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Adventure
DAMNED DUTCHMAN
by
GORDON YOUNG
A BIG NOVELETTE OF CAP'N BILL JONES
THE STORY OF LOP EAR, A WOLF
by HAROLD TITUS

Adventure

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DAMNED

A Novelette—

CHAPTER I

"LIES, LIES, LIES!"

GALTZ groaned as if his puffed-out belly hurt and old Seagrim had a dazed, cock-eyed look as each lifted his face from the letter and newspaper clippings. Then Galtz smashed his fist down on the table, pounding the letter. He was a big fattish man with bladder-blown cheeks and little pig eyes. Some people all through the South Seas hated the very tracks his feet left in beach sand and road dust. There was a sly twist to his thick-lipped mouth when he strutted in tight-fitting whites, carrying a gold-headed cane, wearing a watch-chain of heavy gold links that dangled across his full belly.

The chain had belonged to the dead Englishman, Chumley, who owned the whole of a small island north of Labepo. Chumley hadn't been much of a friend to Galtz or to any man, but they did business. One rain-swept night the piratical Frenchman, Black Pierre, had

DUTCHMAN

by Gordon Young

driven his knife into Chumley's body as it lay a-sprawl on a long steamer chair behind veranda screens. Chumley's steward, some sort of droop-lidded mongrel picked up in Singapore, had seen him. For that matter, Pierre, with a reward on his head and due to be hanged if caught, coolly and without boast admitted the crime. The brutal Englishman mistreated his pretty wife, a young half-caste French girl.

Galtz was her husband now. He had got the plantation, the island, the brig, trifles like a cutter or two, bulging copra sheds, and the watch-chain, through the jabbered blessing of a Samoan preacher, who pronounced Galtz and the young widow, Marie Thurot Chumley, man and wife.

According to one Bill Jones it was this same Samoan liar that, as missionary here and there about the islands, had sent false and favorable reports about Galtz and his traders to the missionary society. But Bill Jones was himself a scoundrelly ruffian; at least Galtz and

numerous other persons often said so.

It was because of Cap'n Bill that Galtz was now in a frustrated rage. He slapped the letter on old Seagrim's table, swearing. There was no fierce drive to his oaths. They were the nearly hysterical farming of a bad-tempered bully up against a situation where bullying did no good. His fat face worked in distorted spasms, and he used every bad name he could lay his tongue to, damning Lloyd's agent, damning his own Captain Kleber, damning the newspaper men of Sydney, and with violent blurt of oaths damning Cap'n Bill, knockabout island trader, blackbirder, pearler.

In the first place, Bill had spread stories about Galtz's brutality among natives. Also he had smacked Galtz's bladder-shaped face with contemptuous, off-handed slap before a group of Labepo planters and told some very bad tales, with names, places, dates. That night, near the landing, Bill nearly killed two or three of Galtz's sailors who tried to use knives.

In the next place, the letter and clippings on the table told how Cap'n Bill had just kept Galtz and Seagrim from pocketing some £10,000.

When Galtz quit striking the letter to wipe his red, sweaty cheeks and neck, old Seagrim, who had a pious cast of face and sanctimonious Yankee voice, poked at the letter gingerly with long bony forefinger, as if a little afraid of being burned.

"Shh-hh-h," old Seagrim urged in reproof. "Very wrong to swear."

"Shh-ish my eye!" roared Galtz, and slapped his heavy hand on a cutting from a Sydney newspaper, as if trying to crush the life out of its headline: *Heroic Feat of Famous Island Captain.*

"Fifty thousand dollars lost! Damn that Jones!"

Old Seagrim went on tapping the letter. It had come, with clippings, that morning, on the monthly steamer.

The letter was from Lloyd's agent. It commended and congratulated Miss Sally Seagrim on having had a captain like William Jones on the unlucky *Masquereo.*

Galtz hunched forward to re-read what he knew by heart. He snapped spatulate thumb and stubby forefinger with tossing gesture. "Money I counted on, like that—gone!"

Old Seagrim sighed. He had got involved with Galtz. Badly involved. Galtz was a lucky, bold, crafty man; but that ruffian Jones had played the deuce and all with Galtz's luck and craft.

Lloyd's agent wrote that any claim for even partial damages must first be subjected to inquiry into the incomprehensible over-insurance on the *Masquereo.*

"It's all your fault!" said Galtz. "I didn't want anything to do with—"

Seagrim raised a bony hand. He was shocked. "Don't lie, Mr. Galtz. Very wrong to lie." His tone was dry, slightly nasal. He had a down-at-the-nose, pious cast of face; his trimmed mutton-chop whiskers gave him a sort of ascetic dignity. "You, Mr. Galtz, suggested, nay, insisted that we use Captain Jones!"

OLD SEAGRIM blew his nose. A long, high-bridged nose. He poked the handkerchief up the sleeve of his black alpaca coat. "It was you, Mr. Galtz, who arranged for the fire to break out and—"

"It did break out!"

"Um-m. But Bill Jones put it out. Very poor planning."

"I'll give my Captain Kleber hell! He swore the flames would—"

"And to make assurance doubly sure, the leaks were—"

"Kleber told me she would sink in dry dock, that ship!"

"And yet," said Seagrim sadly, eying the newspaper cuttings, "she didn't sink in even a gale!"

"The devil helped him!" Galtz

sounded almost humble, as if he believed just that.

Seagrim nodded slightly. The devil, he had found, meddled much in South Sea affairs, and seemed really fond of Cap'n Bill Jones. He eyed the agent's letter, muttered aloud, reading:

". . . . *fortunate to be under the command of one so vigilant, resourceful, courageous, and devoted to the owner's interest. The* Masquereo *was very like a submerged derelict when she appeared off the Heads, but standing waist-deep in water, Captain Jones maintained that he was not even in distress and defended his owner against salvage claims or even exorbitant towage. . . .*"

At that, old Seagrim's voice broke.

Instead of abandoning ship like a sensible man, letting her burn and sink, Captain Bill and his black crew had fought the *Masquereo* through fire and gale. Overdue, dismasted, jury-rigged, water-logged, with deck awash and every downward roll as sluggish and heavy as if it were the last, Captain Bill had put the battered wreck off the Sydney Heads and haggled with tug masters that came snorting out, gleeful for salvage.

The newspaper cuttings told how he had jeered them and said that before he'd let 'em pick the old ship's bones he would tow the *Masquereo* himself with a hawser in his teeth. He didn't want succor, he said, merely towage. All the while the crew hung in the rigging like black, mop-headed monkeys, and the water sloshed around Captain Bill's armpits but could not wash off his grin.

The tugs, snorting and fuming in disgust, laid hold of the *Masquereo* and dragged her into Port Jackson, nuzzled her up against the wharf, where Lloyd's agent, with increase of understanding and great admiration for Captain Bill, looked her over. The valuable cargo was found to be sacked ballast. The *Masquereo* had been got ready for sea by Galtz's Captain Kleber and crew.

"He done it for spite, that Jones!" Galtz roared. "He guessed we wanted her to sink and he wouldn't let her, damn him! Ten thousand pounds, damn him! Nobody but a damned fool would have stayed on that ship; and just to spite us!"

"Shh-shh, Mr. Galtz." Old Seagrim rolled his close-set eyes. "You forget that Jones had no reason to suspect that you were involved in the venture. He knew, of course, that I was interested, since the *Masquereo* is in my niece's name."

Galtz puffed with a kind of relief. "I hope he never finds out. He has told enough lies about me. I wouldn't want him saying I had a hand in trying to sink his ship to get rid of him and collect insurance! All the time, lies, lies, lies about me!"

Cap'n Bill, with pockets empty, had been on the Labepo beach. His dirty little old schooner had been seized over in the Fijis for a debt of some few hundred dollars, which might as well have been thousands for all that he could pay. Cap'n Bill was the sort of sailor who, after a lark on the beach, would rather be at sea on a plank than ashore in a four poster; so old Seagrim, urged to it by the malevolent Galtz, had no trouble at all in getting him to take command of the *Masquereo*.

Galtz's fist hit the table. "I prayed he would roast to death before he drowned! He goes all through the islands and licks hell out of my traders! He says I have done this and I have done that! He lies about what I do on my own island. He lies about my wife! She is a sick woman. He says I keep her a prisoner. Now ten thousand pounds we don't get! The premium we do pay! The towage! And we can't insure no more ships! . . . . ." Galtz was off in another spasm of curses.

Old Seagrim put his fingertips to-

gether, mumbled, "I don't know what to do."

"You don't?" Galtz swelled up. "I tell you what. You just say this Bill Jones set the fire himself. Say he made the leaks. Say he done it to ruin your reputation for spite and—"

"But in Sydney they know—"

Galtz brandished his arms. "A steamer once a month, when it comes. Who will go to Sydney to ask? That damned Jones is a rascal, a scoundrel, a ruffian cut-throat and liar, and near as much pirate as Black Pierre. If you talk loud and act mad, somebody will believe you and not him. I tell you the best advice I know. But ten thousand pounds—Oh-Oh!"

Galtz groaned and leaned against his palms.

CHAPTER II

OWNER OF *THE MASQUERED*

SOME four months later the dirty little schooner *Merry Maid*, Bill Jones, master and owner, was at anchor at Labepo.

Down in the stuffy cabin Cap'n Bill poked his freshly-shaven face up to the brass-rimmed mirror on the bulkhead and had a look. He had nicked his face and his red hair, for all the combing, was still touseled.

A weasel-like old man, pipe in toothless mouth, lolled back in a chair, bare feet on the table. He said: "Primpin' f'r shore! All you think about is girls! That's why you don't get on, Bill. Live from hand to mouth. An' no better trader 'n you, when you put your mind to it, ever passed iron washers off for dollars!"

Bill growled. "I never! That's Galtz's trick."

"Ah, but Galtz gets on," said old Jody Malloy and puffed as if with approval. Jody had only a couple of teeth left in his old jaws. His small, seamed face was covered with grayish fuzz.

"Then why'd you leave off workin' for Galtz?" Bill jeered.

"Ah, fine man," said Jody, eying a beam.

"Is, huh? He's here now. Brig's out there. I'll put a lashing on you, take you ashore. Let 'im step on you, like a cockroach!"

"If 'tain't too much to ask, Bill, I'd ruther wait 'fore payin' my respect to that"—Jody called him a so-and-so thus-and-such — "lobster-eyed Dutchman till after old Black Perry has talked to 'im in the dark. 'R yon. Why don't *you* kill 'im, Bill, and marry his widder? Stands to reason as how the Almighty don't want the wicked for to prosper, so it's doin' right to steal their eye teeth —an' widders. That's what Perry was up to when he killed Chumley. Galtz married 'er first."

"A thousand pounds," said Bill, musing. He slowly closed his fingers, held out his fist. "An' I had him onct, right like that!"

"An' let 'im go!" said Jody, scornful.

"He 'scaped," Bill corrected. "That is, in a way."

"You're a liar. You let 'im go."

"Bad hurt. Was sick. He'd have died. That reward ain't for a dead Frenchman. 'Sides, he'd been hurt fightin' men I wanted to kill. Perry ain't a bad fellow, some ways."

"He's stole your woman!" said Jody, gleeful.

"Never took a woman that didn't want to go. An' you can't blame a man for what a woman does if she wants!"

"Women, huh. Proper way to treat women is to smack 'em good. The bigger what you hit 'em with the better for 'em—and f'r you!" Old Jody worked his jaws, eyed the sand-box, spit a-far and did not miss. "I 'spose just 'cause a woman owned that damn *Masquereo* you won't blame 'er for tryin' to drown you to get insurance!"

"Don't know yet. I ain't ever seen 'er. Maybe she's purty."

Jody fumed, snorted. "If you'd worked it right, old Seagrim would've had to pay you something handsome for to sink 'er. You got no business 'bility at all!"

"I ain't?" said Bill with crushing glower. "Why, them insurance fellows give me a gallon of champagne ever' night for a week. Fed me roast lobster an' cake. Towed me about in a shiny carriage, an' got my schooner released an' give back to me!"

"You saved 'em near fifty thousand dollars! Purty stingy, I call it!"

"I saved your life onct. All I got for it was a chew of tobacco. My own you 'd pocketed, at that!"

Bill took up his clean shirt that was laid out for shore wear. He shook it, turned it about, looking for rips. His brawny breadth of shoulders split shirts, made buttons pop from about the throat.

Jody knocked out his pipe, thumbed in fresh tobacco, meditated on what next he could say that would be disagreeable. His eye fell on the chamois lump near his feet on the table. He pointed with pipe stem. "How much you think that Chinaman's goin' to cheat you on them pearls?"

"Can't much," said Bill, indifferent. "They ain't worth much. Aye, but think, Jody, of all the pearls all these years that passed through old Wang's hands. In forty years, a kegful, I bet!"

Bill took up the small chamois-wrapped lump, no bigger than a woman's small fist could cover. He fondled it.

"Aye, *think!*" said Jody, severely. "Think of all the blood an' sin on them pearls! Of all the stealin' and killin's done to get that kegful! *F'r why? Why? I'm askin' you who wants 'em?* And who wears 'em? Women!" Jody smacked a calloused palm against his leg as if proving something.

"Well, we didn't steal to get these."

"Aye, an' looky what we got!" Jody thrust out the pipe stem. "Measly little barley-sized lot. Fished 'em honest, didn't you? That ain't the way to get pearls as are worth somepin! Looky what in his day Black Perry has fetched Wang. Dead round uns, that big!" Jody put the tip of forefinger to the tip of thumb, measuring a hole big as a hen egg, held it up. "How'd he get 'em?"

"He never did!" said Bill.

Jody took a look at the hole, then curled his finger down inside the overlapping thumb to more nearly pea-size. "That big then. How'd he get 'em?"

"Stole 'em," said Bill, not indignant.

"Does he fish 'em? Spoil them lily hands? Dirty them velvet pants? Them floppy silk shirts? Let that dainty nose of his'n smell oyster stink? No sir. He *steals* 'em!"

"What I said, ain't it?"

"But you didn't say it like you minded!"

Bill pulled the pipe from Jody's nearly toothless mouth, put it into his own, puffed. "An' there ain't more of a thief than you in the whole South Seas," said Bill. " 'F I was to miss the anchor I'd look in your pocket first place."

"Tut, tut! He talks that way to one as was shipmates with his own father!" Jody complained.

Bill got into a shirt, buttoning it tidily about the throat. He pulled on his trousers, drew the belt tight, took a deep breath, let out the belt a couple of notches. He sat down on his chest and rammed stockingless feet into new shoes, stood up and stamped.

Jody looked on, contemptuous and silent.

Bill raised the lid of his sea chest, took out a new cap, with slightly shop-worn dinginess. A blue cap with gilt anchor on the front and an edging of gold braid, a little tarnished, along the visor.

"Where the blue-black, purplish, flam-

in' hell"—those weren't precisely Jody's words, but will serve—"did you get that booby hatch?"

Cap'n Bill, solemnly careful before the mirror, put it on his head. He pressed hard, forcing it down. Snug fit. More than snug. He leaned forward to the mirror, poked his finger to stow an Irish pennant of red hair up under the cap's edge.

"Oh I been savin' it from one time, year or two ago, down to Maw Shiller's in Melbourne. I hit a fellow as was wearin' it. He went right out from under the cap. Stayed out. Had called a girl names, so—"

"Prob'ly true!" Jody snapped.

"Prob'ly. But it's wrong to tell a woman truth. She don't understand. Makes her mad. Anyhow, I got a new cap I been savin' up."

Jody twitched a fingernail into the fuzz on his chin and scratched. "All they're after, Bill, allus, is your money!" Jody rose up; without haste he pulled his pipe from Bill's mouth, poked the short stem against Bill's breast. "Any time a woman's glad she knowed you, you've been done. An' you're the biggest fool that way I ever knowed!"

"I hope I get my hands on old Perry again. You can buy a lot of girls new dresses an' drinks an' tinned salmon with five thousand dollars!"

Cap'n Bill took up his own pipe, pocketed it, clapped his hand on Jody's head, waggled it about, gave him a shove, laughed. Then he strode out, strutting a little in new cap, slightly tarnished, and new shoes that hurt his feet.

CAPTAIN BILL'S blacks took him ashore, passing within a cable's length of the brig, formerly Chumley's, now Galtz's. Two or three sailors, lounging on the forecastle, came to the rail, bawled a few insults.

The blacks put the boat up close to the coral-stone landing. Bill stepped dry-footed to shore, waved off the crew.

"An' keep your food hatchways battened down goin' past that brig!"

The sun was hot and the glare on the white sand made Cap'n Bill pull the visor of his tight cap a little lower.

The town looked as quiet as if plague-stricken. Nearly everybody, even merchants, took a snooze in the afternoon. Native canoes lay high on the beach, like things that had crawled from the sea to sun themselves and died.

As Bill walked out into the road a slim girl on a slim-legged horse came cantering. The girl gave him a steady look as she drew near and reined up. The horse restively sidled and came to a stop broadside to him.

She was young and pretty, blue-eyed and, by her look, high-tempered. She had blond hair and the unburned skin of one not used to being out much in the sun. There was a high-bred air about her and a rather sullen petulance on her young face.

Cap'n Bill was always at ease with pretty girls, whatever the skin's color. He pulled off the tight-fitting cap, bobbed his touseled head.

"Nice day, miss."

"It isn't!" she snapped. "Beastly day, climate, island and people! And you know it. You are Captain Bill Jones, aren't you?"

"Ho, I've denied it before now. But never to a purty girl!"

"I'm not pretty and you know it! And you won't think so when I tell—"

"Be a pleasure to break the necks of them as say not, miss!"

"—tell you that I am Sally Seagrim!"

Cap'n Bill's blue eyes brightened with widening look. She seemed a mere child, eighteen or thereabouts. He grinned. "Hm, miss. Why, now you seem lots purtier even than when I first looked!"

She bent the crop between her gloved hands. "You are making fun and jeering. I don't blame you. That is if—*if*—

Captain, do you think my uncle wanted that ship to sink?"

"However did a girl like you get a thought like that?"

"Black Pierre told me that—"

"How'd that damn pirate come to have a chance to talk to you?"

"He doesn't dislike *you*, Captain."

"He'd better if he knows what's good for 'im!"

"Pierre said my uncle used my name so that in case of a suit the court would be prejudiced against the insurance people, because I am a girl, a young girl and an orphan—"

"But how'd you ever come to meet *him*? With that reward on his head, does he still show up here? I'd sure like to get it!"

Miss Sally bent in the saddle. "You mustn't feel that way about Pierre, because—"

"I know that crazy Frenchman. There's no trustin' 'im. However did you meet 'im?"

"One night about a month ago at a club dance, I was bored. Lonely. Oh, frightfully! It was full moon. I walked out under a tree. A shadow became a man. The man Black Pierre!"

"You wasn't scared?"

"Of a *gentleman*?" she demanded. "He has manners!"

"'Round women, you bet," said Bill, disgusted. "One of these days he'll get caught and hung!" Cap'n Bill sounded hopeful.

"I liked him and—"

"Most women do."

"—and he spoke highly of you!"

Bill grinned, hitched up his belt. "That's the big trouble with 'im. He's a queer one, and makes you half-way like him when you know you ortn't!"

"Captain Jones, will—"

"Bill, Bill. Cap'n Bill!"

"Well then, Cap'n Bill, will you tell me, please, why did you stay on that ship when she might have gone down? Just why?"

Bill laughed.

"Sure I'll tell you. But it'll douse all that hero-bosh they put in the papers about me. Truth is, miss, somebody had opened the seams of ever' boat. We didn't dare leave 'er!"

"How frightful!"

"That bein' the case, we put a raft together an' stood by. If she'd gone down, we'd have floated off. She didn't go down. And some day soon, Miss, I have it in mind to take your uncle by his head and twist two or three kinks in his scrawny neck till—"

"And I," she said savagely, "hope you break it!"

Then she jerked the horse about, struck hard, and galloped off the way she had come.

JEM CLOTCH'S bar was a big dim sail-loft of a place, furnished with bamboo tables and chairs. Bamboo furniture came through a fracas better than most.

A man or two dozed, face down on elbows. Two others, off in a corner, played cribbage languidly for drinks they didn't want.

Clotch, a loose-jointed old fellow with scraggly brows, lay back, picking his teeth with a knife. He raised up.

Bill tossed a dollar at the table. "Gin. Fetch yourself a cup."

Clotch showed big yellow teeth, shut the knife, brought gin. The gin gurgled into cups and they drank.

"I hear Seagrim is sayin' you fired his ship and set her a-leak."

"'F you listen careful, you're likely to hear him sayin' at the top of his voice one of these days that he didn't say it, too."

"An' Dutch Galtz tells that Seagrim is plannin' to bring barratry charges."

Bill sipped gin. "Galtz means he's told 'im to, maybe."

"I hear that tales about heavy insurance on the *Masquereo* are all lies. She wasn't hardly insured at all!"

Bill drained his cup, tossed out another dollar. "I'm just ashore. I haven't told anybody she was. And why does Galtz have so much to say about the *Masquereo*?"

"There's talk, you know—Galtz's wife is sick—talk of—they say he's in love with old Seagrim's niece, her that's been to school in Europe, and is just home."

Cap'n Bill glowered, then laughed, scornful. "That's bilge. Get some more gin."

The afternoon slipped away fast. Shadows lengthened. Now and then girls came in, dark eyes watchful for beckoning fingers. One fat-faced girl sat on the rickety table before Bill; another, with his cap on her bushy head, was on his knee.

Lamps, high up on the wall where they were less likely to be broken, were lighted and burned, not brightly. The flicker of untrimmed wicks in smoked chimneys set shadows dancing as if dark, bodiless ghosts came here for revelry. Laughter rose, often in shrieks. The town had awakened.

Cap'n Bill suddenly became aware that it was night and he was hungry. He went out with the bushy-headed girls, one on each arm, and into a Chinese restaurant. He ate a heap of chopped chicken, pork and rice, drank some tea and much wine, and teased the girls. They traded him out of his cap by the exchange of flowers, which they fastened tightly to strands of his red hair.

He filled his pipe, paid the bill, gave each girl a dollar so she wouldn't be sorry he was leaving, and left them flirting with the Chinaman. The Chinaman, being a Chinaman, had put him in mind of his pearls and the need of seeing Wang.

The stars were out. A breeze was astir. The surf beat the tide's march on the distant reefs. Bill felt fine. He sat down, took off his new shoes, tied them together, slung them over his shoulder, ripped off a shirt button or two about his throat, let out his belt and went on his way to Wang's house.

CHAPTER III

ONE "VE'Y SICK MANS"

IN THE early days Wang had been merely a chink pearl buyer; but for a long time now he had had the exceptional honor to be Monsieur Wang, agent for the French pearl syndicate. The syndicate was a powerful, jealous company.

His house was encircled by a bamboo paling that enclosed a high-reaching coconut palm or two. Cap'n Bill went through the gate, came to steps that led to the flimsy-seeming veranda. Chinese lanterns were hung above the steps.

A dark, sullen-looking Chinaman stepped out with hand barring the way.

"No can do. Wang ve'y sick mans. Much hu't in belly. You clome tomollo!"

Bill had drunk much gin, good warming gin. His arm moved in sweeping push. "I come to see Wang. What's wrong here?"

The Chinaman, motionless in the shadows, lifted his voice in rapid singsong, and so called out warning that Cap'n Bill had come and wouldn't be stopped.

Bill strode on with flowers a-flop in his hair, shoes bumping his shoulders as the bamboo floor moved springily under his feet. He turned a corner. Wang was at the end of the porch, hunched over a table flooded by a warm glow, like sunlight, under a low, tent-like shade of the oil lamp.

The shade was so low that Wang's frail hands could move about in the light while his wizened face and small, spidery body remained in twilight.

Wang was crippled. He carried a cane of lacquered bamboo no thicker than his small wrist. A loop of woven cord at-

tached to the cane handle was always about his wrist. He dressed like an island chink but did not have a queue. His head was clipped and the small skull was covered with grayish bristles. He wore light blue pantaloons, too short, white cotton socks, a loose white blouse that was cut about the skirt like a shirt tail, and slippers with padded soles. His eyes were tiny and black, set deep under skull-like sockets.

"Hi, Wang!" Bill called, coming up. "What's this about your belly hurtin'?"

Wang stood up, cane in hand, and bowed low.

"How do, Cap'n Bill. How do. Much glad to see you. Belly ve'y bad." He put a frail hand there and rubbed lightly. "Set down, Cap'n Bill. Long time you been go 'way. How things with you, hm?"

Wang didn't seem at all surprised at the flowers crazily festooned in Bill's tangled hair, and shoes tied by a string over his shoulder.

"Wang, I been pearlin'." Bill sat down, fingered his pocket. "Not much this time. Damn oysters are gettin' lazy. Meant to get here this afternoon, but run aground at Jem Clotch's." He laid the chamois lump on the table.

Wang called and a fat young native girl came. Her eyes were wide in a fixed look of uneasiness.

Wang said in a thin voice, lifting his small eyes at Cap'n Bill, "You fix big basket fo' you fam'ly and Cap'n Bill take it. Too much heavy fo' you. Too much heavy fo' China boy. Not fo' Cap'n Bill."

That gave the girl a startled, slightly dazed look. She didn't understand such generosity. Bill saw through it right off. He growled, "No such need to beat to windward, Wang. You want me out of the house. Open up them pearls and name a price. I'll go."

Wang looked like a fragile, skull-headed spider and moved a hand in protest. "Oh, no. No, Cap'n Bill. You good flien'."

"An' for thirty years you've had the name of an honest chink. Why not out an' say what you want?"

Wang's thin lips twisted with encouraging smile. "Ah, you like whisky, hm?"

Bill's face brightened like a lantern after a match is put to the wick. "Allus. And you want me to go. Name a price, give me a drink, an' I'll away."

There was a hurrying patter at the front of the veranda; a high-pitched, singsong protest; a moment's slight scuffle, then the shrill beach English of a childish voice and Galtz's name, screamed furiously. A child broke loose from the sullen chink's fingers and came on the run.

He was just a beach mongrel of about fourteen, a skinny, bright-eyed kid. "Cap'n! Cap'n! Galtz and his men come!" He brought himself up with a jolt against Wang's chair, snatched at Wang's shoulder, shook fiercely. "Where my Cap'n?" He looked excitedly about and caught sight of Cap'n Bill. At that, the kid swallowed the shout in his throat as if a gag had been clapped into his mouth.

Bill glowered.

"Black Perry's here, eh?"

Bill was answered in a smooth voice from the doorway behind him:

"Ah, it is good to meet again the Captain Bill!"

BLACK PIERRE stood there in velvet pants, gold earrings glistening below his curly black hair. He wore a loose silk shirt.

"Well I'll be damned!" said Bill.

"Ah, no, my friend. I hope it is never so!"

"Friend the devil!" Bill growled. "You bamboozle me ever' time we meet with some such game. We're enemies, you unhung pirate, you!"

Pierre had a smile to disarm the devil.

"I am glad we meet, my friend." He put out his hand. It was slim, delicate. It looked soft, but wasn't.

"Not much I won't!" Bill told him, half good-natured. "Wouldn't look right to shake hands with a man I'm goin' to get hung!"

"The honest man, as always!" Pierre murmured commendingly. "Some who say they are my friends, they are not so honest." His glance lingered on the inscrutable, mask-like face of Wang.

The little beach kid that Pierre had picked up, more or less adopted, jumped at him, talked fast, using oaths. Galtz, he said, and men, were coming to catch Pierre. The boy pushed, trying to stir Pierre into flight.

At that, Bill said explosively, with sweep of arm, "See here, Perry! If that damned Dutchman's comin', you'd better be off!"

Pierre laughed, not pleasantly.

"No!" he said. It was almost the French "*Non!*" French intonation rather than accent was in his words. "It be foolish to run now. Pierre is no fool!" His eyes darted as if he were considering all the obvious ways of escape and rejecting them.

"Then get caught and be hung!" said Bill. "Do you good." He tipped whisky into a gurgle-gurgle over the glass on the tray. "An' suit me fine!" Bill tossed the whisky down, swiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "It's you are bein' the fool now, stead of—like usual—makin' one of me!"

Pierre's palms came up with questioning shrug of shoulders. "I can run—where?"

"You come in a ship?" said Bill.

Pierre lifted his eyebrows. "The Dutch pig know I am here. He been told by—" Again he shrugged his shoulders, again the oblique glance struck at Wang's face. "Some day I find out who told, eh, maybe, hm?" Pierre raised a finger. "It mean, too, the Dutch pig has been told what lugger brought the damn Frenchman!" He touched his silken breast quite as impersonally as if pointing to some one else. "If I go to the ship he will come while I stand and whistle for the land breeze!"

"Aw, jump an' run, Perry. You've got friends all over this island!"

"Pah! If I run now I must dodge and hide like a little rabbit dogs chase. Pierre is no damn rabbit!" He leaned nearer with eyes a-sparkle. "Always I have promise myself that some day I do the handsome favor for my friend the Captain Bill, so—"

"Oh, do go, queek!" the girl urged.

Pierre slipped an arm about her waist. "It is his trick"—he nodded at Bill—"to scare me off and so make love to you. I know him, that Captain Bill. His great trick it is to make that simple, honest man Pierre believe he has no trick!"

The beach kid pointed into the darkness. "Men come! Men come!"

Pierre cocked his head with alert jerk, took his arm from about the girl, pushed the boy aside, came closer to Bill and put a hand behind him. The girl gave a startled squeak. Pierre drew a revolver.

Bill scowled, hunched his shoulders a little, folded tarry fingers into a fist, showed the fist. "Try that, Perry, an' they won't be any head left for to hang you by!"

"Pah!" said Pierre, deftly turning the revolver about, thrusting it out, butt-first. "Here, quick! Take this! Then I am your prisoner! The Dutch pig, he will come too late!"

"Eh?" said Bill, all a-grin. Then he growled, "But see here, Perry. I ain't goin' to pretend to catch you!"

"So?"

"Just so! If I lay hold on you, I'll keep you, damn you!"

Pierre shrugged a shoulder, pressed the gun-butt nearer. "That is as I want, my friend. Now quick!"

There was the sound of many feet running clumsily.

Bill took the revolver, poked the muzzle up close to his face so he could look into the chambers. It was loaded.

"And," Pierre said, with curious smile as he pointed toward Wang, "you must say Wang sent word to come and catch me!"

"Why that?"

"Ah, don't you understand, my friend? Otherwise it will look ver' bad that I am found in his house. No?"

"Right!" said Bill. Wang's face was a study in bronze. There was a curious tightening of wrinkles, a deepening of rigid lines about the slit-lipped mouth.

"Some ways, like now, you've allus been a good fellow, Perry." Bill's voice was deep with approval. "Not many, time like this, would have thought of Wang!"

Pierre laughed sharply, gazed at the Chinaman. Wang moved the cane a little, bowed his shoulders as if expecting blows.

GALTZ and a half dozen men, running heavy-footed, came out of the shadows. They had tried to surround the house, now climbed the veranda from all sides. They were sailors off the brig; one, Kleber, was the brig's captain.

"There he is!" . . .

"You damn pirate!" . . .

"We've got 'im!" . . .

"Killed poor Chumley, but now—" That was Galtz, wrathful with vengeance.

Cap'n Bill stepped close to Pierre, waggled Pierre's gun in Pierre's face, and sang out: "You're too late, Dutch! Just caught 'im myself!"

Except for a black streak outside of Galtz's coat, encircling his belly, Galtz was all in white. The black streak was a belt on which dangled a flap holster. He held the revolver in his hand.

"How — what — what's the meaning of this!" Galtz's small, cold eyes gleamed out of the bladder-fat face, accusing Wang.

"Ho, me an' old Wang here," Bill went on with companionable nod toward the Chinaman, "trapped this French—" Bill, with enjoyment, called Pierre names, good sea-going names. "Wang here," Bill concluded, wanting the story to sound right, "passed word to me and—"

Galtz swelled up all over, swore at Wang, brandished the revolver; and Kleber, a short-bearded, long-legged ruffian with hatchet-face and a murkiness about his eyes, went up to Wang, called him a "damned yellowbelly that—"

"Steady on!" Bill growled.

"He is *my* prisoner!" Galtz yelled. "And I—"

"Oh no you're not!" Bill told him. "Try to beat me out of a thousand pounds an' they'll be pieces of a Dutchman scattered all over the South Seas!"

"Men, men!" Galtz called, stepping

back from the look in Bill's eyes and that slight hunch of shoulder as if a fist were about to come.

"Men?" Bill jeered. "Pack o' beach rats!" He shook his flower bedecked head at them.

Kleber had looked about suspiciously, with nose a-tilt as if sniffing. He saw that Pierre smiled like an amused onlooker. "You," Kleber bawled at Wang. "You damned yellow dog, did you send word to—"

Wang hastily slid off the chair, rocked a little unsteadily on the leg that limped, balanced himself with movement of cane, then pulled his thin hands along his forearms, held them there, bowed humbly.

"Cap'n Kleber," said Wang in a thin, hurried voice. "I tell truth, God help! Him"—Wang's skull-like head bobbed toward the little beach kid—"he come tell him"—the head shifted vaguely toward Pierre—"Missuh Galtz make party, come catch um—"

"Ah so!" said Kleber and swung at the kid, but might as well have struck at a shadow.

"Then him," Wang went on, with waggle of head at Pierre, "he say to Cap'n Bill, 'I be your pris'ner. Here, you taky my gun!' That how it is, Cap'n. I tell truth, God help!"

Captain Bill frowned, perplexed and not pleased.

"Perry's my prisoner!" said Bill, stubborn, matter-of-fact.

"So he can get away—again, eh?" Kleber pulled the revolver he wore, slapped a hand on Pierre's shoulder. "Come along, you!" He gouged Pierre's ribs with the revolver's muzzle.

"That's the way to do it!" Galtz bellowed. "Fine, Kleber! Fine!" Galtz spraddled his thick legs in an awkward strut on the swaying bamboo floor.

"Stand back!" Bill growled. His blue eyes had the look crystal has when sunlight strikes it.

Kleber's grip tightened on Pierre's shoulder. He called sharply to his men, "Bear a hand!" He gave Bill a hard, mean stare, moved his cocked revolver, pointing it at Bill's belly. Kleber snarled, "That trick won't work, I told you!"

Captain Bill had a wrist like an iron swivel. He swirled his wrist and the barrel of the gun in his hand struck the barrel of the gun in Kleber's hand with a quickness and force that turned it aside. The jerk of the blow pulled on Kleber's forefinger. The gun went off. The girl squealed and clapped both hands to her ears. Galtz stumbled back, almost falling, swayed his arm wildly to catch his balance.

Pierre made a catlike jump, tearing his shirt under Kleber's hand as he jerked free. The gleam in his dark eyes focused where the muscles of Kleber's neck joined the shoulder. Pierre's right hand darted up under the silken sleeve of his left forearm. He had a long knife half drawn before Bill's left fist, starting from somewhere down near his knee, rose in an uppercut that would have jarred the horns off a bull.

The smack of fist on Kleber's jaw had much the sound that a nut shell makes when stepped on firmly. All Bill's bulky weight was thrown behind the blow. Kleber's head went up and back as if he had been jerked by the hair from behind. His murky eyes took on a drunken glaze, his knees waggled, and with sidewise bend of tall body he toppled, falling forward.

"Well?" said Bill, eyeing the sailors with a kind of obliging patience. They shifted their eyes, moved their feet. Galtz was edging back a little with pig-eyes wide, as Pierre, half crouched, smiled with teeth on edge at him.

Cap'n Bill dropped a hand on Pierre's shoulder, straightened him up. "Anybody else want to steal my pris'ner?" He turned on Galtz. "You, Dutch? What you say now?"

Galtz gestured with both hands, show-

ing they were empty. His mouth was wide opened, but his voice wasn't loud: "You have maybe killed Kleber!" He sounded as reproachful as if Bill had hit Kleber over the head with a club from behind.

"No." Cap'n Bill gave a regretful twitch of head that made the dangling flowers in his hair flop. "If it had been a kick in the belly—" He looked at Galtz's belly. Galtz sidled to the veranda rail. Fright flickered in his pig-like eyes. "Or 'specially," Bill explained, "if you hook your knee into a man's belly—so!" Bill jerked up his knee, showing how. "That'll do it sometimes. But a crack on the jaw—all I done just now was break it. Felt the bone snap an' give." Bill nodded with mild satisfaction. "Like some day, Dutch, it'll be your damn neck if you don't stay wide of me!"

"W-why, B-Bill, I never in my life—" Galtz stammered hoarsely.

"You're a liar. You been lyin' about me to Dutch gunboats—hopin' one of 'em would come down on me. Maybe one of these days one of 'em with a captain that speaks English will!"

Bill took up the whisky bottle, raised it, paused. "I've done you a big favor, Dutch." He pointed his foot at Kleber, wiggled his toes. "Bein' as he can't read and write much, and won't talk for a while, you won't get so much bad advice for a time!" Bill tipped the bottle, letting it gurgle.

Wang's face looked as if his mask were of yellow wax and the wax was softening. Fear showed through. His little eyes flashed this way and that, from Pierre to Galtz, as if doubtful of which to dread most.

An old sailor hitched his trousers with wiggling shift of body, stared at Cap'n Bill. "There'll be other times, me lad!"

Bill shook the bottle, seeing how much was left. "Six of you now. How many more you want—at one time?" No answer came, so Bill said, "Hm?" and waited, interested. The sailors stared and frowned but did not stir.

Bill looked about for his shoes, slung them across his shoulder. "Well, Perry, we'd better go. So come along!"

He took Pierre by the arm and marched off, carrying Wang's bottle of whisky.

WHEN Cap'n Bill pushed Pierre into the cabin, old Jody Malloy jumped from his chair, frowned, blinked. "Well I'll be double-damned! Velvet pants an' all! What the—how the—well, you damned old pir't, how air ye?" Jody thrust out his monkey-like fist. They shook hands. Jody looked him over, twitching a finger into the gray fuzz on his chin. "What this mean, you bein' here? You're smarter'n this fool Bill—or is it you've caught him?"

"Set down, Perry." Bill pushed at a chair.

"Thank you, my friend."

"Don't 'my friend' me." Bill glowered, looking savage. "I'm goin' to have you hung. You're guilty, ain't you?"

Pierre bowed his head, confessionally, but there was a glimmer of amusement in his uplifted eyes.

Old Jody heard the story of Pierre's "capture," and demanded shrilly, "Whatever turned Wang agin ye, Perry?"

"He is a thief, and I know it." Pierre lifted his eyebrows. His look and the intonation gave a hint that there could be much sharing of profit among them because of what he knew.

Jody sensed it and responded with, "Oh, how I hate a thief!"

"Yes, I know," Bill growled, standing with arms folded across his breast. "Hate like hell for one to get to something worth stealin'—first!" Then, because he had a liking for Wang's fair dealing in pearls, "How do you know?"

"My good honest friend," said Pierre mildly, "it may be that you have heard of the pearl called 'Mother of the

Moon'?" Bill nodded. "It come one time to my hand." Pierre held out his hand. "Joubert of the syndicate at Tahiti, he learn that, and ask me what do I do with the Mother of the Moon? I tell him I sell it to Wang at Labepo.

"Then he say, 'Why lie to me, Pierre? What you say is not so. Wang has never sent the pearl to us.' So I laugh just as if I had lied, but I think, 'Aha!'

"My luck of late it is not so ver' good. So I come here to have the little talk with Wang. I tell him what the syndicate will do if they find out he has not turned over to them the best. I tell him that the man who will hold out one pearl will hold another, and that for many year he has been agent for the syndicate!

"He say all right, we will talk the business over. But he tell his China boy go tell the Dutchman Pierre is at the house of Wang. How do I know? Ah, the girl love me. She has heard! I send my boy to watch. When the Dutch pig come, well—" Pierre shrugged his shoulders. "I could not make up my mind whether to kill Wang or to kill that fat pig. So as my friend, the Captain Bill, is there, I thought it much better to make myself his prisoner, to make the fortune of all of us, and to kill the Dutchman one time, Wang another!"

"Bilge!" said Bill, and turned to a cupboard, unlocking it.

Jody's red-rimmed eyes had grown feverish. "You think, Perry, the old chink has been keepin' them big uns all these years?"

Pierre spoke slowly, pitching his voice so Bill, for all the clatter he was making at the cupboard, must hear. "Wang has the pearl madness. Like a miser. He keeps the best. If he had sold them, the syndicate, with so many agents and spies—would have learned."

"He's no right to 'em!" said Jody indignant, almost righteous of wrath. "Do y' hear, Bill? All these years Wang's been stealin' pearls from the syn'cate! Damned ol' chink! I bet he could be made to show where they're hid, ol' thievin' rascal!"

"Oh, Wang's all right," said Bill, pouring from the bottle. "Reminds me, I left mine with 'im. An' little as I like Galtz, I don't blame Wang at all for sending for the damned Dutchman to get rid of Perry here."

"Ah then," said Pierre and smiled, "I give you the toast." They lifted their cups. "My so honest friend," Pierre went on, smiling coolly at Bill, "to the day I am hung!" And he drank.

Old Jody faltered, eyed his cup.

Bill was glowering. "That's a hell of a toast. You need the hangin' all right. But why'd you kill Chumley?" Pierre shrugged his shoulder. Bill eyed his cup. "All right, I'll drink, damn you, to the day you're hung. May the rope break!"

Bill drank, dropped the cup with a clatter. Pierre laughed, his eyes sparkling.

Said old Jody, who had worked on the plantation under Chumley, and for a time under Galtz, "We all thought that Sainan lied when he said he'd seen you do it, Perry. Done it hisself, we thought, an' blamed you. An ugly un, that Sainan, an' Chumley'd whipped 'im, you know. Tied him to the post an' whipped 'im good. Then put 'im back in the house. Ugh. I'd never. Not Sainan! You sure, Perry, as how you done it?" Jody coaxed for a denial.

Pierre, without hesitation and in a cool, soft voice, nodded and said, "Ver' sure. Ah, yes! The Chumley was a brute, eh?"

"Right," Jody agreed.

"Good. When he buy little Marie from her father, I send him word, 'I, Pierre the Black, love her. You make her ever cry and I will kill you. Pierre keeps his word!' "

Jody sipped at his cup and shuddered a little. "He done it, Perry. Shameful. Was jealous she loved you, I guess."

"The night it come when it seem good for Pierre to keep his promise." Pierre spoke of himself quite as if of another person. "Pierre's ship was near the island and it rain hard. He was rowed ashore. He went alone to the house where a lamp burned on the veranda behind the mats. He parted the mats —so. The Chumley is asleep in a chair, all sprawl out.

"Pierre call out, 'Chumley, it is I, Pierre the Black, come to keep the promise!' He can not hear. Pierre call again. There is thunder, and Pierre call loud, 'Chumley, wake! Wake or you die as you sleep!' Then Pierre hear footsteps. They come with patter-run. Is it the fault of Pierre if he will not awake? No! Pierre rip the mat aside—so! He jump on to the veranda. He strike with the knife—so! Deep to the heart. And leave the knife so ever' man may know it is Pierre has kept his word!"

"Oogh," said Jody, fascinated and chilled. Pierre was acting it all out. Bill, with cup half lifted, frowned as he listened.

"Then," said Pierre, tapping his breast, "I hear a yell, a scream, and when I look around—so! I see—I swear to you I see the devil! It is he—or," Pierre suddenly shrugged his shoulder, dropped his voice, "so he look."

"That 'ud be Sainan," Jody mumbled.

"He look—" Pierre distorted his face, blew out his cheeks, rumpled his curly hair—"so!"

"Sainan," Jody repeated.

"I cross myself. I say, 'You come quick, *Monsieur le Diable,* for what is yours!' I salute with a bow, then jump from the veranda into the black rain. Ah, and you must believe this, my good friends, for it is true. Behind me I hear a laugh. The devil laughs. Ver' like a scream, but it is a laugh. I feel cold. I run to my boat. I go to my ship. I drink brandy, but the chill does not go away. No, I hear still the devil laugh!"

"Hm," said Bill. "He was maybe lookin' ahead and saw you on a gibbet. Good night's work for him!"

"The devil, a'right," said Jody, "that Sainan!"

CHAPTER IV

"UND TERRIBLE FELLOW, MAYPE"

CAP'N BILL, Pierre and old Jody were eating a breakfast of stony biscuits, white cold fat pork, some sort of glucose jelly, acrid with preservative, and coffee that was inky black and bitter as salt water.

"Oh, yes," said Bill, smashing a biscuit with his knuckles and making every dish on the table jump, "me an' Jody here'll fare better after we get that thousand pounds." He poked the broken biscuit into his mouth and chewed as easily as if eating nuts. "For breakfast, crab meat, champagne, soft bread, eh, Jody?"

Jody, being nearly toothless, wadded broken biscuit into his coffee tin to soak.

Pierre said, "Oh, the great pleasure to be hung and so not have to eat such stuff as this!" Nevertheless he ate, though with much wrinkling of his nose.

"Now, Bill—" Jody looked solemn, stretched his shoulder, being as impressive as he could. "Don't go all your life bein' a fool. Here's a chance. That damn ol' chink—"

Bill sliced a piece of pork. "I told you *No.* For one thing, you don't know Wang's got pearls. If so, they're not mine. Nor yours. Nor Perry's."

"But a dirty ol' chink! He had to sign with the syn'cate not to buy pearls for hisself. He broke his promise, Bill."

"Not to me he never did."

"An' look how pertendin to be Perry's friend, he tried to let Dutch Galtz catch 'im!"

Bill chewed, eyeing Pierre. "Needed catchin', didn't he? Was tryin' to rob Wang, wasn't he? What the hell? You

thieves got cockeyed notions about what's right an' wrong." Bill snapped a biscuit between his fingers, poked the pieces into his mouth, and they were followed by a wad of jelly that he sliced off with his knife. His words were thus a little muffled. "Wang's allus paid me fair. An' fair is fair enough from any man, chink or not."

Jody screeched, "When he's give you enough for a case of gin, you call it fair! You, a blasted, simple-minded idgit! Me an' Perry are showin' how you can get even for all he's stole off you!"

Bill laughed, clapped a hand on Jody's old head, waggled it. "An' at your time o' life! Too old for women, an' can't drink. Only two teeth left—an' they don't meet. What the hell's the good to you of what pearls 'ud buy? At best, a fancy coffin—when canvas with scrap iron's more fittin'! Come along on deck, Perry. I've got to show how severe I'm guardin' you!"

THERE was a flock of canoes about the schooner. Most of the village and some of the whites were out, hoping to catch a glimpse of the famous prisoner; they would have swarmed on board but Bill's half-breed mate, Tongan Harry, sternly kept them off. He was a squat, scarred devil and, except for gin, trustworthy.

A boat came alongside with Wang's sullen, dark Chinaman.

"What you want?" Bill asked.

"Wang slend you money fo' pea'ls," said the Chinaman, dangling a purse.

"Hand 'er up!" said Bill.

He reached low over the side. The Chinaman stood up. Bill said, "Tell Wang thanks!"

Bill squatted and poured the money on the deck, counting. Old Jody put his nose close to the money, too. Three hundred dollars, gold.

" 'Tain't much," said Jody, critical. "The ol' chink's robbed ye, Bill. Like allus. Dirty thief!"

Bill's big hand closed on Jody's little fist and squeezed. A secreted gold piece came loose, fell among its fellows.

"You'd steal the nose off a blind beggar's face!" said Bill, not angered.

Jody grinned as if it were all a joke. It was, because his other hand slipped furtively into a pocket and noiselessly released two gold pieces.

About noon Jem Clotch and a young American doctor, who worked with the fat Dr. von Siegal, came out and after some talk were let on deck.

"Him," said Clotch, pushing up his hat and jerking a disrespectful thumb at the young doctor, "has got word for you from that damn Dutchman."

Young Dr. Martin colored and stammered: "Sir, I'll ask you not to speak of—of Dr. von Siegal in—in that manner!"

"Ask an' de damned," said Clotch. "Bill here is a friend o' mine. My advice, Bill, is—don't go ashore. Get to sea!"

Dr. Hermann von Siegal was a ponderous, shaggy-bearded, slow-moving, man. In his meticulous, thorough German way he was mad about conchology. Lebepo was still under native rule, nominally. The natives of high and low caste thought Dr. von Siegal the best man of all whites. He paid in gifts and money for shells, just shells that anybody could pick up off the beach. Though much too tolerant about bad morals and moonlight dances to suit some of the white residents, still he had been made magistrate.

He held court on his veranda in his undershirt, pipe in hand, and often went to sleep. He had of late been made German consul, the idea being to utilize his prestige with the natives, widen German influence, with a view toward a protectorate. It so happened that the merchant who had been acting as English consul was fond of the huge, bear-

like doctor, and going on a trip delegated his duties to him. Von Siegal knew nothing about official routine and cared nothing. Said so, long-windedly, often in very broken English.

As consul, his work was mostly certifying this and that, and the doctor sluggishly did whatever he was told, and all was all right. He didn't like being used as even a doctor, grumbled and fussed at anybody who sent for him; but if really sick, he took an interest, yet never accepted pay. If the sick weren't really sick, he foisted onto them young Dr. Martin—who needed practice. Martin was also crazy about conchology; and the two of them had their heads together far into the night, making notes for the German doctor's great book.

"From what he's heard o' you, Bill," Clotch explained, again poking the disrespectful thumb at young Dr. Martin, "he was afraid you'd maybe throw 'im overboard. Best do it, Bill!"

"No, no," said Martin hastily, turning red. "Not afraid of you, but—but you see, Dr. von Siegal commands that you be at his house at two o'clock—"

Cap'n Bill hooked his thumbs in his waist band, clicked the pipe to a side of his jaw. " 'Commands,' eh?"

"Well, asks, then," said Martin nervously.

"What's he want? Me to give up Perry? I won't. You damned Dutchmen don't own this island—yet!"

That made Martin a little flustered. He said angrily, "I'm not a Dutchman. Nor even a German, which I suppose you mean. And Dr. von Siegal is a *gentleman!*"

"I ain't," said Bill. "The more reason for havin' naught to do with 'im."

Martin took a hold on himself, tried to be cool. "It isn't about Pierre at all, Captain Jones. But certain charges have been laid against you for—for—the nautical term has slipped my mind, but for—"

"Bar'try, Bill." Clotch spoke up with an intonation of I-told-you-so.

"Barratry!" said Bill, in much the same tone as if accused of baking babies in the galley stove.

"The Masquereo," Clotch added. Young Martin nodded, dignified.

What Bill said was shocking. Even the old ruffian Clotch listened with admiration. Young Dr. Martin looked a little frightened and greatly pained.

Bill finished off with, "Tell the so-and-so, such-and-such, some-of-this-and-more-of-that damned Dutchman, I'll be there! *Barratry!*"

Young Dr. Martin's face flushed to a sunburned red.

"I advise you to modify your language, particularly in the presence of Dr. von Siegal, who is a *gentleman!* And Miss Seagrim will also be present!"

He used her name with much tonal respect, then dodged back from the impetuous sweep of Bill's arm, swinging shoreward.

"Over the side!" said Bill. "Or I'll throw you over."

Clotch grinned and winked. Martin pressed his lips hard, looked straight ahead and walked stiff-legged.

"Whatever the hell has got into 'em?" Bill grumbled. "Barratry!"

Pierre said, "My friend, it is that they hope to make you surrender me so you will escape arrest for—"

"They're crazy. Why, in Sydney it's known—and this schooner!" Bill slapped the deck with his bare foot. " 'Twas insurance men as paid off my debt an' give her back to me!"

"But Sydney is not near. And can you call any insurance man to the Dutchman's veranda by two o'clock?"

"Right—as usual. And as usual," Bill growled, "it's you are causin' me trouble. I'm beginning to think I'd best see that you are hung. Let's go have some dinner. Talk it over an' eat."

AS HE rounded the corner of Dr. von Siegal's veranda, Bill stopped short, paused for a look. His inner turbulence was soothed a little by the sight of Miss Sally Seagrim, neat and trim, and very pretty, sitting in an enormous chair of carved teak. Her face was tense; she gazed at Bill as if she hadn't seen him before. He didn't mind that. Lots of nice girls who liked him pretended before people that they didn't even know him.

Galtz, clip-headed and freshly shaven, sat bulkily, glaring at Cap'n Bill. Behind Galtz the half dozen sailors off the brig squatted on the veranda railing.

Old Seagrim was there in black alpaca coat. His mutton-chop whiskers had been brushed until they looked daintily frizzled. He pressed his thin lips and gazed at Bill with pious reproach, as if sorrowful that any man could be such a ruffian.

Cap'n Bill wet his lips, eyed each of them in turn, said "Huh."

Dr. von Siegal filled to overflowing a wide, low-backed cane chair before a table. He was huge, heavily bearded, near-sighted. He wore big steel-rimmed glasses. A piece of rag was wrapped over the nose-bridge of the frame. His whites were wrinkled, sweat-stained, not fresh; the coat was unbuttoned, showing hairy throat and underwear. In one hand he had a palmleaf fan. When he fanned himself he set his whiskers astir. In the other hand he held the black meerschaum bowl of a curve-stemmed pipe. He peered and blinked at Bill, grunted, said in as deep a voice as Bill ever heard, "Sedt down, Cabtun," and flapped the fan vaguely.

Cap'n Bill sat down with cautious slowness, put his hat on the floor, felt of the newspaper in his hip pocket, leaned forward, elbows to knees, with head lifted.

Dr. von Siegal lighted his pipe, holding it afar as if careful of having the flame near his whiskers. He puffed, then cleared his throat.

"Cabtun," he rumbled, "der hass been brought against you two charges. One for assauldt last night againtst Cabtun Kleber." Dr. von Siegal nodded his huge head toward Galtz. "Der oder py Mr. Seagrim, who say you half dampaged"—Bill frowned, perplexed, before realizing that "dampaged" was merely "damaged"—"der ship intrusted by him to your command, und derefore—"

"They," said Cap'n Bill, matter-of-fact, "are damn liars!"

Young Martin was on his feet. "Here, you fellow! No language like that! A lady is present!"

Bill cocked an eye at him.

Miss Sally spoke clearly and coolly. "I don't mind in the least."

Dr. von Siegal flapped the fan at the table. It didn't make enough sound to suit him. He dropped the fan and struck the table smartly with his heavy palm. "Der lady don't mind. Und a lie, any lie, iss always a *tamn lie!*" He nodded his ponderous head, waggled a hand at young Martin. "Sedt down."

Bill settled back, more at ease.

Dr. von Siegal puffed several times, smacking his lips, *pop-pop-pop*, meditatively. His voice seemed to come from far down in his belly.

"Cabtun, I am a doctor. Ships, I don't know aboudt. Id makes me sick to be on a ship—ugh!" He puffed furiously, shaking his head over unpleasant memories.

"Cabtun, this consul business"—he called it "piznuss"—"I don't like. I half nod been consul long und that iss too long. A man should do what he knows about. I am a doctor. Und I *know* what one of my pills will do to you, if —*if*," he added with doubtful wag of shaggy head, "if it don't do someting else."

He bent his thick lenses on Bill, owlishly. "I hear," he went on in a deep rumble, "that you are a terrible fellow.

Yah. I don't know. I don't care. Mr. Seagrim here iss a prominent citizen. Herr Galtz iss a planter und ship owner. You are a trader cabtun. Und terrible fellow, maype.

"As consul, und one who don't know aboudt ships, und magistrate who must make laws obeyed, I half got to belief der is maybe someting to whadt they say. Mr. Seagrim has made a report to me. Id says the ship was in goot condition und seaworthy when you took command" — that was "goom-man" — "und you say dey are tamn liars. To pe honest, I don't know aboudt dot ship business und I wouldn't know if I listened for a week. Budt der are peoples who do know aboudt ships. The only sensible ting I can do is to half them peoples hear the case. So, Cabtun, you will half to be held to answer—"

Cap'n Bill came off his chair. "Like hell! Arrest me? There's not enough damn Dutchmen this side of hell to do it!"

"*Whadt's dot?*" the astounded Doctor bellowed, jerking up his elbows and looking as if prodded with a pin.

Commotion and hurried talk in loud tones followed. "But Doctor, please!" Miss Sally exclaimed, jumping up, very tense and determined, as she thrust out an arm to attract his attention.

"Shameful! *Shameful!*" said young Martin at the same moment, glaring at Bill.

All the while Dr. von Siegal was rumbling incredulously in German. Apparently it had never entered his head that Cap'n Bill might object to being held for answer before "peoples" who knew about such things.

Galtz had bounded up with a certain grotesque eagerness.

"Grab him!" Galtz yelled and flourished his arm.

"Doctor, *please!*" Miss Sally cried.

"Oh, I never, never in all my life!" said Martin helplessly, fluttering his fingers.

"The consul's orders!" yelled Galtz. "Arrest him!"

"Oh Doctor, you *must* listen!" Miss Sally pleaded, pulling at a ponderous arm.

Old Seagrim arose with a sort of stealthy quickness and, very like an angular, two-legged crab, sidled back, edging for a doorway. Seagrim avoided, always, noise and violence.

The sailors stirred, stood up, hunched their shoulders, making ready. Miss Sally in a tone of frantic scolding was trying to get the Doctor's attention, and at the same time she tried to push off the excited Martin, whose fluttering fingers pulled at her, to hurry her away from these ruffians. But Dr. von Siegal did not notice her. He, lurching ponderously, sent the table sliding before him and thundered, "Stob this tamn foolishness!"

Cap'n Bill stood still. He had a lot of faith in the girl. After all, it was her ship; at least on paper. She believed the *Masquereo* was an insurance swindle—and had wished her uncle's neck broken. Two or three words from her, if this bearded walrus of a consul would only listen, ought to change things.

Galtz drew a revolver that had been concealed. From across the veranda he pointed it at Bill and, with a curse in his mouth, fired.

MISS SALLY jerked her head about with look of horror. She screamed, "I knew, oh I knew, he *wants* to kill Captain Bill! Last night I—"

Galtz fired again. He was determined and hurried. His fat-cheeked face had a strained, intent fierceness.

Dr. von Siegal roared, "Tamn fool!" and lurched with thick arms out, but stumbled, almost fell.

Galtz fired once more. The bullet pitched up splinters before Bill's feet.

Bill's arm was behind him in a far reach. He caught hold of the heavy

chair in which he had been sitting, tipped it off balance. He didn't take his eyes from Galtz. His look was as if making sure of aim. As he got both hands on the chair, he gave a sidelong heave, sent it up and hurtling.

A big chair flying through the air takes a lot of room. Sailors near and back of Galtz ducked with awkward scrambling and jumbled mouthings of "Ow! Look out!"

The hurtling chair went straight at Galtz. He could not dodge. The seams at the back of his tight coat ripped as he dropped the gun and flung his arms tightly about his head, huddling. The chair crashed on to him. Galtz dropped as if killed. Blood ran from his close-cropped head.

Bill followed the chair on a jump. He up-ended one chunky sailor with an over-the-shoulder drive. The fist smacked on the fellow's face with the sound of a mallet on wet canvas. Other sailors were at Bill, all about him, striking from afar, lurching to keep at his back. Here and there on the veranda were some big shells the doctor had as curiosities. One man whaled Bill over the head with a rough oyster shell, and Bill reeled sidewise, shaking his head.

There was a surging stamp of feet. Chairs went over, broken to kindling. A table of potted plants crashed, scattering black earth and broken pots.

Young Dr. Martin ran in with hands out, pleading: "Gentlemen!" Bill gave him a shove to get him out of the way. The shove carried him so far that he bumped into a slope-shouldered fellow, and the fellow stepped back and drove his knuckles squarely against young Dr. Martin's nose. Blood splattered like juice from a squashed tomato. Martin said, "Ow-O!" in shocked astonishment and went down, a hand groping at his hurt nose.

Bill's arm swung like gybing booms, and he was glad for the weight of his new shoes. When he kicked at the man who dove to grapple his legs, the man groaned and rolled over. Bill was bleeding about the head, but he laughed. He wasn't merely beating off the sailors. He seemed to want to beat the life out of them. The man Cush leaped with sheath knife out. Bill's arm fended the blow as he bumped body-to-body against Cush and drove an uplifted knee into Cush's belly. Cush went to the floor and rolled about, howling.

Miss Sally clung to the ponderous doctor desperately. She screamed at him. It was the only way to make herself heard above the clatter and smash and trample, above oaths, yelps, groans. Something of what she was trying to tell got into his head. He blinked and rumbled with hoarse, "Eh? Whadt dot? Whadt *dot?*"

" . . . I *know* because I heard my uncle and old Galtz planning last night. They called you an old fool and said. . . ."

Cap'n Bill had a piece of broken chair in his hand and looked about, still interested. It had been a pretty good fight. He had been in better, but here was a fair display of battered heads and wreckage. Miss Sally was against the wall, out of the way, not shrinking. The doctor blinked, rubbed paw-like hand in his head as if dully trying to wake up.

Men were leaving the veranda with cautious, sidling movements, climbing over the rail. Bill walked to where Galtz lay. He kicked the revolver aside, then on second thought picked it up, dropped it butt-down into his trouser's pocket. He poked with a foot, not lightly.

Then Bill turned, expecting trouble, as Dr. von Siegal bore down on him with the lurch of a wave-tossed barge. "See here, you!" said Bill, waggling his stick, "back off, or—"

Dr. von Siegal roared at him, waving both fists in out-thrust awkwardness. He looked like a blear-eyed and very fat old lion. The Doctor's excited English was so thick Bill couldn't make head or tail of it; but roared back, "This

hearin' ain't over by one hell of a sight! You said you didn't know about ships and things, so you're goin' to learn! Set down!" Bill banged his piece of chair against a veranda post.

"*Gott, mein Gott!*" The ponderous Doctor was furious. "You tamn scoundrel, you!" Dr. von Siegal bellowed, but he was shaking his fist toward the unsteady Galtz, who gripped the veranda rail, rising.

"Ho!" said Bill, vastly pleased. "You hear that, Galtz?"

"If der truth iss how she say—"

"It is," said Bill. "It sure is and—"

"I haven't told him anything yet!" Miss Sally called.

"Then right over here an' listen!" said Bill, backing the Doctor into the big cane chair.

"He and my uncle planned to have the ship sink!" said Miss Sally, pointing at Galtz.

Bill looked more pleased than mad. "So that's the way of it!"

Miss Sally could talk fast, and did, bending low to the doctor. "My name was used as owner to prejudice the court against insurance companies if they refused to—"

"You listenin'?" demanded Bill, poking the Doctor's shoulder with the piece of chair. "You'll find out why I'm goin' to kill that Galtz!"

"*Gott im Himmel!*" Dr. von Siegal growled, brushing with paw-like hand at the hair about the ear nearest Miss Sally.

"—had my uncle put Captain Bill in command because he knows how Galtz and Galtz's traders cheat and abuse natives, and wanted Captain Bill to be drowned so—"

"So dot," Dr. von Siegal bellowed, shaking his fist toward Galtz, "iss why Shermans iss so much hated by natives! Und you say I am an old fool, yah? *Vell I am!*"

"—last night till after midnight he and my uncle talked of how they could get Captain Bill arrested, then seize his schooner and catch Black Pierre! I listened on my knees beside the door for hours and—"

"Lies! Lies! Lies!" said Galtz, making off.

"You can't run far enough, Galtz!" Bill shouted after him. "I'll catch up with you!" For a moment it looked as if Bill was minded to do the catching now, but he jerked the newspaper from his hip pocket. "Here, you read this!" He shook open the paper, spread it before the doctor. "It's what they said in Sydney about the damn *Masquereo!*"

"*Ach*, to tink dey make der Sherman consul help in der dirty tricks!" Dr. von Siegal bent to the newspaper, read, growling and swearing in fuming tones.

Galtz went, dripping blood, and with anxious over-the-shoulder stare. His sailors went too, with hands absently rubbing at heads and jaws.

Dr. von Siegal puffed and rumbled, then he pushed the paper away and got up with slow surge of heavy body. He pulled out a big handkerchief, took off his glasses and wiped them. He scrubbed at the back of his neck and wiped far down on his hairy chest. He fitted the glasses, with a care to get the rag about the bridge carefully back on the tender spot of his nose. He peered at Bill.

"Py Gott, how I am gladt dot you are a terrible fellow!"

"But he isn't!" said Miss Sally, gleeful. "He's nice!"

Bill swelled up, pleased.

"And you aren't either!" said Miss Sally, rising on tiptoes to get her arms about the doctor's neck and squeezing. "You are a darling!"

His eyes twinkled behind the thick lenses. "*Ach*, how der young fellows half all der best of life! To pe old und full of learning like a fat sausage, it iss nodding to peing young und half a wife like you!"

Young Dr. Martin had wiped his face hastily, leaving rouge-like stains on his cherubic cheeks. His nose was as red

and swollen as a rosebud. He kept looking at it with a tender, cross-eyed expression.

Dr. von Siegal laid a hand on Bill's shoulder and with confidential air, as if asking for a secret, "Do you like a leedle schnapps, hm?"

Bill said, "Hell, no—never a little!"

The doctor patted Bill's shoulder. "You comb mit me. We will pudt someting your stomach in to take der pain from your head out, hm?"

He led Bill into the house, made him sit down, all as gently as if he were a sick man. He chuckled as he poured better than a half tumbler full of whisky. "Nod a leedle, eh?" Bill drank it off, said, "Whuff." The doctor poured "nod a leedle" for himself. He examined Bill's head for cuts, clipped hair, shaved the scalp, took stitches.

"Now we will half anoder not a leedle schnapps, den I will you show my shells, hm?"

It was nearly dark when Bill said good-by to Dr. Hermann von Siegal on the veranda steps.

The worthy doctor had an empty bottle in his hand as he put his thick arm about Bill's neck in affectionate parting, and Bill didn't see anything unfitting about being hugged. The noble doctor was in his undershirt and Bill's shirt flared wide. Both were barefooted. Their shoes lay together in some far corner of a forgotten room. The doctor had invoked medical authority to show that shoes were unhealthy—as well as uncomfortable.

Now they wobbled and bobbed in a parting handshake. Bill talked; the doctor talked; neither listened. Bill earnestly renewed his promise to bring a cargo of shell from every island he henceforth touched. No more pearling—just shells for the doctor.

And the doctor with guttural solemnity and expressive swing of the empty bottle urged Bill henceforth to poke on the nose every "tamn Tuchman as vas a disgrace to Shermany, py Gott! Der Sherman consul gifs you dot authoridy! Ven a Sherman cruiser combs, I will half him hank dot Galtz—yah! you will see—high oop!" The doctor with wobbly sway of massive body waggled an arm overhead to show how high Herr Galtz would be strung.

Within the house the pop-eyed young Dr. Martin soothingly fingered his sore nose and eyed empty bottles here and there in a sort of wondering daze. He had been taught to believe that liquor was poison, a deadly drink, weakened a man.

CHAPTER V

MUCH GOOD LUCK STICK

CAP'N BILL steered a zigzag course on his way through town. His head was fuzzy and his legs unsteady. "Hup!" said Bill, frowning studiously. He had found a man worthy of friendship. Drink for drink and bottle for bottle, Dr. von Siegal had stayed with him. "Hup!" said Bill again.

He put his hands into his pocket, groping for his pipe. He pulled out a handful of shells the doctor had given him to start a collection. Bill solemnly restored the shells and went on groping. His fingers closed on some gold pieces, and he stared at them with speculative vagueness, wondering how the devil? Recollection came and at the same time he remembered that he was hungry. He made for the chink's restaurant, but Clotch's wide open doors sucked him in.

Clotch looked Bill over.

"I warned ye, Bill, to get to sea!"

"Fell outa my bunk," said Bill, feeling of his head. "Gin."

"Damn Dutchmen!" Clotch growled.

"Great fellows, the damn Dutch," said Bill, more or less spilling himself into a chair. "Gin."

Clotch, with mystified air, took the

gold piece and walked off with backward look, figuring the crack over the head must have done something to Bill.

A girl sidled close, asked soft and anxious. "Oh, Cap'n Bael, you been in fight?"

"Me? No," said Bill. "A biscuit slipped outa my fingers."

Clotch brought gin and the girl moved to sit on Bill's knee. He said, "Have your sister set down, too."

"You fun' man! I got no sister."

Bill brushed his hand before his face, shut one eye, looked again and understood. "Great man, that Dutchman. Great!" Bill mumbled. He had a sip of gin, looked about, saw two Clotches, two fiddlers, two of everything. He shook his head, feeling a little disgraced. "Let's go eat. I need ballast." The girl gathered up the change Clutch had put down and stuffed it into Bill's pocket.

They took along the bottle of gin and went to the chink's restaurant.

Cap'n Bill ate for an hour. His head was pretty well cleared and the girl had made away with all the gin. He didn't know, but she furtively emptied his glass under the table to get rid of it so he would sober up. No girl who knew him wanted Bill drunk. He was just as generous when sober. They went back to Clotch's and danced.

It was about ten o'clock when somebody yelled *"Fire!"*

Squawks, screams and a trampling rush followed, very like panic. Men that had been squeezing girls shoved the girls aside and ran, bumping into people.

Bill threw back his head, looked all about, sniffing for smoke. His girl, round face stretched wide with excitement, pointed toward the doorway where a lurid, brazen glow lighted the night. There was fire all right, but a quarter of a mile off.

Flames swirled upward with the sound of a roaring wind; and flying embers, scattered like a flight of flame-winged birds, flew seaward. Alarm rattled through the village. People went running to have a nearer view. The tops of two tall coconuts, their fronds writhing like living things in torture, were ablaze. The explosive crackling of thatch and bamboo was like continuous rifle fire.

Somewhere on the way Bill lost his girl and didn't see her again. Long before he got near Wang's house the whole of it was in flames. Even the bamboo fence was burning. Nobody had seen Wang. His servants were out, but it was said that the old crippled Chinaman had been trapped, burned.

A pimply-faced, half bald, dyspeptic young store clerk said to Bill, familiarly, "Ha, hello, Cap."

Bill hated the sight and smell of him, and turned away.

The clerk snickered and pulled at Bill's arm. "I guess it's true, Cap, what's been said about Galtz goin' to marry old Seagrim's niece."

Bill glowered, but the sickly clerk was eager to tell his story.

"Galtz went to sea just now. I just come ashore, having taken out some truck he had to have right off. The girl was aboard. I seen her through the skylight. She was just setting there—"

"Sally Seagrim?"

"Who you think, Cap? She's been to the store dozens o' times. I know 'er—"

"On Galtz's brig?"

"W-why s-sure. You act funny, Cap!"

"He's gone to sea?"

"Why," said the clerk, leering, "anybody would think you cared!"

Cap'n Bill gave the clerk a push, and the clerk came to a staggered stop against a huddle of high-toned people, who snorted and sniffed indignantly.

Bill had gone, on the run.

DR. MARTIN, in a melancholy mood, was on the veranda looking toward the fire. Early in the evening he had sent a servant over to ask Miss Seagrim if he might call. Old Seagrim had sent

the servant back with word that Miss Seagrim was "not at home."

Now he heard the patter of Cap'n Bill's feet and even in the shadows recognized him.

"Oh, you," said Martin coldly.

"Right!" Bill told him. "Where's the doc?"

"He," said Dr. Martin, aloof and firm, "is not to be disturbed. Resting!"

"The hell he ain't! See here—"

Noting Bill's excitement, the young doctor said professionally, "If any one is injured, why I'll—"

" 'F anybody was hurt that I wanted to die, then you'd do fine!" said Bill. "Get the doc up. Say I'm here with word—"

Martin said angrily, "I will not disturb Dr. von Siegal!"

Besides his dislike for Cap'n Bill, young Dr. Martin had had too hard a time to get the huge doctor into bed willingly to rouse him. Dr. von Siegal, being happy, had wanted to sing some old student songs. Not having a stein, but finding a discarded shoe, he took it to beat time with on a table and his voice shook the rafters. Young Martin understood German perfectly, and the doctor wanted him to join in. Martin didn't know the words, and the doctor patiently tried to teach him. Some of the sentiments were to Martin—well, not wholesome.

"Say that I'm here," Bill roared, "with word that Galtz has gone to sea—Sally Seagrim with him, an'—"

"Why, that's impossible! She disliked the man, fearfully! She wouldn't have gone—"

Bill used choice language of a kind to blister the salt-hardened hide of shellbacks. "I tell you she's gone, an' you stand there chatterin' like a monkey adrift on a chicken coop! What she wouldn't do, is done!"

Dr. Martin weakened. His voice sounded as if he were wringing his hands. "Oh but really and honest, Captain, he isn't in condition to—to—he is *drunk!*"

"Drunk my eye!" said Bill, scornful. "Not him! Try to make out he's not as good a man as me, an' I'll put a new polish on that nose! Am I drunk?"

"N-no!"

"Right!" Bill laid hold on him. "So shake a leg!"

"A leg?" Martin gasped.

Bill pushed the young doctor into motion. In the house, Martin picked up a lamp, went to a closed door, cocked his head.

Powerful snizzling and mighty rumbling came through the closed door.

"You hear!" said Martin, sadly.

" 'Course!" said Bill. "Peaceful as a child!" He threw open the door.

Dr. von Siegal lay in a specially built bunk-like bed. His bulk was dimly seen behind the mosquito netting.

Bill jerked it aside, ripping, "Hi!" He shook the ponderous form. The snizzling stopped. Dr. von Siegal grunted in vague protest, sighed, rolled over, snored. Bill took a handful of whiskers. "Doc!"

"Don't do that!" said Martin. Cap'n Bill seemed rudely abusive.

Dr. von Siegal woke explosively, full of fight. Bill's touch was not gentle.

"Come on; hit the deck! Galtz has carried off Sally Seagrim!"

The doctor's glasses were off. He blinked and growled as he surged up. "Whadt dot?"

Martin gave the doctor his glasses. He fitted them, being careful to get the bit of rag in the right place on his nose. He peered and almost shouted in glee, "It iss Cabtun Pill! Goot!"

"Aye, an' Galtz is away to sea with Sally Seagrim!"

"Whadt? You dare tell me dot tamn Tuchman has kidnabed our leedle Sally?"

"That—or Seagrim sent her. Either way, their heads are due for breakin'—necks, too!"

Dr. von Siegal swung his legs over the side of the bunk, kicked out his feet. He wore purplish pajamas, strangely figured. He swore, rubbed at his shaggy head. "Whadt time iss id?"

"Not far from twelve," said Bill.

Martin looked at his watch. "Little after eleven."

"Whadt we going do, Pill?"

"Overhaul Seagrim and find out the why of it. Though Galtz did it, and maybe Seagrim too, because she knew too much—an' told it! Listen! Wang's house is burned—still burnin'. Nothin's been seen of Wang! I'll back the bet Galtz had it fired!"

"Eh?"

"Remember, I told you this afternoon—or tried to—that Perry guessed Wang had a store of pearls. He was there last night to pry 'em out of Wang. Wang could think of no better way to get out of trouble than by sending off word to Galtz to come and catch the Frenchman. I got there first. Pure chance! But Perry thought he'd rather be my pris'ner 'n Galtz's. Turned himself over to me. Galtz come and had a fit. Kleber joined in—that's what the 'assault' was over!"

"Und you tink maype he made the fire to leedle Wang's house for to gedt even, heh?"

"Be like him!"

Dr. von Siegal was dressing. He stopped with one hand holding up his trousers and turned to the water pitcher, lifted it, drank from the side, paused, said "Ah," then drank again. He slipped his thumbs up under his suspenders, raised them to his shoulders. "We'll half to half der carriage. I vouldn't walk up dot hill, nod for the pleasure to hang dot tamn Galtz my own self! Don't ever gedt old und fat und pig, Cabtun Pill!"

There were no servants about. They had gone to the fire. Dr. Martin, who wasn't much of a groom, went out to hitch the two stout little ponies to the open carriage the burly doctor used. When Bill and Dr. von Siegal followed, Martin, by candle light, was sweating and talking to himself. The words he used were mild but his tone was most suitable for cussing.

The three of them tried to get the harness straight, and made a poor job of

it. Bill took charge. He knew no more about horses than about cows, but he knew about knots, strain, and lines. After a time, when the horses moved the carriage followed.

Dr. von Siegal struggled up into the back seat. "You drive, Pill."

"Not much," said Bill. "I'll afoot an' tow. Put me at the helm of this craft and we'd capsize!"

IT was close upon twelve, perhaps a little after, when the carriage rasped along the grayish gravel-covered drive in dense shadows and stopped before the Seagrim house.

A nasal, fear-struck voice called at them from within:

"W-who are you? W-what do you want?"

"We've come to ask questions, not answer 'em, Seagrim!" Bill shouted.

"I am ill! I can't see anybody! I—to—tomorrow—"

"It's already tomorrow—or near it! An' if you're sick, here's the doctor!"

A lean, shrinking figure in floppy pajamas trembled before them on the veranda under the uplifted matches in Bill's hand.

"Into the house with you, Seagrim!"

They went indoors. Bill lit the lamp. Dr. von Siegal had stopped in the doorway so as not to risk bumping furniture in the dark. He now moved forward with solid tramp and his eyes glared owlishly. The thick lenses magnified his eyes.

"Vere," he bellowed with arm upraised as if to smite, "iss leedle Sally?"

Old Seagrim's mutton chops looked frayed. His lean jaws quivered; the vulture-shaped, nearly hairless head hung a-droop.

"Comb on, shpeak oop!"

"Galtz forced me to—to—"

"Oh, put it all on Galtz, would you?" Bill gave him a shove like a blow and sent him reeling back until he brought up against the wall.

"Oh, please, Captain, I—I—" Seagrim put on his best air of abused humbleness. "P-please, don't be brutal. I—I am an old man and—"

"Brutal, eh?" Bill laughed. "It wasn't brutal sendin' me and my boys to sea to drown if we didn't burn! It's prison for you an' for life—if you have any life left when I get done!"

"Goot!" said Dr. von Siegal.

"You want the girl off the island. Afraid she'd retell what she's already told!"

"Sally isn't well," Seagrim said with jaw a-quiver. "Rest—visit Mrs. Galtz and—"

"Makin' ready, are you, to say she was out of her head when she told what she knew?"

Dr. von Siegal glared in loathing. "Whadt we do now, Pill?"

"Do!" said Bill, frowning at the cringing figure. "I'm goin' after her—follow Galtz—get to the island an'—"

"Goot, py Gott!" Dr. von Siegal smacked his palms. "But you will need more men—"

"Not much I won't! Jody knows the island, used to be an overseer there. But you—here!" Bill shoved a table near. "Get pencil and paper. Where is it, Seagrim? The doc sets here, and you write out the whole damn thing, from beginning to end! And break his neck, doc, any time he takes a reef in his tongue!"

"Mit pleasure!" The doctor raised a ponderous arm. "But you, Pill? Whadt you going to do?"

"I'm going to sea after Galtz—an' now! You gouge out the whole story. Make him swear to it. If aught happens to her, I'll break his neck!"

"Ha," said Dr. von Siegal, deepening his voice, glaring. "We will his neck break—togeder, py Gott!"

CAPTAIN BILL'S dinghy was tied up near the landing of coral blocks, slimy with sea growth. He rowed, his head turned far backward to look ahead. There was a moon, but the sky was clouded with hurrying, wind-whipped clouds. After a time Bill drew in his oars, peering over the bobble of dark water. Galtz's brig was not at her anchorage. He had vaguely hoped that maybe she hadn't got away yet.

He bent to the oars, heaving hard. Minutes might count.

The set of the tide had put his schooner bow-on to the beach and as he rowed up he was not hailed from the deck. That made him mad. He was reckless and haphazard in some ways, but not about sea work. When he told Tongan Harry to keep a sharp lookout, he meant a sharp lookout. He made the painter fast at the foremast chains and climbed up, paused at the rail. There wasn't a sound but the gentle mouse-like squeak of blocks and bobbling slap of water.

Bill, suddenly afraid that the revengeful Galtz had been on board, jumped inboard and along the deck. He stumbled, almost falling over a body. He dropped knees down, quickly drawing a match. The small flame fluttered above the scarred face of Tongan Harry—not dead, but dead drunk. Bill flipped out the match, drew back his fist, then let the arm fall.

"Wait till he's sober so he'll know about it!" said Bill, not truthfully. Bill felt the half-breed was too good a man to be mauled, drunk or sober.

There was a glow in the skylight. Bill trotted aft, stopped, peering down, stared. His frown deepened into a glower. He said, "Damn their souls!" and ran on tiptoes to the companionway,

moved down the ladder with hurried stealth. It led directly into the cabin; but neither Jody Malloy, who was drunk, nor Pierre, perfectly sober, nor little old Wang, pathetically stolid, noticed.

Jody sat at the table, pipe in hand. His arm weaved about and his head wobbled. It wasn't easy for the pipe-stem to find his mouth, and he bobbed his head at it as if trying to bite. He looked like a sick monkey and kept repeating in a vague voice, insistently:

" . . . really frien's of yourn, Wang. Y'bet, frien's o' yourn, Wang. Now be prop'r fell'r an' tell your frien's where pearls is hid. . . ."

Wang had on a round, stiff hat. His back was partly to the ladder where Bill paused, halfway down, stooping low, the better to watch—or jump. Wang's frail bony hands fiddled gently with the bamboo cane, but his wizened face was expressionless.

Pierre wasn't drunk. He was never drunk. He had put a foot on the seat of a chair, leaned forward with elbow to knee, with both hands together, both lightly touching on the handle of a slim-bladed knife. It was the sheen of the knife that he wanted to keep before Wang's eyes. Pierre was soft-spoken, but his lips were curled back into a snarl.

"My friend," he said softly, "we have talk, talk, talk. I am a man to do as I say. You have pearls. I ask again, where are they? If you do not tell, I cut your throat!"

Wang moved the bamboo cane, lifted a small hand. "You kill me, awlite, you kill me." He hunched his small shoulders as if accepting whatever blow might come. "I have no pearls. No."

" . . . now be prop'r fell'r, Wang. Frien's . . . " Jody droned, blear-voiced, weaving in his chair.

"Very well." Pierre shrugged, poised the knife.

Bill hit the deck from halfway up the ladder. He caught old Jody by the back of the neck, yanked him over, chair and all, fastened his fingers in the shirt collar and gave a fling that sent Jody skittering like a bundle of rags.

"Catch Wang an' burn his house, will you!" he roared, glaring at Pierre, who had jumped back nimbly, knife lifted, black eyes gleaming.

"Get my boys drunk!"

Bill snatched the bamboo cane out of Wang's hand. It was fastened by a woven thong to Wang's wrist. Wrist and arm came up under Bill's jerk. Wang squealed as if badly hurt, struggled without any force at all, and Bill simply broke the loop with a jerk and took the cane sword-like into his grip.

Pierre was skillful and dangerous with a knife; but Bill knew how to handle a cutlass. He lunged the point of the cane at Pierre's face and Pierre dodged back; then with side-swipe of wrist, Bill swung the cane in a half circle across the Frenchman's head. There was a splintering sound as the lacquered bamboo stick broke. Bill gave it a quick look, saw it was broken and seemed partly held together by some sort of cloth on the inside of the bamboo. He flung it away so hard that it rattled against the bulkhead on the other side of the cabin.

"Knife or no knife," said Bill, "I'll break your damn neck!"

He crouched, braced to jump.

Pierre, not a big man, stood lithe and wary, with head lifted. The gleam in his black eyes flickered, went out. He flung the knife at Bill's feet, folded his arms, said coolly, "I do not fight with you when I am your guest!"

"Guest be damned!" Bill shouted. "You're my pris'ner!"

"It is the same—to me," said Pierre, shrugging his shoulders. He bowed a little. "Wang is a thief and has the pearls. I plan to make the fair division with you and—"

"And if I believed you, I'd still want to break your neck! You two damn

thieves, Jody an' you, got my boys drunk! I've got to get to sea and—it wasn't enough to catch Wang and drag him here! You burned his house!"

"Nozuh," said Jody plaintively. He was struggling like an awkward tight-rope walker, trying to get to his feet. "We wouldn't harm hair o' good ol' Wang's head, would zwee, Wang?"

Wang, limping and moving as if with furtive caution, was edging toward his broken cane. Both Jody and Pierre were talking, telling how they had got their hands on Wang. Bill picked up the broken bamboo. His eyes settled on the exposed cloth which lined the inside of the cane.

He looked toward Wang, and Wang's small beady eyes stared with the look of a man who holds his breath fearfully.

Cap'n Bill's fingers trembled as he felt the small round pea-like lumps under the cloth, and he caught his breath. A predatory urge flamed through him. He did not say a word, but jerked the broken cane to him and with half-turned face looked at the wrinkled old man who peered up in the dim light, motionless. Then Cap'n Bill swung out his arm.

"Here you are, Wang!"

Bill held the cane out, as if carelessly, not looking. He took a deep breath, clamped down on his jaw, took a sudden interest in what Pierre and Jody said.

Wang mumbled, "Thanky, Cap'n. Much good luck stick. Long time hab kep'." He took off his black stiff hat and bowed to Bill's back.

PIERRE said that he and Jody hadn't gone near Wang's house; but they had sent a native with a false message that drew Wang toward the shop of his friend, the merchant. They had brought him out to the schooner, having no better place. They meant to get out of him where the pearls were concealed.

Bill laughed, harshly. "And what the hell did you think I'd do when I come an' found him here?"

Pierre shrugged his shoulders, lifted his eyebrows, smiled. Plainly, he thought Bill would fall in with the scheme if convinced pearls could be got —handfuls of pearls, big ones, moon-sized, lustrous and alive. No man could resist.

"I'm glad you didn't fire the house," said Bill. "An' if you two damn thieves had hurt Wang here, I'd tear you limb from limb!"

"And my friend," Pierre answered in that odd, smooth, convincing way of his, "you would do right!"

"Now," said Bill, grimly, "I'll tell you something, Perry! You and that fool Jody got my boys drunk so you could get off ashore and play hell with Wang. Take hours to get 'em sober. And I've got to get to sea. Galtz has made off with Sally Seagrim! I'm making for his island and—" Bill turned to Wang. "And my bet is, 'twas Galtz had your house fired. Maybe they did do you a favor, bringin' you off here. But I wouldn't be too thankful to 'em!"

Wang bobbed to Bill. "Much thanks to you, Cap'n Bill. I go now. Eve'thing all ruin, but I go all same."

"Go?" said Bill. "Go how? Swim?" His eyes flicked from Wang's face to the broken cane and back again. "The tide's against you, but if I turn you loose in the dinghy, can you row?"

"Oh yes, yes, Cap'n. I know how use oar. Oh yes, yes."

"Then come along. It's ashore for you! I'll put you overboard!" Bill dragged him up the ladder, yanked him over the combing with heave of arm, took long strides over the deck, making forward.

Wang gasped in low-pitched shrill breathlessness, "Wait minute, Cap'n!" as he swung against the pull on his arm.

"Wait hell!" Bill growled. "Get off this island, Wang, and don't stop goin' till you're in China!"

A small yellow hand groped, outreaching. "You no shake hands with ol' Wang in las' good-by, Cap'n Bill?"

Bill's big, tarry hand closed on Wang's small fist, and the small fist spread under Bill's fingers until he felt something small and hard and round against his palm—not one, but two or three. Wang pressed until sure Bill would take a firm hold in closed fingers.

"No need for that, but thanks!" said Bill, and quickly thrust his hand down into his pocket. "You didn't have to buy your way off my schooner!"

"I buy boat to go shore," said Wang. "Wait minute, Cap'n, till I screw back top my stick so not lose—"

Bill laughed and his big hand fell on Wang's shoulder, lightly patting. "You looked old Perry right in the eye with that knife at your throat and the cane between your legs! Damn me, but it took something to say, 'I got no pearls!' "

"It awlite. What good life to ol' Wang if he lose pearls that take all lifetime to get, hm?"

Bill had drawn up the boat. He held to Wang and bent low, lowering him away in the darkness. He let go. Wang clattered down on thwart. There was the stir and rattle of oars as Wang's small hands laid hold gropingly on the oars, set them in the tholes.

"Take it easy. An' good luck, Wang!" Bill threw down the painter, casting off.

There was the thump of an oar blade as Wang struck against the side of the schooner, shoving off. His thin voice called up from the dark water, "Good luck for you, Cap'n Bill. All time hab good luck!"

Cap'n Bill stood for a moment with his hand in his pocket. His fingers groped, counting—one, two, three. He turned, jumped into the galley, lit the lantern and with something of the cautious air of a thief, took a look, unwrapping each of the pearls. He gasped. They were large. They were perfect. They had the Orient blush of a blond girl's cheek and under the yellow lantern glow seemed to breathe. This was wealth. Bill muttered humbly, "I'll be damned!" He thrust them back deep into his pocket.

CHAPTER VI

STORM

FOR the next few hours Bill's schooner was a hell ship; curses rang and rope ends cracked. He put the fastidious but willing Pierre into the galley to make coffee.

"Make it strong," said Bill. "Strong as the devil's breath!"

Cap'n Bill pulled his drunken blacks by heels or hair, whichever came first to hand, into pretty much of a pile on the forecastle. He wasn't gentle and he wasn't brutal. He sloshed them with water. He pinched noses with palm over mouths till suffocation made men stir and writhe, halfway come to life; then he slapped faces with stinging fingers.

"All for your own good!" Bill explained, jeering.

As soon as a man was partly aroused, Bill poured hot coffee down his throat, saw to it that the man was kept stirring. His voice boomed into their sodden ears. The flat of his hand smacked. The rope end burned.

Jody drank coffee until his belly bulged; and as soon as his knees were half way steady, he set up a righteous squealing over men making beasts of 'emselves—"ol' benighted heathens!"—and hurried them to the windlass.

By noon the schooner, far at sea, was being overhauled by the coming storm. Rainy squalls raced over the water like the out-riders for clouds banked in the south. Bill sniffed and grinned. Now and then, absently, his fingers moved to the edge of his waistband, felt sensi-

tively. He had ripped open the front of the waist band, tucked in the pearls, resewn the rip. Now and then he seemed patting his belly in a cheery mood. Wealth was there.

He paced back and forth with head turned to windward. It wasn't his way to haul down and clew up; nor did he want sails to go off with the burst of popped paper bags and fly into rags. So he watched, pleased but wary.

Rain followed, beginning with gobs big as a half teacups' full; then came as if all the washtubs of heaven were being dumped. Bill swore at the rain, not wanting a black night. Lightning flicked with the swish of a fiery whip through the downpour, thunder crashed and rattled.

Down in the cabin old Jody and a couple of blacks ran ramrods through the rifles, getting out grease.

Pierre, from the shelter of the companion way, looked out.

"You will try to go into the harbor in the dark, in a storm, my friend?"

"I'm no blasted idjit," said Bill.

"Ah, then?"

"Jody says to the north of the harbor there's a sheltered cove behind the headland. Trail across to the plantation. We land there. Won't be seen. Go across an' come down on Galtz before he's smelt us. How'd you land *that* time?"

"It was a night of rain with no wind. My ship stood off. I went in with the long boat."

"I don't know this damn island. Girls weren't purty, so it never seemed worth comin' to!"

"Marie Thurot was the most beautiful woman in the world," said Pierre, "when she first went to that island!"

"Aye, if you say it, Perry. You know what's what in women's looks. But Chumley's hands, now Galtz—she'd be bad smudged."

Pierre nodded, solemnly.

"No doubt of it, Perry. Chumley needed killin'. But in his sleep!" Bill wrinkled his face, said, "Ugh. Not like you. You honest done that?"

"If you find," asked Pierre smoothly, with narrowed steady eyes, "that Mademoiselle Sallee Seagrim has been most cruel hurt and the pig Galtz lies in drunk sleep and will not wake, you, my friend, will go away and leave him to live?"

Cap'n Bill glared at him, looked away, glared again, fumbled for an honest reply, couldn't think of one, and walked off, biting hard on the pipestem.

CHUMLEY ISLAND, one of a group off the Teewanis, had been acquired years before by the Englishman. The few natives living on the island had quickly migrated, and Chumley, like all planters, brought in blacks, who were nothing but slaves and ruled by overseers. Jody had been one of the latter.

Cap'n Bill's schooner came down on the island in pretty much of a gale, with mainsail and forestay sail close-reefed.

"I don't like the smell of it," said Bill.

"Round that headland like I tell you, Bill. I know this island better 'n your ol' cabin!"

"Aye, but I've seen you when 'twasn't a dark night not know your way about the cabin."

" 'F you go by an' beat up in the daytime, Galtz'll have his sailors an' overseers lined up f'r to welcome you!" Jody put on his most ominous tone. "What's more, Bill, ever' hour you delay may be the hour Galtz does somepin means to that girl!"

"Right!" said Bill.

An hour later, following Jody's piloting, the schooner flew in behind the headland like a bird scuttling out of a storm. In the blinding drench of rain Bill couldn't see a hand before his nose, but the soughing roar of breakers reverberated from the rocks and the heave of the sea was obliquely shoreward. The headland broke up the steady drive of

the wind into swirling, broken gusts, so that the sails flapped, then cracked in stiffened tautness, and booms jerked at the sheets. Lightning gave him a look shoreward. Land was somewhere near a mile away. He saw the set of the waves. By their heaving size and froth he knew they were running over shallows and piling up on a stretch of low beach behind the buttress-like headland. He was trapped on a lee shore.

Bill roared, "Hard up the helm—up!" and came out of the shrouds as if tumbling. He struck the deck with kneesdown fall, arose, stood still in puzzled straining to tell from where the wind was coming. One instant seemed almost a calm; the next a whooping gust came down the hills; then the schooner was shaken by a blast from seaward.

"We're in for hell!" said Bill.

Pierre, standing by, had jumped to give his weight to the helmsman to throw the schooner up into the wind; but there was no telling which way the wind would come from the next minute—and the next minute there was a yelp, a squeal, a splutter of French oaths. Pierre and the black helmsman were knocked aside by a kick of the wheel. The schooner was caught as a cork adrift, a cork with a feather on it.

Cap'n Bill leaped at the wheel, heaved mightily, and fell headlong. There was no resistance. He had thrown all his weight at nothing. The rudder was gone. The main piece had snapped like a twisted carrot. The schooner was merely driftwood with sail on her.

Bill came up out of the scupperway with a bump on his head and was shaken off his feet as she broached to as if about to go over. Jody's shriek rose above the wind; high in the rigging, he flew in the long arc of the schooner's roll as a sea boarded. There was clamor and crash; boats and even the galley were carried away, smashing bulwarks.

Shoreward was boiling froth, where breakers pounded the sand, scooping it up in great churning heaves, throwing it far up the beach. The anchor either broke from the stopper, or Harry the Tongan, knowing what was best to steady the drift, knocked loose the pin as soon as the deck cleared. There was a zip of chain rattle—the anchor carried some two fathoms against coral—then the whir of cable. The swaying schooner jerked the slack out of the bight with a jar that loosened the windlass bits; and she headed more squarely to the sea, heaving and plunging, bringing the anchor home. Waves boarded her submerged bow, pouring over the forecastle.

"Hell's ahead an' we're all barefoot!" said Bill, and fought his way amidships over raffle, hanging on for life, skittering and lunging, merely to call out that it was each man for himself when the schooner struck.

The dragging anchor kept the schooner's nose somewhat down so her stern tossed in the air; men were bounced about until their shoulder sockets seemed loosened from holding on.

Lightning tore the sky; flame on flame gleamed through the rain. Thunder smashed as if just above their heads as the men swayed. Pierre dangled like a spider on a wind blown web, his head turned shoreward. Bill shouted at him, "Beats hangin', Perry!" but was unheard.

Bill fingered his waistband, feeling the precious lumps. The schooner was lost, but he carried wealth with him. He had no thought of death. Never had died yet, so why think of it?

A shock like a noiseless explosion shivered through the schooner. She had struck, begun to pound. The jolt ran up through Bill's heels, jarred his teeth. Yelping broke out. This was the end, or near it. Then men were scattered from the lee fore rigging, as a broom whisks flies away on a cold morning. The foresheets parted. The boom swung scythelike, as if it were a club in giant hands,

snapping shrouds. The weakened mast snapped, crashing overboard.

Bill, half falling over the side, jumped. The water caught him with the fury of innumerable grasping hands and swirled him under, down and down as if never to let go, then spun him into the rising swell of a heaving breaker.

He had been in gale-whipped tidal surf before. All he or any man could do was hold his breath, shut his eyes, huddle up and go like driftwood; then, in the moment's calm of a backwash, give a stroke or two, the better to thrust up his head and gasp at the spray-filled air, gulp deep, lock his lungs and go under again.

The clutching jerk of the water was at times like the purposeful wrench of powerful hands. The water became thicker with sand as he was driven shoreward. He hit the bottom as if dropped in the hollow between waves, and there instantly his feet seemed enmeshed in a spinning web of sand. He sprang yieldingly into the belly of an oncoming breaker that flung him all a-sprawl, like a loose piece of rag. The best that could be done was to go with the surge, not fight it. Except for being dashed on rocks, or having his neck broken by head-down bump on the bottom, the man who yielded to the water could live in surf a long time. He knew that whether he lived or died, in such a sea, he must at last, even as driftwood, be washed ashore. His throat was scalded with salt and sand. The waves, as if with tricky malice, seemed to know how far up along the beach they could throw him—then suck him back to be thrown again.

At last a tremendous breaker, as if with wrathful heave, carried him forward with the swiftness of a downward fall and flung him into the surging wash that poured far out up along the beach. He had been stranded—even as driftwood always is at last—beyond the pull of the backwash. The retreating water dropped sand about his prostrate body as if to bury him. He arose, leaning forward, struggling as if with quicksand, fell, crawled forward—crawled on and on.

CAP'N BILL came to with the rain in his face. Darkness was all about. The earth trembled under the beat of the surf, and above the roar of the surf, wind howled. In the darkness the sea-froth boiled with spectral flashes, even under the pounding of the rain that beat it back into blackness. Bill cupped his hands with heels to mouth and drank rain water. He laughed, or rather made the sounds of laughter. He had drawn himself up out of the sea to be a castaway on Galtz's island. His hand, as if wandering by itself, groped at his waistband. When his fingers felt the little lumps, Bill remembered. Three large and perfectly matched pearls. Wealth. At the moment he would have given them for the dawn and coffee laced with gin; gin mostly.

The storm held on, but the lightning was far away, the thunder only dim heavy distant rumblings. The storm moved on, striking with lightning, crashing with thunder, as if its battle front fought across the heavens to make way for the rain clouds that followed. The rain might last days.

Dawn seeped through a soggy sky. Bill stood up to watch dim masses take on recognizable outlines as he peered into the blur of rain. Far down the beach he saw the half submerged bulk of his schooner on beams' end, with keel seaward. Breakers washed it like a rock, packing more and more sand about it. There was no reaching the wreck, no good in reaching it. Behind him rose jungle-covered hills. Somewhere there was a trail across from this beach. Jody had said so.

As Bill watched the breakers in a sort of abstracted gaze, a piece of driftwood

some hundred yards or more off seemed to rise and totter. Bill cupped his hands and shouted, but might as well have whispered. The man, with long pauses in seaward staring, moved up the beach, tottered, straightened, paused aimlessly. It was Black Pierre.

Bill went up to him with staggering run. Pierre's face had much the look a ghost's might have if it tried to smile. "Then it is that we are not dead, and this is not hell, my friend?"

"Near by!" said Bill, and tossed a hand toward the hills. Beyond them lay Galtz's plantation. "You hurt?"

"When one lives after such a night, one does not speak of hurts! What do we do now?"

Captain Bill swung his arm again. "Do! We'll go across the hills—on hands an' knees if need be! Get food and drink. Get the girl I come for an' break Galtz's neck, by God!" Bill put an arm about Pierre. "Let's get somewhere up under a tree an' rest a bit."

Pierre let himself be helped, leaned close to Bill, moved with short steps and deep sighing. "It is cold," said Pierre. He stumbled in the sand, fastened his fingers down inside Bill's belt. Bill pushed the hand away. It was too close to the lumpy spot in his waistband.

"Move about a bit, Perry, you'll be warmed up. Ho, look! There's more ashore! Not such a bad night—there's Jody an' some boys!"

Far up the beach through the rain figures were moving, making toward Bill and Pierre. Little old Jody, monkey-sized and spry as a monkey, came at a jogging run; behind him the squat half-breed, Harry. Two or three others trailed, not hurrying.

Jody started grinning and cussing, toothlessly. His voice was lively and shrill with a sort of glee.

"Easiest shipwreck I was ever in, Bill. This makes my ninth! No much of a storm, this warn't. I come straight ashore, like I had holt of a tow line. Clumb up yonder, waitin' for sun-up."

There Jody stood, grinning in the rain and twitching a finger at the wet fuzz on his old face, and looking not much worse for wear than if he'd been tossed overboard in a calm.

"Glad ol' Perry's alive! How air ye, Perry? Look sorta washed out, you do." Jody perked forward his face, peering.

The three blacks that had got ashore flopped down on the sand, worn out, disconsolate, ready to die out of sheer heart sickness. They had already found the battered bodies of two mates. Two others were missing.

When natives began moping they were likely to just turn up their bellies and die. Cap'n Bill prodded them. "Come along! On your feet! You'll all get back to your village yet with guns, pipes, and long-tailed coats! How far across there, Jody?" Bill pointed.

"Seven to eight mile an'—"

"Why you blasted old liar, you told me about three!"

"Aye, Bill, aye! That I did, an' so 'tis, straight across. But the trail winds. It's steep at times. Wet an' slick as slush. On empty bellies, Bill, it'll be weary goin' an'—"

"Fill your belly with rain water an' lead on!" Along a little later than the middle of the afternoon, Jody, at the edge of the bush, pointed through the rain.

"Here we are, purt-near. Blacks quartered 'cross over yonder. House—you can't see it—on risin' ground, overlookin' the harbor. Comp'ny store there. Over there, copra sheds."

As nearly as they could tell, nobody was stirring. In a rain like this little work. Natives hated the rain and chill, and sickened under it.

Bill said promptly, "We'll make for the copra sheds. Be nobody there an'—"

"Ain't we suffered enough?" said Jody, pinching his nose.

"—an' be dry there. An' soon night. We can rest. Then when it's dark move

down on the house. Be food there and, maybe, Galtz!"

They straggled along, keeping well behind the sheds, where less likely to be seen. The nearest shed, an old one, was of shaggy thatch. The wide door, fastened but not locked, swung outward. They went into utter darkness. The air was stale with the lingering stench of old copra. Water trickled with persistent pat-pat-pat through leaks. Bill, for all of his tough stomach, gagged. The weary blacks fell down as if knocked over, lay groaning and sighing. Jody made some comment that ended in a mutter. Pierre lay with his face near the door.

Cap'n Bill reeled, drunk with weariness. He got down, scrouging up near Pierre so as to have his nose near the door. It seemed but a moment later that Bill awoke with a cramp in his arm. He had been lying on it. The pained muscle kept hurting until it made itself felt through the death-like exhaustion. He roused up, rubbing.

It was dead black outside and still raining. Windy gusts whooped. Bill had no idea of the time. Maybe he had slept only a couple of hours, or it might be now near dawn. He was chilled, sore, stiff. He groped about, shook Pierre and kept shaking.

Pierre awakened with a start.

"How you feel, Perry?"

"It will be no worse in hell, my friend."

"Me, I'd fight a shark for first bite at an old boot! Come on. We're going out!"

"Go? We go where?"

"Find something to eat! Drink! Something to put in our empty hands and make it a fight!"

Bill roused or tried to rouse the men. Jody and Harry came up, bad-tempered, filled with pain; but they stirred. The exhausted blacks wouldn't budge. There were slaps, jeering, groans, but the moment Bill let go, the blacks would fall over, passive and unmoving.

"Be damned if I carry you! Come on, you fellows. Up here ahead, Jody. You can't see any better than the rest of us. But the devil loves you most, so he'll see that you find a way!"

They moved with uneven steps and much stumbling in the blinding darkness over soggy ground with slippery pools of water all about. The thrash of rain was in their faces.

CHAPTER VII

WHERE WIVES DIED

THE rain beat down, poured foaming rivulets from the roof of the old Chumley house, now Galtz's. One side of the veranda faced the beach. Gusts of wind shook the tall palms overhead, clattering wet leaves. The mat screens of the veranda had been rolled up and lashed to save them from the wrench and jar of the wind.

It was late, midnight or thereabouts, but lamplight glistened from many windows.

In a large, nearly square room, Galtz leaned both elbows on the table and chewed a half-smoked cigar. Kleber sat across from him. They were alone, but muffled boisterous sounds came from an adjoining room. Overhead could be heard a woman's footsteps pacing restlessly back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. From time to time Galtz looked up, listening. "God, don't she ever get tired!"

Galtz had his coat off. Even the stormy night was too warm; there were clammy sweat-splotches on his shirt. His sleeves were rolled above thick arms. Beer bottles, a dozen of them; gin bottles, three or four, and a whisky bottle were on the table. A big crockery mug was at his elbow, a water tumbler and a pitcher with a chipped mouth near Kleber's. Both were a little drunk; Galtz was nervously gleeful, Kleber cold and disapproving. His murky eyes had a slit-lidded, contemptuous gleam.

Kleber's face was swathed by a bandage wrapped across the top of his head and under his chin, almost concealing his short beard. He could speak between set teeth, not loudly. He thinned his whisky with a little water, sipped it slowly, let it drain into his throat without moving his teeth. At times he winced and put a palm tenderly to his broken jaw.

"Yes," said Kleber, with hand to the side of his face and voice sour and mean, "but do it, and there'll be jaws a-waggle in the islands as never before about you!"

"Bah!" Galtz blew out his bladder-like cheeks, smacked his palm to the table, making bottles tremble. "That for everybody in the islands! In the whole damn world! I do what I like." He swung his arm wide. "Wives get sick and die. What then? A man marries again. That is all. That is what I do!"

Kleber eyed him with slanting glance. "Died, eh? People you want out of the way seem to die most convenient."

Galtz's hand quivered. He grinned. "Sure. I have luck!"

Kleber took up his watered whisky, raised his head stiffly. "You fool Dutchman. Luck like that can't last! This un, Dutch, is white. Not half French black. And has friends."

Galtz flourished his arm. "She will be my wife. It is nobody's business what I do to my wife. Except to her uncle, maybe. That old fool, he will say to people it is fine that I married her. He will tell everybody that she is happy and loves me. And when he die—" Galtz grinned, showing horse-like teeth. "He is an old man. This climate it is bad for old men, Kleber."

"And young wives." In saying that, Kleber moved his jaw a little, exclaimed in pain, rubbed it gently. Pain and anger made him savage. "When I get that damned Bill Jones, I'll cut him to pieces inch by inch! Why couldn't he have busted your jack-ass jaw instead!"

Galtz reared back with woozy dignity. "I am Herr Galtz!"

Kleber frowned, thought it over, affirmed, "You're a damn fool Dutchman!"

"I," said Galtz, loud and earnest, with sweep of arm in wide circle, "am the smartest man in the islands!" He reached for a beer bottle. "Why don't that damn Sainan come?"

"Be better for you if he never comes." Kleber waggled his head sagely, sipped watered whisky, lifted his eyes overhead where the restless tramping went on and on and on.

Galtz, too, listened a moment, then jumped up, rushed with bulky awkwardness to a door, opened it, leaned forward and bawled up the dark stairway. "Malua! Malua, make her set down! Make her stop that walking!"

A woman's indistinct voice, a native's, answered in slow-spoken protest as if something beyond reason was being asked of her.

"Bet she don't marry you!" said Kleber.

Galtz turned about, glared, slammed the door. "By God, she will marry me! And tonight!"

He took up another bottle and the corkscrew. He had some trouble getting the corkscrew set.

"No matter what that old uncle says," Kleber went on, "von Siegal will know she wouldn't marry you—"

Galtz drained his mug, throwing back his head until the bottom was up. He struck the mug to the table. "Von Siegal! He meddle with me, my government"—Galtz struck his breast—"my government will raise the hell with him. I am a good German. I am a planter. I build for the Empire! The German men-of-war, by God, they stand up for us German planters!"

"If a gunboat comes and they talk to that Seagrim girl—" Kleber's slit eyes gleamed with warning.

"Ho, they have come before. I give the officers all they can eat and drink—and the girls, heh? They think I am a great man. Besides, my good Sainan knows how to make women afraid to complain! Ha ha!"

Kleber's lips writhed. He moved his jaw, squeaked in pain, put both hands to his face. When the pain lessened, he cursed Sainan. "Gives me the creeps. Nobody but a fool Dutchman would trust that damned poisoner!"

Galtz threw up his arm in excited silencing gestures, pointed warningly toward the door, through which came the loud tones of merry rough men. Then Galtz moved slowly, shifting the revolver that dragged in the flap holster on his loose belt, and with lumbering stealth went across the room. He put his fingers cautiously on the door handle, jerked open the door.

Kleber's boat crew played cards noisily, all four at the table. Their faces, grotesque in the splotches of slanting light, peered up in startled uncertainty. The presence of Galtz at the door subdued them with fear that their noise had displeased him; but Galtz cried out heartily. "You have a good time, heh? Good! Keep having a good time!"

They blurted surprised thanks as he closed the door.

Galtz marched up with a sort of solemn unsteadiness to Kleber, shook a finger almost against Kleber's nose:

"Don't ever use that damn word again!" He bent even closer, wobbled a little, spoke low, hoarse and confidential with air of smugness:

"Chumley, he was the fool. Whip Sainan like a runaway black—then let him stay on as steward. If ever I whip him, then I will shoot him!" Galtz waggled his trigger finger. "He knows too much about some things that make you not live long."

Kleber put his head far back. "That wife, he poisoned her so—"

"Don't — use — that — word!" Galtz frantically slapped down both arms, almost falling forward.

"Don't trust that man, Dutch!" Kleber swallowed whisky hastily, hurt his jaw, swore, shut his eyes, shuddered, then with toss of hand indicating upstairs. "I heard her dying. The screams! I've cut men's throats. I've bashed their heads with rifle butts. I've seen 'em roast and heard 'em howl. That was

nought to—" Again the up-tossed hand. "You're a fool! Didn't you see that slobber-mouthed Sainan grin as he listened, like it was music? Some day you'll be down on the floor there writhin' and screamin' and he'll stand by and grin like—"

"Damn you, shut up!" Galtz bellowed at the top of his great voice. Sweat burst on his forehead as if splattered with rain drops. He shuddered, very much as if with ague.

He lurched forward on the table, leaning afar. He gasped, husky and breathing hard: "Kleber? Kleber! I tell you what! Tonight after—after it is over—Kleber, he must not be here alive any more. The poison—I wanted that he give me back the poison. He said he had thrown it all away. Yet there was some—some for her! You are right, Kleber. I am a fool. With not so much as you can pinch up so—" Galtz pinched finger and thumb, held his hand close to Kleber's face "—in a little beer, then—then—Ugh! Kleber? Kleber, you will tonight—tonight kill him?"

THE glimmer of a moving lantern twinkled through the rain-washed darkness, glistened over the wet earth as if on a black mirror, and shimmered on the oilskins of two men who hurried through the trees toward the house. They went up the veranda steps, entered the house.

A door to the room where Galtz and Kleber sat opened and closed. A man came in, a fleshy man, wearing a rubber hat and oilskins. There was a loose-lipped grin on the man's dark face.

Kleber looked at him with loathing, sucked up watered whisky.

Sainan's eyes fluttered from one to the other. He spoke in velvety, glib voice. "Ponalo is here!" He whipped off the hat, flung it at a corner, shed the oilskins.

Chumley was said to have found Sainan in Singapore. He had a thick, hooked nose, bushy brows, cheek bones like lumps under the skin and loose lips. His hair curled stiffly into the shape of little horns all over his head. There was an unclean look about him of the kind that soap and water would never wash away. He smirked at Galtz.

Galtz heaved a great breath, wiped sweat with palm from his face. "Get Ponalo in. Get him in here. Have it over with, quick."

Sainan went to the door, opened it, beckoned.

The so-called "Reverend" Ponalo was an unctuous Samoan, shirtless, but wearing a soiled, rusty and now wet frock coat. He pulled a soiled, battered Bible from the tail of his coat, held it one-handedly against his breast, struck a pose. He often had actually fooled trusting and godly men in persuading them to think Galtz was a much better man than ruffianly traders tried to make out.

Sainan lifted his eyes, dropped them to Galtz's face. Galtz, too, looked overhead where the restless tramping back and forth went on.

"Get her down here," said Galtz.

Sainan opened the door to the hall, called in velvet tones, "Malua, ask the lady to come down!"

Sally Seagrim came with Malua at her heels. She was a broad-faced girl. The look in her eyes was just about as stupidly blank as the eyes in a husked coconut. She was flap-breasted and broad-hipped and had made rags of the small Mrs. Galtz's dresses in getting into them. Her coffee-colored cheeks were smeared with face powder. There wasn't as much powder on one side as on the other. Sally Seagrim had slapped her face, furiously.

Miss Sally came in among the men with her head up and eyes glittering. Malua, following sluggishly, muttered with stupid glower, "Her one hell debil."

Miss Sally gave a look about. "So!" she said, seeing Galtz was not sober, Kleber a little drunk. She eyed the frock-

coated shirtless Ponalo, curled her lips, whirled on Sainan. All the fury that had kept her pacing back and forth, back and forth, in the room overhead was in her voice:

"You—*you!*—murdered that helpless woman! Poisoned her!"

Sainan looked shocked and aggrieved, began a humble protest.

"As filthy and low and vicious as this drunken beast is"—Miss Sally's slim arm whipped out in lash-like gesture at Galtz —"I can't believe he knew you poisoned his poor, sick wife! She knew! She screamed it in dying! I heard her! As surely as there is a God, He heard and . . . ."

Sally Seagrim had the gift of words. With the fury of an angered prophetess she called down curses on Sainan. Her voice rang through the men's blabbering protests. Galtz was loud and hoarse, wildly waved his arms. Sainan murmured unctuously with upward leer. The so-called Reverend Ponalo cocked his ears and rolled his eyes. The sailors in the adjoining room had heard, opened their door a little, huddled there.

Kleber nodded, spoke as if slightly pleased: "Damn fool Dutchman, awright. Told you, I did. Told you!"

"Her one hell debil," Malua droned, admiringly.

Miss Sally paused, out of breath, not out of words. Her face was as pale as a sheet of paper, but it was the paleness of anger, of overpowering and infuriated horror.

Sainan bowed in abused humbleness. "It was medicine the doctor sent and—"

"Poison!"

Cold sweat oozed on Galtz's forehead. He wiped at it with swipe of palm. Sainan glanced uneasily toward him.

Kleber said between his teeth, "Make you a lovin' wife, she will!"

Galtz began opening a bottle with unsure, hurried fumbling.

Miss Sally looked from one to the other. "What's that?" she snapped. "What's that you said about a wife?"

Kleber raised his tumbler, nodded toward Galtz. "He'll tell you, miss. But damn me 'f I would 'f I was him!" He sucked watered whisky.

Miss Sally turned on Galtz. "You drunken pig!"

Galtz swelled up, threw back his cropped head in a way that made billowing wrinkles of fat bulge out on the back of his neck. "You," he said, bullying and defiant, "are going to marry me!"

"M—marry—you?" Miss Sally gulped, nearly speechless, looking very much as if sure these were all madmen. "Marry —*you?*" she muttered as blankly as if repeating foreign words.

Galtz lurched nearer, thrust out his face. "Me!" He struck his breast, glared. "There is nothing you can do about it!"

Her hand struck his face as a falcon strikes. She had sharp nails. They ripped down the bulbous cheek, leaving streaks that turned red and began to bleed. Galtz yelled, surprised and frightened; he heaved himself back with a stagger as her other hand struck, claw-like, for his eyes.

Her tongue was going like a pennant in a gale. "Marry a thing like you! I'd marry the devil in hell first—and have the better man for a husband!"

Galtz dabbled at his torn cheek, looked at the blood on his fingers, swore. He pulled a not clean handkerchief from his pocket, pressed it to his cheek.

". . . . now—*now* I know you did know —*poison!* You had this fat slimy—oogh! —thing poison her! I know what you are after! I thought you carried me off because of Captain Bill, but you married that poor Chumley woman for her money, then poisoned her tonight so you could marry me for mine! Then poison me too, I suppose! As big a loathsome brute as you, with all these dirty scoundrels to help you, you can't make me marry you! I'll die first and be glad to. You . . . ."

When she scratched Galtz's face, the so-called Reverend Ponalo had moved backward toward a corner with flurrying swish of wet coat tails. Sainan, with a kind of evil over-the-shoulder snicker at Miss Sally, went to him, jerked away the Bible and returned to the table. He took a stub of a pencil from his pocket and wrote rapidly on a fly leaf.

Kleber rose up in curiosity, leaned above his shoulder, read, looked mystified, then started to laugh, but hurt his jaw. He clapped a hand to the side of his face and sat down, grimacing in pain.

Sainan, having written rapidly, paused for a moment, then wrote slowly with great care. He straightened, eyed what he had written, and with quick oblique look at Sally, smiled.

He held out the open book with a kind of oozy glee to Galtz. "There! Let her scream. It doesn't matter. Here is a record of the marriage. You sign just above here where she has signed!"

Galtz, thick-headed with gin and beer, found the words swimming before his eyes. But understanding came with a whisper and a leer from the smugly gleeful Sainan.

Galtz shouted, "By God! Good! Good!" and hunched over the table, pencil in hand to sign his name.

Sainan with cheery bustle brought the fat Samoan to the table, had him sign, too, the attestation of the marriage.

Miss Sally was suddenly rigid and silent, but her heart hammered at her ribs and she held her breath. What they said and were doing was all at once unimportant. She clenched her hands, set her jaws desperately, not looking toward the open window lest the others, seeing her look, might stare that way too. Every impulse urged her to look. She struggled to be motionless, and all the while wondered with a fear that choked if, in her anxiety, her eyes had not played a trick, so that she merely imagined she had seen Captain Bill's face emerge momentarily out of the veranda darkness, peering intently through the window.

A DOOR opened. It was flung so wide that it clattered in backward swing against the wall.

Captain Bill sprang through without a word, a short piece of fence post in his hand. He was half naked and in rags. His bruised face had a ferocious, gaunt look. The nearest head was Sainan's. The piece of fence post hit with the swing of a blacksmith sledging a piece of iron. Sainan, with jerky twist of neck, barely saw what was coming. He fell against Ponalo's shoulder, slid in a lifeless sort of flop to the floor. Ponalo's wide-open mouth blurted terrified sounds as he jumped up. Bill's piece of fence post smashed him across the face and Ponalo went over, falling backward on to the table with his nose out of shape and pouring blood like a broken spigot. He thrashed his legs in the air and howled.

At Bill's heels came Black Pierre, Harry the Tongan, and old Jody. The lot of them looked hollow-eyed and strangely famished; but there was a fever-fury in their glittering eyes, a look like madness. For arms they had pieces torn from a fence they had stumbled against in the darkness before seeing Sainan's lantern glimmering through the rain. They had followed the lantern and so been led to the house, where Bill crept on to the veranda and listened.

There was the struggling clatter of bodies tumbling over chairs, oaths, yells. Galtz bellowed for help as he pawed at the revolver; Ponalo for mercy as he thrashed his legs about, trying to get off the table.

Cap'n Bill lurched for Galtz, who, with arms a-waggle and feet stumbling in frantic haste, made for the room where the sailors had played cards. His big body bumped in among the sailors as if trying to knock them over and he shouted hoarsely.

A sailor jumped at Bill from the side, and a swinging blow of Bill's elbow knocked him over. Another with knife out sprang at Bill's back, one arm going about his neck. Bill gripped the arm, jerking as he ducked low, bending his back in a kind of doubled-up stoop; the sailor came on over Bill's head and flopped flat on his back at Bill's feet with a jar that shook the floor. The sheath knife fell from the man's hand. Bill gave it a kick and jumped over him with club a-swinging at the head of the next man in his way.

Galtz had stopped just inside the doorway. He was breathing in gasps, as though he had run far and for his life. His bladder-shaped face was grotesque with a look of terror; the small pig eyes were stretched wide; his fat cheeks quivered. His revolver was out. He fired once with frantic out-thrust of arm, hastily cocked the revolver; holding it in both hands, he shot again. The billowed puffs of black smoke dimmed the doorway. Galtz stooped hopefully. Bill's piece of fence post, thrown with full arm swing, came through, missed Galtz's head, smashed against the wall behind him.

"Gun or no gun," Bill thundered, "I'll kill you here and now!" He jumped forward, his hands empty and his body a pointblank mark for the next shot.

But Galtz was unnerved. He was crazed with almost superstitious terror. Bill and these men with him looked like drowned men who had arisen from among the dead, and could not be killed again; Galtz felt that Bill could and would kill him.

He turned with a howl, bumped into the table where the men had played cards, knocked over a chair, lurched for the door, pitched himself out on to the wet veranda, stumbled across it, brought up against the railing and tumbled over into the muddy darkness.

Two jumps behind, Bill cleared the veranda railing and skittered down on the wet earth. He threw his arms about in fierce clutches, expecting to get his hands on Galtz, and touched nothing. All about was dead blackness. There was no sound of movement to guide him as he crouched with head lifted, listening. He thought Galtz might have been knocked unconscious by the fall. Inside the house was the crash and clatter, yelps and oaths, of men fighting. Bill swore and groped.

Galtz, knowing the veranda was open underneath, had rolled in under it and lay still, holding his breath, gripping the revolver but afraid to shoot. He knew that if he missed again Bill would beat him to death with bare hands.

As soon as he heard the slap of Bill's feet overhead, Galtz crawled out and ran for the beach.

When Bill got back in the house he found Kleber dead, shot by his own gun that the half-breed, Tongan, had wrenched from him in a body-to-body struggle. Pierre held a knife that dripped blood and Sally Seagrim clung to his arm, begging him to let the wounded sailor go without further harm.

Old Jody had cleared the others out of the room. He never wanted anything better than a broken bottle for a weapon; smashing two beer bottles together, he had gripped the neck of each in a bony fist and, like a maniacal monkey had slashed and stabbed. As the last sailor, already cut by Pierre, went headlong through the open window, Jody skittered to a stop at the window sill and hurled the bottles at him, squawked jeers.

Sally Seagrim came up to Captain Bill. Her eyes glowed in fixed tense stare, her lips trembled, and she was shaking. "Thank—Thank God!"

"All right, as you say, miss. But I'll thank Him more when we're a thousand miles off this island—that is, if we're not in irons!"

"In irons? Oh no no no! Listen, Captain Bill! Murder—*poison!* I tell you—

that man there—the first you hit . . . ."

Her tongue flew in almost hysterical recital.

CAP'N BILL stood at a corner of the veranda. Near by dim lantern light slanted through an open door. He had a double-barreled shotgun in his hands and a bag of shells slung about his neck. Bill was full of food and black coffee, but he was tired. Every bone ached; his muscles were sore; his eyes seemed scalded and his calloused feet had been cut a little by the broken glass Jody scattered. Nevertheless, Bill felt more or less content. He fingered his waistband and day-dreamed. Those three pearls of old Wang's would set him up with a new schooner, better than the old one.

Pierre, Jody and Tongan Harry were asleep, wrapped in blankets, on the floor of the room where the sailors had played cards.

Sally Seagrim, in oilskins that fitted Galtz, kept near Bill and peered tensely into the rain. She couldn't sleep and wouldn't try. Sainan, with lashings on ankles and wrists, and arms behind his back, was just inside the doorway under the dangling lantern where Bill could keep an eye on him.

"*Bill!*"

"Um?"

"What's that? Somebody is—"

"Sure. It's that girl. I told her to bring more coffee."

Malua came slowly, with the island girl's gliding tread, into the slanting lantern light at the doorway. She looked a little drunken in Mrs. Galtz's too tight dress that fitted her askew. A pot of steaming coffee was in one hand, a heavy china cup in the other. Malua looked as if she wanted to please but was unsure of Captain Bill's friendliness.

Sally moved closer to Bill. Malua paused and stared with a sort of dull interest at Sainan, then held out the cup.

"Good girl," said Bill.

She smiled, pleased, and poured coffee. Bill offered the cup to Sally who said, "Oogh!" and laughed a little. "I'll never want black coffee again."

"How about you?" said Bill and offered Malua the cup.

She hesitated with lifted eyes, and her flat face brightened. "Oh, tank uh." She sat down the coffee pot and took the cup in both hands. Malua sipped the scalding coffee, paused and said as softly as if singing a lullaby, "I hellfire damn glad you fella men come, you bet uh!" Then she grinned. She was almost pretty when she smiled.

"Did that fellow poison Mrs. Galtz?" Bill jerked a thumb.

"You bet um, sure ting." Her voice was flat, unemphatic, and without any trace of horror.

"How you know, Malua?"

"Um?" She picked up the pot and as she poured began to talk in a placid monotone. "One tim he say, 'Malua, you—'" She repeated, quite without any feeling, a string of as bad names as could be given a woman. "'—want see w'at I do to them I don' lak?' He say, 'I show you. Then you, you—'" more bad names "'—bettah do allus w'at I say.'"

She let the pot swing with almost idle motion in the direction of Sainan who watched, eyes wide and glowing.

"I have dog 'at don' lak him. Make bark at him all tim. He give dog some meat. Pitty soon quick dog make howl an' run round an' round, fall down, all foam at mouth. Him look an' laugh. Him say, 'You see? You ever no do lak I say an' you die, too—lak dog.'" Malua showed no more feeling than if she talked merely of boiling eggs: "Missus she die lak 'at dog."

"Did Galtz know about the poison?"

Malua ran a hand over her black hair, and spoke indifferently, "You bet um." She put down the pot and smoothed her hair with both hands, primping herself

a little for Captain Bill. She smiled with coquettish tilt to her eyes. "You lak I tell you?"

"Bet you," said Bill.

"It Galtz gib poison to him fo' to make Chum'y die. Chum'y have him whipped. Him swear hell-damn-fire to kill Chum'y. He say 'at to Galtz an'—"

"How you know all that?"

"Oh how I know, hm?" She smirked coquettishly. "Me, I am Galtz girl lak wife on schooneh. He come here one tim fo' business. Sainan come to schooneh. They talk an' I am in bunk an' play sleep. Galtz say, 'I get you poison, you gib it to Chum'y. Ever'body they say he die of bad heart.' Hm? How he get it I don' know."

"But listen, Malua." Bill had his arm about her. Sally's sniff was loud enough to be heard above the rain. "That's Perry, the Frenchman in there. *He* killed Chumley. Admits it. Stabbed him here on the veranda one night an'—"

She cuddled close to Bill, toyed with the fingers of the hand he had put about her. Without eagerness and without emphasis, she said, " 'At Chum'y die of poison in beer. Um-hm. Him there put Chum'y in long chair." She moved her hands as if measuring a steamer chair. "Man come out of rain in black night, all same lak now, an' put knife in Chum'y after him dead. Um-hm."

Bill swore, pushed her into the light, peered.

"How do you know *that?*"

"I hear um talk an' laugh 'bout how damn Frenchman kill dead man." Malua had no feeling at all that what she said was important except in so far as it seemed to please Bill. "They tink it one big hell-damn joke."

Cap'n Bill stared at Sainan.

The fellow lay with distorted sag of body, half sitting. He stopped struggling at his lashings as if caught and fearful of punishment. He was a loathsome thing, fat and oozy in terror. His heavily-lidded eyes were up as far as fright could draw them. His loose-lipped mouth hung half open.

"W'at matteh with you?" said Malua. "You no lak me now?"

"Like you?" said Bill. "I think you're—" He jerked her to him, kissed her, pushed her away. "But you'll have a handsomer man than me huggin' you now!"

Miss Sally's oilskins rustled noisily and she made vague indignant sounds.

"Hi, Perry!" Bill shouted, and he jumped through the door. He pounced on Pierre, pinched, slapped, prodded. "Wake up! Hit the deck! Hell's blazes, man! Come out of it and—"

Pierre, exhausted, awoke with flying toss of blanket. "We are attacked?" He roused himself, ready to reach toward the rifles standing by the door.

"Attacked, nothin'! You're neck's safe! Chumley was a dead man when you knifed him! He'd been poisoned by this fellow—and Galtz!"

AN HOUR later Sainan, covered with sweat and dry of mouth, sagged weakly on the chair upon which he had been raised under the lantern and whimpered for Pierre to believe he had told the truth, begged for a drink of water.

Pierre's black eyes glittered. He was straddling a chair and facing across the back of it. In one hand he held a piece of the fence. When Sainan closed his eyes, Pierre thumped his head, not softly. In the other hand Pierre had a big butcher knife. Sainan's throat was just within easy reach of the blade.

Malua squatted on the floor, unexcited but blissful, and repeatedly lifted her flat face and cowlike eyes to Pierre.

"Aw, give him a drink," said Bill.

Pierre thumped Sainan alongside the head. "If he can tell nothing more to me, then I will let him wash his throat with his own blood!" He moved the knife and Sainan screamed.

"Oogh!" Miss Sally turned to the

door. The oilskins trailed about her heels and were as loose on her slim body as a blanket on a broomstick. She tugged at Bill, pulled him aside. "Will he kill him?"

Bill half laughed, lowered his voice. "Sooner cut his own throat! What Sainan says'll keep the hemp from Perry's gullet!"

"Where is the poison?" Pierre demanded again.

"I have told you I gave it back to Galtz." Sainan spoke without moving his lips.

Whack! "I know what you think. If there is no poison found, you think later you can say there was no poison. And if there is no poison found you will not be hung. But if no poison is found your throat it will be cut, and," he added with sinister mildness, "that is *now!*"

Pierre pitched the club aside. He grasped the horn-like curls with his left hand, thrust Sainan's head far back, put the edge of the knife to his throat. Sainan howled, writhed. The sharp, rasping edge of the butcher knife bit the skin on his throat.

"Oh-oh, I will tell! Don't—"

"Where is it?"

"Oh—let—let me—my breath—get my breath and I—"

"If you have enough breath to beg for breath you have enough to tell where!"

"Kill um!" Malua urged with gleeful stare. "He kill my dog." Her hand pushed lightly against the arm with which Pierre held the knife.

A hoarse throat howl came out of Sainan. He seemed more afraid of the placid Malua than of Pierre. "It—it is—the bottle is—untie me and I will show—"

"Pah! I will not untie you. But I will—" The knife bit into the skin, lightly. Blood came.

"Oh—oh—let me live! I will tell! In my room—knot hole—the knot in the floor at the foot of my bed—Galtz gave it to me and made me—Galtz—"

"Go look!" said Pierre.

"You bet um." Malua, not hurrying, went, and lifted her eyes coquettishly at Bill as she passed him.

"Water—God, a drink!" Sainan gasped.

"If she comes back with it," said Pierre, and sat down.

The room was very quiet after so much talk and loud cries. The rain held on, but there seemed to be the beginning of morning in the darkness. The dimmest of dirty gray light was seeping through the sky. Sainan gasped for breath. Tongan, huddled up in a blanket, snored; old Jody, flat on his back, with thin, bony arms outflung, seemed dead.

Malua came back, not hurrying, with the knot from a board between finger and thumb of her extended right hand. A short cord, fastened to the under side of the knot, was tied about the neck of a bottle. The bottle was nearly full of white powder, white and glistening. There was something pasted on the bottle.

"That," said Miss Sally, "looks like bottles I have seen at Dr. von Siegal's. And the writing, too."

"How did Galtz get it?" Pierre asked, dangling the bottle before Sainan's eyes.

"A drink—oh my God, drink!"

"Bring him a drink," said Bill.

Malua lifted her flat face, placid, unsmiling, but her soft eyes glowed. "I get um beer, hm?"

She came back with a mug, bottle and corkscrew. She gave Bill the bottle and corkscrew, and held the mug. He pulled the cork, poured the beer slowly against the side of the mug to lessen the foam, then pitched the empty bottle out of the doorway.

Malua held the mug to Sainan's mouth, lifting it faster than he could drink, though he gulped with hurried, sucking sound. She raised the bottom of the mug as he bent back his head and poured down the last drop that he strained for.

"Ah," said Sainan, licking his lips.

Malua stared at him with mild intentness, then dropped the mug as if a little afraid of it and laughed softly. "Now him die. When I fin' poison I take um some fo' me. Put it in mug. Pitty soon him howl now lak my dog he keel, hm?"

Sainan stared with popping eyeballs in a spasm-look of terror. "You—you—" His voice broke into a howl, and writhing, he tumbled from the chair and thrashed about on the floor.

Bill swore at her and Pierre leaped up. There was a demoniacal look in his black eyes and the butcher knife twitched. Malua moved back just a little. In puzzled, hurt mildness, she asked, "You mad with me?"

Pierre sat down on the chair, put his elbows to his knees, his face between his slim hands. Malua doubtful, but wanting to please, moved near, laid her arm on his shoulder, let her hand creep about his neck. Pierre sat motionless, eyes aslant at the tortured Sainan.

He, with ankles bound and wrists tied behind his back, flopped and writhed. His cries were terrible. They pled for help. His eyes were widely distorted. When the poison-pains fastened upon him, he screamed wildly, calling upon God.

The half-breed snored, not stirring. Old Jody rolled over on his side, huddling up his small body and slept on. Pierre suddenly strode out, tight-lipped.

Malua watched with a blank stare, interested. She edged near Bill and muttered in a flat tone, quietly: "He laugh when my dog die. Now he howl lak my dog."

CHAPTER VIII

EMPEROR'S JUSTICE

THE early morning light was a besogged gray.

Captain Bill leaned against a veranda post and peered through the steady rain at the blotch-shape of men in the distance.

"What you think, my friend?" asked Pierre.

Bill's fingers idly rubbed his waistband.

"They think we're about three times the number we are. They were afraid to move up in the dark and have waited for day. And are waitin' for Galtz. He's not there. Now what the hell?"

The men he had been watching were all now facing toward the beach. They gesticulated, then began running as if to meet some one they were glad to see.

"Galtz must be comin' ashore. All right. He'll be welcome, damn 'im!"

Miss Sally's voice called shrilly from the end of the veranda:

"Bill! Captain Bill! Bill, quick!"

Sally was pointing. "There! Look! Out in the harbor—a ship!"

Bill leaned forward, crouched and studied the dimly seen rain-shadowed ship that steamed in slowly. After a long time he put the butt of the shotgun to the floor and leaned on it in rising as if very very tired. He reached to the veranda rail, steadied himself, then grinned a little. "Well, Perry, looks like you'll have comp'ny on the gibbet!" Bill made an encircling motion about his own neck.

Pierre was blinking seaward and made quick little swipes at his eyes as if trying to clear away something, then he shrugged his shoulder and met Bill's grin with a weary smile, barely showing his white teeth.

The ship came on slowly with toy-like figures in the chains heaving the lead. It moved with easy grace, as if conscious of dignity and authority.

"What ship is it, Bill?" Miss Sally asked. "And I should think you'd be glad!"

"That, young lady, is a damned Dutchman. The *Brandenburg*. Her skipper's hell on two legs. He'll hang us all—maybe you!"

"He will not! I'll tell him how—"

"You can't tell a Dutchman nothin'. First place, they don't speak English. Next," Bill went on, slow and musing, eyes wearily a-squint on her pretty, excited face, "*you* are crazy. Little out of your mind. That's why your uncle sent you here. Rest an' quiet—"

"After all Galtz has done and what we know—"

"Shh-hh-h!" said Bill. "Don't speak disrespectful of the great colonizer an' trader, Herr Galtz! Not to a Dutch gunboat captain—never!"

"But when I tell how—" Miss Sally began.

Bill waggled a weary hand. "You're out of your mind, I told you. And Dutchmen never understand English. If they did—Galtz has told his story. Anything we say different—we'd just be liars. Them sailors and that black preacher'll all bear out Galtz in sayin' so. You'll see."

"I won't see!" she snapped. "I will tell! And that Bible—I'll show what's written—marry him!" Sally was exasperated and even alarmed by Bill's complacent hopelessness.

"That *Brandenburg* sure has been raisin' hell with fellows that bothered Dutchmen over in the Solomons. Captain's name is Krauer, or something like kraut. I'm not going to like him."

"Mrs. Galtz is dead and Malua will say—"

"A native beach girl's word? Anyhow, she was sick. Been sick a long time. Sick people die. She died last night. That's all."

"Bill, listen to me! You aren't a raider! You are here by the authority of the German Consul at Labepo! The German Consul sent you and—"

Bill shook his head.

"Might help if the doc was here, but I've mashed too many Dutch traders' noses. Perry's helped 'imself to their stores. That Krauer hanged an Englishman and shot a Yankee for less 'n we've done over in the Solomons. Was a big hullaballoo, but the German Government backed him up. One thing about these damned Dutchmen, they sure do protect their planters. We're caught!"

"If you feel that way about it," Miss Sally demanded, a little scornful, "why do you stay here? Why don't you go—run—get away!" Her eyes were bright with urgent anxiety, even if her voice was reproachful. "You, you and Pierre will let yourselves be caught?"

Bill took a deep breath. "Run? Run where? Try it, and they'd turn niggers loose to trail us. They'd find us even if we got to the hills. And if they didn't find us, how to get off this blasted island?"

"There goes the anchor, my friend!" said Pierre coolly.

"Too damn bad, Perry, I didn't carry you straight to Fiji," said Bill with friendly glower. "Get you hung and get my thousand pounds. Think how gladder the girls I spent it on would be than now!"

"Oh Bill," Miss Sally wailed, "how can you joke!"

"Joke? Huh. It's no joke now—their boats are away! Good God, they're sendin' the whole ship's comp'ny!"

CAPTAIN BILL and his men stood on the seaward side of the veranda watching the boats come ashore. The first boat away was well in the lead. The oars swung as if one many-armed man held them all.

"Purty!" said Bill.

"I do not think so." Pierre smiled faintly.

"Oh I can think of what'd be purtier. Girls at them oars, for one thing."

"*Bill!*" Miss Sally snapped, feeling dreadful. "How can you!"

"'Cause I'm soon maybe goin' to be hung, I ain't goin' to change my lifelong opinion of what's nice," he growled.

Pierre came up close and let his hand

slip up and down the rifle he held as he said softly:

"We are lost, my friend. No chance. So, one volley, eh? A surprise, point-blank? Then die!"

"Volley be damned!" Bill pushed at him. "We'd just kill some kids. Put Galtz and his crew in the lead—they won't be! Three boats away! They must think we're an army!"

Malua, with dress askew and sagging, came up slowly. Her movement was almost like stealth and she looked doubtfully from Bill to Pierre. She was uncertain of her welcome from Pierre.

He smiled at her, patted her shoulder. When Pierre smiled nearly any woman was pleased. Malua's flat face burst into a look of joy.

"Ah, it was best, what you did, Malua. Pierre was a so stupid man to be angry. The dog Sainan, had he lived, would have told lies enough to get out of blame. And so, I, Pierre, thank you, Malua!"

He bowed as if to a duchess and she snuggled against him happily.

Sailors jumped waist-deep into the water, ran the first boat well up on the sand, and men piled out of it rapidly. A bugle sounded. There were hoarse-voiced commands. The sailors formed ranks, all with quick purposeful bustle.

One tall figure had come ashore in a long cloak, stepping stiffly. He stood apart as the ranks were formed. By his attitude and carriage, as far off as any one could see, he would have been picked as the captain. Without waiting for the following boats to land, the sailors began to march up toward the house. The tall figure in the long cloak kept off to one side, but near the lead. They tramped and splashed with slipping feet, but kept ranks.

Near the veranda the man in the long cloak pushed a hand out between the folds, made a gesture, spoke. A sharp command was snapped by a young officer, and instantly repeated by another voice. The sailors halted. They were mostly youngsters, round-faced, blue-eyed, and stared curiously.

Captain von Krauer, with two officers following, came up the veranda steps with eyes lifted. He was tall, big-boned, thin of flesh, but a powerful man. His eyes were blue, glassy, with the nearly opaque color of glass when ice is behind it. He carried himself rigidly erect, and arrogance was all over his face.

He examined the group on the veranda with hard stares, seemed especially to scrutinize Black Pierre, then his cold eyes fixed on Bill. These men looked a bad lot of ruffians, and every German man-of-war had heard stories of them. Bill's face was battered and thinned to a kind of fever-eyed gauntness by lack of sleep and weariness. His tangled hair was sappy and straggling.

"Do you," said Captain von Krauer in slow, precise English and a voice cold and hard as the click of metal as he flung one side of his cloak open and pointed as if thrusting forward a sword, "do you meet with arms in your hands the forces of His Imperial Majesty?"

Captain Bill looked at the shotgun he had simply forgot to put aside, then eyed the captain. The look, the bearing, voice, everything about Captain von Krauer made Bill mad; he almost said something unpleasant, but instead he put the gun silently against the side of the house.

Captain von Kraner turned on his heel, facing Miss Sally. He touched his cap with stiff salute, bowed slightly. "I am glad," he said with slow crispness as if precisely choosing each English word and gripping it firmly with his lips, "to find you—unharmed?"

"Unharmed, thanks *only* to Captain Bill and these men!" Miss Sally had the indignant impression that he mistook Bill and Pierre for men who might have harmed her; and her words hummed. She flung away Galtz's oilskins and used her hands as if her tongue couldn't tell it all. Her voice was shrill. She looked and

spoke as if scolding this rigid, arrogant German officer.

Captain von Krauer frowned down at her. There was no glimmer of sympathy in his glassy eyes, but a look of distrust, certainly an unwilliness to believe.

". . . . marry him! . . . poison! . . . his wife . . ." Sally's arm pointed overhead, indicating the room where the unfortunate woman lay dead. ". . . . Galtz and Sainan—the poison to Sainan . . . Chumley was dead from poison when Pierre . . . Malua, this girl, says . . . bottle of poison has been found. . . ."

Captain von Krauer seemed to have no eyelids at all. His glassy stare was unbroken. The young officers by him, not understanding English, looked from Sally's excited face to the captain's hard features, as if anxiously watching weather signs.

Miss Sally paused and took a long breath. By her look, she wasn't through. Bill expected to hear the arrogant Captain say, "You are mad!" or something of the sort. Instead it was, "Miss Seagrim, you make terrible accusations."

"I tell the truth!"

Bill was wondering how the devil this German captain knew her name when von Krauer said harshly, "Into the house, you men!" His arm moved just about as it would have moved if he had had a whip in his hand and was using it.

They went, slowly. Old Jody stumbled. Pierre kept his shoulders up, head high. No German was going to have the satisfaction of seeing him bowed.

THEY went into the room where Kleber lay on the floor strewn with broken glass. The barefoot men edged cautiously along the walls. Outside orders were given in crisp sharp voices and the hurrying stamp of feet followed. Sailors marched upon the veranda, perhaps being brought up out of the rain. The two young officers in the room stood well back from von Krauer but were diffidently watchful to obey his slightest gesture.

Captain von Krauer looked about, taking his time, noted the wreckage, broken glass, the dead Kleber with bandages about his face. "Who killed him?"

"I keel 'im!" said Harry the Tongan promptly, with lift of scarred face.

Von Krauer stared but said nothing. He went to the doorway of the next room, looked down at the body of Sainan, lying with lashings about legs and arms, then he coldly eyed Malua up and down. "You poisoned him?"

Malua drew back, her flat face dully expressionless.

"Answer me!" Von Krauer's voice brought her to life.

"I do it," said Malua softly, nodding with timid quiver of head.

Miss Sally pointed to the bottle of poison, explained the string attached to the knot out of the plank in the floor. Von Krauer picked it up gingerly, examined it, spoke.

An officer answered on the instant, came with quick stride, saluted, took the bottle with an air of being given treasure to safeguard.

Von Krauer said something in German. The other officer answered at once, placed a chair for Sally, bowed low.

Sally moved toward the chair but her glance fell on the Bible on the floor under the table. She stooped toward it. The young officer bent quickly, picked it up, bowed again low in handing it to her.

"Thank you." She opened the book to the fly leaf, thrust it out to Captain von Krauer. "You can see! Marry him? I wouldn't marry him to save my life or soul! This had been falsely written when Captain Bill came and—"

Von Krauer took the book, peered at the writing. He snapped the Bible closed, spoke to the same officer to whom he had entrusted the bottle. The officer

received the book, again as if getting crown jewels to guard.

Sally sat down, looked expectant. Von Krauer ignored her. He said in a sharp tone, "Jones, show me upstairs."

"This way," said Bill and stared. He gave a jump, hopped, stood on one foot, picked out a piece of glass from the uplifted sole, then went on.

Von Krauer, three paces behind, followed. Three paces behind him two sailors, with rifles in their hands, marched up the stairs.

At the top in the dark narrow hallway, Bill pointed to a closed door.

"Open it!"

Bill opened it, stepped back. The room was dim and a smell like that of mildew came out of it.

Captain von Krauer went in with heavy click of heels. He stopped short, tossed a fold of the cloak over a shoulder, reached up with angular precision and took off his cap. With lighter tread he went nearer to the bed.

The room was small. It was dim and damp. Water seeped through a leak in the roof, fell on the bed. The bed covering was soggy, and there were trickles from blanket hem to the floor. The mats on the floor were not clean. Garments were strewn about as Malua, plundering, had left them.

Marie Thurot Chumley Galtz, half-caste French girl, aged only about twenty-two, lay in death, with a dreadful look on her face, as if the terrors that had harrassed her life lingered still.

"She was on the floor," said Bill. "Died there. Me an' Perry and Miss Sally put her back in bed."

Captain von Krauer did not appear to listen. Bill went on:

"Perry loved her. But her father more or less sold her to Chumley. Kept her pris'ner. He was jealous. Knew she hated him. Galtz kept her pris'ner, too. She hated him. And if you let that Galtz get off after all—"

Captain von Krauer turned with a jerk as if to strike, but gave Bill a scornful look up and down, said in a high tone, "You presume to tell me my duty!" His eyes widened in a sort of outraged astonishment.

"A few facts might help you know your duty," said Bill.

"And it is well known that you, Jones, do not like Germans!"

"Well, in a way, that's right." Bill agreed, not humbly. "They're so damned eager for trade they go about thinkin' fly specks on old maps are islands an' claim 'em 'fore they find 'em. They raise hell with natives, partly 'cause they know you gunboat fellows'll believe their side of the story an' back 'em up. If somebody don't poke 'em on the nose now and then, the damned Dutchmen would think they owned the earth!"

"Silence!" roared von Krauer with upflung arm as if to strike. His bony face was red under the sea-tan and the cold glassy eyes glittered.

Bill bobbed his head, stepped back. Von Krauer pointed and Bill went out. The captain followed. He told a sailor to pull the door to and left him there on guard, then went ahead of Bill with hurrying click of heels on the stairs.

BILL'S heart jumped as if at sudden good news when, coming down the stairs, he heard a familiar booming voice.

Dr. von Siegal had come ashore in a boat behind the first landing party. Fat, ponderous, wet, shaggy, he stood with an arm about Sally.

He came at Bill with both thick arms outstretched, tramping heavily, crushing glass under his great feet.

"My friend, ha!" He almost hugged Bill. "You look bad, my goot friend! But now you half no more troubles. Ho! I swear so hard at dot tamn Galtz und whadt he done dot the goot Gott, to make me shudt oop, send der *Branden-*

burg to Labepo. I go apoard und tell Cabtun von Krauer und den he oop anchor und here we comb! Und do you know from now on I travel only on der man-of-wars. I was nod sick at my stomach—only a leedle!"

"Why the hell's the whole ship's comp'ny ashore to capture us?"

"'Cabture?' Der is no cabture except dot tamn Galtz! Und dot tamn liar comb out in a leedle boat and tell de cabtun you maybe half turned der blacks loose und—"

Dr. von Siegal faced about as his name was called and looked down curiously at the bottle the young officer was holding out.

The doctor fingered the bottle, at first puzzled; then, with belly-deep rumbling and increasing excitement, he began to talk. He waved a great arm about and his deep voice thundered.

Galtz, many months before, had come to him and asked for poison to kill rats. The doctor, always eager to oblige a countryman, had led the way to his cabinet, opened the doors, had taken out this bottle from the back, meaning to give a portion of it to Galtz; but had changed his mind. He had told Galtz, "No, because anything you put poison on to kill rats would be such food as children might pick up and eat. Better you have live rats than dead babies. Poison is not to be scattered."

He then had put back the bottle. He had had no occasion to use strychnine since then. He did not know the bottle was gone. But it was his bottle; and no one but Galtz could have taken it. No one else knew where it was.

Captain von Krauer listened attentively, glassy stare on the excited old doctor's face. Then von Krauer swung back his cloak and chopped down with his hand as if striking something as he snapped a command.

An officer saluted, strode to the door, shouted. Out on the veranda another and hoarser voice shouted. There was stamp of feet, thump of rifle butts as sailors came to attention. Another shout from the hoarse voice, then the tramp of feet.

Two young sailors with bayonets and a square-built, brawny old boatswain marched Galtz into the room.

He came with a humble bow to his thick shoulders and a scared look in his pig-eyes. His appearance was much as if the fat had been beaten out of him with a club. One cheek was lined with the reddish brown scratches of Sally's sharp fingernails. His look trembled about the room.

The brawny boatswain stepped back.

Captain von Krauer fixed his hard glassy eyes on Galtz and spoke as if biting the words and spitting them:

"Liar! Thief! Swindler! Kidnaper! Murderer! Poisoner!"

Galtz reeled back as if being struck. Abject protests stumbled over his thick tongue as he crouched with hands out.

Captain von Krauer cut through the whining pleas: "You poisoned the Englishman, Chumley!" It looked now as if fire, not ice, were behind Captain von Krauer's eyes.

Galtz's jaw was sagging in terrorized astonishment. He had not expected anything like this. He thought only of having to answer Sally Seagrim's accusations. Now, shrinking, he moved back on unsteady feet before the terrible look in the German captain's eyes; but the burly boatswain gave him a push, setting him forward again.

"You," said Captain von Krauer in an awful voice, "poisoned your wife. She lies dead now in the room above. I have seen her!" He lifted his arm, finger upward. The fold of the long blue cloak fell back across his shoulder.

Galtz moved his jaws. Sounds, not words, came in mumbled confusion.

"You signed a forged record of marriage with this young lady whom you had kidnaped!"

Galtz stooped as if about to get down

on his knees. "No—no—no—no—" His mouth worked like an idiot's; foamy slaver appeared on his lips.

Captain von Krauer drew up his tall body rigidly and raised his voice until the thunder of it filled the room:

"You are a German citizen. You have placed this island under the protection of your government. Where the German flag flies, there the justice of the Emperor shall be done. Lieutenant! Have this man taken out and shot!"

Galtz fell to the floor. He groveled. He begged, he wept. He got to his knees, thrust clasped hands up above his bowed head.

Captain von Krauer stared coldly, his face as unmoving as if masked with bronze.

The burly square-built boatswain, helped by the two sailors, lifted Galtz and half carried, half dragged, him from the room. The young lieutenant tramped stiffly after them, his boyish face tense and his eyes straight ahead.

Silence then came upon the room as if at a command. Captain von Krauer folded his arms under the long cloak and looked from the window. The ponderous doctor pulled at his beard, wiped his forehead, glanced over his shoulder and back again as if afraid he might see something he did not want to see. He breathed as if he had been running.

Miss Sally rested an elbow on the arm of a chair, her forehead leaning on an upraised palm, the other hand pressed against her eyes.

Every one was waiting for something. Captain Bill leaned against the wall with head back. His fingers unconsciously rubbed at his waistband. He stared at the bronzed, hard face of the tall German. He was thinking how little you could judge a man by hearsay, or even your own first impressions. The ironhard Captain von Krauer made Bill feel that a lot of things in this topsy-turvy world were, after all, just about as they ought to be.

Pierre, as if remembering that he was a Frenchman in the presence of Germans, folded his arms, held his shoulders up, head high; but no one noticed. Every ear was half turned in tense listening. The rain fell with steady drive and water tumbled from the eaves with the sound of sobbing.

The faint dull rattle of many rifles fired almost together came upon the silence.

THE next morning Cap'n Bill woke up with the great shaggy face of Dr. von Siegal beaming above him.

"*Mein Gott*, Pill, when you are dead you won't sleep much longer than you half done now!"

"Ho there! Now what?" said Bill, good humored, rising to an elbow.

"Ah, first, just a leedle perscribtion, eh? Ah!" The doctor brought a bottle of brandy to view. He stroked it tenderly. "Mit der comblements of Cabtun von Krauer. Only he don't know dot der steward gif it to me!"

The doctor chuckled as he half filled a water glass. Bill drank, shook himself, made a face, said, "Ha! That's good!"

The doctor took back the glass and poured the same sized drink for himself. Then he drew up a chair, sat down, held the empty glass on one broad knee, balanced the bottle on the other. He sighed, shook his head.

"Dot Cabtun von Krauer he ubset my stomach yesterday. Ach! He iss a Prussian. Do this! Do dot! Shoodt him! Whoo! I tell him maype in Shermany they will some troubles make over how he shoodt Galtz. He tell me to mind my own tamn business. Not bad advice, hm? Half some more medicine, Pill. I need id, too."

He poured Bill another drink, had one for himself, replaced the glass on one knee, the bottle on the other.

Bill, beginning to feel alive, sat up,

rubbed his knuckles in his tousled hair, grinned.

"You und me, Cabtun Pill, we are now planters. I don't know one tamn ting aboudt planting. Do you?"

"What the devil?"

"Um, well I will tell you. Galtz he iss dead. He was a Sherman, tamn his soul. His wife she iss dead." Dr. von Siegal shook his head, sighed. "I suggest to our leedle Sally dot we all keep our mouths shudt aboudt der marriage been forged und she inherit this tamn island. But you know how women they are. Stubborn."

Dr. von Siegal held up the bottle, eyeing what was left of the brandy. He poured Bill another drink, draining out the last drop. Bill protested, "There's none for you?"

The doctor's great shaggy face widened with grinning. He reached around in under the tail of his coat and brought out another bottle. "Generous Cabtun von Krauer, only he don't know id—yet. I bet you he will hang dot steward, who iss a fine fellow."

Dr. von Siegal explained that the *Brandenburg* had returned to Labepo, taking Miss Sally, and leaving him, as German consul, in charge of the plantation to make arrangements about property.

"What of Perry?"

"Ah, my friend, how dot fellow love you! When he know dot he must go, he ask to comb here und say gootpy. A sailor mit a knife on his gun comb mit him. Pierre he stand here und look down at you a long time. He bend over und look down at you anoder long time. Der sailor tell me it make him almost cry to see how Pierre seem to want to hug you in gootpy."

Bill nodded solemnly. "Good lad, Perry. But what they going to do with him?"

The doctor shrugged his vast shoulder. "Cabtun von Krauer said as a courtesy to der British Government he must take as prisoner der man dot dey want."

"But Perry stabbed a dead man!"

"Don't I know id!" the doctor growled. "I was oop half the night making out a report. Our leedle Sally says she will go to Fiji herself to tell her story."

"Oh, Perry'll make out. He always does, somehow."

Bill swung his feet over the bed, pulled at his waistband, then absently fingered it. His hand suddenly began feeling quickly all about and he half broke his neck in a craning downward look. The waistband had been neatly ripped.

"Whadt der matter iss, Pill?"

"Matter? Matter! That damned French pickpocket—to tell me good-by! He robbed me while I slept and under the nose of a fool sailor—that wanted to almost weep, eh?" Bill broke into sea-going words. "Pearls, I tell you! That big!" Bill measured off monstrous pearls with forefinger's tip to thumb. "Nearly that big! Like a fool, I'd kept fingerin' 'em just to make sure ever' little while it wasn't all a dream. Perry caught on that I had something hid. He can smell pearls like a shark smells pork. I hope to God they don't hang him because I want the pleasure of breaking his damn neck, and next time—next time I will! Never will I trust—I ought 've known better! I didn't mind losing that schooner because—"

"You want a ship?"

"I'd go skipper on a raft!"

"Goot! Der iss dot ship of Galtz. She need a cabtun. We are business men togeder, hm? Let us half a leedle trink on id, hm?"

They drank, then Bill, all warm and feeling good, said with thoughtful musing: "One thing about old Perry. He may steal your last dollar, and take along your shirt to wrap it in, but when it comes to a fight, he sticks! And after all"—Bill downed the last few drops in his glass—"is it his fault if you aren't

smart enough to watch out for 'im?"

"Bearls," said the doctor with tolerant scorn, waggling his head as if brushing them out of his way, "dey are nodding. But shells, *ach!* We will hundt shells togeder, hm? Py Gott, I am willing dot I pe seasick for to find my shells!"

"Shells it is!" said Bill.

"Now comb on, Pill. Breakfast iss bein' godt for you und me. A chicken apiece, und some sausages—mit Cabtun von Krauer's comblements! Oh, he will hang dot fine steward. Dot girl Malua iss cooking id und—"

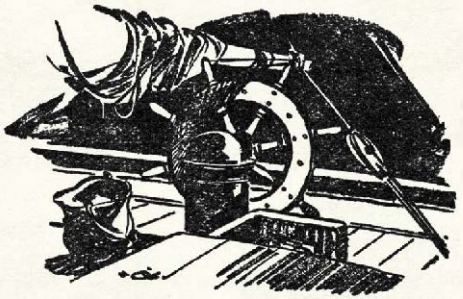
"Yeah, but see here! You sure she didn't keep out some more of that poison?"

"I am never sure aboudt women," said the doctor complacently. "But I don't go mitout my breakfast for the fear of a leedle poison!"

A few days later a cutter came over from Labepo with supplies for the plantation, and brought news that Black Pierre, not choosing to stand trial and risk his neck on the incredible fact of having stabbed a dead man, had taken advantage of the liberty permitted him as a nominal prisoner on the *Brandenburg* and jumped overboard in the rain the night she anchored off Labepo. Sharks either got him, or he got safely to shore and into the hills where he had friends.

Other news was that the old chink pearl dealer had left the island, retiring, it was said, from business and returning to China.

Also, old Seagrim, rather than face the disgrace involved in the written confession made out and signed for Dr. von Siegal, had cut his throat.



WHO'S BOSS AROUND HERE?

By Edgar L. Carson

THERE are two things in this world that cause me a heap of misery. One is my rheumatism, which is plenty bad at times. The other is Hungry Bill Baker, who is a heap of human hell on two flat feet. After we had been together for years and had worked on construction jobs from Alaska to Mexico, Big Bull MacDonald makes me head ramrod of a camp-buildin' outfit on the Skeena River. Big Bull is the *kanawah tyee* of a contractin' concern that is buildin' a railroad from the West Coast through the Rocky Mountains to hook up with another section that runs through as far as Montreal.

Now this is a real chore and it calls for real men. Bull had herded me around for years and even the handicap of bein' paired off with an accident of birth like Hungry Bill could not keep him from seein' that I was the stuff they make bosses out of, so he got busy and made me one. Then, right at the start I had to go and make a mistake.

My first official act, so to speak, should have been to send Hungry off on foot to borrow a tomahawk from the Sultan of India or some other section boss twice as far away. Instead of that I let him hang around the camp as a sort of glorified bull-cook whose principal work was to see that nothing that could be eaten was ever throwed away.

There are a few other little jobs he is supposed to do just to keep on the payroll but they are pretty much neglected. He can't get over rememberin' the days when we were sort of partners and persists in imposin' on my meek and lowly disposition.

Except for this, the job is a snap.

The river steamer would take us up to where the new camp was to be built and shove her nose against the bank. Then half a dozen axmen would jump ashore and slash away enough of the jungle to let us unload our outfit. Then she pulls out and leaves us there, about twenty of us, to build a village where a couple of hundred men can live while they build a railroad for a few miles on each side of it to connect with the other sections that are being built at the same time.

With logs for the walls, cedar to make shakes for the roofs and clay for chinkin', I had everything needed to put up any number of real, cozy homes. My gang was good, made up of axmen, swampers, buck beaver, corral dog, powder monkey, blacksmith and cook.

Thus you can see I am settin' pretty at Cemetery Bend without a thing on earth to aggravate me except a few billion mosquitoes, a crazy supply clerk in Prince Rupert and Hungry Bill Baker. I always speak of Bill last in namin' over my troubles, for if I happen to think of him first I forget all the rest.

You see, with the flies, you can cuss and kill 'em. With the supply clerk, you can cuss and threaten to kill him, but with an accident of birth like Bill you can't do a darn thing. Killin' is what he has comin' to him and the only cure for what ails him, but it's a safe bet that you'd be heavily fined and maybe get a jail sentence throwed in, for these darn Canadians are sort of fussy-like about their laws.

The supply clerk is just plain dumb and the last time I was in Rupert I noticed that some mattocks or grubbin' hoes were not with my order when we were ready to start back up-river. The boat was just pullin' out, and seein' him standin' on the dock I ran to the side and yelled for him to send me up half a dozen.

He yelled back:

"What?"

I yelled back:

"Mattocks, dammit, mattocks."

He yells back:

"We ain't got the dammit kind."

I yells back:

"Never mind what kind. Send any kind you've got."

He yells back that it would be O. K. which I knew was a damn' lie and sure enough, for when the boat came up on her next trip she brought me a little package that weighed about a pound. In it were six pieces of heavy wire turned up short at the end. We held a meetin' over them and by and by one of the bunch recognized them as the things his grandmother used when she made rag rugs. That blasted son of an idiot thought I was askin' for "mat hooks."

Well, you can get along with and without lots of things in the wilderness but you can't use a crochet hook for a mud hoe so I sent Hungry back down river to get what we wanted and then kill the clerk.

"That trip suits me fine," he says. "That new eatin' house will just about be open now and a feller might be able to tie into a pretty good feed."

"Hungry," says I, "You sure do cherish them innards of yours a heap, don't you?"

To which he agrees and departs.

IN four days he was back bringin' the grub hoes, sixty-five men and a black eye. We had the camp pretty near finished but we needed a few days more for extras and I couldn't understand why Big Bill had dumped this bunch on me before I was ready. I asked Hungry about it but he didn't seem to know. He couldn't or wouldn't even tell me how he got the bunged-up eye. All he knew was that there was a swell dump down there where you could get a big feed of mulligan and beans for four bits. Hungry was always delicate-like about his grub.

I asked some of the gang if they knew where they were goin' and who sent 'em,

but they had lost their boss and had just got off the boat at the place where their tickets said. Being just plain railroad stiffs without a ramrod they were naturally plum bushed.

"All right," I told them. "I'll put you all to work clearin' right-of-way in the mornin' and you can do that till I find out where you come from."

Then I went into the small cabin which I used as an office and a sort of storeroom for tools and things.

I had just got set down in my chair, which is a cut-off of a cedar log, and hit my pipe when in busts the cook, Gutrobber Joe.

"Look here, Wildhorse," he wails, "how am I goin' to take care of this gang with no helper or nothin'? You sure don't expect me to cook for all them extra men for the same as I was gettin' before."

"When did you 'cook' for anybody up here?" I asks, mean-like. "All you've done so far is to spoil good grub and pollute clean water, so what in hell is raspin' your gizzard anyhow?"

"I only hired to cook for twenty men and now you're shovin' pretty near a hundred on me and I hain't got the stren'th to cook for that many men for the same pay."

So that was it. A hold-up when he thought he had me in a pinch. I rose to me feet, pickin' up an ax handle as I did so, and got between him and the door.

"Joe," says I softly, heftin' my club sort of lovin'-like, "don't you think that as a favor to me you could stand it for a day or so?"

"I dunno," he answers, sneakin' a look at the window and seein' that there is no escape that way.

"And Joe," still more soft-like and lookin' him over as if to find a real tender spot, "don't you think you could feel a heap more feeble after you and I had a real quarrel?"

"I guess I can stand it for a day or so," he grunts.

"Then jump into it," I yells as loud as I could howl. "Get to hell back into that kitchen and remember you would be a lot less bother to me if you was in your bunk hurt bad than you would be goin' around here snarlin' like a mangy lynx. Now you git."

With that I opened the door and as he scooted through I fetched him a spank with the flat of the ax handle that sounded like a rifle shot.

So much for that mutiny, I thought, as I sat down again to go over some time sheets. When Big Bill put me, Wildhorse Pete McGuire, in for boss, he sure showed good judgment in pickin' a man for the job.

Fifteen minutes after there came a knock at the door which was then shoved open and three of the new crew came in. I looked up at them and spotted more trouble. Determined to meet them in a sort of friendly spirit I asks:

"What do you dam', lousy, flop-joint bums want?"

"We want to have a talk with you," says one walloper, who had "Tacoma tough" written all over him.

"Well, what's stoppin' you? God knows your homely mouth is big enough."

"You're the boss, ain't you?" asks another.

"Leave off that 'ain't you' and you've got it right. I am."

"Well, you said you was goin' to put us all to swampin' in the mornin'. There is only ten of us that's swampers. The rest of us is muckers, drillers, fallers and tie hacks and we ain't agoin' to do no swampin'. That's not what we hired for."

"That suits me fine," I says as I shooed them out of the office.

I stood in the door with the gang bunched up where they could hear good and yelled for the cook. When he showed up at the door of the dining room I hollered out good and loud:

"You won't need to get supper for only ten besides the regular gang tonight. There's only ten swampers in this new crew and the rest are not goin' to work, which means we don't have to feed them."

Joe blinked his eyes for a minute and then yells back; "All right, boss. That's sure good news to me."

"But we've got to stay here till the next boat comes down," objects one honyock, "and we'll have to eat."

"Eat away," I told him. "Eat hearty. I'm not stoppin' you from eatin'. Just remember that you're not eatin' at this camp."

"But where will be get our grub?" asks another.

"I'm not even tryin' to answer that one," I says. "Now get away from here, for I have to do some heavy thinkin' to help out the general manager down in Montreal."

I went back to the office and got busy with my book-keepin' which never was a gift to me, but in about half an hour a feller pokes his head in the door and says:

"We want to know what we are goin' to do. We tried to buy some grub from the cook, but he won't sell us any. He says you'd kill him if he did."

"Well," says I, admirin'-like, "Joe may not be a hell of a good cook, but he's truthful a heap."

"But what are we goin' to do?" he asks again, worried-like.

"Go out and shut the door," I told him, which he did.

AFTER thinkin' matters over I slipped down to the stable and sent the corral dog out on the job with a message to my crew and when they ganged up for supper I saw that my wishes had been carried out. Every man was carryin' some sort of a weapon, the collection coverin' everything from hog-legs to pick handles. They gathered round the table while the newcomers gathered round the door and while my boys shoveled big knife-loads of grub into their faces the outsiders tried to make a hearty meal on sniffs and smells. Then the eaters started in praisin' the grub till even Gutrobber, dumb as he is, knew they were lyin'.

When the meal was over my gang came over and bunched up around the office door, tellin' how good they felt and how they would sure enjoy seein' anybody start something. The new bunch stood this for about half an hour and then one man came up, meek as a marmot, and asked if he could speak to me. I knowed the signs of surrender, so I told him yes.

He said that he had been sent to tell me that if I would give them their supper and breakfast they would go to work in the morning at whatever I wanted them to. Just to be mean, I told him that supper was all over now and that Joe was such a crab I was afraid he would not give them any. Then Hungry had to stick his snout into the trough and say that if they will give Joe four bits apiece for his extra work he will go over and ask him how about it.

I kinda wondered what made him so tender-hearted all at once, but the idea was a good one and gave me a chance to clean up the dumps, so I told him to go ahead. Right away he was back with the joyful news that Gutrobber would have a meal ready for them in half an hour.

This did not surprise me any. In spite of his failin' stren'th he wasn't passin' up no chances to make over twenty-five slugs in easy money and when they went into eat Hungry sneaks in with them and has a second meal for the evening. This is what made him so ready to help them out.

He thought he was pretty foxy and kept on thinkin' he was a meal ahead till pay-day when he found I had held out four bits from his pay for Joe, just

the same as the others. Then he got mad and called me names. Eatin' is a sacred duty with him. Payin' is different.

Well, that trouble was settled and the new gang went to work next morning just as they had agreed to do. That's one thing about a railroad stiff. He won't loaf on the job. He either works or he quits. We went ahead with our work and, exceptin' six or seven fist fights every night and an attempt at stabbin' by a foreign feller, everything was as peaceful as any one had a right to expect.

TWO days after, the *Distributer* poked her nose against the bank, threw off a man and his baggage and *chow-chowed* on up the river as though she did not want to speak to anybody on account of bein' ashamed of some dirty trick she had played. I went on with some figuring I was doin', not thinkin' much about it, for I knew Hungry would soon be in with all the news. He always watches every boat that comes to see if she is bringing up any extra grub. Some time after I heard somebody comin' up the trail yellin' for all he was worth. It was the passenger who had been put ashore and he was demandin' in no uncertain tones:

"Where is all my damn men? Where in hell is all my gang?"

"Mr. Timothy T. Trouble, himself, in person, has just arrived," I told myself, confidential-like, and it turned out that I was dead right as usual.

The noise went off into the timber for a while and about half an hour after, my door bangs open and in comes one of the hardest lookin' cusses I ever saw and I have been railroad buildin' for over twenty years. He was a fairly big man, well built and not too badly dressed but his head was bare and his hair a-flyin', his eyes were bloodshot and glarin', while his lips was skinned back off his teeth in a way that made him look like a trapped wolf. He bats his eyes at me a couple of time like a hop-toad and then spits on the floor.

"Who in hell do you think you are?" he asks.

"That's none of your damn business, you lousy, stinkin' rumrotted bum," I tells him, polite-like, and at the same time reachin' for my ax handle.

"Is your name Wildhorse Pete?" he snarls.

"No, it ain't," I tell him. "I'm just called that. Who in blazes does your whisky-soaked, maggoty brain make you think you are?"

"Me? I'm Howlin' Jim MacKenzie and I'm boss of this camp."

"So-o-o"—I drawls, mean-like. "When did you hire yourself?"

"Big Bull sent me up here to build this station but I missed the boat and the gang got away on me. This is Cemetery Bend, for Captain Gardiner told me so. Now I want to know what you done with my men."

I was just goin' to say something sarcastic when, out in the jungle, we heard a sound that was meant for singin', and from the words and music I knew it was Skookum Dan, the big Siwash axman who had come up with the last bunch. He was whoopin' at the top of his voice which was some height.

"E-e-e-e-e Y-a-a-a-ah!
Nika kapshwala mika papa sackalooks,
Nika haylo killapi,
E-e-e-e-e Ya-a-a-a-ah."

"Good lord!" I groaned. "Here comes a hard drunk to handle. That Indian has got hold of some hootch and the blast is due to go off any minute."

The singer came closer, still chanting his boast of stealing the pants off of somebody's father and refusing to give them up, until at last he came out into the clearing, and a noble sight he was. His dark face was all one big smile with this here "joy of living" and

he was waving a quart bottle in each hand. The other souse in the office, who had just been telling me about his bein' boss, fetched one of the howls that made him famous and started out a-yellin':

"My booze! My booze! That damned Siwash has swiped my whole stock."

I followed sudden-like to see what was goin' to happen and I sure saw plenty. Just as MacKenzie got close to Dan he made a pass at him with his fist that misses him by about seven feet, and then fell on his face. The Indian fell on the back of Mac's head and sat there while he reached for a sizable stick that lay handy. With this he gave him several bats on the bean that put him to sleep good and plenty. I rushed over to stop him from taking the white man's scalp, but it wasn't necessary.

Dan still sat on the prostrate form of his victim, as the newspapers would put it, picked up the bottles he had dropped, took a drink first out of one and then the other. Then he resumed his chant as to how he had killed the guy whose father owned the britches he stole. It was sure some saga.

I came up with a grin on my face that didn't belong there and asked the singer for a drink, thinkin' I would thus get hold of his bottles. He gave me both of them tellin' me that if one didn't suit to try the other. They were potlach, a present for me, since he had *hiyu*—plenty—more. To prove it he got up off of MacKenzie's head and went back down the trail to get them.

I called the cook and the corral dog and after we had poured about a barrel of water on the victim he revived enough to cuss and threaten us, so I knew that my worst fears were realized and that he would live, probably for years to come. I told the boys to put him to bed in the stable, so they packed him off with him mutterin' something about showing us who was boss around here.

That was one wild night on the Skeena River, for after supper Skookum kept gettin' drunker and drunker till he had infected about twenty others. I wondered how this could be, till I found out from Hungry that he had trailed down MacKenzie's booze cache of some two dozen bottles and was sellin' them to the rest of the stiffs.

Men were fighting everywhere, some because they had too much hootch and some because they had none at all. I thought at the time that it was strange that MacKenzie was not in the mix-up but I found out afterwards that the boys had tied him up in the stable with a couple of pack ropes.

I hid the two bottles Skookum had given me, for if that bunch had ever got wise to it that I was holding out on them my life would not have been worth a busted moccasin string.

IT WAS long after midnight before things had quieted down so that sleep was possible, and even then the hush would be busted wide open by the yowls of some hootch hound who had got separated from the rest of the pack and got lost in the jungle. For this reason I was feeling kinda peevish next morning, when in walks the cause of all this misery, his face lookin' like the river ice breaking up after a hard winter. After giving me a couple of sour looks he grunts:

"I'm feeling all right now."

"Well, what about it?" I asked. "Am I supposed to give three cheers or bust out sobbin'? What in blazes do I care how you feel?"

"I mean I'm ready to take over the gang."

"Oh, you are, are you? How nice of you. Now, I'm giving you your choice of gettin' out on that right-of-way and goin' to swampin' or takin' the next boat down-river. How does that suit you?"

"Do you think you have the say of it?" ugly-like.

I got to my feet slow and deliberate and says:

"That has all been talked over and settled. Now get to hell out of my sight."

"But that's my gang that come up on the boat. Big Bull sent me up to put in this station. I'm in no shape to fight you with this hangover but I'll go you one round for luck."

With that he makes a swipe at me that made for murder, but I dodged back and grabbed up my ax handle. His swing threw him off his balance and he was pretty wabbly on his pins besides, so before he could get himself set again I grabbed him round the neck, threw him face down on the table and started to paddle him proper with the flat end of my weapon. I would have sure blistered him right but he turned sick at his stomach. As soon as he got to feelin' a little better I took one of the bottles I had cached and went out to him.

"Look here," I said, "take a good shot of this. Or better yet, take the bottle and get yourself in shape for tomorrow morning, and then we can have another talk."

He took it and looked at me kinda queer-like for a minute. Then he said:

"You'd be all right if you wasn't crazy." With that he walked away into the timber.

Dang the fellow! Somehow he had said the very thing I was thinking about him.

I called him into the office next morning and asked him what kind of work he was used to doing around construction camps, for it was beginning to dawn on me that he had something more to him than a common stiff. He only sneered at me and told me any time I got stuck to call on him and he would take hold where I let go, so I told him to go out on the job and do anything he wanted to so long as he kept out from under my feet.

That night he did not show up till all the others were fed, and there was no mistaking the signs, that man had been fightin' and fightin' hard. I called Hungry in and asked him if he knew anything about it.

"You bet I do," he grinned. "That crazy porcupine thinks he is Big Bull in person. He started out by droppin' into the blacksmith shop and, after telling Hank he was the new foreman, he began to give a few orders. Hank gave him only one, that was to get to hell out of there. Just about then was when Howling James got that big hole in the rear of his overalls for Hank got after him with a red-hot iron and talked him into going away.

"From there he wanders back to the cook shack and begins to question Gut-robber as to why his cookin' was so damn rank. Joe got after him with a kettle of boiling water, which argument led to his prompt departure.

"Then he went out to where they were burning brush and after he had licked two fellers for not doin' what he told 'em the rest of the gang was goin' to throw him in the fire. Just then I came along and talked them out of it or they would have sure as hell done it."

"Mebby that would have taught him to mind his own business," I guessed.

"Not that whiskey-jack. He thinks he is boss and nothin' will change him. All day long he has just gone from place to place, givin' orders and gettin' into fights. He has been beat up and knocked down. He has been rolled on rocks and wallered in mud and it don't make any difference. He still persists that he is boss and, Wildhorse"—impressive-like—"let me tell you something. He knows his business. He's got more savvy on railroad buildin' than any foreman I was ever fired by."

"That may be," I admitted, "but he's got to back trail on that boss stuff. I'm boss here and there's no room for two. I'll just have a talk with that man and if I can't convince him any other way

I'll hafta use a splittin' maul on him."

"That won't be necessary," says Hungry, "for the boys are goin' to gang up on him this evening and when they get done with him he won't want to be boss of anything. Well, I think before I roll in I'll drop over to the kitchen and see if I can talk Joe out of a little bite to eat."

"Hungry," says I, kinda glad to change the subject, "it's too darn bad you ain't fond of grasshoppers. You would sure be one popular bird over in the wheat belt."

IT WAS about half past nine that evening and the sun was just droppin' behind the mountains across the river, throwing a light on a glacier that was slippin' down the mountainside and giving it a glitter that made it look like nothing else on earth. The river was a sheet of glass a mile wide, shattered here and there by the splash of a jumpin' salmon.

Little sharp peaks stuck up through snow-white blankets looking as if they had been baby mountains that had been tucked into bed for the night. The shining water reflected a dozen shades of green from the river's banks and I felt rested just by lookin' at such a picture. It seemed a beauty that nothing could spoil, a peace that nothing could disturb.

I was wrong, as usual. From the bunkhouse came a low growling that grew into a roar. Two windows crashed and bundles of men came spilling out onto the ground, only to separate into units and scuttle for the underbrush like scared rabbits. The door busted open and poured out a human cataract that spread out and flowed away like the waters from a torn-out dam.

Then came Howling Jim MacKenzie wavin' a young cannon and demandin' victims. A big Irishman started for the underbrush and Jim cut down on him. The turf-cutter grabbed his hip pockets with both hands and dove into a clump of ferns. A second shot fired at a form behind a water barrel fetched a cockney curse about bein' struck pink and a third one brought a reply from a ski-jumper in pure Scandinavian.

A dark form shot past me so fast I could hear it whiz and from the war-whoops that came drifting back I gathered that even Skookum Dan did not feel any too safe around there. That sot was sure no respecter of nationalities.

I jumped inside for my rifle, for if that crazy soak was goin' to start gun-play he had to be stopped, since, drunk or sober, he could certainly shoot. I knew I could wing him if he gave me half a chance and if I held a little too close and made a bull's eye, that would be all right with me. My gun was only a .22 bnt she was filled with long specials and good up to a hundred yards. Hungry met me at the door and pushed me back inside.

"Let me go," I yells. "I got to cripple him before he kills somebody."

"That's all right," laughed Hungry. "I found his gun this afternoon and took the bullets out of the shells. He's only shootin' blanks."

"Blanks hell!" I howled, "he's hit three men already."

"Not serious," says he. "Them's just putty gobs. I plugged the shells with some we had left over when we put in the windows."

"Just the same, we've got to capture him before the gang gets wise and kills him," I argues.

"Don't worry. They had their chance in the bunkhouse and he cleaned up on about fifteen of them before he even went for his gun. We may have to hole him up after dark but as long as they can see him they won't come near him."

We went outside and saw MacKenzie with his gun, now empty, in his hand. I asked him what he wanted.

"A box of .38's" he told me, "and don't stand there looking like a hip-spavined,

sway-backed pack mule, but jump, damn you jump!"

I batted him over the head with the rifle barrel, feeling sorry at the time it was not a crow bar. We took his gun away from him and tied him up till he cooled off some, which was about daylight next morning. Hungry coaxed the gang out of the underbrush and I kept MacKenzie under the bed till after they had their breakfast and gone to work. Then I dragged him out and had a talk with him.

"Look here," I told him, "I've been patient and gentle with you so far, because I laid all your craziness to hootch. There is always a chance that a drunkard will sober up some day and have a little sense, but God pity a fool. My gang will be through here tomorrow and we are going to move on up the canyon. I'm goin' to leave you here with the others and if they kill you after I'm gone that will suit me fine, but for today you keep close to the camp. After breakfast you can help the skinner bring that dynamite up from the river bank to the powder house and if a box of it explodes while you're sittin' on it at least one of my troubles will be over."

He didn't say anything when I gave him that job, but I think he knew I was testing his nerve. Packing powder in a springless wagon over a rough and rocky road has been known to make some people just a shade restless.

It never disturbed that cuss a particle. The teamster, or skinner as we call him, was a freckled-faced Irishman with just enough sense to take care of his team in the stable and let the horses do the brain-work on the job. The first load he kept his team at a fast walk, never easin' for chuck-holes and the way he jolted that powder around was enough to make anybody sit light in the wagon.

Jim never said a word, just hung on at the rough spots and kept his seat as best he could. The next load the skinner put the horses on the trot and when he struck a stone he bounced two boxes clear off the load. Jim got off and loaded them on again without even battin' an eye.

That got Rusty, the skinner, on his mettle. He started off with the next load swinging his whip till he got the team on the gallop. They hit a stump, the wagon jerked back and the tongue dropped out of the neck-yoke. Then the team bolted, draggin' the wagon every other which way. The plowing tongue slewed it around till the whole outfit left the road, tore a hundred yards through the underbrush and went over the bank of the river!

All the camp crew made for the scene of the wreck as fast as our feet would take us, the cook with a cleaver, the corral dog with a pitchfork and me with a long rope I had caught up as I left the office. One look over the bank showed us the skinner still on top of the load and the wagon on all four wheels. Rusty was hangin' onto the brake pole and yellin' bloody murder.

MacKenzie was braced knee-deep under the bank and hangin' onto the team. He had managed to get the lines around the neck-yoke and, with their feet barely touchin' bottom, was holding the horses' heads up-stream. I called to the skinner to catch my rope so we could pull him ashore, when MacKenzie yells:

"To hell with that fool. Get that rope on these horses. The current may break this leather any minute."

He was right. The skinner could hang on where he was for any length of time but the team was in real danger. I dropped the rope to Mac, who made it fast to the neck-yoke and the three of us on the bank took a pull on it to relieve the strain.

Then Howling Jim MacKenzie took his life in his hands and went down into that mess of foaming, icy water and lashing steel-shod hoofs. Somehow he managed to pull the king-pin on the

whipple-tree letting the horses loose from the wagon and after that there was nothing to it to lead them down to a sloping place in the bank and bring them safe ashore. Five minutes later Rusty was safe on the bank with us.

Being soaked anyhow, Mac next caught up the end of the rope and went back into the river. A couple of turns and a knot or two made it fast to the end of the tongue. A spell of hard pulling and the load was up on the bank with nothing lost and very little broken. I started for Mackenzie to shake hands with him and take back everything I ever said about him, but he shut me up mighty quick.

"YOU are a hell of a company man, you are," he growled. "Startin' to get that damn fool Irishman out first. Don't you know that them horses are worth all of eight hundred dollars up here, while you can get a bunk-house full of the likes of him in Seattle for four dollars a head?" Then he turned to the teamster and roared: "Get that team movin' before they chill you blasted, stable-swampin' idiot! Who in blazes ever told you that you were a skinner?"

With that he turned and walked off to the bunkhouse to change his clothes, leavin' me willing to donate a hundred dollars to the Salvation Army or any other secret society if I could only think of something to say back to him.

The next day at noon saw the camp building finished and with the *Distributer* on the way up, I figured to take my gang and go on to the canyon, where I would find orders waiting me. After the way he had handled things the day before—yes, and to be honest, feeling that he was the best man for the job—I decided to leave MacKenzie in charge when we pulled out.

Right there is where I struck a snag. The gang, to a man, refused to stay. Some of them were afraid of him and the others saw a chance to go on a small drunk in Kitselas with the money they had earned at Cemetery Bend. It was an excuse to quit and what more could a bohunk ask? There were lots of jobs to be had so what the hell? Let's quit. And they did.

The boat came around the bend and tied up but we were all so busy packing that we did not get down to the bank to meet her. Only MacKenzie was there and he sprang aboard as soon as she made the landing. Our camp-building outfit was all there and when we saw the deck hands packing it aboard we knew there was no hurry. Mac spoke a few words to Captain Gardiner, who nodded as though agreeing with something and then Mac came back ashore.

As we came down the trail with me in the lead, Hungry at my heels and the rest of the bunch straying along like a bunch of caribou feeding, I noticed that the whole crew of the steamer was lined along the rail on the shoreward side, but I thought nothing of it at the time. About a hundred yards from the bank I came face to face with MacKenzie, who held up his hand for me to stop.

"What's wanted?" I asks.

"You don't think you're goin' without settlin' up with me, do you?" he sneers.

"Settle with you?" I yelps. "I don't owe you anything. You're boss now, so you can put in your time to suit yourself."

"Do you think that's all?" Again he sneers, mean-like.

"What more do you want?" I asks.

"Just this. You haven't got your ax handle and I haven't got any sick hangover and right here is where we settle up for the clubbin' you gave me the first day I came."

"The hell you say," says I, as I made to push past him.

The crew of the steamer began to snicker and make remarks and I saw I had to give him a whalin' no matter how much I hated to do it after the way he

had saved that team. I set down my war-bag and slowly peeled off my coat. He waited till I was ready and then yells out:

"All right, Mr. Tame Horse Petie. Say when!"

I was about twenty pounds heavier than he was and a couple of inches taller, and I thought I could stand off and box with him till he saw I was too much for him and would give up, so I dropped into what I had been taught was a sparrin' crouch. That's where I made my first mistake. I should have dodged around him and run like hell.

In place of standing up to me he jumped eleven feet six inches in the air and kicked me three times in the wishbone, twice goin' up and once comin' down. I saw this was not goin' to get me anywhere on the road to victory, so I made a jump and clinched him. This was another mistake for the instant I got hold of him it felt as if some one had dumped a wagon-load of bob-cats on me and they had all lit a-clawin'.

How that man could punch—and-kick—and claw—and bite—and do every damn thing to make the other fellow feel uncomfortable. I only held him about three seconds till I could break away and jump back to get my wind.

This gave him time off to note that Hungry was right at the front giving me a lot of bum advice, so he reached over and handed him a swat so hard that he was seven feet behind the man in the rear rank when he hit the ground.

Then he turned on me again to where I had been standin' stupidly waitin' for him instead of takin' a running jump into the river and dyin' peaceful. He came at me and mussed me up till I couldn't see whether I was hittin' at him or a stump across the clearing.

Up to this he had never said a word, just kept chawin' on something he had in his mouth, a handful of horse-shoe nails, probably, but now he lets out a yell of:

"Last round!"

And them was the last words I was to hear for quite some time.

I found out afterwards that it wasn't a blacksmith's anvil shot from a cannon that hit me in the belly button and damn near killed me. It was just his sprightly way of throwin' a handspring and landin' there with both feet, but I can earnestly testify that so far as feelings were concerned there was practically no difference in the sensation.

Neither did a four-foot cottonwood tree fall on me in the last act and put me to sleep. That was only his playful pastime of jumpin' clear over my head and battin' me back of the ear when he lit behind me, but it answered the purpose equally well and I took no interest in the subsequent proceedings for the reason that I did not know what was going on—or care.

When I came back to my senses he was standin' with one foot on my neck coaxin' the gang to stay on the job, wavin' his hog-leg absentminded-like and pleadin' with them earnestly.

"You lousy, lazy lumps of the scum of hell," he was howlin', "you tell me you're goin' to quit? Why, you haven't even started to work yet—but you're goin' to. Where do you think you're goin' and how are you goin' to get there? The *Distributer* happens to be a company boat and the captain has his orders from me not to litter up his decks with filth like you, so he won't take a damn man of you aboard. Besides"—wavin' his cannon—you will have to pass me first and that is goin' to be some chore. Now pack them war-bags back to the bunk house and get out on the job."

"But we are camp-builders," protested one of my old gang. "We are not construction men."

"I'm the one to settle that argument," said Mac, grim-like, "and I can tell you that if you ain't now you damn soon will be. You are all stayin' with the rest."

"What? Me too?" bleats Hungry, with

visions of a horrible fate starin' him in the stomach.

"No, not 'you too' or even you one-half. I wouldn't have a human maggot like you around. You look to me like something that had intended to happen and then didn't. You make me think of something I saw perched on the stool of a lunch counter down in Rupert one time when I had been drinkin'. It looked so rotten that I thought I was gettin' the horrors, so I took a poke at it to see if it was real, and say—" glarin' a lot fiercer—

But he was talkin' to empty space for Hungry, fearful of recognition and remembering his black eye, was aboard the boat, having cleared the fourteen feet between the rail and the bank without using the gang-plank.

Then MacKenzie made his last appeal to the gang.

"Get a-goin' you lizards," he howled, "and if any man hasn't got back on the job in fifteen minutes I'll be comin' around to see what's keepin' him."

They got and from the manner of their gettin' it was a safe bet that all were present and accounted for at the end of the time limit or even a little sooner.

I was on my feet by this time, somewhat shaky but able to travel and MacKenzie faced me and spoke to me as a human being for the first time since we met.

"I told you once before," he began, "that you was all right only you was crazy, and maybe this will help you to get over it some, I dunno. When you come to look at your homely face in the glass you will see I haven't put any marks on it that soap and water won't take off. This means that you don't show any signs of havin' been in a mix-up so when you meet the Big Bull at the canyon, which you are goin' to do when you get there, you can give him any old story you want to. What I mean is that, when you are makin' your explanation of what happened to your gang, it will be all right with me if you want to cut loose and lie like hell."

Which, when the said meetin' took place, is exactly what I did.

HAROLD TITUS

WOLF TRAIL

WHAT are you going to say to a man like that? A man you know has come into the country just to kill himself and who's lost his nerve? You tell me. I don't know.

I'll tell you what I said. I said nothing. Nothing, net. Not a word. And it was just as well I didn't try. There's a lot of things you don't talk about to the average stranger, and his plan for suicide is one of them. Besides, Danny Arthur wasn't average.

I just happened to be there, see? I'm been making a patrol out along Ten Cent and on the way back I drove down to old Ben's shanty. I'd been looking in on Ben every chance I had, being some worried about him. He was old and getting feeble fast.

So here was this car with an Illinois license and the back seat full of fishing tackle and, being a conservation officer, it was my job to look the driver over.

"Company, Ben?" I asked.

"Yeah. Young dude dropped in an hour ago," Ben said.

That wasn't anything unusual, Ben having a boarder. He'd been taking in

hunters and fishermen for the last two-three years. There's no great living in wolf trapping and Ben needed all the dimes he could scrape for tea and flour.

So I sat down to wait for this outsider and listened to Ben complain about how his daughters kept writing for him to come and live with them. In a few minutes I saw my man coming up through the alders and knew right away something was wrong with him. His face was as white as suet and his eyes—they were dark—as big as dollars, but the thing that got you was the way he walked. He walked slow and stiff-like. I remember thinking that a man would walk to the gallows, that way.

"Son," Ben said, "this 's th' game warden."

I said something meant to be pleasant and then said I supposed he had his fishing license.

"License?" he said, sort of blank. "Why—why, no," he said. "I suppose I'd better have one," he said.

Now, he didn't act like a man who'd planned to try to get by without a license. It was something different from that and when I got out my license book I was doing plenty of wondering, mister.

Ben went inside to start supper. I found out the lad's name was Daniel Arthur, that he was twenty-five and that he lived in Chicago. He told me that much but I found out other things, too. The lines on his face and the puffs under his eyes told me that Daniel Arthur had been living too fast for even a husky young man and the way his mouth twitched was a sign that the marks went deeper than his skin. Besides, his mind wasn't on what I said or he said. His mind was on something more important than a fishing license.

First thing that popped into my head was that maybe he was a gangster on the run but that idea popped right out again. He was a gentleman, if you understand. It stuck out all over him. And he wasn't afraid of anything, either, in the way you'll be afraid of something that may catch up with you. Something worse than fear, I figured, was riding him hard.

I tried to make a little talk.

"Stopped here with Ben before?" I asked.

"No," he said. "This place just happened to be at the end of the road I happened to take," he said.

He laughed after that, and I'm here to tell you that laugh was the queerest thing I'd ever heard. It sent a creep up along my back. He sat there with his elbows on his knees looking out across the river to the swamp beyond but seeing nothing, if you get me. Just looking and seeing nothing and now and then swallowing as a man will when his throat's dry.

I made three-four more tries to get him talking but it was no go, so I went inside to help Ben. I was worried. For Ben, I mean. I didn't like the notion of him being out there alone with a man in the state young Arthur was. I tried to find out what he knew, if anything, but he didn't rise to any of my hints so I figured the less the old-timer suspected the better, and asked him if he could put me up for the night, which he'd done plenty times before.

HE COULD, and that's how I happened to be in on a danged important evening in the life of young Danny Arthur.

We'd had our supper and were sitting inside, the mosquitoes being bad. We didn't have a light and the moon was shining, so when Danny walked out and stood looking down at the river I could see every move he made.

Maybe you'll wonder why I didn't jump up or yell or do any of the things a man might do when Danny did what he did. But it takes longer to tell it than it took to happen. That's why I just sat there and nobody ever knew what I'd seen.

He stood there, I say, looking down at the river. His big shoulders were slack and he seemed to sway a little from side to side.

Then all of a sudden one hand whipped into a pocket, came out with a gun and shoved the muzzle against the side of his head. I could have yelled, then. I could have jumped up. But a thing like that sort of numbs a man for just a second and by the time that second was past he was lowering the gun.

His hand went down slow and kind of jerky. He moved his head and seemed to be staring at the gun. Then he gave it a toss and I heard it plunk into the water.

It was right then that Lop Ear howled and old Ben said:

"Listen!"

I knew it was Lop Ear. Anybody who'd ever heard him would know his howl. It was deeper than most and richer, you might say, and carried further and any other time I'd have gotten a kick out of hearing it, but not that night. Not with Danny Arthur coming back to the cabin, sort of half-shuffling as a man will when he's all in.

"He's back!" old Ben was saying, talking about the wolf, understand. "Him 'nd his mate 'nd the pups 're campin' around. They've swung back to Ten Cent!" he said.

Danny came into the shanty and walked over to his chair. It was in the shadows and I couldn't see him very well, but enough so I could tell he had his head in his hands. I kept my eye on him, plenty thankful that Ben kept on talking about Lop Ear.

Now, old Ben's a great talker. Always was. And when a talker gets going on a wolf like Lop Ear he's set, if you understand.

That old wolf was the most famous predator this country had ever known. He'd been here seven years, then, and had got to be as much talked about as any of our prominent men. He'd gotten to be kind of a date, like a big storm or a bad forest fire. You'd say that such-and-such a thing happened before Lop Ear showed up, or that so-and-so had been here since Lop Ear was a pup. Things like that.

He got his name because the tip of his right ear was lopped down, likely from some puppy fight, and he got his fame because of his size and his smartness.

He was just a walloping big wolf. When he first ran into a trap and lost two claws and the ends of the pads, he made a track that would bung your eye. But he was only a yearling then, likely, because his tracks got bigger and bigger. By the time he'd been named and talked about by other folks than just trappers his track'd measure four and a quarter inches, and that's a fact!

He learned more from that one run-in with a trap than most wolves ever live to learn. He was so smart you wouldn't believe it, if I told you some of the things he did and if you know wolves. I'll tell you some of those things, too, but not now. I want to talk about Danny Arthur, now.

He just sat there all humped over while old Ben laid himself out talkin' about that wolf. Ben brought Lop Ear right into that shanty, I tell you, and led him up and down and showed us his length and his height and his strength and went over and over the things he'd done to try to catch the old devil.

But by the time Ben got to where the State sent in its best trapper to try for Lop Ear and do no good at all, I could see Danny's face, sort of luminous back in the shadows. He's raised it up out of his hands as if he was listening to Ben good and close.

When Ben got to the time the State borrowed a top trapper from the Biological Survey to save our deer herd from Lop Ear, only to have him made a monkey of, the kid was sitting up straight. That's how good Ben was at

telling a thing. Or the stuff he had to tell. Or the combination.

Matter of fact, I'd gotten over the worst of my scare. I still had Danny pretty much on my mind but I was listening, too, even if I did know it all by heart.

Some preachers are like that. Some orators, too. They can make something you know from one end to t'other so interesting you'll listen. That's because they're all wrapped up in its themselves, and that was old Ben's fix. He'd just about gone off his head about Lop Ear.

Oh, he wasn't the only one that 'd done so. Not much! Every trapper in this country had put in weeks and months makin' play for Lop Ear.

Funny, the way a wolf like that'll get under a trapper's skin. It gets to be a good deal like the hooch habit. They'll let him alone for a while and swear they'll never waste time on him again and then they'll go back and spend maybe weeks. . . . Just like goin' on a drunk after you've swore off.

Just makin' a decent try for Lop Ear was a man's job. You'll find plenty wolves that'll range over fifty square miles in this north country but Lop Ear covered *twice* that territory. He generally denned somewhere in the Ten Cent country and naturally hung there pretty steadily until the pups could travel. Then he'd do what we call camp. I mean, he'd start driftin', sometimes with the pups and sometimes without 'em; hang out here for two-three days, move on to some other place, settle down for a little bit and go on again. But along about September when the pups were ready to hunt on their own he'd start his big swing.

He'd range from Ten Cent on the south clear over to Muskrat Basin on the east. He'd hit Breakback to the north and circle over to the headwaters of the Mad Woman on the west. As regular as a clock, too; once every two weeks, almost to the day, he'd make that circuit and every trapper in the country knew it, and yet they couldn't do any good!

Most wolves, hunted as hard as Lop Ear was, would drift off to some other range. But not that old rascal. He stayed and kept out of trouble and kept his pack pretty much out of trouble, too, and the deer he killed! Mister, the *deer* he killed!

I expect Ben talked for an hour straight about that wolf and before he finished young Danny was sitting in his chair with one leg crossed over the other, easy-like. That took a load off my mind—until away in the middle of the night.

That wolf's howl had touched Ben off again. He was bound to have another try for Lop Ear, so he turned in before he'd told half the things he could've told.

He began to snore as soon as he hit the blankets, but I couldn't go to sleep. There was something so danged terrible about the look that 'd been on Danny Arthur's face that it kept me awake. I didn't hear a sound from him. He didn't toss or clear his throat or do any of the things that'll tell you a man's lyin' awake. But I knew he was, and when he groaned I wasn't surprised.

I mean, I wasn't surprised that he gave some sign he was still awake. The groan itself was another matter. It gave me the creeps, I say. It sounded as if all the heart and hope he had went out with it. But I couldn't say anything. He wasn't the kind you'd start prying into.

I went to sleep after a while but I was troubled considerable.

BEN was up when the first gray showed in the east and while the coffee boiled got his stuff together. He was all excited and his breath showed how weak he was.

"It's goin' to be hot," I told him. "You may have to walk all day before you

find sign. Hadn't you better wait for a break in the weather?"

"Wait?" he squawked. "With that wolf in howlin' distance, Harry?" he said to me, "I couldn't no more wait than I could fly!"

Young Danny had taken a plunge in the river and was in the doorway rubbing himself down, so he heard that. His face was just as white and his eyes just as big, but there was something new about him that morning. He seemed to be kind of shaken. He'd lost the only kind of confidence he'd brought with him, I guess.

He stood in the doorway, I say, when Ben said what he said, looking like one of the, now, Greek statues.

"Could I go along, Ben?" he asked. "I could carry your traps," he said.

"But you come to fish," said Ben, and you could see that the idea of having company struck him as favorable.

"Plenty of time to fish," the boy said and laughed again, and once more that laugh sent a chill up my back.

So Ben said, sure, he could go, and that's how Danny Arthur, a young city gentleman who'd come up here to kill himself, got to be a wolf trapper.

He went with Ben that day and got him back at sundown almost bushed. And he went with him the next day and the next. By the end of the week, when I swung that way again and dropped in, he'd made his first set and a week after that he'd taken his first wolf.

It was just a pup and not one of Lop Ear's, Ben said, but it was a wolf and it certainly pleased Danny.

I say pleased, but it was a funny kind of pleasure. He didn't boast and he didn't even smile when he told me. He was just sort of—well, sort of grim, as if he'd done something he had to do on the road to some place he had to get.

His face had plenty of color, by then; and the lines and puffs had gone out of it. He'd lost that desperate look, but there was something about him I couldn't figure out; lots of things, as a matter of fact. I didn't have an inkling of what ailed him until after old Ben went all in.

Danny had come in July and toward the end of August Ben had to haul out. He was a sick old man and Danny drove him into town; the doctor gave him one look and hustled him to the train on his way to his daughters.

Danny and I stood on the platform as the train pulled out.

"Well," I said, "what now?"

"First thing," he said, "is to sell my car."

"Sell your car!" I said, plenty surprised.

"I'm broke," he said. "And that old shanty 'll never do. I need the money and I don't need a car out there."

"D' you mean," I said, "you're going to stay on?"

"Why, of course," he said. "I've got to get that wolf."

You could have knocked me flat! Not just because he was a city dude. He was that, all right, but he'd been a kid in the Minnesota woods and had fished and hunted since he went to live in Chicago. He knew the bush and how to handle himself in it and he'd drained old Ben of all the wolf lore he had.

But the idea of a man like that getting what you might call the Lop Ear habit! And the notion of anybody who hadn't spent years and years wolf trapping thinking he had a chance with that renegade was just too much for my blood.

And then I thought to myself: Lop Ear's not what he's after. He's holing up in this country for another reason, I thought. And I'm sorry for whatever it is that's riding him. That's what I thought, so I helped him sell his car and got a Finn to help build his new cabin.

You know why he wanted a new shanty? He wanted one because he'd figured out that Ben's was too soaked with man scent, that's why.

"It's twenty years old," he told me.

"Warm enough, dry enough, plenty of room. But it's soaked through and through with man scent," he said.

"There's the smell of tobacco and grease and drying wool," he said, "that you'll never get out. And if I'm going to make a play for that wolf I don't want to be packing that kind of scent into the woods with me."

That sounded reasonable, even if it was cuttin' things a little fine. But it was his business. Whatever he wanted to do was all right with me. By that time I'd got a danged funny feeling for the kid. I felt like I was responsible for him, in a way, bein' the only one in the country who knew he was in some desperate fix. And yet there wasn't a thing I could do. Not a thing.

But I got a little notion of what he wanted---or rather what he didn't want—when I dropped into his new camp one day and found him gone and a half-finished letter on the table.

I didn't mean to read that letter. Honest to cripes, I didn't. I thought maybe it was a note he'd left for me, which he'd done before when he wanted me to bring him something.

But it wasn't a note and it wasn't for me. It was pages and pages of letter and the first page, sticking out from under the rest, began, "Dear Dad."

I tried to turn away after I saw that, but my eyes wouldn't. They read what was on the last page. Spite of me, they did.

I can't tell you what all was in it, only it made me understand that Danny Arthur had lost out on something big, and had lost out because of his own fault. So he had run away. Only he couldn't run away from himself. He found that out. Somehow he had to do something else about it. He had been hit hard.

The next time I went there and he was home he handed me a letter to mail.

"Don't mail it from town," he said. "Give it to somebody who's taking a trip. The longer the trip, the better. I don't want folks trailing me through the postmark," he said.

That was all. We went talking wolf, then.

As a trapper, Danny was doing pretty well. He certainly had learned plenty from old Ben and he sure was a bright student. I've never seen a trapper make a better set than he did, right from the first. He didn't know all there was to know about Lop Ear by a long shot, but the pains he took with what he did know you just wouldn't believe.

He'd cut his trap pattern in the sod or dirt with a long-bladed knife like most men would cut steaks. That careful, I mean. He'd lift the extra dirt out and put it on the tarpaulin he spread to work on and pack it off later. Then he'd coil the drag chain in the bottom of the hole and set the trap over it and cover the whole works with dirt. When he got through with that he'd pick up dead leaves and pine needles and rotted wood and scatter it over the place so careful you'd swear it'd laid there since the hills were hollows.

Then he'd bury old meat or scatter his trap scent around so when a wolf came along his nose would coax him right up to that nest of steel.

YOU NEVER saw a trapper who went into this matter of scent the way Ben did. He quit smoking; he kept himself as clean as a nurse; he wouldn't fry meat in the cabin; he quit coffee for tea; and when he dried out his socks it was up under the ventilator he'd built in the roof so the smells would go out with the hot air.

In fly time he'd come into camp with mosquitoes and black flies just hangin' to him and he was one of these kind they go after something terrible. He wouldn't slap at a mosquitoethat'dlitonhim when he was out on his trap line if he went crazy with the stinging, because he knew

that a drop of human blood minglin' with his trail scent would put any wolf, let alone Lop Ear, right up on his toes, you might say.

He had a lot of cotton gloves he wore when making sets and three or four tarpaulins he knelt on while at work, and those he wasn't using soaked in the creek and hung in the sunshine for days at a time.

Then there was his trail scent. Now, almost every trapper has his own favorite trail scent and some of 'em are awful. Just awful, understand. They'll be made of the dangdest mixtures you ever heard of. Ben tried a lot of 'em and then settled down to a scent made out of the scent glands of the wolves he took. There's four of these glands, understand, one in each ham and one under each shoulder muscle. They're about the size of a good big bean and the way Ben used 'em was to soak 'em in glycerine for a long time and then daub a little on his packs before he hit the trail.

A wolf, see, won't pay much attention to the shape of the track you leave, but be sure will think a long time about the smell of those tracks. It's the nose that protects a wolf a lot more than the eyes, same as with most animals. So when a wolf crosses a trail that's got good scent on it he don't seem to consider that those footprints mean man; the smell tells him a wolf's been that way and he'll trail it along to investigate and finally come up to where the trap scent gets him itchy. It's the trap scent that coaxes him into trouble after the trail scent's egged him on.

Well, just as you'd expect, Danny didn't have any luck, hard as he tried and much as he used his head. Oh, he took wolves. He took more wolves than you'd ever dream a greenhorn could. But he couldn't coax Lop Ear up to his sets. Not for a minute!

Now and again he'd get some of the outlaw's pack all worked up. He could see by the sign where he'd coaxed 'em in close and he could see, too, where Lop Ear'd spoiled a catch for him. When the others got investigating Danny's work the old rascal would hang back and talk to 'em and, once, Dan found where Lop Ear had jumped a venturesome pup and given him a chawing he'd remember a long time.

I certainly felt sorry for Danny that first winter. He wasn't the kind of man to get a kick out of shackin' it alone in a place like that. Seemed as if he'd go crazy out there by himself, but he never complained. He never even mentioned that there might be another way for a lad like him to live, though a part of him was kind of being eaten up by the life.

And he'd cut out such a job for himself! Such a danged *hopeless* job! I'll try to show you how hopeless it was.

For instance, there's a long ridge over Breakback way that Lop Ear used regularly. He'd follow a game trail along it for miles but every time Danny made a set in it that set seemed to work like a brass band and the old rascal would make a big swing around the danger spot.

So Danny figured he'd try it blind; without scent, I mean. And the pains he took with his equipment and makin' the set would be hard for anybody but a trapper to understand. He used six traps on that lay-out, two in the trail itself and two on each side.

I was with him when he went back to see what luck he'd had. We saw where the big wolf had been swinging along that trail at an easy trot, not hesitating or seeming to suspect a thing. He just kept right on, up to a sharp bend and on around; and where he made that turn, which wasn't far from the set, I tell you my mouth went dry. Dry, I tell you? I figured he'd gone right into it, which was just what he'd done.

Yes, sir, that wolf had gone plumb into the middle of that set and you could see where he'd stopped from a full trot

to dead still. He'd stopped without a slip or a scuff and stood there right in his tracks with his feet just surrounded by hidden steel jaws ready to spring. One fore paw was between two traps; right *between* two traps; and two pairs of waiting jaws were on either side.

Did he jump to one side or the other or ahead? Not Lop Ear! He'd come into danger and not been hurt so he went out the same way. I mean he backed up, putting his feet down right where they'd been before. And when he'd backed a dozen steps he turned tail and ran and made a wide circle around that place.

What chance has a man got against a wolf like that, I ask you?

And here's another thing I'll tell you, just to show what I'm drivin' at:

Wolves are curious. They're as curious as a nosey old maid. They'll investigate any disturbance they find on their range and sniff and paw and scratch around to see what's been going on.

Danny seen where wolves had investigated holes and hummocks of fresh dirt, so he dug himself a hole in a little burning. Just dug a hole with a shovel and heaped up the dirt and gravel and set his traps in a circle all around it.

When he went back to look it over, after makin' sure that Lop Ear and his family had been through that country, he saw plenty. The she-wolf and the pups had been plenty interested in that hole. They'd circled it and sat down and talked it over and worked in close and gone back again and circled some more. But Lop Ear had hung away back.

He'd run back and forth and got himself all worked up over the way they acted. And when it looked as if, spite of his warnings and threats, some of 'em were going in close he'd gone up just outside the ring of traps and scratched. He'd just tore up the ground, scratching, and flung gravel and lumps of sod in a regular shower and that shower of stuff had sprung two of the traps.

Believe it or not, he'd sprung two of those traps by throwin' stuff on 'em so their jaws'd stick up and show the others what damn fools they'd almost been.

I ask you again; what chance has a man got against a wolf like that?

A MAN wouldn't seem to have any more chance of getting Lop Ear than a deer had of getting away from the old devil, and a deer had no chance at all.

Danny'd seen plenty of signs where Lop Ear had killed. The way he slaughtered deer was just sickening. I'd hate to guess how many he'd killed in those years. It'd run into hundreds; maybe thousands. All that'd be left, of course, were a few bones and the hoofs and a little hair now and then. But when a man saw that sign he could picture what'd happened.

Danny didn't have to draw on his imagination, though. He'd seen Lop Ear kill. He'd seen him through a glass, which he carried now and then. It was one of those breaks one man in a million 'll have once in a long lifetime.

He was up on a ridge above a big burning and saw a deer moving along on the other side, and he put the glass on it just for no reason at all. And when the deer gave a quick look back and a bound ahead Danny looked to see what caused it.

It was a wolf, and he guessed it was Lop Ear from the size. Later he made sure by the tracks.

The deer bounded, as I say, and came down running. Not bouncing along graceful-like, the way a deer will when scared, but *running*. Belly down to the ground, I mean, in terror and going his best.

But that deer had his ticket. Lop Ear came on, closing in like fate itself. He got up to the deer, wouldn't be shaken off, up past his hind parts and launched himself.

No way that a wolf kills a deer is

pleasant, but Lop Ear took the worst way on that one. He didn't grab a hind leg and tear open the big artery and let go and hang back while the deer bled to death, the way they'll do sometimes. That's when some folks think they hamstring a deer and pull him down. I've never seen a hamstrung carcass. They get that big artery and let the deer bleed and when he drops they set on him.

But Lop Ear didn't take that way with that particular deer. He took the quick way, which is the nastiest way. He launched himself and those great jaws opened and he set his teeth in that deer's belly and went limp. He just swung, if you understand, and the deer's efforts to get away ripped his own body wide open. It just ripped him open and let his innards out on the ground; let his life roll and gush out of him, with the deer going down and kicking and trying to get up and unable to and the wolf starting to gorge himself before.

Makes me kind of sick, just telling about it. You can admire a wolf in a way, but when you know how and how often he kills—well—

Danny was so upset he shot, but it was four hundred yards away and coming dusk and it only warned Lop Ear he was there.

The boy's run of failures didn't seem to affect him at all. A kind of fire came into his eye and his jaw set a little tighter. A lot went on inside him a man could only guess at.

He almost never went to town. No mail ever came for him. He never asked me to send another letter. He'd have me bring out grub for him now and then, but if he ran short of this or that and I wasn't comin' that way for a spell it was all right. Talk about a man bein' wrapped up in his job!

In the spring he located Lop Ear's den. He found where the rascal 'd made a kill and got the direction he'd taken, loaded down with meat. He knew enough not to try to trail Lop Ear home. He just got the direction and followed a compass line. Every now and then the wolf's sign would cross that line, swingin' right or left where the going was easier, but the compass took Danny right to the den.

It wasn't a den any more, though. The wolves were gone. They'd taken the pups and lit out and Danny couldn't have been so far behind because the meat was scarcely touched.

"He carried a haunch of venison that'd weigh forty pounds," Danny told me. "And he had almost as much packed inside him which he'd spewed up. But he outguessed me," he said and I thought for a minute he was going to break like any man would and swear or talk about his tough luck. But he didn't.

I didn't see so much of him that summer. He was away from his shanty a lot. He just trailed that wolf by the week. He got to be half wolf himself. He'd sleep curled up anywhere; it made no difference to him. And he'd eat when he happened to need it, I guess.

He got as hard as nails. He thinned down a little and that fire in his eyes kept getting brighter and brighter. I commenced to wonder if he was all there. In the head, I mean. I commenced to think that maybe what had happened to make him want to kill himself was takin' another track and was just making him simple.

And then he got Lop Ear's mate and I'll tell you how that was, too. He got Lop Ear's mate by knowing what she'd do, by knowing her weaknesses, you might say. The winter before he'd noticed that she'd follow his snowshoe trail. She'd walk right in his tracks for a long ways sometimes.

Lop Ear wouldn't set foot in that trail. Danny soaked his snowshoes in a tea made by boiling up cedar leaves, but the prints they left were too much for *that* wolf. When he came up to Danny's trail he'd jump across it and plenty far,

too. He'd take off four-five feet from it and come down that far on the other side and when the she-one ran in it he was plenty worried. But nothing had happened to her all that first winter. Nothing at all.

SO WHEN our first snow came, which was late in October, Danny made sets in his own snowshoe trail. He'd carry a bunch of snow in his tarp and when he came to a good place would stop in his tracks and step out of the harness. Wouldn't step off the rackets, understand, but just use 'em for a platform. Then he'd make a set in the print of one shoe and use the snow he'd packed with him to cover it up. After that he'd stand on one shoe and put the other down over the trap to leave its print. That was a ticklish job. Time again he'd spring the trap doin' it. But he had patience, that boy, and his patience got a reward, too.

Two days later he picked up the pack's trail and, sure enough, there was the she-one's track in his snowshoe prints. She'd left it and missed his first trap and come back and left it again before she got to the second. But the third was gone and the snow all tore up.

She was a quarter-mile off, with the drag hook caught in a cedar. He could see where Lop Ear had followed her, runnin' around frantic-like. He'd tramped the snow down all around her but he hadn't gone in close. He'd sit down and howl, likely, and run some more and start off and come back. Maybe he wasn't so far off when Danny put a bullet through his mate's head but Danny didn't care about Lop Ear that day. He was just working up to something. He packed the whole carcass home and it was a lug, because she weighed a hundred pounds.

A night or two after that I dropped in on Danny and found him in a funny way. You know how the woods'll seem when a thunder shower's about to break? That way, I mean. All bottled up; ready to explode, like. He was shaking up some scent glands in glycerine and when he told me they'd come out of Lop Ear's mate his voice kind of shook. He didn't talk loud or he didn't smile or he didn't say much. But when he said it his voice shook.

Every now and again that evening he'd stop what he was doing and cock his head and listen. I didn't ask what it was. You don't ask a man like Danny Arthur many questions. But I found out.

"There!" he said, just before bedtime. "There be is!" he said in a whisper and stood stock still.

It was Lop Ear, howling. You never heard such howling in your life! His howl at ordinary times was something you'd stop and listen to, as I've told you before, but now— Man, oh, man! There was pain and distress and heartbreak in that howl! It was terrible—just terrible. It went through you like a knife. A knife with a cold blade, if you get what I mean.

"Mourning," Danny said and looked at me. "Poor devil!" he said and I understood then that, hard as he was crowding Lop Ear, he'd built up a kind of affection for the old devil.

Well, his plan was to use the she-one's scent to bamboozle Lop Ear. The old wolf had been running in close to where she was taken, sort of bewildered and lonesome. She'd been his mate for five-six years and he was like a man who's lost a wife he likes and's got the habit of.

But I figured the boy was off on the wrong foot, for certain. Lop Ear had seen her get caught and he'd smelled the distress scent she threw off and it was certain he'd smelled the blood that Danny's bullet let out on the snow. It just wouldn't work. To use that scent would warn him instead of teasing him to keep on its trail.

Far be it from me to advise a lad like Danny, though. And I didn't have much time to visit with him and let the matter come up sort of natural, either, and hope that he'd ask what I thought, as he had now and again, because on the fifteenth the deer season opened and I had my hands full, patrolling to keep violations down.

That first snow had gone and left the ground bare and that made it a little harder to cover my territory. If you can drive these old tote roads and see where hunters have crossed, it's easier to follow 'em and see how they're behaving themselves.

Everybody was growling about no tracking snow but along toward noon of this particular day I'm telling about I figured we were goin' to have plenty. And maybe then some. The wind was uneasy and the air got colder and the clouds hung low.

A little after noon it commenced to spit snow and by three o'clock it was ankle deep and blowing a gagger and getting colder every minute.

I was driving the ridge road that skirts the edge of Ten Cent, making toward town, figuring I'd be lucky if I got out without shoveling in the bad places, when I came on this man's track.

The man had been running. His tracks were mostly blown full, but it was easy to see that somebody had crossed that road at a larruping run.

Now, there's two principal things that a man'll run for in deer season. One is to trail a wounded buck and the other's because he's lost. And if he's a good deer hunter, he won't run after a wounded critter. He'll go as careful as he can.

I hadn't run across any greenhorns in that country who'd be likely to go gallopin' after a deer, and so I stopped with a feeling that maybe I had a job cut out for me. The notion of a man lost at that time of day with the kind of a night that was ahead of us, just didn't set well.

So there was just one thing for me to do: see if I could follow that trail and find the man who'd left it before he got himself all in. I ran the car off the road and set out on foot. All that was left of those tracks was just little depressions. Some places they'd been all blotted out. And I couldn't see a thing that looked like a deer track, either, and so I figured it couldn't be anything *but* a lost man.

I shoved along for a mile, I'd say, going my best and losing ground at every step because the trail got fainter and fainter. And then, all of a sudden it crossed itself.

I'd been traveling right into the wind, which was north. The fresh trail came in from the west. And it was fresh. I mean, it was only minutes old. And with the man tracks were others, the funniest tracks I'd ever seen. There was blood with 'em, too, but it wasn't a deer.

I knew I was good and close and that the man was slowing up. I could see where he'd staggered and almost gone down. I hit out as fast as I could and, topping a little rise, saw him down below me on the edge of a cedar thicket.

He was standing there—Danny, I mean—feet spread, rifle at ready, and never turned his head when I yelled. He never batted an eye when I came up.

"Danny!" I yelled again. He was all in. He was as all in as a man can get and still stand on his feet. He was scratched and bleeding and his cap was gone. His breath came in short, sort of ragged sobs. "Danny, for gosh sakes!" I said.

He stood there and just blew for a minute. Then he said:

"There he is, Harry."

He wasn't excited. Except for his breathing he was as calm as a man would be, say, at his own supper table.

I looked to where he nodded. I had to move before I could see him, standing at bay. It was old Lop Ear, of course. His sides were going like bellows and his tongue hung out the side of his mouth.

He moved and half fell and then I saw what had happened.

Danny'd got him, all right. I'll say he'd got him! He'd got him by three feet, he had! He'd coaxed the old devil into a nest of traps and one had snapped him and he'd floundered into two others. But he'd gotten out of two of them, he had. He'd left his feet in them but he'd gotten out. Chewed 'em off, understand. The chain of the third trap had broken and he had it with him. No wonder I couldn't make out what that trail was! One good foot, two bleeding stumps, and that trap dragging on the one hind foot messing everything up!

All finished, he was. But he stood there with his ears back and his fangs bared and his eyes flashing green hate. Man, he was a sight!

"It worked!" I said. "He followed her scent into the traps!"

Danny just nodded. His breathing was a little easier by then.

"Worked!" he said between shut teeth. He nodded again. "You'll always find something that'll work," he said.

I started to say something. I wanted to compliment him. I wanted to tell him a lot of things.

But he raised his rifle. And he put it down. He raised it again and put it down. The wolf was his, now; his for the taking. But I could see he hated to do it. A man'll get that way, I suppose.

"Want me to finish him?" I asked and he gave me such a look as I'd never had before. It just shriveled me for a second. And then he laughed. He laughed as I didn't know Danny Arthur could laugh. There was fun in it and joy and—and belief in himself at last, I guess.

"No," he said. "Hard things get easy," he said, and threw up the gun and fired and Lop Ear rolled over, kicking.

He wouldn't let me help skin that wolf out. He did it himself. I measured the old devil's hide while Danny wiped off his knife. Eight feet four from tip to tip, he was. That's a wolf, mister! And he'd crowd a hundred-fifty.

"All right," he said, breakin' in on the things I was saying about Lop Ear. "All right; let's go."

He said it in a queer way. It was so queer it made me look close at him. His eyes were shining, but with a different light, now.

"My car ain't over a mile from here," I said. "I'll drive you to camp."

"I won't be going back, Harry," he said and put his knife away and took a long look off into the wind. "I won't be going back," he said as if to himself.

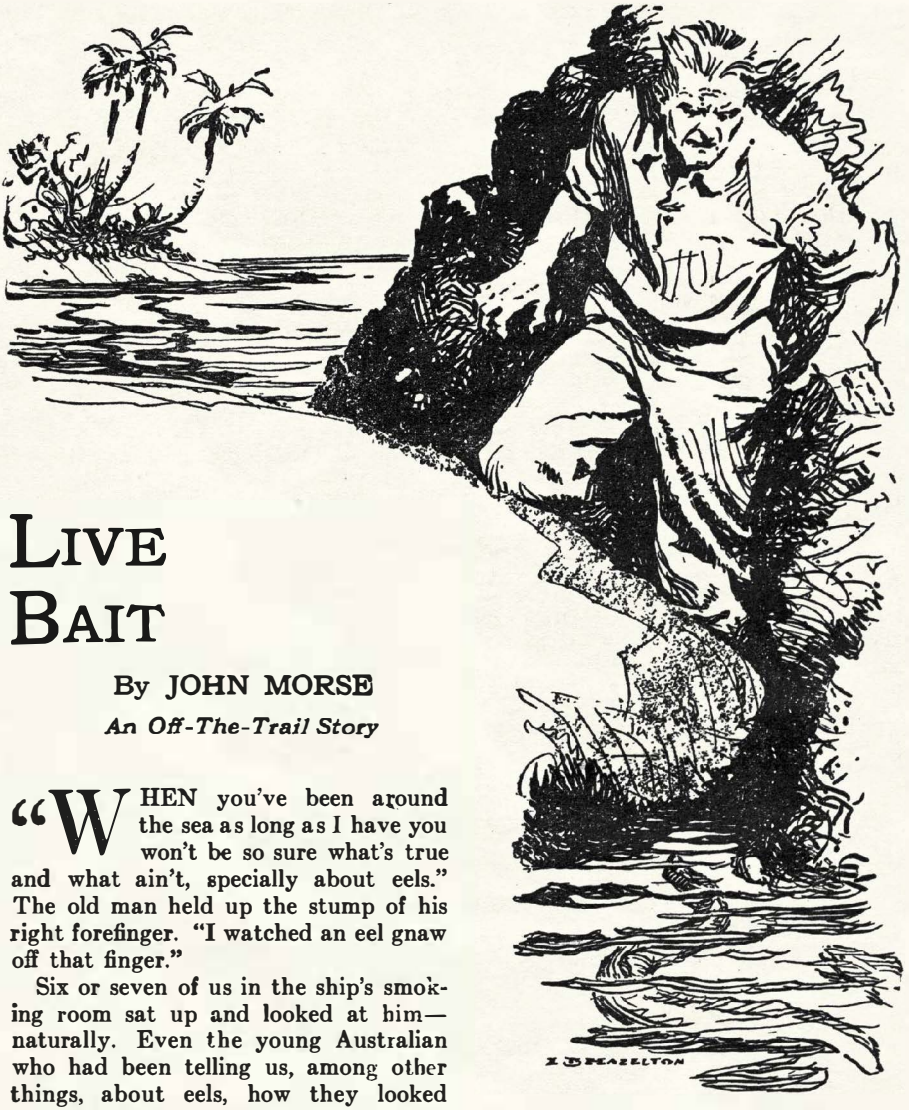
"What d'you mean?" I said.

"Just that," he said. "I won't be going back. There's a night train down for Chicago, isn't there?"

I could only make motions. I made them and he grinned at me. Grinned as a man should when he's, now, at peace with himself.

"It's home, Harry, instead of camp," he said. "The sooner you get at the hard things, the better," he said.

That's all. That's all he ever said to me about himself. But I understood what he meant. Enough of it, anyhow.



LIVE BAIT

By JOHN MORSE

An Off-The-Trail Story

"WHEN you've been around the sea as long as I have you won't be so sure what's true and what ain't, specially about eels." The old man held up the stump of his right forefinger. "I watched an eel gnaw off that finger."

Six or seven of us in the ship's smoking room sat up and looked at him—naturally. Even the young Australian who had been telling us, among other things, about eels, how they looked dangerous but weren't—even he sat up.

We were one day out of Suva, bound for Auckland, so we weren't very well acquainted yet, and nobody had even noticed the old man. He'd been concentrating on the month-old London papers as if they were still damp from the presses. He had bushy white hair and eyebrows, and a face almost as brown as a native's, but when he spoke up we saw he was no South Sea Islander.

His eyes, beneath those white brows, were the color of the North Atlantic in winter—icy blue, not warm like the South Seas. He looked us all over, letting his blue eyes gleam for a second under a cocked eyebrow at the young know-it-all, then he calmly began his story. He was a born story-teller and loved it, like the Polynesians from whom he'd probably learned the art. Only he knew more words, so he was better.

Holding up his hand once more so we could see the scarred palm as well as the stump of finger, he began:

I WAS on the beach down in Rarotonga when that happened. I'd got off a trader at Avarua to look around, and was waiting for another boat to come along and take me off again. Meantime I was livin' with the Kanakas, just like one of 'em.

One morning I was out picking shellfish off the rocks along the shore at low tide, and I'd just about decided to call it a day when I saw one of those shiny cowry shells, the kind the natives call *leho*. They're deep brown and look like these real fine dishes the Chinese have. I knew it would tickle the little boy of the family I was stayin' with, so I crawled out and reached for him while I kept an eye on the sea for the big waves. Then I noticed a funny thing.

The rock I was on was a big flat one that must have weighed five or ten ton, but it was balanced just so my weight would tip it towards the shore. When I wasn't on it, though, it tilted back and almost touched a bigger rock, a jagged one on its seaward side. I stood there in the bright sun, enjoyin' the feeling of power that little tilting stunt gave me. Then I noticed a series of big waves rolling in from the sea, each one bigger than the one before it, like they usually are.

Well, I figured I had time to get that *leho*, so I stooped to pry him off with the old file I was using. He was down near the water in a crack between the tilting rock and the jagged one. I had to get right down in the crack to reach him. All at once I heard a boom on the other side of the jagged rock, and the wave came flying over it to pour down on the tilting stone.

I was soaked of course. I'd sure misjudged the size of that wave. I knew the next one would be even bigger, so I just shook the salt out of my eyes and wedged my foot down in the crack. Then I put my back against the jagged rock and hung on as best I could.

It was so big it flew right over me. The air turned to white spray. But I hardly felt the wave. It banged down on the other edge of the flat, tilting stone, and before I knew it that rock had tipped up and let my foot down in the crack. Then, before I could yank my ankle back out again, the water ran off the stone, she tipped back, and there I was, caught like a squid in a lobster's claw.

I felt pretty foolish, all right, with those two stones pinching my ankle, just tight enough to cut the skin a little bit. It didn't hurt, but I could see the water turning red from the blood. The crack was wide enough so the bone wasn't smashed, but I could no more jerk my foot out than you could crawl through that porthole. And I couldn't tilt the stone from where I was lyin'.

Thirty pounds of weight on the other edge of it would have moved it, but there wasn't any thirty-pound weight handy that I could throw over and disturb the balance, so to speak. I was caught, sure enough. Till another wave flew up and tilted the rock, or somebody came along to jump on it, I wasn't going to do much moving around. It looked like I was in for a dull, hot day.

Then I saw the eels.

The water was pretty low by this time, leaving that rank, fishy smell of a beach under ebb tide. I was noticing the colors of the rocks down below my stone when I saw the first eel, a big yellow one about four feet long. He was slipping along in the shadow of a rock that had a bunch of purple seaweed hanging down off it into the water.

Now, of course, the thought of an eel makes chills go up my spine, much less the sight of one. But even before that day on the rock I'd never liked 'em. No native does. They've always got a hun-

gry look. They ain't afraid of nothing because they can lick anything smaller than they are, and hide under a rock from anything bigger.

And that coat of slime they carry around on 'em will turn off even an iron spear-head as easy as a duck's feathers turn off water. They're like snakes, only worse. Snakes'll run away, mostly. Eels run away and then sneak back.

Well, I watched this yellow eel slipping along under the rock with his jaws open, ready to bite anything that looked promising. Then he doubled back and headed for the crack between my rocks —where my foot stuck through and just touched the water. Then I saw a couple more of the slippery devils and I knew what had brought 'em.

They'd smelled my blood.

Before I thought to draw my foot as far as it would come I felt something slimy against my ankle. Then a jab of pain like a handful of needles shot up my leg. Or maybe I ought to say a jawful of needles, 'cause that's what an eel's mouth looks like. I looked down between the stones and saw that yellow eel with his jaws stretched wide around my ankle. He didn't know what it was, but as long as it had blood in it he didn't care.

As soon as I shook my foot, though, he was gone. Then I drew it up so only the part protected by my shoe stuck out below. But pretty soon I felt him or another one nosing that leather shoe and I began to look around for help.

Up and down the coast as far as I could see there was nothing but green palm trees leanin' out over the hot sand. The sea was pretty calm that day, and about the only sound was the sucking of the water as it flowed in around the rocks and then eased out again.

Every now and then one of those big waves that rise, for no reason, right out of a flat sea would come roaring and foaming in towards the shore, but because the tide was still out no more of 'em came in far enough to touch the two rocks that had me caught.

Well, I wasn't exactly scared. All I had to do was wait till the tide came in again, when another wave would probably tilt the rock like the last one had. But the thought of those eels kind of unnerved me. And the sight of them. I suppose they wasn't any bigger than plenty I'd seen before, but they looked monstrous.

One after another they began to collect around my rock. Black, yellow with black spots, gray ones, and a couple of mean-looking red ones the color of blood. The biggest one must have weighed nearly forty pounds. He was a sight to make any one shivver. As big around as a hawser rope, with a mouthful of teeth that would scare even another eel.

I watched 'em in the clear water, slipping out of the dark holes between the rocks, stoppin' real still to stare like snakes, then circling around the flat stone I was layin' on. I began to get some new ideas about eels.

I always knew they was scavengers, eating fish out of stretch nets and stealing bait, so I'd never thought of 'em as going after live fish, much less a live man. I was a live man, all right, but to those eels I was just another big fish caught in a net. I never get a whiff of a beach under ebb tide any more without feelin' those stones pinchin' my ankle and seeing those slimy eels crawlin' up to stare at me with snake eyes and open their jaws to chew on my fingers. That's the part I'm coming to, only I didn't think I'd ever live to tell the story.

WELL, I began to get panicky. I didn't know what those eels would do, and I had only that file to defend myself with if they decided to swarm up on the rock. I didn't think they'd do that as long as I moved around, but I couldn't move around much with my leg down in that

crack, and fine kind of squattin' on the flat stone.

By this time ten or twelve of the ugly devils had collected, and they was swimmin' around my rock, getting bolder and bolder and more excited all the time. Most of 'em was small, two or three feet, but I knew they'd follow the big ones if they started after me. It began to look serious.

Then I heard a sound behind me. It was probably only a rock crab, but I turned my head real quick. There was a bang and a flash of stars, and then I lost sight of eels and rocks and everything else. I'd hit my head on a sharp corner of that jagged rock and knocked myself out.

The next thing I felt was a terrible pain in my finger and another in my head. I opened my eyes. My right hand was stretched out on the rock, palm down, and one of those big red eels had climbed right up and grabbed my finger between his teeth. He was tearing away at it while the blood spurted over the rock and dripped out of his mouth.

All the time his little black eyes was looking at me just like a snake's. And around the edges of the rocks I could see the heads of five or six more of 'em, just about to climb up and begin chewing.

I let out a yell and jerked my hand back, but it cost me the tip of my finger. I saw the last of that bloody hunk of finger in the eel's white mouth as he dropped off the rock into the water. The pain nearly drove me crazy.

It wasn't till after I tore off the sleeve of my shirt and fixed a tourniquet around my finger that I began noticing the pain in my head. Then I knew where some of the blood had come from that covered the rock. I'd cut a big gash in my head, and from the way I felt I knew I'd lost a lot of blood. All of a sudden I wanted to go to sleep. I was so weak I began to slump down on the rock again, and the minute I did that I saw I was in a real jam for sure.

I'd no sooner got quiet when that red snout came sneaking up over the rock with another yellow one right beside it. If I passed out again, I was done for. Those eels would be right on top of me, and I knew that twelve of 'em could make short work of anything the size of a man.

But I'd lost so much blood by that time that I could barely sit up and yell at 'em. I jerked on my foot. Those two rocks had it clamped down like a vise. I threw my weight toward the shore as far as I could, tryin' to tilt the rock that had me pinned down. It was like me tryin' to move a monument.

With almost my last strength I yelled for help and then I sank down again on the rock, just about out for good. Nobody came. Nothing came except those damned eels. Things was beginnin' to go dim again when I felt that same pain shooting up my arm. I forced my eyes open. There was the red eel back at my finger. The pain brought me out of it again, but I knew I couldn't hold out ten minutes longer. I just moved my hand this time and he dropped out of sight.

I'VE never been in a hospital, but I know what it must feel like to come out of the ether when the doc is still sawin' on your arm. I could feel the pain in my head, all right. Every time the blood spurted, the pain shot up my arm and made me shake all over, but my hand looked somehow like somebody else's hand. I *watched* it hurt.

Then I saw that bloodthirsty devil come slippin' up again. In a kind of unconscious way I moved my hand—before he could reach it this time, and he came right after it. He sort of flowed up over the edge of the rock, as big as one of these boa snakes they have in Malay.

And he must have been a big one, all right, or I'd never be alive right now.

As he slid over the rock toward my finger, kind of swayin' from side to side and leavin' a trail of slime off his red skin, the idea came to me. He was heavy enough to tilt the rock and let my foot out of the crack!

The idea brought me around a little bit, and I held my breath as I dragged my bloody finger real slow over to the shore side of the rock. Like a snake following a crippled rat he followed my live bait. Slow, slow, I led him along till he was past the center of the rock. That ought to tip her. I reached out as far as I could.

Nothing happened. The rock stayed as steady as ever. The red eel wasn't far enough over to take her off balance, and I couldn't make him go far enough. He started after my finger again.

I almost didn't notice the pain for bein' so sick with the failure of my plan. I laid still and just watched that slimy devil nosing around my hand. Then the yellow one slipped up beside him, and I held my breath. The two of 'em ought to be heavy enough to tip the rock.

But still she didn't budge. Them eels wasn't far enough past the center. And I couldn't move my live bait another inch. I knew if I could get even one of 'em clear over to the other edge he'd be heavy enough to tilt the rock. Here was my weight, if I could only throw it.

All of a sudden I reached out with my left hand and grabbed at the eel nearest to me. He ran out of my hand just like water.

I was desperate by that time, I can tell you. If I didn't get off that rock right then I knew I never would. I had a picture of my bones, picked clean and rattling back and forth over the rocks in the waves. The thought just about finished me for good. Everything began to go black again.

Then a jab of pain bigger than any before shot up my arm and I opened my eyes a little. What I saw gave me the idea that saved my life. The red eel was back again gnawin' on my finger. He'd just taken another bit, and he had his jaws stretched wide ready for more. Though I was almost through feelin' pain by that time, the sight of those needle teeth closing down on my finger made my arm shake. But I knew my only chance of holding him was by grabbing at that mouthful of teeth. His jaw wouldn't slip out of my hand if I could force those spikes through the palm.

Before I could shut my hand he'd closed his jaws once more on my finger. I had to lay there, shakin' from the pain till he took a bite and opened his damned bloody mouth for another. Then, when he had his mouth wide open, I grabbed at it. The bottom teeth ran right through my hand. He clamped down from above, and I had him.

With my last bit of strength I sat up and heaved him towards the shore, still hanging on to his head. He must have weighed thirty pounds all right, for when he slapped down on the other edge of that flat rock she tilted up and all at once my foot was out of the crack. I opened my hand and with a splash the eel was gone.

I wanted to lay down on the rock again and go to sleep, but I made myself get up and start for shore. As I crawled off the rock I fell into the water, which is probably what really saved me. It brought me around enough so I could make the beach, where I plopped down under a tree and went completely out. That's where one of the natives found me late that afternoon.

THE old man raised his right hand and with the stump of his forefinger flipped his cigarette out of a leeward porthole. Then he cocked a bushy white eyebrow at the young Australian, reached for his London paper, and forgot about us.

Conclusion

CANOEMEN OF THE CRIMSON STAR

By SAMUEL ALEXANDER WHITE

SYNOPSIS

BRUCE DUNVEGAN, chief trader of the Oxford House of the Hudson's Bay Company, lifts the flap of a Cree wigwam and knows that his mission is ended. He has found Flora MacLeod, who ran away with Black Ferguson of the rival Northwest Fur Company and was deserted by him when he saw the beautiful Desirée Lazard, with whom Bruce himself is in love. On the way back to Oxford House Bruce encounters a U. S. Marshal who is looking for a man for murder. Bruce does not recognize the photograph which the marshal shows him but Flora declares it is a picture of her father, Malcolm MacLeod, as a young man.

Malcolm MacLeod, factor of Oxford House, is known to the Indians for good reason as Stern Father. He decrees that Flora's baby shall be baptized a MacLeod. The simple ceremony is conducted swiftly by Father Brochet, the only interruption being some nonsense uttered by Gaspard Follet, the fool of the trading post. When it is over, Bruce again declares his love to Desirée, but she, whose father had been a French Heart, or Northwest man, says she can never love a man of the H.B.C.

Bruce has a chance to work off his bitterness when Gaspard, the idiot, tells of a Northwest man in a near-by cabin. There he finds Black Ferguson himself, and they fight. As Ferguson is about to be beaten he cries for aid and the H.B.C. men find themselves ambushed. They escape after a running fight.

Bruce then sets about his task of building a fort at Kamattawa to rival Fort La Roche of the Northwest Company. Scarcely is it finished when the north wind blows winter down from the arctic circle. When the storm has finished Maskwa, the fleet-footed and untiring Ojibway fort runner, springs over the snow on his webbed shoes with news which Bruce announces to his men.

"Half our number leave tomorrow for Oxford House. Men from the Northwest have sacked our fur trains. The factor will go to raze Fort Dumarge. We move against Fort Brondel."

A defiant roar lifts the rafters and in an incredibly short time the dog teams are yelping down the frozen trail.

Back at Oxford House Bruce learns that Desirée has married Glyndon, a weak-faced clerk fresh from England, and that the two have fled to the Northwest fort.

MacLeod explains that when he was a young man his wife had been murdered by a man named Funster who fled with MacLeod's little son and that the marshal was seeking MacLeod for the crime.

To the trail again, where Bruce's party captures a fur train of the Northwest Company and learns from them the password to Fort Brondel.

Thus they enter the fort without trouble—and are astounded to find it deserted save for Desirée. When Bruce asks her the whereabouts of her husband and the Northwest men with whom he has become allied she throws open the door of the great trading room.

"Look!" she cries bitterly.

CONCLUSION

DUNVEGAN looked. The scene in the huge interior of the trading room struck him with disgust as well as surprise. Around the long, rough table over a score of men and half-breed women lay in a drunken stupor. A liquor barrel crowned the board. At the table's end one man's debauched face lay on the breast of his half-breed Bacchante of the revel. Bruce recognized the features of Glyndon, empurpled and drink-puffed. The rest of the revelers had fallen into every imaginable attitude expressive of uncontrolled muscle and befuddled mind.

The stench of spirits was overpowering. Dunvegan drew Desirée back.

"This is sickening," he cried.

She gazed at Bruce with an intensity that went to the heart of him. The look awakened glad, magnetic throbs, yet left uneasy forebodings for the future because her eyes prophesied things which could never be.

"Now you know," she replied, pointing at the table. "I have shown you why."

And in her words Dunvegan read the answer to more than one riddle.

Some one moved behind them ostentatiously, in order to attract attention. Bruce turned quickly. The tall Ojibway fort runner stood there.

"What is it, Maskwa?"

"Two messengers clamoring at the gates, Strong Father. What is your will?"

"I will go with you, my brother," the chief trader decided. "It is well to see who they are, myself." He walked with Desirée back into the store.

"Bind the drunken No'westers in the trading room," he ordered the men. "Come, Maskwa," he added to the Ojibway.

The fort runner stalked at his back through the snowy yard. Desirée stood and watched them from the door, while away in the east the light of dawn grew little by little.

CHAPTER XII

NOT IN THE BONDS OF GOD

"WHO speaks?" called Dunvegan from the watch tower to the noisy fellows who were shouting and beating upon the gates with the ostensible object of awakening the sleepy post.

"Messengers from Fort La Roche," they screeched.

"La Roche, eh? With what news?"

"A message from Brondel's factor."

"Well?"

"Ferguson, our leader, orders his transfer to Fort La Roche. He is to occupy the same position there."

The chief trader roared outright with laughter.

"It seems that I arrived none too soon," he commented ironically, half to himself, and half to Maskwa, standing silently by his shoulder.

"Sir?" the couriers interrogated. But Bruce, failing to answer, studied some sudden idea grimly and at length.

"Strong Father," interrupted the Ojibway softly, "bid me open the gates, let these French Hearts enter, and thus make them prisoners."

Dunvegan shook his head. "No," he returned. "They shall go back to La Roche. The shock Ferguson receives will be well worth the warning."

To the Nor'west messengers he cried whimsically: "The password?"

"Marseillaise," they answered without hesitation.

Again the chief trader chuckled, drawing something of humor from the situation.

"An hour ago that countersign would have let you in," he observed. "Now it is of no use whatever, for the post is in possession of the Hudson's Bay Company."

He paused, looking into the upturned, surprised faces of the couriers, quite visible in the strengthening daylight.

"Go back to Black Ferguson," Dunvegan directed. "Tell him that you delivered the message he sent to the lord of Fort Brondel, but explain that the lord of Brondel is Bruce Dunvegan. Explain also that the men of the fort lie in babiche bonds; that Glyndon is a prisoner; that Glyndon's wife is a captive. Announce to your leader the leaguer of Fort Dumarge. By the time he hears the news, it too will have fallen. And advise him in conclusion that the Hudson's Bay forces from these two posts will shortly combine before La Roche's stockades."

The Nor'west messengers fell away from the gates, astonishment mastering their speech.

"Never fear," Dunvegan reassured them. "If I wished to take you prisoners, it would have been done long ago. Now go back as I bade you. And one more message for Black Ferguson. Tell him he did a foolish thing in bribing a drunkard to join his ranks that he might steal that drunkard's wife. Tell him that, and tell him Bruce Dunvegan said it."

Swiftly the couriers retraced the track they had furrowed in the deep-snowed slope. Their movements were furtive and in spite of Bruce's assurance of safety, they cast many backward glances.

As the chief trader and the Ojibway quitted the watch tower, Maskwa spoke in a voice of protestation.

"Was that a wise doing, Strong Father?" he asked.

"How, my brother?"

"To send your enemy warning?"

Dunvegan smiled.

"I could not forebear the thrust," he declared. "I could not help but let him know that his well-made plans had miscarried; that the woman he thought to seize was again under the protection of the mighty Company."

Maskwa ruminated.

"Then Strong Father has unknowingly accomplished what the French Heart would have done," he mused aloud. "It

is well. It is even better than having Soft Eyes, the husband, fall in the fight."

"You mistake my meaning, Maskwa," observed the chief trader hastily. "The woman is in my protection, not in my possession."

"So?" the fort runner exclaimed with a slight inflection of surprise. "The French Heart may steal, but Strong Father steals not. How is that?"

"We are different men," answered Bruce, as they entered the store.

Desirée still waited beside the door. Maskwa passed her by without a look, making his way toward the trading room. Had she had the beauty of all the angels, her fairness would have commanded no homage from his cunning, leathery heart.

But Dunvegan, more susceptible, stopped at her word, his hungry eyes dwelling on her beauty, which even after the wearing night appeared faultless.

"Who were those messengers at the gates?" she inquired.

"Men of Black Ferguson's with a drafting order for Brondel's factor."

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "to—to—"

"To La Roche," Bruce supplied. "You see I was right. I came just in time."

With an impulsive, winning gesture Desirée put her hands in Dunvegan's.

"I ought to be thankful," she began brokenly. "And I am. Heaven knows I am. But I should also be frank. After greeting you as I did in my room, I must explain."

"Not unless you wish, unless—"

"It is my wish, my will," she interrupted, impulsively. "You see, I need relief; I must give some one my confidence. Otherwise I shall go mad."

"There is another who should receive your confidence."

"You think so?" she cried bitterly. "Even if he could comprehend no single word of it? If he were sunk in debauchery from the very day of our marriage? From the moment of our flight?"

"What!" exclaimed the thunderstruck chief trader. "What's that you say?"

Desirée tottered.

"Let me sit down on this bench," she begged. "I'm weak somehow and—and faint."

Dunvegan leaned back against the store counter.

"No wonder," he breathed.

The woman looked up beneath the hand which soothed her hammering temples.

"You love Glyndon," Bruce burst out unguardedly.

Her fist descended viciously on the bench where she sat.

"No! Who could—now?" Vehemence, abhorrence, disgust filled her voice.

"You did," he persisted, rather cruelly and with an ultra-selfish motive.

"Infatuation," Desirée cried, "for the clean mask that he wore. But love? Ah! Can one love a sot, a beast?"

"Tell me," Dunvegan urged.

She caught her breath a few times helplessly in the stress of emotion, her eyes roving round the big store which held none but themselves. Her gaze stopped on Bruce's face. Her sentences came mechanically from her lips.

"I think his poise and his old-world manners dazzled me," was her frank, pride-dissolving confession. "For the time I—I forgot you, Bruce. I imagined I cared more for the other. My indecision could not brook his mad wooing. For remember that change, absence and pressure are the three things which convert any woman's will."

Desirée paused, a pleading for pity in her glance.

"I took refuge behind my vow," she continued after a second. "But that gave me no stability. If I would marry him, he promised to leave Oxford House immediately and join the Nor'westers. You see, Ferguson had approached him through Gaspard Follet."

"That," Dunvegan observed, "should have shown you his true character."

"I was blind," she lamented. "I thought it sacrifice. In a way it was, I suppose. How could I know that the plan arranged by Ferguson through Gaspard Follet was the very thing that suited his evil intentions? He offered Edwin command of Brondel. I thought it safe enough to be the factor's wife in a post removed from Fort La Roche."

Bruce made a disdainful gesture. "Those messengers showed you how safe it was," he remarked acridly.

"Father Brochet married us," Desirée went on stonily. "It was in the evening. At once we fled from Oxford House, the sentry thinking we were only taking a turn on the lake with the dogs. But in the forest a Nor'west guide from Brondel met us with another sledge as agreed, and the flight began in earnest. The Nor'wester had rum with him. I rode on one sledge. The thing I had married rode on the other, gulping down the rum. You can imagine what happened."

"Yes," breathed Dunvegan pityingly.

"When we made camp near dawn, he was drunk. He rolled off the sled while the Nor'wester built a fire, in order to greet his bride—"

Bruce's smothered exclamation interrupted.

"What?" Desirée asked.

"Nothing," he murmured, the veins of his neck swelling and nearly choking him.

"Instead," Desirée resumed, "he greeted my pistol muzzle. Day and night since he has greeted it also."

Struck with the lightning significance of her speech, Bruce Dunvegan leaped across the intervening floor space. Like some cherished possession of his own he snatched her palms.

"Desirée! Desirée!" he panted.

The danger note was in his voice, the danger fire in his look. Recklessly she met the sweet menace. Facing each other for a long minute, secret thoughts were read to the full.

"Yet you are married to him," breathed Dunvegan.

"Not in the bonds of God," she declared.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LONG LEAGUER

SHACKLED with cold, iron fetters that chilled the earth to its marrow, the mighty Northland lay desolate beneath the brief sunshine, fantastic under the auroras. Past Fort Brondel the ghostly caribou hordes drifted rank on rank, coming from the foodless spaces, going where subsistence permitted. In phantom packs the wolves howled by, trailing the swift moose across the crusted barrens. Four-legged creatures which never hibernate foraged farther south where the snows were thinner.

The winged terrors of the air followed them, preying as opportunity afforded. Survival was ordained for only the strong, the fierce-fanged, the predatory. Indented in the white surface of the forest aisles were ptarmigan's tracks and over these the long, shallow furrows left by swooping owls' wings.

A homely spot of life and warmth amid this vast desolation was the post of Brondel. All the Nor'west prisoners except Gaspard Follet, Glyndon and Desirée had been transferred in care of a strong guard to Oxford House, where they had been confined under very strict surveillance in the blockhouse. The men of the guard, returning, brought news of how Malcolm MacLeod, failing to surprise Fort Dumarge and rush its stockades, was besieging the place, hoping to starve it into surrender.

Dunvegan had hastened a messenger to MacLeod, informing him of the capture of Brondel. The Factor dispatched a runner back with orders for Bruce to be ready to move on to La Roche when MacLeod should send him word of his

coming on the completion of his own project.

Realizing the danger in which he stood from the overwhelming power of his own desires, Dunvegan prayed in his heart for the fall of Fort Dumarge and the advent of the Factor. He thought he could find respite and ultimate safety in the call which would summon him to the attack of La Roche, away from the lure of Desirée Lazard.

But monotonously the short days slipped into long nights, and still no word came from Malcolm MacLeod. Dumarge was proving stubborn.

Nor did the tiresome fort routine offer the chief trader any relief. The unspeakable desolation all about, the inactivity, the eternal waiting for a command which failed to come wore down by degrees the control which Dunvegan had exercised over his emotions up to this stage. His pent-up passion was gradually gaining in volume. He knew that its torrent must soon sweep him away, beating to atoms the barrier of moral code which was now but an undermined protection. He was facing the certain issue, understanding the immensity of his struggle, seeing no chance of escape.

True, he contemplated asking permission of the Factor to send Glyndon and Desirée to Oxford House. But over this he hestitated long, fearing that beyond his guard Black Ferguson's cunning might prevail and that Desirée might fall into the Nor'wester's grip. But, finally driven to desperation, Bruce started a runner on the trail to the beleaguering camp outside the palisades of Fort Dumarge, requesting the transfer of the prisoners to the home post.

Fate seemed determined to torture, to tempt, to break Dunvegan. MacLeod would not hear of such a proceeding. His answer was that neither Gaspard Follet nor Edwin Glyndon must pass from confinement or out of his sight. The one-time clerk and the spy, possessing Nor'west secrets and intimate knowledge of the enemy's affairs, were captives far too valuable in the Factor's eyes to be given the remotest opportunity of obtaining freedom. When he should have extracted much-desired information from them, MacLeod planned to deal them the deserts their actions had merited.

Death he had decreed for Gaspard. A hundred lashes from dried moosehide thongs, a lone journey to York Factory and a homeward working passage on a fur barque were promised the puerile drunkard. Incidentally the runner whom Bruce had sent out mentioned the presence of two strange men at Oxford House.

"What sort of men were they?" he asked the halfbreed courier.

"W'ite mans, ver' strong," replied the shrewd breed. "Look lak dey come ovaire de Beeg Wenipak."

And Dunvegan knew that Granger and Garfield, the hardy deputies, also awaited the success of Malcolm MacLeod. Like shadows since the first they had moved across the Northern reaches from obscurity to certainty, from vagueness to tangibility, omens of a coming law in the wilderness.

Also like a shadow Desirée Lazard flitted free before the chief trader in Fort Brondel. Bitter through her utter disillusionment, swept by a fire as compelling as that against which Bruce Dunvegan battled, she cared not how high ran the tide of feeling. With a woman's instinctive pride in her powers she smiled on the reawakening of the old love, thrilled to its magnifying intensity, responded with a half guilty ecstasy to its fierce measureless strength.

Listening in the fort, Desirée would hear Bruce's rifle talking as he hunted through the lonely woods. It spoke to her of misery, pain and yearning. Secretly she rejoiced. Then at night her eyes shone across to him through the birch logs' glow. Her hair gleamed like the candlelight. Her lips allured through

the half-dusk surrounding the crooning fireplace.

Maskwa, the wise old Ojibway, watching them thus evening after evening as the long winter months slipped away, nodded darkly.

"*Nenaubosho* is working in them," he observed to himself. "Soft Eyes will lose his wife unless Stern Father comes to move us."

But Fort Dumarge, feeling the pinch of hunger, still held firm against Malcolm MacLeod.

As ever the evenings came round. Desirée's spell grew stronger. The attitude of the two began to be marked by all in the fort as the curb loosened imperceptibly, but surely. Out of hearing in the blockhouse or the trading room, the Hudson's Bay men commented on their leader's strange—to them—fight against his own inclinations.

A hard-bitten crowd, each followed impulse in the main. The only restriction they acknowledged was the Company's discipline. They were north of fifty-three, and they scorned the fine points of ecclesiastics. Two ruling powers they know: red blood and a strong arm.

Because Bruce Dunvegan held the upper hand and wanted Desirée Lazard as he wanted nothing else on earth, they marveled that he did not get rid of the prisoner and marry her. Behind the screen of hundreds of miles of forest they had seen the thing done many times before, and no one in the outside world was the wiser.

"He goin' crazy eef somet'ing don' be happen," whispered Baptiste Verenne one night when the winter had nearly run its course.

" 'Tis always a woman as raises the divil," announced Terence Burke. "Oi was engaged wanst meself, an' Rosie O'Shea niver gave me a minnit's peace till the day she bruk it."

"Hold on there," Connear cried. "You mean *you* never gave *her* a minute's peace. 'Twould be South Sea perdition to live with you, Terence—even for a man."

"Ye ear-ringed cannibal," returned Terence belligerently. "Niver a woman *would* live wid ye, fer she'd be turned to rock salt by yer briny tongue."

Connear stuck out the offending member beneath his pipe stem.

"No woman will ever have the chance to do it," he declared. "I've been in a few ports in my time. I've had my lesson."

"Now you spik," smiled Baptiste. "You be t'ink of dat tale you told 'bout dat native girl w'en your boat she be stop at—w'at you call?—dose Solomon Isle!"

"Yes," the ex-sailor replied. "Made love to me in the second watch and stabbed me in the back with one hand to leave the way clear for her tribe to murder the crew and loot the vessel."

"Oi didn't hear that, Peter," Burke prompted. "Go on wid it."

"Nothing to go on with," snapped Connear. "She pinked me too high up. Knife-point struck the shoulder blade, and my pistol went off before she could give the signal yell."

"An' thin?" Terence was interested.

"Nothin', I said. The crew rolled out. The night was so warm that they didn't care to sleep any more. Oh! yes, and there was a village funeral in the mornin'."

"Whose?"

"The girl's, you blockhead. Died of fever—a night attack."

"Howly banshees!" stammered Burke.

Baptiste Verenne crossed himself.

"So," nodded Maskwa unmoved, "Soft Eyes might die of fever, or cold, or the Red Death."

SOUTH winds full of strange magic ate away the snows. Blinking evilly, the muskegs laughed in little gurglings and sucking sounds. The forest pools

brimmed with black water. Fresh blue reservoirs, the big lakes shimmered, while rivers swirled in brown, sinuous torrents.

Spring! The mallards shot overhead like emerald bullets.

Spring! The geese ran a compass line across the world.

Spring! The blood of every Northerner, man or woman, rioted madly, leaping untamable as the Blazing Pine River roaring past Fort Brondel.

Through some swift necromancy the frozen wilderness turned to an arboreal paradise. Bird songs fell sweet on ears tuned to brawling blizzards. Music of rapid and waterfall seemed heavenly after the eternal hissing of the wind-freighted drifts. Hotly shone the sun, pouring vitality into the earth. Responsive the bloom came, wonderful, profligate, luxurious.

Gay as any of the mating birds Baptiste Verenne sang about the Post. And when even the veins of squaw and husky thrilled with excess of vigor, the tremendous swelling and merging of the passion that absorbed Desirée and Dunvegan could be vaguely gauged. As surely as the glowing warmth of spring was increasing to febrile summer heat, the man was being drawn to the woman. The distance between them gradually lessened. Dumarge had not fallen.

Then from the south in the dusk of an evening came the canoe express bearing the York Factory Packet in charge of Basil Dreaulond. Since Brondel now belonged to the Hudson's Bay Company, that place had been added to the posts of call.

Baptiste Verenne sighted Basil and his bronzed paddlers far up the Blazing Pine before ever they reached the landing. Instantly Fort Brondel was in an uproar, but in accordance with the rule in troublesome times, no one passed beyond the stockade to greet arrivals. The danger of surprise was not courted.

Yet Baptiste had not been mistaken. Dreaulond and his men hailed the post cheerily.

"Holá!" was the cry. *"Voyez le pacquet de la Compagnie."*

"Oui, mes camarades," shouted Verenne as sentinel, from the high stockades. *"Entrez. Entrez vite!"*

Joyfully Brondel received them.

"Lettres par le Grand Pays," shrieked the volatile French-Canadians.

Bruce Dunvegan met Dreaulond in the store where he had his office as factor of the fort.

"What news?" he questioned, gripping Basil's brown palm.

"Dumarge she be taken," replied the smiling courier.

"When?" Pain nor joy filled Dunvegan, to his bewilderment. He began to think that he really did not understand himself or his feelings.

" 'Fore I leave," Dreaulond responded. "De Factor send de word in de *pacquet.*"

A startled feminine cry sounded behind the men. Bruce swung on his heel. Her eyes brooding with half-formed fear, Desirée Lazard was regarding them.

The chief trader motioned her out. She did not obey.

"He has won? The Factor has won at last?" Her manner was that of a person who faces a calamity long-feared, hard-hated.

Dully Bruce nodded.

"The papers!" she exclaimed. "Open them. See when the force moves."

He broke the thongs of the packet like thread, rummaged the bundle and found the documents directed to him.

"MacLeod will be here in two days," was his answer. "Now will you go?"

The intensity of Dunvegan bordered on savagery. Desirée slipped to the door. Outwardly conquered, she disappeared, but victory lurked in her glance.

Basil Dreaulond wondered much at the chief trader's apparent mood, for he was always gentle in the extreme when dealing with women. The courier could

not know that this was the bitterness of renunciation. He too went softly away and left Dunvegan alone.

An Indian had taken Baptiste Verenne's position as sentinel, and Baptiste, hurrying through the yard, met Basil coming out of the fort.

"Got de fiddle ready, Baptiste?" asked the tanned courier, grinning.

It was the custom of the posts to hold a dance upon the arrival of the packet. These festivals marked, as it were, the periods of relief and relaxation from the toil and danger of the long, arduous packet route.

"*Oui*, for sure t'ing," Vercnne replied. "I be beeg mans dis night, *mon camarade*."

And a big man Baptiste was as, perched high on a corner table, he drew the merry soul of him out across the strings of his instrument.

As he played, he smiled jubilantly down upon the light-hearted maze that filled the great floor of the trading room. The huge hall was decorated by the quick hands of women for the occasion. Varicolored ribbons ran round the walls after the manner of bunting and fell in festoons from the beamed ceiling. Candles stood in rows upon the mantels and shelves shedding soft silver light from under tinseled shades. Evergreens were thrust in the fireplace and banked about with wild roses and the many flaming flowers of the wilderness. A sweet odor filled the air, the fragrance of the untainted forest.

Riotously, exuberantly the frolic began. Blood pulsed hotly. Feet were free. Lips were ready. The Nor'westers' wives, the French-Canadian girls, the half-breed women swung madly through the square and string dances with the Brondel men of their choice.

God of it all, Baptiste smiled perpetually over the tumult, quickening his music to a faster time, quivering the violin's fibers with sonorous volume. Mad horn-

pipes he shrilled out, sailors' tunes which Pete Connear stepped till the rafters shook with the clatter. Snappy reels he unwound in which Terence Burke led, throwing antics of Irish abandon that convulsed the throng. Also, Baptiste voiced the songs he loved, airs of his own race, dances he had whirled in old years with the belles of the Chaudière and the Gatineau.

Out of sympathy for the prisoners, Glyndon and Follet, when all the amusement was going on above Bruce Dunvegan had ordered them to be brought up. For the one evening they were allowed the freedom of the fort, but wherever they went two Indian guards stalked always at their elbows.

And Glyndon went most frequently where the rum flowed freest. After the abstinence imposed by confinement since the week-long debauch, his thirst was a parching one. Half-fuddled, he met Desirée threading her way through the crowd. He put out both hands awkwardly to bar her progress.

"What do you want?" she cried, drawing suddenly back as she would recoil from a snake.

"You," Glyndon answered thickly. "Can a man not speak with his wife?"

"Wife?" Desirée echoed. "Go find one of your half-breed wenches. Speak with her."

Disgust, contempt, revulsion were in Desirée's voice and manner. She darted aside and avoided him in the crowd.

Yet again he found her seated at a table between Dunvegan and Basil Dreaulond, where she thought to be secure. He threw his arms about her neck, attempting a maudlin kiss, but instead of meeting her full, red lips, his own insipid mouth met Dreaulond's great paw swiftly thrust out to close upon his blotched cheekbones and whirl him into a seat on the courier's other side.

"Ba gosh, ma fren', you ain' be fit for kiss no woman," Basil observed sternly. "You got be mooch sobaire first. Eh, *mon ami?* Sit ver' still—dat's w'at I said."

Inwardly flaming, Dunvegan remained immovable, as if the incident were none of his concern. But though apparently so calm, he was the victim of raging emotions. The magnetic personality of the woman beside him was a poignant thing. Her propinquity proved masterful beyond belief. He could hear her heart beating under restraint; could interpret the heaving of her bosom; could feel the hot pulsing of her blood; could read her very thoughts as her mind evolved them. Conscious of the spell which grew stronger with every minute, Bruce sat there unable to tear himself away.

PRESENTLY, seeking to divert his mind from the cause of the unrest, the chief trader opened a few bottles of aged wine which he had found in the cellars of Fort Brondel that were stored with the Nor'wester's liquor. This he had carefully kept to celebrate the first visit of the Hudson's Bay Company's packet.

The amount was not large, yet a little to each the time-mellowed vintage brought from across the seas by way of Montreal went round.

"To the York Factory Packet," Dunvegan cried, proposing the toast.

Cheers thundered out, hearty, loyal, sincere. Then reverently the toast was sipped.

"And Basil Dreaulond," Basil added. A shout this time, loud with great-hearted friendliness and comradeship! Strong pride of the Northland race burned in their eyes as they drank to the finest type of it, the virile courier.

Now in fulness of spirit each voiced the toast that appealed to him personally.

"Scotia! Scots wha hae!" shrilled two Highlanders of Dunvegan's band.

"The Emerald Isle," Terence Burke roared aggressively.

"The Eagle," yelled Pete Connear. "Drat your landsmen's eyes, drink with me. To the American Eagle and the salt of the sea!"

"*La France! La France!*" Voyageurs shrieked like mad.

"Old England," stammered Edwin Glyndon, pounding the table.

"Old fren's," spoke Basil Dreaulond, with quiet modesty.

"Old lovers!" Clear as a clarion Desirée's toast rang through the din, thrilling Dunvegan by its audacity, its fervor. As consuming flames her eyes drew him, withering stout resolves, melting his will. He bent his head lower, lower, glorying in the complete confession those two swift words had made.

"Ah! yes," called Glyndon, leering evilly, "you seem to know that toast—too well."

She sprang from her seat in a fury. He sprang from his, ugly in his mood.

"You dog!" Her nostrils quivered. "You coward!"

"And liar!" Dunvegan's menacing face, eager to avenge the insult, rose behind her shoulder.

Uttering a wild, inarticulate cry, Glyn-

don struck the scornful face of the woman. Desirée gave a little moan and fell, half stunned, against the table.

The Brondel men roared in anger. As one man they sprang forward with the single purpose of rending Edwin Glyndon. But Dunvegan was quicker than they. White to the lips, he had leaped at the former clerk. His first savage impulse was to strike, to maim, to kill. One blow with all his mighty strength and Glyndon would never have spoken again.

Spoken; That was it. The quick realization pierced his brain even in the moment of obsessing anger. Glyndon was a prisoner. He must be produced before Malcolm MacLeod. MacLeod had questions to ask of him. Dead men could not answer questions.

Thus did sanity temper Dunvegan's rage. It was only his open palm that knocked the sot ten feet across the room.

Then fearfully he lifted Desirée. She stirred at the touch. The light of a smile came into the wan face with the red weal upon it. Her fortitude permitted not the slightest expression of pain, and Dunvegan's soul went out to her at knowledge of her woman's bravery. What before had seemed to him as only his human weakness, now became the strength of duty. As if she had been a child, he raised Desirée in his arms and left the gaping crowd.

A murmur ran among the men when he was gone. They scowled as Glyndon staggered up.

Came an instant's silence and the piping of a thin voice. "Now my toast!"

Every one looked to see Gaspard Follet grinning like an ogre at the foot of the table. He thrust his owlish face over the board and shook the wine in his glass till in the light it sparkled like rubies.

"To the devil!" he chuckled.

The feasters started and sat back silent, grave, awed by the vital significance of that last toast.

The challenge of the Indian sentinel interrupted the quiet. They heard the clatter of the gates. Some one had arrived.

In the living room above the store where he had ascended on the first strange night of his coming into Brondel, Dunvegan laid Desirée on the lounge covered with fur robes. He sat by her, tenderly bathing the red weal with some soothing herbal mixture that the squaws were accustomed to brew. It relieved the pain, and she smiled up at him, her lustrous eyes innocent with their depth of love.

"By the God that makes and breaks hearts," Dunvegan breathed, "you'll never look on him again. You belong to me by first and only right of worship."

There sounded a step on the stairs. Whoever had arrived was coming up.

The door opened softly. Father Brochet stepped in.

"My son, my son," he murmured reproachfully, but compassionately.

They had told him all below. He came across the room, clasping hands with Bruce, greeting Desirée parentally.

"Go to bed, child," he ordered kindly, assuming authority over the odd situation. "You look tired out. Go to bed. Bruce and I want to talk."

Wondering at her own obedience, Desirée vanished into the adjoining chamber. Marveling at his own sufferance, Dunvegan watched her go.

He turned to Brochet. "Everything unexpected seems to be happening tonight!" he exclaimed. "But I didn't think you were near. Where have you come from, Father?"

"From Loon Lake."

"You knew we had captured Fort Brondel, then?"

"Yes. The Indians gave me the news. As I was on my return journey to Oxford House, I thought I would pay you a call according to my promise. It seems, my son, that I have arrived very opportunely. You have ruled yourself

for many months. Are you, in one mad moment, going to lose your grip?"

He linked an arm in the chief trader's and walked the floor with him, talking, talking, priming him with the wisdom of his saner years, till Desirée in the next room fell asleep to the sound of their voices and the regular shuffle of their feet.

And by dawn Father Brochet felt the pulse of victory. Something of soul-light replaced the fevered gleam in Dunvegan's eyes. Not yet had he lost his grip.

"But she must go to her uncle, Pierre Lazard," he declared. "Seeing her, I cannot keep this strength you have given me."

"Pierre is at York Factory," the priest replied. "He could not bide the post long after his niece was gone. So MacLeod let him go to the Factory. He passed through my Indian camp at Loon Lake before the winter trails broke."

"So much the better," sighed Dunvegan, with relief. "There she will be safe from Black Ferguson. She can go in the canoe express with Basil Dreaulond and his packeteers.

CHAPTER XIV

BLACK FERGUSON'S WILES

BROCHET arranged it. The chief trader could not trust himself to look upon Desirée's departure with the York Factory Packet. The Brondel people cheered its going, but Dunvegan was not at the landing to see. He had shut himself up in the office.

That day he brooded dismally. That night he awoke from troubled sleep, thinking he saw a nightmare. But the anxious features of the priest at his bedside were real. Real also the face of Basil Dreaulond! He had a bandage on his head, stained with dried blood.

Dunvegan sat up with a jerk.

"What's wrong, Basil?" he shouted.

"Wan party Nor'westaires waylay de canoe express," stammered Basil. "Dey mus' been spyin' round de post. Got de packet an' de girl. An' takin' her to Ferguson at La Roche. Dey keel ma voyageurs, *mais* I escape, me, in de woods."

The chief trader threw on his clothes and rushed for the door.

Brochet blocked him. "What now?" the priest demanded.

"Follow and—"

"No good dat," interrupted Dreaulond. "Dey got wan whole day start. No good."

"We have men," cried Dunvegan wildly. "We must storm La Roche."

"Be wise," urged Brochet, half angrily. "Twice your force couldn't storm La Roche—and you know it."

"We must try. Do you think I'll leave her in that brute's power? Every Brondel man marches at once."

"No," thundered the priest. "You won't dare. You have the Factor's orders. Don't dare wreck his plan through selfish desire. In another day he will be here. But move these men now to waste them in futile assaults and you halve his strength—you lose the Company's campaign."

Dunvegan groaned. Well he knew that. Yet inactivity galled and tortured.

"Dey got dose prisoners *aussi*," Basil put in.

"Are you crazed with your wound?" Dunvegan's eyes flashed.

"No. But I be see dem. Dis Glyndon an' Gaspard."

"They were guarded," began the chief trader vehemently; "are guarded now—"

He broke off to see and to make sure.

Underground they looked into a cellar-dungeon empty of captives. Stiff in death but without any marks of violence, the Indian guards lay on the floor. Dreaulond sniffed their lips.

"Dat Gaspard geeve dem de dogberry poison," he announced. "Mus' be dropped in deir rum at de feas' las' night."

It had been the duty of the guards to apportion the prisoners their food as well as to watch them. Thus their absence had not been marked through the day. It was evident that their escape had been effected some time after the supper and dance had ended, when the Indians had succumbed to the fatal drink.

Dunvegan turned to his friends, the light of unshakable determination on his face.

"My men are the Company's!" he exclaimed. "My life is my own. I'm going to La Roche. There must be a way. Somewhere there must be a means. Either I'll carry Desirée Lazard over the stockades or the Nor'west guns will riddle me."

They did not doubt him. They knew a million protests would not avail.

"An' me," cried Basil, thrilled by his courage. "I go for de *pacquet*. De Company's trippers dey ain' nevaire lost wan yet. I ain' goin' be de firs', me."

"You lovable fools," reprimanded Brochet, tears in his eyes. "You have the stuff in you that makes the Northmen great. But don't go alone on this mad mission. Let me got with you. For, mark this, Bruce, where your strength or Dreaulond's cunning cannot prevail, my cloth may render some aid."

Thus across the chain of lakes and rivers three men went against La Roche.

Paddling Indian fashion, with both elbows held rigid and shoulders thrusting strongly forward at the end of each stroke, the travelers threaded for miles the island channels of the Blazing Pine. Basil Dreaulond had the bow, Dunvegan the stern, Father Brochet sat amidships. They took advantage of the current and made rapid progress, their blades churning the water in long half-circular swirls. Skilled canoeists, they accepted the aid of every shore-eddy, every rushing chute, every navigable cascade.

Down the Rapid Du Loup, a dangerous rock-split through which the river leaped rather than ran, their craft was snubbed with extreme care. The three shared the toil of portaging over to Lac Du Longe where a baffling head-wind blew.

"Ba gosh, I no lak dat, me," protested Basil, pointing to the great white-crested combers which cannonaded the beach. "An' look at dose storm-clouds. She goin' thundaire an' lightnin'."

But the chief trader would hear of no delay. Into the brunt of the tempest the bow was forced. Shooting the sheer wave-slopes, poising dizzily on crests where momentum raised them, rocking sickeningly in the trough of the swinging seas, the men rode in the teeth of the gale. Half way across Du Longe the thunder and lightning Dreaulond had expected burst with raucous bellowing, with livid flame. The wind increased. The lake became a boiling cauldron.

Basil called upon his last ounce of reserve strength to meet the emergency. Brochet muttered as if in prayer while the leaden-backed surges lipped across the gunwales and the spume splashed over the bow. But grim as the storm-wraiths themselves, Dunvegan held to his course, wet drops glistening on his cheeks, wind furies reflected from his eyes. By sunset they made the other shore, their craft ready to sink under water which could not be bailed out fast enough.

Tired to the bone, their sleeping camp was as the camp of the dead that night. An owl hooted on the tent boughs. A big moose splashed in the shallows. A gray timber wolf growled over its kill on the shore. But nothing quickened their dulled ears till dawn, red-eyed from his yesterday revelry, stared through the spruce tops.

Then like the revolving of a treadmill came hours of monotonous straight-water paddling, intervals of tracking and snubbing, occasional poling through cross-currents, swift transient moments of hazardous rapid-running, and the hateful,

staggering grind of the slippery portages.

Across the Nisgowan; across the Wakibogan; across the Koo-wai-chew. Through Wenokona, through Burnt Lake, through Lake of Stars! At Little Hayes Rapid, a half day's paddle from Fort La Roche, came their first mishap. To Basil Dreaulond as bowsman the passage which he had often run seemed familiar.

"I'm not be know dis, me," he cried as the canoe swung for a second before taking the meteor-like plunge downward.

"You're joking," called the chief trader. His paddle urged. The craft shot forward.

"*Non*, ba gosh! Dat rock she be split wit' de frost an' de ice—" and his voice went up in an alarmed yell.

"Look out!" he roared. "Undaire de nose."

A desperate thrust of his blade, a tremendous straining did not avail to clear them. The canoe bow struck a fang of submerged rock with a horrible, ripping sound. On the instant they capsized.

His lungs full of water and twin millraces booming in his ears, Father Brochet hung limply under Bruce Dunvegan's arm as the latter struggled up the bouldered side of the shallow channel. It was the most realistic drowning sensation he ever wished to experience. After them crawled the bedraggled courier, hauling the gashed canoe beyond the hammering eddies.

Blood flowed over his temple. The battering he had received had reopened the wound in his head.

A sound whacking between the shoulders relieved the priest. Basil's hurt was promptly staunched with balsam gum.

"Dat be ver' close t'ing," he commented, shrugging his shoulders.

"Aye," agreed the chief trader, regretfully eyeing the torn canoe bow. "We might guard our lives a little better. There is some one in La Roche who needs them."

"*Oui*," returned Dreaulond, with deep significance, "an' eef I know anyt'ing, mebbe she get dem *aussi*."

"Maybe," assented the chief trader unmoved.

The priest uttered a thankful sigh.

"We are in the hands of God," he declared. "White-water or Nor'westers, it is all the same."

Bruce made a fatalistic gesture.

"I believe you, father; I believe you," he returned. "Nevertheless we must always aid ourselves. Let us portage to the other end of the rapid and try to mend our canoe."

But first he fished their sunken outfit from the clear water of the channel. Brochet went down and found the paddles where they had been cast upon the sand below Little Hayes Rapid. Dreaulond pushed over a dead birch, heaping its dried husk and powdery center for a quick fire.

Then they stripped off their soaked garments and spread them upon the rocks under the perpendicular sun of high noon. There the steaming clothes dried more quickly than would have been possible before flames. It was time to eat. The hot meal of fried fish newly caught, bannocks baked from the already wetted flour, and tea, proved welcome. A pipe or two formed the dessert.

AFTER the meal the men sat about the task of mending the canoe. A long rent grinned in the right side of the bow, a bad gash that would require patience in the gumming. Basil measured it tentatively and went off into the forest to cut a strip of bark large enough to cover the opening generously. Dunvegan melted the pitch over the fire, getting it ready to cement the patch.

Basil returned. Skillfully the two accomplished the delicate work. The patch was gummed tight. Over all they spread an extra coat of pitch for surety. Then the canoe was set aside in the shade

for a space that the gum might cool and harden against the water's friction.

The bark Dreaulond cut fitted neatly; the gum stuck well. The finish of the thing pleased Basil. He gave vent to his satisfaction in a contented grunt as he lay back with lighted pipe among the greening shrubs and ferns.

"*Bien!*" he exclaimed. "She be carry us lak wan new *batteau.* Lak *batteau* sur de old Saguenay—dat's long way from here, ba gosh. I see heem some nights in ma dreams, me. An' dat's w'en de trails be ver' hard an' I'm ver' tired. Onlee las' night, *mes amis,* I see dat *cher* old Saguenay an' Lac Saint Jean."

"Was St. John anything like Du Longe?' asked Dunvegan whimsically.

Basil shivered at the comparison. "*Non!*" he protested. "Du Longe wan *diable.* Saint Jean was angel. I be tell you, *mes camarades,* dose *lacs* an' *rivières* on ma home ain' lak dese in dis beeg Nord. *Non, M'sieu'* Brochet. Back dere I be go out for some leetl' pleasure; nevaire be t'ink of dangaire—she be so peaceful an' sweet. *Mais* op here I always t'ink dis *Nord* lak wan sharp enemy watchin' for take you off de guard, for catch you in some feex. Onlee de strong mans leeve in dis countree—you see dat. An' w'en I journey on dese *lacs* an' *rivières* an' dese beeg woods, I kip de open eye, de tight hand."

"Feeling that if you ever relax your vigilance, the North will hurl you down," suggested Father Brochet.

"*Oui,* dat's way I feel. *Mais* not dat way on ma home in de old days. Las' night I be dreeft lak I used to dreeft from Lac Saint Jean down de Saguenay. From Isle D'Alma to de Shipshaw—*oui,* an' all de way to Chicoutimi. All in ma new *batteau.*"

"And was there any one in the bow?" ventured Dunvegan softly. He was strangely moved, recalling an ancient confidence of Dreaulond's.

"*Oui,*" murmured Basil tenderly, "de *petite* Therese, *ma fille.*"

"Man, man," cried Brochet earnestly, "haven't you forgotten yet? It is years since you told us of that sorrow."

"*Non,* not while I leeve," Dreaulond replied, a suspicious moisture gathering on his lashes. "She be wit' me las' night, de leetl' Therese, black-eyed, wit' de angel smile—Therese from de quiet,

green graveyard on de hill of St. Gédéon."

Silently they marveled at him, this man of iron strength but of exquisite feeling, with poetic heart and temperament, who on the edge of danger could float with the dream-conjured vision of his dead child down between the water-cooled, moss-wrapped rocks of the Saguenay.

But Basil's attitude changed swiftly as he sensed one of those Northern menaces which he had mentioned minutes before. He rolled on his side and stared downstream.

"Who's dis?" His tone, low and harsh, seemed that of another person.

Bruce Dunvegan raised himself on one elbow, his face frowning in a cloud of smoke.

"A Nor'wester!" he muttered savagely. "Coming from La Roche. He cannot miss us here. For, see, he's on the portage. Keep a still tongue till I speak, and follow my lead. There is a chance that he may mistake us."

The chief trader lay back again with an assumption of careless indifference. The other two imitated it.

Meanwhile the Nor'western was crossing the portage with a speed and ease which showed that he was not overburdened by traveling gear. The lines of the canoe on his head bespoke a fast, light craft. His dunnage was scant.

Ascending from the shore level to the hogback of rock which ran parallel with Little Hayes Rapid till it dipped down to clear water at the other end, the Nor'western glimpsed beneath the broad band of the tump-line on his forehead the three strangers lolling beside their fire. Immediately he dropped his load, paused, and glared uncertainly. Dunvegan gave him a cheery call which reassured him.

"Knife me, but at first I was afraid you might be of the Hudson's Bay people," he laughed, coming on and depositing his canoe and luggage with their own. "Yet that was a foolish idea, for one does not see Company men so close to Fort La Roche. But your faces are strange to me." He paused and puzzled them over. "To which of our parties do you belong? You're from the Labrador, I'll wager."

Dunvegan took safer ground.

"No," he answered. "We've come over from the Pontiac with a priest for your district. From complaints at headquarters at Montreal it seems there has been a dearth of priests since Father Beauseul died. So the Jesuits have sent Father Marcin from the Keepawa Post."

Bruce nodded to Brochet by way of introduction, a narrowing of the eye warning the priest to act the part. And the pseudo Father Marcin sat up and greeted the stranger gravely. It was lucky that Dunvegan had some knowledge of Nor'west affairs.

But the sight of Brochet's cloth on the Nor'wester was startling. He stared a second, emitting a great, pleased laugh.

"By all the gods, a priest!" he shouted. "What good fortune! As you say, there is a dearth of priests." Again he laughed that great, pleased laugh they could not understand. "A dearth of priests!"

He thrust out a hand.

"I will never be any gladder to see you, Father Marcin than I am now. You have saved me a long paddle to Watchaimene Lake. There is one of your cloth there. I was going for him."

Brochet looked up sharply. "Who is dying?" he questioned.

"No one. It's Ferguson, our leader. He can't get a priest to marry him quickly enough."

Silence fell, a hateful, awkward, dangerous silence. Brochet looked at Dunvegan. The latter's face was a mask. The pipe protruded rigidly from one corner of his mouth. He betrayed no emotion, but the priest's glance, falling to his bare arms, noted the quivering of the sinews.

"Why so much haste?" inquired

Father Brochet, calmly assuming the task of preserving the former indifference of the atmosphere.

The Nor'wester chuckled significantly.

"It is natural," he answered. "Ferguson has already waited a year in order to lay hands on his bride. For you must know she was under the guard of the Hudson's Bay Company till she married an English clerk in their service who was bribed to come over to the Nor'west ranks and put in charge of Fort Brondel, which has since been captured by the Company."

"How came Black Ferguson to seize her, then?" the priest asked in an attempt to draw out all possible information.

"There was a feast in Brondel when the York Factory packet arrived. After the dance the English clerk escaped with a spy who was also a prisoner. Expecting that some of our men would be lurking about spying on the fort, they sought and found them and gave them the news. The clerk's wife, the lady Fergus desired, was to go north with the canoe express to York Factory. So our men waylaid it, capturing the packet and the woman. The clerk thought she was being taken for himself."

"And was it not so?" cried Brochet. "They were married, you say? Does this lady lean toward bigamy?"

"They were married, yes," admitted the Nor'wester, with sinister meaning. "She is now a widow."

All three men started, nearly betraying themselves. "A widow!" they echoed.

"A widow indeed. The English clerk was shot by some of the packeteers."

"Dat wan lie!" shouted Basil unwarily.

"Why? What do you know?" The Nor'wester looked askance at the voyageur's vehemence.

"I see dat in your eye," Dreaulond declared, quick to recover himself. "We all be *bon amis*. Spik de truth, now." He winked knowingly at the dark-faced man.

"Well," began the other, sheepishly, "it wasn't in the fight, that's true. It happened afterward. I was not with the party, but they say the English clerk stumbled over his own gun."

"Where was he shot?" Dunvegan hurled the query almost ferociously.

"In the back, I heard."

Bruce spat out an exclamation. Brochet gave a sympathetic murmur. The courier growled inarticulately.

"Dat's wan more count for *M'sieu'* Ferguson, wan more hell fire. I t'ink he be need de pries' for confess, not for marry heem. Ba gosh, I do."

The Nor'wester was obviously growing impatient.

"I must be going back if you are ready to move, Father Marcin," he asserted, "for Ferguson will question me as to where I found you, and if he thinks there has been any lagging, I'll pay the price."

Dunvegan's head moved the fraction of an inch in a nod perceptible only to Father Brochet. The latter arose quickly.

"I am ready to make all haste," he averred. "If I delay, I am perhaps permitting sin."

"As for your friends," spoke the Nor'wester, turning to the others, "there is nothing to hinder their coming also. They will give you good cheer in La Roche. You may rest there a while and return at your leisure."

"It would please us," replied Dunvegan, "but the Pontiac is a long way from here. There is little use in adding extra miles to our labor. And Keepawa Post cannot spare us long. We will go back."

"Your plans are your own," the Nor'wester assented. "And I must paddle on. La Roche should see me by sunset."

They helped him launch his craft and load the duffle. Dunvegan addressed a last remark to him.

"You did not tell us," he observed carelessly, "how this lady takes your leader's haste. The story interests me."

"She pleaded for a little time against his eagerness," answered the Nor'wester, "and she stalls him off thus. He has given her till the priest's arrival, which time she is lucky to get. Also she is lucky to have Father Marcin." The man's chuckle implied much.

Dunvegan's jaw tightened. His pipe, broken at his lips, clattered on the flinty rocks.

"It was worn!" he exclaimed.

Brochet picked up the fallen portion. Showing no sign of wear, the amber was fresh and thick. Proof of the volcanic feeling rioting within him, Dunvegan's strong teeth had bitten clear through the stem.

As the Nor'wester slipped his canoe into the water, Bruce whispered to Brochet.

"Do what you can," he begged. "We shall not be far behind you."

With ostentation the priest bade the two good-by. The Nor'wester waved a paddle in farewell as his canoe shot round a bend. Two or three miles start Basil and Dunvegan gave him before they launched their own craft.

CHAPTER XV

FAWN AND PANTHER

LIKE a colossal casting in bronze Fort La Roche loomed against the bloody sunset. Brochet glimpsed it for the first time with a prescience of impending evil. Couchant on the serrated headland it lay some sixty feet above the river level, commanding the waterway, grinning like a powerful monster, impregnable, austere, forbidding. Strongest of all the Nor'west posts, most cunningly built, most substantially fortified, the mere thought of bringing any one over its stockades unresisted seemed maddest folly.

The priest had in his day seen many weird-looking dens bristling with defence, smacking of wrong-doing, smelling of spilled blood. But this impressed him above all as likely to be the abode of extreme malevolence. Even to enter it, he felt, would be like putting one's head into a wild beast's lair, not knowing what minute it might be snapped off.

Brochet was glad at this crisis that he had never seen Black Ferguson. He rejoiced that the Nor'west leader had had no opportunity to set eyes on him, for in such a contingency he could not hope to blind the man's innate cunning and preserve his incognito. Recognition by two people he still had to fear. They were Flora MacLeod and Gaspard Follet.

Against this he drew up the hood of his black cassock to shade his features, formulating in his mind an excuse which embraced asthma and the dark evening mist for the moment when he should be questioned as to the cause.

Under the lee of the headland the Nor'wester's canoe drifted. Backwatering with his rigidly held paddle, he lay to below the river gate. A loud voice hailed them from the watchtower.

"Halloo! Who comes?"

"It is Black Ferguson himself," whispered the Nor'west man to Brochet, studying the tall figure poised on the high wall. "He finds it harder to wait than he thought."

Then, lifting up his shout, Ferguson's messenger answered his leader.

"Cartienne!" he roared. "Cartienne comes. And with a priest."

Wide swung the water gate in the space of a breath. Black Ferguson seemed to have fallen from the watchtower, so quickly he accomplished the descent. His eager face peered at them from the dusky landing.

"By all the saints, Cartienne!" he laughed, greatly pleased. "What did you use? Witchcraft?"

The messenger explained. Voluble with blessings on his good luck, Fergu-

son dismissed Cartienne and took the priest off to the store, in a room above which Desirée Lazard was confined.

"No supper, Father," he joked, "till you have seen my bride-to-be. And knife me, she'll give you an appetite! I'll warrant that. After supper you shall marry us."

"Is she so fair, then?" ventured Brochet.

"Fair? I'll take my oath you saw no one like her in all the Pontiac, Father Marcin. But you shall judge for yourself. Here is the place. Let me lead the way up."

Brochet looked round as be followed Ferguson up the stairway and saw, coming into the building with some trappers to barter goods, the familiar, hideous figure of Gaspard Follet. He swiftly turned his back and pulled the hood tighter. The spy's bellowing laugh made him flinch with the sickening feeling of discovery, but immediately he was ashamed of the falsity of the alarm. Gaspard's mirth held no hint of wicked triumph, nothing but harsh mockery, as he stared a second upon Ferguson and the black-cassocked one.

"A priest, a marriage and afterward —the devil to pay!" Brochet heard the dwarf cheerfully prophesy to the trappers. Again his mawkish laugh vibrated among the hewn rafters.

Above, the Nor'west leader quickly crossed the room and indicated a door.

"Here, Father! Cover your eyes or her beauty will blind you." The tone was exultant as well as bantering.

He fumbled with the bolt, failed to shoot it and stooped to examine, for the dark was gathering thickly so that small things could not be seen easily.

"It's unlocked," he cried. "What trickery's this?"

Kicked back without ceremony, the door banged and quivered. Ferguson bounded inside, the breathless priest on his heels. A single candle, burning serenely, lighted an empty room.

"The devil!" exclaimed the angry Nor'wester, blundering round in sheer astonishment. "Escaped? It can't be, Father Marcin. She could not have gone through the store. My men would have seen. Yonder door, the only other way out, leads into the upper part of the furhouse where the powder is stored. It is locked. What traitor—"

The grating of a key interrupted him. Ferguson whirled at the sound. The door he had mentioned had opened and closed softly. Flora, paler than when Brochet had last seen her, and with the shadow of disappointment in her eyes, quietly broke the key in the lock. She failed to recognize the priest, whose face was partly concealed by his hood.

"You—you!" Ferguson gritted.

"I," she answered unflinchingly. "I told you that you would never marry her. If I had been able to get her out of La Roche, I would have done it. But I've put her beyond your reach. You'll never kiss her living lips."

"You fiend!" shouted the Nor'wester, thoughts of murder leaping into his mind. "Do you dare tell me—"

But Flora stopped him with an imperious gesture.

"Don't misunderstand me," she returned contemptuously. "Go and look for her in the powder-room."

At that he understood. He leaped forward with fists clenched to strike her. Father Brochet had just time to throw himself between.

"Softly," the priest cautioned, whispering low, that the Factor's daughter might not know his voice. "You can't strike a woman. I thought a prospective bridegroom had been more gentle with the sex."

"You pardon, Father," he begged.

But he was barely containing himself. The judgment for the woman who was his wife leaped out.

"I'll not have you here any longer," he snarled. "Leave La Roche in the morning. That's my last word to you."

But the gleaming devil in his eye leered back at him in the steady, contemptuous gaze of Malcolm MacLeod's daughter.

Downstairs in wild, inconsiderate haste the Nor'wester dragged the priest. Dark had fallen on La Roche, a deep darkness of velvety, impenetrable gloom peculiar to the North. A drifting pall of mist that beaded the stockades and dripped from the blockhouse eaves added to the intensity of the night. Suggestive of tragedy, symbolic of disaster, prophetic of unknown calamity, the weird atmosphere chilled the men as with the breath of fatalism.

Both felt it, but neither stopped long enough to analyze the feeling. Brochet attributed the odd sensation to his delicate position, which, in the event of discovery would spoil any attempt to rescue Desirée. Black Ferguson thought the impression was simply attendant upon his abnormal excitement as he raced across the yard to the fur-house.

THERE the priest sweated with a very natural fear when they met a group of Indians who had been storing bales by torchlight. Trooping back from their work, the red gleam licked across their coppery features. Brochet saw Running Wolf, his hot-tempered son, Three Feathers, and others of the Cree tribe from the Katchawan.

Veering a little, the priest walked on Ferguson's right side on the edge of the ring of light. Thus he avoided encountering them fairly and escaped keen eyes that would have undoubtedly recognized him even under his muffling capote.

"*Bo' jou', bo' jou',*" the Crees grunted and stalked on.

Into the fur-house between rows of strong-odored pelts the Nor'wester hurried through the dark with Brochet. Up the long ladder, which was wide enough for both to climb abreast they hastened. Ferguson threw back the ceiling trapdoor with a resounding clang. The tableau that met the two men's eyes as they pushed up their heads was one to be indelibly stamped on their memories.

A candle gleaming beside her in a sconce on the wall, Desirée Lazard crouched behind a heap of powder kegs in the middle of the room. The top of the central keg had been broken in. The powder's black crystals shone with an awesome refraction of light. And, white-lipped, tense-fibered, Desirée held the great pistol in her hand so that its muzzle was buried in the deadly stuff.

Her eyes lightened with recognition at sight of Brochet's colorless face in the dark square of the trapdoor's space. But, being behind Ferguson's shoulder, he placed a finger on his lips so that the girl understood and gave no sign.

First the Nor'wester cursed in helplessness and baffled anger. Then his powers of entreaty were exhausted to no betterment. His handsome, diabolical countenance was set with a rigid glare almost maniacal in distortion.

"Are you mad?" he demanded.

"No, but you are," Desirée retorted scornfully, "if you think you can approach me. Remember! A crook of my finger and Fort La Roche goes up."

To Brochet it was splendid—the soft woman holding at certain bay the wily Nor'wester whom no one had ever baffled before. Her courage sent a glow through his own frame, but instantly he shivered at the thought that this could not last any great length of time. The situation was impossible. Yet, such as it was, Desirée was mistress of it.

"The minute that you or your men show foot above those ladder rungs, I fire," she declared with an intense earnestness which the Nor'wester did not for an instant doubt.

"Your priest, there, may come up, but nobody else."

Daredevil that he was, Black Ferguson began to test her nerve, prancing on the rounds upward, always upward,

showing his waist, his hips, knees, even ankles, while Father Brochet trembled for the sake of the girl. He expected every instant to hear the thunderous reverberation that would carry destruction and death. Once the Nor'west leader rose on the last rung till his boot-tops leveled the floor, balanced thus, grinning to see how little he had to spare.

The priest noted Desirée's hand whitening on the pistol butt, noted the weapon's muzzle thrusting deeper into the powder. Involuntarily his fingertips went to his ears. But the explosion did not come. Laughing a grim, satisfied laugh, Black Ferguson dropped down a rung or so alongside Brochet.

"You should not do that," the latter reproved. "A slip of your foot or a nervous quiver of the girl's hand and we would all be in Heaven."

"You and the girl might, Father. I would be in a fitter place."

Ferguson's face was insolent. He had no fear, neither had he any reverence.

"Hard as you are," the priest went on, "I give you credit for your courage."

"Give Desirée credit too. There is a woman of steel, Father. A fit mate for a Nor'wester."

"But most unwilling, it seems."

"Her will must break."

Black Ferguson turned again to glimpse her fully. He played again his trick of mounting the ladder rungs.

Brochet thought the Nor'wester was baiting her out of sardonic recklessness. This was partially the truth, but had the priest followed Black Ferguson's eyes more closely, he would have seen that the cunning giant had an ulterior purpose in his baiting. Once more he dropped back to Brochet's side without betraying that purpose.

"Beautiful and brave!" he gloated. "Brave and beautiful! Did you ever see her like, Father Marcin? I'll wager not. Not even in the Pontiac. Yet look what madness it is—this standing at bay. I don't want her destroyed. Nor the fort. She knows that. But how long can she play this pretty game? Soon she will need food, and with that she-fiend who planted her here gone, she will never get it. What then? You see it is no use. Go up and reason with her, Father. You have the wisdom. She will listen. As for me, I can wait a little longer."

He urged Brochet through the opening and closed the trapdoor. His heavy boots clattered down the ladder. The outer door of the fur-house opened and shut.

Dropping her weapon, Desirée swayed forward on unsteady feet and, sobbing with nerve-strain, collapsed on the priest's breast.

"My child, my child," murmured Father Brochet.

And when she lay a little quieter in his arms, he whispered a word in her ear about Dunvegan and Dreaulond.

"They can't be far off," he explained. "A few miles behind Cartienne's canoe. That would be all—just enough to keep well out of sight or sound. And I shouldn't wonder if they're about La Roche now."

"But what can two men do?" cried Desirée, utterly hopeless. "He will only sacrifice himself. And for me, in the end it will be this."

She motioned to the powder, and then, drawing away from Brochet with a return of strength, went and seated herself upon the keg.

"You had the pistol," ventured the priest.

"Yes," she returned quietly, "but I could not use it even on a beast. You yourself would not have me use it so, Father."

"No, daughter, not so! Nor yet the other way—the powder. Pray God He gives Dunvegan strength to do something."

Brochet paced up and down in a distracted manner. There was little he could say. Reason with her the Nor'wester had ordered. The priest would

rather see her press the trigger above the keg than reason her into the arms of the Nor'west lord. He began to question her as to the details of the attack upon the York Factory Packet.

Desirée explained how they had been waylaid, for since she was in the hands of the victors after the skirmish she could better learn how they had fulfilled their plans than could Basil Dreaulond who had escaped. She shuddered when she told of the accident to Glyndon which happened afterward as they made speed to Fort La Roche.

For accident it was in Desirée's eyes. How could she know that the men of the party had had their orders from Black Ferguson before they departed on their mission? Father Brochet did not enlighten her.

She went on to tell of the arrival at the Nor'west stronghold, of Ferguson's greeting, with his offer of marriage. Her eyes flashed as she spoke of it.

"Did you ever see a panther stalk a fawn?" she cried. "That was it. But I defied him. I scorned him. I spurned him. Yet defiance only seemed to increase his appetite. He laughed at my fear. He roared at my fury. He locked me in a room to change my mind before the priest arrived. He said I was lucky to have a priest—"

She paused, interrupted by a slight sound which seemed to come up from the river. The wall trembled ever so slightly.

"What is it, Father?" she whispered.

Brochet had stepped swiftly to the other end of the powder room and laid ear to a loop-hole. Suddenly his left hand beckoned. Desirée tiptoed across.

"What?" she panted. "Who?" She breathed in little gasps.

"I don't know, daughter," murmured the priest, his voice tremulous with excitement. "Dunvegan, maybe. He swore he would carry you over these walls." He thought of Bruce paddling and portaging the weary miles for this desperate endeavor.

"What madness!" Desirée gasped. "Think of the cliffs. The stockades are fifty feet above the water. It would require a miracle."

"You forget there is a God who still works miracles. And through earthly instruments. Remember the fur-chute."

"But it is drawn up every night," the girl protested.

"Tonight it cannot be, for the noise is coming from it. The Crees and the voyageurs were unloading fur-bales. They have been careless and left it down. Or perhaps they have not finished. Pray Heaven they may not come back too soon."

Undoubtedly the noise, as of some one crawling, was coming from the fur-chute, the long box-pipe of pine that projected like a spout from the lower room of the fur-house and slanted down over the stockades to within a few feet of the river's surface. It was used for the loading and unloading of pelts carried in canoes, the huge bales being hoisted and lowered by a stout rope which ran through the center on a pulley. The height of Fort La Roche above the water made such a contrivance necessary. It effected a tremendous saving of time and portaging up the steep.

The only drawback was that it afforded means of ingress to enemies, since an active man could pull himself up by the rope, and this the Nor'westers had overcome by hinging the fur-house end on a great wooden pin.

Thus at will the spout could be raised like the arm of a derrick out of reach from any one below.

That the chute was not raised now could hardly have been an oversight. Brochet knew that Ferguson was far too careful for that. It must mean that there was still work to be done. The priest sweated at every distant echo of voice or footfall for fear it heralded the return of the Nor'west voyageurs.

The scraping, crawling noise continued. While they strained their ears, tense as those of listening deer, the caught a faint metallic sound from the room downstairs.

"Bolts," muttered Brochet, straightening up suddenly. "Now what does that mean?"

He was shown. The trapdoor behind them flew open and Black Ferguson's head and shoulders rose up. He had worked the ruse of coming back unheard. In his hand the priest could see a piece of binding cord drawn taut as if fastened under the powder-room's floor.

"Ha! Ha!" His huge laugh reverberated among the rafters.

Desireé dashed toward the kegs, but the Nor'wester swiftly jerked on the cord he held. A gap yawned in the floor before her feet. Kegs and pistols tumbled down into the fur-room.

"Ha! Ha!" roared Ferguson. "It's an old trapdoor where the ladder used to be. I put a string to the bolt. What do you think of my reasoning, Father? Better than yours, what?"

He had reached the floor and was rushing across to them.

"The candle, Father!" Desirée shrieked. For keg on keg of powder, many of them open, was still up-piled around the room.

She sprang for it. Black Ferguson sprang also and wrested the flaming taper from her fingers. Still laughing, he shoved her aside with one great paw and replaced the light in the sconce on the wall.

"There's a spitfire, Father Marcin," he exulted. "There's spirit for you. It's the spirit I want. By heaven, you'll marry us now. I ask no better chancel."

And he leaped after the retreating girl.

"Wait till I get her in these arms," he cried hoarsely, his cheeks aflame, his eyes shining, "or she will not stand quiet for the vows."

Fawn and panther!—the comparison Desirée herself had made. As tawny, as cruel, as strong, and as fierce to feed as any beast of prey, the Nor'wester ran round the yawning floor-gap to seize her. As slim, as supple, as tender as any fawn, Desirée crouched and trembled an instant before him. Then she leaped straight down through the opening.

CHAPTER XVI

CONQUEST

A PRAYER on his lips, Brochet scrambled down the ladder. A curse on his, Black Ferguson tumbled after. In the impetus of his descent, the Nor'wester hit the trapdoor over the ladder. It slammed shut, and the place below was plunged in darkness except for the faint gleam which fell from above through the other square.

The candlelight came down like a golden spray of phosphorescent liquid, bathing and making visible a meager space in

the middle of the lower floor. It was only the square of light in the ceiling enlarged a few diameters, and the rest of the vast room where boxes, barrels and bales were piled in rows on the floor and upon shelves on the walls was black as pitch.

But Ferguson had no chance to go up and bring down the candle without which he had thoughtlessly descended. His prisoner was too close to escape.

"Do you find her, Father?" he called to the priest whom he could dimly see searching where the weak light shone.

"No, nor hear her." Brochet's voice was bitter. "If she struck these boxes, you have murdered her."

"Aye, and if she struck the fur-bales she is as lively as ever. Since you don't see her there, she didn't strike the boxes. She's in this pitch dark somewhere. What's more, she'll be out of it in a minute. Watch the door, Father. I'll stand by the fur-chute. It's down, and it's handy for her to slide into the water."

Quickly he crossed the space of light and groped for the mouth of the chute. He reached it. The cool, dank river air rising through it puffed in his heated face.

"Wait a moment, Father. Wait till I strike a match."

"Don't," cried Brochet from the door where he was secretly trying to loose the bar. "The kegs broke when they fell. The powder's all over the floor."

Black Ferguson chuckled. "Faint-hearted, Father? Take a lesson from the girl. Powder or no powder, we must have light."

The sulphur match crackled on the wall. Ferguson shielded the sputtering blue flame with his hands, but even while he shielded it, the match was struck from his fingers, and he was locked in a pair of powerful arms.

"Let go, priest," he commanded laughingly. "Where did you get such muscles?" He imagined Brochet had gripped him.

But his laugh and his voice died in the strain. He could only choke out a curse and bend to his sudden mad struggle for freedom.

Over by the door Father Brochet heard the sounds of conflict, the hard breathing, heavy trampling, smashing of boxes and barrels, crashing of overturned goods. He thought it was Desirée's striving against the Nor'wester. He rushed to her aid, but the strong whirl of men's fighting bodies hurled him into a corner. Almost under his feet Desirée gave a frightened cry, and, stooping, the priest groped for her.

He gathered her in his arms. "Are you hurt, daughter?"

"No," she assured him. "I landed on the fur-bales and they were soft enough. But my heavens, what is happening?"

"It must be Dunvegan and Ferguson. And one will kill the other."

In the dark they crouched back from the stamping feet. Not a thing was visible. They might have been in some medieval dungeon or charnel vault where monsters of old were writhing in death-grapples. Desirée was trembling all over. She clung to Brochet, her eyes straining for an unrewarded glimpse of the furious antagonists. If she could only see! That was what racked her. The fear that invisible horror engenders shattered her supersensitive nerves. On the verge of hysteria she listened, praying for the end.

Then huge as giants in the spray of light she saw two men stagger into the central space of the floor. She saw one man's body bend as willow in the other's arms, heard it crack like a broken branch. Sweeter than any sound she had ever heard, Dunvegan's voice rang clearly.

"A candle, Brochet! It is either his neck or his back. I hope it's his neck."

The priest's cassock flapped up the ladder and flapped down again. Carefully he walked with the taper and held it tight, for destruction was all around

them, and the trampled powder lay on the floor like meal.

"Steady, Brochet!" warned the chief trader. "This way. Hold on, it's his back."

Horrible to look at, with his spine doubled up like the broken blade of a jack-knife, Black Ferguson was crumpled over a barrel. He looked as if he could never move or speak again, and, placing the candle securely on a box, Father Brochet kneeled beside him.

"Help me, my son," he begged Dunvegan. "Raise him up. Surely he will let me shrive him."

Shrive him! They reckoned without the Nor'wester's steel spirit. He squirmed in their hands. As he saw Dunvegan's face bent over him, he snarled like a trapped wolf and uttered a howl.

"La Roche!" he screamed loud enough to ring from ground to block-house tower. "LaRoche! Come to me, comrades! Come—"

The chief trader's palm stopped his mouth, but the mischief was done. There arose a roar of trapper shouts and Cree gutturals. The yard thundered with running feet. Brochet rushed to bar the door. Dunvegan grasped Desirée's arm and sprang to the fur-chute.

"Quick!" he ordered. "Put your feet over the rim. Now sit down. Basil has the canoe at the other end."

He looped the rope around the girl's waist and lowered her like a bale through the wooden spout. Hands below suddenly eased his burden. The rope jerked twice, Dreaulond's signal that the descent was made, and Dunvegan pulled the hemp up again with feverish haste. The coils writhed and twisted on the floor behind him. The sweat of his climb and exertion ran rivulets on bare arms and forehead.

"You next, Brochet," he panted.

But there was sacrifice in the priest's eye. Men with torches were all about the building. In a moment or two they would break in.

"No, my son. Good-by and go. There is no time for both."

"You next, I said," urged Dunvegan. He leaped and seized the priest bodily.

"Leave me." Brochet tried to throw off the rope. "Your place is with Desirée. They will not harm me."

Dunvegan whipped the cable over the priest's head and took a turn under his armpits.

"Harm you? They would tear you apart. Black Ferguson knows now that you are an impostor. Into the chute you go."

The building shook under the assault of the trappers and Crees. The rafters rang with Ferguson's shouts as he urged the men on. Axe-blades bit through the barred door.

The chief trader put forth his strength to steady Brochet's descent. He was much heavier than Desirée, and the brunt of the drag came just when he occupied the mouth of the chute before the rope could be eased over the pulley. As the priest's head was disappearing, he cast his eyes and Dunvegan saw spring into them an intense horror.

"Look!" he shrieked, and vanished down the pipe.

The chief trader threw a backward glance across his shoulder as hand over hand he paid out the rope, and the sight he glimpsed turned icy cold the hot sweat on his limbs. Black Ferguson, cripple as he was, had possessed himself of the candle and was dragging his broken body along the floor toward a heap of the trampled powder. Paralysis gripped the Nor'wester's legs so that they trailed helplessly, but by means of his tremendous strength of shoulders and arms he was wriggling his way, clutching, pulling, heaving as one in death-throes. He had the candle in his mouth, and he seemed to Dunvegan like some great, evil, fiery-tongued, crawling monster.

Outside the building all was pandemonium. Inside dwelt awful suspense. It was a moment to drive Dunvegan

mad. The rope was not long enough to allow him to back up and kick the candle out of Ferguson's mouth. If he let go he would undoubtedly drown Brochet and capsize the two in the canoe. He hung on grimly, measuring the Nor'-westers' progress by glancing back repeatedly, striving to pay out the cable faster than the dragon-like thing could crawl.

Foot by foot he fed the rope. As it sagged loose, Black Ferguson had gained his goal. His hand snatched the candle from his teeth and reached out to lay wick to the granules.

When he saw the Nor'wester's arm go out, Dunvegan dived headforemost down the chute. Like an otter he slid, and cried a warning as he shot down. Barely in time did Basil catch it. A backward sweep of his paddle, and a whizzing body splashed at his bow.

And abruptly, with the splash, the cliffs rocked and thundered. Like a volcano the hill vomited red fire through the pitchy night. In a blotch of flame La Roche flew heavenward. A rain of wreckage fell upon the water all around the chief trader.

"Dive, camarade!" shouted Dreaulond, backing water.

HE DIVED and came up again in the center of the river. There the courier whirled the stern of the canoe into his grasp and, unhurt, Dunvegan raised himself over it. The last barrier between them gone, Desirée crouched in his dripping arms.

Yet only an instant might heart beat against heart! Dunvegan thrust his legs under the stern thwart and caught up a paddle.

"Drive, Basil," he urged. "Drive hard. I don't think there's a living soul left, but we can't take any chances."

In dashed the blades, but hardly had they dipped a dozen strokes when a string of lights starred the river round the first bend.

"Nor'westers, ba gosh!" exclaimed Dreaulond softly. "Some been away."

"Hug the shore," Dunvegan whispered. "We may slip past them without their seeing us in the fog."

Paddling in silence, they worked their craft close against the rocky wall of the farther shore. Prey to mingled hope and fear, the four crouched low in the gunwales. The lights were still coming in file, and in a moment the hiding ones could see a fleet of canoes with torches in the bows. Swiftly the birch-barks skimmed the bloody streaks the torches cast on the black water. They changed their course slightly, and the leading one forged along within a few yards of Dunvegan's craft.

Discovery seemed certain. The chief trader whispered to Basil and felt for his weapons in the canoe bottom. Voices of the oncoming men struck sharp and clear through the moist air.

"It seemed like an earthquake," some one was saying.

Instantly Dunvegan knew the voice—the Factor's. He dropped his weapons.

"Earthquake it sure was," a voice replied. "And the fort was on top of it. Your men have saved you the trouble of a siege, MacLeod. They sure got to the powder."

The pulses of the four leaped gladly. Now in the nebulous torch-glare they could make out the faces and figures in the foremost craft. There in the bow was Washbiscaw, and behind him Malcolm MacLeod. Amidships Dunvegan saw Granger, the sandy-haired deputy he had met on Lake Lemeau and again at Kabeke Bluffs. Aft was his swarthy, black-bearded companion Garfield. In his place as steersman squatted wise old Maskwa.

The keen-visaged Granger was casting piercing looks on all sides as they plunged on. He timed his paddle strokes with an oft-repeated phrase.

"They got to the powder; they sure did."

And Garfield's white teeth split his black beard. "Yes, and where in thunder are they now?"

"Here," laughed Dunvegan, and from the gloom drove alongside them. "Here. Keep down those guns."

Granger, ever quick to defend, lowered his arms. "By the hinges of hell!" he exclaimed. "You sneaked? You got to it and sneaked? Oh! What a jolt."

All around the other canoes glided up. The chief trader looked on the faces of the Oxford House and the Brondel men. The haggard, strained look in their eyes told of paddling night and day from Fort Brondel. And they had nearly made it. Dunvegan thanked God they hadn't.

As for the Hudson's Bay forces, they stared at the four in the canoe as at people escaped from the grave. But the Factor stirred them from immobility.

"Ashore," he ordered. "Search the hill."

"I'm afraid there's nothing to be found," observed Dunvegan, "except perhaps a few wretches to be put out of their misery. I guess there were tons of powder."

"How'd it happen?" MacLeod demanded, as side by side their two canoes nosed in to shore through the channel where the watergate was blown to atoms.

"Ask Brochet. He was there from the first. He can tell you more than I."

So between MacLead and Granger, as they climbed the twisting path cut through rock to the landing by the watergate, the priest walked, outlining what had taken place. Behind them, with Dunvegan and Garfield, toiled Desirée. She would not be left alone below. Maskwa and Wahbiscaw had gone ahead with the rest of the Hudson's Bay men.

As they reached the top, Brochet finished his brief account of the affair in the fur-house.

The Factor took it in silence. Not so Granger!

"The game old devil!" he cried. "He sure kept his nerve to the last. But he has made himself thunderin' hard to identify. Eh, MacLead? I guess you can't swear to his identity now."

"You should have arrested him as soon as you placed him at La Roche," the Factor answered. "And found me afterward."

"Don't talk nonsense. We'd look fine playing a single-handed game like that, wouldn't we? It had to be worked a different way. You both had assumed names. We didn't know which was which. So we had to nail our plan in the middle and let it swing at both ends. You see how it swung? If we had to take you, the Northwest Company would fight for us. If we had to take Ferguson, the Hudson's Bay Company sure was at our backs. What's here? A quarry?"

A quarry indeed it looked, a huge, black cave amid the rocks, the heart of the granite headland blown out by a titanic blast. They stood on the edge of the slope, gazing at the torches of the Hudson's Bay men as they swarmed like gnomes in the bowels of the pit. They clustered and spread and crawled here and there, round the sides of the chasm, up over its lips, where ghostly as balefires little heaps of wreckage smoldered and flamed.

Then the reluctant lights came back one by one, and the tale of the bearers ran the same.

"Nothing."

"Not a body!"

"Not a limb!"

Like a funeral bell Brochet's voice broke the grim silence.

"Gone? All gone? And unshriven! God rest their souls." He knelt on the rocks.

While he muttered a prayer, Maskwa strode out of the dark. He had no torch, but he held something in his hands. Startled, the others craned and peered.

A dozen torches flashed over the Ojibway, and in his arms the crimson light played upon a crumpled form.

"He breathes, Strong Father!"

Dunvegan sprang to one side of the burden, Granger to the other. As they placed the mangled figure on the ground, the head came by chance upon the priest's knees.

"Ferguson!" Brochet whispered, awed. For though limbs and body were crushed and torn, the face remained unmarred.

"And a job for you," murmured Dunvegan.

But Granger had leaped at the name, dragging MacLead by the arm.

"Look!" he urged. "Look! Will you swear to him?"

The red glare bathed the white face. The Factor's eyes focused on the features and grew full of terrible light and would not come away.

"It's—it's Funster," he choked.

Dunvegan saw his right hand clench and clutch the air. He held an imaginary weapon. The old scar was ripped from his heart. He was the primeval man, red with rage, thirsting for revenge, and baited blind because vengeance had been torn from his grasp.

And as if under the electric prick of his tense words the Nor'wester stirred. He muttered once and opened his eyelids. Straight up into MacLeod's awful face he stared, and his eyes suddenly gleamed with recognition.

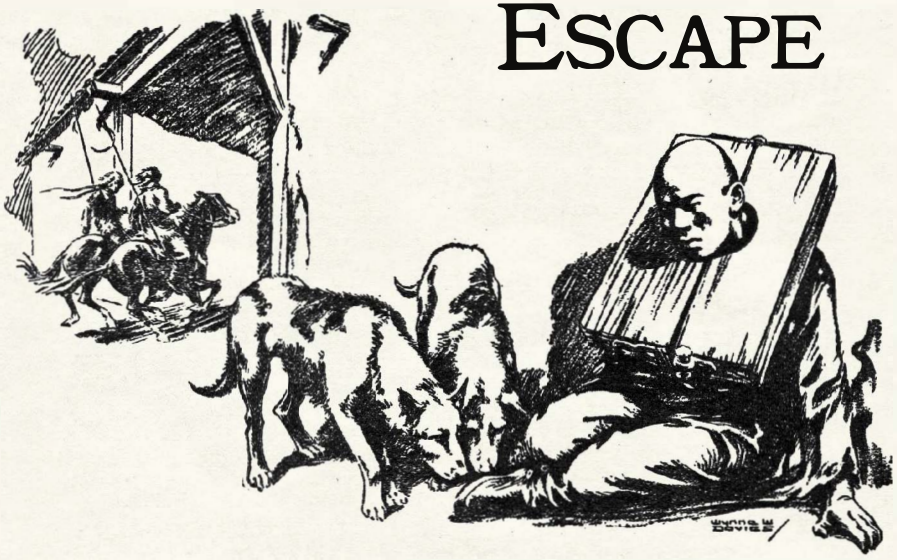
"My son—my boy?" demanded the Factor hoarsely.

The Nor'wester's lips strove a little and parted.

"Gaspard!" he groaned with his last breath.

THE END

ESCAPE



By WILLIAM ASHLEY ANDERSON

THERE was no guard placed upon the prisoner.

He sat at the edge of a vast gray plain, his back to a high mud wall surrounding a crowded caravanserai. Sounds of tumult came from within, guttural shouts and bursts of rough laughter, expressing satisfaction over a successful raid upon the herds of the Jelairs. Warriors with lances and cross-bows, mounted on hairy Eli ponies, scampered along toward the gateway, raising clouds of smothering dust that rolled over the squatting youth.

No one paid attention to him. Flies buzzed around his bare shaven head and clustered in little clumps along the oblique black slits that were his eyes. Wind-whipped tears had drawn lines on his dust-covered face. Except for these and the splashing of dull red sunburn at the points of his high cheek-bones, his round face was expressionless. No one will ever know the pain in his fluttering heart, the ache in bones and bruised flesh. Trapped! Trapped like a wolf, with a baulk of wood upon his neck!

A few raffish dogs, fat on the flesh of human corpses, sniffed tentatively at his felt boots. He neither moved nor changed expression. Though free to stand up and move legs and arms, to change position as he wished, he remained squatting in the hot sun, a miserable atom sunk in the dust of the endless Mongolian plain.

A great wooden cangue was clamped upon his neck.

Broad as the top of a small table, thick as a narrow beam, this simple Chinese device, through which his head protruded, held him as inexorably as the hobbles on ponies grazing within bow-shot.

Once he lifted his head with a long, strangled sigh and looked out across the rolling plain. Heat waves gave an illusion of open water. There was water there, he knew—shallow, brackish lakes, where his father's sheep and cattle were now slaking their thirst after their driving race. How far was he from the friendly shelter of his father's *yurths*? Would he ever hear again the piping of his flute on a cold clear night under the still stars?

He slumped against the wall, a

crushed, dull-witted prisoner, hardly worthy of attention, hardly worthy of the trouble the Taidshuts had taken to fetch him, running and dragging at the end of a thong tied to a pony's saddle. Did they want ransom? Would they subject him to final tortures as a gesture of contempt towards his tribesmen? Or would they end it all with a swift flash of the sword, sending his head tumbling in the dust?

Whatever was their intention, they never had a chance to complete it; for when they eventually emerged from the gateway, they found in the dust nothing but an empty cangue. The boy had gone.

There was sudden silence. The round good-humored faces flamed with rage. There, plainly, were the prints of his feet leading away. But had he taken a horse? Or had he attempted to escape upon the hopeless plain? They flung themselves into their saddles. Grunting with rage, they cantered after him, scattering in all directions. It seemed incredible that even a marmot could escape their observation or an antelope evade the arrows of the bowmen.

Most notable of the bowmen was Surkhan Shirah.

He was the one once called upon by his chief to test his skill with a shot at two ducks flying overhead.

"Which shall it be?" he asked. "The duck or the drake?"

"The drake!"

A single arrow brought the drake to earth. Surkhan was never known to miss a target.

SURKHAN'S men ranged fast and wide, the red foxskin flaps of their bonnets beating like wings, the silk streamers flying in the dry wind. Surkhan was a hunter and he knew the instincts of the Mongols well. Having slipped through the low dust churned up about the caravanserai, the boy would in all probability make for the captured horse, who knew him, or beyond, to the brackish lake where the famished sheep and cattle were crowding into the water.

As Surkhan's men reached the miry margin of the lake, he leaned low from his padded saddle, giving his horse free rein as he looked for tracks in the salty slime. Frightened sheep zigzagged before him like animated rolls of felt. Cattle lunged and swung aside, bellowing as the horse snorted the dust from his nostrils. Soon Surkhan's mount slowed down in the boggy going. He reined in, realizing the uselessness of speed. The boy could not possibly have gone far without discovery. The shimmering plain was as open as a gently heaving sea. There seemed no possibility of concealment. But he had not yet been discovered.

Sitting quietly on his horse, up to its fetlocks in mud, Surkhan watched his men searching for tracks where the cattle and sheep had ploughed up the shore. He looked at the riders, leaning forward on their racing horses scouring the plain, at the dogs and children shrieking and yelling around the walls of the caravanserai. He gazed thoughtfully out upon the water; and there his attention was caught by a tiny object on the dull surface, not fifty paces away.

He studied it with the detachment of a hunter accustomed to long stalking on the open plain. Was it the head of a turtle? Or a piece of dry argol blown from shore? It might be the nostrils of a boy, lying there submerged.

Surkhan drew an arrow and fitted it to his crossbow. He raised the crossbow and took careful aim. Then he hesitated. There is nothing a Taidshut hates more than water. Suppose that spot were indeed only a piece of argol? The lossed shaft would be a lost shaft; or at best it would mean riding out and saturating himself. The thought of drenched sheepskin jacket, quilted breeches and felt boots was extremely disagreeable.

Surkhan raised the crossbow once more, sighted again along the shaft.

Except for the wider opening of his black, squint eyes, in which the sun for an instant flamed like a quick suffusion of blood, no change of expression betrayed his thought.

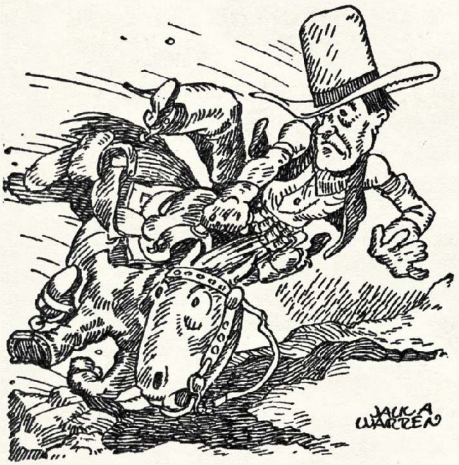
It is possible he considered the target too small . . . or the idea of submersion in the water repelled him. He may, indeed, have suddenly been shocked by a prescience of doom beyond the calculation of living man . . . a horror at a vision of endless slaughter . . . village walls choked with the naked bodies of harmless women and children . . . pyramids of gory human heads piled before the gates from Manchuria to Hindustan . . . gigantic pools of seething flame that were lively and populous cities . . . deserts of chalky bones where green crops once flourished . . . bloody tumults and the relentless torrent of conquering hordes. It might have been this. But if it were pity, it was pity ill-placed indeed!

Surkhan slowly replaced the shaft in its quiver and turned his horse away . . . and the inconspicuous and miserable boy was permitted to live.

That boy fused the battling Mongol and Tartar tribes into one great unit—the fighting horde that, fifty years later, swept forth to ravage the East. Forty million human beings perished before it, in fearful anguish and misery; under its banners much of the fairest areas of the wide world were turned to desert waste.

The boy was Ghenghis Khan.

QUICK JUMPING COWBOY



"A FUNNY thing happened to me once," said Hank, the old cow-hand. "It was in a canyon. I ought to of had more sense than to ride a fool bronc like the critter I was on around a place like that, but I was green in them days. You see I was ridin' around a rim-rock, lookin' out for steers in the canyon down below, and down below it was, shore-nuff—five hundred feet straight down—jest as straight as a wall. Well, I'd rode along that way for a while, when suddenly I took a fool notion to smoke. So I rolled me a fat *tamale*, and pulled out a match and struck it on my saddle-horn. Jest then that fool bronc bogged his head and begun pitchin' and bawlin' like six-bits, and the next thing I knowed he'd fell off that rim-rock. And it was five hundred feet to the bottom if it was an inch. When that hoss hit the bottom, he jest naturally spattered all over the scenery."

"And you?" asked the Easterner.

"Well, you see," said Hank, "when we went off that rim-rock together, I knowed that that saddle that I had been tryin' so hard to stay in was no place for me then; so I got off; and I had to be damn quick about it, too. I wasn't much more than off the brute when he hit the bottom."—From "Tall Tales from Texas Cow Camps," by Mody C. Boatright.

THE CAMP-FIRE

RECENTLY Harold Titus, who had not appeared in our pages for five years, came into the office.

He is well known for his fiction, and also he is a leading authority on game conservation. For example, on ruffed grouse.

I had spent two Saturdays in the hills of western New Jersey escorting a bird dog and a shotgun in pursuit of the most maddening game bird of them all—hearing the distant whir of wings, leading, coaxing, reasoning with that dog, resting him, patting him, booting him, and sitting on stumps while the rain trickled down my neck and wondering why a man, after all, takes a dog and a shotgun and disturbs the peace of grouse. And having a pretty good time, even though getting no shot. Rain down your neck isn't so bad, and the dog was, anyway, a pretty good dog on quail.

I told Titus about it, and we put our feet on the desk, and bagged some grouse—we really got them, that day in the office. And Titus went on to talk about his game conservation work, and particularly about wolves. He has a story in this issue, and tells us some interesting facts about wolves. His remarks raise a question—is there an actual case in which a wolf or wolves attacked a man?

I've spent most of my life here in Michigan. Was born during the pine era, saw the hardwood find a market and disappear, have fished and hunted in danged near every county that affords such opportunities—which means most of 'em—and have naturally come to consider the wolf as a factor in my own fun.

For the last eight years, as a member of the Michigan Conservation Commission, I've been officially concerned with wolves because our field forces have been concerned with predator control. Closer than that, the committee of which I've been chairman all that time was responsible for the trapper system until a few months ago when, over my bruised and bleeding carcass, we returned to a bounty system. (In passing I'll remark that I think a bounty system for the big predators is about as dangerous and ineffective and foolhardy a control device as any conservation administration may engage in.)

So I'm presumptuous enough to believe that I know a little something about the species. A bit at first hand and a great deal at, officially, second hand.

Darned few animals that run interest me as much as do wolves. They're at once hellions and admirable beasts. They're hellions because they presume to challenge man's exclusive right to kill big game, and they're admirable because of their persistence and cunning and resourcefulness. Yes, and courage, too. I know nothing in the woods which has the courage of a wolf.

Not, of course, that he'll take on man. None of our animals in this north country will, with the exception of a she bear with cubs. The wolf stories of our childhood simply don't stand up under investigation; under my investigation, at least. For years I've made it a business to take them as they come—and they come almost every year—and run 'em down. Invariably the tales peter out. You'll be referred to some native who "knows all about it" and who generally was "with poor old Ed when the pack jumped him." And you'll go to the native and he'll say that, sure, Ed was et by wolves and that he was there. Or almost there. He'd seen Ed the day before and Ed said he was goin' out Breakback way alone and the end of that week Bill Spivins come on pore old Ed's bones and part of his clothes and wolf tracks all around in the snow. So you get in touch with Bill Spivins and Bill says sure he was out there and seen the place

but Pete Buchamp had picked up pore old Ed's bones and give 'em a decent burial. But wolves had been there and some blood was left, Bill says, and if you don't believe it just ask Pete. And by the time you get to Pete he's gone to Minnesota to visit his daughter, having left three days before pore old Ed set out for Breakback. The mileage and postage invested gets to be really astounding and you never get results.

Now, it may be that somebody has been attacked and eaten by wolves in the north country at some time. But I've never been able to peg the story or come anywhere near it. I can conceive of a man injured and bleeding and alone; and at a time when wolves are having hard going being attacked. But I've never heard of it from authentic sources. And everybody who's in the woods much knows that wolves will follow a man. But as for their jumping an able-bodied man and devouring him, I think it's . . . well, just a wolf story!

I may add in this connection, though, that I never hear a wolf howl when I'm alone that I don't wonder how right I am!

The sort of courage I'm talking about is very well illustrated in this story of Lop-Ear. And just to demonstrate that, in the tale, I stay well within the bounds of probability, I'll cite the story of "Spook," taken from our official records. In the spring of 1934 State Trapper Howard, working out of Trenary, campaigned against a notorious pair of outlaws. He got the dog finally and then worked six weeks on the mate. He had her in traps several times during that period and when finally taken she had only one foot left. She'd chewed the other three off and had been going strong for weeks. With three stubs and one good foot this Spook could still kill a fair sized doe. . . . That's what I mean by courage.

I think most people who use the woods would hate to see the timber wolf exterminated. We can't let them increase beyond reason, of course, because deer herds would then be in a bad way. Since 1929 our state trappers have taken wolves as follows, year by year: 37, 47, 59, 60, 30, 53. The guess is that this just about accounts for the increase of the wolf population. We have some evidence which seems to indicate that there's a slight stepping-up of wolf population in some localities. Should the situation get out of hand, no doubt deer hunting would suffer; but so long as the annual yield of bucks is good the presence of a small wolf population *may* be a tremendous asset. There's a lot we don't know about wild life and its necessary checks and balances.

IT was in 1918 that *Adventure* published its last story by Edward L. Carson, and he's back now with "Who's Boss Around Here?" Carson has been around a great many edges and corners of the earth, as you will see, and he's under no necessity of inventing characters for his yarns.

Born in Canada on the shores of Lake Ontario a whole lot of years ago, I sailed the Great Lakes in every capacity from cabin boy to skipper. Answered the call of the West while still young, about the time the sheepmen and cattle barons were fighting it out, and by mixing in on another man's fight I managed to get into enough difficulty to make it advisable for me to come away from there, which I did. About forty deputies followed me over the Texas state line to make sure that I did not change my mind.

Went back to Canada and served a hitch in the "mounted," modestly changing my name lest my fame might have preceded me, also lest it should overtake me. I am really bashful at times.

Came back and enlisted for the Cuban show in 1898, but had no luck. Got badly shot up a few days after landing at Guantanamo. Had a swell time in the hospital. This trip was not without good results for, thanks to my war record, I was able to pull wires enough to get the ban of outlawry lifted, a something which my imagination had greatly overestimated.

Spent a year in the Yukon, and in 1900 went with the Canadian troops to South Africa. My only scar from the entire campaign against the Boers was where a mule stepped on my foot. Then up in the North again where I spent a number of years as prospector, land staker, railroad builder and at other frontier pastimes.

My characters, Bill and Pete, are from life, and they, with a host of others, furnish me with material for any stories I may write. One of my best friends is old Sunisak, a "husky" on Anvil Creek near Cape Nome. Another is Otombo, otherwise John MacKenzie, a "reformed" Swazi Chief living on Albany Terrace, Pretoria, South Africa. The others are scattered out between these two points, all creeds and colors and all good men.

I have always been able to find a sunny side to every cloud and the result is that I look and feel twenty years less than my real age. My wife says that at times I act

even younger, yea many years younger, than I look.

My stories are from life, many of the incidents true and, admitting that the truth is not always interesting, there surely is a lot of fun in this grand old world if we will just open our eyes and laugh at it.

DOES any reader know more verses about the Philippine hombre who lived on pescao and legumbre, or the origin of the poem? M. W. Staight of Staten Island, New York, writes the following, remembered from residence in the Philippines, admits some of the spelling may be wrong, and wants information about the poem.

TALE OF A FILIPINO HOMBRE

I once knew a Philippine hombre,
Who lived on pescao and legumbre,
His trousers were wide,
Su camisa outside
And he wore them that way de custumbre.

He lived in a nipa bahay,
That serves as a stable and sty,
He slept on the mat
With the dog and the cat,
And the rest of the family nearby.

Su padre fué buen Filipino,
Who never mixed tubig with vino,
He no insurrecto
Buen Americano,
With a bolo stuck in his chinelo.

Su madre fué buen lavendera,
Scrubbed clothes in a fuerta manera,
On the banks of a stream,
Where the carabao dream,
Which gave them a perfume ligera.

Su hermano fué un cochero,
En Manila buscando dinero,
With stick and with stone
Made his poor pony groan,
And frightened his poor pasajero.

Last time su pueblo held fiesta,
Su familia tried to dijest a
Mule which had died
With the glanders inside,
Y ahora su familia no está.

PINK SIMS, of Lewistown, Montana, is a comrade, from 'way back, who now and then speaks at the Camp-Fire about the guns and fighters of the West. He doesn't give the oldtimers too much credit, particularly Wyatt Earp, and explains this time that Earp's famous O. K. Corral fight was no fair shooting match at all.

Ever since the early days of A. S. Hoffman I have sort of been in the habit sending in a letter to Camp-Fire whenever I think of something of interest to the readers of that much read department.

It was with much gratification that I note the return of an old friend to *Adventure*'s pages. I refer to Hugh Pendexter. I like his stories and they are the kind that I like to have my boy read, thrilling and educational, for they are all based on historical facts and they take the reader beyond the pages of history, and though his villains are blood-thirsty enough, like the Girtys and the Harpes, there isn't a seducer in the bunch.

What really prompted this letter is the one in Camp-Fire written by Mr. Hollenbeck about an old S & W gun. Much has been said by fiction writers about guns of one popular make, which were plenty good, but impression given was that they were practically the only make used here in the West when it was wild. Not true by any means. The gun Mr. Hollenbeck mentions was a 38 S & W with a 3¼ inch barrel. This gun was used a great deal all over the West as a hide-out and was mighty popular with the gamblers; Bat Masterson carried one of the "lemon squeezer" type with enclosed hammer. Though not to be compared with guns of heavier frame and longer barrel for accuracy, it could and did kill a lot of men. Until the advent of the automatics that little cartridge, 38 S & W, had the doubtful honor of having killed more men in the cities than all the other calibers put together. At one time the 38 C & B had a lead over all others for having killed more men, white and red, than any other and as the first 38's were made with 36 tools one sees that it did not take a 45 to kill a man.

In the years I have spent wandering over nearly every portion of western North America, I have seen quite a number of the old single action Smith & Wesson revolvers. These were the American and Russian Models in 44 Russian caliber and the Schofield in the 45 caliber. I do not know much about the latter, but the first two were superior in accuracy to any gun made in their time and were very popular with certain types of border men. The Indian fighters, scouts,

trappers, and buffalo hunters liked them on account of the ease that one could reload, which was an important factor to the Indian fighter. The records made by the 44 Russian among the target shooters all over the world left it supreme as a target weapon for many years, and some of the records made by that gun still stand.

Most cowboys, city marshals, gunmen and gamblers seem to favor a gun with a plow handle grip and a long hammer spur that could be drawn at extreme speed and cocked for a quick shot while the draw was being made. These men did not depend on accuracy and many were poor shots, as their target was seldom more than a few feet away. The gun that met those requirements was the Colt Peacemaker and it was most used.

Frankly I know that I have never seen an old timer in the late eighties and nineties (which was my time) who could beat Young Charlie Askins at his kind of shooting nor equal Ed McGivern at his. Askins is no doubt one of the greatest competitive shots we have ever had, and McGivern has no equal as a high speed exhibition shot with a revolver. We have peace officers today also who would compare favorably with any who ever existed, and they are getting better every day. Yon may take the three Texas Rangers for example, Hamer, Hickman and Goss. I have heard much about Tom Threepersons from reliable sources and no doubt he also is a good man.

Those who like to show the present day men up unfavorably like to talk of men like Wyatt Earp and recount the shooting in the O. K. Corral in Tombstone, Arizona, as a sample of his great efficiency with a sixgun. Whenever they refer to that affair they only weaken their argument, for it was bunglesome, clumsy killing; I know of no worse in all the history of the West. I have stood on the ground where Earps and Doc Holliday stood and, where the dead men lay, heard the story told by old men who were there at the time. There was no surprise element on either side. Only, the cowboys could not have known that the Earps were going to attack them without any provocation. For two days the trouble had been brewing and two of the cowboys had received bad pistol whippings. When the shooting started the four cowboys were in the O. K. Corral. They were approached by the three Earps and Doc Holliday, who had a shotgun slung under his coat by a lanyard. The O. K. Corral is a long narrow affair the width of a lot and ran from one street to another, about one city block long. The Earp crowd approached to within ten feet of the cowboys and five witnesses later testified that the first word spoken was, "Throw up your hands," by Virgil Earp. Some say that they obeyed the command, others say not. Two of the cowboys were unarmed, one of those armed was an eighteen year old boy, Billy Clanton. If there was a heroic figure in that fight it was this boy.

All of the witnesses agreed that shooting started immediately after Virgil's opening remarks and that both Frank McLaury and Billy Clanton, the only two armed, were fatally wounded before they were able to draw their guns, yet they were able to wound two of their assailants before they were killed. Ike Clanton, the one man whom the Earps and Holliday wanted the most, ran out of the corral and escaped. There you have it. Four men against two, one of the four armed with a shotgun, with the drop in their favor, ten feet or less away, fire around thirty shots to kill the two. They allowed the two to draw and fire about four shots before they could cut them down, and were wounded before they could accomplish their purpose. Billy Clanton wounded both men on the other side and was on the ground desperately trying to cock his gun for another shot when another bullet finished him. Billy was shot through both legs, twice through his gun arm, once in the abdomen, and another shot through the breast had torn a great hole through his back and the lung was oozing through his shirt.

A lot of hooey has been written about Wild Bill Hickok. In justice to him, none of it can be directly traced to Wild Bill himself, and in justice to him he had plenty of merit without it. And I think that Wild Bill alone, with conditions as they were, drop and everything, could have cut those four men down with four or five well directed shots. He would have been in no danger, for none of the four would have ever been able to draw a weapon. The same goes for fifty or more men I could name.

Wyatt Earp was no dumb gunman. He was intelligent and had many likeable qualities, but he was no great peace officer, no great performer with a sixgun and no great individual fighter. He was foxy, he always had a pack of tough fighters at his back, and for that reason he died in bed, for he had more enemies than any other law officer I know of. He disliked cowboys in general and Texans in particular and for a good reason. They had given him plenty of trouble when he was in Dodge, and the Texas

trail hands had sworn to kill him if they ever got him away from his shotgun squad, and it was said that a trip down the Texas Trail would have meant death for him.

YOU can bring hawks out of a clear sky, and they'll attack your decoy like battle planes, if you use the method described here by G. Frederic Pelham, Jr., of New York City. Mr. Pelham, by the way, has written a short story, "The Kitten," which we'll publish soon.

I noticed in your "Ask Adventure" Department for April that a Mr. A. E. Kemmerling of Pennsylvania requested information in regard to the luring of hawks.

Your heading pointed out that "an owl can be lured to a decoy—the hawk is a wary bird." The answer to Mr. Kemmerling did not seem to solve his problem and as I have had some experience in this line, I thought I might pass it on.

As you say, the hawk is a wary bird, and to bag him you must resort to the old method of "setting a thief to catch a thief." The only lure that a hawk will come to is that of an owl. These two birds are deadly enemies and when a sparrow or chicken hawk sees an owl he throws all caution aside and attacks immediately. Several summers ago, while visiting a game preserve in Dutchess County, I found an old stuffed owl mounted on a board with a one and a half inch hole in it. The owl was hollow, and a string ran up through the body and was attached to the bird's wings. By pulling the string the wings moved slightly. I asked the Game Warden what it was for. He informed me that by fitting the hole of the board over a ten or twelve foot pole and erecting it in the branches of a dead tree, the hawks would appear from all directions to have at it. It being summer, and having nothing else to shoot at, I took a long pole, the stuffed owl, a twelve gauge shot gun and a box of shells, and hied me to a hill where the skeleton of a dead chestnut rose from above a stone wall.

I erected the pole with the owl on top and settled myself with the gun across my knees and the string in my hand. I could see for miles in all directions and there wasn't a sign of any bird life whatsoever. But I hadn't been there any more than two minutes when two sparrow hawks attacked like Gothas. I shot one of them, and the other returned to the attack time and time again. His hatred for the natural enemy having apparently dulled all sense of fear, he swooped and darted in an amazingly erratic flight, and it took six or seven shots to bag him.

I walked into the field to pick him up, and while doing so, a chicken hawk sailed down and very nearly made away with my decoy. I fired and missed and he returned again. From then on, they came in twos and threes and gave me a busy half hour. When my shells were gone, I pulled down the pole and they were still attacking the bedraggled owl as I did so.

Naturally I was thoroughly amazed, but the Game Warden informed me that such would be the case nine times out of ten.

VOLUME One, Number One, of *Adventure* appeared in November, 1910. The first November issue of this year will be our twenty-fifth anniversary. Twenty-five years is a fine mature age for a magazine in this country. When our November first number appears on the newsstands, where it has competed against and outlived so many hundreds of fiction magazines, it will be making a kind of silent statement: through all its own changes in size and price, through war and boom and depression, through the most changeful twenty-five years of American life, *Adventure* has always had something that men wanted to read.

Now we, in this company, having had *Adventure* for only a year, can't go personally throwing out our chests about this anniversary, which is the result of twenty-four years of editing and writing talent ahead of us. All smug expressions round these parts will be due to the fact that we're proud to have a magazine with such a history.

We're wondering what to do about that anniversary issue. We don't want to make it entirely a reprint of the most famous stories that have appeared in *Adventure,* but it seems a good idea to have some of them play their parts again. What do you think of it? And what stories do you want? Some of you have been with *Adventure* since the first issue, and we want suggestions. H. B.

ASK ADVENTURE

A SCHOLARLY debunking of the divining rod.

Request:—I would like some authentic information on divining rods. The kinds I refer to are the ones made from a branch of a fruit-bearing tree. I have come across many references to them in reading. A few years ago a gentleman I knew in Far Hills, N. J., made a demonstration of one. It actually worked before my eyes, but I never ceased to wonder whether it fooled both of us, for I do not doubt his integrity. As it wouldn't work for me, we laid the cause to some mystic magnetism. Most references seem to avoid the subject.

—FRANK T. BERTSCHE, East Orange, N. J.

Reply by Mr. Victor Shaw:—The divining rod, witch stick, dowsing rod and all variations date back to the necromancers and the mists of antiquity. It is the "*virgula divinatoria*" of ancient Latin writers, the rod of Moses, who got water thus from a rock on Horeb, also the rod of Ctesias which was said to attract gold and silver. Agricola, in 1530, referred to such a "help in mining," and mentions it in "De Re Metallica," translated by Herbert Hoover in 1912. Percelsus, before Agricola's time, said: "It has deceived many miners"; and Agricola, later, added "It does not move in the hands of all men," meaning that there was no affinity between the rod and the object of search. Present rods are crude adaptations of these and the faith in them today has as much base in fact as then.

In other words, the instrument is of no value—a fake.

The first wood used for this device was a hazel fork, especially if the bush grew over a vein of mineral. Later, other wood was used. I have seen them in the West, elaborately carved, bound with copper wire, with a spring clip on top to hold a vial of water, or an object of gold or silver, each said to attract its like in a search.

Your experience in Far Hills, recalls a similar one of my own. It occurred in western Massachusetts near the Chesterfield corundum mines where I was collecting minerals at the age of 17. In my rambles I came upon a local farmer who was operating one of these devices of hazel for the benefit of a prospective buyer of a wide vein of iron pyrites, which the farmer asserted contained gold. After watching this, to me, new and exceedingly strange proposition, they left, which gave me a chance to try the thing out. Had to cut a new one, as the other was twisted off when the outer end tried to point downward as the farmer paced over the vein. At first, nothing happened when I duplicated that farmer's tactics. Then, I discovered that by manipulating the muscles of hand and wrist slightly I could do the same thing (unseen as to muscular stress). Later, I saw subsurface water courses found the same way, in dry regions. Looked into the matter, and learned the truth, viz.: it has no scientific basis in fact and operators are either misled and succeed through subconscious knowledge of the existence of water or mineral, or they are pure crooks.

There are no geophysical scientific methods of locating buried placer, or mineral veins having no outcropping apex, save being electric magnetometric, seismic, geothermal, including use of the torsion balance as well as the dip-compass long used to discover hidden iron deposits. Even these are yet more or less in the experimental stage, and the instruments require technicians for successful operation.

For your further information, you can readily check me on the above by consulting Hoover's translation of "De Re Metallica," or an article by the eminent mining engineer, T. A. Rickard, who discussed dowsing in fullest detail in a book entitled: "The

Divining Rod." Either may be found in any large public library. "The Divining Rod" is by Sir Barrett and Theodore Besterman. T. A. Rickard's work is a "review" of it.

A CROIX DE GUERRE for sixty cents—but probably not from any war department.

Request:—I am one of those catch-as-catch-can collectors, picking up additional items for my hobby when and where the opportunity presents, so far without a definite program. Medals and decorations of military character are No. 1 hobby, with regimental badges or insignia as No. 2, and various buttons next.

I started the collection several years ago, with my own "kitchenware" picked up during the argument with le Boche, item: United States Victory with four bars; Belgian Croix de Guerre; French Medaille Militaire and Croix de Guerre with two palms and a couple of stars, and—this was a personal gift, not a decoration from the Empire—a Cross of the Order of St. George. Also had a German Iron Cross, 2nd class.

Since, have gathered together a British Victory (Royal Marines); Belgian Militaire Medaille; French medal for 1870, another Croix de Guerre, medal for le Grand Guerre; Czecho-Slovakian Croix de Guerre; Portuguese Croix de Guerre and a copy of the United States Distinguished Service Cross.

Now, my troubles. I have no regular place for these bits of bronze, silver and enamel, and know but little about the care they should receive. I should like a cabinet of some sort for them, but would like to have them available at all times, so I could lift out and show them off. Yet I want to keep them from being handled, at least, so they won't tarnish, but would like to display both sides, and it would be most convenient to display them in groups.

I have five or six United States regimental badges, and a friend writes he is sending two or three from England. I have, in all, fifteen military buttons, and half a dozen ribbons (for service blouse), so all these items could be placed in or on the trays of a small cabinet. Of course I plan to expand, slowly, with all these things. Would like a complete collection of United States and British regimental badges some day.

So, do you have any idea where it would be possible to obtain a cabinet which would suit my purpose, at not too great a price? Also, what must I do to keep the medals in good shape? So far, with practically no care, they are still in fine shape.

Could coins be kept with the medals? I have a small group of coins picked up here and there, but they seem to tarnish very easily, and soon look shabby.

Now, more questions. What firm, if any, handles United States campaign medals, and how can I get a price list? Before the tumble from the gold standard, firms in England had such low prices, that I figured it would be cheaper to buy from them and pay the duty, rather than purchase from the boys in this country, who advertise—British Victoria Cross, unused, $40 (and they buy 'em from French firms for $1.50 per copy). What can you tell me of prices now? And have we any really reliable firms here? One outfit in Flatbush offers Croix de Guerre, awarded to spy (!) for only $15 (and I can get the same from European dealers for 60c).

Also, is there any concern, either here or in England, which deals in regimental badges, and is reliable? And why, please, are the German firms so darned high-priced? I'd like some German medals, but can't meet the figure the Berlin firms want, and Bannerman of New York is high on everything in the medal line—though he has several items I'd like.

Well, guess I've been enough trouble for the present. I am an old dyed-in-the-wool *Adventure* fan, or would not have bothered you so much. However, out here, we are quite a ways from anything civilized (thank goodness I hail from, and wish I were in, Kansas) so don't have a chance to exchange ideas, or drop into a shop to mull over what we might like to buy.

So anything you may offer will be greatly appreciated.

—THOMAS L. PORTER, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Reply by Mr. Howland Wood:—It is rather hard to give you definite answers to your general letter, which, however, is most interesting. Did it ever occur to you that you might keep some of your medals in frames, with a backboard covered with, preferably, black velvet. This backboard could be so fixed that it is easily removable. It should be at least half an inch from the glass. Your medals would show off well arranged in this manner and would be adequately protected. Cabinets are rather hard to obtain. They should be made of shallow drawers and I should say for your stuff the drawers should be about an inch in depth. I do not know of opportunities in Salt Lake City but years ago many cabinets were made and used by

stores to keep certain flat goods in. There was a nice cabinet made to hold spools of thread. Some music dealers had cabinets with shallow drawers. You might scout around among second-hand dealers who specialize in office equipment and pick up something approaching your wants. You might be able to convert an old type cabinet that printers use or a cabinet to keep electrotypes. It is rather expensive to have a frame made with glass on both sides so that you can display both sides of your medals. There is no reason why you should not keep your coins with your medals but I would preferably keep them in a tray by themselves. It is very hard to keep silver coins from tarnishing.

There is no firm in this country that specializes in our own campaign medals. There is a law against the displaying of them for sale in windows. Most coin dealers now and then have one or two of these medals. The pawnshops are more apt to have them, especially in towns located near some army post. The best firm I know of in England is A. H. Baldwin & Sons, 3 Roberts St., Adelphi, London, W. C., England, who more or less specialize in war badges and decorations. There is one thing you must look out for and that is French manufacturers make replicas of nearly every medal and decoration —some of them are as good as the original, and in a few instances better.

I never heard of a genuine Victoria Cross selling for $40. I am inclined to think there is something fishy about it. They generally sell from $100.00 to several hundred dollars. There are imitations. Those you get from France certainly are fakes. It is extremely hard to pick up decorations in this country by correspondence as there are no regular prices for such things here and few collectors of them, and dealers and shops that have them, as a rule, know little or nothing as to their value. I know nothing about the prices asked by German firms in recent years. The concern you quote here in New York has always been very high. The St. Louis Stamp and Coin Company at times have had some good items.

IN interior Ecuador you don't need an arsenal—a light "table gun" will do. And Indians are cheaper and better than mules.

Request:—A party of perhaps fifteen persons is forming to take a trip into the interior of Ecuador. The exact destination I do not know but it lies somewhere in that region that has for so many years been in dispute between Ecuador and Peru. Possibly a little beyond, but not far enough to reach the Amazon low country. My position will be as radio operator. As I have spent considerable time on trips of various sorts, no doubt I will find myself burdened with other jobs, as the leader is the only other one of the party who has had any experience away from civilization. He has been in this region before and is no stranger to it. My object in writing you is not that I doubt his knowledge of what is necessary for the trip but that you may be able to suggest something that may be otherwise forgotten. The men as a whole are professional men who want to get away from their workaday troubles for a while. There will be considerable geographical work done and some research work in the medical line. The method of transportation is by mules or horses as the conditions dictate. Almost all the supplies will be taken from the States. It is planned to spend a year or more in the back country. After a base camp is made, contact with the outside will be made by plane. A number of natives will be taken along, from Quito, I suppose, to wrestle with the pack animals, to cook, etc.

There will be at least one doctor along, and ample medical supplies. What might be some particular needs in this line?

The Winchester Carbine, model 1894, Cal. 30-30, is the rifle we have chosen. A few spare parts will be taken along for the rifles, several 22's for small game and the 38 special pistol as the sidearm. I think that a rifle with a little more power than the 30-30 would be better but I understand there are no dangerous animals of large size to be encountered, and the '94 Winchester is a good reliable rifle. Suggestions?

Are the anti-venom kits effective against the bites of any poisonous snakes that may live there? Any insects of a dangerous character?

Is there any certain time of the year that is or is not suitable to travel in? What would be the approximate date to start on?

Clothes, tents and bedding—just ordinary durable clothes O. K.? Good grade of waterproofed tents; blankets or sleeping bag, air mattress and hammock for nocturnal comfort? I've roughed it enough to realize the value of comfortable rest at night, excepting any necessary guard duty, of course.

What percentage of the necessary food can be procured from the country—meat, wild fruits, etc.?

Will any trouble be encountered in buying about sixty pack and riding animals?

Can the saddles and pack saddles be procured with the animals or should they be taken from here?

There will be ample arrangements made about passports and the like so I think no trouble will arise there.

Nothing else comes to mind now, so will leave it up to you. Any information you can give me will be greatly appreciated.

—L. M. D., Superior, Ariz.

Reply by Mr. Edgar Young:—I have just finished reading your letter very carefully. In the first paragraph I note you say you intend to get mules and men at Quito. Do not do this. What mules you could get would be engaged at high rates and what men you would get would be unreliable. There is a phone line part of the way in the direction you intend going and I would advise getting some one (American or Englishman or German) who knows the local country to phone out and have mules and Indians sent in for the party and equipment. It seems to me that the phone line goes all the way to Archidona and if so, get them to get hold of the Indian governor and make the deal with him. If I am mistaken about the phone line going all the way to Archidona get some one out as far as it does go to send. If you can get word to Archidona, in the absence of a phone line, by means of the mail runners, and have him send in Indians and mules, you would be better off in the long run, for you would then be on the good side of a man who carries the silver-headed cane of authority over all the Indians quite a distance in the direction you are heading.

Unless a vast change has been made you will find it absolutely impossible to ride across the mountains. There are, or were, two ways of getting over. Walk, and be carried by Indians in their peculiar pack chairs. One of these big Indian packers can carry any weight of a man all day at a trot. Women are usually carried this way. I imagine all you red-blooded guys would prefer walking to being carried, but real explorers have been carried over the Andes in this manner. These Indians can be hired cheaper than mules or llamas and many of them bring their women to run along with them and carry the parched corn, chicha, et cetera, for grub. They grub themselves and build their own thatched shelters. They are strong, dependable, friendly. These same Indians range the Napo and Cururay.

If you get Quito Indians they would be Quechuas and unused to the wilds. You will remember that Quito is high altitude itself but on the equator (12 miles away) which gives it a temperate climate. You will be able to get by mules as far as mules can travel. There is a climb of 5,000 or 6,000 feet across the backbone range and then you go down the eastern slopes. Quickly you descend to the altitude of Quito and, as there is no plateau on the eastern side, you go right on down. It is 2,500 miles up the Amazon from Para to Iquitos but the river only falls some 900 feet in this distance. At the village of Napo you would be some 2,000 feet or less above sea level.

The climate of the eastern slopes is quite different from the western. You are soon down into the effects of the steamy tropical Amazon basin. Rainfall is heavy at all times and often excessive. Vegetation is dense. The Indians are extremely tame and friendly and know the ropes about throwing up shelters of palm thatch. They know very little about civilized labor but are good at their own stuff. Some of them know how to use the wooden bowls to pan gold from the bars.

Quinine grows wild over there. Quinine is the *sine qua non* in the tropics and should be the mainstay of your doctor. As the redbark is exported and made into the alkaloid here or in Europe he'd better take his own from here. Iodine and a bunch of simple drugs will do for the rest.

I like the Winchester you mention very much. It used to be my favorite gun. You would certainly not need as big a gun as this over there. If I were you I'd stick to small-caliber stuff. There is a law which forbids bringing in anything over 38 caliber and you might have trouble with the customs at Guayaquil. Here's what I suggest, and you can do as you please: high power 22 and these new high power 22's are some babies, 401 shotguns (I think that is the caliber), and for sidearms I would suggest the compressed air pistols which shoot slugs. I hereby guarantee you will need nothing larger than these. I would have no hesitancy in making the trip barehanded and I mention the ones I do as table guns only. If you were crossing from Ambato to Jivero country I would have something different to say. If a crowd of you try to take in big-caliber guns you are going to have trouble at Guayaquil at the custom house. If you must have big guns, buy them locally after you are inside the country.

I own a place in Florida and I think there are more bad snakes in Florida than in the whole of South America. Anti-venom was discovered by a Brazilian at the Sao Paulo snake farm of the Brazilian government and he came up here to make it for our snakes

and was awarded the so and so prize for it at Philadelphia. He was hired by the United Fruit Company to go to Central America and make anti-venom from snakes down there. I don't know how he made out. The antitoxin for our vipers won't act on the South American variety. At any rate you will not need it. There are some insects but it is a fact that the bite of no insect is fatal in spite of all that one has heard and read on the subject.

I would not advise tents. You will have a couple or three cool nights and if you work it right you can find houses to stay in. After you get on the eastern side your Indians can throw up thatches. You might take flies for shelter if you wish, or tarps. You can get the finest hammocks made on the globe at Guayaquil. The Guayaquil hammock, made of fiber like a Panama hat, is plenty long. Mosquitoes will sting through them unless a net or *pavallon* is used. These are made of mosquito netting. You will not have the skeeters from Quito across the range but you will find them on the eastern side. A very close weave is essential to keep out the sand flies and gnats, some using a thin cloth. I have mentioned the worst things down there, mosquitoes and small gnats.

Clothes? It is chilly at Quito and on across but you will need light clothing over there. Khaki, BVD's, felt hats, shoes with canvas leggins. If you *do* prefer boots or high shoes be sure to use yarn socks and dry them at noon and turn them inside out or do as I did in Brazil, wear no socks. One army blanket per man is O. K. and it can be used for packing also. I would not take heavy clothing for the short stay in the highlands. Just take some old clothes that can be thrown away or given to Indian men and women who will prize them highly. A pillow is a mighty handy thing even with a hammock and I could allow you an air pillow. I wouldn't trouble with mattresses, etc. The Guayaquil hammock is a good sleeping outfit and will last forever.

Food is cheap at Quito. You can get beef, mutton, and grain cheap. There is some game on the eastern sides and fish and birds after you get down the slopes a ways, also turtles and turtle eggs. Yams, cassava, cane, and bananas are Indian rations over there.

I would not buy one single mule. Hire them to go as far as you can and then depend on Indians. These Indians, on the eastern side, are better packers and cheaper than mules. They will take up with you as voluntary slaves and will come to you with a whip every so often and ask you to do them the favor of beating them with it. If you intend any sort of lengthy stay you will have a young army of them always around. Slavery actually exists over there and you can buy any number of them but it will not be necessary.

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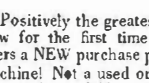

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