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ADVENTURE

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Adventure

December 15th

WHITE PLUMES

A tale of the Orinoco Jungle

By ARTHUR O. FRIEL

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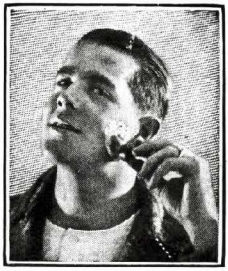

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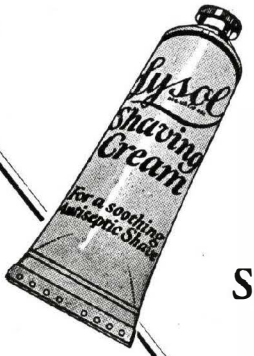

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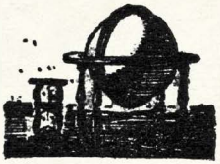

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Contents for December 15th

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The Orinoco jungle and a man who sold himself to the devil for

White Plumes

By ARTHUR O. FRIEL

CHAPTER I

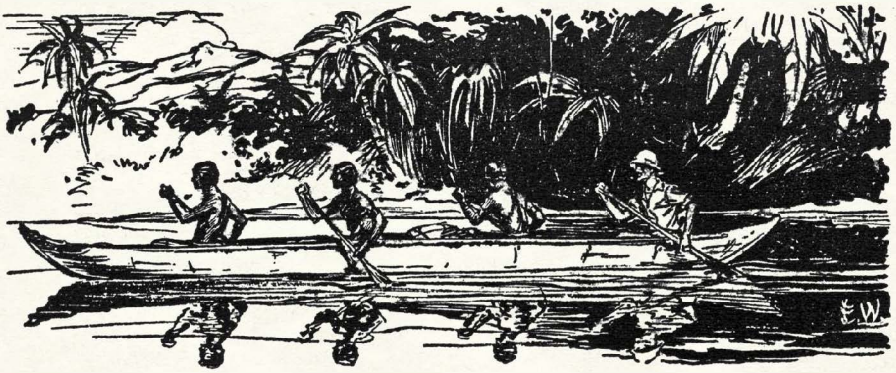
"LORD, BUT YOU'RE PEPPERY TONIGHT!"

FERNANDO VELEZ, the pale eyed Spaniard reputed to be from Colombia, was playing bear in a crooked street of Ciudad Bolívar, Venezuela.

Playing bear, as all the Spanish world knows, means standing outside an iron barred window and paying court to an ardently desired señorita within; perhaps twanging a guitar and singing a plaintive composition born of lovesickness, or breathing melancholy sighs and making mournful eyes, or—if the window be not too high—whispering into receptive ears flowery gallantries or fervent asseverations. Since the window at which Fernando stood was conveniently low, the hour clandestinely late and the dark eyes just beyond the barrier wilfully provocative, he was wasting no time on the more distant and indirect methods. His softly hissing syllables were those of the original serpent coaxing Eve.

"But steal to the door and slip it open for me, *querida mía*," he besought. "All sleep. You have only to slide the bolt softly, and then—"

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE by the author of "Salt"



The girl Justa, so near yet so tantalizingly inaccessible, laughed at him. Her white face, white with the aristocratic pallor of the zealously guarded upper class maiden who walks seldom in the sun, moved nearer to him in taunting temptation, then drew back. With feline enjoyment she watched his arms reach swiftly through the grille for her, only to fall short. Her languorous eyes shone with mirth, with moonlight—and, too, with calculation.

"Open the door?" she echoed, her tone carefully subdued, yet tinged with malice. "Am I a *mestiza*, a girl of low caste, to open my door to a loafer of the town? Señor, you have too high an opinion of your charm. Go, find a girl who—"

"I am no town loafer!" flared Fernando. "I am a gentleman adventurer, a soldier of fortune—"

"Who has lost all his fortune in adventuring against better gamblers and has hardly a peso left!" she thrust. "Where is all the gold you brought back from El Dorado? In the pockets of gamesters. You thought I did not know this? Ha-ha! Perhaps you forget that I have brothers who know all that takes place among men about town—and who, if they were aware that you now are here, would send you running down the street."

"Let them try it!" gritted Fernando, hand involuntarily slipping to the belt whence hung a coat concealed poniard. "Call them and tell them I am here, and watch what then comes about."

He knew well enough that she would not, but for the moment his infuriated defiance was real. When Fernando Velez, former *caballero* of Bogotá, felt his dignity belittled his temper was likely to become deadly, his hand swift. This, in fact, was the reason why he was now a permanent expatriate. In Venezuela there is more than one Colombian who quit his own country at top speed.

The flash of temper passed. Justa, the much desired, was laughing at him again, though keenly gaging him meanwhile. Before her merriment died he spoke again, this time on a harder note.

"So it is gold you wish, cruel one? *Bien*. Gold opens many doors. And when I come again—"

"But no!" Her head rose haughtily, and for an instant her gaze was chill. Then it thawed a trifle. "It is not gold or lack of gold that moves me, señor. But that a man having gold should be so weak of judgment as to let it be taken from him by cards—that is not a point in his favor. It would indicate that such a man was not clever enough to hold what

he had won against other men, *no es verdad?* And no such man can win me! A strong man, strong to win and strong to hold, is the only sort who need talk to me. For one of that sort I might— But it does not matter. Good night, and *adios!*"

She drew back farther, as if about to shut the wooden window beyond the bars. The movement was only pretense, but it had its effect.

"But it does matter!" expostulated Fernando, so vehemently that she started and cast an apprehensive glance into the darkness behind her. "What proof do you desire, *carisima?* What can I gain for you, what can I do for you, to prove— everything your heart demands?"

After a moment of listening for sounds of aroused sleepers the girl turned her gaze back to him and seemed to ponder. Apparently the direct question had caught her unprepared for ready answer. But then, as if the thought had just come to her, she haltingly replied:

"Mercedes Sanchez, the conceited fat face whose blood is not even pure—her grandmother was an Indian—Mercedes has a headdress of the plumage of the egret—a most beautiful thing, whiter than milk and most rare. It was brought to her by her affianced, Carlos Jurado, the river trader, from the Arauca marshes. And I have heard it said that a white man who can go into that region and bring out such feathers must be truly strong and clever and able to hold his own, because it is a dangerous country, with many bad men in it. To a man who could do that, who could bring me a large and beautiful headdress of *plumaje de la garza*, I could give—everything! Yes—" she leaned closer— "everything, Fernando! For he would be one whom I could respect and admire."

The seductive semi-promise, the more alluring look from the languishing orbs, caused Fernando's hands to clutch on the impenetrable bars. But his voice was steady enough as he returned—

"*Pues*, you shall have them—and they will not be bought, like those of Mercedes, from ignorant Indians for a handful of fishhooks and matches by a contemptible river rat, but taken by a man who dares go and get his own!"

"Yes?" She laughed again, softly, slurringly. "Promises are easily made, bold one."

"You shall see," he predicted through his teeth. "And when—"

What more he might have said was never spoken; for at that instant she started, threw another look into the farther dark and swung the shutter tight. He stood in the empty street, facing a blank window.

A quick look up and down the cobbled way—then he strode fast to a corner and vanished from the view of any man of Justa's family who might arise and come to the door. Despite his recently expressed defiance of all the males of that household, he was not so reckless as to scorn discretion when nothing was to be gained by disregarding it.

ONCE out of sight, he slowed, glancing perfunctorily along the byway, then scowling in concentrated thought as he paced onward. Arauca marshes—more than two hundred miles up the Orinoco from here. *Garzas*—their plumage was at its best only in the breeding season. That season was now. How to reach the grounds quickly, with not enough money to pay for passage on even the meanest tub of a sailing piragua? His scowl deepened, his thin lips set tighter, his soft footed gait became a predatory prowl as he swung on through the moonlight and wrestled with the problem.

For some time thereafter he walked the streets, turning corners at random, yet instinctively following byways little used after sundown, and proceeding with subconscious wariness, though without furtiveness. Whenever he did meet another man, that man drew well aside and passed with alert vigilance; for there was something sinister in the feline carriage and cold cat eyes of the lean man from the Andes, even though he now hunted only the answer to an enigma and

walked to calm his emotions. To each of these chance met pedestrians the prowler gave one stabbing glance from beneath his low drawn sombrero, and no backward look. None was an enemy and none was sufficiently well dressed to possess money.

At length, somewhat tired, he found himself in the steep Calle Libertad and turned down its slope toward the river, seeking his room and bed in the cheap *posada* to which he had been reduced. At thought of that mean lodging he muttered a querulous oath.

Curses on the cards, and on all his luck! He was unlucky not only at gambling but at love; always had been, always would be. Yet cards and women were his two main passions in life, and he must continue to win the prices of play with them. To be sure, they both grew stale at times, but when one game or one woman became tiresome new ones could be found; and each was fascinating until monotony set in. Now this girl Justa, with her prattle of white feathers . . .

He slowed abruptly. Just ahead, at the right, was an open window whence came a male voice raised in denunciation. That sudden sound, breaking from a wall in the quiet of late night, had the same startling effect as the physical impact of an unexpected missile. The surprise was all the greater because the words were English, a language with which Fernando was quite familiar but which he seldom heard nowadays.

"A dirty rotten business, and one I'd never befoul my hands with!" came the vigorous denial. "It's been outlawed in every civilized country and would be in this one, if you people— Well, never mind. But don't impute any such motive to me and Grant. We only want to photograph the birds, and we wouldn't harm one feather of them. Why in hell is it that you South Americans are always attributing some underhanded motive to a North American who comes in here and tells you the straight truth about his object in coming? Are your own minds so full of deceit and treachery and thievery that you can't understand an honest man when you see—"

"Pipe down, Jim, pipe down!" broke in another foreign voice. "You've had too many drinks."

"Oh, to the devil with that! I've had no more than you. And I'm sick of this smirking, sneaking suspicion. Listen here: I was in Colombia a few years back, collecting specimens for a museum, and everywhere I went I met the same smirky smile and the question, 'Ah yes, yes, señor, we can see perfectly what you are doing, but what are you really looking for under cover of this museum collecting?' And I was spied on from start to finish and—"

"Oh well, what of it? That has no bearing on this trip. And you're acting as sore as if you really did mean to steal some feathers and Señor Falcón here had tripped you up. Forget it!"

A brief, grumpy response sounded. Then followed a moment of silence. In that moment Fernando oriented himself and noiselessly stepped to the window. He was outside the little Hotel Bolívar, and the men within were newcome transients, except Falcón, who was attached to the nominally American business house in which a nominal American consular agency functioned. Falcón, a sporty Venezuelan, was known to Fernando by name, sight, and reputation, but not by personal acquaintance. Now the listener, with no attempt at stealth except habitual softness of foot, moved to the outcurved iron bars and stared coolly at the trio inside.

A thin blond man, a somewhat stouter one of brunette type, both of medium height and unSpanish features, and the lean, keen eyed Falcón composed the three. The blond was scowling rebelliously, his rather hard jaw set as if biting back further undiplomatic utterances; his dark haired partner frowning at him in a semi-tolerant way; the Venezuelan smiling and unruffled, as if he had an apt retort on his tongue and meant to use it.

Two narrow white iron beds with mosquito nets, an orderly heap of equipment against one wall, a narrow trunk on

end, a plain table with bottle and glasses, and a single unshaded electric bulb glaring pendent from a cord—these formed the immediate environment. After a rapid glance at faces, Fernando swiftly sized up the baggage. The prevalence of bags and boxes, the absence of huge trunks and the businesslike arrangement of the whole indicated that these travelers were wilderness bound and not inexperienced in such trips.

Falcón spoke, his English noticeably accented but fluent.

"Perhaps, Mr. Jameson, we here in South America look with some disbelief on the innocent tales of men from the North because we have heard them so many times and found them nearly always deceptive. The gold hunter or diamond seeker who means to find treasure and run out with it without paying the legal taxes, the bank absconder or murderer or other law dodger from your country, the revolutionary agent of the northern corporation which wishes to upset our government and put in a new one which will be the tool of that corporation—these, and others too, come with tales of innocent intentions.

"They are explorers or engineers or travelers for their health or naturalists or—ah—whatever sounds well. And we are not altogether incapable of learning a lesson often repeated, even if we are uncivilized."

"Oh say, I didn't mean to call you that," blurted Jameson. "I didn't call you that at all—my tongue ran away with me, but—"

"Let it rest, then, let it rest."

"What? My tongue?" The retort was snappish.

"Ha! ha! No. The matter of civilization. But yet, to speak again of the *garzas* and their aigrets—"

The eavesdropping Fernando stiffened slightly, eyes widening.

"Are you not aware," banteringly continued Falcón, "that the 'civilized' countries are the ones paying the prices that make that 'dirty rotten business' profitable? That it is the European feather market, in London, I believe, which pays fifty dollars or more for an ounce of those plumes torn from the mother birds? But of course you do know that. If it were not for that 'civilized' market, the feathers would be worth nothing, señor, and so they would not be gathered. And although the traffic is, as you say, outlawed in your own country, it comes to my mind that it has not long been so; that it did not become so until you North Americans had killed almost every white egret in your own Florida, and that your American women wore the plumes as proudly as any other women— But perhaps my own tongue now is running away. Yet am I not correct, Mr. Grant?"

"I'm sorry to say that you are, friend," admitted the darker American. "And it's checkmate for you, Jim. All the same, Señor Falcón, be sure that for once you've met Americans who are giving you a straight story. We couldn't torture one bird if its feathers were worth five hund—"

"HEY, YOU! You there at the window! What the devil do you want?"

Jameson's sharp demand cut short his partner's declaration. All eyes centered on the bars beyond which, nonchalantly impudent, Fernando Velez stood plainly revealed by the electric light. Grant stared in astonishment. Falcón, after the first surprised glance, narrowed his eyes. Jameson glowered.

"Nothing, most courteous señor," mockingly replied the outsider, "nothing but an admiring gaze at the illustrious visitors to Bolívar. Having gazed, I go. *Buenos noches!*"

With sarcastic grin and insolent hitch of a shoulder he moved away. A chair scraped sharply within the room. Grant's voice sounded quickly:

"Sit down, Jim! Let him go. Lord, but you're peppery tonight!"

A mutter. Somebody came to the window and peered through the bars, but saw nothing. Fernando, a few feet away, had stepped into the doorway of the hotel, where, standing against the shut

door, he was concealed by the thickness of the jutting wall. After a minute he emerged, found the window again empty, and loitered to listen a bit longer. What he heard turned him rigid.

"Yes, señor, you had best let that one go," decidedly announced Falcón. "He is one for the police to handle. They are waiting for him now at his lodging."

"What for?" casually asked Grant.

"For murder."

"Oh. A real hard egg, eh?"

"Rather. He went over into our El Dorado gold country some time ago, and returned recently with a respectable treasure, which he gambled away. It was supposed, of course, that he had found it in the ground—though it seemed a little odd, for he is not the type that works. But now comes news that he stole it all, after killing the miner who had gathered it. Cold murder, nothing less. Tomorrow night he will be looking through heavier bars than these. Well, it grows late. Shall we pour a nightcap?"

The bottle clinked against a glass. Fernando shivered, suddenly cold. To him the sound seemed like the clank of a chain. An instant longer he stood, his legs feeling frozen. Then, tight lipped, slit eyed, hand under coat, he stole on downhill toward the river, where, anchored close to shore, lay the boats of the traders.

CHAPTER II

"MONEY!"

WHETHER or not the devil takes care of his own, as often asserted, there can be no denying the fact that some satirical power or other frequently tosses into the hands of a desperate man an unexpected weapon with which to cut himself loose from the clutch of a lasso thrown by Nemesis. So with Fernando Velez.

The distance from the Hotel Bolívar, on Calle Libertad, to the Calle Orinoco, or waterfront street of Ciudad Bolívar, is short and the grade steep. So a man once under way toward the river is likely to keep going by sheer momentum until he reaches the level at the base of the hill—particularly if his life depends largely on his ability to get out of the little metropolis and up, down, or across the tawny master stream which divides the country into two differing parts. Yet now, though death hovered close, Fernando felt impelled to stop in the middle of the next downhill block, step into a doorway, and there, leaning in the niche of barred door and projecting wall, to think. And while he stood thus physically idle, a solution to his urgent problen literally walked up to him. Had he resisted that unreasonable impulse and continued straight on to the river edge he would have lost his last chance.

Money! He must find money, somewhere, somehow, between now and sunrise. Otherwise the police would get him. And once they got him he was done. The present governor of this State of Bolívar was not like others before him, whose mercy could be bought by considerations of cash value or by stealthy services; he was a stern, hard, drastic ex-soldier who gave short shrift to convicted killers—and was infernally ingenious at convicting them when guilty. And Fernando knew himself guilty. Just how much of his guilt the police and the governor knew just what proof they could adduce, was more than he could guess. But he was not disposed to linger long enough to find out.

Again he cursed his luck. He had felt sure that the body of that fool of a miner was safely disposed of; but, evidently, some one had found it. Perhaps somebody had even seen the killing; he could not be certain, though he had taken pains to conclude the matter discreetly, at a solitary spot, while the fellow was on his way to the Orinoco. That fellow was only a *mestizo*, anyway. Did these dogs of river dwellers expect a mountain white man to soil his hands with manual labor when a little bullet inserted into a half caste would achieve the same result without disgraceful work? Apparently

they did. A pox on the whole nation of them! And now, because they were card sharpers as well as unmentionable other things, he had lost all his gains; and because he had lost them, no boat master would smuggle him to safety unless he could get more *dinero* at once. Curses on all Venezuelans!

The fact that he would be executed as quickly, and with even more satisfaction, by Colombian officials, in no wise lessened his sudden hatred for these Orinocans. There was little danger of capture by Colombians at present, so that cursing them was a waste of breath. But the maledictions which he silently heaped on the entire country of Venezuela relieved his temper, though they aided not at all in clarifying his problem of obtaining funds.

If he could only reach those Arauca marshes he could make money and be safe—at least, from federal authority—while making it. It was wild up there, lawless, savage. This much he knew from hearsay, not from experience. In his precipitate flight from Colombia he had come down the Rio Meta, far south of the Arauca region. Since then he had been concerned with the real adventurer's game—gold. At least, he had thought it to be the real game. Feathers pulled out of birds' backs had not interested him, though he had heard that there was money in egrets. But now, through listening at that hotel window, he had learned much.

Gold, he knew, was worth only twenty dollars an ounce; and it must be pure to bring that price. But those bird plumes, according to Falcón, were worth fifty, or more, an ounce in Europe. True, it might take many of them to make an ounce, since feathers were very light. But one pound meant eight hundred dollars; ten pounds, eight thousand, and so on—at the market. Here they would be worth much less. Yet a few ounces of them would pay his way out of this part of the world and across the seas to Spain, Paris . . .

His eyes glinted. That girl Justa had known whereof she spoke when she set those rare plumes as the price of her favor. She was shrewd. He admired and desired her all the more because she had not been easily won. She was worth coming back for—yes, worth taking away with him when he should leave this part of the world. When he got the plumes he could slip back here secretly, lure her away with those egrets and smooth talk and, whenever he tired of her, desert her and sell the fluffy white bait. *Sí!* But meanwhile he must get out of town and up the river to gather that bait.

The long, predatory face, which had momentarily relaxed, contracted again, and the temporarily twinkling eyes resumed their wonted chill as they unseeingly contemplated the yellowish house wall across the street. There was a piragua sailing upstream tomorrow morning, the *Ana*, and her owner was a rascal who would smuggle out the devil himself for the right price. But where to get that price? Where—

THEN came the answer. On the smooth sidewalk sounded the faint, slightly irregular tread of *alpargatas*, worn by a man somewhat under the influence of liquor, and before the gaze of the lurking Fernando materialized the bulky shape and sleepy face of one Pedro Pillaro, gambler. Eyes fixed dully on the ascending slope, breath coming with some exertion, the gamester plodded past without a glance at the lean form so snugly ensconced in the shadowed doorway. At each forward lift of his right leg sounded a soft, mellow *chink* of gold in a pocket.

Pedro had played in luck tonight; luck a little too good to be permanent. His drinks in celebration of that luck had been just one too many, dulling the alertness which a successful gambler should maintain while walking late at night. In the observant pupils of Fernando Velez gleamed a cold spark. But he stood motionless until the other was well past. Then his head protruded, reconnoitering the street from top to bottom. In all its length moved only the lurching form of Pillaro.

At the next corner that form paused a few seconds, catching breath, glancing around and behind. At the halt Fernando's head drew back; but one eye still watched. Open mouthed, Pedro loudly hiccoughed several times, then swayed around the corner and vanished. Immediately the hidden watcher stepped out. Swift but soundless, he strode to the street intersection; hesitated a second, peering, then disappeared in his turn.

The night remained quiet. Pedro Pillaro carried a revolver and, sober or unsober, knew how to use it. So did Fernando Velez. But no shots—no, not even a voice—disturbed the stillness. Presently, however, Fernando reappeared in Calle Libertad, a new, exultant light on his face. Up and down he glanced; then, with resilient step, walked fast toward the boat anchorage.

In a doorway of the cross street Pedro Pillaro half sat, half lay in a queer position, as if, overcome by his liquor, he had staggered in there and collapsed into coma. If any one should see that huddled shape before sunrise—which was quite unlikely—the observer would pass by with a grin.

Only daylight would reveal the facts that the sleeper would never awake, that the back of his coat was punctured by a poniard and soaked with a dark red stain, and that his money pocket was turned inside out.

Once more the devil had taken care of his own. Perchance some might say that Pedro, being not only card sharper but killer of a man or two, was also entitled to the protection of the Prince of Evil. But the gambler's trickery was no worse, only a shade more clever, than that of the men whose money he won; and his homicides had been committed fairly enough, in self defense. Worse yet, he had more than once given money to the church. Under such circumstances he could hardly expect favors from El Diablo when a capable malefactor like Fernando Velez must be provided for. So Pedro stopped where he was and Fernando went elsewhere.

CHAPTER III

"WHERE IS THE WHITE MAN?"

SOME seventy or eighty leagues up the Orinoco from Ciudad Bolívar—exact distance is immaterial in a land where journeys are measured by days rather than by miles—the dingy, patch sailed piragua which graced or disgraced the name of *Ana* dropped anchor for the night off the western shore.

To starboard several flimsy huts were semi-visible in the tree wall at the edge of the bank, and before these temporary shelters moved brown figures, nearly nude, outwardly ignoring the presence of the little river ship. The *mestizo* captain and crew, on the other hand, peered with wistful attention at the aborigines and exchanged speculations as to the feasibility of attempting to lure an Indian girl or two on board. Aft, aloof from the mixed bloods, a white passenger stood contemplating the same distant shapes, but with a colder calculation under his black brows. After a time he flicked a glance astern at the warped dugout canoe which served as tender.

The master, after ribald jests at which his crew snickered, reluctantly decided against opening communication with the wild people. Indians found on the Arauca shore of this region were likely to be a bad lot—that is, not subservient to the whims of semi-white men, particularly in matters pertaining to their women—and, since he had no rifles aboard, it was better to be prudent. Therefore he yawned, turned on his peons with snappish orders, and sent them scrambling about various small tasks.

To his passenger, who had paid passage to the mouth of the Rio Meta, much farther upstream, the master gave only a casual glance. In the slow sail up against the current he had found that white man poor company, unsociable and uncommunicative, and so had formed the habit of letting him alone. This, by previous experience, he had learned to be the best policy when carrying a man who

came aboard by night, avoided notice at towns and had beneath the right coat-tail the hard lump betraying to an observant eye his possession of a gun.

Night fell, dark, yet not dense; for in the west glimmered a quarter moon which gave scant light but banished blackness. Captain and passenger sprawled in hammocks; crew on warped deck. Ashore burned a small fire. Time, unmeasured, passed in sleep. The sun sprang up. Captain and crew arose yawning, then voiced startled ejaculations. The passenger was gone. So was the canoe.

Over on the shore the brown figures were moving about and a thin smoke rose from a breakfast fire. After a scowling gaze all around, the captain of the disreputable sailing craft ordered his much patched canvas hoisted. The piragua, pushed by the morning breeze, crawled inshore. At the bow a peon heaved lead for soundings. When his abrupt shout betokened danger the others struck sail.

"*Indios!*" yelled the owner. "*Donde 'stá 'l blanc'?*"

The Indian men peered stolidly. The women had withdrawn into the huts as the vessel approached. Nobody answered.

"Where is the white man?" wrathfully repeated the owner. "And where is my canoe?"

Stares. Silence. Then spoke one in fragmentary Spanish—

"No white here."

The captain exploded. Talking with tongue, face, hands and arms, he insisted that the white man must be there. Where else could he be? And one of the several dugouts alongside the bank must be his—though there was no way of distinguishing it. He demanded both man and boat at once. In reply he received only more stares, a lengthy silence, and an indifferent:

"*No 'stá' 'qui.*"*

The riverman opened his lips for another voluble outbreak, but closed them without a word. Now he observed that the Indians were carelessly holding bows and arrows, which, though so casually grasped, could be put into operation in three seconds or less. He was within easy range. And the ancient dugout was worth not more than ten pesos†. And the money he had exacted from the nocturnal refugee would easily buy at least half a dozen new canoes. As for the passenger himself, good riddance! He no longer need be fed.

So, with no more words, the yellow man signed to his subordinates to raise sail again. Amid squeaks of block and tackle, the drab cloth again climbed the mast, bellied out and pulled the blistered hull away from there.

Gradually the piragua shrank away upriver. When it had diminished to a small whitish blob on the tawny surface, Fernando Velez stepped out of the green tree curtain behind the huts and joined the Indians at breakfast.

CHAPTER IV

"FIRST THEY INTEND TO KILL ME"

IN JUMPING ship to join dour nomads who neither expected nor desired his company, the Andean outlaw manifested a modicum of cool nerve, especially in view of the fact that his stealthy approach by night was quite likely to be misunderstood and violently resented. Yet the move was not so reckless as it might superficially seem. On the contrary, it was actuated by both sense and necessity.

The facts that these brown people were camping openly on the riverfront and that they sturdily held their ground in face of an anchored piragua proved that they were not so wild as others of their race. The real *Indio bravo* of South American forest or plain is as wary as the beasts and birds of his habitat, and as swift to conceal himself on sighting potential enemies or possible prey. This Fernando knew. The phlegmatic attitude of this small group was, therefore, good evidence of previous contact with white or partly white men and of approachability. So, at

*He (or it) is not here.

†Eight dollars.

what seemed the auspicious time, he approached.

The little vessel was now, he knew, lying off the many mouthed Arauca region, where streams large and small interlaced and discharged their waters into the master river. All that day, in fact, it had been coasting along the inscrutable mass of verdure masking that mysterious hinterland of *rios*, *caños*, *morichales* and *ciénagas*—rivers, creeks, palm shrouded pools and marshy lakes; and all day he had been covertly making mental notes of palm walled houses or other indications of human life infrequently appearing along shore. It was high time for him to abandon the main stream and fade away into the wilderness over yonder, not only because that was his objective but because he could thereby evade any Nemesis which might possibly be creeping up this river behind him.

Once on his way to this region he had spent a bad ten minutes when the government owned Bolívar-Apure steamer, overhauling the *Ana* several days out of port, had purposefully run close alongside and a harsh voiced officer had questioned the *mestizo* master concerning any passenger he might have. The repeated denials of that cheerful liar, coupled with a nonchalant invitation to come aboard and crawl over the freight below decks—the only possible hiding place, where Fernando was at that moment crouching—had satisfied the inquisitor that nothing was to be gained by acceptance.

So the steamer had gone on, and since then no other sign of pursuit had shown. Nevertheless the refugee knew well that the crew of the piragua might have talked about him at small towns where stops had been made, and that some zealous *jefe civil* might later have dispatched men to try to run him down.

Thus it was imperative for him to quit the vessel hereabouts; and the fact that the anchor dropped that night so near the little Indian encampment seemed a bit of opportune luck. Those brown fellows yonder could be—if they would—the best of guides, hunters, paddlers and all around assistants in his new venture; and before this he had come to realize how vital was some such aid.

BACK in the town, in the first flush of the project, the only practical detail which had bothered him had been the necessity for obtaining the money which would bring him here. The fact that he had to flee without equipment had then been merely an inconvenience. Now, however, the lack of a wilderness outfit had become a big black specter constantly grinning at him. He had no gun, except the short revolver at his hip, and no reload of ammunition even for that; no food; nothing at all, indeed, except the clothes he stood in—soiled and rumpled now from constant wear on shipboard—a hammock bought from the *mestizo* captain, and a little of the money looted from Pedro Pillaro.

Furthermore, he had no knowledge of the region he was about to enter—except that it was much larger than he had first supposed—and, consequently, had no acquaintance with the localities favored by the precious birds which he must find. For any man thus unprepared, entrance into that grim terrain behind the riverfront screen meant virtual suicide. And self destruction was by no means the intention of this self styled "gentleman adventurer."

But now all these wants could be supplied by the indigenes yonder. So, when all others aboard the piragua were sunk in sleep, and the tiny moon trembled on the verge of obliteration by the crests of the far, invisible Andes, and the little watch fire on shore temporarily dulled as some watchful Indian placed fresh wood on its flame, Fernando rolled up his hammock, picked a paddle from the deck, pulled the canoe under the overhanging stern and lowered himself into it. A slice with the poniard severed the painter, and inexpert but serviceable strokes of the ill made paddle propelled the hollowed log shoreward.

A bowshot from earth the paddler paused, raising a hand in mute signal to any

watcher at the camp; for he knew himself to be quite visible to any open Indian eyes. From the shadows beyond the fire came no acknowledgment of his gesture of amity, but neither came any arrow as he swashed onward. Grounding at the edge, he clutched a bush; then, low toned, called:

"Indians! A friend comes."

No answer. After a moment of waiting he stepped out, tied his boat, and then, with careless movements, though with his revolver concealed up one coat-sleeve, he walked to the fire. There he folded arms and spoke again—

"Indians, a friend is here."

Another long minute, while he felt himself scrutinized by unseen observers. Thereafter, one by one, coppery men materialized from the dim huts. Each brought a weapon, each regarded him with cool gravity, but none looked hostile. At length one bluntly demanded:

"*Qué quiere?* What do you want?"

"To warn you. To be your friend. And, if you are good people, to go with you."

A protracted pause, while searching brown eyes bored into his own. The bad reputation of Spaniards, a reputation well earned in their dealings with Indians, was centuries old. Yet some Spaniards were known to be humane. And the action of this man in coming to them with manifest friendliness and with no visible weapons spoke potently in his favor. Presently the leader prompted—

"To warn us of what?"

"The men on the ship are bad men," declared the virtuous Fernando. "They talk of shooting you men and carrying off your women. But they know that if they come against you openly you will dodge back into the trees and escape. So they mean to keep peace tonight, go on tomorrow, go ashore somewhere beyond the next curve and sneak back through the bush to catch you unsuspicious. They will get around you in these woods and shoot into you from the back and both sides of your camp. So you will be swiftly killed and your women will be caught.

"But first they intend to kill me. I heard them plotting to do this tonight. They are robbers, and they think I have much money. I have some money, enough to buy you good things later on, but not so much as they think. But they mean to cut my throat and take all I have, and then to capture your women and sell them as slaves to other bad men up the river. So I have come to you to save my own life and save yours, too. Now shall we be friends? If we are friends I shall show you how to profit by my friendship."

TO HIS auditors the tale was easily credible. Killing or enslavement of Indians, murder and robbery of whites, were nothing new up here. And the declaration that his own life was in peril made his desire to join them seem entirely logical. Nor was the hint of profit lost on their head man.

"How shall we gain?" he queried.

"By doing what I meant to have those men do. I came here to collect plumes of the *garza*, and the men out there were to work for me. Now we shall let them fool themselves and sail on upstream, and as soon as they are gone we shall slip away from them and go our own way. You will take me to the nesting grounds, and we shall collect many feathers. Then we shall come back and trade with river traders, and I will see that you get many more good things than you could get without me. The traders would cheat you, but they can not cheat me, because I know what their things are worth. I shall keep some feathers for myself, of course. That is only right, when I help you to get rich; and if you are honest you will be willing to let me have my share. If you are not honest I want nothing to do with you, and I shall get into my canoe again and paddle down the river to find good people."

So saying, he returned their probing gaze with one even sharper. Their eyes held unwavering while the idea grew on them. Then said the spokesman:

"Stay. We shall talk about this thing."

"*Bien*," acquiesced the white man, secretly rejoicing. "Bring my hammock from the canoe and hang it in your best hut, and then we shall talk as friends."

Thus Fernando Velez, one time *caballero*, now refugee from two countries, became a renegade, entering into fellowship with the bare brown people of the swamplands; a somewhat superior fellowship, it is true, but still a co-partnership in which he was soon to identify himself closely with most of their ways. By the time the ensuing conference ended he had convinced them that they had much to gain and nothing to lose by working his will.

By observation of their reactions to his talk, he had satisfied himself that they were unlikely to prove treacherous, and that they would not kill him for his money; for their näive questions showed that they, like most back bush Indians of that continent, had little acquaintance with the value of minted coins. Assured of this fact, he casually exhibited all the money still in his pocket, with an air indicating that he had much more, and thus proved that his claim to possession of white man riches was not entirely a white man lie. Although he had not been quite a match for the Bolívar gamblers, he knew something about bluffing.

So, when morning came and the captain of the piragua demanded news of his whereabouts, the brown men protected their new companion as one of their own people; outwardly passive, but ready to defend themselves at the first overt act. And when that piragua was well away they gave him their best food, crude stuff, unsalted, but nevertheless edible, and their womenfolk appeared openly before him, self-conscious before his bold regard but, like women the world over, also conscious of such charms as they possessed and not entirely averse to showing them. And when the meal was done the camp was abandoned.

Into their canoes the swamp men put their few belongings and their women and themselves, with their white companion in the place of honor, amidships in the dugout of their head man. Upstream they looked for a second, saying nothing, giving no indication of their thoughts, but noting that the piragua now had vanished around a point of land—and so, if the words of the man who had come to them by night were true, must be now disgorging gunmen who would sneak back to slay them. Then, faces expressionless, they shoved off and began plying their paddles in the short, stiff stroke which they could hold by the hour.

Down the river they headed, to turn soon into the mouth of a nameless *caño* which squirmed away to the westward. As the leading canoe swung into that unknown waterway Fernando Velez grinned mockingly at a tiny sail, barely visible down a straight stretch of the Orinoco, which might or might not be bearing pursuers up here to overhaul him. Then the wide stream faded out and the narrow creek swallowed up him and his followers. With his last match he lit his last *cigarrillo*. Thereafter he alternately contemplated the monotonously wooded shores and the women of the Indians.

CHAPTER V

"HERE?"

ONE OF the most notable characteristics of the white man is his adaptability to changing circumstance. This, more than any other attribute, has enabled him to penetrate to virtually every part of the world and to acquire control of most of it. And he has proven particularly facile in accustoming himself not merely to the climates, environments and habits of other races, but also to their women. If a woman of his own color and class is not available he often can, and not infrequently does, adopt as substitute whatever sort of female is easiest to get. To this fact is directly due the presence in South America of many *mestizos*, in North America of mulattos and "breeds."

So, although—or, perhaps, because—Fernando Velez, quondam "gentleman",

still yearned for a tantalizing white faced Justa back in Bolívar, he found it not at all difficult presently to develop a wistful interest in a chocolate skinned, but comely featured and well formed woman of the chance met band of wanderers who were now his only companions. The fact that he was originally of the highest caste in his continent—that is, of unmixed Spanish blood—and that these bare brown people were of the lowest social order, acted as no deterrent. Of even less consequence was the fact that the woman was addicted to frequent scratchings which might indicate that she was hostess to a number of affectionate animalcula; for by that time he had formed the same habit. She was the best looking woman in his present world. So he found her increasingly attractive.

Nor was she unaware of his growing regard, nor averse to it. In fact, she often stole long, though stealthy looks at him, and as the days passed she sometimes gave him a fleeting smile—when her mate was not looking. For she had a mate, a mate with watchful eyes, hard jaw and strong hand. Perhaps that brown fellow, who was quite direct in his methods, had previously taught her the value of discretion in looking at other men. At any rate, she was discreet now, except in the matter of over frequent glances. And Fernando, quite cognizant of the advisability of prudence at this stage of his game, confined his own attentions to sly scrutinies which, for a time, were not generally observed.

The band numbered about twenty, of whom a third were women. There were no children, no old people. All were young, though mature of physique. In his apocopated Spanish the leader informed the refugee that they were a group temporarily self detached from some larger tribe who dwelt far back in the Arauca region. At present they were roaming about simply to satisfy the nomadic instinct, with the intention of ultimate return to their home. Now that he had come to them they would stay with him until they had collected many fine feathers and he had kept his promise to make them rich. Then they could return to their people with pride.

The white man, solemnly assuring them that they should carry home such riches as would astound all their tribe, swallowed a grin. It was by no means his intention to permit these simpletons to acquire wealth which he could use for himself. Once let him gather his plumes and reach a trader with them, and the Indians could wait through eternity for their share of the proceeds. But this was no time to let them know it.

FOR SEVERAL days the canoes crawled steadily onward, yet seemed to go nowhere; for the waterways which they followed were so tortuous that, as direction changed, the sun shone ahead, behind and on either hand, in bewildering haphazard, and upon the stranger to the labyrinth grew the feeling that he was merely wriggling around in a crazy circle. The monotony of the luxuriant waterside verdure accentuated the impression. Even when the flotilla emerged into the wider reaches of some lagoon the sensation persisted, for to his wearied vision these *ciénagas* all looked essentially identical.

The very crocodiles and snakes and monkeys and occasional bold *tigres*—the Arauca region is noted for the size and insolence of its jaguars—looked and acted so much like others previously met that he could have sworn that they were the same. Yet he retained sense enough to say nothing of this and to look wise; for reason told him that these people would not waste energy in useless meanderings. More than once, too, he realized what would have been his fate had he headed alone into this maze with the sanguine expectation of finding a flock of snowy egrets at the first swampy spot encountered. The thought gave him a chill along the spine.

Thus far, not one egret had been found. Other wild life in plenty was to be seen, and from it the Indians took such toll with arrow and dart that food never lacked.

But the beautiful little herons whose plumage had so long been their bane seemed to have become extinct. By the talk of the head man, however, as well as by the businesslike work of the paddlers, the feather hunter was assured that *garzas* still lived, though their continued existence was hardly attributable to their own sagacity.

According to the swamp dwellers, the birds stupidly returned year after year to the same favored breeding grounds, learning nothing from the fact that each year men came to those places to kill every nesting mother they could find. So well known was this ineradicable habit that the more accessible grounds were counted upon as annual dividend payers, and were rented each season to the highest bidders by the men who, by force of arms if not of law, owned them. Yet, despite merciless diminution, the birds managed somehow to survive.

It was not toward any of these commercialized *garceros*, however, that these aborigines now were taking the renegade. On the contrary, they were heading toward a section little known, if known at all, to any one but Indians. By going there they could not only be sure of a plentiful supply of the valued egrets but would also avoid complications with the gunmen and cutthroats likely to be met in other spots. With both these desires Fernando was in full accord. The work involved in reaching that virtually undiscovered spot was immaterial to him, since he did none of it himself. While his paddlers slaved in the broiling sun he lolled under a palm roof amidships, dozing and scratching.

In all, it was a soft life which he led in those days; so soft, by comparison with what it might have been, that the devil could justly be credited with still caring for his own. True, it was by no means the life he had recently led in Bolívar; still less the aristocratic existence he had formerly enjoyed in Bogotá. His white man palate found the Indian food almost disgusting, although it was usually fresh, because of the lack of condiments. Pepper he could do without, but the absence of salt robbed everything of savor.

Still more keenly did he miss his tobacco. For a few days, too, the thickening bristles of his hitherto clean shaven jaw and throat were a constant discomfort; his unwashed clothing became increasingly offensive; and the little crawlings and bitings under that clothing and in his hair wore on his nerves. The mosquitoes which jabbed his neck and hands, the *eniguas* which bored into his toes, and the ticks which took hold of him anywhere, also bothered him. But he grew used to all these inconveniences, and found them far outweighed by the compensations. He was safe from all officials, and he was on his way to wealth without work. Yes, El Diablo was treating him quite handsomely.

SO, DAY by day, they wormed their way back into the wilderness, seeing no other men; and night by night they camped wherever their leader directed. Slain birds, beasts and fish fed them, with occasional wild mangoes or papaws as fruit. Huts of poles and *platanillo* leaves, quickly constructed by use of the machetes acquired in some previous contact with river people, sheltered them from the sudden roaring rains of night. And, through constant association with the white man and failure to discern any sign of intent to abuse or defraud them, the indigenes gradually lost any suspicions which might still have lingered in their minds and formed the habit of considering him a *buen' hombre*. Thus the present was pleasant and the future augured well.

At length they drew out into a long lagoon, weedy and irregular, along the forested shores of which some *areguato* monkeys howled atrociously, toucans yelped, and other noisy forms of life foretold the coming of another night. To these familiar sounds the voyagers gave only subconscious acknowledgment. But, for no reason apparent to the sleepy eyes of Fernando, the men stopped paddling and peered along the unattractive water

and all about the shores. The very lack of anything worth looking at seemed to satisfy them. Their leader turned to the recumbent refugee and spoke an all-inclusive word—

"*Aquí.*"

"Here?" echoed the white, sitting up with a sudden gleam in his eyes.

"Uh," affirmed the other.

The seemingly endless meandering had ended. This was the virgin ground of the egrets.

CHAPTER VI

"WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF?"

SUNRISE found Fernando, for the first time since leaving the banks of the Orinoco, even more ready to be off than any of his companions. In fact, he arose with such alacrity and showed such impatience to move on that the brown folk stared in amazement. They had come to regard him as languid, not to say lazy. They had something to learn about the quickening effect of the nearness of wealth on the most dilatory Spaniard.

The night camp had been made at the first practical spot on the lagoon shore. In the hour of daylight remaining, while the Indians had been out hunting meat, the white man had watched continuously for some flying white bird, but had discerned none. Other herons of duller hue had flapped across the water, ducks and macaws had jeered at him, a *garzon* stork on a hummock had derisively shaken great wings, but not one egret had made its existence known by sight or sound. By the time night had fallen a deep scowl had cut itself into the brow of the feather hunter, and his questioning of the head man thereafter was so unpleasantly sharp as to evoke a retaliating growl.

Did the white man who came hunting *garzas* know so little of them as to expect them to come flying to him? Did he not know that the mothers were on the nests and the males were wary and elusive? Moreover, this part of the long *ciénaga* was not used by the birds. Tomorrow the hunters would make permanent camp in the heart of the breeding grounds. Until then he must be patient.

Red from the rebuff, the refugee nevertheless swallowed his resentment. He was in no position to attempt enforcement of more courteous words from the men—at least, not yet. But they had better show him some egrets on the morrow!

That night he awoke repeatedly to lie, calculating profits, which, in the rosy light of imagination, became enormous. The doubts which had assailed him in daylight vanished in these dreams of the dark. He had here a virgin field, the ravishment of which should yield not merely passage across the Atlantic but, in Europe, the status of a gentleman. He would sell here only such feathers as he must part with in order to secure transportation. Those, probably, must be sacrificed at half the market price, or even less. But he would neither pay to the government its tax nor to his men their promised trade goods; so he would save something there.

The rest of his white loot would go with him to the market, where he could cash it at the highest price. And then—ho for Monte Carlo! There he could gamble royally and revel with the adventuresses of all Europe. And over there he would win his games. That was the country for a gentleman, anyway. This native continent of his was no place for a real *caballero*, this uncivilized region where a man of honor was not understood by greasy officials. In Europe, where every one was white, he would receive the treatment which was a gentleman's due.

When he dozed, however, he found dominating the vague visions of European women the tantalizing face of the girl Justa, in Bolívar. She must come first. He certainly would take her with him. She would go readily enough—so fancy whispered—when she saw his bait and realized what sort of man he was. And the captain of the Trinidad steamer would secrete them aboard for the right price. On the British soil of Trinidad they would be safe from Venezuelan meddlers.

Whether she would go on with him to Europe or stay in Port-of-Spain and live by such luck as came to her—as more than one deserted girl has done—would depend on the continuance of her charm. But she should go that far, at all costs. Now that she was so far from him, his mind depicted her as doubly fair and desirable. And all through the night his visions portrayed him as not only rehabilitated in the world of white men but elevated to a superior plane.

AT DAWN, when he arose, he glanced about at his crude companions and muttered an oath of repugnance. Yet, for all his resurgence of former pride, he neglected to wash his face, straighten his frowzy hair, or perform any other white man rites of cleanliness, even though some of the Indians bathed before his eyes. Dirty handed, he gobbled his food, meanwhile nagging at the brown people for speed of departure. They eyed him stolidly, ate calmly and hurried not at all.

"There is no haste," reproved the head man, who called himself Tahm. "The birds will not fly off. Now we eat. Then we go. Later we make a good camp. Afterward we hunt. Everything at its time."

"Pigs!" snarled Fernando.

Tahm regarded him imperturbably. The only sort of pig these people knew was the *baquido*—peccary—which was worthy of considerable respect; therefore their undomesticated minds found in the appellation no disparagement. The refugee, however, fancied that he saw offense in that cool gaze, and swallowed his ill temper. Alienation of his workers, he realized, would be imbecility.

When the ever important business of eating was completed, the aborigines delayed no longer. They took their accustomed places in the canoes, exchanged the brief jokes usual among them on starting, shoved out, and swung into the regular gunwale thumping rhythm. In his crude cabin in the first dugout the white man sat eagerly peering ahead.

Except for detours to avoid patches of weed and swamp bush, the blunt prows bore steadily into the north, heading for some predetermined spot which Tahm had not taken the trouble to describe. The stroke was the same short, effortless swing which had become habitual throughout the days of cruising. To the anticipatory plunderer of nests of white gold, the progress seemed maddeningly slow. But he held his tongue.

The sun stood at about the ten o'clock station in the hard sky when Tahm, steering the canoe at the head of the fleet, turned it out of a clearwater channel and into a narrow cove. At the end of the inlet rose a low hill timbered by sizable trees. Under the dense leaved branches the ground bush was thin. The murmur of a brook promised cool, sweet water, and the shadow under the canopy of foliage invited hot travelers to stop and stay. This obviously was the camp site previously selected by the Indians as their headquarters. Grunts passed among the paddlers, and their strokes slowed to mere dips. The passenger lost his scowl as he contemplated the shady haven. Here he could be comfortable and, if egrets were numerous, content.

But the promise of those darksome woods proved deceitful. As the guiding canoe neared the mouth of the brook its crew, scanning all ahead with habitual vigilance, suddenly grunted again and instinctively backstroked. The dugout stopped. Those behind it instantly halted with one combined swash of paddles. The short fleet floated a pistol shot from shore, all its people keenly peering.

"What's wrong?" snapped Fernando, perceiving no danger.

From the stern answered the restrained voice of Tahm:

"Others are here. See the house."

Squinting, scowling anew, the white searched the shades for several seconds before distinguishing what was plain to the eye of every aborigine: a hut of poles and palms, half hidden among brush up the brook, in which hung a lax, yellowish hammock. It was the odd color of that semi-obscured net that had caught the

observant vision of the first beholder; a color which had not been there at his last visit to the spot. That had been enough for him; and his monosyllabic warning that something was queer had been enough for his comrades. Now all the newcomers peered at the partly visible shelter and at the mysterious forest growth around it.

NOWHERE showed any human form, any moving shadow, any sway or dip of brush betraying the presence of watching men. No canoe lay at the shore. The place seemed abandoned. And, though the presence of that hanging bed argued against the supposition that its owner had gone, its looseness indicated that it was not now in use. Minutes passed, and no sign of life became discernible. Still the canoes hung offshore, no paddler drawing at his shaft.

"Bah!" jeered the refugee. "What are you afraid of? It is an old camp."

"'*Sta nuevo*," quietly contradicted Tahm. "It is new."

His keen vision had detected the greenness of the palm fronds composing the roof. If the hut had been old these would have been dull brown.

The white man's eyes narrowed a trifle more, and his mouth grew harder. A hand stole back and loosened the revolver at his hip. To come so far and find interlopers here ahead of him, stealing his camp ground, gathering his wealth of feathers . . . It maddened him. With a sudden jerk he threw himself out from the cabin and straightened up. Hand still on gun, though hidden beneath his dirty coat, he faced back toward Tahm and commanded:

"Put me ashore! I will look at that house."

For a long minute Tahm considered. The threat of the other's face and poise did not move him; he was still unaware of the concealed weapon, and was not the man to be scared by a look. On the other hand, he was decidedly curious concerning that camp. It was not, he felt, the establishment of Indians. White or semi-white men must have come here from some unknown place to catch *garzas*. They would have guns and be dangerous; and they might be close by. But if this white wished to incur the danger likely to result from invading the house of other men— Very well, then.

To his paddlers he voiced a laconic order. The broad blades moved again, though slowly. The leading canoe, and the others after it, slid up into the brook mouth, there to stop. A heavy snag blocked further progress, and the brown men were quite willing to halt there anyway. After a second of hesitation and sharp scrutiny of everything near, Fernando leaped ashore and, keenly alert, passed through the brush to the hut. The Indians stayed behind, some standing to watch the investigator, others picking up bows and arrows.

Beside the crude shelter Fernando paused a few seconds, once more glancing around. Then he walked in, to stand looking with envious amazement at what he found.

There were two hammocks instead of one; two, hanging side by side, with mosquito nets neatly balled up near the head lashing of each. These held the intruder's eye for only an instant. It was the broad pole table at the farther side, where the roof dipped low, which drew his covetous attention. On this hip-high support, safe from the deteriorating dampness of the ground, rested boxes of supplies, duffle-bags, a sack of rice, several *bultos* of cassava bread, a tall can of native sugar, several friction-top tins lightly powdered with damp salt, a small trunk, a khaki shirt carelessly dangling over one edge . . .

For the moment he noticed nothing more. His brain concentrated on the cans of sugar and of salt. Appetite, recently starved of sweets and salines, suddenly incited ravenous desire. With one long stride he plunged a grimy hand into the half open sugar tin, clutched a palmful of the half liquefied contents, and stuffed his mouth. Again and again he clawed up the sticky stuff and gobbled it. Then,

drawing his poniard, he pried off the top of a salt-can and scooped out a handful of the white condiment. Thereafter he stood lapping it up and reveling in its tang, while his eyes resumed their roaming.

A LITTLE way back in the woods stood another, larger hut, which he now observed for the first time; a typical *ranchería*, or temporary domicile for several men. Hammocks hung there also, six or eight of them, but hardly anything else was in the place, so far as he could discern. Behind this broad, low structure was a smaller one, still more crude, and capable of sheltering only two or three persons.

Without thinking out the matter or making conscious comparisons, he felt that the third house was used by a couple of Indians; the largest, by *mestizos;* the one where he stood, by white men. Certainly this one formed the quarters of the leaders of the party. And they were no tattered swamp tramps; not with such an outfit. They were—

He started. On the side of a soiled, box shaped bag of canvas encircled by cloth straps he had discerned three faded letters—

U. S. A.

Americans. Two Americans! The two Americans whom he had left in Bolívar! But no; how could those two be here ahead of him? The baggage looked the same as theirs, although he could not recall having seen this collapsible canvas army trunk among their pieces. But the similarity of the other articles did not prove anything. Quite likely all North American baggage was more or less alike.

Americans were a cursedly nosey lot, likely to travel into the most Godforsaken places—explorers, naturalists, botanists, all sorts of restless fools who had to go and find something new or different. These two might be another pair, probably were, must be. Cocksure fools, too, to go off and leave all their goods unguarded. His gaze riveted on the other trunk—the narrow, rigid one of fiber. That must be the depository of their money. No other piece had a lock.

Reaching, he gave it a tentative lift. Its weight brought to his eyes a swift gleam. A quick look around disclosed nothing new. Down at the shore, blurred by the intervening brush, the Indians still waited in their canoes; none had set foot to land. If these American fools and their men should appear in their own boats the swamp dwellers would call a warning. He drew his poniard, squatted, and began prying at the lock.

Results were nil. By no possibility could that firmly riveted brass horseshoe be loosened with his slender blade. Danger of breaking the point forced him to desist. But, after a moment of scowling and swearing, he began work more tedious but more practical, an effort to cut the lock out of the wood. Since no ax, hatchet, or equally forceful tool was at hand, he could operate only with his knife. But with that he toiled unremittingly. A scratch down either side, a scratch beneath, and so over and over. Each scratch bit a little deeper into the groove. But it was slow work, for the battered case was exasperatingly tough.

The simple expedient of carrying the trunk to the canoes and bidding the Indians come and loot the whole place naturally occurred to him, but he dismissed it. The swamp men would not aid in any such robbery. They were primitive, but not pirates. Moreover, they had wholesome dread of the merited retribution consequent on any such act. He must get this money alone. So he labored alone.

Scratch, scratch, scratch. Sweat exuded from every pore. His hands grew lame. His neck ached. His bent legs stiffened. Thirst, aggravated by the salt, grew keen. But still he scratched, oblivious of all around him. Down at the brook mouth the Indians had resumed their seats and now watched outward, vigilant against returning owners of this camp. Their white man was up to some mischief, they realized, but that was his

own affair. Though they would not help in it, neither would they hinder.

Fernando began muttering oaths through set teeth. At every scratch he swore. But the exhausting work was almost done. A few minutes more and the steel would be through. Panting, grunting, cursing, he scratched harder than ever.

Then—

A frightful shock smote him from behind. He lurched headlong, bumped his face against the trunk, reeled to one side, and fell asprawl, dropping his knife. Two more shocks hit him in the same spot, hurting him wickedly. As he writhed over to face his assailant a harsh voice demanded—

"You damned yellow bellied sneak thief, how d'you like that?"

CHAPTER VII

"THEY'RE MAKING THEIR GETAWAY!"

THREE violent and totally unexpected kicks of a heavy hunting boot would constitute a severe jolt to the nerves of any man. To Fernando Velez, former *caballero*, such assault was almost paralyzing. Coupled with the physical impacts was the stunning realization that he, a Spanish white, had been punished with the treatment accorded only to dogs. And this double shock was redoubled by the ignominy of being caught in the act of attempted thievery and by the fact that the man who had caught him was Jameson, the rough American of Bolívar.

For a few seconds he lay stupefied, staring up into the lean, lantern jawed, hard eyed face which leered down at him. Those cold eyes never wavered, and the grin stretching the mouth below them was merciless. Behind the khaki shirted shoulder formed another face, darker, but equally bleak of eye and uncompromising of jaw. Subconsciously the man on the ground recognized it as that of Grant, the brunette partner, who had acted as peacemaker in town, but who showed no sign of any such intention now. On the contrary, the black browed American looked as if strongly inclined to add a few kicks to those already delivered.

"Who the hell let you in here, you lousy bum?" jarred Jameson. "And who the hell are you, and where from? Get up and spill the straight dope, and be damn sure it's straight, or I'll—"

He stopped short, a glint of half recognition dawning in his eyes. Fernando, his dazed brain quickening, interpreted it and dissimulated. Repressing his first mad impulse to draw his gun and shoot down the blond beast who had so degraded him, he dropped his gaze, rolled slowly over on his stomach, pushed himself to his feet and stood regarding both of them with assumed stupidity.

"Say, Bill, isn't this the guy that spied on us in Bolívar?" puzzled Jameson. "You know, the night we talked with Falcón. I had a few drinks in that night, but I'm damned if I don't believe this is the same sneak. He's filthy, and he stinks worse than a dead alligator, but I'll swear he's a dead ringer for that mutt."

Grant's gaze sharpened. Fernando's grew still more blank. Inwardly he suddenly saw himself as he was, an unkempt, unshaven, unclean creature, much changed from the smooth faced and spotless townsman who had stood a minute in the sight of these two; a man not more than half recognizable by those who had seen him but once. Outwardly he did not recognize these men at all. Staring at them, he appeared altogether unaware of their identity, while he noted that both, though empty handed, were armed with revolvers hanging at the thigh, and that their right hands were close to the holsters.

"*No comprendo*," he declared.

A silence, while eyes probed. Then said Grant:

"I guess not, Jim. That fellow spoke English. And he skipped back into the bush somewhere behind Bolívar and they're hunting for him there yet, unless they've caught him since we left. The steamer overhauled every sailboat on our way up, remember, and he wasn't on any

of them. This is just a bush bum, and half starved, too. Look at his face. He's been gobbling our sugar."

"M-m-m, yeah. Guess you're right," slowly admitted Jameson. "But he's a thief, anyway. I wouldn't blame him for swiping some grub if he needed it, but the trunk— He thought there was money in that, and he couldn't eat money. Ha-ha-ha!" A sudden laugh broke from him. "The poor sucker! Working his head off to get at those cans of film! We ought to have hung off a few minutes more, just to see his face when he found out what was in there."

"He'd have spoiled some of it, trying to find out what it was. These half breeds don't know any more about movie film than you know about sobriety or chastity."

"They sure must be damned ignorant, then," grinned Jameson.

FERNANDO writhed mentally. Even though he was trying to assume the part of ignorant half breed and bush bum, the names stung. So did the sangfroid with which these outlanders discussed him, as if he were a mere insect. His right hand moved hipward a few inches, but no farther. Four eyes still watched closely, and two hands still remained near pouched weapons. His own dropped and hung motionless.

"*No comprendo*," he repeated, as if he believed all the previous words to have been directed at him.

"No?" mocked Jameson, with the same hard lipped grin. In Spanish, he went on, "You comprehend that you're caught thieving, don't you? What were you looking for in that trunk?"

"Money," candidly replied Fernando. "I am a poor man. You señores must be rich. I need a few *bolívars*."

His utterance was hoarse, throaty, altogether unlike the clear, impudent tone in which he had spoken at the barred window on the Calle Libertad. Both the Americans relaxed almost imperceptibly from their intent attitude. After another second or two of scrutiny Jameson sniffed contemptuously.

"Yep, he's a dumb Dora, all right," he commented.

His eyes veered aside, to rove observantly in a semicircle, scanning the woods. Then he turned his head and glanced waterward. At once he wheeled, hand on gun butt, gaze fixed on stealthily moving shapes beyond the brush screen. Grant, catching the motion, half turned also, but somehow seemed to keep one eye on the captive.

"There's his gang," muttered the blond. "Thought 'twas funny he was here alone. But they're making their getaway. Watch this bird, Bill, while I go look at 'em."

He strode away, truculent, ready to boot or shoot any other man found lurking ashore. Grant held his pose of double observation. Fernando, glimpsing the movement of the dugouts away from the brook-mouth, felt quick alarm. The Indians, hearing the sudden voices, had stood up again, seen the two owners, watched a minute, sat, and quietly pushed out. If they once departed from that cove, he realized, they would not return; and he would have scant chance of ever finding them again.

"Señores! Do not harm them!" he begged. "They are only *Indios*, poor inoffensive people of the swamps, and my only friends. If you drive them away I must starve."

Jameson made no answer. Straight on he went, to assure himself that all had gone and that all were really Indians. At the shore he stopped and stood squinting at the brown folk. A little way out, they too stopped, floating quietly and eying him in turn, wary but curious. They perceived that he carried no rifle, and failed to discern his holstered side arm, so they saw no cause for further withdrawal at the moment. For a silent minute or two the northerner and the indigenes regarded each other with suspicious alertness which subsided into mutual assurance. Then Jameson turned back.

"They're harmless," he announced. "A bunch of tramps—several women, no

guns." Surveying the captive with another sneer, he added in Spanish, "Your only friends? That's a fine confession! What did you do that lost you your white friends—if you ever had any?"

"I fought on the wrong side, señor," was the ingenuous excuse. "There was a revolt against an oppressive official at the north, and it failed. So I had to take to the swamps or be shot."

"Oh." Jameson chuckled. "I see. One of your South American elections."

The explanation amused him. His forbidding face was creased by a grin as he remarked to Grant:

"They've got a referendum and recall system down here, Bill, that's a pip. They say it with bullets instead of ballots, and it sure is decisive; there are no recounts. I saw one of those things work once, and 'twas a wow. Well, let's send this honest patriot on his way and get back to the job. I want to shoot a few more yards before the sun gets too far over. But wait a minute. Let's see if he's ruined this trunk entirely. If he has I'll bust his sternum for keeps."

"The sternum is the breastbone, Jim," grinned Grant.

"Oh, is it? Well, you know what I mean."

HE STEPPED to the trunk, scowled at the grooves, ran a thumbnail along one slit, grasped the lid at the ends and gave a sharp tug. Nothing gave way. Grant, now disregarding the prisoner, joined his partner, produced a key, and turned the lock. As the lid rose Fernando peered avidly at the contents for which he had worked so hard. Then his face fell. He saw nothing but closely packed rows of flat, round sided cans.

"Good enough, I guess," judged Grant, surveying the deep knife cuts. "He nearly got through, but it'll hold together. We can repair it with some tin and nails."

"Make the bum do it."

"No. Get rid of him. We can't waste time on him now. Juan will fix this up tonight."

"Well, all right. Pull out what you want."

With the abrupt movements characteristic of him, Jameson jerked his head again toward Fernando, who imperceptibly released his hold on the revolver butt which he now had grasped.

"Here, bum!" he jarred in colloquial Spanish. "Look here and improve your education! See these cans? They're full of motion picture film, and nothing else. You couldn't eat it, you couldn't spend it, you couldn't sell it. It's worth money to us, but not to you. Next time you try to rob a trunk be sure it's worth the work. Now get to hell out of here! And don't come back!"

The pseudo-revolutionist stood still a moment longer to ask a question.

"Do you mean that you are photographers, señor? That you came here to take pictures—here to this ugly place? Pictures of what?"

"Of birds, bum. Birds on the nest, see? *Garzas*, you call them. We're photographing other tropical life too, but right now we're busy with birds. We're not making pictures of vermin, or I'd take a few feet of you. That's all. Now get out and stay out!"

The blue eyes looked into the pale gray ones with the cold menace of twin gun muzzles. And Fernando delayed no longer. With stolid gait, albeit with a limp, he walked waterward. Cornerwise he observed that on the ground outside the hut lay a couple of cans similar to those in the trunk. Apparently these men had, through some oversight, neglected to take with them enough film for their morning's work, and had come back for more. At any rate, they had certainly come back, as every step painfully attested. Once more a rush of rage nearly impelled him to draw and shoot. But, feeling a hard gaze on his back, he once more refrained from vengeance. Hands hanging loose, eyes fixed ahead, he hobbled through the brush to the brook mouth.

"*Aquí!*" he called, in authoritative tone.

The Indians eyed him without motion. Carefully they scanned the growth behind him, the half masked house of the white men, the neighboring woods. They saw

the thin man in khaki come nearer, then stop and stand watching. They glimpsed the stouter one deliberately attending to something inside the hut. They saw no others approaching. So their head man grunted to his own paddlers, and the one dugout slid inshore to receive its passenger. The other canoes lay waiting.

As Fernando stepped stiffly aboard, the paddlers, observant of all details, took note of his furious eyes, his hard set mouth—and the sugary smear still adhering to the bristles around that mouth. Involuntarily they ran their tongues along their own lips, looked wistfully at the camp. Then, as Tahm grunted another command, they backed the canoe outward, still facing the watcher among the leaves. Two lengths away they swung the craft about and headed into the lake whence they had come. The rest followed.

On shore, Jameson spat, and strode back to his partner. On the water, the despised bush bum crouched in his cabin, face blackened by the anger now overwhelming him. The fact that he had been allowed to live and go free when he should have been shot was no balm to his aching flesh and agonized pride. He, a gentleman adventurer, had been booted, called "vermin," spat after. To wipe out those insults only one retaliation would suffice.

CHAPTER VIII

"WHAT ARE THE SECRETS?"

WORDLESS, the men of Tahm paddled on into the north, seeking another camp site. Equally taciturn, Fernando glowered ahead, chewing a cud of thought bitter as gall. After awhile he began chewing also on his lower lip, deriving from it a much more pleasant taste. Half consciously he ran his tongue all around his mouth, licking in the mingled sugar and salt still adhering there. All at once he grew tense, stared at the brown backs of the paddlers, then relaxed, a new light in his eyes. Presently a thin grin crept over his face.

The taste of that salty sweetness had recalled to his mind the hungry look of the Indians at his mouth when he had come back aboard. At the moment his raging brain had recorded that expression only subconsciously. But now it was clear as a photographic print. And, studying it, he found in it an idea which transformed his futile fury to anticipative joy.

When the canoe turned in at the mouth of a creek half an hour away from the scene of his humiliation he still wore that slit eyed smile. And when, on shore, Tahm and all the rest regarded him searchingly, he met their gaze with cool composure. The facts that the movements of disembarking had given him keen twinges of pain, that this second choice camp site was much inferior to the other, that his only friends were viewing him with dubious expressions—these circumstances bothered him not at all, though awhile ago any of them would have intensified his ill temper. The men of his own boat, remembering the rage plain on his visage when he had left the other shore, contemplated him now with puzzlement.

"What happened?" bluntly demanded Tahm.

"Did you not see?" countered Fernando.

"No. We watched the water. We did not see the men until we heard talk. From where did they come?"

Fernando's eyes glinted with satisfaction. None had witnessed the ignominy of his punishment. Nor, evidently, had any one understood the words thereafter spoken.

"They sneaked in from the woods and jumped on me from behind while I was looking at secrets," he explained. "They were angry because I saw those secrets. But when I turned and faced them they did not dare do anything but talk. And, listening to their talk, I learned more secrets."

He smiled slyly. Tahm became more curious.

"What are the secrets?" he pressed.

Fernando grinned mockingly and withheld the desired reply. His tongue ran around his lips.

"They have much salt," he remarked, as if evading the question. "I ate a whole handful. And several handfuls of sugar. M-m-m!" His concluding murmur was eloquent of pleasant recollection.

The eyes of all grew covetous. Though few of them knew much Spanish, all were acquainted with the words *sal* and *azucar*, as well as with the delectable taste of those flavors; and the lick of the tongue and the inarticulate noise spoke directly to their primitive mentalities, arousing cupidity the more keen because of its futility. Like all other Indians of that region, they could obtain salt only from Orinoco dwellers who got it from traders. They now had had none for a long time, nor sugar either. Their faces betrayed sudden greed. Fernando grinned again and lapped his stubby beard with tantalizing deliberation.

"*Aqua!*" he then brusquely ordered. "Water! I have had so much salt that I have a thirst. *Aqua, pronto!*"

A woman filled a gourd and gave it to him, and he drank noisily. Then to Tahm he vouchsafed:

"I shall tell you of the secrets later. Now make me a shelter and get me food."

THE BROWN fellow grunted, and the others went about making camp. As they worked they muttered and mumbled in their own dialect; and Fernando, interpreting tones and looks, smiled maliciously. Avid desire for salt was clamoring within them for appeasement. Salt was only an hour's paddle away. Physical cravings, when sufficiently strong, can overpower all moral ideas, innate or inculcated, in all men. This Fernando well knew. And, whenever they looked his way, he aggravated their salt hunger by licking his lips.

When a hut was over his head, and the carefully saved remnants of the morning meal had been devoured, and all the brown folk still looked discontented with their saltless fare, he called Tahm to him. All the others quietly gathered about, uninvited but unforbidden, to hear what they might, comprehend what they could, and interpret changes of facial expression.

"The men yonder," he declared slowly, "are bad men. They are from some place far away and speak a strange language which they thought I did not understand. But I know that language. So I listened to it and learned what they mean to do.

"They are here to kill the birds that belong to us, and then to work a magic that will spread all over this bird country and kill all the people in it. When you and all the rest of us are dead they will own this place, and the birds that come each year will be theirs. In this way they mean to grow rich.

"They have this magic in a long black box with a lock on it. The magic is in tin cans. They have not yet used it, but they soon will. First they have to make another magic which will save them from being killed by it. They thought they had plenty of time, because they did not know any other men were near. But after they saw us they said: 'We must use this soon.' And that is what they will do—unless we save ourselves by stopping them."

He paused, probing faces. Their gravity proved that his fantastic tale was believed. Since many back bush Indians do believe in such a thing—the ability of white men to loose a pestilence by opening a box or other container—this lie was easily credible to their simple minds.

"I had just opened the box of their magic when they came in," he continued. "They were angry at finding their secret discovered. But I pretended that I did not know what it was. When they saw you, one said, 'Let us open a can and kill all these people now.' But the other said, 'We can not, or we shall kill ourselves too. Let them go until we make our other magic. They can not escape. It will find them, wherever they go. We must protect ourselves first.' So they did nothing."

"Have they no guns?" Tahm broke in.

"They had none with them," lied the renegade. "Perhaps they have a gun or two somewhere, but they had none then. And I let them know I had a gun. So they were glad to see me go."

"You had a gun?" The Indian's tone was incredulous.

For the first time since meeting them, the white drew his revolver.

"I carry here the deaths of six men!" he asserted.

The brown folk stared. Revolvers were almost unknown to them, for such white or partly white men as they had met had carried only rifles. Tahm, however, had heard of these short pocket firearms and of what they could do. After recovering from his amazement on learning that this supposedly unarmed refugee had carried one all the time, he quizzed—

"Then why did you not shoot those two?"

Fernando grinned again. The thought behind that question was in accord with his desires.

"Because I saw you sneaking away," he countered. "I do not kill white men for the sake of Indians who desert me!"

The Indian leader looked uncomfortable. Presently he replied in placating tone:

"We did not desert. We moved out to have more space if war began."

Fernando did not argue the point. He returned to the one which he considered vital.

"*Bien.* That does not matter now. What does matter is that we must save ourselves. To save ourselves we must kill those men before they can kill us. Then I will destroy their magic. After that we are safe. We get all they have. We eat much sugar and salt." He licked his lips once more. "Then we find our birds and take their feathers and trade them and become rich."

A LONG pause. Tahm thought heavily. The others tried to think but, not being accustomed to mental effort, desisted from it and only felt. Their feelings, incited by the white, were largely in accord with his promptings. Tahm felt likewise; but, having somewhat more brain power, possessed also more foresight and prudence. At length he objected:

"They can not be alone. They could not have found their way here without guides. And white men do not paddle canoes. So they must have boatmen. And there must be guns. There are always guns."

"There are a few other men," admitted their tempter. "I saw two other huts; but they were small. We are twice their number. And men must sleep. Sleeping men are easily killed."

Another pause. Men who grasped the situation muttered to companions slower of comprehension. One or two grunted approvingly; others, dubiously. All scanned the doubtful face of Tahm.

"They must be killed tonight," asserted Fernando. "By tomorrow they will have their protective magic ready. I myself will kill both the white men. You must kill the others while I do this. Nobody must live to tell the tale."

To this last warning Tahm agreed quickly. The possibility of retribution by other whites had been troubling him. He did not yet assent to the massacre. He scratched reflectively, contemplated his followers, bent another searching look on the renegade; then shut his eyes and visioned himself and all his people succumbing to a pestilence. When he reopened those eyes they were hard.

Rising from his squat, the brown commander spoke gruffly in his native language. Two capable hunters answered briefly; than, taking their bows and arrows, entered a canoe and paddled away toward hummocks protruding from the water at the westward. Ostensibly they went hunting. Actually they were bound, by a devious and well covered route, to reconnoiter the camp of the white men and learn all essential details. They would land on the western shore, steal through the protecting jungle, and thus approach their objective unseen and unsuspected. On their later report would depend the life or death of the makers of magic.

Fernando watched their departure without comment. For the time, further talk was useless. So, after lolling awhile

in his hammock and grinning at the leaf roof, he dozed and dreamed pleasant dreams. Around him the Indians also took their ease. With prospect of stalking the most dangerous game looming large in their minds, none thought of starting the hunt for white plumes. That could begin tomorrow, perhaps.

About midafternoon Fernando sat up, yawned, scratched, sniffed, and scowlingly regarded himself; then stood and walked lazily away upstream. At a shady spot which looked safe he undressed, emptied his pockets, carefully laid his revolver on a snag at the water's edge, and washed his garments. Thereafter he indulged in his first bath since leaving the Orinoco. The fierce sun rapidly dried out the wet clothing, and presently he returned to his hanging net, cool, clean, but feeling queer and half resolved not to undergo such an experience again in the near future.

Thus far had Fernando Velez, former *caballero*, lapsed from civilized customs. A month ago, though robber and murderer, he had considered the daily bath and shave as essential as food. Now his only motive in cleansing himself was the removal of body odors so strong that they might wake sleeping victims before he could strike.

CHAPTER IX

"WE WILL KILL THOSE MEN!"

DARKNESS, with a thin moon. On the shore of a nameless creek emptying into a lost lagoon, two brown men talked in gutturals to their chief. Other Indians, in compact group, listened closely. A white man, cat eyed, watched all and interpreted voices, looks, and such words as he had recently learned.

There were eight men at the other camp, the spies said—the two white strangers, four halfbloods, two Indians. The Indians were unknown to them, probably members of some tribe at the north. The breeds also were unrecognized. There was another lagoon, a few rods behind the camp, on which were two canoes. Thus it was clear that all these men had come from the north, undoubtedly from the Rio Apure section.

At that word "Apure" the listening Spaniard nodded, a light of comprehension in his face. Those Americans had gone by steamer to San Fernando de Apure, governmental town of Apure state; obtained *mestizo* boatmen, and canoed southward into the egret country. Somewhere *en route* they had picked up Indian guides who knew of this unraided haven of the birds, in which picture hunting should be easy. Otherwise they could never have found the lagoon of which professional feather hunters knew nothing.

The white men had rifles, so said the scouts, but the other men had none. There was one *escopeta*—a weak muzzle-loading shotgun—in the hut of the halfbloods. The only other weapons were machetes. The two Indians probably had bows, and perhaps a *tigre* spear; but they were not likely to try to fight for the white men.

It was true that those strangers were magicians, the observers added. They had a couple of queer boxes that sat on stout tripods, and from one end of each box stuck a short round thing like the muzzle of a big gun. And the strangers did some mysterious work beside a red light after sundown. And when one of them wished to find something in the dark he made a bar of white light, very bright, shoot out of his hand and move about until he saw what he wanted. And in talking to the man who seemed to be head of the *mestizos* the thin white man used the word "*mañana*" several times, and once everybody laughed. So it was obvious that they were making magic which would work tomorrow.

Thus concluded the report. For a minute Tahm was silent. Then he glanced at the moon, scanned all the visible sky, looked squarely into each man's face, and spoke a score of curt, decisive words. A low hum of assent followed. The men dispersed to their flimsy shelters. Tahm turned to Fernando.

"We will kill those men," he announced. "All but the Indians. Them we will take alive. We will make them say why they brought white men here. You must kill the two magicians. We kill the others. At midnight we go."

"*Bueno!*" approved the renegade, agrin with exultation. "But kill the Indians also. Why let them live?"

"No," Tahm refused. "Not until they have talked."

"Oh." The white grinned more widely. "Very well."

"And when the men are dead you must destroy their magic."

"I will," promised Fernando, gloating on the prospect.

Tahm grunted and walked away. And thus, without realizing it, the white slipped down another grade from his once high status. An Indian had told him what he must do, and he had promised to do it. The fact that it was exactly what he wished to do obscured the corollary facts that he would do it at the bidding of the despised brown folk of his continent; that he was virtually taking orders from the swamp men who recently had done as he wished; that the use of that word "must" by Tahm was tantamount to assumption of command over him, and that his unquestioning acceptance of it was equivalent to obedience.

True, Tahm himself had no such thought in mind when he voiced his intentions; he had but spoken bluntly, as was his custom when addressing his own men. Yet the thought followed on the heels of the words, and Tahm's eyes, as he turned toward his own hut, glinted with increased self assurance.

TIME slipped away swiftly for some, slowly for two. The two were Fernando and an Indian who had been ordered to watch the moon. All others, after some buzzing of voices, went to sleep, secure in the belief that they would be roused at the appointed time. Fernando was restless. He inspected his revolver, twirled the cylinder, emptied the cartridges, snapped the hammer a dozen times, worried as to the efficiency of his cartridges, which might possibly have been affected by dampness; reloaded, lay back and dreamed, got up and walked about, reassuring himself that the watchman was awake. That watcher, squatting, stolidly kept track of time. When at length he arose he found the eyes of the Spaniard still open, though he now lay abed.

A muttered word, a passing about among hammocks, a jolt here and there, and all were up. The first to board a canoe was the renegade.

The slender moon now was far down, but still lighting the way ahead. Quietly the men took their accustomed places in the log shells. Dumbly the women watched them go. The canoe of Tahm floated away from shore, then began moving west by south. The others followed. For once there was no cadence of paddles against gunwales; the shafts were muffled with thick pads of leaves, bound on with bush cord, which deadened the habitual impacts. Out toward the setting moon the low shapes swam like hippopotami bearing legless half-men a-sway on their backs. Soon the swamp mist blurred them into nothingness. The women croaked a few times to one another, then returned to their hammocks to wait.

Over at the camp of Jameson and Grant all was still, save for the rhythmic snoring of a *mestizo*. In the near forest recurred various sounds of the night—voices of bass toned tree toads, mutters of nameless prowlers, rustles, cracklings, occasional soft thuds, a sudden small rush ending in a squeak. No human ears heard them. With an active day behind them and another before them, all the men there slept soundly.

Darkness, deep under the trees, thickened still more as the wan moonshine on the lake mists grew yet more pale. The moon had sunk almost to the point of evanishment. Haphazard rustlings increased; stealthy footfalls became bolder as the light weakened. The men slept on, unafraid of all moving things of the night,

unconscious even of their existence. Then the foraging animals about the camp grew motionless and silent, but faint steps continued.

Among the trees stole creatures which, stepping cautiously, crept in around the huts; creatures like huge monkeys, which walked half crouching, heads forward, hands grasping weapons.

These sinister shapes slowed to a stand around the two subordinate shelters. One alone continued movement; one slightly more visible than the rest, since it wore clothes. In daylight its garments would have been dingy white. Now it was dimly gray, while its companions were mere vague shadows in the gloom.

The gray thing worked its way to the faint blob betraying the presence of white mosquito bars in the house of the masters. Tense, it slowly lifted the nearer cloth, seeking to learn which end of the hammocked shape within was the head. Up and up rose the tenuous but baffling net—up and up until the stooping form could see inside. Then—

A spurt of flame split the dark and was gone. A gunshot thumped.

Instantly arrows hissed and bow cords clucked. Short moans, quickly silenced, blended with a hoarse cry, a scramble, a slicing thud, a bump. In the master hut came a harsh oath, a violent upheaval under another net, a second flash and report.

In the light of that flash Jameson's face stood out for an instant, lips down-turned, jaw out, under teeth agleam, eyes stabbing wildly for sight of an enemy. It vanished—with a black hole in its forehead.

"*Eeyah!*" screamed Fernando Velez in savage triumph. "*Eeeeyah!*"

Wild yells answered. That note of exultation loosed the voices of the swamp men in gloating response. The attack on which their minds had been concentrated for hours was over. They were masters of the camp and all it contained; and they howled inarticulate glee at the ease of their victory.

IN THE white men's house the renegade yanked the body of his first victim from its hammock and felt its head. The wet bullet hole in the scorched hair above the left ear reassured him. Grant was dead. He had never known what hit him. Feeling down the shirt front, the thieving fingers of Fernando encountered in the breast pocket a small flat case. Experience told him what it was, a pocket torch. He drew it out, slid the switch. The white magic of electric light shot from his hand as it had from that of the late owner. It centered on Jameson, face down on the dirt.

With a snarl he heaved the huddle over on its back and leered down at the crimsoned features. Into them he swung a foot in repeated kicks.

"Yah! Yellow belly, how d'you like that?" he mocked. "And that? Lousy bum, hah? Halfbreed, hah? Who's filthy now, who stinks now, you offal, you—"

He heaped on the helpless corpse every virulent epithet known to him, kicked it until his legs pained him. Then, panting, satiated with revenge, he turned from his dead humiliator—to find himself ringed about by silent Indians. In their grave eyes was something which made his heat quickly cool.

Their surge of exultation had died out sooner than his. Now they had gathered and watched his continued outburst of vicious fury. And, crude though they were, they did not like it. They were glad that the magicians were dead, and they cared nothing about violent treatment of their bodies. But the naked vindictiveness of their own white man was a revelation. He whom they had come to consider a *buen' hombre* was acting like one of those cruel whites of whom they had often heard, the whites who tortured and outraged and robbed and killed for the pleasure of it. A man who exhibited such ferocity toward a white man dead was capable of similar, or worse, acts to a brown man living. This they felt, as usual, rather than thought. But the feeling brought to their eyes a chill watchfulness, tinged with displeasure.

Fronting that judicial stare, the renegade swallowed something before he found his voice again.

'Are all killed?" he hoarsely demanded.

"All," shortly replied Tahm.

"The Indians, too?"

"Dead. There was a mistake. They tried to escape. Fools killed them."

Fernando smiled covertly. That mistake suited him very well. Then he diverted the thoughts of his judges to the spoils of war, which, oddly, they had temporarily forgotten.

"*Bien.* All is well. Now we shall eat salt—salt—salt!"

That reiteration evoked a sudden low chorus of animal-like eagerness. Heads turned in swift quest. He centered the light on the cans containing the salt and the sugar.

"There," he directed. At once the band flocked to the tins. Snatching, jostling, grunting greedily, they seized handfuls of the appetizing prizes and mouthed them with gurgles of joy. While they were thus busied the renegade took possession of the guns.

Both Americans had slept with revolvers belted on. Jameson had drawn his while springing up, only to drop it unfired as the murderer's bullet crashed home in his brain. Grant's was still in its holster. Fernando pocketed both weapons and turned at once to the rifles.

These stood just inside the nets, each butt on earth, each barrel supported by the crotch of a Y shaped stick set in the ground. One was a .44 Winchester of late model, the other a .30 Savage with military bolt action, both practically new. After a moment of inspection and comparison he walked with both to the waterside, swung the smaller calibered gun once, and threw it far out into the cove. Accustomed to the .44 and unacquainted with the other size, he did not know that he was casting away the more powerful of the two. His object was to rid himself of one rifle, so that the Indians could not claim it. He could not well carry both. With three revolvers, a poniard and a rifle, he was already overarmed.

THE MOON now had gone, and dense blackness ruled. Their dark-dilated eyes discerned him, however, and, on approach, they perceived the gun lying across his thighs. At once Tahm asserted—

"The other gun is mine!"

"There is no other gun," coolly replied the white. "If there were another you would have no right to it. I killed these men. I own all their belongings. You own only what belonged to the men you killed. But I shall be generous with my friends. I shall give you whatever I do not want. Now build a fire. We must destroy the magic."

Tahm muttered, but the fire was built. Into it, while the Indians stood far back and nervously watched, Fernando threw the motion picture cameras, the tripods, the cans of film and various other articles of equipment useless to him or to his companions. To the brown men the hiss and stench of the burned film was truly infernal; to the white, an added triumph. The demolition of the work of his hated foes was the concluding chapter in his book of vengeance. When it was completed he commanded:

"Now drag these bodies to the shore. Tomorrow take them all out on the lake and give them to the crocodiles. When that is done we shall hunt the *garzas.*"

He spoke with an arrogance that caused the lids of Tahm to draw down. With his four guns, the white felt himself master of all. But, since his orders coincided with their own intentions, the chief and all his men obeyed them. The stripped bodies of the magicians were dragged to the water's edge and left there. Those of the *mestizos* and the Indian guides followed, after the thrifty swamp men had retrieved from them such arrows as could be saved by pushing, pulling or cutting out. Then all lay down, in or out of hammocks, to slumber until dawn.

Fernando Velez, alone in the commander's quarters, smoked another cigaret, cuddled his rifle in the crook of an arm, fingered the two newly won revolvers, now holstered on a looted belt, grinned all

around him and finally dropped a mosquito net and lay in luxury. By two swift shots he had vaulted from dependence on bare brown men to ownership of a well equipped camp. He now possessed ample food supplies, fresh clothing, good guns, ammunition, tobacco, mosquito net, other comforts as yet unseen, almost everything he could desire, in fact—except a woman.

For a few minutes he dreamed again of the girl Justa. But then her face faded, displaced by that of the good looking young Indian woman waiting over on the other shore. She still had her husband, but some accident might deprive her of him. In fact, it was more than likely, now that Fernando had four guns. Yes, he would see about making a change. Meanwhile he would catch a nap until morning.

The devil was still taking care of his own, and suggesting new work for him to do. There were some things, however, which that satirical prompter neglected to whisper into the receptive ear. One of them was the fact that the renegade had, by his midnight attack, demonstrated to hitherto cautious Indians how easy it was to kill an armed white man off his guard.

CHAPTER X

"GO AND GET FEATHERS!"

MORNING brought white plumes. While the Indians all were out in their canoes, disposing of the dead men near a crocodile infested islet well away from the camp, Fernando strolled idly into the hut recently used by the *mestizos*, and discovered there a bag. That bag was small and carelessly stowed in a roof corner, as if it held only spare shirts. But when he opened it he found, wrapped in a tattered cloth which might once have been a trouser leg, a quantity of snow white aigrets.

For half a dozen slow breaths he stared at the unexpected prize. Then he laughed loud and long. The angry contradiction of Jameson in the Hotel Bolívar, the more controlled denial of Grant, the cynical smile of Falcón all recurred to him. Those Americans, who considered the slaying of mother birds a "rotten business," had come here and unwittingly caused such slaughter as they condemned; for their boatmen, while they were busy with picture work, had slyly foraged the vicinity and taken feathers for their own gain. No doubt they had brought the light loot back inside their shirts, unperceived by their employers. To Fernando it was a rare jest. Rude Americans had been tricked by shrewd Venezuelans, and a wily Colombian had reaped the reward of it all.

When the enjoyment of the joke passed and the sight of the snowy treasure grew stale, he walked quickly back to his own hut, concealed the package in the trunk which he had labored so hard to rifle yesterday, and pocketed the key. Thereafter he watched with growing impatience for the reappearance of his men, who seemed inordinately dilatory in returning. The discovery of the feathers had both proved the existence of egrets in the vicinage and sharpened the edge of greed. He craved more, many more of the plumes, and at once. By the time the men who were to gather his harvest reentered the cove he was pacing the camp like a caged jaguar. At sight of what they brought, however, his temper subsided.

The freight of dead bodies had been replaced by living ones, those of the women, whom the paddlers had retrieved from their temporary camp when the grim business at the islet was completed. The first to step ashore was the personable young one whose face and unconcealed figure had hovered before Fernando's imagination a few hours past; and her candid stare at him, in which all her feminine companions joined, was eloquent of respect bordering on awe.

It was evident that the men, in telling the tale of the attack on this settlement, had spoken straight truth, and that the prowess of their own white man in killing the two magicians by his own hand had much exalted him in the minds of the

auditors. Now he looked long into the eyes of his latest fancy, gauged the worshipful expression therein, and, with face immobile, let his own pale orbs smile. At her swift response he grinned. Then he turned masterfully on the hunters.

"Go and get feathers!" he commanded.

None moved to obey. All but one looked to Tahm for assent. The exception was the mate of the girl at whom the white had just grinned. Cold, watchful, his gaze hung on the Spaniard. Tahm himself, narrow lidded, probed the bearded countenance a moment, then curtly amended the order.

"We all go," said he.

"I stay here," disputed the white.

"Then we all stay."

Fernando glared. For a fleeting second he meditated pulling a gun on the refractory chieftain. But the somber gaze of the brown commander, imperturbable, inflexible, warned that any show of violence would be worse than useless. At best, it would alienate them; at worst, it might arouse drastic retaliation; and in neither case would it favor the acquisition of feathery wealth. Wherefore he bit back his rage, shrugged, and yielded.

"Are you still afraid of the magic of the strangers?" he jeered. "Then I shall go with you and protect you. *Vamos!*"

Tahm made no answer. The sneer left him unmoved. He had what he wanted; that was all that mattered. He monotoned a few words to his men and dawdled away toward the rear lagoon. Fernando, with outward nonchalance, accompanied him. The other men came after, carrying their paddles.

THOUGH invisible from the camp, the other lagoon was only a short distance away. There, in a cove, lay two canoes; one new, long dugout which had been the travel boat of the whites and the half-breeds, and one short, dingy shell in which the brown guides must have journeyed. Into these the conquerors crowded. Without words they pushed out, heading for some spot evidently known to the steersmen, if not to all others.

Fernando, lolling idle amidships, glanced about, but saw no white birds as yet. His gaze came to rest on the back of the paddler nearest him, who chanced to be the mate of that girl back yonder. It was a symmetrical, powerful back, beneath the tough skin of which the muscles moved in smooth strength at each automatic stroke; a much more potent back than that of the ex-gentleman who now surveyed it and coveted its owner's wife. Between the eyes of the Spaniard came a groove which deepened, then smoothed out. They now dwelt on the spot under the left shoulder blade where bullet or poniard point would be most efficacious. When he glanced again at the swampy surroundings his thin lips were curved slightly downward in a sinister semi-smile.

The canoes moved in comparative silence, with little of the usual gunwale thumping. The absence of this customary cruise beat, as well as the ease of the pull on the shafts, indicated that the trip would be short. And short it was. Hardly half a mile from the camp, the prows swung into a broad bay within which lay a scrubby islet. From the low greenery on that isolated bit of land rose a wide winged bird of pure white, then another, then three more. Fernando sat up with a jerk. Egrets, at last!

Male birds, those were, taking flight at first sight of the approaching destroyers. The females, faithful to their creative task, would not fly, Fernando knew. At sight of those flapping shapes sliding athwart the horizon his mind dropped all thought of man killing, to fasten on the near prospect of gathering white gold.

At a spot chosen by Tahm, the canoes touched land. Unhurried, unexcited, the brown men debarked. The white scrambled ashore in such haste that he tripped and sprawled flat on his stomach. Tahm chuckled. His men laughed without restraint. Fernando, rising red faced, swore at the mirthful crew; then forced a grin and waved inland.

As the band dispersed—each, without instructions, proceeding in whatever direction he chose—the renegade shot after

them glances of sudden hate. It was their harmless habit to laugh at any man who lost his footing, a habit shared by many civilized folk, who find the spectacle of a fall irresistibly funny. But in their present mirth had seemed to sound a note of ridicule, almost of malice, which rankled in memory. Whether this were real or fancied, they were showing too little respect toward the leader of their night raid. Inwardly he cursed them as swine, swore to humble them before he finished with them; but he then obeyed the short gesture of their chief, who thus tacitly ordered him to go in his company.

THE TWO walked only a few rods into the lush growth. There Tahm stopped, moved his head slightly to one side and grunted a monosyllable. The plume hunter gazed at his first live egrets.

A low, crude nest of sticks; a cowering form, snow white, watching with terrified eyes, still with the stillness of a bird hoping to evade detection by its hunter; a creature physically able to dart up and out of danger, yet chained by mother instinct to the spot where lay its babes; a piteous little figure doomed to the ravaging clutch of those who knew no pity. This was the sight on which the gloating gaze of Fernando rested; the sight of which he had long dreamed, now become actuality.

With calm surety, though with the habitually stealthy step of the aborigine approaching prey, Tahm walked to the little mother, poised a hand and pounced. From the captured bird broke a hoarse squawk of fear. A desperate flurry of beating wings ended in a couple of small snaps, as the hard brown fingers broke the wing bones.

Thereafter, with callous deliberation, the Indian tore the beautiful plumes from the hapless captive and tossed the body aside—still living, but broken and helpless, destined now to expire in utter wretchedness; no longer a graceful embodiment of purity, but an agonized wreck. Without another glance at it, he moved away toward another nest. With equal sangfroid the white man followed.

At the second nest, at the third, and at all others found, the tragedy was repeated. And now it was not Tahm who did the ruthless work. The Spaniard found it too tame a sport to stand idle and let another feel the quiverings of the despoiled prisoner. His own fingers seized greedily on the palpitating bodies; his pale eyes shone as the prey shuddered and squirmed within his inescapable hold; his teeth gleamed fixedly in his sun scorched face as he abandoned one looted victim and advanced to loot another.

Blood lust, gold lust, power lust all inflamed Fernando, and his enjoyment of the barbarous destruction was plain to any observing eye. And there were two observing eyes which missed no detail of his methods and his manner—the eyes of Tahm.

Although the Indian's treatment of the birds was quite as cruel as that of the white man, his was an unfeeling cruelty, cool and businesslike. He derived no pleasure from the torment which he inflicted. To him an egret was simply a thing, like a plant or a tree branch, to be broken because it was useful. But to the Spaniard . . . Tahm saw what the Spaniard felt and, in his judicial way, added to his collection of mental notes one more for future consideration.

When the marauders left the islet they bore a respectable load of white plumes. No nesting mother had escaped them. The refuge which, surrounded by water, had seemed to the egrets a secure spot on which to foster new life, was a shambles of misery and death.

As the canoes slid back toward camp Fernando smiled unceasingly at his loot and at something afar off in dreams—not so far off now as it had been, but still not near; for he needed many more feathers to make him rich in Europe. He would get them, though. This was but the beginning.

It was the beginning of something on which he did not reckon.

CHAPTER XI

"I SHALL CATCH MY BIRDS ALONE!"

DAYS sped. Busy days, they were; days of early rising, speedy breakfasting, prompt starting and steady paddling through the morning coolness to new haunts of the egrets; efficient despoliation of victims during the hours of growing heat, and contented returns to camp when that heat became intolerable; then food, rest and leisurely assortment of the filiform booty. The end of each day found the knife scarred trunk packed more tightly with feathery wealth, and carefully locked against possible intrusion of sly fingers.

The plume hunter trusted neither man nor woman, particularly woman; for he noted covetous looks which betrayed the fact that the bare brown swamp women were not immune to the passion for adornment characteristic of their fair sisters in civilization. So the trunk was kept fastened at all times except when he added to its contents, and its key rode on a strong cord around his neck.

Not even the girl whom he now desired, and who daily grew more desirable in his sight, received a single feather from him—though her lingering looks at each day's harvest, and then at him, made plain her wish. He saw no sense in giving where he need not. She would grow no less complaisant by waiting a few days and watching his wealth increase; and he was too busy just now in garnering his gains, too tired on his returns from the hunting grounds, to feel ardent. Moreover, there was always a cold glitter in the eyes of her man which made evident the inadvisability of open advances.

Thus the wealth of the "gentleman adventurer" waxed steadily. And it was of the best quality. The egrets hereabouts all were of the smaller breed, *candidissima*, which yields the finest tufts; the larger white heron, with coarser adornment, was not intermingled with them. Neither the inexpert marauder nor his uneducated aides would have known the monetary difference between these two varieties; indeed, they probably would have judged the bigger to be the more valuable. But the devil, still enjoying his little joke, was taking care of his pet as usual.

Furthermore, the same satirical jester prevented trouble between white and brown men over the division of the camp spoils. Where Tahm might have demanded many articles from the effects of the Americans, and enforced his demand by active seizure or by passive strike against further feather collecting, he did not. He looked over everything, saw some things he liked, but decided against taking possession of them, not because he feared Fernando, but because he was wary of handling things formerly owned by the white magicians; there might be some pestilential essence or influence connected with such things, and they were best left alone.

Once, in an experimental way, he told the Spaniard he would take one of the razors. The blunt refusal with which the white man met this declaration did not anger him; he had expected it, and had no particular use for the edged implement anyway. But he made another mental note, to the effect that the renegade now owned two such tools, used neither of them, yet would not give one to his chief ally. This grasping spirit was hardly in accord with the generous promises made on capturing the camp or with those voiced back on the bank of the Orinoco. Still less did it augur well for the performance of those promises when the white man had nothing more to gain from the Indians.

Having nothing to lose, however, by holding to the course on which he had embarked, the head man continued the daily hunts; also the daily and nightly observation of Fernando, and certain ruminations concerning him. He evinced no further opposition to the commands of the *blanco*, which, in fact, were few and accorded with his own intentions. Passively he watched and waited. And all went well.

THEN came the time when the sport of tearing treasure from defenseless birds began to lose its zest for the Colombian. Days of work and of exposure to sun had brought their aftermath of laziness and desire to loaf in the shade—and to look at the women. To Tahm he said—

"I will not go out today."

"Why?" laconically inquired the brown fellow.

"Because I don't want to!" was the snappish retort.

Tahm stood quiet, dark eyes fixed on the pale ones. After a moment Fernando glanced aside. The Indian's gaze followed his, but saw nothing significant. The white man was merely evading his scrutiny by looking at a bush.

"I am tired," explained the renegade, vexed by the necessity for making an excuse, yet forced to it. "I will stay in out of the sun. You go. *Pronto!*"

Tahm turned deliberately, walked away calmly, spoke briefly. The men started out on the day's work. All but one. That one remained in or near the camp all day. Ostensibly he was left there to hunt meat for the white and the women; and he did so, fetching in a couple of monkeys and a pea hen for the midday meal. But he kept track of all that went on. He was the strong backed, chilly eyed fellow whose presence Fernando least desired.

Fernando gritted his teeth, fumed inwardly, meditated the adoption of high handed methods toward the unwelcome watchman, but did nothing. Any command to go and hunt egrets with the others would be not only futile but foolish. The man would not obey, even if he understood the white man's tongue; nor could he obey if he would, since both canoes were gone, thus leaving him without means of transportation. Whether he had remained behind by his own volition, or by the order of Tahm, was not quite clear.

But it was clear enough that any overt act against him just now would precipitate trouble. So the white, though nominally master and armed with a rifle and three revolvers, let the situation be dominated by a single Indian, and by his own sense of discretion. He idled throughout the day, feigned total lack of interest in all the women, and found the hours long and tedious.

When the hunters returned, bearing plentiful evidence that they had not shirked in their daily work of collection, their chief looked keenly at the white and the brown man who had spent the day together. Satisfied, he had the light loot deposited before the renegade and walked away with his usual silence. The watcher loafed along after him. Fernando, intent on the new increment of his potential wealth, gave no attention to the regard of the head man, nor, until the feathers had been handled and locked up, to anything else. He did not observe the brief colloquy between the two Indians, wherein Tahm was reassured that no dispute had arisen. Else he might have realized that he was under steady suspicion.

That evening, refreshed by his day of inactivity and somewhat restless of body and mind, Fernando prowled about camp, lingered in the vicinity of the hut used by the shapely girl of his fancy, felt hostile eyes grimly watching from the dark interior, and withdrew to his hammock, there to lie with lips pressed tight and lids drawn to slits. Before his mind two faces grew and died alternately. They were not those of the dead Americans, nor of the pale Justa nor the cynical Falcón, nor of any other white people. These were erased from memory as if they had never been. Now he saw only a sly eyed swamp woman and a hard mouthed swamp man. With more intensity than heretofore he thought of each. When he slept, his lips retained the same sinister set. When he awoke at the next dawn he acted on his dark hour thoughts.

"I feel better," he casually informed Tahm. "I go again with you today."

"Ump," responded the head man, his tone indicating content.

And when the canoes departed all the hunters rode in them. The watchman of yesterday was no longer left in camp.

FERNANDO, once more contemplating the play of the sinuous muscles in the back of that erstwhile guardian, smiled and let his gaze rove absently over the unlovely waterscape. His trunk was nearly full. Even if work should cease now—though he had no intention of stopping it until the last plume was gleamed—he could travel far and live comfortably for some time on the cash value of its contents. And if it should become expedient to depart secretly and hastily, the small two man canoe would be available for the purpose. The brown girl could swing one of the paddles; all the Indian women were familiar with the use of the broad blades. Water would leave no trail. Yes, he could afford to take a chance. It was only a small chance, anyway. Discretion in handling the matter should obviate any serious trouble; discretion and, if necessary, a businesslike display of guns.

So, when the landing was made, on a long, irregular spit of land washed on three sides by slow creeping currents, he flicked a glance to right and left, sizing up the ground and the cover with gaze recently grown expert. In the days just past he had picked up the Indian ease of moving about in quest of nests and something of their primitive quickness of vision. He could operate alone, as did most of his companions. And the work he had in mind for today required solitude.

To Tahm he curtly announced—

"I shall catch my birds alone."

The brown fellow regarded him oddly an instant, then walked nonchalantly away. Fernando threw another rapid look around, this time at the scattering hunters; noted the direction taken by the one in whom he was most interested; worked into the bush by a course nearly parallel. Thereafter, for a time, he attended to the business for which all had come—the discovery and destruction of the little herons. Through the tangle on either side sounded occasional despairing bird cries attesting the industry of his workmen. He kept track of those nearest, gaging the progress of the looters. And he kept working toward his left. On that side, not far from him, moved his real prey.

After a while he began his stalk. With the jaguarlike stealth which came naturally to him when intent on a kill, he stole through the scrubby growth. But that man was not caught by surprise. Careful though the approach of the renegade had been, it had been detected. Now the muscular swamp man whose wife was so desirable stood with arrow ready to notch on his bow cord and scowling gaze riveted on the unkempt shape half seen in the near bush. Fernando, pretending not to see him, advanced closer; then stopped short, looked startled, stared a second and grinned in apparent relief. After a gimlet eyed scrutiny the Indian let his arrow point sink and looked indifferently about as if seeking another egret. But he did not move from his ready poise.

Fernando also looked around, as if in quest of another white bird. His whole attitude, in fact, was that of one who had merely blundered into the other's vicinity. After a few seconds, however, he again looked full at the hunter, a new expression on his face; caught his eye and beckoned.

The Indian contemplated him warily, then slowly approached, one hand moving his crude leaf pouch of plumes from his hip to hang before his abdomen. Evidently he thought the master of the hunt wished to inspect his catch. And, since that master stood empty handed, with rifle slung over his back and revolvers untouched, there was no reason to refuse. Comparison of their respective bags was common enough among collectors who met in the course of their work; and the white man had the right of examination at any time.

But the man who summoned him had other thoughts in mind. He glanced at the feathers, fingered them judicially and slyly noted that the aborigine kept close watch of his hands. Wherefore he motioned toward a patch of shade, walked to it, and stood guilelessly waiting. The brown fellow slowly followed, puzzled,

vigilant, but curious. An arm's length apart, they stood facing each other. Then, by words and signs, the white began an apparent effort to tempt him.

There was not much sense, so his lingual and manual talk ran, in sharing the profits of these feathers with every one. When the harvest ceased, why not desert the band, slip away secretly, divide the riches between them? There would be but three of them; the woman would get no share; so it would be an even division. Thus he made clear the fact that he would expect the woman to go, and deceptively displayed the presumable reason for his generosity toward her man. An ironic glimmer in the brown eyes proved that this point was not missed; and a faint downward quirk of the lips betokened noncomplaisance. But no negative was forthcoming as yet. The tribesman was willing to let the renegade say all his say, and then report his duplicity to Tahm.

At this point, however, the one sided dialogue ceased. Fernando glanced beyond, registered sudden alarm, breathed two sinister words:

"*Culebra! Dalle!*"

Instinctively the Indian spun about. Limited though his Spanish was, he knew those words. The *culebra dalle*—scythe snake—venomous and vicious, deadliest reptile of his country, was known to every denizen of the swamps. Caught off guard, he acted without thought. Too late he realized that the only snake near was human. Its sting went home under his left shoulderblade—swift, deep, lethal.

A hand, clamping tight on his mouth as the stabbing pain darted through his heart, silenced his death cry. He heaved forward so violently that his killer was thrown headlong, losing his grips on both mouth and poniard hilt. But when the white man again stood and looked at him he lay prone and motionless.

Fernando grinned, a tigerish grin; jerked forth his red blade, wiped it swiftly on a leaf and sheathed it. Thereafter he added the white plumes in the dead man's pouch to his own; stealthily dragged the body to the nearest shore, looked all about, slid it into the water; returned into the bush and, with frequent chuckles, continued his hunt for new nests.

The little job was neatly done. No witness had seen the attack. No gunshot had barked its message to any ear. No body would tell its tale; the voracious crocodiles hereabouts would attend to it before its inner gases would cause it to float. The man had simply vanished by one of the mysterious deaths of the wilderness, conjectural but inexplicable. And the charming young widow was free to choose her next man. Her recent looks at the renegade left no room for doubt as to that man's identity. So all was as it should be.

CHAPTER XII

"SAY NOTHING!"

ONCE more darkness ruled the camp, the lagoons and all the wide reaches of the swamp lands. Under its concealing pall predatory animals prowled in quest of prey; noisome reptiles foraged along weedy shores; men and their women huddled close for mutual protection. So it had been for hundreds of years, and would be for hundreds more.

Whatever fortune the hunting animals found was probably little different from that on other nights. But one of the voracious reptiles discovered provender rare in its usually manless hunting grounds and disposed of it with avid thoroughness. If a certain petty chief could have witnessed that meal he might have been spared much laborious thought. As it was, he lay scowling with mental effort, staring at the roof of his hut without seeing it, his inner vision concentrated on the scene of the past day's hunt of egrets.

Tahm was not accustomed to unraveling mysteries. When one of his people disappeared without trace, as one did now and then, he usually accepted the fact philosophically and gave little of his time to puzzlement as to the cause. Man

was never far from death in this region. There were poisonous small snakes, enormous serpents, giant cats, electric eels and other slayers, including demons. But Tahm now was not so sure that the loss of one of his best liked men could be ascribed to a demon. Hence his perplexity.

Demons usually snatched a man when he was alone, far from his mates, out in the forest or on some darksome waterway. They seldom, if ever, molested one when his comrades were near. And that one of them should make an attack in the vicinity of a white man armed with guns—a white who, moreover, had slain two magicians—this seemed hardly credible. Yet the hunter was gone, without outcry or struggle. The white man said he had heard nothing. The Indians, searching, had found nothing. If this total disappearance was not the work of a demon, then what could have caused it?

An anaconda, possibly. That huge boa sometimes caught and swallowed a man. Or a big crocodile, lying inland from the water and well hidden. . . . But this was hardly probable. The vanished hunter was a canny observer, quick of eye and ear, always aware of any life near him. He would detect the presence of any lurking reptile. Therefore the only tenable hypothesis, aside from the demon theory, was murder by another man. And the only man at all likely to murder him was the white.

That white desired the dead man's woman. Everybody knew that now. And his bag of plumes today had been unusually good. If he had slain the Indian he would naturally have taken the feathers from his victim's pouch. That would account for his luck. Yet, if he had killed, he would have done it by shooting. White men always used guns. Besides, the Indian was too wary, too quick with his bow, to be killed in any other way. But no shot had been fired. And even if the *blanco* did slay the brown fellow he would not eat him. There would be a body, unless he possessed a magic that made bodies vanish. He had had no such magic when the cadavers of the strangers had to be disposed of; so he could have none now. No, there must be a corpse. Yet there was none. So there was no explanation. Unless . . .

Tahm's scowl deepened a bit. He groped a little longer, then began to see something. After a while he silently arose, walked to the hammocks of a couple of his men and held with them a low toned conference. Then he went back to bed and calmly slept.

WHEN morning dawned he gave a thoughtful scrutiny to the young widow and to the renegade. So far as he could perceive, they gave no more attention to each other than before. Although Fernando knew, and she almost knew, that her brown man would never come back to her, both realized that it might be unwise to associate openly for a few days to come. Even among the swamp folk there must be some regard for public opinion. And not all the people of this little community had yet accepted the disappearance of her spouse as permanent.

So Fernando, after breakfast, slung his rifle and his feather bag from his shoulders as usual, and stood ready to go. Then he stared, scowled, and muttered an oath. No other man was making preparations for departure.

"Tahm!" he called. "*Vamos!*"

"Ugh-ugh," the leader refused.

"What do you mean?" snarled the white.

"We rest a day. We are tired."

The two eyed each other. The brown orbs were opaque, bleak, uncompromising; and in their depths was something which caused a queer feeling of alarm to flit along the nerves of the renegade; something which made him wonder for an instant whether his guilt were known. Involuntarily his hands moved a short way toward his revolvers. Then quick thought stopped them. Nobody had seen his deed, else he would have been accused before this time. The Indians were just balky.

"*Bien*," he grudgingly conceded. "But we go out tomorrow."

"*Mañana*," coolly assented the head man.

Fernando unslung his gun, hung it up and got into his hammock, there to lie relaxed, but open eyed and rather uneasy. Soon, however, he became tranquil; for all was serene. Some of the Indians lay down, while others rested a-squat, dull eyed, inert of body and mind. Others strolled about, doing nothing but stretch their leg muscles. Only two moved with any apparent aim. These walked out into the woods, carrying weapons, as if bound on a hunting excursion.

Fernando noticed the departure of these two but, drowsy, gave them scant thought. Somebody had to get meat, and these fellows evidently had been given the job and were making an early start at it. If his vision told him that they were the best scouts in the party, the pair who had reconnoitered this same camp when the Americans occupied it, his brain failed to attach any particular significance to the fact. Still less did he suspect that, once out of sight, they would turn to the rear lagoon, board the small canoe and paddle to the scene of yesterday's unexplained tragedy. Only one man in the camp knew this, the man who had spoken to them secretly in the night, Tahm.

After a time the renegade grew restless. His eyes kept turning to his woman, to find her looking toward him—and to find others also regarding him. Always somebody or other was gazing in his direction. At length he arose abruptly, opened his trunk and began stroking the aigrets neatly packed within. The sight and touch of them, the visions they conjured, were surcease to irritation and to plaguing thoughts. He was rich! Ragged, greasy, bug bitten outlaw and outcast though he now might be, he was a rich man in future. Nothing else mattered for the time. When he returned to his hammock he drowsed anew and dreamed.

The sun was about noon high when the two hunters returned. They walked in noiselessly, laid down a slain peccary and a curassow turkey, and looked at Tahm. That canny individual returned their steady scrutiny. Then he ambled down to the shore of the cove and seated himself in an updrawn dugout. The scouts followed. Dispassionately they made their report.

THEY had found and followed the faint trail made yesterday by the white man. There had been no rain in the night, so nothing was obliterated. They had traced his course from nest to nest, then to a spot where he and another man, barefoot, had stood and talked. There both men had fallen. Then one had been dragged to the nearest shore. Crocodiles had visited that spot in the night. There was no further evidence, except back at the point where the dragging had begun. At that place was a leaf which did not look natural. This leaf they had brought back with them, and now handed to Tahm.

It was a broad leaf, sliced half open by a knife blade. On either side of the straight cut was a dark smear.

Out of all the myriad leaves on the long landspit, the scouts had found the one on which the stabber of their comrade had wiped his poniard. They had not discovered the dead man's bow and arrows; these had been thrown by Fernando into a dense thicket, where they still lay, lost. But the drooping bit of foliage, forgotten as soon as used, and hardly seen even while in use—this had remained on its stem, beside the spot where the stricken Indian had fallen, to tell a mute tale to the keen eyed men who came after. None had detected it yesterday; not even the scene of the killing had been located then in the random search. But its story was unchanged today. And to Tahm it was plain.

He smelled at the double blotch on the green. He put his tongue to it and lapped it off, tasting it. He studied the cut anew. Then, for some time, he looked out across the empty water, mouth tight, eyes asquint. His men waited, silent.

At length the thinker stood up, face unreadable. He spoke two words.

"Say nothing."

With that he dropped the cut leaf into the water and lounged back to the huts.

Beside the domicile of the master he paused, eyes resting ominously on the slack featured visage of the dozer. After a moment his gaze went to the butts of the revolvers and the hilt of the poniard. Day or night, waking or sleeping, the white man was never without those arms. For several minutes the chieftain contemplated them. Although he had recently held the possessor of those shooting contrivances in contempt, he still had wholesome respect for the capabilities of the weapons themselves. The more he looked at them the more formidable they became. The knife, on the other hand, now aroused in him a smoldering hatred.

Presently his eyes moved toward the women nearby, busy with preparation of the noon meal. One of them, the one who ought to be mourning her lost consort and giving no thought to any other man, was watching her chief with visible anxiety. Tahm noted her expression, then sauntered off to meditate a little further.

THE AFTERNOON passed in complete idleness until near sundown. Then the folk began moving about, yawning, stretching, talking, eating, in a small surge of slow action which would naturally subside at dark into nightlong somnolence. Fernando, speaking to this one and that, made his way with studied carelessness to the young widow who, a little apart from the rest, had drawn him to her by a significant look. Between them ensued a short muttering, with a few signs and eloquent changes of expression. The girl showed worry, and her glances went toward Tahm. The man, too, turned a sudden frown toward the chief. More mutters, and they parted. Tahm, watching sidewise, interpreted it all.

A little later the quiet boss walked among his men, dropping a few words into each sun blackened ear. Monosyllabic grunts answered. The hunters looked cornerwise at one another. Some mumbled a little after the head man had passed. Others were silent. None gave any sign of having received an order.

Night fell. Hammocks received their usual burdens. Except for the customary noises of the woods, all was quiet. Out on the waters of cove and lagoon were mirrored countless stars, undimmed as yet by the late moon. Under the trees ruled density.

Time crawled away unmeasured. Apparently all slept. But at length the white man sat up, looked, listened, arose, stepped to his precious trunk. Noiselessly he lifted it from its rack and laid it on the ground, where both handles could be more easily grasped. Into a sack he put various remnants of the American food supplies. From overhead he took his rifle, to lean it against the waiting trunk. Then, after another look around, he stole toward the hut of the widow.

Beside the dozing brown girl he stopped, laying hand over her mouth. She started awake, snatched at the hand, then relaxed from sudden tension. He muttered a word or two, uncovered her lips, pulled her up. Shadow like, they passed to his house. He slung his rifle, shouldered the sack, grasped a trunk handle. She lifted the other end of the light but clumsy fiber case. Another mutter, and they stepped softly forward, heading for the rear lagoon and its short canoe.

Dense though the darkness was, Fernando knew the route through the bush well enough to travel it without misstep. The stealthy pair passed the other huts with hardly a sound. They cleared the camp and approached the tiny path worn by daily use. A few more minutes of careful treading and they would be gone forever from the ken of the people of Tahm.

Then shadows moved. Faint rustlings sounded, soft as the stir of breeze touched foliage, yet sinister. The fugitives stopped short. The girl voiced a low cry of fear. The man, hands gripped on sack and trunk strap, peered uncertainly, unable to reach one of his numerous weapons without loosing his burdens, but reluctant to cause a betraying thump by

dropping bag or box. In that instant of hesitation came the last sound he ever heard—a thrum of bow cords and a whisper of speeding arrows.

To the ears of the tiger eyed shadows came a patter of impacts as darting points thudded into flesh; a choked scream; a confused bump on earth. Then trunk, sack, woman, man and unfired guns lay in a huddle, motionless.

Over the case of white plumes spread a swift rush of wet red.

CHAPTER XIII

"SÍ, SEÑOR!"

THE PALE girl Justa, in the town of Bolívar, has the aigrets which she long desired. She has had them for some time now, long enough to have lost the first joy of triumph over the "fat faced" Mercedes Sanchez, whose plumes were never so fine or so numerous as hers. That malicious pleasure has subsided into a quiet pride of possession when she exhibits them and a sleek satisfaction when she admires them alone. Womanlike, she gives no thought to the anguish and death involved in their gathering. Even if she knew, she would not care; and there is no way by which she could know.

She knows only that they were bought for her from a riverman by Señor Falcón, who became interested in her after that scoundrel Fernando Velez fled the town, and who is now her fiancé. A very good catch, the Señor Falcón; quite well to do, and shrewd in business, yet generous. He trades with captains who bring down the products of the mysterious up-Orinoco country, and makes excellent profits. The feathers which he gave her were taken from a valuable shipment received through one of those sailing men, who got them from a small Indian band met on the Arauca shore of the Orinoco. That is all that she, or he, or the master of the vessel knows about the source of the splendid plumage.

Nobody knows that it formerly lay in a trunk owned in turn by two Americans and a regenade Colombian; that it caused the killing of all three of them, and of others besides. Nobody knows what ever became of the foreigners or of Fernando. They are virtually forgotten. Any one who momentarily remembers them attributes the disappearance of the northerners to attack by some of the wild swamp Indians, and that of the Colombian to escape into British Guiana or Brazil. The American fools should have known better than to go into those dangerous swamps. As for Velez—good riddance! The police would make short work of him if he ever came back, and well he knows it. *Sí, señor!*

Over in the Arauca region, between two unknown lagoons, stand several rotting huts, about which are scattered remnants of miscellaneous articles, corroded or decayed, which departing Indians left behind them as useless. A few yards away lie bones. Bones of a man and a woman are intermingled on the spot where they were stricken down in the night; bones of a man false to every one, of a woman false to her brown husband. They were not worth honoring with burial, or even carrying to the crocodiles, as their former companions left the place the morning after their execution. So there they lie, forever lost.

Back in the swamps the band of Tahm lives among its fellow men and women, content and respected. All the tale of their travels is known to their tribe, and the trade goods which they got for the plumes of the *garza* are eyed with envy. Yet none of the swamp folk feels inclined to emulate their example by hunting feathers for other white men. White men are too treacherous.

As for the egrets, they continue to nest at the lagoons as before, undisturbed. And as for the devil, who took care of Fernando only to fail him at the end, he is doing the same to other men and enjoying his satanic game—especially the breaking of his tools when tired of them. What else could one expect?

Needed~A Cowhand

Carmody Grant qualifies in the six-gun test

By STEPHEN PAYNE

'LO, STRANGER. Light off and look at your saddle. If that hand carved picture of a beautiful lady on the fender of your hull don't interest you no longer, gaze 'round at the scenery. Them white tipped mountains 'way over yonder in the east is the Continental Divide. Somethin' kinda aloof and sorta sublime 'bout them, ain't they? Make a fella feel small and humble somehow, them a-standin' there lookin' down at him from sky heights; and when the moon comes peepin' over the tips of 'em, it kinda awes yuh.

More mountains over west, but they's sorta insignificant. Rough, rolly hills with sagebrush and some groves on 'em, and more often'n not some cattle on top, too, goes a-stretchin' away to meet the blue horizon north and south. 'Cept for my little wire fenced hoss pasture here in this valley, they ain't a fence in sight. Ain't no other buildin's 'cept this dugout, where I sleeps and cooks, for miles and miles and miles, neither.

Tell you, the country's big and wide and lonely. The Ever Rollin' Hills is the name of it, and it's 'most exclusively populated—barrin' Uncle Sam's native animals—by Key Hole cattle, what belongs to old Frank Keys, you know. That brand should be called the Key and Hole 'cause it's printed thataway on both bovines and hosses, but cowpunchers has a fashion of sayin' things simple.

Keys' home ranch is due west among them dinky mountains. Six hours' steady jog-trottin' by your pony'll cover the distance. In other words, it's thirty miles. If you travels south by east for seven hours at the same gait, you'll hit Fall River. That's the nearest town. They's a post office there, but I don't

get no mail, so I ain't been to town yet; but I'll have to go some day 'cause I'm runnin' shy on tobacco and bacon.

Uh-huh, you guessed it right. I'm the range rider for the Key Hole outfit, and, yeh, I'm new to the job. Carmody Grant is my handle, but the boys where I used to hang out all called me "Carm."

Where's Smithy, who used to be here? You a friend of his?

Sorry, but the news 'bout him's all sad. 'Twa'n't no fault of mine, but I landed this job through that poor feller's cashin' in his checks.

It's quite a yarn, if you've got time—Soho! Lookin' at me s'picious? Don't know's I blame you none, bein' as you observes, I ain't prezactly a downy faced ducklin'. Forty years on the range as infant and man has kinda tended to make me tough as an old pine knot. Notches in the handle of my old .44? Yeh, but I ain't ashamed of 'em. They was cut there in each case after events plumb necessary.

But I could see that Frank Keys, sizin' me up at his home ranch some few days since when I rode in askin' for a job, thought just the same as you're thinkin' now.

"No," says he. "I ain't needin' a hand. Spring roundup won't begin for a month yet. Was we ready to start, I'd put you on," he continues, "for I can see you've cut your eye teeth on the trail and the range; but, mincin' words none a-tall, Carmody, for the other jobs I've got on hand I simply must know something about the men I hire—whether I can trust 'em."

"Fair enough," I returns. "I like the cut of your jaw and I like your layout, but I sees your point. Whereat does you range most of your dogies?"

"Part of 'em 'round the ranch here," says he, "and part of 'em in the Ever Rolling Hills," pointin' east. "Five thousand head over there, scattered from hell to breakfast, and only one range rider on the job. Fella name of Smithy and he ain't much force for that man-size job. If I knowed somethin' 'bout you—"

"Never mind apologizin'," I replies kinda huffy, 'cause I ain't to blame for my hardboilt appearance and he orter be able, I thinks, to look a heap deeper'n the surface. "I'm headin' north."

With that I shakes up Dot-and-Carry-One, who's kinda logy from carryin' both me and my small amount of necessary campin' junk, and mosey off toward the north. But a mile from the Key Hole I changes my mind and decides to drift to Fall River to see what I can find there. Thus it comes about that I crosses a part of this Ever Rollin' Hills range that day and, come night, pitches my camp on a little creek some seven miles south o' this dugout where you and me now is. I has a blanket, fry pan and coffee pot; so I shoots the head off a cottontail rabbit for my supper and, bein' absent-minded-like from thinkin' 'bout how old Frank Keys doubted me, I forgets to reload my hog-leg.

NEXT mornin' I ain't in no hurry a-tall and lets Dot-and-Carry-One rest up and sun hisself till towards one. I has started out and perceeded perhaps a mile when from over the hill at my left I hears one shot. Investigatin' cautious, I sees a riderless, saddled hoss makin' tracks north in a heck of a hurry, and, lyin' real still in the valley near a quakin' asp grove, a man.

Naturally that man may be needin' attention and help, and needin' 'em bad; but I don't go to him for nigh ten minutes. I just lays low and looks and listens, but I neither sees nor hears anything. The country is brushy, hilly, cut with gullies, all-fired rough. And I figgers if somebody has killed this poor bird, that somebody orter come see what he's done, or else I orter be able to see him a-hightailin' it. I sees neither thing, so down to the man lyin' there by the grove I rides.

You would 'a' done so, too—a puncher lyin' wounded or kilt and nobody in sight. Perhaps he's shot hisself accidental? No such thing, I discovers as I stoops and turns him over. Shot from behind, plumb center through the neck, an' dead

as a door nail. His own and another hoss's tracks near by indicates, as I reads 'em, that the dead man and the killer had held a confab, and then, after the cuss as done the shootin' started to ride on, he turned in his saddle and plugged the other feller. I moves back to the dead man, a young cow waddie. His gun wasn't never drawed. Coldblooded murder!

I's bent over him, kinda sad and all-fired ringy all t'oncet, when two words is roared at me from the quaking aspens:

"Freeze! H'ist!"

As I straightens and does both, 'cause they's nothin' else to do, old Frank Keys, behind a foot-long cannon with a hole in the end of it bigger'n the stovein end of a whisky barrel, steps outa the grove.

"So!" he bellers, looking' at me prezactly like a wolf looks at a lamb the second 'fore he jumps. "You told me you was headin' north, and here I've catched yuh red handed after killin' my range rider."

"Don't be a damn' fool!" I yelps. "Whar was you?"

"Left home early. Rode to camp. Follered Smithy by his hoss' tracks," he spits, short and savage. "Heard the shot and seen the horse headin' for camp. Then I sneaked up on yuh. Unbuckle your belt with your left hand and throw it here. One misbobble, and—"

He don't need to say more. That huge cannon in his hand speaks the rest in powerful plain language.

"I's wonderin' if you didn't kill this jasper your own self," I growls, tossin' my belt with its holstered gun to Keys. "If you'll lookit these tracks, you'll know damn' well I didn't."

"Huh? A tough-lookin' pill like you, on my range when you said you was goin' north? Nobody in sight but you, and you good and hot at me for tellin' you plain why I wouldn't hire you?" With his left hand Keys breaks my six-gun and flips out the shells. One cartridge is empty!

Glarin' at that, he rumbles:

"Coldblooded murder! But why'd yuh do it? Jus' bein' ringy at me wasn't enough for yuh tuh take it out on an innocent puncher."

He looks at my hoss and then from poor old tired Dot-and-Carry-One to the tracks near by.

"Barefooted hoss, huh?" says he. "And his feet'll just about fill the bill for such tracks."

"Examine 'em and measure 'em, gol darn yuh," I sez.

"You tellin' me what to do? That's 'nough outa you!" roars Frank Keys. "This gun one bullet short, you a-stoopin' over the body to see what you done—I reckon the thing's plain enough, though of course you lie. Probably figgered to put Smithy out and steal my cattle unmolested, eh?

"Well, I ain't goin' to take you to Fall River, not much. I've had a bellyful of how the law works down there. *Hombre*, I'm a-takin' you to the home ranch. Uh-huh. Smithy was liked by the boys. Reckon they'll handle this all jake and proper, and I'll help 'em, too."

"Say, you misguided idiot!" I bellers. "The reptile as did this is a-gettin' away all this time and here you're a-holdin' a gun on me, what never did it!"

"The reptile as did it ain't gettin' away, not noticeable!" roars Keys. "Now you walk, mighty careful, right around this grove to where I hid my horse with Smithy's. I'll lead your hoss and tie you when we get to the others. I'll rope your hands from a distance, too. I ain't gettin' to close quarters with no killer like you."

I makes no move, for I'm starin' past him at that thick grove behind him. Bein' as it's June, the little trees is in full bloom and affords a heap of shelter. Comin' cautiously outa that grove, a blued steel Colt advanced, is a short, bull-necked, thick-faced *hombre* with the meanest pair of slitty yeller eyes I've ever seen in a human face. With a snarl he shouts at Keys, even as the rancher takes note of my starin' eyes—

"Drop that gat and grab atmosphere, or I'll kill you deader'n a nit!"

If you ever seen a surprised *hombre*, it's Frank Keys at that moment, and he

debates the matter about the tenth part of one second. He could plug me, course, but his life's forfeit if he does, as he must figger; so he drops his cannon and slowly raises his hand.

"Two of you, huh?" spits the rancher. "I might 'a' knowed!"

"Not prezactly," says "Slit Eyes" with a grim chuckle, "but they soon will be two o' us." Then to me, "Jus' as you are!"

"Humph! I ain't movin' noticeable," I observes sarcastic. "And who the hell are you?" I continues.

"I'm the boy that killed that lousy range rider," he returns boastfully. "Also, I'm the boy you've got to thank for savin' your neck, old hardboil."

"So I notice," says I. "And I had a powerful strong hunch of your identity when you appeared, but I dunno as I's a damn' bit obliged to you."

"You ain't?" The slit eyed *hombre* acts plenty s'prised. "Wal, you had orter be. Step 'round here an' tie this cattle king up."

I has little choice in that matter, so I begins to obey. Slit Eyes hands me a whang-leather string and continues:

"The fact is, old-timer, I'm a needin' a hand to help me. This yere Key Hole range is pickin's, was two fellers on the job. One man's kinda helpless. I knows where I can dispose of lots of unbranded calves with no questions asked, and they's heaps o' that kind here.

"Listen all you pleases, Mister Keys, an' cuss if you like. Dead men tells nothin', so what you hears now won't never get out. You was agoin' to have this *hombre* hung by your damned punchers with nary trial nor nothin', an' him innocent. I'm takin' 'vantage o' that and givin' him a chanst tuh get even with you good an' plenty.

"Old-timer," he continues to me, "it warn't needful a-tall for me to do so, but I saved your bacon for a purpose, which same is: I'm expectin' you to throw in with me and help pick this range. If the looks of you's any guide, and if you're grateful to me and ringy at this hot-headed fool rancher, you'll sure be glad to do it. As I mentioned afore, I'm needin' a cowhand. This mornin' I meets this locoed range rider and puts my proposition up to him. It war simply that he play 'long with me and hold his job at the same time, but the damned fool couldn't see it."

"Good fer him! Good fer Smithy!" yelps Keys, who I'm fiddlin' away at, dillyin' and dillyin' pretendin' to tie.

"Yah! Wasn't it, though!" snarls my life saver. "He knowed too much to let him continue livin', o' course. I had him covered an' told the idjit to ride on. He done so—fer about ten feet. You see what happened to him, old-timer," addressin' me again, mighty significant.

"Uh-huh," I grunts. "Goin' to kill Keys, eh?"

"Yah, an' ditch both the carcasses whar they won't be found. Some big range mystery, huh? Ain't you got his wrists tied yet? *Hombre*, you're with me, ain't you?"

"See if that knot'll hold," I stalls him off with, steppin' a little to one side of the rancher's back. "I never was worth a whoop at tyin' knots," which same is not the exact truth.

Slit Eyes steps forward, jus' as I'm hopin' he will. I'm at his right, Keys jus' ahead of him. The feller's gat is still level and pointin' straight at the rancher as he bends to glance at the knot. In doin' this he takes his gaze from me for a fraction of a second, and at prezactly that moment I acts.

With a kick that'd make a mule ashamed of hisself for swiftness and accuracy, I plants the point of my boot-toe directly under that slit-eyed killer's gun wrist, with the full force of the leg swing right behind it. The six-shooter goes a-zingin' up in the air, with no hand a-holdin' it, but explodin' as it does so, and one jiffy later me and Slit Eyes is tangled like two fightin' buck jack-rabbits.

Perhaps you wouldn't think it, but jack-rabbits sure does make the fur fly. Keys grabs up his own gun and tries to get

a lick at the killer's head, but I yells at him to let me alone, and let me alone he does till, b'golly, I begins to think he's goin' to be 'bliged to interfere.

That sliteyed geezer ain't no canary nor mockin' bird to tackle, I tell you. He's an old Texas bull and a lobo wolf on the kill, rolled up in one hunk of hide, and if his right wrist pains him he sure don't show it. He gets me down finally and is a-gougin' at my eyeballs, when all the wrath I got rises up and I twists out from under, while he jumps erect and kicks at my head and don't quite miss, just givin' me a free shave on one jaw.

In return I lets him have my head full in his belly and then a trifle later, in a matter of seconds full of flailin' arms and snappin' teeth, old Frank Keys is draggin' me offen a reptile whose face is turnin' black and whose body ain't movin' a-tall.

THAT'S about all of the yarn, stranger. Smithy's grave is 'way out yonder on the range. We thought he'd like it better so, an' we dug it deep and piled plenty rocks on top so the coyotes couldn't dig him out.

Keys and me kinda understands one another perfect now, and he's one white scout when you gets to know him. Five thousand cattle scattered from hell to breakfast through these Ever Rollin' Hills—you can't blame him if he wants to know somethin' 'bout the one range rider on the job. Keys was needin' a real cowhand and I was needin' the job.

Slit Eyes? No, stranger, you won't get to avenge your friend Smithy a-tall. Sorry on your account, but yuh couldn't blame the Key Hole waddies for—you know what—when me and Keys took that rattler over to the home ranch.

LAYING A FEVER

by Faunce Rochester

LONG before the English came to America the Indians suffered great losses from consumption and a sickness that they called "yellow fever." They didn't make much headway against consumption but they could, so their traditions insist, *lay* the fever, or plague. The technique was simple.

After a certain number had died, all the well-to-do survivors would seat themselves in a circle. Outside the circle gathered all the destitute. The richest man in the circle would announce his intention of beginning to lay the sickness. He would lift in his hand something shaped to resemble a canoe, or a skin, and this he would throw into the air. And whoever of the destitute managed to secure the image at once became the owner of the article the image represented.

After the rich men had given away all their movable property they selected the most prepossessing young man from the poor and housed him in a new wigwam built for the purpose. Then, forming in two lines with the wigwam in the middle, a man would apply the torch. As the wigwam burned, the two lines danced and sang. The young man endured it as long as possible before emerging. When he leaped from the flames he would fall, apparently dead. Five maidens would set about restoring him to life. The tribe must dance and sing until he was revived, although the time thus spent varied from six to forty-six hours.

Then the young man would recover his senses and tell how he had traveled high in the air to where there was a great number of white people. With these he interceded to have the sickness stopped. The early Abnaki legend insists this cure never failed. It fails to explain why it was not used before so many were dead.

Eddie Bride had got himself a reputation as a hard luck flyer in France, and seemed to be out for a new record with the Philippine Air patrol

The Sky Jinx

By RAOUL F. WHITFIELD

IT'S STRANGE how some men will remember a face and forget a voice, while others will pick up a lost thread in just the opposite way. In my case I'm pretty good at registering a face. But it isn't that way with Prop Owens. When it comes to picking out a voice—he's a wizard. And his eyes let him down on human face shapes. Actually, he doesn't care about a man's looks. But he claims he can tell almost everything by the way a fellow speaks up, or doesn't speak. Maybe he's right.

Hot? The old Walled City *can* be hot in the dry season when there isn't much of a breeze edging in toward Manila from Cavite and the bay. Everything is so dry that it crackles, and you get that tired feeling inside and a dry taste along the roof of your mouth. The natives and Chinks move along and grin about it. The whites move along, but they don't always grin. They curse the luck that keeps them away from Baguio up in the mountains.

Prop Owens didn't curse any such luck. As a couple of Army pilots we didn't rate Baguio trips, not at this time of the season, anyway. We were due out at Burton Field in about two hours; Juan Rizaros had set us up to a pretty decent meal over in the Walled City. We were a bit stuffed and we figured that the walk up to the Army and Navy Club, overlooking one end of the Luneta, wouldn't do any harm. So we walked. And it was while

we were walking that we heard the voice. It pulled us up short.

"— got her over in a loop—and let go both guns. The left one jammed—but the other baby poured out a nice stream of lead. Did I get that Boche? I'll say so! Got him plenty, if I do say it myself. Got him plenty!"

I looked at Prop. He was staring with wide eyes toward the screened windows beyond one of the several balconies of an old section house. The place was similar to many in the Walled City; the voice was not. It had a peculiar grating quality. And it used air words. There aren't so many flyers in Manila that it didn't give me a little jolt—that combination of voice and words. And it was clear that it gave Joe Owens a greater jolt.

Prop was still staring up toward the screened windows. His eyes were narrowed now.

"Hell!" he breathed. "It's Eddie Bride! It's the Jinx!"

I stared back at Prop. We'd all heard about Bride at Burton. He was something of a joke in the Service and yet not such an awful joke, at that. He could fly, but everything he climbed into got into trouble. "Jinx" Bride they'd tagged him when I was down on the Border patrol in Texas. He'd been at Nome then and had just cracked up with a ranking major. The major went out in the crash, but Bride had got off with a few goggle cuts. I never had met him. His whole Service history seemed to be a sequence of tough breaks, tougher for the other guy in the ship than for Bride.

"When did you see him last, Prop?" I asked in a low tone.

Prop smiled grimly. He's tall and rather lean and he got his tag for designing one of the sweetest big ship propellers they're using today. His gray eyes went up toward the window again. But the voice had died; apparently those inside had gone into another room of the house.

"Come on!" Prop grabbed me by the arm. "Up to the Escolta for a drink. We'll pass up the club. I want to locate Bert. He'll be around Clark's, most likely. Likes the Dutch music."

I grunted. Something was up, that was clear. Prop was thinking hard and he was thinking *back*. He was passing up the club for Clark's soft drink place where the music wasn't Dutch at all, but native —stringed instruments strummed by Filipinos—but Prop always termed it Dutch music. Easier to say, was his theory, which isn't such a bad one in a hot country.

"Why chase Bert Allen?" I asked as we walked along, our pace set by Prop considerably faster than it had been before. "And are you sure it was the Jinx?"

Prop swore softly.

"I'll never forget that voice," he stated. "Long time since I've heard it, Mac. Ten years, over in France. It's Bride, all right. He's transferred to Burton, ten to one. The *Thomas* got in today. He's come in on that transport. The Jinx at Burton Field! And Bert Allen—"

He'd been thinking out loud and he caught himself suddenly and shut up. I swore softly. It was almost dark, but it was still too hot for such walking. We were both getting soaked.

"To hell with the Jinx!" I muttered. "I'm not killing myself because a bum pilot got transferred down to these Islands. Take it easy."

I had slowed down, and I was talking to the air. Prop was moving faster than ever; his long legs had carried him yards ahead of me. It looked as if he'd forgotten I'd existed. I stared after him, slowed down some more, lighting a pill. Let him go—that was the thing to do. And I did it. It was too hot for speed.

But the thing that got me was why Prop was going in for it. What did he care? And where did Bert Allen come in? Bert had been in France with Prop, but what of that? A lot of us had been in that country ten years ago. Bride had been across, too. I grinned.

"MAYBE he owes Bert money," I muttered to myself. "Bert owes Prop some, and the lean guy figures he'll

put Bert wise so that he can collect from the Jinx and pay up."

But I didn't really figure it that way. I turned toward the bay, toward the Army and Navy Club. Across the Luneta, where the band played at twilight, rose the shape of the Manila Hotel. Two weeks ago I'd nearly pulled a court martial for coming close to leaving a wing on its roof. I swore when I thought of that. The tropic heat didn't help ship engines to keep you in the air. It would be a nice field for this fellow Bride—the Islands. Hard enough without jinxing yourself.

I climbed the steps of the club. It was too hot to worry about tomorrow. And Prop would be back in a little while. I went around to the bay side and sprawled in a fan backed wicker chair. I slept a bit on the screened porch. The breeze that came in from the bay was tepid, ghastly, but it was a breeze.

Something gripping my shoulder woke me in a hurry. It was Prop's right hand. His face held a grim expression.

"Lieutenant Bride's been picked up by native policemen," he told me. "They've taken him to the hospital. Fractured skull and some bad cuts on his face. Happened a half hour ago, around the corner from the Anderson place where we heard him bragging. He met the Andersons in Frisco and went over right away, right after he landed. Bride's almost finished."

I stared up at Prop.

"Who got him?" I snapped.

Prop dropped into a chair beside mine. We were alone on the club porch.

"Listen, Mac, and don't shoot off what I tell you. Maybe you can help."

His voice was low, steady.

"I ran into Bert up at Clarke's and told him that Bride was in town. There was something else I wanted to tell him. too, but he just got up and shoved me out of the way. He caught a Filipino go-cart right outside of Clarke's, and I didn't have that much luck. But I knew where he was going. When I got near the Anderson place—didn't know whose it was then, of course—I heard two native cops shrilling and jabbering the way they do. I had my man pull his pony up and I went over to them. Bride was lying on the cobbles, bleeding like a stuck pig. He was unconscious, looked bad. I did some first aid work and called an ambulance from the General Hospital."

Prop stopped talking. His gray eyes were narrowed on mine.

"Just one thing, Mac. They'll raise the devil about this, of course. Your job—" he hesitated and then went on grimly—"is to forget I was looking for Bert Allen at Clark's. I've come through with you. Am I clear?"

I shook my head.

"Not all the way. You haven't come through, Prop," I stated. "As for Allen, he's forgotten. Pretty tough on the Jinx, though, isn't it? Are you sure Bert got him?"

Prop fished in his pocket, pulled out a button. It was a dress coat Army button. I looked at it, then at Prop.

"It was laying in between a couple of cobbles," he told me. "The cops were so excited they weren't even thinking about looking around. Bert was in dress, Mac—and all the buttons were on Bride's coat."

I nodded.

"Looks like you made a mess of your news, Prop," I told him.

He nodded. There was a peculiar expression in his eyes. He spoke in a low tone.

"I was trying to break it to Bert and then talk to him," he stated, "but I didn't get in the talk. I'm not saying Bert was right, Mac. If Bride goes under, then we can do some thinking. But if he pulls out, you forget about Allen. Yes or no?"

"Yes," I agreed. "Not that I hand Bert much for slugging the Jinx."

"You weren't there, were you?" Prop snapped. "And that's something you don't know anything about."

I nodded.

"Why'd he do it, Prop?" I asked, getting up from the chair.

Prop shook his head. He bummed a cigaret from me, lighted up.

"Do what?" he asked me grimly. "Come on, let's get a bus for the field!"

JINX BRIDE was a pretty tough gent, I'll have to admit that. He didn't go out. Instead, he came out of the General Hospital at the end of a week's time. There was still a bandage on his head; his face bore a few marks of his encounter. The boys at the field weren't foolish enough to joke about that slamming down, but it was evident to them that Lieutenant Edward Bride still had his jinx along.

I ran into him near the north end of the deadline the morning he came out for his first hop. He was medium sized, with reddish brown hair and had a peculiar squint to his brown eyes. We shook hands, and he looked me over as if he were sizing me up for some sort of a job that was vacant and over which he had the big say.

"MacAndrews." He rolled my name over his tongue, his voice rather loud, and his eyes on mine. "Name seems familiar. Ever been in France?"

I yawned. His tone didn't please me, and I guessed what was coming.

"Once," I stated. "You ever been there?"

He stiffened, his eyes narrowing.

"Hell, yes!" he stated. "Got four officially—and plenty unofficially."

I blinked.

"Four what?" I asked mildly. "Trips across?"

He wasn't any fool and he was wise right away that I was stringing along with him. And he didn't like it.

"What were you doing?" he snapped. "Ferrying them up from Romo for us to fight with?"

That got me a little sore, so I let him have it. Maybe the fact that the heat was getting me a bit helped along.

"Listen, Jinx!" I snapped back. "Down here it's too hot to talk and fly both. So we fly, see?"

His face had gone a little white at the tag I used. And I hadn't meant to use it. But he'd started the thing and he finished it.

"You fly down here, eh?" he came back. "And you slug, too!"

With that he turned away. I stared after him. Since Prop had given me the dope that night at the club I'd figured that Bride had known who had battered him down. It was ten to one that Bert Allen hadn't just hit him from behind. The crack on his head had come from contact with the cobbles, but he'd been hit several times in the face.

"Tough baby, even if he is a jinx!" I muttered to myself. "And he knows who got him, all right. But then, he would. Bert isn't the breed who hits from behind. The thing is why did Bert go after him in such—"

I broke off. Prop was coming toward me, a grim smile on his face. His eyes went past me to the retreating figure of Jinx Bride.

"Is he flying this morning?" he asked me slowly.

I grunted.

"He's not telling me about it, that's sure," I stated. "He was talking about the war."

"What war?" Prop grinned. "Oh, I get you. Well, he would. He's been doing that for years. Didn't say anything about getting knocked cold that night, Mac?"

I nodded.

"He did."

I told him how Bride had expressed it. Prop's eyes narrowed to little slits. One of the two Douglass ships that had come down from the States a month ago got off the field, her left wing drooping a bit. We both watched her climb toward the clouds that were drifting up north from Mindoro way.

"That's Bert up," Prop muttered. "Mac, I don't like it. Bride's too damned calm about things. He's waiting for something to break. Never cracked a word to the board. You read the report—native gone heat crazy, attacking him. What a lot of bunk that was! Why even the boys are wise that something funny happened that night."

"Bert's been ducking me," I told Prop.

"What did he say to you about it?"

"He's been running out on me, too," Prop returned. "I got hold of him the day after the mess, and he pulled the surprise stuff. I told him to come out of it, that I knew he'd started for the Walled City, and he got sore. Acted sore, anyway. Said he'd done nothing of the sort."

I rolled a pill.

"Come through, big boy!" I muttered "What's Bert got against Jinx Bride? Why did he tackle him that night?"

Prop jerked his helmet down over the top of his head. He looked at me blankly.

"I don't get you, Mac," he stated cheerfully. "Did I seem to give you the idea that Bert has anything against—"

"Bunk!" I interrupted. "Say, they're putting out a ground strip for Bert now!"

Sure enough, they were putting out the come down signal with a couple of strips of white cloth. Bert was banking the two place Douglass around, gliding for the field already. I looked at Prop Owens.

"Why not come through?" I asked. "You've told me plenty, why not the rest of it?"

Prop shook his head.

"You don't want to get mixed up in this deal, Mac," he stated. "If I think you can do any good I'll let you all the way in. Otherwise, you stay dumb, see? Then, if there's an accident—"

He broke off, watching the Douglass hit tailskid and rubber in a sweet landing. I grunted, as he gave no evidence of finishing. I was getting a little sore, so I decided to try and scare him.

"All right, Prop, but get this. If anything funny happens to Jinx Bride, and you don't come all the way through, I'll have something to say; not that I'm crazy about the Jinx, but I'd kind of like to see him get a square deal."

Prop smiled grimly. Bert was taxing the ship toward the deadline to a spot about a hundred feet from where we stood.

"Noble, Mac," he stated slowly. "And suppose something happens to Bert?"

I STARED at Prop. He swore softly and walked down the deadline toward the Douglass. I followed. So that was what was bothering Prop. He knew that Bride was a good hater; and the fact that the Jinx had let the C. O. and the others think a native had run amuck was worrying Prop.

The red headed Major Duncan was grinning at Bert Allen as he climbed down from the front cockpit of the Douglass. Beside him stood Lieutenant Bride, polishing a pair of goggles with a handkerchief. Bert walked up to the group as Prop and I came up.

"You've met Lieutenant Bride, Bert?" The C. O.'s voice was questioning. "Didn't see you at mess last night, when Bride came over from Manila."

Bert's blue gray eyes met Bride's. He shook his head slowly.

"I've heard of Lieutenant Bride, Major," he said slowly.

I looked at the Jinx. He was smiling, too, but it was a nasty, tight lipped smile. He nodded his head.

"Yeah," he said quietly, "I cracked up a ship once—and it got around."

Some one chuckled. The C. O. frowned. His eyes went up toward the sky. He didn't make any attempt to go through with a formal introduction. When he spoke his voice was Army toned, crisp and to the point.

"Take Lieutenant Bride up with you, Allen," he ordered. "Show him how things lay around here and give him a line on the Pasig bumps. Feel up to it, Lieutenant?"

His eyes were on those of the Jinx. That officer nodded and jerked his helmet over his head. Without a word he turned away, climbed into the rear cockpit of the Douglass. The C. O. spoke to Bert.

"If he asks, let him handle the ship, Bert. She's rigged dual control, isn't she?"

Bert nodded. In the rear cockpit the Jinx was patting his Irving seat pack 'chute, before sitting on it. The C. O. nodded to all of us and strolled along down the deadline. Bert looked at Prop.

"Meant to tell you a few weeks ago, Prop," he said in a tone that was meant to be casual but wasn't, "I've got a couple of letters in that steamer trunk of mine. Top tray. All addressed and stamped. If it wouldn't be too much trouble—"

"Get up above!" Prop cut in gruffly. "The heat's bothering you."

Bert turned away and climbed into the front cockpit. He handed back a phone set to Bride. The exhausts roared and the plane rolled out from the deadline. She'd been tested out, of course, before Bert had taken off the first time.

I groaned as the plane climbed up into the sky. Bert had meant to tell Prop about a couple of letters a few weeks ago. Yes he had! Two good haters sky riding in the same plane—that's what had made Bert remember the letters.

Prop was wiping his forehead with the biggest handkerchief he had been able to pick up on the Escolta. I took a deep breath of the air. At least, at the field, it didn't reek with Filipino and Chink odors. It was bad enough, anyway. I watched the Douglass climb up into the sky. She was a neat job, nicely engined and well balanced. A cinch to fly.

"Well, I've got a sky date with that Duval scout," Prop announced. "See you in—"

He broke off. We both tilted our heads. The exhaust roar of the Douglass had suddenly broken in tone. It wasn't smooth; the engine was skipping!

I swore grimly. One of the ground crew men shouted hoarsely to another. The engine roared again as Bert leveled her off; then the beat died. Bert had her up about three thousand. He nosed her down now; she banked slightly, tilted a wing to the clouds, a wing to the earth. We were all watching.

Then we saw it—a streak of red from the engine streaming back toward the front cockpit! A bright tongue of flame! The Douglass was burning in the air, burning as she banked over and tried to get into a dive angle and hit the field!

I heard Prop swearing slowly and fiercely beside me. Jake Collins' voice reached me in a hoarse whisper.

"The Jinx is getting clear!"

Even as he whispered the words, Bride got clear. For seconds his figure traced a black line down toward the earth. Then the pilot 'chute opened, jerking out the greater spread of silk. My eyes left his drifting figure, went to the diving plane.

Red flame was streaking back over the engine cowling, twisting toward the front cockpit. Black smoke trailed through the wing struts; the diving ship made a trail toward earth and the field.

"Jump!" I muttered fiercely. "Why in hell doesn't Bert—"

I stopped muttering. The Douglass was falling out of her dive, falling off on a wing. And Bert Allen was clear of the plane, at less than a thousand feet from the earth!

For a second I closed my eyes. When I opened them they picked up a streak of brown, closer to earth than I ever want to see such a streak again—with the 'chute unopened. As I stared the pilot 'chute snapped out. Then the bigger spread crackled; we could hear it on the Field. And then, as the downward speed of Bert's body was checked, there sounded the *boom-crash* of the Douglass.

I sighed heavily. Prop reached for a pill. Somewhere near there sounded a nervous laugh. The ambulance clattered out from the deadline, headed toward the corner of the field into which the wind was drifting the 'chutes.

"WHAT do you say, Lieutenant Owens?" The C. O.'s voice, from behind me and addressing Prop, startled me. Prop faced the major. His face was pretty white.

"Busted feed line, sir—that's my guess. Gas or oil, and when it hit the hot engine or struck an exhaust—"

Prop shrugged his shoulders. The C. O. nodded his head slowly. The Douglass, far out on the field, was burning. The Jinx's 'chute had let him down at the usual seventeen feet a second rate, but Bert Allen struck several hundred yards

away, at almost the same second. There wasn't much wind; the chances were the drag wouldn't hurt either of them.

The ambulance had headed for the section of the field on which Lieutenant Bride had landed. A motorcycle sidecar streaked out toward Bert Allen. The C. O. walked out a short distance from the deadline and waited. It was a cinch that the ambulance driver would see him; and the sidecar motorcycle driver, too. The fire crew was going out toward the burning ship. Three or four of us eased up close to the C. O.

The ambulance got back first, and Jinx Bride climbed down from the front seat. There was a faint smile on his face, but I noticed that his hands shook as he lighted a pill.

"Nice work, Lieutenant!"

The C. O. spoke quietly, and Bert Allen, sliding out of the sidecar seat, caught his words. He moved to the major's side as the C. O. half faced him, but his eyes were on those of Eddie Bride.

"Nice work, hell!" he snapped. "You could have saved that ship, Bride!"

The Jinx stiffened. His brown eyes narrowed. He jerked his helmet and goggles off his head and ran a hand through his reddish brown hair. His voice was grim.

"Think so, Allen? Why didn't you save her, then?"

Bert Allen laughed harshly. I noticed for the first time that his khaki shirt was scorched; there were red streaks on his face.

"She was dual control, Bride!" he snapped. "The red stuff wouldn't have reached you—it got me. You could have saved her. It was just a case of—"

He stopped, raised a hand to his burned face. Doc Kennerly caught him by the arm.

"Of what?" Bride's tone was like ice and knife edged, too.

Kennerly stepped in front of Bert, but he shoved the doctor aside. He took a step toward the Jinx; his eyes narrowed on the other man's.

"Of guts!" he gritted. "Jinx? A hell of a jinx you are! That's the bunk—always has been! Just two things the matter with you!"

Then Prop and Doc got him turned around and headed in the other direction. I watched Lieutenant Bride. He stared after Bert Allen, his body tense. Then suddenly he relaxed. He shrugged his shoulders. The C. O. was moving toward the sidecar of the motorcyle. A second later he was driven across the field toward the burning plane.

Lieutenant Bride turned toward me. I felt at the moment that Bert was right. The ship had been dual control; it looked to me as if Bride could have brought her down. I guess my eyes showed the way I felt. The Jinx stared at me for several seconds, then laughed harshly.

"I'm in soft at this field, eh? Slugged from behind the night I get off the ship; expected to set down burning ships—"

He moved off toward the barracks. Doc Kennerly was leading Bert toward the field hospital, and Prop Owens came toward me.

"First crackup in a month!" he muttered. "And the first trip Bride's made up above in the same time. Jinx—I'll say he is!"

I grunted.

"You're getting worse than some of these Islanders," I stated. "Suppose he made the feed line let go, eh?"

Prop dropped his cigaret stub and stepped on it. His eyes were grim.

"Four feet farther back from that flame than Bert," he said grimly, "and he went over the side pretty quick, didn't he?"

I felt sorry for Bride. No reason why, but I did. Things like that happen sometimes, and you can't figure it perfectly.

"I'd have gone over as quick," I stated. "Maybe a little faster."

"Like hell you would!" Prop came back. "You'd have yelled at Bert to duck his head under the fuselage and you'd have brought that ship down. So would I. Bert tried it until he was getting scorched and then he cut loose."

I nodded my head.

"He waited too long," I stated. "The

Government can stand the loss of a plane or two. Our record at Burton has been pretty good."

Prop swore softly.

"It has been," he agreed, "but from now on—"

"Look here, Prop," I cut in, "you know damn' well that Bert slugged the Jinx that night in the Walled City. And you know that Bride knows that Bert slugged him. You don't expect him to give a rap about saving a ship that Bert's piloting, do you?"

Prop Owens shook his head slowly.

"From now on I don't expect anything —at this field!" he stated simply and grimly. He looked out toward the burning ship. "That's Number One. You know how things go, once they get started. If I had any leave coming I'd like it."

I chuckled.

"And go down to Panay after a voodoo native to take the spell off you, I'll bet!" I jibed.

But Prop only narrowed his eyes on the burning Douglass. I swore softly as I thought of the luck that had caused the Jinx to hit Burton Field while Bert Allen was stationed here. The Islands were bad enough when everything was peaceful. The air was bad enough, without a sky jinx. Yes, I figured it the way Prop figured it, only I tried to kid myself that I was all wrong. And like Old Man Smith's helicopter, it wasn't a hell of a success.

JUST before sunset the Jinx took up a DeHaviland two seater. His air work wassweet. He did about everything that can be done with that type of ship. When he landed he did two things that can't be done—not along with a perfect landing. He forgot to get down close enough to the field and he pancaked the last ten feet. That was the first thing.

Then, when she hit flatter than some last week's Chinese beer, he gave her the gun. She blew both tires and went over on her nose. The prop splintered. They pulled Bride out with a nasty goggle cut over his right eye. I happened to be at the hospital getting a dose of quinine for some dengue I'd picked up during the rainy season, when they brought him in. Captain Lewis, the adjutant, had seen the noseover, and he talked sharp about it while Doc Kennerly fixed the glass cuts up.

"Why in hell did you give her the gun, Lieutenant?" he finished up. "She was coming down flat; she'd have cracked her under gear, that's all."

The Jinx swore.

"Thought she'd pick up and get forward speed before we hit," he stated. "Heat waves off the field make it deceptive, Captain."

That was pretty true. Burton isn't any cinch, and it had been Bride's first solo flight in a month. The adjutant muttered something about Bride's making a report and left the room. The Jinx looked out of his good eye and saw me.

"Well," he stated sarcastically, "it's too bad you missed that one, Lieutenant."

I shook my head.

"Don't make any difference to me, Bride!" I came back. "The field is tricky."

He looked surprised. I got my pills and went away. An orderly came up along the deadline and told me that he C. O. wanted me over at the headquarters shack. When I got there Billy Grace and Bert Allen were ahead of me. Prop came in right behind. We went into the C. O.'s office and he grinned up at us.

"Know you men will be glad to hear the news," he said slowly and in a peculiar tone. "Colonel Greene is flying over from Panay to see what we've got here. The natives are starting some little fracas down there, and he thinks we may have to send down some more ships. So we'll maneuver a bit for him—at four. All ships up, and all pilots.

"Lieutenant Allen, you take the first flight. Lieutenant Owens will take the second. Mac, you handle the scouts. Work out something pretty nice. By the way, Lieutenant Bride will go up, too. Let's see—"the C. O. hesitated, then went on—"he'd better ride with you, Bert."

Prop coughed. I sucked in my breath

sharply. The major's eyes were narrowed; they seemed to be looking at nothing in particular. The C. O., I decided, was wise to something.

"Lieutenant Bride just nosed over, Major," I said slowly. "He got a goggle cut."

The C. O. nodded.

"Saw him crack up," he stated grimly. "He won't have much to do, riding in the rear cockpit of the Marlin."

Prop uttered a low explanation. Bert Allen stiffened. The C. O. smiled cheerfully.

"That's all, men!" he said. "The adjutant will give you any other details I may decide upon. Four o'clock sharp."

We piled out of the office. Bert Allen's face was set grimly. Prop whistled a few bars off key. I groaned. Billy Grace passed the pills around and we lighted up. Just two on a match, we were careful about that.

"Well," Billy spoke slowly, "he's been up twice and there's been two crashes. You know how these things go."

"Bunk!" I muttered, but I wasn't at all sure that it was bunk.

It's funny, but crashes around an air field do go in threes. Not all the time, of course, but enough of the time to make you sit back and think.

Prop had started whistling again, and Bert turned on him suddenly.

"For heaven's sake, cut that out!" he snapped. "It's hot enough and bad enough without—"

He turned away abruptly. Prop stopped whistling, looked at me. Nerves. Bert was in just the wrong sort of humor to get up above and fly the Marlin. She was a tough ship, anyway, a two place biplane with too much engine. She landed fast and handled sluggishly. But she was the best bomber we had in the Islands. And Colonel Greene liked plenty of action in the air. When you put on a show for the Island chief of the Air Service, you put on a good one—nothing half way.

Bert Allen had stridden off without saying another word.

WE WALKED back to the barracks together, Prop and I. We didn't talk much. Bert Allen came over to my coop just as I was getting set for a short nap. Island heat makes the midday siesta almost necessary.

"Mac," he said abruptly, "you think I tackled the Jinx and sent him to the hospital, don't you?"

That gave me a jolt, but I managed to nod my head. I thought of the button that Prop had picked up. That made me pretty sure of it.

"I didn't," Bert said slowly. "Intended to go after him, but I got there too late. There was a scrap on and I butted in. Bride went down and out as I mixed it, and the funny part of it is—I was trying to help him!"

I stared at Bert.

"Who tackled him, Bert?" I asked grimly.

The other pilot shook his head.

"It was pretty dark, Mac," he stated "but they were uniforms—American uniforms."

"They?" I muttered. "More than one of 'em, eh?"

Bert nodded.

"Three or four; think one beat it as I waded in. Bride went down. One of them knocked me off balance and to my knees with a shoulder wallop. When I straightened up they were making a break for it. Then I heard the patter of a native cop's feet. Knew what that meant, with what Prop knew, or thought he knew. And there's something else—"

He checked himself, lighted a pill. His eyes were narrowed.

"But Bride knows it wasn't you that tackled him," I said in a puzzled tone. "Why didn't he come through with the truth? Why the mystery?"

Bert snapped out the words.

"He's waiting to get me, Mac! See the game? That's why he didn't take the Douglass down—"

He checked himself for the second time. I stared at him anxiously. It might be the heat or it might be something else.

"Get you for what?" I snapped back.

Bert smiled with his lips. His eyes had a hard expression.

"I tagged him," he said simply. "I started calling him the Jinx."

There was a little silence. Then I shook my head slowly.

"Maybe you did, Bert," I stated, "but you're holding back on me. You didn't go down to the Walled City last week just because you knew he was sore at you. Come clean; cut the funny stuff!"

He spoke in a low voice.

"I tagged him a jinx over in France. It stuck. He had some tough luck and it stuck. When Prop told me he had been transferred down here I thought he was crazy. We usually hear, before a guy comes down. I didn't go down to scrap with him, Mac. I went down to see for myself. I knew what it would mean, the two of us here together. I've got a thirty day leave of absence coming to me. I figured on taking it right away. After what happened, I couldn't do that."

I nodded. The thing was clearing up now. Bert Allen had tagged Bride over on the other side. And such a tag, in the air game, sticks. On top of that, Bride had been having tough luck.

"Bert," I said slowly, "I'm not much on the in between stuff. Don't exactly like it. But suppose I have a talk with Bride? Suppose I tell him how I think you feel? It would—"

"No good!" Bert interrupted. "He's a good hater. They've been riding him at the different fields. He's something of a joke. And he figures I've started it. You can see his side of it. Why didn't he come through? Ten to one he knows something about that attack in the Walled City. Why didn't he bring the Douglass down? He just took one look and went over the side. Put it up to me. And the C. O. has him riding along with me this afternoon. Just wanted you to know how things stand, Mac, but don't go to him."

Bert cleared out. I passed up the nap and did some thinking. Then I went out on the field and looked up the Jinx. He was too new in the Islands to nap in the middle of the day, I guessed that. And I found him looking over the Marlin bomber.

I took him over in a corner of the hangar and gave him the whole story. All wrong? Maybe I was, but it was the best bet, the way I'd thought it out. He took it all without changing expression. And when I finished he just smiled.

"Fine!" he stated. "Well, get this, Lieutenant. I was tackled by three or four soldiers. One of 'em wore Air Service insignia. Got a piece of it I pulled off before I went down. Maybe Allen didn't tackle me himself, but he was there to see how his boys did the job!"

I swore.

"They may have been drinking," I stated. "Looking for a scrap."

The Jinx laughed harshly. "The field's too small for the two of us—Allen and me!" he muttered. "Just tell him I said that."

With that he climbed into the rear cockpit of the Marlin and started moving the dual controls around. I swore a few times at myself. What a great little fixer I was! Then I shrugged my shoulders. I'd tried, anyway, and I didn't believe that Bert Allen had picked up some soldiers and had them beat up the Jinx. But Bride believed it.

There was one chance. I could go to the C. O. and let him have the whole thing. That might keep them out of the same ship, and it might not. Major Burton was a fighter. He was a red headed, flying fool. The chances were he'd laugh at me, and I'd rate as an old woman. So I decided to keep clear. I went back for my nap. It was no go; all I could see was the bomber up above in the maneuvers, with Bert Allen riding the front cockpit, and in the rear, the Jinx.

WE HAD twenty-seven ships in the air. I was leading a formation, V shaped, of scout single seaters. There were five of us in the formation. For a half hour we'd been in the air, stunting, doing combat work, ground strafing. Now, as a sort of *finale* to the maneuvers,

we were to attack two DeHavilands and the Marlin bomber. They were flying in formation, at five thousand and headed over the black watered Pasig from the Malate District of Manila, toward the field. Four Ryan scouts were protecting them, and it would be a good show when we dove down on them from the seven thousand feet we had.

We roared in at an angle. The idea was to intercept them over the field, so that the colonel could see everything that went on. I rocked the scout I was flying, and the formation spread out a little. We were within half a mile of the field now, and flying wide open.

Manila lay back of us—the bay glittered a deep blue, not far beyond the field. The air was rough and hot, as usual. I stared down at the little ships escorting the three bombers. The Marlin was at the apex of the three. I stiffened as I thought of her crew. It would be a sharp mixup when we dropped down on them. The sort of dog fight that needs a cool head and steady fingers on the stick. A slip on rudder bar action, a false zoom or dive, and there would be an air crash.

We gained on the formation below. There was a crowd down on the field. All the personnel were out, and the colonel had brought his staff along. Cars were driving out from Manila, too, attracted by the air maneuvers we'd been putting on.

I leaned over the left side of the fuselage. The little single seaters escorting the three bombers were spreading out some. I drew a deep breath, then waved my left hand. Pulling back the stick, I zoomed, then dove her.

The others in the formation were diving, too. With our engines throttled down, the wind shrill through the wires and rigging came clearly. One of the little ships below zoomed up to meet us. The three bombers banked steeply to execute a left turn.

And then the mimic sky scrap was on. We had blanks in the machine guns, and they made a fine clatter. Jimmy Wyant, a sweet single seater pilot, singled me out, and we had a hot time. But I kept diving and zooming, trying to get near the three bombers, still in formation. Again and again Jimmy cut me off, dropped down ahead of me, forced me to zoom, to roll over, to fall off on a wing. Once we flashed within thirty feet of each other—and I caught a broad grin on his face.

And then the bombers broke formation. One of the boys had got down on them, and it was each ship for herself. I picked out the Marlin, drew Jimmy up in a loop and dove straight for the bomber. I was coming right down on her tail—when it happened. It was all over in a flash.

Bert zoomed the two seater as a little ship came at him from an angle. There was another ship on his right, one of the escort. She was roaring in to combat the scout that was angling in from the left, and Bert didn't see her. At the top of his zoom, he banked to the right, kicked right rudder.

I shouted hoarsely; my body stiffened. Diving down on the Marlin I could see everything. She fell off on her right wing just as the escort ship nosed down in an attempt to get clear. It didn't work. The right wing of the bomber crashed, ripped into the right wing of the little ship! Then they started to fall, tangled together.

I zoomed, leveled off, my heart pounding. Then I banked around. When I looked down again the little escort ship was spinning toward the field below. A figure streaked up from her single cockpit. Her pilot had got clear. The pilot 'chute sprang open as I watched—and then my eyes went to the bomber.

She had four thousand feet and she was going down in a slow spin, her right wing twisted and warping more with each turn's air battering. I dove for her like a bullet.

The other had winged clear, giving both plunging ships air room. I caught a glimpse of the white steam rising from the the field's danger siren. And then the scout was down close to the big ship and off to one side. I pulled the stick back, eased up on the dive angle. My eyes went to the slowly spinning Marlin.

Bert Allen was out, unconscious. One glance showed me that. His head hung limply to the right of the front cockpit, against the curved stream lining of the fuselage. A strut dangled loosely above his head, a wing strut battered free in the crash. Bert was out.

I groaned and looked for the Jinx, and I didn't have to look far. He was up in the rear cockpit; one leg was flung over the side of the fuselage. There was a splintering of the wing fabric as the wind ripped at the broken wing. The bomber rolled her under carriage into sight as she spun. I nosed the scout down more steeply. Then I got a glimpse of the cockpits again. This time I yelled wildly, hoarsely.

The Jinx had his arms forward, under Bert's shoulders. He was trying to drag him from the front cockpit, his body braced inward toward the fuselage, his legs hooked around the lower section of a strut on the undamaged wing. This time Bride was sticking; he was trying to get the unconscious pilot clear of the ship!

She rolled again and, when the cockpits whirled into sight, I saw something white streak upward, off the trailing edge of the left, lower wing fabric. A 'chute—the pilot 'chute! Bert's seat pack. Bride had jerked the rip cord and let her jump.

She didn't tangle. The next thing I saw was Bert Allen's body floating out from the whirling ship, then plunging downward in a series of somersaults. The bomber whirled at a greater speed. I muttered thickly at the blotch of color on the left wingtip.

"Jump! Get clear, Jinx!"

And then the bomber was down below a thousand feet and nosing straight for the field below. I leveled off, banked around widely. Then I muttered a short prayer, nosed down and cut the engine. I had a view of the field below and most of the air above it. The bomber's ground crash sounded.

Bert Allen's 'chute had opened. He was almost to the ground. Figures were running out from the deadline, toward him. And the 'chute of Jinx Bride opened, less than a hundred feet above the earth, as my eyes went toward the hurtling streak. It drifted him down toward the edge of the field.

I got the stick between my knees and wiped the perspiration off my hands. I felt all in, let down all the way, but I grinned. And as I reached for my signal gun to get the other ships back in formation there was just one thought in my head. Lieutenant Bride might be a sky jinx, but he was something else, too, something pretty big, at that!

PROP and I sat near the foot of Bert Allen's cot, in the field hospital. The Jinx sat up near the head. He was speaking in a low tone.

"— and the C. O. says they've got a couple of soldiers over at the General Hospital who've come through with the truth. They'd been drinking *saké* and were looking for some one to lick, preferably an officer. My jinx worked and I strolled along. So they tackled me. I'd figured you might have been in on it, Allen—apologies for that."

Bert Allen grinned. A busted ankle and two ribs couldn't stop Bert's grin.

"Jinx," he stated weakly, and kept on grinning, "when that strut banged me in the head I figured I was gone—and that's all I had time to figure. But now that I'm still kicking, grab hold, man!"

He stuck out his right hand. Jinx Bride took it. Prop looked at me and winked.

"This doesn't mean there'll be any miracles around here," Bride stated, grinning. "I'll still crack 'em up, ten to one."

Prop chuckled. I thought of Bride, sticking in that whirling ship, jerking the rip cord of the seat pack and shoving Bert Allen clear. Crackups would seem sort of small, after that.

It was Bert who summed it up. He closed his eyes, but he still grinned.

"Jinx," he said, "you're still alive."

Which means, in the idiom of the Air Service, that Lieutenant Bert Allen was conceding that the Jinx was *good*.

The Caucasian Strain

in which a Chinese Maecenas deals with an unmannerly guest

By JAMES W. BENNETT

Author of "The Yellow Corsair" and "The Manchu Cloud"

"HAVE I ever killed a man? Is that what you're driving at?"

With a gesture that was habitual, John Howard Abernathy, the Mid-Asian explorer and archeologist, reached out a brown hand, poured three fingers of neat whisky into a glass and then down his throat. Not a cough, not a tear in his eye, hand steady as a rock.

"Story spinning is dry work, and I feel moved to tell you of a certain experience. But wait—I'll give you the thing more or less chronologically."

I WAS on my way to Amoy, aboard the northbound Douglas Line boat from Hongkong. My cabin mate was a Portuguese named Malaguenas. He was the rottenest bridge player! I could talk to you for hours on the mistakes that duffer perpetrated! But there was one certain bloomer that precipitated the row. He had a hand that he could have made—easily. Forgetting that he had to play it, I accepted the challenge of a double, by redoubling. Whereupon, what did that egregious ass do but go down *six* tricks—redoubled, mind you! And at penny-ha'-penny a point!

I let that pass, didn't say a word about the perfectly foul way he'd messed up the hand. Then, what did he do, but commence beefing at me for redoubling! He kept it up all that game and the whole next day. Why had I done it? Once he even implied that I was in league with the two ship's officers—they were the other players of our foursome—to make him lose and later whack up the shekels between us. That time, a fist fight was narrowly avoided—very narrowly!

Malaguenas was an assurance man. At Amoy he was to inaugurate an agency and some sub-agencies of his company. He called his proposition "assurance" but, as I learned through his trying to sell me

a block of its stock, the insurance end was conspicuous by its absence. The appeal to the public—and incidentally a huge fortune for the directors—lay in its lottery features, more than a hundred varieties.

As for the man himself, he was swarthy dark, in his forties, good looking in a rather vapid way. Out three years from Portugal, just long enough to speak a bit of Chinese and to think he knew all there was to know concerning this remote East.

Oddly enough, the Chinese whom my Portuguese enemy had persuaded to take over the head agency at Amoy was my old friend Li. There was an interesting Oriental! One of the richest men in South China, although he'd started life as a coolie. Li had done me a number of favors, so when I got ashore I looked him up. He asked that I come to a banquet he was giving for Malaguenas. Naturally I wasn't keen to attend, after that little fracas on shipboard. On the other hand Li was imperative about it and I wouldn't have hurt the old fellow's feelings for the world.

The party began at the Glory Hole. Ever hear of it? Well, you will, if you get down to South China. It's a drink dispensary that was in existence even before the days of steam ships—a room built like the inside of a tea clipper, ribbed and portholed, with an upper and lower deck.

Li told us in his pidgin-English that the drinks were on him. So we began imbibing while we waited for the various sub-agents to trickle in. As soon as all were present or accounted for, the crowd was to go to Li's house. That sort of prior rendezvous seems to be the accepted thing among the Chinese.

I noted that old Li did little more than finger his glass. But not Malaguenas! The sight of so much free liquor must have maddened him, for he made robust efforts to drink everything in sight. At that, he seemed able to carry out this expansive program. When we finally started, he walked without a stagger, and to my certain knowledge, he'd downed at least three pints of sweet champagne. As for me, I stuck to the good old whisky neat. But then, I'm an abstemious person—

What's that? We'll not argue the point.

Soon all the clan had gathered, and those Chinese were a gaudy group! Iridescent silks, heliotrope and mother-of-pearl, each man of them in his best bib and tucker. Sedan chairs were called. We left the Glory Hole and bobbed through the city and up a long hill.

On the summit stood a great, rambling, Chinese house. A perfect location, overlooking the harbor and the island of Kulangsu—where the foreigners live. I had known Li in Canton; therefore I had never had an opportunity to visit his Amoy house. It must have totaled a couple of hundred rooms. You know the patriarchal system of the Chinese: all of Li's sons and their wives and his grandsons and their wives, living under his rooftree. The place was magnificent. Marvelous carved blackwood chairs, altar tables, cabinets. Scattered about were bits of crackleware, celadon and *sang de boeuf*—not to mention a collection of priceless Tang bronzes. And there was one libation cup of white jade. Speaking of libations, pass the whisky.

The banquet which followed was something to write home about. A magnificent fish started the ball rolling, so to speak. It was served whole and garnished, just as though from the hands of the best cook of the Café Lisbon in Paris. It was apparently a Portuguese *chef-d'œuvre*, for Malaguenas let out loud cries of surprise and joy at the sight of it. The next course was a maroon varnished duck. I like that vegetable lacquer the Chinese put over the bird, even if it does make the *yaza* a trifle tough on the intake.

A few moments later we were treated to a platter of *bêche de mer*, sea caterpillars. I saw Malaguenas staring fixedly at them. His face grew startled. He forgot his quarrel with me, leaned over and whispered in deadly seriousness—

"One of dos annimales leefted hees head and *weenked* at me!"

After that came some unusual combinations of fish and pork and chicken. I couldn't blame Li for trying to make this a number one festival. I knew enough about the lottery game to realize that this agency would net Li a million to add to those he already possessed. Not to mention the pleasure of playing fairy godmother to all those Chinese, the sub-agents placidly gorging themselves at the long table. On the other hand, Li was a feather in Malaguenas' cap. The company couldn't have found a better Chinese to handle its interests in that Province. The old man was honest and he had prestige. If he guaranteed the concern—then the public would be sure to rally around.

AND NOW, enter woman. Yes, the usual band of sing-song girls came trooping in. Without 'em, a Chinese banquet would be as queer as one of ours without its after-dinner speaker. And, as far as *I* am concerned, sing-song girl, post-prandial orator, they're equally obnoxious. And I'm no woman-hater, either!

The chief of the sub-agents each drew a girl. I rated one. The prize package of the lot, naturally, went to Malaguenas.

I remember that my feminine partner began in the usual fashion:

"My come Soochow. What you' name?"

I answered, "Ah Ba Na Tai," and asked her honorable title.

She replied something to the effect—

"Dawmisovahriv."

This I was able fortunately to translate as "Dawn Mist Over The River." Which, by the way, was considerably more romantic than my companion. She listed a wee bit to the fattish side. Malaguenas had a shade the better luck, although his entertainer, crouched on a hassock at his feet, could not have been called a raving beauty.

My little playmate immediately livened things by asking if I wanted her to sing. Without enthusiasm, I nodded. Whereupon she craned upward, elongating her neck, and gave forth the loudest screech that has ever resounded in mine ear. At the end, she slid into the regulation aria pitched within a note of high C, possibly higher. All the Chinese grunted "*Hao!*" and generally expressed what I thought was misplaced approval. Pass the whisky, please.

Thank you. And, speaking of alcohol, it was then that I noted Malaguenas was making the supreme mistake of a thoroughly misspent life. He was mixing his drinks. At the Glory Hole, as I told you, he had taken champagne. Now he was guzzling triple distilled rice brandy. Than which, my son, there is nothing more soul arousing. It is blood brother to mescal or white mule.

I think then was when I had the first stirring of that emotion we call racial pride. My opinion of Malaguenas could be expressed by a long row of ciphers, but, just the same, I didn't like to watch a Caucasian make a blithering fool of himself in the presence of an Oriental.

Nor was Li any too happy over Malaguenas' addiction to the rice spirits. After a few moments, the old fellow tried to divert his guest by breaking up the banquet and suggesting some sort of business conference. This was good Chinese *kwei chü*. He would save his guest's face and at the same time get Malaguenas off to bed.

As the old Chinese was rising from his chair, I saw Malaguenas reach out and try to squeeze his sing-song girl's arm. She drew away as though he had hit her and her eyes seemed to glaze over, become opaque. I don't suppose I need tell you, do I, that such a thing isn't done, over here? The Chinese would no more think of cuddling one of their singing girls than we would of jumping across the footlights and kissing one of our female Mammy-shouters.

I made for Malaguenas, but a flock of agents intervened. Then I saw that the girl had escaped, so I let well enough alone.

Most of the sub-agents drifted into Li's smoking rooms. There were a dozen of these chambers, each with a divan and

tabouret, a pipe and box of opium pellets —cosy as dammit. I don't mean that these men were opium addicts. Far from it! They were simply accustomed to smoke a sociable pipe after eating, just as we would take a cigar, and apparently with about as much effect.

I laid plans for a quiet stroll about the grounds. That meant first sidestepping my sing-song girl. I was a bit fed up with her giggles. Did I tell you that she had a pernicious habit of tittering? So I craftily took advantage of a moment when her back was turned and slid from the room.

But, speaking a shade more seriously, Li's gardens were wonderful. There was a lagoon covered with lotus and an island. A camelback bridge led to that tiny patch of land and to a pavilion of red lacquer and damascene. I crossed the bridge and sat down in the pavilion.

Just as I was congratulating myself on my escape from the building, whom did I see but that dratted sing-song girl of mine, stumbling toward me, frightened, on the verge of tears.

She screamed:

"Mastar, you *jus'* now come! Chop-chop! Makee kill—"

I took the miniature bridge at one jump and plunged up the garden pathway. The girl kept pace with me, too! She pointed a wobbly finger at the door and I hurried into one of the smoking rooms.

THERE, lying on a divan, gazing pop-eyed up at the ceiling, was that fool Malaguenas. He was talking in Portuguese into space, occasionally waving his arms, recounting his wrongs—or I miss my guess—for his tone was unmistakably peevish.

At the opposite side of the room, stood old Li, his face resembling a South China thunderstorm. He flourished a long barreled, .44 Colt, about the vintage of eighteen-eighty, waving the weapon in the direction of Malaguenas as if he meant business. He was talking, too, in Chinese, that steady stream which is a sure sign that an Oriental is moved to intense anger.

Huddled at his feet, clutching at his knees so that Li staggered and almost lost his balance, was Malaguenas' sing-song girl. She added to the general gayety by sobbing like billy-o.

My thoughts concentrated on the revolver. If Li meant business, that weapon might easily prove the end of me, for rarely is the target in danger when a Chinese begins shooting; it's the innocent bystander. Also, there was the possibility that my old friend might surprise the world by actually hitting Malaguenas.

Li apparently saw me for the first time. The dazed look in his eye cleared. He spoke calmly enough:

"As soon as my can makee dis dlunk man understand *why* my makee kill, den my shootee six bull't into him! He velly bad man! Mo' bettah him die! *Hao? Hao buhao?* Good? Not good?"

That question made me do some quick thinking. Funny thing, but I felt racial urge again. An hour before, if somebody had told me that Malaguenas was going to get his, I probably would have said, "Excellent riddance!" Frankly I shouldn't have given a tinker's cuss whether he lived or died. But now came the compulsion to rescue him, even though I could piece together what had happened. He had insulted the girl, committing an unforgivable offense, from the Chinese point of view—an offense not so much to the girl as to his host. And it wasn't such a pleasing thing from a Western angle. Just the same Malaguenas was an Occidental, so I said to Li:

"See here, drop that revolver! No! Point it toward your feet, not toward me! that's better. Now, I know you're all set to kill this man. But before you do it you'd better weigh a few consequences."

Li looked curiously at me for a moment, then he snarled:

"He t'ink dis girl b'long no good! He tly—how you talkee?—tly kissss her! Chinese no likee kisssss—"

"Now, wait a moment," I interrupted. "You're getting all het up again. If you kill this man, what will happen? In the

first place, the Board of Directors of this Assurance Company, with their millions back of them, will start an agitation in Lisbon that will make itself felt in the offices of the Colonial Government out here in Macao. Then, a Portuguese warship will come steaming up to Amoy. It will toss some shells into the homes of a few innocent Chinese. And demand, dead or alive, the body of the city's leading citizen, namely yourself. Wouldn't that be just about what would happen?"

Li nodded—unwillingly—but nodded.

"What then do you stand to lose by letting off that blunderbuss? Most important thing of all, your life. Then, your estate! That means your family will be left in poverty, for the warship will demand plenty of indemnity. Is he—" I pointed to Malaguenas who, all this time, hadn't stopped his feast of wisdom and flow of soul—"worth it?"

"Is it right," Li demanded, "that he no' be punish'?"

"Punish him, by all means! You're a wealthy man. You can afford to give up this agency, can't you?"

"Of cou'se my give it up! My no wo'k with company dat send man likee dis!" Again the pistol pointed ominously.

"But, there's the answer! That's his punishment!"

"W'at punishment? My no savvie?"

"Do you think the board of directors is going to take this loss without a murmur? The millions that you would have made for the company from the Amoy territory? All you need to do—to bring them down hard, on Malaguenas—is to write, resigning your commission and to tell them what sort of a blister Malaguenas is!"

Again the revolver was slowly lowered, although Li's yellow finger hovered lovingly near the trigger.

"You t'ink if my makee write lettah—dat dis man will be all finish'?"

"I do."

"An' his sons, dey all finish', too?" my old friend went on tenaciously.

I hadn't the slightest idea whether Malaguenas had any sons or not. But I could see that Li's mind was reacting along conventional Chinese lines: the sins of the father being visited upon the sons, so I played it up.

"Sure! His children in the soup! Beggars! Starving!"

"An' his sons' sons? No one to lightee candle at his spirit tablet aftah he makee die? All dis if my writee lettah?"

"That's correct, Li. O.K. in each and every detail!"

Abruptly the old Chinese tossed away the pistol. It clattered on the stone flagging and by a miracle failed to go off. He rubbed his hands together and muttered—

"Goodee God, w'at a lettah my makee write!"

Thus was won another victory for the dominant Caucasian strain. Although personally I think my interference was a mistake. The world would be a better and a brighter place without such men as Malaguenas let loose in it—inflicting their bridge games on unsuspecting and defenseless folk!

By the way, have you a cramp in your arm? Or what *is* the matter? Can't you see when a glass is so empty it hurts? Now, in your remorse, don't overdo matters!

Hi! I didn't say four fingers!

Ah, well, since you've gone and poured it, I must make the best of things. Story spinning *is* dry work! Possibly just as fortunate you were generous.

Continuing

HUGH PENDEXTER'S

novel of the Westward sweep of the empire builders

The SUN CHASERS

EARLY in the Fifties when Nebraska was opened to the westward movement of pioneers who ever followed the setting sun, the temporary towns along the Missouri River were filled with restless searchers for land and gold and freedom and—some of them—freedom from the laws of the East and the vigilance committees of the West.

Roscoe Strong was a homesteader who had moved to the booming town of Plattsmouth for the winter, because he did not wish to be snowbound on his hundred and sixty acre claim twenty miles away, especially after the grasshoppers had devoured every blade of his first crops. His daughter Ruth was content in town, but his son Sam was restless to be moving with the adventurous traffic to the West.

Every one else seemed on the move . . . Old Bird of Freedom, genial dealer in wildcat money, flittered from bank failure to bank failure; Freedom's grandniece dashed north and south to meet him; wagon trains crawled over the plains to Fort Kearny; George Hancey, whose father had been dropped into the river by two agents of the Land Claim Club, had

become a gambler, sporting about in fine clothes. But Hancey was a gambler only that he might have access to gangs of thieves, killers and bad men in the hope of meeting his father's murderers; and against such a meeting Hancey had trained himself to become the deadest shot in Nebraska—called the Rattler.

Sam Strong left home and joined a freighter's caravan. At the end of the trip he joined George Hancey to ride back to Plattsmouth and they stopped for the night with Tisk's gang on the Loup. The next day old Bird of Freedom rode into the camp and the three were made prisoners of Tisk's gang. After a night of drinking Freedom announced that he had been robbed.

AFTER he left them the outlaws filed into the cookhouse and closed the door. Freedom and his companions took the hint and slowly returned to the middle cabin. At the old man's suggestion they sat on the grass in front of the door. None could get within hearing without being discovered. Freedom stretched out on his back with his hat resting on his nose. In a low voice he explained:

"That's my little backfire. Robbed myself and hid it where it'll stir up a mess when found."

"Threatens to stir up a mess for us," muttered Hancey.

"Neither Tisk nor his men think we had anything to do with it. Tisk is trying to guess which of his scum is the thief; and the band thinks he did it. I told you how I set the younkers to fighting back in Tennessee. Same notion. Set 'em against each other and they'll be too busy to pay attention to outsiders."

"Mighty dangerous," murmured Strong. "It's made an awful row."

"We was in for a row from the minute we come here," replied Freedom. "I knew they'd take the money once I showed it. That's why I bought the mules. But it makes me laugh to think of them hounding around to get it when you can't give it away in the river towns."

"Where'd you hide it?" eagerly whispered Hancey.

"Where it'll do us the most good. Don't be too nosey, George. The important thing is that I've turned these critters against each other. They don't trust any one, not even their cap'n. You two hark to this. Tisk don't intend that nary a one of us shall leave this plateau alive, so when I explode the next bombshell and give the word to scoot, don't ask any questions, but scoot!"

Beyond this he could not be led to talk. After an hour the men emerged from the cookhouse and sprawled on the grass. After a short time Blackie left the group and came up the path. Hancey remarked—

"He's starting some kind of a game."

"Then he's thinking there's a chance that one of us hid the money," murmured Freedom. "Be polite and he'll tell us what's on his mind."

Blackie halted a short distance from the three and curtly informed them:

"Your hosses are straying down the river. You'll have to do your own herding."

"Then whoever picketed them to feed didn't know his business," complained Freedom. "You boys fetch them in."

Blackie was on his way to the cookhouse as soon as he had delivered his message. Without shifting his position Freedom warned:

"It's a game to see if you'll try to bolt. They'll have you covered. Walk back, leading the horses."

Only three men were in front of the cookhouse when the two hurried by to secure their horses. These gave them no heed. The horses were contentedly feeding a quarter of a mile down the river. Hancey and Strong swung to the south to get below them and drive them back. The animals did not offer to run, and their owners came up to them and led them upstream and picketed them between the cookhouse and the middle cabin instead of leaving them with the band's herd.

Blackie came up as they were driving the foot and half pins into the sod and remarked—

"Looks if you was getting ready to ride."

"It'll look bad for the next skunk who leads our nags downstream and tries to make us believe they strayed," answered Hancey.

"You keep up that line of gab and I'll climb you, even if Tisk tells us we mustn't just yet," hoarsely threatened Blackie.

"Try it, and I'll stitch a row of .38 bullets up and down your front before you can get started," boasted Hancey.

Freedom stirred uneasily, but his voice was lazy as he told the outlaw:

"Queer a feller as big as you hasn't got more brains. Here you are wasting time watching us. Where's your head? If we wanted to scoot and was sober enough to hide the money, why didn't we scoot last night?"

Blackie scowled in perplexity and helplessly asked—

"Then who did take that money?"

"Watch your partners," suggested Freedom, slowly rising to a sitting posture.

He slowly shifted his gaze in the direction of Tisk's cabin. Blackie's small eyes glowed.

"We'll watch!" he hissed. "We'll watch every one. The devil himself can't come that game on the boys."

"But some one has," laughingly reminded Hancey.

"Mighty queer you fellers don't seem worked up about it any."

"Why should we be worked up?" countered Strong. "Lost or found, we get none of it."

Blackie brooded over this rejoinder as though finding new food for thought in it. He did not pursue his suspicion but hoarsely exclaimed:

"Five thousand dollars! That's some haul!"

"If one man can keep all of it he can do nicely," sighed Freedom. "This place has been searched. I suppose you men will keep on hunting?"

Blackie blinked his small eyes and informed—

"We've gone through the cookhouse."

"Of course you would do that," approved Freedom. "The house, bunks, every man's belongings. And Cap'n Tisk will want his house searched, if he ain't already searched it. And if he's searched it, then he ain't found anything, or he'd 'a' said so."

Blackie's lips slowly parted in a snarl.

"Of course. Minute a man finds five thousand dollars he raises a howl like a wolf to let every one know about it. Well, the game is still on."

With that he left them to return to his mates.

THE SITUATION was plain. The disappearance of the money had caused dissension and suspicion and had created a lust to kill, if murder would restore the money. No man was sure of the innocence of more than one member of the band—himself. And each man was cursing his stupidity in allowing another to get ahead of him. No man could leave the camp without proclaiming himself a thief. Outcasts and newcomers were one in appreciating the dramatic tension of the situation. Of the latter, Freedom only persisted in declaring that they would profit by the ugly discord. In a low voice he stated:

"The minute we rode up to this bunch I saw what sort of a game we'd stumbled into. We're trespassing. They can't decide to trust us as new members. They never intend for us to go away and tell what we've seen; but they soon decided they'd have to murder us in our sleep or lose several of their number, if they brought us a fight. They tried us out in different ways. If we'd knuckled under, we'd been dead by this time, killed offhand.

"Now they're splitting up, all suspicious of each other, all suspicious of the boss. If it comes to an open break, the side wins that we help. If Tisk loses out he loses his life and the gang separates, what's left of it, and drifts till it can take on with a new outfit. Tisk is in bad this very minute. He's in worse trouble than we be. It's our part to feed more wood on to what's already a hot fire."

"That sounds reasonable, and you've got more brains than all of us put together," said Strong.

"If I was a lawless critter, I'd take over the command of this outfit and have all of them eating from my hand," complacently assured Freedom.

"But how long can this keep up before we come to a showdown?" asked Hancey.

Freedom pursed his lips thoughtfully and prophesied:

"It's got to be wound up inside of twenty-four hours; perhaps in half that time. I'm hoping they'll come to a showdown by telling Tisk they must search his cabin. That ought to start the shooting without watching from one side. Those left alive won't have any stomach to fight us."

Hancey examined his guns and stretched out at full length. Freedom produced his bowie knife and began cutting thin shavings from a piece of cedar. Strong was finding the situation most disturbing. His only experience with violence was when he routed the thieves from his father's claim. Ever since learning that one of these, Feley, was a member of the band, he had feared Feley's return.

Feley might not recognize him because of the soft beard he had grown. But even if assured of escaping Feley's recollection, he found it impossible to readjust mental habits formed by a life spent in orderly New England surroundings. It bruised and hurt him even to witness scenes of violence. The thought of figuring in the impending tragedy shocked him terribly. Outwardly he might appear quite calm. Inwardly he was afraid, horribly afraid.

"Tisk is coming," murmured Freedom, as he carefully finished a long shaving and critically held it up, a long golden curl, to the sunlight.

Strong held his breath and his heart pounded and thumped most furiously. He did not glance up until Tisk was close to them. To keep his features from betraying his fear he scowled heavily at the leader.

"None of your ugly looks at me," Tisk shrilly warned.

Strong did not change his expression; it seemed to be frozen on his features. But minor annoyances were not on Tisk's mind. His business was with Freedom, and of him he demanded—

"What did Blackie want of you fellers?"

"Sore headed about that money, or pretended to be," quietly replied Freedom, and he began shaving off another long curl. As an afterthought he added, "He did let on something about t'other houses oughter be searched."

Tisk fixed an ominous gaze on the men in front of the cookhouse and in his thin, piercing voice commented:

"Blackie does wrong to talk so much. He shouldn't talk with you outsiders at all. His Injun blood oughter keep him from talking. Instead of wasting yapping on you fellers he ought to 'a' been searching the cookhouse. I'm on my way to see they do it now. Then they must search mine."

Hancey lazily informed:

"We advised him to go through the cookhouse, and that if there was anything hidden in your house you'd a found it by this time and reported the same. Of course, it's foolish to think of a man hiding the money in your house. He couldn't get near it without you knowing it."

"You're trouble makers!" wailed Tisk. "Knew it from the start. Just trouble makers; but this stealing's going to be straightened out before sundown."

"Trouble maker yourself," shortly replied Freedom, suspending his whittling and gesturing with his knife point close to Tisk's fat girth. 'We come up here to be alone Ran into you fellows and was treated bad from the start. I've been robbed of five thousand dollars. I suppose if it had been ten thousand you'd have the gall to say we're even bigger trouble makers. Tisk, we're not hunting trouble. Ain't lost any. But you can't bully us. Blackie talked with us for the simple reason he knows none of us has that money and can't have any of it if it's found. And he isn't sure of any

other man in this outfit—not even you."

"I believe you've got all the trouble you can handle just now without making any war talk to us," calmly added Hancey.

Tisk stared at him then shrugged his shoulders and murmured:

"They know their master. The money must be found. After that I'll have another talk with you three."

He proceeded to the cookhouse and the three watched him sharply. None would have been surprised to see a spurt of flame at a window. Nothing happened. The men on the grass did not shift their positions. He spoke briefly and returned up the path, accompanied by Blackie and Drick They halted upon reaching Freedom and his friends, and Tisk announced:

"I've made these boys search me, as I don't give any orders I ain't willing to follow myself. Now they're going to search my cabin."

None of the three friends had anything to say, but Hancey nodded approvingly and lifted his gaze to mark the position of the climbing sun. Drick, standing behind his master, opened his mouth in a silent laugh. Tisk was quick to catch Hancey's unvoiced comment, and he hissed:

"You young skunk! I begin to feel this place ain't big enough to hold you. The sun is well up, but I haven't left my cabin till now. There's not a man in the outfit that has any notion I know where that money is. And I'm beginning to think one of you three knows where it is, and that the truth can be coaxed out of you by some of Blackie's Injun tricks."

Again the silent laugh from Drick, but Blackie's dark face remained impassive The leader paused only long enough to sweep his gaze over the southern horizon and then led the way to his cabin.

Freedom stared after them and remarked:

"He's troubled; he ain't scared. He's ready to fight to the last ditch any time. But he doesn't understand about the money, and he's worried for fear it may be some gum game. But see how cunning he is! Takes two men along who hate each other. The rest of the gang know the two would never agree to cover up anything, and Tisk is mortal keen for his leftenant Feley to return."

"If things don't bust one way or the other soon I'll go to pieces!" groaned Strong.

Freedom motioned for him to be silent and with lips parted expectantly watched the men draw close to the cabin. They halted outside for a few moments and then entered. Hancey whispered—

"Will they find it?"

"I'm hoping so, but they ain't 'warm' yet," mumbled Freedom.

"The men are outside the cookhouse and waiting," said Strong in a jerky voice.

The three men sprawled out on the grass in apparent indolence were watching Tisk's cabin hungrily. After a wait of ten minutes Tisk and the two searchers came out.

"A trifle warmer!" muttered Freedom.

Tisk stood to one side while the two men examined the ground along the front of the cabin, Freedom was breathing heavily. Finishing with the front, the two men shifted to the downstream end. The stick in Freedom's hand snapped. Blackie and Drick were on their knees, prodding the ground with their fingers along the base log. As they neared the corner next to the river Freedom huskily whispered:

"Three feet round that corner and hell will bust loose!"

THEY were about to turn the corner when a piercing whistle sounded at the cookhouse. Manners was standing erect and pointing to the south. All eyes picked up the bobbing object. Tisk shaded his eyes and cried shrilly—

"It's Feley!"

He started down the path, followed by Blackie and Drick. When they were opposite the middle cabin Blackie loudly announced—

"Light wagon, two horses."

As they ran after Tisk to the cook-

house Freedom and his companions fell in behind them. By the time they reached the cookhouse Manners was calling out!

"Two men in a light wagon!"

"Feley's fetching a new man for us! Bet he'll be a good one," said Tisk.

Blackie rested his hands on the shoulders of Gorling. Manners lifted himself at arm's length and with eyes inherited from a red mother watched the bobbing wagon for a few moments, then dropped to the ground, saying—

"Man and a woman."

A red flush spread over Tisk's face. He confronted the men and warned:

"Some thief stole our money. Don't let no one think of stealing a woman."

Hancey rested a trembling hand on Freedom's shoulder and whispered—

"This is the worst!"

Freedom snarled and tugged at his beard. The wagon, drawn at a gallop, rapidly approached over the grassy plain. Blackie warned—

"Strangers!"

Freedom stared long and earnestly and groaned:

"Good Lord! It's Florida and Betsy Bracket!"

Bracket soon recognized Freedom and yelled a glad greeting. With a snap of the lash he sent his horses into even a swifter pace. Mrs. Bracket waved her hand. The wagon was covered but had the sides up. In it were boxes, a chest and several rawhide trunks. It was plain that the Brackets were moving once more.

The wagon came to halt near the curious group and Freedom ran forward as his friend leaped to the ground and warmly shook his hand, explaining:

"Just trailed along till we found you. When we heard at Brady's Island that you were up this way, looking for our lost town, Betsy and me didn't lose any time in following. The wagon train boss said you was only a few hours ahead, but even a light wagon can't keep up with a man on a good hoss. These our neighbors?" And he smiled on the silent, leering group.

Freedom hastily explained:

"They're movers. They're just staying here for a spell. I've proved our lots. You'n' Betsy take that middle cabin and put your goods there."

"Well, I don't know," doubtfully mused Mrs. Bracket as she viewed the empty plateau. "Maybe it won't be worth while to unload. Now we've started and can't go back to Drakeville maybe we'd better push on and take a look at Oregon—or swing down into Californy."

Tisk came forward and in his high pitched voice informed them:

"You'll have to stay, ma'am, till your title's been examined. My men will take care of your team. Just hop out." Turning to his grinning followers, he ordered, "Jo'n' Manners, unhitch. Leave the wagon up by my cabin. You see, ma'am, there's some things to be talked over before you leave us."

Bracket stared in amazement and demanded—

"Who might you be to tell us what we do and won't do on our own land."

"Keep your trap shut, you poor fool. I'm boss up here," replied Tisk.

Bracket surveyed the men more carefully and fear came into his heart. His eyes were wildly questioning as he turned to search Freedom's face. Hancey was the first to enlighten him. He said:

"These men lead careless lives and at times forget their manners. But no one is going to bother you, Mrs. Bracket."

"Hoity-toity, young man. Betsy Bracket has been meeting rough men ever since she was fool enough to let her husband drag her round from piller to post. Take the reins, Florida, and drive to the middle cabin. It all comes of you being bound to keep on the move instead of staying on the Lancaster road, where we was so peaceful and happy till the hoppers ate us out. I can't say I'm glad to see you two young men in such rough looking company. And Bird of Freedom, I'd expected better of you. As for that little fat man with the glass eyes, Florida, if he has any talk to make just send him to me."

Her beautiful brown eyes slowly contracted as she directed her gaze at Tisk.

Some one tittered at the characterization of Tisk. He whirled, murder in his gaze, but all faces were grave. Turning to the wagon just as Florida climbed over the wheel, he lifted one foot to the hub and shrilly informed Mrs. Bracket:

"You're just a squaw up here! And if you'd don't want to be a widder on the spot—"

Something hard pressed into the middle of his back. Hancey was advising over his shoulder:

"That's enough. No more talk from you to my friends. You'll need all your breath to explain to your men how you came to be digging a hole at sunrise this morning on the north side of your cabin when you thought no one was looking."

Tisk lowered his foot and slowly faced about. His round face became beet red, not because he discovered that it was Hancey's finger and not the muzzle of a gun that had intimidated him, but because of the astounding accusation. Freedom motioned for Bracket to drive. Tisk gave no heed, nor did he hear Mrs. Bracket's complaint—

"If you ain't got any spunk just give me the whip and wait here till I teach that fatty some manners!"

The color receded from Tisk's face. His men stood glaring as if stunned by Hancey's speech. Before he could gather his wits and address them they came to life and, with the exception of Jo, started on a mad run for the upper cabin. Still voiceless, Tisk looked after them for a bit then walked slowly toward the cookhouse and dropped on the ground. Jo stood behind him. Freedom and his companions stood within a dozen feet of him. Tisk glared at them for a few seconds and then slowly said:

"Of course. And we were fools not to have known it at once. And it was clever. So you fellows did sneak out and hide the money there after all. But you've overplayed your hand. The boys will be quick to understand. None of 'em is fool enough to think Ben Tisk would be that clumsy. Jo, you go and tell them that if they find anything I'm not claiming my share. And tell them to hurry back if they want to see the fun. I'm taking none of the money these fools hid there. As to the woman, that's another matter."

"In a minute," mumbled Jo. "You three fellers thinking to climb the boss?"

"We're going to defend ourselves most proper," said Hancey, closely watching the man on the grass and the man behind him. "Freedom, you and Sam step farther to one side. This is a one man job."

"Jo, go tell the boys what I said. They're to take any money they find, but they mustn't bother the woman. Why don't you start?"

"In a minute, boss. I don't want to leave you alone with the three of them."

Hancey insisted:

"Freedom, you and Sam go to the Brackets. See that Jo walks along with you. This is a one man job."

Over his shoulder Tisk warned—

"Jo, if you don't do as I say I'll kick you so you'll always remember it."

"In a second, boss. You've kicked me a heap since I took on with you. That last kick in the mouth hurt most mortal."

"It ain't a marker to what the next kicking will be," exploded Tisk. "Now, damn you! Be off!"

Jo drew a deep breath and meekly replied:

"All right, boss. I sure don't want more of your kicking. And as the young feller says, it's a one man job. But you never dreamed, Ben Tisk, I'd be that one man and—"

The sharp click of the guns cocking scarcely sounded before Tisk with incredible swiftness drew a gun from the bosom of his shirt, but before he could turn or glance up into the wild face of his follower the latter shot him through the top of the head.

Tisk slowly fell forward, a heap of gross flesh. The last command from his crafty mind had caused the thumb to cock the revolver; he still held it clutched in his

pudgy hand while Hancey and his friends remained stunned by the unexpected denouement. Strong was stupidly struggling to comprehend this miracle of abrupt cessation from evil. Jo held his position, staring down on the dead man as if he also were bewildered.

WILD yells rose from the upper cabin. The uproar caused Jo to recover his senses. He jerked up his head and glared about like a trapped animal. But the shouting was not caused by the homicide. There was nothing to indicate that any of the men had heard the shot. Four madly dancing figures advertised the discovery of the buried money. He turned to run to the horses, now grazing east of the cabin. Hancey caught him by the shoulder and stuck the muzzle of a gun against his ribs.

"For God's sake let me!" Jo begged, now thoroughly craven. "They'll kill me! They'll kill me!"

"Tell me the man who came here with Feley!"

"Blackie. They came together one night."

"Did he ever say anything about a killing back on the river?"

"Yes, yes! Mostly lies. Always bragging. Let me go! Tisk would 'a' killed you."

"Did Blackie ever say he helped kill a man named Hancey?"

"No, no! Yes. What do you want me to say?"

The wild rejoicing now changed to hoarse shouts of rage, and the men at Tisk's cabin came down the path on the run. Jo jerked himself free and ran to the horses and threw himself on the first one he reached and galloped madly to the southeast. Blackie and Drick were the first to come. They stared incredulously at the dead figure of their chief. Drick was the first to speak.

"Who done for him?" he asked.

He leaned forward and examined the dead man as if unable to believe that death had touched him.

Blackie stared murderously at Hancey. Hancey, now convinced that he must learn the name of Feley's accomplice from Feley himself, replied:

"Come on, if you want to, and shoot it out! But it wasn't my luck to kill that beast. There goes his slayer."

Without removing his gaze from the swarthy face, he jerked his head toward the grazing horses. Blackie yelled:

"He stole and hid the money! I'll fetch him back."

He ran to the herd and flung himself on to a horse and started in pursuit.

Drick finished his examination of the dead man and, after laughing silently, told Hancey:

"Queerest thing I ever knew of. Think of that sheep having nerve enough to plug the boss! Damn him! Some of us would 'a' done it if Jo hadn't. Blackie's out of his head. It was the boss, not Jo, who took the money while you fellers slept. It was the boss who hid it on the north side of his cabin, just as you said. You oughter told us in the first place, young feller."

"And got shot for my pains," said Hancey.

The others now came up and stared in silence. It was difficult for any of them to comprehend the great change in their affairs. They had no boss. They no longer formed a gang. Never again would they profit by Tisk's planning nor fear his rage. Drick briefly explained how Tisk had died, and added:

"No use for us to chase Jo. If Blackie can't overhaul him we can't."

Manners fairly screamed:

"Blackie riding away? I thought he was in the cabin. Blackie's carrying the money!"

Interest in the dead chieftain vanished. With oaths and howls the men ran to secure rifles and their horses. In a few minutes they were dots, scattered over the tableland. The voice of Florida Bracket, loudly calling from the middle cabin to ask the cause of the excitement, brought the three men back to their senses. Freedom hurriedly directed his companions to carry the dead man below

the cookhouse and bury him before Mrs. Bracket should view the gruesome sight. Then he hurried to the house to explain:

"Man stole my wildcat money, thinking it's good. His mates are chasing him. Don't think they'll be back. Good riddance."

Mrs. Bracket, energetically sweeping the one room, halted her labors long enough to say:

"I'm mighty sorry if that chunky man has quit. It's seldom my temper gets riz. But when it does—" She paused eloquently and turned her wrathful gaze out of the window.

"Now, Betsy! Now, Betsy!" Bracket attempted to soothe.

"Don't 'now' me, Florida Bracket. If I'd known your easy ways I'd never commenced living in a wagon and following you around. When will that fat man, who called me a squaw right before my husband's eyes, come back, Freedom?"

"He won't come back, Betsy. He'd rather face wildcats than you. He spoke while in temper. When he realized what he'd said, he just moved on for good."

"I'll hosswhip him, whenever we meet, even if it's right in church. Now you two clear out and give me a chance to tidy up this mussy place. A pretty parcel to be making free with our land! And where's the steamboats you was bragging about, Freedom? And the county buildings? If any one was ever took in—"

"But, Betsy, you bought with wildcat money, and that money ain't worth a hoot now," interrupted Freedom, as he made for the door.

"It was good money when we paid it over for this empty country," she bitterly broke in. "No neighbors within miles! What few there are go chasing a thief. Land of grief! When I think of our snug home in Drakeville— I can see the ash hopper this second! We'll never get any soap like what we made there. We'll never find the like of those fall nights, when the darkness was splashed a rosy red by the fires a-b'iling down soghum to 'lasses. And our pleasant drives to Bloomfield. Florida, I'll give you about one day to sell this land and take me to Oregon. Either that or Californy. Of course, if the Mormons would behave, I'd rather go to the Salt Lake country. The whole land blossoms like a flower garden, I've heard tell."

She ceased talking, upon discovering she had lost her audience. Then, as her mood changed, she lifted her pleasing voice in song. She was beginning to feel pleased with the country and busily laid domestic plans which she would abandon on the morrow. Outside, Bird of Freedom was rapidly explaining the situation to his astounded friend.

"Mercy and love!" feebly exclaimed Bracket as he mopped his forehead. "Bloodshed on new land! What sort of a town have you got us into?"

"The best. Look at that rich black land. It'll show black with fatness once you sink a plow into it. Cañons filled with big cedars. Game thick as spatter. Wild hosses to be caught and sold to Johnston's Army at a hundred and eight dollars apiece. No better grass and water in the world."

"But murders! Those men are murderers! I'm fearing for my little woman."

"Florida, if you don't like it I'll sell it for you. I never leave a man worse'n I find him. See those mules. Bought 'em for four hundred dollars, wildcat money. I'll sell them on the blue for four thousand, Government money. Talk about chances for trade! And furs! This land simply wallows in all kinds of game. And three good, strong houses built and handed to us into the bargain!"

"Well, I don't know. Of course, it's a rare bargain, but it'll have to be as the little woman says. We've tried so long to travel in several directions at once that the horses just mill around in a circle. It may suit her. If it don't now, it will after we've left it. If you think the younkers have finished their sad business, I think I'll look at that lower house."

Hancey and Strong rounded the corner of the cookhouse and entered. The two older men found them there. Both were

unstrung, and Strong was physically ill from his gruesome experience. Florida's eyes sparkled, as he viewed the saddles and weapons and stock of provisions. He eagerly asked—

"This truck go with the house?"

"It goes. But you'd better haul it off and sell it," Hancey morosely replied as he glanced inquiringly at Freedom.

"Told him everything," said the old man. "Mrs. Bracket doesn't know about it yet. If those fellers come back—"

"They're gone for good, I believe," broke in Hancey. "They'll chase Blackie till they get him, or till he leads them so far they'll keep on going. With their leader dead they'll separate and drift."

Strong at the window faintly warned:

"One's coming back now! Better fire some lead into the air to scare him off."

HANCEY leaped to the window and watched the lone horseman riding rapidly from the southwest. For a minute he watched the rider, then told his companions—

"Stay inside; I'll send him about his business."

He stood in the doorway and with glowing eyes watched the rider come through the grass. He had guessed his identity on first sighting him, but he waited until the man was near and was swinging from the saddle, before he stepped from the doorway and accosted him.

Feley replied:

"You're a new one. Where's the boys?"

"Rode off on some business."

"And the chief?"

"He's away, too."

"Hell! Can't you talk anything else? Chief must have left word for me. I'm his right hand man, Hod Feley. Where'd he go? How long will he be gone?"

"Never said where he was going, but I think he'll be gone for a long time. I'm just looking after things for a bit."

Feley's glance shifted to the middle house and he exclaimed—

"A woman up here!"

"Tisk said she wa'n't to be bothered. He wanted me to show you something at the end of the house. May give you a notion where you can find him."

"Show me what?"

"You can see quicker'n I can tell you. I'm new here and can't explain very good. Don't think he expected you back so soon, or he might have waited. Still you can overtake him."

"Your talk sounds foolish, like you didn't have any wits," complained Feley, as he walked behind Hancey. "Is it a writing he left for me to see?"

"It's that," said Hancey, halting and pointing at the grave.

Feley stared a bit wildly. Then he was harshly demanding:

"What's this funny business mean? This looks like a buryin'."

"That's right. Man buried there within the hour. Jo killed him."

"Jo? That rabbit!" incredulously cried Feley. Without waiting for an answer he demanded, "Who's buried there? Drick and Blackie git afoul of each other?"

"No, it's Tisk. He's buried there."

Feley pushed back his slouch hat and stared in complete bewilderment.

"What funny business is this? Tisk dead, you mean to tell me? Who killed him?'

"Jo."

"Why, damn your hide! You got the nerve to stand there and tell me that Jo, with no more gumption than a toad, done for Ben Tisk?" roared Feley. "Just what kind of a game are you trying to work on me? Never hear the boys say Hod Feley is a bad man to fool with?"

Hancey edged away and muttered:

"I know you're a bad man to fool with. Mighty few who ain't heard of Hod Feley, the killer."

"Ben Tisk wouldn't take a second rate man to carry out his orders. Now you talk."

"Why, I heard of a Feley back on the river. Killed a Cass County man a year ago. You're the same one!"

"What you know about that killing?" demanded Feley, but with his gaze and thoughts on the low mound.

"Heard about it on the river. Folks said you'n' a man named Cooper—"

"Cooper? Who's Cooper? Never heard of him. Blackie's the name."

"Blackie? And he got away!"

Hancey's lean face twisted convulsively as he realized how one of his father's slayers had slipped through his fingers.

"Got away? You're plumb crazy. Course he got away. You found him here. We both got away. But I didn't need his help back on the river any more'n I would in killing a sheep. But he was gun hungry. Injun in him, I reckon. Never mind that. I don't understand this business. I believe you're lying. You're trying some game, damn you! You first said the chief had gone away, and now you say he's dead and buried."

"Feley," Hancey cut in, "your boss went to hell, if ever a villain did. Jo stood behind him and shot him through the head."

Feley's savage eyes narrowed. He rested his hands on his hips and for the first time he was interested in the two guns Hancey was wearing. In a low voice he said:

"All right, we'll say the boss is dead and buried. I don't care where he went to. Sounds more reasonable to hear that Jo was behind him when he done for him. I'd planned to do it myself some day. Why didn't you tell me this in the first place? Why talk about the river killing? Blackie been bragging about it?"

"My name's George Hancey. The man you and Blackie murdered was my father. You're wearing two guns. I fetched you out here as this is where you're going to stay, alongside of Tisk, unless you're quicker on the draw than I am."

Feley was puzzled. He wondered why he had not been shot down from the cookhouse when he rode up, if the young man meant business. The young fool was crazy to go through all this palaver, if he expected to get the better of Hod Feley in an even break. These thoughts streaked through his mind as he stood facing Hancey. Each had his hands resting lightly on his hips.

Feley said—

"You don't mind if I whistle to my hoss?"

"Whistle, but the shooting will be over before your—"

Feley had one gun out, but Hancey was a second ahead, with two guns. He was an instant ahead, firing two shots that sounded like one. Feley started to pull the trigger before he was killed, and Hancey dropped to the ground with his right leg broken above the knee. Feley crashed to the ground, shot twice through the heart, even as his one shot disabled his slayer. Hancey continued firing until he had emptied both guns into the prostrate figure.

CHAPTER VII

THE DEACON COMES AND GOES

HANCEY was taken to Fort Kearny in the Brackets' wagon. There he was left to recuperate under the care of the post surgeon. Freedom took along the mules and sold them to a contractor outside the reservation for a hundred and seventy dollars apiece. He held out for a better price, until the contractor shrewdly remarked that the animals looked as if they might have been stolen. As the season was advanced, Freedom, the Brackets and Sam started for the river. A few miles east of the fort, Mrs. Bracket commenced lamenting their departure from Thermopylæ.

To her husband she complained—

"You've torn me away once more from a happy spot, Florida, just as you did at Drakeville and down on the Republican and the Lancaster road, let alone our pleasant home in Philadelphia."

"Now, Betsy!" groaned Bracket. "If you're set on going back, back we go."

"It's too late now," she sighed, "but I shall never forget how pleasant the river looks with those three good houses. But to be homeless is terrible."

"At Kearny I told you I was willing to go to Oregon, but you was busy talking with that Alabama man."

Mrs. Bracket's expression softened and her beautiful eyes were dreamy as she murmured:

"It might be just what we've been looking and honing for. He's going back there—and such a quaint name—The village of Swinging Limb. I can see the boughs gently swinging in the soft air and hear the mocking birds. Alabama has it's good points. We could load the wagon on a boat and drop down to Natchez and drive across Mississippi to the Tombigbee—well, Florida, we can decide when we reach the river, but north or south it must be, as I'm tired and worn out in this western country."

After crossing the Salt in the western edge of Cass County she suddenly decided that nothing would do but to drive southeast to Nebraska City, instead of making Plattsmouth. The first snow was dusting the backs of Freedom and Sam as they rode into Plattsmouth.

Freedom was historian of the trip and for an evening he paced the floor of the Strong cabin and gave the details of the tragic happenings with much gusto. Nancy laughed joyously as her uncle touched on Mrs. Bracket's mania for moving. She was pale and silent as he dwelt on the dangers faced on the Loup. Ruth sat beside her brother, clutching his arm and saying nothing. Strong, also, was silent, until Freedom paused to catch his breath. Then he remarked:

"You folks got into bad company and are lucky to be free of it. It's only a miracle, Freedom, that your lost town didn't cost us all very dear."

"I made a handsome profit out of it. Those mules were sent by Providence," insisted the old man.

"And I wasted my time and lost my poor earnings," bitterly reminded Sam.

"Well, you're alive and well," comforted Nancy. "That's more than poor George Hancey can say."

"He should have come back with you. He needs better care than he'll get at the fort," said Ruth.

"Nonsense. Post surgeon will turn him out all fit again," shortly insisted her brother. "He told me the trip was fifty per cent. a success. He killed Feley, even if the other man got away. Swears he'll get Blackie some time."

Both girls spoke of Hancey with a bit of awe. He had killed a man. The slaying was justifiable, and yet for them there remained the horror of it.

Next day, when alone with Nancy Freedom, Sam again bitterly arraigned Fate for sending him home practically penniless when he had hoped to bring back his earnings for his family. He insisted that his efforts and his time had been lost. The girl would not listen to this. She shook her head emphatically and declared—

"You're much richer, son; you've aged a trifle."

"If I've grown any older, I wish you'd stop calling me son," remarked Sam. "What if I kept calling you mother? My adventures put nothing in my pockets."

"Only my uncle could turn a money profit out of such a mess," she told him. "Still the balance is in your favor, Mr. Strong. The next time a bully starts abusing you, you'll feel different. You won't feel so nervous."

"Might as well call it scared and be honest," grumbled Sam. "I've no ambition to be that kind of a fighter."

"Wrong, son. I can't call you mister when you talk like that. This country is settling up with honest folks, but so long as it's the fringe of the United States we'll have lots of rascals. You must be ambitious enough to be a fighter and take care of your own. Back East the law will protect you. Out here, each man must be his own law at times. If you had only yourself to think of it wouldn't matter so much if a bully cuffed you around. But there's Ruth."

"There's Ruth," he dully repeated. "Of course you're right, Nance. After seeing that gang carry on, I suppose I'll feel different. But I never can be the fighting man George Hancey is. That was terrible. He'll have to nurse that leg for several months."

The Freedoms went back to Missouri for the winter and the white months saw the financial depression persist throughout the nation. Specie was scarce in the Territory and commanded a premium. The Strongs, competent in various lines of work, managed to earn their living expenses. The spring brought no economic changes for the better. The political unrest throughout the country increased.

Because they feared a recurrence of the grasshopper pest the family decided to remain in town. They talked of going to Nebraska City, where a temporary prosperity had resulted from its selection by Majors Russell and Waddells as an entrepôt for military supplies forwarded to Johnston's Army. After reading glowing accounts in the Nebraska *News* of what it meant to the town to be the supply station under the two million dollar contract, Sam was eager to go down the river.

His father argued that the Utah trouble might be ended any day and leave the lower town no better off than Plattsmouth. The *News*' enthusiastic description of the train, consisting of two thousand wagons, each hauling two and a half tons of freight, of the sixteen thousand cattle, requiring "two acres of ox yokes" to move the same, and the two thousand bullwhackers to be hired, failed to stir Strong from his decision to continue where he was.

Shortly after the family conference Mr. Strong rather sheepishly informed Sam:

"I can go as far as Kearny with the train and get twenty-five dollars a month, out and back. I believe I'll go. I know you want to go; but you stay here with Ruth and after I get back you shall have your turn."

Sam was in no position to argue, as he had made one trip and had brought nothing home to show for it. It was dreary waiting, and he and Ruth often wished George Hancey would return. When their father came back their first question was about Hancey.

"Gone," replied Strong. "The post surgeon had an idea he received some news which took him away in a hurry. He only knew he rode up the river to Fort Laramie."

THE NEXT break in the monotony, and a most welcome one, was the unexpected arrival in July of the Freedoms. Instead of coming up the river, uncle and niece landed from the *Omaha*, coming from Sioux City, where Bird of Freedom had hurried to investigate a rumored real estate boom. He brought word that the northern streams were flood high and that the wheat crop would be a failure.

Then came the newspaper announcement that the "Utah war" had ended and that the Army would be disbanded in Nebraska. At this time speculators were crowding into Nebraska City to take advantage of the Government land sales, and Freedom bitterly lamented that he had no capital to use in this speculation.

His temper improved when, in September, word came up the river that the sales were postponed for a year, and that the disappointed speculators were leaving. Specie by this time commanded five per cent. a month, but with little to be had in the Territory, even at that usurious rate, as the squatters had used all their money in preempting land.

With her credit practically destroyed and possessing no adequate revenue laws or criminal code, Nebraska faced hard times. While the clouds were hanging the lowest word reached the river that gold had been discovered in the Pike's Peak country, then in the western end of the Territory. This was in September; and October fifth, three hundred people passed through Omaha, bound for the new gold fields. This rush caught up all the able bodied, detached men in Omaha, and that town's population dropped to five hundred.

Travel was brisk in all of the river towns. Owing to the lateness of the season, only those living near the river could profit by the first news. Western

Iowa, Missouri and Arkansas contributed men to join in with those setting out from Kansas and Nebraska. The East had not had time to respond. While men along the river were lured away by expectations of easy fortunes and were prodded on by the collapse of the country's finance, the New York *Times* was announcing the supremacy of Douglas because of his opposition to President Buchanan's Lecompton policy, which would permit the people of State and Territory to decide for themselves the question of slavery.

At the same time the Missouri *Republican* was complaining that Abraham Lincoln was indulging in special pleading and "concealing from the people his own opinions". The same organ announced that Douglas "came down on Lincoln with tremendous force and gave to the scorn of the multitude all that his opponent had said". And Douglas had accomplished this demolition inside of thirty minutes of speaking, added the *Republican.*

"Douglas has whipped Lincoln," announced Freedom after finishing the article. "Licked him out of his boots."

"If he has, then I'm mighty sorry," gravely said Nancy, "for I believe he stands for all the things we ought to stand for."

"I'm with him in much he says, but he never stood any chance in arguing with the Little Giant. Douglas will be our next president."

The gold excitement brought money into the towns. Groups of men continued to cross the river and to outfit themselves on the west side. Those without work in the Territory were quick to try their luck. The bulk of the travel was along the south side of the Platte and along the divides of the Blue and the Republican. Many in the first rush gave no thought to winter's rigors and neglected to provide themselves with proper clothing and food supplies. Others were more prudent and stimulated trade in the river towns.

The Strongs and their friends awoke to find Plattsmouth bustling with activity. Storekeepers found their stock exhausted. Parties passing through the town struck a branch of the Oregon road two miles east of the Salt Creek ford. Alluring rumors filled the air. Loose gold was scattered on top of the ground. Anticipation became a fever. Men babbled about the new fields as if they had lost their senses. Once they made the Pike's Peak country they would scoop up a cartload, or a bag of gold, and be back on the river ahead of winter.

Ruth and Nancy worked in a store for three weeks; or until the goods were exhausted. Father and son had more work than they could do repairing wagons, both iron and woodwork. And their pay was in specie. Some foresighted men were well outfitted as to horses, mules or oxen and stocks of provision. Others hauled empty wagons. And there were those who walked and led pack horses. Nor were hand carts lacking. Some men were encumbered only by the packs on their backs and some walked without even a pack. Sam caught the fever and insisted upon joining the rush. His father advised:

"You've got your growth and are your own man, but I want you to wait. Either there is gold out there, or there's none worth bothering with. If it's a real strike this mob won't get only a bit of it. Soon deep snow and bitter weather will sweep the mountains. How will these poor people live? There will be death by sickness and violence. If it's a real strike, fortunes will be made next season, not this. Good land! Even children are going! See that child!"

He pointed to a boy scarcely a dozen years old who was hauling a small cart. In the cart were a piece of corn bread and a ragged coat. When questioned by Strong he admitted that he was a runaway from Mills County, Iowa. He would return home as soon as he filled his cart with gold. Strong endeavored to persuade him to stay in Plattsmouth, if he would not return home. The youngster appeared to be weighing this advice and took dinner at the Strong cabin.

Then he was gone, lost in the straggling mob.

A correspondent for the *Republican* writing from Fort Kearny, reported that mechanics and others at the fort were starting for the Peak and that Plattsmouth and Omaha citizens were pausing there to make their final purchases.

Dangers of travel were not confined to the Western plains, as travelers crossing the Little Nemaha on their way to St. Joseph were said to have been attacked by wolves and were rescued by a settler and his three sons and several dogs. Freedom said this incident presaged a severe winter. His niece ruffled his composure by making merry at the prophecy. Sam Strong did not join the rush, but as the newspapers gave more space to the gold seekers he grew melancholy. He believed that George Hancey, if alive, was among those starting from Kearny.

The winter dragged and the river towns relapsed into dullness until spring leveled the barriers and loosed a veritable army of men. Starting afoot and carrying only shovels and five days' rations, men were leaving Fort Riley in Kansas and were among the first to go by the Smoky Hill route. The eastern seaboard had had time to prepare for the 1859 hegira, and continuous streams of adventurers poured into Kansas and Nebraska.

Up the Arkansas, the Smoky Hill River and the Platte moved the long columns. As this gigantic movement got well under way another migration, from the gold fields to the east, set in. The latter was composed of the homesick and discouraged. These defeated ones, after surviving the winter, would not tarry to try their luck and were obsessed only by a desire to return home.

The advance of the two migrations met halfway between the Missouri and the mountains. Those eastward bound denounced the westward bound as fools and crazy men. The latter replied with "cowards" and the like. As they camped together and shifted from contemptuous terms to explanations, many of the new adventurers were seized with doubts. Many turned back with the ragged, discouraged horde. This mingling of opposing waves of travel brought a new phase of disaster to the Indians of the central plains. At first they were stupefied to discover the three river routes filled with the two currents of travelers. Many a red man believed that the East had emptied all its men on to the plains.

A HUNDRED and fifty thousand gold seekers were swarming up the three river valleys. From the mountains seeped the discouraged. With the exception of the Kiowas the plains tribes had been quiet since the brief summer campaign of 1857. Now they were greatly alarmed by the mad stampede. The thousands of gold seekers, going and returning, frightened the game.

The Indians suspected that the white race was insane, and crazy white men actually were picked up between the heads of the Smoky and the Republican by the Cheyennes. As the crisscrossing migration increased it was plainly seen by the different tribes that their ancient hunting grounds were rapidly being destroyed. The buffaloes were crowding back into the foothills, and the plains Indian could not survive as a free man without the buffalo.

Those remaining on the river began to hear of the return of the discouraged. First arrivals from the mountains spread the news from Brownville to Omaha. An army of disappointed, angry and dangerous men would soon fringe the western bank of the Missouri. These men believed that the gold rumors were started by traders in the river towns to enliven trade.

This conviction placed the river towns in the path of a new experience—the menace of frenzied thousands, vowing vengeance on the traders who had painted rosy pictures of the gold fields, so they might sell their stocks of goods. One morning a horseman galloped into Plattsmouth shouting:

"Thousands of 'em coming! Going to burn the town!"

Being cross examined, this messenger of woe reported that several thousand desperate men were going into camp two miles west of the town and that their least demand would be a complete restitution of all money paid to the traders. Some traders along the river closed their stores and crossed to the east side. Others kept their places of business open and hired armed men to stand guard.

Sam Strong volunteered to ride out and investigate. He found more than two thousand disgusted "Peakers" in a long straggling camp. He talked with several of these and decided that the first messenger had scarcely exaggerated the temper of the mob. Riding back to town, he reported that the one chance of the town's escaping serious mischief consisted of the Peakers' lack of leadership. They were quarreling among themselves. Shortly after his return two ragged men rode into town on half starved horses and called at the stores to make savage threats. They and their followers were defied.

Strong told his daughter:

"You stay at home. If they come in a body this town will be burned. If they straggle in without a leader there won't be much trouble. Sam's down the road to bring word whether they're coming in a body, or in small bands."

Sam was soon back to announce that the long camp appeared to be in motion. The citizens waited anxiously. Clouds of dust marked the coming of the men, but soon there proved to be but two hundred in the body. The townspeople took heart, as two thousand had been expected. The two hundred angrily made demands and were stoutly defied. They retreated. Sam and other young men followed them until within sight of the camp. They waited until the entire camp appeared ready for the word, but apparently without leaders or any definite object.

The army split up into small bands, some making for the river below Plattsmouth, as if making for Nebraska City. The bulk came to Plattsmouth, some halting on the edge of the town while others advanced to the river and attempted to seize the new steam ferry and cross without paying. Group after group intent on free passage were met and turned back. Then the army disintegrated and scattered down the river. The lack of leadership had spared Plattsmouth some sad history.

This dramatic experience convinced many Plattsmouth citizens that there was but little gold in the Peak country, and Strong used it as an example for his son to profit by.

"Where there's enough gold to satisfy thousands, you won't have thousands returning to the river in the sad condition of those poor men," he insisted.

Sam agreed that the new gold fields were yet to be proved a reality.

Yet from the East the newcomers poured across the river, undiscouraged by adverse reports. Boats brought new stocks of goods from Missouri, and the traders called for extra clerks to keep up the steady trade now bringing actual money into the Territory.

SAM BEGAN to fret at the monotony of daily labor with so many young men passing through the town in search of the great adventure. He was finding existence too prosaic. He moped in silence when at home. His face was almost sullen as he labored. There was envy in his gaze as he stared at each enthusiastic band of adventurers. His father understood his frame of mind and one evening erased the gloom from his face by saying:

"You feel tied down, Sam. You feel you're staying here with Ruth and me through a sense of duty. You're finding it a mighty hard duty. You think all the young fellers in the world are foot free but you. I've told you before that you're your own man. So you're staying here, thinking you must be a good son even if it goes against the grain.

"But you're miserable in spirit, and that makes me feel low down in spirit. I know a man who's taking six wagons to Kearny—big load of goods for a Doby

town dealer at the west end of the military reservation. I've told him I thought you'd be glad to go and help him. He'll pay you at the rate of forty a month out—and twenty back if he returns empty. If he picks up a load for the river he'll pay the forty for the return trip.

"You go with him. After you've delivered the freight you keep on to the Peak if you have a strong hankering. I'm hoping you'll come back, but I sha'n't think any less of you as a son if you keep on to the mountains. You're your own boss, and I want to see less misery in that long face of yours."

"That's fine, father!" cried Sam. "I'm crazy to go. And I'll warn you now the chance is slim that you'll see me again until I've been to the mountains."

The wagons were drawn by mules and the word was to hurry. Practically the entire distance to Kearny was made in company with, or in sight of, parties of men hastening to the gold fields. When the wagons passed through Dog Town at the east end of the reservation the traders all but indulged in violence in their efforts to purchase the goods. No stop was made at the fort and its collection of one story sod buildings. Every trader was clamorous to buy the consignment and offered prices which made Sam stare.

At Dog Town, already being rechristened Valley City, and along the road to Doby Town, soon to be known as Kearny City, were outfits waiting to stock up before proceeding to the mountains. The pessimism heard on the river was absent. Men with shaggy locks and beards were displaying quills of dust brought from the mountains.

The freighter breathed in great relief when the six wagons finished the two miles from Kearny to Doby Town. Yet even there, anxious to deliver the freight to consignees, men jostled one another to get near the head wagon and make a bid for the contents. The goods were finally safely housed in a long general store and Sam received his wages and was told to be ready for the return trip at the end of three days.

"I'm not going back with you," informed Sam. "I'm going to join some outfit and make for the mountains.

"Don't blame you," sighed the freighter. "If it wa'n't for my woman and the children I'd go along with you. But my money from freighting is sure, and the pay is best I ever knew. But you won't hang around this place. You'll go to the fort. You'll need a hoss. I'll help you pick one out that's fit. I'm going to the fort straightaway. Mustn't catch the fever to gamble any. Little woman would give me hell!"

Sam was willing to return to Kearny and was eager to select a horse for the mountain trip. But as he was about to climb onto the wagon seat Fate intervened in the person of George Hancey.

SAM HAD to look twice to make sure, for his friend was dressed as a dandy, from his French calf boots to the soft gray hat. There was a velvet collar on his coat and never a wrinkle in the snugly strapped trousers. His linen was immaculate. Strong rushed forward and threw an arm over George's shoulder. George had a gun half drawn before he recognized his amiable assailant.

"Sam Strong, by all that's good and wonderful!" exclaimed Hancey, clamping his hands on Sam's shoulders and rocking him back and forth.

"Velvet collar! White shirt! High toned boots and hat! Good land!" gasped Sam.

"This is no place to talk. Come along with me."

Sam waved his hand to the freighter and hooked an arm through George's and was led some dstance up the street, which was lined on each side with one story adobe or sod houses, and then back from the street to a tent. Pulling back the flap, George said:

"This is my home. You're the most welcome fellow to ever enter it."

He pointed to a couch of buffalo robes and seated himself on a keg and stared in silence at his friend for a bit; then he fiercely commanded:

"You do some tall talking, young feller. I'm fair starved for news from the river."

Sam rapidly told about the Freedoms, the Brackets, his own people, and then insisted:

"Your turn, George. Father was at Kearny and found you gone. Talk."

"Not much for me to tell. Not very interesting. Leg got well. Went up to Fort Laramie looking for a man. Hung around there for a bit and then started east, thinking to return to the river. Reached Kearny about the same time the first gold news did. Went to the mountains with a small party from the fort. Wintered. Come back here a week ago, still looking for a man."

"Blackie?" murmured Sam.

George nodded his head gloomily.

"Heard he was here. So far I've been disappointed. I've been waiting. If he don't show up soon I'll go back to the mountains."

Sam studied him keenly and slowly observed:

"You look lots older, George. You—excuse me for putting it so bluntly—look hardened, George. Your hands are smoother than Ruth's. You haven't swung a pick or pushed a shovel. Just what have you been doing for a living? Look mighty prosperous."

"Gambling," snapped Hancey, his eyes narrowing. "No lecturing, Sam! So long as I'm looking for a certain man, cards are a part of my outfit. No use to look for him in churches or among honest workers. When I find him it'll be in a dance hall, whisky saloon or gambling place. To be welcome in those places I have to do something. As there ain't any women in my life and as it won't do to be caught with unsteady nerves because of drink, I gamble."

"Great Scott! You must have learned mighty smart. Never knew you could tell one card from another. And you must have struck it rich."

"Been lucky. Been poor. But I haven't looked poor yet. When the cards run too hard against me I get a job as trouble mender; the pay is good."

"Trouble mender?"

"Stopping fights in saloons and gambling places. After I get a stake I go back to the tables."

"Why, then you're known as a bad man!" exclaimed Sam, and he felt a bit of awe as he looked into the hard, reckless face.

After a bit of silence George confessed in a low voice:

"Whether in luck, or in cap, I feel rotten. Dad wouldn't want me to be an idle man. God knows I was pointing straight enough until he was killed. I was used to hard work and liked it. My bed is not of my making, Sam, yet I must lie in it. I've been dealt some rotten cards. Let it go at that. Tell me some more about Ruth and your father, about Bird of Freedom and Nancy and the Brackets."

Sam complied with his friend's wish to change the theme, and for an hour he talked about home folks and brought an appreciative smile to the thin lips as he dwelt on Mrs. Bracket's endless quest for a home. Finally he asked—

"Is this place tough?"

"Pretty tough just now," assured George. "Horse thieves, cattle thieves after Government beeves, card sharps like myself, common murderers and the like. Men are reaping an evil harvest here, robbing the outfits bound for the mountains. They rob by stealth and at cards. More than one man has drank away, or gambled away, a stout outfit and is still hanging around this place when he ought to be in the mountains. Yes, Sam, we're all here, always coming and going. Gamblers, thieves, bad men, fugitives from the law.

"The criminal you seek here today left yesterday. Wagon trains are stalled around the fort by the men stampeding to the mountains. Soldiers are deserting to reach the mountains. We're quite wild and woolly, more so than in the camps on Cherry Creek. We've started quite a respectable graveyard a short distance out on the prairie."

"Well, George, I'm sorry. Your father

would never wish you to be chasing his murderers if he knew it would lead you—to idling."

"Gambling," Hancey curtly corrected. "Maybe I'll reform some time. I'm sticking till I find Blackie. To think of having him at the point of my gun up on the Loup and never knowing it! I questioned that Jo, and got nothing. Besides, I looked for Blackie to return when he found he couldn't catch Jo. But if Blackie lives, he's bound to come in where I'm waiting. Roulette, faro, monte, poker, dice, rum, women—one or the other will bring him to me. It's the only life he knows. If the tables don't get them the women will. What are you going to do? Starting back home?"

"I'm going to the mountains and hunt gold."

Hancey frowned slightly and regretted: "I wish you weren't. If I could be with you I could help you a lot. But it might not be healthy for you to tie up to me. You'd find yourself working in a pinch. You stay here a bit till we can talk it over. You're more'n welcome to my tent, of course; but it might be safer for you back at the fort. If you want to earn some hard money the Government agent will be glad to hire you hauling wood. Fort eats up a heap of wood in a winter."

"My mind's made up. I'm for the mountains. I don't need a nurse. As for the danger of sleeping in this tent, I'm not afraid. If you don't mind, I'll stay a few days with you while I hunt up a proper outfit to join."

"Good." There was no warmth in the word. "You have that .31, I see. Carry it in your pocket. If any one tries to bully you don't try to draw. Just knuckle down. No credit to try and fight a bad man who'd turn and run if not loaded with guns and quick on the draw. Gun fighting will never be your strong suit, Sam. Even a bad man won't kill a man he believes is unarmed. Now I suppose you'd like to look around our fair city."

Sam was curious to see the settlement, and Hancey led him through the adobe houses to a large structure, a saloon and gambling hall combined. Soldiers from the fort were drinking at the bar and eagerly discussing among themselves the chances of finding a fortune in the mountains. Bullwhackers and Government employees were scattered about the room. There was a continual coming and going of gold seekers, movers bound for Oregon and Utah. The rear half of the long room was partitioned off and reserved for gambling. Hancey called for beer and told the bartender:

"Shorty, this man is my friend. He's a pilgrim. You're not to take any money from him. Pass word to the night shift that he's my friend and that his money isn't good in here."

"Yes, sir, Mister George. Bet your boots. Your friend's most welcome. He can't spend no money here."

While they sipped their beer Sam stared at the shifting groups. It seemed as if all the stalwart males in the United States had assembled in and around Kearny. Long trains were refitting at the fort and their crews were in Doby Town for a wild holiday. Trains were moving west and east south of the Platte. Trains starting for the mountains north of the Platte were crossing to the south side at Shinn's ferry east of the fort. Dust in clouds marked the river road for miles, an ominous sign to wondering Cheyennes and Sioux. As he watched the men filing in and out and glimpsed through the windows, groups arriving and departing, Sam remarked:

"I can't see this place is tough. Seems mighty orderly and well behaved."

"No fights on just now," carelessly answered Hancey. "At night she'll liven up. Ninety-nine per cent. of all these men bound for the Peak are young men and in prime physical condition. They're looking for some excitement wherever they stop. All innocent enough—just high spirits. But they soon learn that no one notices what they do. They feel they're a million miles from home. Before they know it they lose their heads and there's a fight. Not the honest to

goodness fist fight the pilgrim expects, but one with some scum using a knife or a gun. Let's walk across to the dancehall. It's a bully place for you to keep out of."

"Still, you're taking me there," grinned Sam.

"Quiet now. Tonight it'll be roaring."

THEY worked their way through massed humanity to a long building of cottonwood boards and canvas on the opposite side of the street. They stopped at the bar just inside the door. Hancey ordered beer. The place was empty, except for several girls at a table at the lower end of the hall. Sam noticed these were gaily dressed, immodestly so, he feared.

Hancey glanced at the girls and suddenly said—

"I must speak to Shoshone."

Although not openly invited, Sam followed him down the hall. Faces that bloomed with fairness when seen from the bar were heavily painted when the two halted at the table. The four greeted Hancey with nods and stared at Sam. Hancey turned to a girl with piled up masses of black hair, whose dark eyes seemed too large for her face, and asked:

"Any news yet, Shoshone?"

"Not yet, Mister George. Minute we see him, I'll get word to you."

"Fine. Here's two or three ounces of Peak dust; you all share up between you. But isn't it early in the day for whisky?"

"You're a preacher, Mister George," Shoshone listlessly told him. "Who's your friend?"

"Another preacher, Shoshone. He's been preaching at me. And remember the one who first spots my man gets a special prize of ten ounces."

"You'll pay the prize before you go gunning for him?" cautiously asked Shoshone.

"I'll leave it with Shorty across the street."

He nodded to Sam and led the way outdoors into the dust covered crowd and walked up the road beyond the town.

"Have to come out this far to get a breath of clean air. All those dust clouds mean hell for the Indians."

"So those were dancehall girls," remarked Sam.

"Yes poor things. Shoshone is all white. Called that after her black hair. From the East. Well spoken, except for a swear word now and then picked up out here. Their lives are short, and it's hell while it lasts. I treat them like human beings, which they are. They're on my payroll to keep an eye open for Blackie. He comes and goes, but I'll nail him yet."

"Still the old madness."

"Madness?" snarled Hancey, his eyes half closing. "See here, Sam—lucky you're my friend. To rub out the man who helped kill my poor dad—madness!"

"I'd feel the same as you, George. I meant this life you're living. Surely your father would call that madness. Living by gambling, living among wretched people. We'll assume you ultimately kill Blackie. But at what a price, if in doing that you spoil your own life! Your father was killed, but he died an honest, upright man. If you—"

"Shut up, old puritan!" broke in Hancey. "No more New England moralizing. The fate of the dancehall girl is terrible, but what of the men who bring them out here to die? I've offered to stake several of those poor women so they might go back home and make a new start. They're appreciative more'n you can understand; but they believe they must play their hand out and wind up in a prairie grave. There is no going back for them.

"Only the man can raise hell and repeat, and then settle down snugly and preach the beauties of a well ordered life. The bulk of the men you see are young, happy go lucky, filled with high hopes. They enter a new world when they get this far up the Platte. They feel that their homes and old standards of living are millions of miles away. Many play up to their new environment. The more sturdy stick to their principles of living and are mighty lonesome in a winter camp.

"Once for all, Sam, I'm keen that you get me right in this. I gamble. I drink a little. I fight quite a bit. But outside of that I live clean. I can't gamble alone. Lawyers, doctors, business men and politicians play with me. I play better than the average of them, and I'm a gambler. They're out to win, but of course, they're not gamblers.

"My life out here and in the mountains results from just one desire—to find Blackie. I'll gamble and fight to reach that wretch, just as I'll walk, ride or swim to reach a certain point my heart's set on reaching. I wasn't cut out for a gambler or a gunman. So, old preacher, thank God if you haven't anything tugging and hauling at you and getting you out of the rut of decent living. And no more preaching to me! I have just one favor to ask you."

"Spit it out, George. It's granted the minute I hear it."

"Don't tell Ruth—the girls—I'm making a living off the tables. If I ever return to the river I'll tell them all about it. You can say I'm a prospector. That'll be true. I've washed quite a few pans of dirt. As to Blackie, you're free to tell the whole world I'm trailing him."

"All right, George, but I can't help wishing we'd hear that Blackie is dead."

"You're no friend of mine if you wish that," muttered Hancey. "Talk's getting cross grained. We'll drop into Mike's place and eat."

The long tables in the low room of the sod house were well filled when they entered, but the Irish proprietor seemed to value Hancey's patronage and soon found them two seats at the end of a table facing the door. With the clatter of the tableware and the hoarse calls of the waiters and loud demands of the patrons, conversation was difficult. The two friends applied themselves diligently to the victuals, without attempting to converse. As they were about to rise, a man came through the doorway on the jump and bellowed:

"Richest diggings in the world struck in the mountains! John Gregory found 'em on the north fork of Clear Creek, just over the mountains west of Jackson Bar. I'm pulling out now. Who'll join me?"

Stools were tipped over. Several men leaped to their feet. The news was known in the street, as shown by the commotion caused by groups of men hurrying to join the stampede.

"My chance! I'm going!" excitedly cried Sam Strong, and he started to rise.

"Take your time. If John Gregory, the lazy Georgian I knew last season, has found pay dirt it's a miracle. Drove a Government wagon from Leavenworth to Fort Laramie last year, trying to make the Fraser River fields. Stranded at Laramie and drifted to Denver. Last January he said he'd found color on Clear Creek, but had to quit as his grub ran out. When I quit the mountains he was trying to get Dave Wall to stake him. You mustn't go off half cocked. We'll have to find you a good horse and look up a responsible outfit for you to join. We'll have plenty of time tomorrow. No man as lazy as Gregory is going to corral all the gold in the mountains."

He was interrupted by another swirl of excitement outside the door. A man was hoarsely crying:

"All Peakers get your outfits! Only three hundred people left in Denver! Every one's flocking to the new Gregory diggings!"

"Quietly and patiently, Sam," soothed Hancey. "Even if it's true, you can't gain anything by going off half cocked. More likely to cut open a dog."

Sam stared bewildered, and Hancey explained:

"Make a mistake. That last hoot sounded suspiciously like the fellow was paid by the dealers to stampede the crowd into buying outfits in a rush. Prices have gone up ten per cent. by this time. This evening I'll learn how much of the rumor is true."

He led the way to the short bar near the door and insisted upon paying for the suppers. Sam was wrought up at the prospects of taking part in the wild rush that Gregory, the Georgian, had

started, and he gave no heed when Mike detained his friend long enough to whisper briefly in his ear.

The sun was below the horizon when they left the soddy. Hancey jerked Sam from the midst of a golden dream by announcing:

"I've changed my mind, Sam. This mountain news will keep Doby Town stirred up all night. Go back to the fort and sleep in a wagon. Find the man you came out with and ask his advice in buying a horse. He can get one cheaper than you can. If you're going to the mountains you want a good nag. Come here about noon and I'll have found a good outfit for you to travel with."

"I'm afraid I won't sleep much. Too excited. But I'll be about buying a good horse. The freighter is my friend. But I do wish you were going along with me, George."

"Never can tell twenty-four hours ahead what I'll do. You may have me for a traveling companion. There goes an empty whisky wagon back to the fort. Chance for you to ride."

Hancey ran to the wagon and spoke a few words and the driver said—

"Glad to oblige any friend of yours."

SAM CLIMBED to the seat and commenced building wonderful castles. The driver amicably endeavored to be companionable and talked at length about the mines, Fort Kearny and Doby Town. He was satisfied with his work and the pay and declared that all the gold in America wouldn't tempt him to leave his pleasant two mile haul, if it meant he had to do any digging.

"I've seen grub scurce at Dog Town and Doby Town, but I've never seen whisky scurce," he proudly boasted. "In rain or snow, freeze or frying weather, this old wagon goes through."

Sam listened, but his mind continued to be occupied with the bright trail of adventure which he would enter on the morrow. His great desire that Hancey might be a fellow traveler switched his thoughts for a bit to the tragedy darkening his friend's life. It seemed impossible that a light hearted, lovable youth could change so thoroughly in such a short time. By comparison, Sam discovered himself to be very young and unsophisticated. He wondered how a young man acquired the blasé manner, incisive speech and relentless purpose that characterized Hancey.

Sam believed that, were he similarly afflicted by the loss of his father, he would be a madman while in the presence of the murderers; but he doubted if ever he could pursue Hancey's mode of living while waiting to work vengeance. Hancey was wading through the dregs of life. If he reached his grim goal, would he be able to turn about and pick up life where it snapped the day his father was slain? Sam shook his head as he asked himself the question.

"Well, here we be and you're welcome to sit here long as you like," announced the driver, who had left the seat and was unfastening a tug.

Sam woke up from his reverie and hastened to find the freighter. Discovering him at the stables, he hurriedly told his purpose and his need of a good horse.

"Sorry you're not going back with me," said the freighter. "Yet if I was young and single, and had no wife, no four little shavers to keep me home, I'd 'a' gone in the first rush. Hosses are cheap now. Price will go up tomorrow if there's a big demand account of this talk of a new diggings being found. There's a big herd here, turned in by Johnston's Army. I'll make a dicker tonight. They'll think I want one for my business. But you're wrong in wanting a fine, sleek hoss. You want a nag that's capable of taking you to Denver. After you git there you can sell him cheap. You don't want a fancy nag at a fancy price.

"I can pick you up a Army hoss that's used to all sorts of travel and weather. He won't be pretty to look at, but you can hang your hat on him to get you through. And your outfit won't race any in making the mountains. Army's already sold nineteen hundred mules for

seventy-five dollars apiece that cost nearly two hundred. I can do quite a bit better on a hoss. But the quicker I go about it the cheaper I'll buy. What about the rest of your outfit?"

Sam had not given any thought to just what he must carry. He wished to travel as lightly as possible.

"I'm bound to start tomorrow. Outfits are already on the way," he replied. "I believe I'll go back to Doby Town this evening and ask my friend just what I ought to buy. He knows the gold fields and camps and I'll be advised by him. We'll pick out a horse now, if you'll do the choosing."

"Then you stay here. I'll make a better bargain, if it's thought I'm buying for myself. I may find what you want in some outfit just in from the mountains. But you'll need something beside a hoss."

"I have a gun."

"Then you'd better sell it. You're not going looking for trouble. I was thinking of money."

Sam admitted his cash would be very low after he had paid for a horse, but he hopefully explained—

"If my friend has plenty of cash he'll be glad to lend."

The freighter left him with the wagons and was gone for nearly two hours. When he returned he was leading a big roan, whose bones were unduly prominent. Sam was disappointed. The freighter explained:

"Got him from a pilgrim's outfit. He's sound in wind and limb. Not pretty to look at, but he'll take you to Denver and look better when he gets there. The price is only forty dollars. I can't beat that buying an Army hoss. And there's an old saddle I can buy for ten dollars. Looks about like the hoss, but it'll see you through."

By the light of a stable lantern Sam counted out fifty dollars and said:

"It's mighty good of you. Stable him here with your mules. I'll go and find my friend."

Now his great dream was about to be realized. He scarcely felt the ground under his feet as he rapidly walked to Doby Town. He met several groups of men. Some were singing and arguing. Some were lamenting the loss of money at the tables. But the majority were talking of the new strike in the Gregory diggings and were planning to make for the mountains.

Sam had expected to find Doby Town practically deserted and Hancey at leisure. He was surprised to behold jostling humanity filling the street between the two lines of houses. He was halted by the crowd slowly working inside the gambling hall. As he waited to advance by a few steps a man in front of him insisted:

"But it makes twice he's cleaned me. I'm going after him. He does it too matter of fact—just like I was a pilgrim from New Jersey."

"The luck happened to be with him, Deacon," said the first speaker's companion. "The game went against you. The Rattler plays square. Sleep on it and you'll feel different in the morning. Your turn next time."

"Meaning I'm in liquor," quietly replied the Deacon. "I'm always in liquor. It never makes me foolish; just leaves me cold. I'm going to cut the Rattler's comb."

"He strikes mighty quick. That's why he's called the Rattler," reminded the second man.

"Wait till you see how quick I be," was the grim reply.

The crowd jostled ahead a few steps and in the light from the window Sam beheld the Deacon's profile. It was a long, heavy face, hard as flint, and clean shaven except for a tuft of whiskers under the chin. He wore a tall hat and a long black coat and as he clutched the lapel of his coat with his long bony hand it was plain that he had indulged in no manual labor recently.

Sam was thrilled at the promise of witnessing a tragedy and yet felt a strong inclination to withdraw. The impulse to avoid the sight of violence probably would have driven him back if not for his necessity. He must secure some money from Hancey, and he must learn at once

if his friend had found an outfit he could join.

The Deacon's companion renewed his remonstrance and mildly urged:

"Just wait till morning. No one laughs at the Deacon. And it would be a shame for two men like you and the Rattler to go wasting lead on each other."

"I don't allow to waste any lead. If I'd been carrying something bigger'n a derringer on me it would have been finished when he cleaned me early in the evening. They can call him the Rattler, but I hanker to show this outfit that he ain't so damn deadly as folks seem to think. Now I'm heeled proper. Never dreamed of meeting him here, or I'd been heeled right when I went in to play. He's cleaned me twice, in the mountains and here. We can't keep running into each other like this."

"I'm your friend, Deacon—"

"I don't know about that," curtly broke in the other. "Thought you was, but when you keep singing about my waiting, I don't know."

"I'm your friend. This is too near the fort to make a killing. You'd have to ride for it. The provost marshal is gitting ugly. I'll prove I'm your friend. I ain't flush, but you take what I've got and try your luck against the bank. But keep away from the Rattler, as his luck's with him tonight."

"I don't know about that," stubbornly repeated the Deacon. "I've met folks before who thought they was lucky. And I've changed their luck for all time with one small hunk of lead. I'm going in and look him over. If he as much as lifts an eyewinker he's my meat. You have my hoss ready so I can ride for it."

"All right, Deacon. As a friend I still say—"

"Have the hoss ready back of the dancehall. You talk too much and say too little!"

And the Deacon, now that he was close to the door, became impatient and pushed his companion ahead and began elbowing his way without any regard for men's ribs. Those who were shoved aside began cursing, but ceased when they had looked on the long bony face and met the implacable eyes.

Sam took advantage of these rough tactics and kept at the Deacon's heels. The latter felt his presence as he entered the barroom and jerked his head about. A glance satisfied him that Sam was a nonentity, but he warned—

"I need more room, stranger."

SAM HALTED at the head of the bar and was thankful he was not the Rattler. Shorty, who had served him that afternoon, was removing his apron and about to go off duty. He recognized Sam and with a side glance at the Deacon, now taking a position at the lower end of the bar, he slightly shook his head. Although through with his trick he drew a glass of beer before it could be ordered and, under cover of serving it, he whispered:

"Bad man. Mighty bad. Say 'yes, sir' to everything he says."

"He won't bother me," murmured Sam. "He's looking for a man they call the Rattler."

Shorty's eyes appeared to bulge as he stared at Sam. Then he leaned forward and wiped the bar and huskily whispered:

"You know the Rattler?"

Sam shook his head.

"Well, I'll be damned!" muttered Shorty. "You stick right here."

With that he passed down the line and at the foot of the bar took his hat from a nail and started for the back room. The Deacon quickly halted him by demanding—

"Finished your trick, barkeep?"

"Yes, sir," promptly replied Shorty, smiling amiably.

"And keen to git outdoors in the pure air," remarked the Deacon as he tossed off his whisky and refilled the glass with his left hand.

"I was thinking of risking a few dollars at one of the tables," smilingly informed Shorty.

"And keen to git outdoors in the pure air," repeated the Deacon, his voice

more strident and his pale blue eyes seeming to diminish to two points.

"Well, I believe you're right, sir," faintly agreed Shorty. "The air in here is stuffy."

"Pure air never hurt any one," continued the Deacon. "I won't keep you, as I see you're keen to fill your lungs."

The bartender walked up the line for the front entrance and, as his back was to the Deacon, he rolled his eyes and slightly jerked his head backward. Sam could not interpret the signal at first. Shorty passed outdooors, his face drawn in deep lines, because he knew his unspoken message was not understood. Sam tasted his beer and began guessing. Suddenly he remembered Shorty was eager to serve any friend of George Hancey's. He was trying to do Hancey's friend a good turn by warning him to leave at once by way of the rear exit from the gambling room.

The thought of his having aroused the ire of the Deacon filled Sam with a wild desire for immediate flight. It seemed incredible that the Deacon, seeking a quarrel with another of his breed, should pause to trouble a pilgrim. But the man was in a deadly mood, and killers were not always careful as to victims. That the Deacon was to be greatly feared was shown by Shorty's subservience. Sam's desire was to bolt through the door near at hand, but Shorty, who knew the man and his terrible ways, had signaled for a departure from the rear of the house.

Sam thrust his hands carelessly into his coat pockets and was relieved not at all as his right hand rested on the .31 Colt. Leaving his beer unfinished, he started slowly down the line, intent upon gaining the rear room and escaping from the building as quickly as possible. He hoped Hancey would not be there, or at least would be too busy to notice him. Once outside he could go to his friend's tent or wait in the street until he saw the Deacon depart. Turning his gaze toward the tables on the left so as not to encounter the Deacon's cold eyes, he reached the end of the bar and felt he was safe from annoyance. Suddenly he tripped over an outstretched foot and, having both hands in his pockets, all but fell on his face.

Recovering his balance he turned angrily. The Deacon was leaning against the bar and staring at him fixedly. For a few seconds Sam glared into the pale eyes, then began to quail. He started to move on but the man's long leg shot out and kicked viciously at his feet, hitting him on the ankle. Between the pain and ignominy of it Sam gasped and stammered—

"Don't do that again."

"Why?" asked the Deacon.

Each face in the long line of men was turned to witness the scene. With a quick jerk the Deacon dashed the glass of whisky into Sam's face and drawled—

"Mean to say you don't like what I do?"

Sam held his breath, fighting against the horrible rage that bid fair to choke him. Without removing a hand to wipe his wet face he panted and glared at his assailant. In the back of his mind New England caution was telling him that here was a bad man, that even if his self respect was sadly wounded he must retire. He turned to gain the front door. Almost instantly a bony hand clutched his shoulder and spun him about. When he staggered to a standstill the Deacon was leaning against the bar and watching him, his long upper lip slightly drawn back in a sneer.

"That runt of a barkeep forgot about the mirror," said the Deacon. "Another time, you sneak, you won't be so quick to run errands for that runt."

"I simply want to leave this building," whispered Sam. "I don't care which way I go."

The Deacon made no reply. Sam realized that he could not leave by either exit until the brute wearied of his play. The Deacon filled his glass and lifted it. Sam blinked his eyes to escape the fiery liquor. The Deacon gave a short laugh and said:

"Wait your turn. I'll take this one. Next is yours."

Tossing off the drink and refilling the glass he curtly ordered—

"Open your mouth."

Sam opened his mouth to command him to stop and the whisky was dashed into his face. Choking and half strangled, Sam bowed over and clawed at his face with his left hand. When he straightened and, through tears of rage and mortification, beheld the long sneering face, he shed all that environment and paternal teachings had taught him. To lose entirely one's self respect was worse than death. With his right hand cocking the revolver he dashed his clenched left fist into the Deacon's face and knocked the head back so that the tall hat fell inside the bar.

With a howl of rage the Deacon thrust his hand in the breast of his long coat. He had yanked the revolver clear of the arm holster when Sam fired through his pocket. The long face took on an expression of mild surprise for a second. Then the knees buckled and he fell in a heap. There against the cottonwood logs, forming the front of the bar, he rested, a dead man.

There was a moment of tense silence; then a man was screaming:

"By God! He's killed the Deacon!"

"Look out, younker! His friends will git you!"

"Run, you fool! And ride!"

In the gambling hall Hancey had heard the first outcry announcing the death of the Deacon and at the same moment Shorty, the friendly bartender, had gained his side to tell him his pilgrim friend was in danger. Hancey, followed by the white faced Shorty, was the first man to enter the barroom from the hall.

He came to a plunging halt before the body of the Deacon and, holding a long gun half raised in each hand, glared quickly about. Men were running from the room. Sam Strong stood with the .31 in his hand, staring stupidly at the corpse. A gun barrel came over the sill of a side window. Hancey fired twice and it vanished to the accompaniment of a scream of pain. Then Hancey was shooting with both hands at the four oil lamps.

As the room was plunged in darkness Hancey seized Sam's arm and dragged him to the door. They joined the mass of milling men. Oaths and yells resounded in a deafening chorus. Sam's coat was half torn from him as they went through the doorway, but Hancey's grip never loosened.

Into the thickest of the wild mob he dragged his friend and, under cover of the crowd, gained the opposite side of the street. Without any delay he pulled Sam between two houses. Without wasting breath for a word he urged his bewildered companion on. Moving in a half circle, as swiftly as the darkness permitted, he swung back into the reservation road.

Even then he compelled Sam to travel rapidly. When they were a quarter of a mile from Doby Town he drew Sam to one side and took time to speak.

"Shorty told me!" he whispered. "Said the Deacon was abusing you. He didn't dare come to me till sure the Deacon would keep busy with you. Before he'd scarcely finished I heard a shot and someone yelling that the Deacon was dead, killed by a pilgrim."

"I've killed a man!" hoarsely exclaimed Sam, scarcely able to believe the grim fact. "Good heavens, George! I've really killed a man!"

"No!" corrected Hancey. "You killed a poisonous, cowardly snake. Oh, I wish he had come straight to me!"

"Picked on me, a stranger," hysterically continued Sam. "Went there to fight another man, then picked on me, a stranger. He abused me shamefully."

Now he was sobbing.

"Brace up!" sharply ordered Hancey. "He's just where he ought to be. But he has friends. Tried to nail you through the window. I must get you a horse and you must start tonight down the Platte road for home."

"But the new Gregory diggings? I've bought a horse. I was making for the mountains tomorrow!"

"No mountains for you this season, Sam. His friends know you, and you don't know them. They'd nail you before you could make the old California crossing. Get your horse and start at once for the river. Darn the luck! To think

that you, old pious Sam, should blunder into his path and do for him when he was fetching a fight to me!"

"Not you, George," wearily corrected Sam. "He was after another bad man—one they call the Rattler."

"I'm the Rattler, Sam. A horse and a long ride. I'm proud of you, old preacher. And don't think bad of me because I'm the Rattler. Just George Hancey to you. And don't tell Ruth. Now for your horse and ride for it."

CHAPTER VIII

FREEDOM BUYS SOME COWS

IT WAS Nancy Freedom's indorsement of the Little Blue country that induced the Strongs to sell their Plattsmouth house and the Lancaster road claim and to enter land four miles east of the Kiowa stage station in Thayer County. The Brackets and the Freedoms had traveled together to the Little Blue and the Brackets had written several enthusiastic letters to Mr. Strong and Ruth. But it was Nancy's description rather than Mrs. Bracket's glowing accounts that decided the Strongs to make the venture.

This was in the spring of 1864 and much had happened since Sam Strong came home to tell his father in whispers how he had killed a man. John Brown had died for an idea. Martha and Hercules had been sold in the street in Nebraska City. The political complexion of the Territory had become Republican, and the Little Giant had held Abraham Lincoln's hat while the latter made his inaugural address.

The Pony Express had come and gone, furnishing one of the most colorful and thoroughly typical American chapters of Western history. Telegraph poles had stalked across the continent; and so thickly had ranches sprung up along the road from the Missouri to Denver that a man riding a horse could find shelter and food at some wayside place almost each night of his traveling.

The Civil War had come, and many men scampered west of the Mississippi to escape the draft. To strengthen the Federal Armies the Government had weakened the military strength of western garrisons. Replacing withdrawn troops were detachments of captured Confederate soldiers, who preferred active service to life in prison camps, and who were ready to enlist on the condition that they fight Indians but never their own people. These were called "galvanized Rebs" and "whitewashed Yankees."

An army of buffalo hunters, after hides and tallow, had begun the extermination of the buffalo. To complete the hopelessness of their situation, the plains tribes knew an iron horse was coming, which could not be killed. Smoke and dust of battlefields stained the skies east of the Mississippi. Dust and smoke of hurrying passenger coaches, freight and immigrant trains, of hunters' camps and of biennial prairie fires smudged the western heavens.

Before moving to the valley of the Little Blue, Sam Strong had helped Moses Stocking bring a herd of three hundred cattle from the Verdigris to sell to the Mormons. This experience convinced Sam that the free range was to coin millions for cattle ranches, and the cattlemen were soon to become a permanent feature of Western development. His father was skeptical.

In all this time George Hancey had not returned to the river. Sam had received one letter from him a year after the death of the Deacon. George wrote that he was still "looking for a man" and that his travels had carried him through many of the Colorado camps and to Taos and might take him to new diggings in the North. Since then, Alder Gulch and Last Chance had spread the fame of Montana over the world; and Sam had no doubt that his friend was pursuing his grim search at Virginia City and other Northern camps.

The Strongs found a board house ready for them, which was a great improvement on the combination cabin and dugout their friends had had to use during their

first year on the river. Nor was the problem of food troublesome, as two wagons of provisions and two cows were brought by the way of Nebraska City and Beatrice.

As for meat, the entire country swarmed with small game, while deer, elk and buffalo were easy to find, although hide hunters were rapidly driving the last into the Republican Valley and to the foothills of the Rockies. Pasturage was practically unlimited and hay was to be had for the cutting. Strong senior often declared that opening one of these farms was much less laborious than clearing Maine timberland for tillage.

He long since had profited by his mistakes on the Lancaster road claim and knew the breaking should be done in May or June. To plow the sod earlier, or later, was time wasted, as the grass had time to grow in and make it necessary to repeat the work another season. He and Sam, aided by their friends, broke up some forty acres to be sown to wheat and oats another year. The ensuing season would find the soil suitable for corn. The Brackets and Freedoms were well advanced with their farming.

The three claims, about a mile apart, were strung along the old Oregon road, now the route for immigrant trains and Ben Holaday's passenger coaches. Having time to spare this first season, Strong often went up to the road. He got in the way of trading for stock. He soon had a herd of more than fifty cattle and was in a fair way of realizing his son's ambition. His neighbors sowed their grain in March, plowed and planted corn from April to the middle of May, and filled out the latter month with odd jobs.

Those who looked ahead did not disturb the small game during May and June, the breeding season. There was much visiting back and forth between the three families, and the Freedoms and Strong privately agreed that Mrs. Bracket was reaching the point when nothing but hunting for a new home would satisfy her. The nearest settlement was the Kiowa station. Between that and Oak Grove Ranch there were ranches but no settlements.

TWO MILES northeast of the Strong house was a big soddy which was uninhabited when the Strongs arrived on the river. One August morning Nancy Freedom, riding astride like a boy, came to the Strong place and, after visiting with Ruth, she casually asked Strong,

"Learned who your new neighbors are at the big soddy?"

"Didn't know any one had moved in there. Must have come recent. I was down by there only a few days ago."

"Uncle's been roaming around. Found folks living there. No women. I'm worried," the girl confessed.

Sam approached in time to hear the last and he laughingly asked:

"Afraid of what? Think they're up to mischief?"

"Uncle bought some cows of them. I think the cows were stolen. They were not driving a herd," Nancy explained.

"Chances are they were stolen so far away from here, if stolen they were, that their owners will never trace them," said Strong. "Unless they're branded and a man proves ownership your uncle won't lose the purchase price."

Nancy shook her head and explained—"They're not branded."

As her expression was very serious she startled them by breaking into hilarious laughter. Suddenly becoming grave again she went on:

"I'm afraid the men will make trouble for my uncle. Uncle won't talk, but I know he is awfully pleased with his bargain. It shames me to say it, but I'm afraid he's been up to mischief again."

Her hearers looked blank, and with a sigh she continued—

"I don't try to excuse him, and the good Lord knows I have scolded him enough; but you know his queer notions about wildcat money—"

"Paid for the cattle with wildcat money!" softly exclaimed Strong.

"He really believes any kind of paper that pretends to be money is all right to

pass," she defended. "He always holds that so long as it's kept in circulation it's as good as any other money." Again she paused.

"Yes, Nancy, we know that. But I shall be sorry to learn Bird of Freedom has been passing any of that old wildcat money. It was bad enough right after the banks failed, but now—" He halted and threw up his hands expressively.

Nancy was obviously downcast.

"It's worse than that," she told them.

Then was reborn the unquenchable sparkle of amusement in her eyes and she frankly began—

"Somehow he got hold of bills on the Bank of the Interior, supposed to be located in Albany, New York."

"Good land! That trash! Why that's counterfeit money!" gasped Strong.

Sam smothered a grin and gravely reminded—

"But it was smooth enough looking for a man to pass quite a bit of it on Barrows, Millard and Company, the Omaha banking house."

"That don't make any difference," insisted Strong. "Money's either perfectly good, or perfectly bad. It can't be pretty good, or pretty bad, any more than you can be partly dead or partly married."

"Well, that's the trouble," sighed Nancy. "I'm sure he bought those cows with some of that counterfeit money. Now what can I do? How can any mortal keep track of him? I scold and scold, and he'll be tame enough till the next time."

"He shouldn't do those things," declared Strong. "There were the houses up on the South Loup. He claimed them. Nothing to show they were in his lost town. Probably the folks who bought won't have their title disturbed. Yet they may. As to this deal in cattle, those men in the big soddy may be traveling on any day. They'll be going soon anyway. They may not learn they've taken counterfeit money till they're far from here. In that case they'll never bother to come back and trouble him."

"But it isn't right. That's what bothers me. I won't feel any better if they ride away and never return. I can make him give up good money; we have enough. But I can't make him take it to them," said Nancy.

"Then it's all very simple, Nance. I'll ride over and say howdy," broke in Sam. "After I get acquainted a bit, I'll break the news easy to them that the money is a clever counterfeit. Maybe I'll lie a bit and say he supposed it was good money."

"No! Don't lie for him," she fiercely interrupted. "Just say he's an old man and doesn't know any better . . . But that would be lying. He does know better. Simply ask if they want the cattle back, or the purchase price in real money."

"Leave it to me and stop fussing. I'll ride over at once."

His father followed him outside where his horse was grazing and in a low voice said:

"I don't like it. Those strangers didn't come to the big soddy to ranch. I'd rather you'd stay here and let me go."

"No, sir! No sense in your taking chances in my place. But there's no danger. No band of drifters will want to start trouble up here so near a freight road. But Freedom ought to have a keeper. He must worry Nance terribly with his queer ideas about property rights. Don't fret. They'll be glad to get the cows back, or good money in place of the bad."

Yet when he rode away he carried his .31 in the side pocket of his coat.

THE RIVER was some eighty feet wide, with graceful bends. Cottonwoods and willows grew in patches along its banks. The ridges forming the valley were from a mile to two miles apart, the slopes heavily grassed. Sam rode up the north slope and, gaining the top of the ridge, saw the dust of trains plodding along the old road. He rapidly covered the two miles and came to the big soddy, situated a half mile back from the road.

He counted six men sprawling on the grass before the opening door. They

continued smoking, but none rose to welcome him as he drew close. Their questioning gaze and silence reminded him of that other group of men lounging on the grass in front of the cookhouse on the South Loup. Sam reined in on the edge of the group, gave his name and explained that he was a neighbor.

Before he had finished, his quick gaze had told him these were not ranchmen. Their horses, grazing on the south side of the soddy, were fine animals and bred for speed. There was no wagon, no other property, except a herd of forty or more mules picketed down the slope near the river. He saw no rifles, but the grass appeared to be cluttered up with revolvers of murderous caliber.

He had instinctively picked out as the leader the man to whom he had addressed his greeting. This man had not discarded his belt, although it must have been uncomfortable with its load of three .38's. This individual was older than his companions. His long upper lip and face were clean shaven; he wore a short frill of iron gray beard under the chin. His gaze was steady, but as expressionless as if he were staring into space. After Sam had finished and had sat in silence for half a minute the man quietly ordered:

"Fetch out the jug, Biss. Neighbor kindly come to call."

To Sam he said:

"My name's Race Toms. We're riding through to Montana. Right neighborly of you to call. Light and have a drink."

Biss brought a jug from the soddy and Sam swung from the saddle and went through the ceremony of drinking the strangers' health. Toms gave him an opening by asking—

"Who told you we was here?"

"Man living to the westward of me said he bought some cows of you."

Instantly he sensed a change in the group. Those listlessly sprawling on the grass changed their positions and eyed him sharply. Toms' eyes opened with a flicker of sudden interest. For a second Sam believed the man Toms was about to explode in oaths and threats. To his amazement the long features developed the beginning of a smile, then slipped back into immobility. His voice was more cordial, however, as he said:

"Tall, bald headed old coot, with long white whiskers? Talks soft and sweet and praises almost everything? Loves every one, loves the whole world? Makes you think for a bit he's a preacher? That the feller?"

"I think you've described him—a bit overdrawn but, as he said he'd been here, we have the same man in mind."

Toms rose and beckoned Sam to step to one side and squat on the grass for a private talk. Plucking a prairie rose and idly picking it to pieces he began:

"That old cuss is smoother'n oil. I'm keen to see him again."

"See here, Mr. Toms," Sam frankly confessed, "he's an old man. He's not quite responsible for what he does. He keeps his grandniece much worried. He brought home some cows and she's afraid whatever deal he made isn't satisfactory to the other party. I'm thinking you're the other party."

"Cows be damned!" softly exclaimed Toms. "He's welcome to keep them. He'd be that welcome because he's clever enough to come a game on Race Toms and his boys. And we all come up Texas this spring with Quantrell."

He paused to let this bit of information register. Sam endeavored to suppress a shudder. Civil war had brought terrible times to Missouri and Kansas. The fear of Charles William Quantrell and his guerrillas had spread far. Almost as quickly as the cold shadow touched him, Sam decided these men must be weaklings of that hard riding, deadly shooting guerrilla band, else they would not be riding to the northern gold fields. No Maddox, no Anderson, no Shepard was among these men lying on the grass and lazily watching their leader.

Toms continued:

"He's welcome to the cows. We couldn't bother to take them farther."

"I've come to offer to fetch the cows

back, or the bargain price in hard money," said Sam.

"The bargain price in hard money wouldn't keep my boys in liquor for two weeks. But the old coot has something we must have?"

"Something else than cows or hard money?" puzzled Sam.

"We must have all the pretty paper money he hasn't passed out. What we have is so pleasing that we must have more—all!"

"But, that money is questionable," said Sam.

"It's worthless as money. Yet it's all face value when handled right. We're waiting here for one man to overtake us. You ride back and tell that old cuss we're waiting for him to fetch in all that kind of money he has. If you hadn't come along as you did some of the boys would be in the saddle, looking for him. It'll be much pleasanter if it's handed over here. And just to show Race Toms don't want both ends of the stick and grip on the middle, you can tell him he can have those prime Missouri mules down by the river."

"But you can sell the mules for genuine money."

"If we rather sell for funny money, that's our business," grimly replied Toms. "Perhaps we're in such a hurry we don't want to bother with mules any longer. And not having long white whiskers and looking like circuit riders, we ain't natural traders."

"But his niece won't let him do any more trading like that," insisted Sam.

"If she don't change her mind there'll be an uncle missing in this river bottom. If he ain't here by tomorrow, we'll come looking him up. He done us a great wrong, taking our property that way. There's only one way to square it—all the paper he has of the same kind."

"That sounds mighty like a threat," said Sam. "And this isn't Missouri."

Toms tossed the stem of the wild rose away and stared at him with eyes hard as flints. But his voice held to an undertone as he slowly replied:

"No, this ain't Missouri, but we're the same critters who come north from Texas with Quantrell. S'pose you've heard of him."

Sam inclined his head and rose to his feet and said—

"I'll tell him what you said."

Toms rose and curtly ordered—

"Have the stuff here before we ride—all of it—or we'll come after him, and that'll be very bad for him."

Feeling he had played an inglorious role, and with his mind thoroughly disquieted, Sam rode slowly back to the ranch. Strong came out to meet him and asked—

"How'd you make it?"

In a low voice Sam replied:

"Didn't make it. Where's Nance?"

"Gone back home. Took Ruth with her. No one to hear. Spit it out!"

"They're bad ones. Rode with Quantrell. They don't want good money for bad. They want all the bad money Freedom has. And they'll give him nearly fifty mules."

"That can't be allowed," snapped Strong. "That bogus money must be destroyed in our presence. Those men stole both cows and mules. They'd turn them loose rather than to take them farther. But Freedom must stop this business. He's old enough to know better."

"If he doesn't go to them tomorrow they'll come after him, they said. And I believe they'll do it. With Bracket and Freedom we probably could stand them off. There's only six of them. That would mean they'd burn two houses while we're cooped up in the third. We might fetch some men from the Kiowa stage station and run them out of the country."

Strong was worried.

"To call in help would leave us in a bad position," he mused. "They have done nothing yet. Their leader would simply insist that he had been cheated with counterfeit money; and Freedom would stand exposed as a passer of worthless money. If Freedom wasn't in the wrong we could round up some of the freighters. The best plan I can think of is

to ride up to Freedom's and warn him. He must go away for a bit. This band won't stay long at the old soddy. With him out of the way, we'll call in men from the freight trains if necessary. With Freedom not present to answer to the charges, or hand over the money, these fellows won't trouble us. I'll be back soon."

ABOUT the time Strong set forth to find Bird of Freedom and deliver his warning, George Hancey rode up the valley of the Little Blue, having entered it at the mouth of the Big Sandy. It had been years since he had seen the eastern Nebraska country and his mind was filled with painful recollections. He looked much older than his years, and yet the rough life of his wanderings had less to do with carving the lines in his thin, dark face than had the hate ever driving him on.

If anything, he was more of a dandy than ever, and from boots to soft hat he was quite immaculate. On his way up the road from Kansas he had inquired, of every freighting and immigrant outfit he passed, for a dark complexioned man who looked like a half-breed. Sometimes he called him by name—Blackie.

Sighting the big soddy, he left the road and slowly rode toward it. Permitting his horse to proceed at a walk, he confided to him:

"There's some men there, Faro; but our man can't be among them. He can't be ahead of us, yet this is the way he will come. But he couldn't come up here without some outfit seeing and remembering him. All folks can't be blind, or liars; and the trail was warm till we struck Independence."

He reined in and for half a minute stared at the men on the grass and, as had Sam Strong, he found the scene strongly reminiscent of the outfit on the South Loup. His quick gaze read the character of the men and also told him that the mules, so eagerly eating the common scouring rushes down by the river, were stolen.

His dark eyes lighted with hope. Riding at a walk, with one hand on his hip, he told his mount:

"That's the outfit, all right, Faro; but our man isn't among them. I don't reckon he's come up yet. Still he might be in the house."

He slipped from the saddle and walked along, with the horse between him and the soddy. Race Toms got on his feet and stared at him questioningly.

Hancey halted a dozen feet from the silent, staring group and said:

"I'm a friend of Blackie's. Was to find him up here. Is he with you?"

"Who's Blackie?" quietly asked Toms.

"Half-breed. Used to run with Ben Tisk's gang years ago. I was with him on the Loup."

"Who'n hell be you?"

"Lost my name years ago. But I'm often called the Rattler."

Toms stared at him steadily for a minute; then, without shifting his boring gaze, he asked—

"Any you men know anything about this feller?"

"Man by that name was talked about in the camps in Colorado. I heard a heap about him when I was in Denver," spoke up a man.

"You come from Colorado?" asked Toms.

"Yes. By the Smoky Hill road. Blackie was to meet me in Independence. Friends said he was coming up this way to join an outfit making for Last Chance Gulch in Montana."

"How do you know this is the outfit he is going to join?" lazily asked Toms.

Hancey smiled good naturedly and promptly replied:

"I don't. All depends on whether or not the boss is called Toms."

The leader's eyes narrowed and he asked suspiciously—

"Who told you that name?"

"One of Quantrell's men, who's in hiding near Independence. Waiting for two riddled ankles to heal. His name is Inders."

The men glanced quickly at each other. Toms relaxed and admitted—

"If you're a friend of Doc Inders you must be all right."

"Not his friend in the way you mean, perhaps. I never traveled with him. But he and I have the same friends in Independence. When I said I was looking for Blackie, I was taken to his hiding place. He told me Blackie was on his way to join Toms' outfit, bound for the Montana diggings. Now you have the whole thing."

His frankness impressed Toms favorably. He advanced and shook hands and said:

"We ain't afraid of any one troubling us up here. We ain't afraid of trouble anywhere. But we fight shy of strangers, as so many nuisances. I'm thinking you'll fit in. Turn your hoss out to feed. Mighty likely looking critter. Blackie oughter be here any minute; but we can't wait more'n another day for him. We'll be gitting rid of these mules tomorrer and then we must be pushing on."

Hancey observed the mules more closely and advised:

"Get rid of them down here. Up on the Platte some one might spot them for stolen Government mules."

Toms nodded and readily admitted:

"They was stolen. Down in Kansas." Then he abruptly asked, "Play cards for a bit?"

Hancey nodded. Toms tossed a deck on a blanket and sat down. Removing the saddle and bridle, Hancey turned his horse loose to graze and then took his place opposite Toms. Three of the men at once drew up and each produced some paper money. Hancey placed a handful of gold before him, then glanced at the money in view. His brows went up and he asked:

"Confed money for stakes against my gold?"

Toms scowled and tossed over a roll of bills and curtly said—

"Not Southern money."

Hancey picked up the money and was about to return it when he discovered eagerness and expectancy in the gaze of Toms and the man at his side. He opened the roll and examined it more carefully. After a minute of study he tossed it back and pocketed his gold and said:

"Counterfeit! Wonderful work. If you men hadn't been so keen to see how I took it, I'd have swallowed hook and bait."

Toms gathered up the cards and genially said:

"Well, it almost had you fooled. That's good enough for me. It'll fool others. It's good counterfeit money, and inside a couple of days we're hoping to have lots more of it. We can change it into gold with no one ever being the wiser."

Hancey was not interested. He lighted a cigar and turned his gaze toward the road. Toms lazily explained:

"Funny old man, looks like a preacher, fetched this money in and paid it for some cows we'd gathered up along the road. Bald head and long white whiskers. He'd take in anybody. Called himself some sort of a bird."

Hancey jerked about and his dark eyes betrayed keen interest. Toms was quick to detect his animation and he demanded—

"What do you know about him?"

"Description fits an old man I once met up on the Loup. In Tisk's gang. Innocent look, but cool as ice. Awful bad to trifle with."

"Something like Race Toms, bad to trifle with," said the leader. "I sent word for him to bring me the rest of the stuff and take the mules off my hands. Tough old feller, eh? Well, that's the way we like 'em."

Hancey's nerves were tingling. Bird of Freedom was the last man he would expect to meet away from the Big Muddy. He maintained an appearance of careless composure and remarked:

"You're offering him a big trade. Prime mules for no account money."

"Got to git rid of the mules. Up North we can change the paper into dust. If he don't come in by tomorrer I'll ride up the valley and dig him out."

Hancey removed his cigar and examined the wrapper critically, then asked—

"Lives that near?"

"So the young feller said who came here to get us to take the cows back, or swap the bad for good money. This young feller—Sam something—let on the old man had a gal who would be nervous about the deal."

HANCEY removed the cigar, broke it and tossed it aside.

"I see. Chap named Sam came here to patch things up, fearing you folks would get angry when you learned the money was no good."

"That's right; but you seem slow in gitting it. And you look keen enough."

"I am keen enough," heartily assured Hancey. "I'm mighty keen. If you'd been in the mountains these last few seasons you'd heard about me—the Rattler."

Race showed his teeth in a grin and replied:

"We folks come with Quantrell from Texas this spring. If you'd been in Missouri these last few seasons, you'd heard about *us*."

"Oh, I've heard lots about Quantrell's men. I saw at first glance you fellows were all right, or I'd never want to take on with you. I'm not traveling with any cripples. And don't forget for a second about me being a yard wide and all wool when it comes to real trouble."

"A real he-man should have a good opinion of himself," said Toms, and the toe of his boot secretly prodded the back of a man stretched out at his feet.

The man, as if receiving his cue, rolled on his back and staring up at Hancey demanded—

"Just how bad can you be, younker?"

"I never brag," coldly replied Hancey.

"Still you admit you're half mountain wolf and half alligator?" bantered the man.

"Something like that, or worse. Look here! You've talked too much. How do you want to settle this matter? Knife or gun. Either way, I'm your meat."

Hancey was on his feet, a long Spanish knife in one hand and a revolver in the other.

Race Toms watched the two eagerly. The man on the ground scowled hideously up into the dark face, straightened out his long legs, but did not rise.

Toms murmured:

"Time to show your mettle, Rufe. A quarrel's busted out in this band. It must be settled."

"I'd look pretty trying to git on my feet with him waiting for me to move, with a gun and knife all ready!" snarled Rufe.

The revolver and knife vanished and Hancey stood with his arms folded.

"Now do you dare get up?" he asked.

Rufe grunted, as if the effort was almost beyond him, and slowly came up on his knees. He wore enormous cowhide boots and it took time to lift a knee and rest one big foot on the ground. Then he leaned forward as if about to rise. Instead of standing erect, his right hand whisked a knife from the bootleg and he jerked his arm back for a cast. He held his position as if frozen, finding himself staring into the muzzle of a revolver. For a second or two the tableau continued; then Rufe yelled in fear and dropped backward, the fear of death dilating his eyes.

Toms stared at Hancey with a little frown puckering his brows.

"No fighting!" he sharply ordered. "Put up that gun, young man."

Hancey slowly tucked the weapon through his belt, although the eager onlookers would swear he had not taken it from the belt. Toms vigorously rubbed his frill of a whisker and announced:

"All at peace again. Just a bit of our rough fun. But Rattler, just where'n hell did that gun come from?"

Hancey laughed loudly and instantly displayed good nature.

"Naturally quick on the draw," he explained. "You were just trying me out. Wish Blackie would come along!"

"If you can shoot as well as you can draw you can ride with me till my saddle's empty. Blackie'll come soon enough."

Hancey threw himself on the ground and became silent as were the six men. Back on the road the sun's slanting rays were trying to make something glorious out of the canopy of dust kicked up by passing freight trains.

Far in the East President Lincoln had expressed disgust with the helplessness and confusion along the Potomac. Grant was preparing to advance on Petersburg.

In the West the gold camps of Colorado, Idaho and Montana were calling for men to risk their lives for the possibility of winning a fortune. Gruesome guerrilla warfare was being raged on the Missouri-Kansas border. Nebraska settlers had sent more than their quota to the fighting east of the Mississippi, and were now cultivating their crops and wondering if the threatened Indian uprising would become an actuality.

Race Toms announced that it was time to eat and Hancey, accepted as one of the band, at least for the time being, entered the soddy with the others and partook heartily of the steaming kettle. Already he was something of a favorite with the leader. He shrewdly estimated Toms and his followers to be below the fighting grade of Quantrell's men, although they were ready enough to boast of having followed that terrible killer. In Quantrell's following were mere youths, ferocious fighters. The men behind Toms gave the impression of being too lazy for the unceasing and reckless border warfare. As Hancey ate and listened to the talk he was convinced that they must be castoffs from the dreaded band. A man in the doorway interrupted the eating and talking by calling out—

"Woman coming!"

Toms halted the general movement toward the door by ordering:

"Keep back out of sight. Any talking to be done, I'll do it."

He took his place in the doorway and waited. The woman, riding astride, came galloping over the grass. From one of the small windows Hancey could glimpse the flying figure. He admired her skill and he wondered what errand could bring her to the old soddy. His glimpse was brief, as she soon left his line of vision and was pounding up to the front of the structure. As he stepped back to the fireplace and secured a light for his cigar, he heard her clear voice announcing:

"I'm looking for a man named Toms."

"You're looking at the critter now," Toms replied from the doorway. "Light and come in."

RUFE turned a ghastly grin on his mates. Hancey, suddenly alarmed, clamped his teeth into the cigar and stared at the leader filling the doorway. The woman hesitated for a moment, but as Toms backed into the long, low room she advanced with confident step and crossed the threshold. Once in the semi-dusk of the long room she halted and blinked. The sunlight was still in her eyes and she could make out the lounging figures but vaguely. A small opening on each side, serving as a window, was at the height of a man's head.

Being unable to discern the men at the back of the room the woman faced about to the door only to find that Toms had resumed his position in the doorway. She did not attempt to regain the sunlight, but wheeled about and started down the room, walking with confident step. As her head came in line with the west window a shaft of sunlight revealed her face. Hancey spat out his cigar, hooked his thumbs in his belt and stared in amazement.

Some of the men laughed a bit as they read a sudden fear in the girl's face. She darted her glance about and made out different figures watching her. She turned and hastened back to the door. The leader, with his arms extended to rest on the door jambs smiled slowly and asked:

"Just what did you want with Race Toms, pretty one?"

"My uncle bought some cows of you. He gave you counterfeit money. I've brought real money to pay for the cows."

As she spoke she suddenly switched her gaze about, as if fearing some shadowy

figure was creeping upon her. She fumbled hurriedly at the bosom of her blouse and produced a roll of money and said:

"Here it is. Now I'll be going."

Toms took the money and thumbed it over, but did not offer to remove his bulk from the doorway.

"Let me out! I'm in a hurry to get back home," she said.

Toms thurst the money into his pocket and replied:

"Wait a minute. What you fetched is all right so far as it goes. But it ain't the full price. That old pirate passed counterfeit money on me. He has more of it. And I'm going to put it beyond his power to pass any more of it on unsuspecting strangers."

"Just what do you mean? Get out of that door!"

"Now, now, miss. That ain't no way to touch the heart of Race Toms, who rode with Quantrell. I sent word by a young buck for your relation to fetch me the rest of that bad money. He ain't done it."

"He did not get your word. He had left the ranch with the cows before the word was brought. You have your money. Let me pass!"

"But where's that young feller? Why didn't he come in place of you? He ain't got much gumption to make a little lady ride out here alone."

"He never knew I was coming. No one knew. I want to pass."

Toms half closed his eyes as he muttered:

"You should a told them, miss. If you dropped out of sight, they'd think Injuns got you."

"But I'm not going to drop out of sight. Get out of that door!"

Hancey caught the motion of her hand drawing a revolver. In the same second it was wrested from her grip.

"You can thank your lucky stars you come to a man who can look after you, miss," said Toms as he pocketed the weapon. "We'll keep you safe here till that relation of yours obeys orders and shows up."

One of the men at the end of the room laughed aloud. Toms glared over the girl's shoulder and warned:

"You folks be careful and keep your fingers out of my dish. This little lady is staying under my care till it's safe for her to go home."

He seized the girl's two wrists and drew her close to him.

The man Rufe hoarsely insisted:

"Remember the 'greement, boss. Share and share alike—"

Instead of completing the sentence he lurched a step forward and fell heavily on his face.

"Damn you, Rufe!" hissed Toms, still holding the girl helpless.

"Something's wrong with Rufe, boss!" cried another man.

He knelt by the prostrate figure and, after a brief examination, he jumped to his feet and ran to a window and held his hands up to the light. Then he excitedly cried:

"God! Blood on my hands from his head! What hit him?"

Toms started forward to investigate and the girl all but wrenched clear of his hold. He caught her, just as she was trying to dart out into the waning sunlight. Yanking her back, he closed the door and leaned against it and sharply commanded—

"One of you freshen the fire so we can see."

Kindling wood was thrown on the coals and as the flames rose the girl saw the long silent figure of Rufe lying face down, and she saw the evil faces of four other men and the figure of a seventh at one side from the fireplace. The man who started the examination picked up a bar of iron that served as a poker and held it in the firelight and cried—

"Some one basted him with this!"

"See if he's dead," ordered Toms.

Again the man kneeled and soon reported:

"Still breathing, but only his hat saved him. Must a got a hell of a tunk!"

"Open that door and let me go!" screamed the girl, and it made her more

afraid to discover that her strong nerves were sadly shaken.

"Keep your mouth shut!" grimly commanded Toms. "Some one has broken my rules. Some one has stepped out of bounds and must be looked after. Two of you fellers stand here at the door. If you let this young wildcat open it, I'll cut your hearts out."

Hancey and another quickly advanced. Hancey had his slouch hat pulled well forward, but there was no danger of her recognizing him, even had he been bareheaded. She had eyes only for Toms, who was now advancing into the firelight to examine the prostrate figure. She did not even hear the soft thud behind her, although she was startled into a realization that something brutal had happened, when one of her watchers slipped to the earthen floor and brushed her skirts.

She twisted frantically about to face the one sentinel standing between her and liberty. He caught her wrist gently and started to open the door. She advanced her face close and began to make out the thin, dark features and felt a hand pressed over her mouth for a second.

Toms ceased shaking the silent figure of Rufe and glanced back suspiciously toward the door.

"Why is there only one of you?" he hoarsely called out. Then he came to his feet, yelling, "Who's that on the floor?"

Hancey opened the door and pushed the girl violently outside and cried—

"Ride!"

Nauseated by the horror of her discovery and sick at soul because of the terrible danger she was trying to escape, the girl ran to her horse and fairly threw herself into the saddle.

A booming volley of shots rang out in the soddy. Screams and oaths made the place more hideous.

The girl started off at a furious gallop, then pulled in and glanced back. A hatless figure came through the doorway, walking backward and shooting into the dark opening. A spurt of flame darted from a window as Hancey entered the range of the western opening. He instantly answered it and then ran toward the girl, whistling shrilly. Gunfire streaked from another window as the horse came galloping up to his master. Then Hancey, bending low, was racing after the girl and crying:

"Ride, Nance! Ride!"

Although he could easily have taken the lead, he held his mount down and kept behind her. He rode with body erect to shield her from a chance bullet.

As she dipped down over the edge of the slope she heard him fire his last shot at the soddy. As her mount recklessly made for the river path she looked back to make sure he had not been shot from his horse. He was still in the saddle and waved his hand. As he overtook her she saw that his hand was covered with blood.

He ranged along at her stirrup and cried—

"No hurry—they'll not chase us."

TO BE CONTINUED

Sergeant Coke meets the nobility

*A Rainy Night

By LEONARD H. NASON

THE NIGHT was approaching with speed. The shadows under the poplars that lined the road were already quite deep, and men and horses, teams, guns, machine gun carts and water wagons were becoming fast blended into one long wriggling, indistinguishable mass. A battalion of infantry passed; the men shambling wearily along, overcoats over their arms, rifles slung, their uniforms in rags and their faces expressionless masks, lined and scarred with the horrors of the past week. A division had been relieved at daybreak and had been hiking ever since, marching back to its rest billets to have new clothing and equipment issued and its casualties replaced.

At the rear of the battalion lurched its wheeled transportation, drawn by poor, thin, gassed, cowhocked, high withered ewe necked beasts that were called horses. A ration wagon, a water cart with its hose shot away, and an escort wagon. Upon the seat of the escort wagon were three men, the driver, his orderly and a supply sergeant, who ranked a seat on the wagon because his entire department was within it. A motorcycle zipped by, almost under the wheel horse's nose, and the wheel horse, summoning all his strength for a shy, leaped to one side, shoving his mate with him. A wild pitch of the wagon, accompanied by a clatter from its interior and its sudden halt, appraised those on the seat that their chariot was in the ditch.

The driver swore feelingly. Then the three men descended to the road. The wagon was mired, two wheels in the deep ditch and the body resting on the edge of

*An Off the Trail Story

the road. The wheel horse had done well.

"She's stuck," said the driver.

"I hope t' Gawd," agreed the orderly.

The sergeant said nothing. He extracted a bit of chewing tobacco from his pocket and put it all in his mouth.

"Well, boys," he said, "I must be gettin' on. I gotta be in town tonight, may have to issue stuff. Hope you get out all right."

He climbed to the seat of the wagon, secured his pack and, slinging it over one shoulder, clambered down again and started off down the road. The driver and his helper spoke their minds.

"That damned Coke Braddish!" said the driver. "Sleep all the way in and drink all our *vin rouge* and then off he goes when we get in the ditch! Ain't that him all over!"

"*Psst!*" said the orderly. "Here comes hard luck!"

An officer was approaching through the darkness. The two immediately bent over the wheel in pretended consultation.

THE SUPPLY sergeant pursued his way down the road. As he came to an open space he could see the column ahead of him rounding a curve, moving along like a giant centipede.

"Now that road curves," said the sergeant to himself, "an' I might just as well go across this here field, an' come out lower down, an' sit an' rest till the company comes along, as go dragging my poor carcass along this road in the mud. I'm a great guy for lettin' my head save my heels."

He jumped the ditch and started across the field, pausing now and then to shake off the great weight of grass and clay that accumulated on his hobnails and to shift his pack to an easier position. It grew darker and as night finally fell there was a gust of wind and rain began.

"Send her down, Davy," said Coke Braddish, "I ain't afeared o' gettin' wet. I ain't been dry fer four months."

Nevertheless, he wrapped his slicker about him like a cape and increased his pace.

The rain fell in torrents. It was farther across that field than he had expected and the mud clung to his feet. He rounded the corner of a small grove of trees and there before him, instead of the road and the town that he had expected to see, was a wide sweep of driveway and the ruins of a château. The curve that he had thought the troops had followed must have been simply an offset in the road, and he had wandered off into these fields a good half mile out of the way. Well, he had nothing to do but follow the driveway, which must lead back to the main road, and catch up with his company as best he might. A little brook of rain ran down the back of his neck, where his slicker collar made a convenient funnel.

"Well, I'll be a drizzling son of a soldier," said Coke, halting in disgust, "if hell is gonna be anything like this I'll never shoot another crap!"

The blackness of the château loomed against the slightly lighter blackness of the sky.

"I wonder," said Coke, "if a man might find a dry spot in that old barn. It looks like the Boche knocked it for a row. Now if I could get a mite o' sleep there, I wouldn't have to go prowlin' after that gang o' mine on this wet night. Probably there ain't a dry spot big enough fer a cat to lie down in it."

He went up the weed grown driveway, brushing aside the flowers that had seeded there from the old garden and that now deposited cupfuls of water on the knees of his breeches, and climbed the crumbling steps to the door.

This was no Boche wrecked château. A goodly sized tree grew out of one corner, and its branches covered all that portion of the building. Coke hung his head through one of the great windows that opened off the terrace, but he could see nothing except weedy blackness. He turned his flashlight into what he thought had been the cellar.

"What the hell!" he muttered in astonishment.

There was no cellar there, nothing but

a bush grown bank. He went down the terrace and when it ceased abruptly turned and flashed his light along what should have been the east wall. Bushes, trees, and a few piles of stones. The place was not even a shell, nothing but a front wall, supported by the trunks of the great trees and the pile of moldering stones at its base. Rain dripped on the terrace and the tall weeds that grew between its stones waved in the wind.

Coke grunted with disgust. Water was seeping down inside of his puttees and his shoes were rapidly filling with it. They were new shoes and had no holes for the water to escape through.

"I better be goin'," said Coke, "but first we'll rest a little minute."

He sat down upon the terrace, leaned against the wall and unslung his pack. The rain did not drive so here and the old ruin sheltered him somewhat from the wind.

"The good thing about France," continued Coke, undoing the straps of his pack carrier, "is that there isn't never no shortage of good drinkin' likker."

He unrolled his blankets, wrapped his shelter half about him and, shielding his blanket roll from the elements, carefully undid his blankets.

"There, now, safe and sound," he grunted. "This is the most useful use to which I ever put this pack carrier."

He leaned against the wall and flicked on his light. He held a bottle in his hand, which he had removed from his blankets, and about the bottle's neck was a paper crescent, bearing upon it three golden stars. It was a bottle of cognac, the "coneyac" of A. E. F. parlance, and Coke transferred some of it from the bottle to a place where it would do more good.

The wind howled, but not so loudly; it bit, but not so keenly; nor was the seeping water so cold as before Coke took that shot. He took another, and for him the wind ceased to howl altogether and the rain stopped falling. An empty stomach, a long hike and a wet skin offer little resistance to strong waters.

"Pneumonia is what a guy gets a night like this," said Coke, "but this likker kills the germs."

He killed a few more germs. He took a drink against cold, he took one against fatigue and, having fortified himself against measles, scarlet fever, pneumonia, gas, tonsilitis, lockjaw, *otitis media*, and taken a few for luck, he corked the bottle and reached for his blankets to wrap about it. He was surprised to see that there was a shaft of light across the terrace and that there were many more like it, not bright, but soft and mellow, all the way down the wall.

Coke wished he had a gun. He had never carried one, because a supply sergeant does no fighting—that is, not with the Germans—and a gun was so much extra weight. A window creaked and a tall sash swung out against Coke's arm. There was a gentle smell of food, of flowers and of warm rooms. The odor was utterly quenched and extinguished by a perfume, a bouquet, that made Coke's pulses leap convulsively. He had smelled such a perfume before, in Dijon, in Bordeaux, at Chantilly. There was a woman there!

Indeed there was. She stepped out of the window and glided rustlingly across the terrace, her dresses brushing Coke's hand as she passed.

"Gawd!" gasped Coke. "She'll wreck that silk dress in this rain!"

He leaped to his feet.

"Here, lady, put this around yer shoulders!" he said, extending his shelter half. The lady turned and put up her fan across her face.

"Thank you, sir," she said in the sweetest of voices, with a most interesting, darling little halt, a sort of lisp in her voice, "but really it is quite warm here. In fact, I came out here for a breath of cool air. The moon is so glorious!"

"Huh? Moon?" Coke looked up.

THERE was a bright silver moon, round and full. It shone on a wide stretch of lawn, smooth and velvety, garnished with little white statues. A

fountain, playing from the center of four horses rising from a pool, glittered in the distance. He looked at the château. It swept to the stars above him, a white wall in the moon's rays, row upon row of lighted windows. He looked in through the window. There was a gleaming floor, gilt chairs, candles and candles and candles, a tapestried wall.

"Well, drizzling dewberries!" quoth Coke. "Don't this beat hell!"

The lady drew near to him and tapped him upon the arm with her fan.

"What are you doing here on my terrace?" she asked.

"Golly, lady, I didn't know there was a party on. Why, I just stopped a minute to catch my breath. I'll git right along."

He started to retreat, but a gentle hand as light as a silken scarf was laid upon his arm.

"First," said the lady, "tell me who you are."

"I'm a sergeant," said Coke proudly, "a supply sergeant, in L company o' the fightin' Ninth. Name's Braddish, called Coke."

"Ah, a soldier," breathed the lady. "I had hoped for a soldier. There is need for a brave man here tonight, a brave man, a bold man, who fears no living person, nor does he draw back from any who is not alive. Have you the courage to protect me against unnumbered foes?"

"Lady," said Coke fervently, throwing his shelter half down on the stones, "fer you I could knock any ten men fer a row of brick houses a mile long!"

"Hush!" whispered the lady.

There was a roll of wheels, jingle of harness and the rapid *tipatap* of horses' hoofs. A huge coach came down the drive, its lanterns gleaming and a mounted man ahead bearing a torch. The coach swung around the curve and came to a halt, the horses plunging and tossing their heads. Two men leaped down from a platform at the rear; others ran from the doorway of the château, the door of the coach was flung open, and the lone passenger descended, a tall man, clad in crimson silk, his jewels flashing in the light of the lanterns and of the torches held by the servants.

All bowed to the ground, their hands sweeping the earth, and the crimson clad man, holding a handkerchief to his nose, walked majestically between the lines of scraping attendants, up the steps and into the château.

"It is he," breathed the lady. "Let us go in."

"It is who?" asked Coke.

"Ganymede Perrier de Laine, Duke of Nevers."

"Is that the guy you want me to grapple with?"

"Hush! He will kill you!"

"Kill me? Me? Say, lady, I could powder the nose of fifty like him—fer you!"

She answered nothing save a tiny squeeze of her velvet hand.

"Let us go in," said she, and led the way into the room.

Coke stopped, when he had crossed the threshold, and removed his tin hat. There were ladies in the room, seated about a long table. There was an old one and one of indeterminate age. At the head of the table was a man in a yellow silk suit, on which were embroidered or painted or sewed different colored flowers. He wore a white wig, the ribbons from which came around in front of his collar and were tied in his buttonhole in a gorgeous bow. The man in crimson who had come in the coach was seated at the other man's right, glaring wrathfully at Coke. Opposite him was a young man in sky blue, who was engaged in doing something with a handkerchief. All three had on their hats. The man in yellow now rose and, lowering his eyebrows, looked at Coke and his companion.

"Yvette," said the man, "why do you delay us? Is it your caprice to have us die of hunger? We expect little from you but folly, it is true, but attendance at meals should not surely have to be made compulsory."

"My father," said the lady, looking at him with a steady gaze, "I was but doing honors of our poor house to an unexpected

guest. I have the pleasure to present Duke Coke of Braddish."

There was a little murmur and the company bowed. Yvette extended her hand to Coke and led him to two vacant chairs, which were drawn back by servants and then slid gently to the table again. The man in crimson looked at Coke and skinned his teeth. Coke returned the look with all the contempt he could muster, bending upon the other a stare such as he would have given a recruit who had dared to say that his newly issued blouse did not fit.

Coke snorted audibly. A gentle pressure of Yvette's hand beneath the table restrained him and he looked about the table to see what there might be to eat.

"Oh, hell!" thought Coke. "We got here too late fer chow. They brought on the finger bowls."

Before each guest was a crystal bowl in which floated a few rose petals and beside which was a folded napkin. Coke looked at his finger bowl.

"This ain't no good to me," he said to Yvette. "I ain't had nothin' to eat."

Then he smiled to show that he wasn't sore. Yvette tapped his lips with her finger and a sound of grating teeth came across the table. The company proceeded to dip their hands in the finger bowls and wipe them on the napkins. Then they sat back expectantly.

"Put on your hat," whispered Yvette. "It is the custom here."

Coke put in on with an audible clank. He gazed calmly about the table and his eye fell upon the elderly lady at the foot thereof. This must be Yvette's mother. The lady wore a dress of purple velvet with some kind of glittering brooch that sparkled as she breathed. She had a little stick in her fingers with something at the end that looked like an ivory hand, and this stick she occasionally poked into the towering wig she wore.

When she reached over her shoulder and made the stick go up and down rapidly, her fingers curled in the air in a most genteel manner, Coke could restrain himself no longer.

"What's the lady doin' with that stick?" asked Coke, in a hoarse whisper.

"That is my mother, the countess," said Yvette. "She is scratching herself."

The finger bowls were wafted away and each guest was given a plate.

"Well, I'll be damned," said Coke, "they musta been washin' their hands." He looked at the crimson clad duke opposite. "If the rest didn't do better than him," thought Coke, "they ain't much on the hand-washin' jobs."

A huge dish, an enormous mountain-sized thing was brought in and placed grandly upon the table by two of the servants, one of whom removed the cover and carved some kind of fowl. The man in yellow stretched forth his hand, using the first and second fingers and thumb only, and very elegantly transferred a morsel of what was thereon to his dish. The dish then went to the crimson clad man, the Duke of Nevers, who, instead of taking his portion delicately, poked about in the dish for some time, until he found the choicest morsel.

"What an unmannered beast he is," whispered Yvette, leaning so that the high wig she wore brushed Coke's ear.

"What's all that stuff in your hair?" asked Coke, shivering deliciously.

"Ah," smiled the girl, "that is a puff. Mine is to represent the Coliseum. Do you not see the columns? Madame the countess, my mother, hath a frigate upon hers, and my Aunt Eudoree, you will perceive, has conceived a peacock with spreading wings."

"What are them patches for on their faces?"

"Why, they have different meanings. Look at mine."

Coke looked and, meeting Yvette's eyes while doing so, felt little tingles play hide and seek up and down his spine and his scalp drew together.

"See!" whispered Yvette, her breath upon Coke's cheek. "This one by my eye, that means 'passion,' but I have another, here, on my lower lip. That means 'discreet'. Here is the dish."

The bird on the dish looked like some

kind of turkey. It smelled like mince pies, like burned sugar, like lemonade, like talcum powder, but not like a roast bird.

Coke, emulating the example of the father, seized the first thing that he could and, crooking his little finger, bore the meat to his plate with a disdainful glance at the man in crimson opposite, who never took his eyes from Coke and who never ceased to grind his teeth. Yvette took her portion with queenly grace, and with just as much grace carried it to her nose and so to the plate in one movement.

Not so the man in blue on the other side of her. He sniffed at his, grunted and put it back on the platter again. Nothing was said, but from the looks and uprolled eyes Coke gathered the impression that the man in blue had been unmannerly, not in smelling, but in putting back what he had smelled. Coke's appetite was not what it had been a few minutes before.

"Who's that guy?" asked Coke indicating the man in blue.

"He's a poor relative of ours," said Yvette, "and the other lady is his sister."

One of the servants now approached the head of the table and put down a silver mug before the man in yellow. The goblet was evidently filled with liquor, for the master of the house took a long sip, and another, and smacked his lips. Gazing round with a benign expression upon all the company, he remarked that the wine was very good.

"It is of my own vintage," said he, "pressed from my own grapes. I may be forgiven, I trust, if I admit that it is most excellent wine."

The man in yellow drained the cup and the servant bore it to a kind of tank on a serving table, replenished it, and handed it to the man in crimson, who downed his with one gulp, not forgetting to give Coke a glare over the rim.

"Aaaah!" husked the man in crimson. "I could sweat better wine than that."

"What a beast!" whispered Yvette.

"Want me to chuck him out?" asked Coke, very audibly. "I c'n give him the bounce out one o' these windows with one hand. Lady, if you wanta see the barfly flop demonstrated, say the word."

Here the lady in the velvet dress interposed. In her capacity of hostess it seemed incumbent upon her to restore the harmony of the table.

"Listen," she said, laughing lightly. "I have just thought of a droll story told me by the curate today. Really, one has to laugh at it."

Then, while the female guest of uncertain age sipped her wine and the rest went on with the meal, the countess proceeded to relate the droll story. As the tale progressed, Coke felt a curious sensation in his cheeks, a sense of burning that he at first attributed to the heat given off by the many candles, but which he finally attributed to another cause.

"Jumped-up Geronimo!" thought Coke. "I'm nigh to forty years old, and I'm on my seventh hitch in this man's Army, but I never heard no yarn like that before. I betcha a month's pay I'm blushin'."

He kept his gaze bent on the table, and did not look up until hearty laughter from all announced the conclusion of the tale and the restoration of harmony to the company. Two of the waiting servants hurried to the countess. One on either side of her chair they unrolled a streamer of white linen about a foot wide, which extended under her chin.

"She's gonna shoot her lunch!" gasped Coke. "I don't blame her, I'd done it myself if I'd cracked that one."

Coke was mistaken, however. A third servant hurried over with the beaker and the countess took a pull at it that would make a mule skinner blink. Some of the wine rolled out of the side of her mouth and fell upon the streamer of linen. Evidently this had been placed under her chin for just that contingency, so that the wine would not stain her dress. The empty cup was borne away and the napkin rolled up.

"You are not eating your pheasant," said Yvette in Coke's ear.

"No, lady," said Coke, "I ain't wishful for none, thank you; I ain't got much appetite this evenin', thank you kindly."

To himself he added:

"Watchin' that guy in red poke around with them manure hooks o' his would take the appetite from a Algerian! An' I ain't had nothin' to eat but some hardtack since four A.M."

Just then, however, the wine was placed before Coke, and he cheered up immediately. He raised it to his lips and then jerked his head back.

"What kind of stuff is this?" cried Coke. "It smells like the hair restorer I used to drink when I was dog-robbin' for the captain in the old Army."

"The wine has been perfumed with rose water," said Yvette.

"Well, it takes worse than that to make me turn down a good drink," remarked Coke, and thereupon he leisurely finished the wine.

For all that wine may have been perfumed, and for all the man in red may have decried it, it was strong, powerful stuff, and its recoil was tremendous. This Coke began to observe. His pulses sang, his ears buzzed, and two burning desires began to kindle in his heart. One was to lean over the fair Yvette and implant a large and enthusiastic bite right where her neck joined her shoulder, and the other was to smite the man in crimson, the glaring Ganymede de Nevers, in the exact center of his countenance.

Said Coke to himself:

"Remember, you ain't to home. You're in sassiety now."

He gazed about the table to calm himself. The head of the household cracked a bone, licking his fingers and wiping them on the table cloth. The man in crimson had the serving dish before him and was turning the pheasant over and hunting about for a juicy portion with his forefingers, his forehead creased and his nose wrinkled like that of a dog digging at the entrance to a woodchuck's burrow. The poor relation gurgled at the wine and the countess scratched herself with the little ivory hand, now in her hair and now out of sight down her back.

Coke looked back at Yvette. Here, at least, his eyes would find something to rest themselves upon, something that was pleasant to the sight. Yvette turned her face fully to his and smiled. Across the table the man in red snarled like the dog that he was. Coke rose to his feet and kicked back his chair.

"Listen!" said he. "You birds may be Vere de Veres in this place and rank above grade seven an' all that, but I'll tell you I never eat with such a bunch o' savages in all my service, an' I come in when they was still wearin' fatigue caps. An' you—" turning squarely and facing the man in red—"I'm forty years old, but I can take your measure for a coffin any time an' anywhere. I don't like the shape o' your nose nor the way your ears flap. If I liked you a whole lot I'd pay you a compliment by callin' you a cheap scurve, but as it is, I won't flatter you. Lady, when we first met, you said something about a rodeo. Is this the *hombre* that's bothering you?"

Coke pointed to the raging Duke of Nevers, who gnashed his teeth across the table.

"It is he," said Yvette, rising.

"What's he been a-doin' of?" asked Coke, unbuttoning his blouse.

"He is my husband," said Yvette. "He bores me."

"Your husband!" gasped the supply sergeant.

"Yes, my husband," answered Yvette.

She came quite close to Coke, very close in fact, so that he was reminded of a purring cat rubbing against his leg. She turned her face to him and he saw her full countenance for the first time. Then appeared the reason for her sweet little lisp. She was minus two of her front teeth on the right side of her upper jaw. Perhaps Ganymede de Nevers had kicked them out for her.

It had been a long time since any girl had ever asked Coke, by every means save that of voice, for a kiss. A long, long time indeed, and Coke was not made of

the same fiber as Saint Anthony. He implanted an echoing salute upon Yvette's lips. There came a crash of an overturning chair, and the crimson clad Duke of Nevers leaped to his feet, drawing his sword with a swish.

"Man," said Coke, putting Yvette gently aside, "don't make no pass at me with that knittin' needle or I'll knock you right out from under your back teeth!"

Instead of withdrawing, as any gentlemen should and doing his fighting outside, the duke made a thrust across the table, which Coke evaded by stepping backward. The supply sergeant looked helplessly about. This gorgeous dining room was a poor place to tangle horns in and all these ladies would undoubtedly squeal and squawk and faint away.

He looked at the diners more closely. The man in yellow had likewise risen and was drawing his sword, the man in red was tucking up his wrist ruffles and removing his hat, the female poor relation hunted for more to eat on the platter and the countess surveyed them all with drunken gravity. As for the male poor relation, he had gone under the table, whether from fear or the effects of the dinner it was impossible to tell. Yvette had seated herself again and was languidly waving a fan.

The crimson duke thrust again, but Coke seized the blade in his hand. A quick jerk, and he had the duke off his balance and dragged half way across the table, where Coke could get a firm grip on his neck. Coke wrenched the sword from his grasp and then, seizing him with both hands, heaved the silken clad body in the air, not omitting to rap his head sharply against the edge of the table in so doing. Then he hurled the spread-eagling duke at the man in yellow, who was rushing toward him with blade advanced. They both went to the floor with a crash, and the long mirror that hung behind the head of the table, jarred from its fastenings by the shock, fell upon them mightily, and all was ruin and destruction.

The servants at first had stayed at a distance, sheltering themselves behind serving table and buffet, but while Coke was busy with the duke they emerged and began to beat the sergeant with chairs, silver platters and other handy articles. Coke swung on one, and that one was never the same man again, but the head butler had crept up behind him with the great wine tank or punch bowl or whatever it was that held the liquid part of the feast, and this he ruined beyond repair by casting it with all his force at Coke's head.

Well for the American that he was wearing a steel helmet, or he had breathed his last. As it was, he went to his knees with the force of the blow, drenched and strangling with the wine from the bowl, but fighting still. The servants leaping upon him, bearing him down, holding his hands, clinging like leeches to his flailing arms. He got a throat within the compass of this right hand and squeezed.

"Gaah!" choked the man. "Be yourself. We ain't no Boche!"

Startled, Coke released his hand grip, and the weight upon him lightened. Beneath his other hand he felt stones. They must have dragged him to the terrace. He got to his feet, reeling. Where was Yvette? Had daylight come so soon? Yes, he was on the terrace. Inside then, again, and renew the battle! He rushed for the window, but something prevented his going in. Then as his vision cleared, he drew back in horror.

There was a pit before him, a deep pit with sloping sides, filled with half-covered heaps of blackened masonry, overgrown with bushes and great fat weeds that bent and writhed in the wind, that dripped soddenly and leaned their heads wearily before the sheets of rain. Trees, a ruined wall, the sockets of empty windows, and the barren countryside, gray in the light of a cold dawn. Coke turned about, croaking—"Yvette." A man held him by the arm, and another had him around the waist.

"Be yourself, now," said the man who held him by the arm. "You're awake. It's all right. Sober up now!"

COKE wiped his eyes with a trembling hand. The men released him and he shook his head to drive the water from his eyes. Beyond the terrace were three horses, and a third man held the bridles. The men were soldiers of the American Army, belted and slickered, with rifles under their arms and upon their sleeves a brassard with the letters M. P.

"Where's your outfit, Sergeant?" said one of them. "This ain't no place for you to be."

The M. P. was more respectful than he usually was when finding a straggler, but Coke wore upon the breast of his blouse the ribbons of the Cuban Campaign, the Philippine Insurrection, China Relief, Cuban Pacification, and the Mexican Interior, 1916. Coke looked wildly at the military police, at the terrace where his open blankets formed a resting place for a small lake, his shelter half, as wet as if it had been at the bottom of the sea, then at himself, soaked to the skin, every fold and wrinkle in his uniform dripping.

"Drizzling Decimus and jumped-up Geronimo," moaned Coke. "What a beatin' I got!"

He hobbled a step or two and stretched his arms with every indication of stiffness and pain.

"Beatin' where?" asked the police.

Thereupon Coke related to them the tale of the fair Yvette, and every so often he would turn instinctively to that gap in the wall that had been a window, to point out to the men the places in that weedgrown ruin where this one or that one had sat, or where the wine reservoir had been, or where the mirror had fallen upon the duke and his father-in-law.

"You can believe it or not," concluded Coke, "but I'm tellin' you straight."

When the tale was done, the M.P.'s looked at each other. One stretched out his toe and there was a tiny clink. An empty cognac bottle rolled across the terrace.

"It's bad stuff, that coneyac," said the other policeman. "It drives a guy crazy."

"Now listen, you guys!" said Coke. "I'm tellin' you straight, an' I can prove it. You know that Yvette girl that I was so chummy with? Well, she was lousy. I seen 'em when I was lookin' at the things she had built in her hair, and I seen 'em again when I was kissin' her."

He removed his tin hat and swept his hand over his head.

"There," said he, extending his open palm to the police, "don't that prove it? Look 'em over."

BEACHCOMBER

By Norman Springer

MY CLOTHES, save those I stood in, were bound for the West Coast on board the bark I had run from. I had no money and a growing appetite. In short, I was "on the beach" in a strange port.

But—save your tears. The port happened to be Sydney, New South Wales, and that town was (and still is, unless the climate and the character of the inhabitants have radically altered) the beachcombers' paradise.

I discovered that pleasant fact before I had time to get really hungry. In front of the shipping office I met a wall-eyed Swede who had been in my first ship. Otto hailed me as an old friend and shipmate, and my beachcomber's fortune was made.

Otto knew the ropes and taught them to me. He was a member of the exclusive Miller's Point crowd and he took me over there to a grassy plot of ground behind a warehouse where fires burned on the ground, and a grand mulligan stew was

the daily event. But first he took me to the alley entrance of a Pitt Street market and begged from a sympathetic Italian two bunches of carrots and several onions. These were to be my contribution to the communal feast; his contribution, he told me, was already in.

That was the only rule of the Miller's Point Club, I discovered. To eat from the general store one must contribute to the general store—cooks, of course, excepted. The cooks were permanent residents on the beach. One of them, the chief cook and the boss of the crowd insofar as that anarchistic assembly would submit to being bossed, was "Santos" Paddy, a South American Irishman who talked with a Spanish accent. He had then been seven years on Sydney beach, and had no thought of leaving that easy land for the hard, cruel sea. Otto had been five months ashore and he was considered a mere transient. Though indeed most of the crowd were transients, good sailormen stranded ashore between ships and making a very good best of the disaster.

"Ve go make oop our beds," said Otto after dinner.

He took me to a newspaper office. Not to be interviewed. No. We went down an alleyway to an open window and, without a word being passed, a man handed each of us a large bundle of old newspapers. Once a week, Otto told me, this newspaper gave away its unsold copies. Other newspapers were also thus liberal. A bum could sleep between clean sheets every night if he wanted to go to the trouble of collecting them. Otto and I were lazy and not fussy; a clean bed every Tuesday sufficed us.

We made "oop" our beds in the Domain, for generations past a famous roosting place for homeless men. It is a beautiful park, containing public buildings and, more important, countless sheltered nooks and gullies where a tired man may sleep undisturbed. No millionaire in town had a lovelier bedroom.

Nor had he a warmer bed. Otto, who had skill with the palm and needle he carried in his coat, sewed out bundles of newspapers into two sleeping bags, each about eight feet long and of many sheets' thickness. One's coat and shoes made the pillow. Of course, one had to ooze into this bed very carefully, and ooze out the same way; but inside it one was warm and comfortable so long as it didn't rain. Mere wind couldn't penetrate it.

With the dawn we were afoot. That was the only drawback about our hotel; one had to be up so early. Beds tightly rolled up and hid away in a convenient tree, we adventured into the city. First to the shipping office to wash up at the yard spigot where the kind authorities thoughtfully provided free soap; then about the business of breakfast.

We had to rustle our breakfasts and suppers, for the feast on Miller's Point was a midday affair. But it was little trouble. We could walk aboard any ship moored alongside and "visit" in the forecastle. We were assured of coffee or tea, and "burgoo" or hash, and if we were lucky enough to crash the gangway of a mailboat, even ham and eggs and fresh roasts were not beyond our reach.

It was a soft, easy life. I grew fat; Otto was already sprawling out of his clothes when I met him. But sailors are never content. One day Otto got restless, and made a pierhead jump into a big full-rigger bound around the Horn for Europe. Then I was lonely, and a couple of days later shipped out on a tramp bound for Manila. Three weeks had I rested on that hospitable beach; I know I could have stayed there three years, had I wished, and never missed a meal.

Concerning A Musician

who handled his sword as vigorously as his fiddle bow

TO MY just and merciful particular good lord, my Lord Duke of Rometia; from Luigi Caradosso, formerly captain of the guard, these:

Sire—

I thank your Grace for the ointment sent by the hand of Pietro, the son of Jacopo the apothecary. It did my rheumatism no good, but hath proved marvelous against a stiffness in the hinges of my house door. I think that perchance the snakes' backbones ground up in it came from green vipers instead of from brown; or that the butter and honey were not fresh.

With profound respect, I would fain know whether it is true that your Highness caused the Court fiddler to be whipped for flatting a note in a piece of music written by your Grace. If so, it was ill done.

Kissing your Lordship's hands,

—L. CARADOSSO

TO the same:

Sire—

Your Lordship's fulmination hath happily found me in a state of loving-kindness such as I have not known since the vintage of 1547. We had the gravest doubts as to last year's crop; which maketh its success all the sweeter.

I will therefore speak comfortably to your Highness, pointing out that if indeed I have presumed on the privilege of an old servant in saying it was ill done to flog the musician, there are yet excuses for me. All I have gained by fifty years' armed service of your Lordship's family is seventeen wounds, a pension, a house and the freedom to speak my mind. Of these benefices, the wounds ache, the pension is beggarly and the house roof leaks.

That my freedom may remain unimpaired, I move this day to Costecaldo, out of your Highness' boundaries.

With respect,

—L. CARADOSSO

TO the same:

Sire—

The generosity of your Highness overwhelms me. I am sorry I struck the nose-end off the young man, but he had an impediment in his speech which prevented the immediate making clear of his errand; and habit is strong.

There was no need for the quadrupling of the pension—doubling would have been enow. As for the new house, it is overlarge for a lone old man, though I thank your Highness gratefully.

As your Lordship surmises, I had

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE by F. R. BUCKLEY

Author of "The Way of Sinners"

indeed reason, of past experience, for what I said about the whipped violinist; but I have my bed to make, and dinner to cook, and four great rooms to dust with no help, and there is no time for writing tales.

With gratitude and prayers to all the saints for your Lordship's long and fruitful continuance,

—L. CARADOSSO

TO the same:
Sire—

The girl arrived yest'reen, and hath already shown a pretty hand at mulling wine. Though I protest I wrote without idea of robbing the palace still-room of such an ornament. The affair of the other fiddler happened in the days of your Grace's father (whom God assoil). I remember it particularly for the wine that was then current in the palace; a great vintage for the clearing of the brain and the steadying of the writing-hand.

In the trust that health and prosperity will flow unceasingly upon the duchy,

—L. CARADOSSO

TO the same:
Sire—

This word "plunder" is strange, used against an old man about to cramp his fingers for your Grace's entertainment.

I do not understand the term, as applied to me; even the wine (for which I thank your Highness) doth not make the matter more clear.

However, in the name of God:

At that time (when your Grace had not as yet added to the felicity of the world by being born) I was captain-probationer of the guard; he under whom I had served as lieutenant being dead of a plethora. This was a disease much commoner then than in these days of prudence and dietaries. Men ate what they liked, drank what they chose and loved whom they listed; so that they lived a merry life and died suddenly. All this has been changed by the counsel of the learned doctors of medicine. Men live nowadays like friars on a perpetual Friday and pass from this earth organ by organ, as it were. I have oft noted it as a strange phenomenon that those whose lives have left least sins on their consciences have the most time for deathbed repentance.

To return: There was no lingering, I say; no dawdling on the path to eternity, either with Gian Nero, my commander, or with Filippo Porpora, who was court fiddler on my coming to the castle. Filippo's end came by a congestion of the lungs; he was fat, he had a cross-eye, and

it carried him off in two days. Well do I remember him, on the evening that he caught the malady, sitting on his low stool before your father's chair after dinner; rather more than three-quarters drunk; a flask of chianti on the floor at his side; fiddling away in a high perspiration with his loose eye swiveling about as if to ask whether its owner were not a fine fellow. So he was, at least in the estimation of some; for it was in rushing forth, still heated, to meet a kitchen maid on the battlements, that he contracted his fatal chill. He was buried behind the servants' quarters where he had lived, with a bit of music cut on his gravestone.

So the duke who, according to the ancient tradition, occupied himself with the gauds of life, leaving the essentials to others—the duke, I say, went in search of another fiddler, found one in Siena, brought him to the castle and gave him Porpora's old room, with its accompanying seat among the lackeys at table. This was all I knew about the young man—and more than I cared, my mind being full of certain matters which shall shortly appear—until one evening, when he was playing before some half-dozen nobilities after dinner, he dropped his violin to one side, his bow to another, and himself in the middle, and lay on the stone floor unconscious; so that we had to take him away to the guard-room.

" 'A's not drunk," says my lieutenant, in some surprise. "Is't a fit?"

Certes the young man did not smell of wine; but on the other hand, his face was not contracted, nor his legs drawn up. He lay on the table quite still and calm, almost as pale as a dead man, and with heart beating scarcely more. Further, he was woundy cold—hands, feet and face; reminded me mostly of those peasants we used to pick up on the roads when the crops had failed. Wherefore—though evidently this one could not be starving in the midst of such plenty as we then enjoyed—I did what we used to do with any peasants that were pretty enough; held him up to one side of the fire, that is, while a sergeant boiled a pot of wine on the other. Also, I raised his eyelid and put my thumb on his pupil; under which treatment he revived, and sat for some time speechless, head in hands and trembling all over. My lieutenant had gone, in the meantime, taking the wallguard and the escorts for the gentlefolk; so that we were alone.

" 'Twas a nasty fall," says I, as he raised one hand to a graze on his forehead. "A—"

He leaped up like a madman.

"My violin!" he cried; and fell atop of me. I picked him up and restored him to his chair.

"Plenty more in the castle," I said soothingly. "For the moment, let us abandon wood and catgut and talk about men. What ails thee? Hast thou a sickness?"

He looked at me with a pair of great black eyes, and twisted his hands together—long, thin hands they were, whose whiteness gave me a great contempt for him; but he said nothing.

"Drink that wine," I said, nodding at the pot.

He made no motion to obey, and a soldier had just come in. So, in the interests of discipline, I caught the boy by the back locks of his hair, twisted his head back and so poured the liquor into his mouth that he must either swallow or drown.

He swallowed.

"Well?" says I to the soldier.

"Under favor, Captain, the Red—my Lord Count Piero di Favetta is to spend the night here."

"Then his escort is to be dismissed and added to the wallguard."

"*Subito, Capitano!*"

SO HE went, leaving me in a state of near frenzy, which will doubtless excite curiosity, considering the ordinary nature of the tidings brought. This curiosity I fear your Grace must control—just as I had to control my desire to be off alone and think—until such time as we are done with the young musician; done with him for the moment, that is to

say, for we are not to get rid of him until the end of this narrative.

While yet I stood staring, then, the lad grabbed a cake off the table (where stood, according to custom, a plate of food for officers coming off guard sharp-set) and bit into it like a hungry wolf. That nothing might be lacking of his symptoms, he then threw the aforesaid cake away in disgust; and thirdly, was piteously ill. Yea, by the Holy Nails, he was in the last stages of hunger, and that was why he had fainted in the great hall!

The strangeness of such a case even took my mind off the Red Count—for the instant.

"When didst thou eat last?" I demanded of the young man, as soon as he was able to speak.

The wine had sent a Parthian shot, meseemed. He laughed feebly and said that, save for a manchet of bread he had begged from a field laborer two days agone, he had had nothing since he came to the castle—nearly ten days. And what was his reason therefore, if your Lordship please? That he had been assigned a seat among such as groomed horses, and placed under the authority of the servants' butler!

"But—but—" says I, dumbfounded—"we be all servants here, except his Grace the Duke. What madness is this?"

"Thou'rt not a servant," says the young man, raising himself and glaring at me, "thou'rt a soldier, and treated as such."

"But thyself, now—" says I.

"I am an artist," says he proudly, "and it is harder to draw tears than to draw blood."

I sat there and blinked at him in the firelight; and he held himself up on his elbow and stared at me right fiercely.

"The truth is," he went on, "that thou art well treated, and I badly, because the duke can have plenty of fiddlers, but only one throat; which he fears thou might cut if slighted."

"Hush, 'a God's name!" I gasped, getting up and closing the guard-room door.

At the same instant, up leaped this strange young man and started to tear his hair.

"Ha-ha," he cries, "the soldier afraid! O mud-begotten humanity! O miserable world!"

"I have seen men dance on nothing for the half of what disrespect thou hast already shown," says I, not liking this second reflection on my trade.

"What's that to me?" demands the young man scornfully. "And still less, what should it be to thee? Art thou not human, with a brain and opinions? What are such for, save to be expressed? If the duke hang for them, what is that to thee?"

Meseemed, as perchance it hath by now appeared to your Highness that, wine and starvation aside, here was a strange young man; and though at that time I was barely in my fiftieth year, already had I learned the wisdom of letting pass no straying away from the usual, without searching inquiry upon the stray. Moreover, at this point in came our servant to lay the table for the supper of the outgoing guard; so that for one reason and another, I took the fiddler by the arm and led him forth to the battlements for a further chat. His name, it appeared, was Giuseppe Alberelli; he came from Pisa, and had twenty-four years of age. He took my breath by saying that in the Sienese court his appointments had been fifty sealed florins.

"In the name of God!" says I. "What are they here, then?"

"Thirty."

That was better. I myself had only thirty-five.

"But why, then," I demanded, "wert thou willing to come here for less pay?"

"The Duchess of Siena beats time with a splay foot," says Giuseppe, after a hesitation.

"And I dare swear thou'lt leave here for fifteen crowns, so thou'rt not required to eat with thine equals?"

"I have no equals," says the young man gravely, and, incredible though it may sound, quite without conceit. "As for leaving this place, I would certes have

gone long since; but that—but that—but that the duke hath a writing with me, whereby I may be thrown into prison if I leave him before a year."

"If thou hast such a contempt for hanging," I began, "surely—"

"The chains would ruin my wrist," says Giuseppe simply. "Can we sit here awhile, Captain? I am weak."

So we rested in a gun embrasure; and while thus resting we talked—in low tones—for that the said embrasure was nearby the chamber window of your Highness' aunt, the Contessa Fiametta, whom God receive into His everlasting mercy, amen! She had recently come to the castle so that she might appear in state before the husband proposed for her—Michele della Tramoia, a lord who owned what is now the northern quarter of your Grace's duchy; she had been lodged in the second *piano* of the north-eastern tower, and there was tan-bark on the sentry walk lest the clank of the patrol disturb her maiden slumbers.

But for the stink of this stuff, certes I should have spoken loud, so did my young companion astony me. It had never struck my mind—as, from the report of yon whipping, sure it hath never struck your Highness'—that there are other adventurers in this world beside soldiers and sailors and merchant-captains and the like. At least these go in search of fortune armed to the teeth, and with the world's commission to slay her human sentinels; but what shall one say of him who goes out to face the world with nothing more deadly than a fiddler's bow, a paint-brush or a quill-pen?

Such was the case of this Giuseppe, mark you; and moreover, that spirit which had driven him forth on such a mad emprise likewise forbade that he should advantage himself by statecraft or diplomacy, the refuge of the weak in other walks of life. Nay, it was quick to be seen that he thought himself the very reverse of weak; and that all his pity was for the poor wretched stupid world around him; because, though it could hang him out of any window that took its fancy, it could not bring tears to the eyes by playing of the fiddle!

"Of a surety," says I, when these ideas of his were clear in my mind, "thy place is not among 'ostlers. Art thou hungry now?"

He licked his lips and said that he was.

"So am I. For tonight, then, be my guest in the guard-room—that is, if thou canst tolerate foul language and much laughter lamentably off the key; and to-morrow I will see what may be done for thee."

He arose, leaning on my arm as a dizziness took him.

"I was most happy in my life," says he, "when, fleeing from Genoa, I lived for three weeks on a *tartane* with sailors."

"Fleeing from Genoa?"

"I threw soup over the chamberlain," says Giuseppe.

Whereupon I determined that he should be a permanent sitter at our mess. As I have oft told your Grace, after occasions of high ceremony, it is the ambition of every soldier to throw soup—at least soup—over every chamberlain; yet of all my armed acquaintance, at that time, I knew of none that had carried the ambition into effect.

"Come, friend," says I to the amazing youth, "and we will eat together. Now. Forthwith."

BUT it was not to be so.

At this moment there was a swishing sound in the air; a rope-ladder of silk fell from the Countess Fiametta's window; and, as we crouched in our embrasure and as the horn blew for the guard relief, there appeared from a shadow further along the battlements, and climbed the said ladder, none other than the Red Count Piero di Favetta. Behind him came, to take post at the foot of the tower, his deaf mute servant Pandolfo, a drawn sword in his hand.

Now this, as your Highness may discover by reading the records of the time, was a pretty state of things, both for the persons involved and for the duchy; and I beg your Grace to believe that though I

was by accident involved personally, 'twas of the duchy I thought as we crouched there in the shadow and watched Pandolfo peering from side to side. The duchy (since I had my sword and a wall to put my back against) was, for one thing, in greater danger than was I; it had neither sword nor wall.

In plain words, our last little war, whereby we had acquired the county of Fioramonte, had been mighty ill advised and mightily ill managed by my late Captain. We should not, at that time, have undertaken any conquests at all; or, having undertaken them, we should have managed to carry them through with the loss of less than three-quarters of our armed strength.

As it was, your Highness' father found himself newly placed cheek by jowl with ferocious neighbors—my Lord of Costecaldo for one—and without troops enow to defend his old frontiers, let alone those he had just acquired. It had been a busy six months for my spies, and a busier still for the duke's officers of state; ending peaceably (I had thought) in the decision to wed the Countess Fiametta to Michele della Tramoia. He had small lands, a large army and an unlimited credit with the Florentine bankers; moreover, placed as he was on the map, and niched as he was to be in the genealogy, he would secure both the flanks of our new acquisitions.

I trust your Highness doth not find me tedious; I must explain these matters ere it can be seen why my heart palpitated between my teeth at the spectacle of the Red Count on a rope-ladder hung from the countess' window. Let it be remembered that the Conte della Tramoia was likewise a guest in the castle; and that in those days she was not considered a desirable bride who received men in her apartments by night.

Moreover, it must be observed that the openness of this attempt meant that corruption was rife in my guard; Pandolfo, certes, would never dare slaughter a sentinel, besides, the patrols were doubled, so that in the event of discovery he would have had to kill two men. Nay, he was posted merely for the silencing of any passerby; the sentries had been bribed.

The sweat started out on me; my knees shook; and at that moment, to my great surprise, I saw the Red Count descending the ladder he had climbed three minutes before. He seemed to be muttering under his breath what time he lowered his bulk from one step to another; which muttering, when he was on the ground level, I found to consist of most fearful and terrible oaths, some of which even I had never heard before. There were also allusions to the Countess Fiametta, and to a maid of hers; altogether, his lordship seemed to be in the vilest of tempers.

He gave the silken ladder a tug which tore it loose from what fastenings it had had above, flung it helter-skelter over Pandolfo, adjuring him to wrap it about his middle quickly, and then knocked the poor wight down for failing to hear the order. I surveyed this with some interest; first, because I rejoiced to see Pandolfo receiving what the laws of hospitality had forbidden me to give the brute myself; and second, because I wondered what circumstance could have so deranged my scarlet lordship as to make him take away a ladder which he had not brought.

I was soon to learn—within the next minute, I should think. For scarce had Pandolfo picked himself up, and so arranged the meshes of ladder that he could run when ordered, than there was a clash of presented arms at a far end of the battlements, and I heard the voices of sentries saying one after the other at short intervals—

"Pass, your Ladyship."

She had not, then, been in the tower at all when Piero di Favetta had paid his visit. My heart leaped with delight; and then chilled with apprehension as I perceived Piero bite his lip and stare broodingly toward the direction from which the voices had come. He was a determined and dangerous man, your Grace, as shall later appear; and when of a sudden he snarled an order to Pandolfo to

be gone, instinctively my hand closed on my dagger. It tightened on the hilt when, as if carelessly, the Red Count strolled over and took seat on the battlement not a yard from Giuseppe and myself. He yawned and dangled his legs; and then, between his teeth, began to whistle the aria Giuseppe had played just before his faint.

"Pass, and God bless your Ladyship!" said the last sentry before the tower; and then, by the click of high-heeled shoes on the stones, I knew that the countess was in sight of Piero. I knew she would not be alone; but with nerves on edge, how eagerly did I listen for the shuffle of the slippers of her maid! It was there; and likewise, to my joy, there was the tread of an attendant man-at-arms—a house sentry, judging by the way his clank was muffled by felt overboots.

"Good evening, madame," says Piero, getting off the wall; and then to the man-at-arms, "Dismissed!"

What right had he to dismiss a man sent by the duke? Apparently, the right which bribery gives; for the man saluted without further question, turned and disappeared along the battlements. Peering forth, at imminent peril, to see what rogue I should have to deal with on the morrow, I now perceived the countess, backed up against the tower wall in the moonlight, staring at Piero with much the expression of one unexpectedly confronted with the devil.

"Doth that wench speak aught but Italian?" demanded the Red Count in the French language—luckily known to me by force of several campaigns.

The countess shook her head.

"Then attend," says Piero di Favetta. "Where hast thou been, and what doing?"

He said it in the tone of one who remarks on the beauty of the night, and ended the question with a careless laugh.

"Answer!" he said a moment later, and there was steel in his tone. Yet even so, and because of her very terror, the countess could not obey him for some seconds.

"I—have been—with my brother," she stammered at last.

"And the wedding with Tramoia?' asked Piero tensely.

"It—is—arranged."

The Red Count let forth his breath slowly.

"It is well," says he. "Very well. How long hence?"

"A month."

"Ah!"

There he stood, considering the wretched woman before him—she had her hands clasped on her bosom, and her shoulders bowed in dumb supplication—with much the merciful aspect of a viper regarding a sparrow.

"Dost thou stay here until then?" demanded Piero.

"N—nay. It is intended that I enter Rometia from my own lands, in state. I—"

"When goest thou, then, to Fioramonte?"

"In three days. O Piero, be merciful! Be merciful! What I may do for thee, I will. This marriage is no will of mine; it is an affair of state, as thou knowest—"

"Enow. It is decided?"

"O Piero—"

Whereat the Red Count turned his back upon the countess and without another word walked away. For an instant I thought that this proud lady was about to follow him, weeping and imploring like a soldier's sweetheart on the departure of a garrison; but she restrained herself—her maid likewise caught the flounces of the countess' dress—and, staggering, entered the doorway of her tower. I assure your Grace that my hair stood straight up on my head; for at that time I was not firm in my present conviction that the nobility is composed of human beings; your Highness always excepted.

'A nice coil!" I found myself muttering as the door closed. "A pretty affair! O merciful God of Israel, what to do?"

BECAUSE, if your Highness will deign to observe the facts, I was left to confront this strange turn of events, alone. *Imprimis*, the Red Count, as my spies had reported, was in close though

secret league with my Lord of Costecaldo, the most likely aggressor against Rometia.

I had reported nothing of this because there was lacking enough proof entirely to convince secretaries of state. *Secundo*, it was evident that the Countess Fiametta, upon whom we relied to marry sufficient force to keep our frontiers, was in love with the said Red Count; and *tertio*, it sprang to the eye that Piero di Favetta was of intent to use her infatuation for the breaking of the said marriage—had not Fiametta been delayed by the duke that very evening, Piero would by chance have been found in her apartments; the plot was transparent enough. Fourthly, and to complete the horror of the situation, there was no help I could call to mine aid.

I knew the duke—hasty, hot-blooded, imperious and proud with the furious pride of those days; at a word of this evening's work, he would have clapped Piero in a dungeon, or ordered him to the gallows, thereby opening a scandal that would both break off the marriage and loose the troops of Costecaldo upon us forthwith, in the name of rescue. And I had learned, by the behavior of the sentries that evening, my guard was not to be trusted; which meant that the army was still less so.

The Red Count was playing a dangerous game, and playing it well. Doubtless it was in the interregnum while my captain lay ill, and I had not yet assumed command, that he had been busy with the corruption of the soldiery.

Rising suddenly in the perplexity of my mind, I felt a drag on my arm, and for the first time in some minutes remembered my companion. I shook him off, but he renewed his grip, and indeed grasped my other arm, swinging me about to face himself. I noticed with some surprise that he was powerfully excited; actually, his thin fingers were biting through my leather sleeves and hurting my arm muscles.

"Well?" says he. "Well, Captain? How now?"

Certes, the fellow had been a witness of what had passed; I thought this a good time at which to warn him. Yet did he not figure largely in my conspectus of the matter—his mien was not that of one having comprehension of political affairs.

"There is but one thing I have to say to thee," I therefore told him, "and that is, keep a close mouth and save thyself a cut throat. No need of more. Go to thy quarters and lay what thou hast seen to much wine on an empty stomach."

"But what's to be done? Art thou to sit back—"

"What's that to thee?"

"Captain—"

He was beginning to speak loudly, so I shook off his grasp and pointed in the direction of his quarters.

"Enough of this! Interfere not in matters too high for thee. Be off; play thy fiddle and—forget."

That he might have something on which to meditate during the night watches, I made the gesture of one who cuts a throat, and turned away from him; my purpose being to lock myself in my own rooms and think of this most fearful complication.

I had made perhaps half a dozen steps, and had already reflected that the army of Costecaldo numbered fifteen hundred horse, when my elbow was grasped again, and Giuseppe once more appeared before me.

"Listen, Captain," says he breathlessly, "I am not to be left thus. I have lied to thee. It was not because the duchess beat time that I left Siena."

I cursed him in set terms, and told him how little it mattered to me whether he lied or not. With a losing campaign of eighteen months staring me in the face, imagine my concern over his conscience!

"But thou dost not understand!" he cried. "It was because of the Countess Fiametta that I came hither! I saw her at a ducal ball and—and—"

Here was a jest sufficient to take my mind even off approaching destruction.

A fiddler in love with a countess!

"Thou art indeed mad," says I. "Begone. And beware of idle chatter concerning this. The duke'd have thee out of a window with a rope around thy neck in next to no time."

At this the wretched youth (as I then thought him) began (as I then thought) to rave. It appeared from his ravings that he had no need to declare his passion for Fiametta to herself or to any one else; that the fact of her existence (provided he could see her) was sufficient to satisfy him; that his sole ambition in the world was to serve her, preferably without her knowledge; and finally, that she had something mysterious to do with a piece of music which Giuseppe was then composing.

"She is in danger!" gasps the unfortunate young man, what time I pulled my beard and wondered whether to put him in restraint. "I am not mad, Captain! Only promise that if there is aught for me to do—if I can aid in her protection—"

One can but try humoring a maniac; so I said—

"Aye, aye."

"Swear it," says Giuseppe, "by the Saints."

"Go to bed," says I.

"If thou dost not promise me this," says Giuseppe, "I'll go now and hammer on the duke's door and tell him what I have seen. Aye, pull out thy dagger. It may be in thee to stab me thus; that's no concern of mine. Promise or stab—all one to me."

He was hungry, I thought, and drunk; besides, the finding of his body would have raised question. He would be more reasonable in the morning; and so I promised.

"And the first aid thou canst give me," says I, noting with relief that his excitement had calmed itself, "is in utter silence. Dost thou understand?"

"Aye."

"Then good night."

He stared me long in the eyes, as if to remind me, without words, of the absurd oath I had taken.

"Good night, Captain," he said at last.

II

THE RED COUNT left next day, my lieutenant commanding his escort for that I felt a disinclination to leave the castle at that time. I pleaded, therefore, a return of an ague, and in my bed (the doctor's medicine well and truly thrown into the moat) I bethought myself concerning this and that; essaying more particularly to divine what might be Piero's next move. I will not trouble your Highness with the result of my reflections, because this is not a story of intrigue, but an account of the proceedings of one Giuseppe, a violinist; who came to my quarters that afternoon with a face like a ghost's.

"Is it true that thou'rt ill?" he demanded.

I was not in need of his chatter, so that I answered that it was; whereupon his face set into a most strange expression for one that made his living scraping catgut and horsehair together.

"So!" says he, and his eyes, which glittered peculiarly, began to roam hither and yon about my sleeping chamber. Naturally, there were swords and daggers not a few lying on various tables, and a pistolet in hooks on the wall. He walked over to the pistolet, examined it, and then began to play with a Florentine poniard. He shaped a very pretty hand at it, too, putting his thumb on the blade and striking upward as to the manner born.

"How now?" I asked.

He turned to me, and I saw that his lips, of ordinary full and red, were compressed to a thin line which showed blue against the pallor of his face.

"If thou'rt unable to move," says Giuseppe, "needs must that some one protect the countess."

"Well?" says I; and on that word, my lieutenant in the courtyard below yelled the word for the escort to mount. Also, there arose from the folk whose morning work brought them into the courtyard, various feeble cheers for the Red Count, who was evidently about to mount. And at this moment, furthermore, Giuseppe

the fiddler, still grasping his dagger, made two or three hasty steps toward the door. May it be believed that he was going forth then and there to cut the political coil surrounding us by murdering the Red Count in cold blood! Angels and ministers of grace defend us! Holy saints in glory, look down upon an extraordinary world!

Of course I bounded out of bed, carrying blankets and all with me, and wrapped myself and them most utterly about the young man, bringing him to the flags with a crushing thud. Even so, I was astonished at his desperation. May it be believed furthermore that he first tried to stab me; and then, being relieved of his weapon, drove his thumbs at my eyes as if he had been floor-fighting since birth! Virgin Queen of Heaven! I was so astonished at him that it was some seconds ere I could hammer his head sufficiently on the floor. And when he lay still at last, I found myself regarding the young lunatic with admiration.

As your Grace is aware, I am by taste, as well as by profession, a soldier; with a soldier's natural taste for resolving difficulties by the short way of steel, rather than the long road of parchments and poison bottles. And, being then less broke to courtly harness than later I became; with the fire of comparative youth, to boot, burning in my veins, I was more sympathetic with the ideas of my victim than I should have been had they been propounded to me say fifteen years later.

Also, I was more amazed at the soldierly reaction of this most unsoldierly young man; being then ignorant of the fact which I have now the honor to place before your Highness, and which I will here state without further delay; namely: that the twist of brain which maketh a man espouse the profession of arms and that which causeth another to despise his father's wine business and become a fiddler, are one and the same twist of brain. Only, the fiddler (and I mean likewise the poet, and the singer, and sometimes the goldsmith) can not be commanded. He must be his own general, all his own under-officers and his own army; I am sorry for him.

What time I stood staring at Giuseppe, as yet without any idea of what I have just stated, my lieutenant entered, sweating in his ceremonial attire.

"Another faint?" he asked. "Are we a hospital, then?"

I did not like his tone, so made no reply. Whereupon he saluted, and remembered he was my subordinate.

"The duke hath commanded another escort—for the Countess Fiametta," says he, "either for tonight or tomorrow early. Am I to stay the night as usual at Favetta?"

"Nay. Return at once."

"It will be an all night march, and the horses will be exhausted," says he.

"No matter. The castle can not be left unguarded nor unofficered, either."

"These are peaceful times," says the lieutenant, glancing to see how I took this, in such manner that I perceived he was not free from the corruption of the guard. My heart sank. I was indeed alone in this conspiracy!

"Another question will cause the outbreak of war betwixt me and thee," I told him. "Dismissed! Begone! And return before midnight, mark me. I shall not march until thou art here again."

He saluted and retired. And scarcely had the clatter of the departing escort ceased—I was down on my knees with a dipperful of cold water, trying to revive young Giuseppe—than there was another knock on my door; replying to the which I found myself confronted by that same maid who had been with the Countess Fiametta on the previous night.

SHE BOLTED into the room as if the devil were after her, slammed the door and stood with her back to it, staring wildly at me with a pair of great black eyes.

"Captain! Captain!" she gasped.

"What is't?" I asked. I will confess to your Grace that she was not the first woman that had come to my door and said, "Captain! Captain!" But her tone in so

saying was so novel as to make me forget Giuseppe, drop the water-dipper and pay her serious attention. Whereupon she gave a small shriek, left the doorway, forgot me and knelt by the young musician.

"Is he dead?" she wailed aloud. "O Mary—"

Things were becoming a trifle too complicated for my taste; so, observing that Giuseppe had answered her question by moving his eyelids, I caught the girl firmly by the shoulder and pulled her to her feet.

"Let us mind one thing at a time, my chicken," says I sternly, "remembering that yon young man on the floor is my affair. What's to do?"

Her eyes still wandering to Giuseppe, she seemed in two minds whether to tell me or not after all, stood there twisting her hands together until I reminded her of my presence by a slight twist of the wrist.

"Speak, then," says I. "Either speak or begone. This is not a parlor for assignations."

"I know not whether—"

"I'll know it for thee. Speak, wench!"

She hesitated; and finally, to my surprise, stammered forth an account of that interview between the Red Count and Fiametta, which I had already witnessed.

"But," says I, "what dost thou know of this? Did they not speak in French?"

"My father and mother were French," says the girl. "Piero di Favetta had them hanged for not paying their taxes."

"Well?" says I.

"Look you," says the maid, now quite forgetful both of her scruples and of young Giuseppe, who was sitting up with his head in his hands, "I love the Countess Fiametta. Her life with that brute would be a hell, even if he wed her, which he will not do. He—"

"That I believe, seeing that she is to wed—"

The girl laughed scornfully.

"Ah, clever Master Captain! Aye, I have watched thine airs in office. Art thou then aware that this very morning 'twas arranged that as soon as the countess shall be at Fioramonte, the Red Count is to come and carry her off as it were by force of arms?"

My hair stood up on end.

"With—with her consent?"

Giuseppe got up and staggered over to us. Save for a side glance, however, the maid paid no attention. There was stuff in that girl.

"Aye. Look you, Captain. I was with the countess at Siena, six months agone, when first Piero di Favetta began his gallantries—in French always—the snake, the—"

"Aye, aye. Go on."

"What was my poor dove to do against him, that hath seduced half the women in Italy? I pretended an ignorance of what he said and waited my time. It hath come! This very morning I went to the duke, but he would not see me. Nor would his secretary—"

"It was as well," says I, thanking God for court etiquette; the first and only time I have done so in a long life. "There'd have been a burned hole in my tongue by this time, young woman, be thy news true or false."

Her eyes flickered to Giuseppe for an instant, but she was steadfast.

"There'd have been a cut throat or a stretched neck for Piero di Favetta," she said slowly, "and my mistress would have been safe. What else matters to me?"

Such a little thing as the duchy, which would have been overrun with armies the day after Piero's violent death; my own violent death, which I should certes have met, going forth at the head of our insufficient troops . . .

I sank into a chair.

"Wench—" I said feebly; the situation was rather much for me. 'Twas ill enough, as a task, to be charged with the protection of the Countess Fiametta on my own responsibility. Already I had seen that it might involve armed assault on a friendly noble, without orders from my master the duke. This was a hanging matter, but I had planned to avoid the rope as certainly as might be. Judge of my dismay at finding the lady I was to protect aligned with mine enemies!

In that black moment I saw Fiametta ruined, the Tramoia alliance turned into bitter enmity, the Duchy of Rometia a stricken field and myself a bundle of rags still spinning slowly at the window of the north turret. I was to command the escort of the countess; of a surety, she would now order us to return forthwith, once she had reached her castle; and when the news of her abduction came, of an equal surety would the duke wreak his fury on me, for not having stayed and defended her. Whereas to stay, in defiance of the countess' orders, would mean dismissal, if no worse. I sweated a little.

"Well?" said the maid and Giuseppe in chorus; the young man continuing solo, "Sit not there despairing! Arise, man, and let us concert a plan of action!"

In less grave conditions, I could have laughed at him, or returned to my pastime of hammering his coxcomb against the floor; but now I was past these amusements. I arose, almost ignoring his impudence, and laid a hand on the shoulder of each of my advisors.

"Hearken, my children," says I. "This affair is more serious than ye esteem it."

Both started to protest that naught could be grimmer than folly on the part of their adored Fiametta. The maid began to pour forth some account of how Piero roasted peasants at his garden parties; soaked 'em in oil, it seemed, and used them for lighting the grounds—a quaint conceit, but one that tickled me not at the moment.

"It is, at all events," says I, "no business for handling by the unskilful. I myself will deal with it."

The girl seemed somewhat comforted at this; but Giuseppe stared at me with despair undiminished. Possibly your Highness may have remarked that while any woman is grateful to relinquish the fate of any other woman into the hands of the first man that passes, no man, however weak, is willing to admit the fitness of any other man but himself, when it comes to the squiring of dames.

"For the present, there is but one thing I would tell ye," says I, "and 'tis this: That if one word of this matter is spoken abroad—to the duke, or his secretaries, or any one else, all will be lost—more than ye wot of. Is that understood?"

"The countess' other two maids are in Piero's pay," says the girl.

"Then they will be the more silent," says I, fixing her with mine eye, "and if a word is spoken, we shall the more surely know the guilty party."

"I would die before I—"

"And thou, young man?"

Giuseppe glowered at me.

"I would fain know—"

"If I have not thy promise to be mum as a grig until thou hast permission to speak, which will be never," says I, pulling out my whistle, "I'll have thee in a dungeon ere two minutes be gone. Now. Come."

He appeared to think; I had the whistle at my lips before he nodded his head.

"I will be silent," says he; whereupon there came another knock at the door. Waving them into a corner, I opened a few inches. A soldier was without.

"Captain to the duke forthwith," says he, "for instruction concerning the escort."

It needed but this—that we should march at once, ere I had time to think, plan or increase my forces from those which my lieutenant would bring back.

We left the castle, the Countess Fiametta in a litter and her three maids on palfreys in our midst, at three o'clock of the afternoon.

III

NOW I was not at that time the Argus-eyed Nestor your Grace hath since been pleased to call me; but it would have been obvious to a blind man with his back turned, that all was not well with the last file but one of this escort. We rode, as was the custom, in fours; forcing folk of meaner condition into the ditch, and thus increasing their respect for the temporal power.

Well, this last four appeared fain to sag in the middle, the third man from the

right failing continually to keep the pace of his file mates, and thus giving the column a ragged tail. Twice I sent my sergeant—a scurvy rogue with a swivel eye—to correct this fault. Twice he returned, a peculiar expression on his face, and reported all remedied; and twice, turning in my saddle, I observed the trooper in question forging ahead or lagging behind as before.

On this second turning I noticed that the man had, moreover, his helmet on hind side before—I had been in too great haste and trouble to inspect the escort before marching—and that he rode bent over, so that his face was invisible. Wherefore, by God his mercy, I ordered the fellow forward; intending, if he indeed proved drunk, to leave him under arrest at the next guard station on the road.

I have the honor to inform your Highness that when he came to my side and raised his head a little, I perceived this member of my command—he had his breastplate fastened to the wrong buckles, moreover—was none other than Giuseppe Alberelli, court musician to your Lordship's father. He regarded me gravely; then, his eyes dropping to my open mouth, he grinned. But he said nothing.

"How—? What—?" I gasped forth at last.

Hereupon, without speaking, he made a slight gesture of his head at the sergeant, who was riding aside of him; thus anticipating my intention of sending the man away. I was annoyed at this but the youth gave me no time wherein to express myself.

"I took a guardsman to my room for wine," says Giuseppe, "and there stunned him with a water pitcher and took his armor."

"But—" says I, now completely aghast.

"The sergeant is in the pay of Piero di Favetta," says young Alberelli, "and most of these soldiers likewise. I said that my coming was by the count his orders. So that I am considered to be one of their band; as, after this conversation, thou wilt be also. Which is well—we may gain time."

Perchance your Highness may have some idea of my feelings at this; at the news that mine own men, at that instant, were regarding me as a boughten traitor. If so, it will come as no surprise to your Grace that I was quite beyond stabbing the young man, and even beyond speech. I goggled at him, dry mouthed, while our horses ambled through the country side by side; and he spoke on.

"Already," says he, "I have information of value. The second time he came to me, the sergeant asked, 'It is indeed for tonight?' Which I take to mean that the Red Count plans no delay."

At this news my faculty of speech in some sort returned and I made choking noises.

"It will be better to send me to the rear in disgrace," says Giuseppe, "because then the men will think thy treachery is not to be openly admitted, and will bear with thee longer when we act not according to their expectations."

His impudence restored my speech fully, much as mutes have been healed ere this by strokes of lightning. I forget what I called him. I wish I could remember, for I was then in the flower of my vocabulary, which in these later days doth somewhat begin to fail me. In my despair and fury, moreover, I must have spoken more loud than I witted, because before I had half eased my mind, my sergeant came, saying that the countess would fain speak with me; and her speech was concerning what she pleased to call obscenities. She (her plan to be abducted still hot in her mind) conversed at such length on this matter of my words, that we passed the guard station at which I had planned to leave Giuseppe under arrest; she was a—but I forget that she was your Highness' aunt; and, as I have shown, her own maid loved her.

The upshot of the whole business was that when we reached Fioramonte, and the great gates were opened for us, and the trumpets blown, and the guns on the walls fired in greeting, we marched in with

the tail of our column still bulging; which is to say that Giuseppe Alberelli was with us.

IV

WITH all due respect, I am compelled to inform your Grace that at this time Fioramonte was a mean place, considered either as a fortress or as a palace. My lord the duke had never been overfond of his sister, and heretofore she had been of little use to him politically; so that he had left her to live at Fioramonte on her bare dowry, which was not enough to sustain the castle, small as the place was. It had been the rule, during five years past, for the countess rather to be absent on some visit—to Rome, to Milan, Venice; or Siena, at which last place, 'twill be remembered, Giuseppe had fallen in love with her, and she with Piero di Favetta. So that the money she should have spent on men-at-arms, armaments and the repair of the castle, she was free to pay for clothes and jewels, wherewith to make a brighter blaze at foreign courts.

I doubt not, furthermore, that since the castle was entailed, and must at last come to her brother or his descendants, she watched the falling of it into ruins with secret amusement. My lady was of that cast of mind which rejoiceth doubly in its pleasures if they work harm on some one; I am sure she would have revelled still more in her passion for Piero had she possessed the brains to understand the political ruin it might wreak.

However—

The courtyard which we entered (as I began to say some page and a half back) was depressing above all. The guard which met us at the gate was weak in number, half dressed, and about one third awake; very evidently it had turned out hastily, having been warned of our coming when we were almost at the gates. I glanced up at the battlements, and perceived three sentries—the one man on the fourth side being either absent or asleep, I suppose—turned about at their posts, leaning their elbows on the parados and staring down at us. And their commanders, seeing them as clearly as I see this paper, paid no attention!

Everything about the place was in the same manner. The stable doors were opened and unguarded, and a trail of straw and refuse led out of them across the court toward the moat gate; seemingly it was the custom to use their ditch as a dunghill, regardless alike of disease and the shallowing of the water. And finally—this disgusted me the most, and besides it shall appear to be of importance later—one of the wall guns had been turned about for some reason unknown and to me inconceivable; and at the moment of our entry had its muzzle pointed into the courtyard!

I do assure your Highness that I had the impression of being in some nightmare; which impression was intensified by the behavior of the countess' guard. After taking her over, and with many false moves installing her in her apartments what time we sat with presented arms, they returned walking, not marching; their captain deep in converse with a sergeant, and apparently quite forgetful of my existence. I conversed with him, and he invited us grudgingly into the guard-room. He was drunk.

"It is the countess' order that this escort be dismissed forthwith," says he. "The duke's command was for an immediate return."

"But not without food," says I, "nor even without a little wine, and a currying of the horses—the which solaces I pray you of your courtesy and according to custom to command for us, Signor Capitano; because in their default, by Gabriel his fingers, I'll lay thee flat and take command myself, as senior officer surviving!"

"Michele! Ho, Arcangelo!" he bawled.

I raised my finger and, as two or three of his men came tumbling forth from their guard-room again, my own men with one accord levelled their arquebuses. In those days we oft had trouble with the guards of friendly nobles, and I had taught them ever to watch my hand until amity was firmly established. The immediate threat had oft saved blood-

shed in the past, and it did so again.

And here I may say that, turning my back on the countess' captain as he began to promise the things I had required, I observed that a man was missing from the rear rank of my troop, which was now drawn up, for ceremonial, in two lines. And, as your Grace will already have surmised, the man missing was that infernal fiddler. Probably, I thought, he hath gone to the countess' apartments to make love to her, and get comfortably hanged out of my way; in any case, I was too busy now to take much need of him.

To make a long and unwilling business short, our horses were unharnessed and stabled; we ate and drank—very vilely; and then, without word or bag of pieces from the countess, we were given to understand that the sooner we were gone, the better. Wherefore, after I had half drawn sword on the other captain, and repented because of his drunkenness and given him a bloody nose instead, I gave the command to fall in; at which juncture it was found that there remained not a single useful horse-girth in the whole detachment.

Your Grace is surprised? So was I. The greater part had been cut from the saddles and utterly carried away; whereas a half-dozen—mine own included, which I had bought from Padua at my own charges—were still there, but cut in twain as with a sharp knife.

"The countess shall hear of this!" I roared at the captain, turning on him with full intent to add two black eyes to his injuries.

"Let her hear, 'a God's name," says he furiously. "As for me, I'll murder the man that's caused thee to stay here longer, bear-face."

He laid his hand on his dagger at this; and since he was somewhat sobered now, there might have been argument there in the stables, but that of a sudden I remembered Giuseppe Alberelli, how I had not seen him since we came to the castle. He had not been in the servants' hall at meat; he was not at the assembly now.

There entered into my raging mind an idea that, since he had not answered the bugle of our departure, he must have known that we were not to depart; and that if he knew that, it was odds but he had arranged the delay by cutting up the girths. He was madman enow, as I have previously shown. So, assigning one party of the men to a search for the girths (they were, I learned later, at the bottom of the moat, in a bag with a cannon ball to keep them down—fifty sealed crowns' worth of saddlery!), I sent another party to look for Messer Giuseppe. I had, as your Highness may surmise, somewhat to discuss with him.

Both squads returned unsuccessful; but that which had been in search of my fiddler was not empty handed. Two of the men were bearing a third between them by the head and the heels; seeing whom, the countess' captain made great outcry and would fain have provoked more trouble.

"They have murdered my sergeant cannoneer!" he roared, before I could gag him with my hand and place a poniard over his heart.

"A lie!" says my own sergeant. "May it please the Captain, we found this fellow in the magazine, with 'a's head in an empty powder keg. He's not dead. There was blood on the outside of the keg, the which had an iron binding, your Honor. We thought maybe he had fallen thereupon, being drunk according to local custom."

And he winked at me—my own sergeant, so was discipline in ribbons; not to point the joke, however—though it made the countess' man writhe woundily in my arms; but to indicate that there was more in this finding of the cannoneer than might meet the eye. Yes, yes; but I knew what more there was. Had not this Giuseppe told me, scarce two hours agone, how he had stunned a soldier with a water pitcher, so that he might take the man's armor? Was it not certain, by the similarity of method, that, having cut all the girths in his madness, he had now fallen on this wretched man and half killed him for some reason that his lunacy told him was good?

And what might he do next—if he met the countess, and she repulsed him, *videlicet?* Made he but a move at her, my own neck would be forfeit to the duke; at thought whereof I sweated somewhat, shifted my hands from the captain's mouth to his ears and said hastily to my sergeant:

"Go back and search for Giuseppe again. Come not back without him—dead or alive! Mind now—it is an order!"

BUT BEFORE it could be executed to a greater extent than the salute of acknowledgement, the bugles on the ramparts blew tardily. And lo! there was a thundering on the courtyard gates.

When the gateman opened the postern thereof, a great bull voice roared forth (among oaths) that he who waited was his Puissant Lordship Piero di Favetta; and that he would have the hides of those who kept him waiting. Which said, the man himself, evidently in a towering rage, pushed through the little door, knocked down the keeper of it and stood in the midst of the courtyard swinging his head from side to side like a bull indeed, and roaring for his followers to come after him.

"Where's the guard?" he roared. "Hell's seventh layer, am I to be received like a ploughboy?"

Seeing my badges of rank, he mistook me for the culprit commander, and advanced with his fist clenched; at the which I thought it well to inform him of his error and to point out that if he struck me, I would assuredly spit him like a fowl.

"I am of noble-ish blood myself, Sir Count," I told him, "and while—"

I saw him moving his finger behind his back, to beckon on his men to my destruction. Oh, aye; quite clearly. I made much the same sign to mine own fellows, and they drew closer.

"Announce me to the Countess Fiametta," says he, in a voice that would be civil, but which was choked with his burning rage. Meantime his men drew in; trusting (unwisely) to the dusk to conceal their loosening of their swords in the scabbards. I was sorry that my own fellows had not their arquebuses; I could have stopped the affair by ordering the present; whereas with swords all I could do was to signal the fall-on.

"I have no authority to announce any to the countess," says I; whereupon (not heeding the voice of the countess herself, who had meanwhile appeared at the window of her rooms) the Red Count gave a scream like a strangled animal, and ordered his men to attack.

So I ran two of them through, and the rest halted; and when I told my own men to return their advance with interest—lo, they did not obey. I stood there, red sword in hand and two writhing men at my feet, and the half company shrank away from me, staring sullenly.

Piero di Favetta was grinning, and once more beckoning on his men to my finishing—they were moving—when of a sudden a clear voice sailed down from the level of the battlements and commanded a halt.

And looking up, what did we perceive? Clearly illumined, in the near-darkness, by the portfire he held in his hand, there stood Giuseppe Alberelli the musician at the touchhole of the gun which had its muzzle into the courtyard; and he spoke as follows, to wit:

"At them, ye traitors of Rometia! Sweep them forth!"

There was a silence of hesitation, what time my men noted that the cannon bore directly on their rear.

"This is loaded with small balls, perhaps two or three hundred, and a double charge of powder," says Giuseppe in his chorister's voice. "One, two, three—and at ten I fire. On, on! Four, five, six—"

Something was needed to break the amazement which had fallen on my men; I leaped forward therefore, caught my sword by the middle and, using it dagger-fashion, cut the throat of a fellow that was feeling for a pistolet. Piero di Favetta thereupon tugged at his sword, and I flung myself at his knees and he fell on me. It was when all his followers with one accord hurled themselves on me as I

struggled on the cobbles that old custom proved too strong for my sergeant—him of the swivel eye; and, regardless of bribes received, he flung himself into the fray. His men followed him. And within twenty heartbeats the courtyard was the scene of as pretty a fight as may be imagined.

At the time, I was too busy with the preservation of my life to indulge in philosophy; but looking back on the affair, I am woundily amused. Your Highness will observe that, under the circumstances detailed, it was not to the interest of my men to fight; they had been bought, in the first place, by Piero di Favetta; and in the second place, the success of the schemes on which he was engaged would have got them better paid places whenas the duchy was conquered, while relieving them from the prospect of a losing war.

Yet (like the peasants who form the Rometian forces in the larger affrays) these men were very easily induced to make an aggression; which made, the fight managed itself and grew of its own nature. Witness the two fellows whom (casting a murderous corporal off my chest) I saw, as it were, in a series of glances; first they were standing face to face, sword in hand, undecided, but each in fear of the other. Then he who was most afraid, fearing lest his cowardice should be observed by his adversary, made a half-hearted blow at the other and cut him on the shoulder; whereupon there was a reply in kind, and the next moment they were on the ground, grabbing at each other's throats. And I will wager that, could they have been separated and placed upon their salvations, each would have sworn that he cherished the deepest hatred for the other.

How much easier (I reflect) is the work of chancelleries than that of captains! Statesmen, when the question is of war, have only to say, "*Avanti, ragazzi!* Indulge your natural instincts!" Whereas we poor soldiers, through long campaigns, must take care that the inborn enthusiasm of our men for killing and being killed shall not interfere with strategy.

AH, WELL! As I say, I flung the corporal off my chest and stabbed him deeply on the groin; he was paid. Then some one of my men ran his sword through a fellow that was strangling me; the point, having done its work, passed on and wounded me in the shoulder. But I cared little for this in the excitement of warding off a pistolet which was presented at my head. It was fired just as my hand struck its muzzle, and the bullet, smashing on the stones, filled one side of my neck with shards of lead, while its flash burned all one side of my beard away. I flung my dagger into the face of its firer, and had the felicity of seeing its point enter his eye, which discomposed him greatly. There was but one fellow left of my assailants, and since he was bare hands to bare hands, he departed this life.

Whereupon I arose, and went to the aid of the battle general.

IT WAS a grief to me that in the confusion I could not find again mine own sword—I am a full blooded man and of hearty tastes; and the blade I found in my hand as I got up was a puny thing; yet I did well enough. Piero di Favetta himself was my chiefest grief, because he had picked up a two-handed sword that had been dropped and was mowing at people's legs in a way it made my mouth water to see. I had to jump over his edge twice, and on a third occasion barely parried a hamstringing cut at the cost of half my sword blade.

Now it was too dark to go weapon hunting among the slain and wounded, and I must needs take a mace away from a fellow who had no more sense than to swing one at my head; and a mace is a thing not at all to my taste. Piero nigh to slew me while I was trying the feel of it on the lieutenant of his guard—a nice boy he was, with an amazing flow of brains; and I heard the hiss of his point again past my right ear while I was dealing with a group of four that seemed to be sole remains of Piero's forces. Mine own, I noticed as I turned about, had dwindled to six or

seven; none inclined, it seemed, to have commerce with Piero himself. They were standing about two ells beyond the sweep of his sword, debating among themselves whether to flee or to join forces with him. The third course possible—the springing upon him, a noble, and doing him to death as he had done to death so many of their comrades—was not present to their minds; there was too much hanging about it.

So that Piero, grinning from under his shock of red hair and wiping one of his hands on his hose, took a firmer grip of his sword hilt and began to sidle toward me, who was not only at that moment somewhat under the superstition that nobles are not made to be killed, but also somewhat dazed from other causes more real—stabs in the right side for one. I had dropped my mace, moreover, when my last opponent had jumped for my throat; which left me unarmed.

"So now, Captain—" says Piero, heaving up his blade for the stroke.

But never did he cleave me to the breast-bone, as he had so evidently purposed, because at that moment, like a shadow in the light of a torch brought by the countess' captain out of compliment to the visitor—there appeared between Piero and myself the flying figure of a man; and this flying figure, hurling himself without hesitation as without skill upon the count, did incontinently run him through the shoulder. Piero gave a roar and a weak, misdirected slash with his own weapon; then, dropping that, seized the blade that was sticking in him, wrenched it forth, and with his unhurt arm sent a wicked blow at the newcomer's neck. At which, Giuseppe Alberelli—for it was he, of course—drew a dagger from his belt, leaped forward and stabbed Piero half-a-dozen times through the heart.

Over the count's gurgles as he lay on the ground I heard a strange mad shriek. It was the Countess Fiametta, at her window, trying in the one breath to lament her unholy love—such are always more bitterly lamented than the variety it is fashionable to admire—and to order her captain to hang us all.

I had great envy to fall down on the stones myself, and to be gathered up unconscious; but I looked at this functionary as he stood in the light of the torch, and his eyes glowed red as he looked at Giuseppe; so, reluctantly, I stayed awake.

Twelve days later.

IT IS strange how this business of farming invades a man's soul. I have had no time to write, and I could tell your Highness a tale of caterpillars that should curdle the blood.

However, one thing at a time; and unless my memory deceives me, this dispatch was to deal with musicians.

I stayed awake then, as aforesaid; but, having lost a pint or so of blood, awake only in the mode which your Highness once witnessed—at the battle of Ponticcio; which is to say that while I was capable of action, I was entirely beyond using my brains. At Ponticcio, it will be remembered, I led a charge for the folly of which your Grace would certes have dismissed me, had it not chanced to win the day. Here at Fioramonte there was no urgency for action, so I stood staring at Giuseppe and the dead noble at his feet very much as village idiots stare at gallantry shows, aware that this was something unusual, yet unable to carry my thoughts concerning it to any useful conclusion.

It was a spectacle, to be sure; the torchlight, throwing the hue of blood even on such parts of the scene as were not really bloody; Fiametta, at her window, still waking the echoes with her reasonless shrieks; my men hanging back, swords in hands, sullen and undecided; and in the midst of all, Giuseppe the fiddler, helmet still back to front, harness still wrong-buckled, dagger in hand and face unrecognizable. He had become paler even than usual; his eyes seemed to have grown larger and his mouth to have disappeared entirely from the view; moreover, instead of standing up straight and slender as was his habit, behold the young man crouched,

with his left hand doubled up and pressed to his side, and his head moving from side to side like that of a bull at bay.

"Caradosso!" says he at last, in a hoarse voice; and though unaccustomed to commands from civilians, I went over and stood where his pointing finger indicated.

"Tell thy fellows to see these guards of the countess' make us no trouble," says he. "I have that to tell thee which can not wait. Dost thou see our affair in this?"

I stared and shook my head, my eyes refusing to move in their sockets. There was a woundy great slash from the crown of my head to my left eyebrow; in childhood your Highness was greatly amused by that scar—though hair hath grown over it since.

"This will be a hanging matter," says I dully. "The count is dead."

"Fool!" snarls Giuseppe—imagine this, to me! "Take me away. I can not abear her shrieking."

Well, I suppose I took him away—into the castle guard-room; and I assume that, having seated me in one of the great chairs and himself n another, he talked to me for a long time. Certes I have some memory of him so employed—eyes narrow, right hand waving in gesticulation and foot frequently against my ankle; thus seeming to combine in his one person a schemer, an orator and a very foolhardy fighter.

But of what he said I have no cognizance, until after that I came suddenly to myself and perceived Giuseppe to be standing at my side with an empty leather bucket in his hands. Yea, by God's wounds, he had soused me from top to toe, had this gut-scraping stripling; in my uniform of ceremony too; and now, as I struggled to rise and murder him, he pushed me roughly back into my chair and held under my ear the point of his red dagger.

"Answer me!" says he. "What is the tale?"

"Tale?" I replied furiously. "Tale? What tale? There's but one, and it will hang thee, young man. Yea, hang thee! And the telling will expose this amour of Fiametta's—"

Giuseppe gave a groan.

"—and since Michele della Tramoia will be our enemy from time on," says I, "the friends of Piero will certes attack the duchy forthwith. Which means my death, too. Alas!"

At this period, as your Grace will perceive, my brains were functioning, but the body not at all; or I should have arisen, not considering the dagger, and saved the hangman work upon young Alberelli. Reproaching folk with my coming death is not a habit of mine.

"Caradosso!" says the young man desperately. "Art thou indeed out of thy mind? Look you. What has happened? We brought the countess hither; the Red Count came with violence to attempt an abduction."

"It was arranged between them, as well thou knowest," says I, staring at him.

He shook me by the shoulder so that my wounds grated, as it were, one on another.

"Who is to say that? We know it, but shall we speak? Will she? Will her two maids that were in league with Piero? He came without warning given, and broke in through the postern. That we know. That we can prove. He stunned the gateman."

This sounded reasonable. I felt my eyes resume their faculty of motion and turned them on the face of Giuseppe.

"Dost thou understand?" he demanded. "Finding, against his expectations, that the guard which had accompanied the countess was not yet departed, vile passion possessed him; he ordered his soldiers to fall on the troops of the Duke of Rometia, with intent to carry off his Grace's sister and the bride of Tramoia, by force, her own soldiers being already purchased and unwilling to protect her as their duty was. For which reason, thou didst order thy men into the fray, and saved—at great cost—the honor of the duke and of Michele della—"

Now this was a lie; I had not ordered my men into the fray, as has been shown;

nor would they have defended the honor of the duke, nor of the countess, still less that of Michele della Tramoia, had I so ordered them. It had been Giuseppe with his cannon that had brought the fray about. Just as (a light began to break upon me) he had caused my guard to be in the castle when Piero di Favetta arrived. In this strange and most perilous intricate affair, I had been for nothing; all had been done by this fiddler, even to the confection of this artful story; the which thought, combined with a commencing fever from my wounds, saddened me greatly.

"If only the Red Count had not been killed!" I groaned.

Giuseppe tore his hair—the first and last time ever I saw this done by a man in armor.

"Fool!" says he. "Had he lived, who could have taken our word against his? That is wherefore I slew him. Now there is none that can tell of any complaisance on the part of Fiametta, and—"

"There is that maid of hers," says I.

"The third? But she loves her."

"Aye, but she loves another better; and if they go about to hang thee, as certes they may, since thou'd'st no business in this affair, she may tell all."

"Why that?"

"Because she's in love with *thee*, ass!"

Giuseppe stared at me, uncomprehending.

"In—?"

"Aye. Visibly in love with thee. As thou art with the countess."

At this, he buried his face in his hands for a moment, and a shudder ran through him. He was indeed deeply struck, your Highness; the sigh he now gave, or the sob I should call it rather, made the two candles flicker. He remained some seconds with his face thus hidden.

"The allies for whom Piero was working—" I began.

"How shall they dare march to avenge one slain in the course of such an attempt as this?" asked Giuseppe, his face still in his hands and his mind, by the sound of his voice, far away from politics.

I NOTICED, at this instant, that he had not escaped scatheless from the evening's entertainment; the left hand which, in the courtyard, he had held pressed against his side was now wrapped in a great rag from which, despite its size, blood was drip-drip-dripping to the table. He seemed unconscious of the thing until I arose with difficulty and tore off the bandage for to tie it again and better.

Then I perceived that he had lost three fingers—from that last blind slash of Pietro's, it was.

"In the name of—" I began; and met his eyes. I have seen the eyes of many men, your Highness, in many conditions; but never such an expression as his. At first it was of tragedy unalloyed; then he began to laugh, without altering that look; and the mixture was such as to make me cross myself.

"That's an end to fiddling, eh, Captain?" he chuckled, and then fell into silence.

We stared one at the other, while his blood dripped unregarded on the stones. I did not know then what later weeks taught me—that, furious at the attempt on his pure and innocent bride-to-be, Michele della Tramoia would buy us an army without waiting for marriage, wherewith we should confiscate half the Red Count's domains, his late allies not daring to defend the property of such a damnable deceased villain. But I did perceive already, and most clearly, that this youth alone had saved the Duchy of Rometia, by a strategy I could never have conceived, and at a cost I should not have cared to pay. For those fingers were not to him what three fingers would be to me, or even to your Grace; they were his trade, his art, his life. Without hope of the woman he loved, he had thrown these away likewise for her sake.

No other words came to my lips than a question as to how he should earn his living hereafter.

"I can copy music," says he, slowly, staring at his finger stumps. "Copy music."

Thereafter he sat in silence while I put

on the bandages.

"It would be better to copy it elsewhere than in Rometia," I suggested.

"I shall go to Florence," says he, still; seemingly in doubt about something else and still stared before him as, finishing my surgery, I returned to my chair with a swimming head.

'Twas certainly this feeling of daze which led me to counsel him on the properest mode of forgetting his passion for the countess; and to inform him of my own experiences of a similar kind. He would meet some fine, fair woman of his own class when he should be in Florence—

He got up suddenly, with a brief laugh like a cough.

"If there is a horse for me, I will go away now," he said. "I have done what I can and—"

"Await me here, then," says I, struggling to get up. "Thou'rt faint and ill—"

"I have affairs," says the young man, going to the door. He went out, and remained invisible until the horse I had had saddled for him—with one of the castle guards' girths—was at the western gate. The countess' captain had some objections both to the furnishing of the girth and to the boy's departure; which is how that captain comes to be known as the One-Eyed—my other thumb slipped, because I was weak. Him disposed of, we had little difficulty with his men; locked them in their own guard-room under arrest for taking of bribes from Piero di Favetta, and I told them they would surely hang.

"As yourselves would have hanged," I said to what remained of my own fellows, "had ye not shown yourselves perfect loyal troops, serving one master in fear and trembling. Attention!"

They came to attention, wondering wherefore; I myself wondered after the order was given, seeing that the persons who now approached were no more than a former court musician (such as your Highness whips for flatting notes) and a tire-woman. The musician was wiping his face—the countess had spat in it and tried to stab him; and the tire-woman was weeping; half with terror, as I judged, and half from happiness.

"What's this?" I asked Giuseppe; as, with his one sound hand, he tried to mount the girl on the horse.

"She goes with me," he said, looking me between the eyes. "We will be wed by the first priest on the Florence road."

"Giuseppe! Giuseppe!" moaned the girl in protest; meaning (I hoped) that she was not worthy of him, which would have shown her good sense. But to comfort her he stretched forth his other hand in its bloody bandage. She blanched and shrank away, and so I knew that she was protesting against the unknown into which this counterfeit passion of hers—it was, most evidently to me, nothing more—was hurrying her.

As for Giuseppe, he looked from her to me, and smiled. I did not like that smile. I seized and dragged the young man some paces from listeners.

"What art thou to do?" I demanded. "Is this to prevent the telling of her story?"

"In some sort," says he, "and then—"

"It is flinging thyself into hell!" I gasped, for so much had his smile conveyed, whenas his bride shrank from the red sign of his nobility.

"There are but seven layers in hell," says he, extending his wounded hand and glancing for the last time at the windows of Fiametta's tower, "and I am already on the seventh. Besides—"

He paused.

"It is not good for folk to have a hopeless passion," says he slowly, at last.

"I know. This wedding is naught to me, and it will be much to her. Farewell, Luigi Caradosso. Remember me."

And, as your Highness perceives, he is still fresh in my memory. Never did I see nor hear of him again; he came, he did what I have told and he departed to copy music.

That, your Grace, is all I have to say; this is not one of the tales such as I was wont to relate in your childhood, showing how, for instance, I had seen a body of horse do such and such, whereof the lamentable results were so and so. In this

case I tell simply what came to pass, confessing that I know not why Giuseppe's spirit moved as it did, nor how, so moving, it was capable of the things it accomplished; nor whether all fiddlers are of the same clay.

I should have supposed not.

But I must add that a wise woman, to whom once I told this story, seemed not in the least surprised, but said:

"That is the way of artists. They have devils."

And there was a look in her eyes as she said it (having known many artists, it appeared, in the way of her trade) which made me think, thenceforth, that such were not folk (in her opinion) to be (for instance) whipped.

I therefore give this information for what it is worth, though the gathering of information for your Grace is not, as formerly it was, my office.

Alack, the old days!

I trust that your Highness is in good health, as this leaves me, save that the roof is leaking again and the effect on my rheumatism is bad.

Bending as low as it permits me, however, I kiss your Grace's hands, remaining humbly,

—L. CARADOSSO
Sometime Captain of the Guard.

ROMANCING

by Bill Adams

ROMANCE is the mother who sits wrinkled upon every high road in the land. She has a great many children.

I never go out without coming face to face with her, or one or t'other of her sons and daughters—Hate, Greed, Pity, Love—all her children born to her from the strength of her good man Humanity, these and many more. It is a large family.

II

WHEN I was a Cro-Magnon man I held a girl by her wrist in my teeth while I finished killing a timber wolf with my bare hands. It had been about to attack her. After the fashion of some women she thought that I was going to kill it just for fun, and take no notice of her.

Well, she had another guess coming. I threw her over my shoulder, and the wolf over the other, and at my cave I made her skin the wolf and scrape his hide. Then her lover came for her, and I killed him with one blow on his forehead. I threw his carcass and the wolf's into the flooded river before my cave, and when I came back the girl's eyes were shining and she snuggled her head against my chest.

This Civilization!

III

AREN'T folks funny? Every one seems to think that just because he happens to have an opinion it is the one and only opinion and that he is the great big high-and-mighty "let me tell you" IT.

Self-opinionated folks give me a worse pain than the first strawberries of the season give a month-old baby.

Folks stand in their own windows and holler their heads off as though no one else had any window whence to see a view. Don't they?

I am one of the worst of 'em, I reckon.

SOUR MUG

The gob who was his brother's keeper

By JOHN WEBB

THIS story of the Cardigan brothers is hard to get going. It could start most anywhere. In Brooklyn, for instance, in the parlor of the Cardigans' third floor railroad flat. With hard-working old Pop Cardigan, after a long, weary day, sitting there cracking his big knuckles and saying over and over, "Don't worry, Mom, it'll come out a'right. Joie's just young and skittish; a good boy at heart." Or with Mom blinking over her sewing and saying she didn't need to be told a thing like that.

Or it could start with the little girl who had been Mary O'Toole, crying her eyes out in her pillow. Or with rough, homely Bull Cardigan, he of the gentle eyes and the single-track mind, sitting behind iron bars and stone walls and counting the days. Or with handsome Joe Cardigan—Joie—the Red Hook gang fighter; swaggering young Joe of the slashing, stabbing fists and the bitter snarl.

Or perhaps it's a Navy story and should begin there on the forecastle of the old *Virginia*, in April, 1914, with Bull and Joe, the brothers Cardigan, engaged in as fast and tough a scrap as any gob ever looked upon.

That wasn't the beginning, but perhaps it's the place to start. Besides, it was the beginning for me.

There they were, those two young giants, those brothers, fighting like fiends. *Smash—bang—wham!* Get back, sailors—give 'em room! *Wham!* Stand back, leatherneck! Jeez, what a scrap! *Clup—clup—clup!*

That was Joe Cardigan. He was taller than Bull. And faster. And cleverer. And he could hit; his fists landed with a sharp *clup—clup—clup!*

He was good looking, Joe was, and had curly black hair, but now there was a savage look on his face and he snarled through his teeth.

Bang! Clup—clup! Stand back! Keep 'em away from the hatch! *Clup!* Lookut! Bull's smeller is broke! Keep close, Bull —keep close! Aw, pipe down, dirtyneck! Get in with 'em yerself, if yuh can do better! G'wan, Bull, smack him! Keep close! *Wham! Clup—clup—clup!*

Money was flashing. Two to one on Joe! Two to one! *Three* to one! Three to one! I took fifteen of that. Bull, to me, looked good.

I don't know how to describe that big boot. He was about two inches shorter and maybe eight years older than Joe, but he was thicker across the shoulders and deeper through the chest. He was as ugly as sin, and if you met him at midnight on a dark and lonely street . . .

But wait; there's an "if" there. If your sight was good and there happened to be a little light, so you could see his eyes . . . But I can't describe Bull. Here's something, though . . .

Back on the *Kearsage*, before old Grape Juice came along and banned wines, liquors and mascots, we had a dog named Mug. A bulldog. A mean looking animal, built close to the deck, with lean loins and shoulders like an ox. Short, thick legs, packed with muscle. A big undershot jaw with back teeth that could crunch the end off a hickory fid. He would set himself and we would try to knock him over. It was like running against a capstan drum. Old Sour Mug! Sixty pounds of bone and muscle, built close to the deck. And ugly! I've seen many a new gob take one look and leap for the shrouds. Gangway, sailors, for one scared gob!

But if you got a look at him close, right in the face, you would laugh. Then you would push him in the face and say, "You big fake!" And he would laugh back. And you'd be friends.

It was his eyes; they gave him away. Big brown eyes, soft and gentle. Old Sour Mug was as gentle as a woolly lamb.

When I got to know Bull better, I wondered some about this transmutation of—of— You know what I mean. Bull Cardigan was old Sour Mug come back to life.

Joe Cardigan was more like a greyhound—swift, sure, clean limbed, smart. Not a quitter, either. Bull was slow, brain and body, but sure. Just plain sink-your-back-teeth-in, clamp-down-and-hang-on.

So I bet my five on Bull at three to one.

His face wasn't what you would call a face by now; it was live flesh hammered into raw, red pulp, and he bled like a pig. But he kept on, working in close and driving short, lifting drives to his brother's body. *Wham!* In the kitchen. Under the heart. *Wham!* But for every punch he landed he took three: *clup—clup—clup!* Three punches to land one, and never a backward step.

Nose all over his face, brows slashed open, one ear torn, lips like smashed tomatoes, one eye closed and the other a bloody slit; but in he shuffled, always, in, in, in. Then—*wham!*

Joe was snarling at him:

"Down, you fool! Go down! Yuh won't, huh?" *Clup! Clup!* "Now! Go down! I'll kill yuh if yuh don't!" *Clup!* "Lay down, yuh clumsy clown! I'll kill yuh—I'll kill yuh!"

There was no shouting now. There were about three hundred men on that forecastle, but there was no sound except the shuffle of feet as the crowd swayed back and forth to make room for Bull and Joe, and the thump of blows. And Joe's snarl:

"Go down, yuh bum! I'll kill yuh if yuh don't!"

No more sound than that. Gobs were tough and hard in those days, but this was a nasty thing to watch, this scrap. And those two were brothers. So the gang was silent.

I knew the signs, and besides, I felt that way myself. I stepped in and pushed them apart. It took a dozen of us to stop it. We dragged them apart, and nobody kicked—not even the fellow who had faded my bet.

I asked a chief yeoman about them that afternoon. Who and what were they?

"Ordinaries," he told me. "Sewer deck. Boots. Tough eggs from Red Hook, Brooklyn, New York. Joe has been in the ring, won the amateur light-heavyweight championship of Greater New York when he was only seventeen; then fought a half-dozen pro bouts and won 'em all."

The Cardigans, then, were boots—rubber socks—recruits; recruits fresh from the Newport Guardo—the training station. Ordinary seaman, of the gun-deck division, the Fourth. The same division as I.

Tough birds from Red Hook. Gang fighters. Pluguglies. Bull Cardigan, the yeoman told me, had enlisted one day after Joe.

That night I crossed over to their part of the ship on the port side and found Joe getting a drink at the scuttlebutt. Except that he was cut up some about the face, he didn't look so bad. But he moved kind of stiffly, and I knew his ribs were sore.

"What was it about?" I asked him.

A third-cruise coxswain had the right to ask questions like that of a four-months' boot. He brushed his nose with the ball of his thumb, like you have seen pugs do, and made a funny noise in his throat.

"That brother of yours," said I, "is a hard guy to stop."

"I'll kill him some day," said he, and drew his lips tight across his teeth.

"Harsh words, kid," I said. "He looks like a good guy to me."

He made that funny noise in his throat again.

"That brother of mine," he said kind of huskily, "is a skunk!" Other things, too, he called his brother—not pretty; you would not talk like that about a man unless you hated him a lot.

A little later I found Bull sitting on his ditty-box by the Second Section bag jackstay. A sick bay apprentice had done a good job on him with court plaster and bandage; you couldn't see much of Bull but one mild brown eye.

"Sailor," I said, "it looked like you were in for a pasting."

He shook his head. I knew he was grinning behind that bandage.

"I'd 'a' licked him," he said. "He knew it, too. I always win. I'm older'n him, see, and no guy can lick his big brother."

He had sense, that fellow. What he said is true—no man can whip his big brother. It is written. Joe was really bigger than Bull, a little; but it's age that counts. It's mental more than physical, and comes up from kid days, when sixteen is twice as strong as eight.

"How did it start?" I asked.

"Well," he answered, "Joe wanted to go ashore, see, and I said no. He's got no money to leave on Court Street, with Higgins or O'Connor or the Evans House. He's got an allotment goin' home, see, and he needs every cent. So I said, 'No, kid, you stay aboard'—and aboard he is."

Next morning we sailed for Vera Cruz. The spicks had started something with Mayo; and the whole Third Battleship Division — the *Virginia*, *Nebraska*, *Georgia*, *New Jersey* and *Rhode Island*—steamed out of Charlestown Navy Yard and headed south. Big send-off. Crowds on every pier. Flags. Whistles. Horns and bells. We didn't know what it was all about and didn't give a darn.

The taking of Vera Cruz, April 14th, 1914. The *Chester* shelled the Mexican War College and then a gob landing party was put ashore and took the town. All Marines from the Fleet were sent to Tampico, to wait for something that never happened.

I was coxswain of the Second Steamer and needed two deckhands. My bow hook, a short-timer, had been left aboard the receiving ship at Boston to be paid off. My stern hook had a chance to go jack-of-the-dust, a politician's job and five dollars a month extra, and he asked me to let him go. So I needed two men; good men, and only one in a hundred makes a good steamboat man. I went to Bull Cardigan.

"Sailor," said I, "want a good job? I need a stern hook, a tough guy who can work twenty hours a day without kicking, eat on the fly, sleep on a twelve-inch board while the boat's trying to stand on her ear, and be wet and tired and hungry and still carry on. In the tropics you'll be combing baked salt out of your hair and up north you'll shake icicles out of your whiskers, but you'll be a steamboat man."

In those days a steamboat man was a sort of aristocrat. The officers, without saying anything, sort of favored him. He seldom went to inspection—never went when the boat was in the water—got out of most drills, and his only boss was the coxswain of the boat. He scrubbed clothes whenever he wanted, and in the boat the smoking lamp was never out. Steamboat men were the first ashore, and often got ashore when no one else did. Most of the time we had a bottle in the boat, or a bucket of beer. Good steamboat coxswains were scarce, and some captains and executive officers took them from ship to ship with them, or swapped them like star ballplayers.

A rough and ready life, and hard, but you could not drag a real steamboat man back on deck. I, for instance, had been in this one boat twelve years.

"There's a chance for you to make coxswain in a couple of years," I told him.

I wanted those shoulders. A stern hook, to be any good, had to have good arms and shoulders. The *Virginia's* two steamers could stand any kind of a sea, but they handled hard. In making a port gangway, the propeller kicked the stern out, no matter how you put the rudder. The stern hook had to wrap one leg around a canopy stanchion, grab the gangway manrope and hang on; he had to fight the kick of a three-bladed propeller and a fifty H.P. engine. It took shoulders and arms—and guts.

Bull Cardigan looked good to me.

"Say, I'd like that," he said. Then his face fell. "But my brother—yuh see, I wanta keep near him, and—"

I was ready for that.

"I need a bow hook too," I told him, "and I'll take your brother."

I could see he was thinking hard.

"You say it's hard work, huh? A guy don't have no time to loaf around and run wild and get in trouble, huh? He has to keep pluggin', don't he?"

"That's what."

I knew he was thinking of his brother, and I wondered. A man might try to look after a kid brother and keep him straight and out of trouble, but there was something more than that between these two.

"I'm your man, Jack," he said. "Have Joe detailed, see, so he'll have to go in the boat whether he wants to or not."

That's what I did, and when I told Joe he just looked at me and then nodded. He didn't say anything, but I think he was glad. Then I told him Bull too was going in the boat and he cursed in his throat and became sullen. He wasn't glad of that.

"Take your gear up and put it in the boat now," I told him, "and start sleeping there tonight."

He just nodded. I went to find the engineer and tell him to have steam up in the boat by six in the morning; the ship was to anchor off Vera Cruz at eight.

It's a pretty sight, a battleship coming to anchor. Let go port anchor! And the chain rumbles out. The ensign drops from the gaff; another leaps up to the flagstaff, and the Jack goes up. A boom swings out from each side. Boats swing out. A score of things happen at once, and it's all over before the chain stops clattering over the wildcat. Smartness. Speed and accuracy—the old Navy motto.

I watched Bull and Joe when the starboard crane picked us up and swung us out. It was a ticklish business, and I've seen many a green hand so scared he couldn't talk.

The crane hummed, and you were swinging high up above the superstructure deck. Then out you swung. *Ung-ung-ung!* groaned the chain slings with the strain of fourteen tons. Then down—fast. *Swoo-o-ooosh!* A smart craneman,

like "Spud" Murphy, at the controls, and you actually dropped. Then—*swa-a-ash!*—you hit the water.

Let go! All gone, on deck—hoist away! Up go the slings. Let go the sea painter! *Clang!*—one bell to the engineer and you circled around to tie up at the boom, while the deckhands started putting up the hinged stack and hauling over and lacing the canopy.

I knew one thing now—Bull and Joe Cardigan had nerve. They had stood that drop from the boat deck without turning a hair. They'd be steamboat men some day, I thought.

We were about half ready when the bugler on watch blew steamer call, and ended with two blasts. Second steamer.

"She's started, socks," I told them. "The grind is on. You'll get to know that call!"

Joe, on the bow, let go the guesswarp and I swung the steamer around for the starboard gangway.

AT MIDNIGHT we tied up to the boom for a breathing spell. All day we had been chasing back and forth from ship to ship, all through the Fleet. I had lost track of how many trips we had made into the harbor, and I don't know how many foreign refugees we had brought out to the *Virginia.* We were tired and grumpy, all of us, and to make things worse, wind had come out of the northeast and was kicking up a nasty sea.

"This is a hell of a job!" growled Joe Cardigan; and then, after a little while, "Wouldn't be so bad if it wasn't for him."

"Who?" I asked.

"That damn brother of mine, sittin' there."

Bull rubbed his nose and kind of grinned.

"Wherever you are, Joie," he said, "there I am too."

"You'll be with me once too often," grunted Joe.

"Maybe. But till then, kid, I stick."

Bull got up. The bandages had been taken off his face and he was about healed up. He yawned and went aft, and I heard him getting out his bunk-board in the sternsheets, for a wink of sleep.

"I hate to be near 'at guy," said Joe, and got out on the bow. "I'm goin' on deck for a while."

He jumped for the Jacob's-ladder and climbed up, and went aboard over the boom, his bare feet gripping the smooth spar like a cat's. I saw him, his white uniform standing out of the darkness, go along the deserted deck; then he entered the passageway behind the port eight-inch turret and I couldn't see him any more. I spread my mattress on the clothes chest and went to sleep.

"Second Steamer! Hey, there—Second Steamer!"

I tumbled out. The messenger from the officer of the deck was calling us from on deck.

"Hello?"

"Cox'n there? Officer of the deck wants you."

I looked into the engine-room to see the time. One o'clock. We had not been ordered to secure for the night and still had steam up. The engineer and the fireman were corking off on the seat-boxes. The wind was still freshening.

I climbed on deck and went aft. Ensign Stewart had the deck and was standing in the port passageway out of the wind. A little way off, the chief master-at-arms was talking with the paymaster. I wondered what they were doing up at one in the morning.

"Cox'n," said Mr. Stewart, "you are to take no one ashore but men who come down the gangway in the regular way, checked by the officer of the deck."

That was a funny thing to say.

"I never take ship jumpers ashore, sir," I told him. "Nobody comes in my boat over the boom but the steamer's crew."

"Then as a steamboat cox'n you're unique," he said, and grinned. Every steamboat coxswain smuggled a shipmate or two ashore and back once in a while, and he knew it as well as I did; it was all right if you were slick enough not to get caught. "Yes, unique," he said again. "But never mind that. This is different.

Make sure nobody sneaks down and hides in your boat. Search well each trip before you shove off."

I knew then that something had happened aboard, and waited.

"This is strictly confidential," he said. "The pay office has been broken into and the safe opened. The master-at-arms on watch discovered it a few minutes ago and called the paymaster. About six hundred dollars have been taken. So remember—don't let any ship jumper in that boat!"

The pay office robbed! I had never heard of such a thing before. Only a fool —or a boot who didn't know the Navy—would try to get away with a thing like that. Whoever the pinhead was, he was due for Portsmouth prison, sure.

IT GOT rougher and rougher. The steamer was heaving and tossing and jerking at the guesswarp so heavily that I thought that at any minute the boom would part the toppinglift or the forward guy and come down. The fireman and the engineer were awake and cursing and Bull had come forward into the cockpit with me. Joe had slid down the guesswarp and was helping us lace the side curtains taut.

In a little while the officer of the deck called down and told me to drop astern, and we made fast to a long sea painter that the anchor watch ran out for us. The other running boats—two motorsailers, the admiral's barge, the captain's gig and the First Steamer—had been sent into the harbor. I thought of Red' Conroy, coxswain of the First Steamer, with a bottle of *ceveza* Schlitz before him, and sighed.

It was a norther that had come up. By watching the Third Division's anchor lights I discovered that the column was getting out of position; anchors were dragging. The *Virginia's* blinker light was sending a message and I saw little Admiral Usher on the quarterdeck beneath a standing light.

"Second Steamer!"

Mr. Stewart was at the taffrail.

"Sir?"

"The Fleet is getting under way till the blow is over. Run up under the port crane and we'll lower you over some food. Then you'll have to look out for yourself."

We let go the painter, ran under the crane and took aboard a case of canned stuff—tomatoes, corned beef and hardtack, then cast off and headed for the harbor.

It was a tough three miles, but we made it, and didn't care how wet we were. The blow might last for days, which meant that much rest and plenty of beer. We tied up at the regular landing.

"Just bank the fire," I told the engineer. "In the morning we'll find a better place to lay and then haul the fire till the Fleet shows up."

I got out on the landing to report to the landing officer, but didn't see him around and told myself I wasn't going to look for him. Not in that wind and darkness. I went back aboard the steamer and dropped into the cockpit.

Bull and Joe had a lantern slung from a canopy frame and were changing into dry clothes. On the floor boards I saw a round white something and picked it up.

It was a picture—a little snapshot. Of a girl.

I took a good look at her, beneath the lantern. About twenty, she was, and a sweet little lady. The kind you would bet your bottom dollar on.

"Your girl, Bull?" I asked.

They both turned to see what I meant.

"No, mine," said Joe quickly. He looked at Bull and sort of tossed his head. "My wife," he said, and reached out for the picture.

Somehow he fumbled it and it fell to the floor boards again.

I didn't know Bull could move so fast. And I didn't know those mild brown eyes could get so hard. He brushed past me and almost knocked me down.

"Pick it up!" he barked, and his voice was hoarse and low.

Joe did.

"I didn't throw it down; I dropped it,"

he said, "and I'm not picking it up because you tell me to. You better lay off me, Bull," he snarled. "I'm tellin' you for your own good. You better lay off. I'll cripple yuh some day."

Bull sat down slowly. His face was like rock.

"Till then," said he, "I'm stickin' with you, kid."

And I'd have bet that he would. Bull was a sticker. Not fast or clever or bright, but one to hang on once he got his back teeth clamped tight. Old Sour Mug.

"I'm goin' ashore," growled Joe. "I guess there's places open yet, ain't there—all-night places? I'm goin' to town and—"

"You ain't," said Bull, and got up like a man who has to start in again on a job he doesn't like. "You ain't goin' ashore, Joe."

"I am, you interferin'—"

"Shut up!" I put in. "Both of you. I say who can go ashore, and when. And another thing. You two are boots—rubber socks, your names are not dry on the books yet. You won't be regular gobs for a couple of years, and till then you'd better not talk too big. Somebody's liable to cut you down!"

Joe sneered. Bull grinned. The way they took that bawling out told a lot about them. I said nobody could go ashore that night, and if I decided to let them go in the morning I'd let them know.

"You're the boss, Jack," said Bull, and crawled into the doghouse under the bow to break out his bed-roll. Joe sat still on the clothes chest, his face sullen and his eyes like ink, staring down at nothing.

I thought about that sweet little girl with the misty eyes, and wondered how she had come to marry a curly wolf like Joe Cardigan. He was a bad one, that fellow.

He still had the picture in his fingers and was turning it over and over without looking at it. I guessed he was thinking about it, though.

Bull came out from the doghouse with his bed-roll, and began to unlash it. He looked at the picture in Joe's hands, then at Joe himself.

"Joie," he said, kind of soft.

"Aw, go to hell!" snarled Joe. "You go to hell!"

I got out upon the landing. The wind was almost a full gale now. Across the harbor there was a blue-white line drawn across the blackness—the surf against the breakwater. It boomed like first line ships firing turret salvos without a break. Ahead of us the city glowed yellow against the sky. Hundreds of gob sentries patrolled the streets with loaded rifles. Machines were lined up and barricades built. Gobs with Benét-Mercie and Colt automatic guns were on the housetops, to keep them clear of snipers.

I could see nothing of all that from here, of course, but I knew about it. This was no time for a loose gob to go drifting around. Some sentry might get nervous and take a shot at him. That's why I had kept Joe Cardigan aboard.

I was still standing there when a gob in landing party uniform—whites with leggings and belt, and a .45 Colt revolver at his hip—came out upon the pier.

"Hey!" he called when he saw me. "Gosh, I been lookin' all over for you, Jack. Knew you'd be somewhere around, but couldn't find you."

It was Ernie Faber, a boatswain's mate I had been with in the *Kentucky*, and he had a quart of Canadian Club with him. He knew what was good for a tired steamboat man.

We went to the steamer and into the cockpit. The engineer and the fireman must have smelled it in their sleep. They left their seat-boxes and came scrambling over the boiler into the cockpit. The bottle began to circulate.

"We been havin' a time, sailors," said Ernie. "Playin' hide-and-seek with the spicks. Every time you turn your back somebody takes a crack at you from a window or a roof. Eighteen poor gobs been bumped off."

I knew that. We had taken some of the bodies out to the *Birmingham*.

Joe Cardigan got the bottle. He upended it and would have emptied it, I guess, if I hadn't let out a yelp and made a grab for it. He was in a mean state of mind and was working up to something. I knew that.

"Some of these first-cruise boots," Ernie was saying, "sure got brains! Yeah! Here's two socks jump the *Georgia*, and they think they'll go inland and join up with the revolutionists and make a lot of jack for themselves. They get ashore somehow and try to get out of the city! Can you beat it?"

Joe was leaning forward.

"What'sa matter with that?" he wanted to know. "Why couldn't they get out of the city?"

"Because, felluh," Ernie said, "sentries are all over the city and all around it, and a hairless dog couldn't slip out without bein' stopped and questioned—and then sent back. Them two nuts was picked up *pronto* and chucked in the brig . . . Well, I gotta be makin' knots, sailors. I'm corporal of the guard. Another jolt apiece and we'll kill this soldier."

The bottle started around again. Joe took a big drink and looked again at Ernie.

"There must be some way o' gettin' out," he said. "What would you 'a' done?"

"Me? I'd stay aboard the wagon, where chow comes around three times a day and pay day twice a month."

"But suppose you hadda make a break?"

"Well, if I hadda, I'd use my head. I'd go over to one of them bumboats—" he pointed to a dozen native boats tied up in the lee of the next dock, under an arc light—"and I'd get the cap'n to take me down the coast a little ways and put me ashore."

"Would he do it?"

Ernie laughed.

"Boot," he said," if you showed one of them spick cap'ns ten dollars gold* he'd take yuh to hell and back."

* American money.

"I bet he wouldn't go out in weather like this."

"Yes, in weather like this or any other kind. For ten bucks gold he'd do anything." Then he said, "So long, sailors," got out on the landing and went hotfooting it along the pier.

Joe threw his mattress on his bunkboards, shoved the fireman out of the way and yanked off his jumper.

"I'm gonna cork off. I guess a guy can do that," he said out of the corner of his mouth, and glared at Bull.

I slept forward in the cockpit, but I wanted to talk with Bull and I followed him aft. It was snug and dry there in the sternsheets with the curtains taut, and the wind didn't bother us at all.

I broke out the makings and we built cigarets. I talked first about the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Then Brooklyn itself. About Sand Street, and Andy Judge and his black bottle—knockout drops. Lot of crooks around Sand Street. Was all Brooklyn like that?

That's how I got Bull talking. Brooklyn. Sand Street. Red Hook. Home.

Pop Cardigan. Getting old. Worked hard, foreman in an iron works. Mom, she worked hard too. Bum neighborhood, Red Hook, for Pop and Mom; they ought to be out in the country some place, with grass and flowers and things. Yeah.

The neighborhood. Not so good. Lot of trucks and drays banging past all day. Lot of kids squalling and cats singing all night. Lot of dirt and noise.

Sitting there, listening to Bull, I could see and hear all those things. I could see drunks staggering through the streets and loafers and toughs holding up the lamp posts on the corners. Could hear the women squabbling all day and screaming at their men in the evenings. I could even smell onions and garlic and corned beef and cabbage.

Every now and then Joe Cardigan slipped into the picture. It wasn't the things Bull said, but the things he kept sheering away from. I was getting a good idea of Joe without Bull knowing it.

I saw Joe on the corner with his gang. Swaggering through the streets after he had won a semi-final at the Gowanus A. C. Playing the horses and in crap games. Gang fighting. Joe, I made out, was a loafer at first, and then a small-time crook. A surly young tough who had a yen against everything, particularly work. I got that from the way Bull kept dodging and shying off in his talk.

Then I got a picture of Bull lying to Pop and Mom. About Joe. Painting him white to keep the old folks from worrying. Lying like blazes.

"Aw, Joie's all right. Just having a bunch of tough luck. Kind of wild, but not really bad. Young, too. Don't mind work, but having tough luck with jobs. He'll come out all right. Good kid, Joie."

That was a mistake, lying like that; I guessed Bull saw it now. He should have told the truth in the beginning and brought Joe up short. In a way, Joe's going to the bad was mostly Bull's fault.

Bull was older. Big brother. He had fought for Joe and got him out of scrapes. And had taken the blame for a lot of things that Joe did.

Pop and Mom had helped spoil Joe. He had been the baby of the family. Somebody always thought up an excuse for everything wrong he did. It was a mistake, making things so easy for him. But gosh, everybody made mistakes. And Pop and Mom, they were like Bull himself, I guessed; not too bright.

Bull had always worked—hard. Drove a van for McGuigan and Swain, moving, storage, licensed piano movers. Nobody ever worried about Bull going wrong. Too steady. A big easy-going plugger, slow but steady, coming home every Saturday night with his pay and a quart of ice cream and a can of Dan Patch Long-Cut for Pop. No need to worry about Bull. At five-thirty he would come plodding up the street, grinning to the kids, his empty lunch tin in his hand.

But Joe—well, Joe was probably over in Eddie's, knocking the balls around. A young fellow had to have some fun.

There was a girl, too. Mary—Mary O'Toole. I don't think Bull realized he was talking about her; he was in a kind of trance, thinking about home. Bull was homesick. I knew the signs. He was thirty-three or four, but what of it? I was homesick for twenty years. And still am.

But about Mary O'Toole. She stepped into the picture as nice as you please, and mighty quiet.

"And then on Sundays Mary and me use to go down to Coney—" And a little later—"Mary O'Toole, she used to come over and help Mom with the work sometimes." Things like that.

Yes, that little girl was very much in the picture. Once he got talking about her, his thoughts seemed to revolve around her like she was the center of everything. He'd wander, but always come back.

I had all the pieces, but they were kind of jumbled.

"And I suppose," I said, "she's back there in Red Hook waiting for you?"

"Huh?" Bull blinked at me.

"Mary, I mean. She's waiting for you?"

He shook his head, real slow.

"Well, no; she ain't waitin' for *me*. She—you see—"

"She what?"

"She married *him*," said Bull, and motioned toward the cockpit with his head.

So Mary O'Toole, then, was the girl in the picture—Joe Cardigan's wife. The picture was scrambled worse than ever now.

Bull had always wanted to get Pop and Mom off into the country. A little place with flowers.

"I thought about that a lot, specially sittin' there in my cell, countin' the days—"

He broke off with a grunt and then started to talk real fast about something else. But I saw sudden light ahead, and kept him bows on.

"Your cell, Bull? You were in jail, huh?"

"Gosh," he groaned, "ain't I dumb?

Every time I open my face I put my foot in it. Yuh won't say nothin' about me bein' a jailbird, Jack?"

I promised.

"But what did they send you up for?"

"Robbery. Grocery store. Two hundred dollars. I got eighteen months. Le's don't talk about it, hey Jack?"

That suited me. Just then I was thinking too hard to talk, anyway. I was putting the pieces together—and darned if they didn't make a perfect picture! I could see Bull and Joe and Mary and Pop and Mom, and every one had done what you would expect them to do. Just like in a play, where the villain does something bad and the hero does something good, and the girl . . .

But when I got to that, I saw this was a funny sort of play. The girl, darn it, had gone and got married before the play was half over—and had married the *villain!* That wasn't according to Hoyle.

But the rest of it was. And thinking of it, I remembered something that the gale and the Fleet's getting under way had chased out of my mind—the robbery of the *Virginia's* pay office.

I jumped up and scrambled out on deck. The wind almost ripped my clothes off me, and I had to hold on to the manrope and work forward hand over hand. I reached the cockpit, kicked the port curtain flap open and looked in.

Joe Cardigan was gone.

I jumped to the landing and went up the ladder to the pier. At the head of the pier was a gob sentry, and I ran toward him. He was standing with his poncho wrapped tight around him, his back to the wind and the fine rain that had come up.

"Did my bow hook go past you a little while ago?" I asked him.

"Bit tall guy with a mean look? Yeah, he went by. Went over that way." He pointed with the barrel of his rifle at the next dock, where the bumboats lay.

Just what I had expected. Joe had got that bumboat idea from Ernie Faber.

"One of those boats went out a while ago, didn't it?" I said.

The sentry wasn't sure.

"Maybe. Seems like I did see one go out, but it's so darn dark—" Then he remembered. "Yeah! About fifteen-twenty minutes ago. Standin' lug rig, she was, with a kicker. Say," he said suddenly, "you ain't thinkin' your man jumped ship, are you?"

"Oh, no." The less he knew the better, I thought. "I just sent him over to get a bottle from that bumboat, and the bumboat—" It didn't mean a thing, just something about a bumboat and a bottle, but it was enough to put the sentry off the course.

"Well, drink hearty," he said as I started back for the steamer.

I stood on the landing and looked out into that howling blackness. Joe Cardigan, with six hundred dollars that he had stolen, was bound down the coast, making his getaway. He was gone. That was that.

I went into the sternsheets and broke the news to Bull. He sat there for a long minute looking at me, and I could almost hear his thoughts moving along slow and steady and straight, like that moving van of his. Then, at last, he got it, and got up like he had a piano on his shoulders.

"Jack," he said, "we gotta get him. We gotta, Jack! We gotta run out there—"

I laughed.

"Talk sense," I told him. "Run out there—in this? I've got a pretty good idea where they'd head for—a little inlet a few miles south—but if you think I'm going out there in this weather—"

"Aw, Jack! Gosh, ain't we shipmates? I'd do anything for a good guy, Jack; I'd go out there in a paper canoe, for you. Help me out, will you? Gosh, Jack, if I don't get him back it'll be awful tough on—on—aw, come on, Jack, help me out."

Well, those brown eyes of his and that pleading way, would soften the heart of a fifth cruise master-at-arms. And we *were* shipmates. And I knew Bull would go out there in a paper canoe—a tissue-paper canoe—to help me out. He had been doing things for people all his life.

I put my head into the engine-room

and looked at the steam gauge. Fifteen pounds. Enough to get us away from the landing, and with this wind the fire would come up fast.

I gave the engineer a push.

"Rouse out, guy! We have to go out right away. Important. Tell you about it later. Get steam up! Start the jet! Shake a leg, sailors!"

They roused out, and still half asleep, began to work the fire before they knew what they were doing. Bull cast off the lines and I gave one bell. We swung and headed toward the opening in the breakwater.

It was a foolish thing to do, of course, but I've done worse. I've chucked away a month's pay in one night on Court Street and then looked for a Boston-Irish cop to lick. I've risked thirty days in the brig and three months' pay by smuggling a ship-jumper ashore so he could see a burlesque show. I've stolen alcohol from the quarterdeck chest, right under the officer-of-the-deck's nose, and then given most of it away. Things without sense to them, and for no good. Thinking of those things, I was glad I hadn't turned down Bull.

As long as we were in the lee of the seawall it wasn't so bad, but when we got in line with the entrance the wind and sea hit us full force and a half-ton of water slopped into the engine-room. Coursy, the engineer, let out a yell and began to tell the world what he thought of steamboat coxswains in general and me in particular. Beside me in the cockpit, old Sour Mug hung on and swore he'd get hold of his brother if he had to grow fins and swim.

"What's he think I did eighteen months for him for? Didn't he promise he'd go straight and get a job and help save for a place in the country? And then he loafs around and gets worse, instead of better, and when I get out and start after him he runs away and joins the Navy! Sittin' there in that damn cell I figured out what I oughta do, and once I make up my mind to a thing I do it. I'll stick with him!"

A sea smashed in the port bow curtain and knocked Bull back against the clothes-chest. But he flung himself forward and in a second was again beside me at the wheel. He had his teeth clamped now, and I knew no norther that ever blew could scare him.

"For years, see, I'd been tellin' Pop and Mom and Mary that Joie was only wild, not really bad, and they believe it, see? So none of 'em suspected he had robbed that store, and he went along on the reputation I had built up for him. Got by with it—with Mary, too."

That's how it was. While Bull was in jail doing time for him, Joe had married Mary. They had been both in love with her, but I guess Bull had stood in better, up till the time he went to jail.

"Everybody knows now I didn't do it," he said in my ear, "because my boss and a couple of movin' men, when they heard I was in jail, came out and told how I was on a movin' job that night, but I got word to 'em and told 'em to lay off; said I had a reason but couldn't tell anybody what it was. I couldn't let Pop and Mom know it was Joie. Gosh, I'd go to the chair before I'd do that."

I believed that. Pop and Mom probably thought Bull didn't want to clear himself because he couldn't do it without implicating some good friend.

We were right in the center of the harbor entrance now. One minute that forty-foot steamer was climbing the side of a black mountain and the next she was shooting down so fast that I held on to the wheel hard to keep my feet on the floor boards. Coursy had both bilge pumps running at top speed, but even so I could tell by the sloshing of water under the boards that we were carrying plenty.

I had my face in the hole in the bow canvas when blue lightning forked across the sky, and in the flash I thought I saw something in the driving rain almost dead ahead. I put down a spoke or two and we smashed straight for it.

"Don't yuh think he owes me somethin'?" Bull was growling. "Don't he? Don't he owe Pop and Mom somethin'?

And Mary? He does, Jack, and he's gonna pay it if I have to dog him twenty years!"

Another lightning flash, and this time I was sure I saw something ahead. Maybe the bumboat men had changed their minds about going out this night and were beating about to run back. Or maybe they had hove-to under bare poles with the kicker going, to talk it over.

The steamer buried her nose in a sea and it looked as if she were never coming up. For a few minutes the water in the cockpit was up to our hips.

Then, slowly, she thrust up out of it, shook herself like a dog and battled on. Those old forty-footers were wet and unhandy, but tough. They had guts.

Bull was mad. Not raving mad; the emotion that was driving him on was slow, heavy, powerful, like the steam that shoves an ice-ram ship through a field of floating ice.

"He owes me somethin', and he's gonna pay! He's gonna pay me back by bein' a man. I'll make a man out of him if I have to follow him around the world and hammer him senseless every day! He's rotten bad, but no man's so bad there ain't some good in him way inside, and I'll bring it out if I have to turn him inside out! That poor kid, Mary—he's gotta treat her right! And Pop and Mom! I'll make a man out o' him and take him home! I didn't go to jail for nothin'!"

Dawn was breaking; the blackness was turning gray. And ahead of us I could see a long two-masted boat, hove-to. Bull saw it too, and before I could stop him was outside the canopy with his bare feet braced and one arm around the manrope.

"Just nose up to her, Jack!" he bawled. "Just nose up so I can jump."

"Jump with the painter," I yelled back, "and take a turn around a cleat."

That would keep us close to the bumboat so we wouldn't lose her and have to make a long circle and beat up again. Once fast, I could work the engine so as to keep off and not get stove in.

We could make out the men on the bumboat now. There were five of them on deck, and one was in whites. That one, of course, was Joe Cardigan. The four others were greasers. Probably there was another one below, at the engine.

The four on deck were hanging on for their lives and seemed to be yelling argument back and forth, to one another and to Joe. The spick at the wheel was doing most of the arguing, and kept pointing back toward the harbor. I had guessed right; he was going to put back as soon as he could make up his mind to take a chance and come about.

Slowly we smashed up to windward through those roaring seas. Bull was one minute hanging half over the side and the next flattened back against the canopy by the pressure of wind and water. But I knew that he had a good grip of that canvas-covered, twenty-one-thread manrope, and he would not let go. Not Bull Cardigan. If old Sour Mug went over the side, he would take with him canopy, stanchions and all.

We were no more than twenty yards down wind of the big bumboat now. The spicks waved their arms and shouted to us to keep off. Joe shouted too, and his snarly voice came clear to us.

"Lay offa me, you lousy bum! Lemme alone! I ain't goin' back, d'yuh hear! Lay off me, or I'll kill yuh! I've had enough of you!"

Bull bawled into the cockpit.

"A little more, Jack—so I can jump! Just gimme a chance to get aboard there, old-timer!"

Just a little more. Only ten yards off now, and then ten feet. A little more. I put the wheel over to be ready to sheer off when we backed. The bumboat's stern dropped into the trough. Our bow went up—up, up, up. We were looking down at the bumboat now. I saw Bull brace himself. His bare feet gripped the yellow-pine planks. He steadied himself with both hands on the Samson post.

Then, just before we started down, he leaped.

He landed like a big cat on the bum-

boat's slanting deck. Two spicks sprang at him and the three went down in a kicking, hitting scramble of arms and legs. Another spick flashed a knife and piled in, but a moment later came sliding out with both arms wrapped around his stomach. A foot or a fist had landed there. I saw Joe Cardigan, his lips drawn back, start toward them at a run.

Then I had to put the wheel hard over and sheer off. Bull—the hammerhead—had not taken the painter with him; either he had forgot it or had decided he could handle things aboard the bumboat without any help.

Without a bow line out, I could not back in that sea, and would have to haul around and beat up again. Then I would get the fireman to jump with a line and, once fast, we could all pile aboard the bumboat and give Bull a hand. But it would take fifteen or twenty minutes to get up again, and till then Bull would have to take care of himself, and with the odds five or six to one, it looked like he had bit off a pretty big chunk.

We swung, and the seas, rushing along at sixty miles an hour, almost swamped us in the half-minute we were broadside-to. Then we were around and racing down wind. Astern, the bumboat dropped out of sight in the slanting rain.

Again we beat up. Slowly the bumboat came out of the grayness. I shouted back to the fireman and he climbed over the boiler into the cockpit, to be ready. He was a tough fellow named Moriarity, and in one hand he had a fourteen-inch monkey wrench.

We could see the men on the bumboat now. The fight was still on. But who was who, we couldn't make out. There was a tangle of fighting men in the lee of the mainmast. A spick dived into it, then came flying out. One was down, hurt, and clinging with both arms to a deck cleat. Another was doubled up against the wheel-box. I couldn't see Bull or Joe. They were in that straining tangle.

Then the tangle broke. A brown-faced native staggered out. Got his balance and started in again. A big fist shot out and smashed him to the deck.

Then I saw Bull. He came plowing across the heaving deck. His head was down and his heavy fists were driving short, lifting punches into the body of a spick who half-backed, half-ran before him. Old Sour Mug. Clamp down and hang on. Plow in, in, in, and never pause nor take a backward step.

He had his man on the run now. Then the spick went down like a cow before a hill engine, and was trampled underfoot.

But two others of the spicks had recovered and were plunging at him. Out of the cuddy came a man in dungarees, with an iron bar in his hand; the bumboat's engineer. Then they closed up again. For an instant I saw Joe Cardigan, his white jumper ripped half off, his face all smeary. He plunged into that swaying mass. I saw fists swing and knives flash; saw the spick engineer looking for an opening for his iron bar. Then a swirling cloud of mist and rain rolled over and half blotted them out. They became only dim figures that swayed and fought and fell and scrambled away.

Coursy had the engine open as wide as he dared and we were fighting to windward inch by inch. It seemed that we would never get up.

I took my face from the hole in the canvas to wipe the salt from my eyes. Holding the wheel with one hand, I reached back to get a towel from the clothes-chest. Moriarity, eager and cursing at our slowness in beating up, had his head out the port side and was watching the fight.

"Hey!" he yelled suddenly. "He's went over the side. The guy with the bar smacked him on the head and knocked him over!"

"Who? Who was it went over?" I asked, and jumped back to the wheel.

He didn't know, hadn't been able to see clearly through the rain and mist. But it must have been Bull, I thought. What would the spick with the bar hit Joe for?

The bumboat was a bare fifty yards ahead now. Under the boat's quarter I

got a glimpse of a head in the water. Then it was gone. I looked up at the bumboat's taffrail. A figure was there, posed. A big figure in whites. It steadied for a moment, then dove.

"Naw," cried Moriarity. "Couldn't 'a' been Bull went over. Must 'a' been Joe. Bull's gone after him. Joe wouldn't do 'at, the sneerin', sharkmouthed scum!"

He was right, I thought then. Probably the spick had swung his bar at Bull and hit Joe instead. Joe had been knocked over and Bull had gone after him. Sour Mug would do a thing like that. He had a one-way mind, but a mighty grim one. He was after his brother Joe.

"He's got him!" cried Moriarity. "Got him and holdin' him up!"

The bumboat started ahead. The sudden thrust of her propeller sent the two forms twisting toward us, and Coursy gave the steamer a kick ahead. Moriarity leaned far out. I put the wheel hard down and saw them for a moment under the bow; then they passed aft along the side. Moriarity reached farther out. I let go the wheel and bore down on his legs to give him purchase. Coursy came forward outside the canopy.

We hauled them aboard. Bull first, then Joe. Bull was unconscious, a gash in his head. Joe, then, was the rescuer; he had saved Bull's life. That went down hard, but there it was.

Moriarity and I fired questions at Joe as we helped him get Bull on the clothes-chest. All he said was, "Lousy spiggoties!" then shut his mouth like a trap and would say no more. I noticed then that his jumper had not been torn, but sliced with a knife.

I gave one bell and swung the steamer toward the harbor.

AN HOUR later we tied up at the regular landing. It was long after sun-up and the rain was thinning. The wind still held, though, and I was glad. It would keep the Fleet at sea. A steamboat man didn't get a vacation every day.

Bull had come to and was in the sternsheets with Joe. Bull was talking, kind of low and solemn, and Joe was listening. I couldn't hear what Bull was saying.

Coursy and Moriarity kept asking me what it was all about. I told them as little as possible, and didn't mention the six hundred. I told them to say nothing to anybody or I'd run them ragged. They promised, and they were the kind of men to keep their words.

I went aft, into the sternsheets. Bull stopped talking and looked at me. Then he looked at Joe. Joe bent over, pulled up his pants leg and took a sheaf of wet money from his sock. He gave it to me without a word.

"You're a old-timer, Jack," said Bull, "and I guess yuh know how to get that back where it belongs."

I did.

"I'll put it in an envelope," I told them, "and address it to the paymaster, and when we get back to the ship I'll drop it in the post office slot."

It would be easy, and safe. The captain would figure that the man who took the money had repented, and would let it drop.

I looked at them. Were they friends or enemies? All Joe's life Bull had been doing things for him, and it had only made Joe worse. Now Joe had done something for Bull—had saved his life. Would he get a decent opinion of himself and set out to live up to it?

Some men are like that. Keep doing them good turns and they get to dislike you, but if it happens that they do something for you they get friendly again.

"What we're gonna do," said Bull, "is buy out. It'll on'y take sixty dollars apiece—for the clothes the Navy give us—and we got that. Then we're goin' back to Red Hook and start a business together. Cardigan Brothers, moving and storage. I know a feller will help us out with jack to get started.

"Then we'll get a place in the country for Pop and Mom. Make Pop knock off work and get a girl to help Mom. Joe, here, he'll make things up to Mary; he'll be glad to get back to her, 'cause he thinks more of her than he thought he did.

"Yeah, Jack, everything's gonna be fine as silk from now on."

That was all right—if true. What did Joe think about it? He was a hard one to make out, that fellow. I couldn't tell anything by looking at him, and he didn't say a word. Just sat there staring down at his feet.

"A word with you, kid," I said, and took him by the arm and led him out upon the landing.

"Listen, guy," I said, "don't you go falling for any of that slush he's slinging. I know him better now than I did before. Bull is just what you said he is—an interfering skunk. You should have let him drown."

I was half ready for what followed, but half ready wasn't quite enough. I didn't have time to duck or dodge, so I rolled with the punch, and his fist clipped me on the cheek instead of on the jaw. He was starting another one when I waved him back.

"Lay off, boot," I said. "I was only trying to find out something. Now let's make the steamer shipshape, grab a wink of sleep and start this furlough off the way it ought to start."

He was puzzled, but he went back to Bull. They turned to straightening up. They worked with a will, and it made me sore. They were good men—the makings of real steamboat men. Steamboat men were scarce.

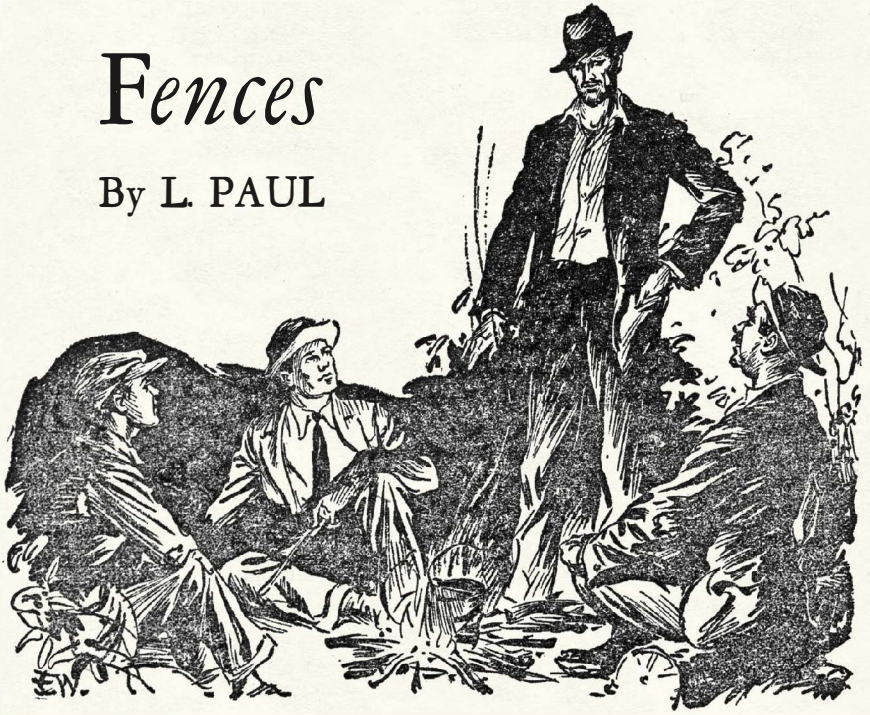
No use arguing with them. Bull had said they were going to buy out, and once old Sour Mug made up his mind and set a course . . .

Well, no use moaning about it. I would have to get me a couple of new deckhands.

"Some is chained by houses, some by wimmen, and some by—"

Fences

By L. PAUL



WE SAT by our jungle fire, a thing of broken sticks and odds and ends of refuse that burned the parched bare ground still harder.

A fence divided us from the road where a policeman walked, a battered, blistered fence of ancient rails. Another fence across the white dusty road, a thing of wire with easily swinging gates, enclosed that other, orderly jungle where gas arabs parked their cars beneath tall elms.

They were new creatures in these days and highly popular. That policeman eyed them indulgently, but us he watched. This Maine city gave them freely a park across the road and to us yielded grudgingly this corner of wasteland where, hemmed in by heaps of ash and rubbish, we might linger our brief permitted day, penned up under the eye of the law.

We were the Elder Nomads and fully as honest as these others. Yet there were fences between. We were the Elder Nomads and the clasp knife I fingered was token of my standing in the Lodge of the Itching Foot.

I had left my New Brunswick farm home a year ago, that clasp knife and ten dollars in my pocket, high aspirations in my heart and at my side tall Yonderbound, my father. I had seen his world as he would have me see it, and here we were at the end of our circuit, with New Brunswick just over the border.

The ten dollars had gone long since. The keeper of a New Orleans dosshouse had pouched the last dime. My aspirations had become vague, uncertain. But

the clasp knife I still had with me. That nick in the blade? I'd put farm training to good use out there in Oregon—pouring leather on to two rawboned horses, yanking a slip on a new grade. And a harness rivet had nicked the big blade as I made a hasty repair.

The point of that same blade had gone farther south. As I felt its rough edge I remembered an officious man who clapped wanderers into an adobe lockup, who sat nodding through the early night outside the door while we cut our way out and slipped noiselessly away. The horn handle had cracked as I slid over the sill of a crawling box to find Florida beneath my feet and warmth about me in winter.

So it went, and as I fondled that battered old knife memories came.

I should have seen tall mountains rising above dense forest, valleys leading into silent hills of mystery, trails beckoning. I saw instead the open door of a ranger's cabin in the foothills and a girl's face remembered now because it was a girl's. I should have seen great sweaty men, sock footed, in that Northern Ontario lumber camp; should have winced again from the heavy blows of a heavier man. For there I had won my first stand-up fight. But what I did see now was trail's end the next morning and a village druggist's little dispensary, where a young girl held a basin of water as they washed and bandaged my bruises.

I should have seen the Blue Grass, where men were polite even to dusty folk like our pedestrian selves, where such horses as I had never seen showed in every line, in every graceful movement, their aristocracy. But I remembered now only that girl who had smiled down at us from atop a load of hay. That, and my father's puzzled frown as he caught me looking back.

Looking back? That, too, was part of this open road life. That and the fences. For fences we had found everywhere. Nor were they always fences that a man could climb.

So it went, memory upon memory—and myself in a brown study gazing at the old clasp knife. Till Tantramar Joe looked up from his cooking and whistled in wonder. Till my father, who had been watching me, turned and saw too, and said—

"It's him—Smoothface."

Smoothface it was, walking down the road, seedy and small, yet strangely not unkempt. There was dust, thick white dust, on the lower half of each boot, but above, worn leather and shiny serge of trouser were clean. Smoothface it was, nodding to the law there, swinging open that oiled gate, walking as by right across that bit of parkland where now the gas arabs were eating in strange tabernacles of canvas; Smoothface who paused by the long wash stand under blue sky and unrolled a paper parcel.

We watched him, as the law watched him; saw him borrow a cake of soap from a nearby tourist; saw him brush his teeth carefully, slick down the last stray lock of hair across his forehead; saw him wrap again in paper brush and towel and, by the same token, that tourist's soap; and finally greeted him as, walking out of that park, he strutted impudently by the policeman, scrambled over our rickety fence and squatted by our fire. But, watching, I thought:

"Crossing this way's easy. It's getting back that counts, if ever you want to get back."

Then I became aware that Smoothface was talking.

"That bull—he don't like me none—me that ain't no worse than others. A holy guy, likely, he is—white collars meanin' righteousness."

"That there tourist's lookin' at ye," Tantramar cautioned. "The one lent ye the soap."

"Redhill mud on his spare tire," Smoothface winked. "As I told him, Tantramar, as I told him when I borrered the soap, 'Redhill mud, and Redhills in Canada.' And he's got a Jersey license plate—and if he ain't glommed that tire off some farmer up North he sure acts like it. An honest guy, that one

—parkin' acrost the fence. That's the kind Holy Joe hits hardest."

And at that I remembered the Evangelist, tall and bearded and thin, Smoothface's partner, laid by the heels in Farley, doomed to the rockpile. Remembered, too, how we had parted from lonely Smoothface in Montreal almost a year ago, how we had not seen him since. One moment he stood on Notre Dame Street, looking small and deceptively ineffectual and alone. The next, the crowd had swallowed him.

Almost a year since we had seen him. No regrets at parting, no surprise at reunion. Trails crossed and forked in our wandering world and reason had no place in it.

Almost a year, yet now I remembered clearly our first meeting in a box car. Smoothface and Holy Joe the Evangelist, Red Alick, who had tried to knife me for my ten dollars, Bookie, that strange scholar—these my first acquaintances on the open road. And of them all, after a year, Smoothface alone had come back to us.

But now his voice came through my thoughts and Tantramar was lifting his mess of food off the fire. The policeman by the fence was eying us as we began to eat, as if he grudged us our very food. And from the corner of a mouth that worked like a rabbit's as he gulped his share, Smoothface told us why he was here.

"Holy Joe—can you beat it, Yonderbound? On the rockpile? Like hell. Got to exhortin'—sorta reformed them stone crackers. They say even Red Alick nigh got religion. Beats hell how a man that believes hard can sorta spread things. Why, I heard tell one of the guards took to prayin'. Anyways, some reeligious wimmen hears of this and pries Holy Joe loose, sets him up in a shack that used to be a school. Now he's branched out with a tent and a regular ballyhoo revival outfit. And, by the same token, there's a long skinny guy playin' a cornet I ought to be tootin'. And so—"

He spread his hands out, gesturing, as if that explained all.

"So you aim to go do likewise." Tantramar eyed the policeman at the fence uncertainly. "You'll get as far as the rockpile. I just been up to the New Brunswick border. Your number's up, Smoothface. They'll like for to see you."

"He was my pardner," Smoothface said simply. "Holy Joe, that's gettin' fat an' lazy, he was my pardner. I reckon I got to go pry him loose. I got to take my chance of the bulls, Tantramar. Once pardners, always pardners. When you take on a game like that you'll come to the place where you asks yourself questions. I'm askin' myself some right now in this here jungle. And the answer—the answer—"

So I realized with a start that in his warped way Smoothface was being conscientious. Whatever the risk, he must make the attempt, must try to save Holy Joe from respectability.

But across the road a girl leaned on the gate, a young girl who watched us. And, catching her eye, I smiled, then flushed, for she looked away. And a woman's voice shrilled, so that the girl turned and ran across grass and was gone. Only the fence was there now, to remind me that even in our wandering world there were boundaries.

And my father, stirring, said softly:

"Questions, aye, questions. There's them can't—can't answer for themselves—there's them can't be trusted to answer for themselves—but—"

"If Till Death Erkimer was here," said Tantramar, "he'd answer free. Till Death, Kid—"and he turned to me—"called so for reasons, Kid. Ask him where he's goin', where you're like to meet him? 'Till death I can't tell,' says he. 'Till they holds me down with sod I don't rightly know nawthin' 'bout where or when!'"

"But a grand hand for questions when they ain't personal," said Smoothface. "For these here, now, moral gadgets Till Death's your man and will yarn for a week."

"There's another better," my tall father put in. "There's Yarb Doctor, old

Yarb Doctor that lives on Baldhead crost the border."

"Ay, him, Yarb Doctor," Tantramar agreed. "Some men gets chained by wimmen, some by houses. Him, he got chained by plants. Well, if ye ever hit north of Moncton there's fine duck in them marshes. Give my love to them Tantramar marshes, Smoothface."

"Shot them duck? You was raised near there, wasn't you?" Smoothface asked.

"I left young, but I heard tell them duck was good," Tantramar answered, and sighed.

Smoothface chuckled.

"Damn you, that's my home," growled Tantramar, and turned away to stare into the dying fire, seeing God knows what distorted dream pictures. So that to me he seemed again a little boy, so simple was this man beneath the hard veneer of the Road.

But my father stretched and yawned and said:

"We're goin' North too, come dawn, Smoothface. Best hit the grit together."

"Forever why?" I asked, for we had had other plans.

"For to ask a question I dursn't answer," my father explained. "Yarb Doctor lives on Baldhead, and him we'll ask."

Nor would he say more just then. But his face was somber and I caught him looking at me strangely.

Then a farmer's rig creaked along the road and stopped, and the farmer himself, leaning down from his high seat, talked with the policeman of crops and meadows and stock. I could follow this old familiar jargon—and, over there, across the fences, a girl's voice was lifted in song—and from the celluloid window of a pretentious tent came yellow light, like a beacon.

And because I was very young I wondered if I could have walked through that gate, opposite, as Smoothface had walked, if I could have stayed as old Smoothface dare not stay?

And, wondering, slept.

WE HIT the grit at dawn, Smoothface, Yonderbound my father, and myself. We walked in single file past a new policeman who smiled to see us go. Over in the campers' park they still slept beneath the law's benignant eye.

We hit the grit steadily, silent till the sun was up, for dawn walking is no romance after a year of it. After ten or twenty years? I wondered what it must be to Smoothface. Shadows on the ground and the air chill, and joints stiff, muscles cold; ahead a road winding mile after mile. I wondered what it would be like if nothing lay at the end of that road after all.

But the sun rose and Smoothface grew cheerful after a few miles and began to talk.

"Thirty mile to Holy Joe, His Sanctity," said Smoothface, and lengthened his stride. "Them's words I got from Bookie."

"That died mad in Frisco two months gone," my father answered, and this was as new to me as to Smoothface, so that I wondered at my father's two months' silence.

"Them clever guys, they mostly does just that," Smoothface commented. "I'd wondered where Bookie'd hit for."

"You ain't heard?" my father went on. " 'Tis not a tale for Holy Joe to hear. 'Twas him started Bookie off, yarnin' away in that box car, pluggin' religion at him on the rockpile, prayin' when a guard cracked him on the jaw, prayin' for the damn' guard. 'Twas that done for Bookie. He seen there must be somethin' in religion, and so made one up for his own self. Worked out a creation and all but couldn't make the pieces fit. Made a religion for hisself at the last and died mad in the makin' o't."

He walked on silently.

Till Smoothface said, softly:

"I got to get Holy Joe clear o't it all. You see what that guy does to folks."

But I was puzzled. Why had my father never told me this? I could remember a hundred of his anecdotes concerning chance acquaintances. All gay or funny,

all glorifying the open road. And now we were going north to ask some questions of Yarb Doctor. And my father chose this moment to daub black on his own fair picture.

To daub and daub, for now he was telling another tale of another acquaintance crippled with rheumatism, drowning himself at the last as old age crept upon him.

"With a smile on the face of him as he sank," said my father, "a brave sort o' smile, doubtless, but meanin' nothin'—nothin' save he kep' his heart to the end. 'Tis cruel for to think of it, but there's things crueller yet."

"Such as?" Smoothface asked. "Such as?"

"Not havin' the courage for to end it," my father explained. "Goin' on and on. 'Twas mebbe *that* Bookie couldn't fit into his new religion. 'Twas mebbe that drove him mad. He'd know more'n us, fear more'n us, 'cause of his readin'."

On we walked. And as they talked, these two, the morning brightness went from the fields and though clouds swung up from the horizon it was a more intangible overcasting of the heavens that I blamed for the chill in the air and the shadows on the land.

We came through rain at dusk to an old tumbledown barn and there slept. The border lay a mile ahead.

THE Stars and Stripes flew over the little post office, but across the small river a bright red signboard said, "Clegg's Plug 15 Cents." So I knew I was back home in Canada. Knew as I stepped from plank bridge to reddish earthen road that this was native soil.

And if the trees bent more graciously over the muddy road, if the very frogs in the ditches seemed to croak melodiously, it was not strange. For this very soil had nourished me. This land I knew. I had bent over my hoe in fields such as these, had drunk from earthen jug beneath such elms at nooning time the same clear cold water.

My step lengthened till I scuffed Smoothface's heel. Till he cursed me good naturedly and said:

"You and me don't feel the same about Canada, Kid. But, ten mile and we'll see Holy Joe. An' then—"

"Fifteen and we'll see Yarb Doctor," my father added. "Best walk quick."

He glanced back apprehensively, though it was not of himself he thought, nor of me. It was Smoothface whose number was up, here across the invisible boundary, the boundary of peace for fenced-in folk, of war for poor Smoothface. Another fence, so it seemed, across which men of the Open Road must stray sooner or later only to find danger at trail's end.

But Smoothface minded this least of all. At noon we came to a little village tucked away between hills and here we lunched grandly in a neat hotel.

"Got to come respectable to Holy Joe," Smoothface explained, and paid the reckoning gayly. "Though I will say paid grub chokes a guy."

He whistled as we took the road again.

For he was near his goal. Rigs came past us and mud from many hoofs splashed us. Democrats and buggies, almost a procession of them going our way, kept us scuttling for the ditch.

"Single-minded folk, goin' for their kind o' jag," sneered Smoothface.

Then he had the grace to smile placatingly at me, since, but for thirty miles, these were my people who now crowded this country road, making for a great white tent somewhere far ahead.

"All folks breaks out somewheres," my father put in. "If it ain't drink, it's gamblin'; it if ain't gamblin', it's mebbe religion."

And, as if to prove his statement, came a hard faced man in a wagon driven by a small boy, who reined in obediently as they came opposite us and the man bawled—

"Stop!"

A hard faced man, red skinned, rusty haired, with blue eyes that had the toper's look, though probably he had never taken a drink, a man "breaking

out," as my father had said, shaking free of civilized restraint, crashing down artificial barriers in some species of debauch. So much I guessed who had read a hundred faces this past year. So much I sensed dimly. Then stopped all speculation as fear gripped me. For the man leaned over and said:

"Well, well. It's you. Now ain't that lucky? Though tough on me."

It was at Smoothface that he glared. But I had some knowledge of the law by now, and to him we were three birds of a feather.

"Well, well!" The man flipped aside the lapel of his coat and something glittered. He patted a pocket that clanked and said: "Never travel without 'em. Now, question is, what's to be done? Slide over, Sonny. Big Feller, you climb in the back seat with me. Smoothface, you get up front with t'other one. And set tight. Anything you hoboes says will be used agin you. An'—"

"We was doin' nothin'," whined Smoothface. "We was just makin' for that revival."

The man laughed skeptically.

"That ain't your sort o' play," said he. "Amos Casset cut his teeth years back. Amos Casset ain't never lost his man. You three get up. Revival? Revival's for decent folks, not for your sort. Revival—" and his face saddened strangely, like the face of a child denied some treat. "Me, I was goin', me an' Sonny here—but now—" and was silent as the wheels creaked and the horses swung into a trot; was silent, but, turning to look at my father, sitting there beside Amos Casset, I saw that expression of doubt and longing on the officer's hard face.

Smoothface nudged me. From the corner of his mouth he whispered:

"Can you beat it? Ever see a guy that's swore off smellin' red-eye? That bird's red-eye is religion—served hot. Wouldn't wonder—"

"After all," said Amos Casset, "it's on our way. I't'd be beyant his powers, th' Evangelist's, though even hoboes has been moved to grace. No tricks—no tricks. I ain't never lost a prisoner—"

The boy who drove, grinned, brightened up, cracked his whip over the horses.

"That's right, Sonny. We want for to be there in good time. Want real prominent seats up front in the public eye," said Amos Casset.

Turning, I glanced at him again. His tongue tip was brushing his lips, as if he already tasted something long desired.

SO CAME brief respite. So it was we saw, at last, the green meadow with its gracious trees and the great ugly tent, behind fences where tethered horses trampled grass to mire. Jail Express, making a brief stop at Revival Siding. But after that—

The people streaming into the tent were, in one way, like Amos Casset.

Civilization breaking up, veneer of restraint already cracking, emotions rising to the surface. Fodder for Holy Joe. That was his great voice surging out to us as the boy drew rein, as we climbed soberly to the ground, as we paused at the entry where people brushed past us, scarce noticing us, their eyes staring straight ahead, feet stumbling over rough ground.

Whispered words to an usher who stared at me as if half recognizing me. Words of Amos's that changed the curious stare into one almost of hatred. Amos had told him. We were lawless folk, of the world Holy Joe fought, creatures of the Thing Holy Joe cast out.

But that usher led us to a prominent seat, just behind the penitent benches, a seat where all might look on us, whence we could not easily escape. And I found myself between a fat man who moaned and Smoothface who sniffled, aping sorrow for his manifold sins. And on the other end of our bench sat Amos Casset, patting the pocket that jingled, touching the badge on his lapel.

The boy had not come with us. Too young for salvation, he played pitch-penny with his fellows outside.

Holy Joe was there on the platform. His voice had died with our coming. Now

he sat crouching, on a low bench. The tall thin man was blaring away on his silver cornet, moving it rhythmically, swaying from the hips, as I had seen negroes sway down South, melody mad. He was bringing harmony from a volunteer choir behind him.

Holy Joe sat there, his body tense, eyes glowing. The white collar and beard together almost hid his throat, yet I could see it work convulsively as some strange force, pent within him, tore him.

Holy Joe's eyes were gazing out over the crowd, upwards, as if held by something glimpsed afar off. As yet he had not seen us.

He was a little stouter than when we had parted. His clothes were good and on any other man would have looked it. On his gaunt frame they merely hung, for all the added weight about the belt and the slight softening of shoulder angles.

The music soared, the vast crowd that packed the tent joining in. Then it died, suddenly, on a high shrill note.

Holy Joe got up, arms stretched out. He came to the edge of the platform and began to preach. The stout man beside me settled himself more steadily on the bench, planted his feet firmly on the trampled sod, one pudgy hand gripping the edge of the board.

Amos Casset looked us over, then faced the platform. And Smoothface, all admiration, whispered swiftly to me:

"Better'n ever. Listen to him the old exhortin' fool. What I ain't taught him o' sins he's found out for hisself."

No reverence here. Smoothface was listening as a professional, approving as an expert, a connoisseur. And what he heard, what I heard, the words that went out over that vast throng, moving them, swaying them, scourging them, had indeed a strange power.

Yes, Holy Joe knew his stuff. He wasted no time. His great voice bellowed. He hit them hard, right and left. Small sins, such as country folk affect, these he lashed and magnified, setting up peccadillos as crimes, knocking them down as spawn of the devil.

And he got them. Oh, yes, he got them. They swayed on those hard benches like trees in a gale. And now the stout man beside me was wheezing, "Glory! Glory!" as Holy Joe threw in a word of hope. He got them, almost got me, for I remembered an orchard I had robbed in Oregon and those apples seemed to have come across a continent to damn me.

But Smoothface, watching, broke the spell. Dry lipped, he whispered—

"If he didn't believe it so damn hard, what actin' that'd be, what actin'!"

Now, Holy Joe was reaching his climax. How he struck at them, these simple folk, and how they submitted themselves to his lash. A woman fainted, with a half-scream of dismay, back there near the door, and her husband staring, staring at the Evangelist, did not know it, though two ushers carried her out. The fat man, fingers clenched, was rising, rising slowly, till he stood on broad feet.

"God help me, God help me!" he bellowed, and his breath told me what *his* secret sin was.

The Evangelist was striding up and down, up and down now, fixing those burning eyes on this one, on that one, till at last they swung over our bench.

Then a sudden pause, a stricken pause as he saw us, saw who was with us.

"He knows, God bless him, he knows!" Smoothface bawled, and I took it for pious ejaculation, as did our neighbors, nodding their approval, until Smoothface winked at me.

"He knows," Smoothface whispered from the corner of his mouth. "But ain't he a darb? Most folks'd wreck the show, but not him, not Holy Joe. That's the windup. Them that don't get convicted of sin now—"

The Evangelist lowered his voice. It became soft, pliant, devoid of all harsh force, pleading. A few brief words as he pointed the Way to Hope. Then music, soft music, and the cornet shining in silver glory beside him as the thin man played. Then the choir in hushed voices, taking up that weeping strain, working it into melody, louder and louder, till it

became a crashing, swinging song of triumph and hope. Till the cornetist teetering on the very edge of the platform, almost falling into the audience, blared away like mad.

And Smoothface, leaning closer, was saying:

"I always tripletongued that bit. Sorta adds class, I figger." He scowled jealously at his successor.

But the Evangelist gave me no time to consider this nice point. He had fixed his eyes on a man halfway down the aisle, was stalking down toward him, beckoning. The man, sunburnt face flushed even darker, unaccustomed collar cutting chafed neck, gnarled hands dangling, rose, came to meet him, walking slowly, then more swiftly, then running, to slump on the penitent bench.

Holy Joe lifted his hands, cried, "Hallelujah!" and the women started to come, in twos and threes, then in a mob, till the penitent benches became dotted with them, sitting there, heads bowed, moaning, crying, praying.

Hallelujahs rose like echoes all over. The fat man was crowding past me now and as I followed him with my eyes I could see Amos Casset.

Amos was gripping the bench with both hands. His face was strangely pale. That toper's look, that starved look of desire had gone. In its place was something else, something half satisfaction, half fear.

I saw him, and saw Holy Joe again, whirling suddenly; eyes glowing, fixed on Amos Casset. Saw the man rise, as if against his will, feet stumbling, uncertain as he groped his way out into the aisle, as he turned toward the penitent bench, like a sleepwalker.

Then he vanished in a sea of bent bodies, bowed heads, became another bent body, head bowed. Then I lost him and Holy Joe's eyes flickered over us for an instant, and Smoothface whispered:

"Now slope. It's our chance. Easy! Slow!"

But we had to fight our way clear, fight through people who crowded the aisle, seeing us not, feeling us not, as we thrust with knee and elbow, Smoothface, my father and myself. Behind us Holy Joe the Evangelist had mounted to the platform again, was praying. Behind us the cornet was singing softly. Past us these people came, almost over us, crowding forward.

And as we gained the door, Smoothface, forehead damp with sweat, looked back for one fleeting moment.

"It ain't right," said Smoothface. "It ain't right." He stared at the emotional disorder. "I made money by it in the old days, but never no more, never no more. He nigh got *me* for a minute."

Then plunged out into daylight.

The woman who had fainted was there, fighting with the two men who would have held her, escaping to dart back into the tent, staggering weakly till the crowd in the aisle engulfed her. Up forward the benches were crowded. And over the bent heads came the great booming voice of Holy Joe, praying for the saved.

"Which is us," said Smoothface, voicing our common thought. "Which is us."

"Look sharp." My father stalked toward the road. "Miles between us and here is good miles."

He was strangely pale, as if Holy Joe had got to him too, as if he broke chains reluctantly in this escape. Yet as we neared the road he broke into a run and leaped the fence.

Then, turning, paused. For Smoothface was no longer with us. But beside the great tent bushes moved and, for a moment, we glimpsed his short figure as he struck deeper into the woods. And we knew we would call for him in vain. Poor Smoothface. Whatever the outcome he would not leave here alone. Partners? That still meant as much to him as ever.

The boys around the horses raised a shout. My father and I ran up the road, till a rig came bouncing out of the meadow where the tent stood and turned our way. But by then the woods were solid on either hand and, climbing a fence, we hid.

In those woods we remained till it was dark, lying quiet, listening as, one by one, the democrats and buggies rattled by,

listening for pursuers who came not. Hid, as somewhere back yonder Smoothface was hiding, Smoothface, who, seeing the wheels go round, must remain to remove the mainspring. For that, I guessed, was still his purpose. And I wished him luck in it.

Darkness came at last. We took the road. Ahead lay Baldhead, where Yarb Doctor lived, chained down by plants. Ahead lay the answer to a question I now could guess. For though my tall father had been silent through the twilight hours of waiting, I had sensed without words what, perhaps, mere words could not have told me.

Through the darkness, then, we went, silent still, till the road curved and a trail climbed away through trees. Up and up this trail, till lights gleamed from scattered farms below, and the stars seemed nearer.

Up and up, till at last our feet tramped growth that crowded the path and sweet odors came up from the ground in waves. Till ahead a square of radiance showed beneath the two trees that bent grandly to form a lofty arch, black against the blacker starry sky. And, "Here's Yarb Doctor's," said my father, pausing as if to gain his breath, looking back over the dark wide sweep of country.

"Here's answers, all we'll need," said my father, "unless Yarb Doctor's changed and won't talk. And oh, Jamie lad—"

He gripped my shoulder, swung me about till I faced him, though he scarce could see my face, though I scarce could know that his lips were working.

Small need, I say, of words between us now. I had guessed, now guessed again, the question he had brought this weary way. Back went memory to my farm home, to my father facing my landbound unclewho would have had mestay, saying:

"You ha' showed him your world. Now, I'll show him a bit o' mine."

And he had shown me, all this year. We had ranged far. And, at the last, with wonders behind me seen, still other promised wonders ahead, I had faltered, had failed him. I had envied other orderly folk who lived behind fences, on whom the law smiled.

And he—he had seen—or guessed. "Fair is fair," a saying of his, was yet more than a saying. It was a creed.

Up here Yarb Doctor lived. Yarb Doctor had the gift of tongues. Yarb Doctor knew the road, yet had left it. My father would ask his question and Yarb Doctor would answer; and when this was done, perhaps I might judge between them. Two roads ahead—and I to choose.

Fair is fair—and since we left the jungle by the motor camp my father had been more than fair, had made no mention of Chi or California, had painted no glowing picture of lands we were to have seen. Fair is fair—and he had been more than fair, brushing in, one after the other, the drab colors of the open road.

Not blindly would I choose. On that point he was determined.

I could imagine, now, the question.

"Here's my kid," my father would say. "Here's my kid, Yarb Doctor. He ain't easy in his mind. He looks queer at folks chained down. He sorta hones for over the fence.

"Here's my kid. He liked New Orleans. We had grand days in Kansas. In that loggin' camp he showed he was a man. Men enjoys the open road, Yarb Doctor.

"Here's my kid, and here's you, Yarb Doctor. You that's settled down after knowin' the road. What's he to do? It's thus and so, thus and so. The roads fork here and may never fork again for him, Yarb Doctor, an' you been down both roads, you have."

And Yarb Doctor would answer. Well, what would he answer, that old man who knew all things?

Time would tell. The cottage loomed up ahead, black, with brightness in the window.

THE PATH circled around it to the door. But at the window my father paused and looked in. Then stiffened, reached gropingly for me, drew me up beside him, till I too could see.

Yarb Doctor lay on his bunk. Old, grey of beard, face ruddy, as in health, eyes closed. Yet on his face the look of one who sees at last as he has never seen before. Yarb Doctor lay in state with a lamp on either side and a clean fresh slip on his soiled pillow.

Ghosts hanging from the rafters, or they looked like ghosts; were, indeed, but bunches of dried herbs. Shadows in the corners, and, on the table, Yarb Doctor's spartan kit of tinware, polished bright. Stove cold, as Yarb Doctor was.

"I reckon—I reckon—he can't never tell us that answer—him that's found one for himself," whispered my father, and gripped me tighter.

The shadows in the far corner split—something white, a young girl, came out into the middle of the room, stood looking down on Yarb Doctor.

"I reckon it's no use stayin' " said my father "and yet—and yet—they'll bury him by the church, belike, unless—"

He hesitated. Then led the way to the door and knocked.

The young girl said, simply, that her name was Felicity, that her father lived yonder across the hill, nor told us Yarb Doctor was dead. Merely that she had "done for him" of late.

WE BURIED him, at dawn, in his own wild garden. He had made it, that garden, imprisoning wild things in orderly captivity. Now he was gone and the wilderness would close over it all again—would close over him. The fence he had crossed would vanish and he would sleep on and on, not with the army of orderly dead beside the white valley church, but here as one of ours should sleep, gaunt trees above him, wild things growing on him, as the years passed.

We buried him while the dew lay heavy, then stood facing each other as the sun rose higher.

The girl, Felicity, crying softly, watched us.

She had come back from her home across the hill to be with us at this moment. She had told nobody that Yarb Doctor was gone. My father had given her reasons for her silence.

Now she watched us. If her perceptions were acute she must have known that Yarb Doctor's burial did not end matters, that something else remained to be settled.

"You see, Jamie lad, 'tis trail's end for him, Yarb Doctor. 'Tis, belike, end of one trail for you. If you so choose." And he led the way to a bald knob of granite that thrust out through the trees. "Here's fences to climb, if ye must, while ye may."

Below lay the valley, and, beyond, gently rising slopes and ordered farms. Far off a red barn bulked almost black in the morning shadow, a barn I knew. It was but a mile from the farm I had called home.

Below, a dusty road and two tiny figures moving furtively, one tinier than the other; figures that paused now and then to look back as they came nearer and nearer, till they were almost below us.

Horse and rig behind them and a man who drove with whip plying. A man we recognized and, recognizing, could guess who those others were, though they now lay cowering in the bush at our feet.

"He waited. Smoothface waited—for his partner," said my father.

He was silent, though speech struggled for utterance, though there was much yet to say. Smoothface had braved arrest, had lurked back there in danger, and in the end had triumphed. Holy Joe was on the road again.

The rig clattered by, and we could see Amos Casset clearly now below us as he whipped his horse on. Round a curve, gone—and the bushes below us crackling as those two came out. Smoothface and the Evangelist, Holy Joe, together again, and something that glittered in the morning sun, something bright that Smoothface fondled for a moment, as they stood together on the road, then hid beneath his coat as, together, they took the mountain trail.

I still faced my father. His eyes were on me now. He waited. The girl, Felicity, had drawn apart as if in this matter

she had no place, little dreaming that she, or what she stood for, had indeed as much part as anything.

The red barn was bright red now as the shadows shrank before the morning sun. Beyond, a farm waited for me, mine at a word if I went home to claim it. And below footsteps sounded on the trail. Smoothface and Holy Joe, coming up the path, bound over the hill, partners once more. The girl Felicity took two little steps forward, eyes on me, lips opening, then closing in silence.

My father stirred uneasily and, turning, faced the hillcrest above.

And I? I was young. And here I stood on a mountain looking over a world that might, in part, be mine, an orderly world where orderly people were now stirring—looking, wondering, and choosing.

For choose I must.

Now, Smoothface leading, the pair were almost on us. My father's face broke into a smile, though his voice showed strain as he said:

"He's nabbed the cornet. He's nabbed the music as well as the Gospeler. He's on the road equipped complete, Jamie lad—and that's a partner, a partner!"

The girl Felicity, as if guessing my dilemma, voiced a local proverb.

"Going's the starting of coming," said she, and watched those two come up the hill to join us.

Then I, too, knew that four of us would take the mountain trail.

PROVISIONAL FIELD ARTILLERY

by Steamer

THE 2nd Cavalry, the old Second Dragoons, raised to fight the Seminoles, was broken up into three parts and each of the parts used as a nucleus to form a new regiment of cavalry. From these divisions were made the new 2nd Cavalry, the 18th Cavalry, and the 19th Cavalry. These three cavalry regiments of the regular Army had a pleasant summer at Fort Ethan Allen, and then the 18th was suddenly transformed to the 76th Field Artillery, and the 19th to the 77th.

Now, cavalrymen stick to their branch. We were all ardent yellowlegs, and wore our yellow hat cords until threatened with trial for mutiny, and even in France I have heard men claim that they belonged to the 18th Cavalry, P. F. A., the letters signifying Provisional Field Artillery. The old 2nd still remained a cavalry regiment and went to France as such.

We heard rumors for a long time that the 2nd was in action as cavalry and at St. Mihiel we ran into them. I remember I sat in a ditch outside Vignulles and watched a troop of horse go clattering by to head off the German retreat, and I was very near to tears. If they had had a spare mount I would have got on it and gone with them.

Later we crossed their trail again in the Argonne. A troop went by our position at Montzeville, and the whole outfit cheered them lustily. That night about thirty percent. of our effective force went absent. When the adjutant sadly told the colonel about it, the colonel foamed at the mouth.

"Don't send in the morning report," said he, "until I come back. I know where they are. A cavalryman will go farther to get a little smell of horse than a drunkard will for a drink."

He climbed into his car and hustled over to the 2nd Cavalry bivouac. The missing artillerymen were all there and he promptly herded them back. While he sympathized with their ambition to be cavalrymen again, he was a believer in discipline, so he had them all tried for desertion in the face of the enemy, and the captains who had the greatest number of absentees were relieved from command.

J. D. *Newsom*

TELLS OF AN AMERICAN WHO SOUGHT SOLACE IN THE FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION

THE MEDAL

SOME of the consequences of the world war were far more terrible than the war itself. Among them was the French wife which a buck private by the name of Alexander Sutton wished on himself one November day in the year 1918.

There was nothing intrinsically wrong with the girl, who was a nice girl according to her standards, but there was a great deal wrong with the word pictures Sutton painted for her benefit. He led her to expect castles on the Hudson, a fleet of eight-cylinder limousines and a staggering checking account. Sutton wasn't a pathological liar; far from it, but he was carried away by his emotions, and his chronology became badly mixed.

What he really meant to say was that, after he had been demobilized, if he worked hard and made a success of truck driving, he would eventually but positively acquire the castles, the limousines and the bank account. It is quite possible that his faulty French made matters even worse, but the fact remains that Madame Julienne Sutton, *née* Dugourdot, went to America under the impression that she was sailing into the possession of such wealth as is totally unknown in the fair city of Troyes in the department of Aube.

It took exactly forty-eight hours to convince Julienne that America was no place for her. After the calm of her native city the noise of the Ninth Avenue Elevated made her scream and tear at her permanently waved hair. And there were other things which made her scream. Alexander was one of them. His father and mother were added incentives, and so were his sisters, and the dingy flat, and the cooking, and the lack of money—the dollars which were to have been sent back by registered mail to her own *pauvre mère*, living on depreciated French francs in the *belle* France.

If Sutton didn't scream too it was solely due to his stolid temperament. Nobody loved him. His family uprose and blackguarded him, for he had injudiciously forgotten to warn any one of his bride's arrival. He sprang her on his people, so to speak, before even his own mother knew that he was married.

"And youse out of a job!" cried the good woman. "And married to that French hussy. Full of cheap perfume, she is. Take her away!"

The scandal spread up and down Ninth Avenue. Young Sutton had brought back a French wife! A made'moselle from Armentières. Alexander became an object of derision. He had no job, no money and no prospects. Even if he had had a job, money and prospects, they would not have suited the vivacious Julienne. Had not her poor parents paupered themselves to pay her passage to New York, on

the strict understanding that the money would be repaid at once?

Sutton, who had been forgetting his French, quickly identified such little pet names as *menteur*, which is liar; *cochon*, a pig, *vaurien*, a good-for-nothing, and many others besides. Somehow or other Julienne had lost all her languishing charm. She was shrewish, and to make matters worse Nature had endowed her with a slight mustache, which Alexander had never noticed before.

As soon as his mother and father recovered their wits they ordered him to take his painted woman out of the house. The painted woman asked for nothing better, for the Ninth Avenue Elevated was driving her crazy. But the only place she wanted to go to was home. Nothing else would do—home, France, Troyes and *pauvre mère*. Gor, how she hated the Americans! She called the Woolworth building a grandiose monstrosity.

For a few days Alexander floundered in the midst of this tumult of sound. Hair brushes and insults were hurled at him with equal venom. At last he made up his mind. He would take his girl back to France and live over there with her. In her proper environment she was, he remembered, very wonderful. And France was a hospitable country, where a doughboy could not go wrong.

He had no money, but that didn't deter him. He slipped a blackjack in his pocket one evening, and when he came back, behold, he was richer by $823 and a gold watch.

EVENTUALLY he reached Troyes, but he found that his troubles were only beginning. The $823 brought him no luck whatsoever.

Julienne fell into her mother's arms on the station platform, while Alexander was being dealt with by an indignant

father, flanked by a mutilated son, a nephew and a few friends. A large crowd gathered to listen to the indictment of the despicable American. There were loud hisses, whistles and catcalls.

A station porter drew the crowd's attention to the patent fact that Sutton was healthy, well fed, uninjured—whereas regard poor Monsieur Dugourdot's son! Regard him well—maimed on the field of battle, a hero. And to think that this foreigner, this slacker, had stolen poor Monsieur Dugourdot's daughter and dragged her half way around the world on the strength of lying promises!

It occurred to Alexander that his presence was not considered desirable in the city of Troyes. But he didn't know where else to go. It was an awkward moment. When at last the family trooped out of the station he tagged along behind, carrying two of his wife's suitcases. No one noticed him. He was allowed to come as far as the threshold of the *café-restaurant-débit de vin* owned by M. Dugourdot. There he was stopped.

"*Jamais!*" thundered M. Dugourdot. "Never shall you cross my threshold again, species of a seducer. Depart at once or I shall summon the *gendarmes!*"

Alexander turned to go. He walked, for the first time in months, with a light and springy step. Despite all the humiliations heaped upon him he had a sneaking feeling that he was quite glad to see the last of Julienne's thin red mouth and her faint mustache.

At the corner he paused for one last look at the café-restaurant, and he noticed that the name was not what it used to be. In the good old days it had been called the "Café Lafayette." Today it was the "Café de France." Planted squarely in the doorway stood M. Dugourdot with his fists on his hips, keeping an eye on his unwelcome son-in-law. Then as Alexander turned on his heel, a face appeared above the café owner's shoulder and a shrill voice cried out, "*Cochon!*". It was Julienne's parting gift.

There was a broad, happy smile on the rejected husband's face as he swung down the street.

He had no cause to smile, however, for between him and starvation there was only a matter of forty paper francs. Julienne had relieved him of the rest on the way down from Paris, threatening to pull the alarm cord if he did not hand over his wallet.

"I know you," she had said acidly. "If I let you out of my sight I shall never see even so much as that of my money."

She emphasized the *that* by snapping her thumb nail against her pretty white teeth.

At the time Alexander had not foreseen the brutal separation and he had given her his money, making some lame remark to the effect that henceforth she would have to feed him until he found something to do.

"Ah, yes," Julienne had retorted. "That is what you would like, is it not? To live on my family. But wait until my father has spoken with you. He will decide."

That had been the tone of all her conversation ever since he had welcomed her at the foot of the gangway in New York. Not once had she called him her "adored little cabbage."

"Strikes me," murmured Sutton as he wandered down the quiet street, going nowhere in particular, "strikes me, I'm in luck. Think of being hitched to that jane for life. Jus' think of it! I'm well out of it."

Then he saw a clock and realized that it was one o'clock and that he craved food.

One square meal cost him twenty-seven francs, and it was none too square. Afterward he sat on the shady banks of the canal, with his back against the trunk of a secular elm tree, and threw pebbles at the minnows wriggling near the surface of the smooth, green water, while he tried to think coldly and dispassionately about his future.

He had no money, no friends and no job. His family had kicked him out, and his father, who did not approve of

blackjacks as moneymakers, had threatened to have him arrested if ever he set foot on American soil again. He was sorry he had had to resort to such strong-arm methods to acquire a little wealth, but it was too late now to bother about vain regrets. His one consolation was that his victims had parted with their money so willingly that he had not had to make use of his weapon. This, however, was a minor consideration. He was in France now, with thirteen francs in his pocket, in a small provincial town which was fully aware of and hostile to his presence.

It occurred to him that he had made a hash of his life and for a moment he was tempted to put an end to it by jumping into the canal. This would annoy Julienne and, perhaps, cast a certain amount of disrepute upon her arrogant family. But on second thought he remembered how glad he was to be rid of that impossible woman; and anyway he knew how to swim.

The sun was warm on his back and the *mouton printanière* plus a half liter of red wine were making him pleasantly drowsy. He tried to tell himself that he was in a nasty predicament, but before he could succeed he fell sound asleep.

HE WAS awakened by a tickling sensation in the neighborhood of his right-hand trousers' pocket. In the pocket, he discovered, there was a hand. It belonged to a small man with a scraggly beard, who exclaimed in a shocked voice:

"Oh, pardon, monsieur! I assure you— Oh, lala! I beg you, do not break my wrist— I implore you, monsieur— My shoulder dislocates itself!"

He looked astonishingly respectable, even though his beard was unkempt and the wrinkles on his cheeks were crusted with dirt. He wore a threadbare cutaway coat, greenish black trousers spattered with mud, and broken down patent leather shoes with black cloth tops.

"Species of a pig," said Sutton, trying to remember his French, "is it into the canal that I shall heave you?"

"It was an act of desperation," the man assured him with intense seriousness, rolling his eyes and shuddering. "I— I starve! It was in no light mood that I decided to pick monsieur's pocket. I had scruples. Oh, please do not break my wrist. I am at your mercy, monsieur. Let me assure you, I am no common bandit."

"Well," grinned Sutton, "next time you need money choose your victim with more care; for me, I have no money either."

"I perceive that you are a foreigner," said the man, nursing his bruised wrist. "Believe me, monsieur, I am most ashamed, but alas, what will you! A moment of folly . . ."

He looked so bedraggled and absurd that Sutton's resentment gave way to a feeling of good humored tolerance. Moved by an unaccountable impulse he fished his thirteen remaining francs from his pocket and proferred six of them to the amateur pickpocket.

The latter drew back, horrified.

"Oh, but no," he protested. "I could not! No, no—impossible!" Then slowly his hand came out and he grabbed at the money with shaking fingers. "You are more than the good Samaritan! Any one else would have precipitated me into the canal, but one sees at once that you have the kindly disposition. No doubt but monsieur is an American, if one may judge by the accent. I, too, speak a little English," he went on, smiling tremulously. "You see, I am no common apache. I have the education."

"I'll say you have," agreed Sutton. "How come you're on the rocks?"

"The rocks? The rocks? Ah, yes— broken! You who are an American can not understand these things."

"I'm telling you, we're both in the same boat. I'm out of luck too. Flat."

"Impossible! Not as I am without luck. Oh, no, sir! I will tell you and you may judge for yourself. You may then do with me what you will." He thumped his flat chest and cried. "I am a tracked man, desired by the police!

That is the truth. Armand Cabillot is desired by the police!"

"All right," agreed Sutton, "just go on shouting about it a while longer and they're sure to get you."

"You are not disgusted? You do not repulse me? For one so young—what understanding! But then you are American. That explains everything. Yes, the police desire me, and I will tell you why. I am a government servant, sir. A director of the post office at Chellières. A responsible position, it was. But I was married to a woman who made my existence terrible. For ten years I endured the shrill voice and odious manners of Madame Cabillot. Ten years of the hades! Hers was a saving nature. Everything must be saved—passion, old clothes, pins, and I know not what. I stole from her to purchase cigarets—and at last I could stand it no longer. It was when she refused me two francs to buy an aperitif for my friend Galmier, whom I had not seen since the war. Sir, do you know what I did?" He scowled, and his eyes blazed fiercely. "I went to the post office, opened my own safe and robbed it. Twenty thousand francs—*voilà!*"

"That's quite a wad. Did you blow it all?"

"Blow—*soufflé?* Is it expended you mean? Yes!" There was an exultant ring to his voice. "To the final centime, I blowed it. I went to Dijon and I *lived*. I recompensed myself for the lean years inflicted upon me by Yvonne. Sir, it was a debauch, an orgy, a shameless saturnalia. I let go of myself—wine, women, everything. Until the money was gone I was insatiable. But now I am repentant. What will you! It is prison for me if I am caught. Prison and disgrace. I was a government employé, a servant of France, and I have betrayed my trust. But I shall make amends, sir. This very day, I shall enlist in the Foreign Legion and vanish!"

"I heard about that outfit during the war," put in Sutton. "What kind of an outfit is it?"

"A place of repentance—the open door to the anonymous grave! One serves in obscurity and silence, and one dies for France. My France, she—"

"All right, all right," Sutton said quickly. "Say, listen, I'm in the same sort of fix you're in; got a wife who don't want me, and I'm short of cash. How about the Legion—is it all parade ground stuff, or do they see some action every so often?"

"You wish to join the Legion? Incredible . . . But if you have a detested wife I understand. Yes, I fully understand." He waved his hands about as he spoke. "The Legion offers the hunted man a place of refuge. It sends him to mount guard on the frontiers of the colonies of France. A perilous life, sir, and a hard one. Let me warn you against it most earnestly. But I wish to make expiation." Again he thumped his chest. "I broke my trust. I shall pay my debt to France with my blood!"

"I dunno so much about the blood part of it," declared Sutton, "but I wouldn't mind doing a hitch myself. Where's the recruiting office? Can I join, d'you know?"

"Do not throw away your life unless you have no hope."

"I'm throwing nothing away," Sutton said emphatically. "I'm in a jam. I been in it so long I can't think straight. The army's the place for me. That'll give me time to sit back and let the dust blow over."

"Then we shall join together!" cried Cabillot. "We shall be comrades in arms, yes? I will explain the cords—the ropes to you—everything! And to think that I tried to rob you. I am still ashamed of it. But it was the hunger. Now, because of your generosity, I can buy bread and cheese, and so appear before the recruiting officer in a fit state for acceptance. And you will see, in the army, I shall be of great help to you."

"I been in the army before. I was—"

"But not in the French army!" broke in Cabillot, squaring his shoulders and looking up at the tree tops. "The army of

France—the bright sword of my beloved country—"

"Let's go get that bread and cheese," Sutton said quickly.

AN HOUR later Alexander Sutton became a soldier of the second class of the French Foreign Legion. He had never done anything easier in his life. At the recruiting depot a bored sergeant asked him his age, his name and nationality. Then he was led into a room, which was clammy and smelled of sweat, and then he was told to strip. Cabillot stripped too, after having apologized for what he called "this promiscuousness." They sat side by side on a greasy bench and waited for the doctor. Cabillot spent the next five minutes assuring Sutton that he had a marvelous physique.

"One sees with half a look that you are a *sportif*, a man of the open air. But observe me. So thin, so bony. It is the office life. The cooped-upedness of the bureau." He expanded what chest he had, and added with fierce determination, "But they must take me. I can not allow myself to fail. It is for France that I shall fight—fight and die!"

"Do you ever," inquired Sutton, "give your mouth a rest?"

Cabillot snickered and looked up with doglike affection shining in his eyes.

"You Americans! Always the joke, yes! Not like the English. I was with them as interpreter during the war. So solemn, they are, so reserved. But you, you joke even with death. *La mort!* And we shall see her at close quarters, this death, very soon! Together we shall face it—comrades, friends! Friends to the very end, yes! Never shall I forget your magnanimity. Your—what is the little word?—ah, yes, your kindliness of heart."

"Look at here," said Sutton, leaning over and fixing Cabillot with a cold blue eye. "I don't want to hurt your feelings none, but for the love of Mike, just sit still for two minutes and let me *think!* You're getting me all rattled."

"Think!" bubbled Cabillot. "You wish to think—but what about, my friend?"

"Home and mother," snarled Sutton. "For God's sake, shut up!"

Cabillot's grimy face beamed with pleasure. He acted as if Sutton's harsh words filled him with pure delight. Before he could say more than, "Your mother will miss you—" the door was thrown open and the doctor came in. He was a large, jovial man, who smelled of cigars and cognac.

The examination was rapid and not particularly thorough.

"Two arms, two legs, a torso, two blue eyes," commented the physician, cocking his head on one side and staring critically at Sutton. "Are you under eighteen or over forty-five?"

"No, sir!" snapped Sutton. "Twenty-five!"

"I thought as much. Let me listen to your heart. Perfect—perfect. So you desire to become a Legionaire? Is your heart broken, or have you assassinated your grandmother?" He threw up his hand in a gesture of warning. "No, no, don't answer. It's none of my business; none of my business. You'll do. Next!"

"I am a—er—Belgian," began Cabillot, doing his utmost to make it clear that he was lying. "But I wish—"

"Let's have a look at your teeth," retorted the doctor.

"But I wish to fight for France, and to die for her! It is a privilege and an honor."

"How much did you steal?" grunted the doctor. "Let me see you bend down and touch your toes." He gave Cabillot a resounding smack. "All right," he concluded. "I'll let you crawl under the bars."

"I am accepted! I am fit to fight!"

"You are. By the way, it is easier to get into the Legion than it is to get out. *You* had better think it over, my brave one, before you sign your papers."

"But what can he mean?" protested Cabillot. "He insults me, but never mind."

He swaggered up behind Sutton, who

was pulling on his socks, and smacked him on the back.

"Legionaires!" he cried. "We two!"

Sutton wheeled upon him and threatened him with a clenched fist.

"See this?" he inquired angrily. "Smell it! You try any more monkey tricks, and I'll crack you one over the dome."

He was sick and tired of Cabillot. He had not known him three hours, but he was ready to murder him. Still, he couldn't very well hit a runt that size. And Cabillot was smiling a sickly smile.

"I am very sorry," he apologized, pawing at Sutton's arm. "Nothing must spoil our friendship. I can not forget your kindness. Never! I am the swine, yes! I try to pick your pocket and you extend money to me."

There were tears of gratitude in his eyes. His lower lip quivered.

"Boy," yelled Sutton, although Cabillot was ten years his senior, "boy, if you don't lay off me, I'm going to go crazy. Talk, talk, talk! G'wan, get dressed!"

Then the bored sergeant summoned them into the outer office. They signed a document whereby they undertook to serve faithfully and well for a period of five years, while in return the Republic of France guaranteed to feed clothe and pay them the sum of twenty-five centimes a day, not quite one cent in American money. There were a great many other clauses to the contract; so many in fact that neither Sutton nor Cabillot took the trouble to read them.

"I sign away my life!" commented Cabillot, adding a flourish to his signature. "To France I dedicate—"

"Muh!" said the sergeant. "Stop gabbling. You're Legionaires now. You'll get your matriculation numbers at the depot. Here are your tickets to Marseilles. Catch the 19:02 out of here, change at Dijon. Take the 23:55 to Marseilles. If you miss the train you'll be court-martialed."

"What for?" inquired Sutton.

"What for? Desertion! Muh! And here's five francs each, subsistence allowance." He dismissed them with a wave of the hand. "Don't get drunk before traintime."

"Desertion!" echoed Cabillot. "There is no danger of that happening. No!"

He strutted down the street at Sutton's elbow and added confidentially:

"It is good to have a friend to share with him the perils of the great adventure. My gratefulness is unlimited. In the hour of danger you will find me beside you—resolute, inflexible, ready to die—"

"Just you lay off me," ordered Sutton. "Keep away from me! Give me elbow room! I don't mind telling you the hour of danger ain't as far away as you might think."

"Let it come!" Cabillot cried. "We await it with sereneness."

And Sutton, after one malevolent look at the ecstatic face of his companion, lapsed into gloomy silence.

IN DUE course of time No. 74,112, Soldier of Second Class Alexander Sutton reached the depot at Sidi-bel-Abbes, where iron voiced drill sergeants taught him the rudiments of his trade.

It did not take him long to find out that the Legionaire is a creature apart—an impersonal "combat unit," a cog in a fighting machine which has no more compassion than a lathe, and is as efficient. He was drilled off his feet on a hot, glaring, dusty parade ground; drilled until all unconsciously he became an automaton, working in perfect unison with a hundred and fifty other automatons. He learned how to march forty kilometers a day with a hundredweight of kit on his back; he learned how to wash a uniform of coarse sailcloth until it became as soft as muslin and snow white; and he learned also that to wear socks inside his boots was not only considered effeminate but dangerous. Moreover, it was forbidden; so he greased his feet and kept out of prison. He behaved neither better nor worse than any one of a thousand other recruits, and did his fair share of extra drills for all sorts of minor infractions of the cast iron disciplinary code.

If occasionally he was made to suffer

he had none but himself to blame, for the Legion knows no mercy. The human material with which it does its work is heterogeneous and unpromising in the extreme. They drift in from all the slums of Europe: broken men, hungry men, ruffians of every type, of every race and creed. And the Legion takes them all in, all this tenth rate stuff, and molds it over into one of the finest fighting machines in creation. What it can not mold it breaks and throws away. But the system is sound; it works; it has worked for a hundred years, ever since the regiment was first organized out of the remnants of the old Swiss Guards and sent to Africa in 1830.

The Legion is the lineal descendant of the Irish Guards who fought at Fontenoy under the banners of Louis XV, and of the Swiss who died defending the Bastille against a Paris mob. For the kings of France, at the zenith of their splendor, felt safer when, between them and their most loyal subjects, there was a line of muskets in the hands of foreign mercenaries.

Napoleon carried on the tradition, but after him the bourgeois kings did away with their foreign bodyguard. The French, however, have always been a thrifty nation. They did not disband a regiment of veterans which had cost good money to train. They sent it to Algeria and set it to work carving out an enormous African empire.

Since that time the Legion has served in every colonial campaign waged for the greater glory of France. From Morocco to Indo-China, from Dahomey to Madagascar, wherever the tricolor flies, there the Foreigners have worked and sweated and died—for a cent a day, for a vague thing called glory.

The flags of France are stiff with the blood of Legionaires, but the French people have not forgotten their old distrust of the *Étrangers*. Wherever he goes, the Legionaire is an object of undisguised antipathy, for he serves none but his own officers, he is trained to obey blindly—and he will open fire with the same disquieting efficiency on a Moroccan *harka* or a French mob. It is all one to him. Consequently he is kept overseas*, where he can not interfere in purely domestic quarrels, and is very usefully employed mounting guard over remote frontiers.

Outwardly Sutton conformed to the rigid standard required of him, but his surrender was far from complete. He could not be made to believe that a sergeant with a wine tainted breath was a god whose orders were above criticism; otherwise he scraped along quite contentedly and refused to worry even when an apoplectic noncom called him a "species of a calf" or accused him of having been infanted by a camel. He went on being a moderately bad Legionaire and managed to enjoy himself thoroughly—or rather, he would have enjoyed himself if he had not been pursued and bothered by the ever grateful Cabillot.

When he went to the canteen of an evening, there was Cabillot standing at his elbow, spouting gratitude and patriotism and airing his English for the benefit of bemused Saxons. If he went downtown on concert night to exchange light banter with hatless Spanish girls, while the regimental band played beautifully but inaudibly in the depths of the officers' club, Cabillot was always close at hand, urging him to forget the women and remember the manual of infantry training. If he stayed in the barrack room and spent the evening cleaning his kit, there, on the next cot, sat Cabillot, bubbling over with good advice, encouragement and praise.

Cabillot wanted Sutton to "get on." He had decided that the American would make a splendid noncommissioned officer and he spent days on end worrying over Sutton's lack of enthusiasm. *He* was a good soldier, a wonderful soldier; whenever a sergeant spoke to him he leaped right out of his skin, and he thought Sutton ought to do likewise.

When Sutton lost his temper and

*The regiment has served in two continental wars: 1870-71, 1914-18.

threatened to kill him, he accepted such threats as a further proof of his friend's sense of humor. He was insult-proof, he was everlastingly grateful—and he was too small to hit. Try as he might Sutton could not shake him off. He was always close at hand, always at white heat, always trying to devise new ways of helping his great, his only friend.

Before long every man at the depot knew the touching story of Sutton's kindness of heart. Troopers he had never seen before came to him and tried to borrow six francs. In the canteen, especially on pay day, when the Algerian wine was in great demand, comedians tried to pick his pocket and shouted "*Vive la France!*" when he wheeled upon them. He couldn't fight the whole battalion and very wisely he made the best of a very sour joke.

MATTERS reached a climax, however, one baking hot afternoon in July. The company had been out on a thirty-five kilometer hike, starting at four in the morning, and Sutton was sprawling on his cot, resting his aching limbs, when in marched the platoon sergeant with a stamp and a shout:

" 'Tention! Any man in here with a knowledge of motor vehicles?"

Silence. Nobody knew anything about motor vehicles, not even Sutton. Sutton less than any one else.

"I said, does any man here know the technique of the internal combustion engine? Answer me at once!"

Then up spoke Cabillot—the industrious Cabillot who, alone of all the twenty men in the room, was hard at work burnishing his buttons:

"*Mon sergeant*, my friend Sutton here—a modest man, yes—but he drove a motor vehicle in the city of New York. He is the expert."

Sutton stared helplessly at his defamer, while a snicker ran around the room. It burst into a gale of laughter.

"Silence, band of gorillas!" brayed the sergeant, and there was a most profound silence. "You, there, Sutton, lard face, why did you not speak up at once?"

"He comprehends not very well the French tongue, *mon sergeant*," Cabillot apologized.

"Well, he can't shelter behind your back! Shut up and let him do his own talking. Why, *sacré tonnerre*, he speaks French as well as I do. So you know all about engines, eh?" he flung at Sutton. "All right. Get your clothes on and report to me in three minutes."

"Working clothes?" inquired Sutton, controlling his enthusiasm with great difficulty.

"Did I say working clothes, *bougre d'andouille?* No! Your Number Two uniform—in three minutes! If you're one second late you'll do ten days defaulter's drill to smarten you up! Move!"

"Promotion!" Cabillot whispered excitedly as Sutton struggled into his uniform. "I am so glad. Me, I have done this for you. It may lead to anything this chance that has come to you!"

"When I get back—if I ever get back," said Sutton, hooking up his collar, "I'm going to murder you. Promotion, you poor sap—d'you think I want to sweat over an engine on a day like this?"

The look of sad reproof in Cabillot's eyes made him incoherent and blasphemous. He swung out of the room, followed by a fresh peal of laughter.

"*Bon!*" said the sergeant. "You'll do. March!"

He led Sutton across the sizzling parade ground to the officers' quarters and brought him into the presence of Captain Minaillon, the company commander, a tall, thin man with a cadaverous face ornamented with a horn-rimmed monocle.

"So," said the captain, "is this the man with an understanding of vehicles?"

"Yes, *mon capitaine*. He is the expert, this man. He drove a truck in New York—in America."

"What talent we have in the Legion to be sure. It is most amazing. The last time such an emergency arose we unearthed an architect. *Eh bien, mon ami*, since you know so much about vehicles, I wish you to promenade Azor for me." He flipped his hand in the direction of a

wire haired fox terrier which was evidently suffering from the heat and fleas. "You will take him to the Botanical Gardens and exercise him. Light exercise, you comprehend—in the shade beneath the trees. And do not let him off the lead."

"But engines—" began Sutton.

"Silence!" roared the sergeant.

"I said nothing about engines," snapped Captain Minaillon, when the echoes of that roar had died away. "I said vehicles. Azor is a vehicle for an infinite brood of parasites. He needs exercise—you volunteered. It is now four o'clock. Bring him back at seven. That is all. Dismiss!"

In summer the Botanical Garden is the one cool spot in or near Sidi-bel-Abbes. Great trees protect the sanded alleys from the glare of the sun; and a pool of clear water dribbles pleasantly over moss-grown stones. In a clearing stands a statue of Icarus, whose stone wings are extensively patronized by birds and lizards.

Of an afternoon the garden becomes a nursery, where the children of the garrison officers come to play with hoops and tops and sticks of sugar candy, while mothers and nurses mount guard to see that their charges do not fraternize with nasty little Arabs.

Dragging his dog behind him, Sutton spent the next two hours trying to dodge pestiferous brats, who insisted on playing with Azor. They bounced rubber balls in front of it and tried to seduce it with bits of candy, and they begged the soldier-man to be allowed to pet it. Everybody knew the mutt. Sutton was pursued by a sibilant whisper, running from wife to wife, from maid to maid.

"That is Captain Minaillon's little *chien*. Is it not adorable? How fortunate is Madame Minaillon to be back in France at this time of year!"

And Sutton cursed between set teeth. He was tired and sticky and hot. His legs and his back ached. He had been up since four o'clock in the morning and had been robbed of his afternoon siesta. Every time he tried to sit down some female was sure to ask questions of him.

"Are you Captain Minaillon's new orderly? Ah, no? He has not changed orderlies. I see. Thank you."

The officers' wives were haughty. Some of the maids were coy, and some of them tittered, but one and all they exasperated Sutton. He didn't want to talk to any woman—he wanted to sit down quietly and think over the appalling things he was going to do to Cabillot.

AT LAST he found an empty bench on a deserted alley, and there he slumped down with his elbows on his knees, staring at the dog, who looked at him as if to say—

"Well, you big fool, dragged me around enough for one day?"

Then the gravel scrunched and Cabillot, all out of breath, came hurrying around the bend.

"I have found you," he cried. "I search for you everywhere. As soon as the *sortie* is allowed I precipitate myself to find you. Is it not wonderful—this especial duty? It brings you into the close contact with the captain. He will appreciate you—"

Sutton arose, shifting the dog's lead from his right to his left hand.

"You wished this on me," he said huskily. "But lemme tell you this: It's the last time you'll ever mind my business for me. I'm going to whale you!"

"Again I have put my foot in the thing!" groaned Cabillot, flapping his arms about in a helpless manner. "I desire to help you. I did it for your own good. Pause, my friend, think!" He talked faster and faster, backing away as Sutton bore down upon him. "Think! Oh, but you must think. Do not be the foolish one!"

"Stand still," ordered Sutton, tugging at the reluctant dog. "Engines!"

"Do not commit the grave scandal," pleaded Cabillot. "For the regimental sake. And listen at the news. I rushed to tell you. Next Monday we depart

for the south. We shall distinguish ourselves. The time comes for expiation. For France we shall suffer!"

"You're going to suffer right now," Sutton snarled. He kicked the dog aside. "Made a monkey out of me! Engines!"

His fist caught Cabillot above the right eye with the time haloed dull and sickening thud. Cabillot rolled over like a shot rabbit, and the terrier howled dismally.

"You ain't hurt," Sutton declared, "and there's lots more coming your way. Hop up."

Cabillot was on hands and knees. A trickle of blood ran down his white face, which was illumined by a sickly smile.

"Please," he begged. "Control yourself. I will say nothing, nothing. I promise. It is the heat which makes you desire the combat. Remember the departure for the south next Monday. France needs us both—"

"Going to stay down there much longer?" inquired Sutton.

"It is the dizziness. But I implore you, remember yourself—our friendship—"

"Get up and I'll show you," threatened Sutton. Suddenly he turned away with a savage oath. "My God," he cried, "how can I hit that damned worm? I can't do it! But I'll murder you," he went on, shaking his fist at Cabillot, "I'll break your neck if I hear so much as one squeak out of you."

"Now I know you joke," declared Cabillot, staggering to his feet and pulling his rucked-up tunic into place. "I am small in size, yes, but my heart—"

But Sutton could not trust himself to listen to that creaking voice one second more. He wheeled on his heel and went rushing back to barracks.

"Was the dog good?" inquired Captain Minaillon.

"I guess so," said Sutton, "but I'm no judge of dogs."

"Then you'd better do four days defaulter's drill to teach you to keep your likes and dislikes to yourself," said the captain. "Dismiss."

FOR the better part of a century, in North Africa, the French have been diligently shouldering their share of the white man's burden. They have built roads and railroads, harbors and model cities. They have showered the inestimable fruits of their civilization upon Islam, and if they have made quite a good thing out of wheat and wine, wool and minerals, nobody can begrudge them such pecuniary advantages. After all, they have only taken the Arab's land, but in exchange they have given him spendid opportunities to become better acquainted with such marvels as steam engines and wireless telegraphy.

Nevertheless, there are Arabs so stubborn, so intractable, that to this day they look upon the white man as a burden, and they shoot him down if he comes within rifle range. These people are not patriots, since they do not constitute a majority of the population. They are rebels. There is a world of difference between the two definitions. If they are not rebels, then they are fanatics or self-seeking *kaids* or vulgar marauders.

The Tafilet is full of such soreheads. It is a region of desolate hills and boulder-strewn gorges; an arid, barren, tormented land drenched with the incandescent light of the desert sun. Its people thrive on hate and stringy goat's meat. They are stubborn and tricky. They fight for the sheer joy of fighting, they raid caravans fifty miles from their lair and ambush the punitive expeditions sent to teach them better manners. If they are penned in and forced to surrender—they hand in a few ornamental smoothbores, which they quickly replace with high-powered magazine rifles.

Into these hills, at his appointed time, came Soldier of Second Class Alexander Sutton, slogging along in a cloud of dust. The column had come across the desert by forced marches, hot on the trail of a rebel band which had been playing havoc with the trade routes in the name of the One True God. The column was a strong one, for the authorities had decided to put an end once and for all to

the nefarious activities of that particular rebel chief, a young fanatic by the name of Mustapha ben Slimane.

Mustapha was something more than an ordinary rebel. He was A Menace—a disloyal scoundrel with a price on his shaved head. He had been caught young and educated at government expense at the Algiers school for the sons of chiefs. There he had been taught to love, honor and obey the great white nation—Islam's staunchest friend. He was even sent to France, because he was a brilliant scholar, to complete his education.

And instead of coming back to be a loyal, dependable subject, he found nothing better to do than to preach sedition. He spouted something incoherent about Liberty, and when the gendarmes tried to arrest him he quoted the full text of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, ending up with:

"The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are: Liberty, property, safety and *resistance to oppression*."

Then he shot the gendarmes. He was crazy.

Afterward he led his people to the sack of the trade routes and polished off a detachment of *spahis* which had been sent out to punish him. But his worst offense consisted in having brought together all the scattered bands adrift in the Tafilet and welded them into a single force under his command. Word was already traveling from oasis to oasis that a new prophet had arisen who intended to make cat's meat of the French at no distant date. Such rumors have to be discouraged; they have a bad effect upon the moral tone of a colony. So the military headquarters at Bechar took quick action.

The column comprised a squadron of *spahis*, half a battalion of Senegalese *tirailleurs* and two companies of the Legion. An imposing, reassuring force. With its baggage train, its flock of goat's meat on the hoof and its contingent of Senegalese wives, it stretched out for a mile or more and raised an awe inspiring dust cloud as it crawled across the flat, stone covered plain. This display of force had the desired effect. All the restless people who had been on the verge of joining Mustapha ben Slimane thought it over and decided to wait a while longer before they answered the call, and the column reached the hills without having met any opposition.

But of these momentous matters Sutton knew nothing. There was dust in his eyes and dust in his mouth; sweat dribbled down his cheeks and evaporated before it reached his chin. His throat was dry, his canteen empty. The straps of his knapsack had cut red grooves in his shoulders; his stomach was sore from the incessant smack of his bulging cartridge pouches. The sun weighed down upon him, ate into his skull. His rifle was almost too hot to touch. He marched mechanically with his eyes fixed on the heels of the next ahead.

Abruptly the acid call of a cavalry trumpet broke the spell. Halt. Bivouac. In a minute the valley was filled with tents. The dust slowly settled. Lookouts stationed on the hilltops mounted guard over the camp. Silence.

Sutton crawled under the shelter tent which he shared with Cabillot, turned his back on his companion and prepared for sleep. But he was out of luck that day.

Cabillot cleared his throat and squirmed nervously.

"We have had the grave misunderstanding," he began, pawing at Sutton's shoulder. "You have struck me. You will not speak to me, but I have not taken offense. I know you have the good heart."

"Shut up and leggo my shoulder," ordered Sutton. "Curl up and die. Don't you ever get tired of talking?"

"Of my gratitude, how can I ever say enough? I desire but to be your friend. No one desires your good as I do, yet you sulk me. It is sad. We go toward the peril. Soon, today maybe, comes the bullet of the enemy to strike me down. Perhaps then you will sorrow—"

"It can't come soon enough to suit me," declared Sutton. "Shut up."

"Without flinching I shall die. I am ready! But I am also sad. What animates me toward you? Nothing but friendship. Yes, and the best good wishes. Come, will you not be friends before it is too late?"

Sutton sat bolt upright, glared for some seconds at the sweaty, dirty, earnest face of his tormentor, then sank back with a weary groan.

"All right," he agreed. "It's all right. God Almighty, have it your own way! You've got me licked. Now, for the love of Mike, roll over and—"

Crack! Sharp and unmistakable a rifle-shot rang out. The sound rolled and echoed between the hills. Sutton scrambled feet foremost out of the tent. For a moment the glare of the sun blinded him, then he saw that one of the *tirailleur* patrols was tumbling down the hill. Their red fezes made spots of bright color against the gray boulders. From up ahead came a confused sound of shouting, a shrill birl of whistles.

AND suddenly the hillcrest awoke with a deafening roar. There was a singing rush of bullets. Plumes of bluish smoke hung above the boulders on the hillside. A bugle called and called again.

"*Rassemblement!* Fall in!"

Sutton saw the bugler collapse with a bullet in his throat as he trotted out clear of the tents. The platoon sergeant dropped; another man went down, then another. But the machine worked as smoothly as on the parade-ground at Sidi-bel-Abbes. There was no faltering, no confusion. Squad by squad, section by section the two companies fell into line. Out in front Captain Minaillon walked slowly up and down, polishing his eyeglass while he waited for orders.

Waiting— An almost overwhelming impulse took hold of Sutton to sling his rifle to his shoulder and pump lead at the blurred brown figures moving up there among the rocks.

Thump! the man on his right doubled up like a jack-knife and pitched forward on his face.

"Close up!" barked the senior corporal. "Steady!"

Steady. Eyes front. Keep cool. Wait for orders.

The dirt spurted at Sutton's feet. His heart was leaping and pounding against his ribs—like that time near the Marne, going forward through the mist by the riverbank. Same feeling. The grass underfoot had been wet with dew . . .

"What the hell are we waiting for?" he wondered.

Something had gone wrong up ahead in the Senegalese lines. There was a haze of dust and smoke. A gust of rifle fire answered the rebels on the hillside. It died down to a sporadic crackle. Shouts, yells, confusion. A bugle squawked. Sutton could see men running about in an aimless fashion. A maddened horse rocketed by, tearing its way through the tents.

"Stand up, Sutton! What d'you think you're doing, you *salopard!*" yelled the senior corporal. "Stand up! You're on parade now. Steady the front rank. Look to your front. Steady!"

But the wounded, rolled to the rear, were no longer on parade. Their cries carried shrilly above the bellowing clamor.

For one fleeting instant Sutton caught sight of Cabillot's pasty white face. It seemed to have gone all flabby and soft, and the eyes were enormously distended.

"Scared," thought Sutton. "Wonder if I look like that. What the blue flaming hades are we waiting for?"

The brunt of the assault had fallen upon the center section of the column. The Senegalese and the supply train were being cut to shreds—and they were beginning to panic. The Legion, which had been acting as rear guard, did not come under very heavy fire until the obscure mass of men and horses, camels and mules and goats, which had been blindly milling in the heart of the turmoil, washed back toward the Legion's bivouac. Then the marksmen let drive at the rows of motionless men, and the casualties leaped up.

A runner appeared out of nowhere, shouted at Captain Minaillon, pointed at

the hilltop, spun around like a top and dropped, hitting his head against a boulder. His legs twitched convulsively as if he were trying to swim. Then he flattened out against the ground—so flat and empty that he appeared to be sinking into it.

Captain Minaillon had turned toward the Legionaires. His mouth opened wide, a black hole twisted sidewise.

"Fix bayonets!"

A slithering flash of steel in the sunlight; a crisp rattle of metal meeting metal.

"Steady!"

"They can't be going to charge," thought Sutton. "Not up that doggone hill! Why not give 'em a couple of volleys?"

The insistent whisper of the bullets was all about him. Spurts of white flame leaped through the haze hanging on the hillside.

"Company will advance!" shouted Minaillon. "*En avant!*"

And the sergeants picked up the order—

"*Par la gauche*—forward!"

Then they were moving at a steady pace toward the hill; and then they were climbing the hill. For a time they passed out of the zone of fire. Glancing up, Sutton could see the leading platoons crawling in a long line over the smooth brown rock. His breath was coming in short, hard gasps. He was gripping his rifle so tightly that his knuckles ached. Immediately in front of him Cabillot was climbing jerkily, dragging his feet, tripping over loose stones.

The leading files had reached the top of the buttress which had been protecting them from the plunging fire. For a second Sutton saw them outlined against the clear blue sky; then the full blast of the rebel fire struck them and they crumbled away. The ranks were torn to pieces. The hillside was dotted with sprawling gray figures. Where the slope was steepest they rolled over and over, bumping downward to lie huddled among the boulders.

Still the rear ranks pressed on. Platoon by platoon was smashed as it went over the ridge. There came a backflow of leaderless, dazed men who, for a moment, checked the advance. For a moment only. Captain Minaillon rallied them, sergeants brought them back into line, and the forward surge began again.

It dawned on Sutton that they were being thrown away, deliberately thrown away to draw the enemy's fire while the rest of the column was being pulled out of the ambush. Down below he caught sight of the stream of red fezes flowing back out of the valley, and the khaki burnouses of the useless *spahis* cavalry, and the camels and the goats, and the staff—a jostling mob.

And he was going up to his death. The ground was carpeted with the corpses of men he had known. There was a stench of fresh spilled blood in his nostrils.

FOR a moment he marveled at the steadiness of his mates, at his own machinelike coolness, and he exulted at the thought that he belonged to such an outfit. They could easily turn and scuttle for cover. There was nothing to stop them. Most of the sergeants were gone. Both lieutenants were down. Captain Minaillon's left sleeve was red with blood. But the rank and file reformed and went on.

And at the back of Sutton's mind, there was an angry voice saying over and over again:

"Can't it be done otherwise? It's grand, but it's crazy. Can't we go about it some other way?"

He set his teeth and went on. The crest was not six feet above him. His front rank man was almost level with it. A little farther to the right the line had cleared the buttress. The troopers were going down like ripe wheat, scythed.

"Aw, let's get it over," he told himself between stiff lips.

He drove himself upward until all at once the man ahead of him collapsed, slid backward and knocked his legs out from under him. Locked together they rolled

and bumped down the slope, fetching up at last against a dead man, who sat propped against a projecting rock.

"Wounded?" inquired Sutton, dragging himself off Cabillot. "Where you been hit?"

"I—I am not hit. I do not think so," gulped Cabillot. "It is my ankle— Oh, my ankle! She is sprained!"

"And I got to do it all over again!" wailed Sutton. "Got to go up there again. That bloody butchery!"

He swore bitterly for some moments.

"I can not go," whispered Cabillot, violently shaking his head. "No, I can not!"

He caught at Sutton's wrist and pleaded in a choking voice:

"Please, do not leave me here. It is too much!"

"Leggo my wrist, you snivelling little swine! Here's your chance to get croaked—just what you've been bleating about for months, and now you balk. God knows, I don't blame you much," he added, "but I can't stay here. Not while them other guys are getting theirs. Let's see what's to do."

Once again the remnants of the two companies had fallen back. They were reforming a hundred yards in rear—getting ready to throw their lives away so that a disorganized crew of black soldiers could be hauled out of the trap.

The ground was littered with débris; rifles and twisted bayonets, canteens and *képis*. Beneath a dead man, lying not five yards away, Sutton spied an automatic rifle. He rolled the corpse aside and snatched up the weapon.

"What will you do?" gabbled Cabillot

"Do? I'm going to act sensible," Sutton retorted. He stuffed his pockets full of clips. "I'm going to take a potshot at them Arabs before I pass out."

"Do not leave me here," begged Cabillot. "My ankle—"

The sight of that wobegone, twitching face filled Sutton with pity and remorse. Perhaps he had been too hard on the poor cuss.

"Stay where you are," he ordered.

"You—you do not think I am a coward?"

"Naw. I should worry! So long."

He was in a desperate hurry. He left Cabillot lying among the rocks and crawled up the hill, lugging the gun behim him. When he reached the ledge he flattened out and took stock of the position.

The rebels were in full view, not a hundred yards away. Many of them had come out from behind the boulders and were squatting in the open, pumping lead into the wounded squirming on the bare slope. Others were standing upright, banging away at the troops in the valley. There must have been three hundred of them—lean, barelegged men, dressed in the stiff folds of their *djellabas*. They were waiting for the Legion to come at them again, and they had no eyes for Sutton, one lone man crawling from cover to cover, hugging the ground, wriggling along on his belly.

Stray bullets ripped past him, and a jagged fragment of stone cut a red groove in the flesh beneath his chin. He went on, dripping blood down the front of his tunic, until he reached a position on a level with the mass of the rebels.

It was really absurdly simple.

He squatted down, bracing his elbows on his knees and brought the automatic rifle to bear on the Arabs. The Legionaires were advancing again, and the hillsmen were blissfully unaware of Sutton's presence.

He aimed carefully and gave the trigger a nice, gentle squeeze. The gun began to bark in short, quick bursts. It worked without a hitch. First he sprayed the center, where the rebels were thickest, and he grunted contentedly as he saw the bullets take effect. A bit to the right, then a bit to the left. The gun worked as smooth as silk.

A group of twenty or more ugly looking customers came charging down upon him, and he caught them neatly with the last remaining bullets in the gun. The survivors scattered. He reloaded quickly and let drive at another cluster of men

which had appeared among the boulders. He mowed it down with scientific accuracy. But the gun was growing too hot to hold.

"Jus' a little common sense," he told himself several times. "That's all—jus' a little common sense. If you use your bean you can get away with murder."

The Arabs were beginning to break. They were scuttling back uphill. Their backs offered an admirable target for a cool headed gunner. The whole show had not lasted three minutes.

Then the Legionaires cleared the ridge and drove the Arabs clean over the top of the hill. Sutton stood up and cheered as they went by, led by a wild eyed captain armed with a bamboo cane. He joined in the mad scramble, and had the infinite satisfaction of emptying his weapon into the rebels as they went bounding down into the gulley, where their horses were hobbled. The Legionaires were streaming down in pursuit, and as Sutton tagged along behind, weighted down by the automatic, he was joined by Cabillot—a vociferous and triumphant Cabillot.

"The rout!" he yelled. "The rout. What we have done to them, eh? Ha, so fine a regiment! So brave! I have made amends!"

"Sure, go on down and tickle 'em up with your bayonet instead of talking about it," urged Sutton. "What you waiting for?"

"I go on the instant!" declared Cabillot.

But he didn't go. He stayed in the background until the last Arab had galloped out of sight, and a bugle called the Legionaires home. His enthusiasm did not flag, however. What he wanted to talk about was the great victory, and the superhuman courage he had displayed. His ankle was sprained—he limped heavily just to show how badly sprained it was—but he had not hesitated for one second. As soon as the company came up he had joined in the forward rush—

He went on talking about his astounding courage until the remnants of the two companies were drawn up on the crest of the hill they had conquered, and Captain Minaillon walked slowly along the front of the ranks. In front of Sutton he paused and said abruptly—

"You brought that automatic rifle into action?"

"Yes, *mon capitaine!*" snapped Sutton, disguising his self satisfaction behind a mask of complete indifference.

"H'm. Great initiative, my boy. Well done. I shall not forget it."

As soon as he was out of earshot Cabillot snickered.

"He will not forget it. Oh, no! It is ten days' cells you will get no doubt for having disobeyed orders. You did disobey orders, you know. It is not for me to criticize."

"That's right," agreed Sutton. "You can shut up."

"You are my friend, of course," Cabillot went on implacably. "That is quite so, but I must say, I do not see what it is he meant by that. 'Great initiative.' Ah, now I comprehend! It was the joke. Beware the little joke of the captain. There was a nasty look on his visage." He sighed a resigned sigh. "Always you are in trouble, but perhaps because we did so well today he will forget your error of discipline."

CAPTAIN MINAILLON did not forget it. That evening, after the dead had been buried, and the column had retreated out of the hills, Sutton was summoned before Colonel Leballiot, a mighty man upon whose plump shoulders defeat rested lightly.

The colonel, in his own estimation, had not been beaten at all. No such thing. Nonsense! There had been a slight brush with the enemy, but the latter had been dislodged and driven off with heavy losses. Oh, very heavy losses. Honors were even. He had lost a good many men, and there had been a messy quarter of an hour when complete annihilation stared him in the face. Still, everything was for the best, and he was quite sure that, given a few days' rest, his troops would round up Mustapha ben Slimane

in short order. In fact, the more he thought about it while he wrote out his report, the more convinced he became that he had really scored a signal victory. Consequently, he was in a very genial mood when Soldier of Second Class Alexander Sutton was paraded before him.

The Legionaires, drawn up in a hollow square, presented arms as he appeared, and he noted with quiet satisfaction that they had not lost more than twenty-five per cent. of their effectives.

He strode up to Sutton and tapped him on the shoulder (the Napoleonic tradition).

"*Eh bien, mon brave,*" he said in a clear, loud voice, "one is proud to have such lascars under one's command. Splendidly done, Legionaire! To have faced such an enemy singlehanded calls for no small dose of courage. Your action saved many valuable lives. It must not be said that such acts of devotion ever go unrewarded. Here—take this! You have won it ten times over!"

Spontaneously he unfastened his own *médaille militaire*—the catch had been loosened by his orderly before he left his tent—and pinned it on Sutton's tunic. Then, having kissed him on both dirty cheeks, he stepped back and saluted him —saluted the *simple soldat de seconde classe!* It is just such gestures which win the affection of the rank and file.

The bugles sounded "*Aux Champs,*" and the brief ceremony was over.

But as the colonel retired an unfortunate incident occurred. A Legionaire by the name of Cabillot staggered out of the ranks, cried hysterically, "No, no! This is too much!" and fell in a dead faint at Leballiot's feet.

"Poor fellow," said the colonel. "The sun, of course, the sun. Very hot day today. Very hot!"

That night, when the column retreated toward Chel-Dellah, Cabillot traveled on a stretcher slung on the back of a mule. He was suffering from partial paralysis of the legs, and he had lost—which was indeed strange—the use of his tongue. The surgeon spoke words of wisdom about sunstroke, shock and hysterio-neurosis.

In the Legion, however, hysterical manifestations are not considered respectable. Patients suffering from such nervous disorders are cured by suggestion and castor oil. Cabillot's case was a bad one. Two whole days elapsed before he was cured, and by that time the column had reached Chel-Dellah.

"Listen to me, species of a calf's head," said the surgeon, bending down and scowling at the patient. "There is nothing the matter with you—nothing. But I am a man of the most lenient. You have had a free ride, and I will give you another five minutes in which to get well. There are quite enough wounded for me to care for without having to bother about your fits. Either you recover or you go before a court martial. Are you going to recover?"

Four minutes later a miracle occurred. Cabillot tottered from his bed of pain and the surgeon-major callously sent him back to duty. The surgeon-major was used to such marvels of modern science.

BUT ANOTHER, more subtle miracle had taken place beneath the trees of Chel-Dellah. Alexander Sutton, the hard, unemotional roughneck, the tough guy, had fallen in love with his job. Neither the medal nor the colonel's words of praise had had anything to do with it. Of course not. The medal was just so much hardware; the colonel was an old coot who didn't know an ambush from a hill of beans. But the Legion— He saw it with new eyes and a clearer understanding. He didn't attempt to analyze his feelings. He simply felt that for the first time he really fitted in—he belonged. It was a good outfit, and he was quietly pleased with himself. Medal looked good on his chest, even though he hadn't done much of anything to deserve it. Just used his bean.

"Pretty soft," he told himself. "Cabillot was right, the old son of a gun. And him all paralyzed right up to the eyebrows. Tough luck. I guess I'll wander over to the ambulance and see how he's

getting on. He ain't such a bad little feller, and I sure treated him like mud."

At the time he was full of kindly thoughts and red wine, for his platoon had been helping him to wet his medal in the customary manner at the canteen. It was six o'clock in the evening; the last parade of the day was over, and a hush was settling over the oasis. The sun hung low on the horizon, staining the desert with bands of crimson and gold. From the rooftop of the native village hidden behind the trees, drifted the voice of the *muezzin* calling the people to prayer. The flies were retiring for the night, and the mosquitoes were enjoying their apéritif.

The more he thought about the way in which he had treated Cabillot, the more Sutton hated himself. He left the canteen despite the platoon's protests and walked, with only an occasional lurch, over to the hospital marquee.

"Cabillot?" said the orderly. "He went back to duty an hour ago."

"But I thought he was paralyzed!" exclaimed Sutton, steadying himself against the tent flap.

"He was but he isn't," declared the orderly, "and let go that canvas, or you will bring down the hospital. *Allez!*"

Sutton *allezed*. He found Cabillot sitting in front of the tent, resting his chin on his fist and scowling. It was almost dark, but the scowl was unmistakable. He took one look at Sutton out of the corner of his eye, spat between his teeth, and went on scowling industriously.

"Hello!" cried Sutton. "Glad to see you up and about again. I don't mind telling you, you had me worried. How you feeling now? I got fifty centimes—come have a little drink. Say, you made a quick recovery!"

"Yes," agreed Cabillot, speaking with evident difficulty. "A quick recovery. The beast—inhuman beast! To back to duty I must go when I am the sick and broken man. One is treated like a dog in this Legion, by arrogant doctors who threaten one's life if one does not recover."

There was a hard and ominous ring to his voice as if very soon he would have much more to say.

"Anyway, come have a drink," insisted Sutton. "Do you good. Warm you up. Put some pep into you. Make you think of something else."

"I desire to think of nothing else. Injustice, inhumanity, arrogance—these are the rewards for the faithfulness of service! A farce, I tell you, it is a farce. I have had much time to think while I lay on my back, stricken with the partial paralysis!"

"You're feeling low," broke in Sutton. "They've rigged up a canteen over yonder. Come on!"

"Not to any canteen to swill wine with lousy foreigners!" snapped Cabillot. "I am finished making the hobnob with such swine. I, who was a director of the post office, a man of position—to have fallen so low! And to think there was a time when I admired this!" He gave a bitter laugh. "But I am blind no more. No! I see it all: the vileness, the dirtiness, the brutality."

"Don't let it throw you," urged Sutton, trying to get in a word sidewise. "The canteen's no place for you tonight. It's full of wild men. But there's a joint over by the pond, this side of the Arab graveyard. Sort of quiet. I guess we could pick up a drink over there for fifty centimes. How about it?"

"No," said Cabillot. "I am not drinking with you. You would play the good Samaritan again, but you are like the others—rotten!"

Sutton's temper was beginning to wear thin, but he told himself that he was dealing with a sick man, and he accepted the insult without flinching. However, he was growing thirsty, so he bent down, hauled Cabillot to his feet, and dragged him along, holding him tightly by the elbow.

"You don't know it," he pointed out, "but what you need is a drink. Come on and don't make a fuss."

"Under protest," declared Cabillot. "Only under protest!"

THE GROG shop was a mean mud hut close to the native village. A low platform of sun-dried bricks covered with rush mats skirted three sides of the room. It served the double purpose of tables and chairs. There was no other furniture. In one corner there was a small open hearth where a kettle simmered over a camel dung fire which gave off an acrid, bitter smoke. Three wilting tallow candles, stuck on spikes let into the wall, shone like pale stars in the smoke blurred twilight.

Two Arabs sat on the platform close to the fire. One was wrapped in the folds of a *djellaba* with the hood drawn down over his eyes, so that his face was a black shadow tipped off with a wisp of black beard, which glistened in the firelight. The other, evidently the owner of the place, wore a dingy, torn *haik*, a garment similar to an oldfashioned nightshirt. There were sandals on his dusty feet, and a strip of cloth was bound around his head.

When the two Legionaires groped their way indoors he came forward to greet them without any display of hospitality.

Wine? He had no wine. Beer? No beer. He didn't cater to white soldiers. They compromised on two small clay cups full of liquid fire. Having attended to his unwelcome guests, the owner went back to his place by the fire and turned his back on them.

"Here's looking at you," began Sutton.

"Sneering at me," brooded Cabillot. "Do you think I do not know?"

"Aw, forget it. Can't you act natural for two minutes?" Sutton held up his cup and tried again. "Well, here's to the good old Legion, and its—"

"To the inferno with the Legion!" shouted Cabillot, dashing his cup to the ground. "Is it fresh insults I must bear? No—I am through. The Legion—I spit on it! Of what use is it to do one's duty and love the flag and make amends? It is no use. What is it?" he gabbled, lashing himself into a fury. "I do my duty. I go to my death as per orders. Yes, if I say it myself, I go with courage, devotion. I face the enemy bullets, and what occurs? You—" he flung out his arm and pointed a palsied finger at Sutton—"you, you creeper, you crawler, you get the medal!"

He broke down and wept.

"I could not believe it," he went on, torn between grief and rage. "I hold myself in. I refuse to believe so monstrous a thing. It can not be! And then I see the colonel pin it upon you, the medal, and then my blood takes but one turn! Madness! I faint! I am paralyzed! The doctor threatens my life! My life! I must walk. I walk. Infamous treatment. I hate it all, everything. I see it all now!"

"If you aim to throw another fit, you'd better hop back to the ambulance," grinned Sutton. "You ain't hardly normal."

"I see clearly," raved Cabillot. "My country? I renounce it! It pays me a wage of misery to direct a post office. I am driven to criminality. And this Legion, this odious Legion. The—the—oh, I spit on it all!"

"I'll say you've changed your mind."

"What is it that we do? We massacre natives. Yes, massacre! That is our civilization, and then they give medals to murderers. Medals! The colonel's medal upon your breast. The badge of indignity!"

"Boy, you better watch out—"

"Never! I fear nothing. I spit upon you and upon it!"

"You try that stunt," observed Sutton, "and I'll crack you one over the coco that'll hold you for a lifetime. You ain't gone nutty, have you?"

"Yes, you are proud of your medal!" jeered Cabillot. "They pull the hood over your wink. Slave—that is it! Slave! Do you deserve the medal? No."

"Did I ask for the doggone thing?" protested Sutton, astonished at his own patience.

"No, but they give it you—you who creep and crawl. You who have abandoned a French girl. You, a man of no education—who can not speak even the

proper English—who speak through your nose! To you they give the medal. Absurdity! I shall desert, I tell you! If I could help those Arabs fight the fight of liberty I would do so. My country—I hate it. It decorates foreigners!"

"You're crazy," decided Sutton. "Wild."

"Never before have I been sane. Never! I am not afraid. You with your medal, I laugh at you. Haha!"

It was a nasty laugh, which curled his lips back off his crumbling teeth.

"You ain't got nothing to bellyache about," Sutton pointed out. "You tried to sprain your ankle as I remember it. What's come over you anyway?"

"What has come over me? The truth! Because a medal is given you, you uphold the dirty system of oppression. It is to vomit. They give decorations to creepers of your species. Medals of shame. No, I would not have one from the hands of the President himself. I spit on it, I tell you!"

And, effectively, he did spit on Sutton's medal!

ALMOST at once something astoundingly hard and compact collided with the bridge of his nose, which squashed out flat with a terrible crackling sound. The force of the blow hurled him backward against the wall, and as he rebounded—defenseless, blind and spouting blood—Sutton hit him again, a great, openhanded smack on the mouth which flung him across the knees of the hooded Arab.

"I'd like to stiffen you out," Sutton declared, "but you ain't worth the trouble. Come here and make it snappy. You're going to polish this doggone medal with your nose. Get a move on."

Cabillot lurched to his feet, gently propelled from behind by the Arab, who had been following the conflict without any show of emotion. The owner of the café likewise remained aloof and impassive, for the natives of North Africa learned long ago never to interfere in rows between Legionaires.

Cabillot's face was unpleasant to behold. His mouth and chin were covered with a nap of blood. His nose was a lumpish, purplish mass, and both his eyes were beginning to close.

He leaned against the wall, barely able to stand upright, whimpering and snuffling through the blood which clogged his throat.

"Get busy!" ordered Sutton, not in the least impressed by the havoc he had wrought.

He took one step in Cabillot's direction. It was enough to put fresh life into the suffering man. He jumped out of reach and whipped his bayonet from its scabbard.

"Swine!" he cried. "I will show you—"

But the English language was an inappropriate medium for all the things he had to say. He burst into a torrent of French, reviling Sutton, the Legion, the officers, and his mother country. And at each fresh denunciation he made a lunge at Sutton with the point of the bayonet. He omitted nothing. He was a martyr; Sutton a fiend in league with other fiends to torment and ridicule him. Medals! A fat lot he cared for medals! He was going to let daylight into Sutton, and after that he would go where his services would be appreciated.

By that time Sutton was backed up in a corner, fending off the darting blade with one arm, while, with the other, he endeavored to loosen the buckle of his belt.

The Arabs were taking a greater interest in the proceedings. They were standing up, whispering in violent undertones. The owner was shaking his head from side to side as if he were rejecting some utterly impossible suggestion.

"You hit me!" clamored Cabillot. "Me—a sick man! You think I am afraid of a belly crawler—a creeper!"

He had reached the paroxysm of his rage. Literally, he was seeing red. Drawing himself up on his toes he lunged, driving the bayonet straight at Sutton's stomach.

Sutton's arm swept down, deflecting

the blade, which scraped against his wrist and buried itself in the mud wall. At the same second he succeeded in loosening the belt. He swung it around, belt, bayonet, scabbard and all, and brought it crashing down on the side of Cabillot's head just above the ear.

Cabillot dropped in a heap, rolled loosely over and lay still.

"Maybe he'll have a little more sense when he comes to," Sutton said aloud.

Then he walked out of the café and swung off toward the camp. Half way back, however, he recalled the queer business which had been going on between the two Arabs.

"Wonder what they were up to," he grumbled. "Looks kind of fishy to me."

Abruptly he turned on his heel and started back. There was no sense in leaving a Legionaire at the mercy of those birds. Judging from the photographs tacked up in the barrack rooms, they had a nasty habit of cutting their prisoners open and carving them up.

He thought he heard a stifled yell, then, unmistakably, he heard the thud of horse's hoofs.

When he reached the grog shop the owner sprawled on the floor, with a knife handle sticking out between his ribs. The other Arab and Cabillot had vanished.

It took Sutton about one second to realize that he needed as many witnesses as possible and needed them quick. He headed for camp at a run. Minutes later he was back again accompanied by the officer of the day and an armed picket.

The Arab was not quite dead. He had strength enough to gurgle:

"Mustapha ben Slimane—took the soldier away—stabbed me."

"That scoundrel here in camp!" cried the officer. "You are sure?"

The Arab was past caring. A pink froth was bubbling out of his mouth and trickling down onto his beard.

"What happened?" snapped the officer, turning to Sutton.

Cabillot was lost and done for anyway. It was useless to blacken the poor crazy nut's memory.

"Well, *mon lieutenant*," he lied briskly. "We were having a drink to celebrate my medal. But I discovered that I had not enough money, so I started back to camp to borrow some. I heard a shout and ran back. Cabillot and the Arab had disappeared, and this man had been knifed. That's all, *mon lieutenant*."

And the name of Soldier of Second Class Armand Cabillot was listed among the "missing, believed killed."

COLONEL LEBALLIOT rested his troops at Chel-Dellah for three days while he overhauled his plan of campaign and pondered over the reports brought in by native agents.

Instead of attacking again with a single large and unwieldly force, he split up the column into three sections, and began what he called a "systematic encirclement of the rebel position." There was but one thing wrong with this definition—the fact that the enemy had no fixed position. He was here today and somewhere else tomorrow.

The next six weeks were to stand out in Sutton's life as the hardest he had ever endured anywhere or at any time.

The detachment to which he belonged consisted of one company of Senegalese and sixty Legionaires. It was sent in by the northern pass, with orders to drive the rebels before it until, at some time and place unspecified, the latter were caught between three fires and duly annihilated.

March, fight, and march again! Fifty kilometers without water, through a wilderness of stone beneath a killing sun, and at the end of the day a crackle of rifle fire, a spatter of lead on the rocks. Wounded men were left behind to blow out their brains; the column was traveling light. It was a nightmare of heat and thirst and hunger. And always, just ahead, over the crest of the next shimmering ridge, around the very next corner—the glint of sunshine on a rifle barrel, the beat of a horse's hoofs.

The end came suddenly. They had been marching since dawn, when toward

nine o'clock in the morning, the narrow gorge which they had been following opened out into a mile-wide plain. In the middle of the plain sprawled an oasis—a cluster of date palm trees, mud walled gardens, a few low huts.

The detachment hurried toward the trees, eager to reach shade and water. Water especially; the canteens had been bone dry for almost eight hours.

Five hundred yards from the fringe of trees, Captain Minaillon halted his men while he studied the approaches through his glasses. The place seemed quiet enough, but he was too old a hand to run any unnecessary risks.

He sent out a squad of Senegalese to peer at closer quarters into the blue black shadows beneath the trees. His men, leaning on their rifles, cursed him savagely between blackened lips—but before the patrol had covered half the distance there came a quick spatter of fire, which flared up to a roar and died away as the patrol fell back.

In among the trees Mustapha ben Slimane stood at bay. The relentless pressure had demoralized his followers. Many of them had abandoned his cause, stealing away over the hilltops to make their peace with the French. The others had had to face three ways at once. Their hard driven horses had collapsed beneath them; their flocks had withered away. At last they had been cornered in this valley. The trails were blocked. Down all three passes leading into the plain troops were pouring. There was but one thing left to do—fight it out. Wait for the French attack, break it and bolt—or die.

Luck seemed to play into the rebel's hands, for instead of the simultaneous assault which he had been dreading, only one detachment confronted him. The others were still miles away. So he turned and struck with all the fury of a cornered beast.

Almost before the sound of the shots had died away, out from under the trees poured a thundering mass of horsemen, charging headlong at the straggling line of men standing out in the open. They should have wiped them out of existence, ridden them down and trampled them into the ground. But they didn't.

That straggling line stiffened and stood like a wall to meet the charge.

"At two hundred meters," ordered Captain Minaillon. "Prepare for salvo fire!"

Up came the rifles. Legionaires and Senegalese elbow to elbow.

"Fire!"

A sheet of flame, a single crashing report— The center of the oncoming horde was checked in its stride. Salvo after salvo beat against it, hammering it to pieces, strewing the ground with men and horses. Great gaps appeared in the close packed ranks, and at last the survivors swerved away and went racing back toward the shelter of the trees.

And then, carried away by their enthusiasm, without waiting for orders, the Senegalese charged. One hundred and fifty triumphant savages, galloping like deer across the plain. Neither their officers nor their sergeants could hold them; they were off with a shout, a yell of triumph.

NOW THE Senegalese, when he charges, has no use at all for a bayonet on the end of a rifle. To him it is clumsy, and no amount of drilling can make him use it once his blood is up and he smells the coming of a hand to hand fight. His weapon is the machete, with the long, heavy blade and a short, thick handle. In his hands it is a very terrible weapon with which he can snick off a head with the same ease he can lop off a dead twig. Unfortunately, when he draws his machete, he has a tendency to dump his rifle on the ground and to forget it until the fight is over. Which sometimes leads to disastrous complications.

Until that moment Captain Minaillon had had the situation well in hand. He had intended to fall back as far as the head of the pass and sit tight until the other columns arrived. His men were thirsty, but it was better for them to go

without water for a few hours more than to risk being cut down piecemeal among the trees.

"One volley over their heads!" he shouted. "That ought to bring them back."

The Legionaires let drive, but the effect of the salvo on the Senegalese was unexpected. Instead of checking them, it sent them on faster than ever. But they were no longer charging a beaten enemy—they were escaping from murderous Legionaires. Fear gave them wings. They scattered, some going on toward the trees, others swerving off to right or left, straggling all over the landscape.

For a few moments Sutton was tempted to laugh at the spectacle, but the joke was short lived.

The chuckle died away on his lips when he saw the Arab horsemen sweep around the belt of trees and drive straight at the Senegalese. The disorganized mob crumbled away, snuffed out of existence beneath the flying hoofs.

A bugle call beat against his ears. "Stand fast!"

The Arabs had run down the last Senegalese and were closing in on the Legionaires. Again the rifles spat and crashed. Again the wall of lead brought the charge to a standstill and flung it back.

All at once Sutton became aware of a fresh menace out on the right. Rebel snipers had joined in the fight. They were lying out behind a low mound, pumping lead at the Legionaires. Five men went down, then a sixth— There was no cover of any sort, and it was too late to retire, for the horsemen were closing in once more.

Minaillon dropped with a bullet in his thigh; a sergeant who went to his aid was hit in the head.

"Close in!"

The handful of Legionaires met the rush without flinching. They emptied their magazines into the plunging mass, checked it for the fourth time, staved off the end just a little longer. And as the horsemen swerved off and went thundering away, the snipers became busy again.

The last corporal was gone. Sutton found himself in command of twenty-odd men, hemmed in and pounded to pieces, in a whirlwind of smoke and dust.

"Hold on!" croaked Minaillon, propped up among the dead.

"Don't worry," Sutton reassured him. "We'll hold on all right!"

Thud! A nearby trooper clapped his hands to his stomach and fell, spilling his bowels between his reddened fingers.

Through the haze of dust came the horsemen riding in to the kill. The weight of the Legionaires' fire could no longer stop them. They came on, yelling.

"Good night and good-by," thought Sutton. "It's all U. P."

Then above the clamor arose a new sound: the harsh, methodical chatter of a machine gun, hammering out its sleet of bullets, six hundred to the minute.

For a second Sutton winced—and then he shouted, for the bullets were drumming into the Arab ranks, piling them up pell mell, in squirming, kicking heaps. The attack melted away, and still the machine gun clattered, hunting out the survivors, hewing them down, plowing red lanes in their ranks.

Those who escaped turned tail and fled.

"The other column!" cried Minaillon.

But the other column was nowhere in sight. As the dust cleared away Sutton spied the gun, thrusting its blunt nose above a fold in the ground, two hundred meters away. As he stood watching it, agape with surprize, he saw several burnoused figures spring up close behind it. There was a brief struggle. A rifle banged. The machine gun ceased fire.

Sutton shook off the lethargy which had been creeping over him.

"Move!" he shouted. "Run—that man needs help!"

THE MAN was Cabillot. There were six bullets in him, but he was still alive. He lay twisted sidewise, with one leg thrown over the hot jacket of the machine gun, and his leg was roasting, but he felt no pain, for his spine was smashed.

A ghost of a smile appeared on his face when he recognized Sutton.

"You see," he whispered, "next to me—the dead man."

There was a dead Arab lying beside him—a huddled shape in a gray *djellaba*.

Sutton nodded.

"That is Mustapha ben Slimane. You understand? The big rebel—I shot him."

"You've done quite a lot of shooting," declared Sutton. "You can tell it to the skipper."

They carried him back, going very carefully among the dead, for he threatened to break in two, and put him down beside Minaillon.

There was a rattle in Cabillot's throat as he spoke:

"He caught me. Needed somebody to work a machine gun he had captured. I say 'no,' so they burned my feet. It hurt." Tears dribbled down his cheeks. "It hurt—but it doesn't hurt now."

"And then?" inquired Minaillon.

"I don't know— Pain— They brought me here, and I heard the firing, so I said I would—use the gun. He was standing beside me—caught his revolver—shot him, and—" the rattle in his throat became more pronounced—"and afterward, the gun—I switched it on to the horses—"

"You are a brave man, *mon petit*," said Minaillon. "As good a Legionaire as I ever met."

Perhaps Cabillot heard him, and again perhaps not. His mind was ebbing away, sinking. His dull eyes moved slowly until they came to rest on Sutton.

"Sutton," he whispered, "here, Sutton. What I said to you that night—nobody knows?"

"Nobody."

"Do not tell, eh? Not a word. I—I lied—jealous of your medal."

"You'll get a bucketful this time."

"No. I am finished, and it does not matter." His fingers closed on Sutton's wrist. "I have made amends. Made amends for everything. You deserved the medal—"

Then the business of breathing became increasingly difficult, and he lay staring at Sutton, holding his wrist until his last dealings with life were over.

They buried him that afternoon, after the arrival of the other columns and, pinned to his blanket, as they lowered him into his ditch, was a cross of the Legion of Honor. The bugles sang in the twilight, and a firing party of fifty men sent him to his God in state.

"Funny," thought Sutton, as he trailed back toward camp. "Jealous of me and my doggone medal. And now he's out of the way for keeps, I'll be goldarned if I don't miss him. Can you tie that?"

Everything that linked him with the past was dust and ashes. He had neither wife, nor family—no one. For the first time he realized how completely he belonged to the Legion; and it was as if he looked back upon his past from some high and lonely place.

He was saddened by this thought for fully twenty-four hours.

The Camp-Fire

A free-to-all Meeting-Place *for Readers, Writers and Adventurers*

A Horse From Life

LEONARD H. NAS N'S novelette, "The Arab," evoked many comments from readers, Two of them, with Mr. Nason's replies, are given here.

In the first, Mr. Burton suggests that a prod of the heels would have made the horse give an accurate imitation of Steamboat and No-Name, rolled into one horsehide.

I been a-settin' back in the shadows a-listenin' for a long, long time, I've heard a lot of discussion pro and con this and that, and have simply kept the old pipe going and listened. Now, without invitation or apology I "law" to romp right out in the firelight and—yowl like a singed hyena.

Comrades of the Camp-Fire, "acoutez vous!" In nearly every story of the West that I read I find the writer describes at length some superhorseman and his mount together, representing them as being the best of their kind. That is, of course, as it should be. Then somewhere in the story the writer almost invariably tells of this superhorseman's "touching the spurs to his horse."

Now I have made the acquaintance of several horses—some of them in the West—and I'll be gosh dinged if I have ever ridden one worth two bits Mex that could be "touched with the spurs", without jumping ten or fifteen feet in the air or rearing or pitching or any two or all three actions. I suppose there are saddle horses in some parts of the West that must be aroused from a trance when one wishes to set them in motion; but by Godfry, *all* the broncos that I ever rode were ready to perform as hereinbefore set forth, when touched with the spurs.

The slightest backward motion of the heels would start them at a walk, and the same slightest motion when moving instantly brought forth increased speed.

I could turn any of those mounts completely around to "about face" by simply moving *one* heel backward and holding it back as the horse swung his haunches away from it until he was in the desired position.

The real rider, when mounted on a perfectly trained horse, uses spurs at all times, but *not* in the manner described by the writers.

Sometimes a horse will become stubborn or scared. In such instances the rider touches spurs to the flanks—and it is only a touch—just to warn the horse that punishment will follow if he doesn't behave more in accordance with his teaching.

My pet peeve just at this minute is this sentence in Leonard H. Nason's story, "The Arab", in the September fifteenth *Adventure*. "Johnell prodded him with his heels and the horse obediently moved out at a walk."

This, in speaking of an Arab stallion!

Brothers of the Camp-Fire, I should like to hear some of your ideas expressed as to what an Arab stallion would do if prodded with the rider's heels.

I have read a lot of Mr. Nason's stuff—all I could get in fact—and have been hoping I might get his stories in book form, so I am not trying to knock him. Gosh! imagine it—"Prodded him with his heels!" — BLAINE BURTON, Morgantown, West Virginia.

Incidentally, the Doubleday, Doran Company of Garden City, Long Island, New York, publish Mr. Nason's stories in book form.

Mr. Nason's reply:

Dear Mr. Burton,

Replying to your letter about the Arab, which was forwarded me by *Adventure*, I can only say that the context of the sentence you quote explains why the horse behaved so at that particular moment. The horse in question was taken from life, but slightly overdrawn for purposes of the story. His name was Kingfisher, owned by Col. Frank Tompkins, U. S. A. I have ridden him several times, and he never raised up hell unless there were other horses around. I had the pleasure of riding some Arabs in Tunis last winter, and have ridden a number of Andalusian horses which are of Arab extraction. Their outstanding characteristic is gentleness. Too many people judge all horses by cow-ponies, a breed of horse that has too often been ruined by rough handling in the colt stage. That stuff is all right when

all a man has to do when he needs a fresh horse is to go rope one out of the corral, but in the army especially in war time when a man uses up a horse by brutality or ignorance he has to walk, and his commander is shy a rifle in case he gets into a scrap. Spurs or heels or anything, no horse—or man either—will act the fool and start sunfishing if he has been properly handled when he was a colt.—NASON.

And here is a letter typical of dozens received thus far. Perhaps still other readers have wondered, too, concerning Nason and his characters. We know several men who thought they recognized themselves.

Would you please forward this letter to Mr. Leonard Nason? He has my curiosity aroused, as in two of his stories he has written of my old outfits—the 13th Cavalry at Columbus, and 79th F. A. "Over There".

He must have been at Columbus personally to know the accurate detail of his story, and Major Frank Tompkins' cannibal stud.

Some little difference of opinion may arise as to the details of the Columbus affair; but we all know that *every* man in an engagement sees things at a different angle, and it is hard for some of the command to believe that the other fellow is correct in his version.

For instance I thought the sentry (number of post forgotten) at I. M. and Hqrs. inclusive was the first to go down. However, this detail may have been changed to fit the story, as it was a story instead of a history; or Nason may have been correct. However I am drifting, as what I want to know is Nason's Army name, and if he remembers me who was assistant band leader at Columbus 13th Cavalry and band leader 79th F. A. An admirer of Nason's stories, and *Adventure* in general.

Am very glad you have returned to *our* cover as the other seemed a stranger in the home.—H. E. ALDEN, State College, New Mexico.

Mr. Nason's camouflage didn't quite conceal — or rather it seems to have boomeranged slightly.

I am sorry to say I wasn't at Columbus. Col. Tompkins is a friend of mine, as well as Radcliffe his old striker at Columbus. I knew him when he commanded G troop of the 11th. Well, he told me about the ride. I've ridden that stud horse Kingfisher once or twice and have had him damn' near chew my arm off a couple of times too. When I was overseas I was with the 76th, but I called it the 79th. I never knew there was such a regiment in the service until people began to write and ask me what my Army name was. Well like the John, I lost my hat and so don't remember.

Good luck to you. The army ain't what she used to be.—NASON.

SHOES AND SHIPS

Sittin' on an office stool
  Lookin' out to sea again.
Just another doggone fool
  Scratchin' with an office pen,
  While the skippers call for men.
  Wishin', wishin'—yes but then
  God help me and my old hen
  If I should go to sea again!

Dirty little schooner tramp
  Headin' for Sebastopol—
Filthy decks and dirty lamp
  Headin' for Sebastopol.
  Kids what ought to be in school
  Gyp the sailors as a rule.
  A sailor is a doggone fool.
  Rotten town Sebastopol.

Them poor blokes what goes to sea
  Won't never make their lives a go.
Never nothin's what they'll be.
  Just a sailor, and that's low.
  A few're officers; what's the show?
  Work like hell, promotion slow,
  Damned poor pay for what you know.
  Still—ah God I'd like to go!

Just a wife and just three kids
  Keeps me workin' for this crook,
Buyin' suits and coats and lids,
  Puttin' figures in a book.
  Never give the sea a look,
  Man what goes to sea's mistook.
  Better jobs is to be took—
  Puttin' figures in a book.

Against The Law

COMRADE STROM had a good excuse; yet if he had been picked up by a game warden his lot might have been a hard one. The nests of sea-gulls are protected by statute.

Picking out the swellest meal I ever ate is going to take a lot of thinking; I'll let you know some day. But right hot off the griddle, and with friend wife in absolute agreement (!), I can nominate and elect by acclamation, the punkest, awfullest breakfast I ever hung a lip over.

The wife and I had just a single day left in Prince Rupert, B. C.—a magnificent harbor, and a place from which on clear days one can easily see the

southernmost tip of Alaska. And for some fool reason I wanted to set foot on Alaska.

So we took a basket of grub, chartered a motorboat, and set forth early.

The harbor is puzzling, and I knew nothing of navigation. Pretty soon all of those big rock islands began to look just like one another.

I got thoroughly lost. Worse, driving through a narrow passage, I steered the crazy old scow straight on a jagged rock, which tore out half her bottom. She sank—in a humiliating three feet of water. And both crew and captain were so upset they gave no thought to the food—until the sea water had ruined everything except a corked thermos bottle full of coffee.

With this and a tin pail we waded ashore, set up a limp white signal made from an undershirt, and then chuckled ruefully at our plight.

All that day, beside a fire, we dried out—and watched for some passing boat. None passed.

By morning the coffee was gone, we were cold, and hungry. I got a bright (?) idea. Seagull's eggs! Weren't they flying all about? Their nests must be near.

To make a long story short, I found about thirty, boiled them hard in the tin pail, shelled one, and plopped it into my mouth.

The taste? Did you ever hear the old one about the way to cook carp? You wrap the fish in linoleum, leave it out in the sun for three days, unwrap it—and then cook the linoleum . . .

I've heard since there's a fine of $250 for taking seagull's eggs. Huh! If I was richer I'd *pay* that much just to see some hombre *swallow* one!

Yes, we were rescued. But it was not until I guzzled four ounces of vanilla extract—which passed for liquor in those days—that I really got rid of the taste in my mouth.—CARL VICTOR STROM, Burlington, Vt.

Along The Trail

III

MAINE had State prohibition then, although neighboring commonwealths still calmly enjoyed their cirrhosis of the liver. So I met Jake Alvord. It would be dry and very cold up in the Aroostook; and Jake, said our guides, put twelve pounds of brown sugar into every keg of apple cider he laid down . . .

Jake was short and fat. He had no neck. His bald head sloped up to a point at the crown. Yes, if some one had amputated his short legs, he would have rolled, a trifle erratically, like a well inflated football. As it was, shaking with cidery laughter at his own jokes, he nearly rolled out of his armchair. For a time we too laughed—politely.

We sampled, smacked our lips. No matter what we thought of unshaven, piglike Jake, his beverage certainly did fairly tingle with authority. We bought a cask, and were just about to carry it to the sleigh, when in came a thin, black garbed woman—who moved stiffly, as if she had no knees. In a plain, high collared dress her neck was held rigid; and from wooden, homely features burned out at us a pair of startlingly blue eyes—eyes that were searching, agonized; bewildered and yet frightened. Shivers ran up my spine and across my shoulders as I helped lift the cask.

"That's only my wife, Sal, boys," chortled Jake. "She ain't much to look at, but she's been damn' useful."

We said nothing—what could one say?

Jake perhaps was able to feel a rebuke in the way we turned away quietly to the door. I doubt it. But at any rate he came waddling out.

"Sal don't know nothing since our boy Ned run away and was killed on the freight," Jake added.

I gave my share of that cask of cider, to the guides. Somehow it wouldn't go past my throat.—TOI-YABE TOLMAN.

How to Make a Barbecue Oven

IN A LETTER to Mr. Horace Kephart, whose interesting account of southern barbecues appeared in Camp-Fire of *Adventure's* November fifteenth issue, Mr. Clyde Jones tells how to go about making an oven and spit for chickens and small game.

In the June first issue of *Adventure* in the "Ask *Adventure*" department Mr. W. G. Breswenger speaks of a barbecue oven which did not give results for his city cooking; and since I have had some experience along the same lines I suggest that he build a gas oven on the following plan.

First, let me explain that, while knocking about South America some fifteen years ago, I ran into a *fonda* or eating house which was serving roast spring chicken with a special juicy flavor. It might be that I was hungry, and then again it might be that the roast was fine, because I ordered a second chicken. Within twenty minutes I was served with a

most delicious roast. Afterwards I asked permission to go to the kitchen and see how it was done. In the center of the kitchen I found a built-up fireplace with upright grate bars, on one side of which was a heaping fire of charcoal almost three feet high; and on the hot side of the grate bars was a man basting chickens on spits, while a boy turned the spits.

Some years afterwards a friend of mine was having trouble with his inclosed oven. He could not baste his roasts properly, so I had a machine built on the open hearth plan which is giving results.

First I called in a boiler maker, and had him make to our order a back plate very much the shape of a new moon. This back plate was made of 3/8 inch boiler plate six by six feet and when curved stood five feet high; and at each end were riveted pieces of the same plate, which was to be slotted to hold the spits. Seven holes were bored in these end pieces to permit passing seven Bunsen burner gas tubes following the moon circle. This was mounted on an iron work stand three feet high, six feet long by two feet wide and a place made to hold two basting pans about eighteen inches by two feet long.

Next we called in an electrical man, who sold us a small motor, not much larger than a fan motor, on which was placed a worm gear to reduce the speed of the shaft supplying power to the spits. On the end of this shaft was placed a small sprocket gear; and we bought three more sprocket gears with about fourteen feet of 1/2 inch wide sprocket chain. This was installed on one of the end plates of the moon so that the chain would come down about four inches back of the slots cut for the spits. These slots were cut at a down angle, so that when the spits were rolling there would be no danger of them falling out. We had a half dozen spits made, at one end of which was placed a light sprocket gear eight inches in diameter.

The cook can spit two kinds of meat on the same spit if he wants to, as long as he separates them so that the drippings fall in separate pans; and hoist the spit to the slot which will give the heat best for the purpose, and the sprocket chain will roll the spit. It is advisable to reduce the speed to not more than ten or twelve revolutions per minute.

—C. J., Havana, Cuba.

Tomahawks

ARTHUR WOODWARD of the Heye Foundation, Museum of The American Indian, has some interesting things to say in respect to Gordon Young's comment on these weapons, when used elsewhere.

In the last issue of *Adventure* I noted an interesting comment by Mr. Young concerning the use of the tomahawk by the natives of the islands in the South Seas. It so happens the tomahawk (metal type) is a pet weapon of mine which I am working on at the present time, gathering data for a brochure which I hope to publish at some date in the future. Both Mr. Young and the unknown reader who challenged Young on the nativity of the weapon are right in their respective fields. The tomahawk, as a tomahawk both in word and form, was distinctly a North American weapon, although there has been and is some debate as to the original form.

To begin with the word tomahawk originated in the Lenape or Virginia branch of the Delaware tribe in the form *tamahak*, "(what) is used for cutting." Captain John Smith was the first writer to mention the instrument under the name tomahack and described it as "a long stone sharpened at both ends" which description was supplemented by Strachey in 1616 who added "Thrust through a handle of wood and which they were wont to use for hatchets to fell a tree or to cut any massy thing in sonder."

However, the English writers of the period, describing the implements and weapons of the Indians from Maine to Virginia, not only mentioned the hafted celt or ungrooved ax and the grooved ax as tomahawks, but they also described the globe headed war clubs and the scimitar shaped clubs set with a deer antler spike, as tomahawks.

Later, when the small iron axes patterned after the large cumbersome European felling axes were made especially for the Indian trade in America became the popular hand weapons of the various tribes and in a measure superseded the wooden war club (the tomahawk never did succeed in replacing the old time wooden club as a favorite weapon of war) the name tomahawk was transferred to the metal axes.

Some authorities have held the belief that the metal tomahawks used by the Indians were modeled after the original stone axes, but so far I have never heard of or seen a single tomahawk in any metal that was of the same shape or size as the ungrooved celt or the grooved ax. On the other hand the iron axes found in the earliest of the historic graves and on old village sites which were occupied when the first Europeans touched America, and whose occupants were the first to receive trade goods from the English and Dutch, are of the same shape but of smaller size as those cumbersome, heavy bladed felling axes used by the peasants of Europe at the time of the occupation of America. These first forms of the ax later gave way to an utterly different form, that of the early European "hand striking" or battle ax used by the feudal warriors of the days of chivalry. To begin with, the metal axes supplied to the Indians as trade goods were not listed as tomahawks on the invoices, they were merely "axes" of different sizes.

THIS does not mean however that axes were not called tomahawks. It simply signifies that the term tomahawk had not become generally known to the wholesalers of trade goods in England and on the Continent, the latter place being the place where most of the early iron goods manufactured for the

Indian trade were obtained, Utrecht in Holland being the center for such hardware.

The far famed pipe tomahawk, presumably the invention of some fertile brained English trader, entered the trade lists about the opening quarter of the 18th century. There is reason to believe that the first pipe tomahawks were simply the early form axes with pipe bowls screwed in the polls. In a very short time this two piece weapon gave way to a standardized form pipe tomahawk cast in one piece, varying in length and width of blade, size of bowl and degree of ornamentation as well as choice of metals.

It has been claimed that the tomahawk as we have come to know it was more of a tool than weapon but an examination of any quantity of these implements, especially those in their original condition, will tend to convince one that they were primarily a fighting weapon, well balanced and ill adapted for much wood chopping, although a man might cut small branches and twigs with them and do it very nicely.

THE French type of tomahawks are more ornate and run the gamut of fantastic combinations of Oriental battle axes and the cruel *martel de fer*, crow's beak, and ordinary woodman's ax. One can expect almost any freak form of tomahawk from those tribes allied with or friendly to the French.

Even in the presentation axes, pipe tomahawks given by both French and English, especially the latter nation, to important head men of the various tribes, which are beautifully made of finest steel, inlaid with silver and mounted with polished handles ornamented with silver plaques and bands and generally bearing on the handle a "silver chain of friendship," the workmanship is the finest and although the weapons are showy, they are decidedly substantial and businesslike, and are not made solely for decorative purposes.

As far as the metal tomahawks were concerned, they were manufactured of several different metals, iron, brass, steel, lead, pewter, and brass with steel cutting edge inserted. While the greater majority of the weapons were made in Europe, there were many home made affairs hammered out on the forges of blacksmiths in isolated frontier settlements, or more isolated cruder forges set up by the diplomatic blacksmith interpreters both French and English in the Indian villages themselves.

I have handled some two or three hundred tomahawks of all varieties, and save for those which were made in later days for the more modern Indians who carried the weapon more for show than actual use, I can safely say that they were all made for a definite purpose, which was fighting. In the majority of cases, the ones I examined had been used a great deal, the handles were worn by long years of usage and the blades well kept. There were exceptions of course, some had seen service as handy camp tools and there were some that were just ornamental trade axes.

Mr. Young is undoubtedly right when he says the trade axes peddled in the South Seas have the trade name "tomahawks." I would also like to bet a dime, just to be liberal, that the bulk of his iron "tomahawks" are of English origin, although I must confess I have never seen one of the axes used in the trade in that part of the world. I would greatly appreciate it if Mr. Young would forward to me a sketch of the type ax, blade, and handle, used in his part of the world with as much detailed information concerning prices asked for them and their original point of shipment and manufacture. I am curious to know if the axes known as tomahawks have followed the early Colonial style or whether the trade in that part of the world has developed an entirely new model. And as Mr. Young says, "there can be no argument". He is correct in assuming the name tomahawk as derived from his trade axes and the Unknown Reader is likewise correct in his statement that the tomahawk is strictly of North American origin. — ARTHUR WOODWARD.

BUSHNIGGER LOVE SONG

Translated from Djouka "Talky-Talky".

Two kilometers out, and
Two kilometers back,
Over the Rickinau trail,
Through the steaming jungle,
Velvet black—where the white man's
Heart would quail,
At the baboon's howl,
The witch-birds call,
Or the bushmaster's sibilant hiss.
But, no Obi I fear,
As swiftly I go,
Over the trail—
For a kiss.

—LESLIE ASHLEY.

Second Call

AS MENTIONED in the December first issue of the magazine, I should like extremely well to have all readers of *Adventure* vote on the stories we have published during 1927. Which serial novel did you prefer? Which novelette? Which short story? What tale or tales did you dislike?

So that comrades far away may have a voice if they wish, we will not attempt a compilation of results until March first. As soon thereafter as it is possible, we shall publish the figures in Camp-Fire.

Portions of letters which have a more general bearing upon magazine policies, will be printed somewhat earlier.

—ANTHONY M. RUD.

ASK *Adventure*

For *free information* and *services* you can't get elsewhere

Guns for Bear

THE big brown fellows will stand a lot of killing. A handgun *might* do it, but you would feel infinitely more at ease in the company of a powerful carbine.

Request:—"This winter I am going north, with several other fellows, on a halibut boat to do some scientific work. We will be working along the coast of southern and southwestern Alaska and during weather too rough for operations at sea, we will have an opportunity to do some hiking about ashore. With this in view we have been discussing the best kind of gun to carry. For hunting a rifle is of course the thing, but for hiking about it would be too heavy and cumbersome,to carry.

We would like to pick out a gat which carries enough kick to stop some of the large animals, such as the brown bear, in an emergency, will permit accurate shooting, and is not too heavy and cumbersome to pack around. We first picked on a .38 special revolver with a five or six inch barrel, but though it is very accurate and has plenty of penetration it does not carry the kick. A .45 revolver would probably do the business, but we would like a lighter gun if possible and using a smaller cartridge. A Luger pistol, either 7 or 9 mm. with four or five inch barrel has enough velocity to mushroom in flesh, is accurate and fairly light, has a good range, but probably is more liable to get out of order and is more dangerous to handle.

That is the way we have summed up the situation and we would like your advice. Also any pointers on caring for guns on a boat under such winter conditions where everything rusts, given the least opportunity. I would appreciate an answer as soon as possible for we are leaving about the end of October and would like to get the guns as soon as possible."—Wm. C. Herrington, Seattle, Washington.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—I'll say that you have passed me a very hard question to answer in the manner in which I wish to reply; I don't know of one single handgun made today on which I'd rely to down one of the big Alaska browns, save and excepted the possibility of the Ithaca twenty gauge shotgun pistol with round ball, as the best possible bet.

I don't believe you would find the Luger 9 mm. equal to the task, although I believe them to be the most accurate of the military automatics, if my use of my own guns can be taken as a criterion. I don't believe any length of barrel will make that gun equal to a .30-30 rifle, and that is in most cases considered too small for the big browns.

THE best bet would be, to my mind, the Ithaca mentioned above, with round ball, and its heavy recoil will discourage most men; next in order would be the Model 1917 Colt or Smith & Wesson revolver, and last, the .44-40 single action Colt revolver.

But, my earnest advice is to carry as powerful a carbine as you can secure, and I advise the .35 Remington Model 14 carbine, or the Model 54 Winchester bolt action carbine in .30 '06 caliber, as the two guns carrying the most punch for the least bulk, or the .300 Savage with short barrel. Remember, those big bears take a lot of killing power to put them down, and a pistol or revolver, in my personal opinion, lacks the necessary punch to kill them. I'm informed by men who have hunted them that they will in many instances attack a man on sight, after which the situation resolves itself into "kill or be killed" from both parties' standpoint.

No, in your hiking trips, at least one man in the party should carry a good powerful rifle, and KNOW ITS USE. Personally, I'd prefer a .410 pistol with shotshells for small game and a heavy rifle for self-protection against the browns.

Olympics Fencing

YOU "pink" your man with red ink, but that is sufficient to indicate to the judges that you have won.

Request:—"Can you give me any information about the fencing in the Modern Pentathlon in the Olympics? What are the rules of the fencing event?"—Mr. C. Stevenson, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Reply, by Captain John V. Grombach:—The modern Pentathlon competition in the present Olympics is primarily a military event and the armies of the different nations supply the various representatives. The five sports engaged in are fencing, riding, shooting, swimming and running.

The weapon used in the fencing is the épée or dueling sword. The rules governing this event are the ones universally accepted for that weapon. Both men are armed with the épée (straight point weapon) equipped with the "point d'arret". This latter is a three barbed tip which catches, tears or pricks into the glove, jacket, mask, trousers, or shoes of the opponent. In the center of the three points and also on the three tips is a small amount of red ink so that the judges can with certainty ascertain if a man has been touched or not. The marks of the points and ink can leave no doubts. A match is but for a single touch which is not confined to any target but can be on the foot, hand, leg, arm, head or body. In other words the dueling sword fencing event is an exact counterpart of a real duel for first blood. In case both men are hit the first to land wins. And in case the time of landing is the same both men lose.

The contest is generally officiated over by four judges and a director. Each contestant is watched by two judges one on either side of him while the director directs or controls the match.

For more detailed rules covering épée fencing and the regulations relative to how double touch decisions are arrived at by the five officials write to the Amateur Fencers' League of America, New York City.

Alligator Hunting

THE coastal rivers of Panama and Colombia swarm with them. An arboreal reptile that you potshoot as it climbs a tree.

Request:—"Would like to have some information regarding the hunting of alligators in the Republic of Colombia and the Republic of Panama; have had considerable experience in hunting alligators in Florida so am fairly well versed in the mode of hunting them.

Am listing a few questions below, so as to give you a line on what information I desire—

Is there any restriction on hunting these animals in above republics?

Are these animals plentiful in above countries?

Approximately what would the average hide sell for there?

Would tariff have to be paid on hides, in order to ship them out of these two countries?

What sections of these countries would you advise me to go?"—A. J. SCHULTZ, New York, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—None that I have ever heard of. I myself killed an even million of the critters in Panama and on the C. Z. while working on the construction of the canal.

Yes, both alligators and crocs abound in all the sluggish rivers and streams of both coasts, also on the borders of Gatun Lake on the C. Z. The crocodile has the upper jaw hinged, is more pointed of muzzle, is more green in color and is a bit quicker than the 'gator. In my time there were more of both sorts in the Rio Chico about twenty miles from Panama City by launch. This stream was literally crawling with them.

Large hides have little if any value, due to the ordeal of skinning them and the clumsiness to handle after skinning. The best length was young ones about three feet long. There was no set price. Owner took what he could get. For prices they bring here write Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Latin American Division, Washington, D. C., and ask for number imported into the U. S. last year and the declared price per each.

Not out of the C. Z. I never saw any one stopped from bringing such things from the Panama Republic into the C. Z. either. I have never heard of a duty on them from Panama Republic. I would suggest writing the American Consul, Panama, R. P., and asking him.

There are also immense iguanas (the tree sort) which have excellent skins for the same use as 'gators and crocs. They are easily shot as they climb up the trees along the border of Gatun Lake.

Due to many things I would suggest Panama City and up and down the coast from there; Colon and up and down from there; and along the C. Z. There are a great number of Americans located down there and English speaking negroes are easily obtained for about $1 per day or less. This would keep you out of trouble with the native authorities and no better hunting than could be found on the coast and bayous of the Republic of Colombia. You want to get shallow water, for the critters sink when shot. The Rio Chico near Panama City is ideal.

Canoes

HOW to do a good reconditioning job.

Request.—"I would like to know what kind of varnish or paint I can use for reconditioning a sponson canoe and also some hints as to how I could go about it to do a good job?"—CHARLES C. JONES, Cumberland, Md.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar S. Perkins:—Use any good canoe enamel paint; Valspar varnish is one of the best and fine for canoes. Be sure to take all the old paint off and also the old varnish. This can be done with a strong solution of washing powder and a fine grade of steel wool; or with some paint remover and putty knife. If the filler is out of the canvas put another on before applying the paint; then if you care to cover the paint with a thin coat of varnish it will improve the looks of the paint job and make it more lasting.

Cannibalism

THE ceremonial and plain gastronomical varieties as practised by American Indians. The symbol of the "war kettle."

Request:—"In the appendix of Rupert Hughes' 'Life of Washington', on page 533, among the references of the Braddock fight, the last paragraph mentions Charles Langlade as one of the leaders on the French side, and then further along in the paragraph, page 534, in giving a sketch of Langlade's career, states where he won a great victory over the English traders and Indian Chief La Demoiselle, whom his *Indian allies boiled* and *ate* alive.

Now what I have in mind is that until the last four or five years the writer had never read of any cannibalism being practised by the American Indians in the East, though I have a vague recollection of reading something a great many years ago of a tribe in California who practised cannibalism. In some semi-historical fiction I have read, the period of the French and Indian War, and just prior to it, reference was made that "a prisoner had been sent to the kettle and eaten." This referred to the western part of New York and the eastern part of Ohio. Do the records show that actual cannibalism was practised by our American Indians, or is this just a figure of speech?"—GEORGE P. THOMAS, JR., Baltimore, Md.

Reply, by Mr. Arthur Woodward:—Yes, cannibalism in two forms was practised in this country by many tribes of Indians, and the cases cited in your letter were not uncommon. The tribes of the East, those of the Algonquian and Iroquois stock did boil and eat their captives but not as a matter of relishing it nor as a habit of doing it ordinarily. It was primarily a war custom rising out of the age old belief found not only in this country but in other parts of the world, that if a person partake of certain portions of a brave enemy, the virtues and greatness of that person is thereby incorporated in the eater's own body.

The boiling and eating of La Demoiselle occurred at the Indian town of Pickawillany on the Maumee River in June, 1752. In this case the Ottawa and Ojibwa did the cooking and eating. Other tribes in the East practising this ceremonial cannibalism were the Montagnais and some of the other tribes of Maine, the Micmac, Armouchiquois, and some of the Huron. In other parts of the country the Assiniboin, Cree, Foxes, Miami, Illinois, Kickapoo, Winnebago, Pottawatomi, Sioux, Ottawa, Ojibwa, Tonkawa, Attacapa, Karankawa, Kiowa, Caddo, Tlingit, Heiltsuk, Kwakiutl, Tsimshian, Nootka, Siksika, some of the Californian tribes and the Utes, practised cannibalism at some time or another.

OF COURSE the custom of boiling and eating captives or parts of their bodies grew more rare as contact with the whites increased until in later days the act of cooking the captives, especially among the Iroquois, was symbolized in council speeches by reference to the "war kettle put on the fire to boil" rather than the actual deed.

As a rule among many tribes only such parts of the body as the heart, brains, blood and marrow of the bones was eaten, the belief being that the desirable qualities of a man were centered in those portions of his anatomy. The heart belonged to the warriors while bits of the flesh and less important parts of the body were given to the boys and sometimes to the women and children in general. Among the Menomini, in ancient times the heart of an enemy was eaten raw but later the heart of a snapping turtle was substituted and even then the bravest of the warriors suffered qualms of a squeamish stomach on swallowing the palpitating, squirming bits of beating heart, for as you know the heart of a turtle throbs and pulsates even after death. I had a friend who was put to this ancient test of manhood by his adopted Menomini uncle and my friend ate a quarter of the turtle's heart and today that act is incorporated into a legend entitled "How Sekosa ate the Turtle's Heart."

All of the foregoing practise may be included under the title of ceremonial cannibalism. The second form was that induced by actual hunger brought about by starvation and lack of game and other food stuffs. In this second form, as a rule, only those that died were used, although there have been cases recorded where individuals were slain to furnish sustenance for their fellow tribesmen. However this is not confined to the Indians alone; to wit, the Donner party and that pariah Keysburg who ate of his fellow men when his hunger had been allayed.

Bananas

WE *do* have them — 50,000,000 bunches per annum.

Request:—"Can you tell me anything about the history of bananas? There are yellow bananas and red bananas. What do they call both kinds in Spanish? Which of these two kinds do they ship the most of from Central America?"—WENDELL ELLIS, Los Gatos, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Bell Emerson:—*Plantano*, meaning plantain trees. The orthography and

pronunciation of this word as above written, are considered vulgar; it is always written *platano*, and pronounced pla'-tah-no.

This is a tree of the West Indies, and other parts of America, and its fruit, called in some parts banana. There are several species of it. *Platano comun* or *sapalote* (common plantain-tree, or Adam's fig.) *Musa. Platano guineo, Musa sapientium,* and *Platano dominico, Musa regia.*

The natives speak of them in the general term of *guineos.*

The red fruit is banana, and the yellow fruit is *guineo* or in English plantain, as found in the fruit stands of our cities and towns. Forty years ago the banana was very little known in the United States, but within two generations it has grown so that the importation yearly of 50,000,000 bunches is the usual thing.

Captain Baker of Cape Cod, Mass., brought a few bunches from Jamaica to New York in 1870, and he became the father of the banana business. The fruit was a high-priced novelty at that date, and a brisk trade gave inspiration which developed into the great banana industry of today.

Costa Rica holds first place among the Latin-American Republics in the cultivation of this fruit. The United Fruit Co. and the other fruit companies handle the yellow fruit mostly. The 50,000,000 bunches were valued at $15,000,000 wholesale.

This fruit holds its own "strictly on its merits," and the business is increasing each year.

Cameras

ALL-AROUND machines and the best speed for lenses.

Request:—"I would like a very high powered, sharp focusing, quick action camera that would take near and far views and panoramas; a camera that could be used all over and that would not need very much light in order for it to register. Could you tell me if there is such a camera (preferably small) and if a F 3.5 lens is best in all cases? And also how to develop films with as little paraphernalia as possible, a small neat developer."—M. B. KATZKIN.

Reply, by Mr. Paul L. Anderson:—There are plenty of fast, quick-acting, small cameras on the market, such as the Ermanox, sold by Herbert and Huesgen, of New York City, but they are not generally arranged so as to focus on objects nearer than about six feet. If you want to get closer than this, to get small objects life size, for example, you will need a longer bellows, and that increases weight and bulk. For panoramas you will need a special camera, built for that work only, though panoramas can be made with any camera, by taking successive photographs, swinging the camera between exposures and matching up the prints. To do this, the tripod screw should be located under the lens, for best results, though an approximation can be secured without doing this.

So far as speed is concerned, the Ermanox lens works at F 1.8, which is fast enough for 1-5 second exposures by ordinary stage lighting, and fast enough for almost anything outdoors.

Personally, I think the most generally useful all-around camera is the 3¼ x 4¼ revolving back, long focus Graflex. Your lens can be of F 2.5 or F 4.5 speed, and should be at least 7½ inches in focal length for good perspective. I do not know whether or not the Graflex front-board will take a lens as large as this F 2.5—probably not—but anyway, a speed greater than F 4.5 is so seldom needed that it wouldn't pay to have the shorter focal length in order to get the speed. I have been working for twenty years, and have never owned a lens faster than F 4.5, or felt the need of one. I believe the Graflex is your best bet. Get a magazine plate-holder and use plates when possible. If you must have films, use roll films rather than film packs.

For developing films with as little trouble as possible, get a Kodak film tank and follow the instructions which come with it. The most convenient developer I know is Burroughs Wellcome's tabloid Rytol. Get the Burroughs Wellcome photographic note-book and study that; it contains a lot of valuable information on developing, besides having a convenient form of exposure table and a space for recording your photographs.

Southern Utah and Northern Arizona

THE outlook for newcomers to this stock-growing territory where all the available water has been appropriated for many years back.

Request:—"I am writing you for information of Southern Utah and Northern Arizona. My intentions at present are to settle in one of the two localities and raise sheep and goats and I wish you would inform me as to what particular section would be the best suited for same and if there is still government land to be homesteaded. Would there be any opposition on the part of the cattle men and is there sufficient water to be had there for the raising of stock and would one have to raise feed for winter feeding or could one graze the whole year? Would it be possible to find a place such as a valley where one could irrigate a few acres of land or would it be a hard matter to find water enough to irrigate with? What is the extent of the winters, the snow and the rainfall? Are the summers dry and without rainfall or are there frequent rains? Are there trails or roads or any possible means of transportation in or out of that country and what would be the nearest railroad points?

What would it cost to start on a small scale in sheep in said country and could one find a ready market for wool, sheep, goat, and lamb?

Has the northern part of Arizona and Southern Utah any deserts?

Where can one obtain reliable maps of that country and to what branch or department of the Land

Dept. of the United States could one write to get books and pamphlets?"—J. E. Brown, La Porte, Indiana.

Reply, by Mr. E. E. Harriman:—Southern Utah is devoted to sheep, cattle and horses principally, and the cattle are grazed on the mountains, while sheep feed on deserts. At Cedar City they told me there were 65,000 head of horned cattle on the Parowan Mountains in which the town stands. There were 90,000 sheep in Escalante Valley alone, which lies between Cedar Valley and Lund.

The San Juan Basin lies across the spot where New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Utah corner, the only place in the United States where 4 States corner on each other exactly. San Juan Basin is rich in coal, oil and gold, besides being a good farming and stock raising section. When the Santa Fé Railway builds the branch it talks about, into San Juan, the Basin will be a tremendous producer. Now sheep and goat raising in southern Utah has been an established industry many years. Starting in that part of the country, you of course would conflict with others now in the same business. Men long engaged in raising sheep or cattle are now in possession of the waterholes, springs and creeks.

NORTHERN Arizona is covered by the Kaibab National Forest, where the deer are so numerous that no sheep may graze at all, as in most forests. From the Kaibab east lies the Hopi and Navajo Indian Reservations, on which no white man may run stock of any kind, unless he holds a Federal permit and pays the Indian Bureau handsomely for the grazing privilege. All of which shows you that starting in the sheep and goat raising industry is bound to be a hard proposition in either Southern Utah or Northern Arizona.

Homesteading is impossible in Arizona north of the Colorado River on account of the National Forest and the Indian rights. In Utah there was a wonderful chance until June, 1911, when a Mormon bishop preached a redhot sermon on wasting the inheritance of the Lord and his hearers homesteaded 23,000 acres in three weeks.

San Juan Basin is about the only chance for a man to start and in there he has to watch his step, lest he trespass on an Indian or a Mormon. In fact, both States have had all the available water taken up by stockmen for many years back and stock growing without water is impossible.

The whole section occupied by the Navajo and Hopi Indians is only desert land, with a few little cases where they raise hay. Most of the southern part of Utah is nothing but desert land. Cedar Valley is a sagebrush country, with sage hip high to a tall man. Escalanta Valley is separated from Cedar by a low range and is pure desert, shadscale and rabbit brush land, an old lake bed.

Doukhobors

THIS mystical sect, literally "the spirit wrestlers," were expelled from Russia about 1885 and migrated to Western Canada and Cyprus. Those who have latterly moved to Paraguay have apparently settled in South America's chief sore spot.

Request:—"I should like some information regarding the Doukhobors who left Canada and went to Paraguay. I wished to know how they liked it and how they were getting along and what line of agriculture they are following and in what part they are located. I should be much obliged if you could furnish this information; also particulars of rainfall, climate, temperature, transportation facilities and are these last expensive."—M. A. Silbo, Prince Rupert, B. C.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—In spite of several rather obvious defects in their new country the Doukhobors seem to be satisfied with it. A thing that has most of us "experts" puzzled is the boundary question. Paraguay has given them land in a territory that has been under dispute for many years. Paraguay possibly gave them land in this particular portion so that she could have a better claim on it when the final arbitrament is made. It will be made some time and the fur will fly.

Paraguay, Brazil and Bolivia, to say nothing of Argentine, have all been trying to get settlers into the disputed zone for twenty years. You can see on a map that it is a great big hunk of country that is marked "in dispute". The Doukhobors bit on a big grant. They may win out in the long run. *Quien sabe?*

It's a queer sort of country where they have settled. It's the upper edge of the big Chaco, a plain covering a quarter of a million square miles from there on down through upper Argentine and sloping about four inches to the mile toward the south east on an average. The Argentine portion is treeless and covered with bunch grass where it isn't being farmed with tractors by the big Jewish farmers.

This upper portion goes on up into wooded territory. The Doukhobors are not up all the way to the real timber but are where there are patches of woods, plenty for their own use and for shade for their stock. It rains like the deuce about every two years and lakes and lagoons appear. These swarm with fish, water snakes and lung eels *pronto*. These reptiles have been buried down under the earth, living on the fat of their tails during the dry spell. They go down six and eight feet to where it is damp and curl up and wait. You *dig* fish when you dig a well or foundation for a building, also eatable snakes and lung eels.

The climate is temperate at all times. For transportation you have the Paraguay River for rafts and canoes down to where the steamers stop. Also a branch of the Argentine National Railways to the west which makes connection with the Bolivian system of railways.

The TRAIL AHEAD

A Complete Novel

Black Sheep

By Murray Leinster

It was a queer sensation to *Steve Galt* to be lost on the old Block H, even though he had been away for years and the night was black; so black that he could not see the face of the man who suddenly thrust a pistol into his middle and demanded that he sell his boots! A queerer sensation, later, when he learned that the money that had been offered was a murdered man's gold.

Two *Novelettes:*

The Gorilla of No. 4

By J. D. Newsom

This squeaking little fop of a colonel with his immaculate white drill and his monocle in his eye, this dandified fellow was telling him, *Lieutenant Grellon* who had risen from the ranks and served twenty years in the Legion, that a company of Legionnaires had mutinied. Yet had not this same colonel glibly said a few days ago that the wild Ouled-Farick tribesmen had made their last stand, and were they not at this very minute swarming in the hills and threatening the very walls of his fort?

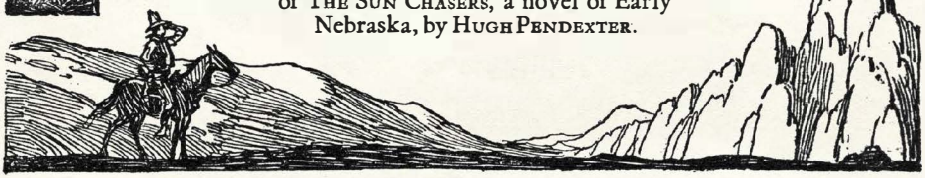
Of Gallantry

By F. R. Buckley

He was a cruel man, *Count Rinaldo,* and impetuous; nor was he very admirable in other ways. To *Luigi Caradosso,* captain of *condottieri,* he seemed also far from being an able soldier. But this is a tale of gallantry, and even wise old *Luigi* who had, more than most men, seen brave and noble gestures on the part of fearless men, had to admit that young *Rinaldo's* gallantry was quite beyond belief.

And—*Other Good Stories*

DORYMATES, a story of the Grand Banks fishermen, by GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND; CARIBOU COMING, greed and just reward in the Canadian Northwest, by A. DEHERRIES SMITH; HELL AND HIGH WATER, *Carmody Grant* and a problem in rustling, by STEPHEN PAYNE; THE CARNIVAL KID TURNS SQUARE, how smooth is the skin game? by EDWARD L. MCKENNA; CEASE FIRING, Navy gunners on a sinking ship, by BEN J. PETMECKY; A COOTIE COMPLEX, a humorous Western story; HALF PINT, a desperate waddy and a salubrious suicide; PART FOUR of THE SUN CHASERS, a novel of Early Nebraska, by HUGH PENDEXTER.



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