uproar increased. Bonaparte made a final effort to make himself heard, but his wits had deserted him and he merely stammered incoherent phrases. He left the room hurriedly, surrounded by his generals and a few Grenadiers. Otho left by another entrance, trying to master his hammering pulse. So the charge was true. Bonaparte had come here planning to seize the government. He had thought to harangue the Ancients into supporting him, had intended to escape the trap in the Council of Five Hundred. Otho pressed close to Bonaparte's group. A Grenadier warned him aside at the point of a drawn saber, but Berthier gave a terse order that admitted Otho to the group.

Bonaparte was trembling visibly, the blood gone from his face, the assurance from his eyes. He made a poor effort at self-possession as his generals excitedly debated the situation. Berthier detached two young officers to keep intriguers from inflaming the handful of troops. From time to time he paused in the deliberations to receive the whispered report of a secret agent.

"So I spoke a lot of nonsense, did I?" Bonaparte finally spoke up, the affront to his pride looming out of the jumble.

"Well, yes, General," an officer assented boldly. "A lot of nonsense."

"We must not hesitate too long," cautioned another. "There is the Council of Five Hundred. Now that the cat is out of the bag, we must not give them time to organize their thoughts."

Bonaparte's decision returned at this warning. He set out for the Council of Five Hundred. Otho detached himself and managed to enter unnoticed. He knew the reception that waited there. The charge of outlawry would be forced to a vote. Bonaparte was stepping into the baited trap.

The storm broke at sight of the Corsican. It subsided as Bonaparte lifted his voice. But the temper of the lower house of the legislature of France waited but briefly.

"Down with the dictator!" yelled a deputy. "Outlaw him!"

The cry was echoed furiously. It became a demand. Lucien Bonaparte hammered in vain for order. In the midst of the storm Augereau rose and by sheer power of his lungs, gained a moment's silence. He roared out a demand that the motion of outlawry be put to the vote. The Corsican's brother threw off his robes and threatened to bolt the Council.

A group of deputies rushed upon Bonaparte. One of them caught him by the collar. Otho pressed close. There had been threats of the poniard. He watched closely expecting to see a fatal blow struck home. The deputies were mad. Their fury threatened to tear the Corsican to shreds. A stern command rang out above the cries of those who were assailing Bonaparte. It was one of Bonaparte's generals ordering the deputies to stand aside. Other officers pressed their way to Bonaparte's side, shielded him from assault, took him forcibly toward the door.

Outlaw him! The demand for the fatal vote was raised again by Augereau. As Bonaparte disappeared through the doors, a rush was made toward the impotent Lucien. He blurted out that the session was dissolved and fled from the room.

WHILE the deputies rushed about like madmen, shrieking maledictions, waving their arms, demanding an order of outlawry, Otho followed the broken general of the French outside. Bonaparte had stopped in the midst of his generals.

They were debating hotly among themselves. One of the generals was haranguing the troops. The troops responded with a stolid indifference. Charges that the deputies had attacked a general of their ranks with poniards fell flat. Charges that the deputies had betrayed France for English gold failed to rouse the soldiers.

Some one rushed up to Bonaparte with the news that the deputies would organize to vote the order of outlawry. At this news the Corsican threw off his indecision. Lucien rushed forward and shouted to the troops to turn against the Council.

"To arms," Bonaparte called excitedly. "Soldiers, can I trust you? I will bring them to order!"

Lucien made another appeal to the motionless soldiers, now stolidly at attention. He poised his sword over his brother's breast and vowed that he would thrust it home if ever Bonaparte betrayed the liberties of the French. But even this dramatic appeal failed to move the Grenadiers.

Then Bonaparte's figure stiffened, his eyes flashed, his lips tightened as he threw aside irresolution and turned to his trusted officers in this critical instant when the future of France hung trembling in the balance. A sharp gesture, a terse word of command from the Corsican's taut lips and General Murat leaped forward, whipping his sword from its scabbard as he seized command. Springing in front of the troops, Murat barked at them in the positive language that the drill sergeants had taught them to understand.

"Forward, Grenadiers! Forward! *Vive la République! Vive Bonaparte!*"

The drums rolled. An excited drummer began beating the charge. The Grenadiers, swept into action by the order of a general in uniform, the call of the drums, the sharp crackling commands of the junior officers, advanced behind Murat. They entered the Council, bayonets fixed, and advanced upon the brawling statesmen. A few deputies attempted debate. But the bayonets of the Grenadiers did not pause for logic. In a few minutes the hall was cleared.

Outside the deputies raised cries of treason. They gathered in frenzied groups. Some one bellowed an order that they hurry to the Tuileries and resume the government there, vote into effect the order of proscription, take proper steps to send the Corsican traitor to the guillotine. Otho, thrown into confusion by the unexpected turn of events, went from group to group. But confusion was everywhere. He hurried back to the assembly. Bonaparte nor any of his generals were in sight. Armed Grenadiers turned him away despite his Hussar uniform.

Riding to the Tuileries, he found only a handful of dazed deputies gathered there. At dusk he went to the Rue de la Victoire. The place was deserted. Not even Bourienne was to be found, nor an aide-de-camp. There was little excitement in the streets. The grim silence of the past week hung over the cafés. Otho was left completely in the dark as to the meaning of what he had seen. At eleven he went to the home of General Augereau. The conspirators might gather there. Sight of their waiting carriages quickened his step.

Le Montier was declaiming avidly to five somber mannikins. Augereau was not in the room. France had been betrayed. There was not a moment to lose. Le Montier was frothing. Augereau must stir himself immediately. They could no longer depend upon a stiletto or poison to rid France of this Corsican monster. Moreau must be appealed to. He must detach a corps of veteran cavalry from the frontier and rush them into Paris to support the government of the Directory.

In the midst of Le Montier's ravings, Augereau arrived. He was in dress uniform, the robes of his civil post cast aside. He faced the five and listened briefly to Le Montier's demands. Then he raised his hands for silence.

"I am a soldier, messieurs!" he roared. "My sword is drawn on the side of the government. I will not listen to words of

treason, no matter what my personal feelings. You will desist!"

Le Montier turned to him in outraged amazement.

"*Sang Dieu!* But I do not understand such words, Monsieur the General!" he gasped. "It is of the traitor Bonaparte we speak. Are we not sworn to rid France—"

Augereau broke in with an acrid laugh.

"But Bonaparte has placed himself beyond the pale, Monsieur Le Montier! While we plotted and debated, the Corsican acted. Bonaparte is at this minute the government itself. Two others who serve with him as consuls—Ducos and Sièyés—are but his puppets. The decrees are in effect. I shall report my services promptly to the First Consul of France, General Bonaparte! The door, messieurs, and make haste before I lose my temper!"

CHAPTER XIII

MINIONS OF THE CROWN

IF THE Corsican's gift of magic had turned grim defeat to glorious triumph in those critical moments of St. Cloud, the night gave him time in which to consolidate his victory. Lights burned all night long in the Bonaparte quarters. Aides-de-camp, generals, messengers, entered and left unceasingly while the pale little man who couldn't make a speech wove the web of complete military mastery. Statesmen of all ranks were ushered in and out by other doors while the new government was forged. Sièyés had planned the consulate for his own glory, with Bonaparte in the rôle of military puppet. Bonaparte promptly thrust his own diminutive figure into the post of First Consul by the calm expedient of announcing himself.

Paris awoke the next morning to find itself securely in the grip of a new master. Plotters who might have roused a public revolt found themselves helpless. Bonaparte had adeptly taken the leaders into his councils overnight. Instead of doing away with his enemies, Bonaparte was setting them to work, yielding an outlet for their energies and pent up ambitions. Those who got secondary posts were baited with alluring prospects for the future. By a sleepless period of insuperable effort, the Corsican entrenched so firmly that even the boldest plotters saw the hopelessness of dislodging him at once.

The days that followed merely confirmed Bonaparte's mastery. He wove leaders to his own design, placating where possible, cajoling where necessary. The police suddenly became effective. Troops began receiving their pay, and a more liberal ration. The pulse of government began to beat throughout France; feebly at first, then more and more strongly. Proclamations were put out to bolster up the flagging popular morale. The national spirit was fired against foreign enemies, against treason to the consulate. The Count of Provence, attempting to treat with Napoleon for restoration of the Bourbon throne, was bluntly repulsed. A fortnight, and even the most sanguine royalists had lost hope of ousting the Corsican. Therefore there was but one hope. He must die.

Into the plan for Bonaparte's assassination, Otho fell without qualm of conscience. It was no more a matter for hesitation than the killing of a dangerous beast. This Corsican ogre, master of intrigue, would stand as a menace to every throne in Europe until he was struck down. And France, bereft of God and king, would continue a motley race of madmen.

With the fiery Le Montier and his implacable little group of plotters, Otho met from time to time to help weave the net for the Corsican. Circumstances favored Otho in these intrigues. He had time on his hands, now, and a Hussar's commission to mask his operations. Since that day of the coup at St. Cloud he had set eyes on neither Bonaparte nor Berthier. Once, for a brief moment, he had seen Bourienne. He received from an aide-de-camp the one meager order that had been given him, which required that he do

nothing more than roam about the cafés and clubs with his ears open.

"But there will be important things presently," Bourienne had assured him. "The First Consul will have a sharp need for you one day and a dozen couriers will be on the run to bring you."

Many times Otho bolstered his flagging spirit by recounting those words. They lent substance to his intrigues, to his belief that the Corsican was certain to betray himself. His bitterness against the man had only been fanned by the events of St. Cloud, by Bonaparte's meteoric rise to power. The importance of his duty to the crown of Austria outweighed any ordinary scruple. Necessity must follow its own code.

Le Montier planned many coups. On a report that Bonaparte was visiting incognito at midnight a certain actress of the Opera Italienne, two royalist assassins stood guard nightly for a week with ready stilettos in an isolated pension. They stabbed a diminutive lieutenant of Dragoons in the process of learning their mistake. An intrepid Englishman was placed with a Charleville rifle in a room overlooking Bonaparte's approach to the Luxembourg. Fouche's agents had the rifleman within an hour, and the guillotine completed the job before sunup of the next morning.

M. Lissop's poison plan finally was put in motion. After plotting every detail, securing royalist gold and support, Le Montier threw all his cunning energies into the attempt. A distinguished statesman became the innocent victim when he invited Bonaparte and many leaders of France to his château. Bonaparte accepted, the deadly potion was placed in the victim's favorite potage. A trifle alone upset the plot. The trusted assassin, disguised as waiter, lost his nerve as he set the deadly dish in front of Napoleon. His hand trembled so violently that part of the soup was spilled on the table. Bonaparte pushed it aside nonchalantly and ate from his pockets—a square of bread and slices of cold chicken. A mere precaution, evidently, since the Consul made no comment upon the incident and ordered no arrests.

BUT repeated failure did not quench Le Montier's fire of hatred. He racked his brain for new and fertile means of killing the enemy of France, vowing that he would disguise himself as a priest and plunge a poniard to the Corsican's heart with his own hand if no better way offered. The remaining weeks of the old year passed, the year VIII of the French calendar dawned with Bonaparte's tentacles spreading with every hour. Paris was now under his thumb, the most remote and violent sections were falling into step with the consulate. Then Le Montier passed the whisper that at last Napoleon's doom was sealed. At last fortune had come to him with a plan that could not fail.

"From Egypt, the Corsican brought with him two Mamelukes," Le Montier announced, reducing his voice to a bitter whisper. "It is they shall be avenged for the misery he wrought upon Egypt."

Otho responded with a mocking laugh.

"Spare yourself that dream, monsieur," he taunted Le Montier. "I know too well that the Mamelukes are as faithful to Bonaparte as two Newfoundland dogs."

"And as stupid!" Le Montier shot back. "But please to hold your tongue, Monsieur Le Falcon. From a noisy valet-de-chamber who drinks too much at the Palais Royal I have learned much. Those Mamelukes are the guard over the monster's cuisine. They stand by looking on even while Roget, the trusted chef, prepares the Corsican's meals. A voracious eater, the wretch, forever demanding food at his desk—a circumstance that plays into our hands. I tell you he will not escape this time!"

Le Montier paused to rub his hands and look about with a superior smirk.

"If you are counting upon treachery among his suite, you are wasting your time, monsieur," Otho persisted warmly.

"As I have said, monsieur, I am trusting upon their stupidity. If the chef,

Roget, gained an inch in stature, or shrank a few pounds overnight, neither of those dumb Mamelukes would recognize the difference. So we shall select some nice Winter night, when the hour is very late, to give Monsieur Roget a brief respite from his duties. Do you understand, messieurs!"

Again Le Montier paused to rub his hands, his smirk spreading across his face as he regarded the puzzled expressions of the others.

"I was never interested in parables, monsieur," Otho rejoined dryly. "Tell us frankly what you have in mind."

"Of course, if I must lead you by the hand right up to the door," sneered Le Montier. "I plan to send as cook a trusted agent who will so closely resemble Roget that the Mamelukes will never discover the difference."

M. Lissop bubbled over at this disclosure and launched into a discussion of the proper poisons. A sleeping potion, no matter how deadly, would not serve the purpose, he argued. The surgeon of the household might be able to give an antidote. A sudden violent poison was necessary, one that would wreck the heart before the staff could recover its wits.

"Before you wax too enthusiastic over the kind of poisons," Otho put in, "let me remind you that only an agent of remarkable genius would have the slightest hope of penetrating the home of Bonaparte. Where are we to find such a man?"

"He is, monsieur, now in Paris and at our disposal," snapped Montier.

"A man who resembles Roget?"

"Yes, when he so chooses. Or he is able to resemble any one he pleases. We chose Roget because of the similarity in stature—only a few pounds difference in weight, perhaps an inch or two in height."

"But even then, he will require nerves of iron, Monsieur Montier. There is something about the mere presence of Bonaparte that tries men's nerves."

"Ah, but our man has nerves of steel—and he quails not even in the presence of an emperor. Personages are no strange thing to him, monsieur."

"An *émigré*, perhaps? Or one of the nobility incognito?"

Montier motioned them into a group while he whispered.

"An agent from friendly lands, my friends. An agent of courage and iron will, lent us by the Emperor of Austria. Ah, but Bonaparte shall never escape the wrath of the kings!"

Otho started involuntarily. For an instant the room swam. An emissary of the emperor, the lost trail again, an end to this uncertain groping; word from Vienna. With an effort he restrained himself until he was sure of his voice.

"An Austrian agent?" he repeated quietly. "The plan is much to my liking since, messieurs, I have had many dealings with the Austrians. Therefore, Monsieur Montier, it is desirable that I meet this emissary as soon as possible."

"That is impossible, Le Falcon."

"But—I can be of service," Otho replied hotly. "I can put him on the trail, work with him, aid him to avoid traps. Is it not logical that I—"

Le Montier shook his lean head.

"I have given my word," he averred. "None is to meet the Austrian but I—trusted minion of kings. This is a matter for great discretion, but you have your own good part to play, Monsieur Le Falcon. For it is you we must count upon to reconnoiter the jackal's lair. By tomorrow you must know the habits of Bonaparte's cuisine so that we shall miss no detail. Report to me here as soon as you are ready. And remember, messieurs, when we succeed, there shall be everlasting glory for us in the eyes of his Majesty, the King of France!"

OTHO accepted the futility of pressing his claim. He would bide his time. But the portentious news set up a restlessness which caused him to dismiss his cabriolet and walk to the Café of the Golden Goose. It meant contact again with Moskolz. It might even be his cousin Ferdinand. He weighed this possibility carefully. Regardless of the barrier of

dislike between the two, such an adventure as they were engaged upon would hold them together. At least until they were back in Vienna. And from Ferdinand, more than any one else, he could glean all the intimate news of how things went with Zita, and the court of Vienna.

His reflections were cut short at the café. No sooner had he sat down and ordered champagne, than a secret agent of the household, Gautier, drew up a chair and leaned across the table.

"You will report at once to General Berthier at the home of the First Consul," said Gautier.

"In the interest of discretion, I presume we shall first drink the champagne I have ordered," Otho suggested.

"In the interest of discretion you will leave instantly," retorted Gautier. "For two hours I have been looking for you. A summons from the minister of war waits upon no man, my Lieutenant!"

It was the first peremptory summons he had received from higher authority since the coup at St. Cloud. The possibilities, as he reflected upon them en route to the Luxembourg, flooded him with uneasy foreboding. It might mean an order to travel to some troubled province of France. An order taking him out of Paris at this critical instant would spell dire disaster. He reported to Berthier with masked misery. Bonaparte's war chief wasted no time in disclosing his wishes.

"You will prepare to leave tomorrow on a secret mission of delicate nature and great importance, Le Falcon," Berthier droned in his measured, metallic voice.

Otho's nails bit into his palms. Berthier was looking at him in a detachment that failed to catch the change in Otho's face. Otho waited in silence for the general to continue.

"Your destination will be Dijon, Le Falcon. You will be absent the better part of ten days. So if you have any private arrangements to make for such an absence, do so immediately."

"The nature of my mission?" Otho prompted. He added plausibly, "I ask only so that my mind may be occupied with plans while I wait for the hour."

"To be sure," agreed Berthier affably. He lowered his voice. "It has become necessary for the First Consul to go himself to Dijon. He has asked that you accompany him. He will make the journey by the route, Provins—Chaumont—Langres—Dijon. A very small escort will accompany him, since he goes incognito. Report at nine tomorrow night, ready to start at eleven by post-chaise. At that time, Le Falcon, you will receive your final instructions from the First Consul himself, or from Bourienne. That is all."

The color returned to Otho's face as Berthier said this. As he left the room his cheeks were burning, his heart pounding. The great opportunity had leaped at him. He felt an impulse to hurry at once to Le Montier with the glorious news.

On such a trip Bonaparte would be at their mercy from the instant of leaving Paris. Bonaparte's methods of travel would deliver the chef promptly into the hands of the Austrian. They need only bide their chance en route or at Dijon when Bonaparte, traveling incognito, would put up at the best inns. Even if the poison plan failed, there would be other means of attack. The knowledge of his itinerary, the fact that the Corsican depended upon secrecy and a small escort, delivered him into their hands.

Discreetly putting aside all thoughts of reporting to Le Montier before the next day, Otho spent a sleepless night. He studied the maps and laid out the probable stops. Bonaparte would travel fast, perhaps with many changes of horses. The fact that he was leaving late at night probably meant that the first overnight stop would be at Troyes, the second at Chaumont, a third at some village beyond Langres. A musket fired from some handy billet, a powder trap along the road, the thrust of a poniard on some dark street, a deadly potion in the Corsican's food at one of the numerous inns where he would halt briefly, or overnight; there was little chance of running such a gantlet.

These plans Otho nurtured with small compunction. Though he had no heart for assassination, he had accepted the thought that the service to his emperor justified the means. He reminded himself that he had not sought service of Bonaparte. It was simply that the Corsican had been placed in his power by destiny. That long deferred hour of the ogre's retribution was now close at hand.

AFTER going through the form of a breakfast which he did not taste, Otho went by carriage to Le Montier's rendezvous on the Rue de Soubise. A servant admitted him and reluctantly called his master, who was yet asleep. Le Montier appeared promptly however, in dressing gown, rubbing the sleep out of his puffed, jaundiced eyes.

"*Sacrebleu*, but why do you come here at such an hour?" he complained. "It's only a few hours since I gave you important orders."

"I've done my part, Le Montier. We are ready now for your Austrian, and with no time to waste."

Le Montier was instantly wide awake. He searched Otho's face.

"That," he said, "is a matter for me to decide."

"But this is no time for hesitation, monsieur. A wonderful stroke of fortune overnight has put the Corsican completely at our mercy."

"Ho! Often before I've heard that said, Le Falcon."

"But have you before had Bonaparte's itinerary when he was at the point of crossing France incognito?"

Le Montier's eyes started from their loose sockets, his features twisted in a devilish expectancy.

"You state that for a fact, Le Falcon?"

"Precisely. The Corsican leaves tonight around the hour of midnight for Dijon. He goes on a secret mission, the nature of which I have not learned. He will travel by carriage, incognito, doubtless with an aide-de-camp and a small retinue. I have the word from General Berthier, who has detailed me one of the party."

For a moment Le Montier stood staring at Otho, then flung his arms above his head and rushed from the room to arouse Lissop and Etienne. The three came pattering in, beside themselves with excitement.

"Tell it again!" cried Le Montier. "Tell my friends the glorious news. Give us the whole story, a few words at a time, so they may drink in every detail."

When he had reviewed his momentous interview with Berthier, and answered a score of pressing questions, Otho turned again insistently to the subject of the mysterious Austrian.

"You must summon your agent at once," he charged Le Montier. "Our plans must be perfected immediately."

"We will make our plans here among ourselves. I will communicate them to my friend from Vienna," Le Montier evaded.

"But you waste advantages, Le Montier," Otho argued. "It must be plain to you that I must recognize the Austrian if we are to work together."

Le Montier's jaw snapped shut. He brought his bony hand crashing down on the table.

"I have given my word to the Austrian! Le Montier keeps faith with those who trust him, Monsieur Le Falcon. Let us fritter away no more of our good time in needless debate."

The Frenchman added to his finality by leaping to his feet. He rushed from the room to return with champagne. When they had drunk to the death of the Corsican and the glory of the king, Le Montier spread maps and paper on the table, seated the three about them and proceeded with his plans. Lissop and Etienne chimed in from time to time with a suggestion. Lissop was for poison. Etienne had a variety of gory suggestions; ranging from hidden musket fire to a direct attack by a small party of royalists as the Bonaparte carriage passed through some isolated countryside. Le Montier mixed questions and suggestions inces-

santly, as he gaged each line of action, Finally he clapped his hands together. joyously.

"Messieurs, a happy thought," he exclaimed. "What would be the effect of a whole barrel of gunpowder exploded under the Corsican's carriage?"

Lissop shook his head thoughtfully.

"Messy, monsieur, and not nearly so discreet as my poisons."

"I say the gunpowder!" blurted Etienne. "It would do such a complete job. Not enough of him left for a public funeral, hence the militarists would have no one to weep over."

"Wonderful perception, Etienne," gloated Le Montier. "You voice the very thoughts that were in the back of my mind."

"But how do you expect to spring so awkward a trap, monsieur?" Otho put in. "Smuggling a barrel of gunpowder under the general's conveyance is not going to be so simple a matter."

"Use your wits, Le Falcon! We need only bury the keg in the road. The fuse can be touched as the carriage approaches. That is easily timed, and will require a single man to strike the flint at the proper moment."

"Please to remember, monsieur," Otho remonstrated, "that I have no desire to be blown to the devil with that Corsican."

"But you will be in a second or third carriage, Le Falcon. Of course, if you are not, we will give you warning and you can drop out on some pretext."

"Remember that if your gunpowder misses, Bonaparte will be on his guard thereafter, Le Montier."

"Ho, but I have thought of that, messieurs. Le Falcon raises an excellent point. Only as a last resort will we plant the powder." Le Montier rubbed his hands and beamed. "We will use not one plan but many of them. Poison at every inn this side of Chaumont, messieurs. Then if our Austrian fails us, we must watch our chance with the poniard, the muskets and gunpowder. Come, now, to work upon these plans. There will be adventure for every trusted patriot we can muster between now and the hour of midnight!"

CHAPTER XIV

INCOGNITO

WHEN Otho reported at Bonaparte's new chambers at the Tuileries late at night, it was in the hope of receiving final orders from Berthier or some aide-de-camp. After his day of plotting he had no taste for meeting the man whom it was his sworn duty to destroy. This distaste grew into an aversion, then into a fear as he was kept waiting in an ante-room of Napoleon's official suite. What if those penetrating eyes of the Corsican should read in Otho's face the dangers that lurked under the surface? Was not such a man as the First Consul, endlessly beset by intrigue, sensitive to the slightest omen? Was he not keyed to find treachery in the slightest shifting of a guilty eye, the telltale twitching of a muscle?

An aide summoned him shortly before eleven. He got up uneasily and followed the officer. At seeing the way led to Bonaparte's chamber the blood left his face, his legs seemed to weave, a feeling spread over him that his hidden thoughts were emblazoned on his features.

On entering the room, he made an effort to pull himself together. But his wonted sangfroid had deserted. He knew it for that same mysterious ague that had upset the hand of the waiter-assassin at the poison banquet in the presence of greatness. But he was unable to master it. Bonaparte looked up as Otho entered. Otho made a bold show of meeting his eyes, but was conscious of failure. He had the feeling that he could not betray his designs more completely by shouting them at the Corsican.

But Bonaparte's scrutiny was brief. His blue eyes twinkled and he spoke in a bantering, friendly voice.

"You, too, my friend, look at me as if I were a ghost!" he exclaimed. "What a power in a little title. My best friends

quake when they come. Well, put yourself at ease, Le Falcon. You see I am no different—and I have not forgotten you!"

"The Citizen First Consul does me great honor," Otho replied, with a nervous bow.

"You have the manners of a courtier and the stiff bow of an Austrian Hussar." Bonaparte laughed. "Doubtless as actor you have played both rôles, Le Falcon?"

"As an actor, I have played many rôles, Citizen First Consul."

"A fortunate circumstance for both of us, Le Falcon. The general has told you that I must go at once to Dijon?"

"I was ordered to hold myself in readiness for the orders of the Citizen First Consul."

"But I rather imagine you little guessed the importance of those orders, Lieutenant. You see, something must be done and at once concerning those stupid Austrians. I will tell you briefly what there is to be done so you will understand your mission."

Bonaparte unfolded a map with a few impatient jerks of his hand and laid it across the top of his desk. He pointed out the positions with his long, thin index finger and spoke in a staccato voice.

"You know what happened under that asinine Directory while I was absent in Egypt? Here are the Austrians. Overrunning Italy again. Ranging like a wolf-pack beyond our east frontiers. Two great armies, under my old foes, the Archduke Charles and General Melas. Well, if that were France's only problem I would settle it promptly. A few weeks—and a few corps would clear away the Austrians. They are too horribly stupid at tactics to escape destruction once I give them my attention. But you see, France has other ills. I must straighten out the finances, the laws, the industries, commerce—in a word, make France over again internally. While I am doing this, I negotiate for peace with the Emperor Francis. Ho! As though such a thing were possible! In the meantime I am forming a new army, the Army of Reserve. Already the Austrian spies have learned it is to be centered at Dijon. It is to give that army at Dijon importance in the eyes of our enemies that I must go personally. Do you grasp the situation, Le Falcon?"

Otho, not daring to trust his voice in reply to what he had heard, bowed assent.

"The Austrians, Le Falcon, have no thought that I will attack in Italy. They think the Army of Reserve is a subterfuge—at most a desperate play on my part to support Moreau on our eastern frontier and keep the Austrians out of France. Which is what I wish them to think. In fact, by going to Dijon now I will convince them once and for all of my intentions—and in the meantime the Army of Reserve will continue to grow throughout France, unnoted."

A SWARTHY Mameluke entered with a tray of food. Bonaparte swept the map from the table, seized a half chicken before the servant had set it down and began eating. The fate of the Austrians, the projected trip to Dijon were dropped while the Corsican bolted his supper. Otho stood waiting. The Corsican was even thinner than before. His eyes were deeply ringed in blue from loss of sleep. But his eyes were brighter, his undersized figure seemed to bristle with a limitless nervous energy and his presence had grown in authority. It was a growth that seemed to pervade the room. The Mameluke's hand trembled as he served the remnants of the vanishing meal. Bourienne, having to leave the room, went out timorously on tiptoe. Berthier, looking in the room and finding his chief still engaged, beat a hasty and noiseless retreat. When he had eaten, Bonaparte brought his business with Otho to a terse end.

"You will prepare to leave at once, Le Falcon," he commanded. "But before you go drop in here and let me have a look at you. I am curious to see how much you have profited by personal contact." The Corsican's face broke into a wry smile. "I rather envy you your ad-

venture, Le Falcon. It is you that will be receiving great homage in the next fortnight while I remain incognito in Paris. But remember, you sly rascal, I forbid you to disgrace me by making love in my name!"

Though he managed to control his face and execute a precise military salute, the room was reeling as Otho left with Bourienne. Bonaparte's final injunction had given him his first hint of the real purpose for which he was to be used. His mind had not fully accepted the whole unbelievable truth until Bourienne brought up in a small dressing room and pointed to a brilliant new uniform laid out across the top of a chest.

"You will dress at once, monsieur," the secretary directed. "You will find here everything you require for arranging your masquerade. I will return presently to inspect your appearance and give you final orders."

A tense smile passed across Otho's face. His plans were in ruin. He, rather than Bonaparte, would thread the devious traps that had been planted across the face of France. The royalist plotters would be risking their necks within the next fortnight in an effort to destroy one of their own agents. Otho saw that he was completely shut off from last minute warning to Le Montier. He would have to see the adventure through. The most he could hope for was possible contact with one of the assassins somewhere along the route to Dijon.

The uniform fitted him perfectly: a gray uniform coat with a single decoration, tight pantaloons of white cassimer, immaculate top boots, a cocked hat, and at the waist a tri-colored silk sash. Since Otho was some sixty-six inches in height, and slightly broader than the Corsican, it was clear that the uniform had been cut to his measure by some observant tailor detailed for the purpose. He wondered at his own stupidity in not guessing that Bonaparte might make such use of him. He saw now that such an emergency as this must have been in the Corsican's mind from the first.

Materials for his makeup were on a dressing table. These he laid on with a deft hand. His features needed no change. It was a matter of simulating the Corsican's pallor, the hollows under Bonaparte's eyes, his heavy brows, and the lines of that haughty mouth. Muscular control did the rest. As he drew himself up before the full length mirror and surveyed himself, he saw that he had created a speaking likeness. At a distance, or except to very close friends, Otho would pass for Bonaparte. He was able to simulate the Corsican's bearing, his stride, even something of his moods.

The unemotional Bourienne, on returning to the room, surveyed his master's double with a critical eye.

"You will pass—if you but hold yourself aloof from the garrison at Dijon," he announced. "Your carriage is ready. Lieutenant Fullois goes as aide-de-camp, and with him a trusted detachment. He will attend to everything. He alone of those who accompany you knows your true identity. At Dijon, he will present the First Consul's compliments to the commanders of the Army of Reserve. You will go in your carriage to the review, where you will mount your horse, ride the lines, and then leave at once by carriage. Fullois understands everything. You will be under his command at all times. You will accompany me now to make your adieu to the First Consul."

Bonaparte was alone in his chamber when the two reported. He came from behind his desk and stood in front of Otho in sober appraisal, no hint of amusement in his face at the masquerade. Otho saw that the Corsican was nearly three inches shorter, perhaps ten pounds lighter than he. He saw, too, that there was one characteristic that he could not hope to imitate—the penetrating keenness of the First Consul's blue eyes.

"You will pass, my friend," Bonaparte commented at last. "Your eyes are not of the same shade of blue, and you are larger—yet I think you will deceive even the veteran regiments from a discreet distance. The service you perform for me

is of the greatest value. If we succeed in tricking those Austrian oxen, you will have served all France. Adieu, Citizen Lieutenant, and *bon voyage.*"

The journey to Dijon was launched with military punctiliousness. Bourienne escorted Otho to a closed carriage, ushered him inside, closed the door behind him and the carriage jolted forward. The conveyance was drawn by two sturdy Belgian light draft horses, bred for endurance. The postilion, a Hussar in uniform, rode the off-horse and kept his team moving at a lively clip. Two armed Grenadiers rode the rear box, six Dragoons trotted close behind the carriage. A second conveyance, bearing chef, valets and baggage, brought up the rear.

Fullois sat at Otho's left, puffing at a pungent pipe and saying nothing. The blinds were drawn, the carriage in stone darkness, so that Otho had no glimpse of his companion in adventure. The other's silence he accepted gratefully, since it left him to his own thoughts. Out of the wreck of his plans he was able to glean a single grain of comfort. There would be useful information to gather of that mysterious Army of Reserve which Bonaparte was forming against the Austrians. Some large purpose must lie behind the Corsican's wish to appear publicly before the troops at Dijon. Otho was skeptical of Bonaparte's explanation of this. He suspected some larger strategy, perhaps an impending concentration on the frontiers, or a surprise invasion of Italy.

Otho smiled as he recalled Napoleon's insulting reference to stupid Austrians. How little did that conceited little bantam know that he was entrusting his mission to an agent of the Austrian emperor. Stupid Austrians, indeed!

As they left Paris behind and settled down to the long grind into Provins, Fullois stretched himself out and was soon snoring loudly. Otho felt no weariness. His mind was busy with a means of extricating himself from his precarious position. The dangers that lay ahead demanded prompt action. Le Montier's assassins, the most reckless adventurers in the royalist cause, would be hounding their course. Royalist runners, mounted on swift horses, had gone ahead early in the afternoon to bait their traps. Riflemen would be waiting their chances in the upper stories of the larger villages. Lissop's poison crew would be haunting every inn, spring and well along the way. If all else failed, there would be powder kegs planted under the road between Langres and Dijon.

A change of route was the one hope of escaping those dangers. Otho's decision had crystallized by daybreak. He would face the risk until reaching Troyes in the hope of sighting familiar faces. At Troyes, if he had not contacted Le Montier's men, he would demand that Fullois proceed by way of Chatillon, avoiding Chaumont and Langres. That at least would leave Le Montier's desperate henchmen with no time on their hands to sow the road with powder kegs.

CHAPTER XV

THE ROAD TO DIJON

DAYLIGHT brought him his first sight of Fullois. His escort was a tall young man of lithe, muscular build, the bold rugged features of a military adventurer and an adventurer's ability to sleep under any circumstances when not otherwise engaged. As the sun swung over the hills and Otho estimated that Provins, at their steady speed of six kilometers per hour, must lie close at hand, he shook the aide-de-camp. Fullois was awake instantly without blinking.

"Good morning, my General," he said with an agreeable smile. "I must apologize that the Citizen First Consul awoke before I did. Are we coming close to Provins?"

"It can't be so far, monsieur," replied Otho. "But before we reach Provins there are some matters of importance I must discuss with you."

"Breakfast, my General, is the most important subject I can think of. What else have you?"

"The matter of changing our route," Otho announced. "I have been giving much thought to this. I would much prefer going by way of Chatillon when we leave Troyes. For one thing it is a much shorter route."

"*Diable!* That is impossible, monsieur!" Fullois rejoined. "We travel to Chaumont from Troyes, thence to Langres and into Dijon."

"But I must insist, Monsieur Fullois. There is time to be saved and danger to be avoided by the other route."

Fullois sat stiffly erect and faced Otho with two very level brown eyes.

"Publicly, monsieur, you are the Citizen First Consul and I must treat you with the greatest deference," he replied severely. "Privately you are a sub-lieutenant of Hussars and take your orders from me. We will go by the route originally planned!"

"Without giving you details, monsieur," Otho persisted, "I have good reason to suspect that royalist plots are laid along our route. What is to prevent them from shooting us, if our route is known, or blowing us up with gunpowder?"

Fullois laughed heartily.

"*Pardieu*, what a joke on the royalists!" he boomed. "If they succeeded they would hold a great celebration. General Bonaparte dead! And in the midst of it all, our general would appear in the flesh to confound them. Ho, but I can think of nothing funnier!"

"Amusing, indeed, monsieur. Though I can't see where it is for us to laugh over the matter."

"A trifle, Lieutenant Le Falcon. We are soldiers and take our chances. A soldier is happy only when he can laugh at death."

Fullois snapped his fingers and began striking sparks into his pipe.

"A soldier need not take silly risks simply because he is not afraid to," Otho retorted. "A dead soldier is of no use to any one."

"Nor a disobedient one, Monsieur Le Falcon! *Sang Dieu*, but I have my orders and I shall obey them to the letter. Your mission is at Dijon. I have important missions at Treves, at Chaumont and at Langres. So let us not discuss the matter further."

Otho yielded. He sank back in the soft cushions. So it was not all a matter of visiting Dijon? Fullois' disclosure told him that there were deeper complications in this junket. There were garrisons at Treves, at Chaumont and at Langres. It must be that the whole Army of Reserve was not concentrated at Dijon. Else why a visit to obscure garrisons of an aide-de-camp of the high command? Otho launched several adroit feelers for information. Fullois promptly changed the subject and held his own counsel.

They swung into Provins shortly after nine o'clock. Fullois drew the curtains of the carriage. A few minutes later they brought up at an inn, the aide-de-camp leaped out, opened the door, and escorted Otho inside. There was an instantaneous commotion. The *concierge* ran about his place in high excitement giving orders. Patrons were ordered out summarily to make way for the First Consul and his party. Otho entered amid a flustered bowing of flunkeys, Fullois escorting him to his rooms. A valet brought hot water and was preparing to shave him. Otho waved the fellow out of the room. He had no wish to ruin his makeup and contented himself with dipping cold water into his sleepy eyes.

Fiolet, a lean, beetling chef of the consulate, slouched from the second carriage, took over the cuisine and prepared omelettes. Otho looked at the food with wistful eye but did not touch it. There was the chance that the sinister Lissop might have smuggled his boasted seasoning into the eggs. Fullois ate with gusto. But Otho pleaded loss of appetite, refused coffee, or even a glass of wine, and pulled in his belt. He contented himself with the thought that as they left Provins he would halt at some shop for dried herring and bread. Lissop, he could feel sure, would not have thought to plant his poisons there.

But when, an hour later, they left the inn, Otho was unprepared for the demonstration that waited them. The street outside the inn was packed tight with an excited throng. Word of the First Consul's coming had passed through the village like wildfire. Otho was taken aback at the rousing cheer that greeted his appearance.

"*Vive Bonaparte!*" rose from a thousand lusty lungs. "*Vive la République!*"

PEOPLE began pressing close, necks craned, eyes staring. Some tried to touch Otho as he passed. His escort of Dragoons was compelled to force a lane along which he strode toward his carriage in the haughty gait of the Corsican, hand thrust in coat, head lowered, glowering straight to the front. Fullois nudged him sharply.

"Not so stiff, dummox!" the aide-de-camp hissed in his ear. "Lift your hat—and smile!"

The cheering trebled as Otho took his cue. The throng surged closer. Otho had a momentary taste of the thrill of public adulation. Then he remembered the dangers that might lurk in that throng. One of those hands that reached toward him vainly from behind his Hussars might hold a pistol. Or Le Montier's men might have a point of musket vantage on some adjoining roof. He quickened his gait and entered the carriage gratefully.

An official of the village thrust himself forward before the aide-de-camp could close the door. He begged the First Consul to accept from a grateful people the gift of champagne which they had horded against the day when they might be thus honored, champagne of a rare old vintage dating to the very year of the First Consul's birth. Otho bowed his acceptance, the aide leaped in, a Grenadier slammed the door upon them and the conveyance lurched forward.

The crowd followed. Even when Dragoons cleared the street, a motley rabble of men and boys followed at the run. As the carriages passed into the country again, a score of hardy enthusiasts were keeping pace, waving their hats and shouting. Otho groaned. The demonstration robbed him of his chance at bread and herring. It meant he must ride many weary kilometers on an empty stomach.

"*Sacrebleu!*" exclaimed Fullois, when they finally left the last of the villagers behind. "But I am glad you are nothing better than a sub-lieutenant of Hussars, *mon ami*. Six bottles of champagne of such a vintage! We will not want for cheer today."

Otho put out a restraining hand as Fullois loosed a cork.

"Beware, monsieur," he warned. "Some royalist rogue may have tampered with this wine."

Fullois responded with a reckless laugh and thrust the foaming neck into his mouth.

"A pleasant death, at least," he bantered gratefully, when half the bottle was drained.

Otho bit his lips. The Frenchman's abandon, his own enforced timidity stung him. But he reminded himself that he must preserve caution at any cost. His opportunities were too great to risk the danger of Lissop's poison. But the royalists had not gotten in their treachery at Provins. Fullois became mildly drunk but suffered no other ill effects. Le Montier, doubtless, would make his main effort then at Troyes. That city would offer the plotters greater security because of its size.

At Nogent, through which they passed early in the afternoon, Otho's stomach was again cheated. Word had gotten through in some mysterious fashion and the town was out in force. There was another outbreak of wild cheering. But the cavalcade did not slow down. Two Hussars rode ahead with drawn sabers to keep the way clear. Nogent passed, without incident, into the background.

Hunger wracked Otho through the long bumping ride of the afternoon and early evening. The fresh mounts secured at Provins were nearly spent when the car-

riage drew into Troyes long after dark. Fullois drew the curtains again as they came into the lighted section of the city. They were able to see out through the front of the carriage, without risk of being identified. Few people were on the streets, which told them that news of their coming had not seeped through from Provins or Nogent.

Otho's first thought now was of dinner and a bottle of wine. If no better plan offered, he would shift his disguise and go to some public café where he would not have to pay the penalty of Bonaparte's greatness. But even his hunger was swept aside and he was tricked into a sharp exclamation by a figure standing on the street closely observing the carriage. It was, unmistakably, the elusive Major Moskolz, the emperor's secret emissary in Paris.

Impulsively, Otho signaled the driver to stop. As the carriage brought down he recovered himself.

"A very valuable person, monsieur," he addressed Fullois. "Standing on the street to our right, near the first street-light behind us. Please hurry with the message that he is to follow us to the inn and there await your further orders."

"Run your own errands," scoffed Fullois. "Since when did a sub-lieutenant of Hussars give orders to his superior."

"You forget that I cannot be running about in the First Consul's uniform, my Lieutenant. And it is important."

"Of course, I forgot." Fullois grinned.

He opened the door, leaped out, ordered the driver to move on slowly, and disappeared on his mission. Otho's heart was pounding. A miracle of good fortune that he gain contact now. Moskolz had appeared at last, and at a moment when he was most needed. And he could count upon the Hungarian's discretion in dealing with Fullois.

SOME time elapsed. Fullois had not reappeared when the party drew up at the inn. The Hussars dismounted and formed a barrier into the place. Valet and cook disappeared inside with the hand luggage. The obsequious *concierge*, sensing some important personage, stood rubbing his hands in front of his door. People began to gather, but no Fullois. When he did come, at the end of a long awkward wait, he was flushed and puffing.

"A strange fish you sent me to catch, Le Falcon!" he complained.

"You gave him my message, monsieur?"

"Our best Belgian couldn't have run him down," said Fullois. "He bolted as I approached—at a walk, then at a run as I followed. For three hundred meters I ran after him. Not even an Austrian Grenadier with a Frenchman at his heels runs faster! *Voilà!*"

Otho swore under his breath. The fool. Again the Hungarian had faded at a critical instant. He had credited the fellow with sharper wits and stouter nerves than to run at sight of the Corsican's aide-de-camp. He got out of the carriage, remembered to thrust his hand into his coat and scowl to the front as he stalked into the hostelry. The *concierge* turned stark at sight of the First Consul and retreated ahead of Otho with a series of speechless bows. Fullois brought the fellow out of his funk with a snap of his fingers and ordered that they be shown to their quarters. Otho drew the finest suite in the hotel, Fullois a small room adjoining.

"Twice, sir, in the days of my father, was our poor hostelry honored by the presence of kings of France—but never such an honor as—"

"Yes, we'll take that for granted, Citizen," Fullois cut the fellow off. "But take your flattery to the kitchen and see to it that our chef has everything he needs. The First Consul is starving—not to mention my own stomach."

As the innkeeper backed out, his head bobbing absurdly close to his knees, Fullois turned sharply to Otho.

"The point is," he announced, a lively sparkle in his eyes, "I haven't a moment to lose. In Troyes I have a most interesting companion and will be back here

very late. Your orders, monsieur: see to it that you remain close to your apartment. But when you retire, do so in that rookery the knave put aside for me. I will occupy the First Consul's chamber myself. *Au revoir*, Citizen Lieutenant, and keep yourself out of mischief."

The valet came in as Fullois went out. He bowed deeply as Otho turned to him with instant orders.

"Have the chef search for a shop that is open," he commanded. "One that will take an oath at having freshly laid eggs for an omelette."

"But that has been attended to, if I may explain," protested the valet. "The inn keeper vows the eggs are fresh, and the poultry, and the vegetables for the Citizen First Consul's table."

"Do as I command, instantly!" snapped Otho. "I prefer to wait for dinner. And when you have sent Fiolet out to obey my command to the letter, you will go in another direction. Buy me a large quantity of dried herring, several loaves of bread and two bottles of a good wine. See to it that you select some remote shop, and do not say for whom you get them."

"As the Citizen First Consul pleases." The valet bowed and was on his way.

Otho dabbed the dust out of his eyes with a wet towel and washed his hands. Then he meticulously touched up his makeup. The departure of Fullois had been a marvelous turn of fortune. It ridded his suite of the aide for the swift plan that had formed in his mind following the escape of Moskolz.

The Hungarian's presence in Troyes suggested the probable location here of Le Montier and the mysterious Austrian. They knew, now, of the Corsican's arrival, at least to their own complete satisfaction. They would be hanging close with a dozen sinister death traps. Fiolet's appearance about the streets would give them their opportunity. Otho reasoned that they would not be slow in seizing Fiolet and sending their own man in. Since Fiolet was lean, silent and of commonplace mold, they would be able to fill in his place. The Austrian, with small skill at makeup, would be able to meet that need.

When the valet returned with herring, bread and wine, Otho ate ravenously. The valet looked on in pained astonishment.

"But the Citizen First Consul will spoil his dinner," he pleaded. "Monsieur Fiolet will soon be back with fresh eggs for the omelette. A tender broiler is already on the fire, watched over by the innkeeper. It will be small time before—"

"The innkeeper is over the fire you say?" Otho demanded, looking up with sharp interest.

"Yes, and busy preparing the salad."

"Good. Then you will have the night off. Leave word with the innkeeper that Fiolet may serve my dinner himself as soon as it is ready."

"But I do not wish to neglect my duty. I am not tired."

"Nevertheless, you will make yourself scarce," Otho said tartly. "I have important business ahead and do not wish to be pestered." He took a handful of silver coins from his pocket and tossed them on the table. "There is money for your own dinner and a bottle of the best wine—and mind that you listen well to what people are saying of your First Consul."

The valet smiled in sudden understanding, scooped up the money and bowed himself out of the room.

CHAPTER XVI

THE AGENT FROM VIENNA

WHEN he had washed down the last of his bread and herring, Otho sat back to wait. At last, if his counter-ruse only worked, he would be brought back into contact with Vienna. The course was clear now for Le Montier's vaunted Austrian to do his work. With Fullois and the valet out of the way, the assassin would stand no danger of discovery if he appeared in the rôle of chef.

The better part of an hour had ticked

by before Otho was drawn tense by footsteps on the stairs. He drew his chair to the table and buried his head in his arms. The door opened. He heard the clatter of dishes and sat up.

"*Diable!* You have been altogether too long, Fiolet!" he snapped without looking up. "What has kept you?"

"Your pardon," said a weak, apologetic voice.

Otho bent over his food for a moment to conceal the effect of that voice. It confirmed his wildest hopes. A twinkle crept into his eyes. He arose, crossed the room and folded his arms.

"Fiolet, you will sit down at my chair!" he commanded.

The uneasy chef complied tremulously, keeping his face averted. A contingency upon which he had not counted, clearly.

"Fiolet," said Otho in his sweetest voice, "you have scoured faithfully and I know you must be very hungry. I want you to enjoy my potage, and the chicken. Come, now, eat your fill."

"Pardon, Excellency," piped the now demoralized chef. "But I have just dined."

"You dare to say you have kept me waiting while you fed yourself!" exploded Otho.

"Your pardon, Excellency," stammered the other.

"Excellency?" Otho mocked. "Since when did you come to call the Citizen First Consul 'Excellency'? Do you take me for some Austrian silk garter that you address me in such fashion?"

The other rose, looked about awkwardly and attempted to bow his way out of the room. Otho pointed a tense finger at the chair and bellowed a command that the fellow eat.

"Perhaps it is that there is some strange seasoning in the food for which you have no relish," Otho baited, when the chef seated himself and stared dumbly at the food.

"Oh, never, sire!" he protested. "Why should you think of such a thing of poor Fiolet?"

"How else, my dear fellow?" Otho laughed. "How else am I to account for the presence here in disguise of the Lieutenant Baron Ferdinand of Waldegaden, special aide-de-camp to his Majesty, the Emperor of Austria!"

The man sprang from his chair, overturned it and faced Otho with distended eyes. Seeing his accuser unarmed and off guard, Ferdinand adopted violence. He fumbled in his serving apron, snatched out a pistol and was raising it when Otho lifted his hand.

"One moment, my dear Ferdinand!" he exclaimed, smiling broadly. "Don't be ridiculous. Remember there is no quarrel at present between you and Otho of Donau-Walden."

"Otho?" Ferdinand searched his intended victim's face and figure. Even as he saw, slowly, through the masquerade, his wits seemed unequal to the enigma. His jaw dropped, he brushed his fingers across his astounded eyes. "I—I do not understand!" he gasped at last.

TO BE CONTINUED

A Story of the Niger Delta

COMPANY MANNERS

By ROBERT SIMPSON

A SMOKY hurricane lantern, that squeaked as it swung lazily in the Lenox beach watchboy's hand, told Badak that the watchboy was just a step or two around the corner of the kernel store.

On Badak's right was a stairway leading up to the white palm oil trader's living quarters. On his left, between him and the mangrove stick breakwater that fronted on Segwanga Creek, was a square iron water tank. And overhead, beyond the light at the top of the stairway, the hum of white men's voices told Badak that Lenox and his two assistants were still at chop and were not yet quite ready to turn their attention to him.

Badak was a Jakri of Benin River. To all appearances he was just a primitive human animal in a loincloth. Intrinsically, however, though he was altogether unacquainted with the written word, he was a poet. And principally because of this, he was a shop thief.

Just then, with the black night of the African jungle crowding in upon him, he

was tied hand and foot to an ironwood upright that supported the awning of the Lenox beach kernel store, and he was waiting for Lenox and the Kroo headman to pronounce judgment and administer justice in the customary Oil Rivers trading beach fashion.

On the Slave Coast of West Africa, where the sullen green blanket of mangroves covered many things that were strange and frequently unprintable, it was not unusual for enterprising young men of color to become shop thieves. It was, in fact, unusual if they did not find shoplifting a helpful aid toward the possession of a sufficient number of wives to make life tolerable in a land where it was not honorable for a man to have less than three.

But it was doubtful if any of them, as Badak did, specialized only in silks.

This was because Badak was, first of all, a poet; and secondly because the father of Lani of Akerri had a failing for silks and had stipulated that any man who desired to make Lani his wife would be required to pay the marriage price in many pieces of silk.

A "piece" was equivalent to two English shillings, and so very many pieces did Lani's father demand that Badak had no wives at all as yet. For Badak, who aspired to possess Lani and to give her the most honorable position of a first wife, had not yet pilfered quite enough silks from trading beach shops to pay Lani's father the price he asked.

There was no question in Badak's mind about the price being a just price, and that the medium was an appropriate one, there was no doubt whatever.

Silk. Lani. Red, gold, and black . . . Even the frowsiest bushman from the Ijo country knew Lani of Akerri, with a flaming yellow silk handkerchief wound about her crinkly head and her lithe young body wrapped in a piece of red and gold Madras that vied with the glory of the setting sun.

Badak groaned.

Lani was the glint of the new moon upon rippling water; she was a dragon fly flashing into the sunlight out of the shadows; she was a young she-leopard—soft, swift, silken—leaping, laughing . . . Badak paused sharply and his brows furrowed. He had never seen a leopard laugh, or heard of one that did; and Badak, even under these heroic circumstances, was too honest a poet to allow so unconvincing a figure of speech to pass uncensored.

Nevertheless, Lani was like a young she-leopard, and she did laugh; and laughed mostly at Badak, who aspired to pay her marriage price—the marriage price of Lani of Akerri who would, as every one knew, become the first wife of the eldest son of Chief Gano of Segwanga.

Badak's forehead leaned against the ironwood post, and he closed his eyes. Lani would laugh at the marks of the hippo hide thong upon his back! She would laugh at him before all the village of Akerri—laugh at his torn and bleeding flesh and ask him if he thought he could pay her father the marriage price with the lashes laid upon his back by a Kroo headman who was the spawn of swine!

Badak shivered. There might have been a song in his soul if he could have thought that Lani would not laugh and would not sneer at him because he had been so much of a fool as to allow himself to be caught—and caught on the Lenox beach! But Lani would be sure to laugh at him for this and say to him in her own inimitable way:

"Fool! Is your head as empty as a hungry paddleboy's belly? Did you not know that the Lenox beach headman could make your back hang in strings with less than twice ten lashes? If you are the kind of fool that is caught, why did you not choose a Kingdon beach where there are no more floggings, even for shop thieves?"

This, of course, was Badak's own thought, but he could well imagine Lani echoing it, more particularly since she knew, as Badak himself did, that Kingdon happened to be in Segwanga at that moment; Kingdon, who was the "big cap'n" of the African Merchants Com-

pany, who was known to all men, white and black, from Conakry to Calabar, who feared nothing that lived and, most important of all, who was Badak's very good friend.

Not that Kingdon could possibly be of any assistance to Badak now; not on the Lenox beach. Lenox brooked no interference from any one at any time; and when the Lenox beach watchboy's squeaking hurricane lantern sounded almost immediately behind Badak and a smoky light suddenly shone in his face, he shrank from it as from a blow.

THIS light revealed that Badak's eyes were slightly bloodshot, his lips dry and dusty and his cheeks streaked with the sweat of anguish and fear. For Badak knew only too well what lay ahead of him. He had seen it happen to many others—others who were stronger and more hardened than he—and he had seen what it had done to them.

The Kroo headman on the Lenox beach was proud of his reputation as an expert with a hippo hide thong; and Badak knew he could expect the worst from Lenox himself, because Lenox, who was an independent trader, chronically at war with the world, had an ugly disposition that was most ugly toward shop thieves.

Therefore, Badak, who was no hero to himself, however heroic he might appear to be while others looked on, shivered to the marrow of him and shrank from the searching rays of the smoky hurricane lantern and did not look at the watchboy at all.

"You fear?" the watchboy asked in pidgin English because, being a Kroo boy, he scorned to speak the Jakri tongue.

Badak's naked back, shiny and as yet unblemished, drew away from the question and his eyes continued to look straight past the watchboy.

"Badak—no fear—nothin'."

"You lie! You fear! We headman go cut yo' heart 'way."

Badak's knees knocked and sagged and his lifted chin drooped perceptibly. Fear, stark and staring, raced through him, shaking him like a helpless, wind driven leaf, and all thought of Lani of Akerri, laughing in the young light of the morning . . .

"Badak—no—fear—no—man."

The words were scarcely more than a whisper, dry and thick as Badak's lips and tongue and throat, but when they were spoken his chin came up again, even though his forehead still rested gratefully against the ironwood post.

The watchboy laughed derisively.

"So-so Jakri man fear all man. Jakri man be fool! He be so-so catfish. He be all same monkey no catch tail. You fear! All man fear we headman. He go cut yo' back so you belly no fit to chop no mo'!"

This was a gross exaggeration and Badak knew it, but his stomach seemed to rise into his throat at the same moment that his legs became very wabbly and apparently detached themselves from the rest of him.

A booted foot sounded on the house veranda and the heavy figure of Lenox showed in the light at the head of the stairs.

And then, somehow, and with the swift stealth of a leopard . . .

Silk! Red, gold and black leaping from behind the watertank into the light of the smoky lamp like a blurred daub of paint that blotted the watchboy from the picture in a trice.

Then Badak, his numbed wrists suddenly and miraculously freed, slipped down the post like an empty sack—sick, dazed, his head whirling at the incredibility of it all. Behind him, just a little to his right, the dim figure of the watchboy sprawled upon his face and the smoky lamp had gone out. A knife that had two edges was hacking at the cords that bound Badak's ankles.

"Fool!" a voice whispered to him in Jakri. "This is no time to sleep! Make quick! We go!"

Lani!

Badak staggered drunkenly after the girl around the watertank just as booted

feet sounded decidedly on the stairs.

"Watchboy!" Lenox's voice thundered thickly down. "Where's that light! Watchboy!"

The watchboy did not answer and before Lenox had reached the foot of the stairs, a two-paddle canoe was slipping darkly away from the mangrove stick breakwater and was leaping toward the blacker shadows of the overhanging bush.

"You hear?" Lani asked as her single bladed paddle stabbed savagely into the waters of Segwanga Creek. "Lenox roars with a voice that all Segwanga can hear, an' your arms are no better then dried sticks an' your hands only good for dipping into the chop pot! Take paddle! We go away from dis place. We go far away. We go to another country. One time!"

Badak had already taken up the extra paddle that lay in the bottom of the canoe and his numbed arms were trying to keep pace with Lani's vicious paddle strokes, just as his numbed senses were trying to keep in step with Lani's appallingly sudden march from the incredible present into an utterly impossible future.

Go away with her from Segwanga? She would run away with him from Akerri? From her father's house? Far away. To another country. With him! And without paying the marriage price!

BADAK'S head spun and his paddle fumbled and faltered even though the bull-like voice of Lenox was bellowing his rage for all the world to hear.

"My father will kill you." Lani's whispering voice ran on. "Lenox will kill us both. Government commish' will put a rope around our necks an' we will hang on the mango tree where the white man makes the little white ball jump over the net that catches no fish. So we go away. Far away. One time!"

The mango tree Lani referred to was adjacent to the tennis court on the government beach on Segwanga Creek, and as it was no longer the "hanging tree" Badak knew they would not hang there wherever else the ceremony might take place.

"Did you kill him?" he demanded thickly, feeling cold all over. "The watchboy?"

"His head is too thick," Lani said savagely, "an' my mangrove stick was too thin."

Badak drew a long, deep breath, and the relief he felt was so decided that sudden new strength raced into his arms.

"Then we will not hang," he said after a while. "White man's law is life for life."

"*Chal* Will not my father, Bodamo, kill you if you do not pay the marriage price? An' do you think I, Lani of Akerri, would marry a man whose back was cut like strips of wattle by a pig of a Kroo headman? Are you always the fool whose eyes are blind from staring too much at the sun?"

Badak did not answer this. The voice of Lenox was growing fainter and fainter, and when the canoe's nose turned sharply into a narrow and very dark side creek, Badak's power of thought began to assert itself.

What Lani had done for him and why she had done it was not lost upon him, and her eagerness to depart for "another country" without the formality of paying the marriage price, had its own decided significance. Being invited to elope with Lani of Akerri was possibly the most remote possibility Badak would have dreamed of even in his most optimistic flights of fancy.

Yet, while Badak's heart leaped and an exultant fire raced through his veins, he did not forget—as, of course, he could not forget—that he was a Jakri and a male of the species. This meant that, under any and every circumstance, it was necessary for him to be superior to each and every wife and particularly to the first one. Else this woman would rule him and his house and make him a mockery before all men for the remainder of his life.

Therefore, Badak put a rein upon his impulses and his passion and presently he said:

"You are but a woman an' your tongue rattles in your head like a single ground

nut in a calabash. The white commish' will not hang us from a mango tree, Lenox will not kill us either, an' your father, Bodamo, will not kill me if I pay him the marriage price. So, we do not need to go to another country, now or tomorrow, or any tomorrow. I, Badak—"

"*Cha!* An' for this I, Lani of Akerri, have left my father's house an' have crawled on my belly in the dark like a lizard to cut you away from the flogging of a so-so Kroo-boy pig!"

"Peace! Am I your paddleboy or am I Badak, the son of Dorr, who will pay to Bodamo, your father, the marriage price in silk?"

"The marriage price!" A sound that was not at all unlike a snarl accompanied this, and Lani, who had stopped paddling, spun in her seat. "In silk? In kernel dust you will pay! Fool, an' the son of a fool! Will Lani of Akerri wait till her teeth fall out for you to pay the marriage price?"

The paddle blade, aimed in fury at Badak's head, missed its mark only because Badak ducked under the blow. He wrenched the paddle from her hand as it passed and for a moment or two the canoe rocked dangerously. But Badak's laughter sounded clearly above Lani's viciously hissing breath. In a low, authoritative tone, he said—

"It is not good to fight in a canoe where the Crocodile of the Slave waits to snap even at the paddle hand that dips nearest to the water."

"*Cha!* Where is this Crocodile of the Slave? What lie—"

"Peace, little leopard's claw," Badak reproved smoothly. "Did you not know that in this creek the Crocodile of the Slave waits for such as you?"

"For me!" Lani gasped and glanced affrightedly at the water on either side of the canoe.

"This Crocodile of the Slave," Badak continued, drawing upon his imagination with glib ease, "likes above all things sweet, to hear the death scream of a woman—particularly of a woman who is yet young enough to live in her father's house."

"It—it is a lie! There is no—"

"That is the tale as the old men tell it," Badak went on romancing smoothly. "They say this Crocodile of the Slave is older than Benin itself, and that the spirit of a slave who had no wives found peace in him. And in many, many years the spirit of this slave has married many wives."

"*E-yaw!* Your lies are smooth as the oil of the palm!"

Badak laughed, and his paddle dipped again into the sullen waters of the creek.

"It is a good tale," he said not a little proudly. "And I could tell more, but this is not the time for the telling of tales. Take the paddle and sheath your claws. We go to Akerri, so that you will wake in your father's house when the sun comes up and there will be no chatter among the women."

Lani held her breath for a volcanic moment. Then came the explosion:

"Son of a pig, whose mother was a bush dog and whose greatfather was the mango fly that all men hate—*augh!* I will cut your head away! I will cut out your lying tongue, for your tongue is poison and your heart is water—"

"The chatter of the women in the morning has more poison in it than the bite of the adder," Badak interrupted quietly. "And the first wife of Badak, son of Dorr, must not—"

"Wife! I, Lani of Akerri, the wife of the son of a pig!"

Lani's laughter lifted shrilly into the blackness, making a mockery of Badak for all who cared to hear.

"Go back to the Kroo swine who waits for you with his hippo hide whip," she told him. "Let him cut your back into strips till it runs blood like water from a rain barrel in the season of the rains. And then, you great-son of a mango fly, come to Akerri so that the chattering women whose tongues you fear may see you pay Bodamo, my father, my marriage price in the marks of twice ten lashes!"

Again Lani laughed and continued to laugh even after Badak rose slowly in his seat and stood a silent moment looking

down upon her laughter—that very laughter that, for the remainder of his life, would make just such a mockery of him as it did then.

That is, if he did not . . .

Lani's laughter died in her throat and there followed a moment of breathless silence, because Badak made scarcely any sound at all as he slipped from the canoe into the black waters of the creek.

"Badak! The Crocodile of the Slave! He will eat you! Badak!"

There was no answer; not a sound of any sort, and presently, after several long, dark minutes of waiting, Lani's trembling thoughts dwelt more personally upon the Crocodile of the Slave that liked, above all things sweet, to hear the death scream of a virgin. Of course, Badak had lied. There was no such crocodile. But, perhaps . . .

"Badak!" she whispered again peering down into the water. "Badak!"

Still no answer. The blackness that hung over the narrow, bush bound little creek seemed to grow blacker and blacker every moment. Lani's paddle blade stabbed suddenly at the water.

"Badak!" A pause and then another paddle stroke. "Badak! Badak!"

Presently Lani's paddle blade was rising and falling at a speed that would carry her back to her father's house long before the morning.

"Badak! Badak! Badak!"

But only the sudden chatter of wakeful monkeys answered her.

For Badak, by this time, was heading along a bush path, away from the mocking laughter of a woman, back to the Lenox beach.

AT FIRST, with the sound of Lani's laughter still in his ears, Badak's feet turned automatically toward the punishment from which she had set him free.

Some of this action on Badak's part was bravado, and some of it was due to the dominance of the white mind over the black, particularly as represented by the inexorable, inescapable character of trading beach law in the Oil Rivers territories; but most of it was the result of the simple fact that Badak was Badak at whom Lani of Akerri had laughed in mocking ridicule.

Badak, simply and naturally, was a product of his environment and of the traditions of his fathers. And while it was only too true that the gods of his fathers were crude, that their faiths were mostly incredible, that their stark cruelties had been the horror of civilization for centuries and that they had feasted upon their fellow man with gusto since time began, it was equally true that it was not at all unusual for a paddleboy in a loincloth to refuse meat and drink for days simply because he had been accused of telling a lie. All too frequently, too, a burst of thoughtless, mocking laughter had been followed by a tragic, lonely climax in which death had been preferable to ridicule.

Badak was not going to starve or die. But he was going to refuse the freedom which Lani had given him. He was going back to give the Lenox beach headman a chance to cut his back into "strips of wattle" and, having settled this account with the Lenox beach so that he would never be called upon to pay it again, he would then go to Akerri and greet Lani when the sun came up.

And Lani would not laugh then.

She would not laugh because he would quietly remind her that she had broken a Lenox beach Kroo boy's head with a stick —that Lenox and his Kroo boys and the government commish' were all very angry and were all trying to find out who had broken the watchboy's head; and that though he, Badak, had settled his own account with the Lenox beach and had bought his own freedom forever by taking twice ten lashes on his naked back, she, Lani of Akerri, was not free. Not if he chose to speak her name.

When Badak had first thought of all this, he had laughed within himself at the twisted humor of the situation, and there had been a leaping exultation in his eyes.

That Lani had broken the head of a Kroo boy in his, Badak's, behalf, Badak

was thoroughly aware. But this was not important. The important thing was that a Jakri man's wife—particularly the first—should be afraid of him and at all times respect the words he spoke. And Lani, when Badak greeted her at sunrise, would most certainly become possessed by a very great fear; fear of Lenox who hated all men and was said to curse all women; fear of the government commish', and a most decided fear of the Lenox beach Kroo boys who did not like to have the head of any one of their number broken with a stick. Also, and which of course was most important of all, Lani of Akerri would fear him, Badak, because he could speak her name at any time.

No, Badak was sure Lani would not laugh when the sun came up. She would be silent and afraid and would put oil and good medicine upon his back; and when his back had healed and he could use a paddle again, she would go with him to a country he knew beyond the Benin River. They would go away from Akerri in the night when her father, Bodamo, was asleep; and perhaps Badak would leave behind them many pieces of silk for Bodamo to count when he awoke. Perhaps not.

Badak thought, just then, that if his back hurt very much, he would leave very little in the way of a marriage price.

Almost within hailing distance of another of the Lenox beach watchboys, Badak still smiled at the prospect of Lani's fear of him when the sun came up. Perhaps the smile was rather thin now; dry and dusty and drawn; and perhaps the exultation that had been in his eyes had drifted.

For, of course, the price of Lani's fear was the price of his own freedom. And this price had yet to be paid. Badak knew this to the roots of him as he stared at the light of the Kroo watchboy's lantern; and as his naked feet dragged now like lead weights, Badak was finding out, in his own way, that the triumph of the flesh over a woman's mocking laughter was not quite so exultant a thought as it had been just a little while before.

But Badak was still moving toward the light of the watchboy's lantern; and he was not doing the heroic thing, for heroism as such never occurred to him. He was doing what was to him the necessary thing, and he did not think for a moment that he was being impelled to do this necessary thing because he was a poet—a teller of tales—a dramatist in a loincloth.

He was dragging himself out into a spotlight that would consist of a number of hurricane lanterns; lanterns that would shed their light upon his naked, shiny back and show a swine of a Kroo headman where to strike; and Badak was doing this so that he would be free to greet Lani at sunrise and, in his own way, after the manner of his kind, become the master of his own house and his own soul forever.

Then, within an ace of making his presence known to the watchboy with the lantern, Badak glanced upward and his eyes fixed themselves upon the light in Lenox's office-living room. Badak paused.

The Kroo boys on the beach would most certainly beat him if they were given a chance. So perhaps, if he went directly topside and delivered himself to Lenox in person . . .

THE watchboy ambled toward the Lenox beach oil yard, swinging his lantern and droning a dirge-like refrain that seemed to have neither beginning nor end. A clump of cactus and a row of lime hedge screened Badak from view and made the watchboy's movements uncertain, but in a little while, when the beach bell at the oil yard gate chimed two bells, Badak knew that the watchboy had reached the oil yard and was therefore too far away to interfere with his intention to go topside.

Badak's feet carried him cautiously around the end of the lime hedge and then, with a sudden rush, they carried him into the shadow of a water tank. This tank was immediately below Lenox's end of the house veranda, and straight before

Badak was the stairway with the light at the top.

All Badak had to do now was to climb those stairs, walk along the veranda and slip through the wide open double doors of Lenox's office-living room. No one had to show him the way. No one had to tell him where he would find Lenox. He knew where he would find Lenox; and how he would find him!

Badak felt sick and weak as if the life were oozing out of him. He shivered in the shadow of the water tank and for a blurred moment wondered why he was there. Why had he come back? What *juju* madness had seized upon his senses?

Lani! Silk! The marriage price! Laughter! A mockery before all men—before all Akerri . . . Somehow, his legs almost crumpling under him, Badak found himself at the foot of the stairs looking up toward the light at the top. His right hand gripped the stair rail and he began to mount, step by step, each step an agony that hung his trembling, fear wracked body upon a cross.

There was no light at all in his eyes now. No fire. Only his legs and the hand that gripped the rail were alive. The rest of him seemed to have burned up and gone out as if a scorching flame had shriveled him.

In the morning—before all Akerri—laughter . . .

"Where'n hell are *you* going?"

Dimly, as from out of a thick bank of fog, Badak heard the harsh voice of Lenox behind him. The sound of it straightened him like an electric shock. His eyes popped wide and he turned his head sharply and looked down.

Lenox was coming heavily up the stairs. And when Badak's glance had shifted affrightedly from the angry blue of the white trader's eyes, Badak noted that Lenox's chin was minus its usual reddish gray stubble.

For a second or two, perhaps, Badak stared at Lenox's cleanly shaven chin and dumbly tried to grasp at the meaning of this amazing phenomenon. Lenox's shirt and white flannel trousers were clean, too, but Badak had seen Lenox in a clean shirt and clean white flannel trousers before.

But Lenox's chin, clean, smooth—something very unusual had happened or was happening to Lenox; and then Badak realized that some one was following Lenox up the stairs. Another white man. A little white man about half the size of Lenox.

Kingdon!

Kingdon, who was the "big cap'n" of the African Merchants Company. His very good friend!

Badak could feel the blood rushing back into his finger tips. Life leaped through his veins in a flood. Kingdon was his friend. Kingdon was the friend of every black man, and when Kingdon spoke, every black man and every white man turned the ear to listen. Even Lenox.

Was not Lenox's chin clean and smooth because Kingdon had come down to the Lenox beach? Was not Kingdon the big cap'n of the African Merchants Company—who went everywhere in all the rivers, knew all men, white and black, and feared nothing? Not even the white man's guns that killed at a great distance?

Badak was right. Kingdon was all of this; the quiet, unassuming, inoffensive little man who needed no introduction to any one on the West Coast of Africa, and of whom it was said that the meaning of the word fear was unknown to him. Of course, Kingdon, himself, knew better than this. He was human and he had known the meaning of fear many times, but he had simply managed, by virtue of a kind of superhuman calm, to keep the discovery to himself.

To Badak, however, Kingdon, in a crisis of the sort, assumed the proportions of a god; and that the African Merchants Company, of which Kingdon was now the agent-general, had chosen this moment to begin tactful negotiations for the purchase of the Lenox trading properties on Segwanga Creek and Benin River, would not have meant anything to Badak.

Kingdon doubted if it were going to mean very much to Lenox, who was a

hard man to deal with; but Badak was sure that something tremendous was happening to Lenox and to him; something that caught the breath and held it, so that even a whisper was a thunderclap.

Was not Lenox's chin clean and smooth; and had not Lenox done Kingdon the honor to go down to the Lenox beach gig wharf to meet him? Lenox, who honored no man, who damned all women and who shook his clenched fist at the launch of the government commish' as it went by?

"Well, what the—well, I'll be damned!" Lenox gasped in amaze. "You've come *back!*"

LENOX was staring at Badak as if he did not believe his eyes; then he turned sharply toward the little man behind him.

"Isn't that a ruddy knockout!"

"What is?" the little man asked and came up a few steps to stand on a level with Lenox, who explained with a high note of incredulity in his voice:

"I had this rat of a shop thief tied up and somebody biffed my watchboy with a club and got this snake away. A woman, the watchboy said it was, too. And here he is back again!"

"Hello, Badak," Kingdon's voice broke in quietly. "What's the matter you come back? Your feet no catch sense?"

Even Lenox laughed at this, and Badak smiled, a rather vague sort of effort that had but little mirth in it.

"Isn't it a knockout!" Lenox demanded again. "Did you ever know one of them to come back after—" Lenox stopped and glared suddenly upon Badak. "What's the matter? Why you come back? You no *savez* my headman go cut him name in your hide? What ruddy game is this?"

Badak did not answer. A Kroo house steward had appeared at the top of the stairs, and Badak glanced just a little fearfully in his direction, then at once looked directly toward Kingdon.

Kingdon smiled, even though there was a puzzled furrow between his quiet eyes. Shop thieves who came back, under circumstances of the sort, were so rare that he was genuinely stumped.

"What hellcat of a woman bashed my watchboy?" Lenox demanded of Badak, without bothering to translate the question into pidgin English. "Who is she?"

"Let's go into your office," Kingdon intervened calmly. "And if you don't mind, I'll talk to him. This is really interesting."

Lenox demurred.

"Why do you want to waste your time talking to a shiverin' rat like that? Let's turn him over to the Kroo headman. He'll take care of him."

"I don't doubt it," Kingdon said dryly. "But not yet. I know this boy. He's from Benin River, and he once told me the story of a canoe that tries to make its way against the swift running current of the Benin, every night, and—"

"A canoe—every night! What canoe?"

"There is the spirit of a beautiful young Jakri girl in the canoe."

"Eh? A spook? What are you givin' us?"

"Apparently, a long, long time ago," Kingdon went on, jockeying for delay, "this young woman, just before she died, was making a desperate effort against the current of the Benin to reach Koko-town where her lover was going to be executed for killing the chief who was going to marry her. Then, she suddenly saw the Benin turn red with her lover's blood and she fainted or lost her paddle as a result of the shock and the current swept her out to sea. And every night since then, this canoe tries to fight its way upstream and every night the Benin River turns red—"

"Turns red, my eye! Haven't I bucked that damned current at every hour of the day or night for twenty years?"

"Quite right, Lenox. The story is a pleasant little fancy of Badak's own, as I discovered when I dipped into Benin River folk lore in search of the origin of the thing. Whatever else Badak may swipe, he's no plagiarist. Let's go into your office."

Lenox scowled and grunted another suggestion about turning Badak over to the Kroo headman, but Kingdon, who

had known Lenox for years, managed to have his own way without making Lenox feel that his prerogatives on his own beach were being interfered with.

Presently Lenox was nursing a brandy and soda, Kingdon a lime drink and Badak was occupying a space between them. He was facing Kingdon, keeping his eyes fixed steadily on the little man's face and in a low monotoned mixture of pidgin English and Jakri, he respectfully answered Kingdon's questions. In a little while the answers to these questions put Kingdon in possession of all the facts of the case—everything but the name of the woman who had mocked Badak with her laughter.

"What's her name?" Lenox thundered. "And what you go do to her morning time?"

Badak did not answer this; did not look in Lenox's direction at all, but kept his whole attention hopefully fixed on Kingdon who was trying to make himself believe that Badak was telling the truth; that simply because a woman had laughed at him in mockery, Badak had come back to take his punishment.

"You want to make marriage palaver with this woman?" Kingdon asked quietly.

"No, sah," Badak lied glibly for Lenox's benefit and knew that Kingdon did not believe him which, from Badak's point of view, was just as good as telling Kingdon the truth. "Dat woman be so-so. She laugh plenty too much and make trouble for me all time."

"Suppose she laugh morning time?" Kingdon suggested. "What you go do?"

Badak paused, and once more the glint of exultation shone in his eyes.

"She no laugh," he said with unusual decision. "She fear."

"Fear? Why?"

"She fear Lenox, she fear government commish', she fear Kroo boy foh dis beach plenty too much an'—" an impressive pause—"she fear me, Badak."

"You! Why she fear you?"

Badak smiled a dry and wispy smile.

"I *savez* her name," he said simply.

A light of sudden understanding leaped into Kingdon's eyes and he, too, smiled at the oddly twisted humor of the thing, even while he gasped at the raw, naked courage with which this black boy in a loincloth was backing up his truly native conception of things as they ought to be between a man and a woman who dared to laugh at him.

Lenox was leaning across his desk staring a little.

"You *savez* her name, huh? What is it?"

Badak shook his head.

"Her name—be—my palaver."

"Your palaver!" Lenox bellowed and came round the desk with a rush. "Blast your lousy, thievin' hide—"

"Just a second, Lenox," Kingdon said and somehow, without seeming to hurry in the least, stood between Lenox's wrath and Badak. "No sense in you cracking your knuckles on his thick skull. Let your headman take care of him."

"Huh?" Lenox's fiery blue eyes held a sudden puzzled look. "Headman? Why—sure. That's what I said in the first place, but you—"

"I was just curious," Kingdon interrupted midly. "But he came back for the flogging he ran away from, so I think he ought to have it. It would be a pity to disappoint him and spoil his notion of dramatic justice."

LENOX'S jaw sagged a little as he looked at Kingdon in dubious wonder; then he apparently decided that Kingdon was not trying to tell him how to run his beach, and finally he laughed so loudly that his raucous bellow of enjoyment of Kingdon's "joke" might have been heard on the other side of broad Segwanga Creek.

"Disappoint him! Where's my headman? Boy!"

The scuff of naked feet answered his summons immediately and a Kroo houseboy appeared in the doorway leading from Lenox's bedroom.

"Bring headman for flog palaver one time!"

"Yessah."

Then Lenox turned to Kingdon, who had taken a firm grip on Badak's arm.

"Want to see it?" Lenox asked and paid no attention to the fact that Badak's whole body glistened in a cold, shiny sweat of fear. "Or would you rather—"

"I think I'd like to see this performance," Kingdon said, and Lenox did not see how pale the little man had become. "I haven't seen anything of the sort in a long while and I understand your headman is an expert."

Again Lenox laughed.

"Expert! Watch him! He can write his name with a hippo hide on a shop thief's back!"

"Can he? That must be quite a trick. I hope he's as clever as you say he is because I wouldn't like Badak here to be disappointed in his own choice of a climax."

Again Lenox looked dubiously at Kingdon, but finally exclaimed:

"That's good, Kingdon. That's damned good. I'll wager you a puncheon of oil he won't be disappointed. Wait till I mix myself another drink."

"All right. Go ahead. I'll take him down."

"Eh?"—blankly. "Oh, all right. I'll be with you in a couple of shakes."

Badak heard all this, understood very little of it and, in a shivering fog, found himself being led downstairs by his good friend Kingdon and was immediately turned over to the Kroo headman who seemed to have anticipated Lenox's message and was waiting for his victim at the foot of the stairs.

This Kroo headman, whose name was Gonda, was squat, burly, terrific; one of the most powerful of all Kroo boys in the Oil Rivers; and aside from being an expert with a hippo hide, he was a notorious gambler who would bet on anything from a canoe race to the exact number of gallons of palm oil in a string of calabashes.

When he saw Kingdon his manner became very respectful, almost apologetic, and he leaned an attentive ear to what Kingdon had to say to him while another Kroo boy bound Badak hand and foot to the ironwood post from which Lani had freed him.

Kingdon spoke to the headman hurriedly and in a whisper, and Badak did not hear what Kingdon said; but he did hear Gonda say excitedly:

"I no fit to do um! No, sah! I no fit to bet so!"

Then Kingdon whispered some more words into Gonda's ear and Gonda's squat and powerful body suddenly assumed an attitude of offended pride.

"I no fear! No, sah! All man *savez* Gonda. You *savez* me plenty too much! If we bet so, you go lose. You *savez* dat."

Again Kingdon whispered and Gonda's eyes gleamed like twin lights; and just as Lenox came heavily downstairs with a long glass of liquor in his hand, Badak heard the headman laugh almost hysterically—and say in thick guttural excitement:

"I go take um! Yessah."

"All right," Kingdon said audibly enough for any one to hear, and again Gonda laughed—a sound that chilled Badak to the bone.

His good friend Kingdon! Kingdon who was the friend of all men—even of Gonda, the headman; Kingdon, who was the soft, understanding voice of the white man and the black! Kingdon had turned him over to Gonda and had made Gonda *laugh*, while he, Badak, with the ropes about his ankles and wrists, waited for the lash.

Lenox's heavy tread on the stairs sounded a long way off to Badak, like low thunder rumbling nearer and nearer out of the black throat of a tornado.

But Badak did not care now in any case. There was no life in his legs or in his arms, and his naked, shiny back did not seem to belong to him at all. His bloodshot eyes stared at the black, tar covered post immediately before him and he thought vaguely of silk—red, gold and black—a dragon fly flashing out of the shadows into the sunlight . . .

"Look me," a soft voice whispered in his ear. "All time, all same *juju* doctor, look me. No look at Lenox. No look at

Gonda. Look at me an' all be all right. I make *juju*. *Savez?*"

Badak's eyes popped wide so that the whites of them gleamed sharply in the lantern light, and he stared at Kingdon, who was already backing away from him, and wondered gapingly what white man's *juju* Kingdon was going to make to help him at such a time as this.

Badak knew, as every black boy did, that there was *juju* magic in the trick of looking steadily at a given object or person for a long, long time. He had seen Jakri witch doctors "cure" the palsy and cast out devils by just looking, without blinking an eyelid, at some chicken's blood in the center of a circle of chalk upon the ground. But he had never seen a white man make *juju* like that; and though he understood what Kingdon meant, there was not time enough to . . .

BADAK'S eyes swept wildly about him in panic. All around him now was a vague circle of muttering Kroo boys who hung like a menace in the background behind a rough ring of hurricane lanterns.

Overhead, leaning on the veranda rail and peering down at him were Lenox's two white assistants; to the immediate left was Gonda, grinning dubiously and coiling the hippo hide about his calloused hands; and to the right Lenox came largely and glumly into view, while beside Lenox, looking steadily at Badak, was the little man who was going to make such quick *juju* that twice ten lashes from a hippo hide thong in the hands of an expert like Gonda could be "fixed" so that Badak need not fear them at all!

Need not fear!

Fear, quivering and gray, stared from Badak's eyes when they at last found Kingdon's face; fear and a hungry, pitiful hope that made Kingdon wince.

Kingdon knew Badak was no hero; and he knew also that Badak knew it. Yet, simply because of a woman who had lifted her voice in mocking laughter . . .

"Everything all right?" Lenox asked the headman gruffly.

"Yessah. I fix um propah, sah."

"Good." Lenox took a long drink because counting was dry work. "Two dozen and make 'em bite. *Savez?*"

"Yessah," the headman answered in a lower key, then glanced toward Kingdon and added, "I *savez* flog palaver too much."

Badak also was looking at Kingdon and Kingdon, still pale of face, looked steadily at Badak; a look that was almost hypnotic in its steadiness and which paid no heed to Lenox or to Gonda who was setting himself for the work at which he was so expert.

Suddenly the hippo hide curled, whistled and struck and seemed to bite into Badak's naked flesh like a knife. Badak's back shrank, his body stiffened, his staring eyes wavered and a low moan of anguish broke from his parched lips.

"One!" Lenox grunted and Badak's wavering eyes searched wildly for Kingdon's again; searched for them and, finding them, tried desperately to believe.

Again the vicious whistling sound, and again that curling and biting of the thong into his naked, shiny flesh.

"Two."

Badak's whole body strained away from the song of the lash, even as his eyes became wider with a gaping unbelief; but the pitilessly measured count climbed higher and higher and Lenox had counted seven before Badak really began to believe that what Kingdon had promised was coming true!

The voice of the hippo hide and the curling feel of it around Badak's body sent a tremor through him that lifted him on his toes and flung his body away from the cutting threat of the thing in most realistic fashion. But . . .

"Eight—nine—ten."

Lenox had taken a few steps forward and was now peering more closely at Badak's back.

"Eleven. What's the matter, Gonda? Losing your punch? That's the first dozen and you haven't—hell! There isn't a mark on him! What the—"

"That's Gonda's company manners,"

Kingdon interposed quietly. "Gonda probably knows I don't like this kind of thing and as I am your guest—"

"Eh? What's that? Didn't you say—"

"That I didn't want Badak disappointed? Neither I did. He had to pay for his freedom, you know, and it's Gonda's job to see that he does it. Let him finish it. Only an expert like Gonda could use a hippo hide like that and not leave a mark. Watch him. It's really masterly!"

"Watch him!" Lenox's disgust was profound. "What for? Might as well watch him wallop a post."

Lenox held up his hand and Gonda paused. Then, deliberately and heavily and without a word, Lenox handed his glass of Scotch and soda to Kingdon, produced a pocket knife and, with an accompanying grunt or two, cut Badak free!

Even Kingdon held his breath as Lenox turned slowly toward his headman.

"Gonda!"

"Yessah."

"Send all men foh Kroo house."

"Yessah."

The hippo hide snapped at the gaping circle of Kroo boys and a crackling order in Kroo followed it. The circle melted instantly, whispering off into a gasping silence and leaving an even deeper silence behind; a silence in which Badak, shivering and quaking on the fringe of a new freedom, wondered how Kingdon had fixed it. Then Lenox was saying to him:

"All finis'. Palaver set. Get to hell out of here. *Savez?*"

"Ye—yessah."

"And I hope you break that woman's neck in the morning. Edge! Vamoose! One time!"

"Ye—yessah."

A glistening, perspiring streak of black sprang beyond the scattered ring of lights and merged into the night, uttering a low moan of ecstacy that Kingdon at least never forgot.

And Badak was gone.

Lenox looked toward Gonda, who was careful to look elsewhere; so Lenox turned to Kingdon into whose pale face a touch of more natural color had come.

"If I've reached the stage," Lenox said slowly, "when a ruddy Kroo boy like Gonda can teach me company manners when you come to call, it's time I quit these rivers and went home. Let's go topside and see how much I can sting you for this lousy business of mine."

Kingdon said nothing; just handed him back his Scotch and soda and they passed on upstairs.

The white assistants leaning on the veranda rail disappeared into their rooms and Gonda, left alone beside the post to which Badak had been tied, waved the lantern bearers back to the Kroo house.

Then, idling beside the post, dangling the hippo hide in his hand, he wondered if Kingdon would pay all of the bet he had made with him or just half of it; fifty "pieces" or just twenty-five, because, of course, he had given Badak just twelve lashes, and not two dozen, without making a mark upon him.

Gonda worried about this. Any Kroo boy would. For Gonda knew that in his own country he could buy at least two wives with fifty pieces and still have ten pieces left for gin.

Badak's naked feet carried him along the path to Akerri—which was the path of light toward the morning—scarcely without touching the ground.

Yet, several times he stopped long enough to run his hands over the spots where Gonda's lash had curled, and every time he did this, he assured himself that he, Badak, the son of Dorr, was indeed a man!

All men would know that he had been flogged by Gonda and all men would know that he had a back of iron.

And when Lani of Akerri heard men speak of this thing and listened to the rising chatter of the women on the white man's trading beaches . . .

Badak stopped running. He walked. His head lifted and his eyes flamed with exultation.

Silk. Red, gold and black. A young she-leopard fawning at his feet in the dust in the morning.

Arrgh!

The Hero of Petrolia

By FOSTER HARRIS

YOU STEP on to the derrick floor of a drilling oil well. The driller will be bending one ear to the growl and rumble of the rotary, the other to the yarn spinner on the bench. A couple of grinning roughnecks will be squatting, listening to a story of the great legendary hero of the oilfields, a story they have probably heard before and are all set to cap with another about the same amazing giant.

"—And ol' Paul Bunyan, he turns around quick, knockin' down a few pine trees in doin' so and he says, 'What do I care where they eat? Let 'em eat and sleep in heaven if that's closer!' "

And then you know the story teller is relating the yarn about the great well old Paul drilled out in Arizona—the well whose sides caved in some time after he abandoned it and now most folks think it's the Grand Cañon.

Whether Paul Bunyan, the great hero of the logging camps, is the same Paul Bunyan, the patron saint of all oil workers; whether the lumbermen stole him from the oilfields or the oil workers from the lumberjacks, I don't know. Personally I never even knew the lumbermen had old Paul for their hero until I read James Stevens' famous stories about this astonishing giant in the big tree country. But, all in all, I suppose I have heard no less than a thousand tall tales about Paul Bunyan the oil man. Probably it doesn't matter greatly. Perhaps Paul was a lumberman and an oil man both.

Pipeliners tell more Paul Bunyan yarns than any other class of oilfield workers and there seem to be more legends in which Paul figures as a pipeliner than any other kind.

One very famous story is the one about the time Paul Bunyan secured a contract to lay a pipeline clear across Arkansas. He had several days off from his other labors, so instead of hiring the usual hundreds of pipeline workers with their teams, ditchers, wagons and so on, Paul merely bought all the pipe necessary and fastened it into a convenient bundle he could carry on his back.

Then he rounded up all the razorback hogs in Arkansas. He started them across the State, the hogs rooted out a great trench and Paul, strolling along behind, laid the pipe with one hand, scraped the dirt back into the trench with his feet—and completed the pipeline in three days. At least that's one version.

There was the great well Paul Bunyan drilled in Arizona. Some accounts put it in New Mexico, some in Texas and some in Oklahoma, but regardless of where it was, it certainly was some well. It seems Paul's idea was to tap the petroleum reservoirs that supply the flames of hell. Naturally that called for a pretty deep hole but old Paul thought nothing of that. He was used to things on a big scale.

He began by hiring his crew. Around the oilfields he went, applying a very simple little test to applicants before taking them on. All you had to do was walk up to a hundred and forty foot derrick and lift up one corner about waist high, and Paul hired you.

With his crew complete, Paul Bunyan then started construction of his derrick and drilling rig. Everything was on a gigantic scale, of course. The boilers, for example, were so big and the stacks so high that when the pot men fired up, the folks in Europe could see the smoke.

The derrick was so high that the big crew which worked on the fourble board, the working platform up in the derrick, couldn't get down to earth in anything less than a month. So they just ran out a gangplank to the Pearly Gates and boarded and roomed in heaven. When the derrick burned down later on they were marooned up there in heaven and are still there—the only oilfield workers ever to land in that pleasant place.

They spudded the well and started down. For some reason Paul wasn't trying to hurry matters on this job. Some days they would only make fifty to a hundred miles of hole, but Paul said that was all right; he wasn't trying to hang up any drilling records this time.

Finally the well ran into what appeared to be a regular bottomless abyss, a place with salt water in it, and Paul decided they better run casing to bottom and shut this water off. He had to have the casing made special in Eastern mills; and it was so big the trains couldn't carry it. So Paul had to go clear back East and pack it out on his back. Naturally that was a lot of trouble and the big casing was very, very expensive and, to make matters worse, it didn't seem like there was going to be any bottom to that subterranean chasm. They lowered pipe for months and still the string never landed on bottom.

But one day a strange casing salesman arrived and told Paul he was representing a foreign steel mill which happened to have a huge supply of second hand casing on hand, just the size Paul was using. A man had figured on running a pipeline up to the Milky Way, it seemed, and putting all the dairies out of business. But he'd had to give up the idea for some reason and now the mills had all that pipe on hand. He offered it to Paul at an absurdly low figure.

Of course Paul jumped at the chance to save money. The salesman started making deliveries, ships bringing the pipe into California ports and a big herd of elephants rolling the stuff overland to the well. This went on for months and still the casing in the well never touched bottom, and finally Paul began to hear rumors that all was not right.

Suspiciously, he started marking joints of the casing as they were lowered into the hole. And in due time, lo and behold here came the elephants rolling some of that identical, marked pipe back to the well. The hole had gone clear through the earth and out into the middle of the Indian Ocean. The canny salesman had a fleet of ships hanging around the spot, unscrewing the pipe as it came through, taking it back and selling it to Paul over and over again.

Another famous yarn is the one about the buttermilk gusher old Paul drilled down in the Southwest one time. This was just a little venture for Paul, a one horse wildcat test only contracted to go a hundred thousand feet. At fifty thousand feet, very unexpectedly the drill ran into the well known buttermilk strata and the well started belching buttermilk at the rate of a hundred thousand barrels a day.

There wasn't a market for that much buttermilk anywhere around those parts, but Paul wasn't worried. He loaded his knapsack with pipe and he got out his bicycle and peddled down to that well.

"Now, boys," he said to his crew, "I'm going to lay a pipeline to the Chicago stockyards. Give me a hundred yards start and then turn the well into the line. I would say fifty yards only I'm not feeling real well today and anyway I want to stop off in Kansas City."

So he got on his bicycle and started off, stringing pipe behind him. And after he had gotten a hundred yards away from the well the crew turned the gusher into the line, running a hundred thousand barrels of buttermilk a day.

Paul put on a little more steam and disappeared over the horizon. He stopped off in Kansas City to see his folks for awhile. But he reached Chicago with the finished pipeline two days, four hours and twenty-two minutes before the first buttermilk arrived through the line.

The MAGIC OF AL-LATEEF

A Novelette of Morocco

By GEORGE E. HOLT

FEZ, the capital of Morocco, is a twin city. There is Fez el-Djedid, or New Fez, which is looked upon as something of an upstart suburb, having been founded no earlier than the year 1274. Those who so look upon it are the people of Old Fez, which became an important town about the year 800—and which, nearly seven hundred years later, gave one Cristoforo Colon his idea that the world was round and that land could be found to the westward, if one sailed far enough.

In Old Fez Al-Lateef the Clever One this night made ready to depart, together with his young brother, Aidomar, from beneath the hospitable roof of the venerable Hadji Sidi Hassan, where for a time they had found sanctuary against the enemies who sought their death.

In New Fez, beyond the Bou Jalud and the Imperial Gardens, a dark faced man took advantage of the darkness to plunge the blade of his *kumiah* thrice into the intestines of a French consular interpreter—a swaggering fellow from Algeria—watched the fellow die somewhat noisily, and then carried the body to the French

consulate and draped it according to his artistic perceptions over the concrete mounting block in front of the building. Upon the dead man's jacket he fastened a brief message.

In Paris, very shortly thereafter, the French foreign office ordered that the interpreter be given a military funeral, and that the French consul at Fez make immediate demand upon his Shareefian Majesty, the Sultan, for certain harsh indemnities for the death of Omar, and for the insult of the message pinned to the corpse. The prestige and honor of France were at stake. And French rights in Morocco must be protected.

And—also very shortly thereafter—Al-Lateef the Clever One listened with incredulous ears to the story with which a dark Riffi friend had raced from the Little Market of the Poor just after the sunset prayer.

"But—but," he stammered. "This is sheer falsehood. I have been here in the house of Sidi Hassan a fortnight. I have scarcely been outside of it. Assuredly I did not kill any French interpreter by the name of Omar—or Mustapha, or Hamed, or Abdeslem. Pah! This sounds like a Christian lie, sahibi."

"Nevertheless, my friend—" the bearer of the news, a short, chunky, brown bearded Riffi, settled himself more comfortably cross-legged upon the cushions at Al-Lateef's side—"nevertheless, it is not a lie to be shrugged from our shoulders. The interpreter is dead and buried—that I saw with my own eyes, before I rode like Shaitan, thinking to warn you. Even the paper I saw, through the good offices of a guard at the French consulate. 'Thus Al-Lateef,' so it read, 'thus Al-Lateef warns the Christians as to what awaits them in Morocco.' "

"And I suppose," objected Al-Lateef, his mouth dry at the portent of this news, "that if the writing had said 'Thus Allah warns the Christians' it would be held that Allah Himself had grasped the pen?"

"But, *aweely, aweely!*" moaned the friend. "Can you not perceive that this is one of those situations in which a lie is much more useful than the truth? I do not think that you killed the interpreter. *Allah kerim!* You have head enough to foresee what trouble such a thing must bring down upon us all. You know, as well as I do, that Europe awaits such events—or, tired of waiting, instigates them. Not the governments necessarily, but fanatic patriots, or overzealous agents, acting on their own responsibilities. The town is full of rumors. But concerning the demands upon his Majesty the Sultan—of those I am certain."

"Precisely what are they?" inquired Al-Lateef.

"The head of Al-Lateef and the payment of two hundred thousand Spanish dollars. In default of which the customs house will be taken over and a military police established."

"*M'shim'zien!*" said Al-Lateef, pulling his short black beard. "Bad! Very bad!"

"Very bad, indeed," agreed his companion. "The Sultan has no money. The French know it. They don't want him to pay—any more than they want the head of Al-Lateef. What they desire is to establish a French police to hunt for Al-Lateef. And when those ten thousand French soldiers are in our country, Allah Himself could not oust them. Nor prevent trouble, killings—which will mean more soldiers. Which will mean still more trouble, and still more soldiers—until the country becomes a French province, like Algeria. That is the policy of all countries which desire to extend their possessions."

Al-Lateef nodded agreement to the views of his friend. Once the deadly sequence began the end of Morocco's independence as a nation was in sight . . . These things he saw, but now his anger was chiefly against the unknown assassins who had used the name of Al-Lateef.

"*Allah kerim!*" he groaned. "All the world will begin the hunt for Al-Lateef. The people of the country will think I did it. Their hands will be against me. The officials, of course. Every hand will clutch at me. I could prove my innocence—by bringing death to my host,

Hadji Hassan, to my brother, Aidomar. And to myself. Or could I? No—I am wrong. They would say my witnesses lied; or that I might have killed the Algerian without their knowing. I am convicted; that is clear as the Word of God. But why have I been made the victim of this plot?"

"Because," returned his friend promptly, "you have shown that the Sultan can not catch you. And so—what will you do?"

"Allah only knows. My head is balanced on my shoulders. A breath of air will topple it. Hitherto the plain people have been my friends. Only the officials have hunted me. But now—now every hand will be against me." Al-Lateef groaned.

"To prove your innocence—" began the Riffi, but Al-Lateef stopped him with a shake of his head.

"Impossible. My host, Hadji Hassan, would be thrown into prison were it known he had given me sanctuary. My brother would be shot—for being my brother. Nor could they clear me. I have fared forth from the house twice or thrice."

"The mountains are not far distant," suggested the Riffi. "Go to my village, you and your brother. There you will be safe."

"And let Europe seize Morocco—with Al-Lateef to blame?" demanded the Clever One. "Or having all the world *say* I was to blame?"

"But your life—"

"Allah's curse upon my life—if it must be ended that way," passionately cried Al-Lateef. "Is the name of Al-Lateef to become the anathema of all Morocco because some murdering scoundrel has used it unwarrantably? Is Europe to walk into Al-Moghred and take possession because Al-Lateef killed an Algerian? Is the plot of some scoundrelly plotter to succeed so easily? Run to the mountains, Al-Lateef—there is safety; and let the plot succeed." He saw the look on his friend's face. "Forgive me, forgive me," he cried, and bent forward to touch the man's brown hand. "But—but I am troubled."

"With reason," responded the Riffi. "I—I but suggested the mountains out of—out of love for you, my friend. But I perceive—"

"You perceive, as I do," declared Al-Lateef, "that my safety, my head, even my brother, is of no importance in comparison with the stakes to be played for. This plot must be defeated. Our country must be protected—even though I bow my neck beneath the blade of the Sultan's executioner. I am afraid. Allah knows I am afraid—as I have never been before. Nevertheless, more than my life is involved in this. I will not be known as the man who wrecked my country!"

The Riffi at last went away, protesting loyalty whatever might arise, leaving Al-Lateef to consider, in all its black phases, the most terrible problem which he had ever had to face. Hopeless. All hands against him. Calumny, infamy for his epitaph if he failed to bring disaster to the plotters. Death—that was to be borne with some fortitude, as every man had to bear it, willing or no. But to have the name of Al-Lateef spat upon by the mouths of children, to have the prayers of the elders condemn him, to be anathema to his people, that was not to be borne. Nor to be the catspaw of Europe. Never! Rather, he would go to the Sultan and say, "Sidna, here is the head of Al-Lateef; send it to the Christians." But that would do no manner of good, because his innocence would still be unproved. The indemnity would still be demanded. And Europe was tricky: give them what it asked for—and there remained yet more to give.

No; the only way out of this black business was to discover the plotters and, by some means yet held within the head of Allah, force them to repudiate their plot. That and that only would save Morocco—and the name of Al-Lateef.

But how could such a miracle be accomplished?

Al-Lateef fell into profound thought. Half an hour later he had captured a fugitive idea. He examined it with care. It was a good idea—if it worked. He could

find no flaw in it, so far as it went—save that deadly danger in which he must henceforth walk until he found the man he sought. It might succeed. That was for Allah to determine. A mad gamble, perhaps. A gamble for name and country—and life itself. But he might win. He might win—if God willed it so to be.

And then, from a wooden box, gaily painted and arabesqued in many colors, Al-Lateef the Clever One took out various garments and trappings, and a small tin box. The small tin box was such as actors sometimes use.

"A honey pot!" he muttered, as he set to work.

II

THUS it came about that one Sidi Ajuba—which is to say, The Wonderful—took possession of a small house hard by the Bab-el-Maruk. The Bab-el-Maruk is the western portal of the city, and came to its name, which means "Gate of the Burning," in the 13th Century, when the body of a notorious rebel leader was there burned, after the head had been severed and hung as a trophy—and warning—over the massive gateway. Since then, for a matter of six hundred years, it had been the custom for the heads of such offenders as were unfortunate enough to be caught, to decorate the iron hooks embedded in the stones of the portal.

From the upper windows of the little house of which he had taken possession, El-Ajuba the Magician could get a very fine view of the gate, and through it, of the road which led to New Fez, where dwelt the Sultan and the members of his government, all of whom were seeking industriously for Al-Lateef. It was impossible for El-Ajuba the Wonderful to avoid the mental picture of those people in New Fez placing angry hands upon Al-Lateef, of summary trial and execution—of some other person than El-Ajuba staring from this same window at the Bab-el-Maruk, and noting the brown head of Al-Lateef the Clever One looking down from an iron hook upon the traffic which filed through the gateway.

Verily the bridge across hell to paradise is narrow as the line between good and evil, but it was as a broad highway compared to the line which El-Ajuba now walked between life and death. No wider than the difference between the identities of Al-Lateef and the Magician, that is to say.

Even the boldness, the audacity of Al-Lateef, trembled a little as it surveyed the situation. Accustomed to danger, accustomed to running hand in hand with death, his motto unknowingly the same as that of a bold and brilliant Frenchman—"Audacity, audacity, always audacity!"—accustomed to reliance upon his wits and his knowledge of other people's wits, nevertheless Al-Lateef felt that never before had he balanced himself upon such a pinnacle of danger. Here was a great city, a city of more than a hundred thousand people, and upon every lip was the name of Al-Lateef, the man who had brought disaster upon the country, who had opened the way for European occupation, who had placed the Sultan's throne in rare jeopardy—or as they would believe was the case. Wherefore there were a hundred thousand pairs of eyes searching for Al-Lateef, a hundred thousand tongues to give voice to the view halloo, a hundred thousand pairs of hands to seize the magician, Sidi El-Ajuba, and lead him to the Gate of the Burning.

And besides the vast search of the common folk, there was the angry, persistent search of the officials of government, to whom French control meant the end of place, power and patronage—and who consequently sought Al-Lateef in their own interests as well as for more worthy reasons.

The spirit of Al-Lateef, in the body of El-Ajuba, shivered a little. But again his sublime audacity came to his rescue.

"It is," he told himself, "no more difficult to deceive a thousand people than one person. The hundred thousand Fassis are as one man. And besides, as nothing is impossible to Allah the Merciful, the

Compassionate, whatever He wills inevitably shall come to pass. If He wills that El-Ajuba shall not be recognized as Al-Lateef, then indeed shall El-Ajuba's feet follow the path of perfect safety."

And yet Al-Lateef, voicing this confidence in the divine power, had not the slightest intention of doing anything less than his better-than-best in aid of that power.

"*Y'allah*," he muttered. "If a man creates a situation like this to submit to the attention of the supreme Being, the least that a man can do is to aid Him in the matter to the best of his ability. Even He must tire of the troubles which mankind stirs up for itself—and then dumps on to His knees to be taken care of. I am no longer Al-Lateef. I am Sidi El-Ajuba the Magician—and as such I must not even think of my previous incarnation."

Al-Lateef had been brown; the skin of the Magician was almost black. Al-Lateef's beard and mustache had been short and of the color of the burned summer hills; those of El-Ajuba were blue-black and so seemed doubly thick—besides which they had been trimmed in a different fashion. The eyes of Al-Lateef had seemed almost black against the light brown of his skin; but against the darker shade of epidermis were distinctly brown. The heavy eyebrows of Al-Lateef had been cleverly shaved, altering them from perfect crescents to oblique lines sloping outward from the nose, wherefore the eyes appeared to be somewhat slantwise in the head, the whole face assumed a touch of the Mongolian type. The nose of the Clever One, straight and narrow and high bridged, had altered; it was now broad, and thus appeared flatter, due to small tubes of celluloid within the nostrils. And Al-Lateef had overlooked no smallest detail. The hands of Sidi Ajuba were not as the hands of the Clever One. They were black, the nails were long and polished and pointed, and the fingers, against the direct prohibition of the Book, wore many rings of silver and gold, inscribed with mysterious, cabalistic characters.

All of this new Al-Lateef which was El-Ajuba was gowned in heavy robes of shimmering black sateen, which whispered when he moved, like the voices of innumerable *djinnoon*. A heavy turban of the same somber material swathed his head, hanging well over the eyes, which thus became wells of mystery and threat.

In this personality had Al-Lateef appeared on the streets of Fez el-Baili. Immediately it became known who and what he was—Sidi El-Ajuba, a noted magician and wonder-worker, master of the spirits and of the ancient knowledge, a Moor returning with the secrets of far Timbuktu. Immediately it became known that he desired to reside in Fez, that he desired a house, servants. Wherefore such things as he desired were promptly offered. He made his selections, paid in good silver coin, and was duly installed in the house by the Bab-el-Maruk, two men servants in attendance, a porter stationed at the gateway of the little courtyard which gave entrance to the house.

He instantly became the talk of most of the town. His powers became public knowledge—even though they were created for him by the credulity and desire to tell a good tale, which is the heritage of the Moor. All things were possible to him. There were no secrets to be withheld from him: his *djinnoon* could tell him anything which he desired to know. And as for wonder-working—*Y'allah!* Wasn't his name El-Ajuba the Wonderful?

And so El-Ajuba sat like a big black and shining spider where his honey had been so perilously spread.

And to that honey the flies already had begun to buzz.

Thus far, however, they bore no resemblance to the insects for which El-Ajuba was lying in wait. A young second wife who desired to please her husband with a child, in order to supplant the No. 1 mate of her spouse—and who suggested quite unprofessional aid from the magician in the matter; a captain of city guards who desired that El-Ajuba either confirm or dissipate his suspicions concerning the friendship of his superior officer; a woman

with a baby suffering from blindness which she prayed El-Ajuba to cure with his wisdom; a fair and bejeweled courtesan who had been subsidized by France to decoy a young German official, and who desired occult information as to whether she might not get a greater reward for spilling the beans to the German consul. A tottering old imbecile of seventy—once a brilliant mathematician—who shed tears upon the black sateen of El-Ajuba's robes and offered a small fortune for a charm which would set back the clock and draw into his skinny arms a certain young widow.

To all of these El-Ajuba gave words of wisdom, after burning incense tapers, or consulting the magic book of Sidi Aissa bin Aissa—a parchment volume four hundred years old—or holding extended whisperings with the invisible but all-knowing *djinnoon* who filled the air about him, awaiting his pleasure.

The suggestions of the young wife he laughed at, and assured her a child in the near future. The captain of the city guards was content with the information that his superior was a man who would place some value upon loyalty, which seemed a safe wager.

For the blind baby, El-Ajuba gave the mother a flask of lotion which would not cure blindness, but which would at least keep the flies away from the infant's eyes. The courtesan was excessively grateful for the black magician's superior wisdom; he advised her, having in mind the good of Morocco, to collect her pay from the French, and then sell her information to the German consul.

But as for the lecherous old wreck of a man who desired renewed youth, El-Ajuba quoted scorching phrases from the Koran concerning what a corpse should and should not do, and thrust him forth into the courtyard, thereafter burning a stronger incense to remove the bad smell.

And after these and others, in the course of two days, had come and gone their ways, came one Azalaia, a dancing girl, clinking the golden coin necklace of her profession, kicking off her little wooden soled *kabakibs*, shamelessly throwing back the covering *haik* which had enwrapped her, and seating herself comfortably upon the cushions which El-Ajuba indicated. Dancing girls are not restricted by the innumerable conventions which seal the better class of Moorish women. She knew men—thoroughly; hence she came to El-Ajuba the Magician as man to man, so addressed him, so offered payment for his aid in the matter with which she was concerned. Before she told her business she produced a cigaret from her silken belt, lighted it at one of the tall candles on the floor, inhaled and exhaled slowly. Then she pointed a fine forefinger at El-Ajuba and said—

"Sidi, I desire to purchase, for whatever sum you may think it worth, a poison which will kill a Christian—and leave no trace."

That was directness. El-Ajuba gulped. Assuredly this magician business brought one into close intimacy with the motives of his brothers and sisters.

III

EL-AJUBA the Magician was startled by the directness of the dancing girl's request, not at all by its nature; to his own good knowledge there was more than one so-called Christian in Fez who needed arsenic in his tea, and more than one dancing girl who would be quite warranted in putting it there.

After his first gulp of surprise, the magician grinned cheerfully at Azalaia, as one man might grin at another. That Azalaia was beautiful, with the dark beauty of the Berber women, was indisputable. Her features were as perfect as those of a European beauty; her eyes were brown onyx with little lightnings playing eternally within them; her teeth were matched whitenesses and her lips were crimson as the hibiscus. Nor did her brown skin—which came from the Atlas sunshine, and from no dark blood—mask her charm: in other clothing she could have passed—and been received—anywhere in the world as a Spaniard or a South American, or

perhaps an Italian. She grinned cheerfully back at El-Ajuba, shrugged her perfectly molded shoulders ever so slightly, gestured with one slim brown hand.

"Well, sidi," she said, "why talk in endless circles, like a fat Arab shopkeeper? That is not our custom, in the mountains. Many words must support a weak arm. My arm is strong. Will you sell me the potion?"

"Why not, Little Mistress of the Tambourine?" El-Ajuba replied. "Except—" he hesitated.

"Except!" exclaimed the girl, twisting her mobile lips into a pucker. "Except, I suppose, that it must be made quite certain that the source of the potion is not the house of Sidi Ajuba. Always—"

The magician checked her with a lifted hand.

"Children," he said, "should not interrupt their elders." Again he grinned and had his grin flung back at him as by a mirror. "I was about to say, Lalla Leili—" El-Ajuba had called her Lady of the Night —"I was about to say that there are one or two or three Christians in Al-Moghreb whom I don't want you to poison."

"What! What is this, sidi? You—you —assuredly you can have no mercy for those who—who destroy our country, who rob it as thieves—"

Again the magician halted her.

"Because," he explained, "I desire to have the pleasure myself—of killing them. Wherefore, if you care to name the particular *nasrini* for whom you desire the potion—"

"Why not, sidi?" The girl shrugged again. "Why not? And if—if he should chance to be one whom you desire to attend to personally, shall we throw the dice for him?"

El-Ajuba chuckled. This girl was not only charming; she was a personage. *Y'allah*, but the high purple mountains mothered a bold race! As Europe should discover when she finished with the fat and flabby Arabs along the coastal fringe and faced the brown Berbers of Er-Riff.

"As you will, Azalaia," he assented.

"Settled," said the girl. "His name is Letraine, and he is an *agent provocateur*—I am satisfied he is—of the French government. Shall we use the dice, sidi?"

"No, child," replied the magician. "He is—yours. I know him not, save by some talk here and there. And—you wish to kill him for—hm—because he is an *agent provocateur*, or merely because he is French, or—or—hm!"

"Hm," echoed the girl, and her eyes threw a little lightning streak into El-Ajuba's. Then, swiftly, "Give ear, sidi. Those who aid one are entitled to an understanding. You are no *nasrini*-bought Arab. I think— But never mind that. You seem to me like one of my own people."

She did not see the little start the magician gave, nor the quick look he flashed at her. She was staring at the pattern of the embroidering of her kaftan, formulating a statement.

"Wherefore," she went on, "I shall tell you. I have a brother—no, a half-brother; one Tameem bin This, That and the Other Thing. A worthless brute, to speak plainly. His mother was a black wench discarded from the harem of the basha of Tetwan. For reasons. For very good reasons. Which, naturally, my father did not know about until he had fathered—or believed he had fathered—this whelp of evil. Nevertheless, Tameem—may Allah make sport of him!—became through death of his elders, head of my house. I, his sister, am therefore subject to his rule. With the result that he has now sold me to a Frenchman, to a dog of a *nasrini*. And I may as well confess, sidi, that I desired enough poison for two men —two dogs, I should say."

El-Ajuba said nothing, but he nodded his head, and in that gesture Azalaia perceived friendship and sympathy.

"Yes, he sold me," she continued, passionately, her little hand tearing now at the golden embroidery. "But—but the purchaser has not yet laid hands upon his purchase. Nor shall he!" She looked for confirmation of her stand.

"Not unless Allah wills," commented El-Ajuba. "Proceed, girl."

"Not even if Allah wills!" declared the girl. "I—I am no daughter of Arabia. I am no soft female merchandise to be thrown hither and thither. I am no daughter of the *mellah*, to be bought and sold and whimper, 'It is the will of God.' I am a daughter of Er-Riff, and the Riffi will is as strong as the will of Allah."

This was truth, El-Ajuba reflected. He recalled the famous incident of the occasion upon which the Riffian warriors had gathered and set forth in search of Allah, to destroy him because the crops had failed three years in succession. Ah, that mountain breed! Those sons of Atlas who for two millenniums had defied the world. When Europe had *them* to handle! . . .

"True," muttered El-Ajuba. "True."

"Quite true," emphasized the girl. "Wherefore I am not a hundred kilos of such-and-such merchandise. Wherefore, Tameem can not complete his sale. Wherefore, I shall kill both buyer and seller, rather than submit. And look you, sidi—I shall tell you also that which I well know your *djinnoon* and your magic will discover unto you after I am gone. Because—because I want my potion. I think—nay, I am satisfied—that Tameem and this *nasrini* have committed some crime. Murder, I think. Tameem does not know that I saw—but he is a fool—and bloodstains do not come readily out of a woolen *djellab*, even if it is brown in color. Wherefore, he burned it—but not until I had seen. And also did I see bloodstains upon the blade of his *kumiah*, where the blade joins the hilt. And he has money—much more money than he received for me, which was only a matter of a hundred *duros*. A hundred *duros!* For me! *Allah kerim!*" Her eyes flashed. "I am Azalaïa bin-Tameem er-Riffi!"

She said it as another might say, "I am Elizabeth Mary Rosemond Alice Beatrice, Princess of Lancaster. And El-Ajuba nodded understandingly; he was a Berber. He knew the Berber pride, for it dwelt within him. Was it not said that a Berber cobbler was a better man than an Arab sultan? Or, again, that Arabia sent the servants to wait upon the desires of Er-Riff? But even as these things took swift flight through his mind, some unborn idea was kicking within the womb of consciousness.

"And so he came sneaking into the house in the darkness," the girl went on with her narration. "And then he began spending French gold upon fat Jewesses and the forbidden wine, and Allah Himself only knows what other piggishness. And the *nasrini*, the Frenchman, this Letraine, he comes and goes by darkness, whispering. Undoubtedly there is the partnership of crime between them."

"When," demanded El-Ajuba as she paused, "did this—when did you see the blood on Tameem's *djellab?*"

"When? Oh, let me think, sidi." She began checking off days upon her slim, neat fingers. "*Wahid, zhouzh, tlatsa,*" she counted. "*Tlatsa, arba*—no, *tlatsa.* Yes, three nights ago, sidi. On the day of the Thursday market, I remember now. But why do you ask?"

El-Ajuba shrugged.

"No good reason," he said. "I just wondered."

"And you will give me the poison, then, sidi?" asked Azalaia.

"It will require," said El-Ajuba, thinking quickly, "some days to prepare. It must be fresh."

"How many days?" questioned the girl. "I do not like delay—when there is a matter which needs attention."

"You are safe against the Frenchman for, say, two days?"

"Two eternities, for that matter," cried the girl. "He shall never possess me. There is always the knife. But I preferred secrecy, you understand."

"Come back tomorrow at this time, Azalaia," commanded El-Ajuba.

The girl rose, nodded.

"I wish to say, Azalaia, the delay is in order that I may put a charm upon him which will, I think, prevent him from annoying you in the future."

"Look for me at the time you have set. Farewell, sidi. I am grateful to you. And—"

She held forth her palm, upon which rested a French gold coin.

"It seemed to me that Tameem should pay for this." She grinned like a naughty child. "It is gold from Monsieur Letraine, which I took."

But El-Ajuba shook his head.

"I want neither pay from you, my sister, nor Christian gold."

For a moment the eyes of the girl smiled into those of the magician. Then—

"Nor I, sidi," she said, and tossed the goldpiece through the window, heard it tinkle upon the cobbles of the courtyard.

Then she was swiftly gone.

El-Ajuba reseated himself and fell to musing. Tameem had blood on his *djellab*—on the night of the Thursday market. He was mixed up with a Frenchman, who might be an *agent provocateur*. And the Algerian interpreter had been murdered on the night of the Thursday market—with a knife—and the body had been taken to the French consulate. And the French had been further insulted with a note signed by Al-Lateef. Allah above! Here His hand showed plainly in the affairs of Al-Lateef the Clever One.

IV

AS A RESULT of the visit to El-Ajuba of Azalaia the dancing girl there followed a brief conversation between the magician and one of his servants. And as a result of that, the servant —who was a discreet fellow and a Riffi—went forth to seek, and eventually found, Tameem in a noisome little coffee house in the Street of the Coppersmiths.

Tameem was more than a little drunk, and inclined to be boastful about matters concerning which he knew nothing at all. The three or four other guests squatting about on the mattings or cushions had long ago turned a deaf ear to his talk, so that with the entry of a new patron, Tameem turned his attention entirely to him. This facilitated the task of the servant of El-Ajuba, who seated himself beside the talker, ordered coffee for two, and for a quarter of an hour let Tameem boast to his heart's content. Then, perceiving that the time was ripe, the Riffi spoke as his wisdom suggested.

"Your name, O great one," he said, "is Tameem, if I err not." Tameem had so stated not less than forty times in the last fifteen minutes. "But can you by any chance be Tameem bin-Tameem, brother of a certain noted dancing girl, Azalaia by name, and he who two years ago overcame the base plan conceived to bring about his downfall as khalifa of Arzila—a base plan concocted by one ludicrously called Al-Lateef the Clever One?"

"Tameem bin-Tameem," affirmed that one. "He I am, and no other. And all Moghreb knows how I foiled the plans of that nobody whom fools call Al-Lateef." This was building a pillar of untruth upon a foundation of imagination, for Tameem had lost everything but his slippers in that contest with the Clever One. "Moreover, I am not yet finished with that one. He shall learn." Some warning poked its finger through the haze which enveloped his mind. He fell abruptly silent, sipped his coffee thrice before he spoke again.

"But why do you inquire if I am Tameem bin-Tameem, brother?"

"Oh," replied the crafty Riffi, "it was nothing of importance. Mere curiosity."

"But—but curiosity? Why should you be curious concerning myself?"

"Oh, merely because of something my master said," replied the Riffii yawning.

"Your master? And who is your master?"

"He who is known as El-Ajuba the Wonderful." The Riffi yawned again, vastly. "This coffee is not bad, eh?"

"The coffee—hmph! And you say your master, the magician, El-Ajuba, of whom I have heard and whom I knew very well in—in Marraksh—hmph! What did *he* have to say of Tameem bin-Tameem? Speak."

"It was merely something — something— Sometimes I have thought of opening a coffee shop of my own, brother. Do you suppose one would pay well?"

"*Allah kerim!*" exploded Tameem.

"Will you tell me what your master said of me, or—" he reached a big, menacing hand toward the Riffi, who drew back as in fright, but smiled inwardly, "or shall I loosen your tongue with my fingers around your neck?"

"Peace. Peace, brother," answered the Riffi. "It was nothing. Only this and that which his *djinnoon* told him. And as for that, *I* do not believe in *djinnoon*. Nor, of course, do you."

"Not believe—" began Tameem. "Well, of course, that is to say— But what did they tell your master?"

"Oh, merely that one Tameem bin-Tameem, formerly khalifa of Arzila, was greatly menaced by—by—I have forgotten what it was; something of which he was quite ignorant. I have quite forgotten. *I* pay no attention to *djinnoon*. But *y'allah!* I remember that the *djinnoon* mentioned a *nasrini*, a Frenchman, who was desirous of having the head of Tameem bin-Tameem affixed to the Bab-el-Maruk. But pfah! It is nonsense. What have you to do with *nasrini?* Why should a Frenchman desire your death? Let it pass from your mind, brother; let us talk of sensible matters. Now, I have a horse—"

"*Allah kerim!*" snorted Tameem. "Sensible matters. Is it not a sensible matter that my head is in danger? Is it not sensible that the *djinnoon* have warned— In the name of Allah, where does your master live?"

"In the house of Sidi Faradji, near the Gate of the Burning," replied the Riffi. "Where are you going?"

But Tameem was on his feet, on his way.

"Sensible matters!" he snorted again, as he strode from the room. "As if the head of Tameem bin-Tameem—"

In a handful of minutes, or at most two handfuls, he entered the courtyard of El-Ajuba the Magician. He was shown promptly, but without haste, into the presence of the Wonderful One. If he had known him in Marraksh, or anywhere else, there was no recognition in his face, now, no attempt to prove previous acquaintance. He salaamed respectfully and, overcome by a strange sensation of profound inferiority, gulped and coughed and failed to produce intelligible words. El-Ajuba spoke from his seat upon the cushions between the two great brass candlesticks in which three-foot candles burned.

"Look!" he commanded, and pointed to one of the candles.

Tameem obeyed—then recoiled. For the blaze had suddenly died down, and a pillar of smoke as thick as a man's arm rose to the ceiling. As he looked the bar of smoke bent toward him, spread out, seemed to take on the appearance of a huge gray hand clutching at him. Then, like the snap of a finger, it was gone, and in its place a bloodstained knife swung a moment, and then dropped slowly to the floor at Tameem's feet. He slid backward, gulping.

"You," said the magician, then, "are Tameem bin-Tameem, formerly khalifa of Arzila. Your life is in great danger. You are brother to Azalaia the dancing girl, whom you have sold to a Christian. Also, you have sold your soul to that same Christian. There is blood on your hands. There is blood on your garments. Look! Look!" He pointed a forefinger at Tameem's right arm.

EYES wide with growing horror, Tameem obeyed. Upon the white sleeve of his *djellab*, upon his wrist and hand, there was a crimson stain which spread and contracted, spread and contracted, like a great eye opening and closing as he looked. He suppressed a scream—and the stain was gone.

El-Ajuba, with an unseen motion, disposed of the little lens of red glass which he had held between the candle and Tameen as he pointed.

"Blood," he repeated. "The blood of— of a fellow believer, of an Algerian."

"Sidi! Sidi!" groaned the now prostrate Tameem.

"And your own head is forfeit to your fellow conspirator. Oh, assuredly such is

the case. My *djinnoon* have told me. Forfeit, unless—" He paused significantly.

"Anything, sidi; anything," gasped the now craven Tameem.

El-Ajuba considered him mournfully, thereby adding to the fellow's terror. But he was not thinking mournfully; he was thinking how easy it would be to give this assassin, this fellow who struck only in the dark, and from behind, this beast who sold himself and his sister to the *nasrini*—how easy it would be to give him the Potion of Protection, containing enough arsenic to carry his soul to the pits of perdition. Or to thrust a knife into his bulging throat—thus avenging the peril which he has brought down upon the innocent head of Al-Lateef . . .

His mournful expression gave way to a faint crinkle of humor at the thought of what Tameem would feel did he but know the real identity of El-Ajuba the Magician, could he but read the thought which had just passed through that person's head. A boaster—and all boasters were cowards. An assassin, and all assassins were egoists. Assuredly the fellow would die of sheer amazement and fright.

But killing him now was out of the question. It would be just vengeance; yes, and did not the Book say, quite plainly: "Whoso shall avenge himself after he has been injured, it is not lawful to punish him for it"? Aye, verily, such were the words of the Prophet, blessed be His Name! And also, did he not say: "Whoever shall take vengeance equal to the injury which hath been done him, and shall afterward be unjustly treated, verily Allah shall assist him." Allah's holy ordinance . . .

But El-Ajuba plainly perceived what would be the result of such a vengeance at the moment. It would change the situation of Al-Lateef not in the least. He would still be considered the assassin of the Algerian; the hand of every man still would be clutching for him. Death would still hover on near wings. No, this man must continue to live; he himself must be the witness which would clear Al-Lateef from the black charge against him. Then, and not till then, should he pay the penalty for his crime. Wherefore El-Ajuba held his hand, that the future might be fashioned to his desires.

"The power of El-Ajuba and his *djinnoon* and his magic," the magician spoke ponderously and the kneeling Tameem quivered at the sound, "shall protect you for a space. Go now, without fear of death. Shortly I shall send for you again. And when my summons reaches you, fail not to come. Rise and go."

"I shall come, sidi, I shall come," blubbered the stricken Tameem, scrambling to his feet. El-Ajuba nodded, watched him back from the room; heard his slippers pat down the cobbles.

"Verily, Allah hath given him into my hands," he murmured. "Verily He hath revealed the truth to me. But—how shall I make use of it? How shall I clear Al-Lateef?" He fell into profound thought. It was a perplexing problem. For of more importance than Tameem was the Frenchman who employed him to commit murder, who undoubtedly was the conceiver of the plot against Morocco. To trick Tameem into another confession, with concealed witnesses—that would clear Al-Lateef of the charge of murder of the Algerian; but the French government would merely say that it mattered not at all who was guilty—so long as he was a native. The blood debt would still have to be paid by Morocco . . .

No; even though the truth had now been put into his hands, an even greater problem confronted him. It was the same problem which confronts every man who knows truth: What should be done with it?

And to add difficulties to his danger—if that could be increased—came a little squill of parchment by the hand of a brown boy who dashed quickly away.

On the parchment one had written in Arabic—

> The identity of El-Ajuba is known to a high personage, so make haste; make haste.

It was unsigned.

Al-Lateef shivered. Henceforth he must play this terrible game with the sword of Damocles hanging over his head, suspended by a single hair. That hair, manifestly, was the friendly attitude of the one who warned him. But who, in all Morocco now, could afford to protect Al-Lateef?

V

A NEW day—with perhaps the aid of a sleepless night—brought new counsel to Sidi Ajuba. Also it brought again Azalaia the dancing girl, to whom the magician revealed as much of the new counsel as he thought discreet. Most of it was crystallized in a request to which the girl, seeing pictures behind lowered eyelids which were a menace to somebody, assented without a heart-beat's hesitation.

"Only," she added, "when these things which you desire have been done, do not forget my potion. Tomorrow, sidi, you said I would have it."

"It is brewing, my pretty one; it is brewing," replied El-Ajuba, smiling upon her. It *was* brewing, but not precisely the sort of potion the dancing girl had in mind. "You shall have your revenge, as Allah is my witness."

"I trust you, sidi," replied the girl, flashing him a glance which stirred even his experienced blood. "And now I go to carry out your commands."

She slippered away, a brilliant, passionate butterfly wrapped in the white, impenetrable cocoon of her *haik*, and very shortly thereafter the slippers of El-Ajuba pattered softly over the spots which the girl's had touched—for a way. Then, where Azalaia had turned into the street which would take her to her house, to prepare smiles and enchantments which would lure the Frenchman to disaster, the magician took the opposite course, and after passing through so-called streets incredibly narrow, surprisingly dark because of the continuous arching of houses across them, came to a tiny, box-like shop set into a wall, where a white whiskered old man squatted in shadows among queer objects.

A strong scent came from the shop, and its shadowy interior was marked by mysterious eyes and odd shapes. The ancient apothecary looked up from a scroll he was reading—a book, that is to say, written upon a long, long strip of parchment with rollers at each end, so that it could be unrolled and rolled up as read. His deeply sunken blue eyes returned the gaze of the magician's, a question in them.

"May the blessing of Allah rest upon thee and thine," said El-Ajuba.

"And upon thee, likewise," returned the apothecary.

Then El-Ajuba took a gold coin from his *shakarah*, laid it gently upon the eight-inch high octagonal taboret at the ancient's elbow.

"I am El-Ajuba, the magician," he explained, "and I am in need of a small vial of the Weakener of Wills."

For a moment there was a silence, as the eye of the apothecary searched his customer from head to heel—and back again to the eyes.

"Any one," he said then, "may come and lay a coin upon my table and express the need for a small vial of this or that or the other thing. No offense, my son—but if thou hast the right to purchase the Weakener of Wills, which is no plaything for a child, without doubt thou hast also the proper knowledge as to what accompanies the request."

"Assuredly, father," returned El-Ajuba promptly, and quoted a little known verse from the Koran.

At that the apothecary nodded his satisfaction—waited in silence.

"Besides which," continued El-Ajuba, "I testify in the hearing of Allah, the holder of the scales of justice, that the purpose for which I desire the drug is worthy in His sight."

Thereupon the apothecary turned and busied himself for a moment taking from the top of a small, brilliantly lacquered wooden box a pile of accumulated articles—dried herbs, a child's slipper, a horn flask, a silver wrought Hand of Allah, a

lizard skin; then he drew the box toward him, slipped open the lid of it a hand's breadth, reached his withered old hand inside and brought forth a small brown glass vial, no bigger around than the little finger of Azalaia the dancing girl. This he held for a moment against the light, shook it. It was no more than half full of a liquor which showed very faintly through the brown of the container. Satisfied, the apothecary held it out to El-Ajuba.

"This," he said, "is what you desire, Sidi Magician." Again his eyes, keener than they were aged, searched that which lay behind the forehead of his customer. "It is well," he added, apparently to himself. "Go thou with Allah, then, my son —failing not to remember that which thou knowest very well indeed."

"I shall not forget, father," returned El-Ajuba, dropping the tiny vial into the leather *shakarah* suspended about his neck beneath his outer robe. "Within this vial thou hast given me there lies, perhaps, the fate of our people, thine and mine."

"Allah will protect us," replied the apothecary slowly. "Of that thou mayst be certain, my son. Either—" he paused, reflected, and then smiled slowly—"here or hereafter."

"As to the hereafter, however," El-Ajuba commented, "probably we can be of no aid to Him. But as for the present—" he shrugged. "A single utterly worthless human being—a Christian gutter-snipe without a soul—may wreck the Moorish empire. But even a lesser thing than that may save it, father."

The old man nodded, picked up his book, turned to his place.

"A drop of the Weakener of Wills," he muttered. "Go with Allah, my son—and tell me nothing more of this business. I am old. I crave peace of mind. But may the mantle of Allah's protection be about you, and may His hand guide your footsteps aright. *Selaama*, my son."

El-Ajuba turned and slippered away. Whether his feet were directed by the will of Allah or not, they led him, after a good many roundabouts necessitated by the winding streets or by the desire to observe certain precautions, to a squat building over the doorway of which hung a flag bearing the black eagle of Germany.

Beneath the flag a *makhazni*, which is to say, a native soldier, squatted comfortably on guard. But as El-Ajuba approached he arose swiftly, with a single graceful motion, saluted and asked, with his eyes, what the visitor might desire.

"There is," El-Ajuba told him, "a matter for the attention of his Excellency the German consul. The consul himself, and no underling. I desire speech with him."

The guard bowed slightly.

"My lord the consul is indeed in his office," replied the guard. "And assuredly he will be delighted to hear what the sidi has to say. However, if the sidi would permit me to learn his name, that I might carry it to the ear of my lord—"

"Tell him that Sidi El-Ajuba desires speech with him."

The guard started, recoiled a step, stared at the face of the counsular visitor.

"Sidi—Sidi Ajuba! I go, sidi; I go quickly."

El-Ajuba watched the flapping skirts of the *makhazni* as he hastened away. Holy men might receive great lip service, but a magician . . . He had not completed an amusing chain of thought before the guard was back, inviting him to follow.

The German consul at Fez was a plump, blond, smiling man; but there was a light in his blue-gray eyes which, to a wise one, would indicate that his smile and the accompanying suave manner were as easily changeable as his clothes. Al-Lateef knew him well; El-Ajuba was presented to him by a *makhazni*, and he saw no recognition in the consul's face. And, knowing him well, Al-Lateef knew that Herr Hermann was leader of the shock troops which the Kaiser had thrown into Morocco to oppose other Powers at work there. A deadly brain was behind those smiling blue-gray eyes.

El-Ajuba spoke and the German consul listened. Then Herr Hermann nodded his head—once quickly, twice slowly. Which

meant that he had perceived, in the space of three heartbeats, the end of a road suddenly opened to him.

He himself escorted El-Ajuba to the doorway, waving aside the consular guard who thereupon looked with even increased awe upon the visitor.

At the corner of the street El-Ajuba looked back. The consul had disappeared. The *makhazni* had squatted down in the doorway. The German flag drooped from the masthead. El-Ajuba shrugged, grinned, went on his way.

"When two dogs fight over a bone," he told himself, "there is a chance for a third dog to eat."

VI

DARKNESS came upon the capital city.

Through this darkness a man—a Christian—made his way along dim, deserted streets toward the Gate of the Burning.

His walk was brisk, but not entirely steady, and every now and then he paused to argue with some unseen companion of his thoughts. His words were in sibilant French, interspersed with Arabic of a vulgar quality and usage.

"*Y'allah!*" he exclaimed. "I, Philippe Letraine—afraid of the silly mumble-jumble of a magician! It is a thing not to be conceived. I shall laugh at him, and probably I shall pull his nose."

He strode along past the dark faces of closed houses.

"Not to be conceived!" he muttered again. "Verily she is a cat out of hell—but what a cat!" He paused to finger ruefully two red scratches down his right cheek, swayed a little, pushed onward. "But it is not what I think about silly magicians, but what she thinks. Superstitious as the devil, all of these people. Hmph—a love potion! I, Philippe Letraine, a Frenchman, make my way to a black man from Timbuktu to secure a love potion. Inconceivable. But manifestly true, inasmuch as I perceive ahead of me the Bab-el-Maruk.

"Not a potion for myself. Oh, no—no indeed. I am too wise, I trust, to be taking any mysterious potions. Not even a love potion. She hates me. Thus, if she gave me a love potion, undoubtedly it would be composed of arsenic, strychnine and a number of other unpleasant ingredients. But if *she* wants to drink a potion, in order that she may love me—ha! That is a different matter altogether."

He drew near the Gate of the Burning; his eyes sought the house of El-Ajuba.

"Quite a different matter," he continued his soliloquy. "*Peste!* The girl is clever as well as beautiful and—um—passionate. She has a head. She desires to love me, inasmuch as I now own her through purchase from her brother. Sensible girl. Much more pleasant for her to love me than to merely—merely submit. A head, yes. And so the love potion. Which, according to the mystic nonsense, I must buy for her, not she for herself. Stuff! But why not? She must drink it, not I. And a little walk to the house of El-Ajuba—it is nothing if it results in fewer scratches and more kisses."

Thus Monsieur Philippe Letraine, ex-*agent provocateur* of the French government, made a little drunk by the wine in the house of Tameem and Azalaia, more so by the delightful picture painted by Azalaia, a picture which might be realized, *if*, through a magic potion from the all-powerful magician, El-Ajuba, she could be made to love him as fully as she now frankly hated him.

As had been arranged by the magician and the dancing girl, Monsieur Letraine sought the house of El-Ajuba, in the darkness of a Fez night.

Although he was not aware of it, Monsieur Letraine, by indulgence of some years in the pleasures which Morocco has to offer to the undiscriminating, had as nearly "gone native" as ever happens to a European. The dissipations and the vices of the East are not those of the West. Those of the Moslem are not those of the Christian. And, preeminently, those of Africa are not those of Europe.

A European may indulge in every form of dissipation, even of vice, which the Continent has to offer, and he will still be a European. But let him play with the forms of vice which are native African, or Oriental, and through them he ceases to be what he was. For one's nationality is not a matter of birthplace or parentage, but of the way one thinks; and the dreadfulness of Oriental vices in the case of a European is that it makes him think very differently indeed.

Monsieur Philippe Letraine had come to think pretty much Moorish—which had been good, up to a certain point, for the French government, but very bad for Monsieur Philippe. Opium, *keef*—which is a form of hasheesh—native women, and certain other weaknesses which had best be left unmentioned, added to wine and an animal nature, had played the very devil with one who in his youth had been a fairly decent fellow. Although he was unaware of the fact, the mental effect of these things had made him more than half Moor, susceptible to those incredible forces which affect native minds; had weakened brain and will as well as body. Now, only in his own wild fantasies was he what he had once been, a legitimate agent of his government.

Monsieur Letraine reached the portal of the house he sought, his hand grasped the heavy iron knocker and, in accordance with the fate which is written upon the foreheads of Christians as well as infidels, he knocked thrice upon the door of destiny.

VII

EL-AJUBA, wrapped to the eyes in a mysterious black garment, sat cross-legged upon a huge crimson floor cushion. At either side of him tallow candles, as big around as a man's wrist, stood in tall, massive brass candlesticks, like two sentinels. They gave the only light in the high ceilinged room, and from the dark corners and cloudy blackness overhead there seemed to come faint whisperings, and strange shadows seemed to move. Behind the magician hung a heavy velvet curtain, covering the entire wall from ceiling to floor. Upon it, in many colors, were geometric figures, mystic cabals, strange angles, embroidered in silk. On El-Ajuba's lap lay a heavy book bound in ancient leather. And in front of him stood an octagonal table, mystically painted, less than a foot high, two feet in diameter.

The magician looked up from the book as the door was opened and a brown servant bowed upon the threshold. Behind the servant stood Monsieur Letraine.

"Enter, and remain silent," commanded the magician, his gaze returning to the book.

The servant stepped aside and the Frenchman entered; the door closed. El-Ajuba, paying no attention to his visitor, moved a forefinger down the page of the book in a wavy line; paused, frowned, closed his eyes.

Monsieur Letraine, knowing the customs of the country, took three steps toward a cushion along one of the walls of the room, his feet noiseless in the thick pile of the multicolored Rabati carpet. But at the third step he stopped, grunted, stared. For the two huge candlesticks with their lighted candles which sentineled the squatting master of magic had slowly risen from the floor and exchanged places, passing, with great dignity, behind the sitting man.

Monsieur Letraine gulped, blinked—and then remembered that he had consumed quite a quantity of good wine. Yes, assuredly that was it; his eyes were playing tricks on him. Candlesticks didn't take legs and walk. Resolutely he stepped forward again, to the floor cushion. But the second step stopped halfway, because a small table, much like the one standing before El-Ajuba, barred his way. He considered it carefully. Queer he hadn't noticed it there before. But of course it must have been there. Or perhaps, while he was staring at those silly candles, somebody had put it down. Anyhow, it had to be accepted. He walked around it, sat upon the cushions, stared for a moment, suspiciously, at the smooth

vacancy of the table top. In his ears was the faint hum of drowsiness.

His attention was seized by the voice of the magician.

"I am occupied for a moment more, monsieur," said El-Ajuba, in very good French. "A little matter concerning that which is now going on in Tangier. You'll excuse me for a few minutes. If you wish tea, or a cigaret, you will find them on the table before you. Pray help yourself."

Monsieur Letraine cast a quick sidewise look at the table. *Allah kerim!* Where the devil had those things come from? A pot of tea, steaming, with fresh mint sprouts protruding from beneath the lid. A bowl of broken pieces of sugar. A teacup, saucer and spoon. A silver box, filled with cigarets, the lid open invitingly. Matches . . .

"You are tired," he heard El-Ajuba say, as through a fog. "You went to sleep, I think. Tea will rest you, monsieur."

O-ho! So that was it! He had been asleep. And the table had no doubt been arranged during that period. Strange he didn't remember having been asleep. But yes, he was sleepy—he perceived that. It would feel good to tumble back among the cushions and go to sleep. But he had to talk to this queer dark fellow over there, mumbling over a book. What was it he wanted? Oh, yes, that potion for Azalaia . . . He must have drunk a lot more wine than usual—sleepy. Maybe the tea would wake him up. That was the idea—tea and a cigaret . . .

Monsieur Letraine filled a little cup with the mint flavored tea, inhaled the pungent aroma, drank it at a gulp. Then he selected a cigaret, lighted it. That was the stuff. He felt better already. Wider awake.

El-Ajuba, watching the Frenchman without seeming to do so, breathed a sigh of relief. One cup was enough; two or three would do no harm. But one cupful was plenty to do the work of the Weakener of Wills. That, and other things he knew concerning the minds of men.

El-Ajuba slowly reached a hand behind him, patted thrice upon a yellow slipper which protruded a toe length from beneath the wall covering. Then he resumed the study of his book, waiting.

The waiting ended shortly, broken by an outburst of silly laughter from Monsieur Letraine. He began to mumble meaninglessly.

And now the hard, dark eyes of El-Ajuba fastened their gaze upon the closed eyelids of the Frenchman, little lightnings seeming to play in their black depths. Vibrations seemed to emanate from the magician toward the man on the cushion.

Thus the picture was posed, immovable, for a long moment. Not a breath, not a sound, not the waver of an eyelid.

Then the slow voice of El-Ajuba uttered a command in a tone which seemed to enter the brain of the seemingly unconscious Frenchman, and to take possession.

"Speak now, truthfully, Philippe Letraine, of the plot you conceived against Morocco, of the killing of Omar the interpreter, and of the parts you and Tameem bin-Tameem have taken. Speak, truthfully and fully. All must be revealed. Speak, I command."

For a moment thereafter the silence and the motionlessness continued. El-Ajuba held his breath, seemed trying to pierce the very skull of the Frenchman with the dagger of his thought. And yet his hands were lying open on his lap; there were no wrinkles of effort upon his forehead. All his strength of mind and will were concentrated in some restricted, throbbing spot behind his eyes, and they were the twin muzzles of guns which were shooting their dominating power at the man on the cushion.

Philippe Letraine opened his eyes. He stared about, stupidly. Then his head turned slowly, as if twisted by some invisible hand upon it, and his gaze met that of the magician.

El-Ajuba's eyes enlarged, the lightnings played more fiercely—and in turn the eyes of the Frenchman stared, distended, and then assumed a fixed, unseeing glare.

"Speak," commanded El-Ajuba.

"I—speak," assented Letraine.

"All must be told," said El-Ajuba.

"All must be told," repeated Letraine, like a child repeating new words.

El-Ajuba relaxed. He leaned back a little. In a different voice he said:

"Come forth, Hajeeb, and make record of what is about to be said. And you, Sidi Kadi, also. And you, Herr Hermann."

The great velvet wall hanging shook, parted. One by one three men came forth.

To them the Frenchman paid not the slightest attention. His eyes were fixed upon the face of El-Ajuba, his master now, master of his body, mind and soul—and for him there was no other voice in all the world.

Sidi Hajeeb, head of the Sultan's secret service, folded his robe about him and sat down beside El-Ajuba, producing writing materials. The venerable, white bearded kadi, which is to say, judge, and Herr Hermann, the German consul, crossed the room to a vacant cushion.

"Now," commanded El-Ajuba. "Now, Philippe Letraine, tell us about the murder of Omar the interpreter."

VIII

NOW, although thus far matters had progressed in a most satisfactory fashion for El-Ajuba—or Al-Lateef, if you will—it was written that his progress toward the goal of self-vindication and retaliation upon his enemies was not to be without its unpleasant surprises.

Monsieur Letraine, under the influence of a peculiar drug, had been forced to submit his weakened will to the power of El-Ajuba. His complete and signed confession had been listened to with absorbed attention by the German consul, the chief of the Sultan's secret service, and the judge of Fez el-Baili. It had been taken down verbatim in a system of shorthand by Hajeeb, had been signed by the confessor and duly subscribed to, as a true and faithful record, by the others.

And thereafter Monsieur Philippe Letraine had had removed from his mind the weight of the magician's hypnotic control, but still under the influence of the Weakener of Wills, had been escorted in complete secrecy, so far as the world in general was concerned, to the house of Sidi Hajeeb, the secret service chief, to await a decision as to what further use should be made of him—or what punishment administered. The fact that Monsieur Letraine was a French citizen—and so under French jurisdiction only—did not completely prohibit the idea of punishment by those who would in no respect be acting for his government.

Thus one day passed, and a night, and a new day came, with its surprises.

El-Ajuba was as elated at the success of his adventure thus far as one may be who has passed the exuberance of youth and who is fully aware, by both experience and observation, that good fortune is as uncertain as the Spring breezes. When it blew upon him he was appreciative and did not spoil the occasion by dark suspicions that the direction of the air current was about to change. But on the other hand, he no longer possessed that juvenile assurance that the future might safely be judged by the present.

In fact, El-Ajuba had been so amazingly successful thus far that Al-Lateef scratched his head and rubbed his nose and quoted proverbs to the effect that one does not stumble over an obstacle perceived, and that a mule probably does not realize that he is not a horse.

The receipt of the mysterious anonymous note urging him to make haste because his identity was known, bothered him somewhat—now that greater dangers were past. When a man whom all the world is seeking to run down sits for some hours in a smallish room with the chief of the Sultan's secret service, the kadi, and the German consul, and plays the part of a magician from Timbuktu—and is completely successful in the deceit—that man has not only accomplished a feat worthy of record, but he has been under somewhat of a nervous strain.

Undoubtedly the sheer effrontery of the business had brought success. Or perhaps

the daring to carry out the imaginative concept which had occurred to him—one of those little conceptions which had caused him to become known throughout Morocco as the Clever One. Not that it had seemed to Al-Lateef so much an intellectual feat: it was the business which the occasion called for. It was an utterly unreasonable problem which he had to solve. And the only way to solve an unreasonable problem is *not* to use reason. Imagination's the thing.

But even after he had perceived what imagination might accomplish, he had had bad moments. The eyes of Sidi Hajeeb, of the secret service, were keen and his mind was agile, and for him to run to earth Al-Lateef the Clever One would mean glory and reward. And it had been *quite* impossible for Al-Lateef, when those keen eyes met his, to remember that he was El-Ajuba and not Al-Lateef.

As for the kadi, there was a second great danger. For the kadi knew Al-Lateef. After the first few moments, El-Ajuba knew that his disguise was sufficient for the kadi. But kadis are venerable, wise, mentally trained to a high point. Might it not occur to the kadi, as also to Hajeeb, that this interest on the part of a newly arrived magician from distant Timbuktu in an affair which was discredited to Al-Lateef was somewhat strange? Of course, his reasons had been good: his *djinnoon* told him what was going on; he saw the danger which menaced Morocco. And as for whether or not Al-Lateef was identical with the Tameem whom the Frenchman had told about—who could say?

He would have been less perturbed concerning his stratagem had he been better able to perceive the stupendous effrontery of it: to him it was an example of applied imagination; to the others it was—or, rather, later became—an example of sheer impossibility.

This part of the business took his mind off the anonymous note of warning, and before he got back to considering its possible source and purpose, the breeze of fortune veered away.

Azalaia, the dancing girl, to whom all news, gossip and suspicions came, heard fragments of talk which she pieced together—and ill-advisedly had the pleasure of telling her half-brother, Tameem, that his *nasrini* friend, the Frenchman, was probably the prisoner which rumor said was being held in the house of one Sidi Hajeeb.

Tameem cursed her for a fool, and waited many hours for the Frenchman to turn up. No Philippe Letraine arriving, Tameem set forth to find him. Failing in this, he proceeded to get rather drunk, and thus released the full force of his ego. He became a fire-eater, a man whom it was useless for other men to oppose. And he proved it to his own satisfaction by going to the house of Sidi Hajeeb, beating up a couple of servants who opposed his entrance, and breaking in the door of the room from within which came the loud lamentations of a Frenchman who was uselessly trying to remember what had happened to himself.

Tameem had to choke a third servant into insensibility on the way out, but that was the last obstacle. Tameem and the Frenchman then disappeared, apparently from all human sight.

This news was sent to El-Ajuba by Sidi Hajeeb, who added the information that he, Hajeeb, should neither eat nor sleep until the Frenchman was recaptured and his rescuer, whoever he was, along with him.

El-Ajuba considered this new development in as many of its aspects as he could perceive, and sent a message to Sidi Hajeeb in his turn. The message wished Hajeeb success. Its concluding sentence was interesting.

> From certain sources I have learned that the man calling himself Tameem bin-Tameem is in reality one Hassan bin-Sanhajji—although I know not if this be of any value to you.

Hajeeb read the note on horseback near the Bab-el-Tangier.

"*Allah kerim!*" he exploded, making his horse jump. "*Allah kerim!* Of value, eh? But of course the magician from

Timbuktu would not know that Hassan bin-Sanhajji is he who is known as Al-Lateef the Clever One." And he set out at a gallop to the house of El-Ajuba.

IX

THERE came now to the house by the Bab-el-Maruk, Azalaia the dancing girl. Emotion was inscribed in arabesques upon her face and glowed in fires in her eyes. El-Ajuba guessed at the cause of her excitement, but played the part of ignorance—a method by which one may acquire much wisdom.

"You have come, no doubt," he offered, smiling at the girl who was too wrought up to accept his courteous invitation to be seated, but pattered about the room, "for the potion promised you."

The girl shrugged the slim brown shoulders which were visible because she had flung her street robe into a corner of the room. The golden coins strung about her neck danced and tinkled irritably. She turned upon El-Ajuba, stabbed at him with a slim brown forefinger upon which a jewel glittered ominously.

"Potions!" she jibed. "Potions! *Allah kerim!* By the time a potion is forthcoming, he for whom it is intended is in South America. Keep your potion, I shall use the knife— Do you know what has happened? Do you *know* what has happened." She glared at him as though he, El-Ajuba the Wonderful, was entirely responsible for whatever it was that had taken place.

"I have been—er—occupied, Lalla Leila," returned El-Ajuba. "Too occupied to consult my *djinnoon* very frequently as to what is taking place." Thus one of Western lands might speak of newspapers or the radio news. Azalaia stamped her tiny foot—which is a feminine gesture not confined to the Occident.

"Your *djinnoon* be cursed," she snapped. "You would be surprised to know how little I believe in them, sidi—I shall tell you what has happened. That descendant of a female pig, Tameem—"

Swiftly and vividly, she narrated the exploit of her half-brother.

"And thus," she concluded, eyeing the magician oddly, "they are gone. Perhaps your blessed *djinnoon* can tell you where."

"Perhaps that is true," agreed El-Ajuba smoothly. "No doubt I shall have to ask them, when there is opportunity."

"Bah!" snapped the girl. She strode up close to the magician. Her fist beat upon his breast, and her eyes burned him. "Bah! Let your *djinnoon* sleep. Do you think I am a fool? I know where they have gone. Did I not see that drunken fool start out for—somewhere? Did I not follow and observe? Hmph!" She sniffed like a cat. "One cannot recognize one's own grandmother, when she is wrapped in a *haik*. I watched; I followed. I know where they are in hiding, sidi; and now I am going to call upon them—with my knife. As for your potion—" she snapped her fingers under El-Ajuba's nose—"give it to your *djinnoon*."

Intensely amused though he was, El-Ajuba managed to keep a straight face. What a spitfire! What a tigress! *Y'allah*, but they raised women in the Riff! That the girl fully intended to carry out her vow was wholly believable. She was quite up to making an attack—and probably a successful one—upon Tameem and the Frenchman. She would do them injury; but also, she herself might get hurt. El-Ajuba was quite aware that both Tameem and the Frenchman would be in moods which would make the murder of a woman more or less agreeable.

After a moment of consideration he took the girl by the arm, led her to a cushion and made her sit down. He sat beside her.

"Give ear, now, Azalaia," he said, slowly and impressively. "This matter has become serious. There are things I must tell you. There are things you must do. Must. And things you must not do. Must not."

"I desire revenge," said the girl. "More than that, I shall have my revenge."

"Precisely," agreed El-Ajuba. "But not the sort of revenge you had intended. Oh, one much better. Much better, as Allah

is my witness. Does that interest you?"

The girl turned her face toward his, her eyes pierced deep; and then, feeling that the magician spoke in profound earnestness, she nodded.

"If it is better than mine, sidi," she said, "I shall be glad. Tell me what you have to say."

A quarter of an hour later—fifteen minutes which had been filled with the measured, considered speech of El-Ajuba, and a few questions by the girl, Azalaia took her departure. A different Azalaia—one who now smiled and glowed and was thrice as dangerous as the spitting cat who had arrived half an hour before.

In her hands she carried the fate of Tameem bin-Tameem, who had sold her to Monsieur Letraine . . .

In the hands of El-Ajuba she left the fate of Philippe Letraine. . . .

Scarcely had the patter of her slippers died away before Hajeeb, chief of the Sultan's secret service, burst in, breathing loudly.

"Hassan Sanhajji?" he asked. "You say this Tameem is Hassan Sanhajji?"

El-Ajuba nodded, rising to greet his guest.

"So I have been told, sidi," he said. "By one who should know. But—what matter whether it be Tameem or Hassan Sanhajji?"

"Allah above!" almost shouted Hajeeb. "Allah above! Hassan Sanhajji is he who is better known as Al-Lateef the Clever One. That was how, you remember, the murder note was signed: Al-Lateef."

El-Ajuba nodded.

"But," he puzzled, "if, as the Frenchman said, the murder was done by one named Tameem—I do not see—"

"*Y'allah!*" exclaimed Hajeeb. "This Al-Lateef, who not for nothing is called the Clever One from Tangier to Cape Juby—this Al-Lateef, who is really Hassan Sanhajji, has gone by a hundred names in his career. That he calls himself Tameem means nothing; but that Tameem is really Hassan Sanhajji means that unquestionably he is also Al-Lateef."

"Ah," breathed El-Ajuba. He nodded, said brightly, "Now I perceive. And you have never seen this Al-Lateef?"

"Never. And now," groaned Hajeeb, "he is gone, Allah alone knows where, with the Frenchman. By the Prophet's beard, I thought that it would take a man like Al-Lateef to effect the rescue of that cursed *nasrini* from my house. And now no one knows where he may be."

"Oh yes, sidi," said El-Ajuba quickly. "Yes, indeed. I know where he is. You forget—"

"You know?"

"You forget my *djinnoon*, Sidi Hajeeb. I heard that something had occurred. Naturally I asked my *djinnoon* to inform me as to the facts. Wherefore, naturally, I know where Al-Lateef and the Frenchman are in hiding." Would Azalaia, he wondered, feel complimented at being called a *djinn?*

For a moment the chief of the Sultan's secret service looked incredulous. Then from the depths of his native being arose that fundamental belief in mysterious powers which many an educated Moor sternly tries to suppress. His look of doubt gave way to one of almost childish awe.

"Forgive me, Sidi El-Ajuba," he said, for he had seen that the magician had perceived the look of doubt. "Forgive me; and tell me, if you will, where I can find those whom I must find."

For a few breaths El-Ajuba was silent. Then he spoke, rising.

"I shall do better than that, Sidi Hajeeb. You have an extra horse available? Good. Come then, I shall go with you. Come, let us go and seize these fellows. The Frenchman who has almost succeeded in bringing disaster upon the land; this Al-Lateef who calls himself Tameem."

X

AT A LITTLE distance outside the walls of Fez there stood, hidden in a tiny valley, a deserted and decaying edifice which had once been a *kasbah*, or fort and residence combined.

Its upper story was crumbling; the once white plastered walls were bulged and cracked, and little moraines of mortar lined the base of the walls, as though the old building were slowly bleeding to death. Trees had grown up around it, thus aiding the world to forget its existence.

On the ground floor was an arched gate, of which, for many years, the double oaken doors had sagged ajar, offering refuge for such of nature's creatures as might desire sanctuary.

Now the doors were in place again—and in the small cobbled courtyard behind them two human beings heartily expressed their hatred of each other while they awaited the next turn of the Book's invisible page.

Monsieur Philippe Letraine sat upon a much dented five-gallon oil can, such as is used for transporting American petroleum in Morocco, smoked cigaret after cigaret without knowledge of his action, and drew upon a large storehouse of anathema to find curses which might be, to his mind, apropos of his companion, various other people, and the course of human events in general. He had gotten somewhat apoplectic in the process.

Tameem bin-Tameem, wrapped in a brown *djellab*, squatted cross-legged in a sunshiny corner, and retaliated in kind, when the Frenchman's words seemed to be directed at him. His vocabulary was not abundant, but it was forceful. And he was now suffering not only from his debauch of the preceding day, but from the results of that debauch.

"If Allah knows what devil possessed me to rescue you," he retorted to one of the Frenchman's attacks, "I wish he would tell me. Drunk! Drunk and crazy! I should have left you to be shot by Sidi Hajeeb. O Allah, never again shall my lips touch the cursed wine."

"Bah!" sneered Letraine. "Swine! Infidel swine! You are to blame for this situation. How you are to blame makes no difference. I *think* that you sold me out to Hajeeb." He glared at the Moor. "You or that sister of yours. And some day—"

"Some day, perhaps today," replied Tameem, "I shall tear your tongue out by the roots. It is you who planned to betray me. To murder me. Oh, I know—I know." But he did not explain that the *djinnoon* of one Sidi El-Ajuba had given him this information. "And then, like a drunken fool, I had to break into the house of Sidi Hajeeb and carry you off to safety. *Aweely, aweely;* what a camel I am! And I should very much like to know just what happened to you at the house of the magician. You have hemmed and hawed and talked around in circles and chattered like a monkey in a palm tree—"

"God above!" shrieked the Frenchman, jumping to his feet. "By all the devils in hell, I shall tell you! If only to keep that black mouth of yours shut." The narrowing of Tameem's eyes at the word "black" should have warned the Frenchman. "I have come to remember. I told them everything. Understand? Everything, you swine. They—they did I know not what to me. Some business of hypnotism included. But that was not all. Queer things happened. And after I had taken a cup of tea—hell and its angels! I could do only what the voice of that cursed magician commanded. I told everything. And there were others there—the kadi, and Sidi Hajeeb, and the German consul. And something forced me to tell them everything I knew—as a result of which you will no doubt be executed as soon as they can lay hands upon you. I hope that I may see the performance. I—"

"You drank tea, eh?" inquired Tameem, incuriously. "Hmph! A child would know the answer to that. Any fool knows that there is a drug which makes a wet thread out of one's will. And you told them that I—"

"That you killed the interpreter? Assuredly." Letraine was getting some queer pleasure out of his own distress of mind.

The Moor rose slowly and approached the Frenchman who stood grinning at him. His own face was expressionless.

Suddenly, when he was only two steps from the *nasrini*, his hand moved swiftly and a knife appeared in it; he sprang forward.

But before he could strike, a pistol barked, and the two of them turned to stare at a native who dangled his legs over the wall and who held a black pistol in his hand.

"Most interesting," said Hajeeb. "What great friends you two fellows are." The pistol moved a little as the Frenchman, with a curse, moved his right arm. "I am wondering whether to shoot you out of hand, or not. Very little would decide me to do so. Come up, Sidi El-Ajuba, and see what the cage holds."

In a moment the head of the magician appeared above the wall. Then he drew himself up and swung his legs over.

"Descend first, sidi," said Hajeeb, "while I guard them."

El-Ajuba swung over, dropped. Then he drew his own revolver and covered the two hunted men while Hajeeb descended.

"Let us tie them up, first of all," suggested the chief of the secret service. He removed from beneath his robe a coil of small rope and approached the pair. El-Ajuba covered then with his gun. "I think I shall tie the most dangerous one, first. This man—" he brought Tameem's arms around behind him—"who thinks—" he looped the cord about the wrist—"I do not know he is not Tameem bin-Tameem, but Al-Lateef the Clever One, who—is—not—quite—so—clever—as—"

OUT of sheer surprise Tameem did a thing which he had not intended to do. His more or less simple mind was jarred by the accusation that he was Al-Lateef; wherefore, forgetting entirely that one was engaged in tying his wrists, he turned abruptly to face Hajeeb. The motion was so unexpected that the rope was jerked from Hajeeb's fingers. He sprang upon Tameem, who turned under the onslaught, thereby bringing Hajeeb's body between himself and the gun in the hand of El-Ajuba.

The Frenchman, mistaking the purpose of his companion's action, supposed him to be starting a fight for his liberty. He jumped behind El-Ajuba, drew his own gun and, as Ajuba turned to meet his attack, fired. The bullet cut through the magician's clothes, seared along his ribs.

El-Ajuba fired at the Frenchman, who was dodging in retreat, missing him. Letraine found cover in a doorway, and fired again. Hajeeb staggered back from grips with Tameem, who started to run. Then, his eyes falling upon the knife that had been taken from him and thrown aside, he halted, picked it up—and charged back to finish Hajeeb, who had gone down.

El-Ajuba felt the wind of a bullet past his ear from Letraine's gun as he raced to protect the fallen man. Too late—he realized that Tameem would reach him first. He raised his gun . . .

And then, when Tameem was almost upon Hajeeb, the chief of the secret service saved himself. He rolled over once, toward the running feet of the Moor. Tameem hit the unexpected obstacle, fell headlong over Hajeeb, crashed his head upon the cobbles and lay motionless.

Hajeeb scrambled to his feet as a bullet chipped the stones beneath him. El-Ajuba's gun barked and the Frenchman, with a muffled gasp, fell lifeless in the doorway.

They turned as the Frenchman dropped—and saw Tameem crash through the oaken doors of the gate.

"Quickly!" shouted Hajeeb, racing for the gate. "Our horses. If he sees them—"

"The Frenchman?" questioned El-Ajuba.

"We shall return and bury him," replied Hajeeb, running. "The French must not know what has happened to him."

He threw a shoulder against the door. It stuck. Tameem had thrown a fallen stone against it. And then came the sound of a horse galloping.

The doors opened. One riderless horse

was racing off across the hills. The other, bearing Tameem bin-Tameem, was going like a whirlwind toward the city.

"There," gasped Hajeeb, "goes the head of Al-Lateef!"

An hour later they came to the city gate and passed through, leaving the clay of a French *agent provocateur* safely stowed beneath ground—another man mysteriously to disappear from the face of the earth.

They rode to the house of El-Ajuba, and there were met by a white robed female who ran up to them, seized the stirrup of the magician, and spoke excitedly.

"He is at my house now," said Azalaia, careful to keep her face partially covered with the folds of the coarse white *haik* she wore. "Something has happened. He is mad—mad. Go there at once, sidi. But be cautious, for he is as a wild boar, injured. As for me—I wait in your house."

El-Ajuba nodded assent and spoke to Hajeeb. They rode off for the house of Tameem. To this house there was but one entrance—the massive oaken front door, set deep in solid stone. Barred, without doubt, on the inside. Nor were there windows which might be forced, or from which one could observe the approach of people.

The manhunters dismounted and consulted as to what was best to be done.

Even as they did so, Tameem himself solved the problem.

He had raced to his house as to sanctuary, and almost immediately begun to regret that he had sone so. Here he could be caught like a rat in a trap. He should have raced to open country. Gone to the hills, the mountains. But, true, he needed money for that. The money was now in his *shakarah*. He had new weapons —knife and pistol. Also, he had emptied a full bottle of strong wine. Fear urged him to go away from that house; wine emboldened him to do it. He opened the door a little, peered through the crack. He saw no one to interest him, for those who hunted him were on the other side of the entrance. He swung open the door, and stepped forth.

Then he saw them.

Even as they leaped toward him, he jumped back into the doorway and flung shut the massive door. Not quite shut. El-Aujba had kicked a slipper from his foot, thrust it against the doorframe so the portal would not close. Now he flung it open and he and Hajeeb pursued the murderer.

There was a stairway to the upper story of the house. Midway up this stairway Tameem paused and emptied his gun at his pursuers. He was partly hidden by a turn of the stairs; so their answering shots did him no injury, but spoiled some priceless old wall tiles.

They faced the chance of more bullets as they ran up the stairs, El-Ajuba in the lead. A door slammed . . .

Reaching the top of the stairs a light pine door halted them. A crash, and they were in an empty room. They ran to the open window and looked out.

Tameem was picking himself up; surprisingly uninjured after a twenty-foot drop on to hard cobblestones. His pursuers turned and raced downstairs again, out into the street.

But Tameem bin-Tameem had completely disappeared. There were few people about. All they could say was that he had gone in a certain direction. Following the direction indicated, it was not long till they found themselves close to the house of El-Ajuba, at the Gate of the Burning.

"Name of Allah!" growled Hajeeb. "Let us go to your house and have tea. I am as thirsty as one who has crossed the desert. And that swine has escaped us, after all."

El-Ajuba led the way into his house, into the room which was his reception chamber. At the doorway he stepped aside to let Hajeeb enter. Some one grunted. The two men turned.

There on the cushion sat Tameem bin-Tameem. And in each of his hands was a pistol—one of which was El-Ajuba's own.

"*Allah kerim!*" gasped Hajeeb, when he could close his mouth again. "Verily he is Al-Lateef the Clever One, and no other."

El-Ajuba said nothing; he was watching something.

Then the velvet hangings behind Tameem silently parted. Azalaia, the dancing girl, stood there, resplendent in her gay kaftan. In her right hand was a heavy brass vase. She smiled at El-Ajuba, showing her white teeth. El-Ajuba smiled back.

Tameem scowled, half turned his head—and with perfect precision the slim brown arm of Azalaia struck downward with the brass vase.

Tameem bin-Tameem grunted once, and slumped over upon the cushions.

Azalaia laughed.

XI

JUSTICE, short, sharp and—from more than one angle—impregnated with grim humor, was meted out to him who called himself Tameem bin-Tameem, but who signed notes with the name of Al-Lateef.

His brief trial was held in a big candle-lit room, about the corners of which invisible *djinnoon* seemed to be in motion.

His judge was the basha of Fez el-Baili. His accusers were three: the dead hand of Monsieur Philippe Letraine by way of his witnessed confession; Hajeeb, chief of the Sultan's secret service; Azalia, his alleged half-sister. In addition to which there was the note found upon the body of the murdered interpreter, and the deep national necessity of complying with the French demand that the head of Al-Lateef be produced.

Tameem was a dead man before he entered that room.

"Here," testified Hajeeb, "is a note found on the interpreter's body. It is signed by Al-Lateef. This man admits having written the note. The Frenchman's confession charges him with the crime, which he has also admitted. That the Frenchman's confession is truth is evidenced beyond question by many facts. Together they tried to make their escape. The Frenchman—succeeded. I think we shall hear no more of him in Morocco. And as for the true name of this fellow who calls himself Tameem—we have the note which he signed—his true name is said to be Hassan Sanhajji, which, as you are aware, is the name of Al-Lateef. And more than this—" he beckoned—"here is a woman who has known the man well—too well—who will testify to his identity."

Azalaia, wrapped discreetly in her white *haik*, only tiny hands and the upper part of her face showing, stepped forward—to take that revenge which cried in her like hunger in a child. Seven words, each like a shower of rain upon the heat of her passionate heart.

"I am his sister. He is Al-Lateef!"

She looked once at her half-brother, then she went from the room.

"It is therefore in order, your Excellency," continued Hajeeb, "that this man be condemned, executed, and his head sent swiftly to the Sultan, that the French demands may be satisfied. Or rather—" this was a place for plain speaking; no word would go farther—"that his Majesty may complete the discomfiture of those who would ruin his country."

Tameem made effort now to speak, having recovered from the shock of Azalaia's words. But a burly guard, holding him by the neck of his robe, twisted the garment until Tameem's tongue stuck out. The basha turned to the accused.

"You admit to the murder of Omar, interpreter at the French consulate?"

The guard loosened the tourniquet.

"Yes, sidi, yes," gasped Tameem. "But—but I am not Al-Lateef. I am—" But the basha looked away, and again the guard tightened his hold.

"It matters not who you are," replied the basha.

He turned to the kadi—he who was one of those to hear the Frenchman's confession in the house of El-Ajuba.

"He merits death," said the basha.

"Death," agreed the kadi, nodding.

"Death," echoed Hajeeb of the secret service.

"So be it," pronounced the basha. He turned to Hajeeb. "You will attend to this at once, then. Let the head be in the Sultan's hand within the hour."

Hajeeb nodded.

"In half that time, Excellency," he said, and rose from his cushion.

He strode from the room, followed by the guard and Tameem.

The basha and the kadi sat in complete silence for several minutes.

Then there came the muffled crash of guns.

"Al-Lateef has passed on," said the kadi. "May Allah find mercy for his soul."

The basha rubbed his brown beard.

"Well, at any rate, I think we have baffled France this time. And no doubt Tameem will acquire merit in the eyes of Allah therefor."

XII

EL-AJUBA sat upon his cushions reading a book by candlelight when Hajeeb was ushered in.

The chief of the secret service heaved a sigh of relief, threw himself upon the cushions beside the magician.

"*Y'allah!*" he exclaimed. "Not a pretty business. But well done, Sidi Ajuba, well done."

"It is finished, then?" asked El-Ajuba.

"Finished," agreed Hajeeb. "This evening the German consul and the kadi and I and the French consul—we met with the Sultan at his Majesty's command. Suggested, of course, by himself. The confession of Monsieur Letraine was read by the kadi. The German consul was most glad to swear that he had personally listened to the confession. *Y'allah*, he was fairly quivering with the pleasure of thus helping to nullify the French demands. And then the kadi testified. And then myself.

"The French consul was a pitiful sight. He desired speech with Monsieur Letraine; then he averred that he knew no Monsieur Letraine, had never heard of him. I explained that the monsieur had departed suddenly for parts unknown. Thereupon the French consul accused the German consul of concocting this business. Excitable, the French, sidi! I thought he would choke. But his Majesty put an end to the business.

" 'Inform your government,' he commanded the French consul, 'that this matter shall be presented to the entire diplomatic corps in Tangier unless it is at once ended. Am I to be made a mock of by your petty intriguers, your murdering conspirators against myself and my country? This is my answer to your demands. A Frenchman was responsible for the crime for which you demand reparation. That is provable to the world. And as for your demand for the head of the actual murderer—' he looked at me, and I nodded—'you shall have it shortly. The audience is ended.'

"But after his Majesty had gone, the German consul had a word for his French colleague.

" 'Monsieur,' he said, 'unless you desire intervention by Germany, this matter will be dropped instantly. Not a nation in the world will support you. Be advised.'

"So the business is finished. Even now the head of Al-Lateef is hanging over the Bab-el-Maruk. With a placard which I myself had the pleasure of writing. It reads: 'The head of Al-Lateef, which the Christians so greatly desired.' "

The two men stared into each other's eyes.

"And thus," said Hajeeb, slowly, "there is no more Al-Lateef. And as for one Sidi El-Ajuba—hmm! I have told his Majesty of the part you have played in this matter. That you and you alone saved us from the French. His Majesty is profoundly grateful. He authorizes me to offer you, as an expression of his gratitude, anything you desire. Anything. Treasure — lands — a viziership — anything." He produced a written scroll from his

belt. "Here is his Majesty's written word. Read it."

El-Ajuba unrolled the scroll, saw the involved royal signature, the countersign of the royal scribe and notary, read the two lines of Arabic script which preceded the names.

> He who is known by the name of El-Ajuba has rendered us a great service. Whatever he may ask shall be granted him. Let this be made known to him at once, by our servant, Hajeeb.

El-Ajuba was not unmoved. But he showed no emotion either in face or voice. Hajeeb stared at the magician; the magician stared at the floor. Silence. And then El-Ajuba rose, filled his lungs as though with the air of sudden freedom.

"I go to consider, my friend," he said. "Await my quick return, if you will."

He had been gone scarcely a minute when there came the basha of Fez-el-Baili seeking him.

"He will return shortly," Hajeeb told the basha. "I have offered him reward, on the part of his Majesty. Be seated."

But the basha remained standing, pulling his beard as if in perplexity about some matter.

"The Sultan is very grateful," continued Hajeeb. "Anything—anything which El-Ajuba desires, that may he have."

"Hmph!" The sound would have been a snort, had the basha been a less dignified gentleman. "Hmph!" His blue eyes began to twinkle, a smile to grow about his bearded lips. "So Mulai Abd-el-Aziz offers reward to—to El-Ajuba. And El-Ajuba is gone—to consider the matter. Hmph! No, I think I shall not wait for the return of El-Ajuba. I came to—to congratulate him upon the speed with which he—he has accomplished the defeat of his—that is to say, our—enemies. As well as— I ventured to write him a note yesterday, urging him to make haste. Hmph! I shall go to my house. All is well with—with one I admire. Farewell, sidi."

The basha's footsteps had scarcely died away before El-Ajuba reappeared. Perhaps the two men actually met in the darkness outside and clasped each other's hand for a moment. Sidi Hajeeb rose as the magician entered, stood looking at him expectantly. El-Ajuba returned the gaze, but a little smile flickered around his bearded lips.

"I have decided," he said at last, "as to what I desire from his Majesty."

"The Sultan's commands authorize me to bind him, here and now. Give me the scroll, pen and ink." Hajeeb took the royal writing from El-Ajuba's hand, went to squat before an octagonal table whereon lay bamboo pen and ink stand and a box of sand. "Dictate your reward; I shall write it, sidi."

For a moment Al-Lateef hesitated. A proverb came into his mind; even now, after he had decided, during his brief absence from the room, what course he should take, what risk he should accept. "Trust not the sea, the future nor the Sultan." But one had to trust, sometimes. One had to take a risk in order to eliminate greater risks. The present situation had been created by others, not by himself. But it meant opportunity to him—and to his brother, Aidomar—opportunity unless the Sultan should violate his written word—and that would be an incredible thing!—for them honorably to end the outlawry which the Sultan had imposed upon them, to stand again in the free sunlight, to go and come as they would with no man to say them nay, no man to follow seeking their ruin, their death.

"Write, my friend," said El-Ajuba. "Write thus: 'He who is known as El-Ajuba accepts as his reward—' Is it written, sidi?"

"Written," assented Hajeeb.

" '—the full pardon, from all for which they have been outlawed, of Sidi Hassan Sanhajji, otherwise known as Al-Lateef the Clever One, and his brother, Aidomar.' That is all, Sidi Hajeeb."

The scratching of the pen jerked, proceeded, slowed to a stop. The surprised face of Sidi Hajeeb turned upward at an angle toward El-Ajuba.

"This—this is strange, El-Ajuba," Hajeeb said, puzzled. "Nothing for yourself? Only pardon for Al-Lateef, who—who is dead. I do not understand. Was Al-Lateef a friend—but no, that is impossible; you yourself hunted him down."

"You mean Tameem?" asked El-Ajuba.

"Of course," returned Hajeeb. "Tameem—Al-Lateef; they were one."

"Tameem was not Al-Lateef," said El-Ajuba slowly. "It was my desire that for his crimes he die as Al-Lateef. But he was no more than Tameem bin-Tameem. It was justice that he should die under the name of the man to whom he tried to bring disaster."

Slowly now Hajeeb rose. He was no fool. He began to perceive things. Slowly he approached El-Ajuba, raised a hand to turn the magician's face toward the light of the big candles. Then he grunted, his eyes grew wide. And a slow grin spread itself over his face, answered by a similar expression on the face of the magician.

"Al-Lateef the Clever One!" gasped Hajeeb. "Oh! The clever one!"

"No other, Sidi Hajeeb," agreed Al-Lateef. "And—is the writing still to be made?"

Sidi Hajeeb grinned more broadly.

"*Allah kerim!*" he exploded. "I am the head of the Sultan's secret service. My business is to protect his empire and his person. Is it conceivable that I should refuse such an opportunity to rid him of a dangerous enemy? Is it? *Y'allah!* I sign the pardon for Al-Lateef—as I should have done long ago, had I been his Majesty."

He stooped, his pen scratched; he rose and offered the scroll to his companion.

"You are restored to favor, Sidi Hassan," he said. "And here's the hand of friendship."

Here's a Dish I Like

By WM. ASHLEY ANDERSON

OF COURSE, an appetite is the best of all sauces. It's equally true that food tastes better to hungry men the nearer you approach the Frigid Zone and the farther you are away from the Tropics.

There is nothing in the Tropics (or elsewhere, perhaps!) better than a Bombay mango in the morning. Of a consistency almost identical to that of homemade ice cream, its orange colored flesh has a smooth richness of flavor comparable to nothing I know. Of course the wild varieties are coarse, fibrous and taste of turpentine, but there is as much difference between them and the Indian variety as there is between orange sherbet and an unripe pumelow. It took me five years to overcome my original aversion to mangoes.

Fruits really are in a class by themselves, because every climate seems to

have its own best. No one in northern climates can ever tire of apples, in almost any form. And no one in the Tropics ever loses a taste for bananas in almost any form. I used to make fresh banana ice cream in Zanzibar and, just before the cream set, add a little yellow Chartreuse.

Nor will I ever forget some papayas which Major Holland gave me south of the salt pan that's called Lake Eyassi; with a little brown sugar and a squeeze of lemon juice, they were marvelous to a nearly dried out man.

But these are not dishes for a hungry man.

Once Shroder and Brodie and I ate a whole roast lamb, with flapjacks and tea, on a mountainside in Northern Shansi, when the temperature was somewhere around twenty below zero. That was a meal for blond savages! Another roast lamb, eaten in the company of two Arabian sultans and several sheiks and merchants of wealth, was the main course of a notable meal; tearing the delicate, crackling meat with our fingers, sopping the unleavened bread in the delicious gravy—this was a meal eaten where Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton had sat, and in the best traditions of the "Arabian Nights".

My Goanese cook in Aden used to make a thick, jade-green soup, served with rice. I've searched everywhere for its equal and never found it. Nor have I ever found an equal for the thick Mocha coffee he served on our moonlit *barasa* after dinner.

There's a kinship between the cooks of China and France. No other people in the world attain their skill. Their menus are of infinite variety, their dishes often are mysteries. The trouble is their most famous dishes are usually prepared for civilized tables and somewhat jaded appetites; the flavors are subtle and piquant.

Wonderful in their place, many of them are not sufficient in themselves. I will except my first dinner at Wever's on the Rue Royale, after months of lean rations in England. What a meal! Four waiters stood about my table congratulating me, and filling my glass with a dry champagne; but of all that extraordinary feast I remember only a bowl of remarkably fresh green peas and, of course, the champagne.

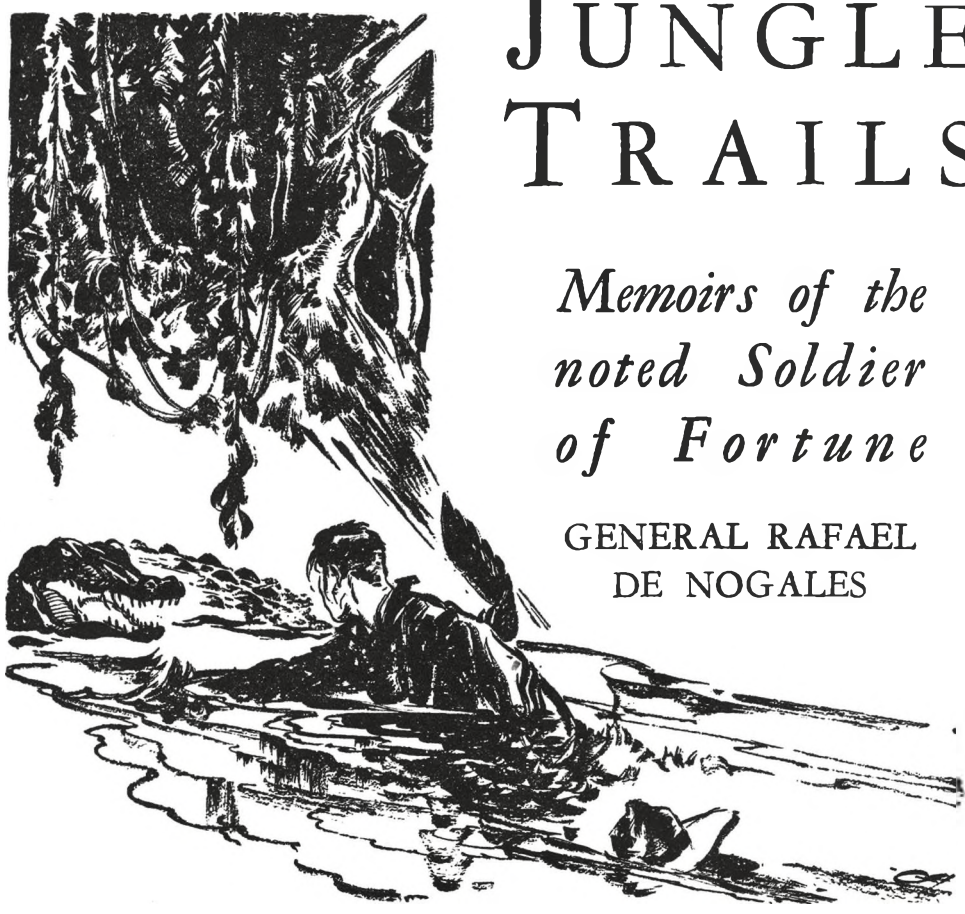
Of Chinese cookery I remember many dishes, and I often feel a real craving for some of them. I like the sweet delicacy of lily bud soup, and grew to appreciate shark's fins which I ate with gusto (as I shall eat stewed snapper today in Philadelphia with gusto, though it must be drenched in sherry); but I never could do more than keep a straight face while chewing the black, slimy, grisly strips of *bêche-de-mer*—which are nothing more than sea worms!

I think of Chinese cookery with real wistfulness when I recall Peking duck, steamed in its sauces to such a tenderness that the brown and pink flesh can be picked lightly from the bones with long, ivory chop sticks; and when I think of silvery mandarin fish, dipped in batter, and fried to a light tan crispness in mutton fat; and when I remember a certain meal of small chips of mutton dropped in boiling fat and served hot in zero weather.

I know the famous dishes of Europe and America—*bouillabaise* of Marseilles; Virginia ham and peaches; those crabs they have in Puget Sound (Dungeness?); roast beef of Old England with Yorkshire pudding; the *hors d'œuvres*, mainly of sea food, in the Hotel Normandie at Le Havre; country sausage, pancakes and maple syrup; roast turkey and cranberry sauce; plum pudding and bombe glacé . . . I've eaten most of the famous dishes of the world, and I believe I've enjoyed them all.

My favorite dish in the hot Tropics is a curry—a small curried stew with white rice; and mango chutney, dried currants, grated coconut, peanuts and Bombay duck on the side.

But in the cold countries, after hard work in the open, give me an Irish stew—and more of it!



JUNGLE TRAILS

Memoirs of the noted Soldier of Fortune

GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES

MANY Americans make the mistake of judging alligators by the specimens which are usually exhibited in circuses or in the zoological gardens of the United States. The majority of these specimens belong to the category of *babas*, or dwarf alligators, typical of the Everglades of Florida and the rivers of southern Cuba, whose semi-tropical climates do not allow those saurians to reach the tremendous proportions which they occasionally attain in the jungle fastnesses of South America.

One of my most ticklish experiences with alligators took place on the right shore of the Carcanaparo, in the Arauca plains of Venezuela. Two *llaneros*, or pampas cowpunchers, and myself were gliding past a grassy slope in a dugout canoe, carrying our saddles with us because we had lost our horses in giving the slip to some government troops.

Turning a bend, we ran into a yellowish *crocodilo*, or giant alligator, the only specimen I have ever seen. It was snoring tranquilly on the river bank, its wide, gaping jaws protruding over the shore. Instantly I drew my gun and shot pointblank into the monster's mouth. It emitted a frightful bellow and, floundering into the river, knocked me overboard.

Things went black before my eyes. The only memory I have of what happened immediately afterward is a terrible stench—the gigantic halitosis of

the *crocodilo's* breath. The *llaneros* told me afterward that they had literally torn me off a root to which I was clinging with both hands, keeping myself under water, and near to drowning, despite their efforts. Fortunately the *llaneros* succeeded in averting my unconscious suicide.

A year later I came very close to being caught by another enormous alligator. I was drifting down the Magdalena River, in Colombia, on a raft during a hunting trip. A crazy English engineer, who was working in the Mariquita Mines in the upper Magdalena, had dared me to shoot the rapids of La Dorada with him during the big flood of 1912. We were engulfed in a world of hissing sheets of foam, clinging to our craft. The rushing waters buffeted us about until they finally catapulted us into the main current, stripped of everything but our guns and our camping outfits, which were fastened to the raft.

My British friend was so shaken by the experience that he took the first steamer we met, while I continued on the raft as far down as Puerto Berrios, with the two boys that had accompanied us. There we came within a hair's breadth of being shoved under by a whirlpool and jammed by the current between three river steamers. For ten days we had floated down the Magdalena pursued by all sorts of driftwood and swimming islands of swamp vegetation, living almost exclusively on the game we shot. I had no more clothes than my underwear, and my two boys were in still lighter costume. At night we camped on the sandy river flats to escape the mosquitoes.

One evening, while I was sleeping beneath the open thatched roof on the aft part of the raft, which was pulled halfway up a sandbank, I awoke to find resting almost on top of my stomach the head of an enormous alligator, which had apparently mistaken our raft for a jam of driftwood and was trying to climb aboard. My predicament was disagreeable in the extreme. I let out a yell that must have put the fear of God into the alligator, for it let go the raft in a hurry and jumped back into the water, almost taking the raft along with it.

This incident took place opposite the Open Mountains, which are the only region of Central Colombia that still boasts of wild Indian tribes, similar to those which roam the jungles of Arauca and Casanare at the foot of the eastern slopes of the Cordillera, which marks the boundry line between Colombia and Venezuela.

On a certain occasion, while crossing those jungle reaches, I heard a terrible row. On approaching cautiously to see what the matter was, I noticed a large boa constrictor holding with its tail the trunk of a tree, while its teeth gripped the snout of a fair-sized bull calf. Every time the unhappy bull drew back the snake would stretch out like a rubber band, only to contract again the moment the bull relaxed. As soon as I had recovered from my surprise I jumped off my horse and, with a slanting stroke of my *machete*, cut the snake in two. Whereupon the bull—the ungrateful wretch—charged me and compelled me to take refuge up a tree with the seat of my only pair of pants torn to shreds.

I shall never forget the eighteen terrible days which we spent in the early spring of 1914 (during my second uprising against Gomez, the tyrant of Venezuela), cutting our way with *machetes* through the dripping virgin forest of El Sarare, half naked, almost starved to death, eaten by mosquitoes; and the genuine relief we experienced when, while approaching the lower limits of the forest belt, we heard once more the healthy yells of a band of wild Goajibo Indians on the warpath—old acquaintances—who started sending volleys of feathered *lancetas* our way, which welcome to Casanare we answered with an equally courteous use of our sorely diminishing ammunition.

It was an interesting fight. The Indians charged, screaming and waving their long bows and lances covered with

green, yellow and scarlet parrot feathers. They were naked except for white or colored loincloths and red or black cotton scarves tied to their bronze heads. They were certainly a brave looking, sinewy, splendidly built lot of savages, while we were a sight for the gods—fever stricken, barefoot, clothed in flying rags, our arms rusty, our ammunition almost gone . . .

One of my men was badly wounded, another had a foot that had swelled to twice its normal size due to a *raya* cut. My legs were covered from the knees down with festering mosquito bites. I hadn't had a shave for a month. We looked like the devil and felt like the devil; but we were there, like the Conquistadores that had first come upon such polychromatic warriors, ready for the worst but confident of the best.

Before we entered Tame I sent a messenger ahead to fetch some clothes and food. In the town we found several of our old confederates waiting impatiently for us.

WE RESTED three days in Tame, reveling in the luxury of salted beef and mosquito nets and, before we departed for the savannas of Arauca, we visited an Indian tribe which had been reported camping in a *mata*, or prairie jungle island, the bluish silhouette of which stood against the dazzling skyline like that of a fairy forest. We went on a pilgrimage for medicine. The Indians are good physicians for all ills derived from the jungles and savannas, and our sore footed companions were clamoring for a certain local prescription to ease their distress.

To reach the *mata* we had to follow a narrow forest trail which led us after a quarter of a mile to a large clearing where the Indian *rancheria* had been established. Several dozen huge, open thatched huts loomed into view as we debouched on the farther side of the clearing. In the shade the Indians rested, sometimes in pairs, in hammocks made out of the silky fiber of the *moriche* palm. It looked to us like a sobering up party such as the Indians are wont to indulge in after a fortnight's spree. The forests of the region supply them plentifully with a beautiful golden palm wine that sparkles like champagne and kicks like strong rum.

To secure a supply sufficient for a distinguished party, several hundred palm trees are cut down on which square holes, about six inches deep, are dug where the leaves branch out. In those holes the fermented wine gathers overnight, and continues to well up for several days afterward. The Indians keep the holes covered with a shingle and drink the wine through long hollow reeds. To stop a party while the wine is still oozing is a waste too repugnant to the Indians' sense of thrift.

The women were dressed in brownish, sleeveless dresses made of bark fiber that reached to their knees, and some of the younger squaws were very attractive.

We learned that the cause of the festivities was the approach of the rainy season, which allows the Indians to travel in every direction in their light dugout canoes over the flooded savannas, looting isolated ranch-houses and spearing hundreds of cattle that remain marooned at that time on the *bancos*, or grass islands.

In many such ranch-houses the *llaneros* have fought gallantly, if hopelessly, against the savage hordes that paddle and wade to the attack, howling like devils. Some ranches keep hounds to terrorize the Indians. Not being horsemen, they naturally are afraid of dogs, especially of trained bloodhounds.

For a long time before we reached the Indian *rancheria* we knew that we were being observed by sentries posted in treetops. And soon enough we knew that we had been seen because their signals—imitations of the cries of startled egrets—came floating to our ears on the breeze. Many times I have heard that cry in the night, while I rode for my life over the jungle trails.

At the approach of danger, the Indians usually break up their camps, and drift or paddle down the stream to build a new one. They can find a living almost anywhere, as they are good fishermen and very clever hunters. They know how to get the maximum efficiency out of their strong bows and four-foot *lancetas* which they shoot by elevation, thus attaining a great range. This ability gives them confidence enough to face a *brujo chiquito*—small medicine—as they call the six-shooter; but they have strong objections, unless drunk, to looking into the muzzle of a *brujo grande*—big medicine—which is their name for a rifle.

Normally they do not abandon a camp until the surrounding jungle has become bare of game. If they break camp and take to their canoes, it is useless to try to pursue them through the jungles, for by the time that a trail has been cut, they have disappeared.

The particular Indians we had come to visit were too drunk to be afraid of us—Indians are singularly susceptible to liquor courage. The cacique greeted us amiably enough and furnished us with the medicine we desired. He insisted, also, that we should join his party and get drunk in honor of the rainy season. To this I naturally objected, for we were not on a pleasure trip but on the war path, with the result that in less than fifteen minutes we were trotting back along the forest trail, firing right and left at savages who were infuriated because we seemed to scorn their feast. I covered the rear by riding backward on my horse, firing away at the howling Goajibos, whose red and yellow decorations made a good target.

They yelled and howled and shook their bows and *macanas*, or heavy war clubs, over their plumed heads, and kept circling, leaping, stamping and performing other irrelevant gestures while their squaws shrieked and their infernal *tambores*, or log drums, kept up a weird racket through all the surrounding forest.

Several miles away, after ascertaining that no men were missing, and treating our bruises and scratches, we headed for the entrance of a wild mountain trail which a *ranchero* by the name of Tocaria had cut several years before through the dense forest belt of northern Casanare. Most of the peons that had gone to open that trail had died of the black fever, or had been killed by the poisoned arrows of the Goajibo; and those that finally reached the plains of Tame were almost insane from the tortures inflicted upon them by that pitiless jungle. We were familiar with the story, and therefore knew what we were risking by following that trail. But we had to take our chance because that was the only way in which we could reach, unobserved, the plains of the Upper Arauca.

NEAR the beginning of the trail we ran into a cacique, or Indian chief, and his son, who were so busy skinning a deer that they did not notice our approach. We invited the cacique to trot along, with a rope around his neck and his arms tied behind his back, lest he should take unfair advantage of our hospitality. The youngster we turned loose with the request that he inform the other Indians that his father would be dispensed with violently if we were molested during our trip.

This plan worked exceedingly well. The first two days of our trip were a pleasure. The first night we camped in a *rancheria* from which the Indians had fled leaving everything behind, including two large earthen pots full of steaming *sancocho*, a sort of stew composed of many good things such as plantains, yams, meat, fish, all cooked together. Also several calabashes of palm wine. It looked fine, but we let the cacique taste the food first, because the Indians are wise and capable of tricks worthy of the highly refined Renaissance Borgias.

After the chief had eaten his fill and was comfortably stretched on a hammock, we fell to and did the *sancocho* the honor

it deserved. Fortunately the Goajibos are not cannibals; otherwise we might have found a human hand or foot in the stew, as General Azuaje did in the Opon Mountains, east of the Magdalena.

Early during our march the following day, we came upon a big copper church bell, only a few feet from the trail, the last remnant, probably, of an old Jesuit settlement, built there when that part of the forest was still the edge of the timber belt. For those forests advance steadily, creeping through the centuries into the plains.

The scenery that surrounded us was beautiful. Those dark, silent, primeval forests, as yet unexplored, inhabited by jaguars, monkeys, tapirs, mountain lions and all kinds of reptiles and insects, are a sight never to be forgotten. Enormous butterflies, the size of an elephant's ear, metallic in texture, blue, brown and green in color, flutter among the somber cascades of orchid covered vines, pierced, as with golden swords, by the sunbeams that penetrate the foliage.

On the third day we realized that the Indians were following us at a distance. At first they had kept silently on our tracks, but finally they could hold their tongues no longer and began their yelling and howling. Once or twice they set fire to the underbrush ahead of us, but it was too wet to burn. Only then did the Indian break the silence that he had kept ever since his capture. He addressed us in fluent Spanish and informed us that what the Indians meant by all their noise was that we were leaving their hunting grounds. He looked at me venomously as he explained that on the opposite bank of the creek we were about to cross the territory of a rival tribe began, and that he would surely be killed if he returned alone over their land. As he had behaved himself, we exacted from him a promise of friendship, gave him a few presents, shook his hand and allowed him to depart. Then we resumed our journey, redoubling our vigilance.

About noon of the fourth day we struck the plains of Arauca, not, however, without having had a brush with a band of Indians that attacked us as we were fording the Upper Ily River. One of our men was wounded with a poisoned arrow, but we saved him by cutting his wound open at once and burning it out with a red hot *machete* blade. Four more days of marching over the pampas and their giant quagmires, or *esteros*, brought us to the small settlement of Cabuyare, where ten more veterans joined us.

Thus our little band of *revolucionarios* kept increasing steadily, for we were on the war path, on the way to El Viento for the purpose of giving the garrison of that frontier town a surprise party. The volunteers who joined us at Cabuyare had with them some extra ammunition, which came in very handy, and the information that Venezuelan government forces had been posted all along the border, with a large detachment at El Amparo, to prevent our crossing the Arauca in that neighborhood.

FROM Cabuyare I sent word to our friends down the line to get ready and, leaving the town of Arauca on our left, we headed east, with the intention, as I have said, of taking El Viento by surprise. We traveled by night only; in the daytime we usually hid in a large mata or in the jungle belt of a river shore. And we gave all settlements a wide berth, so that our progress could not be reported.

One afternoon, while I was resting beneath a giant *guayabo* tree near the edge of a forest island watching an exceptionally large alligator which was swimming in a muddy slough, I caught sight of a big, molasses colored bull that was advancing in my direction. I was too tired or lazy, perhaps, to climb the tree, so I crept behind a thicket of wild pineapple plants, expecting to return to my resting place as soon as the bull had passed.

The bull stopped and sniffed the ground where I had been lying. The moment he caught the smell of the man-beast, he let out a low, defiant bellow, and pawed the earth furiously, probably calling me all sorts of names. Then, suddenly, like a streak of yellow lightning, a big jaguar leaped from the tree under which I had been resting, and landed on the bull's neck.

For awhile after that I could only see a coil of something that was spinning and whirling in a cloud of dust—a scratching, spitting, bellowing sort of mess, of which, hard as I tried, I could not make head or tail, literally. Then, with a wild snarl, Brother Jaguar went spinning through the air. When he hit the ground again, he was stamped upon by the furious bull and converted into a Tartar steak.

But the bull itself had been severely handled in the battle; blood was streaming over his head, his neck, and his flanks, which had been slashed open in many places. He was full of pep, however, for, lifting his powerful head, he emitted a triumphant bellow and walked slowly away. From behind the bushes I took off my sombrero to that blood stained hero of our prairies.

This incident took place on the savannas of La Maporita, where, that night, we cut the big wire fence in order to cross my own savannas of Santa Maria and Mata Azul. These savannas are about seventy miles square and occupy a large stretch of Colombian territory on the right bank of the Arauca River. They were now empty. The ranch-house had been destroyed, and the cattle had been driven into Venezuelan territory to enrich Gomez and his henchmen by Venezuelan soldiers disguised as cow rustlers.

Near the ranch-house of La Capilla, where we arrived three days later, we ran into a band of Goajibo Indians, who immediately deployed in battle array. They outnumbered us ten to one and seemed to be itching for a scrap; a scrap which we would have readily accepted under different circumstances but which I had to avoid then at all costs because the noise of the mêlée would have betrayed our presence to the garrison of El Viento, which we intended to attack at dawn on the following day.

While my men lay ambushed behind some logs, I zig-zagged my way ahead, with hand uplifted toward the gaudy warriors, who kept jumping and whooping with their arrows poised and their bows slightly bent. A tall buck, who seemed to be their chief, threw down his bow and *macana*, and stepped toward me and greeted me cordially.

It was my old friend, Chief Oahu, the fellow I had kept standing with my six-shooter in his ribs for five minutes the night I was ambushed by him and his Indians on the Ily River, a year before. Although his countenance was stern and forbidding, the way in which he pressed my hand showed plainly that he was grateful to me for having spared his life, when I, rightly, ought to have had him shot.

Thus an act of clemency at the right moment enabled us to achieve our goal: to take El Viento by surprise and establish an honest revolutionary government in the rich cattle states of Apure and Zamora, which stood its ground victoriously against the Gomez régime for a month and a half—until the outbreak of the World War forced me, for patriotic reasons, to suspend hostilities at least until some other day.

The Risin'

IN A BACK room, up three flights of stairs in a rickety Dublin house, by the fitful light of a very cautiously handled electric torch, four men talked in whispers.

It was between two and three of a black morning in late Autumn, and the four had every reason for selecting that hour and that place for their confabulation. Outside, in the street fifty feet below, there was a periodical hum, as a Crossley tender filled with armed police or steel helmeted troops passed on its steady nightlong patrol of the curfew ridden city; from Kingstown—not yet rechristened Dun Laoghaire—and from the Liffey itself closer in came the slowly circling beams of searchlights, where destroyers of the English navy stood by with shotted guns ready for emergency; a couple of blocks distant from the men's lurking place Dublin Castle, grim and black against the black night, was very far from being seasonably asleep.

And these four men, talking in whispers in the dark, were most grievously wanted by every one of those agencies. Indeed, a price was set on the heads of two of them, and all four held their lives in their hand in foregathering thus in Dublin City. For they were—to name no names—the accredited leaders of revolt in Ireland; the revolt which in this year of 1921 was giving London's statesmen pause, and in its course turning the lovely island into a hell—a hell of whisperings and sidewise looks, of atrocities and reprisals, of frantic, unbelievable horrors, one leading to another . . .

England was still fighting the revolt in her own bull headed manner, the "knock-your-block-off" policy, not yet discredited. And Ireland was fighting back, as only Ireland could have been expected to

of the MOON

A Story of the Irish Rebellion

By R. V. GERY

fight—guerrilla warfare by chosen experts at the trade, with three out of four of the inhabitants of the South and West openly sympathetic.

So the four men, with the whole might of England on their trail, held session almost within hand's reach of England's ancient stronghold on the Irish shore, and talked strategy in whispers.

"Then that's settled," said one of them. "It's to Cork ye want me to go?"

"It is—and tell the boys there to watch out, the way they'll be expectin' Flanagan and his lads in a week. And then we'll see."

"And you, Michael?"

"I'm stayin' in town for awhile. There's things to do yet."

"Be careful, for the love of the saints, boy! We can't lose you."

The other laughed quietly.

"No, I'll not go that way, Richard; it isn't any damned Englishman'll get me. No, but my own people—and that not yet. I'm safe enough for awhile."

He paused for a moment and then went on to the third man.

"You, Danny, back to the Silvermines with you. There'll be one or two lads comin' down your way soon enough, so get you ready for them. We've to slap some powder into things, boys, and yourself, Danny, 'll do it for Tipperary."

He turned to the fourth man, who had hitherto been grimly silent.

"And you, Denis, I've a special job for you. Maybe you know it already, eh?"

"Kyleranny?" asked the other in a throaty whisper.

"Just that," said the first. "Go you down to Kyleranny and start somethin' there. It's this long time since they've

done anything but collogue with the police and the military, and they're due for a bit of trouble, the two-ways-lookin' scamps!"

"What kind of trouble?"

"Any kind. Wake 'em up—that's all. And ye can tell John Kelly from me that there's a lot better reports got to come out of his district, or he'll be disciplined. He'll know what I mean. You've the pleasure of his acquaintance already, though, Denis, eh?"

"I have," said Denis between his teeth. "And may he rot in hell, the same John Kelly. A dirty traitor he is, nothin' more. And by the saints, men, if there's a quarther chance, I'll have his blood, the schemin' pup!"

"Arrah, whisht now, Denis," said one of the others. " 'Tis no time for screechin' like a grampus because ye don't like a gentleman's face."

"Then he'd do better not to cross me," said Denis darkly. "I'd out him as soon as eat me dinner."

"Hsht!" The other gripped his wrist, and an electric silence fell in the dark room.

Outside the whirring of a car's engine had become stationary, and there was the scuffle of many feet; a furious hammering began on the panels of the door below.

"The roof, boys!"

There was the infinitesimal flash of the torch on a ladder, and four flitting shapes vanished one after another. One more hairbreadth escape of their quarry went down in the records of the Crown Forces in Dublin City.

II

COLONEL GOGARTY of the Ragpickers, that British cavalry regiment of ancient tradition and renown at present quartered in Kyleranny Barracks, came hacking along the little town's straggling main street in company with Dennistoun, his abrupt and peppery senior major. It was a glorious afternoon —one of those of which western Ireland seems to have a monopoly, when the hills slumber purple against the robin egg blue sky, the air is drugged and lulled with the murmur of late bees, and one almost expects the spirit of peace to walk radiant and in person about the country. Her weather is not the least delusive of Ireland's many delusive qualities.

There was a frown on the good colonel's brow. Once more, and for the hundredth time, he was discovering that command of his beloved Ragpickers was not the haven of honorable peace to which he had looked forward through thirty years of unspotted service. Peaceful it certainly was not—no soldier's job in the Ireland of 1921 was that—and its honor was just one of the questions that was setting lines of worry in the colonel's good humored brow, and making him look upon service among the Burmese *dacoits* as a consummation devoutly to be prayed for. For Gogarty was an Irishman, and torn between the devils of duty and inclination—of duty to the king's uniform he wore, and of inclination toward his country. "Ould Gogarty", as Kyleranny had come to call him with some affection, was in a dilemma; and his method of dealing with it and still squaring his conscience was characteristic of the man.

He was grumbling to Dennistoun as he rode along, and the tenor of his observations was, as usual, Dublin Castle and its follies, and how best to circumvent the series of inflammatory orders with which the Ragpickers were in process of being favored from that quarter.

"The damned fools!" he was saying. "Why the devil can't they let well enough alone? Here's Kyleranny nice and peaceful—no murders, no ambushes, no midnight parading about the country. Oh, yes, there's a certain amount of quiet rebellion, I know, and they don't love England a great deal, these corner boys of ours. But that isn't anything new—it's just normal for these parts, Dennistoun; as a matter of fact I remember things a great deal worse than they are now in the old days, when the Land League was going strong. No, if there's one corner of Ireland that's keeping its head and be-

having itself, it's Kyleranny; and here come these idiots up at the Castle whose one notion seems to be to stir up trouble. They make me sick, I tell you."

Dennistoun grunted in sympathy. He too had seen the wires from Dublin, demanding more action on the part of Kyleranny's Crown Forces, and he felt for his superior. "Let well alone" was almost a fetish with Gogarty, he knew, and there were not many things—this side of flat disobedience to orders—that the stout hearted colonel would not do to avoid disturbing his district's serenity. But Dublin, to whom a peaceful Irishman was a doubly dangerous one, was riding him hard; and the time was obviously not far distant when the tall troopers would have to ride on their provocative duties of search and crossquestioning.

"It's a pity, sir," he said shortly. "Especially when Kyleranny's quite able to look after itself. What's Dublin's latest now?"

"Oh, the usual thing," growled the colonel. "Exert the greatest vigilance, which means go round the country hauling innocent farmers out of bed by the leg: institute a most rigid espionage on the movements of suspect characters—in other words, set half Kyleranny watching the other half and spend our days listening to a pack of idle gossip: cooperate with the police in every way possible. Quin, the D.I, gets the same sort of stuff thrown at him, and is as sick of it as we are. And so on and so on—you know. Why the devil can't they leave us alone?"

Dennistoun laughed.

"Well, there's one thing, sir," he said. "I expect the other side are in the same boat. I'd not like to be in John Kelly's shoes these times. If Dublin badgers us for keeping the district quiet, I'll wager Kelly's superiors in the I.R.A. give him a damn sight worse time. It's a lot more to their interest to raise the devil than it is to ours. Look what they're doing down south."

"Kelly's a good man," said the colonel, "and it'd be as well if they'd more like him. I don't know when I've come across a fellow with a leveler head; and as far as the Kyleranny boys are concerned, what he says goes. There's no danger from John Kelly."

"No," said Dennistoun. "We've proved that long ago. But one of these days they'll send some one down to ginger things up a bit—one of their lively boys with a big tongue and a gun—and then we'll see some trouble. I don't believe Sinn Fein will let this place rest like it is."

The colonel nodded gloomily. It was just this contretemps that he had been quietly on the lookout for, the stick of dynamite suddenly introduced into the middle of Kyleranny's quiescent explosives. For all its peace and good behavior, he had few illusions about the effect of a little really violent rebel propaganda upon Kyleranny's young men. The type that met in the back parlor of Clancy's *shebeen* and mouthed sedition, and had a helping hand for any of their compatriots "on the run", and were now standing on the dingy whitewashed street corners and watching himself and Dennistoun out of the corners of their eyes—there was plenty of tinder here. No doubt of that; which was one of the reasons for the colonel's furrowed brow and preternaturally crusty temper in these times.

ON THE steps of that hostelry of repute, the Kyleranny Arms, its proprietor, a short, thickset man with a scrubby black mustache and a twinkling blue eye, stood with his hands in his breeches pockets looking up and down the street. His glance was rapid and wary, for all his twinkle, and there was little that escaped him in Kyleranny; there had to be little, for this was John Kelly, who held the rank of general in the I.R.A. and who had, by an adroit mixture of tact, diplomacy, and the more elusive quality expressed by his countrymen as blarney, kept the livelier souls among Kyleranny's corner boys out of mischief.

It had not been done, as Dennistoun had hinted, without trouble from up top; and indeed, there was a personage, by

name Denis O'Riordan, at present on his way down from that back room in Dublin, with the sole intention of playing cat among Kyleranny's pigeons. Of whose coming John Kelly was so far in blissful ignorance.

He stood on his doorstep, watching Dennistoun and the colonel steer their mounts in and out among the donkey carts, groups of gabbling old women, stray colts and cursing drovers that were the usual traffic of Kyleranny's afternoon streets. A comic expression crossed his face, a momentary flicker of amusement, mingled with the pitying contempt of the Irish patriot for anything in the hated uniform of the oppressor.

Kelly had had many dealings with the Ragpickers, and they had all, so far, been friendly; but he did not allow himself to forget that in the event of matters livening up round Kyleranny, the first individual upon whom the strong hand of the military would descend would inevitably be John Kelly. And the thought twisted his humorous mouth into a smile as he accosted Gogarty.

"Good afternoon to ye, Col'nel," he said. "And to yer Honor's self, Major. And how's his Majesty's Ragpickers this fine afternoon?"

There was just enough sparkle in his tone to free it from the charge of insolence, and Gogarty smiled back at him, pulling up his charger.

"Well, John," he said good humoredly. "Still doing all the custom in Kyleranny, eh? You make me wish I kept a hotel. Nice easy kind of life, I should think. No worries, eh, John, nothing to make you lose any sleep at night, is there?"

Kelly chuckled.

"Why would there be, Col'nel?" he asked. "I'm a peaceable, law abidin' citizen, as yourself knows well long ago—" He caught the colonel's knowing eye, and laughed outright. "Ah, well," he went on, "maybe least said's soonest mended, gentlemen. I've no manner of doubt there's more things thrue than tellable on both sides. But will ye not come inside and taste a suppeen of cherry brandy, maybe, or of the whisky itself? I've a new stock in that's mighty pliable, gentlemen—here, Bat Mooney, ye *omadhaun*, be afther holdin' the col'nel's horse, will ye?"

Gogarty shook his head. For months Kelly had been striving to get him inside the Kyleranny Arms, as much by way of propaganda as for any other reason; but discipline was discipline, and although the colonel would have been delighted to have had the opportunity for a quiet chat with his opponent, informally and with the gloves off, yet it obviously could not be done. There were too many eyes and ears about as it was.

"No thanks, John," he said, gathering up his reins. "I must get back to quarters. Thanks very much—and my regards to Mrs. Kelly."

He clucked to his sturdy brown mare and clop-clopped off up the road, with Dennistoun at his side.

Kelly looked after him thoughtfully for a minute.

"A fine decent upstanding man he is," he said, half to himself. "And it's the pity of the world he's follyin' the dirty trade, and him as good an Irishman as meself. But there—we live in queer old times, and it's not for John Kelly to say too much, maybe—"

He turned away into the hotel, lighting his short black pipe as he went. Bat Mooney, a dark haired, beetle browed young man, with the lank jaws and hot blue eyes of a certain type of western Irishman, threw a glance after him and then spat with immense and ostentatious deliberation.

"Ach!" he said under his breath. "To hell with ye for a traitor, John Kelly! Wait awhile, me boyo—we'll larn ye to be invitin' ould Gogarty and enthreatin' him to step within an' taste the pliable whisky with ye. We'll larn ye!" Bat Mooney glared angrily as he spoke.

From which it may be gathered that there were others than Denis O'Riordan who looked askance at John Kelly's traffickings with those who were generally regarded as the enemy.

IN HIS whitewashed office at the barracks, Colonel Gogarty, still booted and spurred, took a decoded message from his adjutant. It was a wire from Dublin—yet another—and warned the Kyleranny military authorities to look out for squalls, as it were. There had been, so said the cryptic sentences from Intelligence, a deal of dangerous activity recently among the hotter firebrands of Sinn Fein, and there was every reason to believe that Kyleranny itself was designated as the scene of an outbreak in the very near future. Wherefore would Colonel Gogarty kindly . . . The message went off into the rigmarole of exhortation and order already familiar among the Ragpickers to the point of weariness.

The colonel threw it across to Dennistoun.

"What d'you make of that?" he inquired. "Anything in it, or just one of their scares again?"

The major read it and frowned.

"Difficult to say, sir," he admitted. "It's true enough they've let us in for false alarms often enough, but somehow or other I can't help thinking we're about due for real trouble here. Dublin doesn't give us any idea of the source of its information, of course; they wouldn't. But I'm inclined to believe they're right for once."

He looked up as Quin, the district inspector of Royal Irish Constabulary, trim in his dark bottle-green uniform, came in. In his hand he held a copy of the Dublin wire, for both the R.I.C. and the Ragpickers were served by the short distance wireless set in the barracks.

"I see you've had this, sir," he said to the colonel.

"What d'you think about it?" asked Gogarty. "Got any information your end that'll bear on it."

The D.I. nodded, sat down at the colonel's gesture, and pulled out another wire.

"A lot of this is before your time here, sir," he began. "But I'm pretty sure it has a bearing on the case, and anyhow I think I ought to keep you informed. Will you just glance at this first; it's from our own investigation people."

He laid the wire on the table. It ran as follows:

> 73 SEEN YESTERDAY QUAYS HERE STOP MAY BE MOVING YOUR WAY STOP TAKE ALL NECESSARY STEPS AND NOTIFY MILITARY.

The colonel looked up.

"I don't understand," he said. "Who or what is 73?"

Quin leaned back and stroked his grizzled mustache.

"73," he said, "is a very interesting character. He's Kyleranny's one and only outbreak into real violence. In other words, sir, he's a gunman, and a dangerous one, by all accounts. So that, putting two and two together—from your wire and mine—it seems to me quite possible that he's heading this way; and if so, we'll have to look out."

"But what's your point, Quin?" asked Gogarty. "Who is he, anyhow?"

"His name," said Quin, "is Denis O'Riordan. Every soul in Kyleranny knows of him, and most of them remember him well enough; after all, it's only ten years ago he was a wild *gossoon* about the place, with his hand in every piece of mischief there was, and the back of his hand and the sole of his foot to any one that stopped him. A pleasant enough young lad, too, until he was crossed."

"Well?" asked Gogarty.

"Well, then he and his old mother got evicted. 'Twas a bad business, anyhow, and I'm namin' no names of who put 'em out; but out on the road they went, sticks and all, in the middle of winter, and the old woman died of it. It's a common enough story, Colonel, God knows."

Gogarty nodded.

"God knows, Quin," he rumbled. "Too common."

"Well, Denis wasn't the easiest tempered boy at the best of times, but you'll imagine what that did to him. The landlord that evicted them was an English-

man, by the way—I'll go that far—and Denis was layin' for him with a shotgun for weeks afterward, swearin' all heaven he'd have his life. And bedad, it's my belief he'd have done it too, except that the landlord was warned and got out quick; he's not been seen again in these parts."

"Don't blame him," said Gogarty shortly. "But who warned him?"

"Ah," said Quin. "That's the point. The man who gave him the office was nobody else than our old friend John Kelly."

"What?" Gogarty exploded. "Kelly?"

"Just him," said Quin. "Told people afterward that he didn't see any sense in making things worse than they were, or something of that sort. Anyhow, he tipped him off, and made an enemy of Denis for life. If it hadn't been for the Easter rebellion just about then, Denis'd have downed him for it, sure enough. As it was, me brave lad goes off to Dublin, gets mixed up in the fightin' there, and since then he's been too busy raising the devil in other parts of Ireland to come back and give Kelly his medicine. But, if he comes back now, sir—"

"Whew!" said Gogarty. "I see. He comes back with a double job. First, to ginger up Kyleranny, and second, to pay off old scores on John Kelly. Well, Quin, if you think there's anything in it, I suppose we'd better take what Dublin calls all precautions, eh?"

"I think so, sir," said Quin seriously. "I'm getting my fellows to stand to."

He went out, and Gogarty turned to Dennistoun.

"See to it, will you, Major?" he said. "You'd better out headquarters squadron on half an hour's notice, and tell the quartermaster to see about ball cartridges with the sergeant-major. Oh, and by the way," he went on, "I don't think there'd be any actual harm in letting it get out around town that we are standing to—just as well if these chaps know we're watching them."

"And Kelly?" queried Dennistoun.

"Kelly?" The colonel rubbed his chin ruminatively. "Yes, I'd like to warn him, Dennistoun; but the question is how? Can't be done officially, of course. You see that. Let me alone awhile, and I'll think it over."

Dennistoun saluted and went out, and Gogarty lighted a cigar and began to consider.

III

FOUR miles or so behind Kyleranny the tiny, barren fields die away into bog and heather, and the ground begins to rise into an irregular block of wild upland, known to the district as the Mountain. In normal days its recesses, intersected with steep coulees and dotted with hanging woods of ash and holly, were a paradise for the local moonshiner, the distiller of *potcheen*, and for the hunter of rabbits and grouse. Now, however, an aura of mystery hung over it, and you were apt on mentioning it to meet with a brassy stare, or to be exhorted in a whisper to "kape clear of that place"—that is, unless you happened to be either "polis" or military, in which case the brassy stare became even brassier, and the reticence even more impenetrable.

It was, in fact, a kind of Alsatia—a refuge for Irish gentlemen temporarily or permanently anxious to avoid contact with the authorities; "on the run", to use the expressive argot of the period. There were a number of places in Ireland like it, fastnesses into which "the boys" might retreat, relics of the days of Desmond's kerns and the savage irreconcilable gallowglasses hunted by Cromwell's jerkined troopers. Gone to ground in caves and more lately dugouts, living the sylvan and retiring life of its own rabbits, there were usually a dozen or more hard bitten fellows ambuscaded in the Mountain's depths, and rationed stealthily by sympathizers from the impoverished farms on the lower ground.

Now and again, spurred on by Dublin, the Ragpickers would turn out in force, assisted by Quin and his constables, and "take a trawl" through the ten-mile-square lump of wilderness; but in a country where eight out of every ten of the

populace were all on the side of the refugees, and only too ready to pass the word of any such activity, their searchings and combings were fruitless enough. Nothing short of a young army would have turned the trick.

A man drove a plodding and decrepit old horse over one of the Mountain's trails. It was midnight, or thereabouts, dark and inclement, with a stormy moon showing now and then between driving clouds from the Atlantic and a periodical splash of vicious rain.

The man sat, huddled under a cape of sacking, on the edge of an ancient cart, loaded with the mysterious agglomeration of junk, old tinware, cheap crockery and broken clocks that form the stock in trade of the Irish tinker. What he was doing on a mountain road at this unholy hour was strictly Denis O'Riordan's own business—although there were a number of people in Kyleranny to whom it would have been a matter of considerable concern, had they come to know of it.

His movements, from the moment when he had so hurriedly escaped from the back room in Dublin, had been erratic and confusing, as had befitted a much wanted man. It had taken him three days to make the journey, moving much at night, and passed from hand to hand across country by bicycle, farm cart and on foot. The tinker's outfit he had acquired the day before—that and some other necessaries, whose presence under the pile of trash behind him might well have upset his nerves if he had had any—and the rest of his disguise had been easy.

In fact, he was moving without any masquerade at all, save for a three day bristly beard; five years' absence from his native haunts was enough, he thought, to have put him out of mind of all but his friends. And when he met his enemies, disguise would not be needed.

He meditated hotly, as the cart plodded on between the low stone walls, and his meditations were all concerned with one man. John Kelly, the betrayer, the pacifist, the tipper of Ireland's enemies and his own. Now, at last, if fortune were kind, vengeance lay under his hand, and Kelly should pay. "Stir up trouble. Start something," had been his orders from Dublin. Very well, he would. But in the stirring up, it would be odd if there was not an unfortunate accident to a certain general officer of the Irish Republican Army. He cursed bitterly under his breath at the thought of him.

The road suddenly plunged downward, into a narrow valley choked with trees. At the bottom a stream bickered over its pebbles, and there was a rough stone bridge carrying the track. O'Riordan pulled the old horse up and looked about him, as far as he could in the gloom. Then he began whistling a tune very quietly.

Twice he repeated it—the ancient elegy of Ireland's woes, "The Wearin' Of The Green"—and at the end of the second repetition he was answered. A man slipped from under the bridge and came to the cart side.

"God save all!" he said in an undertone.

"God save Ireland!" O'Riordan replied, and whistled another bar of the tune. The other took the horse's head.

"Stay where ye are," he said to O'Riordan. "There's a small trifle of a path here, and it's not easy to keep on it."

He led the cart across a ditch and up through the darkness of the wood. At its edge he halted cautiously and projected an owl's soft hoot into the darkness.

Four or five other formless shapes detached themselves from the shadows and closed round.

"Who is it ye've there, Terence?" asked a voice.

"Faith, ye may ask," replied the man who had stopped O'Riordan.

"It's equal to me who he is—but he has the sign."

O'Riordan dismounted from his perch on the cart.

"Draw close to me now, men," he said grimly. "And 'twon't be long ere I show you who I am, and what I'm here for."

Twenty feet below ground, in the very heart of the loneliest wood on the Moun-

tain, O'Riordan looked about him into a ring of sullen, grimy faces. The dugout in which he stood had been built by men familiar with the trade of the field engineer; indeed, quite half of the score or so of refugees to whom it was sanctuary had served with one or other of the Irish divisions in France, and this troglodytic existence was an old tale to them. They were young, most of them, but pallid with continued exposure and the nervous strain of "on the run"; their hollow cheeks and bright eyes told a tale of undernourishment. But there was a dour fixity of expression, and a bitter twist to the mouth that said it would take more than mere tribulation to defeat these men.

O'Riordan was talking with a tongue like a whiplash.

"Ye know who I am now," he was saying violently. "And, by the saints, ye'll know more of me before we're through with it. There's to be a play hereabouts that'll sound through the globe of Ireland, or I'll know why not. Irishmen! A fine noble body of Irishmen ye are, that'd sit here easy on your hunkers and leave the rest of the world go by. Irish! No, but it's a pack of old women ye are, and it'd be well if ye took to suppin' tea and' sittin' by the hob—'twould suit ye fine, bedad!"

He glared round the assembly with prominent bloodshot eyes, his slim figure vibrating with passion, his hair dishevelled, and his voice hoarse with fanatic fury.

"Out now!" he went on. "Out with ye, and whip up a few of the lads from round about—poor scuts they are, at that—and be after learnin' the ruddy English a lesson they'll not forget. There's only one medicine for the likes of them, and ye know what that is!"

Once again he glared about him at the faces, flushing now with some of his own enthusiasm.

"And if ye want a leader—ye oughtn't to, but maybe ye do—ye won't need look for him far. 'Twon't be the first time I've stood up to the murderin' divils, I pass ye me oath—"

"And where'll we get the arms?" asked a voice.

O'Riordan stooped with a single gesture to his feet, lifting a long bundle on to the table.

"There!" he said dramatically. "D'ye want more?"

He unrolled the rough sacking off a well kept Lewis machine gun, of the British army pattern.

"That's the lad," he said. "And where d'ye suppose that came from, me gallant boys? Stolen, eh? Thieved from one o' their armories? Bought from a traitor? That's the way ye'd conthrive it, eh? No, but this lad was taken from 'em in fair fight, by the Lord—and a dozen rifles as well. That's the way to deal with the damned English—walk up and slap 'em on the gob, and take what ye want from 'em. But you, you haven't the spunk to do anything but hide from 'em!"

He paused again, and a hoarse murmur greeted him.

"That hits ye, does it? Then take a look at this." He heaved another package on the table and displayed a dozen white squares. "And what d'ye think these are? Guncotton, that's what. A couple of hours, and some of the tins ye get bacca in, a slob of mud and a few stones, and ye've as good a bomb as any of theirs. 'Twill kill, anyhow; and that's all ye want."

They crowded round him, handling the explosive, examining the gun, all talking together, filled full of excitement—whirled out of themselves by O'Riordan's passion. Gogarty's fear had indeed come to pass. There was more than guncotton loose in Kyleranny.

"'Tis truth he's sayin', boys," said one of them, a straight backed fellow with "soldier" written all over him. "For I've made the little toys just that way meself, the time when the high up ones over yonder hadn't come to issue us with the Mills as yet."

"Then ye'll be bombin' sergeant, or whatever 'tis they call 'em, for this occasion only," said O'Riordan with a touch of sarcasm. "Ye'd better pick your men

and begin manufacturin', for there's no time to lose."

His personality, vehement but assured, already dominated them, and there was a different atmosphere in the place from the hunted depression that had filled it on his entry.

"And what's the scheme that's in your mind, Denis?" asked another. "'Twould be well, maybe, to send down into Kyleranny and get John Kelly up here. He's the leader of the boys hereabouts, and the word's with him."

O'Riordan's lean face flushed.

"John Kelly!" he said. "Let you leave John Kelly to me—"

HE WAS interrupted by the sound of feet on the stair. The door was flung open suddenly, and Bat Mooney, mud splashed and panting, almost fell into the room.

"Boys," he said excitedly, "there's news! They're plannin' somethin', the English spalpeens, bad 'cess to 'em! The troops is standin' by, and the polis—"

He broke off suddenly as his eye fell on O'Riordan.

"By the powers!" he exclaimed. "If it's not Denis! And where, for the love of the saints, did ye jump from, Denis *asthore?* 'Tis in the States we heard ye were, this long time."

O'Riordan looked him up and down.

"It'll be Bat Mooney, eh? Well, it's long enough since I clapped eyes on ye, Bat," he said sourly, "and I don't know that I'm takin' any great joy in that same now. And it's not in any States I've been, Bat. No, but fightin' yer battles for ye, the way ye'd be able to sit quiet an' genteel with the rest of them in Kyleranny town, and sup porter with the polis in Clancy's place—or maybe it's in John Kelly's bar itself, while your betters was lyin' out on the cold mountain sod. That's where I've been, Bat Mooney, me philanderin' *bosthoon!*"

There was the same whipping contempt in his voice that had devastated the others; but Mooney was built of different stuff.

"Your sowl to the divil, Denis O'Riordan!" he snarled. "Ye've the license to call me what ye like—ye'd always the long dirty tongue on ye—but be after keepin' my name away from John Kelly's, and I'll be the better pleased. The low jumpin' blackguard!"

O'Riordan stared at him for a moment and then burst into a laugh.

"Begob!" he observed sarcastically. "And listen to the little fella layin' his tongue on John Kelly, and him, God save him, a general, no less. Think shame of yourself, Bat Mooney—think shame!"

But Mooney was not to be deterred by this kind of thing.

"Me tongue's me own, Denis O'Riordan," he said venomously, "and I'll lay it on whatever ones I like, so ye can smoke that in yer pipe. And John Kelly may be a general, or a liftenant-colonel, or the great *panjandrhum* itself, but he's a two-ways-facin' upshtart, and it's equal to me who knows it."

There was a quality of sincerity in this objurgation that told O'Riordan of an ally here.

"What's that ye're sayin', Bat?" he inquired, with all the irony gone from his voice.

"I'm sayin' this," said Bat stubbornly. "John Kelly's been on top hereabouts too long. 'Tis about time he was taught that shakin' hands with owld Gogarty, and tippin' his hat to Quin, and slappin' the sodgers on the back's no way for an Irishman to be goin' on. It's my belief—" he spat—"that me splendid John Kelly's sold, hide, horns and trotters, to the English. And ye can make the most of that, Denis!"

O'Riordan cocked a speculative eye at him.

"And what d'ye advise, Bat?" he asked. "What'd ye do if ye had yer way?"

"Do!" said Bat. "Do! And ye're askin' me that? I'd see he got what every traitor should get, and by the same token I'd conthrive a stratagem that'd make the damned English wishful they'd left Kyleranny be. It's time," he went on savagely, "and long gone time for a piece of action in Kyleranny—"

He broke off, glowering about him with the half sulky defiance of the visionary doubtful whether his audience follows him all the way. He was soon reassured.

O'Riordan clapped him on the shoulder, turning to the other men.

"Will ye hear that now?" he asked admiringly. "And me miscallin' Kyleranny for a parcel of herrin' gutted sneaks without the spirit of a louse among them. Bat Mooney, sit ye down now, and listen careful to me—for ye're the lad I'm lookin' for, and between us all it'll be a wonder if the English don't get what's comin' to them."

He swung one leg over the corner of the table, with the shining machine gun at his side, and began to talk in low, deliberate tones. Bat sat opposite him, eyes on his face, following him intently and with rapidly increasing interest; and the other men grouped themselves round the dug-out walls, as O'Riordan developed his plot with the skill of one to whom these things were an open book.

At the end of an hour Bat Mooney sprang to his feet.

"Hurroosh to yer sowl, Denis!" he cried. "We'll do it—we'll do it! 'Tis a neat head ye have for stratagems, to be sure. And bedad," he went on, with a slow grin, "it's meself that'll enjoy seein' John Kelly downed."

O'Riordan returned the grin sardonically.

"Ye'll not be the only one, Bat me boy," he said. "And now off with ye—and not a word to a soul, mind. This is better done by outsiders, so we'll leave the Kyleranny lads out of it."

"Except John Kelly," Bat put in, with an indescribable wink.

"Except John Kelly," agreed O'Riordan colorlessly. "I'll be lookin' out for him later on. Ye'd better contrive to have him here late on in the afternoon. D'ye think ye can persuade him?"

"Let you leave it to me," said Bat, halfway up the rough stair. "I'd whistle a bird out of the tree itself, if I'd the half of the cause I've now."

He waved a hand and was gone.

IV

THE BAR of the Kyleranny Arms was the coziest place in Kyleranny. It was, as a matter of fact, Kelly's pride, and he had spent hours of time and a good deal of hard earned cash in making it a snuggery that should entice the custom he liked to see about the place—the local "ginthry" and squireens, the hard riding young bucks and farmers from round about, who—so far—had not found their normal sports and avocations seriously interfered with by the "state of the counthry".

Behind his polished counter, in a setting of gaudily labeled bottles and twinkling glass, John Kelly himself presided, relieved now and then by his grave featured, gray eyed spouse. Those who were in a position to know held that a great deal of John's desire for maintaining the peace in Kyleranny was a reflection of his wife's attitude toward things in general; and the good lady certainly played a major part in keeping on the right side of the police and military and at the same time doing nothing to offend the excellent Irishmen who frequented the house. It was known too that she disapproved very heartily of her husband's connection with Sinn Fein, and was not above saying so over a friendly cup of tea with the neighbors. John was a little afraid of her, in a half humorous way.

He stood behind the bar in the middle of the afternoon, swapping gossip with a group of his regular customers among the buckeens aforesaid, and idly watching the heterogeneous traffic passing the window. He was vaguely worried, since it had been common property in town since the night before that the Ragpickers were under orders, and there was a massive reticence about Quin's police that told of something out of the ordinary in the wind.

Normally, Kelly would have expected to have had news of the trouble, if any, even before the military and police, for Sinn Fein's intelligence system was—as might have been expected—considerably efficient. A whisper here from a tele-

graph clerk; ten words from a traveler in whisky; a carefully ambiguous remark by one of the porters at the railway station—such was the grapevine system through which the local chief of the I.R.A. had hitherto got his information, and it had hitherto been entirely regular and infallible. This time, however, it was obviously out of gear, and John Kelly under his genial outward demeanor was chafing with suppressed impatience.

He did not like the look of the streets, deserted by the khaki clad troopers; nor the business-like movements of Quin in his battered flivver. For once he felt out of things, and deserted, so to speak, on a pinnacle surrounded by unintelligible whisperings.

The door opened, and Bat Mooney slid in. He slouched up to the bar, ordered a glass of porter, and took it back with him to a seat under the window, where he proceeded to glower round the room in a pregnant and formidable silence.

Kelly kept an eye on him. It was an unusual thing for Bat to enter the bar at all, as a matter of fact; normally his haunt was the taproom at the back of the hotel, or the frowzy parlor of Clancy's place—half grocery store, half liquor shop—up the street. He was a rare phenomenon among the society of Kelly's snuggery, and the general pricked up his ears at sight of him. Bat, he knew, was not particularly friendly to his régime; on several occasions already he had shown signs of just the smoldering temper whose flaring up it had for so long been Kelly's anxiety to check. But it was well within the bounds of possibility that the hot eyed little firebrand had news that should be a welcome bit of illumination in the darkness. He watched him carefully.

By and by, over the rim of his thick tumbler, Bat's roving eye caught his, held it for a second, and then passed on. There was the remotest hint of a sidewise nod from the close cropped bullet head—a nod in the direction of the Kyleranny Arms' back premises, a rambling congeries of tumbledown stabling and mysterious sheds, dating from before the Famine and normally filled with the riding cobs of the farmers. In its murky recesses various little under-the-rose conversations had taken place in the past, and Kelly knew exactly to what Bat's unspoken invitation pointed.

Unobtrusively he strolled out into the littered yard, now commencing to be shadowed in the twilight. There was no one about to begin with, and Kelly, whistling idly between his teeth, went into the dark stable.

In a corner he found Bat, his face grave.

"For the love of God, Misther Kelly," he broke out, his voice husky with simulated horror, "will ye be after comin' out with me to the Mountain? There's the divil and all to pay."

John Kelly stuck his hands in his breeches pockets and regarded Mooney balefully.

"And what's the meaning of all this, Bartholomew?" he inquired with severity. "Ye're blubberin' like an owld woman—and ye've dhrink taken this minute," he added, sniffing suspiciously.

Bat contrived a dramatic shudder. Play acting was a new experience to him, and he threw himself into it with all the histrionic ability of the Irish, those pre-eminent character artists.

"Ye'd do well to hurry, indeed, Misther Kelly," he asseverated. "For I'm thinkin' it's dead altogether he'll be by the time ye get there, the poor fella—"

"Dead?" inquired Kelly. "What's this, then? *Arrah*, will ye howld yer tongue and talk sense, Mooney?"

"O murdher, murdher," wailed Bat, warming to his work. "Wirra wirra, the poor man—"

Kelly took him by the Isabella colored neckerchief and shook him.

"Now, out with it," he said furiously. "Who is it ye're chatting about now?"

Mooney gasped.

"'Tis owld Martin Reilly, the poor cod," he said with a hint of tears in his voice. "They have him up there—the lads that's in hidin' up yondher—and they set to slit the throat of him, the way ye'd shtab a cow—"

"What's that?" snapped Kelly. "Reilly, ye say? What's he doin' up there?"

"'Twas in the wood they cot him," Bat swung into the higher flights of invention, "and him thrappin' rabbits, as innocent as the day. He shtumbled on their nest, the unlucky divil, by what was told me; and they've sworn they'll have his life. And ye know, Misther Kelly," he added with just the right amount of gravity, "what them lads up there are like. They'll be the death of him."

It was a picturesque and alarming tale. Old Reilly was a town character, and a close crony of John Kelly's, as Bat knew exceedingly well. A mere imagined report of wars or rumors of wars in the Mountain might very likely have set Kelly to making inquiries before he took any rapid action; but when it came to the matter of a friend—and of the helpless old Reilly at that—in the hands of the none too particular gentlemen hiding in the fastnesses up above, why, that was another matter. Bat Mooney, unknown to himself, was a psychologist of no mean attainments, when he invented his pretty story.

Kelly looked at him for a moment, hesitating, and Bat's heart was in his mouth. Then the general grunted and thrust his way into the bar once more. He raised his voice, interrupting the buzz of conversation, the bickerings over the price of heifers, and the friendly and ferocious arguments which enliven any Irish bar parlor.

"Did any one see Martin Reilly this day?" he called.

The conversation ceased abruptly. A young farmer at the back of the room replied.

"I seen him ere this morning," he said. "And he on the Mountain road, with an owld tarrier he does be usin' for rabbiting, and ferrets in a bag."

Click! Something went so inside Bat Mooney, and he felt the relief of a man taken out of a strait jacket. It need not be said that he had known well enough that Reilly was in the Mountain that day before launching his scheme, but corroboration such as this was more than he had dared expect.

Something like a groan broke from Kelly's chest. Bat touched him on the arm.

"Come you now, Misther Kelly," he said. "Leave me slap the harness on the horse, and do you dhrive like the wind. The saints guide ye," he added piously, "for faith I'm thinkin' ye may well find what ye'd not care to find."

"*Arrah musha*, will ye be silent!" said Kelly. He turned abruptly and thrust open the glass door that led to the inner sanctum behind the bar. "Theresa," he called to his wife, "I'm for the road—a small matther of business. I'll not be from ye long. Do ye tend the bar meanwhile."

Mrs. Kelly came quickly to the door, protesting.

"Ye're an owld fool, John Kelly," she said. "Traipsin' and meanderin' about the counthry, if only one of the scuff of the barony whistles to ye. Ye'll not go out this night!"

Bat cursed all women in his heart, but for once Kelly stood up to his lady wife.

"Hush now, Theresa," he said firmly, "and don't be interferin' in what doesn't concern ye. Do ye do as I tell ye, and I'll be with ye again in a couple of hours, no more."

He went out of the room, with Bat Mooney in his wake, and Mrs. Kelly's screamed benediction tingling in his ears. Together he and Bat rammed a tall chestnut into the shafts of his high dogcart; and in five minutes the general was spinning alone up the darkened street.

Bat Mooney watched him driving off into the dusk with something of the expression of a small boy who has set a firework to his father's coat tails and waits for it to burst. Then he broke into a sour grin, cursed under his breath, and dived into the darksome back parlor of Clancy's place.

"Give me the sign of whisky, Clancy," he said to the black browed, scowling proprietor. "And husht! do ye listen here to me . . ."

V

GOGARTY and Dennistoun faced each other in the office once more. The colonel's brow was more cloudy than ever, and Dennistoun himself looked genuinely worried.

"It's a pretty tall order, sir," he was saying doubtfully.

The colonel chewed on his cigar.

"Perhaps," he said. "But I see no other way out of it, Dennistoun. I'm certainly not going to let this fellow—what's his name? O'Riordan?—get at John Kelly without doing something to stop it. And if we warn John out and out—"

"Exactly, sir," said the major. "Gives the whole show away. Still—" he hesitated—"I don't know that I like it. This arrest on suspicion business is going a trifle far. After all, we've nothing definite against Kelly."

"That's not the point, Dennistoun," said Gogarty. "The question is, are we going to allow Kelly, who's in a way a friend of ours, to get a bullet in the back from a gunman without doing what we can to stop it. I don't think there's any doubt about the answer to that one. And—" he flipped open the wire from Dublin—"if these people say anything about it we're covered. Use your discretion. That's what all this chapter of advice amounts to, after all, isn't it? And there's Quin's wire from his people as well."

"What's Quin say, sir?" asked Dennistoun.

"Agrees with me," the colonel replied, rising. "No, let's get it over, Dennistoun. It may only be for a couple of days, anyhow; and I'd not sleep if I thought Kelly—I.R.A. or no—was going to be put out of the way by an enemy." He struck his hand on a bell, and an orderly entered. "Tell the adjutant and the sergeant-major I'd like to see them," he said. "Dennistoun, you stay here in charge. I'll go down and do this myself."

Kyleranny's evening streets took one look at the armed party sliding through them in a couple of military cars, with the colonel in the first one, and half a dozen steel hatted troopers in the second—took one look and incontinently went to ground. Shutters went up, lights were extinguished in the shortest of short order; pedestrians scurried home. War was come to Kyleranny, and sensible people kept out of its way.

At the door of the Kyleranny Arms the cars pulled up with a jerk. The colonel got out and, with the sergeant-major in close attendance, ran up the steps. At the top, her face white with sudden apprehension, Mrs. Kelly met him.

"Och, holy St. Anthony, Colonel!" she ejaculated at his question. "And for what'd ye be after wantin' the poor lad for? And you with the sodgers and guns and the like. The Lord be between us and harrm, the sight of thim gave me a weakness, the way me knees'd be knockin' together like nutcrackers."

"Where is he, Mrs. Kelly?" Gogarty's voice was crisp.

"Indeed, your Honor, and sayin' it in yer presence, the divil knows. An hour ago—what, no, two hours it is—he comes to me and, says he, 'Theresa,' he says, 'do ye look after the bareen; for it's called away on business I am, and I'll not be long.' "

"Called away, eh?" asked the colonel. "Who called him, d'ye know?"

Mrs. Kelly looked him straight in the eye, and there was little weakness in her demeanor.

"Col'nel Gogarty," she said, "it's you that's the fine gentleman, and it's the truth I'm tellin' ye now. 'Twas that lyin', slinkin' divil's brat Bartholomew Mooney—and it's into the Mountain himself's gone, this two hours."

"Sergeant-major," said Gogarty sharply, "clear this room, and have a sentry on the door." His face was grim, with a look on it Kyleranny had not seen before. He faced Mrs. Kelly as a friend when they were alone.

"Now, Theresa," he said, "you must take a hold on yourself. Did ye ever hear—" he had dropped into his native

brogue—"of a lad by the name of Denis O'Riordan?"

If Gogarty had had any previous doubt of the woman's sincerity, it was dispelled by her face at mention of the name.

"O'Riordan?" she asked in a whisper. "For heaven's love, Col'nel *achudth*, ye're not tellin' me that murdherin' vilyan's here?"

Gogarty nodded.

"I'm afraid so, Theresa," he said. "And John—"

He did not need to finish, for Mrs. Kelly interrupted him by a strong attack of Irish hysterics. The colonel went to the door.

"Send some one in to look after Mrs. Kelly," he ordered. "You, Sergeant-major, take four men and stop here. Search the place, and arrest any one trying to get in or out. I'm going back to barracks, and I'll be sending patrols down in half an hour. Written report to me, please, every three hours."

He took the steps in his stride and leaped into the car.

"Barracks!" he snapped. "And hurry!"

Dennistoun was standing with the sentry at the gate as the car whirled up.

"Well, sir?" he asked, with a glance at Gogarty's face.

"Sound the alarm, trumpeter—and the double!" rasped the colonel. "Come inside, Dennistoun. We're for it at last—"

VI

DENIS O'RIORDAN, that highly wanted gentleman, sat on the table in the dugout, crooning to himself and patting the machine gun at his side. The guttering light of the lamp shone on his strong fanatic's face, with the clean cut jaw and opalescent, luminous eyes; he looked, as so many of his rebel kindred did, like a lean saint, ridden and bedeviled by the very violence of his emotions: pale, drawn, hollow cheeked, and with a kind of super-courage radiating from him, exalted and not of this world.

He was wet and mud splashed still, for he had just come in from setting a dozen of the men to their task—that of digging a three foot trench across the Kyleranny road, sited so as to be unseen from the front until anything approaching was too close to it to halt and turn, and commanded at a hundred yards' range by a clump of limestone rocks, a heaven discovered nest for the machine gun. It was a simple trap, but deadly; anything coming along that road—say a carload of police or military—would plunge into the trench before they even saw it, and be swept out of existence by the gun long ere they could tumble from the wrecked vehicle on to the road.

And if any did, O'Riordan was at that moment watching his "bombing instructor" with a couple of men squatted on the floor, busily manufacturing the rough but none the less effective grenade whose details he had given them the previous night.

He was waiting, anxiously; waiting for John Kelly, and the success of Bat Mooney's stratagem in enticing him up out of Kyleranny. That would be one half of his task done, he thought; then—he smiled twistedly—it would be queer if the military or the police, or both, did not come hotfoot in search of the innkeeper; they were so thick with him, they'd be lookin' for him for sure. And there was another little scheme of Bat's to be reckoned with as well—he'd be about playin' that now, reckoned Denis. It all fitted in neat enough. There would be wild doings this night.

He crooned away at his air—the heart-rending pathos of the "Wearin' Of The Green"—and finally words took shape to it. But they were not the familiar words of Ireland's distress, and Napper Tandy had no place in this ditty:

"Oh tell me, Shaun O'Farrell, where the meetin's goin' to be,
At the old spot by the riverside well known to you an' me.
As a token thrue for signal, whistle up the marchin' chune—
An' we're off to Dublin Castle at the risin' of the moon!"

One of the bomb makers looked up.

"Where'd ye come by the song, Denis?" he said. "New, is it?"

O'Riordan opened his mouth and sang on:

"There beside the singin' river that dark mass of men was seen,
An' they pledged their oath in silence to their own beloved green . . ."

"New, is it?" he asked scornfully. "'Twas old when yer dads were boys. 'Tis an old ancient song—but bedad, it's comin' thrue."

He dropped once more into his crooning, and then suddenly rolled out the last line—

"An' it's death to ruddy England at the risin' of the moon!"

The men were looking at him raptly, like hounds first scenting game.

"By damn, 'tis sthrong stuff, Denis!" said one of them admiringly. He began to hum the tune again. Denis snorted.

"Sthrong, he says," he sneered. "Sthrong! And well it may be sthrong, with the weak backed boys that's listenin' to it in these times. Sthrong! My soul!"

He broke off short, listening. There was a heavy tramp of feet on the stair, a turmoil of voices. The door was flung open, and John Kelly stood on the threshhold, his sanguine face more florid than ever with rage, and his hands securely held behind him by a couple of the refugees. The first part of Bat Mooney's little scheme had worked perfectly.

O'RIORDAN got down from the table.

"Well, Gineral John Kelly," he said acidly. "And a fine good evenin' to ye. I hope yer health's keepin' good."

Kelly faced the sneer without blenching, although his heart may have tripped a beat. There was no mistaking O'Riordan's attitude, and he recognized with a shock of indignation the hand of Bat Mooney in all this.

"So it's you, Denis?" he said quietly.

"It is," O'Riordan's voice cut like a knife. "And sorrow the day for you, John Kelly."

"And what," asked the general composedly, "is it brings ye down here among us again, Denis? 'Tis this long while that ye haven't been runnin' with the lads—and indeed, 'twas runnin' a trifle swiftly ye left us, I believe. But there, I suppose it's for yer bit of spoort and funnin' ye're back again. Anyway, ye've started well." He glanced down at his own tattered clothing; his captors had not been any too gentle in dragging him from the seat of his gig, nor had it been done without argument.

O'Riordan laughed almost hysterically.

"Spoort, is it?" he asked. "Ye'll learn whether it's spoort I'm here for, John Kelly—soon enough ye'll learn. And it's the last thing ye will learn, me buck!"

Kelly let his glance travel contemptuously from O'Riordan's head to his feet.

"Ye've not improved, I see, Denis," he said coldly. "Still the full mouth and the empty head. Now, what's the meanin' of all this play?"

"That's what ye're goin' to learn, me gallant Gineral," said O'Riordan. "It's six years I've waited for this—and lain out on the sod with me belly empty and starvin' with the cold, thinkin' of ye settin' behind the bar down yonder with a noggin of sperrits at yer elbow, and a cigar in the ugly mug of ye as like as not, tradin' and traffickin' with the English as gay as ye please. And so ye're a gineral in th' I. R. A, are ye? Well, th' I.R.A'll be a gineral short on their roll this night, ye damned bethrayer! Now, let's see what ye've to say for yerself."

Kelly suddenly wrenched one of his arms free from the grasp of the man that was holding it, and found himself looking down the muzzle of O'Riordan's automatic. He waved it aside.

"Ach, put it away, Denis," he said coolly. "I'm not armed, anyway—and if I was I'd not waste good powder on ye. There's others'll do that soon enough, and a good riddance to ourselves and everybody. 'Tis only the pipe I was lookin' for."

He fished in his pocket and produced the battered old black briar he affected, filled it casually, lighted and finally turned to Denis once more.

"Now," he said, "there's a hell of a lot of talk this night about what ye are goin' to do and what ye're not, Denis O'Riordan. And I suppose—judgin' from the antics ye've been playin' with me—that ye think ye're thravelin' the counthry unbeknownst, eh? Denis O'Riordan, the fly-be-night terror; is that how it is? Well, Denis, troth and I'm sorry to undeceive ye; but they've been watchin' for ye down beyant for a day or better, an' they're ready for ye. So bite on that, me playboy!"

O'Riordan said nothing whatever for a moment, stroking the machine gun at his side. Then he laughed creakily.

"Kelly," he said, and his tone was finally belittling, "ye're more of a fool than I thought. D'ye think I didn't know about the troops and the polis shtandin' to down yonder? And d'ye think we've not a thrap set on the road to catch thim when they come up here? And why should they come up here, says you? They'll come lookin' for their good old friend John Kelly—that's why. And who'll tell thim you're here in the Mountain, John? Why, if your wife doesn't, John, Bat Mooney will—and what's more he'll lead thim head first into the thrap we have for thim, John. *'Ochone*, Col'nel Gogarty,' Bat'll say, 'come ye now with me and rescue the bowld John Kelly from them divils up the Mountain!' And d'ye think Gogarty, with his fat brains, won't be convinced? Ye know better, Kelly. Bat bought you and sold you this night with his tale; d'ye think he can't buy and sell owld Gogarty?"

He paused and cleared his throat with the nervous rasp of the unpractised orator. Kelly said nothing, but smoked on.

"And when all's over," continued O'Riordan, "and Gogarty's a dead man and twenty, maybe, of his throopers with him, and maybe too a few of the polis, who'll get the blame for dhrawin' thim to the thrap? Bat Mooney, ye say? Ah, but Bat comes with us, and we'll be far enough from here by then. Who else? Who but John Kelly, that's found stretched dead on the ground with a rifle in his hands, pointin' at the throops? D'ye see now, me clever jackass, who's got the spoort of this? To be sure, it won't be any English bullet that's killed ye. I'll do that meself, for what ye did six years gone, warnin' the English blackgyard before I c'd dhrill him, ye dirty sneak. And when ye're fryin' in hell, John Kelly, ye can be thinkin' of who'll get the blame, and the latter end of yer wife, Kelly, and the Kyleranny Arms ye're so proud of. 'Tis persecuted she'll be, John me boy, and th' owld place'll burn, for the English'll be that mad they'll tear iron!"

The man was frothing at the mouth with fury, and his eyes were starting out of his head as he concluded. Kelly smoked on, impassive as a Chinese idol. Then he said as quietly as ever—

"And was there anything else, Denis?"

O'Riordan stopped ranting, as if a tap had been turned off; the placid scorn in Kelly's voice acted as a cold douche to his excited brain, and he became deadly business-like once more.

"Outside, boys," he said to the other men. "We'll get into position now, for I believe it'll not be long before they're comin' up the road. And as for you, me brave fella,"—he stuck the muzzle of his automatic into Kelly's ribs—"you'll come with me. And unless ye're anxious to go to hell an hour or so before yer time, do ye try no tricks!"

THE NIGHT was dark as yet, but cloudless and with the promise of an Autumn moon later on. On the Mountain's flanks the scattered patches of woodland were blacker than the surrounding wastes, from which rose a kind of faint luminosity, the reflection of the sky on myriads of dry grass blades and heather spikes. The road, a narrow, poorly metaled track between the inevitable stone walls, glimmered faintly, a ribbon of mystery

stretching down toward the plain; and very far away, a mere steady mutter against the silence, there came the diapason of the Atlantic rollers towering steadily in on some strand.

At a crook in the road, just where it dipped to the bed of a trickling stream, the trench had been dug—a deep gash, sufficient to break the back of any ordinary automobile that struck it. From the Kyleranny side it was invisible until it was almost under a car's front wheels; and the pitch of the road would inevitably run any incautious driver blundering into it before he could check his speed.

Behind the stone walls crouched a dozen men with the grenades, and a few odd shotguns. There were no rifles among O'Riordan's party, but they were not needed. The Lewis gun itself was enough, properly handled, to riddle a stalled car and its occupants in thirty seconds; so at least O'Riordan, who had seen this type of thing before, maintained.

A hundred yards or so on the Mountain side of the trench, the ground shot upward into a little eminence, studded with gray limestone blocks and outcrops, and crowned by a kind of natural fort of the same rough stone. It looked straight down on the road below, and commanded as well the straight stretch along which the enemy must come before turning down toward the trench and stream. It was an ideal site for the machine gun; even in that dimpsey light it would be hard to avoid hitting the target of a stranded car.

O'Riordan, automatic in hand and the Lewis gun and tray carrier over his shoulder, drove Kelly in front of him. He had already posted the grenade men himself, and left with them instructions to hold their hands until the third burst of the machine gun. He had his calculations nicely made, had Denis O'Riordan.

"Walk ye ahead of me, Kelly," he said between his teeth. "And it'd be well for ye to be puttin' up any prayers ye'll be needin' now—for in awhile it'll be too late."

There was a kind of somber elation about him, as of one who sees a dream coming to fulfilment. He was about ten times more dangerous than anything John Kelly had hitherto encountered, and Kelly was entirely aware of his own situation.

He did not doubt for an instant that O'Riordan was completely capable of carrying into execution any or all of his threats—and there was a most unpleasant deal of force in the gunman's line of reasoning about the consequences of the ambush. They would inevitably fall upon innocent Kyleranny, and heaviest of all upon his own wife and property, Kelly admitted to himself. He could very well picture O'Riordan setting the stage for the dramatic discovery of the corpse of John Kelly, rifle in hand against the forces of the Crown; and also the subsequent reprisals for the death, as his captor so gleefully prognosticated, of Gogarty and his troopers . . .

It was a tight corner, and Kelly found himself perilously near to the final prayers which were so strongly recommended to him.

O'Riordan shepherded him into the little natural fort formed by the rocks at the crest of the high ground. Then he dropped the Lewis gun on the grass, motioned to the general to sit, and squatted on his hunkers himself, automatic in hand, and his glittering eyes fixed on his enemy.

He began to hum the tune again and then broke into a harsh laugh.

"And it's death to ruddy England—at the risin' of the moon," he said savagely. "So it is, me fine fella, and death to you too. Look yondher—" he swung the muzzle of the automatic eastward, where a faint luminosity was already beginning to show on the horizon—"there she rises, and ye'll not see her set. So chew on that, Kelly."

He clasped his hands round his knees and rocked backward and forward in, a paroxysm of rage.

John Kelly sat calmly opposite him, his empty pipe in his mouth, his brain working furiously.

VII

CLANCY'S place in Kyleranny—"High Class Groceries: Licensed to sell Beer, Spirits and Tobacco"—was a darksome establishment in a muddy side alley, distinguished mainly for its penetrating aroma of stale fish. Indeed, a wag might have suggested some connection between the odor in question and that of some of the clandestine transactions discussed and brought to fruition in Clancy's murky back parlor; for the generally conspiratorial air of the place, and of its frowzy, low browed proprietor, were not in any way misleading.

Bat Mooney leaned over the sloppy, zinc covered counter, whispering earnestly to Clancy. The latter's unprepossessing visage reflected first interest, then doubt, then alarm, and finally consternation in successive waves as he took in what Bat was proposing; and at the conclusion of the recital he shook his head with great decision.

"Not I!" he said. "I'll not be goin' near the same barracks. I'd as well be undher the sod, Bat Mooney, and ye know it."

Mooney leaned closer and fixed him with a remorseless eye. In a few well chosen phrases he told Clancy some of the things he need not be, and added by way of good measure a brief but striking forecast of what was likely to happen to him if he continued in his intransigent attitude. Apparently the threat was efficacious, for Clancy nodded sulkily at last, and produced a battered pen, an ink bottle and a sheet torn from an account book.

"There ye are," he said. "Do ye write it, for I've no schoolin'."

Bat, with many a grimace and much agonized protrusion of the tongue, finally achieved a smudged and blotted three or four lines of spidery hand of write, and the two of them regarded it with pride.

"Now," said Bat, "do ye conthrive a stratagem, Clancy, the way that'll come to the hands of owld Gogarty—or Quin'd do, but better Gogarty: he's the more simple, glory be to him. And then t'would be better for ye to go to yer bed and dhraw the blind, for there'll be quare doin's in Kyleranny ere mornin'."

Clancy nodded.

"And yourself, Bat?" he inquired.

"Let you lend me the loan of the owld bicycle," said Mooney. "And I'll be away into the Mountain like a hare. And ye'll be tellin' the polis," he added earnestly, "when they're questionin' ye, that ye saw me this night, thrue, but that it's goin' home to me supper I was, and ye can embroidher on that the best way ye can."

Ten minutes later a black shape flitted out of Kyleranny by devious byways, pushing an ancient bicycle. Once clear of the town, Bat leaped to the saddle and commenced pedaling furiously into the darkness, so furiously that he came very near to falling into the trench awaiting Gogarty and the Ragpickers.

Clancy stood for some minutes after Bat had vanished into the night, looking down at the scrap of paper and scratching his head. His was no heroic temper; he preferred mere lowering sulks to direct action any day of the week; but he did not love Gogarty and the troops. His establishment had been raided far too often by parties of brusk and suspicious soldiery to permit him to entertain any especial liking for the men in khaki, and an opportunity to take a hand in their discomfiture was a tempting bait.

Still, when it came to getting Bat's scrawled message into the barracks—by whatever stratagem it was to be done—that was another thing again. It was far too much like thrusting his head into the lion's jaws to please Jeremiah Clancy. No, another scheme must be devised, and as he pondered it came to him, so that he snapped his fingers in delight. He took his greasy cap from a nail behind the door and slipped out unobtrusively into the quiet street.

Theresa Kelly was sitting in the inner parlor of the Kyleranny Arms, in a quite justifiable state of twitter. The colonel's surprise announcement of O'Riordan's presence in the district, coupled with her husband's rapidly lengthening absence,

was enough to try the stoutest nerves; and the good lady, with the sergeant-major sympathetically in attendance, was now giving way to the "weakness" appropriate to the occasion, and in a high state of nervous tension—signalized by frequent callings on assorted saints, and a tendency to jump hysterically at the slightest sound or movement. The hotel was empty, and the sergeant-major had posted sentries at the front and back door, a matter of which Jeremiah Clancy, sneaking wraith-like along under the wall, was in complete ignorance.

His plan for getting Bat Mooney's message into the Ragpickers' hands was simply to give it to Theresa. He reasoned, and not without justification, that the lady would be sufficiently startled at sight of it to fly at once to the authorities; and whether it fell into Quin's hands first, or Gogarty's, was after all a matter of small moment. The point was to get it on its way as soon as possible.

He reckoned, however, seriously without his host; which is why the sergeant-major, that keen and intelligent warrant officer, was rudely interrupted in his attempts to calm Mrs. Kelly down by a sudden challenge outside the window, followed by a scuffle and the voice of one of his sentries calling him in blasphemous and urgent tones.

Mrs. Kelly screamed and flung her apron over her head. The sergeant-major, snatching at his revolver, made a dive for the door. Outside he ran into the sentry, one of whose hands was occupied with his rifle and bayonet, while the other grasped the terrified Clancy firmly by the scruff of the neck.

"What's all this?" demanded the sergeant-major.

"Found 'im crawlin' along by the wall, sir," said the sentry, holding tightly to his prize. " 'E's Clancy, that runs the *shebeen*, 'e is—a bloomin' Sinner, too."

"All right, let him up." The sergeant-major turned his head over his shoulder and summoned another trooper from within the hostelry. "Here, Jennings," he said, "search this chap. Stand still, you!" to the discomfited Clancy. "Let's see what you've got about you."

Unceremonious but thorough frisking soon resulted in the discovery of a scrawled fragment of paper tucked away inside the lining of Clancy's cap. The sergeant-major spread it open and read it by the light shining from the window.

"Them that wants Kelly," it ran, "let them look for him tonight on the Mountain road."

That was all. The message was unsigned.

The sergeant-major was an individual who had not obtained his promotion by going to sleep on the job. He turned to the trooper.

"Jennings," he said, "take this up to the C. O. at the barracks. See him personally. Tell him where it was found and how. And don't double, Jennings. Run like hell!"

The trooper grinned and made off. The sergeant-major turned to Clancy.

"And as for you," he said, "I'll keep an eye on you until I get further orders, me lad. Now, march!"

And the unfortunate keeper of the most notorious drinking den in Kyleranny found himself locked expeditiously into an outhouse and left there to meditate on the foolishness of interfering with the little plans of gentlemen like Bat Mooney.

COLONEL GOGARTY looked at the note and grunted.

"What the devil?" he inquired of the world in general and tossed the scrap of paper to Dennistoun.

The major puffed out his cheeks as he studied the scrawl.

"Fake, sir," he said abruptly. "We've seen this sort of thing before."

Gogarty nodded, a little absently.

"Yes," he said. "I suppose so. But why?"

"Part of the game," said Dennistoun. "Some one knows we'll not let Kelly get into trouble without looking into it, and we're intended to look into it where they want us to. The thing's a trap."

"I suppose so," said Gogarty reluctantly. "And yet it isn't like them. I wonder who's at the bottom of it, besides O'Riordan. This thing—" he tapped the scribble—"isn't his work."

"Better get Quin," said the major. "He's up in all the locals—knows 'em better than we do."

"Very well." Gogarty rose to his feet. "But you understand, Dennistoun, that I'm going to follow this up. There's no particular sense, of course, in blundering into the trap; but I'm pretty clear these devils have got Kelly out there, and I'm certainly not going to sit still and let them do what they like. You agree with me, of course?"

"Of course," said Dennistoun. "And we'll get Quin's men in on it, as well. I think—" he chuckled—"that these birds in the Mountain might easily get a shock before the night's out. There's such a thing as a counter-ambush, Colonel."

Gogarty smiled for the first time for hours.

"I see," he said. "A sound scheme. Look here, Major, you look after the details of all that. Better take two troops, I should say, and get Quin to lend you half a dozen men as guides. Run 'em out in the cars as far as you think it's safe, and then on on foot. Is that the idea you had?"

Dennistoun grinned like a schoolboy.

"Something like that," he said. "But what about you, sir?"

"Leave me out of it," said the colonel. "I'm going right in after Kelly, as a matter of fact, although I don't want any one but yourself to know it. I think our old friend may need help. No, I won't run any extra risks. It'll be like this—"

He spoke for five minutes, and the major, who had fallen very grave at the colonel's suggestion, nodded relievedly.

"Very good, sir," he said. "I'll get Quin and his ruffians. We'll start, say, in half an hour. That suit you?"

Gogarty went to the window and drew up the blind.

"Yes," he said. "There'll be a moon in an hour from now. It'll help."

VIII

BAT MOONEY fell off his bicycle within a yard or two of the trench in the road. A cautious head raised itself over the stone wall.

"Is that yerself, Bat?" it said.

"It is," Mooney replied in the same stage whisper. "Where's Denis?"

"Up on top," said the other jerking a finger in the direction of the rock crowned height, "with John Kelly undher his thumb, the dirty slob."

"Then ye got him?" asked Bat interestedly.

The other man laughed.

"To be sure," he said. "Didn't he come paradin' along the road, so pleasant as ye please, in his dhrivin' gig—and straight into our arms? How'd ye manage it, Bat?"

"I'll tell ye another time," said Mooney. "Are ye all ready here, boys?" He looked quickly at the details of the ambush, and nodded as if satisfied. "Keep a lively lookout, now, for I b'lieve it won't be long before ye've visitors."

He moved off along the road.

"I'll just take a visit to Denis," he said over his shoulder. "He'll have insthructions for us, maybe."

Bat stumbled up the hill, over the dry grass and between the boulders, ghostly in the faint light. As he climbed, he observed that the moon was not far from its rising in the east, and that objects were becoming easier to distinguish; in half an hour, he thought to himself, they would have excellent illumination for the play to be staged on the road below him. He licked his lips sinfully, in excited anticipation. Then he was challenged in a low voice by O'Riordan, and turned the corner of a rock to find him still guarding his prisoner.

"So ye're here, Misther Kelly," he said ironically. "Begob, but I'm glad to see ye settin' there so comforatable. And did ye find owld Martin Reilly?" Bat sniggered irrepressibly at the last shaft of wit.

"Ah, it's you, Bat."

John Kelly's voice was entirely level

and he sat imperturbably chewing on the stem of his cold pipe. He made no attempt to continue the conversation, however, or to express surprise or resentment. O'Riordan spoke in the little silence that followed.

"Let you take a howlt on yer tongue, now, Bat Mooney, and leave the man to be thinkin' peaceful. He's a deal of thinkin' to do, the poor fella."

The words were spoken entirely seriously, and even with a sort of sympathy. O'Riordan, for all his determination to "stretch" Kelly tonight, was, like many another of his countrymen, rapidly recovering from his vindictive fury now that he saw his victim beyond all chance of rescue. Fanatic as he may have been, and contriver of a murderous ambuscade as he desired to be, he still felt, through the hate which devoured him for the man who had, in his own view, betrayed him, a sneaking warmth and pity, not decreased by the cool and unshaken courage with which John Kelly was facing his end.

Not so Bat Mooney. He spat once again, venomously.

"It's howld my whisht, eh, Denis?" he said. "Well, I'll not, then. It's this long time since John Kelly's been blue molded for want of tellin' a word or two—and maybe there'll not be another chance, praise be to the saints! Listen here, me splendid man—"

He was well embarked on a torrent of vituperation, almost choking with the bitter phrases that stumbled over one another for precedence, when O'Riordan leaped to his feet.

"Will ye be after stoppin' yer dirty gob, Batholomew Mooney?" he said under his breath. "Or d'ye want I should discipline ye here and now? 'Twouldn't need so much—"

For an instant they faced each other in the illusory light. Then Bat broke out sneeringly:

"Aha, so that's it, Denis! Playin' both sides, is it, like John Kelly himself? Ye stinkin' brock, think shame to yerself this night. Ye're—"

O'Riordan gripped him by the throat like a flash, shook him roughly, and finally flung him breathless on the grass in front of him.

"Now," he said, "the next time it'll be the bullet, Mooney. I'll stand no triflin' with, and ye can remember that. Go down now below—that's an ordher, Mooney—and wait ye there until ye hear thim comin' along the road. And tell the bhoys there there's not a bomb to be thrown or trigger pulled until ye hear the machine gun firin'. Then leave them turn loose with everything they've got."

Bat scrambled to his feet, and ran down the hill without a word of reply. O'Riordan turned, pistol still in hand, to the immobile John Kelly.

"And that's the stuff we've to deal with," he said. "A mouthful of ugly talk, and a bellyful of wind—and nothin' else. Ah, sorra, sorra the day Denis O'Riordan took to thrafficking with the likes of thim."

HE STARED gloomily at Kelly.

"And what's to be the end?" he said, the strange note of amity still in his voice. "Tell me that, now, John Kelly, while ye've time. What'll it all come to? You'll go—for go ye shall, ye lousy traitor!— and I'll go; soon enough I'll go, and I know it, though whether it's the rope or the bullet for me is not told me. And Collins an' the rest of them, they'll go too, for in this Ireland today a man can't live forever. We'll die, all of us after our fashion for Ireland; and then what? Will we look down from the side of Peter and see the black English scuts still oppressin' us? Will we have died for nothin' at the latter end? Tell me that, Kelly."

The general remained silent, and the two men sat motionless, as oddly assorted a pair as might have been found in all Ireland, that odd place. The moon slowly pushed its silver edge up over the shoulder of the Mountain, flooding the scene with its liquid radiance, and turning O'Riordan's white face into a wedge of

weird lights and shadows. He began to croon again to himself, his queer, haunted eyes glittering like stones. Apparently he had for the moment forgotten the death he had prepared for Kelly, although the pistol was still directed at the general's stomach, and Kelly knew his man well enough to have no illusions whatever about his own danger. O'Riordan went on, almost dreamily.

"There's times I think," he said, "that there's a divil loose in us Irish, an old cold divil that'll not let us forget a hurt, or trust a friend. Workin' within us he is, and conthrivin' day an' night, so's we'll sell them that's closest to us—the way ye sold me long ago, John Kelly: don't think I'm forgettin' it—and quarrel between ourselves bitter as weasels. It's him that's stood against us workin' together this long, long time, and runnin' the cruel English into the sea. Well they know it, too, the cunnin' schemers! Isn't it that that's given them the sway in Ireland always?"

He clasped his hand about his knees once more, the pistol's point deflected to the ground. Kelly shifted position ever so slightly as O'Riordan went on, his voice rising a little in the silent night.

"And what'll satisfy him, this old divil? There's but one thing, John Kelly, that'll set him to sleep and lettin' the Irish be. And what's that? Blood, John Kelly—seas and rivers of it. It's through blood he came to us, the blood of the boys Cromwell, and curse him, strung up years agone, and the boys that died in '98, and them that've gone before and since—killed by the English, John Kelly, that ye're so fond of. It's that way he came, and that's the way he'll go, through blood, and English blood. And here tonight we're making a beginnin' of it."

He looked down into the valley beneath him, deep in shadow, where the bombers lurked under the wall and the trench gaped for its victims. The road, from where they sat, was a ribbon of dull light, and the eye could follow it looping round the edge of the hill. Anything advancing along that track would be perfectly visible, long before it approached the ambush.

O'Riordan went on, in the tone of a mystic wrapped in his own thoughts.

"And you, John Kelly, that's sittin' there like an old toad, without a word out of ye, does it not hit ye too? Or have ye been colloguin' and conversin' so long with Gogarty and his like that ye've forgotten how to think as an Irishman? Listen to me awhile now, and I'll be singin' ye a song—and then, ye damned traitor, ye can prepare for the bullet . . . And it's not because ye sold me, John Kelly, for I'd forgive ye that, maybe, if ye were loyal; but because ye've gone back on holy Ireland, and may the saints teach ye better, ye Judas!"

He began to sing his song in a half voice, rocking back and forward, his face thrust out, his hands clasped still about his knees.

"'Oh, tell me, Shaun O'Farrell, where the meetin's goin' to be,
At the owld spot by the riverside, well known to you and me . . ."

He sang on, rapt. Once again Kelly stirred almost imperceptibly.

"As a token thrue for signal, whistle up the marchin' chune,"

"Listen to this, John Kelly, before ye die—

"'And it's either death or freedom at the risin' of the—"

Crack! The general had projected himself forward from his seat, all in one piece. His iron fist took O'Riordan under the chin; the neck snicked like a gun lock; and the leader of the insurgents collapsed like a wet sack.

Kelly possessed himself of his automatic and stood for a moment looking down at him.

"Faith, Denis," he said to himself, "it's the queer owld singer ye are."

He chuckled throatily and turned to look about him.

IX

DENIS O'RIORDAN came to himself with a spinning head and a very sore jaw. He was lying on the grass in the moonlight, and the first spectacle that greeted his clearing vision was John Kelly sitting on a rock, smoking his pipe and threatening him with his own pistol.

"Steady now, Denis me lad," said the general. "Easy does it, for if ye thry any tricks I'll drill you quicker than ye can think. Sit up—that's it—and get your brains clear; for I believe ye'll need them this night."

O'Riordan gaped stupidly at him for a moment. Then he broke into a bitter curse.

"Sit ye there, John Kelly," he said, "and have yer funnin' while ye can. It won't save ye, for the lads be up from below—as soon's they've done for Gogarty and yer friends—and they'll be doin' what I tell them."

Kelly laughed in whole hearted amusement.

"And so ye think, ye poor *omadhaun*, that Gogarty and the polis'll walk into yer trap for ye? Well, well, we've all got a head, but it's not all of us use it. Why, ye big noodle, they've been watchin' for this these months past. And what's more, me fine fella, they know ye're here, or I'm mighty mistook, and it's for that they've been standin' to arms. Ye didn't see fit to warn me—no doubt ye'd your reasons—and for awhile they had me puzzled with their maneuverin's. But now I'll wager a pound they're out across the counthry, scores and scores of them, and just lookin' for this kind o' thing. And what they'll say when they have ye surrounded and brought in, Denis O'Riordan, ye may ask yerself—there's no need for me to tell ye . . ."

O'Riordan sat up as if he had been stung.

"And ye think—?" he queried.

"There's no need to be thinkin'," Kelly interrupted. "I know."

"Ye're a dirty murderin' traitor," said Denis.

"I am not," Kelly replied equably. "Neither a traitor nor a murderer, Denis O'Riordan, and ye know it. But what I am is not a fool, and it's not my way to see Kyleranny turned outside in because a wild *gossoon* or two like yerself comes down and says so. Oh, I know they sent ye; ye needn't hold that over me. But here's what—them that sent ye didn't know this place the way I'm knowin' it, or the way that Gogarty's knowin' it either; that's flat. And the sooner ye quit this fool's business of goin' about stirrin' up mud, the sooner we'll have peace in Ireland, and peace the way we want it, too."

There was a silence, and then O'Riordan spoke.

"John Kelly," he said, "ye have me trapped. I've failed. Ye're too much for me, with yer blarneys and blandandherin's, and yer Gogartys and polis. I'm beat—beat out. And I'm askin' ye here and now to shoot me before ye—or if ye'll not, to lend me the loan of me pistol, and I'll do it meself. Me heart's broke on me—"

There were real tears in his voice, and the hand he stretched out to the general shook like a leaf. Kelly jumped to his feet and clapped him on the back.

"Don't talk that way, Denis *asthore*," he said comfortingly. "*Arrah*, there's no need to take on so. Tell me now, how much have the English against ye? Murder?"

O'Riordan shook his head.

"Not yet," he said.

"Then what are ye worryin' about?" said Kelly. "Get ye away out o' this and lie up for a time—there'll be peace here in Ireland in a year, Denis—and then out ye come, and who's to lay a finger on ye? Ye'll do betther, b'lieve me, for yerself and for Ireland as well that way than by any tricks and *tashpy* of this sort."

O'Riordan hesitated.

"And the boys down below?" he said. "They'll be in throuble over it, John, and 'twas me got them there. Leave me go down and warn them."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," said

Kelly decidedly. "Ye might well walk into owld Gogarty down there, for all ye know. I'll attend to all that. And now, do ye slip out o' this, the way ye came, whatever it was. And before ye go, Denis O'Riordan, here's John Kelly's hand for ye. Ye're a man and an Irishman, even if ye are a bit of a singin' idjit now and again."

O'Riordan gripped his fist, muttered a word or so of farewell, and was off down the reverse side of the eminence like a hare. Kelly looked after him and sighed.

"That's the way it is," he said. "A fine *grauver* boy as ever a man could see—but ye know how it is."

He shrugged and went off down to the road below, where the men in ambush were anxiously awaiting news of Denis O'Riordan—or of Bat Mooney, for that matter. About the last person in the world they looked for was John Kelly.

X

BAT MOONEY stumbled down the hill, choking with blind rage. His brain was in a whirl of fury, and red specks danced before his eyes at the recollection of his manhandling by Denis O'Riordan. An Irishman—even the most peaceable of Irishmen—is the last person in the world upon whom to lay violent hands, and no one could have accused Bat of being even half way peaceable. Trouble was his middle name, in his own estimation, which was all that counted; and he had, as a matter of fact, all Denis O'Riordan's capacity for raising it, without any of the gunman's patriotic idealism. And he was, even more than that gentleman himself, subject to fits of black, unreasoning anger, in which he was (to quote himself) "as apt to do one thing as another."

At the foot of the rise, on the road, he stopped and sat down, his head in his hands, fighting down the surges of passion that swept over him nauseatingly. Denis O'Riordan! The low *slopeen!* Layin' his dirty hands on Bat Mooney, the proud blackguard. There wasn't a man, no, nor woman either, in the circle of Ireland that'd have leave to do that thing, and get clear with it.

He sat there for long minutes, while his temper flared hotter and hotter. Up the road, a hundred yards distant maybe, there were the waiting men, the trench and the ambush; O'Riordan had given him a message for them, but it was never delivered. For Bat suddenly came to a resolution and rose to his feet, glancing cautiously about him. As he did so, from straight over his head he heard O'Riordan's voice uplifted in the "Risin' Of The Moon."

Bat paused and shook his fist at it, his mouth full of black curses. Then he slipped over the wall, light as a fox, cut out into the open, turned right and, half crouching, began to parallel the road back toward Kyleranny. Straight, in fact, into the faces of the oncoming troops and police. As he went, he recollected with a kind of sob the feel of O'Riordan's fingers clutching at his throat, and once more reckless fury surged up within him. Bat was in the grip of the "old cold devil" envisaged by Denis a few minutes previously, except that the devil was not cold but red hot.

A mile or so along the road, in the shelter of a clump of stunted trees, he halted and stood listening for any sign of the military party being on their way. It never occurred to him to doubt that come they would, or that Clancy and his message might have gone astray; Bat's temperament was not one of those that suffers much from doubts or hesitations. But he certainly got the surprise of his enterprising young life when, as he stood in the shadow of the trees, a couple of darker shadows detached themselves from their surroundings and fell heavily upon him—so heavily, indeed, as to knock most of the breath from his body and make it a couple of minutes before he could do anyanything else but gasp and crow.

And when in course of time he found his breath and speech it was to discover Colonel Gogarty towering over him in the moonlight, and a dozen tall shapes, with the familiar and accursed round helmets

of steel, moving swiftly past on the road. The jig was up.

The colonel, himself in steel helmet and with drawn revolver, glared down at Mooney.

"What are you doing here?" he asked uncompromisingly.

Bat felt a sudden quenching of the flames of wrath blazing within him. This was not what he had expected at all. He had looked forward to advancing along the road and putting a spoke in O'Riordan's wheel once for all by warning the blundering soldiers of the trap set for them; he pictured the careless offhand generosity of his attitude and the grateful thanks of "owld Gogarty". And lo! Here were the soldiers, but by no means blundering; rather proceeding forward in a stealthy, business-like manner (a couple of Hotchkiss automatic rifles passed him) that meant the biggest kind of trouble for the lads in front. And "owld Gogarty", so far from being grateful, or even pleased to see him, was frowning heavily in the moonlight, and prodding him in the ribs with a singularly hard and uncomfortable pistol barrel. Something had certainly gone wrong somewhere.

"Well?" inquired Gogarty again. "Out with it. What are you doing here, Mooney?"

Bat made up his mind. There was a chance, just one, that he might escape the wrath to come. He took it.

"Col'nel," he said in a dramatic whisper, "is it John Kelly ye're after?"

"What do you know about John Kelly?" Gogarty began; then a light broke on him. "Oh," he continued, "I see. So you're the gentleman that sends notes to Mrs. Kelly, are you? Now I wonder just why. However, we'll have more time to go into all that later. Where is Kelly, anyhow?"

"Denis O'Riordan has him up yondher," said Bat, "and he set to murdher him, the way he'd be revenged for what John Kelly did—"

"Yes, yes, I know," said Gogarty. "And who was it sent Kelly up here, Mooney? You, you little scoundrel. And there's an ambush on the road in front of us, eh? You see, we know all about it. Now—" his voice became suddenly cold and stern—"you'll do this, Mooney. You'll walk ahead of me up the road—fifty yards ahead. And you'll tell your silly ambush the game's up, and that I'll give them five minutes to make themselves scarce, and not to try any damned nonsense like this about here again. And then you can find your friend Denis O'Riordan, and tell *him* he's surrounded by this—Inspector Quin's the other side of the Mountain with fifty police—and that he can either fight it out, or come in and talk things over with me here on the road. And you can tell John Kelly I want to see him too."

Bat's knees knocked together at this program.

"I'd be in dread," he began.

The colonel reached out and took him by the scruff of the neck—and this time Bat omitted to see red over the proceeding—and shook him.

"Now, lead on," he snapped. "Or I'll begin to look into your share in this business, Mooney—and it'll be uncomfortable for you if I do, you little reptile. Come on, now, march!"

Bat's progress back along that stretch of mountain road was an experience he never forgot.

Behind him, moving remorselessly and according to the rules of war, came the armed—the very much armed—forces of the Crown, perfectly aware that there had been a little welcome prepared for them somewhere or other close at hand and entirely ready to deal with it. In front, crouching under the stone walls by the trench, were the refugees from the Mountain dugout, ill armed, provided with a few amateur bombs and shotguns, deadly enough things when turned on a capsized lorry and its helpless occupants, but ineffective as a handful of damp squibs against the Hotckisses and Mills grenades of the Ragpickers. True, there was O'Riordan with his single Lewis gun, Bat thought; but what was one, against a

string of trained men moving in extended order?

And—his knees knocked together as he considered it—what would the boys waiting there have to say to him, that came from the enemy, with a message from the enemy? That brought—so they'd be saying—the troops, armed and forewarned, straight as a line to the very spot prepared against their coming unsuspectingly? They'd have his life, and upon the whole he wouldn't blame them. And if they didn't, Denis O'Riordan, the gunman, the serious expert in murder, certainly would. Bat's teeth commenced to chatter.

And then behind him there was Gogarty, an exceedingly different Gogarty from the tall, good humored personage he had so often spat after, riding about Kyleranny's streets with a genial smile for every one. Grim he was now, and forbidding, the embodiment of the "sodgers'" power—and what was worse, apparently quite familiar with all Bat's dealings. He foresaw a stormy passage at the hands of the colonel, even if he did by some miracle escape what was in front of him.

A great dryness had taken hold on his throat, and his heart was pounding violently against his ribs; he felt weak and helpless. Fear—good honest fear—took hold of him, for the first time in his life, and the terror of Clancy's *shebeen* experienced a strong desire to sit down by the roadside and cry. He hesitated, hanging about in the middle of the road, until a sharp jab in the back notified him that the colonel was close in attendance.

"Get on there," said Gogarty, disguising his own amusement beneath a gruff and irritable enunciation. "We can't wait all night for you!"

Bat scuttled ahead, his eyes full of tears and his mouth of weak curses against every one and everything. In front of him was the stretch of moonlit road leading to the dip in which was the trench. It was, or might well be, he knew, swept from end to end by O'Riordan's gun on the crest of the hill, and his legs turned to water beneath him at the idea; it was one thing being in ambush, and quite another here on the open road. Still, there was the chance that Denis would not fire at a single man.

Yard by yard he advanced, groaning and perspiring, until at last he was looking down into the little valley; he could see the trench, a black scar across the white road, not fifty yards from him, and on each side of it, he knew, were the dozen or so refugees, bombs in hand, waiting for —what? Certainly not for what he had to tell them.

Once more he halted irresolute. No sound was audible—not a whisper or a murmur. Summoning his courage, he gave a cautious hail. There was no answer. He moved carefully up the road, thrusting his hands in the air as an extra precaution, and finally stood on the brink of the trench. Still there was that eery silence. He hailed again and got no answer once more. A sudden thrill ran through him and, leaping over the trench, he peered across the ominous stone wall. There was no one there. The place was deserted.

Colonel Gogarty walked up to Bat and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Now then," he said, "what's the meaning of this?"

Bat Mooney swung round to him, his mouth still open in astonishment.

"Before God, Col'nel," he said simply, "I don't know more than you do. They was here."

Gogarty set a whistle to his lips and blew. There was a rustling murmur among the heather and rocks, and the line of the Ragpickers' skirmishers became visible, moving rapidly forward in the moonlight. Dennistoun came up and saluted.

"Look at that," said Gogarty, pointing to the trench. The major glanced at it and nodded shortly. The affair needed no comment.

"And Kelly, sir?" he asked. Gogarty turned to the trembling Bat.

"What did they do with him, you?" he inquired.

Bat pointed a shaky forefinger to the

little eminence on whose summit he had left the general a prisoner.

"'Twas up there they had him," he said. "Denis O'Riordan—"

Gogarty jerked out his revolver once again. "Come on," he said to Dennistoun, "we've got to get him out of this."

He moved up the road, with the major in attendance, and the line of Ragpickers swept forward at his wave. Bat Mooney, in the grip of a stout corporal, brought up the rear; he was in the condition aptly phrased as a perishing funk.

Suddenly there came a sharp challenge from in front.

"'Alt! 'Oo goes there?" A rifle bolt clicked, and the party came to an abrupt stop.

A hearty voice answered out of the darkness, and at its tones Bat's overstrung nerves went altogether.

"Friend—friend, me lad!" it said. "Why, Col'nel, what in the divil's name are ye all out like this for?"

John Kelly strode into the middle of the group, his teeth glittering in an easy smile.

"A man'd think," he said coolly, "that there was throuble in the Mountain this night." He chuckled contentedly. "Here," he added, "Col'nel—here's a little toy I'm after findin' lyin' round; mebbe ye'd better take charge of it. It's a nasty business I'm not so pleased at havin' in my disthrict."

He took the Lewis gun from under his arm and handed it over to the amazed Gogarty.

XI

"YOU old ruffian!" Gogarty stared at the general, and then broke into a guffaw of laughter. "What have you been doing tonight?"

Kelly's expression in the moonlight was a masterpiece.

"Doin'?" he said. "Ah, Col'nel, can't a man take a quiet, pleasant stroll on the Mountain without havin' yerself an' the sodgers, and the polis as well, I make no doubt, leavin' their beds and scourin' the counthry after him? 'Tis up here I came, the way I'd be visitin' a poor sick lad that's in these parts—ye'd not know him, Col'nel—and here I'm goin' to me home again, quiet and peaceful, if ye'll let me—"

"Yes," said Gogarty with sarcasm, "and I suppose you've just picked this fellow up by the roadside." He displayed the machine gun. "And I suppose too you don't know anything whatever about the damned trench across the road back yonder, or Denis O'Riordan, or Bat Mooney either. Come on, John, out with it! What's your share in this business? Where's Denis O'Riordan? And where's the bunch of lads that were waiting for us by the trench there?"

Kelly laughed.

"Ah, ye know too much, Col'nel," he said. "There's no deceivin' you. 'Twas a little joke the boys had, to get us all out of our beds for nothin'. Indeed, I'm not sayin' 'twasn't a clever trick; the young lads round about'll have the laugh on us all, I believe—"

Gogarty cut him short.

"That's enough, Kelly," he said crisply. "You can't keep that up. I want to know where O'Riordan is, and all the others he had up here on this business. You can tell me, I know very well. So we'll just drop the comics for awhile, please."

Kelly's slow smile left his face in an instant, and he became deadly serious.

"Col'nel Gogarty," he said slowly, "will ye be good enough to consider what ye're askin' me? To bethray me own friends to ye, no less. As for O'Riordan, he's far enough away by this—we'd a thrifle of a quarrel, it's true, but it's settled between us now—and you'll not catch him this night. And for the other boys that was here, d'ye think I'd let ye lay hands on them, after they's seen the foolishness of their ways. They've gone where they came from, Col'nel, and it's my belief ye know what I mean by that—and ye may search for them, if ye like; ye'll not find them, and ye know it.

"But there's one thing I've brought ye, and that's what not many'd have done,

that's the elegant holy water shprinkler ye're holdin' under yer arm this minute; for them things I'll not have me boys hereabouts playin' with. Rough play's one thing, Col'nel, and black looks and may be a curse behind the hand now and then, but murdher's another; and there's to be no murdher in Kyleranny while John Kelly's on his two feet. Ye can put that in yer pipe and smoke it, Col'nel Gogarty—and also that John Kelly'll not give ye up a finger of one of his boys. Do yer own dirty work—although faith I'll say this, there's not a one meself or Kyleranny'd sooner have to do it, if it must be done. But don't ask me or any one else to help ye. That's all I've to say, Col'nel."

He fell silent, and for awhile there was no sound on the moonlit road. Then Gogarty turned to Dennistoun.

"Sound the rally, Major," he ordered, "and we'll go home. I'm inclined to think we've seen the last of O'Riordan; and there's a good deal in what John says about the others. I think we'll let well alone and call it a night."

Side by side, at the rear of the marching troops, Kelly and Gogarty tramped homeward. After a long half mile of taciturnity, Kelly suddenly laughed once more.

"Col'nel," he said, "there was an old ancient song I was after hearin' tonight. I'll sing it for ye, if ye like—it's a favorite with your friend O'Riordan."

Gogarty grunted assent, and the tall troopers of the Ragpickers a hundred yards in front grinned among themselves as Kelly's rich baritone rolled out on the night air—

> "Oh, tell me, Shaun O'Farrell, where the meetin's goin' to be . . ."

First one and then another took it up, and a scandalized Kyleranny—wide awake, by the way, with apprehension—was reassured, at four in the morning, by a hundred English voices bellowing, as they swung into barracks—

> "And it's either death or freedom at the risin' of the moon."

John Kelly stopped for a moment on his doorstep to listen to it. Then he chuckled and went contentedly in to face his waiting Theresa.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers writers and adventurers

ON the literary and other less commendable habits of pack rats. Frederick J. Jackson, of our Writers' Brigade, who usually sees things from a rather humorous slant, believes there must be a serious moral involved, and perhaps there is . . .

Dos Rios, California.

We had resided on a 400 acre homestead, a very isolated one, in northwestern California for three and one-half years. In this period we had never been troubled by wood rats, although this immunity probably was due to the presence of three dogs and a large hunting cat, and sometimes two cats. In September 1930 we were forced to remove for the time being. And were unable to return until late in June 1931, after a dragged-out right-of-way suit in the superior court had been decided in our favor.

Which brings us to the pack rats.

The first building erected on the homestead early in 1927 was intended to be a storehouse. It is 10 x 14 in size, a shell of one-inch boards, the boards, covered by tarpaper, with shakes nailed outside of the tarpaper. Along three walls are dozens of shelves—on which old magazines are stored. *Adventure*, for instance, is almost complete from the 1923 issues to date.

Late in June 1931 we returned.

I UNLOCKED this storehouse. And blinked several times before being able to comprehend what had happened to it. It was worse than a wreck. A wood rat's nest six feet high, and larger than that in diameter, occupied all of one-third of what had been a neat and orderly storehouse. The remaining space in the room was paved several inches deep with torn magazines that had been pushed or pulled from the high shelves. Issues complete for years of about ten different magazines had been stacked on the shelves from the floor to a height of eight feet on three sides of the house.

From the rafters suspended by wires were two good stock-saddles. They were still in place and unharmed. Six saddle blankets had been removed from where they had been draped over the ceiling beams of the unceiled room. And chewed up by the rats.

WHAT hit the writer straight between the eyes and caused his first loud wail of grief was what had happened to his 15-inch fishing creel—the entire top had been chewed out of it. The sop at the moment was the discovery that about $30 worth of trout flies were still intact in a flybook that had fabricoid covers. The synthetic leather cover had been distasteful to the rats. Experts to the contrary, the rats had chewed up considerable tar paper.

I had fondly imagined that I'd left the place protected. Five pounds of poisoned barley had been left in a paper bag. Seven mouse traps and two rat traps had been set and left to take care of vermin. To top that, the house was supposed to be vermin proof. To make it so, a couple of gunny sacks had been stuffed into ventilation spaces at the eaves, where fly screen had not been tacked into place. The gunny sacks had disappeared. Bits of them were found incorporated along with bits of shredded horse blanket as the linings of various rats' nests.

AFTER working for perhaps ten minutes starting to take apart the huge structure erected by the pack rats, the writer took pencil and paper and began listing the articles he found in the large stack of débris, while working to salvage what he could from the nest, which had been neatly topped with several inches of twigs with leaves on them from black oaks and white oaks. These oaks do not leaf out until late April in this high mountain region, and the freshness of the leaves showed that the rats had been still working until late in June.

To sum it up, it took the writer three days to remove the débris, meanwhile salvaging what he could from what the rats had not destroyed. Magazines were replaced where they belonged on about 200 running feet of shelves.

The funny part of it is that the rats had a preference for *Adventure*, this magazine invariably being chewed down from the front cover to about page 40. (If the editor doubts this, many copies of very much mutilated *Adventures* can be sent to him—with the hope that he will replace them.) *National Geographics* and *Popular Mechanics* were pushed off the shelves to the last copy, but they remained intact, unchewed. To prove that coated book paper had nothing to do with it, many copies of the *Cosmopolitan* and the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Pictorial Review* were chewed rather thoroughly by the rats. Why should *Adventure* be chewed that way—when many other pulp paper magazines were left severely alone?

THE writer believes that the following list is the first list ever made of what was contained in a huge pack-rat community nest:

One horsehide glove. The other glove was found intact in the woodshed on a bench, weighed down by a 10 lb. sledge-hammer, which the rats had been unable to move.

Bottles of ammonium persulphate and other chemicals used for cleaning gun barrels had been tumbled from shelves and buried in the débris.

One bamboo fishing rod had been chewed. Two steel rods had been dragged to the heap. There were twigs, weeds, old deer bones, seven mouse traps and two rat traps. Four of the nine traps had been successful, but they contained only part of the dried spines of the vermin that had been caught. The rest of the victims had been eaten away.

Auger bits, pipe joints and elbows, various other waterpipe fittings, files and metal file handles, lag screws, iron washers, rivets, carriage bolts, stove bolts, machine bolts, tacks, about 3 quarts of assorted nails, spikes, nuts, hacksaw blades, horseshoes, horseshoe nails, rasps, hammers, half a bar of solder, solder wire, hinges, screws, a cotter-pin extractor, a scoop, a cocktail shaker, funnel, a pair of spurs, a no-good wristwatch, a flatiron holder, no-good spark-plugs, a lost jack-knife, a putty knife, various pieces of baled-hay wire, two gaslamp pumps, oilcans, discarded flashlight cells, mason-jar covers, drill points, screw hooks and screw eyes, leg bands for fowl, empty salmon-egg cans, two steel fishing rods, reels, empty shells and cartridges for about 10 calibers, etc. are among the metal articles found in the immense nest.

Some of the junk articles had been brought up from where they had been dumped by me into a cañon about 150 yards from the house. The rats left dozens of empty tin cans on the ground below the opening they had made in the eaves, because the cans were too large to go through the opening.

IN case you may be interested, it is very easy to list a few more articles, such as boxes of matches, three whetstones, pencils, chalk, soapstone, bits of rock or ore, rosin, rubber, two broken

combs, feathers, chewed ropes, strings, razor strops, some old eyeglasses and cases, a pincushion, sand paper, bits of tarpaper, clothespins, dried bits of cow chips, various discarded medicine bottles, bits of bark, everything in the way of auto top trim, buttons, tent pegs, oily rags, bits of mistletoe, toothpaste tubes, a toilet bowl brush, various other brushes, two currycombs, a chewed-up yardstick, discarded rubber heels, paint brushes and paint paddles, road maps, catalogues and cook books, a force pump, saw handles, a keyhole saw, some bungs, a bathspray, corks, sewing awl, fishing bobber, nipples that had been used to raise baby goats and fawns, empty cigarette paper books. Prince Albert cans, Bull Durham bags, a spigot, a bottle of coon scent for trapping, a bushel or two of acorn hulls, two soldering irons, hose washers and connections and dozens of small pieces of wood.

The prizewinner for destruction was what had happened to a 50-foot cotton tape. The kind that is all painted and marked in feet and inches and winds up into a covered reel. The rats unreeled this 50-foot tape and chewed it into pieces from 12 inches to 49 inches long.

THE only article in the storehouse that appeared to be beyond the strength and ability of the rats to weave into the nest was a five-foot length of ¾ inch waterpipe that had been standing in one corner. It had been knocked down and rolled clear into an opposite corner—and buried under at least 12 or 14 inches of more or less chewed-up magazines.

One look at the wrecked storehouse, and I dumped a couple of good meat-getting cats into it and closed the door on them. The next morning they were quarreling over a long rat tail. A few minutes after that I potted a pack rat with my .22. This female had two young ones clinging to her, which, I am informed, is the way they carry their young with them, but that is the first time I had ever seen it. And then our Irish terrier came and dumped a rat at my feet, proudly.

THE rats had a good time for eight months with Jackson property, but times have changed. The Jackson pets are now having a good time in clearing the ranch of vermin. I have one gray-striped hunting cat that I wouldn't sell right now for $50. That cat eats two or three lbs. of meat a day. And all I feed it is an ounce or two of suet or fat daily. That cat stays nearly to the belly-busting point all the time—pack rats, gophers, moles, mice, shrews, ground squirrels.

The dogs tangle up mostly with civet cats, skunks and coons. When they get a wise old coon, it's mostly just too bad for the dogs. The coon manages to get away, over a fence. The skunks do *not* get away, but the dumb dogs can't understand why we don't like them like we used to like them, and why we won't let them into the house at all for some days after they have killed a skunk. Or a civet cat.

To get back to wood rats, the only thing they had left alone was half a sack of alfalfa meal. I wish that some reader would explain how come. The wood rats got fat on the five lbs. of Government poisoned barley left for vermin. The only remedies I seem to have for the rats are cats, dogs or .22 bullets.

—FREDERICK J. JACKSON

BEARING on his story, "The Laughing Fox," which appeared in the May 1st issue of our magazine, A. DeHerries Smith sends in the following Canadian Press dispatch on the Pribilof Islands sealing patrols:

VANCOUVER, B. C., April 8—A Royal Canadian force flying boat equipped with wireless will assist H.M.C.S. *Armentières* in guarding thousands of fur seals on their annual migration to their breeding grounds in the Pribilof Islands off Alaska.

The machine, in command of Flight-Sergeant E. P. H. Wells with Flight-Serg. A. Anderson as relief pilot, will leave Jericho Beach Thursday for Esquimalt to join the *Armentières* for the 600 miles patrol from the international boundary to Alaska.

The seal patrol will last for two months and the aircraft will make daily flights over the migrating seals to spot any attacks by hunters.

Under the sealing treaty of 1911 between Japan, Great Britain, United States and Russia none but the Indians and other aborigines armed with primitive weapons are allowed to kill the seals on their way to the breeding grounds.

The U. S. coast guard patrols the seal herd on its migration from southern waters and the task is taken up at the international border by the Canadian navy.

H.M.C.S. *Armentières* will act as tender for the Vickers Vedette flying boat.

The Pribilof seals, of which there are more than a million, have more valuable pelts than any other seals. They make a "grand circle tour," of the Pacific each year, leaving their breeding grounds in the fall and migrating south along the coast of Japan and then north again in the spring.

The much debated question of whether the seals contribute to the depletion of coast salmon may be settled this summer by experiments to be made in connection with the migration. Major J. A. Motherwell, chief inspector of fisheries for British Columbia has arranged with W. E. Dichburn, commissioner of Indian affairs, to have the stomachs of some 50 seals examined.

THE swordfishing article by F. H. Sidney, to which Comrade Havens refers in the following letter, was originally purchased and edited for *Everybody's,* and later acquired by our magazine. Perhaps the point disputed was set forth more clearly in the original version. Anyway, here's the argument, and let those of you who are better informed on the subject than the editors (which number probably includes many) form your own opinion:

Long Meadow, Rhode Island.

I HAVE been reading *Adventure* for some time and when there are articles such as swordfishing, etc., I am very much interested in them.

I read the article on swordfishing in a recent issue, by F. H. Sidney, and it was rather amusing.

He tells of seeing a swordfish attack a sperm whale and kill it, then eat the tongue. Now a swordfish does not have any teeth to bite anything with and uses the sword to kill small fish with for his food.

I have been swordfishing for 17 or 18 yrs. and have never seen quite as bloodthirsty a fish as he writes of.

—W. H. HAVENS

Mr. Sidney's reply:

Still River, Massachusetts.

IN my original article I stated I had seen the swordfish team up with the grampus or killer, and between them they killed a sperm whale, and ate out the great tongue mass in the whale's mouth. I know a number of other people who have witnessed a like occurrence. There is an old saying and a true one that "truth is stranger than fiction." I know men in Africa who have done considerable hunting there, and who never ran across a lion. I spent two years wandering through the California and Arizona deserts, living outside all the time, and rattlesnakes are said to be plentiful in that district, but in all my two years of desert wanderings I never saw a rattlesnake. In fact, I have been in every State in the Union, and the only rattlesnake I ever saw was a dead one in Western Texas that had been run over by a freight train. This was a diamond back with nine rattles.

I WAS born in Provincetown, Mass. My people were all deep-sea fishermen and whalers. I made one trip whaling with my father as a boy; and numerous deep-sea fishing trips out of Provincetown. I spent three months on a salt-fishing trip to the Grand Banks, and I have made fresh-fishing trips to Georges Bank, South Channel and other grounds. I made one swordfishing trip. And when I was a boy in Provincetown two other boys and I captured a swordfish that had grounded on the beach by winding a seine around him, and that swordfish fought like a demon.

I remember one case of a man being killed as the result of a swordfish ramming through the bottom of his dory and the end of the sword striking the lower part of the man's leg, causing blood poison. The man died.

ONCE down on the Amazon, I saw the skeleton of a man who had been eaten alive by a school of carib-fish. These are a freshwater fish the size of a perch, and woe to any man who attempts to bathe in waters where these vicious little devils are! A school of them will attack a horse that wanders in the water and devour him in a very few minutes.

Some years ago I read that the large codfish was more to be feared than the shark, and that the cod had been known to attack divers.

I HAVE always agreed with Holder, the zoologist, who claimed that many sea-serpent tales were the result of large boa constrictors, pythons or anacondas crawling into a hollow to digest a meal after swallowing a deer, ape or some other good sized animal. While the snakes were peacefully sleeping in the log, the Amazon floods would overflow the forests and logs would float out to sea. After a while the snake wakes up and the first thing he does is to head for the shore. A huge snake seen swimming in the ocean by seamen would of course be called a sea serpent. Once while off the coast of Brazil on a Portuguese trading schooner (I am part Portuguese) I saw a big snake crawl out of a log floating in the water. We were then about 50 miles off the mouth of the Amazon. The skipper rushed below for his rifle. In the meantime a shark made a lunge at the snake. The big snake coiled round the shark, and I witnessed the most terrific battle I ever saw.

It is a well known fact that the anaconda (water boa) and the alligator are deadly enemies, and always watching for a chance to catch one another unawares. In my trip up the Amazon, we saw such a fight. The big snake had wound his tail round a tree as an anchor and coiled round an alligator on the bank. We watched that battle for thirty minutes until the snake finally squeezed the alligator to death.

FUNNY things happen in the tropics. Here's one I heard Dallas Lore Sharp, the nature writer, tell after he came back from his six months' stay on the island in the Panama Canal reserved as a wild life sanctuary by the U. S. Government:

He and the two biologists stationed there heard

a pitiful wailing, and they went out into the woods, and finally saw a pair of howling monkeys trying to comfort a baby monkey that was in pain. After doing all they could for over an hour the two parent monkeys carried the baby monkey through the trees to the quarters of the biologists and dropped him on the ground. It was like an invitation to the men to pick the monkey up and cure it, as the two parent monkeys realized they had failed.

It is a fact that a troop of monkeys will often drive hunters out of the woods, and if the hunters don't move fast the monkeys will tear them to pieces. I had just such an experience hunting in Java, where the monkeys first attacked us and drove us out of the woods without any provocation.

TO return to our subject, as far as I can figure, the swordfish simply helps the grampus just for the sake of the fight, kills for the sake of killing. Old fishermen tell me the bluefish is also a killer. They will attack a school of herring and kill far more than they can ever eat.

There are people who insist that sharks will not attack human beings, but I'd hate to take chances with any species of shark. Although sharks are salt water fish, there are sharks that breed in a fresh water lake, above the falls in the Fiji Islands. Sharks do attack boats. One of my thrilling experiences as a youngster was when in company with several other boys fishing off Provincetown our boat was attacked by a grampus that bit the gunwale off all around the boat trying to pull us under. We beat him off with oars and gaff while the dory sailed towards shore. Lucky there was a fresh breeze and a fair wind or we would have been pulled under. The grampus followed us into shallow water. My father had to put a new gunwale on the dory.

—FRED H. SIDNEY

A QUOTATION from a memorial address on the late Horace Kephart, for many years connected with Ask Adventure, delivered by Paul M. Fink at the annual meeting of the Appalachian Trail Conference. Readers who received benefit and friendly aid from Mr. Kephart's almost limitless knowledge of wild-crafting lore will be glad to know that he has left us a wonderfully comprehensive book on the subject.

". . . Horace Kephart was born in East Salem, Pennsylvania, in 1862, going to Iowa in 1867. There on the frontier, where the Indians still roamed the prairies, he began to develop that love of the outdoors that was to be the predominant characteristic of his whole life. Returning to Pennsylvania in 1876, he completed his education at Lebanon Valley College, Boston University and Cornell and later abroad, specializing in historical research and determining to follow for his life work the career of librarian. In starting this labor he was assistant in the Yale University Library for four years, and from 1890 to 1903 was in charge of the St. Louis Mercantile Library, where he built up a collection of Western Americana that had at that time no equal in the country.

Following a breakdown in 1904, he came to the Carolina mountains, seeking the most primitive spot he could locate, that in the solitude of the big woods he might find peace for mind and body, and build his strength anew. Knowing nothing of the country, its very immensity, inaccessibility and the unmarred state of nature shown by the topographic sheets charmed him, and lured him to take up his residence in a tiny log cabin on the Little Fork of Sugar Fork of Hazel Creek, where for years he lived the life of his few neighbors, and indulged to the fullest his propensity for fishing, hunting and exploring the unknown wilderness.

It was while living here that he gathered the material that resulted in "Our Southern Highlanders," the recognized authoritative work on the subject; and also, his "Camping and Woodcraft," the most complete and exhaustive treatise on these sciences that has ever appeared in print—a guide covering every point any woodsman might wish to know. Had nothing more than these two works come from his pen, they would have assured him a perpetual place in the list of writers of the outdoors. He was also the author of several other books, and hundreds of magazine articles. A writer trained in research work, his articles were authoritative, for he would never present a statement unless by exhaustive work he had established its accuracy.

Kephart had long cherished the idea of a National Park in the Smokies, and I recall correspondence with him along that line before 1920. When public sentiment finally crystallized into action, he immediately laid aside all other matters and enthusiastically threw all his efforts into the work. Letters, magazine and newspaper articles, personal influence, all the forces he had at his disposal were put behind the movement, and we know that his personality and reputation played a large part toward arousing the outside, as well as local, sentiment that has carried on the project until now its final consummation is just around the corner. Such a pity that he could not have lived to have seen his dream come true . . . "

ASK Adventure

For Free Information and Services You Can't Get Elsewhere

Navy

EVOLUTION of a man-o'-war. The *Harry Grace a Dieu,* perhaps the first two-decker, appeared in 1515, with 72 guns.

Request:—"Is there any record of what was the first double-decked naval ship? Three-decker? Four-decker?"—THOMAS L. SULLIVAN, West Roxbury, Massachusetts.

Reply, by Lieut. F. V. Greene:—It is difficult to say just what was the first two-decker; records of the old times at sea are not complete. The first two-decker that there is any real record of so far as I know is the *Harry Grace a Dieu,* British vessel. She was a two-decker, with 14 heavy guns on the lower deck, 12 on the main, and 46 above. 1000 tons displacement. She had four masts and a bowsprit, all square rigged. The sails were a course and topsail on the "foer" and "mayne," and a lateen on the "mayne mizzen" and "bonaventure" masts. Guns were from 60-pounders to "hailshot pieces." The smaller pieces were breech-loaders. Date 1515.

The first three-decker was commissioned it appears in 1612. Name *Sovereign of the Seas.* British. Displacement 1500 tons. One of the old writers says of her: "She has three decks and a forecastle, a halfe-deck, a quarter-deck, and a round house. Her lower tyre hath thirty ports, which are furnished with demi-cannon and whole cannon throughout. Her middle tyre hath also thirty ports, for whole culvern and demi-culvern. Her third tyre hath 26 ports for other ordnance. And her forecastle hath 12 ports and her halfe-decke 14 ports. She hath 13 or 14 ports more within for murdering pieces, besides a great many loopholes out of the cabins for musket shot. She carries, moreover 10 pieces of chase-ordnance right forward, and 10 right aft."

There is no mention in available records of any four-deckers. Ships which carried as high as 135 guns on three decks are mentioned. Nelson's *Victory* carried 100 guns on three decks.

Bonnet

ALAS, alas! the crown of a modern Indian's feathered headdress may be made from the top of a discarded felt hat. Silk ribbons and mirrors have displaced the fearless hawk's skin. And dyed goose feathers are often used instead of the black tipped tail feathers of eagles caught in traps by hand. Bad medicine. . .

Request:—"The redskin feather headdress is often called a war bonnet, yet often the warriors had their heads shaved except the scalplock. The feather bonnet is also called a 'ceremonial headdress.' Can you explain when this bonnet was worn, and if any variation in it? What was the bodily dress in war—was the Crow dress different from the Blackfoot? I know the moccasins were different, though not in what respect."—R. BURR, Dollar, Scotland.

Reply, by Mr. Arthur Woodward:—Most of the tribes in the various culture areas of America wore distinctive costumes. Today, the flaring feather headdress or bonnet is seen on Indians all the way from Maine to California.

The use of the war bonnet proper was confined principally to the Plains area where varying forms of this picturesque head covering were used.

The typical, nodding bonnet of eagle feathers and ermine tail strips was and is the best known feature of Plains costume.

In the old days, a war bonnet meant a great deal. Today it is just another method of advertising. There were times when the war bonnets were worn only by the headmen and principal warriors. These head coverings of skin and feathers were badges of manhood. A man could not rightfully wear a bonnet unless he earned it. Even the feathers from which the bonnets were made had to be obtained ceremonially, that is, the eagles had to be trapped and killed without bloodshed, i.e., strangled to death.

AMONG the Blackfeet the feathers of five eagles would purchase a horse, but in other parts of the Plains where the birds were more scarce, two eagles would buy a good horse. Time was when the feathers of the bonnets were notched, split and painted in various ways, each mark or cut denoting a certain achievement, bars to the medal as it were.

Among the Cheyenne, and possibly other tribes, there were taboos connected with war bonnets. If a man broke the medicine taboo, he suffered. The Cheyenne claim that Roman Nose, their great war leader (not a chief by the way) was killed in the Beecher Island Fight, September, 1868, because he unwittingly broke the taboo of his war bonnet, which in this case happened to be one forbidding him to eat food taken from the fire with an iron implement. The day of the battle he unknowingly ate some bread which had been lifted from the fire with an iron fork. A friend told him about it and he remarked, "My medicine is broken". He went into the fight only after some persuasion and, even then, resigned to his fate. He was shot from his horse at the first charge and died before sunset. An ambushed rifleman in a camouflaged gun pit was the real cause of his death, but to the Indians his demise came because he had broken the taboo of his war bonnet.

War bonnets were worn in standup fights; they were proud tokens of manhood, uniforms of distinguished men, and the Indian going into a set battle lavished a great deal of care on his toilet.

OFTEN the bonnets had some personal medicine attached to them—a stuffed, dried hawk skin for example, the hawk being a swift, blood-hungry bird which always swooped fearlessly and struck hard. Likewise, since the weasel was a cunning hunter, a fierce fighter and seldom returned to his lair without having drawn blood, he too was adopted as a bit of good medicine and the white ermine, or the winter coat of the weasel, adorned the bonnet bands. Today gaudy silk ribbons take the place of weasel skins, and mirrors (the ultra in bad luck of Cheyenne warriors) adorn the temples on the bonnets. Dyed goose feathers or inferior eagle plumes take the place of the black tipped tail feathers of eagles caught in traps by hand. All in all the bonnet of today is quite inferior to those of yesterday. The crowns of the modern bonnets are the tops of discarded felt hats. In olden times they were either buffalo or deer skin.

War costumes varied. Generally the men stripped to the breech clout and moccasins and paint. Bonnets might be worn by those who owned them. Others wore single feathers or caps of buffalo hair with split horns fastened to them. Certain of the Plains people sent out scouts ahead of their war parties; these generally wore dressed wolf skins over their heads, by means of which they could crawl a bit past the military crest of the hill and observe enemy movements and if seen would probably be mistaken for wolves. Buffalo, and later cloth, robes were carried by the "helpers" of the war party for the warriors proper. Many pairs of extra moccasins were also always taken along by the members of the party.

Head shaving, leaving a single scalplock, was practised more by certain of the Eastern Woodland tribes than by the Plains people. The Shawnee shaved their heads, as did some of the Delaware and Iroquois. Some of these people wore roaches of dyed deer hair or stiffened a crest of natural hair with grease and clay to make it stand upright. Single feathers or small bunches of feathers and occasionally rattlesnake rattles and other items were worn in the scalplock.

In the main, the fundamental costume of all the tribes was the breech clout and moccasins or sandals. Forms of breech clouts varied with the area. The cuts of the moccasins as well as the actual type likewise varied. East of the Mississippi the one-piece, soft-soled moccasin was in vogue. The same type was likewise used by some of the Northern tribes, but on the Plains and in the Southwest, two and three-piece moccasins with soft uppers and stiff or semi-stiff rawhide soles prevailed.

Photography

A PROFESSION with lots of room at the top.

Request:—"I would like to know if opportunities are open in the profession of photography. Also what my chances are of getting into some phase of this work?

Is it best to receive one's training from a school or to serve as a sort of apprentice to some experienced photographer?"

—R. K. KINCAID, Louisville, Kentucky

Reply, by Mr. Paul L. Anderson:—Like every other profession or business in this country, photography is overcrowded—at the bottom. And like every other, there is plenty of room at the top; a good man is always in demand.

The plan which will give you the soundest and most thorough education in photography is to get a job (at about $15 a week) as forty-second assistant helper in some motion picture laboratory, and study by yourself while working there. This is slow, but when you get through, if you're really in earnest, you'll know your stuff *well*.

An alternative plan is to take a photographic course in some school, and then get a job which will

probably pay a little better than the other; this plan has the disadvantage that you'll think you know all there is to know, and won't feel the same impulse to study on the side. Also, you'll probably learn a lot that you'll have to unlearn after you get to working.

I don't believe you'll find a correspondence course very satisfactory, but you might at least write to one for information concerning a course.

As to the pay you can expect, it ranges from $15 a week to $12,000 or $15,000 a year, depending on how good you are. Even more, in exceptional cases.

Big Game

TIMID animals, that lose their poise and bolt at sight of man, are oftener observed than sly and stealthy ones. But you have to be quick on the trigger.

Request:—"What big game is usually found in the mountains of the Western States?"

—ROBT. D. RUTHERFORD, Jersey City, New Jersey

Reply, by Mr. Ernest W. Shaw:—As to the various wild and game animals met in the West, it is mighty difficult to cover, since so much depends on the part of the country you have in mind. More or less, one sees at some time or other all species of animals which are native to the country. However, one is most apt to see the more timid or easily frightened animals, such as deer, elk, etc. This may seem strange, but it is nevertheless true. Occasionally a wolf, or coyote, is sighted, but usually at great distances. Where these animals are surprised near at hand they are so sly that, like the bear and mountain lion, they slip off out of sight before a man is apt to see them. Deer, elk, moose and sheep are so very badly frightened by man that they lose their poise, as it were, and tear madly away through the brush, making plenty of noise in so doing and thus giving you a sight of them, though that sight is often very fragmentary. I spent the greater part of 30 years in or very close to good bear country, in Alaska, Montana, Wyoming and Colorado, and I have yet to get my first crack at a grizzly, and have had but a half dozen shots perhaps at brown and black bear.

Isle Of Pines

THE buried treasure may not be real, but the golden climate is.

Request:—"Recently I have become very much interested in the Isle of Pines and was highly gratified to find that you, who were handling the West Indies requests, were actually living on the island that I am so interested in.

1. How hot does it get? Much or any fever?

2. Are tales of buried treasure on the island at all founded in fact?

3. Is there any opportunity there for a man without pre-arranged connections? If so, what?

4. Any treaty or laws protecting American citizens?

5. Is cost of living high or low? How much for average man?

6. Is there much crime?"

—JACK C. GILL, St. Joseph, Missouri

Reply, by Mr. John B. Leffingwell:—1. The temperature here in midsummer never reaches 100 degrees. About 98 is the limit, and we always have cooling breezes and showers at that time of the year. In regard to fevers, malaria is absolutely unknown and we have no other tropical diseases. This is the most healthful place on earth.

2. I would say no, but some people believe in them and we always have some bug out looking for buried gold with a map and everything. If they find anything, they keep it dark—but honestly I don't think they do.

3. There would be a slim chance, as we have just enough work for our population and naturally look out for them first. If you want to get into the fruit growing game and have the money, yes. But you can't shoestring down here.

4. Yes. Hat-Quesada Amendment to Constitution. Americans are thoroughly protected.

5. Actually foodstuffs cost more than in the U.S., but in spite of that, living costs less. When I am living out on my farm I figure that it costs me about $20.00 per month for food purchased, but I have a garden and chickens, cow, etc. Living in town as I do part of the year, my expenses are about as follows. Rent of furnished apartment $25.00. Maid who does my laundry, cooks, etc., $10.00. Chow about $30.00. Besides that, gasoline, tires, garage bills, movies, club, etc., make living for a "batch" about $75.00 per month.

6. Is there much crime? None! Sure, some negroes do a bit of petty thieving sometimes, but nothing such as you are thinking about.

Fencing

FIVE touches win in a duel with foils.

Request:—"1. What is the procedure to follow when one's opponent either drops his foil or has it knocked out of his hand?

2. What part of the body is legitimate territory for points?

3. How are points reckoned and how many are needed in order to win the duel?"

—HERBERT F. BRIDGES, Chicago, Illinois

Reply, by Capt. Jean V. Grombach:—1. If one knocks one's opponent's foil out of his hand, and then scores a point in the same move, and before the foil has hit the ground, it is a touch. However, if you disarm opponent in one separate move, the procedure would then be to stop and allow him to recover his weapon.

2. Legitimate territory for points, or the target, starts from the top of the collar, extends to the

groin lines, exclusive of the arms, up to the shoulders, the seams of the jacket being made to correspond with the attachment of the arms to the shoulders.

However, touches on the head, the arms, the hands, or the legs below the groin lines are valid whenever they are intentionally or unintentionally between the target and the button of the opponent's blade.

3. In foil the first man to score five touches with the point on the opponent's target is adjudged the winner.

Horse

THE "pay load" of a Western pony.

Request:—1. "I am a forest ranger in the State of Pennsylvania and I have a Western breed horse which weighs 900 lbs. and I would like to know how much a horse of this type can carry, using him every day in the mountains. I weigh 140 pounds and use a 50 lb. stock saddle, and carry a 6¼ lb. saddle rifle, also carry a pair of saddle bags which weigh from 10 to 20 lbs. and wear a pair of bullhide chaps which weigh 10 lbs. and also use a 5 lb. saddle blanket. How would you recommend feeding this horse?

2. What kind of shoes would you recommend for this kind of work?"

—CLAY WILLARD, Blue Ridge Summit, Pennsylvania

Reply, by Mr. Thomas H. Dameron:—1. The rule of thumb is one-fifth the horse's weight, but a good Western bred pony built close to the ground and nine hundred pounds weight will carry with ease 250 to 275 pounds day in and day out, on ten pounds of oats and ten to fifteen pounds of hay or good grazing, covering thirty miles a day.

2. I would use cold fitting pony shoes with small heel calk, as are used by most cow men out here.

Our Experts—They 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 commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They 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 assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

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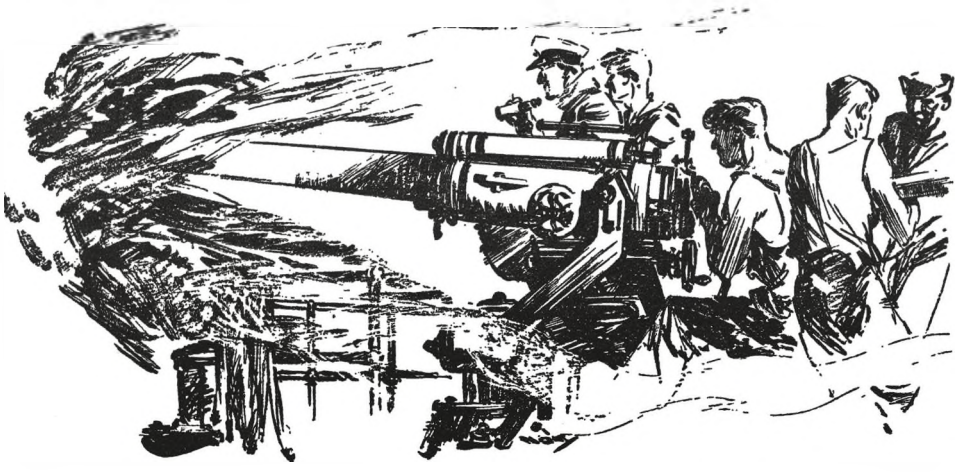

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