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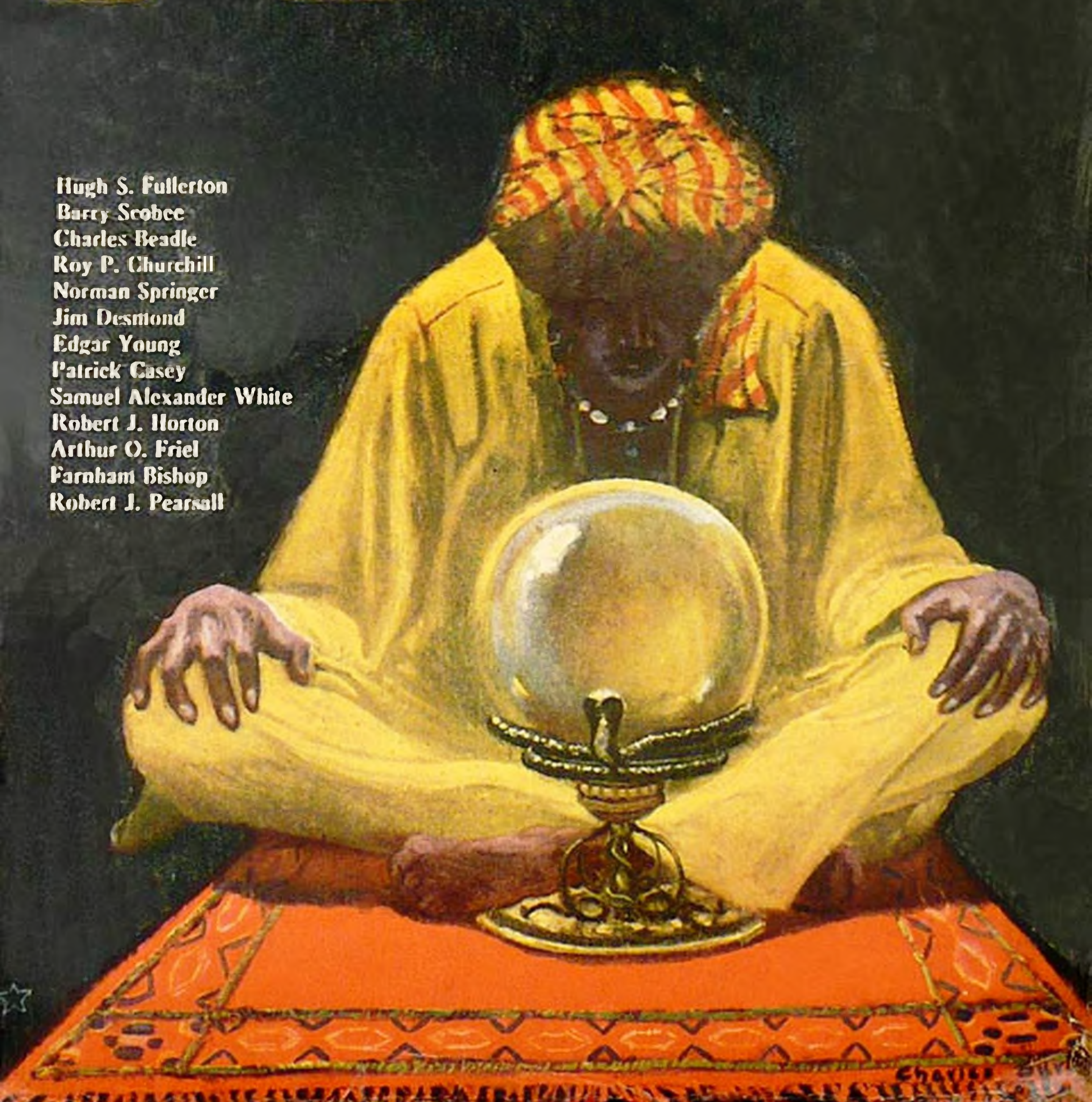

Adventure

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

BUSHFIGHTERS

"THE BUSHFIGHTERS," by Hugh Pendexter: A tale of the French and Indian War in New York, and of the dark year 1755, when Ticonderoga was lost and folk trembled lest the scalp-yell rise in the streets of Albany. Israel Putnam—"Wolf" Putnam—does the work of many men in killing Montcalm's "praying Indians." A full book-length novel complete in the next issue, by a man who knows.

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

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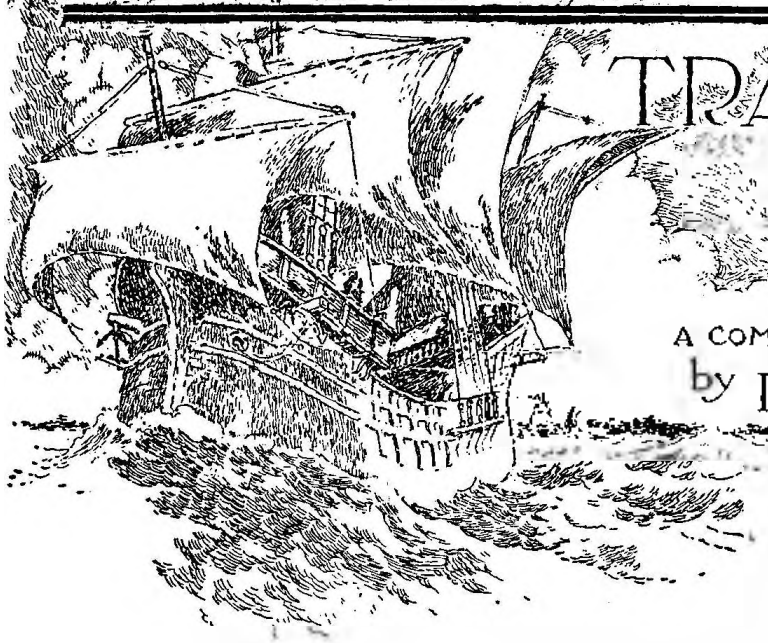


TRAIL of the CHOSEN FOUR

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by Barry Scobee

Author of "Heart of the Yankee," "Road-Signs and a Nose-Ring," etc.

CHAPTER I

A BIT O' BLUFFING

BALES and boxes of trade goods were piled high on the low deck of the Barcelona-built hull, and the stowaway Irishman hidden among them, cramped from sitting for hours in one position, longed to shove the packages aside and walk out among men as a man should. But he dared not be so reckless; the vessel might still be near enough to land for them to put back with him.

He actually ached for knowledge of their whereabouts. But all he knew pertinent to the subject was that at noon of this tenth of July in the year 1527, a fleet of five wooden ships had sailed from San Lucar de Barrameda, Spain, for the mystery world of gold and adventure that Columbus had discovered not many years before—America, called New Spain.

About the time he began to feel that he would rather fight the whole crew than to endure the muscle aches any longer, he realized that dusk was coming on. A great babel of talk rose aft, but the creak of the rigging and the *sssough* of the sea kept him from distinguishing words. Then the talk fell off; it stopped as if every man had shut his mouth at a given signal. What was up? He popped to his feet. How good that first straightening of his knee hinges felt! He stepped to the bale on which he had been sitting, and was able to see out over the ship.

In the stern, against the rail, was what seemed to be the whole ship's company—the brilliantly garbed court gentlemen, the boat's officers and low-born crew, all forgetful of rank and rubbing elbows as they peered through the gathering night for a last look at their homeland. Beyond them, stretching out toward the dim shore, were the four other vessels, all in a row like so many ducks. In a moment a gaunt figure detached itself from the cluster and, making a pose with his gauntleted right hand held high, declaimed oratorically:

"Farewell, my Spain! Farewell till I come back to you, my ships weighted down with yellow gold!"

"Farewell! Farewell!" rumbled a hundred voices.

The stowaway's throat pinched, not for love

of the land he was leaving, but with the thrill men feel who venture from the known into the unknown. The commander, Panfilo de Narvaez, dropped his pose and turned to his captain.

"Pantoja, have lights brought. Instantly, sir!" He always spoke with offensive arrogance. "And assemble the company. I wish to announce the king's final orders."

Pantoja transmitted the order and presently sailors were hanging baskets of pitch on the after cabin. The company crowded around eagerly to hear this important communication. The stowaway climbed down and joined them, unobserved in the darkness, though he stood elbow to elbow with sailors who smelled of garlic.

"Gentlemen and men," began Narvaez, his one good eye running over them sharply, "by the orders of his Majesty, our King Charles the Fifth of Spain, I make final announcements. I am your commander, and I am to be your governor in the settling, exploring and conquering of the firm land of New Spain that lies between Florida and the River of the Palms.

"I am instructed, because of the prying pirate ships of the Normans and British, to avoid touching at the Canaries and Madeira. We shall take our course southwest to the trades, thence to Santo Domingo and onward to the firm land."

The commander paused to open a parchment that he held. The stowaway thought he knew what this was—a roster of the company, and he expected to hear a roll called and see noses counted, with his own nose being an extra one. At the thought his hand sought the hilt of his long straight sword, for he knew that the king had given orders that not one foreigner be permitted with the fleet.

Narvaez said nothing of a roll call, however, but began to read:

"From King Charles the Fifth

To my trusted officers and friends of the fleet,

Greetings.

Also to the near six hundred men of the fleet, who by my orders, for political reasons and reasons of state, are of Spanish birth——"

So it came that way! The Irishman was keyed to a high pitch with his hiding and waiting. Impulsively he decided that now was as good a time as any to dive in and have it over with. He elbowed his way through the line of men and at each step he became cooler. When he entered the light and stopped before Narvaez he was smiling jauntily—a lithe, blue-eyed figure of a man, booted, sword at side, and crowned by a bristle of sandy hair.

"Image of Satan!" the governor stormed out. "Who are you?"

"Andy Doran, Irish gentleman, and at your service, sir." And the stowaway swept his plumed hat through an exaggerated bow that was a scornful dare to the Spaniard.

"Foreigner! Spy!" came the hisses.

"By my soul!" exclaimed an easy-going voice among the gentlemen—Cabeza de Vaca, "'tis Andres Dorantes, the Irish swordsman."

Every eye turned, almost clicked to the stranger, for this Irishman had some fame in Spain as a duelist. Doran's ruddy face was alight with amusement at the circle of amazement and chagrin.

"How came you aboard this ship?" Narvaez demanded.

"By a bit o' luck, Excellency."

"Why?"

"To go venturing into this new world with so renowned a navigator as yourself, sir."

"Keep your northern blarney to yourself. I dislike it. Besides you lie."

"The word, an it were turned to a Spaniard, would be a compliment!" Andy flamed.

"You are a spy of the Normans, or the insolent British."

"Would I were!"

"What do you mean? Answer me!" The commander's anger was gathering like a storm on the horizon.

"I mean that I would take pride in an alliance with either of those clean nations," Doran replied with deliberate insult, stung by the Spaniard's manner and words. "The morals of you Spanish *conquistadores* have come to smell since Columbus gave you a world to loot."

"By the saints! I'll have you drowned. Pantoja, have men fling this foreigner over the side."

"Nay, Excellency," interposed de Vaca, who was treasurer and second in command. "This man was born in Spain, in Bejar, and though of Irish parentage his nativity will fulfill the King's requirements. It is ill-advised to baptize our expedition with blood. Remember what the soothsayers told——"

"Enough! Fling him over the side!"

"An you do, Excellency," Doran said easily, striding close to the governor, his arms folded over the breast of his slashed doublet, "my ghost shall sit on your cabin and kick its heel against the port o' nights from here to Florida."

Narvaez, who was notoriously superstitious, gave back a startled step.

"You threaten me?" he cried.

"Not at all, but my father used to say, 'If ye start, keep going.' An' I mean to reach this new world, an' it's as how you wish my company—a wet and dripping ghost or a warm and welcome guest."

"You northern dog!" Narvaez, his one eye flaming, was beside himself with anger. He whipped out his sword. "You pig, I'll run you through."

The governor had not drawn his sword half out before Doran had sprung back and rasped out his own. The two poised for an instant, measuring each other for attack and defense,

and fortunately for the Irishman that this pause came, for it gave two men an opportunity to rush between them.

"Nay, nay," urged Cabeza de Vaca quietly, "do not set the fates against us by ill-judged slaughter."

"Stand aside," Narvaez ordered.

"No," spoke the firm, yet pleading voice of Fray Saurez. "Do not baptize our departure with blood, Excellency." He put a detaining hand on the governor's arm. "It is useless to slay this foreigner. He can be held at Santo Domingo and returned to Spain."

"I'm going as far as this expedition goes!" Doran, in a tempest now, flung out.

Narvaez put up his sword—no doubt glad of the friar's intervention, for that gave him an excuse to desist in an act that he must have felt would bring evil upon them.

"Very good," he said to Saurez. "Go forward, Irishman, while I continue the reading of orders. At Santo Domingo you shall be returned with the first ship sailing to Spain."

"Santo Domingo is another day," Andy retorted. "Before you and I say good-by, Excellency, I shall be a captain in your horse."

CHAPTER II

A GOOD NOSE PAYS

HOWEVER—a handy word—this was the fortieth night in Santo Domingo and Andrew Doran was no nearer to being a captain in Narvaez's horse than he was the day they docked.

However, this was the fortieth night here also for the governor and the fleet, and there was like to be an eightieth night and a hundredth night and possibly an abandonment of the expedition and a return to Spain. For bad luck had come upon the fleet. All the mechanics had deserted, and not one horse could be obtained. And horses were necessary. However. . . .

Santo Domingo, beyond the strictures of the old world, was a wild and reckless town. From dark to daylight barefooted, bare-armed sailors caroused about the wine shops and streets singing and drinking and getting into a thousand kinds of mischief. The shop called the Pirate's Hive was forever filled to its thatched roof with the ribald uproar of men who drank, and with the music of guitars in the hands of sailors.

This was a fine large night at the place. Andy Doran sat by a table, his chair tilted against the wall, and bantered back and forth with every Tomas, Ricardo and Pedro that came along. He knew them all and every one was his friend. As he sat there and held his own against the rude throng a slim, dandified officer of the fleet entered. He was Captain Alonso del Castillo, of horse, and following him as his shadow was his man Estevanico, an Arab Moor.

"*Bueno noche*, Andee," he called out gaily. "What bottle shall I order for you?"

"None at all, an you will excuse me, Alonso. As you know, I have no palate for more than two bottles in a night."

"You're not consistent in your philosophy," Castillo charged. "What maxim would your father have? If you drink, drink hard!"

A laugh went up around the room, for "Andee's" quotations from his, apparently, gifted father had become famous.

"The Señor Andee is in a corner, no?" laughed Sergeant Bastos, whose lasting friendship Andy had won by finding a house for the man and his wife. " 'If you drink, drink hard!' "

The soldier laughed in huge good fellowship, and the house joined in again.

"But my father had a different verse for that," Andy demurred, and the shop became quiet to hear his words. " 'If ye drink—your wife will soon be wearing the breeches.' "

Ha-ha-ha-ho-ho-ho! Men laughed in those days, pirate laughter that could be heard a mile.

Now that Castillo, an officer, was present with their adored Andee, the red kerchiefed throng departed, every one lifting his hat and bowing deeply before passing through the door. Castillo sipped and gossiped.

"Anything about the fleet sailing?" Doran asked.

Castillo shook his head.

"Great fishes!" Andy yawned. "I wish it would sail."

"What!" Castillo pretended surprize. "Why, everybody in the port knows that you will not go. It is an open secret that the Alcalde Diaz will hold you here on Narvaez's instructions."

"Wait and see! I suppose the governor is still whinneying like a horse with the hope he can attract a few score steeds to his ships."

"Ay, or braying like a donkey of Seville. He's got on our nerves up there at headquarters with his ragged temper."

"Why doesn't he try for horses in Cuba?"

"He fears he would not get any there and would be compelled then to go on without any. He's in an unenviable quandary." The captain rose and the Moor fell in behind him. "Well, Andee, I'll get back to the *casa grande*. His Excellency may want to swear at me, and not be able to find me. Wish you would go along."

"And I would, right gladly, had not Narvaez, as you know, forbade me to enter the staff's building. My compliments to him, though, and tell him to save a good cabin for me."

With Castillo gone, Andy was alone save for the man behind the counter, a husky, bare-armed half-breed called the Pirate. The man was habitually as silent as a post and Andy, always wanting company in his misery of uncertainty about continuing the voyage, sauntered out to see—what he could see.

Instead of going toward the beach he went up

the gentle sandy slope in the direction of the town and government buildings. No one was abroad here, it seemed, for the citizens kept to their beds at night when a fleet was in and the water-front was maggoty with brawlers. Besides, there were frequent showers—little splotches of rain that passed over the sand and roofs like pattering feet. Yet the seeming that no one was abroad was a seeming, for Andy had not progressed far when he saw two men coming toward him. As they drew near he saw that one was Alcalde Diaz himself, the big man of the town. They came on and drew abreast and passed; then Andy stopped as abruptly as if he had been a soldier commanded to halt. He whiffed, he faced about and lifted his nose toward the retreating figures and whiffed some more.

"I'll be banished," he said half aloud, "if I didn't get the smell of horses from them—and there isn't a horse on the island, so says Diaz. Andy, here is where you make Narvaez your friend and get the captaincy, or—don't find any horses."

He followed the mismated pair—mismated because the man with the mayor was a half-nude laborer—and they led him straight back to the Pirate's Hive. He was close enough on their heels to see Diaz nod significantly to the Pirate and, with his man, pass behind a curtain at a door that Andrew knew was the entrance to a series of rooms. Their step-sounds told him that they had gone to the rear, out of hearing. He lounged up to the counter, assuming a lazy and indifferent air.

"Queer birds get together," he commented, nodding idly in the direction the mayor had taken.

The Pirate's hard black eyes turned on him keenly, but the grim lips did not part in speech. Andy knew by Diaz's familiarity with the place and with the barkeep that he had been here before and he decided the Pirate knew what was afoot. Also he proposed to fish a little with his wits for a hook and line.

"The man should get the smell of horses off him before he comes into the settlement," he commented.

"Why?" the Pirate snapped him up.

"Any of Narvaez's men can smell him, and they might learn something the governor is anxious to find out." Andy chuckled knowingly.

"How did you learn?"

The barkeep was divided between curiosity, suspicion and belligerency.

"For one thing, Pirate mine, me father came from the island of saints and scholars." He was encouraged by the barkeep's look of mystification. "And for another, when a subject is talked of indiscreetly about the government buildings, leave it to a Celt o' Erin to learn. I wonder, now, what this bumpkins could be wantin' to whisper to Diaz? The horses are not dying, do you think?"

"They need new pasture. This old 'One-Eye' Narvaez keeps staying and staying and the horses eating and eating. Porfirio, who it is that talks jowl to jowl with the *alcalde*, asks for aid to drive the beasts to another valley. 'Tis curious that ye know all this."

"Wouldn't the governor prance if he knew how the mayor is deceiving him! No horses my foot! A hundred at least."

"Nay, not so many. Half that, *possiblemente*. It is strange, *señor*, how you came by this knowledge." The Pirate was troubled. "When Alcalde Diaz sent the horses inland he gave out that they had been shipped to Cuba and lost at sea. Only Porfirio knew the truth at first, then I. And now—open talk at the government building."

"Oh, not open talk."

"Thou wilt have care, *señor*, with thy words lest it appear that Porfirio or I have talked in forbidden ears?"

"Should I be asked, Pirate, whence came the first whiff o' these horses to me I should say in the street, and say true." Andy was elated and he wanted to go out on the beach and yell, but there was still more information to gain, so he affected a huge yawn. "Wh-wh-ho hum hi—why did Diaz attempt such a fool's trick anyway? Doesn't he know the tale will tickle the King's ear sooner or later?"

"Disappointment sharpens knives and dull wits," the Pirate opined. "Diaz had his mind pegged to be governor on these new firm lands and old One-Eye got the place. When your fleet cut the horizon Diaz knew who came, and that night he sent the fit horses up the coast, knowing well it would be a burr in Narvaez's crop."

"Have you not thought of selling this information to Narvaez for a few handfuls of gold?" Andy asked curiously.

"Aye, I had thought of it but—I heard the wife of Sergeant Bastos talking the other night."

"What of that?"

The Pirate shook his head positively and shuddered as if in fear.

"The devil would wait for me at the door of hell with a bucket of hot pitch," he said and thrust out his hands, as if to push Andy and his suggestion away.

Andy sauntered around the room, yawned again, complained about the dullness, and with a "good night" passed out of the door. But outside his demeanor underwent a magical change. A happy grin lighted his face.

NARVAEZ and most of his staff gloomed about the big room of the many-roomed bamboo house on the beach that the expeditionary officers had appropriated. Outside, every few minutes, a

light shower of heavy drops pattered over the thatch and the sand like running feet. Inside, the rush lights waved in the draft stirred up by the governor's pacing back and forth over the creaking slat floor.

"Satan's plague!" he blazed out suddenly. "Can not you men at the dice game there be quieter. You make more noise than a troop of horse on the Toledo bridge."

"Horses are on your mind, Excellency," Cabeza de Vaca remarked lazily.

A rattling scabbard interrupted the commander's retort, and he stared at the door in amazement, for Andy Doran stood there, smiling. He removed his plumed hat, bowed, and strode forward—a little short of six feet in height, but muscular and light-treading and as self-confident as—an Irish swordsman!

"Why come you hither?" Narvaez demanded sharply.

"For a captaincy in your horse, Excellency." He chuckled happily.

"You impudent——"

"I can put a bug in your ear, sir, that will repair your garment."

"I will not hear you. Out with you."

"Nay, nay," de Vaca interposed. "A son of Erin is a luck piece. Perhaps 'twould be profitable to listen."

"An it would——"

There was something in Andy's tone that made the governor pause and knead his sharp chin with his long fingers.

"I will listen," he granted. "Speak out."

"Horses, that is my talk, an it were induced by a commission in your army."

"Horses and men?" The governor and the whole company pricked up their ears. "Know you something new?"

"I do that."

"Out with it then."

"I can be persuaded by a commission, sir, sworn to before the friar, and saying that I am to accompany you on all expeditions and remain in your service until I wish to quit or the expedition is ended."

"Commission! Fool! Thinkest I can risk the wrath of my King by making you, a foreigner, an officer of my horse?"

"Remember thou hast no horse yet," Andy retorted significantly.

"You—you—" Narvaez fairly panted with wrath. "I've a mind to choke you. Speak out. The commission is yours."

" 'Twere of more substantiality written on good parchment and in my hands."

"You doubt my word."

His hand went to his sword.

"Yes," Andy replied calmly.

Narvaez was beside himself. He jerked out his sword.

"Tell me what you know of horses and men or I'll run you through!"

"You do that and you'll never hear a horse snort in Santo Domingo."

Narvaez ran at Andy, point to the fore. Doran retreated a step or two, drawing his own blade. He had felt in his serious moments that a contest of this sort was inevitable between himself and the governor and he had made up his mind what to do, let the consequences be what they would. As the swords clashed and flamed he retreated step by step, backward and sidewise, keeping his opponent's steel away from his body and waiting his chance. It came quickly, and, taking advantage of it, he cried out—

"I hate to fight a blind man!"

At the same instant the governor's sword seemed to be wrapped about with Andy's. It was jerked from his hand, and in the same motion Doran sent it flashing across the room.

The enormity of his offense was impressed upon him by the dead silence of the onlookers. They regarded him as if he were already flayed to death. For a second he was at a loss what to do, but he had the faculty of knowing when retreat was victory, so now he picked up his hat from the floor, every man, including the governor, still staring at him, bowed low and said—

"I bid you a pleasant good evening."

He expected to be arrested before he reached his lodging, and he expected it all the next day. The tale soon was on everybody's lips, and a group of horse and sailors offered to mutiny in support of him, but Andy went about as gaily as ever, and bided time. Then on the third day the governor sent a summons. He was in the Pirate's place at the time, and that individual, having heard the story, was much alarmed.

"Thou hast put thy neck in a noose," he whispered as Andy started off. "Be careful that thou dost not get mine in also. Thou will say nothing of our talk, *señor?*"

"Not even if I have a chance to," replied Andy, not knowing whether he was to be hanged or appointed.

He found the commander in his private room of the *casa grande.*

"Irishman," Narvaez began without preliminary, "I prefer to hang you, and some day I may, but necessity devours wrath. Here is your commission." He passed over a paper which Andy saw was a proper commission in all respects. "Speak of what you know, and remember, if your words are not true, I shall put you in jail—and worse."

IN THE afternoon of the forty-fifth day at Santo Domingo, near fifty horses, obtained from the *alcalde's* hidden pasture, were in the low waists of the vessels, a sixth ship had been added by purchase, and a troop of ten men had been assigned to Captain Doran's command. And in the evening the fleet sailed away in all its pride and

glory for the unknown shores of the American mainland.

In the stern of the vessel that Cabeza de Vaca commanded, Andy leaned over the rail and pondered his change in fortune and the future. He was interrupted in this pleasant pastime by a soft-footed Spanish woman stopping at his side.

"*Señor*," she said in a low earnest voice. "Dost thou value thy life?"

"Well," Andy answered whimsically, "it isn't worth much but—about all I have."

"Then—this fleet will stop at Cuban ports. Lose thyself in one of them."

"Why all this?" Doran asked. "What do you know?"

"*Señor*, thou didst do the sergeant and myself a favor in Santo Domingo. I do thee a favor in return. I warn you. Remain in Cuba, for they who go with the expedition on the firm land are lost."

Andy laughed aloud at her woful seriousness.

"Tut-tut, woman. My star is a lucky one, and my feet are itchin' to be scratched by the golden pebbles of yon far beaches. Nay, I shall go as far as our commander, and may be it, a bit of distance farther, weather and health permitting."

CHAPTER III

THE DEAD MAN'S GOLD

MANY a month passed before Captain Doran felt the tickle of the sands of North American beaches. For this was an ill-fated expedition from the first, delayed and harrassed and—cursed.

It was late in October when the fleet left Santo Domingo. In Cuba Narvaez bought two more ships and additional horses. In November two ships were lost, with sixty men and nearly twoscore horses, in a tropical hurricane; and after this, one tempest had hardly subsided before another was bobbing them about like corks in a boiling kettle.

The culminating piece of misfortune, though it was not known at the time, was Narvaez's selection of a pilot for the uncharted waters of New Spain, one Miruelo, who boasted that he knew the north coasts from the greatest harbors to the oyster beds.

The second day that the pilot was at the wheel of the flagship, he grounded the entire fleet on a low island, and it held there for fifteen days, until another storm blew up water and floated them clear. Eventually, in early April, this man by the sheerest luck doubled the west end of Cuba and trimmed the sails for Havana with five vessels—one brigantine and four three-masters. One ship had been left back to come on later with fresh supplies.

It was the commander's intention to repair his ships at Havana and rest the company, but bad luck, like a gray bird perching on the mizzen, snatched this last cup from their lips. When twelve leagues off the settlement another tropical hurricane broke and blew them northward like a shower of leaves in Autumn. When the storm subsided they were west of Florida, half lost. But the pilot assured the commander pompously that he would guide them to a safe harbor, one not far from the River of Palms—the harbor of Panuco.

Panuco! The Spaniard's ignorance of the north gulf coast was colossal. Panuco was what a long time afterward became Tampico, Mexico. It had been located by Spanish ships coasting north from the Carribean sea—Cordova in 1517, perhaps. The navigators went as far north as the Rio Grande—River of Palms—and believed they had traversed the coast clear to Florida. Yet they did not know that Galveston Island and the Mississippi River existed. Thus it was that Miruelo thought to pilot the fleet northward from Havana, and soon find Panuco in Florida.

Even persistent bad luck relents now and then—long enough to fool its victims! And one morning when the red sun was edging up from behind the cloud of land like a copper coin from a magician's fingers they descried a bay—probably Tampa Bay—reaching inland. Miruelo admitted that it was not Panuco, that he did not know what place it was. But the commander was anxious to land, get rid of their sea cramps, and explore the country, so he had the fleet hauled up on the north lip of the bay.

Immediately there was a great to-do in preparation for landing next day and taking formal possession. Trade goods were winched up, armor scoured for the ceremony. Everybody speculated as to who would be permitted in the first landing party.

"There will be few enough," drawled Cabeza de Vaca. "The governor is jealous of his prerogative to be first, and he wishes to have only a select company with him."

"I lay a good wager that I am one of them," Castillo said. "I am always lucky."

"I'm not lucky," Andy denied, "but I am going to be in the first shore party if Narvaez will listen to reason. I feel like a bug shut up in a book. I'm going in and chat with him about it."

"Better not," de Vaca advised. "If he thinks a man wants a favor—he will give it and pay the interest before it is due."

"He'd leave me aboard sure if I didn't see him, so I might as well go and see if I can pick some good out of a bad nut."

A moment later when he knocked at the governor's door, high on the poop deck, he received a short "Enter!"

"Ah," Narvaez said suavely when he saw who stood before him. "Think of a friend and the

friend thinks of you! I've had you in mind for a half hour, Captain Dorantes. Sit down. I have a special honor to confer upon you."

"Yes?"

Andy was plainly skeptical.

"But state your business first, my good Captain."

Narvaez fairly beamed.

"Oh, a mere nothing, sir," Doran was very polite. "I would go ashore on the morrow, an you are willing."

"A coincidence! Just what I had in mind. I mean to honor you by permitting you to lead the horsemen, breaking the way for us mere followers as we explore inland tomorrow. There may be savages and danger."

"No doubt."

"You are not afraid?"

"Nay, Excellency." Andy smiled. "Neither am I puzzled why the honor is mine. 'Tis a good honest way of ridding yourself of one Captain Doran. Indian attacks, you know, and——"

"You have a quick wit," Narvaez complimented, his one good eye twinkling like a kindly father's. "Such a quick wit that I shall go farther and extend the honor." He leaned forward and tapped off his words with his long white fingers. "Every journey, every trip inland henceforth, thou shalt be the leader to break the way. Thou shalt soon be slain by the savages, certainly, but what an honor to die for Spain! Get out, and be ready in the morning with thy ten horsemen."

THE ceremony of taking formal possession of the mainland was gone through with the next forenoon. It was typical. Narvaez walked up the beach in advance of the others, knelt and kissed the ground, then planted two iron-shod staffs, bearing the colors of King Charles and of Spain. He was gorgeous in his slashed doublet, his cape, the plumed hat and polished boots. After he had proclaimed himself governor and conferred their titles on the staff members, he directed the company, consisting of about fifty men, to go inland to see what manner of land they had arrived at.

Doran and Sergeant Bastos led the way, the others of the troop being stretched out in a sort of skirmish line. Every man was interested. They at once began to examine the pebbles and sand for gold, paying little heed to the strange jungle, to the land and water birds that flew up with raucous cries, or to the gorgeous blossoms and the rich odors.

Because their responsibility was greatest, Doran and his sergeant kept alert, but in the end their caution went for nothing, for without warning four naked Indians, armed with heavy bows, suddenly confronted them. All the other explorers had fallen far behind.

"'Tis time to be polite," Andy called back to Bastos whimsically.

He dismounted and put out a hand, but the Indians, not knowing the custom of shaking hands, gave back a step. However when they saw that he was friendly, they invited him and the sergeant to follow, using expressive gestures.

In an hour they arrived at a village of a half dozen grass huts with a patch of corn close by. The populace, men, women and children, mostly naked, came pouring out with incredible amazement in their faces and a curiosity that made them finger the cloth of garments, the armor and the cross-bows. They were led straight to a hut larger than the others. Inside an old man, no more than a bag of bones, sat on a skin. The instant he saw the two strangers he sprang to his feet, and Doran thought the old eyes would pop from their sockets. But the tribal father controlled himself at once and led the way hurriedly, all the tribes people following excitedly, to a patch of low brush not far away.

Here, it was Andy's and the soldier's time to be amazed, for in a half-circle were a dozen boxes such as were used by the Spaniards to ship merchandise in to the new world. They bore in Spanish lettering, "Trade Goods." Over the tops lay painted skins. Andy lifted one of these to see what was within, and started back in horror. Then one by one, Bastos looking over his shoulder, he lifted the covers of the other boxes.

In each one was the dried-up body of a man, Spaniards as evidenced by their clothing.

"Where have these come from?" Bastos asked stupidly.

"I know not, sergeant."

"An omen, these corpses!" the soldier whispered hoarsely.

"*Pooh!* Forget those superstitions and what your wife is always saying. These no doubt are the men of de Ayllon who, you remember having heard in Cuba, sailed for this north coast last Summer."

"'Twas a dismal end." Bastos shuddered.

"Let us see if we can find a clue to their identity," Andy suggested.

They began to peer into the boxes again, going from one to another, the Indians meantime watching with curiosity.

"These savages," Andy surmised, "found the men dead and they are curious about our being alive."

"What is that?" Bastos cried, pointing inside of a box. "The mummy holds something in its hand."

"A kerchief! Gripped tight, too, as if he had tried to take his money to heaven with him. Let's see." He seized the bag that the kerchief formed and it tore away rottenly from the dried hand. Into his own hand he poured four

gleaming pebbles. "Look, Bastos. What is this?"

They peered at the pebbles for a moment. Andy hefted them, bit at one. Bastos cut at one with his knife. Then they looked at each other.

"Gold!" croaked the Spaniard.

"Gold!" Andy triumphed.

The Indians were pleased at their interest and the two soldiers asked, by signs, where the nuggets could be found. For a little while the Indians were puzzled or were reluctant to tell; then the chief, with an air of concluding that he might as well do it as not, lifted his arm to the north and began to wiggle his fingers.

"That would mean north, and no doubt several days, I take it," Andy said. "Watch him."

The chief slowly swung his extended arm to the northwest, still wiggling his fingers.

"Then that would mean northwest many days, after going north, eh, *mi capitan?*"

The Indians pointed then to the feet of the women, and the two saw that every female from twelve years on wore heavy beaten gold anklets.

"Great stars!" Andy gasped. "There's sufficient gold—why, a bigamist among these people could start a mint!"

The savages now led their guests back to the village and gave them food—gourds of boiled fish, a crushed maize concoction and "cabbage" of the palmetto. While they were eating, the main body of Spaniards came into sight around a point of the jungle. So many strangers paralyzed the Indians with fear for a moment; then they fled, down to the last screaming child, to their canoes that lay bottom up on the beach.

ANDY led Narvaez and the others to the mysterious boxes and an excited discussion arose as to the identity of the corpses. But the commander was not so moved as not to see the patch of maize, and when he found that the grain was ripe he sent his men into the field to gather the corn. Fray Saurez, the friar, however, was greatly perturbed over the bodies. In the end he surmised that the Indians were keeping them for some idolatrous purpose and ordered them piled and burned. When the flames rose, the Indians at the beach hurriedly launched their canoes and paddled affrightedly away into the bay. Seeing this, Andy nodded Bastos aside.

"With the savages gone," he whispered, "these others can learn nothing of the gold. Keep a dumb tongue, sergeant. If the people knew of these nuggets and the direction the chief told us of, they would abandon the ships and their reason and go north, mad for gold. Understand?"

"Yes, *capitan*. I shall say nothing."

"Keep quiet until the time arrives to talk. We would not be the cause of disaster."

But the story of the nuggets did not remain a secret. By noon the next day the whole fleet's company—numbering now four hundred, some having deserted in Cuba—were talking about them. Bastos told his wife, and she told a friend, who told a friend . . . ! When Andy returned from a scouting venture of exploration, Narvaez charged him with holding back information for selfish ends, or for the Normans, or Britains. Andy then told the whole story. After a few days Narvaez assembled the company and informed them that as the land was empty—there being no food, no Indians for slaves, and no gold—he had decided on another step. He ordered the pilot Miruelo to coast southward toward Florida—already they were lost without knowing it, for they were in Florida—to seek Panuco. Lieutenant Caravallo was placed in charge of the other ships and ordered to coast northward, also seeking Panuco or some other safe harbor. At the same time a land party was to go northward seaching for gold and a harbor. Whichever northward party found a safe anchorage first should wait for the other, and Miruelo could join them or send word of his whereabouts.

A great discussion ensued. Cabeza de Vaca argued that a safe harbor for a base should be found first, then inland expeditions made. Fray Saurez on the other hand held that it would be tempting providence to go on the ships again, seeing that God had saved them from the storms so many times. Narvaez settled the matter by announcing arrogantly that his plan would be followed.

Then one morning, the first day of May in the year 1528, the expeditions were ready. Formed in a column, the land party waited for the order to move. Everything was in readiness. Farewells had been said—the ten women of the fleet wailing sadly. Narvaez was on the point of giving orders to move when a woman, the wife of Sergeant Bastos, ran forward from the group that was to return to the ships.

"Sire, sire," she pleaded, dropping to her knees before him, "abandon this journey. Change thy decision. Go not inland."

The gold-mad Spaniards broke in with catcalls and ribald derision, except Bastos, who sat his horse with white face and trembling lips.

"Cease thy foolishness, woman," Narvaez ordered. "Unless," he added, "there is something new to tell us."

These women had done a great deal of prophesying, and though the governor was as superstitious as the meanest of his men he had given orders against open talk concerning the dire fate that was said to await them.

"I have something new," the woman said. "We ten women have relinquished all hope of seeing our husbands again and will each take a

new husband when the land expedition passes out of sight in the jungle."

There was a shocked outcry at this. Every husband was in the land expedition. Some of them turned pale, some wrathful. A half-dozen dropped their packs and, mumbling threats, started toward the group at the water's edge, where the women stood looking on in agitation. Narvaez, brandishing his sword, sprang before them.

"Back to the ranks!" he bawled.

"But Excellency," protested a big sailor, "I would speak with my wife."

"I would give mine a taste of my fists to make her remember to be true," another blurted angrily.

A third, sickly-pale under his dusky skin, simply wrung his hands and looked at the governor pleadingly. Others looked first at Narvaez and then their women, irresolutely.

"Back!" the commander ordered sternly. "'Tis a trick to break up the expedition."

"No, no, sire," wailed the woman. "It is not a trick. Thou goest to thy death. Those who go inland will never be seen again. It is so written. They will vanish from the earth like smoke."

The Spaniards were thoroughly frightened. Bastos, the worthy old soldier, sat his black mount sobbing in terror and grief. For a moment Doran felt the panic, especially as he remembered that the same woman had warned him to stay in Cuba. But Narvaez, the most gold hungry of them all, was not to be cheated. He too was pale, but he steadfastly bellowed an order for the column to move forward. It did not move. Instead, the bolder of the husbands again started toward the group by the water, where the nine remaining wives were now wailing and sobbing. Narvaez began to whip the rebellious ones with the flat of his sword, two or three of the horsemen assisting him. They speedily found their places in line, though they kept muttering curses on the expedition, the governor, and their women.

"Pay heed," Narvaez shouted so that all could hear. "Any one of you tries again to leave the column I shall run him through. We go inland. Have no fear of the idle superstitions of these cats. You husbands will see your women again within a fortnight." He paused while the assurance could have its effect, then suddenly he held up the four nuggets before them, just a moment so that all could see. The trick was magic. "Gold!" he shouted in a sort of ecstacy. "Forward, march!"

Some of the noblemen and some of the sailors raised their voices in a marching chant. The column moved like a company of soldiers.

The wife of Sergeant Bastos, standing there alone on the sand, screamed once, then wailed her warning again.

"You will vanish from the earth like smoke."

Bastos rode away sobbing. The column kept on, Narvaez ready with his sword to make good his threat to run through any man who turned back. At the edge of the jungle they half paused to wave a farewell to the silent knot on the beach and to those on the ships, then entered the forest.

Not one of them ever saw the fleet again.

CHAPTER IV

THE FOREST PROCESSION

THIS journey of the Spaniards northward into a strange and savage land is one of the most remarkable pictures in the world of human avarice. Those who marched in the company numbered three hundred. They had forty horses. There were no women.

For food they had only one-half pound of bacon and two pounds of ship's biscuit to each man. Their weapons were lances and crossbows. The soldiery and many others wore heavy armor. There were no hunters, no artisans, no guides.

Fifteen days they traveled northward without seeing a soul except themselves. The only extra food they found was the spadex of the palmetto. Day in and day out Narvaez ordered Doran in the lead—at the very point of the column, and had it not been for his Irish sense of humor he could not have stood up under the labor.

"Bastos," he said one day, "did you ever sympathize with a needle that a woman uses?"

"What mean you, sir?" countered the puzzled soldier.

"Nothing, except that I am the point of the needle. A few days more of this and my front shall be worn off to my back-bone."

"It is true thou hast lost much weight."

"Oh well, this is adventure, and I stole aboard the flagship to find adventure. I daren't lose courage in two weeks."

At the end of the first fortnight they were a ragged and desperate procession. Their shoes were worn off, their feet bare and bleeding. Heavy armor gouged into the flesh so that some groaned from raw pain. Many would have deserted and sought the sea, but they did not know where it was, nor how far off. On the fifteenth day they reached a river and when the sick and sore refused to cross, Narvaez and his noblemen went among them with whips, lashing and driving.

No sooner were they across, however, than they came upon a large party of Indians. The Spaniards siezed four for hostages and compelled them to lead the company to their village, which proved to be a small collection of grass huts with a patch of corn. The hungry horde went through the field like a devouring swarm of locusts.

The people set up a cry to be led to the sea and the fleet. De Vaca, Andy and others urged Narvaez to heed them, and events might have turned out differently had he done so, but in going among the Indians exhibiting the four nuggets he found an old man who recognized the stuff. Pointing toward the northwest the patriarch spoke a single word many times—

"Apalachen, Apalachen."

The Spaniards forgot their misery, the fear that they were lost. In their new excitement they threw away parts of armor, tossed bundles of trade goods into the brush, lightened themselves for the race to the city of gold. Again Doran, who had learned caution from his father, protested to Narvaez, only to be rebuffed.

"Attend to thy own affairs as trail-breaker," the leader snarled. "I do not need advice from a northern pig."

Andy, sitting his wiry black pony, spat savagely in disgust and rode away.

The Spaniards plunged into the journey. Within a day or two they were in a thick dark forest of great trees where they must clamber over windfalls and go around frequent lagoons. Fortunately they found plenty of young waterfowl for food. They talked of nothing but gold, thought of nothing—except Doran, Enriques, the clerk, and Estevanico, the Moor. They gave attention to learning the Indian language.

One night Narvaez and Andy, officer of the day, walked together among the groups about the cooking fires on inspection. They came upon men tearing up shirts and blankets and sewing them into bags for the gold that was to be found, and they saw others gambling for this same gold, using knives and trinkets for pawns and gambling by weight. Narvaez laughed.

" 'Twill be a laugh on the other side, an no gold is found," said Andy.

"Gold will be found, never fear. It must be found. I've got to find it. For years in Cuba, in Trinidad, have I searched for it and never found, but now it must be at Apalachen or—I shall never return to Spain. By the saints, it will be there."

It was as if he were trying to make the gold be there by his will power.

On they went, singing, cursing, half-starving—until the four Indian hostages said they no longer recognized the country and the company failed to find Apalachen; then a change came over them. At first a numbing fear took hold and their pace slowed down. The deep dark forest oppressed them. They began to question one another with hollow, anxious eyes. They forgot about gold and sank into a lassitude, moving forward only because instinct forbade them to stop. They kept on and on like silent and weary ghosts, scarcely speaking above a whisper in this twilight gloom.

Two men kept their brains keen—Doran and Narvaez. The governor knew but two words, "northwest" and "Apalachen." To make speed he quit lashing the sick and the weaklings of mornings, preferring to let them remain behind. But Doran had the sort of courage that never bent from humanity; he took it upon himself to lash the laggards into column rather than to let them die alone.

On the thirtieth of June the company reached a river, and again the people refused to cross. Again, in the extremity, Indians appeared. They said that Apalachen was but nine days distant. The Spaniards forgot their lassitude, straightened up like hungry men at sight of a laden table; they felt the gold on their palms once again. In their pell-mell rush to get across the stream the first loss of life occurred—a dragoon and his horse were drowned. The Spaniards ate the horse for supper.

Their speed revived. They began to throw away of what they had left—mainly tools, such as a hand-forge, sledge, saws. The day came when men sobbed over this. It was a race between mad beings. Gold! Gold! Apalachen but nine days off.

The Spaniards made it in eight days, less time than the Indians required.

On the eighth of July, two days short of one year from the time they sailed from Spain, they came suddenly upon their dreamed-of city of gold. Doran and Estevanico went ahead, while the company waited, not knowing it was the place. The two, advancing while Indian women, old men and children gave back in fear at the strange men astride stranger animals, counted no fewer than forty grass houses, some large enough to house a score of men.

"Dost thou observe there are no men?" asked the Moor.

"Warriors? They are away, but one of these old men will answer our purpose."

The women and children were able to get out of the way but one old man was unable to run. Doran overtook him and addressed him.

"O great chief," he said in the simple tongue he had acquired, "we would be told the name of your village."

"Apalachen," the old man replied.

Estevanico instantly spurred his horse toward the waiting Spaniards and began to shout at the top of his voice:

"Apalachen! Apalachen!"

The company abandoned reason along with packs, arms, surplus clothing, and rushed into the houses, through the streets, plunged into lagoons and swept up handfuls of sand, dodged hither and thither.

Andy felt the madness seize him but he held himself in check by remembering that he would be accorded his share even if he did not pick up a single palmful of the glittering metal. He held staunchly on to the old man so that they would have at least one hostage in case

of attack. Cabeza de Vaca joined him after a while.

"Didst thou ever see such madness, Andee?" he asked. "See them pawing in the sand!"

"Has a speckle of gold been found?"

"Figuroa but told me that were he to make a bag out of the eyelid of a duck it would yet be too large for all the gold in Apalachen. Lad, the devil is to pay."

"And no gold to pay with."

THE Indian warriors returned and attacked within an hour. Andy put his armored men to the fore and drove them back, not because the Spanish soldiers knew how to fight, but because their armor could not be pierced by the arrows and the savages were afraid of men who kept on advancing after being hit.

They attacked again the next day and burned the village, and they kept up their attacks day after day, but Narvaez, the implacable, held on and sent out party after party to search for gold, because the old *cacique*, whom Doran had held, said that Apalachen was a province as well as a town and extended northward even to great mountains.

Time and again the explorers returned with the same report, "No gold." On the evening of the twenty-fourth day in Apalachen the party which had gone farthest and made the most detailed search returned to say that they had not found a fleck of gold. Narvaez assembled the company. He looked them over in silence for a moment, then—

"No gold," he said, and by the very saying of it he seemed to become an old and broken man. "Captain Dorantes," he went on without spirit, "repeat again what the *cacique* told thee."

"About Apalachen?"

"Nay. About the sea."

"Little enough, Excellency." Doran was one of the few who still honored the leader with this form of address. "He tells me that south of here, or a little west, nine days distant is a village named Aute and beyond that, he knows not how far, the sea."

"Captain Dorantes," the governor continued in a subdued and pleading voice, "you led us hither under compulsion, and were a good leader. Will you lead us to the fleet by favor?"

Doran was swept off his feet for a second by this surprising request but he responded at once positively, for his mind had journeyed to the sea many times and his opinions were ready.

"I will, an we can start at once, and I may have full authority."

"Does any man object?" asked Narvaez.

"No! No!" the people cried. "Dorantes, Captain Andee."

So it came about that the next morning Andrew Doran found himself at the head of a moving column, responsible for reaching salt water.

The horses were given to the sick. Indians attacked every day. Andy put his few armored men on the fringe of the column and again the armor saved them, for arrows that would penetrate through trees a hand's span in thickness would no more than dent the armor. The Indians feared to pass this fringe of steel men.

On and on they went, gold forgotten, their minds busy with ships and a phrase—"vanish from the earth like smoke." If their journey northward was one of lassitude and hopelessness at times, every day southward was a journey of fear and despair and death—for graves were left at every camping-place.

By day snakes pended from the hairy moss of dripping trees, their forked tongues flashing poisonously. The sun never penetrated to the forest rot under their naked feet. Slime lay on the water they drank. At night wild animals prowled and screamed, the feverish cried out in delirium. And some asserted that the ghosts of the dead walked with them through the twilight shade, refusing to be left alone in the hellish land.

At last, somehow, they arrived at Aute—to find it in ashes, burned by the Indians to foil the strangers. There was plenty of squash and maize, but the next day the Indians drove them on. They straggled throughout the day, in a final spurt, and reached a river. This had inlets and sluggish water, indicating that the sea was not far beyond.

The company was at the end of its tether. Every man was wounded or sick. On the shore, by an oyster-bed, the Spaniards gave up; they could go no farther. They simply lay down and quit. Three men died almost at once; life was at the lowest ebb. Even Andy, who had not relaxed a moment heretofore, slept with the rest of them throughout the night, not even putting out a guard.

When day came again it was plain to be seen that they could go no farther. Not half of them could have walked a league. Andy mauled his brain to find some way out. When he began to see a glimmer of light, de Vaca addressed the supine crowd, recommending that they resign themselves to death.

"No!" cried Andy. "Are you weaklings, cowards!" He literally was the only man among them on his feet—a gaunt reminder of himself, sandy hair and beard long, barefooted, in rags. "We are near the sea. We must go on. We will go on!"

"How?" asked de Vaca contemptously.

"Build a fleet of barges!"

"How?"

"How? An yo[redacted]paniards had had my father to tell you, as he told me, of a belly pinched by hunger, of makeshifts and ingenuity

in turning a sow's ear to silk, you would not lie on your backs and ask how."

"We have no tools, no forge."

The end of everything seemed to be at hand. The indifference, the helplessness, overwhelmed Andy. His eye chanced to fall upon the man who had thrown away their hand-forge and his temper flamed.

"Murderer!" he shouted, pointing an accusing finger.

The man turned over on his face weakly and began to sob.

"You blatherskite of a bloated nobleman," Andy flung at de Vaca, "is there not a man among you?"

The sobbing man sat up suddenly, a queer expression on his face.

"I can burn charcoal," he said.

Andy was contrite on the instant. He patted the man's shoulder.

"You can redeem yourself," said he. "Now for the forge." He looked around.

"I am a ship's carpenter, as you know," said another man, sitting up and speaking doubtfully. "I might make a bellows of reeds and sticks and skins."

"The fleet is built!" Andy declared.

HE IMMEDIATELY assigned men to various tasks, though most of the company had never turned a hand at useful employment and did not know how to work. He ordered the noblemen, otherwise useless, to care for the sick, threatening to kill with his bare hands any man who refused. None refused. The horsemen he appointed food-getters, directing them to raid Aute for maize and squashes, and some footmen he set to gathering oysters. But as to artisans, not more than twenty men were found who showed the slightest ability to wield a hammer or a draw-knife.

When the forge—a hairy thing what with the untanned hides—was finished, Andy made the first tool, a hammer. He pounded red-hot stirrup irons around the end of a stick with a stone until there was a knob of iron on a handle. With this he shaped a hammer, and with the hammer he made other basic tools, so that soon several were working on hand-axes, draw-knives, crude saws, all made from scraps of armor, metal from the cross-bows, their spurs. Every sliver of metal was saved for nails.

With these crude tools small trees were flattened on two sides and made to fit together for the bottoms and sides of the barges.

It was a struggle for existence with ingenuity as the key. Each day some man went to Andy with an idea. A Greek named Teodoro, who had stolen aboard as had the Irishman, suggested palmetto fiber and pitch from the resinous trees for oakum calking. Another spoke of using the horse legs—Andy was having a horse killed every three days for food—for water-bags. Doran thereafter had the legs skinned, leaving on the hoof, and flayed the hides. Andy himself thought of having the noblemen braid the manes and tails into rope for rigging.

All did not go well. Men died constantly, and once ten were killed by Indians at the oyster-bed with the others looking on helplessly because they no longer had weapons, the cross-bows having been robbed of the metal. Always they were hungry. The score who worked on the barges kept at it from daylight to dark, then by the light of fires until they fell asleep at their tasks and others dragged them aside out of the way. Everything was makeshift; everything was used. The pouches made to carry gold in from Apalachen Andy had filled with corn, ravaged from the fields of Aute. Oars were made of juniper saplings and sails of their shirts.

Finally on the third of October five barges, each twenty-two elbow-lengths long, were launched. Most of the company felt themselves already saved so great was the feeling of victory in having made a fleet from nothing. But this optimism was dampened when Narvaez assembled them for orders. He was scarcely able to stand, even with one hand on a tree trunk, and he aroused pity in their hearts by his aged feebleness.

"My people," he began in a quavering voice, "we owe Captain Dorantes our thanks—more than that, and I salute him—I have here information which I shall give you so that should any of us survive it can be carried to the ear of the king." He referred to a scrap of white bark covered with charcoal marks. "The pilots swear that since leaving the fleet in Florida we have traveled two hundred eighty leagues, more or less. That is a far way to come not to arrive at a profitable destination. Of the three hundred who started on land, two hundred fifty-one are yet living. The others have perished. I shall now appoint commanders for the barges and assign the companies."

To himself he gave forty-nine men, and the same number to Fray Saurez and Alonso Enriques, the purser; to Captains Tellez and Penalosa, forty-seven men; to de Vaca and Alonso de Solez, an inspector, forty-nine men; and to Doran and Castillo, forty-eight.

The following morning they went aboard. When the bags of corn, the two hundred forty horse legs filled with fresh water, and their clothing had been placed among the companies the sides of the barges were but one hand's span above the water.

"The ships! The ships!" the people shouted when the boats were pushed off. "We have won."

CHAPTER V

VANISHING LIKE SMOKE

FOR seven days the barges were sailed and poled in waist-deep water, then they reached the open sea. Here they made a fatal mistake by turning westward instead of to the east—westward, because in that direction they believed Panuco to be, and the fleet there waiting for them.

For thirty days and more they held their way westward, hugging the coast, not daring to venture into deep water because of their frail craft. Always their eyes were strained to see the tops of masts sticking above the trees in some inlet, which would be their fleet awaiting them. Storms were frequent. At first the Indians they found were low-lived, dim-minded creatures flitting under damp live-oaks, so poor and ignorant that they had no supplies of food even for themselves. Then the horse legs rotted and spilled the fresh water. But by the time this happened the character of the Indians had changed, had become fierce, so that when they attempted to go ashore for fresh water they were driven off. Storms also prevented them landing.

On one occasion they went six days without water and five men died from drinking out of the sea. Cold rains began to drift across the land and water, from low gray clouds, and all the food they had to warm their blood was unparched corn. To live was worse than to die.

When the rains stopped cold northers began to blow. In the midst of these, their tongues black from three days' thirst, they sailed into a current of fresh muddy water that flowed into the sea from the north. (This was the Mississippi at the mouth, seen for the first time by Europeans, for de Soto of course had not yet discovered it. Thus the Narvaez expedition really discovered this river, though de Soto, coming later, has the credit.)

They plunged into it with the barges, in the continuance of their journey west, but soon found that it was a mighty stream, seeming to move like a never-ending tide from out of a continent. They surmised that the country from which it came must be as large, or larger, than the whole of Spain!

Within an hour after entering the stream it became apparent that they could not cross it without danger and trouble, for the barges were being carried out to sea. Doran, always more alive to the situation than the chilled and hopeless Spaniards, rose in his vessel and called to the others—

"We had best turn back, else we will be separated."

"Nay," spoke Narvaez feebly from nearby. "We must keep on toward Panuco. We must cross or we are lost."

"Panuco! Go on! Cross! Panuco!" called many voices.

"But we are being carried away from land," Andy countered. "The barges with the weaker oarsmen are unable to combat the current. We will be washed apart."

But the crews were for beating ahead, and Andy, realizing that after all they might as well be separated as to remain where they were, broke off his protest. He hoped it would at least serve as a warning for the barges to do their uttermost to cling together in a fairly compact group.

Throughout the day they kept pulling to the west to get across the stream, but steadily the mighty volume of water dragged them and manhandled them and worked them out from land toward the open water. By night no barge was within two hundred yards of another.

On the second day they became more widely separated. Once in curiosity, Andy paid the lead-line over the side to test the depth of the current. He paid out thirty fathoms and failed to touch bottom. The men were amazed and even frightened, as men are when they realize that bottomless water is beneath them. Then Andy discovered that the lead was being carried down-stream by the current, and they knew they could not tell how deep the water was. But without doubt it was swift.

By the evening of the third day of this killing contest to break through the clutching barrier it was evident that the barges would be entirely separated. They called out from one to another as best they could to go it on their own and get across somehow then continue westward, working gradually back to the coast—for now they were miles from land.

In the watery sunset of that evening the farthest barge was but a dim gray speck on the high waves, from Doran's craft. It seemed, indeed, that they were vanishing like smoke. By daylight of the fourth day, Andy found himself on the western edge of the current—across at last, but not one of the other barges was in sight anywhere. An off-shore wind had set in over night. Andy believed there was one barge, that of de Vaca, between him and the shore, but he could not see it.

"They are all lost," Castillo declared mournfully. "A watery grave."

"Why think you that?" Andy demanded. "Because we can't see them? Neither can they see us, but we are not lost. An we push or west we all shall meet again, if not at Panuco, at least somewhere on the coast."

Castillo shook his head so dolefully that Figuroa, the big sailor, laughed outright. They, with sail and oars, worked westward, trying at the same time to make it back toward the land, now far to the north. On this fourth day gray clouds came on again, the seascape

turned gray and wickedly wild, and cold rain set in afresh.

Through two days of this they fought their way, never sighting another barge. Then on the thirty-seventh day after turning westward from the inlet where the craft had been built, now toward the last of November, they came to the point where only three men were able to help navigate. These three were Doran, Castillo and Figuroa. And they were on their last legs. In desperation they set the rag of a sail, turned the barge's nose into the oncoming breakers and let the northeast wind drift them to the west and southwest.

"If we let her go we'll get somewhere," Andy decided. "In this way one of us can steer while the other two get some rest."

"I hope 'somewhere' is the bottom," Castillo shivered. "This cold! It makes my blood as cold as the fishes. Why man will try to go on living is a mystery to me."

"It's the man in you," Andy retorted. "Die fighting, Alonso. That is the glorious end! Hand me a handful of corn, an thou wilt, so I may feast and lie down under the blanket of the thick rain and sleep. Let us be cheerful."

Andy chuckled at the absurdity.

"Thou imbecile!" exploded Castillo. "How can you laugh?"

Figuroa, the strong, laughed in ribald amusement at his captain.

For days they were blown westward, with rain eternally drenching them, with the north wind whipping their rags and cutting to their entrails. Sometimes they were near the dark and inhospitable shore, sometimes far off. Twice they sighted a barge, or two different barges, they could not be certain, on the gray-green horizon to the south. They forgot to count time, forgot even to lift overboard a dead man who lay on his back in the bottom of the barge, his mouth open to the rain, pools of water in his sunken eyes.

Andy worked alone one night, shifting the sail, trying to steer with an oar, and tried to figure out how long they had been coming west since leaving the river. He estimated that it was ten days, but could not be certain. In the midst of the vexation of trying to recall he was startled by a new sound. Hastily he awakened Castillo and Figuroa to ask if what he heard sounded to them like surf. They said it did, and when daylight arrived they saw the shore very close. Moreover, just back of the line of white foam, continually in a turmoil from the great waves, stood a horde of Indians, watching and waiting.

The three able ones tried hard to keep the craft offshore and were having success when fate in the form of a great comber picked them up and wiped them forward. They were helpless. In a moment the barge was slammed down on the sand, high and dry, with a loud crash. The Indians stood petrified for one instant, then galloped forward, yelling.

CHAPTER VI

THE ISLAND OF ILL-FATE

THE giant roller that cast Doran upon the sand also beached de Vaca, but two leagues or so farther back on the coast to the northeast. The leader immediately sent his strongest man to climb a tree for a glimpse of the country. When Oviedo returned he reported that he saw Indians approaching. The Spaniards were too cold and weary to care. Oviedo explained that they were on an island—probably Galveston Island—a few leagues long and one wide, and that a narrow ribbon of water separated them from the main land.

The savages appeared presently. There were only a few and they were alarmed, but when they saw that the voyagers were emaciated and sick they came forward—a stupid and brutal set, so low in the scale of humanity that they had no weapons nor clothes. But they offered to bring food, and set out at once, promising to return before nightfall.

Somewhat cheered, the Spaniards decided to launch the barge and be ready to continue as soon as food was brought. De Vaca ordered every man to strip, put his clothing aboard, and lend a shoulder to get the craft off the sand.

"But Excellency," protested Oviedo, who, though the strongest, was the greatest grumbler among them, "this wind will nip at our skins like the teeth of a squirrel."

"But our garments have dried in this wind, and when the barge is afloat we can put them on again. Off with them, men! Let us have the task finished."

Every man naked, they worked at the heavy craft for an hour, and at last had the satisfaction of seeing it float. A few scrambled aboard with the clothing while others waded and pushed. Then in the midst of this success a big wave upset them and the barge went down with two men and all the clothing.

The scrubby mesquite brush offered no shelter. No one knew how to build a fire. The keen norther chilled them so that their back and stomach muscles jerked spasmodically. For the sake of some protection, it occurred to Estevanico, who was the most ingenious of them all, to dig individual pits in the sand to lie in. And here they laid and shivered until almost night, until the Indians approached with gourds in their hands.

The savages looked all about and could see no one, but they kept coming, their faces expressing surprize at the disappearance of the voyagers. At this point one of the Spaniards called out that the Indians were back and the thirty-five bearded, naked and wild-looking

men rose to their feet as one. The apparition was too much for the natives, who dropped the gourds and fled.

The Spaniards lost no time in falling upon the gourds, which contained the meat of ruffs cooked with roots, and the Indians, seeing they were only hungry humans, returned. Estevanico explained to them the best he could—he was ever glib—about the loss of the barge, the clothing and the two men, whereupon the savages all sat down upon the ground and began to weep and wail. For a half-hour they kept this up, then broke off abruptly at a signal from their chief. Having thus paid their proper respects, the chief stood two of his men beside each voyager, and those Indians who were left over ran back into the brush. When they were out of sight, the remaining hosts siezed the Spaniards by the arms and began running, every two Indians supporting a man between them. A little way into the brush and they saw a big fire ahead.

"They mean to roast and eat us," Oviedo cried out affrightedly.

"We shall at least get warm then," shouted de Vaca as he was swept along over the ground in eight-foot strides.

And the Spaniards, thus heartened, made an effort to increase their pace!

Arrived at the blaze, the Indians sat their guests down around it in a circle and explained to Estevanico that the fire had been built to keep the naked ones from freezing on the way to the village. The Spaniards literally wept in relief. When they had warmed, the Indians helped them on the way, and they stopped at four more big fires before reaching a village, where they were put in a big grass hut and given food and fuel.

For several days they remained here without heart to examine their surroundings, or strength to make any sort of effort, but on a day that de Vaca calculated must be near the last of November the leader observed a savage with a sheath knife, and learning upon inquiry that none of his party had presented it, the whole of them took a new interest in life, believing that other Spaniards were near. They flocked around the Indian and he told them that men like themselves were then approaching. De Vaca and all his group set forth at once and had not gone far when they met Doran and Castillo with forty-three men, so that altogether they numbered eighty.

Those who had clothing divided with the naked ones. Each group learned that the other knew nothing of the remaining barges. Doran explained that when they were beached the Indians saw how near death they were and helped the Spaniards to their village and fed them. The day before Doran's party had learned that other white men were near-by and had set out to find them. In the end the two parties decided to return to the place where Andy's barge lay, launch it, and send the abler men on to Panuco for help. They still contended that Panuco was along that coast and believed, since they had come so far, it could not be much farther. The entire day was spent in going to the place, the stronger carrying the sick on their backs through the deep sand and thorny mesquite scrub, and when they arrived it was to find the barge split from stem to stern and beyond repair. Thus balked and there being nothing else to do, they all returned to the village where de Vaca and his party had been.

The talk now turned to sending a small party south but no one was willing to go except Andy and Figuroa.

They thriftily traded beads, a few trinkets, and some even let their knives go for food, but what they received—and the Indians had no other—was nothing but roots and bony fish so that day by day the sick died from starvation and exhaustion. At the end of two weeks they counted themselves and found that forty, just half, had died. The same day the Indians said that they had no more food to give them, which was too obviously true. The Indians were dying also. These two facts drove them to action. Three men volunteered to go with Figuroa to find Panuco, and Doran remained to care for the sick.

However, after the four had departed, the remaining thirty-six concluded that they could not stay together for the stronger to care for the weak because they could not get food. The Indians advised them to distribute themselves among the family groups on the mainland, where roots were more plentiful. This advice they followed, bidding one another farewell—after agreeing to meet on this island of Ill-Fate, as they named it, in the Spring—and set out by ones and twos.

OF THEM all, Doran went the farthest south on the mainland, and joined a family group consisting of a dozen men, their wives, and a score of children. They had heard of the many strangers, but when they learned, through inter-family gossiping, that many had died and the others were scattered, their first kindliness changed to cruelty and they drove Andrew to actual slavery. His work was to dig roots from the salt water in the low places, and to catch small fish in the reedy channels. His hands and feet soon became lacerated by the sharp grasses so that they grew swollen and seeped blood from one day's end to the other. Andy attempted rebellion to avoid such agony, but the only result was that Glott, the family head, and his brutal warriors drove him to the work with sticks.

The roots gave out in February and a period of starvation set in. Necessities of life would

not be easily obtained until birds' nests, then berries, came in April. Andy, expecting that help might arrive any time from Panuco and fearing he would be left behind, tried to escape several times, but his every move was watched and he did not even get away from the camp in the first attempts.

The Indians were so low in the scale of humanity that they sacrificed every girl baby to keep it from falling into the hands of enemies and thus bearing more enemies. Their own wives they captured from enemy tribes. It was of an early morning in the midst of one of these sacrificial ceremonies that Andy saw an opportunity and fled.

He went straight toward the coast, and at tide-water turned northward toward the Island of Ill-Fate. The Indians evidently knew he would do this, for Andy suddenly found them confronting him, having cut across the hypotenuse of the right angle he formed in his flight. Chief Glott dragged him back to the village, sometimes actually by the hair of his head, and the whole tribe beat him with clubs.

Warm weather arrived by degrees—Spring with its carpet of scarlet and yellow and purple flowers like a gay woman appearing in a ballroom. Andy grew more uneasy each day for fear the Spaniards would gather on the island and go on without him; at nights he dreamed that a ship had come and was sailing away with him standing alone on the shore. His nerves became ragged, and he resolved on another break for freedom.

The second attempt was more discouraging than the first, for men of another tribe stopped him and sent for Glott. That chief and his men, instead of prodding him back to the village, walked beside him and made merry in their watery gutturals. Their geniality was a threat, Andy felt; he smelled a brew of unusual cruelty.

Back at the encampment, Glott, with much ado, graciously brought him a gourd of water to drink, as if he were an honored guest. Andy thought of poison as the vessel was extended to him, and in the same instant he saw, from the tail of his eye, a man squat behind him. As Glott put the gourd into his hands he shoved backward quickly and with force. Andy was tripped over the squatting man and landed flat on his back. The Indians roared; it was their idea of a joke. But there was more to it than that. In a second a half dozen were on top of him. They spread-eagled him, sitting on his legs and arms, and Glott sat on his chest.

The chief plucked Doran's beard, hair by hair, from the entire right side of his face.

When the torture was completed they let him up. His face was swollen and bleeding, but his blue eyes glinted as of old. He deliberately spat in the chief's face and kicked him in the stomach, all at once.

They held him down again and plucked the left side of his face, hair by hair. He did not rise this time, but lay on the ground in such exhaustion that he seemed to be dead.

When the men left, an old woman, for whom Andy had carried water often, came and bathed his bloody face and massaged it with salve.

The Indians may have thought they could break a white man's spirit; they did not know the race that seemed born to venture over the world. Andy meant to escape, was more determined now than ever, and he bided his time.

Preceding the season of blackberries, came the time of living on eggs from birds' nests and tender shrubs boiled in water. Andy ate of this rich food and conserved his strength. The hard work had given him endurance. He was not so heavy as Glott, but he was wiry and strong.

One day, a short time before the berries should be ripe, the tribe was making a systematic search of a grassy slough near the seashore for birds' nests. Andy kept working his way farther and farther to one side and rear of the others in the tall grass, watching for a chance to go. Presently he began to nourish a real hope of making a run for it and getting away to the north and the island where the others might still be. Then, when he would have been gone in a moment more, Glott raised up out of the grass at his very side and grinned.

"Come with me, slave," he said mockingly. "There is something to fill the eyes of a slave who would escape from his masters."

ANDY followed, resolved to kill the man if an opportunity offered. The Indian led toward the shore, leaving the others at the tasking of getting their dinner. Within a mile or so the two passed through a fringe of reeds and mesquite brush and abruptly came out to the sandy shore.

There before them lay the wreck of a barge. Andy ran to it. The craft was more completely wrecked than his had been; some of the timbers were missing. But sufficient was left for him to know, by the wood and workmanship, that it was the barge of Tellez and Penalosa. Ready at hand when the inspection was finished, Glott touched Andy's arm and pointed back toward the fringe of brush, off to the right.

Scattered about were human bones, and just beyond them, set in a half-circle, were human skulls on short sticks driven into the ground.

"One, two, three—" Andy's shocked mind counted them. Forty-nine, the number that had been aboard that barge. Forty-nine grinning brown skulls.

"Come," said Glott. He led to the very center of the half-circle and set another short stick into the sand. "For the skull of a slave," he said, "if the slave should try to leave us

again." He tapped Andy's head with his fingers. "We will put it here for the dead to laugh at. See how they laugh with their mouths full of teeth!"

"Glott," said Andy quietly, "I am going to kill you."

The Indian stiffened, and chuckled. He was ready. Like animals ready to battle, they read death in each other's eyes, that were kin to the soulless eyes of wolves. Neither was armed. They began to circle about each other, seeking advantage.

Doran set his thoughts on one purpose. That was to get behind his enemy, lift him from the ground and throw him down. He had in mind just how he would do—sieze the man's hair with his right hand, and with his left arm and left knee lift him at the crotch and get him off his feet.

The Indian forced the offensive with confidence in his greater bulk. Andy, lighter on his feet, evaded. Back and forth and around and around they darted, tearing up the sand. An impalpable dust rose to smother them; sweat ran down their naked bodies in streams. Andy centered his mind upon a preliminary task, which was to sieze one of the chief's arms and jerk him off his balance so that he could leap in behind.

Twice he succeeded in getting the Indian's right wrist, but the grip slipped because of perspiration. Then an unexpected thing happened. The Indian tripped Doran, and before Andy caught his balance the savage had him in a hug. The great arms began to bend his ribs, to force his breath out, to crush him. He began to gasp, then he wilted, turned limp. Glott's strong arms relaxed, just barely relaxed. Perhaps he meant to change to the throat. On the instant Andy's sweat-slick body slid downward. He darted under Glott's right arm and was behind the Indian. The hair grip, hand and knee at crotch, a lift and shove, and the Indian was on his face. Doran landed with his knees along the savage's spine, and at the same time he transferred his left hand to the Indian's hair and his right under the chin with his elbow on the chief's right shoulder.

For a space they were like two straining sculptured figures, the lower one writhing in death agony while its head came back and back. After the neck cracked there was nothing but dead silence.

Andy left his enemy there for the skulls to grin at and started north for the island of Ill-Fate.

Arriving at the rendezvous the following day he found fourteen of his companions. These accounted by word of mouth for all the others of the thirty-six, except—

"Rodriguez and his five," Castillo reminded.

"I shrink at telling you," Cabeza de Vaca said, and grimaced in disgust. "In the cold of last Winter Rodriguez came to me. His mind was going. He confessed that as his *companeros* died one by one they ate the bodies, and at last only he was left, and there being no one to eat him, he came to me. That night he killed himself and I gave him a decent Christian burial."

The question now arose as to what they should do. Doran held that they should start south at once by land, since if they remained here they would die as the others had done. He told of the third wrecked barge and of Tellez and Penalosa and their companions.

"Fifteen of us left from three barges," he concluded. "No doubt Narvaez and Saurez failed to reach Panuco, or a ship would have come to us."

"But we can not go southward by land," Castillo declared. "Hast thou not observed the feet of de Vaca and Oviedo, Captain Andee? Poisoned by dipping roots in the water and swollen so they can not walk a league."

"For chivalry's sake you insist on staying with us," de Vaca broke in, "but we shall die for we need medical aid and must depend on you reaching Panuco—which Figuroa must have failed also to do—to send it."

"But we can't go south," Castillo insisted. " 'Tis better to wait for help if we wait even another year. Every one of us has had to escape from our Indians, and they will either capture us or kill us on the road. Better for us to return to them."

"And be slaves!" Andy snorted. "Eat birds' eggs and grass the rest of our lives? Alonso, thou wert ever an easy-going youth."

Castillo was voted down at once. Thirteen agreed to go down the coast. Democratically they chose Doran as the leader, he being the strongest among them, and as a parting gift Cabeza de Vaca presented him with a heavy steel sheath knife, silver mounted. It was the only one left among the Spaniards. It was a sad farewell, for none expected to see either de Vaca or Oviedo again, and they knew that not all of the thirteen would be lucky enough to reach Panuco, for some of them were very feeble.

The next day they took their departure, going inland to avoid the Indians, known to be near the coast eating eggs and waiting for the berries to turn.

The first three days of travel they saw no Indians, but other trouble developed. Four of the feebler ones grew too weak to travel. It was obvious the others could not carry them. The four generously urged that the others go on, saying that they would search out Indian families for themselves. This was agreed to partly, Doran insisting he would first find the Indians to care for them.

The fourth morning Andy set off alone toward the coast to find a family, one small enough so as not to be a hindrance to the others in continuing the journey. But none were to be had; he did not see a soul throughout the forenoon. At noon he observed a great smoke where he had left the party and thinking it a signal for his return he hurried back.

No living men awaited him. In the smoking fire were ten bodies, indistinguishable except that they were Spaniards. He had left twelve, so two must have escaped or been taken captive. For two days he searched in hope of finding these, but failing he set his face grimly toward the south.

Day after day, under the white sun, naked, with long, braided hair and smooth, stern countenance lighted by unflinching blue eyes, he kept on, sometimes hidden in the sweltering jungle, sometimes silhouetted against the sky on a rise of land, like some solitary primordial man wandering alone after a cataclysm had destroyed his woman and their offspring.

CHAPTER VII

THE END OF THE WORLD.

THE barges of Narvaez and Saurez, when the little fleet was torn asunder by the great river of fresh water in November, hugged the coast and continued the journey as the others had done. But more men in these two vessels were able to handle the oars and sails, so that they made greater speed and succeeded in getting much farther south than the Island of Ill-Fate. Eventually, however, Saurez was cast upon the shore on the northern lip of a great bay. Historians believe this was San Antonio Bay, Texas.

Narvaez, not far behind, entered the bay and left his company in a big pecan grove and returned for the others. He reached the stranded ones in the evening, and that night all slept on shore except the governor and two men. The men were ill and Narvaez remained aboard to care for them. The anchor was a huge rock. In the night the line slipped off it and when morning came the company saw the barge, with the governor standing in it, far out at sea.

Throughout the forenoon they watched, helpless to give aid. Narvaez seemed helpless also, for he made no effort to get the barge back to and. Perhaps his oars were lost—or the span of life had already grown too long for him under his great disappointment. The people stood with faces turned to the sea until noon, when the barge disappeared in the haze of the horizon, Narvaez still standing and looking toward the shore. He was not seen again.

The companies, now under command of Pantoja, went into Winter camp on the bay. No Indians were about, so that they had to depend wholly on their own efforts for food. This consisted principally of fish—at first.

Here Pantoja met a fate that he could not have thought of on that day he sailed as captain of the flagship from Spain. His rule was overbearing, and a man named Sotomayor struck him with a club and killed him.

Soon the Spaniards were dying and the living eating the dead. At last only Sotomayor and Esquival were left. Then Sotomayer died and when Esquival had eaten him, and there was no more food an Indian appeared, by chance, and Esquival went away with him. In the tribe that they joined Esquival found Figuroa, who told how, when he and his three companions set out to find Panuco, one had been killed by the Indians and the other two had died of cold and exhaustion.

This tribe, which Esquival joined, placed heavy stress upon their dreams, believing them to be communications from the Great Spirit and interpreting them accordingly. The first night a woman dreamed that Esquival would slay her children, and when she told this the next morning the Indians killed the Spaniard at once. This left Figuroa the only survivor in all that region.

Figuroa was big and strong and jovial and for those reasons did about as he pleased among the savages. He traveled from family to family in search of his countrymen, and not long after Doran's companions had been killed and burned the two met. Thus the story of the other two barges came to the Irishman.

"So," Andy commented at the finish, as they sat in the shade of a thin mesquite, "there are but six of us left out of the three hundred. And you know nothing of Panuco?"

Figuroa shook his head. "Why bother? Life with these Indians isn't so bad."

Andy regarded him in amazement. "Why bother! Great stars, man, doesn't your heart itch to get back to your own kind? To see how the world is pegging along?"

The sailor cocked up one eye and grinned. "The women make the living here," he smirked. "Why go back to work?"

"You —— you —— heathen! Well, I'll tell you this, I'm going on and I'm going to keep going till I can't go any farther. I don't mean to 'vanish like smoke.' I want to see civilized people again. Come, Fig, aren't you a white man?"

"Yes, but——"

"Let's go then. We've got a knife apiece. Are you afraid to try?"

"Afraid? Not I, but——"

"Prove it then!"

Figuroa debated this and abruptly got to his feet.

"By ——, I will, Andee, an it's thou 'asking it. I'm ready."

So they set out in a renewed search for the settlement of Panuco. Soon, however, they found that the food had given out—the berries and birds' eggs gone. They found scattering Indians working west, "following the tunas," or prickly pears. They told of how each year they went westward until about the first cold moon—September—living on this fruit, then returned to the coast for nuts. The two travelers were forced by hunger to turn westward also but ever and always they slanted to the south; under the white sun of noon, in the breeze cooled evenings and the sultry mornings they kept elbowing to the southward. By mid-Summer they reached a river that poured into another great bay—Corpus Christi Bay—and kept on beyond it. In the end there were no more Indians and little fruit and then they reached the border of a waste land.

Sand dunes confronted them, yellow heaps that were ever shifted by the winds, burying trees and moving on by grains, and leaving the trees free again months later. Sometimes the dunes were high enough to cover the trees, and one of these Andy and Figuroa climbed to survey the land. To the west was a dark green forest of mesquite; to the east, the sea, glinting under the sun far away; and to the south, yellow dunes and dancing heat waves and lonely whirlwinds that rose and twisted and died away—little symbols of life. A desolate empty land scorched by white sunshine.

As they stood there debating, not with each other but in their private hearts, about the possibility of going on, an Indian appeared from out of nowhere by their sides. He swept a naked brown arm out over the southward and shook his head solemnly.

"Where dost this way lead, O chief," Andy asked.

"To death, white-skin. This is the end of the world that thou beholdest spread before thee."

"Are people there?"

"Naught but thirsty ghosts who have not drunk for a thousand moons."

"And what lies beyond, O wise man?"

"No wanderer hast returned to tell. Did I not say that this is *nunu*, the end of the world? Thou canst not go farther and live."

CHAPTER VIII

THE MEETING

NOW comes one of the most amazing phases of this amazing adventure of the first white men in the land that three hundred years later was made a part of the United States.

Doran turned back from *nunu*, the end of the world, and lived for five years with various tribes of Indians—savages so low in the scale of man that they had but little clothing, no permanent homes, no agriculture, no pottery, scarcely any religion, just mostly superstitions and vile and brutal practices. Indians who had no thought that around the curve of the globe were cities and civilization; who could have no idea of the tragedy of a white man's life being snuffed out by their barbarous hands.

Andrew by force of circumstances became a surgeon because he had a knife. He was called Svss, or the Knife.

For five years he lived from tribe to tribe, not knowing where the land went, nor scarcely where he was on the face of the earth. How would he have felt had he known that an unbroken wilderness stretched through endless leagues to Hudson Bay, to the Mackenzie River, the Yukon River, to San Francisco Bay, all yet nameless places upon the silent geography of the western world!

Lost and alone, like a Mohammedan in a Christian's hell, he all but forgot his native tongue and his adopted Spanish. He was a shuttle flung back and forth by the seasons. In the early Summer the red men moved westward to live on the prickly pears; in the Fall they returned to the coast to live on pecans, roots, fish, and on birds' eggs and berries in the Spring. Pacing the years, hopeless, like a panther in a circus cage. In all these five years he heard of but one survivor of the fleet, a man referred to as the Trader, but who he was Andy could not learn.

Then one Autumn day there came to the tribe where he was an Indian chief from the north to ask the white man's service in healing the sick. Andy sat in the shade of a *huisache* tree naked, brown, sullen, wondering if it would not be best to take a wife among these heathen.

"Oh, I'll go," he answered the chief listlessly.

"In my village, O mighty *Svss*, are two of thy kind," the chief suggested.

Andy sprang upright, his blue eyes glittering.

"Thou liest," he said wickedly. "I will bend your neck back until it cracks. Who are they? What are thy like?"

"Look upon them with thine own eyes," the Indian evaded cunningly.

He wanted the Knife to go with him very much.

By the hour the night birds ceased their weird chant and the sky crimsoned in the east the next morning, they were traveling northward over the brown and empty country swift as the shadows of flying eagles. Scarcely a word was spoken, for the chief's son was sick and the father had no breath to blow out on idle chatter. And when they stopped at springs to drink they were on the swing again before water ceased to drop from their chins.

Many times in that swift journey Andy's hand found the knife in his girdle and felt of the five little nicks in the back of the blade. His calendar for five years.

"Who are these of my kind?" he kept asking himself. "Who, oh, who?"

Before the rays of day were level across that level land they came to a clutter of grass huts. Doran's heart pounded from excitement, his eyes darted hither and thither, searching, prying, doubting, hoping. Then abruptly, startled, the expected ones rose from the shade of a hut, and two and one they stared—Castillo and Estevanico, and Doran.

Andy mumbled stupidly—

"The fire didn't get you."

"The Spaniards?" hoarsely questioned Castillo. "Panuco?"

Andy shook his head. Confusion was in his mind. Through the day he had wondered how this meeting would be, but he had not foreseen this stupidity and half-fearsomeness; had not forecast that they would not embrace in the Spanish way.

"*Los bahee?*" demanded Estevanico in Spanish and Indian, meaning "Those men?"

"*Keet,*" Doran answered, continuing in three tongues, "*todos keet.* Figuroa told me *de los*—barges—*brin*—and he was—kill by—by *bahee de los Indios*—over a woman at *nunu.*"

"We three live," said Castillo in awe. "And—are you the Trader?"

Andy shook his head.

"Then we three and the Trader, whoever he is, are left," the Spaniard continued.

The Indian guide plucked at Doran's arm. It was the call of duty and he turned from his re-found friends to a hut where, on the bare ground, lay the sick boy. He knelt over the swollen and blackened leg and began to blow on it, his eyes and mind meantime keen upon a diagnosis. Snake bite, he saw. He called for boiled sea-water and when it was brought he removed his knife and a little gourd vial from his girdle and knelt again.

Before the curious onlookers realized his intention he cut away the spot of gangrene flesh. The lad cried out and quivered but Andy soothed him with soft words while the wound was permitted to bleed. Presently he cleansed the place with water and applied liquid from the vial—a styptic made of herbs. The bleeding checked, Andy instructed the family to keep flies and other insects away and to pour warm salt-water upon the sore four times a day. Then he bent over the basin of water with mysterious gestures and senseless words.

"That is mummery," he said to Castillo and Estevanico as he rose, "but it impresses the *bahee* and helps me."

"And will the lad recover?" questioned Castillo, who had retained his Spanish by always having the Moor to talk with.

"More—possible," Andy answered, fishing for words again. "I have learn—*Suss*—knife healing. Salt water, dry air, after the cutting."

"And that is the way you have saved your life!"

"Aye." Andy reached out with a bare foot and touched an earthenware pot, the first he had seen in all this land. "And has that been your way, Alonso? Or Estevanico's?"

"Mine," the Spaniard answered with a touch of pride. "I chanced upon it at a cooking fire to the westward of here where my *bahee* go each Summer to live on tunas. I wrapped a hare in clay to cook and when I drew it out of the coals I found I had burned a piece of pottery. After that I moulded and burned pots and the Indians let me live."

"And Estevanico, how have you managed?"

"Because my skin is dark like unto the Indians, Captain Andee, and my tongue quick to learn their words."

"He is called the 'Glib'," vouched Castillo. "Or sometimes the *'baheen'*, man of many women."

WITH the coming of night and supper of broiled hare their tongues loosened. Doran got back his Spanish by leaps and bounds and they talked of all that had transpired in the five years; of *nunu*, of Figuroa's death at the edge of the sand dunes because he had coveted a warrior's maiden; of their journeys westward in the Summers, but never their courage in simply keeping life within them.

"And have ever you tried to escape?" Doran asked.

"Once," Castillo answered. "Estevanico and I, when we were thirty or forty leagues west of here living on tunas and getting fat stomachs from them, tried to but came to a river that we could not cross."

"So large?"

"We could not swim."

"Give heed," Andy admonished, putting his hands on their knees in his enthusiasm. "Often have I tried it, alone, and failed. We can not cross the *nunu*, but on our annual journeys west to live on the tunas I have learned that by going still farther west we can reach a country, where there is food and water, that extends southward in a wide belt, and by following this belt far, far south I think mayhap we might find Panuco.

"It is now the season of nuts," he went on. "After that will be the moons of roots and fish and birds' nests and berries, then the tunas. When we join the Trader and the Summer comes again we shall escape."

Castillo shook his head.

"We have decided that it is best to be resigned."

"Resigned?" Andy drew back shortly. "Quit? Men, don't you want to see your kind again? And have the adventure of finding them? This country grows stale. A white-skinned woman—doesn't a woman of your kind with soft lips and lighted eyes call to you? Come, let us start this night to find the Trader."

"'Tis useless," replied Estevanico. "I learned this day that he comes this way. Before this moon wanes our Indians will go to meet his Indians at the pecan forest. We shall meet him there—and next Summer will be time to talk of escape."

"I'll tell you this," and Doran got to his feet coldly, "an this Trader will go, we shall set out to find men whether you have courage to accompany us or not."

Castillo shrugged. The Moor spread his hands. Andy spat savagely as was his way and laid down by a thorny mesquite to sleep.

Within ten days they started north along the coast to the pecan forest, and when they arrived Andrew recognized the place, because of human bones and Figuroa's description, as the bay where the companies of the two barges perished. In a few days other *bahee* appeared in sight coming from the north, and the three companions went out to meet them. As the parties drew near a figure broke from the large one and ran forward.

"'Tis a Spaniard!" cried Estevanico.

The man came on, paused as if afraid, came on again.

"It is Cabeza de Vaca!" Andy whispered, tensed with excitement. He ran forward now. "Cabeza, it is I, Andy."

De Vaca, his chest heaving, hardly knew whether to flee or stand his ground. Finally he brought himself to take the proffered hand of this man, who might be a ghost for aught he knew. De Vaca was, perhaps, suspicious, for he asked—

"Where is thy beard?"

"Dost not remember? I told thee of Glott pulling it out."

Andy's face was as smooth as a boy's.

"Ah, aye."

When the flood of greetings was over, de Vaca explained that he had spent five years trading among the Indians, carrying sea-shells to the west and bartering them for hides, bows and arrows. The savages had come to respect him and wait for his appearance.

Oviedo had remained all the time on the Island of Ill-Fate among Indian women—a helpless little group living in eternal fear of stronger families. De Vaca had gone back this year to get him and they had started out to meet the Potmaker, the Glib and Svss, the Healer by the Knife, all of whom de Vaca had heard about that Summer. But Ovieda had turned faint-hearted and gone back to the women, rather than to face the prospect of danger among new tribes, or of slavery.

Five years had taught these men patience. They resigned themselves to wait patiently until the next Summer, when the families would be west after tunas, to attempt an escape. Castillo and the Moor were persuaded to try it with the other two, and when the tuna season arrived they all started westward with their Indians traveling in one friendly group. Their spirits rose; escape seemed close.

But not yet was the cup to wet their lips. For the savages began to quarrel among themselves over the ownership of a young woman they had captured. In the end they separated in a huff, each of the four being compelled to go in a different family. So sudden was the rupture that the travelers had barely time to call out to one another to be patient and perhaps they would be more fortunate the next year.

Next year. Twelve months. Patience were indeed a virtue with them. Andy was surly the Summer through, often from the disappointment that fomented in his heart, fighting and whipping stalwart Indians to within an inch of their lives. No family dared kill Doran, for his services were valuable, and had any dared such a thing they would have been punished by other families by extermination. But through the year somehow Andy lived, and when the prickly pears turned yellow and red and purple in the next Summer the Indians resumed their former friendship and all worked westward together.

This enabled the four to find each other without much trouble by the middle of the Summer, and when September arrived they were at the extreme limit of their range. They, while not immediately together, yet were near enough to visit and arrange plans for an escape. This they agreed to launch at the full of the moon, which would be at about the end of the month, but chance threw them together in the middle of the month, and in the depths of a night they stole each one to a clump of mesquite and eluded their sleeping captors. Thus, by daybreak, a little more than seven years after the three hundred had left the fleet in Florida to go inland, they were free from the coast Indians and were going into the deeper unknown, into the forbidding wilderness of a savage continent.

CHAPTER IX

THE WHITE WOMAN

THE sun was beginning to make the morning comfortably warm when the four travelers paused in the chaparral to get the lay of the Indian village immediately before them. Well out of sight, they could still see everything

that was in progress among three or four hundred people.

On the north side was a hill and at its foot, cut deep into solid rock, were pools flowing over and tumbling down a terrace—a spring no doubt, for the water flowed off in a hardy little brook. Widespreading live oaks gave perpetual shade, and the Indian feet of centuries had kept undergrowth down so that except for the trees the place was open and grassy.

Some of the men lay on their backs in the sun, women were busy at fires—a peaceful village. But into this scene came a startling apparition, startling, that is, for Doran and his companions. From among the skin tepees came a girl, hopping, skipping, doing a sort of dance of a butterfly-over-the-flowers. The Indians gave her not the slightest heed, and she seemed to be unconscious of them.

As she drew nearer in her erratic and half-idling course they saw that she wore a soft garment of well-tanned hide thrown over one shoulder and gathered, fore and hind, at the waist so as to form a skirt that fell to the knees. Otherwise she was without clothing. But it was not these things that caused their mouths to drop open in amazement. It was that she was white of skin, with golden hair and eyes of the daintiest blue.

She passed them so closely that they saw there was naught but emptiness in her face—one whose mind has gone. She disappeared into the mesquite, and the moment she was gone Doran gasped out a single phrase—

"A Basque woman!"

"Fool!" snorted Cabeza de Vaca. "How could a woman from the far mountains of Spain be here?"

"Here an—" Castillo tapped his cranium significantly.

"She's a Basque or—there are white-skinned people in this land," Andy maintained. "Come on, let's find out and get some food."

"Wait," cautioned de Vaca, who was always cautious. "These *bahee* are large and savage looking. Observe their long bows and the stone hatchets."

"It's get food here or die of famine," Doran retorted. "Death by a punctured skin or an empty belly—I make no distinction."

With that he crowded through the chaparral and the others, perforce, were compelled to follow. A boy, running after an arrow, saw them and screamed shrilly. Immediately the whole tribe was running in their direction and slapping hands on thighs in grotesque imitation of a rooster flapping its wings.

"Thy glib tongue may stand us in good stead again, Steve," Andy said to the Moor. "Wiggle it like a Winter leaf."

"But they call for you, Captain Andee."

"Svss! Svss!" the Indians were shouting.

"They have heard of your healing," de Vaca exclaimed with relief.

The Indians gathered around them jabbering excitedly. From out of a whirlpool of humanity a chief, judging by his skin robe ornamented with orange and yellow laurel beans, confronted them and spoke.

"Svss?" His face was remarkably stubborn; his words unusually harsh and gutteral.

"I am the Knife," Andy admitted, stepping forward.

"The night birds murmur of thy healing among the peoples toward the rising sun, O great one," the chief went on. "Wilt thou go among my people and make them so they can skip and run and be happy?"

"Aye, an thou give us first of food and water."

The tribes people, who had been silent while the chief was talking, broke into joyful shouting and led the way toward the live oaks under which were skin tepees, that, Estevanico said, formed more of a village than Apalachen had been. Gourds of sparkling water first, then meat of the armadillo, nuts mixed with maize, and dried figs were brought; and when the four had eaten in ceremony, with the tribe looking on silently, the chief addressed the travelers, saying that all his people were ready to be healed.

"But all are not sick," Andy said contrarily, for he was weary from five days travel from the last village and had no mind to do more than was necessary.

"Thou shalt touch the well that they may not become sick."

"But I heal with the knife and not by touching."

"You heal," the chief returned flatly. "All my people await thee."

"Andee," said de Vaca, "I have an idea. Choose you those who need the service of thy knife, and these you leave I shall touch. Mayhap 'twill satisfy his choicy excellency."

"You have a head, even it is a cow's head!" Andy praised, alluding jocularly to de Vaca's name, 'Head of Cow'. "I shall be thrifty——"

He stopped. He stared. The yellow haired girl was coming toward them in her airy dance. She was close—easy whispering distance—when she saw them. She halted sharply, and for one fleeting instant, like a flash of lightning, keen intelligence came to the surface of her eyes. The four stared at her. Startlingly the chief cried out—

"Look not into her eyes!"

"Who is she? Whence came she?" Doran demanded.

"Her spirit is with the Great Spirit. We speak not of those who are protected by the Great Spirit, O Healer."

"I would talk with her," Andy persisted, watching the girl dance away.

"No! The eyes that wed hers, even for so brief a space as the raindrop remains separate from the brook it falls into, shall send the mind fluttering away on the wings of butterflies."

Andy, knowing the superstitions of the Indians, shrugged and turned to de Vaca—

"I shall choose the sick and leave the well to you, first informing the *cacique* that you possess the art of touching as well as I."

The chief swallowed the story, and helped them to get started. Many Indians had festering sores caused by cuts and poison from plants; one had web fingers, another's palms were covered with a horny scale resembling the material of a horse's hoof; rheumatism was common. For the last, Andy often pulled decayed teeth with a deer sinew and succeded in curing!

IN THE middle of the day they rested, and ate and talked with the chief and his leading men. In the course of this Andy asked what manner of country lay to the south, for he felt they had arrived at the belt of food and water where they must turn off to go to Panuco.

"Why would you know?" the chief asked suspiciously.

"We would go in that direction, O mighty warrior."

"Nay, thou shalt stay with my people."

"But we must go on and heal those who have devils."

"Those who dwell between the suns—" he gestured to the south—"and my people are enemies. My kinsmen dwell to the north and on the morrow we shall travel in that direction to find and heal them, going many suns."

Andy turned to his companions and spoke in Spanish:

"This looks bad, just when we have come to a good season and place to turn to the southward. We must escape tonight. But first we must see the white girl. By the saints, yes; she may be a prisoner, like us, or the Spaniards may be near."

They agreed with him, and the Moor said:

"But appear to agree with his naked honor. And return to your gouging. Señor de Vaca and I will seek the woman this afternoon."

"Yes we must see her before we go, and remember that we go tonight, unless she tells something to change us."

Andy returned to his surgical work—surgical mainly, though he often used herb concoctions, and as frequently nothing but bluff or "magic." When the last of the afflicted had passed through his hands, happy, the day was old and the tribe was in the midst of preparations for a great ceremonial celebration of their healing. There was a din of pestles hammering in mortars in the rocks grinding corn. Women were roasting armadillos in the animal's own turtle-like shells. Andy's three companions each told him, when he found them joking with some maidens, that the white woman was not to be found. He swore viciously at them for laggards, and being weary to his very marrow, he asked the chieftain to assign him a tepee that he might rest.

The head man indicated the largest tent in the village. Andy went to it alone, taking occasion to observe that it stood somewhat apart and backed against the little stream, offering some chance to escape without arousing the village. When he entered and dropped the flap he could see nothing in the dusky light but immediately another flap, high up on the rear side, was drawn, and there, in the golden light of the westering sun, like a clear-cut cameo, was the white girl.

As he stood breathless, taken aback, he saw that she was not more than seventeen years of age. Her deep eyes were like flowers from the clear blue sky, emotions skidding across them with the softness of fleecy clouds and lavender light-bars. In the first moment she seemed but a girlish child, but as her eyes held his he observed a change—she became womanly warm. His heart began to throb. Then she spoke in rippling Spanish—

"Where is your beard?"

He had expected anything but this. He laughed, a delighted boyish chuckle.

"Thou art a woman! Thou art my kind!"

She put a quick finger over her lips for silence. In two steps he was by her side. She was interested. She took the plait of his sandy hair and held it by the plait of her golden hair and smiled at him as if to say, "We are alike." Her warm fingers lightly touched his bare arms to make certain he was flesh and blood. This was too much for Andy, he siezed her in his arms.

An instant she struggled, then lay quiet in his strength, studying his face. He bent and kissed her—and knew the warmth of a woman's lips. His heart threshed within him. Her arms went up and about his neck—as if she too were hungry for her kind. Then she drew away abruptly.

"This is the guest house," she said in a low voice. "I knew you would be sent here, so I have waited, hidden. Whence came you and whither do you go?"

"We came from Spain many years ago." Like her, he spoke rapidly, tensely. "Our fleet was lost at sea and we on the land. We turn southward here to search for Spaniards. Dost thou know aught of them? Whence came you? What is your name?"

"My name is Paula. Do not turn southward. Go to the setting sun."

"To find Spaniards?"

"Because I ask it."

She drew up imperiously.

"'Tis sufficient." He glowed. "I would follow you to the night bed of the sun, an you wish it."

"We shall find the Spaniards then," she granted, her woman's pride satisfied. "They are in the west."

He would have taken her in his arms again but she eluded him.

"Thou touch me, and the Indians see it, we are lost. Go now. Prepare to escape tonight with thy companions, else will the chief take all of us far northward on the morrow." She put her hands on his shoulders and compelled him to the entrance, and as he raised the flap she whispered—"Follow me, my man—and act naturally, for the Indians must not suspect I am in here."

His thoughts were flying about like pigeons disturbed at their cotes. By sheer exertion of the will he gripped himself and tried to seem casual. He picked up an arrowhead, examined it, threw it down. He smiled at a wandering papoose. The chief strolled forward.

"Does Svss find the robes hard for his bones?" he asked.

"Nay, O chief. I find your village too interesting to sleep by day. I would sit among the warriors and hear your plans."

And hear he did in detail of the plans for the next day's march, for the language of these Indians differed but little from that of the other tribes. He gave thoughtful ear until the sun winked good night and the dancing of the ceremony began. All the tribe joined, even aged hags and warriors, who that morning had hobbled from rheumatism. They still hobbled, but such was the effect of the healer's suggestion and presence and the general gladness that they hobbled less than usual and were happy. The travelers entered the dance, but when all except the warriors dropped out the four quit also, at a signal from Andy, who was anxious to work toward the escape.

"Art thou not as strong as my warriors?" the chief asked with a touch of scorn.

"Aye," Andy boasted in the Indian manner. "I could be dancing when they drop to the ground and groan, but I prefer now to rest rather than to show my powers."

"When the moon rises we shall feast," the *cacique* remarked.

"Nay, O chief." Andy's wits raced like lightning for an excuse, for he meant to be gone before the moon came. "White men are troubled by devils in dreams when they eat after the moon arrives to grin at them. We shall not eat out here but in our teepee where the man in the moon may not bewitch us. I would have two gourds of food brought, and a gourd of hot coals buried in ashes, and a gourd of water, and put in our teepee."

"Strange ways," murmured the Indian, striding off. "I shall have squaws bring the things."

"Why this?" grumbled Castillo. "I had anticipated a hot feast."

"We must escape at once and carry the things with us."

"At once?" echoed de Vaca. "Better wait until the savages are gorged and asleep."

"No. In the night a guard will be placed, but if we enter the guest house now and pass immediately through on the back side and follow down the brook we will be away before moon whitens the land."

"But we haven't seen the white girl yet."

"I have. We go west."

"You mean south."

"I mean west, toward the setting sun," Andy contradicted tartly.

"And miss Panuco?" de Vaca demurred. "Why this change, Andee?"

"The white girl says there are Spaniards in the west and that she will lead us thither."

"Spaniards? How far? Who?"

The three were excited.

"I had no time for so many questions. She but said there are Spaniards in the west and I promised to go."

"Bah! You would harken to an insane twit of a girl on so important a matter?" De Vaca was not so contemptuous as he was alarmed at the change in plans. He ever feared any sort of change. "Who is she? How came she here?"

"I tell you I don't know. I talked but a minute." For an instant Andy wondered if he had been indiscreet in promising the girl; then he remembered her warm body and soft eyes, and didn't care. "She's not insane, I can tell you that for a fact, Cabeza de Vaca. And I go west whether you three slugs move a step or not. Stay here till you rot for all I care."

Doran was often abrupt and impatient. The heavy burden of the journey was on his shoulders. It was he who healed while the others loafed, he who planned, negotiated with the savages, kept alert. De Vaca was anxious enough to escape but had no initiative. The other two didn't care whether they escaped or not, particularly. He grew weary of always urging them. He repeated now, harshly—

"Till you rot, —— you."

"Why not?" The Moor grinned. "The women here are slim and pretty."

"And the food plentiful." Castillo tongued his lips.

He was the bony ghost of a man with a round cushion stomach.

"Heathen!" de Vaca charged. "Andee, I shall go with thee, be it north, south or west."

"And we too," the others said together hastily.

"Step lively then. Here are the squaws

with the gourds. Take the things and get them into the teepee."

They courteously bade the chief good night, wished for a pleasant journey on the morrow, and strolled casually to the guest house. Andy entered last and left the flap back as if not caring who peeped in.

"Paula," he whispered, "it is we. Art thou ready?"

"*Sssh!*" came the low response. "Follow."

Noiselessly a patch of skin was removed from the back of the tent and in the dim light they stooped and passed through. Outside the girl was barely visible. They followed her example of stooping and began to wade along the brook, treading carefully.

After a while she turned off to the west, but with never a word. They followed. Once Doran caught up and put a hand on her shoulder. She pressed his fingers—and dropped away from his touch.

"Keep always to the west," she instructed in Spanish and presently was gone from their sight.

When day came she was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER X

THE GREAT TRADING SCHEME.

"NOT another step toward the sunset will I go!" avowed de Vaca, his thick lips setting in as firm a line as was physically possible.

"As you will," Doran replied good naturedly. "Where then? To the North Sea?"

"Why not? The Indians say 'tis but fifteen leagues distant and no doubt the Spaniards have arrived on its coast in numbers in these seven years."

"Your knowledge of geography—why, great stars, man, the North Sea lay to the north of Havana and east of Florida, and from Florida we have traveled a thousand leagues to the west."

"But the Indians say——"

"The Indians' knowledge of distance, Cabeza de Vaca, is blood brother to your knowledge of women, which is less——"

"Women! Now you have undammed my disgust. For two months have we followed this mystic woman west and not once has she waited for us to address her, not one word has she spoken. Sometimes I think you dreamed—or conclude that she is a ghost."

"Have ghosts warm lips?"

"Warm lips? Hast thou kissed her?" De Vaca was positively startled.

"Lips must be warm to talk," Andy evaded, "and she said we would find Spaniards in the west."

"West! West! Always the words are on your tongue, Dorantes. I say I will not go west. I believe you would lead us to our deaths."

"I have told you a hundred times I would take the responsibility," Andy said tartly, getting to his feet. "I am not a murderer. I have no will to lead you three to your deaths, nor myself to mine own." He slapped de Vaca on the back. "Brighten up, old grumbler. I shoulder all responsibility for you."

His blue eyes sparkled.

"*Foul*" De Vaca snapped his fingers. "You talk like God. Great trails cross here, cut deep into the earth. I follow the one that goes south, let it lead me where it will."

"Then I remain here," the Moor said. "The women are blithe and have soft hands."

"And food is plentiful," Castillo added. "Much good meat do the hunters bring in from beyond the great river we crossed—meat of the humped back cows (buffaloes). Besides, water flows from the ground in a mighty fountain." (The Comanche Chief Spring, Ft. Stockton, Texas.)

"Moreover," de Vaca went on, "it appears that none of us will leave. Yon Indians are again quarreling over us. I expect to be quartered and divided among them yet."

Andy laughed gaily. He laughed a great deal these days—much changed by new hope and the success of two month's travel, and also no doubt by the memory of a girl in his arms. Said he:

"Cabeza de Vaca, you are like the little animal the Indians speak of, the groundhog that is afraid of its shadow. Yon bickering Indians mean no harm to our bodies."

The "bickering Indians" that he pointed to consisted of the fierce tribe that dwelt about the springs, numbering a thousand or so, and about five hundred Indians from the east who had accompanied the four travelers. For in the later days of their marching the travelers had not gone through the wilderness alone, carrying a pot of fire to kindle their night blazes. Their healing had gained such fame that they were able to travel like kings. Indians escorted them to the westward in gathering numbers, hunting for them, setting up individual teepees at night.

They never found opportunity, however, to talk with the blue-eyed girl. She ever kept ahead, going where she chose because the Indians believed her mentally infirm and therefore refrained from touching her. When the four men reached a village they literally would see her leaving at the other side.

The journey had gone well until they reached the Auauche springs. Here the Auauche warriors had offered to conduct the travelers on west, but these who had come this far refused to let the great men out of their possession, refused to turn them over to the Auauches without some great payment. The travelers had nothing to trade for themselves, and the Auauches scornfully refused to pay the weaker numbers

for men they already had in their possession.

Andy was sincere in believing their bodies would not be harmed. It was other things that troubled him—when he would permit any worry to interfere in his enjoyment of this tremendous adventure. For one thing, he felt certain that if the five hundred Malichuches would retire and leave him and his companions with the Auauches, and the Auauches kept their promise to conduct the travelers on west, that when they reached the next tribe, the Auauches would there refuse to give up their men. Virtually the four were captives, though kings. The Indians knew a good thing when they saw it, and Doran, as well as the others, had become great healers, though this was chiefly due to Andy's surgery. However, hundreds claimed to be healed by de Vaca's touch. As these things passed through Andy's thoughts he got back to the newest problem, which was de Vaca's obstinacy.

"Cabeza," said he, "I appeal to thy reason to continue the journey westward. It ——"

"No! I am determined. I will not continue to follow this girl who—why, we haven't seen her for a week."

"I have," Estevanico spoke up. He saw everything, was an inveterate gossip. "She returned to this place this morning from the west."

"There she comes now," Castillo exclaimed.

"Dancing as usual," de Vaca scoffed.

The girl was coming, and, strangely, the Indians were following her. Each group as she passed stopped its argumentative talk and fell in behind her. The travelers watched. Gracefully she skipped along. A tinkling as of a bell reached Andy's ears. He stiffened, expecting some message. She drew near.

"By my eye!" de Vaca cried. "She has a bell."

"A hawk-bell," gasped the Moor. "Observe. We have seen those things in Spain."

"I and other noblemen have hunted doves with them on the necks of our falcons," de Vaca granted snobbishly.

Paula had been coming toward the group. She turned off now in her apparently erratic way, and began to rattle the little bell in the faces of the Indians. The warriors gave back, turning their faces, for they would not look at her countenance. The girl made a little circle and again came toward the travelers. Andy ran out to meet her.

"What hast thou, Paula?" he asked, keeping his face turned aside so as not to appear overbold before the Indians.

He reached for the trinket, and obediently, like a child, she handed it to him then stopped to observe what he did with it. De Vaca and the others crowded up.

"A hawk-bell sure enough," said de Vaca, unbending.

"With the head of King Charles cast in relief on the side," Andy added. Then without seeming to do so he spoke to her— "Where did this come from, Paula?"

She snatched it from his hands and resumed her idle dancing, but now Spanish words were in her little blithesome sing-song that reached their ears.

"To the west, to the west, to the west! Follow me, follow me, on the morrow follow me."

Her words were drowned in the scuffle of moccasins of the Indians, wild to see the bell yet not daring to take it from her.

THE next morning at sunrise when Andy left his tent of skins he found his companions squatting about a fire, for these early Winter mornings were frosty and sharp here. He came forward laughing—still naked except for breechcloth and moccasins, his sandy hair in a queue down his back.

"To the west, to the west, to the west," he sang airily, and smacked the pouting de Vaca across a shoulder. "Cheer up, doctor!"

"The girl has left again," Estevanico said.

For an instant Andy experienced a twinge of jealousy that this black-skinned Moor should know more than himself of the woman he loved but this passed and his good cheer bubbled again.

"She leads the way for our departure today," he explained as if he had known all about it.

De Vaca eyed him sharply.

"Today?" he asked.

"Aye, today." He struck a kingly attitude in good-humored mockery. "O Moor, go thou at once to the chiefs of the Auauches and Malichuches and say that the Mighty Healer, Svss himself, desires their presence immediately. Ahm!"

De Vaca was canny in recognizing confidence.

"I will go west with you," he said hurriedly.

"Shall I tell the chiefs? Dost thou mean it?" Estevanico asked.

"Aye."

The Moor hurried off, and in a short time he was back and the chiefs coming—taking their dignified time. The four travelers squatted to form a circle and one by one the big men of the Indians took their place in it, very dignified, for a cold snap was on between the Auauches and the Malichuches. The latter had a perfect right to be at the great springs, for this was a neutral meeting-ground. Great trails crossed here—trails fifteen and twenty feet wide cut a foot or more into the ground by the ceaseless passage of moccasined feet through the ages. It was a meeting-place and a *franca lingua* prevailed. Dorán rose—after waiting a decorous period of silence—and in this general language began to address the grim-mouthed chiefs.

"O mighty leaders of the Auauches and Malichuches," he began, "evil spirits have been

whispering evil words in thy ears. I come to speak words of softness and wisdom. We know that the Malichuches have us in their hearts and that their hearts pain at thought of departing from us. But we are mighty healers and in the night the Great Spirit whispered words to me that I would reveal to you."

Doran paused dramatically.

"Good, fine!" whispered Estevanico. "Right keen for a maiden speech!"

"I'll choke you," Andy hissed in Spanish, and resumed his address.

"The Great Spirit, O chiefs, used fiery words to tell me that the time has come for our going to other tribes to give them of our good medicine." The Indians stirred uneasily. "But the Great Spirit did not speak of empty hands. He told me of certain gifts that are to be given today."

The head chief of the Auauches looked up sharply at Doran from his little watery eyes.

"The Great Spirit said that the Auauches would make gifts to the Malichuches, and that the Malichuches would depart for their homes while the Auauches would escort the healers toward the setting sun. The gifts which the Auauches will give our friends the Malichuches will be as many robes of the humped-back cows as Malichuche chiefs have fingers on their hands; one bow and six arrows to each chief; and twice the food that the Malichuches will require for their journey home."

The Malichuches exhibited huge satisfaction at this princely gift, for buffalo robes were very precious to them. But the Auauche chiefs looked rebellious.

"The Great Spirit," Andy went on, "directed me then as to the good Auauches. He said that when they, his children, had obediently taken us to their brothers in the west, those brothers would give the Auauches the same amount as the Auauches had given the Malichuches and as much again."

The Auauche head chief rose to his feet. "Will the brothers in the west understand this talk?" he asked.

"Do they have ears for the great Spirit? Thou knowest they do."

"A heavy deal for us," warned de Vaca. "You will ruin us."

"The Auauches," Doran went on, "have told me that the nations to the west are very rich. I am ready to have it proven that your tongues are not forked. Wilt thou travel there with me to receive this wealth? Will the Malichuches accept from the Auauches?"

The Malichuche head chief got up.

"I would not disobey our Great Spirit," he declared, looking at a fine Auauche buffalo robe greedily. "I will obey thy words of wisdom and accept gifts from the Auauches."

"The words of the Great Spirit are my law," the Auauche leader echoed. "As much again as we give, did thou say? It is good trading!"

"'Tis done," Andy decreed. "Auauches, bring thy gifts to the Malichuches, and I will make count. Prepare also for the journey west. Svss, the Mighty Healer of the Knife, has spoken."

"Irish gall!" muttered the astounded de Vaca.

CHAPTER XI

WHITE MAN'S ENDURANCE

LONG before noon the strong men and women of the Auauches, numbering nearly six hundred, were marching away from the spring in a loose column. Doran led, and in a short time he was faced with a choice of three trails.

"The middle one," Estevanico directed as he arrived panting from where he had been dawdling with the column. "To the southwest."

"Did Paula say so?"

"She went that way."

"Did she see that you saw her do so?"

"Aye."

"Southwest it is then."

The Indians who were armed with bows set out in the afternoon to hunt deer for the party. Others whose weapons were heavy smooth sticks, two spans long, formed rings which gradually closed upon rabbits, and as the long-ears made attempts to escape between the hunters they were clubbed with the sticks. That night stacks of rabbits waist high and fat deer were piled before the tents of the four great men to be touched and blessed before going to the cooking-fires.

Six hundred Indians can not move as rapidly over the country as a small party, so that many days were spent in getting to the next plentiful water supply. Here they found a big and wealthy tribe. Without difficulty Doran obtained goods to repay and award the Auauches, just as he had promised.

The new tribe, being given the same sort of promise, gladly accompanied the travelers on the journey, and thus from one tribe to another the four made their way, with an ever-increasing number in the retinue and an ever-increasing amount of goods necessary to pay off the last tribe. De Vaca continually grumbled that the trading would be the rope to strangle themselves, and Andrew laughed at him.

The gray wilderness of mountains and rock and yellow grass of Winter was no longer lonely and empty. Now hunters shouted in the chase; women, spiritually moved by the healing and the presence of the healers, chanted as they marched. Every consideration was given the four. Food was supplied in abundance. If they chose they were carried on the shoulders of warriors. Their word was law. The journey became a pageant of happiness, marked for

many leagues by a cloud of yellow dust through the days and by a banner of starry fires at nights.

Progress was slow, but what difference so long as they were surely moving? They expected every day to find Spaniards. Of each new tribe they inquired whether any men like themselves had ever been seen before, or heard of. The answer was always negative, but the travelers were not discouraged; the hawk-bell had heartened them to a lasting faith.

Delays were frequent. Sometimes they would wait two or three days for parties on either side of the trail to join them. The "owning" tribe usually numbered six or seven hundred Indians, but the marchers sometimes formed a regiment of two thousand.

The direction of the journey was steadily southwest, through gray mountains oftentimes, and along southward reaching valleys filled with dun dust. Sometimes their fuel was cedar, sometimes thorny shrubs, or a weed filled with wax that burned hotly.

At first the white-skinned girl marched with the column, keeping hidden from Doran and the others. Twice the Irishman sought her but she evaded him, and finally she disappeared altogether, not being seen even leaving a village on one side as the people marched in on the other. She was constantly in Andy's thoughts, and the only worry he had in these days was for her traveling over the country alone. He itched to know about her—whence she had come and why she was so far from friends.

De Vaca worried about something different—the matter of the trading. He, and Andy too for that matter, saw that it was becoming top-heavy. How could they escape from their promise to pay and award if some new tribe should refuse to give up a levy? Or if a tribe were too poor to reimburse with such a tremendous quantity of goods? Whenever he spoke of the subject the middle-aged Spaniard would wag a sad head.

"Cheer up!" Andy would admonish, slapping de Vaca's back. "A door always opens to the resourceful. You would stop? Not I. My father always said, 'If ye start, keep going,' and I mean to find the end o' this journey properly if we go till we wear our feet off to the knees."

Then one day they reached the domain of a chief named Ul, the All-Seeing. This was along a river—the Rio Grande at Presidio, Texas—that lay between mountains. The travelers had no way of knowing that it was the River of Palms more than two hundred leagues up its course from where they had expected to find it. There were wide cultivated fields being prepared for crops, and the first permanent houses they had seen—houses built of sticks and mud and thatch. Ul's people lived in the villages along the stream for many leagues.

Ul refused flatly to stand for the levy. The escorting Indians, about fifteen hundred of them, grew exceedingly wroth at Andy and threatened to take him back. Ul relented at this and, on Andy's agreement to heal in every village along the river, made the payment. This was large, consisting of bows and arrows to every chief, two stacks of buffalo robes, spread out flat, as high as Andy's head; ten stacks each of jerked beef and dried squash as high as his head, and three thousand squaw's loads of maize. Andy knew he would never be able to double the amount to pay Ul back.

The four began their service of doctoring for Ul's people. This took them up the river for more than ten leagues on one side, and they returned down-stream on the other. Ul accompanied them with his standing army of about thirty warriors, and he assigned one soldier to each of the four daily as a messenger. Fifteen days were spent on the trip, so that it was February when they returned to Ul's main village where the River of Shells emptied into the stream between the mountains. Andy and the others made a formal matter of asking Ul to assemble his people to march west and collect his goods from the next tribe. The chieftain shook his head.

"There are no goods nor people toward the sun's bed," Ul said.

Andy's heart sank. If Ul could not be induced by the promise of a great payment to go west, how were the four to escape and continue their journey? They could not get away from their body-guards who served them as servants, or if they did they could not hope to work their way through the dozens of wide-spreading villages. The immediate prospect was that they would be held here perhaps for years. But Andy essayed an attempt toward action.

"Yet, O mighty chief," he said, "we would go on with our journey, healing the sick and winning favor in sight of the Great Spirit."

"Whither wouldst thou go? And how? There is naught to the south for food in seventeen days of hard marching. There is naught to the west or the northwest. Besides," Ul added, "thou art mine. Did I not buy thee?"

He turned away, ending the palaver.

Andy started back to his hut, disconsolate. He groaned. Paula had not been seen for weeks. He became more downcast than he had ever been before.

"Fie, Andee," Castillo admonished. "Why so windy with thy sighs? Are we not great men here, and is the food not plentiful?"

"And the maidens bright of eye?" added Estevanico.

Andy spat disgustedly.

De Vaca grunted.

"Thou two worry me. Since I smelled the Spaniards on that hawk-bell I have felt assured. They are somewhere, mayhap for all we know just beyond the next mountain range."

FOR a week Andy and de Vaca gloomed, though the Moor and Castillo were quite content, talking with enthusiasm of a great chieftains' dance and feast that the Indians were preparing for. This was a noted annual event at which head and subchiefs for the ensuing year were selected. One day Andy, having nothing else to occupy him, went with the others to the place where the ceremony was to be held.

Within a rincon, a horseshoe-like place that formed a natural amphitheater for thousands of spectators, a fire-pile with kindling ready to light had been made, and around it forming a circle was a ring of spiny cactus. Outside the thorny circle was stacked a great quantity of dry wood.

"A cooking-place fenced off," Andy surmised.

"Aye, a cooking-place it is," Estevanico agreed. "For men."

"Human sacrifices?"

"Nay. Give ear. I have heard the whole story." The Moor took pleasure in showing off his knowledge of the Indians, which he possessed in greater amount than the others. "Ul himself and all the lower chiefs and all men who aspire to be chiefs will enter the cactus ring at sunset and dance. A roaring fire will be built in the middle for light and to give the dancers something to endure. They will dance until they drop out from exhaustion, and he who stays longest will be the chief; and next to the longest, second chief, and so on down."

"But Ul has been chief a long time."

"He has won eleven years in succession."

Andy regarded anew the sides of the amphitheater; in his mind he saw the slopes lined with thousands of people. His vision went farther; he saw himself in the ring with the contesting warriors lying at his feet exhausted. When he started back to the village he was whistling thoughtfully, but as he went he remembered the mightily muscled Ul and the whistle petered out.

As he slept fitfully in his *jacal* that night he was brought up by a sound of scratching on the rear wall below the window opening. Jumping to the conclusion that one of his companions was there with some secret message concerning escape, he crossed the dirt floor cautiously so as not to alarm the guard outside the door.

The window was just large enough for him to put his head out, and he saw a figure, in the reflection of the moonlight from the sand, at one side.

"Paula!" he exclaimed under his breath.

"Andee!"

She raised her lips for him to kiss.

The warm touch thrilled him but she signaled with a finger over her lips for him to be silent.

"I returned this evening at sunset and saw you enter this place," she whispered.

"Paula, where have you been? Tell me about yourself. Clamber in through this window. Day in and day out I wonder about you."

"Not now, Andee. Soon, an thou wish it. I have been far to the west and have come back for thee. Renew thy journey. Go south along the River of Shells for seventeen days. When thou reach the village of deer-skins turn west for an equal time. It is not much farther."

"But Paula, Ul has a mighty grip on us."

"Can not my Andee loosen it?"

Andy was silent for a moment before such faith that was a dare, then—

"Aye, girl, I can, and I will."

She touched his cheeks with the tips of her fingers and was gone, dancing in her blithesome way in the moonlight on the sand.

Early the next morning Estevanico hurried in from a jaunt to tell Andrew that Paula was back. For once Doran was ahead with his knowledge and he took delight in shrugging indifferently.

"She arrived about sunset yesterday," he supplemented.

"Why didn't you tell us? I learned something about her."

"What?"

"That she was here two years ago. She was sane then, and a prisoner of Indians who were carrying her north, a very fierce tribe not at all afraid of Ul. I surmise that she escaped them by acting as if her mind had slipped its cable."

"A remarkably intelligent woman," Andy vouched proudly.

THROUGHOUT that day the people of Ul assembled literally by the thousands for the chieftains' dance. As they arrived they sought places of vantage on the hillsides of the rincon above the arena.

Long before sunset they were all there, tightly packed, making good-natured sallies as to who would enter the contest. No one was near the arena until a short time before the sun descended to the black humpbacked mountains in the west, then a medicine-man, the master of ceremonies, took his place by the cactus circle and proclaimed that all who aspired to be chiefs must gather outside the ring. About thirty men ran up, among them being Ul.

To the surprize of the throng, and even his companions, Andy dropped his deer skin robe and stepped into the ring of warriors. An audible gasp went up. Ul glanced at him scornfully and looked away. Andy trembled, inside, lest the master of ceremonies order him back, but instead of that the old man, whose hair was so oddly white against his dark skin, began to make what Andy took to be the formal announcement.

Doran knew much already of what he said and was not tensely interested until the grandsire began to explain how the last man in the circle should conduct himself. Eventually, it

appeared, only two men would be left in the contest, then one of these would fall. The remaining one would then make a complete circuit of the ring alone and getting back to where the contestant lay on the ground, would set his foot on the fallen man's head. Whereupon the conquerer, so to speak, would be proclaimed king with all power.

The old man finished his talk and faced the west. The throng was silent, breathless. The medicine-man never took his eyes from the sun, nor did the contestants look away from him. The coppery ball was soon half-hidden. A second medicine-man sprang into the circle and lighted the dry fire-pile with a torch. The master of ceremonies, gazing unblinking, raised an arm. The warriors unconsciously tensed. The arm dropped. The thirty sprang over the cactus barrier and the dance was on.

The would-be chiefs were naked except for breech-cloths of soft deer-skin, and Andy was garbed like them. He fell in directly behind Ul. It was not a race; it was a contest of endurance, and every man kept a steady pace without trying to pass any other man. Doran looked them over. Only Ul, he thought, seemed superior to him with his long gaunt muscles and oiled, glistening copper skin.

Andy saw how he was expected to do within three steps. At first the gyrations looked foolish, for the stalwart, fierce visaged men danced in the manner of light-footed maidens—like Paula, a sort of skipping and hopping on the toes. He decided to stay directly in rear of Ul, because he believed the chief, to win eleven times in succession, possessed some method, some bag of tricks by which he had eased the contests for himself. He resolved to cling like a shadow and watch. He became a man of one thought.

At first they danced blithesomely. Andrew had no difficulty in keeping the pace, but it wasn't long before he was cursing the heat, for the January weather was warm enough in this mountain-enclosed country without the blazing fire in the center. Men on the outside steadily passed wood over the dancers' heads to the fire-feeder in the ring.

When darkness had fallen thoroughly, in something like an hour, the first man fell out. Andy's heart jumped. If they had no more endurance than that he would win easily! Then he saw that the Indian limped and surmised he had a sprained ankle. How this was possible Andy could not understand, for the treadway had been beaten down hard. While pondering this he suddenly tripped and fell headlong so that his hands went flat against Ul's back, almost shoving that savage off his feet. Ul grunted savagely over his shoulder. As Andy caught his balance he knew what had caused his, and no doubt the fallen Indian's mishap—a piece of stiff bark that had dropped from the wood as it was passed in to the fire-feeder. This gave him something to watch out for, to think about. But his thoughts took to other fields too. He wondered what he would do if he won. Would the Indians proclaim him their chieftain? Or would he succeed only in winning the hatred of the best native contestant? Which one that would be he could not even forecast, for no man seemed to be doing better than his fellows.

Sometimes they folded their arms over their chests, sometimes had them at their sides—kept them anywhere, in fact, to ease their muscles and keep their balance.

They moved to the left, that is, so that the blistering fire in the center was on their left sides. The breeze was from the southwest; thus when they were on the northeast side the flames almost licked them. By the hour that Andy thought must be midnight legs began to lag; and soon after, five fell out pretty close together, and Doran did not wonder at it, for he was parched for a drink. His thoughts began to dwell on water, going back and holding to the time they were rained on day after day in the open and cold barges.

Shortly after the five, a sixth fell out, landing square upon the cactus barrier. The muscles of Andy's stomach flinched, for he knew the Indian must have been pierced through the abdominal wall in a dozen places by the sharp, long spines. Two wood-handlers lifted the man off.

By the middle of the after part of the night only five men remained besides Andy. Among them without warning appeared Paula, dancing. For a little she ran beside Doran, who slowly, in his suffering, became aware that she was singing in Spanish—an improvised tune.

"You must win—you must win—I will watch from the crowd—I will watch for your success—your woman will watch her man!"

She fell behind him and when next he saw her she was outside the barrier. Her presence revived him, took his mind off his dry and burning mouth and stiffening legs. So far as he could tell Ul had not faltered; the only sign he gave of weariness was a frequent changing of his arms from his sides to over his chest. Andy imitated his every gesture.

Two more men dropped out, one of them falling across the cactus spines. With the first hint of day only three were left. Andy's feet felt as if they were dead, but he kept behind Ul. This practice cost him dearly, for the Indian running with them stumbled over his own feet and fell down. Ul, unable to leap over him, fell also, and Andy, moving half-blind, sprawled over them both.

"Up! Up! Andee!" bawled Estevanico. "You've won. Make another circuit!"

The only way Andy could tell that he had got to his feet was by the sense of sight. He could not tell that his legs were moving except that

the ground off to one side seemed to pass by him. As he went on around he saw Ul rise up before him, and again he was the follower.

A time came when he could not see well. His eyeballs felt shrunken. He kept to the course by following the bulk of Ul ahead of him. There seemed to be fiery flashes within his skull. He forgot the fire, the cactus, the girl, and kept on from the force of habit of willing all night to do so. His going, by the time the sun was ready to burst into day, was no more than an echo of his going through the previous hours.

Then Ul stumbled and fell. Andy shot over him and struck the ground flatly. The jar revived him for a few seconds so that he heard the voices of de Vaca and the others shouting for him to make one more circuit and win. He got to his feet and willed to keep on—and Ul, starting up also, fell over him. Both went down again.

"Up! Up!" bellowed the Moor. "Go one round! One more round and you are king."

Andy got to his feet and staggered on. He heard a subdued scream from a thousand throats and somehow he knew that he was about to fall on the cactus or in the fire. He kept on, hours or minutes, he knew not, till a bulk loomed darkly on the ground ahead of him.

"On! On!" screamed a demoniacal voice. "Put your foot on his head and thou art king! One round after he falls. Your foot on his head. Six more steps."

Andy dully sensed that the black object ahead must be Ul. But he did not know. Everything became flaming darkness. He paused and tried to raise a foot. He tottered—and fell down. The last he knew was that a mighty shout was making the ground tremble.

CHAPTER XII

LUCKY HORSESHOE

CASTILLO sat in the sun with his back to a boulder sucking at a scrap of raw venison tallow. De Vaca hugged his knees and dozed. Doran lay supine on a flat rock. Only Estevanico was vivacious, and he kept his tongue going with all the enthusiasm of a born talker. In a pause Castillo took advantage of opportunity to remark:

"Fine food! I'll wager my stomach has contracted 'til it's no more roomy than a hen's egg."

"As I was saying," Estevanico went on, "when you raised your foot you set it on his chest instead of his head. Then you swayed and would have fallen on the cactus had I not touched you and set you off your balance in the other——"

"Yes, yes," Andy broke in testily. "You have told it no fewer than a hundred times. And I fell with one foot on his head, which wasn't according to court practice but answered for the Indians. They proclaimed me king. Ul was satisfied. I rested twenty-four hours and soaked in steaming robes. Then I gave Ul back his kingdom, selected eight carriers, loaded them with venison tallow, and by the right of being chief and doing as I pleased, set out to march seventeen days up the River of Shells. We have come five days without a slip. The whole yarn in a cocoanut shell. Now we'll put it out of mind and turn our thoughts to the future. Understand, Steve?"

"*Si, Señor*, but——"

"We've got twelve days more to go before we reach the village of skins. Save your breath, because we are going to travel faster than we ever traveled before. We've got to keep from starving. Few people, no food."

"And seventeen days west from the village of skins, not so, Andeer?" de Vaca suddenly asked out of his dozing. "A long way, say I, for a man whose temples are gray."

"And the sooner finished the better. Come. The sun is the turn of an hour-glass beyond the zenith. Four leagues more today."

"Never a sign of a Spaniard yet," de Vaca grumbled as he groaned himself to his feet. "I would welcome finding e'en the Portuguese or the Britains."

Of all their traveling the journey up the River of Shells and westward seventeen days—thirty-four days in all—was the hardest that they endured. The monotony of the empty and silent land went unbroken most of the time. Food was scarce and the cold of the high mountainous and plateau country was intense, with February and March northers tugging at their buffalo robes eternally and suffocating them with dust. Andy had no idea where he was going but he knew why he traveled this way—Paula had said to.

They questioned every Indian wanderer they met about white-skinned men but not one gave them information. The monotony was broken but once. They fell in with a small bunch of Indians and eight of the savages died in one night. There was no obvious reason for this, so the Indians believed the Spaniards had caused the deaths. Instead of becoming vengeful they fell into a quaking fear and a steady unbroken silence. Andy came upon one mother frantically scratching the calves of her small boy's legs with mice teeth to hush his squalling!

Expecting Spaniards at the end of seventeen days to the west, they found—not even Paula.

A decided change was perceptible in the country. The people were agriculturists and raised maize. The women wore cotton garments. And the men told of great houses to the northward, each one capable of holding an entire tribe—the pueblos of New Mexico as later Spaniards learned. They decided to recuperate among these farmer Indians for a few days

and see if Paula would appear or send some message.

At evening of the third day they beheld a cloud of dust on the wind a league or so to the west. They could not understand it, nor could the Indians enlighten them. They waited expectantly, and in an hour were measurably rewarded. For between three and four hundred natives marched up and their leader told a story of flight from their own district to escape slave-catchers.

"What sort of slave-catchers?" Doran asked.

"Men like yourselves," the chief answered, including the four with a gesture. "But different," he added, "since they come from where the great salty water washes the land."

Andy and the others were puzzled. Men like themselves, from the west. And salty water. They could not conceive that they were approaching the South Sea—the Pacific Ocean as it was afterward named.

"Why do you run away?" Andy kept on. "Can you not fight and drive the slave-catchers out of your country?"

The Indian shook a hopeless head. "They are more numerous than pebbles in a mountain brook, and they carry long sharp lances, and sit on the backs of beasts mightier than the hump-backed cows of the north."

"He means horses," Estevanico interpreted. "By the saints, he must mean horses."

"What are the names of these people?" de Vaca questioned.

"Takers of slaves."

"Meager information," Andy commented. "O chief, do the slave-catchers come this way now?"

"Aye."

"How far off?"

The Indian shook his head. He made it evident that he had escaped from the wrath while he could, without waiting for too many details. The travelers regarded one another with questioning eyes, hope and excitement making their breasts rise and fall like erratic bellows. Yet they were almost tongue-tied with the feeling that something tremendous was about to happen. The leader of fleeing people, seeing that these strange white men had no more questions to ask, made a dignified obeisance in leave taking.

"*Adios*," he said.

The four at once broke into voluble excitement. The slave-catchers to the west must be Spaniards, or how could this savage know that. So they argued the night half-through and were off the next morning by sunrise—with the near four hundred Indians trailing back with them pleading at every opportunity to be protected from those "who rode on the backs of animals and fought with lances." The talk was of what they would do if they fell in with Spanish people, of what they would say.

"I shall at least get a square meal once more," Castillo vouched. "A fat goose baked on its back with its legs sticking up, and stuffed with olives and ——"

"Fie," scoffed de Vaca. "Eat, eat, eat is your song. For me, give me a gallon of wine made from the grapes of Castilla, and bananas browned over a blaze in olive oil, and ——"

"Gluttons!" shouted the Moor. "I ask naught, naught—except my two hands once full—twice—thrice full of dates dried in the sun."

They looked at Andy.

"Give me the taste of a woman's lips," he said. "I have not the coarse appetite of you wrinkle-bellied *pobres*. A few thick slices of ham from a well-fed shoat, some bread of barley, a curd, hare stewed with olives, a ——"

AND then they cried him down. So they traveled for days, wrapped in foreseeing and foretalking. Indians began to join them from all sides, and Andy, as of yore, doctored them with his herbs and the knife, while de Vaca said words and made signs upon all impartially. But gradually their spirits sank again. No more news came of the strange people. Andy mourned silently about Paula. Finally after many days some new Indians besought them to turn northward to the great houses where whole tribes lived. It came to be a question of what to do next, and just when they were in the darkest depths of indecision, they came upon Paula on the trail.

With two Indian men she was a stone's throw distant when they saw her. She saw them at the same time. She halted abruptly, flung something about the neck of one of the Indians and ran away. Andy started after her, but stopped to stare when he saw what the Indian carried.

It was a horseshoe and a belt buckle about his neck, slung on a thong, evidence of Europeans without a doubt.

They renewed their pace immediately—but Andy failed to catch sight of the golden-haired girl. On they went, due west in accordance to the messenger's instructions. This man led the way, with the emblems of civilization still hung to his neck. Estevanico, the pert as well as the glib, often went ahead, and on one of these occasions he came running back and shouting:

"Horses! Horses!"

He led the way to a spot under a tree and sure enough there were imprints of horses' shoes, and other signs of a camp. They were thrilled and with their joy was mixed a sort of fear, for these were the first actual signs of living Europeans they had seen for nearly eight years.

The horses, six or eight in number, had come in from the west, following a visible Indian trail, and the tracks led off north from the camping

place. After some discussion, Doran urged de Vaca and Estevanico to go on west in hope of meeting other horsemen, while he and Castillo would remain at the camping-place to see if the party returned. The six or seven hundred Indians now in the party remained with Doran.

The waiting proved difficult for Andy and Castillo. They were on nettles. Andrew tried to doctor his patients, but most of the time his eyes were roving over the barren country, seeming to see moving horsemen in every inanimate rock.

At night they could not sleep. By the third day they were worn out, and at noon resolved to seek a quiet place and try to get much-needed sleep. They went out on the westward trail and lay down on the ground beneath a shelving boulder. They did go to sleep—and were awakened by the jar of horses' hoofs around them, and the jingling of acoutrements.

They sprang up and stared, their breasts panting with emotion. Almost upon them were many horsemen, Indians largely; but there were three in the fore who were not Indians but Spaniards. Andy and Castillo regarded the strangers with pop-eyed curiosity and amazement. The fact of the existence of other white men than themselves seemed incredible after so many years of seeking and waiting.

Presently one of the strangers dismounted and came forward and they recognized him as a priest. His lips trembled as he saw them draw back when he offered his hand. And when they shook hands they were trembling all over.

"My sons," he said. "My sons." Then in a moment he added: "The other two found the captain and his company back there thirty leagues."

He meant de Vaca and the Moor.

The other horsemen came forward and spoke words of welcome, but all the time Andy and Castillo said not a word. The priest kept looking at Doran—and little wonder. Tall, lithe, tanned, he looked more like an Indian than a white man. And to increase the oddity of himself, unwittingly, he had cut off his sandy queue so that now his hair had a bobbed effect, hanging only to his shoulders, and it was held back from his face by a band of tanned hide around his forehead. He was naked except for the loin cloth, of cotton now; and he stood as straight as a lance.

"Art thou Andee—Dorantes?" the priest asked. "He of whom the girl Paula speaks?"

"Paula?" Andy's first word. "Dost thou——"

"Aye. She is with the company—" his eyes twinkled—"and speaks much of you."

"And has the company," Castillo now spoke, "real Spanish food in its possession?"

The dam of their silence gave way and a flood of questions came that kept the Spaniards busy the remainder of the day. The Spaniards had crossed Mexico, they learned, and come up the west coast. Two settlements had been established, San Miguel and Culiacan, not far from tide-water.

Next morning the party, accompanied by all the six hundred Indians set out to join the company of soldiers, which was commanded by Captain Diego de Alcaraz. Castillo and Andy rode extra horses that had been brought, and they laughed like boys over the oddity of the sensation. As they rode Father Juan told Andy the story of Paula, and it began back in the time of Columbus. One of the men on that explorer's second voyage had married a native woman in the West Indies. Years later a daughter of theirs had been married by a blue-eyed Basque sailorman and this couple had gone to Yucatan with Cordova in 1517, where, soon after landing, Paula was born. She, three-quarters white, had every mark of a Basque girl; and she lived with her parents until they went to the west of Mexico, when, at the age of twelve, she had been stolen by the Indians.

"She is eighteen now," the priest went on. "She told me that the Indians carried her northward to where there are many high houses of two and three stories, then down a long river (the Red River of Texas), then northward—always being traded from tribe to tribe, you understand—until she reached a river called the Kaw. There she fell sick and when she grew strong she pretended that her mind was gone. Thou knowest the custom of the savages—not to harm those who, as they say, are with their Great Spirit. So she traveled alone from tribe to tribe, or made her way with migrating Indians until she found you, or you her, after which thou knowest the tale."

The old man smiled benevolently.

"Why did she—what was her reason——"

Andy was at a loss how to put his question.

"I know what thou would say, my son. Why did she lead thee hither?"

"Not that! But why did she flee from me?"

"Canst thou think of no reasons?"

Father Juan asked softly.

"She would be married by the church."

"That is one, and manly of thee to think of it. Another?"

"Nay."

"To save thy life! Tut-tut, my son. Had she waited for you to make love, the Indians would have become suspicious of her illness of mind. She would have been slain, and thee with her. She loved you. She longed to see you safe among us here. So she came ahead to avoid you and to prepare your way—to make the Indians expect you and be friendly. A woman, Dorantes, a woman fit for thee!"

"Aye, and as soon as we reach——"

"Hold! I have spoken indiscreetly." Father Juan's face clouded. "So happy have I been in the happiness of her and you that I forgot.

When I was leaving, Captain Alcaraz did inform me that his lieutenant, Charcon, would wed Paula. Both——"

"Wed Paula! Father, thou art the court in that matter."

"Aye, my son, but both men—Alcaraz and Charcon—are evil men, who care naught for the authority of the church. They capture and kill among the Indians without conscience, and mock me when I protest. If Charcon is determined in the matter I shall do all within my humble power to ——"

"I will kill him."

"Nay, my son. That would bring you naught but death to yourself at the hands of the captain. Be patient——"

"Thou wert never in love, Father. Patient! Like a hungry wolf!"

The old man reached across the space between their horses and patted Andy on the shoulder.

THIS day but one they arrived at the place where Captain Alcaraz and his company were encamped. The officer was in high indignation, for he and de Vaca had been quarreling over the matter of enslaving the Indians. Alcaraz was on a slave-hunting expedition and was chagrined and angry because they had hidden in the mountains and fled the country. De Vaca, loving the simple and honest savages who had befriended him on the long journey, threatened to carry the matter to the throne in protest and insisted, as the alternative, that Alcaraz use his influence with the governor of the colony to put a stop to the practice of killing and capturing Indians indiscriminately. So that when Andy and the others met the group of Spaniards, the commander was in a tempestuous state. He scarcely greeted Doran and Castillo. But Andy did not care. His first question was—

"Where is Paula?"

"See yon *jacal* through the trees?" asked Alcaraz shortly. "There she is with her lover, Lieutenant Charcon, and my advice is that you do not interfere."

"This is an affair between the lieutenant and myself, sir," Andy replied. "You will do well to look the other way."

"Have care!" warned the commander.

Andy strode off toward the flimsy shelter, his heart in a tumult. "With her lover," Alcaraz had said. He looked back, fearing that some one might follow. Father Juan was following. Andy ran forward, his long strides seeming slow, but covering the distance rapidly. Turning the corner and coming abruptly to the front, he saw Charcon standing in the door chuckling.

"Paula!" he called.

A smothered cry, then the girl herself brushing by the officer, answered him.

"Andee!" She ran to his arms.

Charcon jerked her back roughly.

"Thou art mine, girl. Be not indiscreet lest I be forced to make thee regret." He looked at Doran. "So thou art the man she prates of? Well, I have bespoken her and have the authority of the church."

"You lie!"

"Lie! Why—you—naked—savage!"

"Touch her again and I will bend your neck backward until it cracks!"

"Dog!"

Charcon deliberately spat in Andy's face.

Andy slapped him. Then he struck him in the mouth. Charcon staggered back and spat out what looked like three of his front teeth. Andy struck again, half-tearing off the officer's left ear. Once more he struck with his hard right fist and Charcon's nose slipped loosely to one side. Then Andy, in the rage of a savage whose woman has been harmed by another, rushed in and whipped out Charcon's sword. Charcon ran, and Andy fell in behind him belaboring him with the blade.

Whack! Whack! He almost kept time with their pounding feet as Charcon fled toward Captain Alcaraz.

The captain ran toward them shouting.

"I will have thee hanged for this, Dorantes," he stormed when the two stopped. "At Culiacan will I have the governor to string thee up for striking an officer with intent to slay."

"Bah!" Andy retorted. "Beware of thy words, Alcaraz, else thou shalt suffer with this lieutenant."

"Would you strike me, me?"

"With pleasure, then lead you by an ear to the governor and have you punished for impudence to a superior officer of his majesty's expeditionary force. You know, thou enslaver of Indians, I am a captain under Narvaez with a commission older than thine. Ask Cabeza de Vaca, an thou doubtest."

De Vaca grinned.

"'Tis true, Alcaraz, and right well would I like for you to strike him. I could see you hanged for mutiny."

Andy glared a moment, then turned abruptly and started back toward the *jacal*, the two officers licking their lips in trepidation.

"Wait, Andee," called de Vaca, drawing a paper from the shirt he now wore. "I have something to show thee."

"Well?"

"Thou knowest we have reached the Spaniards. And that two settlements lie a few days southward of here? And that at last we have found the goal for which we have sought, in hunger and cold, for eight years?"

"Say it. I would go to her."

"Read the date at the top of this paper. See?"

"April 14th, 1536."

Andy read.

"Exactly. That is the day I joined Alcaraz and these others. Now read the last clause, there just above the captain's signature."

"It is further my belief that these four men are the first to have crossed from one ocean to the other, the first to cross the continent that must lie to the northward of us here."

"Great Stars!" Andy grinned, the Irish rising to the surface, "And we were naked too, and in no fit condition to be meeting strangers. Let me go. I want to tell a certain person what a great man I am!"

THERE isn't much more to tell. Andy and Paula were made happy in the mission church at Culiacan by Father Juan and the governor. As to the others, Castillo and de Vaca returned to Spain, where the latter was subject to political ups and downs for several years, and died finally in old age at Seville. The Moor was later killed by Indians in Mexico because of indiscretions toward the wives of natives.

As to Oviedo, who remained with the Indian women on the Island of Ill-Fate, he was never heard of after de Vaca left him; nor was more heard of Narvaez after he disappeared over the horizon of the sea.

The fleet which the three hundred land explorers left on the coast of Florida cruised up and down for a year, then giving the expedition up as lost returned to the Indies. Cabeza de Vaca afterward talked with some of its people.

Captain Dorantes, ever itching for fresh sights, helped to organize an expedition in Mexico to explore to the northward, no doubt having in mind the pueblo country, but for some reason the company never made the venture. He remained in Mexico, however, where there was always a bit of adventure to season his days.

So ends the tale of the first Europeans to cross the American continent proper—one of the most remarkable adventures that men ever emerged from with their lives.

"NUMBER ONE" MACEY

by Norman Springer and Jim Desmond

WE PASSED in through the Golden Gate late in the afternoon—the schooner *Mose*, in which I was before the mast—and it was already dark when we finished tying up to the Main Street wharf. Then when I was breaking out my go-ashore togs the mate told me off as shipkeeper.

I felt picked on—although I knew it was my turn. But it was hard luck. All hands except myself went up-town; I had to stick around and feel sorry for myself.

It wasn't a nice night to be outdoors; or indoors either if one were alone and just off the sea. The bitter December gale which had chased us down the coast blew up again with the darkness and whipped over the wharves, driving a cold, stinging rain before it. It was the kind of night that makes a fellow want company.

It got lonelier and lonelier on board, and finally I banked the galley fire, and went up the dock to Harry Kline's West Wind Exchange, which, in those days before San Francisco had burned down and grown up again respectable, stood on the corner opposite the dock-head.

I didn't expect to run into any excitement in the West Wind, because it was Saturday night and I knew the whole neighborhood was along with my shipmates, whooping it up on the

Barbary Coast. In fact when I opened the door and literally blew in I found Harry Kline and one other man the only occupants of the saloon. They were sitting by the big stove in the middle of the room, just finishing a game of checkers, and when they looked up at my entrance I saw that Harry's companion was Captain Abner King, a retired shipmaster, a huge-bodied, bluff-aired, Father-Christmas sort of old man who was known by sight at least to nearly everybody in the port. He had commanded big clippers in the gold days, and afterward had sailed as master on the coast until he grew old enough to want to stay ashore.

Harry gave me a hearty greeting. I knew him pretty well, for he had been mate of the clipper *Dashing Wave* at a time when I was pulling a whitehall for the Golden State Butchers, and I had hooked his ship many times when she was making port. He introduced me to Captain King, and after a drink around I joined them by the stove.

The captain wanted to know right away where I was from. I told him Coquille River with lumber, and, seeing he was interested, went on with the yarn and described how it had blown blazes all the way down the coast and how when we came up to the heads the night before, the wind hauled ahead and lightened at the moment we didn't want it to, and out we went again and rolled and tumbled on the bar half the night.

May be I spread it pretty thick about the bar; I was young, you know, and I hadn't spoken to a soul for hours. I noticed him smile when I went into details.

"Yes, I know that bar," he commented when I finished.

Then he added to Harry—

"Remember that big gale in the Winter of '89?"

"You bet I do," replied Harry. "Didn't I have a dose of it myself? Twenty-eight days from Puget Sound in the *Dashing Wave*. Then over a week outside before we dared more than look at the bar. Why, Captain King, when you went scooting by that morning, bound in, I says to my 'old man'—

" 'There goes a —— fool to Davy Jones!'

"Yes, sir; and I believed it, too. And my old man takes a squint and he says—

" 'I know Ab King knows his business, but I'm inclined to agree with you, mister.'

"I don't think there was a living soul in all the fleet outside that morning who thought you could make it."

"I had my doubts myself," said the captain. "I never would have made it if it hadn't been for 'Number One' Macey. That confounded beach-comber pulled me through; it was Macey who really ran the bar."

"So I've been told," said Harry. "But I never did hear you tell about it, captain; and the lad here, I guess, has never heard the yarn."

I had. Twice before; once in Guaymas, and another time in Dutch Harbor. It is quite a famous yarn on the West Coast. But I had never heard it from the lips of a principal in the adventure; and, seeing that the old man was willing to talk, I promptly joined my request with Harry's.

WELL (began Captain King) the yarn really begins with my shipping Number One Macey in my crew up in Coos Bay. My mate thought that was a grave mistake, and I had my doubts myself after sizing up the man; but as it turned out, taking Macey on board was nothing less than our salvation.

I had the three-masted schooner *James Townsend* at the time, and we were loading in Coos Bay for this port, with lumber in the hold, which was all right, and a deck-load of butcher-blocks, which was all wrong. You know these butcher's chopping-blocks, Harry—sections of tree-trunks about four feet high and as many in diameter. As nasty a deck-load as a vessel could have, for there is no lashing them so they won't work loose in a sea. When they do get loose they take charge of the decks.

It was while we were loading these devil's playthings that Number One Macey introduced himself to me and the ship. I was on the poop at the time and saw the whole thing with my own eyes. It described as well as anything just what sort of man this Macey was.

The blocks were being hoisted inboard three at a time, and a sling gave way in mid-air. The blocks fell back upon the wharf, and one of them rolled across the foot of one of my Swedes. A chap who was lounging upon a lumber-pile watching the loading, got up and went over to the Swede and helped him take his boot off.

He took a look at the foot and turned away without even offering to help the poor devil to his feet. Instead he trotted down the wharf until he was opposite me, his face cracked like a crescent moon, he was smiling that wide, and sang out with the best cheer in the world:

"Captain, your squarehead's got a busted leg. I'm going south, sir; I'll ship in his place."

That was Number One Macey. If the block had smashed the Swede's head instead of his foot Macey would have acted just as he did. Never a thought for any one or anything in the world except himself—his own safety or comfort or pleasure. That is how he got his name—just thinking of "number one."

Well, I admit it gave me somewhat of a jolt to be tackled for a man's berth before he was even picked up and carried off the dock; and I never was a man to sentimentalize about foremast hands, either. But this affair made me think of what the London men used to say about getting jobs in the East India lines—waiting at the gangway until a coffin was carried down.

However, I was short-handed anyway and expected a lively time outside, it being January; and when the mate came to me and said the Swede was signed up for the hospital I took another look at this fellow on the dock. I could see by the cut of his jib he was a sailor man—a little, lean, bandy-legged, sandy-haired bully, with "deep water" and "hard case" written all over him—and I told him he could take off his coat and turn to. In a half-minute he was doing the injured Swede's work, and doing it handily.

Carlson, my mate, came to me with a protest. Seems he knew Macey of old—had once made an offshore passage with him to the Cape—and he didn't have any fond recollections of that voyage.

"He's a desperate hard case and trouble-maker, captain," he told me.

"He's a sailorman, isn't he?" I asked.

"Never saw a better," admitted Carlson. "But he's a bad man on a ship, captain. Trouble sails with him like wind sails with Winter. I'd rather you shipped some stiff who didn't know soup from sails than that bully."

"It isn't what you'd rather; it's what I'd rather," I said a bit testily, for Carlson was a man who was always stepping out of his place. "I've shipped the man. You'll see that he does his work. If you can't handle him I'll lend you a hand."

Carlson went off forward with a flea in his ear at this, for he was a big fellow and a bit of a bucko, and the new man was as I said undersized.

We went to sea at the flood of the tide, and when the tug dropped us outside of Coos Bay bar we found ourselves in a screaming sou'east gale of wind. I was expecting weather, but nothing as bad as this. We had our hands full for a while, I can tell you. I stood offshore all night under close-reefed sails, and with the dawn hove to.

It was all hands and hard work all that first night, and I had no thought to waste upon the new hand. The Swede had been in Carlson's watch, so I knew the mate had the fellow under his eye.

But with the daylight and the breathing-spell that followed heaving her to, I chanced to observe Macey at the wheel. It was bitter cold, and rain-squalls blew up and broke upon us occasionally, and Macey was facing the weather like an old-time packet-rat.

He stood hunched against the wheel, visibly shaking with cold; he was dressed in the same clothes in which he came on board—a suit of thin, patched dungaree—and they, being wet, clung so closely to his body that I suspected he had on no underwear. The uppers of his shoes had come adrift from the soles, and I could see his toes sticking out. He looked so utterly forlorn and miserable—like a cat that had been doused in the wash-deck tub—that I spoke to him and discovered that what I suspected was true; he had made a pier-head jump into my ship, and all the outfit he had for Winter seafaring was the few sodden rags upon his back.

"I'll tell the steward to give you some clothes and oilskins out of the slop-chest," I said to him.

Would you believe it, the little runt declined with thanks? Yes, sir. His face was blue with cold and his teeth clicking like a fandango but says he:

"The more slops the less whisky, captain. Thank ye kindly, sir, but I'll want no more from the slops than a bit of tobacco."

I told the mate about it later.

"That bad man of yours is no more than a bad bar-fly," said I. "He'll freeze to death at sea, so he may have a dollar or two more for whisky ashore."

"Freeze? Not him," says Carlson. "Others may freeze, but not that bucko. He hasn't had time yet to feather his nest, but you just keep an eye on him, sir, and you'll see.

"Oh, but don't I know the lad and his tricks! Without knowing what's in his mind I'll lay you five dollars, sir, that he'll come on deck after his first watch below in dry clothes, and they won't be slop-chest clothes."

I LAUGHED at Carlson and took the bet. I knew my fo'c's'le crowd—squarcheads to a man, and as clannish as Hieland Scots. I knew they would hold two things against the new man—the fact that he was an alien, and the fact that Macey had exhibited a heartless promptness to profit by their shipmate's misfortune.

I knew there was some bitter feeling about the last, because I overheard some words on deck as we were casting off from the dock. The beach-comber was likely to get hard knocks and black looks from his shipmates, but little else.

I'll be hanged if the swab didn't show up in the afternoon wearing the oilskins of the biggest man in the crew, and the seaboots of the next biggest man. I recognized the clothes, and looked about for the owners.

Well, Swanson, who belonged in the oilskins, was standing his watch in a pea-jacket and a most beautifully blackened eye. Hansen, who had been proud to possess the best sea-boots on board, was kicking his cold heels together and paddling about the wet decks in a pair of ruined gaiters, and Hansen also had one side of his face in mourning. Both men looked as if they had spent a hard night on Pacific Street.

It looked mighty interesting. I paid Carlson his five dollars and asked him if he knew how it happened.

"Not yet; but I'll find out soon enough," says he, not seeming a bit elated over winning. "I knew this was coming. Trouble—and then

more trouble. I know that man, captain; he's a bad actor. You'll find out, too."

But a little later Carlson came to me with the yarn of how it happened. Seems he had it from the carpenter, who had it from the cook, who had it from the fo'c's'le direct.

Macey had drawn a couple of pounds of plug from the slop-chest, taken it for'ard and agitated a poker-game in the fo'c's'le with the strips of tobacco as currency. Well, like all coast sailors my squareheads were poker fiends, and every man Jack in the port watch sat in the game with his supply of plug at his right hand. It didn't matter that they had been on deck all night and all the day before—the game was more exciting than the bunk.

It seemed that Macey played in luck. Phenomenal luck. He held everything in the deck, just at the right time.

First he won every stick of tobacco in the fo'c's'le. Then when the watch was properly blooded and wedded to the game he began to stake his tobacco against clothes. Yes, sir; he went through the circle picking and choosing the best, taking woolen underwear from one chap, socks from another, a cloth suit from a third. He couldn't lose.

He was staking Hansen's sea-boots against Swanson's Guernsey—he already had Swanson's oilskins—when the row occurred. There happened a sad mistake. Swanson held an ace too many at the showdown, and it was Hansen's deal and Hansen's deck, and Hansen had his new brown bowler hat, which Swanson had openly admired, in the pot.

Well, Hansen said it was a misdeal and Swanson said it was a skin game and the bet stood, and Macey laid down four deuces—which was high hand—and said he believed in peace, but he never knew a Norwegian yet who wouldn't double-cross a Swede when he got a chance. The upshot was that Swanson mixed it with Hansen there on the fo'c's'le floor, and in the scuffle the cards were scattered.

After the pair had thumped each other properly and Swanson had won because he was the bigger man, Macey claimed the pot on the strength of his high hand, which all had seen, and Swanson, having fought to make the bet stand, couldn't deny it him.

"Didn't I tell you, sir, that that bird would feather his nest?" demanded Carlson triumphantly. "Oh, I know him! He played the same sort of tricks on the *Lucy Parker*, and had the crowd for'ard swearing gory murder at each other the whole time, and he profited in some way by every row. He's a trouble-bird, captain!"

"So long as he confines his tricks to the fo'c's'le and doesn't interfere with the ship's work it's none of our business," I told Carlson. "Besides you have no proof—just suspicion. Perhaps Hansen did slip in the extra ace."

The mate went away with a snort of disbelief. I put the gossip out of my mind, but not before I resolved to keep an eye on the fellow, as Carlson advised, for he seemed to be a pretty slick sea-lawyer, and a sea-lawyer is nearly always a shirker.

But I didn't have much thought to waste upon any foremast hand during the next couple of weeks. I had my hands too filled with other things—the gale and the ship.

I was hove to out there for twelve days. I never saw such weather north of Cape Horn; and even down under I never saw it worse. The ship was old and loose, and after a two-days' pounding by the seas she opened up like a fan. Then it was pump or sink, and so we pumped.

Then there was the deck-load, those cursed butcher-blocks, to worry me. Every day or so some of them would come out of their lashings and go rampaging about the decks. It wouldn't have been so bad if the deck-load had filled the decks; but it only filled the amidship space, and when blocks got loose they had a clean space both fore and aft in which to work havoc.

Capturing one of those runaways was like capturing a wild, dangerous beast. They weighed over half a ton each, were too wet and slippery to grab hold of, and because of their shape it was next to impossible to get a hitch about them with a rope. I never tried to save one that broke loose; merely prayed we might get it over the side and away from the ship before it killed some one.

If I had been able I'd have jettisoned the lot. I think the blasted things might have wrecked us, but for one man. And that man was Number One Macey.

THE first time we had trouble with the deck-load, three of the blocks got loose at once and took charge of the forward decks. I roused all hands to get rid of them, and after a risky tussle we did get two of them over the side—though we lost a strip of teakwood rail, and one lad had his hand smashed during the operation.

But the third block defied us. It was possessed of the devil. It smashed the fore fife-rail, flattened the bosun's locker and spilled fifty dollars' worth of good paint on the deck, and threatened to make matchwood of the deck-house.

Talk about guns breaking loose on the old time men-o'-war! This was just as bad. That block charged about like a wild bull, and every time we got it cornered and thought we had it, it broke loose again and came within an ace of flattening somebody into two dimensions.

We worked all morning at the job, and when eight bells went I told Carlson we would have to continue and get the thing over the side before the watch went below. The mate passed the

word to the men, and it brought Macey to the front.

I had noticed the fellow occasionally during the hot work of the morning. Noticed him lagging behind, not shirking exactly, but never jumping forward unbidden like the other hands were doing. When one of the mates gave him an order he obeyed it, and waited in the background for the next order. I thought to myself—

"You're a true sea-lawyer, my fancy man; you're not going to risk your precious hide if you can prevent it."

Now I saw him come lounging out from under the fo'c's'le head with a piece of half-inch board about six feet long in his hand. The butcher-block had come to rest for the moment in the center of the forehatch and was quietly teetering to and fro, getting ready for a wild dash with the next heave of the ship.

Macey walked up to it and stood in front of it with this silly piece of board sticking out before him. I yelled to him—so did all hands—to get away from there and have a care for himself. He never let on he heard. I really thought the man had gone mad.

The ship lunged, and the block hurled itself toward Macey as if cast from a catapult. The man never budged, and in my mind he was just as good as dead.

Well, sir, would you believe it, he changed the direction of that charging mass with the little strip of wood he had in his hand, and a flip of his wrist! Then he coolly jockeyed the block over to the lee rail, using the stick and the jump of the ship as leverage, and when he got it to the rail he jumped the thing clean into the sea.

Yes, sir. I never before in my life saw a bit of nerve quite so cold-blooded or a bit of work so skilfully done. And when he was through and the block had drifted away to leeward he tossed his stick overboard and walked into the fo'c's'le with never a look to right or left.

A moment later he was at the galley door with his pannikin and plate, getting his dinner. I stepped up to him, told him he was a smart lad and asked him where he learned that trick with the board.

"I've sailed on the Slave Coast, captain," says he.

"Maybe," I agreed. "But where did you learn to handle butcher-blocks in that fashion?"

"Lightering—on the Slave Coast of Africa," says he. "Palm oil, captain—bleeding big puncheons of the stuff. And they'd come adrift in the surf or when we were crossing the bar in a breeze, and we'd have to spring 'em back in place again. The natives could do it with two foot o' bamboo."

There you have another glimpse of Macey—Number One Macey. The runt knew all along how to get that block over the side, but he let all hands take chances for three hours that no insurance company in the world would have underwritten, and he never offered a hint, or a help that he could avoid. It just wasn't his affair! But when the butcher-block threatened to seriously inconvenience him, when it stood between him and dinner and his watch below—why, he promptly eliminated the block.

I was grateful to him, for all that, and I sent forward to him a swig of hot whisky. It was the best thing I could have done, for when Macey discovered that whisky would follow ridding the decks of runaway butcher-blocks he promptly took that office upon himself.

In the days that followed he jumped a dozen or more of the devilish things over the side in the same way he had handled the first and without accident to himself. He even came up from his watch below to do the job.

For my part, I never failed to come through with the drink, and never grudged it either. Toward the last Carlson was openly suspecting the fellow of helping the blocks slip their lashings.

But butcher-blocks and leaks were not the only troubles I had on my mind during these days. My provisions were giving out. I left Coquille Bay with less than two weeks' supply on board, expecting to be in San Francisco in less than a week, and here I was with the week well past still hove-to in the teeth of the sou'-easter and getting farther and farther away from my port each day.

There was but one thing to do. On the ninth day I put the ship on half allowance. Of course it was hard with the men laboring at the pumps continuously, but there was no help for it. Indeed, I figured that if there was no change within four days I'd have to make it quarter rations.

But on the twelfth day the wind chopped around to the west'ard, and I was able to lay a course in for the coast. The seas were running mountain high, and our diving into them caused the vessel to leak worse than ever. If she hadn't been lumber-laden I think she would have foundered under our feet.

We made bad going of it. The westerly gale behind us was just as heavy as the easterly that had driven us offshore, but we were in no condition to take advantage of the strength of the wind and make a passage of it. The vessel was crank and logy, and I dared show no more than rags of canvas.

We wallowed down the coast like some barge adrift, breaking through the seas instead of mounting them, with all hands half-frozen, half-drowned and half-starved, and with "karachi" watch at the pumps.

THE day the wind veered Macey came prominently to the fore again. But this time he was the villain instead of the hero of the situation.

The second mate ran out of his store tobacco,

and on attempting to obtain a plug from the steward discovered that the slop-chest supply was exhausted. Carlson was religious and didn't smoke. My jar of fine-cut was almost empty.

I was surprised at the disappearance of the slop-chest plug. Of course, being a coaster, I didn't carry much tobacco in the slops because the men preferred getting their own supply on shore. There had been only five or six pounds in the steward's locker when we left Coquille River. The steward said that the new man, Macey, had drawn all of it.

"You said, captain, to give him all the 'baccy he wanted," says he, "and he wanted it all."

It was a physical impossibility for Macey to have consumed it all, or even the major portion of it, so soon. I supposed he needed the sticks for his adventures in poker. The second mate went forward to negotiate for a couple of plugs.

Pretty soon he came aft with a very red face and the astonishing news that there was plenty of tobacco in the fo'c's'le which was for sale—for sale, mind you—at a price. Macey held the tobacco, and he was willing to sell it at one dollar a strip, ten strips to a pound; and, seeing he was dealing with the afterguard, he would take our I. O. U.'s in case we were short of cash. Yes, sir, that is what the little runt told my second mate, and the second mate was so taken aback by the proposition he couldn't even curse the man.

Nor was this all—or the worst. It seemed the fo'c's'le was on the verge of mutiny and had been for nearly two days, and if I didn't compose matters very shortly there was likely to be murder done on my ship. For Macey not only held all the slop-chest tobacco; he held all the tobacco on the ship.

It seems he had taught the squareheads how to shoot craps, and when he finished every scrap of tobacco for'ard was in his hands. And he was selling the tobacco to his shipmates at twenty-five cents a pipeful and fifteen cents a chew—he cutting it—and threatening to boost prices. Already he had most of the cash in the fo'c's'le in his pocket, and men were going smokeless.

You would think that a crowd of men would refuse to be imposed on in such a fashion. Especially my squareheads, for they weren't particularly stupid or meek; in fact they were rather a hard lot, full grown, with hair on their faces and fights to their credit. A better lot of sailormen than you could pick up today in any port you might name.

But by this time Macey was autocrat of that fo'c's'le. Yes, sir, and his influence pervaded the whole ship. My mate was afraid of him, I know, and my second mate was too slow of mind to circumvent his nimbler wits. Macey was having things his own way.

He didn't get his own way by force. Indeed, the runt was the smallest man on board. It seems strange to mention character in connection with that whisky-soaked little beach bummer, but character is just the thing that gave him his advantage over his shipmates.

His will, his personality, his wits—oh, call it what you wish! The fact is, there was a positiveness, a certitude, about him that was appalling. He took what he wanted; and he displayed the devil's cunning in keeping what he got. Why, from the first he kept the fo'c's'le divided and at daggers' points with itself by slyly fostering the ancient race feud between the Norwegians and the Swedes. He espoused first one side and then the other, and always half of the crew was willing to fight the other half at his behest. As Carlson was never tired of telling me, Macey knew how to "feather his own nest."

But of course I immediately put an end to his tobacco venture. Smokes and chews were too important to the morale of the ship's company in such a stressful time to allow them to be doled out in such a conscienceless fashion. I confiscated the whole supply, and had it removed to my own room and had the steward whack it out evenly to all on board as long as it lasted. That wasn't very long.

When we finally made our landfall of Point Reyes we had for two days been living on weak coffee and hardtack with never a taste of tobacco to cheer us up. Even the tea-leaves which kept our pipes alight for a day were exhausted.

The gale was still blowing heavily from the west'ard, and when we came inside the Farallones we fell in with fully forty sail of vessels, all bar-bound and unable to get into port until the weather moderated. There were square-riggers from offshore, and the China steamer and the Panama steamer, and a whole fleet of coastwise vessels.

A good many of the ships had been standing off and on before the port for weeks, afraid to chance the bar. It was the longest spell of continuous bad weather any one remembered.

Practically all of the coastwise craft were in the same fix as I; that is, they were starving. The barkentine *Melanchthon*, which had left Coos Bay seven days before me, had been there for two weeks, and her crew had already eaten the ship's dog. So had the crew of the *Discovery*, over two months out from Port Ludlow. So had other crews in the fleet. So would have my crew, had we been lucky enough to have a dog on board. Indeed, we did try, without success, to capture sea-gulls for the table.

Things on board my old packet were in a bad way. The morning we fell in with the fleet we finished our coffee, and there was nothing left in the victual line save the sea-biscuits and a pound or two of rice. All hands on board were

worn out by the combination of short rations and hard work. We pumped continuously, and there was not a dry stitch of clothes on board. Aye, we were a miserable lot!

WE STOOD in to the bar, and I went aloft to have a look at it. A look was sufficient. As far as I could see was white water; the bar was breaking clear across in to the land. It was just a mass of huge combers. I came down on deck and put the ship about, and all day and all night we stood off and on with the rest of the fleet.

Next morning there was no sign of any change or moderation of wind; it still came out of the west with frequent heavy squalls of hail and rain. The bar was breaking, if anything, worse than before.

My plight was becoming almost desperate. The water in the hold was gaining on us steadily, and the crew was losing strength just as steadily. I knew I had to get across that bar soon, and into quiet water, or my ship would be diving from under my feet. The lumber cargo was about the only thing that was keeping us afloat as it was.

I thought the matter over very carefully, and decided to attempt to sail in. I knew it was a desperate chance, but conditions on board warranted my taking it; indeed, it was a more desperate chance to stay outside. I consulted my almanac, and learned that the tide would make flood at eight that morning; and then I called the hands aft and told them I was going to run the bar.

I expected an outcry of protest when I made known my decision. Indeed, I got one from my mate when I informed him beforehand. He begged me with tears in his eyes not to try the bar, to wait another day or two, and prophesized dire disaster if I did not heed him.

Fact was, the man was hysterical. Carlson had a family dependent upon him, and his nerve had not stood up under the buffets of the trip. His going to pieces was another reason why I felt I must get inside at once, for the second mate was laid up in his bunk with three broken ribs, caused by a shipped sea washing him against the deck-load, and for two days I had stood watch and watch with Carlson, and felt that I myself was the only person aft I could depend upon in an emergency.

The men listened quietly enough while I pointed out my reasons for making the attempt. They knew, being sailors, just what the chance was I was offering them; but they also knew the plight of the ship. They just looked scared.

I painted matters as brightly as I could, and told them I was sure—which I wasn't—that the flood tide would moderate the seas on the bar, and the gale of wind behind us would shove us safely across in jig time. I pointed out that if we waited we should likely be blown offshore to founder, because the barometer was down and indications were that the gale would make stronger instead of moderating.

When I finished, Swanson spoke up and said:

"The bar vas ——. Ay tank, zur, we should vait!"

Well, I knew by their faces that the men were with the Swede, and I did not blame them for their fear, for if the ship touched bottom on that breaking bar it was good-by all hands, and every one knew it. I did not feel justified in attempting the crossing without their consent. I dare say I'd have stayed outside and sunk if it hadn't been for that blessed beach-comber.

Macey spoke up when the Swede finished, and before any one else could stick in his oar.

"Have ye no guts at all, mates?" he says to the gang of them. "Standing there like a flock o' wet sheep when the captain asks you to take a chance! Sailors? Why, you're no more sailors than the blocks in that deck-load!"

He went on and swore at them in a prime fashion; aye, he had the gift of tongues when it came to hard language, had Macey.

"I know what's in your minds," says he. "You're thinking with the big Swede there that when the old wagon goes under you'll pile into the long boat and make one o' these other ships. Aye, you will if you're lucky; if you're not you'll drown. Same chance as you'll have on the bar. And outside here is starvation, and inside there is plenty. And all you are afraid of is a bit o' white water. And you'd lose your ship because of it?

"Call yourself sailor men, hey? Have you no feeling for your ship? Aye, I know that Swede hasn't got the guts; but how about you Norway lads? We'll take her in—hey?—and show the —— Swedes!"

With that Macey turned to me and sang out before any of the crowd had a chance to answer him:

"Aye, aye, captain, we're with you to a man. We'll take her in."

Then he swung on the men again.

"Won't we, lads?" he cried.

The influence Macey had acquired over the slower-moving minds of his shipmates was aptly illustrated at that moment. The men looked at him and at me and at each other; there was not a one who had the wish to say "Yes," and there was not a one had the nerve to say, "No." The only sound that came from them was a sort of chorused groan which sounded like a protest, but which I chose to consider a cheer of agreement.

"All right, lads; we're going in," I said hurriedly. "Now I want a couple of steady hands for the wheel. Who'll volunteer?"

There was a dead silence. Then Macey spoke up again.

"I'll be taking that job, captain," says he.

It was the very first time he had volunteered for a job on the ship.

"You'll need a lee wheel," said I, having in mind his smallness.

"I'd better be taking it by myself," he replied, stepping closer and speaking confidentially, though all hands heard him. "There isn't a squarehead in the bunch, captain, that wouldn't get galleyed and broach her to with the first bit o' water that came on board.

"It will be looking pretty bad for a minute or two. But I can handle her, captain; I've steered a ship across a breaking bar before now, captain—in the palm-oil trade. Aye, and I've done a bit o' surf-boating, too. Let me take the helm, sir."

I said "Yes" in a hurry. I was pleased, I can tell you. That item of a trustworthy helmsman had worried me. I felt I couldn't trust Carlson, for his nerve was already gone, and the second mate couldn't stand. I feared too that, as Macey said, any of the squareheads I sent to the wheel would get "galleyed" on the bar and get us into a mess.

I hadn't thought of Macey for the job—indeed his siding with me in the enterprise I considered astonishing; for, being such a practised malingerer, he should by all signs have been opposed to the risk—but now I gave him the job, feeling I couldn't have found a better man. There was his character, his hard, cold-blooded recklessness to reassure me; and besides I had sailed to the Slave Coast myself in my younger days, and marveled at the superb boatmanship and steady nerve of the riders of the worst surf in the world.

I began to prepare for the run immediately, for I didn't want to give the men a chance to get together and talk things over. Though for that matter I'm confident Macey could have held them in line with his tongue. They obeyed orders willingly enough, though without any display of enthusiasm. Poor devils—I guess every man Jack save Macey thought he would go to bed that night a dead man!

THE tide flooded at eight, and about eleven o'clock I planned to cross, because the set would be strongest at that hour. I stood out on the offshore tack and went very carefully over the deck-load lashings, making them doubly secure and praying none of the blocks might come adrift while we were on the bar. Then I shook out the reefs in the main and fore sails and put the ship about, taking in the mizzen sail while in stays, and stood in for the bar with our sheets off.

Macey was lashed to the wheel. In the fore rigging two other men were stationed ready to haul the jib to wind'ard in case the vessel should come to. The rest of the crew, including the second mate, who had to be hoisted aloft, were in the main rigging.

I had ordered a piece of two-by-four scantling lashed to the mizzen rigging for me to stand on and con her in. Before going aloft I told Macey if he needed help to signal me and I'd come down and give him a hand. He looked a pretty weak brother, standing hunched up and alone on that bitter deck, shaking with the cold, with his empty pipe clamped between his teeth. But he answered me cheerily and boldly enough.

"Don't have a care for me, captain," says he. "I'll do my part, for I'm minded to spend this night ashore on East Street."

I went aloft to my station wishing I had a ship full of Maceys.

We came booming up to the bar, going like a race-horse, with wet decks and a list, and the top hamper threatening to come down from the press of sail on her. We passed ship after ship of the bar-bound fleet. They could see I was making the run, and ship after ship gave me a signal or a hail or cheer, and several stood in after me to see the fun. We passed the schooner *Venus* close aboard, and old Dodd hailed me to know if I was crazy.

"You will never make it, King—it's suicide!" he shouted.

I thought this was an ill-omened send-off, and I was immensely cheered up when a little later the barkentine *Discovery* passed us, tacking out to sea, and her crew manned the rigging and gave us a good hurrah.

The closer we got to the bar the worse it looked. I knew of course there could be no turning back this time; but I'll freely admit the sight I had from my vantage-point almost "galleyed" me! The bar was a seething caldron, as the books say—a great mass of swirling foam in which a ship would stand no more show than a chip.

As we drew nearer I could make out the endless procession of great combers marching up to and breaking upon the shallow. Aye, but they looked wicked.

Then all at once we were in the midst of it. The ship plowed into the back of one of the combers, which was just rolling up, and for a time we seemed to be sailing through the air on the back of a bird. At least, that's what it felt like.

But we were in luck for that wave carried us a long way in on the bar before it broke; and then it broke well forward. We were in the white water then, and the decks were smothered. I looked at my deck-load and prayed the lashings would hold; and I looked forward and quiet water seemed a long, long way off; and then I looked astern, for the next comber was the ticklish one, the one which would decide our fate.

It was coming, rolling up behind us like a tidal wave. I tell you it was a terrific sight; it dragged my heart right up into my mouth. Aye, it looked to me, that huge, leaping, arching

wave, like the devouring tongue of God licking out to annihilate us.

It rose higher and higher behind us, and raced closer and closer to us. Our sails were topped and swung in amidships. The ship seemed to be going astern, to be drawn beneath the breaker.

I looked at that mighty wall of curving water and thought it was the end—and my men thought so too, for I could hear their despairing cries from the main rigging. I was sure that sea would poop us and crush in our decks.

I glanced down at Macey. Would you believe it, the runt was behaving as nonchalantly as if he were steering the ship through a mill-pond.

I saw him look over his shoulder at the fearful spectacle—then he turned forward again, and there wasn't a trace of anxiety in his bearing or actions. He merely gave her a spoke or two, and lounged against the wheel. Aye, that lad had nerve—or no imagination. I don't know which.

But maybe Macey knew more about that oncoming sea than I. It didn't topple down upon us—or I wouldn't be sitting here, spinning the yarn. Instead its life began to work beneath us, and our stern rose.

Aye, it went up, up, to the very crest of the wave, and the ship seemed to be standing on her nose—while all the time we were being rushed forward at a terrific pace. As I live, I feared she would trip and go end over end in a somersault. The stern seemed to move faster than the bows.

However, the wave was working forward, and very gradually her head lifted. Then for a time—it seemed for an age, though I suppose it was but a moment—we settled into the comber and raced along with it with the wave's crest spurting from either side fully ten feet above the rail.

Then the breaker broke, and the fore deck was smothered. The ship promptly came to several points, and it looked as if the next sea would board us broadside on and roll us over.

"Keep her off, man, for ——'s sake!" I screamed to Macey.

He was hanging to the wheel for dear life.

"I have it hard up—clear across her," he shouted back.

"Then ease her a couple of spokes," I cried, "or you'll have her in irons."

I started down to the deck to help him, but hesitated when I saw another breaker rolling up against us. I saw this one would break before reaching us. But its crest came aboard over the quarter, burying the after part of the ship and tossing a couple of tons of water plump into the belly of the main sail, splitting it from boom to gaff.

Looking down, all I could see was the top of Macey's sou'wester above the foam and water—and then I saw his hand, and the wheel-spokes turning! Yes, sir, that lad was on the job even under water. And the sea breaking as it did really helped us, perhaps saved us, for it carried the vessel's head to leeward, and Macey got control of her again.

THE worst was past then. The next comber broke ahead of us, and the next two astern. We were scudding along on the back of the next one when the men forward suddenly shouted and pointed into the water to leeward.

I looked down and in the trough of the sea saw the "nine-fathom buoy" bobbing around. It seemed the most beautiful thing I ever beheld! It told me I was on the inner edge of the bar, and getting into deeper water every foot I traveled.

The glimpse of that buoy also gave me an idea how fast we were going, for it was astern and out of our sight almost before a man could say Jack Robinson. Out of mind, too, for we were well inside the Golden Gate, and chopping down the channel through a nasty sea—and never did green hills look so good to a man as did the Marin Hills to me that hour.

When we got inside the Heads I dropped to the deck and called the rest of the hands down. Then I ran to Macey and fairly hugged the man.

"Easy, easy, captain!" he exclaimed when he felt my arms about him, and I could feel him wincing. "That —— sea that boarded us beat me up as well as drowned me. I'm killed entirely—and wet all over, except inside."

"That's soon cured," says I, and I had Carlson relieve the wheel and sent Macey below to the cabin with the steward in attendance to look after his bruises, and with permission to make as free as he wished with my private bottle. And he emptied it.

I was minded to finish our adventure in style, so I got the mizzen sail set, and the ensign at the gaff, and hoisted an old deck-broom to the masthead. Aye, that was a touch, that last, that the port appreciated—the old *Townsend* coming into port in clipper style.

Inside the bay from the Presidio to Meiggs' Wharf was a great fleet of vessels anchored, all bar-bound and waiting to get to sea—just as outside they were waiting to get in. From every last ship we got a cheer as we lumbered proudly past, our torn sails and wrecked decks eloquent evidence of our recent peril.

A tug came out and grabbed us and docked us at the bulk-head. Captain Nelson, the owner, was the first man on board—followed by a throng of owners and agents anxious for news of the fleet outside, who they were and what their state.

Nelson was overjoyed by my arrival. Besides the money it meant, it was a bright feather

in his hat to be the owner of the first vessel to cross the bar in three weeks, and that old codger was a prime sport! Aye, he couldn't make enough fuss over me.

"I didn't bring your ship in, captain," I told him. "The man you want to thank is in the cabin."

I told him about Macey, and he couldn't get below quick enough to see the man.

Well, we found him gone. The steward was there, the empty bottle in his hand and a look of disgust on his face. He said that Macey had gone over the rail the moment we touched the wharf. I sent forward, and found it was true. During the confusion of docking, his shipmates had seen Macey crossing East Street, still in his sea-gear.

Nelson said it was too bad, and that he would remember the lad when he paid off—which he did, and handsomely—and in the mean time he would see to the comfort of the rest of us. He turned the ship over to the boss stevedore, sent an order to a restaurant to have a feast prepared in a hurry and marshaled all hands over to the 'Young America' in Steuart Street. He told us to put our feet on the rail and order the best in the house, and all we wanted of it. Aye, it was a cheerful hour.

In a twinkling, almost, the place was crowded to the doors with people who wanted to have a look at the lads who had braved one bar, and were now, without rest, braving another. My squareheads strutted finely, considering they were heroes for the first time in their lives.

Into this jolly party burst Macey. Aye, burst is right. He was in a place across the street, and heard about the free drinks the *Townsend's* boys were getting. So he came in a hurry.

I saw him pushing his way forward; he was still in his oilskins, and his old pipe was still clamped between his teeth like it was the moment he took the wheel outside the bar—but now he was puffing at it like a bellows, and smoke poured from his mouth as from a smokestack. What with the bottle he had emptied on board and the drinks he had had since coming ashore, he was already more than half seas over.

"There's the lad who saved your ship," says I to Nelson.

Nelson grabbed both Macey's hands and pumped his arms and hugged him and danced around him and shoved him up to the rail and put a glass in his hand. Macey downed the drink and blinked his eyes. I could see he didn't know what it was all about—but he was willing to profit by it.

The crowd caught on and began to cheer. It was "Hurrah for Macey; he's the lad!"

Macey blinked and drank, and drank and blinked, and looked around. Then when the noise died down so one could talk, he demanded of me—

"Say, what's all this, captain?"

"It's because you steered the ship in. You're a hero," I told him.

"You certainly are!" exclaimed Nelson. "And I'll not forget it, my man. I appreciate men who look after my interests."

Macey batted an eye at Nelson, and then at me.

"He's the owner," I explained.

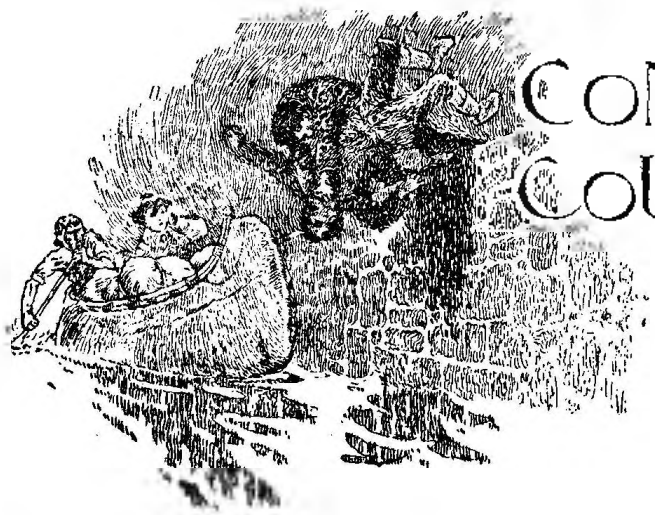
"Is he?" said Macey.

Then he began to grin. All at once he took his pipe out of his mouth and laughed; just roared, as if he had suddenly thought of the funniest joke in the world. Nelson was astonished. So was I.

"Your interests?" said Macey when he was able to talk. "And will you tell me why I should look after your interests? 'Tis my own interests, me, number one, I'm thinking about!"

He puffed a moment pensively.

"Never a smoke for three mortal days," said he. "Did you think now that I'd stay outside and suffer?"



CONVOYS COURAGEOUS

by Samuel Alexander White

Author of "The Call of the Crimson Star," "The Void Spaces," etc.

THE yellow slip of paper was the last despatch in the bundle of despatches that had come by canoe courier to the Little Company's, otherwise known as Gregory and McLeod's, fur station of Huron Post, situated just where the deltas of the Wahnapitae and French Rivers mingled to pour together into the great reservoir of Lake Huron.

The despatch had come there direct from the headquarters of the firm in Montreal and Angus Murray the agent in charge took it up mechanically, glancing at it in the usual routine, expecting that he had to do with beaver returns, post supplies or some other matter of the inland fur trade.

But as he glimpsed its contents he stopped, bending over his counter in the store and reading it carefully, eagerly, triumphantly. His hand trembled as he held it, his eye gleamed and he drew breath with an audible exclamation. For it was a despatch to stir the blood of any fur trader as it ran:

You will proceed at once from Huron Post to the Falls of St. Mary to convoy, through the North West Fur Company's settlement of the Sault, our furs which are bound down from our Lake Superior station of Grande Portage to Montreal on our fur sloop *Beaver*. You will receive them there from the *Beaver;* also a passenger Jacquemine Stewart daughter of James Stewart our agent at Grande Portage and bring both passenger and furs on to Montreal by canoe.

Times are so troublesome among the competing companies in the West and the North Westers are occupying Grande Portage in such force and threatening to close it as North West ground that he deems it safer to send his daughter out to Montreal. In this connection you may look for opposition from the North West Fur Company and also from the Hudson's Bay Company. We have learned that the North West Fur Company is sending in Roland Du Vivier from here to intercept our furs en route.

Whether he knows of Stewart's plans we have not been able to ascertain, but the chances are that his agents have let him know and that he intends to intercept more than the furs. As you perhaps are aware, he has an inordinate interest in the girl and is a man who will go to any extremes. Also, we are informed on good authority that the Hudson's Bay Company has commissioned Fletcher Graydon their agent on the Wahnapitae to travel south to Lake Huron and west to the Sault on the same mission. Both of these men may make a good deal of trouble if you do not reach Sault Ste. Marie first to meet the fur sloop, so leave Huron Post the moment our Montreal brigades arrive. The brigades themselves will not be far behind this despatch.

Gregory & McLeod.
THE LITTLE COMPANY.

It was a bold and risky mission to be entrusted to even the oldest of the Little Company's post keepers, and what thrilled Murray so much was the fact that out of all their tried agents he had been selected for the task. What was the reason, he wondered? Was it his proximity to the Sault, the energy he had shown always in conserving the fur, or his known interest in the *Beaver's* passenger Jacquemine Stewart?

Daughter of one of the partners of the Little Company, perhaps the most beautiful of the many beauties of Montreal, she was the idol of the servants of the corporation, and of all the Little Company men who would spring to her service at a call none was more ready to emperil his life for her than Murray himself. He had not half the years of some of the keepers in the Little Company, but the truth seemed plain that his record in the firm had told.

A clean, trim, eighteen-year old Highland lad, son of a clansman and second cousin of a

chief, he had sailed from Stornoway in the Isle of Lewis in 1783 to seek a greater opportuniry in the new world than the old world promised to afford.

In Montreal he enrolled himself with the Little Company in preference to the North-West Company and served his apprenticeship so well for two years in the counting-house of Gregory and McLeod that he became one of the bourgeois or partners of the firm and entered into the proud possession of his allotted company shares.

More than that, he had been promoted to the inland trade and appointed to the station of Huron Post, and now he was going as supreme in command of the Little Company's brigades to champion their interests in the North West hive of the Sault.

THE command was not to delay a moment, and even as Murray finished reading the despatch he commenced his preparations for departure, putting his papers away in order, giving his chief trader directions for the running of the post in his absence, selecting equipment and calling out additional canoemen whom he proposed to take along with their craft.

Huron Post lay on the traveled canoe route to Montreal. The courier who carried the despatch had set out ahead that morning down the French River, and although he had paddled swiftly there were mighty paddlers behind. It could not be long before they would arrive, and Murray ordered his chief trader to make speed in all things.

"Hurry the packing," he urged. "Quick or they will be here before—listen! There is their canoe song now."

Faintly at first they caught the chanting of the Little Company brigades singing in unison among the island channels far up the mouth of the French. Then the chanting grew in volume, echoing from moss-wrapped rock to moss-wrapped rock, and the next moment the brigades burst en masse out of the channel.

Half a dozen of them Murray counted, thirty-six canoes carrying a total of over two hundred canoemen, and his eye glistened as he glimpsed the brawn of the men he was chosen to command. The pick of the Ottawa voyageurs were they, trained *coureurs des bois*, driving great birch-bark craft piled with trade goods and supplies to be exchanged for the fur from the West at the assembly point of the Sault.

Heavily laden as they were, they dashed up to Huron Post at racing speed, back-watering with foaming paddles and raising the blades in salute. From the foremost canoe the Ottawa brigade leader, Joseph Chartrain, stepped out and with a dramatic gesture whipped his bills of lading from the pocket of his red flannel shirt and handed them to Murray.

"*Mon Dieu*, but we be here at last an' now you be in charge instead of me," he cried in greeting, his white teeth showing as an ecstatic smile wreathed his brown face. "*Oui*, an' I'm ver' glad of dat for de Nor' Westaires heel us ver' close all de way from Montreal."

"Ah-hah, Chartrain!" exclaimed Murray. "So you had friction on the river-route, then?"

"Ba gar, *oui*," breathed Chartrain, "dere's bickerin' every day an' sometaims so bitter I'm be afraid she'll come to de open fight an' I'll be lose ma cargoes, 'fore I be get here."

"What strength have the North Westers?" Murray asked him.

"Seex brigades, same as ourselves, an' dey're keen for fight. All picked crews, *aussi*. *Mon Dieu*, dere—be look for yourself."

Chartrain whirled, his eagle-beaked, weather-wrinkled countenance alert, his huge corded hand, broad as a paddle blade, pointing suddenly from the shore over the heads of the canoemen in his massed brigades, and Murray, staring up-river in the indicated direction, saw the North West Fur Company's brigades swing through the channel.

Hard in the wake of the Little Company men they came, plying their paddles with vigorous strokes that made their huge Rabiscaw canoes leap ahead like things alive. Timing their strokes to swift measure, they roared out their river songs at the top of their lungs, drawing up abruptly beside the Little Company brigades before Huron Post in a picturesque fleet.

A mighty horde, Montreal Pork Eaters, Ottawa river-men, Iroquois Indians, they greeted their late rivals on the river-way with a voluminous shout, and their leader, Roland Du Vivier, stood up in his craft to hail Murray on the landing. A dashing figure he made in his gold-laced uniform as one of the head officials of the North West Company, one of the powerful lords of Beaver Hall, and he carried the pride of his position on his insolent face.

Handsome he poised, his face with the piquant cast of a woman's, abnormally broad at the cheek-bones and abnormally narrow at the chin, so that when he smiled and twisted his black waxed mustache in two fine points he reminded Murray of some old courtier of France bearing the sword of an ancient empire.

"*Bon jour*, Monsieur Murray, *bon jour*," he greeted with easy ceremony, "a lusty lot of Little Company men you have here. Who has charge of them on to the Sault? That slave-driver Chartrain, I suppose?"

"No, I have charge of them myself, Du Vivier," Murray informed him bluntly, "so if you run foul of us you know with whom you are dealing."

Du Vivier's somber eyebrows, black and straight as if they had been painted on his skin with charcoal, lifted in suspicion at Murray's announcement. He knew that a canoe courier

in Chartrain's fleet had come on ahead to Huron Post bearing despatches, and he guessed that they would contain orders for the Huron Post keeper to add what canoe strength he could to the already strong Montreal brigades of the Little Company.

The settlement of Sault Ste. Marie was North West ground, and it would be but a natural precaution for the Little Company to travel in what force they could muster, but the presence of Murray with the fleet was quite another matter. Why should he leave the post to which he was appointed unless he had some information about the designs of his rivals?

Du Vivier wondered if it was possible that Murray knew his mission or had news that the first lady of the Little Company was traveling east. He wondered but wondered swiftly, versatile actor enough to conceal his thoughts and laugh unconcernedly at Murray's challenge.

"*Dieu*, yes, that is a good thing to know," he returned, ignoring the challenge. "And by all I hear, you are not the only one I may run foul of. What about the Hudson's Bay Company? Their actions concern us both, and the word flies in Montreal that they are going to take a hand this year at the Sault. Have their canoes come down the Wahnapitae River yet?"

"They haven't passed Huron Post that I have seen," Murray told him. "Still for all that they may happen along any minute, for the June high water has just gone down and Fletcher Graydon always times his voyaging well on the run of the floods."

"*Diable*, but you never spoke a truer word than that," cried Du Vivier. "What did you say? He times it well indeed. For see yonder, they are coming down the Wahnapitae delta now."

THIS time from the northward another fleet burst into view and the massed brigades of the Little Company and the North West Company saw over a score of canoes with blood-red stars upon their bows shoot out of the Wahnapitae's main channel. In a blaze of color they flew, the paddlers all strikingly dressed in vivid leggings, fringed sashes, tasseled caps of brilliant hues, old country men enlisted from overseas, native Crees and Ojibways, recruited from the Hudson's Bay district, and their shouted hail, half greeting, half war-cry, to the brigades of the other companies rumbled like the roll of thunder.

"*Pro Pelle Cutem!*" they yelled. "Skin for skin!"

"*Bon jour, mes camarades*," welcomed Du Vivier, undisturbed by the Hudson's Bay men's noisy advent. "You have come out of a lonely wilderness stretch but you will not be lonely now. There is plenty of company here. Eh, Monsieur Graydon?"

The Hudson's Bay Company leader, Graydon, stepped out on the landing of Huron Post, his tall aristocratic figure poising a full six feet in height. Son of an English gentleman, one of the black sheep whom the aristocracy were accustomed to ship across the seas for the Ancient and Honorable Company to mold into the semblance of staid men, he bore the marks of his breeding and his sinning.

On his patrician face, waxen-clear except over the cheek-bones where the crimson blotches of too much drink showed through, was stamped the hall-mark of independence, and from under the waves of his brown hair shone great steel-blue eyes born to command. He nodded easily with a graceful swing of his head and shoulders that embraced both Du Vivier and Angus Murray.

"So it seems," he observed calmly lighting his pipe and spraying the smoke about, his eyes all the while shooting here and there and everywhere in appraisal of the rival brigades.

"You are both bound for the Sault, I take it."

"*Oui*," Du Vivier assured him, "I am en route from Montreal and I have paused here only to greet my friend Monsieur Murray whom I am delighted to learn is likewise bound for the Sault."

"And I," put in Murray, scorning hypocrisy, "have little time for greetings or anything else at present. I was just going to launch fresh canoes to go on with the Little Company's Montreal brigades when Du Vivier's fleet arrived. I hope neither of you will think me inhospitable if I proceed with my plans."

"Not at all," returned Graydon quickly. "I am somewhat in a hurry myself and I only pulled up here to let my crews breathe themselves and to see if you had any rum."

"I have none but the kegs in transit in those canoes," Murray informed him.

"Will you sell some?" Graydon demanded eagerly.

"They're not mine to sell," Murray pointed out. "They're bound from Montreal to the Little Company posts in the West and I can't take them out of the bills of lading."

A shadow of disappointment darkened Graydon's fine face, and Murray thought he saw the crimson cheek blotches burn a little brighter. The Hudson's Bay man turned to Du Vivier.

"What about you, Du Vivier?" he asked. "It's North West daily fare, isn't it?"

Du Vivier shrugged his shoulders and laughed lightly.

"With the regular river crews it is," he admitted, "but I am on a special mission and carry no cargo, you see. The freighting brigades have not come through from Montreal yet and I could not weight myself down with

the stuff. I am sorry, Monsieur Graydon. I should like nothing better than to broach a keg with you, but I haven't a drop in the Rabiscaws."

Graydon nodded gloomily, his eyes straying to the big Little Company canoe which contained their supply for the West. In it were four dozen kegs, luring bait for any liquorless brigade, and, as if to ensure its safety, Graydon and Du Vivier noted Murray placing it in the center of the massed canoes as he arranged the departure.

"Take good care of it, Murray," cautioned Graydon with a mirthless laugh.

"*Oui*," urged Du Vivier with a hint of mockery, "go ahead and launch your canoes with all haste. *Dieu*, yes, and make the best use of your time for that is what I intend to do myself. You know, in the fur trade it is every man for himself and the devil take the laggards."

Du Vivier left his own craft, at the same time ordering all of his men ashore and telling off a dozen of them to gather wood, light a fire and boil over it a big copper kettle full of coffee. In a few minutes the kettle was steaming and, lying at full length on the rocks to stretch their cramped limbs under the warm June sunlight, the North West canoemen drank huge drafts of the fragrant liquid as they snatched their midday lunch. At Graydon's direction the Hudson's Bay men did likewise, kindling their fire some little distance from that of the North Westers and maintaining a sort of private bivouac upon the open lake shore.

Murray meanwhile had despatched the Little Company canoemen into Huron Post itself to sit down to the dinner the chief trader had ordered to be prepared for them. While they ate, Murray himself was busily engaged with the canoes, directing the post men in the unloading of what supplies were to remain here, apportioning the rest among the other craft, adding his own equipment and launching his own canoes.

To the Montreal fleet he added a seventh brigade manned by a band of fifty men made up from Huron Post. As the Montreal men poured out of the post after their hasty meal he had everything in readiness, and they launched off without delay in a compact fleet across the broad waters of Lake Huron.

NOR were the North Westers and Hudson's Bay Company men long behind him. They bolted the remains of their lunch and followed close in Murray's wake, driving hard between wild Manitoulin and the wilder North Shore for the settlement of the Sault. It was a three-cornered race, and there was little to choose between the fleets, but the advantage given by Murray's addition of the fresh men of Huron Post was never lost.

With a few miles to spare over his rivals he worked through the North Channel, into the mouth of St. Mary's River and on toward the ancient settlement that lined its banks. East and west of it for two hundred miles stretched the North Shore wilderness of Lake Superior and Lake Huron, unbroken save by few and far-spaced trading posts like Michipicoten, and through it flowed all the fur from the West on its way to Montreal.

Contested ground it had always been, site of the first French trader's battle for its possession with the Iroquois, site of Marquette's mission, goal of De Lusson's search for copper mines. The Iroquois had triumphed for a time in 1689, torn down the cross the French had erected and razed their posts to the rocks only to lose possession again in 1750 in the face of French fortifications that were built behind palisades on a grant of land six leagues square. Behind these new ramparts such famed figures as Cadeau and Alexander Henry had held sway, checking Hudson's Bay Company trade and endeavoring to smother such independent companies as the Gregory and McLeod corporation.

All the Little Company was able to maintain there was a single cabin, hardly dignified enough to merit the name of "post" which was nevertheless bestowed upon it, kept by Henry Garden and used chiefly in Summer as a way station for the brigades where they could store goods for freighting by sloop westward over Lake Superior.

It was Garden's business to meet the Montreal brigades and have his cabin open for use, and as Murray paddled in to land below the rambling log structure he saw Garden running down hotfoot toward him.

"We're here first, Henry," he greeted, "but there are North West and Hudson's Bay brigades not far behind. Give me the news quickly. Any word of our sloop *Beaver?*"

The Sault trader, a rangy woodsman smoke-tanned to the hue of leather with hair like an Indian's falling straight and black to his shoulders, removed his pipe and the words he spoke in his huge voice shot out like a bomb.

"The North Westers have captured her," he announced without a quiver of expression on his leathery countenance.

"Captured her?" exploded Murray. "Where? How? Who gave you that news?"

"It was just after she left Grande Portage for this place," Garden explained. "The North Westers despatched their furs in two sloops, *Otter* and *Lynx*, and the pair of them fell upon the *Beaver* and boarded her on Superior. A band of Mackinaw men bound down in canoes saw the fight and brought me the word."

"Condemn them!" Murray snarled. "And the *Beaver's* crew, her furs, her—passenger?"

"The North Westers set the crew ashore,"

the trader answered. "The furs and passenger they kept aboard, so that there are now three North Wester sloops instead of two. I sighted them at sunset becalmed five miles out in the lake."

Murray turned his eyes down-stream and in the distance, driving up from the St. Mary's mouth, he glimpsed the oncoming brigades of the North Westers and the Hudson's Bay Company.

"Well, Garden, there's the man who planned that stroke," he observed bitterly. "Du Vivier, yonder. But the game isn't played out yet, and by Heavens before morning there will be three Little Company sloops instead of one. Becalmed, you said? Then hurry and get this stuff unloaded before the night wind starts to rise."

SWIFTLY the Little Company men fell to work, all too eager to make ready for the clash with the North Westers at which Murray had hinted. They had all the trade goods unloaded and were down to the rum when Du Vivier's and Graydon's brigades drove up and beached together upon the river frontage that skirted the tumultuous rapids a quarter of a mile above Henry Garden's cabin.

"Ho, Graydon!" hailed Murray. "I think I can fix that matter of the rum now."

At his cry Graydon came running down the shore.

"What in the —— name do you mean?" he spluttered suspiciously. "You told me at Huron Post you couldn't let me have any. Now you tell me you can."

"Things have changed a little since I left Huron Post," explained Murray, leaning over the kegs in the big birch-bark to hide a grin.

"This liquor was to have gone aboard the Little Company sloop for Grande Portage, but there isn't any Little Company sloop at present. The North Westers have captured her, Garden tells me."

"The —— they have!" laughed Graydon, to whom this exploit was news indeed. "I thought I might have had a chance at her cargo myself."

"You're too late," lamented Murray. "The North Westers have beaten us both this time and interrupted my freighting. I'll have to leave my trade goods lower down the river. Garden can make a secret cache of them in the woods, but there's no use trying to cache rum around the Sault. You know that. With hundreds of thirsty Northmen about it would be only an incentive to search and pillage. So you had better take what you want, Graydon; and I'll carry the rest of it back."

Graydon's eyes glittered at the unexpected opportunity.

"I'll take it all and save you the trouble of freighting it back," he proffered. "Name your figure for it."

"The firm of Gregory & McLeod will do that," Murray told him. "We'll bill the Hudson's Bay Company from headquarters."

"If you do, they'll never pay," laughed Graydon.

"The risk is mine," declared Murray. "There are your kegs."

With a vim the Hudson's Bay men rolled the kegs away up the rocks to where Graydon's camp-ground touched on Du Vivier's, and as the dark descended they could note the kegs being broached about their fires and the North Westers coming across to hobnob with them.

"It's working," Murray nodded to Chartrain and Garden in their own camp below the rambling log cabin. "Pretty strong stuff, too, to guzzle as they're doing. They won't bother you now, Henry, if you go by alone. Slip over the portage and take canoe at the other end to keep watch on the sloops. If the wind rises to let them come in before midnight give us fair warning."

For an hour or two the Little Company men breathed themselves, lying at ease after their strenuous paddle and listening to the sound of the revel above them. Then when the tumult subsided Murray told off one hundred men of his two hundred and fifty-odd to shift the canoes to the head of the North West canal. The rest he took with him, leading off quietly along the scarred river frontage.

"Keep out of the glow of their camp-fires," he cautioned them, nodding toward the crimson flares that starred the portage winding past the roaring rapids of St. Mary's River. "And go slow, now, till we see if they're on the watch."

Slowly, silently the Little Company men crept up near the big camp below the palisaded post, but no North West sentinel challenged them from camp or post. In the fire glare they could see that the gates were open, the buildings and yard inside deserted for the *boisson* on the beach. Murray raised his head over the flat rocks that rimmed the camp-ground till his eyes were on a level with the fires, and his hand fell upon his brigade leader's arm.

"By Jove, Chartrain, look here!" he urged.

The brigade leader silently raised his head alongside Murray's and the two of them gazed on as strange a camp scene as they had ever witnessed. Round the score or more of fires that had burned themselves through unattended till they were blood-red conical heaps of coals, lay the whole band of Hudson's Bay men and North Westers just as they had sunk into fuddled sleep beside the rum barrels. Sprawled in grotesque shapes, they lay in the open under the stars, either unable to reach or careless of the shelter of their upturned Rabiscaw canoes upon the shore.

Among them Murray could pick out the patrician Graydon and the dashing Du Vivier lying side by side before one of the fires, their hands clasped on the rum glasses with which they had toasted their last toast.

"They're dead to the world for an hour or two anyway, Chartrain," concluded Murray, "so we'll just spirit away their Rabiscaw canoes while they sleep. If our plans work well at the Superior end, it will kill pursuit when we come back this way again."

Treading like cats in their noiseless moccasins, the Little Company men climbed over the rocks at Murray's direction and slipped the huge birch-barks of the North Westers upon their shoulders.

"Never mind running them through the North West canal," Murray whispered. "Carry them over the portage. It will leave the canal free for our own canoes to work quietly through."

MURRAY himself in the lead, they filed off along the footpath that skirted the rapids. Between the line of white foam on the one hand and the rampart of dark rocks on the other they forged silently ahead out of range of the North West camp, past the North West store and wharf, past their canal and primitive lock that they had built to circumvent the unnavigable part of the river.

On by the corner of the palisades they stole, through the muddle of tents and cabins of the sleeping settlement of the Sault. A voyageur settlement it was, with few in the tents and cabins except the sleeping women and children.

The freighting of the fur had drained the place dry of its male population, for the Sault men lived by the packstrap and the paddle and what white men and Saulteaux canoemen were not to be accounted for among Du Vivier's band on the beach would come down with the North West fur sloops from Grande Portage.

Thus there was no opposition to be met with from the settlement proper and no one aboard to sound an alarm that might rouse the drunken North Westers and Hudson's Bay men farther down the river. Like the ghosts of the first far-faring voyageurs the Little Company men stalked in the night and reached the other end of the portage without a mishap.

There as they let the Rabiscaws slide gently into the water that was the drainage of mighty Lake Superior, Henry Garden drifted up like a phantom from off the bosom of the lake.

"What's the word, Henry?" demanded Murray in a low voice. "Have the sloops caught the breeze yet? The night wind's rising, all right. I can feel it on my face."

"Aye, it's rising and the sloops are moving," Garden confided. "They've got their breeze at last, and they're making for the river entrance. You'll have to hurry to stop their landing."

"All right," nodded Murray grimly. "Step in, men. Keep the positions you had in your own canoes. Every one ready? Dip your blades."

Under the urge of new crews but gliding lightly, quivering, leaping alive with the same old qualities of the splendid river craft that they were the Rabiscaws made a few twists and turns and shot out of the head of the St. Mary into the vaster water of Superior.

The lake was intensely dark but under the peculiar luminosity of the stars Murray could discern three sloops making in. Slowly, very slowly, so weak was the breeze, they approached the entrance to the river.

"Which is the *Beaver?*" asked Murray of Garden.

"The one in the center," the Sault trader pointed out. "See her larger sail?"

"Then that's the one I'll board myself," Murray decided. "You take the *Otter*, Henry, and you, Chartrain, the *Lynx*. Rush their crews before they get a chance to recognize us."

Straight across the bows of the oncoming vessels the Little Company men drove the big Rabiscaws, and instantly a hail came from the center sloop *Beaver* which was leading by a length.

"Rabiscaws ho!" a great voice yelled. "What fleet is that?"

"North West brigades from Montreal," answered Murray.

"Under whose command?"

"Du Vivier's," Murray shouted. "Shoot up into the wind and stand by. I'm coming aboard to see your passenger."

There was a rumble of laughter aboard the *Beaver* as the sloop obeyed, hanging in the wind with the *Otter* and the *Lynx* imitating her maneuver, while the fleet of Rabiscaws swarmed in about them. Murray laid his hands on the *Beaver's* low rail and vaulted over, one swift glance revealing Jacquemine Stewart among a half-dozen North Westers who crewed the sloop. She was half-standing, half-crouching aft amid the piled-up fur bales, and as Murray took a step toward her a long pistol flashed out in her hand.

"Don't lay a finger on me, Du Vivier," she cried sharply. "Stand just where you are."

Like some wild fairy creature of the forest she stood at bay, her gray eyes like pearls in the starshine, her tossed hair showing misty as spun gold under the woolen scarf that wrapped her head. Partly to give his own men plenty of time to board, partly to prevent the North Westers having any suspicion as to their identity he dodged low and sprang in under her guard.

He seized her bodily with his right arm, his left hand closing on her wrist and deflecting the pistol. It went off with a roar through the

sloop's canvas, and for an instant they were locked thus, her breath warm upon his face, her hair brushing his cheeks, every muscle of her tense body straining in his grip. Then as the starlight fell on Murray's face she saw that he was not Du Vivier but a man of her own company.

"Angus—Angus Murray of Huron Post," she breathed half-incredulously.

"Aye," he whispered in the ear that his lips almost touched, "you are in better hands than you thought, Miss Jacquemine. All the boarders are Little Company men. I wanted to get close enough to you to tell you this, you see."

"My goodness," she cried under her breath, "that was very gallant of you, but don't you know you took the risk of being shot?"

"I'm a good judge of distance," laughed Murray softly, "and just to hold you like this for a moment is worth the risk. But put away the pistol. You won't need it now."

He released the wrist he had pinioned and the girl slipped the weapon under her blanket cloth coat which she wore against the coolness of the Superior night.

THE North Wester who had first hailed the canoes, who seemed to Murray to be master of the sloop, had followed aft on his heels, and he laughed aloud as the pistol slipped out of sight after its futile shot.

"Ha, ha, a fiery maid, Du Vivier, *oui*, and a good mate for a bold North Wester," he grinned. "But I see you have her tamed nevertheless."

"Perhaps she's not so well tamed as you think, friend," growled Murray, wheeling on him suddenly.

He gripped as he wheeled, smothering the North Wester by sheer weight under the sudden attack, and even as they rocked and staggered back and forth in the sloop the North Westers abruptly sensed their enemies.

"*Mon Dieu*," the cry went up, "treachery, *camarades*. Little Company men aboard!"

But they cried too late. The men from Murray's section of the canoe fleet were all aboard, blackly overrunning the sloop from end to end, while Garden's and Chartrain's crews were equally swift in swarming over the *Otter* and the *Lynx*. Bitterly the North Westers fought, but they were swamped by numbers, and not even the flash of a knife, the bellow of a pistol here and there availed to clear the vessels.

"Overside with them," yelled Murray, "overside with them all."

Raging, resisting to the last, the crews of the three sloops were dumped overside into the Rabiscaws and shoved adrift without paddles. Murray, holding the master of the *Beaver* in a vise-like grip, dropped him over last of all and sprang back to the side of Jacquemine.

"Now we'll have to make a quick run for it," he declared. "That noise will wake the settlement and the North West camp as well. Du Vivier's down yonder in person, you know, and the Hudson's Bay crowd under Fletcher Graydon besides."

"My Heavens, be quick, then," urged Jacquemine, "or we shall never get through. How is it they had no watch set for the sloops and how in the world did you steal the North Westers' Rabiscaw canoes?"

"Too much rum answers both those questions," laughed Murray. "I made them a present of a whole canoeful, and I guess there's hardly a drop left. But they're roused now, and we haven't a minute to waste."

He wheeled and hailed the *Otter* and the *Lynx* off on the starboard bow.

"Pilot the way in, Garden," he ordered. "You next with the *Lynx*, Chartrain. I'll come last with the *Beaver*."

Immediately the *Otter* and the *Lynx* came back on their course and pointed in. Murray seized the tiller of the *Beaver* and called on two good boatmen of his crew to handle the sheets. Gaining momentum with the ever increasing wind, the three sloops drifted off the lake bosom into the faster flowing river water, heeling and plunging till they crowded all together up to the landing above the St. Mary's falls.

Down came the sails with a rattle of blocks, out writhed the lashing lines and overside flew the fur bales. Like madmen the Little Company crews worked as they hurled the cargoes of the three vessels ashore, timing their vigorous heaving to the spaced roars of the cataract. Loud in the night boomed the plunging waters, but above the bellowing of the foam-crested waves rose another sound as they toiled.

"Listen, Angus," begged Jacquemine. "What's that sound?"

"Du Vivier's and Graydon's camps are awake, as I feared," interpreted Murray, turning an ear as he threw the last fur bale out on the landing.

"Quick, men, we can't let them get up and block the canal on us. We'll have to run it with this weight of fur, and we must reach it first. Everybody shoulder the bales."

The three sloops had brought down from Grande Portage two tons of fur apiece, twelve thousand pounds in all, baled in the regulation eighty-pound bales, and, each shouldering a bale, Murray's one hundred and fifty men dashed from the landing for the North West canal where their own canoes had been directed to wait.

The battle of the boarding on Superior, the shouting and the shots had wakened the settlement from sleep. Where darkness reigned

when the Little Company men first passed was now a glow of lights from tents and cabins, and amid the clamor of crying voices and slamming doors they could hear the patter of women's and children's feet as the more timid fled for the shelter of the palisaded post.

Through the clamor and the panic that prevailed on both sides of the trail, that sounded to high heaven in front of them and redoubled in their rear as they went by Murray's men came in sight of the canal, to find the canoemen who had remained by the craft flinging madly to meet them.

"Come on," they yelled. "The North Westers and Hudson's Bay men are astir. They're coming up like wolves let loose."

"All right, float your first canoe," shouted Murray, pulling Jacquemine along by the arm as he ran at top speed. "Line up the rest behind. Now, you canoemen, take the bales as they come and drop them aboard."

The whole channel, called a canal, which the North Westers used as a waterway to avoid the rapids, ran over half a mile in length and at its upper end the Little Company canoes were lined up as Murray directed. At his word they are hastily flung afloat and the canoemen stood by to receive the bales of fur from the packers.

Packer after packer came forward at a swift lope, all straining like racers under a mighty handicap, twisted their heads from the pack-straps in mid-stride and let the bales fall into the hands of those waiting in the canoes to receive them. Nor did they pause as the loads were released but raced on the faster at Murray's exhortations to possess and hold the primitive lock which was the key point of the canal.

The lock itself was only six fathoms in length and no broader than a man could leap, and Murray, hastily placing Jacquemine aboard the last canoe in the line, plunged on with the packers to direct their rush.

"The first canoes will take the brunt," he called back to her over his shoulder. "You'll be safer in the rear, and I'll join you at the lock if we can break a way through."

"Ah, but be careful of yourself, Angus," breathed Jacquemine anxiously. "Please Heaven, we'll go through."

Murray waved a giant hand to reassure her and forged on with his men.

"Take both sides of the lock," he ordered them; "half of you on one side, half on the other. Chartrain, you lead the men on the south bank. I'll take the north myself."

IN THE middle distance he could see the North Westers coming, and among them he marked the men of the Hudson's Bay. These had drunk with their rivals throughout the evening, and in their muddled minds they could see no reason why they should not fight with them when so rudely aroused from their sleep.

Fletcher Graydon was with them, running shoulder to shoulder with the lurching Du Vivier in the van, and Murray realized that the forces of both companies, albeit many of them were none too sure on their legs, were following their leaders to a man. "By Heavens, Chartrain, we're going to have our hands full, drunk as they are," he called across the water to his brigade leader on the south bank.

"The Hudson's Bay men have turned in to fight with the North Westers. See them coming yonder?"

"Ba gar, let dem come den," cried Chartrain, glorying in the approaching conflict. "We'll be smash dem bot' at once an' dat'll be save us de double fight."

Truly, every man of the Little Company forces realized that the decisive moment had arrived. There could be no drawn battle here, no compromise of any sort. Murray himself knew he must win the passage triumphantly against the combination of his rivals or else go down to bitter defeat.

And defeat meant more to him than the mere punishment of being worsted in personal encounter. It meant the loss of the Little Company fur they had recovered, the loss of the North West furs they had captured by the bold stroke, the loss of the prestige that victory would bring his company. Also, above all these, it meant the loss of Jacquemine Stewart, first lady of the Little Company and the idol of his Stornoway heart.

What he had gained for her by his strategy in intercepting the fur sloops on Lake Superior would be gone in a flash if he allowed her to fall into the reckless, disreputable hands of Du Vivier. He glanced back to see how she was faring with the canoe fleet and glimpsed her kneeling in the rearmost craft steered by Henry Garden. Propped among the tumbled fur bales as the fleet flew forward, she smiled and waved her scarf.

"Success to the Little Company," she cried.

Murray shook his clenched fist in air. "Aye, and down with the North Westers," he supplemented. "Down with the H. B. C."

Before he could draw breath for another word the opposing forces were upon his with upraised paddles and half-burned brands snatched from their dying camp-fires. They had divided like the Little Company men at the lower end of the lock; the Hudson's Bay forces under Graydon leaping across to the south bank, the North Westers themselves coming straight on at the heels of Du Vivier. Reckless as a brigand, drunk as a hilarious Caughnawaga canoeman, he lurched forward in a frenzy of rage, urging his retainers on with savage ferocity.

"Down with the Little Company dogs," he

shrilled, brandishing a great knotted stick with a charred end as big as a man's head. "Drive them into the canal and seize the furs and the girl. *Par Dieu*, if you let them get by I'll flog the lot of you."

Nor were the North Westers slow to obey his command under threat. Their *boisson* with the Hudson's Bay men on the beach had put them in an ugly mood, and they charged like an avalanche into the Little Company men.

It was a mighty conflict, hundreds of men struggling on both banks, and Murray on the north bank, holding back a whole quartette of North Westers with his tremendous strength, shot a glance across to see how Chartrain was faring on the opposite side.

He saw the brigade leader in the center of a horde of Hudson's Bay men, a dozen followers at his back, hewing his way with a paddle blade to the foot of the chute while the rest of his band stubbornly held the thirty-six feet of lock against assault.

Chartrain's aim was to spread the fight, to carry Graydon's strength over a longer river front and to dissipate it so as to give Murray on the north bank a better chance to rush the canoes past. Graydon, more inebriated perhaps than Du Vivier his ally of the moment but steady as a rock on his feet, anticipated Chartrain's move and tried to head it off, but he was no match for the vigorous brigade leader either in wits or in strength.

Murray saw the brigade leader meet the Hudson's Bay agent as he sprang to knit up the cleavage in his ranks, saw Chartrain's paddle blade descend on Graydon's head sending him reeling senseless on the rocks. Then he saw him no more as the gap between the whirling bodies of men closed and the fight went on afresh. Even as Graydon went down in the maze a shout arose on Murray's side.

"The canoes," was the cry. "The canoes are here."

"Hold the line, then," roared Murray. "Hold for your lives."

WITH a desperate effort the Little Company men shoved the unwieldy weight of the North Westers back from the wall of the lock. The next moment a fur-laden canoe shot into it, flashed past with the speed of a meteor and in the space of a paddle flip leaped out into the water of the canal.

Another and another followed, shooting by with their crews yelling wildly as they won through and back watered to a halt below to take on the men who fought for them. They were all through, all but one, the canoe, steered by Henry Garden, with Jacqueminc.

Pandemonium reigned on both banks. Chartrain had beaten the Hudson's Bay men back on the south side and possessed the foot of the lock with his men, making a sort of human gateway through which the Little Company craft locked down, but Murray on the north side, however, found himself more closely pressed. The North Westers were more numerous, and they fought with fierce intensity.

Amid all their ferocity, their pagan savagery, Du Vivier raged as chief, the baffling of his men, the sight of the Little Company canoes shooting through unobstructed sending him into a paroxysm. He cursed and struck blindly at friend and foe, tearing his way by sheer madness to the edge of the lock before the last canoe containing Jacquemine might get by. He bore down three men who tried to block him and leaned out to seize the bow of the craft.

"*Dieu*, but you do not get away after all, my little Jacquemine," he snarled.

Yet even as Du Vivier clutched the birch-bark his grip was torn away and the next instant he found himself grappling with Murray and rolling over and over on the wall of the lock. Over and down they rolled straight into the waters of the lock, and the keel of Garden's canoe rode them under as it shot in.

"My God, back water!" Jacquemine cried as the big birch-bark trembled at the shock.

She stared overside, fear in her eyes, till Murray's head broke surface.

"Angus, Angus," she breathed, putting out her hands to help draw him aboard, "it was a miracle you were not killed."

"It was my close grip on Du Vivier saved me," confessed Murray. "I could feel the bow graze my head and smite him from my arms. And, look, he doesn't rise! The St. Mary has him, God rest his reckless soul."

The abrupt fall and disappearance of their leader was a sudden check on the North Westers' fighting ardor. They fell back and scattered so that the Little Company men broke through, merged forces with Chartrain's voyageurs at the foot of the lock and rushed all together for the waiting canoes in the canal below.

Pell-mell they piled themselves in, and the craft containing Jacquemine and Murray shot down into their midst as they flashed out of the canal into the navigable section of the St. Mary's River.

"*Mon Dieu*, but dis taim de brigades of de Leetle Company win," gloated Chartrain.

"Dey win de fight, de furs, an'," his keen eyes glowing lambent in the dark as they smiled on Jacquemine and Murray, "dey win de bride."

"By Jove, Chartrain," cautioned Murray, as his hand searched for Jacquemine's in the dark, "aren't you taking quite a bit for granted? All we're certain of yet is that the Little Company has won."

"Yes, through the hearts of its brave men," lauded Jacquemine sweetly.

"No, through the hearts of its beautiful women, you mean," murmured Murray, finding the hand that did not repulse.

THE EIGHTY-ONE*

by Hugh S Fullerton

Author of "Throw It Over on John Lund," "On One Wave," etc.

THIS is the story of the Eighty-One as told to me by Lester Bancroft—Number 72—in a German prison pen near Benain on September 10, 1918, the night before the Kaiser and his chief advisors narrowly escaped death and a number of his staff perished.

Bancroft asked me to write the story if I lived to reach the United States. I'm writing it, conscious of the fact that there are many things that never will be known. I have done my best to verify the story he told me.

The War Department professes entire ignorance of the Eighty-One and scoffs at the tale.

However, I have learned from L. Koenigsberg, agent of the building mentioned, that the meetings described by Bancroft were held there during January, 1918. The city editor for whom Bancroft and I worked is, unfortunately, not in position to confirm Bancroft's statements, although his assignment book records the fact that Bancroft on February 3rd was sent to an address on East Seventeenth Street, New York, to report a meeting from which he never returned. I have learned that on February 4th three motor busses filled with men went from the East Seventeenth Street address to a ship on the North River and that the men immediately boarded a sub-chaser which crossed to where the *Leviathan* lay.

I have learned from a member of the 308th Field Artillery Replacement Company and from two members of the 127th Engineers that shortly before the *Leviathan* sailed a number of men were taken aboard from a sub-chaser, that during the trip they were kept apart from the others of the twelve thousand men aboard and that considerable curiosity was excited especially among the two hundred aviators aboard as to the character of the mysterious group.

Further than that I can offer nothing excepting Bancroft's bare narrative as given on the night before—I feel certain—he perished in an attempt to carry out one of the strangest missions ever conceived by men. If any member of the Eighty-One lived through the war—which I doubt—let him come forward and tell the whole story. I shall try to tell it as nearly as possible as Bancroft told it to me, as we huddled over a smoky fire in the cold barracks in Benain, with the roar of distant guns telling us of the advance of the Allies.

This is Bancroft's tale:

I WAS coming down in the sub the morning of February 3, sore on the job and fretting because I couldn't get into the war. I had been turned down twice for officers' training-camps, and the Old Man couldn't see me as a war correspondent. I was like a lot of fellows, wanted to do my bit, but was lazy and soft and dreaded the training worse than the fighting. I had determined to enlist in the Marines after the next pay-day because I wanted quick action; and I got it more quickly than I expected.

I always had a habit of reading want ads, funeral notices and all sorts of queer corners of the papers, looking for a news story hidden away, and that morning an ad caught my eye that read:

Wanted—One hundred men who intend some day to commit suicide. Desperate cases preferred. Families provided for. Ask for Wallace at No. —— East Seventeenth Street.

★ *This is an Off-the-Trail Story. See second contents page.*

The ad puzzled me. I figured it was some sort of an insurance come-on scheme and forgot it by the time I reached the office.

The Old Man was waiting for me. You remember the uncanny way he had of figuring the kind of story each reporter would work best on? Well, he had cut out that ad and was keeping it for me.

"Find out what this nut is up to," he said, throwing me the clipping.

"I read it coming down," I said. "Sounds like some fake insurance scheme."

"No insurance man would put that kind of ad in a paper. This reads to me as if it is on the square."

I put the clip in my pocket and started up-town again with no idea that it was my last newspaper story. I feel guilty now because I got that story and never wrote it. If you get back I want you to write it and tell the Old Man I didn't throw him down on the assignment.

Going up-town I planned what to do. I would present myself to Wallace, whoever he might be, saying I was tired of life, and figured the best story to tell him was that I had been crossed in love, which was true enough as I had been crossed and double-crossed half a dozen times, without, however, causing me to have any idea of suicide.

I was directed to an office on the third floor. Two men were waiting—one was Craighart, afterward my chum, and the other a brute named Reckley, a bum and a drunkard. Craighart looked like a man who had staked everything, lost and was ready to pay. Reckley was a drunkard with a wife and children, of whom he was passionately fond excepting when drunk—when he abused them. He had determined to commit suicide so they could have his life insurance.

These two were called into an inner office one at a time. Reckley emerged with the expression of a man reborn, his face showing a half-insane determination. I tried to talk with Craighart, but he froze me. Yet twenty minutes later, when he emerged from the inner office, he slapped me on the back and said—

"Cheero, old top, this is worth while."

These two went into a rear room, and as the door opened I could see other men and hear talk and laughter which aroused my curiosity. I was determined to learn why these two had seemed as if they had discovered something new in life. The door opened and some one called—

"Come in."

I found in the room a man about forty-five, well-dressed, healthy-looking and seeming cheerful. He seemed pleased over something but when he saw me he frowned and studied me. I never saw a man show determination and suspicion more plainly. Not suspicion; fact is, he knew I was an impostor the moment he saw me and I knew he knew it.

"Sit down," he said.

"You're Wallace? I read your ad."

"Want to commit suicide?" he asked without seeming to regard the question as shocking.

"Yes."

"Why haven't you done it?"

His question spoiled my carefully rehearsed story, rattled me, and he kept watching me, smiling a little.

"Well," I stammered, "I hadn't exactly set the hour. I'm a newspaper man—there isn't much in the way I've lived and I decided when I got tired, or broke——"

"Figured life isn't worth much. All right when things break easy, not worth troubling over or suffering for? Married?"

"No, my girl——"

"Girl?" he shook his head dubiously. "Fellows that kill themselves over girls do it right away. If they don't kill themselves the first week or two they get over it and get another one. I'm afraid you don't want to die."

He said it so regretfully that I felt a bit ashamed of not wanting to and hastened to insist that I was in earnest.

"Glad to hear it," he said. "Understand, I'm taking you at your word. You're as good as dead now."

"I'm glad you're glad," I said. "What's the idea?"

"I'm glad for the sake of our enterprise, not for your sake," he said. "Fact, I'm sorry you're such an idiot as to want to die. Life is pretty good but I need your kind. Most of the fellows who decide to kill themselves are a poor lot; drunks, bums, quitters, yellow dogs. I've got seventy-one of them in this house—not more than a dozen of them worth much—food for a colonel or two, or a major, but no ambition."

He shrugged disgustedly.

"Notice that Britisher chap who came in ahead of you?"

"Yes."

"That's the sort!" he rubbed his hands with satisfaction. "Game chap; glad of a chance. If he isn't worth a general or something big——"

He stopped and eyed me.

"Still determined to kill yourself?"

"Yes."

"Sign here."

He pushed a card toward me and I read it slowly. The signer agreed to obey implicitly the party of the first part, Laurence G. Wallace. In return Wallace agreed to deposit in any bank designated four thousand dollars to the credit of party or parties named by party of the second part, pay all expenses, provide transportation and adequate expense money.

Wallace watched me narrowly as I read. I

reached for the pen and he stopped me with a quick motion of his hand.

"Young man," he said with a cold stare, "don't sign unless you are in earnest. If you sign I'll make certain you do not live and I'll guarantee a quick and not painful death."

He meant every word of it. I never posed as a brave man and I came near weakening. I'd have made a jump for the door or window if I hadn't been ashamed to do it. Fact is, I think most heroes are fellows who are afraid to let any one know they're cowards. Besides I was stubborn and wanted the story. I managed to hold my hand tolerably steady while I signed. Then Wallace reached over and shook my hand, gripping it hard.

"Good," he said joyously. "You'll make good and die game."

That didn't comfort me any. I got up and Wallace came around and put his arm across my shoulders.

"That's better than sneaking into a room and shooting yourself, or swallowing some nasty poison or jumping into cold, dirty water, isn't it? You're dead, as certainly as if you had done all those things, you get four thousand dollars for your family or friends, and you'll help save the world."

He was so confounded tickled over it he gave me the creeps.

"What's the job?" I asked. "War work, I hope?"

"Yes. I'll tell you details later. Give me the names of those you want to have the money and join the rest of the band. Needn't tell them your name unless you want to. No one knows more than you do and won't until we get started. I'm glad to get you. I may give you the big job, or the second chance, if I fail. Wish we had more like you and that bally Britisher Craighart. Trouble is so few men of brains want to kill themselves."

He appeared quite annoyed by the fact. I wrote the name of my Aunt Elizabeth, who had been good to me after Mother died, for three thousand dollars, gave five hundred dollars to Burke's widow because he had died leaving nothing, and five hundred dollars to Bill Brandt as a joke, because Bill never had that much cash in his life.

[Note—I have investigated and find that, on February 5, 1918, Miss Elizabeth Mackey, of East Cleveland, Ohio, Mrs. Peter Burke, of Brooklyn, and William Brandt, an itinerant newspaper writer, received the sums mentioned by draft, and never knew anything beyond the fact that the money came from Lester Bancroft—F.]

I WANTED to save some for funeral expenses, and the idea seemed to amuse Wallace.

"Don't worry over that," he laughed. "That's part of the joke—make 'em pay the funeral expenses, if there are any and, my boy, you have a chance to get the finest obituary notice ever written."

Wallace's sense of humor was on my nerves. I was trying to figure a way to get that story and get it to the office, but he gave no chance.

"I'm closing the books at five o'clock," he said. "Wanted a hundred men. Lucky to get eighty now. You're seventy-two and there are some more waiting. Run back and play with the boys."

The crowd in that back room was the queerest ever gathered on earth. They were sitting around, smoking, talking, playing cards, but the majority were arguing and trying to guess what Wallace hired us for. Craighart was puffing away contentedly on his pipe, smiling and listening. One guessed Wallace intended to use us to blow up German ships, another that he planned a revolution. They made all sorts of guesses.

The hopelessness and desperation was gone—every one was keenly interested. Craighart finally took his pipe from his mouth.

"What's the odds, mates?" he asked. "I told him I'd do anything he said, saving against my own country, and he gave his word we were serving instead of attacking the Allies. Here we are, jolly well fed and found, money to pay our debts of honor and a bit for those that need it, besides saving us the trouble of doing it ourselves. Beastly messy work killing oneself! Makes one feel like a blooming slacker even when it's the decent thing to do. What's the odds how it comes?"

Craighart was a leader from that minute. He and I talked for a time; then we found cots in a room on the fourth floor and turned in. Some time after dark Wallace brought in big baskets of sandwiches and pails of coffee and told us the chow would be of the best the next day. During the night he brought in a big bunch of drafts, checks and money-orders made out in the names we had given him, gave each fellow envelopes and allowed him to address them and inclose the checks. There were eighty-one in the house, including Wallace. I counted them while he called the names.

We mailed three hundred and twenty thousand dollars and I was convinced there was something bigger than Wallace back of the thing when he brought in a mail man, placed the letters in a bag in sight of us all and told the mail man to register each letter separately. I knew then that Wallace was sane and sincere.

If I were writing the story I'd work in some psychological stuff about the situation in that back room. Just as soon as it became certain that it wasn't a joke, but a real adventure, I felt enthusiastic. The bums, the brutes,

the whisky soaks braced up and appeared to have found something worth while just when they became certain that they already were as good as dead. The nervous, half-insane fellows were excited and interested; the sullen ones waked up and became jolly.

You would have thought we were going on a pleasure trip.

I didn't sleep much that night. Wallace promised me he would send word to the office that I was on a big story and would not be back until I landed it. Before daylight we had breakfast down-stairs on the third floor, and Wallace ordered us to get ready to move in parties of twenty. I was in the third bus-load with Craighart and Lyons, a highly nervous fellow who had smashed trying to smash the stock market and was a defaulter. We went west, turned around Union Square, went on Fifth Avenue a short distance, then toward the river.

Somewhere on West Eleventh Lyons tried to jump from the bus but was jerked back by an ex-convict named Jere who threatened to save him the trouble of killing himself.

Lyons cried all the rest of the way.

We drove on to a pier and were hurried aboard a sub-chaser. As soon as Wallace came aboard we cast off, crossed the river and ran alongside the *Leviathan*. Ten minutes later we were in quarters apart from every one else and informed that we were to remain in the three sections and have no communication with any one else on board. It was just getting daylight when we went aboard. In spite of that I saw two men I knew.

[Note—Bancroft named these men to me. Both were aboard the *Leviathan* on that trip. One, a member of the 127th Engineers, died in France. The other has no recollection of seeing Bancroft or his party aboard the *Leviathan*, although he says he was on deck early the morning the ship sailed. F.]

WE WERE four days out before Wallace gave us a hint. We were getting restless, confined below decks. The weather had been bitterly cold for two days, until we hit the Gulf Stream. Then it was warm and we fretted. Most of us rolled in bunks, others smoked or played cards. Wallace simply got up, rapped on a bunk for silence and said:

"Fellows, I know you all want to know where we are going and why. Maybe I'd better tell you my own story. My doctor told me I had a cancer and no chance and I decided to kill myself to escape the suffering. I figured to set my business in order, scatter my money among friends and finish it up nice and quiet and easy.

"Then the war came. I was pretty bitter; always wanted to do something for my country and now the chance had come I had an incurable disease. I decided to finish it that night. Would have—but I had a sudden idea. I decided not to go without taking a German with me. I planned to get into Germany, kill the biggest officer I could reach and keep on killing them until they got me.

"That idea grew. I had half a million dollars as useless as I was and figured there were a lot of fellows in the country fixed the way I was and that a hundred men can do more than one. So I fixed it with certain persons and advertised for you fellows.

"That's the plan," he said simply. "When we get to England each of us will be supplied with what he needs to get to Germany and turned loose. I don't mind saying that the Government of the United States and that of England had nothing to do with this and, while certain persons may wink, you'll get no aid. I want each of you to figure out his own plan, consult me before we part, and don't let any hint of this reach any one outside.

"That's all," he added, smiling. "Excepting that I have arranged quite carefully that if any one has been insincere in his declarations of his intentions, the act which he professed to contemplate will be performed for him."

He spoke pleasantly, but every one understood. You may imagine my feelings, for I still cherished a keen prejudice in favor of living. The cold chills crept up my back when Craighart began clapping his hands and saying—

"Bravo."

After Wallace sat down Craighart took the floor and said:

"My lads, I propose a vote of thanks to Mr. Wallace for giving us this great opportunity. It is a chance to serve, and much better than messing up some cheap lodging house."

We applauded, but I confess the applause was not boisterous. The idea chilled us, but it was one that grew on a fellow and continued to grow. After a short time every one commenced to take interest, and in spite of myself I began to get enthusiastic, and to take a delight in planning what to do.

Ought to work some more psychology into the yarn here. I wish I had the chance to write it. The big interest to me was the way the men took to the scheme. I began to understand why the bomb is such a favorite with the anarchists—it appeals to the self-interest and the sense of the spectacular. Nine-tenths of us wanted to make a spectacular finish, to blow ourselves up with a bunch of generals. Selfishness—we almost quarreled as to which could have the chance at Hindenberg, although most of us secretly aspired to blow up the Kaiser. Hearns, a drunken little Cockney bum, said—

"Blimy hif Hi don't load me bloomin' rear pockets with bombs hand let the bloody Kaiser kick me."

We made a fast run across—seven days. We outran our consort and picked up the British consort off the Irish coast. By that time we had begun to pair off quietly and study maps. Wallace was busy night and day conferring with different ones and advising us. The joking and bragging was done and every one got down to serious business.

Craighart and I drew closer together and talked of trying it as a pair, but he was too typically English to fit my scheme and besides that Wallace decided we should work alone—said he could not risk losing two smart plotters at once.

My plan was approved by Wallace. My boyhood was spent in Wisconsin in a Swedish community and as a kid my imitations of their dialect and quickness in picking up the language amused the family. After I went to New York I frequently wrote and told Swede stories.

My plan was to pretend to be a Swede, returned from America, and to engage in running supplies from Sweden into Germany.

I told Wallace of the plan. Now, while Wallace always declared he had no sanction from any government he certainly had a pull and he agreed to provide proper papers and passports and working capital.

Craighart was in the dumps from the day we reached his native land. He grew bitter and had dark moods which I could not understand.

He was the bravest man I ever knew and he was contemplating the greatest sacrifice a man could make. Dying had rather aroused his enthusiasm. He wanted to die clean, to square accounts for the way he had lived and wasted, to die serving his country and the plan he evolved meant worse than death—it meant eternal damnation in the eyes of every Englishman.

His plan was to play the rôle of traitor, an Englishman selling his country for gain. His soul had revived at the thought of dying to win back the respect of those he had disgraced—and he decided to make the sacrifice of everything.

Wallace gave us addresses in London and Liverpool and we scattered. Craighart and I went to London, lay low for a week. Then I got my necessary papers and money and went to Sweden.

I NEVER saw any of them again—excepting Craighart, Wallace and a little Irishman named Cleary. I saw Cleary, just a glimpse of him, as a Berlin mob tore him to pieces after he had blown a military car loaded with officers to pieces with a bomb. Craighart I saw in Berlin but dared not speak to him. Wallace I met twice and the second time was two days before he died, trying to blow up German Grand Headquarters.

I heard from Wallace that the band was doing well and that it had caused a reign of terror among German high officials. That we scared them is certain, for they issued strict orders to watch the American prisoners, having an idea it was escaped prisoners who were doing the work.

It was Lyons, the little embezzler who tried to run out in New York, who stole a Canadian uniform, made his way to the front, allowed himself to be captured and, while being taken to the rear near Douai, saw a motor-car loaded with officers passing and blew seven of them and himself to eternity.

I was winning confidence. Wallace had appointed me to get the Kaiser, the Crown Prince and Ludendorff. I was running copper wire, butter and fats from Sweden. No one suspected me but it was difficult to get to the interior of Germany.

It was June before I managed to find a pretext for visiting the capital. In fact, I was commanded by a grafting German colonel to take food supplies to his family in Berlin. I protested that I would lose days, lose the profits on another voyage, but he sent me, on a pass.

I met Craighart, who was drunk or pretending to be. There was no chance for us to talk, but he brushed drunkenly against me and whispered:

"I've done for three of the blighters. I'll get the Big one yet."

I knew what he meant—the Kaiser, I understood too, how three officers, two members of the general staff, had died. Berlin was in a turmoil over the killing of these three in two weeks, and two German officers were under arrest charged with the murders. I never knew whether or not they were convicted.

It was just a week later that Craighart failed. A guard drove his bayonet through him and spoiled his aim as he fired at the Crown Prince.

Craighart's failure made my job harder. The high officers were more closely guarded and every one was under suspicion. I was forced to make another trip to Sweden.

When I got back I handed my friend the colonel a special package of food for his family. At that time one could have bribed half the General staff with a roast of beef.

Several officers wanted my friendship, among them a big secret service man. He told me the —— Americans were escaping from prison pens and killing officers and that a great plot existed among prisoners to die taking German officers with them.

I mentioned the fact that I had spent several years in the States, and added that I hated the Yankees. He took me to other officers and, for a sum of money, I agreed to be put into prison pens with the Americans, pretending to be a prisoner, and to uncover the plot. I've been doing it for six weeks—and the big plan is working out.

SO BANCROFT finished his tale.

"Your plan?" I inquired.

"I'll report to Headquarters," he said calmly. "If eminent personages are there to hear my report we will have a blow-out."

He spoke lightly, as if the end would be a relief.

"Anyhow," he added smilingly, "tell the Old Man when you get back that I didn't throw down the assignment."

"You mean to go through with it?"

"A fellow has to finish his assignment, hasn't he?" he asked and, rolling into his bunk, turned his face to the wall.

That is all I know. The next day some German officers came and talked with Bancroft and he went away with them. Perhaps an hour later there was an explosion not far away and great excitement among the Germans. In the afternoon German officers, purple with rage, went through the pen and struck at American soldiers, sick or well, with swords and cursed us violently.

Half a dozen of the boys were dragged out and put through a third degree. I never knew what happened, but I overheard a guard say many were killed and that the Kaiser escaped getting his just dues only because he had become so terrorized he refused to permit any, excepting a few trusted ones, to enter a room with him.

Perhaps when confidential German reports are printed the complete facts may be known.

ONE WEAK SPOT

by Edgar Young

Author of "The Man-Maker," "Converging Trails," etc.

I'VE tramped with a good many men and I've studied men on the trail, weighed them, measured them with the yardstick to see how they checked up as pals. Perhaps this is a hobby of mine to keep the brain occupied on hard, cruel jaunts when men are too tired to speak and must conserve each tiny speck of energy for the work in hand; perhaps it's a sort of fear that I, myself, have—a fear that I may not be all that I would like to be.

At any rate, I've learned a rough way of sizing men up and I've seen them teeter in the balance and I've seen them go bad and fail. And I, myself, have tottered. A pal has lashed me with an oath or a kind word and I've gritted my teeth and hit trail when every stride was a wrench of torment.

I was burned to a crisp after I left the mouth of the Banana River, by walking two days in a suit of B. V. D.'s on the beach trail from Limon to Bocas. Infection set in and the veins bulged through, swollen hard as wires. If I paused for so much as a second, the blood stagnated in my legs and threw me as if I had been hit on the head with a club.

Ross, the barber in Colon, knows what I looked like when I staggered into Baldy's saloon on Front Street. He knows, because he quit shaving a man to take me up to his room and the Zone doctor he ran after knows that I was packing a fever of over a hundred and four. But I made that trail.

It seemed a thousand miles long. It *was* over two hundred of beach, jungle and swamp. And two live men came into Colon when two dead men might have rotted on the Costa Rican beach if I had failed to do my bit. Part of the time I walked automatically. I swam the Sexola on the boundary between Costa Rica and Panama in a dream. My shins are jagged with saw-grass cuts—the scars of those made as I stumbled through oceans of it on the Panama side of this river. Don't tell me there is no saw-grass there. I know better.

My trousers were worn off at the knees.

The blades of grass were three feet long and their edges were sharp as hack-saw blades. Ask Ross how I rolled and tore at his mattress with my teeth when the doctor slashed into the proud flesh that had formed and poured blue-stone water in to kill the tropical sores that had eaten to the bone. I made it. I'm proud to have made it. My pride happens to run in that direction, for in that direction lies my fear.

And Eugene Rodin made that trail with me. If I am proud of myself what shall I say about Eugene Rodin? A little wisp of a man, burned to a cinder from the sun, barefooted from the loss of his shoes in the Rio Estrella, whose feet printed their soles with blood on the trail, bare-headed and with his ears swelled to black lumps on his head, slashed to ribbons with saw-grass and briers, rocking like a drunken man with delirium as he clasped my hand so we would not stray apart in the reeling jungle, shouting in a frenzy of torture, and hitting trail from morning to night. Not only did I fail to out-nerve him but I was hard put to keep him from out-nerving me.

"Come on, —— you! You call yourself a man. Hit trail! It's Canal Zone or bust! How far is it? Maybe four hundred, maybe a thousand. I'll walk you to death. Two hundred and twenty you weigh. You'll tip the scales at less than that when we hit Culebra town. My hundred and twenty-five won't balance the scales."

This is how he shouted at me when he knew he was shouting. Other times he screamed things that merged with the troop of fantasmagorial monsters that marched beside us and reached for us with claws that barely missed. The real and the unreal were merged into one and it was only by heavy concentration that I was able to separate them.

HE, TOO, had studied me and he knew the raw spot where the spur would make me flinch. And we made Colon. A man picked him up in his arms and carried him across the line into Cristobal just as I staggered into Baldy's place. And we lived through it and dug our bit of the big canal.

We got prosperous and dolled up out of Uncle Sam's big stores. And I guess I swaggered a bit more than I should have done and bragged of how we had made the beach-trail. And other men who had hit trail in Brazil and down across the Andes sought us out and came and chatted with us on the cool veranda of House No. 7 in Gatun by the Lake.

They had bucked big on big trails with men of many climes and they shook us by the hand and talked of hopes and prides that were in their heart of hearts.

There was Flood from Mazatlan, Kid Matthis from San Antone, two buddies, Hart and James—Hart with a scar on breast and back where a Mexican had plunged a candle-stick through him, Brewer with a brow like a sheet of writing-paper and the wisdom of a Greek god, old Mike Sullivan from the Rand, Walt Johnson from a thousand trails, Lanky Moore who blew into Sao Paulo, Brazil, with a bag of diamonds and a suit of parrot feathers; and a dozen others.

Big talk and vain words were spoken with these men, but they knew and understood of what we spoke and why we did so. Also they, too, dropped sneery hints as to home-guards, contract-stiffs and white-collared dudes. And often when Rodin had stepped away I told them behind my hand what a true-blue guy he really was, for I felt ashamed to let him see just how much I appreciated him.

He was a little shy on talk in a crowd and I guess I had a little more than my share of the gift of gab. This is the truth, take it or leave it, doubt it or believe it. Ask Ross. And I guess Jim Adams might be able to bear it out. I know. My shins know. And when I take a bath I see a few grim reminders in the way of glistening scars that say "beach-trail" so that I won't forget.

Other men may, and have, walked the low beach and swamp-trail from Limon to the Zone without a scratch. But it sure gave us a mauling. I, for one, don't want to double that stretch of country again. Men died on other trails that we trotted over without half-trying. Tom Rourke is buried with a machete between Morales, Guatemala, and Puerto Caballo. That trip was his Waterloo. Costa Rica beach came near being ours.

Could you blame me for being strong for a guy that came clean that way after me having been double-crossed by a dozen others? John Roach quit me in Edmonton, Canada, one dreary Fall night after we blew in from Red Deer on a rattler. He got afraid a yard-bull would pinch us in the yard. He was afraid of the hoosgow.

I sneaked after him when he slipped from the box car where we had crawled in to sleep and crept up through the yard to the ticket office. I peered through the window and saw him cash a fifty-dollar bill and buy a ticket to the States.

He'd been under cover with that cash all the time. He had shown good nerve but was afraid of a night in jail. That's why he didn't stick. Hal Devers quit me in Eagle Pass, Texas, when we came up out of Mexico on the I. M. Ry. and got a job in a shoe store. He told me he was of a good family and was afraid he would be a tramp if he did not quit the road. That was his weak spot. I'm thinking he would have made a better tramp than he did a shoe salesman. It depends on what a man wants to be. Look at old man Dowie! He made a million trying to be the second Messiah.

Red Hicks sent me out to batter the main

stem in East St. Louis while he ate a big steak with some money that had been sent him from home, in the dining-room in the passenger depot. I quit him and I'll bet it cost him part of that cash to get a new set of teeth after I got through with him.

"Lefty" Ward held out the last cigaret. I was dying for a draw. I knew he wouldn't do at all, so I quit him quick. Barnsy met up with a girl he liked and while he was struggling with the question whether he would or would not quit me and me thinking he wouldn't, I drifted off by myself. I guess they have quite a chunk of a boy named after me now. I sure would appreciate it if they had, for that Barnsy was a blowed-in-the-bottle pal.

Rodin was the survival of the fit from many buddies and pals. He had been with me longer than any and showed no signs of quitting. His ideals were about like mine, to follow the rainbow to the end and while en route to look for beauty in all things.

Crazy ideals? ——, men have had worse! Look at Will Hohenzollern, for instance. At any rate Rodin suited me. I was betting the works on him at every turn of the cards. That's how I felt about it. I was ready to go to the mat for him any time. I guess that's what made me begin feeling so bad a short time afterward.

Now if the truth be told there were some pretty hard birds in the towns along the canal. It's that way in all big construction jobs and Panama was no exception, maybe it was a little worse for it was a very large job. Good guys there were in plenty but there was a large sprinkling of ex-bad men, coyotes and crooks.

The colonel even chased away secret service men who had trailed bad actors down there, telling them he didn't give a whoopee what they had done just so they dug dirt. He was side-tracking passenger trains on the Panama Railroad to get dump trains over. He was making the dirt fly—beating the world's record in price and quantity.

He even told a bunch of officers' wives that they could go back on the first boat when they kicked about the rough-necks sitting out on the porches in their pajamas; said he could dig the canal without women but needed the men and wanted them to rest when their work was done.

He even let a dirt-train conductor change back to his right name when he wanted to get married. The conductor came out one day signing orders under one name and next day signed another. He was a good conductor and the colonel didn't have time to care what he had done that he flew a bum flag.

THE best were rough men and the worst were darned rough. Gum-shoe men stood in the saloons in Colon and kept tab and men poured fiery rum down them like water, but not a word was said if they were on the job and digging dirt next day. Men were going to pieces from the "hot sun and tin roofs"—according to a zone expression—and the colonel's assistant was shattered by the strain of the slides in the cut.

Still the old man sat in the saddle and yelled for the dirt to come out of the canal. And it came. Bucyrus shovels roared, Star drills and channelers snorted, dirt trains came up out of the cut at Dump Six Cabin in a steady stream.

And the men who stood this strain were no weaklings. A man, to stand his ground, in the quarters, at the post-office, in the eating-houses, and even on his job had to rear up and roar to keep from getting run over. Men fought fist fights down in Gatun Locks, on the Spillway, and down on the Rock Storage Dump below New Gatun.

Sometimes they used such playful weapons as sledge-hammers and crowbars and then there was a hospital call and a trip to Culebra penitentiary. Sometimes a man smiled at another man's wife in one of the commissaries, for white women were awful scarce, and then a man was packed away on a stretcher with a bullet-hole drilled through his chest.

Actual violations of the law were taken care of by the Zone police and the courts, it was the past that did not matter. Every man had his chance to make good on the canal; all that had happened previously was forgotten.

I AM a little oversize and men do not pick on me when they want to fight as a general rule. Also I've had my part of training with the gloves and don't mind getting beat up a trifle in a fisticuff. When it comes to throwing rocks and making a rough-house with clubs, I'm a little shy on that but I will take a chance.

I guess I'll have to admit that I made a pretty fast run from a knife once in Mazatlan until I got a piece of two-by-four to come back with. I'm not very strong on that knife stuff. Taken all in all, without blowing my own horn, I guess I'll pass if I have to fight.

I don't like to but I'd rather fight a man than have him think I'm afraid of him. The worst thing I can conceive of is to be called a coward and I'd rather get beat up than have any doubt on the subject.

I took it as a matter of course that Rodin felt the same way about it I did. That's how I didn't come to take note at first. Not only had he shown nerve on the beach-trail but before that he had showed pure grit at every thing we had tackled.

I'd seen him laugh when we got caught in a squall off the breakwater in a dugout at Salina Cruz when we were tossing like a feather on the high waves and being swept out to sea. Our chances were about a thousand to one of ever

making the Mexican coast but he hadn't turned a hair.

He swam a muddy bayou in Honduras teeming with sharks and alligators to fetch a dugout from the other side while I was trying to figure out a sane way. I'd seen him under fire when we fought with old man Lee Christmas in Guatemala and he seemed to enjoy it. He made a balloon ascension in Salvador with the aeronaut and came down in the parachute just for the fun of it.

He was afraid of no horse that ever bucked under a saddle. He was not shy around women —a common fault of brave men—but was very partial to them. I was just about to decide that he was the exception to the rule that every man harbors a fear of some sort when this thing began to crop up in Gatun.

The first time I noticed it particularly was in House No. 7 one night just before supper. The quarters were noisy with hungry men washing. Rodin had been craning a shovel and he was black with the grease and dust.

I had had my locomotive crane in the shop and had sneaked up before quitting time to wash up and take a short rest. The machinists were doing the work on the crane and it was merely a rule that I had to stick around the shop. I suppose the Government made this rule so that we would not strip a cog just for the sake of a lay-over day.

I was waiting for Rodin to wash up for we usually ate at the same table and had some extras cached with the waiter. He started for a vacant sink and was almost to it when a big dinky skinner from the Spillway marched up ahead of him, elbowed him aside and began to wash.

I expected to see Rodin reach up and get him by the collar and yank him back out of it. I'd have done just that and as I brought his head back past me I would have hit him a crack on the burr of the ear that would have taken both the idea of washing and eating out of his head.

Flood was washing at the next sink and I saw him pause and look back out of the corner of his eye. He finished hastily and told Rodin to go ahead and wash if he was in a hurry and stood behind him when he started. He remarked to me in a loud aside that "the red-muzzled guy there at the second sink appeared to be a durned hog, and would get clawed some of these days."

The name seemed to fit. Several roughnecks laughed. He was known after that all along the canal as the Red-Muzzled Guy. He appeared not to notice Flood's words but finished washing with an extra spluttering of water, dried his face hastily and hurried by.

I was itching for him even to look at me as he passed. I'd have knocked him for a goal if he had. I was boiling for he had hurt me worse than he had appeared to hurt Rodin. I wouldn't have felt half so bad if Flood had not been present. Flood had a way of kidding a man as he mauled him to a jelly.

He spoke almost as if in benediction when he was at his worst. I had heard him speak in soft, pleading tones to "Big Jumbo," the blacksmith, the Sunday afternoon they fought under the eating-house.

"Brother, you should not have done thataway," and "Sir, I'll beat you up as if the hogs have had you," or "Friend, you hit below the belt that time, take that."

That was usually a haymaker that almost sunk the tattooed ship on Jumbo's chest. But Jumbo was a man. He got up with his face beat to a pulp, spat out a mouthful of teeth, grinned and shook hands.

The Zone policeman had stood beside his horse on the edge of the crowd just out from underneath the eating-house gazing down across Gatun Lake. He himself had once walked five miles to the Zone borders to fight a man who accused him of using his job to run over him.

They came back laughing and talking and no man ever did hear how it came out. Those who noted closely said the policeman showed the fewer marks but they both had many.

And it wasn't the case of fighting and getting licked. A man can only do his best. No one can lick everybody unless he is a champ and makes that his business. No blame can rest on a man who has fought all he can fight and then goes down and out. Men had a way of saying that they whipped such a man, but they got fought with.

Many times the victor would not have relished another fight with a man who had almost put the Kobie on him. I wouldn't have said a word to have seen Rodin beat up by the Red-Muzzled Guy if it had been open and aboveboard, if he had dug in when his rights were imposed upon. But he didn't try. That is what hurt and it hurt deep. He was much more than a brother. He was my partner of a thousand hardships who had always rung true.

He did not mention the incident on our way over to the eating-house and I kept my head half-turned away so he could not see my face. To tell the truth I was so badly cut up about it I had a lump in my throat and felt like I wanted to cry. He talked very low and seemed very much subdued.

As we passed a bunch of steam-shovel runners I gave old Tom Logan a whack on the back in fun that made him turn and glare at me. Tom was poison and had his bluff in on a dozen down in the cut. He stuck out his tongue, made a playful swipe at me with his huge fist and laughed deep in his throat.

I did that just to show Rodin that there wasn't any subdued feeling in me at the time. He grinned his characteristic twisted smile and together we entered the eating-house.

It just happened that the Red-Muzzled Guy

had picked our table and sat at Rodin's regular place. No man had a lease on any of the places at the tables but as a rule we had our own place and patronized the same Jamaican waiter. Why this was so was because every man tipped the waiter by the month and a man could get better food from his own waiter than from a strange one.

Uncle Sam played no favorites in his eating-houses but those black boys sure knew a tipper and lugged out the grub. The Red-Muzzled Guy really belonged at another negro's station just back of us for I had seen him eating back there many times. His table was full and he had a right to grab the first vacant place.

I saw him in Rodin's place just as the door-boy tore off our coupons and I saw Rodin look and give a quick start. Then without pretending to have noticed he wandered off to the other side of the room. The Jamaican recognized us as another waiter's regulars and he proceeded accordingly, bringing out the poorest grub he could find.

IT WOULD not have bothered me if he had brought none. I had no appetite. My throat felt swollen when I tried to swallow my food. I talked abstractedly to Rodin without knowing half of what I said. I felt sore at Rodin and I felt sorry for him all at the same time.

A man with his nerve to let a red-muzzled dinky skinner get away with a bluff! And then I began to think along the lines of my old theory that a fear of something lurks in every man. This must be the answer. Yet I glanced across the table at his half-turned head.

He had the head of a fighter. Not only were the bumps of combativeness normally developed, they were abnormal. His head was heavy behind the ears and I had never seen a man with that kind of a head who would not fight. Yet he had not fought and the cause had been just. Truly this seemed an exception to the rule. Phrenology was a pseudo-science at the best, I decided.

And then I began to think of this red-mustached bully. A fire burned deep within me. It seemed that in the past I could remember subconsciously having seen him look sneeringly from where he sat over at our table at us. Looking back at the incident in the wash-room it appeared he had done it with some intention or other. In the future I would keep an eye on him. Maybe he had run a bluff on Rodin before. Perhaps he would try that game on me. I hoped so. I didn't want people to think he could get away with stuff like that on me. I would rather have him put me in Ancon than have that happen.

When I saw him get up from the table I got pp and hastened toward the door. As we uassed out I jostled him heavily against the jamb. He stepped back and allowed me to go ahead without a word. He stopped in the door and Rodin had to wedge by him. His red mustache lifted in a snarl and he muttered something which I did not hear.

Rodin's face grew white but he did not answer. He vouchsafed no explanation and I asked for none as we walked over to House No. 7. The trail-hitters were gathered at the end of the porch and they greeted us with extra effusion.

Flood had told them of the incident and they were pretending not to know. Any one of them would have dug up his last cent for the others, even though he knew he would never get it back. One man of that party did afterward pay eight thousand dollars to get another out of serious trouble caused by an accident, and the man he helped died within a month.

I knew that the Red-Muzzled Guy was in bad with that crowd. I knew that each one would watch for a real or fancied grievance to pick trouble with him, just as I intended to do. The conversation naturally drifted to fighting.

Flood was the windiest man in the town, but he was that rare exception, a windy fighter. He would tell beforehand just "how, when and where," as he phrased it, he would put the Kobie on some man he did not like and he never failed to do it.

In a hotel in Colon which had very thin partitions he had heard one man telling another that he, Flood, was a crook and a deadbeat. Flood was neither a crook nor a deadbeat. On the contrary he was so open-handed he gave away all he made. He figured out that a fight in Colon would cost him fifty dollars and a night in the spiggoty jail. In the Zone he could do it for twenty-five and a reprimand from the colonel.

He had come back to Gatun, told every man in town what he was going to do, saw the man who had made the remarks coming up the street past House 65, went out and took him by the collar, told him just how he was going to thrash him, and then, in this particular case, did not strike a blow when the man refused to defend himself. This was the only time and men gave him credit for his generosity.

He easily knew more of rough fighting than any man I ever saw. Without looking at Rodin he began talking of defensive fighting. He showed by exactly thirteen demonstrations how to fight to keep from getting licked if unable to thrash the other man. He fell on his back, made imaginary swipes, grunted, roared and strained until the men were convulsed with laughter. And if they wanted to fight dirty just watch him!

He went through a demonstration of biting, choking and mayhem that made the tears roll down our faces. Rodin sat very quiet and had little to say. The truth is that Flood was a big

brute of a man who needed little of the science he had; and such science as it was, it was of his own manufacture and gained in many battles. Rodin moseyed off to bed early. Flood looked at me closely.

"I sure would have hated to see that Red-Muzzled Guy's face if Rodin had put for him," I told him in an undertone. "He's one of these quiet kind that hates to start."

Flood nodded gravely but I could see he doubted my words. We all fell to talking of other things and the incident was laid aside. Finally we lumbered off to bed for tomorrow a hard day's work awaited all of us. Men worry in the tropics more than in temperate climes.

Ultra-violet rays of the sun is the explanation that science gives us for this. Yet on this night my worry was deeper than the slight neurotic tendency of the torrid zone. I had had a pal go bad. He had showed fear, the worst failure a pal can show. I rolled and twisted far into the morning trying to solve it. It was beyond me how it could be so. Even the fear of death can be conquered in one quick instant. How could a nervy man like Eugene Rodin fear the mauling of another man's fists?

And in the days that followed I tried to shield him from further showings of this streak. It was something that must not be made known but concealed. I overstepped other men's rights and was fast approaching a time when some fighting canal-digger would hammer the daylights out of me.

I had grown into a sort of bully from a good-natured lumbering ox. Men glanced at me from under tense eyelids that advertised hate. A bully is a man to be despised and I hated the rôle I was playing. But I had to do it to try to lift the stigma that might rest upon us both. Men would know that at least part of the combination contained fighting blood.

Rodin grew more mild-tempered and many times I caught him studying me. I was afraid to be known as a coward. My bullying was a direct result of my fear. This I knew in my heart of hearts. Rodin's failure I had charged to his fear of physical combat. The thing was becoming unbearable. I began talking Rio and B. A. and the West Coast. I wanted to get Rodin back on the trail where he would loom up big again.

He was cutting a sorry figure in my eyes and I had lost a great deal of my respect for him. And I noticed when the bunch of rainbow chasers talked to us they always directed their remarks to me. This hurt too, for I knew he had lost caste with them. Finally he got so he did not join the circle when they gathered but sat far at the other end of the long porch reading a book or staring off across the lake.

HE WAS sitting thus one evening just at sundown when the Red-Muzzled Guy entered the screen-door in the middle of the porch, between where we sat and where Rodin sat, glanced quickly at us and walked over to Rodin. We ceased talking and Flood half-rose from his chair muttering something about "a red-muzzled funeral at Monkey Hill."

I laid my hand on his arm and pushed him down in his chair. I had decided then and there that the red-muzzled man was my meat if he did anything to Rodin he should not do. I measured the bulging shoulders of the dinky skinner as he stopped in front of Rodin. His bullet head was thrust forward and he was speaking in a low snarl.

Rodin's finger marked the place in the book where he had left off reading. We could not hear what the Red-Muzzled Guy said to him but we could catch every word that Rodin said in return, for his face was toward us and his voice though low was cold and tense as steel. We craned our necks and listened so closly that we scarcely breathed.

"You killed him. I sat right there in the Cotton Belt depot waiting-room with the lights out and saw you do it. I heard the two of you quarreling and I saw you begin to fight. I saw every lick that was struck. As you locked with him I saw you had a barlow knife open in your hand.

"You stabbed him with it just at the base of the brain and as he fell the knife clattered to the ground. You saw me run out and I ran after you beyond the light cast by the electric arc-light and I lost track of you in the yard. It was my report that put them to searching for you. They tracked you to Navasota and down to Eagle Pass and couldn't find where you went in Mexico."

Rodin spoke as if in an ordinary conversation but his throat tightened and the words began to click from his smiling lips like the purr of a rattler. His face grew white as cotton and the veins on his forehead showed like blue-pencil marks. His eyes, steady as knife points, glowed like those of a tiger.

He rose to his feet and laid the open book on the porch railing against the screen. The Red-Muzzled Guy took a couple of steps forward, walking on the balls of his feet and snarling deep in his throat.

Rodin's voice quivered to an angry pitch.

"You killed him, you murdering cur—killed him like a dog with a thrust in the back. You've tried to bully me to keep me quiet for you saw my face as I ran out of the depot and you knew what I knew. There's a ranger heading this way for you now. I cabled for one the day I saw you——"

The Red-Muzzled Guy made a quick snatch at his bosom and fired pointblank into Rodin's

face. Rodin's move was quicker than the eye as he ducked the flash of the gun and struck the revolver to the floor. Then there was a sharp crack as he smashed the big man in the face and straightened him up. Flood sprang three feet in the air and let out a roar like a wild bull.

"Go to him, you rainbow-chasing trail-hitter! Claw him and skin him from his forehead to his waistband. Chaw him up and spit him out! Tear him up like the hogs have had him! Put a head on him he can eat green briers with! Stand back, fellers, and let 'em fight! I'm betting the works on that little guy. Thirteen ways of whipping him and try 'em all! Whoopee!"

Flood was leaping into the air and performing peculiar gyrations as we gathered around the two men. Rodin was about half the size of the other man but he had a huge fist and his wiry frame was hard as nails.

He was ducking and dodging blows that would have killed him had they landed square and glancing licks had started the blood flowing from his nose and face. But he landed full and square on the other man's face quick and regular as the stroke of a pile-driver. Hell's tide had surged into his face. I noticed that the whites of his eyes were blood-red like those of an angry ape and a low growl came through his snarling lips.

Men had run from the bathrooms and living-rooms and gathered from the street until the porch was packed with people. The thick heavy lips of the Red-Muzzled Guy were beaten to purple bladders that oozed blood. His cruel little eyes were snapping in rage.

He struck a terrific crash at Rodin's face, missed and turned half-way around. Then his hand shot into his pocket and he drew forth an open barlow knife. As he raised it Flood started to spring for him but Rodin was quicker. He jumped through the air like a cat and wrapped himself around the Red-Muzzled Guy's neck. The knife fell to the floor and the big man began to scream as Rodin started tearing at his throat with his teeth. They went down together on the floor. The Red-Muzzled Guy was roaring and crying for mercy. Rodin gnashed his teeth as he tore the life from the big man's frame.

Flood, who could judge another man's resistance to an ounce, looked seriously at me. I stepped in and laid my hand on Rodin's shoulder. He snapped at my hand and his teeth clicked as they missed. He grasped the Red-Muzzled Guy's head in his hands and rising to his knees began twisting it around so as to break the neck.

He was fighting to kill. I snatched him by the wrists and strove to break his hold. He sank his teeth into my neck and put me to shouting for help to tear him loose. Flood, Hart, and James sailed in and between all of us we managed to drag him off and pry him loose from the Red-Muzzled Guy and from me.

He was blind-mad, a fighting demon. Some deep barbaric strain had been touched, a strange atavism of man's prehistoric ancestry had risen within him. At last, puffing and blowing we subdued him and sat upon him.

THE Red-Muzzled Guy lay quiet. Then his eyes began to blink and he began to gasp. He rolled over and sat up. A quiet little gray-haired man with steady gray eyes who stood in the group walked up to him and knelt beside him. There was a sharp snap as he adjusted a pair of handcuffs to the Red-Muzzled Guy's wrists. The gray-haired man grinned into the surprized faces of the by-standers.

"I've been waiting two weeks for this bird to get out of the zone and into Panama or Colon so I could pinch him. I took the Ranger's oath that I would bring him back when we heard he was down here. Now he's going back with me, colonel or no colonel. It isn't the first time a Ranger has kidnaped a man and I guess it won't be the last."

Flood walked out behind the two of them and as they passed beyond earshot I heard him telling the Ranger of a negro in New Gatun who owned a cart in which they could ride the six miles to Colon. The Zone mounted policeman, riding toward House No. 7, nodded to the Ranger as they met and the Ranger called him by his first name.

If he noticed that the Ranger had his arm locked into that of a handcuffed man he appeared not to do so. Perhaps he was an ex-Ranger himself. He blustered up into the porch, told all of us we must not disturb the peace, walked down the steps chuckling to himself, mounted his pony and rode away about his business.

Rodin finally quieted down and we let him up. His face was very sad and he hung his head as if with shame. I led him toward the wash-room to help him wash the blood of battle from him. When he had finished he laid his hand on my shoulder.

"Sandy, if ever you are around when I get into a fight, watch me. When I get started I don't know when to stop. I've come near killing a few men. Everything gets red and I only have one thought—to kill and kill quickly. I've seen all along you were afraid I would murder that Red-Muzzled Guy and I sure have been patient with him but he did crowd me; you'll have to admit that yourself."

That was the one weak spot in Eugene Rodin —afraid he would kill an adversary in a fight— and a better weakness no man could have. Many is the time after that I got him away from some one I feared he would tie into in a fight.

TELL IT TO THE MARINES

by Roy P Churchill

Author of "Esprit de Corps," "Mixing In," etc.

MAYBE Mickey Dolan didn't mean to start anything when he opened up on Gabe Sykes from the corner of the gun-deck where the marines had their mess-table, and maybe he did, but a good seed in a handful of dirt on a bare rock sometimes grows into a tree, and the spark at the end of a long fuse gets down to business in time just the same as a short one. It was rocks and shoals to say the least, and every gob and leatherneck in hearing lost interest in his chow to take notice.

"Morning, Gabe," said Mickey. "I thought you fellows expected company for breakfast."

The boatswain's mate eased a slice of fried potato in between a pair of swollen lips and made no reply except to glint his unswollen eye at the marine sergeant.

"Morning, I said, not mourning," continued Mickey calmly. "What slipped, old-timer? The bunch of you look as if you 'd run foul of a Treat 'Em Rough society, and been initiated into the order. Who was it said one bean-fed gob was good for six spiggoties?"

"Who says he ain't?" growled Sykes. "We're all back, able to wriggle a fork, nobody even down for a chance at a count for being overtime."

"Yes, you are all back," said Mickey Dolan, grinning tactlessly. "All back, and I see you've been decorated most as liberal as they passed out D. S. C.'s a while back. But where's this old shipmate that you love so much, and that the gang aimed to take out of jail? You're bearing all the marks of the conflict, but none of the spoils of war."

"Somebody tipped 'em off," spoke Fred Gillum, and Gabe Sykes turned on him fiercely.

"That'll do," said he. "What's this bunch of saluting leather-necks got to do with a gob's affairs, except to butt in and have him to the mast for taking a drink of water out of hours or some such awful crime? They couldn't trifle with little things like scrapping for a shipmate. Not in a thousand years."

"Tell it to the marines," taunted Tom Boxley, glaring from under a knob on his forehead which looked like a horn. "Some motto, some hot advertising!"

"Ship ahoy," said Mickey Dolan, his tone showing mild surprize. "Do I get you—sort of challenge? You fellows can't do it, and neither can anybody. There's a hundred and fifty husky flatfeet aboard this wagon and they pass the buck up to us. This is the coast of Mexico, and the good ship *Pegasus*. Over in Guadalupe City, half a mile away, Tony Rierson, good American gob, sailor, citizen and shipmate, is in jail.

"These hundred and fifty tarry sea-dogs try to pry him out, all kinds of ways, from force to fudge. The skipper uses diplomacy according to Hoyle and strict orders. The Consul figures to speed up a hearing in the courts. They all fall down, fall back, strategically retreat, like Gabe and his bunch last night. What do you say, marine guard? Shall we go get him? There's four off duty at a time. Eight of us altogether. That ought to be plenty."

"Tell it to the marines!" repeated Fred Gillum, and Gabe Sykes laughed though the sarcasm through bruised lips was painful.

Mickey Dolan left it at that, finished his breakfast and went on deck. He and the marine guard of the *Pegasus* had not had an easy time aboard the ship. To them fell the guard duty about the decks and the honors at the gangway, sentry duty at the door of the captain's office, and the guarding of prisoners.

Politicians, the sailors called them, and officers' pets and regulation valets, with the old rivalry between two branches of the same service, where one has to play policeman to the

other, until Mickey Dolan and his squad had grown close together and clannish, anxious to show the sailors of the *Pegasus* that the marines were as good as any outfit and a little better.

Nevertheless, as Mickey sat on a sea chest on the top side, with his short legs stretched comfortably before him, and a well browned clay pipe afire with ship's tobacco, going as a pipe should, he reflected that perhaps he had given his squad a large order and had kidded himself into the middle of a knotty problem, if, as he had boasted, Tony Rierson was to come free by the efforts of the marine guard.

Tony was a good guy and all that, but what right had he to run foul of the spiggoty police and get himself in jail? True, there was old Carlos Molino's daughter Maria, and Tony was one of the California Riersons, a fourth Spanish himself, olive-skinned, warm-blooded, speaking the language and savvying the customs; but blame the bonehead, weren't there enough good lookers in his own country?

"Tony should have known better," complained Mickey, when Corporal Touchy Pike joined him.

The long-legged corporal shot smoke from both nostrils and took issue with spirit.

"Why blame Tony?" he accused. "He's just comfortably in jail. You've let the guard in for getting him out."

"So I have," said Mickey. "So I have. And what made you ship in the marines?"

"Looking for peace and quiet," said Touchy Pike, scowling. "When do we start?"

"That's better," said Mickey. You can sit down. Let's you and me go ashore and practise up some on the spig language, architecture, and present state of cussedness."

GUADALUPE CITY lay asleep in the sun as the liberty party climbed from the ship's launch to the rickety dock. In the shade of the weather-stained buildings lining the narrow dirt street the men made their way in little groups of two and three toward the plaza and the larger buildings facing it. Some few who had been more careful with their last pay-day climbed into pony-drawn carriages and went noisily away in clouds of dust.

Mickey Dolan and Touchy Pike took a carriage.

"To the jail," said Pike when they reached the plaza and the driver looked back at them expectantly.

"Not that way," said Mickey. "Make it snappy. Show 'em we're here for business only. Every one of these fellows knows he's good for a stand-in with the high-ups if he can deliver any underground American news."

He turned to the driver.

"You savvy *carcel?*" And at the driver's affirmative, though somewhat puzzled nod, waved his hand and added an imperative "*Pronto.*"

The driver knew enough about marines to associate their uniforms with formal calls from the captains of ships, and the rounding up of an occasional liberty-breaker ashore. Consequently he at once linked these two with duty and drew up at the jail with an important flourish of his pony steeds.

Climbing out, Mickey told the driver to wait, and the two walked briskly by a sentry who lounged on the sidewalk, came to a second who stood at the entrance to the building, brushed by him importantly, and demanded "*Commandante*" of another inside of a sort of office.

Mickey used the same tone of authority with which he gave a recruit the monkey drill, and presently while they waited with outward confidence and some inward tremblings as to whether right off the bat they were to share this bare stone dwelling with Tony Rierson, there appeared a carefully groomed young person in red and gold uniform who demanded their business while he corrected the angle of a small but spiked mustache.

Mickey Dolan was very polite. He found that the captain could speak passable English, and did himself proud, matching a few bows and flattering remarks. Touchy Pike fanned himself with his hat and wondered if it would come to kissing; but Mickey stopped in time, unrolled a package and took from it half a dozen packs of the best cigarets that the canteen on the *Pegasus* carried.

"A gift to our shipmate," he explained, "who must find the days lonely even in this delightful place. Also, if the good *capitan* will honor us, some for him as well."

The gold-striped one smiled affably. The *Americanos* were indeed funny. To think that good cigarets would be wasted on a prisoner. But Mickey seemed entirely without wit. He went even further. Pay-day was about due on the ship, and if the prisoner was to draw his money, he must sign the receipt the friends had brought.

"And to him here you will bring the money?" inquired the officer.

"*Si, señor,*" said Mickey complacently. "There are little things he may wish to buy for himself, trifling comforts—and without money one is embarrassed, even among friends."

The captain hastened to agree. Of a certainty the ways of *Americanos* were rich and foolish. He began again a careful finishing of the left spike so that his hand hid half his smile. He wondered how much in gold Rierson's check would be, and which of the many ways he knew would be best to get it.

"We'll have it cashed into hard money," Mickey Dolan was saying, "so he can get any little extra he needs. But we'll have to

see him long enough to sign and witness the pay-check."

The officer touched a bell on the wall near him. There came a faint tinkle outside, and soon a soldier appeared wearing a girdle of heavy keys.

"The *Americano* from the tower," he ordered, as if the key-bearer were to blame for living, and a few minutes later Rierson came in guarded by two soldiers.

"Hello, fellows!" he said, brightening when he saw the familiar faces and uniforms, and a wild hope springing into his mind. "What is it? Orders to take me back to the ship?"

"Not yet, old man," said Mickey Dolan. "Just a little friendly call. Tomorrow is pay-day, and we thought you might want to draw some money. Here's the slip to sign. We'll bring it out to you."

Tony Rierson looked at the two marines steadily. What was underneath this play? It sounded as if they were trying to kid him, and if they were, he'd get even with this bunch of jokers if it took him a lifetime.

His disappointment that they had no news of release, and suspicion of a rival outfit, flared into quick anger. Hot words rushed to his lips and cooled unuttered, for Mickey Dolan had thrust a regular printed blank form into his hand, and he saw something.

"Could we borrow a pen, *señor capitan?*" asked Mickey, reaching across the desk toward one.

"Have a cigaret, Tony. How much money?"

Tony thought a moment, looking at the slip.

"Make it fifty dollars," he said. "Don't care if I do have a cigaret. Good old ship's brand."

Then with a quick flourish he signed his name to the paper, obscuring a part of it with his left hand as he held it on the table.

Mickey Dolan waved the slip in the air to dry the signature, then folded it and thrust it back into his pocket. Tony Rierson lighted a cigaret and forgot to give the package back.

The spiked mustached, tightly uniformed young captain had really meant to be magnanimous and let the prisoner have one of the six packages of cigarets, but now since he had pocketed one already, what was the use? And tomorrow these fools would bring fifty dollars gold, which he knew exactly how to spend. He was well content.

Content, too, was Mickey Dolan as he and Touchy Pike started toward the plaza and a cold drink. And hopeful was Tony Rierson, for the sudden check to his rising wrath had been the discovery of a series of unobtrustive dots and dashes on the requisition paper, spelling the words—

"Don't smoke these cigarets, read 'em."

Consequently, when Tony Rierson was safe in the seclusion of his cell at the top of the tower, he hurriedly pinched out the fire of the half burned cigaret and broke it open. There was nothing in it, and nothing as well in the next whole one that he slit with his finger nail and examined carefully. But the bottom row was different, and the first one he tried yielded a wisp of cigaret-paper rolled fine and drawn through the tobacco.

This was covered with Navy code dots and dashes, and when he had read and reread the message, Tony made it serve a double purpose by rerolling the loose tobacco into a passable cigaret borrowing a match from the sentry who paced the circular balcony outside, and lighting up.

THE two marines stopped at the café near the plaza, and partook of the mild joy of a cold brown bottle labeled one and one-half per cent. Touchy Pike, who had begun the adventure bouyantly, confident of Mickey Dolan's scheming, was now silent and skeptical. It seemed to Touchy that Mickey was doing too much fooling with the sights for real good shooting.

Direct action appealed to Touchy, like rapping the spiked mustached captain over the head with some of the office furniture when Tony Rierson was with them, and then making a running jump through the crowd of spiggoty guards for the waiting carriage, trusting to good luck, poor shooting, and long legs for a get-away.

He didn't have to mention his disappointment, for Mickey read his mind as a marine has to in order to keep his rating badge safe on his sleeve.

"We've got to use brains and maneuvering," said Mickey, helping to fill Touchy's glass from his own bottle. "I hate to do it, it's like gambling with the cards nicked. But look what happened to Gabe Sykes and his bunch of buckos. A crowd of them is in here, trying to fool themselves with watered stock, and noisier than a litter of bull-pups.

"Along comes Tony Rierson on the way to one of his mock hearings, and they figure they'll go right out and take their old shipmate away from this bunch of spig guards in broad daylight. They get all warmed up to the idea, and try to pull it off, even after some of these spig bartenders had slipped in the back way and spilled an earful. You know what happened. They're lucky, and deserve credit for not all being in jail, but they never had a chance to get Tony."

Touchy Pike nodded gloomily.

"Look where they got him now," he said. "Up high with a view all around, walls two feet thick and iron bars to the windows. Then there's a sentry walking around on the little balcony just outside. I looked her over today after we'd found out he was in there, and where

the tower comes up from the corner of the wall there's not a hand-hold a monkey could climb on. Forty feet straight, if it's an inch, and this spiggoty up there with a rifle.

"They've been telling around Guadalupe about a general or something that got in wrong and was put in this same place. All his friends tried to get him out—underhand and straight rushing. But he waited up there fifteen years and died of old age."

Mickey grinned and emptied his glass.

"Old Gibraltar has been took," he said. "Having them think he's all safe makes it just that much easier for us."

"We've got so many cogs that if one slips the whole works will go overboard like an anchor chain," said Touchy, somewhat heartened by Mickey's assurance, "but I'm with you. It would be something to hand down to our wide-collared bunch of boasting gobs if half a dozen doggoned marines took a prisoner out of Guadalupe tower."

"You're saying something," said Mickey. "Only of course we've got to make it plain that Rierson gets out mostly by his own efforts and what outside help he gets has to be unknown to the spigs. Far as that goes, the old *Pegasus* could fire a couple of salvos into this jail, send a landing party ashore with fixings on and take Tony out like a white man. That's the way I'd do it, if I had my say so, and a couple of doses would make these spigs behave all over. But the job has to be done the other way, under cover and no comebacks."

MICKEY DOLAN and Touchy Pike slept aboard that night, and Mickey bought some more things at the canteen and made a couple of trips to the sick-bay, where he consulted learnedly with his friend Pills, the hospital steward. The next day at the same hour and with the same pony rig he and Touchy Pike appeared at the Guadalupe jail. Pico Andera, the captain in charge, had on a new resplendent uniform, and the spikes of his mustache were needle-like.

Yet Señor Andera had a disappointment. It seemed that Tony Rierson had too hurriedly signed the pay-requisition, and that the paymaster's yeoman was fussy about details. It must be done over with the full name spelled out, instead of with the initials.

Rierson appeared, happy at first, and then scowling.

"It's bad enough to be shut up in jail," he grumbled, "without having an ink-slinging typewriter hound interfere with a man's few comforts. I had my teeth set for a little candy, and a couple of tins of peanut butter. It would go mighty good with this fancy Mexican chow I'm getting."

"We'll bring it out," soothed Mickey. "Could have today if we'd remembered."

It seemed that Touchy Pike had been more thoughtful. Hurriedly with the nervousness of one friend trying to serve another in need he produced a small box and offered candy mints around. Tony took a liberal handful and thrust them into his pocket, and put another in his mouth. Andera took one daintily.

Not to be outdone, Mickey produced cigarets, graciously offering the box to Andera first and then to Rierson. Andera's keen black eyes were watching. He remembered that the day before the prisoner had accepted a full box. But Mickey Dolan was too wise to play the same game twice in the same way. Withdrawing the cigarets from Rierson's eager fingers, he scooped up a few from the lower layer, handed them over, and put the box in his pocket. Rierson glared at him.

"What else can we bring you besides the money and candy?" asked Mickey calmly.

"That'll be all, I guess," said Rierson. "I'll buy my own smokes after this."

A few minutes later he was being escorted back to the tower while Pico Andera bowed the two marines out.

Touchy Pike had left the open box of mints on the table, and Andera helped himself, smiling. Doubtless they had left the box for Rierson, but American candy was very good indeed.

Up in the cell that night just after the watch had been changed after supper, Tony Rierson stood at the small iron-barred window and very slowly and deliberately smoked a cigaret, timing the beat of the sentry's footsteps so that when he passed in his circle of the narrow balcony Tony could blow out a cloud of smoke and catch the other's nostrils.

It was a black night. The air heavy and motionless and moist. Rierson counted the steps around and around the thick wall. He waited until the monotony of the circle began to wear on the sentry. Then cautiously he offered the man a cigaret. There was no answer. Punishment was severe in Guadalupe, and a certain adobe wall was well flayed with bullets from the firing squad. Still, it was a good hour until relief would come, and the night was lonely. If the glow of a cigaret were seen, it could be laid to the prisoner.

At the third turn after the offer the sentry took a cigaret. While it was smoked, Tony Rierson did a few simple things in the darkness, according to the instructions already received, part of which in dots and dashes on cigaret papers now burned between the sentry's lips.

"I have candy," he said in Spanish after a time, and with slight reluctance a brown hand took the offering from the stone sill of the window. Indeed the American candy was satisfying, for the hand felt along the window-ledge for more, hearing from within the reassuring

crunch of Tony Rierson's teeth on duplicates of the same.

Very soon the footsteps outside grew jerky and staggering, and when they stopped, Tony tied the tiny vial which had come to him inside a cigaret, to a linen thread which had spoiled another smoke, and standing on a chair with his hand and arm out the window, tossed it over the balcony. A few drops from the vial had gone on the last offering of candy.

He waited until a slight tug came, and hauled in first a sail twine, then a length of white line, and following that, a new piece of one and one-half inch manila rope which would bear the weight of several men.

Rierson knotted it securely around a couple of window bars, and a moment later when he had signalled with a jerk that it was fast, he felt it grow taut with the weight of a climber. Then peering out into the darkness, ears strained for the sound of an alarm, feeling the jerking strain on the rope, he waited tensely until a form appeared out of the blackness, hatless and shoeless.

"All right, Tony?" came a questioning whisper through the bars, and Rierson hastened to answer. It was Mickey Dolan.

"Wait until I get the spig's rifle," said Mickey "Between us we ought to pry one of the bars loose before a relief comes."

"I've got the mortar picked from around one of them," said Rierson. "Thought it might help a little, whatever you had in mind."

"Good work," approved Mickey, and was gone to feel along the balcony for the drugged sentry. He was back in a moment with the old-fashioned heavy barreled weapon.

"If we make a noise and she pops," directed the rescuer, "be ready to sing out whatever the guard says for 'All's well.' How much time before the watch is relieved?"

"Nearly an hour, as far as I can figure," said Rierson, and Mickey thrust the bayonet of the rifle between the bars.

"If we've got that much time, see if you can loosen it up a little more before we try to pry it out. I'll put a few lashings on our sleeping friend, just in case Pills' dope plays out on him.

Rierson had done what he could with the bayonet by the time Mickey returned, and putting it aside the two pried together on the loosened bar, using the rifle as a lever. The first heave brought a gratifying crunch from the rusty iron.

"Next time I ship, it's going to be under a 'top-of-the-world' cap," promised Rierson.

"You're not out yet," whispered Mickey. "I heard something. Belay a minute."

Rierson heard too. He had grown accustomed to the sounds around his cell and knew that the muffled footsteps from below were made by someone climbing the tower stairs. Hardly breathing he wondered what the interruption meant, and if the attempt to free him had been discovered. Noiselessly Mickey Dolan slipped the rifle from the window-sill and crouched in the darkness at the far side of the tower.

There were two men, one carrying a lantern, and behind him Captain Pico Andera. Tony Rierson spoke sharply in Spanish, and Mickey Dolan took the cue instantly, repeating gruffly what would have been the sentry's challenge. He did it rather well, considering everything, and Pico Andera did not notice the deception since it was hardly possible that he should know the voices of all his men.

He answered sharply, and Mickey kept out of sight, thumping his gun against the wall occasionally to show his presence. He hoped Andera had not heard anything to make him suspicious, and that Touchy Pike would have sense enough to keep quiet down below.

As for the cause, if this fellow Andera and his helper started any investigating, they might get something more painful than drugged candy to remember the night by. He could crack at least one of them over the head with the gun barrel, and have a chance at the other; but he didn't just see how Tony Rierson was to get out, and the two of them make a getaway before the noise brought help.

Mickey did not like the plan, yet there might be a chance for the rough stuff to take hold where the brain work stopped, and two pulls on the rope would bring Touchy Pike to his aid. Two could work faster than one.

ANDERA and his man stood at the door to the cell, and Andera made speech with his prisoner through the small iron grill in the heavy oaken door. He seemed in excellent good humor, and chancing that the conversation would cloak Touchy Pike's climbing, Mickey gave the rope two pulls and crouched closer to listen to Andera. He understood enough Spanish to get nearly everything.

"A pleasant evening, *senor*," Andera was saying, the words hissing out with caressing softness. "A night for lovers and for dreams. I go to keep tryst with fair Maria, who is waiting in impatience until I come."

"To —— with that stuff," answered Rierson, using the good Americanism with angry force. "Maria would spit in your face if you got close enough to her."

Mickey Dolan thought he could hear Pico Andera's teeth snap but it might have been Touchy Pike shinnying up the rope. Andera's voice was not so pleasant as he answered.

"It is easy to make insult when one is safe, *senor*," he said. "But tonight I am indeed forgiving. I go to the wedding feast at the house of Carlos Molino. The priest waits,

and the rich gifts and the wine. The carriage, also to take me and my bride away."

"What are you wasting time here for, then?" said Rierson, trying hard to keep the choke from his voice and to hold in his anger, for Andera's words rang too true to suit him, and he knew that Maria had been bedeviled with every force possible to make her promise marriage to Andera.

"For more than one thing, *señor*," went on Andera. "First I wish greatly that you should know of my happiness and of Maria's. And also I have come for the little gold trinket, the ring which she gave you, and which you wear on your finger."

"So that's it," cut in Rierson. "Nothing doing, you yellow-bellied sneak. Get away from there and let a man sleep."

"We shall see," said Andera. "I much desire the ring. It will show the lovely Maria with how much faith the *Americano* holds her regard."

Mickey Dolan put a hand over Touchy Pike's mouth as his long-legged companion joined him on the balcony.

"Easy," he cautioned, with his lips at Touchy's ear. "I'll give the sign for the rough stuff."

Andera had given an order to the man with him, and Mickey heard the rattle of a key in the cell door. As the bolt was ready to be thrown Andera halted him, gave another order, and the man with the lantern called in Spanish. Mickey Dolan knew that he was summoning the drugged sentry. They meant to take the ring from Rierson's finger by force.

So far there had been no sign of anything out of the ordinary from the tower. The captain had gone to speak to the prisoner. Rierson's voice had often been loud and angry when he and the captain were together. The sentry had challenged and been answered.

Before Andera and his man had a chance to wonder at the slight delay, what appeared to be the sentry on beat came to them, saluted, and stood just outside the circle of light from the lantern. He wore the sentry's cap, and the faded khaki coat trimmed with red and green, but he was barefoot except for Navy issue socks, and his trousers were of a material entirely too heavy to be worn in a tropical climate. Mickey believed in strategy and in the element of surprize in attack, until it failed utterly.

Turning the key, large enough in itself to make a fair weapon, the door swung outward on squeaky hinges and Mickey Dolan and the soldier stepped inside, followed closely by Andera.

Tony Rierson was ready to believe that what Andera said of Maria and of the wedding might be true. There was a certain quality of exultant triumph in his tone which had not been there in previous interviews. Also, Andera was dressed in his new uniform, resplendent with gold lace, and bright trimmings. A desperate fear struck Tony that the story was true, after all. He resolved that nothing short of death would make him give up the ring.

On Andera's coming, Rierson had hidden the bayonet in his bunk. He wondered what had become of Mickey, and reasoned that fearing discovery, he must have gone down the rope and gotten away. It had been taut and was now slack. He hauled it in while Andera waited for his other man, and while the door was being unlocked. He might find use for it later.

What he saw now was a big raw-boned soldier carrying a lantern, and a shorter, bow-legged, long armed one whose jacket sleeves were too short for him, advancing across the stone floor of the cell toward him. Pico Andera stood behind them, an automatic ready to save his own skin from hurt, if need be, but confident that his two soldiers would make its use unnecessary.

Rierson backed away for a step as if to get to the circular wall, stopped suddenly and kicked the lantern from the soldier's hand, making a dive in the almost instant darkness for his bunk, and the hidden bayonet. The sight of Andera's sneering face had set Tony on fire with rage, Andera had told him the truth, and he preferred to die rather than live and see Maria Molino married to his rival.

But a pair of long arms caught him close around the shoulders, and a face prickly with rough, day-old bristles ground against his. He tried to shake loose, but the bigger soldier had him now, further down the hips, pulling him down.

"It's me, Mickey Dolan," came words in his ear. "Give up. Take it easy. Save your strength." And at a repetition of the essentials the meaning got through to his consciousness.

"That'll do, Andera," Tony cried. "Take the ring. You're lying, anyhow."

Andera gave an order, and the big soldier let go and straightened up, holding one of Tony Rierson's arms with both hands, and instructing Mickey Dolan to do the same with the other. This was Mickey's chance. He leaned forward a little until he felt and heard the panting breath of the larger man.

"And so the *señor* has decided to have good sense?" Andera was saying, so contemptuously that Tony writhed. "He will permit the ring to be withdrawn and place it in my hand. So it is with triflers—great words and small struggles. One moment until the lantern is lighted."

It was then, while Pico Andera righted the upturned lantern, and sought a match, that Mickey Dolan drove upward from well below

his waist in a smashing punch toward the big soldier's jaw. The blow struck clean with all the weight of his hard springy body under it, and the soldier hardly grunted as he went over backward against the stone floor.

Touchy Pike beside the doorway, waiting for his signal, joined the gang rush on Andera, who was smothered where he stood, his one startled cry stopped at his lips by a vengeful thrust of Tony Rierson's bony fist.

"No noise," ordered Mickey Dolan, holding first his broad hand and then the sentry's cap over Andera's mouth, while Rierson sat on his chest holding his arms spread-eagled with his knees, and Touchy Pike was wrapped around his legs. Andera could only squirm a little and groan, and the bare stone floor of the cell was a poor sounding board for what small noise of his conquering there had been.

"Take a piece of the white line we had and tie his legs," Mickey instructed Pike. "Make a good quick job of it, and shift over to the big guy. He might be coming out of it soon. I had to guess in the dark."

The light strong line used to haul up the rope made lashings and Andera and his man were soon tied into helpless bundles. Parts of the uniform which Mickey Dolan now discarded, made effectual gags. The drugged sentry was brought in and secured with the other two, and finally all three were locked in the cell.

SO FAR Tony Rierson had obeyed without question every order that Mickey Dolan gave, but now when escape seemed certain, a disconcerting thought made him hang back for a last turn at the rope over the parapet. He had the key to the cell, and when the two marines had disappeared down the rope, he went back, opened the heavy door, and went in.

Mickey Dolan and Touchy Pike crouched in the shadow of the wall and grew impatient at the length of time it took Tony to join them.

"Must love the place," growled Mickey. "Seems like he'd burn his fingers coming down instead of making us wait for him."

But as he whispered the rope gave notice of Tony's belated coming and a moment later he had joined them. Without further words and one at a time they slipped from the shelter of the shrubbery along the wall and came down together again on the dark side of the street towards town.

"There used to be a sentry outside the wall," said Tony.

"So there was," chuckled Mickey Dolan, running lightly on the balls of his feet, and well pleased with himself, "but he fell in love with Touchy Pike, and took a drink out of a bottle. Touchy used to be a confidence man before he joined the marines."

"You did the lingo slinging," denied Pike, panting a little and trying to make one reach of his long legs equal two of Mickey's. Soon Mickey turned in at right angles from the street and led the way down a steep alley which led directly to the beach.

"Keeping away from the regular landing," he explained. "Gring, Hampton and Flint are laying off the foot of this street in the dingey. Figured if we had to make a hot trail they'd be handy for us. Then somebody might run into that little tangle we left up in the tower, and telephone to the custom guards on the dock to get us."

But Tony Rierson had no intention of following down the short cut to the sea. He had other plans.

"Wait a minute," he said now. "I'm going to leave you fellows."

Mickey halted, amazed, and by the dim light of a small street globe saw at last why it had taken Rierson so long to make his getaway down the rope. He had on Pico Andera's resplendent uniform, even to the gold-striped, tightly fitting trousers. He and Pico Andera were of the same build, and they fitted well.

Mickey gasped, took a step forward, and almost expected to see the spiked mustache.

"Well, I'm a horse-trading Baptist," said he. "What have I got now?"

"I'm going after Maria," announced Tony.

"You're going bugs," said Mickey. "Look at the way luck has been with us. What do you want to do, make a fool of yourself and us at the last minute?"

"You don't get the idea," said Tony. "I'm out, yes; and you two did it. I'm grateful. But unless I can help Maria, nothing you did matters. Andera wasn't lying. The marriage papers are in his pocket. If I run off and leave her, he'll get her, and you might as well have left me in jail."

"Wish I had," said Mickey. "Lead on, brainless, we'll all go to jail."

Tony Rierson caught the implication instantly. Mickey had not read all the fine lines in this contract, but now that he had signed on he would help carry it out to the last comma.

"I thought you'd be gone," said Tony happily. "We can do it. I've got a simple plan. The household will be expecting Andera, and in this get-up I can pass for him in the dark at the gate. I'll go up boldly as if in a great hurry over some detail to be arranged at the last moment, send a note in to Maria by one of the servants, have her slip away and meet me outside the little gate to the grounds."

"And then what're you going to do with her?" asked the practical Mickey Dolan.

"Marry her tonight," said Tony. "Find a priest, use Andera's papers. Leave her at the American Consul's until a steamer sails north. She can stay with my sisters in California until

I'm out of the outfit. Even her dad and Andera wouldn't dare make trouble after we are once married. You know how our church regards marriage."

"It may work," sighed Mickey. "Anybody that's got a luck piece, grip it hard, and let's get started before we forget some of the details, or Andera works that wad of clothing out of his mouth."

Tony Rierson had been inside the pretentious grounds of Señor Carlos Molino, and at the watchman's gate outside the high stone wall he spoke imperative sentences in correct, unfaltering Spanish to the gateman who answered his knock. The servant opened up at once, and stood well back as if he expected Señor Pico Andera to be nervous and angry.

"The *señor* has heard then?" he inquired with nervous servility.

"Enough from you," said Tony sharply. "Take this message to the Señorita Maria with dispatch."

The gateman stepped still farther back, but made no move to obey. From the house up the white driveway lights flashed through the trees, and there came the murmur of excited voices.

"What is wrong, fool?" demanded Rierson, a vague fear gripping him. "Quick! Or your ears shall be slit like a pig's."

"The beautiful *señorita* is not to be found since *siesta*," whined the gateman. "The master is wild with anger. He rages as a lion in a cage. A messenger has been sent to you, *señor*. I thought you knew already, and came to assist."

The gateman expected an outburst from the young captain, and Tony Rierson did not disappoint him. All his plans went tumbling in a dizzy whirl, and he stepped forward much as Pico Andera might have done.

"Maria gone!" he challenged. "Where, When? Don't stand there grimacing, monkey!"

As the man broke into a frightened explanation, offering to call his master, and then begging to escort the madman to the house, Tony had wit enough to turn and slam the gate and join Mickey Dolan and Touchy Pike where they stood hiding behind a hedge of banana plants half a block away.

"Maria's gone," he said dazedly. "Old Molino has sent word to Andera. Where do you suppose she could have gone? What shall we do to find her?"

"Very first shot a dud," grumbled Mickey, and reassumed command.

"First thing, let's get out of this," he said. "We can't do her any good if we're in jail, and besides, a girl that's got sense enough and spirit enough to run away must have had some place picked out to run to. We'll make it out to the ship. Try to think of any friends she might have gone to who wouldn't be afraid of Carlos Molino."

Rierson hesitated and Mickey went on:

"You'll be getting a message from her likely, and with the ship as a base there will be a chance to do something. Any way you figure it, there's not going to be a wedding tonight, with Andera minus his best uniform, the marriage papers and the girl."

Tony didn't want to do it, and his mind was full of wild schemes to try and dodge the aroused police of the city on the bare chance that he might get some clue of Maria. But Mickey Dolan talked him out of it, and at last after dodging through dark alleys and on the shady side of buildings with the shrill whistles of police and soldiers behind them and about them, the three knelt among the rocks along a deserted part of the beach opposite where the *Pegasus* lay and made cautious whistled signals for the dingey.

While they waited a couple of soldiers came to search that part of the beach, for Carlos Molino's messenger seeking for Pico Andera at the jail, had caused an early discovery of the prisoners in the tower. The orders were to arrest all Americans and particularly one who wore a Mexican captain's uniform, and called himself Pico Andera.

THE fugitives waded into the water and swam out beyond the line of vision from the shore. Floating noiselessly they could hear the conversation of the passing soldiers. What Mickey Dolan could not understand Tony Rierson interpreted for him in a cautious whisper.

"They've escaped surely," said one of the soldiers.

"But no," said the other. "I have just spoken to a servant of Señor Molino, and he who wears the stolen uniform was seen there since the boats began patrolling. They will be caught at daylight or before. The gringo boats have been counted also, and all swing from their davits."

There was more, but this was enough to make it certain that the dingey had been driven off.

"We've got to swim for it," said Mickey Dolan. "It's nearly a mile but the tide is with us. How about it, you fellows? Want to take the chance? We can dive under the boats if we have to, but it's so dark I doubt if they can see us."

Half an hour later Spud Hampton, sentry on the forecastle, spotted three figures as they crept dripping down the deck from where they had come aboard by way of the anchor chain.

"Good work," whispered Spud. "I see you got him."

"What's the matter you didn't meet us?" demanded Mickey Dolan. "Who fell down?"

"Nobody," whispered Hampton. "You fellows get into your bunks before you get me

into trouble. We got chased in after we had picked up a girl out there half drowned. We've got her in the sick-bay now. The doc says we picked her up just about in time. The old man wanted to know what we were doing out in the dingey and we had to tell him we heard a cry for help. What did he do then but go and have the boat hoisted. There's been no chance, Mickey, honest. You know how the falls squeak, and the boat hangs aft there by the old man's cabin."

"What did the girl look like?" asked Tony Rierson.

"How do I know?" said Spud. "Wasn't it dark as a coal bunker? Ben Flint carried her on deck. Ask him. But she was a slim young thing, like some of these high class spig girls that peep out at you over a black veil. She fought like a cat, though, and didn't want to be saved until she found out we were Americans."

"I want to see her," insisted Tony Rierson, and since Mickey Dolan was a pal and cronie of Pills, the hospital stewart, Tony had his chance to look even before he reported his escape to the officer of the deck.

The girl was Maria. She had taken a maid's clothing, slipped away from the house, and tried to get across the bay to one of her mother's old servants. But the boat she found unlocked began to leak, and swamped before she was halfway over. As she struggled in the water the dingey came up and thinking the men in it were pursuers she had preferred to drown rather than be caught.

Mickey Dolan went outside the sick-bay door and scratched stubby fingers through his hair, standing bow-legged and thoughtful, while Tony told the story, so happy and relieved at finding Maria that he had not yet realized the certain duty of the captain of the *Pegasus* to put the girl ashore as soon as her father called for her, or the native officials were on duty.

Mickey shut him off by putting a hand over the excited lover's mouth, and half dragging him up on deck.

"Listen to me, and listen good," he said, shaking Tony's shoulders. "They will be swarming out here like gulls over a school of sardines, just as soon as day comes. We can't keep this girl on board the ship. Can't you savvy that much?"

"That's so," said Tony, sort of helpless. "What can I do?"

"Don't you move from this chest," ordered Mickey. "I've got a plan. Stay here like you was tied. I'm going down and break out the sky-pilot. I know it's no time to wake a man up and ask a favor, but the bird's writing a book, and he has his weaknesses also. Pills is a friend of mine. You sit right here quiet, and let me have it out with the chaplain. Maybe I can talk him into marrying you two right now.

"He's got the papers and everything. This ship being a part of the good old U. S. and you a citizen in good standing, once the fatal words are said it makes Maria an American, too. After that it's up to the captain and the high diplomats at Washington. They can do the figuring."

THE next morning there appeared before the captain of the *Pegasus* just after his Chinese boy had delivered his crisp toast and steaming coffee, Tony Rierson, seaman first class, and Maria his wife, stating their case in simple words, mostly of Mickey Dolan's choosing.

After the captain had looked them over up one side and down the other, he caught the hopeful flash of Maria's eyes and decided.

"Escaped, did you, Rierson, with this girl's help? Chaplain married you last night. Do you love her?"

"Yes, sir," said Tony.

"And you, Madam?"

"Yes, sir," said Maria with a soft little Spanish trill to the words.

"All right," said the captain. "Go forward, Rierson, and take up your duties. You, Mrs. Rierson, will take the chaplain's room and he can bunk wherever he finds space. Rierson, tell the first lieutenant to up anchor and proceed to sea at once."

This was the captain's way out of a tangle. The buck had been passed to him. Now he'd do some passing himself. Let the heathen rage.

In the course of events the matter was straightened out. Tony Rierson got a summary court martial and lost three month's pay, which he didn't particularly need. His wife, as an American citizen, had a right under the law to take asylum on an American ship. Extradition was denied. Put ashore at the first home port, she went to live with Tony Rierson's sisters in the big house overlooking the California bean fields and walnut groves which had been the Rierson's from the days of Frémont. In a few months Tony's enlistment expired, and he went home to her.

Then when the priest in the mission had rebound them and the excitement of the wedding feast and the wedding journey were over, Maria and Tony fixed up such a box of California fruit as the good ship *Pegasus* had never seen before. Certainly nothing like it had ever before fallen to the lot of Mickey Dolan, Touchy Pike and their mates. They called in the gobs to help, and Gabe Sykes paid tribute where tribute was due, as he bit into an orange.

"Tell it to the marines," he said, blinking the juice out of his eyes. And "Tell it to the marines" was what Mickey wrote to Maria and Tony.

TOYAMA

A FIVE-PART STORY
PART II.

by Patrick Casey

Author of "According to his Caste," "The Phoney Man," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

I, CHET OVERMAN, saw it myself—the treasure chest which we had dug up on the shore of Magdalena Bay—filled to overflowing with freshly minted Mexican gold pieces. It was the end of our quest; that quest which had sent us out from San Francisco on the bare word of Adolfo Ramerez de Valencia, alias Serafin Dicenta, an absconding paymaster of the Mexican army, who swore he had buried his loot here before he was arrested.

Dicenta had vanished and the bail we had put up for him was forfeit; but here was enough gold to satisfy all our claims, and there were only four of us to share it: Kit Morley, the reporter who had gained the Mexican's confidence; his wife; Jim Hathaway, captain of the *Seventy-three*, a converted submarine chaser which had brought us there; and myself.

Jim and I wished that Mrs. Morley had not come, for we distrusted her. Now as we stood staring down on the wealth before us, I knew that already she coveted it all for her husband. Yet when she ordered me back to the ship to get Jim and some of the sailors to help move the chest, I went.

There was need for haste. The secret of the buried treasure was shared also by Mariquita, a beautiful Mexican who was the discarded mistress of Dicenta. We believed her to be living inland with the Indians and feared she might attempt to regain the gold at any minute.

A strange sight greeted us after we had the chest safely on board the *Seventy-three*. A ship sailed into the bay, flying the flag of Japan and laden with Japs, men and women in bright-colored kimonos. We watched them disembark under the leadership of a tall man, whose high hat and somber robe were covered with figures of mice. Late in the afternoon they tramped away across the desolate, cactus-covered sand dunes.

By signals we learned that the ship was the *Taisei Maru* and that the yellow people were to become cooks and camp-followers of Villa. Jim and I disbelieved this, and our alarm increased when later in the evening we found that the Morleys had deserted us. Through the gathering dusk we saw them boarding the *Taisei*.

We burst open the treasure chest; the gold was still there. A thick fog arose, drifting around us like a gray, impalpable wall. We weighed anchor and tried to escape. Useless. Our propellers had become entangled in the thick, lush seaweed of those Southern waters.

A moment later we were boarded by the Jap crew, whose naked yellow bodies had been greased with oil. At the first attack Jim fell wounded. Again and again I emptied my revolver into that writhing mass.

The struggle was too unequal. Our crew were beaten and I, with a knife-gash in my leg, was forced back against the rail. It gave under my weight and I found myself swimming desperately toward shore, through shark-infested waters. Once on land I made haste to put a safe distance between the treacherous Morleys and myself.

Suddenly from out of the darkness I heard a strange cry—

"Gov'ment agent."

An instant later a Japanese, one of the advance guard, hurled himself at me. As I crouched low he catapulted over me. Flinging myself on his back, I beat his face into the stony ground until he lay motionless.

Again I fled and again I heard that weird cry. A figure arose by my side. It was the Mouse-Man himself. He offered me no violence but in broken English tried to persuade me to return to the ship. I protested that I was not an agent of any government and meant his people no harm.

As I talked an odd thing happened. Believe me or not as you will; one of the mice embroidered on his robe moved! It crawled slowly up his sleeve and disappeared. As I stared he said again—

"You must return to your ship, please."

CHAPTER X

THE SIGN OF THE WHITE MOUSE

"I THINK um this very fine night to walk," the voice continued. "There is a *tendai*, what you call a heavenly tranquillity about all this soundless space of glowing sand and vast blue curve of sky. It is in the lonely places like this that one hears the *shingon* of the Blessed One, and knows it for the true word. Come; we shall walk back together across this great one-piecee sand."

I shuddered at the pressure of a long-fingered hand on my arm. I felt myself turned round by those insistent fingers, and then I was walking on through the trough, back the way I had come, by the side of that mysterious Japanese. I could hear the soft crunch of his white felt sandals on the sand, feel the silken slap of his robe against my bare shanks.

My eyes never left his hat, that tall Korean hat which was the nest of the white mouse. I was watching it in gruesome fascination lest it should rise again and a whole gang of mice creep out.

You might say that I should have bowled the fellow over with one unexpected blow and finished him, if the need be, with the mouse-carved knife. What if he did have a sword, that short curved sword in the golden girdle, you might argue, and like all Spartan *samurai*, pride himself on never drawing that sword without using it? It surely sounds easy.

But imagine yourself alone, altogether alone, out there in the gleaming sand beneath that fathomless, star-dusted blue of sky. And this odd-looking Japanese with his Chinese mustaches, tall Korean hat and mouse-decorated robe rises up at you out of the hyacinthine shadows of a sandy dell. He grimaces like a monkey and makes hissing sounds like a snake and tells you blandly that you must retrace your steps.

He makes no threat of violence. There is no rasp of command in his oily voice, no posture of offense in his richly robed body; the sword in the golden girdle is undrawn, his hand never strays toward it; but beneath and behind his insistent words seems to lurk some force, unnamed but sensed. You believe he is trying to scare you with some mumbo-jumbo mysticism, cow you into obedience with Eastern dark arts.

You wax indignant. You say you will not obey, you will not go back. He bows low, shadowing his yellow face. He flips his wrists and brings into life on one sleeve that which you thought was an embroidered white mouse. He suffers you to watch the sleek rodent creep with catching claws up the cloth of his sleeve, tilt back his hat and seek haven inside upon his head. Then he raises his slant buttons of eyes and, looking through you and beyond you, repeats—

" 'Scuse, please, but you mus' go back."

I ask you what would you do?

A WHITE mouse is ordinarily a harmless creature. Because of its meek, white appearance and capacity for domestication beyond the usual standard of rodents, save possibly squirrels, it is often prized as a pet. But why should any man carry with him across thousands of miles of sea aboard a crowded schooner, such a creature as a white mouse if only as a pet?

It seemed to me that there was more than the mere desire to tame and train behind Nidzoumi's possession of this white mouse. It seemed to me that there was some deep but obscure purpose, something unclean and indecent and abominable.

The Mouse-Man had made no overt move in all his talk remember, yet there had seemed to lie hidden in his cabalistic words some mysterious hidden force, inarticulate but felt. I had thought it some dark force out of the art of black magic, some fee-faw-fum superstition, futile and ridiculous. Now sight of that white mouse had lent me to credulity and crowded my febrile brain with unwholesome thought.

Nidzoumi-San was an Oriental, and since time began Orientals have put certain animals to uncanny uses. This white mouse appeared to be highly trained, now lying dormant and complacent on his sleeve, now familiarly nesting beneath his high hat.

It struck me that at Nidzoumi's behest the creature would drop off his robe, scent out a man along the ground and crawl up his trouser-leg, up his coat, up to his exposed throat.

It stuck me that the chisel-like pair of incisor teeth in either jaw of the mouse might be hollowed out and filled with some subtle Oriental poison. The smooth-talking, bland Japanese, whose silken robe was even then brushing softly against me, began to take on the proportions of some Asiatic ogre out of the "Arabian Nights."

Perhaps he sensed what was stirring in my mind. I was eying his hat steadily in the brighter light as we mounted a lustrous slope of sand. His tall frame was stooped forward a little over the hands, which were crossed characteristically just above the hilt of the sword; he appeared to be looking straight ahead; but I felt instinctively that he was watching me through the upturned tails of his eyes. He may have noted in me a little shiver of repugnance.

"The honorable sir," he said sibilantly, as his white felt sandals padded almost noiselessly through the sand, "the good *San* is no doubt wondering who I am and what I do here. I um

very fine, high, noble Buddhist *bonze*. My name, it is Suzunoya-no-Koji. It is um very fine, old and reverenced name. It means, in my own language, the Retired Scholar of the House with the Bell."

On a sudden, punctuating his words, a faint, far cry arose in the still night. It rushed upward, a soaring javelin of sound, till it reached a high blood-thrilling note, and there it hung for intolerable moments, vibrant as a taut string, then slowly quavered away. A second cry rushed upward, loud as if nearer at hand. stabbing the stillness with steely sharpnness, It was the shrill ululation of a pack of coyotes.

I looked ahead across the sheen and shadow. I thought to see a bulk of tawny forms go slinking out of some trough, or mark them sitting up on their haunches atop some dune, voicing their hunger to the riding moon. But there was naught moving in that uneven surface of heights and hollows.

All at once from behind and below us, as if indeed from the shadowy gully out of which we just had climbed, came an answering cry, bursting upward in a great heart-tugging yell, then quickly sobbing away. It was startling, so close it sounded. It was startling to sense on the back of it, the swift inrush of breathless silence. I looked inquiringly at Suzunoya-no-Koji, padding softly beside me through the sand.

His head was tensely raised, I noticed, as if the better to catch the chill howls, and there was little shadow under the wide-brimmed Korean hat. I saw two long, bald, red tails protruding down from under the band, one curled prehensilely about his ear. And then the hat trembled ever so slightly as both tails slipped up and out of sight. There was a perfect nest of white mice in his hair!

"These low-born Japanese," his voice hissed calmly on, "they come aboard at a place where white houses peep from the green of mountains and there is a brown headland standing out in blue water. It is like one of the many thousand isles of Nippon; Honolulu, I think um they call it. I tell the low-born I look for the Middle Path, the fine, noble eightfold Path. They go to this Mexico to fight and cook and work. They are only ignorant.

"I shall lead them. They mus' sit about and learn of wisdom. The spirits of my ancestors have whispered the true word to me and I know as the great Buddh knew after his seven days' fast and struggles under the sacred bo-tree. Tonight——"

"These white mice you carry in your hat," I interrupted abruptly, unable longer to contain my morbid curiosity. "For what use do you find them? Are they only pets, harmless or—or—" I caught myself. "Or do they symbolize something spiritual or mundane?" I hazarded to cover up.

He swung his head fully round and looked at me out of beady, unblinking, hairless eyes. The upslanting, yellow lids were stretched, I noticed, unusually wide.

"You do not know, honorable sir, of the white mice the meaning?" There was in his hissing voice the shock of surprize.

I shook my head.

"No," I answered truthfully. "However ignorant it may sound, I really do not know the significance or use of the white mice."

"Every Japanese knows of the white mice the meaning," he returned. "In Nippon there is a great and powerful sect, of which I am the spiritual head and of which the symbol is the white mouse. Perhaps of it you have heard plenty?"

To be sure, I knew that Shintoism, the basic religion of Japan, is a mixture of ancestor and nature worship, and that the three thousand islands of Nippon are dotted over with such temples as that of the Jumping Porpoise, the Jeweled Beetle, the Indescribable Night-Moth. Perhaps these sleek white mice were indeed objects of worship, but hardly could I credit it. It seemed to me that there was something perverse and earthly, rather than spiritual, attached to their significance.

THE BONZE had halted dead on the summit of a hillock and was watching me with those double-folded snaky eyes. And then it struck me that he was not looking so much at me as through me and beyond me. I turned swiftly on bare heels.

From the cluster of heat-shrunken yucca, in the shadows ahead and below had risen, all at once, a shrill ki-yiing like that of a frightened litter of puppy coyotes. I caught a metallic clinking, a swift crunching of sand, the snap and brush of leafage. But I could see no leap of brown, canine bodies, no movement of bodies of any kind. The frightened yelping died away.

"There are men all around us, strange men!" hissed the voice of the Japanese close to my ear. "Hear the grind of sand under their coming and going? They think um you have seen 'em and are scurrying away."

I stood with the sand clinging coldly to my bare ankles and looked, confounded, from the slant, beady eyes of the *bonze*, down into the soft, silent shadows, and then about over the corrugated sand-floor. I could see nothing in the lambent night but faintly glistening sand, rising and falling into shadowed dells and ink-spotted here and there by patches of greasewood and odd shapes of mesquite and cholla. I could hear nothing but the whispering of the wind ruffling the sand and the low-throated break and rumble of the distant sea along the coast.

Grave doubt assailed me then. Suppose we

had only disturbed, below there in the trough, a sounder of young coyotes and Suzunoya-no-Koji had said they were men in one of those mysterious flights of Oriental mysticism? Perhaps he had adopted this abrupt tangent in order to swing the conversation away from the discussion of the white mice.

"How do you know these sounds were made by men?" I questioned skeptically.

"Because, honorable sir, it is not the first time I heard them tonight. These men have chased along me ever since I left um camp of the low-born in the hollow. They were about us in the shadows when you came up to me. I say nothing, none of my —— business, but I see lots.

"There was that howling of the coyotes when we started on together over the dunes. Those ahead must have been asking with animal cries where we were; those behind answered with a single howl that we had just started on for the coast. It is very simple."

But I could not agree with him in that.

"I have seen nothing of them," I objected. "I didn't note one suspicious occurrence till I heard that scared ki-yiing just now in the yucca. Even that yelping, like the distant howling, sounded most natural."

"They are all about us even now," returned the Japanese with unshaken and surprizing certainty; "but you no can see them as they are down in the dark troughs on either side this knoll. When we are climbing the sandy heights they are tracking us like a pack of coyotes through the hollows. Wherever the sand opens flat, they squirm along on their stomachs and hide behind stones and cacti. They are like *neko sama*, my lords the cats, seeing but unseen in the night."

There might be some truth after all in what he said. It had impinged on my mind long before this, what a fine cloak for protracted ambush, for stealthy advances and retreats, for masked stalking, were all these scrubby dunes and shadowy depressions rolling one into the other.

"But why couldn't I make them out when we scared them from the yucca right below?" I probed. "You say you have seen them. Who are they? What do they look like?"

Suzunoya-no-Koji veiled his beady, unblinking, hairless eyes. As if he were seeing a picture against his yellow lids, he purred:

"They are little men, honorable sir, small of stature as the low-born back there in the camp. They wear white hoods over their faces and coarse black hair, and their terra-cotta limbs are all coated over with white clay like an Australian savage at a funeral. It is a most deceptive costume against the glowing night and sand. They are Indians, honorable."

"Mariquita's Guiacuras!" I muttered.

The yellow lids rolled up from the beady, unblinking eyes; he grunted something and started down the slope for the shadowy cluster of heat-shrunken yucca from whence so recently the startled ki-yiing had come.

"But why do they trail us like a bunch of hungry wolves?" I wanted to know, hanging back. "They are many against us two. Why don't they attack you and me?"

I thought I heard a low, hollow chuckle; but the tall wide-brimmed hat shaded the *bonze's* mustached face and I could not be sure it came from him. It might have been only an eery whisper from the desert. The Japanese turned round.

"Honorable sir," he hissed in my face, "when I met you tonight, you mus' have noticed on my sleeve that white mouse. I was carrying *nid zoumi* there for a purpose. These Indians were all about and I desired them to see it. I do not fear. These Indians know of the white mouse the meaning. It is a sign. They are plenty afraid now to put hands upon Suzunoya-no-Koji."

Was this strange certitude of the Retired Scholar only a fancied security? We forthwith put it to the test. We went down the lustrous declivity. We broke through the heat-curved sword blades of yucca without disturbing so much as a sleepy quail.

CHAPTER XI

TOYAMA

IT WAS a mighty strange business and every moment seemed to add some new element of the incredible. Who would believe this tale of my walk across the ghostly sands, the captive of a wily Japanese priest, unfettered yet indissolubly gyved and manacled by the fearful fascination instilled by the trained and probably poisonous white mice? It is a recital to tax the normal credulity of any person, like a story out of "Alf Laylah wa Laylah," the "Thousand Nights and A Night of Queen Shahrazad."

We had left the shadowy heat-tossed yucca behind and a silence had fallen between my mysterious captor and me. In that silence my mind reverted to all those extravagant incidents of the night since I had been thrown overboard from the *Seventy-three*.

There had been the two Japanese sentries, one of whom had attacked me and the other fled screaming and both of whom had judged me a government agent. I did not credit the Mouse-Man's explanation that the Japanese believed they had been landed in the United States and were fearful, because of the immigration laws, of being transported back to Hawaii. Some deeper motive had actuated them to stand guard in the sand and had caused them, at sight of me, to become panicky.

And then this Suzunoya-no-Koji with his mystic telepathy and clairvoyance, and his sleek trained mice that were a symbol of some powerful Japanese religious sect. How much or how little of the *bonze's* conversation I should believe was a moot question. What truth was there in this talk of hooded, white-coated pursuers? Were they the Guiacuras of the Mexican girl, Mariquita?

And what was this sign of the white mouse that these Indians should know of it and respect it? Was it the symbol of some secret and dread religion, like unto the hair-ball of the practitioners of Voodooism? Was it a sign of disaster and death, like the five orange pips of the Ku Klux Klan?

A sound, slipping from afar out of the night, broke in upon my bewilderment. I thought for a trice that it was the eery howling of one of our invisible escort. But it did not persist on a single high, chill note like the coyote yelling. It was a burst of sound rushing upward, ebbing immediately, dull with distance, faint almost as a whisper of the wind.

"It is some one shouting," hissed Suzunoya-no-Koji. "Some one ahead."

The sound came again, loud and nearer. It resolved itself into a series of shouts, hallooing across the sand, echoing in the troughs of the dunes, flinging up into the illimitable vault of the heavens.

I peered ahead through the lambent night. Floating across the sand came the shouting again and then I made out, dropping up and down the lustrous hills, a dark form. It was that of a man running toward us, a flapping skirted man, a kimonoed Japanese. It was the self-same Japanese of the water-hole from whom I had stripped knife and gourd. I could distinguish the peculiar wavy stripes of his kimono and the black streak of coagulated blood down the left side of his yellow face.

It was as if he had recognized us from for off. Why else should he have shouted? He showed no surprize at sight of me. It was almost as if having won by him, he knew I should be stopped by the Mouse-Man and brought back. It jarred me a bit, the Oriental certitude of his faith in the *bonze*.

He was hatless and excited, panting and jabbering rapidly as he came up. He did not forget, however, to bow low to the Retired Scholar. Then his voice rippled on, his hands gesticulating, now cupping over his eyes in mimicry of one peering, now pointing back toward the distant beach.

I could make out little of the uncouth tongue. But it seemed to me that he mentioned the *Taisei Maru* several times and twice or more mouthed the words gov'mint ship and *pilikea*. What impressed me most was the emotion evidenced by Suzunoya-no-Koji. He fell backward before the little jabbering fellow as with astonishment; his slant beady eyes darted quickly toward me; and then his usually imperturbable face lighted up yellowly as with some great inward joy.

Comprehension of the pantomime slowly seeped in on me. The pigmy Japanese was saying most likely, that when he had come to himself by the water-hole, he had climbed to the top of the seaward ridge of dunes to stand watch and see that no one pursued inland from our little gov'mint ship.

The fog had lifted by then and he was amazed to note that there had been some kind of trouble down in the bight of bay and that the Japanese of the *Taisei Maru* were in possession of the gov'mint ship. Realizing from what Suzunoya had told me that this fellow like all the dwarfish Japanese was from Hawaii, I had been quick to recognize the recurrence of that much overused Hawaiian word, *pilikea*, meaning trouble.

Suzunoya-no-Koji was speaking in Japanese and motioning with his long-fingered, bead-wrapped yellow hands. He struck his breast and pointed ahead toward the distant sweep of coast, then indicated me and pointed behind. I looked behind and was surprized to discover that I could see from this vantage promontory or knoll the weak flicker of the fire of the Japanese camped away off in the hollow.

The rustle of silken garments caused my head to swing round. The Mouse-Man had left my side and was padding swiftly onward down the sandy slope in the direction of the distant beach. The pigmy Japanese with the cut temple stepped up to me, grunted in my face, unexpectedly jerked the knife from my belt and then motioned me back toward the flickering camp-fire farther inland.

"*Ayakou!*" was what he grunted. "You *sabe* quick, —— quick!"

He had armed himself with the mouse-carved knife which he held menacingly in his pudgy right hand. I turned round with a shrug of shoulders and with the tiny Japanese at my back started off toward the flicker of light.

Once I looked back. There was a faint glitter as the knife was upraised in the hand of the Japanese. I glimpsed his slant eyes spread with a kind of fear of me.

"*Pilikea!*" he growled. "You want too much trouble!"

But I gave him no heed. I had seen what I wanted—the high-hatted and long-robed figure of Suzunoya-no-Koji plodding through the sand away from us—and I swung my head round with a distinct sigh of relief over getting rid at last of that suave Oriental priest and his nasty white pets.

The Japanese *bonze* was going on toward the schooner to find out more than likely what all the ructions had been about. Perhaps he and his motley party had camped out here and

strung guards along the sand in anxious expectacy of just such a piratical move taking place in the bight of bay as had actually occurred that evening.

At any rate I welcomed this riddance of the Mouse-Man as my chance indeed for a getaway. If ever I expected to win across the desert and enlist aid form the American ranchers on the uplands, I must speedily call a halt to this continual shuttling back and forth over the sand. I began to ponder the simplest way to overcome the pigmy Japanese walking with upraised knife at my back.

A FAINT far cry arose in the still night. It rushed upward, a soaring needle of sound, till it reached a high, blood-thrilling note and there it hung for intolerable moments, vibrant as a taut string, then slowly quavered away. A second cry rushed upward, louder, as if nearer at hand, stabbing the stillness with steely sharpness. It was like the funereal keening of some primal soul.

Instantly I sensed what was going forward in the sand. The invisible escort was reporting our change of maneuvers. Far away toward the beach some hooded, white-coated watcher had seen us three meet, then separate, one going onward toward the coast, the other two making an about-face and heading toward the pale flicker of the firelight. Like a coyote voicing hunger pangs to the dust of stars, he had queried with that eery howl what it was all about and the howl was being taken up along the ridges.

There burst up a third cry startlingly near, as if indeed from close about Suzunoya-no-Koji several hundred yards behind us. The short, squat men that were seeking the dark veins of troughs and going along with the *bonze* were signaling that they still were hanging on to their quarry.

I peered ahead and to either side over the sheen and shadow. Were there slinking, furtive Indians also hounding us? Were the hollows on every hand alive with white-hooded, clay-coated men, stooped and running low through the shadows?

A heavy silence wrapped us round, broken only by the soft pad of our sandaled and bare feet in the alkaline flint, by the distant weird echoes of echoes. The moon sailing high up the sweep of sky was flooding the land with a confused and changeful luster and, strain my eyes as I might, I could discern nothing moving.

There were several dark spots on the glowing gypsum dunes but I could not identify them; they might be shadowy apparitions of men, they might be only odd shapes of cacti and mesquite. I became conscious that my body was glowing hotly all over with nervous expectancy.

All at once, as if from the dark trough not six jumps away on our right, came an answering cry bursting upward in a great heart-tugging yell, then quickly sobbing into silence. It was appalling with closeness. It was blood-curdlingly convincing. I was sure now they were there—men, small and squat as the Japanese behind me, not over five feet tall, with white hoods over their coarse, black hair and broad faces, and a mold of white clay on terra-cotta limbs and body; men that squatted in their oily breech-clouts in the cold sand and watched us pass without move or shiver and signaled one to another with animal calls. And men that bent double and leaped along the bottom of the troughs, squirmed like snakes over the sand, slunk behind cacti and yucca—furtive shadows forever pursuing, before, behind and all about us, a great invisible escort.

The idea leaped full-fledged and with brutal startlingness into my brain. Why not question my pigmy Japanese captor as to whether he knew who were making those coyote yells? Perhaps I could surprize out of him some revealing inkling of what was behind this protection of the white mice.

I knew the fellow was hardly inclined to be communicative. He had encountered me with ill result once that night, and undoubtedly he feared I might turn on him any moment with sudden violence or some unexpected trick. I did not chance a blow from the knife by halting or swinging round in my tracks. I merely twisted my head.

I was in time to note that he was looking off toward the trough from whence the howl of our unseen escort had come. There was a bright beam of wonder in his slant, beady buttons of eyes. Perhaps he had expected to see a wedge of tawny forms slink out of that trough and was bewildered now by the lack of movement on the lustrous hills.

"Honorable sir," I said, adopting Suzunoya-no-Koji's formal method of greeting, "do you know the meaning of these howlings in the night?"

His answer was to raise the mouse-carved knife and to grunt—

"Go 'long, you."

But despite the menace, I persisted:

"They sound like the howls of coyotes and yet no coyotes are to be seen. They are not the hunger cries of desert wolves. They come only at certain times."

I could tell from his distended slant eyes that I had intrigued his interest and, though the knife still was upraised at my back, I halted and turned round to him. A sudden conclusion had blazed in my mind.

"I heard those prolonged shrill cries some time ago. They announced your coming. A cry rose from far away toward the beach and it was taken up all along the sand. Those

cries fore-ran your coming before ever Suzunoya-no-Koji and I heard your shouts or could see you racing up and down the hummocks."

He lowered the knife hesitantly, evincing sharp distrust of me and of my motives. There was the slackness of stupefaction about his yellow jaw.

"Me don't trust you too much. You speak all the time riddles. What for these dogs howl likes wolves because I come? Why for don't I see them? What you mean coyotes no more?"

I looked down at the small, hatless fellow.

"We are two men alone, you and I, in a land of hostile Indians," I said calmly. "You can look everywhere and see nothing but sand and shrubs and shadows, yet everywhere you look there are eyes glowing out of the night—the yellow eyes of cat-like men.

"Squat men they are, with white hoods over their heads and white clay coating their reddish-brown limbs, so that you can not see them against the glowing sand. They are running along with us in the shadow of the troughs, squirming on their bellies over the sand, hiding behind low trees and shrubs."

There was a glitter in his slant, black eyes, but whether of moonlight or sharp fear, I could not be sure.

"But Suzunoya-no-Koji," he objected, "him say nothin' to me 'bout these men, these Indians. And Suzunoya-no-Koji, him wise man, him knows everyt'ing."

It was the chance for which I had been angling.

"Oh, Suzunoya felt he was protected by the white mice in his high hat, those white mice he called out upon his sleeve. He told me these Indians knew what those mice represented and were afraid of him."

The Japanese emitted a guttural exclamation. His slant lids were spread wide apart in a very real and visible surprize.

"Toyama!" he ejaculated. "These Indians know him Toyama? Him heap big in Nippon and other place—Korea, China, Siberia, even Hawaii. But these Indians! Me never t'ink Toyama over here. But Suzunoya-no-Koji say so, him true."

I was all ears and questions.

"What is this thing you call Toyama?" I asked. "Is it some religious sect? How did it ever get over to Hawaii and Siberia? What's the idea of it? What does it mean to these Indians?"

He looked up at me oddly, his yellow lids narrowing into two slant lines with a black, glassy dot in the center of each.

"Me t'ink you chin-chin 'nough. Now you go 'long, *ayakou!*"

He raised the knife in one hand and with the other gave my shoulder an about-face twist. I plodded on through the sand. At least I knew now that Toyama was the name of the mysterious agency of these Japanese.

CHAPTER XII

THE INVISIBLE ESCORT

ALL was still and ghostily bright on the dunes; yet I felt certain that down in the shadowy troughs to either hand files of men, hooded and clay-coated, were running stooped along with us. I became aware of an increasing pleasure as, drawing ever nearer, the flicker of the Japanese camp-fire waxed in power, size and stability. We had only suffered it to flicker out of sight during this return trip when perforce we had dipped down the slopes and some hillock had interposed its sandy bulk between us.

It was inconsistent that I should feel even a tinge of pleasure at thus approaching the camp of enemies; but I suppose the invisible companionship of all these Indians was getting to me. However hostile the Japanese might prove to be, at least they were of substance one could see and touch. This stalking by ghostly men was shivery and uncanny.

A sharp, rattling sound clattered up from one dark dingle. It was like the noise of dry, heavy leaves in a wind. And there was stirring only a feather of wind! I peered down the sandy dingle, quite shaky I'll admit, until I recognized the dark growths as shad-scale straightening with that clatter from the heat of the day.

"Me no like that sound," came gutturally from behind me. "You see anyt'ing?"

I glanced back over one shoulder. I was really surprized to note that the eyes of my pigmy captor were darting here and there, from side to side, and that there was in their obliqueness something of the glitter of the eyes of a hunted animal. To be sure it may have been the moonlight. He wore no hat and there was little shade to the pupils from the undented, osseous ridges and hairless lids.

It struck me, however, that my previous words had fallen on fruitful soil and that his Oriental mind was even more harassed than mine by dread of this unseen companionship. I had been on the point of telling him that the noise was merely the rattle of shad-scale. Instead, I said—

"Indians!"

I was figuring, to tell the truth, on a sudden turn and a clash with my frightened captor. But with the spoken word a better plan hit me. Why not at one stroke get at the root of this hiding-out business, settle my own doubts and misgivings and scare for good and all this captor of mine into a fleeing panic?

It could be done. To judge from his ability to describe these white-hooded, clay-coated

savages, Suzunoya-no-Koji must have surprized one from cover. I felt that by pursuing a course along the ridge of the dunes, keeping the hollows on either hand in sight, I must surely dislodge one, soon or later, from concealment.

I judged that in such case sight of the white apparition added to his present perturbed state and constant fear of me would cause my captor to lose his head utterly. He would forget entirely about his guardianship of me and in all probability leap like a frightened hare across the sand, superstitious fear dogging his heels. I resolved to be on the alert, however, and at the first show of a hooded, white-coated Indian, at the first sign of panic in my pigmy captor, to spring upon him, wrench the knife from his hand and with doubled fist knock him down and altogether out. I felt I needed that mouse-carved knife.

Keeping the growing flicker of the Japanese fire as much as possible in view, I chose a certain well-defined ridge and, making along it, commanded on either hand the shadowy hollows. I remarked carefully the lay of the land ahead and noted, a few hundred yards on a slightly taller dune rising above the roll of hummocks. From the bald top of it one might see for a goodly distance over the surrounding mounds and down into the hollows about its base which were, oddly enough, not so deep and dark as widely sweeping and bare, for quite a space, even of brush.

Before I quite reached the elevated mound, while indeed I still was remarking it, I noted in the open sweep of one trough a kind of movement like a dust whorl of the wind fretting the sand, or the play and flicker of moonbeams on gypsum. For some unaccountable reason I screwed up and strained my eyes.

And then what was my astonishment to identify the movement as that of a white-hooded, clay-coated man squirming flat on his stomach and almost indistinguishable from the glowing sweep of sand. He was making, with a swiftness that was deceptive, for the concealment of a clump of creosote bushes and low grove of mesquite some thirty yards up the trough.

"Look!" I exclaimed to the little Japanese at my back, halting dead and pointing down at the squirming, illusory object. "There's one of them! A white-coated Indian! See, he's turning his head; he's heard my voice; you can see the black slits of eyeholes in his white hood. There, he's afoot!"

Surely enough, as if he had heard my voice and realized concealment was no longer possible, the clay-coated Indian had leaped to his feet and, bending almost double, was darting in leaps and bounds like a jack-rabbit for the cover of the brush up the hollow.

I had no more than sensed what the Indian was about than I swung around on my Japanese captor to note the effect of the apparition upon him and to be prepared to take advantage of his almost certain panic. What was my confusion then to be bowled over suddenly by that Japanese and to see him, as I gathered myself up from the sand, racing down the slope, knife in hand, for the shadows of stunted trees and bushes into which the clay-coated Indian had disappeared.

I was free thereat of the menace of the knife at my back. But I did not think to swing off in another direction, toward the north for instance. I stood there on top of the ridge, a bold outline in the moonlight, and watched that kimonoed Japanese vanish into the shadowy grove.

There was a moment of silence so tense I could feel the pound of blood in my straining ears. Then stabbing the silence came a weird, high cry that froze my blood. It was the scream of a man. It wailed away quaveringly and then all was terribly still.

I waited, palpitant and tense for some creature to step out of the shadows of that thorny grove. Should it prove Japanese or Indian, it would be all one with me. I would head straight away from him as fast as my bare feet could travel across the dunes.

There arose all at once from the grove the three-syllabled call note of a cock quail and then on the heels of it, from the ashy-hued soapweed in the trough immediately below me, a low, sleepy clucking, as if that call note had disturbed others of the feathered tribe. Those were bird signals of the Indians, I had no doubt. Something ghastly had overtaken my Japanese captor.

A MORBID curiosity drove me down into the grove to determine just what had occurred. It was none of my business, of course, and it was mighty risky business to boot; but I had an inordinate, unrestrainable desire to get at the bottom of what had happened between Japanese and Indian, and not leave every occurrence of that night unsolved and obscured in a fog of mystery.

The truth is I did not expect to find a single trace of that Japanese below in the grove. Imagine my horror, therefore, when picking a way for my bare feet as best I could through the creosote bushes and bending low to escape the sharp needles of thorns on the mesquite, I almost stepped plump on the body of the Japanese, wrapped in wavy-striped kimono and sprawled on his face across a low bush. The acrid, smoky smell of the broken bush was strong in the air.

I noticed that the arms of the Japanese were outflung to either side of his head and that his yellow fingers were clawing into the sand beyond, as if he had been running forward

when some blow in chest or midriff had sent him sprawling. I rolled him over, off the broken shrub. The slant eyes were open and glazed, the mouth black with sand. He was quite dead. There was a black daub on the kimono below the left breast and marking its deadly center with a black, glassy luster, the haftless head of an obsidian knife.

Sight of that crudely carved, jagged splinter of volcanic rock put me in sudden mind of the mouse-carved knife of the Japanese I had so desired but a few moments gone. But there was no sign of it, neither about the person of the dead man nor in the broken bush and trampled sand.

That struck me as decidedly strange. Why should these Indians rob the man of his knife? To judge from that haftless dagger of obsidian they could not be in need of such weapons. No; there was something else, some deeper motive, some greater significance attached to the taking of that mouse-carved knife.

I stood over the Japanese in a black ponder. I could visualize the happening. On the pigmy Japanese had come, knife in hand, breaking through the brush, his kimono tearing in the long throns of the mesquite. And suddenly before him had arisen the clay-coated Indian, the jagged, glassy splinter of volcanic rock balanced in hand. He had flung the heavy blade with sure aim. The Japanese had screamed and then sprawled across bush and sand like some popped and flapping bird.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE CAMP OF THE JAPANESE

EVERYTHING was still about me, save for the feather of wind that stirred up the smoky odor of the broken creosote bush. From a little way off came the sleepy clucking of quail and I knew there were eyes in the bush, eyes behind black slits and leafage, eyes watching me, the eyes of white-hooded men. But so still it all was, so faint the clucking, so wispy the wind, that I caught all at once the tinkle as of a remote mandolin and then a high, nasal voice intoning in a weird kind of chant.

It was shocking to hear that eery chanting as I stood in the shadows alive with eyes, over that poor Japanese in his wavy-striped winding sheet. I shivered a bit and broke through the grove with what I imagine was more of haste than circumspection and came thus, racing up the lustrous slopes, to the bald top of that higher mound.

From here I could look about over a goodly distance of sheen and shadow. I could look down, I found to my surprize, into a deep, wide trough a score of yards ahead, where the fire of the Japanese glowed in fitful red on camp and brush. The chanting came from there and was pitched I surmised in those weird, high tones in accordance with the Japanese ear and idea of music.

They were about the fire, those many yellow men and women and children, in various postures. The most were wrapped in their garish kimonos and outstretched in the cold sand as close as could be to the fire, their sandals off, presumably asleep. I could make out tiny mounds of sand under the necks of the prone women which lifted their heads and high, polished chignons of hair off the ground.

There was a circle of men squatting on their hams to one side of the sleepers. Their inverted bowls of hats had been discarded and the sweat bands showed startlingly white against their black hair, yellow brows and fire-tinged eyes. They were slapping down their hands and punctuating the chanting with guttural exclamations I could hear, as if they were engaged in some game of cards, although no cards were visible.

For a space indeed I thought the high, nasal intoning came from them. I could see however no one of their number thrumming the taut strings that surely must give off the faint, eery tinkling.

One of the circle arose as I searched for the chanter and, picking a way gingerly among the prone sleepers, made for a heap of dry knotted roots of greasewood. Lifting a handful that looked like a cluster of sweet potatoes, he flung them upon the coals. Came then, amid the chant and guttural exclamations, the sharp crackle of the flames licking at the wood and the red light deepened and widened its radius.

A tall, straggling, weedy brush of greasewood, hedging one wall of the hollow, came into glossy brightness and I noted then, beneath the tufts of leaves, the chantress. She was the little, fluffy kitten of a girl who had dabbled her tiny feet in the water that afternoon upon landing from the schooner.

The *samisen* was in her lap and she was bent over it, singing from the top of her nose, her plump soft baby hands tinkling the four strings with a white triangle of wood. The red cast of firelight shimmered over her delicate, silky kimono, dyeing it to the rich hue of the under petals of the rose, and glistened upon her hair as if she lately had anointed it with camellia oil. There trembled in the high chignon a sprig of the inverted pale, fragrant bells of the yucca.

Presently the tinkling of the *samisen* and the weird, nasal singing of the girl ebbed away and I became aware, between the guttural exclamations of the men, of the steely sound of running water. There, from a brown rock in the opposite sandy wall, water was trickling out blackly, for all the world as if Moses himself had here passed and smitten the stone with his staff. I felt this had been the cogent reason

why the Japanese had camped in the hollow.

All in all there was nothing about the camp that I could see which might confirm the evil suspicions I had formed of it when first I had encountered those guards in the sand. Everything looked peaceful and above board and particularly inviting after this night of shapes in the sand, freezing howls and that last swift horror in the brush.

Indeed, sight of my Japanese captor, dead among the creosote clumps, had shaken me more than I imagined, for I felt a strong and moving temptation now to drop down into the camp and seek the society of men that one could see and talk to at the least.

They were not friendly to me I felt sure, yet they could hardly prove as hostile as the Indians who were dogging my steps, those ghostly Indians who had killed my captor with swift silence and without ruth.

IT IS at a moment of wavering like that when the slightest vagary makes for a decision one way or the other. I happened to notice that the little girl who had been singing was bent far forward over her quieted *samisen* and that the firelight was glimmering in a delicate, rosy dance upon the silken curves of her shoulders. It struck me suddenly that perhaps it was not so much the firelight which was causing that rosy shimmering as the shaking of her own round shoulders—shaking as with great, slow, choked sobs.

May be it was that the chant had made her homesick for the crowded compounds of her own people in faraway, beautiful Hawaii. May be one of the guards in the sand, the very one that had been snuffed out, was her lover and instinctive apprehension was glooming her mind. At any rate I observed particularly that none of the men in the circle paid her any heed.

That struck me as most heartless and alien. She seemed such a delicious little kitten of a girl. Vividly then I realized that those men below were not my own kind; they were uncouth foreigners; and I should only be wasting time, if nothing more, seeking association with them. I turned away therefore, to pursue across the dunes to the north.

Out of the tail of my eye as I half swung about, I glimpsed something that gave pause to the beating of my heart, that froze me as in a paralytic spell in my tracks. There, standing behind me on the bald summit, sharp-edged against the crystal-blue sky, rigid and immobile, his clay-coated arms leaning on the barrel of a Mauser rifle, was a tall, surprizingly tall, hooded apparation of whiteness!

For a breathless trice I feared my eyes were playing sad tricks. I had thought the Indians were short, squat men, no bigger than the pigmy Japanese; and here was this apparition so unexpectedly tall I looked, on the instant, for stilts; then realized he was only about my own size.

Again, when I had found the ragged splinter of obsidian, I had judged the Indians were armed with primitive weapons and should not have been at all surprized had they proved to carry bows and arrows. Yet now before me was this fellow leaning on the barrel of a long Mauser rifle. It was all mighty upsetting, I'll tell you.

He seemed more like some stark picture than any human being—like, indeed, some glaring poster of those ghostly avengers of the South, the Ku Klux Klan. There was a white cloth falling over his head down to the shoulders, white clay coating limbs and naked body, and a breech-clout of dubious white folded about his middle.

Two black slits in the hood served as eyeholes and I observed, with a distinct shock, the moonlight glittering on the eyes behind. It was such a shock because it told me positively that my eyes were truthful and that his was no weird apparition raised up by febrile imagination.

Lightning-swift then human aspects of the man penned themselves in my mind. I could see the black fissures where the swing of elbow and knee had caused a break in the white clay coat. There was a whole ragged patch of clay gone from his middle and I could see the indent of navel and the gleam of sweat on the darkish skin as the diaphragm rose and fell with measured breathing. That clay was worn from his stomach by the squirming across the sand—perhaps the very act of squirming in which I had discovered that man below in the trough.

The skin tightened over my scalp and the hair stood up. The Indian who had darted for the creosote clump had appeared short and squat I remembered; but then deceptively, he had been bent almost double. This fellow might be for all his tallness the knife-wielding slayer of the Japanese.

Perhaps at that, he was only watching me lest I should go down into that encampment, report the death of my captor and arouse all those Japanese to vengeance. It was the aberrated hope of desperation, like the clutch at a straw of a drowning man. Yet I could not restrain a slight movement to show plainly that I did not intend to go down into that camp.

What horror! I made the merest turn, more of head than body, and there, on the right side of me where I am positive there had been no one before, stood another tall, immobile statue of whiteness—another equally upstanding Indian, white hood over head, black-jointed, clay coat on limbs and naked body, arms folded over the barrel of a Mauser rifle

and the moonlight glittering on the slits of eyes.

I think I must have cried out then. I know I rushed and struck out, blindly, madly, at the fellow before me, the first apparition. He fell back, leaping into swift action, swinging the Mauser by its barrel like a club up into the air. Before it could descend, the butt of the gun in the hands of the other man thwacked down upon my head. A bright, white flash blinded my eyes, head and neck seemed telescoped into my trunk and I felt I was falling, falling into a black abyss!

CHAPTER XIV

THE DREADED AMAZON

I CAME to consciousness slowly, like one leaden with fatigue rousing by laborious effort and gradually from sleep. I had a nightmare sensation of heaving astride a broomstick through space, now soaring breathlessly up, now chuting down with a drop so sudden and sharp as to chase little shivery thrills from the base of my spine round to the hollow emptiness at the pit of my stomach. I groped vaguely for remembrance of that forgotten banquet where I must have eaten too much or too rich food, or that quiet club where in these dry days I had secured the liquor which had so upset my digestive organs.

It struck me, with the slow sharpening of my senses, that the constant lift and fall was not so much of me as outside me, as if I were back once again aboard the *Seventy-three*, slipping up and down the crests and troughs in that riding cork. I must be sleeping well into the day, I reckoned, as I felt uncomfortably warm. There was the steady pound of the engines aft and I could almost imagine I heard on the grating of the pilot-house over my bunk the familiar scrape of Jim Hathaway's boots. I must have gone to bed the wrong way, with head aft and feet forward, as there was a cramped feeling all through my body and a dull pain like a lump at the base of my brain.

It was that dull pain which brought vivid recollection. I remembered all of a sudden the two white statues on the bald hummock overlooking the Japanese encampment, the thwack of the gun upon my head, the black sensation of falling. Quickly I opened my eyes, almost afraid that the lids would not obey, filled with doubt and wonder that I was alive.

I should have the greatest difficulty in relating step by step what my surprized eyes saw. Suffice it that, when I beeame fully conscious of my surroundings, I found myself bound like a sack of sand across the broad brown back of a galloping horse. A length of rope slung under his barrel from one of my ankles to the other held my legs tightly to his heaving sides.

I was slumped forward over his shoulders and my two arms were secured, much after the fashion of my legs, about his neck. Before, behind and all about, even overhead, was a cloud of hot gray-white dust. I was in the midst of a thundering cavalcade of horsemen whose clay boots, white hoods and steely Mausers slung across their backs showed only now and then in sudden thinnings of the dust or flashes of sunlight.

I lurched and jolted atop the horse, my bare ankles and wrists chafing under the constant rub and tug of the ropes. By twisting my head against the mane of the animal, I could make out through the cloud of grit the murky ball of sun well up in the sky and two high sandy walls leaning over from either side, the tops of which were draped and cascaded with green leguminous plants. It was late in the following morning, I judged, and we were progressing up a sandy-floored cañon toward the llanos.

The dust cloud thinned and fell altogether behind. We had debouched upon a broad mesa which, like a vast natural bench, shoved out into the sandy flat from the copper-hued mountains. Underfoot was spiky grass, yellow wild flowers and tangles of leguminous creepers. Ahead, apparently slap against the high, ochre mountain walls, was the gloss of the green tufts of cottonwoods, and I knew we should find water there.

I looked at the cavalcade, then, for sight of the Mexican girl, Mariquita, whom I had no doubt was leading these Indians. There were four Indians, two on either side of me, tall, flat-chested men, erect of shoulder, pliantly swaying to the rhythm of the galloping animals beneath them, superb bareback riders all.

Whether they still were coated with a mold of white clay was more than I could tell as a powder of gray dust was laid thickly over limbs and hoods and naked bodies. Slung across the back of each was the hot, flashing steel of a Mauser. From the breech-clout of one protruded the mouse-carved ivory hilt of my Japanese captor's knife. Another had gathered to himself my rattan-laced gourd, which was jouncing and thwacking as if empty against his thigh. There was no sign of the Mexican Amazon, Mariquita.

They drew up sharply in the clump of cottonwoods that hedged, surely enough, a fair-sized pool of water. There was a chasmy break in the chrome-orange wall beyond and I could see the glossy tufts of cottonwoods curving on and in as if bordering some tortuous watercourse that were here emptied into the pool.

A little way up one wall of mountain yawned the black tunnel of a former mine. There was a dump of prismatic clay all the colors of a painter's palette, extending out and down from the tunnel mouth and checkering the ground beneath the trees with rubble, red and black and malachite and white. No doubt the down-

ward rush of these colorful fragments had been halted by the boles of the cottonwoods. On the flat top of the dump was an adobe hut with a corrugated tin roof, the flashing sections and ends of which were all curled and twisted from the heat of the sun into the writhing appearance of the angles and gable-ends of an Oriental pagoda.

My arms and legs were unbound and like a sack of sand forsooth, I was suffered to slip to the ground where I lay for a space, too stiff and sore to move. Then all the dust-coated Indians having drunk, I crawled to the black, miry rim of the pool and slaked my thirst. I was hauled upon my wobbly legs thereat, my hands were tied before me and, at the end of the bit of rope, I was dragged up the hot, colorful, brittle clay to the 'dobe hut atop the dump. The clay was like cutting flints under my bare feet and I noticed here and there fleeting spangles as of copper or gold.

The hut consisted of four square walls of sun-baked clay and naught beside, not even a rude bench upon which to sit. I was thrown upon the earthen flooring; the door creaked shut and there followed the grating slither of a bolt. Within it was not dark, however, as segments of sunlight shot through the cracks of the ramshackle door and the wide interstices between the writhing sheets of the superheated roof.

I could see a shadow progressively darkening the cracks in the wooden door, as if outside some one were pacing guard. There came a clatter of horses' hoofs that echoed back for moments, as though the remainder of the cavalcade were pursuing up the watercourse through the chasmy break in the hills.

It was stifling close within the 'dobe walls of that hut. By reaching up my bound hands, I could feel where the hair was matted with dried blood from the wound in my head. The long ride, bare of head, in the sun and the lack of food were telling on me. I felt poignantly weak, my head and stomach gyrating dizzily, the shadow pacing the cracks in the door seeming to leap up and down like a bounding rabbit before my eyes, then to lean toward me, then far away. Suddenly the shadow spread out in a shower of sparks and everything was black.

A TICKLING sensation, as if a drop of quicksilver were trembling in the hollow of my ear, roused me from the faint. Some one was bathing my forehead and a bit of the water had trickled into my ear. The sunlight was streaming vertically down upon my eyes through the interstices in the roof and for a moment I was dazzled and could not see. With bound hands cupped over my eyes, I got a glimpse of a tanned deerskin jacket, a brown shirt open at a downy white neck, a tall peaked sombrero and then, beneath the shadow and sparkle of silver cord on the sombrero, the face of the girl above me.

It was a chubby, oval face, with a short nose and tiny mouth whose rich carmine formed distinct curves against the olive pallor of the skin. Her skin was nacreously transparent as mother-of-pearl about the temples, the fine tracery of azure veins showing through the whiteness, and the sunlight wreathing all as in a halo, lighting the ends of the clouded hair into black, lustrous silk. There was something Germanic about the cast of features and that elusive, olive tinge of whiteness so like the downy, sunny shade of a peach; but her eyes were fervidly Spanish—large and long, brown, humidly splendid and fringed with a black drip of lashes.

"Mariquita!" I breathed, for almost instinctively I knew that this face belonged to her who was as beautiful as sin.

CHAPTER XV

MARIQUITA SURPRIZES

THE long, dripping, black lashes of the girl fluttered as she bent over me.

"*Si, si, señor;* it is Mariquita surely. But how did you know? You understand the Spanish?" she added quickly, as if afraid I was not comprehending what she said.

I rolled my head weakly to indicate the affirmative.

"Studied it at college," I whispered. "But I understand better than talk it."

A little knuckle of anxiety was furrowing between her slim eye-brows.

"It is enough, *señor*, that you comprehend. We have little time to lose." She was hastily unbinding my hands. "You must eat *muy pronto*. Metztli is coming and you must gather strength to give straight answers to his questions. It is important I assure you, *señor*."

A shadow fell athwart the open door of the hut.

"Is that this Metz party?" I asked sharply.

She shook her sombreroed head. Spoke the shadow in Spanish—

"La Caballerita, is it more water you need?"

"No, he has recovered; that will be all, Quetzal," she made answer, getting swiftly afoot. "You will stand before the door, *amigo*, and warn me should Metztli come."

I had had my answer. I sat up. Outside the open door, leaning on a Mauser and looking broodingly away across the heat-quivering mesa as if thinking morose thoughts, was a breech-clouted, reddish-brown, upstanding figure of an Indian. He was the guard.

"Who is this fellow with the odd name, Metz something?" I asked as best I could in halting Spanish. "Why should he question

me? What do I know of interest to him? Say, what do they intend to do with me, anyhow, these Indians?"

With one tan, knee-booted foot, she shoved across the earthen floor toward me a wooden platter containing speckled yellow dough cakes, wild dates and what looked to be the roasted ears of Indian corn.

"Eat, please, *señor*. There are *tortillas* here, some wild *tacos* and the roasted stems of the century plant which these Indians have discovered are rich as cream. While you fortify yourself, I shall try to answer your questions. But I can set your mind at rest upon one point. These Guiacuras are not barbarous savages. They do not intend, *señor*, either to kill or torture you."

It was a surprizingly frank return to my rush of headlong though pertinent queries. And it was surprizing in more than frankness. Her words and manner showed, from what I knew of the Spanish, education and true refinement. She was no ordinary camp-follower of ebullient Mexican revolutions, no ignorant, greasy, squat, brown peona. There was blood in her, man, and back of it all no doubt, a strange history.

I looked up at her in great wonderment. So this was the fearsome Amazon, Mariquita, she who was as beautiful as sin, against whom so fervently Teniente Dicenta had warned us, and whose Indians and herself I had so dreaded meeting during these last twenty hours. This glorious, limpid-eyed girl, so solicitous, so anxious for my welfare, so friendly eager to put me in the know.

Tall she was as she stood concernedly above me, tall to stateliness, with the luxuriant molding more of Juno than of Psyche, yet giving the lithe appearance of a pliant willow. She had the feminine trick of wearing clothes, her severe bolero jacket of deerskin and mannish riding breeches of cord draping her statuesque form like a wax rather than a cerement. Beautiful she certainly was and never more so than now, with the delicious little frown of thought knuckling her white forehead and her mobile, oval face incandescently expressive of her desire to tell me all, clearly and comprehensively.

"You have remarked. *señor*," she began as I fell to, without further ceremony, upon a thin, circular slab of *tortilla*—"you have remarked the uncouth strangeness of the name Metztli. That Indian outside the door also has not the name of a patron saint but that of the royal bird of the ancient Mexicans.

"Not far from here, in the copper hills, once existed the good mission of Dolores del Sur; but today the mission is in crumbling ruin, the padres have vanished and the brown communicants have lost altogether the true faith. They have retrograded back to the weird idolatry of their fathers, the Aztecs and Toltecs of early Mexico. To-day these Guiacuras are sun-worshipers!"

I COULD not restrain an ejaculation. It was of commingled astonishment and pleasure in one; astonishment at the startling information she was divulging, pleasure over the sweet taste that suddenly had tickled my palate as I bit into one of the roasted stems of the century plant. The section of stem like an ear of corn, had been coated over with sugar, then roasted, and now as my teeth sank into it, it was as if I were eating cream fried in cognac.

"Excuse me, *señorita*," I apologized. "I am listening with more interest than I can express. Who is this Metztli—if that's the way you pronounce it?"

"Metztli is the high priest of the Guiacuras. His name means in ancient Azteca the moon; and he claims accordingly, as the moon is the reflector of the sun, so he is the reflection of the sun-god, Tonatiuh. He will lead you to the Teocalli of Tonatiuh, the temple of the sun-god."

"But why, Mariquita?"

"Suffer me, *señor*; I am coming to that shortly. But first you must know that Metztli is the only one unfriendly to me among all the Guiacuras. I will not say he is an enemy; he is a noble man in many ways, but of all these Indian, he is the only one that has reason to dislike me. In order to explain, you will allow me, *caballero*, to tell a bit of my history among these Guiacuras?"

I nodded eager encouragement.

"Know you, *señor*," she went on then, "that when I was captured by these clay-coated and white-hooded Indians among the sand dunes along the beach, I had been living for days on the mesquite bean, which I had crushed into a kind of meal and with water, formed into pale *tortillas*. I was brought here, weak from lack of nutritive food. Metztli appointed several of the brown girls as *criadas* to me and he was, all in all, most solicitous of my welfare.

"I felt beholden to him, believing him a fine, utterly unselfish character until he made overtures toward marriage. Then I could not help it—I am a good deal Spanish, *señor*—I repulsed him with scorn. Perhaps I should have showed less of abhorrence; but when you see him, I think you will understand and not think ill of me.

"He was terribly angered however, his arched nostrils twitching red like flaming craters, his eyes black with evil. He had several of the bucks rope an unbroken stallion, a noble animal with the fine skin, large veins and slim shoulders of a thoroughbred, whom many of the bucks had tried to master only to

be thrown ignominiously, vanquished but fortunate to have escaped with unfractured bones.

"The stallion was called El Asterisco Negro, or the Sable Star, from his black glossy coat and white star on the forehead. Like a sack of sand, I was thrown upon the back of the wild creature and bound, hand and foot——"

"I understand," I nodded vehemently. "It was in that manner I was conveyed here today, though not of course upon the back of an unbroken maverick."

The girl continued:

"El Asterisco Negro was trembling in every limb and dancing around, nervous as a butterfly. The riata was cast off from about his neck and away he leaped like a desert wind. *Señor*, I have been familiar with horses since I was a *niñita* on my father's rancho in Chihuahua and there loved the foals like a mother because their stilts of legs were so wabbly and their heads so big for their poor weak necks. I have ridden all my life, but I assure you, never before in my life had I experienced a ride the like of that.

"For miles we flew up and down the dunes, the sand flinging into my face and cutting like bits of glass. The binding ropes sawing into my wrists and ankles gave like elastic and finally, unable to stretch farther under the jolting strains, broke in two like rubber bands pulled too far.

"There were times when I half fainted away; there were times when the horse, leaping off a sandy ledge and coming down stiffly on all fours, jarred me so severely that the teeth almost shot from my head, my ribs seemed to cave in and, shaken and sick, I came near slipping to the ground beneath the flailing hoofs; but at no time did I slacken the grip of my knees, the frantic twist of my hands in the flying mane.

"In a loamy stretch of desert we burst all at once into a grove of mesquite, fairly tall, spiked with thorns and so cluttered together one could not see more than twenty yards ahead. It was a perfect maze of jungle. I held my will between my teeth and clung on, the fleeing boughs almost scraping me off the horse's back, the long sharp thorns penetrating like needles.

"Gradually the stallion slackened his pace, as if even for him the jungle was too much, the thorns too agonizing. His hide was rippling under me continually as he twitched his flanks and withers in a vain attempt to rid himself of the nettles. He slowed up so much, that I felt safe at last in slipping off upon the ground.

"I must have fainted then—dead away. When I came to a consciousness of myself, I heard a rustling of leaves as of some one tearing paper and, searching through the thorny forest, saw a little distance on the Sable Star reaching up and feasting on the clusters of mesquite pods that were long as exaggerated string-beans. He was flipping his fine tail from side to side, partly in ineffectual endeavor to rid his hide of the prickling thorns, but more as a sign of pleasure. Horses and cattle, you must know, *señor*, revel in the fattening fodder of the mesquite.

"I untied the broken pieces of rope from my wrists and ankles, spliced them together after a fashion and crept toward him as soundlessly as the thorns littering the ground would allow. In a sudden leap I had hold of his nostrils and before he could jerk his head away had noosed his nose with the rope.

"It was the greatest surprize in the lives of these Guiacuras when at dusk I rode into the pueblo, the noble stallion drooping-headed and dog-weary beneath me and obedient to the slightest tug of my hand on the rope about his nose. These Indians are superb horsemen as you must have noticed, *señor*, and I had done something that they could not but admire—*si*, even marvel at. They had thought me dead out in the sand and sage and here had I come back, a *conquistadora!*

"I became la Caballera del Sol, the Horsewoman of the Sun, the most superlative title they could think to give me, as it linked the respect they had for my skill in their own particular art to the reverence they cherished for their ancient religion. From an adobe cache they produced a handsome silver-chased saddle and bridle, the memento of some *hidalgo* who had attempted, with too much éclat, a portage across these hills, and nothing would do but that they should present it to me with almost religious ceremony.

"Thenceforth, my path was smooth; no longer did chocolate-colored lovers attempt to serenade me in the warm nights; I was a power in the tribe second only to Metztli, the high priest. He resented greatly my ascendency but, having bared his fangs once and struck flint, he was forced into sullen submission."

"I believe," I said, nodding, "that I glimpsed that horse Sable Star yesterday, through the binoculars, with you standing alongside him."

"Ah, you saw me on the white dunes. Then it was you and one other below in that salt sink. I remember now that I caught the glint of yellow gold when you opened, for a brief moment, that army chest of Teniente Dicenta; but I should never recognize you as having been one of those two down in the glistening sink, as you wore a hat then and I could not see your red hair.

"Oh, there is so much I would ask you, *señor*," she rippled off at a tangent with Latin gusto, "about how you ever came to locate that treasure chest, what has happened to Serafin, how you knew me at first glance, why those Japanese boarded your vessel last night,

as the bucks who captured and brought you here have reported of them. *Señor*, my mind is all in a flutter, swarming with questions like a hive with bewildered bees.

"I should like to know where is that chest of gold which belongs more to me even than Serafin, and what you might know of these Japanese and their business here that you, of all on your little ship, should be parading the sand with them last evening, as has been reported of you, and heading to all appearances directly for their encampment. Oh, I am a very cat for curiosity and I only hope that we shall have time for you, *señor*, to explain it all."

SHE gazed down at me, her eyes wistful with pleading like drops of dew in the hollow of two brown leaves.

"I should be most glad, Mariquita," I assented, "to tell you what little I know. But to me it is all a most weird puzzle. There is one thing though that you can settle. We on the little ship, as you call it, thought sure you would attack us with your Indians long before this."

She gave a Spanish shrug to her well-rounded shoulders.

"And so I should, surely, *señor*. At least I should have made some show of strength against you in order to determine by what right you unearthed my chest of gold. The coming of these mysterious Orientals stopped me, however, and brought to an issue the hostility between Metztli and myself.

"When I discovered you, *señor*, and that other *hombre* bending over the chest of golden hidalgos and medio hidalgos down in the salt sink, I could hardly credit my eyes, believing I saw one of those mirages that so often hang in the crystal air over such glistening stretches.

"Once I was certain you were not distant phantoms but real live men, I immediately rode back here to Siete Fuentes and, reporting your bold depredation, gathered behind me a war-party of some forty bucks.

"We sent fast runners ahead on foot, clay-coated and white of hood, as is their Indian custom, so that they might act as scouts without being distinguishable against the sand and sage. We were well down into the desert when one of the runners came flying back to say that a ship of many sails had blown into the bay and that it was freighted with small yellow men."

"That was the Japanese schooner, *Taisei Maru*," I corroborated.

"Astonishment halted us," continued Mariquita, "and then, *señor*, there was let loose a perfect mischief of trouble. Metztli was for straightway turning back, leaving only the scouts in the sand. Once returned here to Seven Springs, he planned to prepare elaborately for the reception of the delegation expected from these yellow men. I was all for going on forthwith; but, *señor*, there was so much of legend and religious superstition attached to the coming of these Japanese that I could not combat Metztli's scheme of things, and finally his will prevailed."

"Legend and superstition!" I repeated, instantly minded of Suzunoya-no-Koji, his sleek white pets, and total lack of fear of these Indians. "Tell me, *señorita*; what is behind all this mysterious affinity between the Guiacuras and these Japanese?"

Her lashes fluttered as if I had thrown a dust of surprize into her great eyes.

"My soul, *señor*!" she exclaimed. "Do you not know the connection between these Japanese and the Guiacuras? I am overwhelmed. You were with the Japanese last evening, making toward their camp, and it is because of that you were brought here so that Metztli himself might question you. He believes you know all there is to know about these yellow——"

"I?" was my dumfounded interposition.

"*Seguramente, sí!* And so did I up to this very moment. That is why I tried to explain, as dispassionately as possible, the condition of affairs here. I was not seeking to instruct or bias you in the answers you should give Metztli. That was the farthest object from my mind I assure you, *señor*. I merely desired that you should understand comprehensively, and then speak the truth about these Japanese, clear away all this legend and clogging superstition and show them forth in their true——"

SHE paused sharply, with an excited catching of breath. Outside, Quetzal, the guard had vaulted out of his pensive brooding, whirled round and inserted his head in the doorway.

"You hear, la Caballerita?" he queried, his bushy brows raised, one hand cupped about an ear in hearkening attitude.

All else was shelved for the time while we too gave ear. Thrumming through the hot windless air, as if echoing out of the chasmy break in the hills, came the remote eery blaring of horns, the rumble as of kettle-drums.

"It is Metztli, *señorita mia*," warned Quetzal with marked concern. "He is approaching in state down the cañon and it is best he should not find you here."

Mariquita stamped her booted foot in an impetuous show of vexation, the blood pulsing scarlet in her nether lip under the small, white biting teeth.

"*Dios de mi vida*, what a pity!" she exclaimed, disappointedly. "There is ever so much I wanted explained by you, *señor*, and here comes Metztli, interrupting and intruding, anxious himself for information about these yellow

men. He must not find me here. After he has marched you to the Teocalli and there questioned you, *si;* but now he may think I have instructed you in what to say.

"*Señor,*" she appealed to me, "you know I have not! Quetzal, you have heard all," she turned to the Indian, listening tensely in the doorway. "If Metztli should see me by any chance, you will bear witness, *amigo,* that I have not told this *caballerete* the kind of answers he should give."

There seemed more than vexatious disappointment perturbing the girl.

"It is the truth," grunted the sentry, swinging round on bare, brown heels. Then, the Mauser a streak of glittering steel across one chestnut-hued shoulder, he started pacing with springy tread back and forth before the doorway. I realized, thereat, that his previous brooding had been but a posture of hearkening. His present activity was a restoration of sentinel appearances.

"As for me, *señorita,*" I spoke to Mariquita's back as she made toward the door, "I know little of these Japanese and what little I know I have every reason to doubt and distrust. To me, this whole business is a most weird puzzle. But Mariquita," I added appealingly, "cannot you even hint the nature of the queries Metztli will ask me?"

The blaring of the horns and roll of the drums was growing loud with nearness. Mariquita, about to step through the doorway, paused abruptly at my appeal and flashed a look from her excitedly radiant eyes back over one shoulder.

"It is the sign of the mouse, *señor!*" she breathed. "Metztli will want you to explain the meaning of that sign. He will tell you what I have not had the time to say. Now, go thou with God, *caballerete!*"

CHAPTER XVI

THE FIRST SIGN OF THE ZODIAC.

HE WAS a hideous looking Indian, shocking to gaze upon, like a man monstrously gotten up for some masque of horribles. His prominent, bronze cheek-bones were heightened by a plaster of red clay, as if in coming up the dump he had stooped and dabbed on some of the pigmented earth.

His black hair, long and coarse as the mane of a horse, was molded with white clay into snaky locks that dangled about his shoulders. He wore a zebra-striped colorific suit of balbriggan underwear, a breech-clout of dubious white and naught besides.

There was a wide stripe of brilliant red in the yellow garment across the chest and a stripe of primary blue encircling the waist and below the oily white of breech-clout about the middle, the legs were like the legs of a donkey with further barrings of blue and red.

From the folds of the breech-clout, which he apparently wore less in modesty than as a *jaja* or sash in which to carry articles, protruded the ivory mouse-carved hilt of my Japanese captor's knife and the black lacquered sticks of a closed fan, obviously of Oriental manufacture. My rattan-laced gourd was at one hip.

Now that I saw Metztli, standing zebra-striped and mud-marceled in the entrance to the hut, I no longer wondered that Mariquita had turned down his proffers of marriage. The surprize was mine instead that the beautiful girl should have used rankling scorn when she might more naturally have rallied him with derision. Under any other circumstances, I am positive the ludicrous appearance of the high priest would have provoked me to no end of laughter.

But back of him, down the colorful, clay slope of the dump, ranged at least a hundred breech-clouted, naked bucks, tall, soldierly erect, the sun of the fervent noon stinging their reddish-brown skins to the tinge of tawny gold, flashing hotly from the steel of the Mausers across their muscled shoulders.

Immediately behind Metztli, without the door of the adobe and hushed, now with expectancy, stood the horn-blowers and two drummers with their copper-bottomed, sleekly shining drums.

The high priest noticed, as he looked down at me, the concave wooden platter on the earth flooring, containing the wild dates that I had been intending to eat as a dessert to my luncheon.

"Hola!" he ejaculated in mild surprize and in Spanish, nodding his clay-molded locks. "Some old one of the pueblo, some wrinkled, toothless *anciana,* thought to bring you something for your belly. Leave it to the crones! But it is well, *señor.* You feel stronger now, though not so strong I warrant as to need to have your hands re-tied when guarded by five-score men!"

He began fidgeting, after that pointed remark, with the back of his oily breech-clout. The shafts of sunlight through the interstices of the roof glittered on his black eyes, the while he watched me as if he were some cat and I some bird in a shrubbery. He produced a pair of rawhide sandals—no doubt his own, as his walnut-brown feet were bare. He appeared in this short interim to recover from his surprize. His attitude changed, unaccountably, to one of conscious courtesy.

"I notice your soles are rather tender, *señor caballero,*" he said. "Here, put on these *guarachas.* Then, an you please, *señor,* you will follow me."

Bewildered by his thoughtfulness yet withal

mighty thankful, I slipped on the soft sandals. I noticed several of the bucks wearing similar protection against the burning earth and ubiquitous thorns, albeit the soles of most of them were stoically toughened to a leather. Appearances might prove deceptive I thought but things surely seemed working to a desire. I got quickly afoot and made after the weird-looking priest, happy in a measure to be shut of that stifling, blazing-sheeted shack.

His zebra stripes fulgent in the sunlight, the clay curls bobbing with each motion of his body like snakes writhing in an agony, Metztli led the way down the colorful slope of dump, myself behind; and a little behind me the silent drummers and buglers and the four-deep ranks of armed men marching on up the slope, performing a snappy military flanking maneuver on the flat before the hut, and then marching down after us. The shrilling of cicadæ from the shaded pool below, the stumbling and crunching of bare and rawhide soles on hot, brittle clay, the creaking of leather Mauser slings against tawny shoulders, were loud noises in the quivering stillness of the high, torrid noon.

The shade of the cottonwoods was an inexpressible relief from the stabbing of the sun. With the steady, flopping sound of the marching feet behind and the clank-clanking of loose stacking-swivels on the Mausers, we made through the shade, following the gurgling little stream up the chasmy break in the hills.

We debouched, after a little, upon a box cañon, seemingly several miles deep and flanked on every hand by high chrome-orange walls. Close up squatted a village of thatched roofs and mud and stake walls, apparently built about one larger adobe in the center; farther away waved the yellow of maize and wheat, the rich shimmering green as of alfalfa grass.

The street leading down and through the squat pueblo was no more than a cow-path, empty of folk, radiating with heat. Behind me, all at once, the buglers blew a tantara. Then, with drums drumming and horns blaring, we continued down the *calle*.

A nondescript dog left off scratching himself to chase before us and bark at the striped legs of the priest; a brown, greasy woman crouched in a dark entry, paused, in searching her *niñita's* hair, to poise wooden comb and black saucer eyes, over our *pasear;* like lizards from their nooks, the eyes of other women and children gleamed out from the black obscurity of the hovels.

The cow-path widened in the heart of the pueblo into a pitiful attempt at a plaza overgrown with trampled grass, dried by the withering sun into the color of the mud huts about. In the geometric center of the sorry square stood the larger adobe hut.

I SAW, as we made through the parchment grass of the plaza, that it was no hut at all but a cube of solid adobe on top of which upreared like a clown's hat on an overlarge head a low inset mud mound of pyramidal shape. Embossed on the four-square walls of solid adobe base were sculptured snakes in all manner of posturing. I realized thereat that here was I face to face with an evidence of the ancient religion of these Guiacuras. These serpent walls were the old *coatepantli* of the Aztecs. This solid cube of adobe was the base of a *teocalli,* its square sides oriented to the four quarters of the compass.

In the south face of the serpent walls was notched an indenting flight of steps, up which the zebra-striped priest led. I was alone in following. The armed bucks ranged themselves in a hollow square about the *teocalli,* the drummers with flashing sticks and buglers, with bronze cheeks swelled like wind-cysts, remaining vociferously at the foot of the staircase.

We came out, the weird priest and I, on a kind of platform overlooking the thatched roofs of the village, the upturned, sweat-gleaming, bronze faces below and the heat-striated cliffs above and beyond. The platform was like a runway about the low pyramid of adobe which crowned the cubic base like a small clown's hat.

In each of the four plane triangular faces of the adobe pyramid was sculptured a ball of sun with an offshoot of eight broad rays and about all, in a circle, the picture writing of ancient Mexico. The ideographs in each circle were like the twelve signs of the zodiac, only in this case, instead of our Chaldaean symbols of the ram, the bull, the crab, the lion, the goat, the fishes and so forth, these hieroglyphics depicted, in the order named, a small rat or mouse, an ox, blotched ocelot, hare, lizard, feathered serpent, tapir, sheep, monkey, eagle, dog and pig.

The high priest, Metztli, and I were alone on the platform atop the cubic base. Below us the rubadub of the drums and quaver of the horns drifted away into silent reeking heat. There was a conscious hush, palpitant with drama, tense with portent. Somewhere far off a dog barked and the echoes seemed to slip down from the high, notched teeth of the chrome cliffs.

"Behold, *señor!*" said Metztli in a commanding voice. His black eyes were glittering metallically, but whether from the sunlight or in excitement, or from an admixture of both, I could not be sure. Like flexuring snakes, his mud curls shook about his head as he bent abruptly over.

He pointed at the rodent in one of the zodiacal circles, then at the mouse carved in the ivory hilt of the knife in his breech-clout. They were amazing duplicates, one of the other. I really surmised from something I had read once

that the primary symbol of this strange zodiac was a mouse dormant, head between forefeet, long, bald tail curled underneath. Precisely the same as the mouse carved in the ivory hilt of my Japanese captor's knife!

"This *cuchillo*," explained the high priest, watching my every move and shade of expression with glittering eyes as if once again I were the bird in the shrubbery—"this knife did not come with you, *señor*. It was in the hand of a little man who attacked one of the Guiacuras last night, and had to be silenced forever that we might preserve our secrecy. But here, look; this was found on your person."

It was like a damning accusation. He lifted up the water-bottle I had stripped early the night prior from my Japanese captor at the water-hole and which in turn the Indians had stripped from me. Engraved in its glazed face beneath the fine lacings of rattan, I saw now that which I had failed to notice in the ghostly moonlight of the night gone.

It was the etching of a mouse, dormant, head between forefeet, long bald tail curled underneath. The same as the mouse carved in the ivory hilt of my Japanese captor's knife and hence, identically and exquisitely the same as the mouse sculptured in each pyramid face, as the first sign of the zodiac.

CHAPTER XVII

THREE WISE MEN OUT OF THE WEST

"SEVEN moons ago, *señor*," said Metztli, the high priest, "there camped, at the Seventh Spring outside the cañon, three men dressed like you, in *camisa* and wide trousers but smaller of stature, with odd slits for eyes and skins yellow as the sulfur out of Popocatepetl. They were examining the variegated clay in the Collado de Colorado and talking in a strange tongue when our bucks stole up on them and took all three prisoner.

"Immediately, thereupon, the tallest of the three who was built as big as any Guiacura and had black sprouts of hair over either mouth corner, floated out before our surprized eyes a banner of some soft, shiny stuff on which was emblazoned the red ball of the sun and the eight, broad rays on a yellow field."

"The flag of Japan," I mumbled, nodding.

"We escorted them in here to the *teocalli* because we thought, from the banner, they must know of Tonatiuh, our great god of the sun. Surely enough they did, and more. Just as I have pointed out to you *señor*, just so did that tall *haciendado* point out the sign of the mouse in these circles and then the same sign picture-written on their pistols, their knives, their water-bottles, even on the saddles of their horses, the boots on their feet and sombreros on their heads.

"We had lost the meaning of most of these signs of the circles. *Señor*, so long had our fathers been under the sway of the Frailes that today we have only a mongrel smattering of our ancient Nahuatl tongue. But these three strange yellow men told us that they knew the meaning of the first symbol of the circles, the sign of the mouse.

"They introduced themselves. The tall one with the black tails over his mouth corners spoke Spanish as well as Mariquita herself, but neither his name nor the names of the other two *hombres* were Spanish names. They said they came of a race called Yamato, which I have remembered; but their own names were so odd I have since forgotten them.

"Then, *señor*, came the astounding announcement. The tall *caballero* said that he was a priest of Quetzalcoatl, the good god and civilizer, he who shunned war and all violence and sought the ways of peace, he who taught our fathers to write in pictures, to till the soil and work in metals and to rule a well-ordered state.

"We were dumfounded and doubting, as you might well imagine, *señor*. The tall one pointed thereat to the sixth sign of the circles, the central and keystone picture of the feathered serpent. That, he said, stood for his master, the great Quetzalcoatl. It was one sign the meaning of which we had retained. *Señor*, in pure Nahuatl, *quetzalcoatl* means the feathered serpent. He had spoken rare truth.

"The tall yellow one went on then, as further evidence, to recite certain legends about the Feathered Serpent. He reminded us of the bitter rivalry that once existed between Quetzalcoatl the Good and Tezcatlipoca, the highest *teoll* of the little gods.

"After the contest between the two gods to settle that rivalry which Quetzalcoatl unfortunately lost, the legends have it that Tezcatlipoca, the sly tricky one, persuaded the good god to drink of some *octli* to rid himself of melancholy and inspirit his failing heart.

"That *lagarto*, Tezcatlipoca, had made a bargain with his cousin, Tezcatzoncatl, the god of strong drink, and there was some magic in that pulque. That magic sent Quetzalcoatl wandering over the high *cordilleras* till he reached the great sea where he took ship and disappeared from the sight of men.

"Now, *señor*, we Guiacuras are supposed to be descendants of Quetzalcoatl after he sailed across the Water of Cortez and settled here in the hills of Baja California. And here this man speaking, he of the goodly height and black tails over the mouth-corners, claimed that he and his *compadres* were offspring of the same god after he had roamed still farther on over the Western Sea. He explained that they called themselves the Yamato just as we called ourselves Guiacuras. Really, he said, we were blood brothers!

"It seemed all beyond belief *señor*, to say the least. But we had told them little of our history; the tall yellow *hombre* who claimed to be high priest of the Feathered Serpent was doing the most of the talking; and to make the truth of his words undeniably true, he said now that the first picture-writing in these circles, the sign of the mouse, meant water. Quetzalcoatl had given them the sign and, according to this saffron priest's story, the Feathered Serpent himself had exhorted them in these words:

" 'Preserve ye this symbol, ye of the Yamato. In the great ocean of world tendency, some day there may arise the dire necessity that ye should be recognized and known as the children of mine and of my seven Nahuatlac tribes over the water. This sign is your birthmark. It betokens from where ye have come—that ye have come, forsooth, over the water!' "

I could not smother an ejaculation as I heard, at last, a sort of meaning for the sign of the mouse. How soundly based in truth it was I could only conjecture. It had all the earmarks of one of those mystic fabrications of the wily Oriental, Suzunoya-no-Koji. Yet, withal, there was a ring of familiarity about the pseudo-meaning as if somewhere I had heard or read something to similar effect.

The truth was that if my mind had been in a flutter a short while ago swarming with questions like a hive with bewildered bees, it was athrum now with busy bees, each coated with ideas to answer those questions and driving toward some gray cell of the brain to store up therein its knowledge.

I knew now why Suzunoya-no-Koji had felt no fear of these Indians in the sand the night before. That Japanese was none other than the tall yellow man who for superstitious effect on these Indians had claimed to be a priest of Quetzalcoatl, a god of their own religion.

卍 THE knowledge Suzunoya-no-Koji had exhibited of the legends of ancient Mexico was not so surprizing as its facial appearance might seem. I had sensed his intellectual power in the walk across the ghostly dunes the night prior and had he dropped then his alien and theatric affectations, I am sure I should have been astonished at his capabilities in English. According to Metztli the high priest, his Spanish was as expressive and fluent as that of Mariquita herself. His very name, that of the Retired Scholar of the House with the Bell, spoke of ascetic learning.

The legends of Quetzalcoatl, the saintly ruler and civilizer of the Aztecs, are well-known and popular subjects, the themes of many school-book stories I read myself as a boy. Small wonder the Japanese scholar had known of them so thoroughly as to be able to twist them, with delphic prepense, to the utter confounding of these poor, superstitious Guiacuras.

What a daring, bewildering hodgepodge he had made of it all. In one breath he had said that he and his compatriots were of the Yamato, which is the Japanese name for their own race; in the next he had explained this blandly away and was using the name as if it were some mysterious, secret title. What a suave, slippery eel of a fellow! Every time I thought of him, I was forced to compare him with some eery magus out of the "Arabian Nights."

I saw now why Captain Yasuhara had draped the sun-flag of Japan in the sternsheets of the dory the previous afternoon, so that Suzunoya-no-Koji might sit thereon in being conveyed ashore. It was in order that should any clay-coated and white-hooded Indians be spying from the dunes with possible thought of attack, they would see that flag of occult meaning to them and be cowed from all idea of violence.

Suzunoya-no-Koji had placed the flag within some recess of his robe for future use. Both sun-flag and mouse-decorated robe were garnitures to awe and further enslave these Guiacuras. He had told me in the walk of the night prior, that these Indians were short, squat men, when all the time he had known they were goodly sized and upstandingly slim, just to lend color, no doubt, to his own fabrication of race relationship between the two. I began even to think——

But the high priest was speaking on, his arched nostrils fluttering like paper in a wind, with the excitement of his recital:

"These three wise yellow men gave fine presents to us all—colorful beads, soft bright cloths, and works of silver and gold such as Quetzalcoatl himself only could have taught them to do. The tall one with the black tails over his mouth corners presented me with this dainty fan as the offering, he said, from one Nahuatlacatl priest to another.

"He said further that after six moons had waxed and waned in the sky they would return with many more descendants of the good god, our father, Quetzalcoatl. Then would we together water the sterile sands of the desert and bore the everlasting hills, till the soil, work in metals and found such a state here, they promised, as would rival in power and splendor the lost one of ancient Azteca.

"It was a noble vision. But six moons yellowed and paled in the sky and they did not come, and we began to think we had been listening to lizards. Then yestere'en, when a new moon had sprouted in the sky, came all these strange yellow men in skirts like women.

"One of the three wise men is with them. The priest, he of the black tails over the mouth corners and the goodly height. But he is not garbed as he was before, in boots and wide trousers and *camisa*. He wears a long, blue robe in which are all manner of picture-writing, colored mice outlined like the first sign of our

circles. We know him thus for a blood-brother come to us over the water; but strange, he does not come to us as a brother should.

"He camps in the sand far away, and our bucks must go forth and spy upon him. Last night he walked about and jingled tiny glass beads in his fingers and made noises through his teeth like the hissing of the solecuate, the blunt-tailed green snake of the sand. On one sleeve he carried a mouse the like of which we never before have seen. It was white, perfectly white as the snow tops of the hills farther up, with red eyes and a long, red tail. *Señor*, you yourself saw it!

"We followed him through the gullies, mystified by it all, not knowing what he could be about and only waiting for him, should he sense we were near, to call to us in the Spanish that he can speak so well. But he went on walking and talking to you, *señor*, in a strange throaty tongue like the jabber he was using with those other two when first he appeared outside on the Collado de Colorado.

"He put you in the hands of another man who had come shouting up. Something had happened in the Bay of the Magdalena and he went on to see what was the trouble. I myself saw him climb aboard that ship with the many poles.

"There had been a fight in the fog between the yellow men and the men of your little ship, one of our watchers on the dunes told me; but this time all was quiet down in the *bahia*. The slice of moon showed out the small, sulfur-colored men, in big sombreros, parading up and down the decks of your ship. *Señor*, they were a perfect swarm and none of your *compañeros* were to be seen."

I nodded acknowledgment of the information, as if it were first-hand news. I did not commit myself to explain that I had been in the fight and been flung overboard. I was hanging on every vibrant word of the high priest who, in true Indian style, was taking pains to elaborate and prolong his discourse. Shortly now, I felt, would he have to come to the crux of the whole business, explain why he was relating all these details and reveal what was expected of me in return.

"I waited and waited," he continued, "until the pallor of dawn crept into the sky and I could wait no longer, else I should be seen. And I did not want to be seen, *señor*. I felt that this saffron priest should first pay the respects of his yellow people to us as this is our own land, *señor*, given into our trust by the Feathered Serpent himself.

"Another crowd of bucks came on with you and your comrade, that other yellow man. Suddenly he discovered one of the bucks below. He gave chase, this mouse knife in his hand, and he would have killed Quetzal had not he soundlessly flung his *atlatl* and caught the *hombre* over the heart.

"It was the only thing to do, *señor*, as we did not want the yellow men, should they prove indeed blood-brothers, to know we had been spying on them. We still hoped the saffron priest would send his promised delegation on to us, requesting the Guiacuras to join hands with his people in the founding of the great, new Nahuatlac brotherhood.

"Indeed, *señor*, there were so many strange things about these sulfur-skinned men—the skirts and tinkling beads of the saffron priest so like the robes and rosaries of the hated Frailes, his walking about and odd hissing sounds, the white mouse he carried on his sleeve, the like of which I never before have seen, the camping far away in the sand without attempt to get word to us—all this put me in such a flurry of doubt I even questioned whether these men and their women were of the promised tribe. Then Quetzal, when I got back from the beach, showed me the mouse knife he had taken from the dead *hombre*——"

"But why did you bring me here?" I interrupted, at last, in an effort to get to the kernel of the matter. "Why do you tell me all this?"

He shook back his mud locks and gazed at me out of serious, black eyes.

"I saw the sign of the mouse on your water-bottle, *señor*," he said gravely, "when, with the rosy fingers of the sun streaking the sky and a bluish haze hanging over the sand, I came upon you unconscious in the mesquite flat with the horses. Before that, last night, I saw you the *compañero* of the tall, robed priest with the black tails over his mouth corners and the strange, white mouse on his arm.

"You were the comrade of the *hombre* who was killed lest he should expose our spying. Indeed you were on your way to report the matter to these yellow men when Quetzal and Ichcapilli stopped you on the bald-headed mound overlooking their camp. You were brought here and have been told all this to one good end. *Señor*, you know the significance——"

"But I don't!" I saw fit to deny ere I should become embroiled too deeply and lead these Indians to expect too much of me. "That man who was killed was no comrade of mine. He held his knife to my back before ever he attempted to use it on your buck, Quetzal. This gourd——"

"I know, *señor caballero*," said the priest quietly, as if to subdue my doubtless apparent nervousness. "You are no *paisano* of these saffron men, nor are you of the race of the Nahuatlacatl. Your hair is red; you are of the white *conquistadores*. But you know the meaning of the first sign in our circles as you carried the same sign on your water-bottle. *Señor*, you know the significance of the coming of these sulfur-hued men."

I began to fear the wrath of these Guiacuras

should I fail in their expectations. I made hastily, if belatedly, to explain my status when with upraised hand the priest silenced me.

"Mariquita," he said, "whom these poor Indians call la Caballera del Sol, maintains that these yellow men are enemies, that they mean to take our land from us as her own ancestors did before them. She holds that these saffron men are not descendants of Quetzalcoatl, the Good, such claim being but the lie of crafty lizards. They are of a race called the Yapanee, she says, like the men who fish for pearls and sponges, sharks and whales, up in the *Bahia de los Ballenas.*"

His leathery lips curved in scorn; the feline glitter crept into his eyes.

"La Caballera del Sol is thought by these poor Guiacuras to be a veritable *sacerdocsia*, in bravery and knowledge and occult power second only to me, Metztli, the moon, the reflection of the sun, Tonatiuh; but I know she is only Mariquita, a woman of the race that overwhelmed our fathers, robbed us of our language and slew our noble gods for the benefit of the triad of *teotls* of their own creed.

"*Señor!*" and he spread his walnut-brown hands out to me— "you shall be the *cihuacoatl*, the supreme judge. On your word, will we be friendly or hostile to these newcomers. Speak, *gran caballero!* Are these yellow outlanders the children of the great Quetzalcoatl? Are they here as blood-brothers to found with us the great new Nahuatlac nation that shall inundate the whole land like a flood, or do they come, as the Spaniards of long ago, to wrest the land of our fathers from our keeping?"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TWELVE CYCLICAL ANIMALS OF THE CHINESE

I WAS like a man upon the convex of the world, looking down. It was not because I was up here with the zebra-striped priest upon the cubic base above all those wattled roofs, black heads, gleaming guns and upturned sweaty bronze faces. It was not at all a physical sense.

The yellow and green of the distant fields dazzling in the sunlight like remote mirages of amber and malachite, the heat-striated, chrome cliffs towering wide and high above me, would have killed any such elemental projection, crushed me with my finiteness and feebleness, showed me what a mere mote was I in this hollow of great, blind forces.

The orientation in me was of the brain, mighty with mind matter. The vibrant appeal of the glittering-eyed priest had been the spark that had fired my brain. I felt myself surging, as on some apex of a whirling globe, into a knowledge of the signification of all those hieroglyphics upon the adobe pyramid, a solution at last of this whole mystery.

There was real need that I should explain away the clutch of superstition Suzunoya-no-Koji had fastened upon these Guiacuras. To do that I must get at the root of the whole cult, delve down to bed-rock and build up anew. I must explain away with sound reasoning the remarkable similarity between the mice, carved on water-bottl and knife, and the first sign of the Azteca zodiac.

Then might I tell these Indians what I feared rather than knew, of these Japanese. They would believe me. They would act on my counsel to eschew the yellow men as enemies. I might even be able to persuade them to get behind me, drive into the desert, rout the Japanese and recover control of the *Seventy-three* and the chest of golden hidalgos and medio hidalgos, in the forward magazine.

Necessity is the mother of invention. It is also the dynamo of the brain. I remembered in a flash as occult as a bolt of lightning from the sky, as sudden as a landfall to a seaplane, the book on nautical astronomy I had read on the way down to Magdalena Bay.

Certain paragraphs leaped out at me like fire and behold, the convoluted structure of superstition, built with crafty care, block by block, on the basis of the mysterious similarity between the signs on pyramid and Japanese implements, crumbled away like a dune of sand before a blast of the Trades.

Let me go back. After taking our departure from the Farralones on the run to Magdalena Bay, Skipper Jim Hathaway had evinced so much enthusiasm in the problems of navigating the *Seventy-three*, taking sights morning, noon, before sunset, and even at night watching the transit of the stars, that he had aroused in me a contagious interest in the mystery of it all. At that time, you may recall that we were none too friendly with Kit Morley on account of the unannounced and undesired appearance of his wife; once the jagged skyline of the Coast Range faded into hazy distance time had hung a bit heavy on my hands, and I thought to study navigation, thus filling in the vacuity most admirably.

I pulled down the books in Jim's cabin— Bowditch, Aquino's "Altitude and Azimuth Tables," "Elements of Trigonometry and of Navigation," the "Hydrographic Office Edition of Azimuths of the Sun," books on Nautical Astronomy, Sumner's "Line of Position" and the Marcq Saint Hilaire Method. They were all Greek to me, confusing and stupefying. Even Jim's scribbling on the flysheets looked like the excited tracings of some ink-dripping bookmite.

The preface to the study of Nautical Astronomy, however, intrigued my imagination. It was a readable résumé of astronomy from

the age-dusted days when the science was a black art called astrology. I read about Pythagoras, Ptolemy, Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Descartes, Bacon and Halley, and about scientists of whom I never before had heard, Tycho Brahe, Kepler, Gassendi, Johann Bayer, Horrocks, Huygens, Romer and Tobias Mayer. I read of the origin of the science shrouded in superstition; the mystical Chinese, Babylonian and Egyptian fancies, and the founding of astronomy as a genuine science when the Greeks sublimed the notions of two of these peoples into solid theory.

Under the subheading of Signs of the Zodiac, certain paragraphs I had perused were leaping, now, like flames in my mind:

"The characteristic Chinese mode of dividing the yellow road of the sun was by the twelve cyclical animals—the Rat or Mouse, Ox, Tiger, Hare, Dragon or Crocodile, Serpent, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Hen, Dog and Pig. This series served to designate the divisions of time. Having no clocks, the Chinese regarded instead the face of the sky; the stars thus denominated acted as almanacs; they hunted and fished, sowed and reaped in correspondence with the recurrent order of celestial appearances as the sun whirled on its yellow road. It is remarkable that the opening sign of the rat is, in the Far East, frequently used as an ideograph for 'water' and denotes a time of 'want and rain.' Nor has it yet fallen into desuetude. 'Years of the Rat,' 'Mouse Months,' still figure in the almanacs of Central Asia, Cochin China and Japan.

"A large detachment of the 'cyclical animals' of the Chinese even found its way to the New World. This is not so hard to understand if we will subscribe to the theory that the original peopling of the American continent came from the East when there was a continuous land between America and Asia, say by way of a neck where the Aleutian Islands now dot Bering Sea. Even questioning this, at all times communication has been open between east Asia and the west coast of America.

"While Japan was incommunicado with the world and even on into the Twentieth Century of today, Japanese junks drifted over by the ocean current to Lower California at the rate of about one a year, often with some of the crew still alive. Moreover there are other details of early Mexican civilization which are most easily accounted for on the supposition that they were borrowed from Asia.

"Accurate and experienced Alexander von Humboldt compared the Mexican calendar with that in use in Eastern Asia. Prescott also noted the similarity in his 'Conquest of Mexico.' Seven of the twenty days constituting the Aztec month bore names evidently borrowed from those of the Chinese zodiacal signs. The rat or Mouse, Monkey, Hare or Rabbit, Dog and Serpent reappeared with slight variations; for the Asiatic Tiger, Crocodile, Horse and Cock, unknown then in America, the Ocelot, Lizard or Alligator, hoofed proboscidial Tapir, and Eagle were substituted as analogous.

"Of the zodiac in its true sense of a partitioned belt of the heavenly sphere, there was no aboriginal knowledge on the American continent. Mexican acquaintance with the signs related only to their secondary function as dies, so to speak, with which to sculpture their *teocallis* to mark the recurring intervals of time."

TO EXPLAIN all this to these Indians was now the question—a grave question, treacherous with explanations. I realized all in a heap the insuperable difficulties facing me. As well try to tell these people they were the lost tribe of Israel as was once maintained, the descendants of Naphtuhim, son of Mizraim and grandson of Noah who had left Egypt after the fall of the Tower of Babel! Suzunoya-no-Koji, the crafty Oriental, had judged these Guiacuras adroitly and builded his structure of superstition with uncanny Asiatic cunning. Every cherished tradition and supernatural belief of the Indians, every unforeseen coincidence, had been grist to his mill. I no longer wondered that Buddha, Zoroaster, Mohammed, all the great mystic teachers of the world, had come out of the East.

The priest of Shinto had blandly changed himself to a priest of Quetzalcoatl. The rayed, red-ball flag of Japan he carried had become through happy correspondence, the supernatural emblem of these sun-worshipers. He had recognized the Azteca zodiac as having been borrowed from the Chinese. Wherefore, contrariwise, the tradition of Asia peopling America in the prehistoric past he had twisted into America peopling Asia through Quetzalcoatl, the Wanderer. He was a master of paradox.

I could only marvel at his ingenuity, readiness of wit and apt judgment. On the implements he carried, the clothes he wore, was stamped the sign of the mouse, the symbol of the mysterious Toyama. Through fortunate coincidence again, it was precisely the duplicate of the mice carved in the Azteca zodiacs.

The mouse of the zodiac, according to its original Chinese meaning, stood for water. He told these poor Guiacuras therefore, that the symbol on his clothes and utensils signified "over the water"; was a treasured sign from the Feathered Serpent himself to show that originally the Japanese, or better Yamato, had come from Mexico "over the water."

Perhaps, the sign of Toyama really did signify "over the water." I doubted it. From all the other paradoxes, I could only conclude there was subtle duplicity lurking somewhere.

To that sign of the mouse, that symbol of dread Toyama, there must be some other meaning, secret and potent.

I could not deny to these Indians however, that the first sign of their zodiac meant water. I could show them that, as one would carry a passport in a more civilized state, so for protection had Suzunoya-no-Koji carried on his person the ensign of his country.

Still, that would not gainsay the fact that the flag of Japan represented the sun. Were I to aver, even, that Suzunoya-no-Koji was no priest of Quetzalcoatl, but of Buddha, they might think that only another name for the Feathered Serpent, a secret mystical name as Jehovah once was to the Jews.

Oh, believe me, I was no longer like a man upon the convex of the world. I perceived myself as I was, finite and feeble, a mere mite in the concave of cosmic forces, the shuttlecock of age-old superstitions, Oriental cunning and great blind ignorance.

Suppose I should tell these Guiacuras of the origin and meaning of the picture-writing in the circles, that they were the twelve cyclical animals of the Chinese zodiac, symbols of the twelve constellations in the yellow road of the sun? That would involve explaining how the signs had come here across the Pacific, bring up the theory of the prehistoric invasion of America by Orientals, show clearly forth the fact that they were sprung from the same root as the Chinese and Japanese and that in other words, just as Suzunoya-no-Koji had claimed, they were indeed blood-brothers.

I resolved in dismay to be done with all the weird business and to cut to the heart of the matter by making a clean breast of how little I knew of these Japanese. I turned to Metztli of the snaky locks and brilliant stripes.

There sounded on my ears as I did, a noise like the rapid clatter of a horse's hoofs; I noted several of the bronze faces below, no longer lifted to me but gazing curiously up the cow-path toward the chasmy break in the cliffs; then I felt upon me the eyes of the priest, glittering watchfully like a cat's.

"*Señor don sacerdote,*" I said, "suffer me to tell you what these yellow men gave as their reason for coming here, and then you can judge whether they speak truth, whether they come as friends or enemies.

"Over in Mexico, beyond the Sea of Cortez, there is continually the crackling of guns and of flames and much spilling of red blood. One of the powerful *bandolero* chiefs named Francisco Villa sent to the Land of the Rising Sun across the Western Sea for men to cook for his *soldados*, to build bridges and repair railroads, and to farm the farms deserted by the *hombres* who have all gone off to the war.

"These yellow coolies and their women have come in answer. They purpose making a portage across these hills, taking ship on the Sea of Cortez and going on into Mexico. They do not intend to remain here in——"

An audible murmur from the armed bucks below the *teocalli* interrupted me. I saw the black eyes of the priest swivel from me to look up the cañon. I swung about.

She came clattering down the cow-path between the mud and stake hovels, her Junoesque young body swinging lithely to the rhythm of the high stride of the magnificent stallion, her sombrero gone and the cloud of storm-black hair loosed on the breeze stirred up by the rapid gallop.

It was she called la Caballera del Sol, the girl Mariquita, riding the glossy-coated stallion with the white star on the forehead. Across her saddle-bows, limp as a rag, hung a clay-coated, dusty Indian, the white hood fallen from his face and caught in the shock of black hair, his head and limbs dangling and swinging with odd flaccidity to the jolting of the horse.

She reined the Sable Star up sharply in the papery grass of the plaza just beyond the rear rank of armed bucks. She looked up toward the adobe platform. Her great eyes were expanded with excitement like golden flowers in the sun, the tight bolero jacket of tan deerskin was lifting and falling with the riotous heaving of her bosom.

As she glimpsed me, she made a little, scornful moue of her open lips, sudden and fleeting, vanished ere in my surprize I was sure I had remarked it. Then she addressed the priest.

"It is Temalacoatl, the courier!" she exclaimed in quavering voice, indicating the limp form before her across the saddle-bows.

"He overtaxed himself, so excited was he by the news he bore. He is unconscious from the heat, the lack of water, the long run—he has been on the way for hours. Before he swooned, he told me all, everything. Here, you *macehuallil*" she cried commandingly to several of the nearest bucks. "Take him away and give him aid."

"What is this news, la Caballera del Sol?" questioned the priest solicitously and with marked deference, in his eagerness leaning far over the edge of the *teocalli*. The girl looked up from instructing the peasants, as she had called the bucks, in the removing and succoring of the courier.

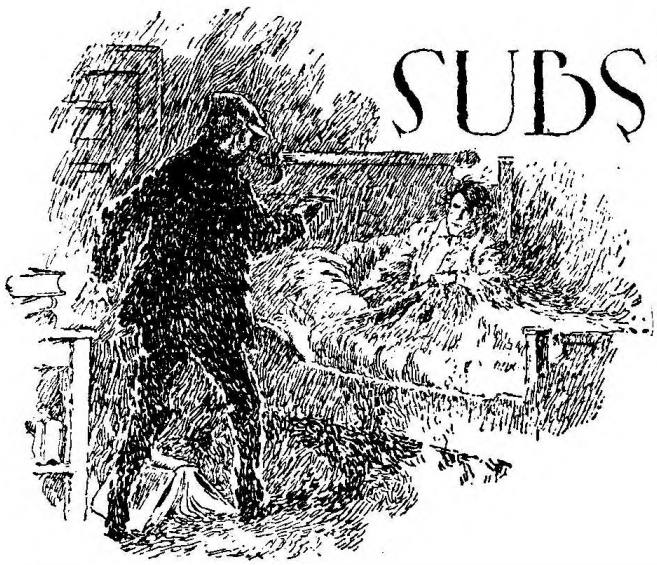
"News? *Dios de mi alma*, it is these Japanese, these yellow men! I told you, Metztli, O Reflector of the Sun, they were here for no good purpose. *Ba pues:* well then, what do they do now? They go tracking back and forth across the desert like two armies of ants, every yellow, creeping insect of them bearing on his back some burden lifted out of the hold of that ship with the many sails— Frames of black and white and gilded paper, lanterns of shell and stone, all manner of wood—timbers,

light and dark, thin and stout, the beams and tie-ribs and uprights of houses. Down where they camped last night, there they are building a pueblo of their own, a village in the sand.

"*Chiton!* Hush, not a word!" she commanded peremptorily as with sharp ejaculation and angry, tiger eyes the priest would have interrupted her.

"God forbid, but that is not all! Two of the members of that *hombre's* little ship"—and she flung me a swift, scornful glance out of eyes that sparkled flintily as if studded with bits of brown glass—"two of this man's *amigos* have joined forces with the yellow fleas! They are a man and a woman. Who the woman is I don't know; but I do know the man. I swear from what the courier said of him, he is that *hombre* of whom I told you, that snake in the grass, that gnat of the midden, Teniente Serafin Dicenta!"

TO BE CONTINUED



SUBSTITUTES

by Robert J. Pearsall

Author of "Mastery," Ghost-Ruled," etc.

BEHIND the drawn blinds of the protected "Pacific Club," wherein Wassner and Keating had become acquainted, courtesy between visitors was a rule that was enforced. Another no less rigid rule was that a meeting there did not necessarily imply recognition elsewhere. Men met, matched wits and luck, and thereafter passed each other on the streets without nodding if they liked, and with no offense. Suchlike, judging from their visible circumstances, should have been the way with these two, the banker-promoter and the gambler; but there were in Wassner's life certain other elements, invisible and sinister, that drew him to Keating.

Old-time piracy was a more or less certain game, governed by a code of a sort; but modern piracy, being played with hidden and less scrupulous weapons, has no code and no surety. The absence of a code Wassner had accepted long ago; but it was only recently that he had discovered that other lack. They were brothers of the black flag of finance—a clan that is passing—who had chased him from the sea of deception into narrow waters underlaid with the sharp rocks of disaster.

Seeking to escape, he had found himself headed for a maelstrom. The warning had come to him straight. Still twisting and turning, he had encountered Keating, and hope.

So he had invited Keating to his bachelor home, not without suggestion of another purpose than companionship. They sat there, dapper, self-sufficient youth and nervous middle age, talking on indifferent subjects, while all the time Wassner studied Keating from behind half-closed eyelids. A handsome, mobile face with a hint of a smile on the lips at times and a glint of the devil in the eyes; a reckless face, touched a little with hardness and cruelty, and lightly with some personal worry—that was what Wassner saw. Surely it should not be hard to make a confidant of such a man.

But thrice Wassner, trap-lipped and cautious, approached the subject that lay on his mind, and shied away again while the air of the study grew heavy with the reek of cigars which he was forever lighting and which as often turned cold between his teeth. And finally Keating furnished a sure opening by the recital of a difficulty of his own.

In a word he was broke; and the Old Nick

himself—in Keating's words—would be hard put to it to find a way out of that plight that he wouldn't take.

"You mean it?" queried Wassner, moistening the corners of his lips with his tongue.

"You heard me."

And Keating's face grew still harder and his eyes more inscrutable, as if a curtain had dropped over them.

"Still, you've been winning," murmured Wassner.

"If my winnings had matched your losses I'd be fixed. But I suppose"—enviously—"that was merely chuck-a-luck to you."

"Now that," said Wassner with his thin, predatory face darkening and his lean shoulders slumping forward, "that is where you're mistaken."

Hook-nosed and jutting of jaw, he stared into the electric fireplace, looking like a picture of defeat, or a freebooter planning fresh conquest.

"What!" exclaimed Keating. "You, too!"

His lips remained parted in amazement.

Whereupon Wassner seemed to brace himself, and, turning to Keating, completed his revelation.

"Yes, I too. The fact is, Keating, I'm ruined. Gambling at stocks, at cards—madness!"

He threw away his cigar and began to beat with his fingers a devil's tattoo on his knees.

"Everybody'll know it in a week," Wassner went on after a moment more calmly. "You've noticed my worry lately. Well, it's over the consequences of it. Mine is a private bank as you know; but it's got hundreds of small depositors and stockholders. People that trusted me, and every one of them's a tragedy. Are you beginning to understand why I've spoken several times tonight of—of suicide?"

"Well, yes," said Keating rather callously. "But I don't see how that'll help the small fry out of the skillet. Not of course that I'd worry much about them myself."

"Ah!" hesitated Wassner; and then, forcing the sentence, "That's where you come in."

"I!"

"Well, of course there's a reason why I'm telling you this. And there is a way—I admit it's partly cowardice, partly that I can't face the thing—but there's a way that my suicide may be made to benefit these others too."

"Insurance, eh?"

"But unfortunately," said Wassner in a lowered tone after corroborating Keating's guess with a nod, "all of my policies contain a clause protecting the companies from loss in case of suicide."

Keating, whose penetrating eyes glowed curiously when Wassner was not looking at him, has as yet seemed neither particularly shocked at Wassner's suggestion, nor aware of how out of keeping it was with Wassner's apparent character.

"That is unfortunate except for the companies," he said. "But I don't see where I fit into the play."

"And yet," asserted Wassner, "it was really you that suggested the thing. I admit I puzzled a long time, trying to find a way around that clause.

"I guess I'm not the first man that's discovered that it isn't easy to figure out a manner of suicide that can't be detected. Leave one clue and the insurance detectives grab at it; and if they find another, there's their case. They're argus-eyed, those fellows, and no mistake.

"Well, then, without going into details, I failed entirely to think of any way of killing myself with my own hands that didn't leave a chance for discovery. That being disposed of, what remained?"

"To sensibly give up the idea, of course."

"No," said Wassner, his grim voice sinking ever lower. "To kill myself by the hand of another man."

AT THAT, and for the first time, Keating recoiled, so sharply that it seemed he must have already divined Wassner's startling next words.

"By your hand," Wassner concluded.

"You're mad!" cried Keating, but with not as much repugnance to the idea in his voice as might have been expected. "I'll not——" And he started up.

"I'm sane, and you will, of course," replied Wassner with cold composure. "If I didn't know that d'you suppose I'd make the proposition? Sit down, please."

And after a moment Keating slowly complied.

"Why, as I've said, it was really you that gave me the idea," pursued Wassner. "You remember your claim that it should be easy to kill and get away with it without a risk. It was in connection with that other argument of yours, about the easy possibility of mistaken identification after death, the possible substitution of bodies and so on—but that doesn't matter.

"What I'm asking of you isn't murder. It's justifiable suicide, if there ever was such a thing; and you're only my tool, as a pistol would be. Your hand substitutes for mine. There's five thousand dollars in it for you, and you will do it."

It was sophistry, but it was well put, and Keating seemed to waver, while an avid twist came into his flexible lips.

"You will pay five thousand dollars—to me—to kill you?"

"I will," said Wassner, as if registering an oath.

"Why, man, it would be funny if——"

"If it wasn't serious. Now look here!"

Wassner hitched his chair closer to Keating's. Presently their heads were close together like conspirators'; and they were talking in tones that didn't carry beyond the little circle of greenish light cast by the study lamp. Urgence followed argument.

With his face looking more and more wolfish, its crooked lines of greed contradicting every one of his words, the speculative banker and promoter pleaded with Keating in the name of his reputation and business honor, and for the sake of widows and orphans and modest homes threatened with ruin, to enter into this curious agreement. And every few minutes he dangled the offered reward of five thousand dollars before Keating's receptive mind.

"We'll arrange it this way," he said. "A thousand tonight when you agree. The money's here, ready. And four thousand more when the thing's done."

"But how am I to get it after you're dead?"

"I've thought of that too. I'll send the four thousand in currency by registered mail to any address you give me in New York. You'll see me send it tomorrow. If I'm dead by the following morning it's yours. If I'm not, I'll hold up delivery of the package by wire."

"Well, that's safe for both of us," replied Keating.

Wassner was sure of Keating from that moment.

Finally Wassner rose and led Keating into the front hall, up a flight of stairs and to the bedroom in which the murder which would be no murder was to take place. It was part of the perfection of Wassner's scheme that he should depart in no way from his regular routine in order to accommodate his assassin.

Fortunately Wassner lived alone except for an old housekeeper who slept in a far wing of the house, so Keating would run no chance of being observed while in the discharge of what was now naively called his "mission." As for any clue he might leave behind him Wassner himself suggested a perfectly safe means of destroying it.

Wassner would leave a can of coal oil handy in his closet, which liquid tinder Keating would put to its obvious use. After giving the flames time to get well started, Keating would phone in the alarm from a down-town telephone box, thus making sure of the housekeeper's escape.

The manner of the killing itself was to be left to Keating's discretion; and Wassner agreed to make the operation easier for both Keating and himself by taking a strong drug that would ensure slumber through the night. It was of course clear that the house should be well darkened, and that Keating should receive a pass-key.

A wind-harried rack of clouds was driving across the sky when a little later Wassner and Keating shook hands upon their incredible compact and parted at the front door. When Keating was half-way to the car-line a pale moon broke through those clouds, half-illumining a night that was soft with the promise of rain.

Upon Keating's mobile face was a smile, somewhat grim, daredevil perhaps, but lacking harsher qualities; and it turned into a chuckle when he tucked the crumpled bills that Wassner had given him into a pocket inside his vest. Back in the house Wassner spoke softly into the telephone a Judas message, the reply to which pleased him; and then, rubbing his lean hands together with nervous satisfaction, repaired to the library to await another caller.

AT NOON of the following day Keating and Wassner met by appointment in the post-office lobby, where the matter of the registered package was attended to. Mid-afternoon Keating paid another visit to the Wassner home. He knew he would be alone in the house, for from a room across the street which he had rented he had watched patiently until he saw the housekeeper leave. Although Wassner had furnished him the pass key to enable him to enter the house that night, this earlier use of it was not according to program; nor did Wassner know that Keating continued to watch the house until a little before midnight he entered it for the killing.

By then it was raining, a thin drizzle that settled slowly, thickly opaque as a fog; and no one could have seen Keating as he stole across the street. Silently as a wraith he passed up the steps, inserted the pass key in the door and noiselessly turned it.

Entering, he stood for a moment as if listening with all his senses, with every nerve and fiber of his being. There was no sound nor movement in the house; the darkness was as impenetrable as Wassner had promised him it would be; and presently, moving thus blindly but with no incertitude of action, Keating reached the bottom of the stairs and began at once to ascend them, cat-footed.

Each step he planted his feet lightly, bearing his weight upon the stairs with imperceptible gradations, so that not a single creeping sound betrayed his assassin-like approach. At the top of the stairway he stopped and listened again.

Now the stillness was not quite complete; from down the hall in the direction of Wassner's room there came the audible evidence of a man asleep. He wasn't snoring, but the breathing was loud enough, a harshly monotonous sound.

Keating drew a long breath, which seemed to indicate relief. Then, still guarding against any noise with supernormal sensitiveness, he crept down the hall until he came to the door of the room.

By that time he had withdrawn a revolver

from the side pocket of his coat. Holding it ready, he turned the door-knob with his left hand. The door swung open on noiseless hinges, which Keating himself had oiled.

The bed of the sleeper was the faintest patch of white against the blackness of the room. As if some subconscious warning of this invisible, unheard menace had come to him he stirred uneasily, breathing irregularly.

Keating raised his revolver and crept forward until he was about four feet from the bed. Now he could see the vague outlines of the sleeper's head against the white pillow.

He recalled that very near where he stood was a small table laden with books. He felt for that table until he found it. Then, steadying himself with his left hand on the table, he took deliberate aim at the sleeper's forehead.

A book large as a dictionary, dislodged somehow by Keating's hand, slipped from the table. Keating snatched at it, not quite managing to stifle an ejaculation of dismay. But he only succeeded in accelerating its fall; and the sound of its contact with the floor, in that dead silence, was like the crack of doom.

AND he who was supposed to be Wassner, self-drugged to facilitate his own killing, sat up in bed with the swift awakening that hints of a hunted life.

Motionless then, his breath coming in gasps, he stayed there terrified, afraid to investigate the sound that had broken his dreams until a hint of its possible meaning seemed to come to him, and he whispered hopefully—

"Wassner?"

But at that same instant Keating also whispered that name in astonishment and some reproach, which last would seem to be deserved by the man who had evidently forgotten his compact.

And Keating went on:

"I've got you covered, Wassner. I'll shoot if you say the word. Serve you right if I shot anyway. This wasn't the bargain by a —— sight. You were supposed to stay asleep."

"What!"

It was an exclamation of amazement so great that it drove out fear, and it wasn't Wassner's voice.

"I say that I've come to do as I agreed, but—Good Lord!"

The man in the bed had pressed a button, and the room was flooded with light. From under his pillow he had plucked a revolver; but as he looked squarely into the muzzle of Keating's gun he made no attempt to raise it. Not did he need to, for after a moment Keating slowly lowered his own.

And the two—Keating and the pallid, high-foreheaded, narrow-featured man whom he had found in Wassner's bed—regarded each other, both with the eyes of stupefaction.

"You're not Wassner!" gasped Keating as if he could not believe the evidence that was before his eyes.

"Do I look like— Say, what's this?"

Swiftly the man swung two pajama'd legs out from under the covers and sat on the side of the bed.

"Nothing, I guess," replied Keating feebly. "A mistake. Wassner intended to sleep here tonight, didn't he? Because he hired me to come here and——"

"Like —— he intended to," rasped the other with the beginning of understanding and rage in his close-set but powerfully gleaming eyes. "What's that talk of hiring? What did he hire you to do?"

Keating stuttered his reply, his words tumbling over each other, the hand with which he held his gun trembling:

"He hired me to kill him—you—I don't know. He said he'd be here, drugged. Ruined, he said he was. It was the insurance—he wanted his insurance for his creditors. And you— Did he know you'd be here?"

"Did he know? The ——! I should say he did."

Then Wassner's involuntary proxy in his appointment with Death fell into a fit of low and passionate cursing that was the more terrible for his evident effort to restrain himself. And after staring at him a moment as if slowly absorbing the situation Keating joined him in his imprecations against Wassner.

"So that was the game, eh?" snarled Keating after epithets failed him. "To get you killed. But why did he want to? And how did he work it to get you into his bed?"

"I was to take his place here for a week," blurted the other. "He said— But you— Oh, ——, you're one of us or you wouldn't be here. I was to play sick under his name. He said there was a doctor and nurse coming in the morning, who were both fixed. I was to be pronounced too sick to see visitors or even the housekeeper. Danger of contagion; see?

"An alibi for Wassner. The records would show him safe here in bed while he— What an infernal simpleton I was to believe him!"

"An alibi for Wassner while he was really doing some business somewhere else, eh?"

"Yes, that was Wassner's stall."

"Queer!"

Keating uttered this word in a peculiar tone, which might have been either exclamatory or inquiring.

"Queer! What's that?" And the other suddenly darted at Keating a look that was lowering and distrustful.

"Why, isn't it?" queried Keating innocently. "But I begin to understand now. Instead of an alibi Wassner really wanted a getaway. A perfectly safe getaway. After it was burned

with the house your body would certainly be mistaken for his.

"Officially he'd be dead; really he'd be gone with the proceeds of whatever game you two were working. And with what he could rake out of the remains of his busted bank, for I suppose that part of his story was true. He is bankrupt, eh?"

"If he hadn't been he wouldn't have come in with me," said the other morosely. "And one other point you've missed is that he wanted to get rid of me, the only man who knew of our little side game. But I'm talking too much. You——"

"You sure are," interrupted Keating. "What's all this to do with getting Wassner?"

"The murdering cur!" growled the other. "I will get him, too. I think I know where he'll be. Unless he's already gone from there. But there's a chance anyway. I——"

"Count me in too," rasped Keating. "Lead me to him, and I'll show you what we do to such men where I come from."

The sallow-faced man was already dressing in a great hurry and a greater rage; but at that he looked around.

"Just where do you come from, pal?" he asked curiously.

"Chicago, last week."

And Keating glibly recited a history of his immediate past and recent acquaintanceship that was quite different from the story he had told Wassner or his other intimates in the semi-respectable Pacific Club.

"Well, I guess you'll do. It's a new gunman's stunt, hiring out to a man to kill his own self, but I guess you'll do. You can call me Roark. By the way, just how was Wassner to pay you?"

Keating told him.

Roark, in spite of his rage, grinned.

"Five thousand dollars! You've got one thousand, and you saw him mail four thousand to New York. And you think——"

Mockery had crept into his voice; but now he seemed to remember that Keating might possibly be useful, and he changed his tone.

"Well, if he don't die he'll be apt to beat you to it. No wonder you're keen to finish your job. You just come along with me."

WHEN the two got outside they found that the drizzling rain had changed into a torrential downpour. On their way to the car-line they encountered no other pedestrians on the swimming sidewalk. Under a dully flaring street-light they waited, wet to the skin and chilled to the bone. From time to time Roark cursed luridly under his breath.

Keating was also patently impatient. Again and again he stepped out into the middle of the street, searching the long stretch of pavement, slate-colored and empty, for the light of a car. None came, but luck favored them, nevertheless.

Presently a night-hawk taxi, inbound and empty, whirled down upon the two lonely figures. Keating hailed it with an upflung arm; Roark muttered something to the driver that Keating could not catch; and the machine bore them on toward the business section at a speed that was dangerous.

The rain beat against the hood of the vehicle with a steady drumming noise that would have drowned any ordinary conversation. Once Keating, pitching his voice high, asked Roark—

"Where are we going?"

"South of the Slot—well out. You'll see when we get there."

Down-town their speed was checked somewhat by a thin tide of traffic. But presently the taxi turned to the right, left the smooth pavement and bounced on over the cobbled streets of the factory district.

After about fifteen minutes of this the machine stopped; and Keating, nudged by Roark, opened the door and stepped out upon a narrow street flanked by towering brick and wooden walls, and empty of any sign of life.

Roark paid the driver and led the way into a black doorway.

"We'll wait here until he's gone."

The machine spun around and departed. Roark touched Keating's elbow; and the two left the partial shelter of the doorway and rounded a corner into an alleyway that would have been malodorous on any other than this night of downpour.

"Your gun? Is it dry?" Roark asked with sudden anxiety.

Keating grunted an affirmative.

"Water-proof pocket," he explained.

"So!"

There was approval in Roark's voice.

The alleyway, which was on the edge of a passing factory section, led them into a silent web of side streets with infrequent, flickering corner lamps, dismal as black-bordered lanes in some city of the dead. Here were shops with boarded windows and tumble-down dwelling-houses, and over all, deserted factories bent their heads like mutes at a wake—a somber memorial of the recession of the city's trade. Here also, Keating realized, was the one district where a nefarious business would be aptest to remain unmolested; and he was not at all surprized when Roark presently stopped before a set of wooden steps which led down into a basement.

"It's here he'd come," he muttered hoarsely in Keating's ear. "A'course, he may've left, but— Mind your steps now. We don't want to warn him. You understand."

Keating nodded with swift comprehension. Rendezvous guarded with electric buzzers were nothing novel to him.

Roark descended the steps, pressing close against the wall to the right and planting his feet with meticulous care. Keating followed him. There was a door at the bottom, and a keyhole in the door, through which a thin pencil of light shot out.

Roark pressed his ear against the door and listened. He snarled, a tigerish sound, deep in his throat, that barely reached Keating's ears.

"He's here, the ——"

Roark had already drawn his revolver. Now he produced a key, and, holding it in his left hand, turned it in the lock. If there was any sound Keating could not hear it.

Keating, tense-muscled, with nerves strung tight, leaned toward Roark as if involuntarily; and his hands seemed to strain toward his companion. Then a widening shaft of light flared out upon Keating; Roark had opened the door and stepped inside, and Keating followed him. The door closed again; and outside there was now nothing but the night and the rain, and a slow movement somewhere that suggested the furtive stirring of men.

Inside, Keating and Roark stared about a great, cement-walled basement room, cluttered with wooden packing-boxes and nauseous with the smell of chemicals. In Roark's narrowed eyes was the cold light of murder. Keating was on tiptoe, alert, inquiring-eyed. His glance fell and hung for a moment on the electric switch to the left of the door that presumably controlled the two lights in the center of the room. He looked away from that switch speculatively toward the pile of packing-cases that extended like a barrier half-way across the room, near its farther end. His right hand held the butt of his revolver, which lay in a rubber sheath inside his coat; but he did not draw it.

Then the silence of the place was broken by a barely audible sound—the sound of cautious footsteps. Some one was moving on the other side of the barrier. Some one! Wassner, of course.

Keating glided a little to one side, placing himself out of the line of Wassner's fire, if his fire was directed at Roark. But he continued to study the barrier intently, a question in his eyes, waiting for Wassner to show himself or to fire.

The two occurrences were simultaneous. Wassner's face, livid with hatred and terror, popped up over the barricade; and his revolver, a heavy, old-fashioned Colt, leveled into aim in an angle between two boxes. Something like satisfaction glinted Keating's eyes as he saw that revolver.

Wassner fired; he was answered by Roark; there was a curious difference between the two reports. Roark's shot went wild; for at the moment of discharge Keating had leaped past him toward the electric switch and had jostled his arm.

"——!" rasped Roark. "What the——"

Profounder astonishment checked his speech altogether, for Keating yanked at the switch and the room went black.

Then some one leaped upon Roark from behind and wrenched the revolver from his hand. It was Keating. He bore Roark backward, tripping him, and the two went to the floor, Roark underneath.

There was a jingling of metal. Something cold and hard, like wet steel, touched Roark's hands as Keating fought to force them together.

From across the room Wassner ran toward the writhing heap with silent and deadly intention. The next moment the darkness was lanced with flame from his revolver, fired point blank.

"Keating, you devil, he'll kill us both!"

Wassner emptied his revolver at the two men, and Keating paid no more attention to his shots than he did to Roark's curses. Something clicked sharply—twice. Roark, his hands rendered useless, clung to Keating with a scissors hold of his legs; but Keating tore himself loose. The room flared into light again. Keating whirled upon Wassner, covering him with his gun.

"Now," said Keating, "if you really want to die——"

But Wassner at that moment was regarding him not at all, nor anything but his own emptied revolver, at which he was staring with an expression of bewilderment.

"Don't blame the gun, Wassner," said Keating. "There was nothing but dummy cartridges in it. You see, I used that pass-key of yours twice. Lucky for you you left your armament in the house where I could get at it or there might be a charge of murder against you, as well as——"

IN THE middle of Keating's speech Wassner had glanced toward the door as if measuring his chances; but his eyes fell defeated at the sound of heavy footsteps pounding down the stairs.

"—— you!" he cursed Keating deliberately; while Roark, who stood up handcuffed, glanced from Keating to Wassner and back again, comprehension slowly dawning in his eyes.

"So you're a rat of a detective, an infernal——" went on Wassner.

"Merely a Federal officer," interrupted Keating mildly. "But go on. You've got a right to hate me, I suppose. Though the force has really had you dead to rights for a month—not my doing.

"It was to locate this plant, and the artist, Roark, here, that we put on this play. All I did to you was to have you followed tonight so there'd be no chance of your escape even if

you passed up destroying whatever evidence there was against you in this plant, and carrying away what you wanted of the goods in it. Or in case you tried to leave it before Roark led me to it. As witness this."

And Keating nodded toward the four policemen who had burst in a body through the door.

"You sneak, you liar——"

"Easy, easy!" protested Keating. "After all aren't you a little to blame yourself? If I hadn't sized you up as a man who would do anything for a perfectly safe getaway, this wouldn't have happened. After I did it was up to me to furnish you with a plan, wasn't it? And to see to it that you got information that the bank examiners were coming down on you, and that you were also suspected of this."

And Keating nodded toward the rear of the room.

"Naturally," pursued Keating, "you'd sacrifice your confederate here, he being the only man you could swap identities with easily. I suppose the business you promised him that you'd be engaged in while he substituted for you was—well, another little game of substitution. The substitution of bad money for good in the currency system."

"Oh, shut up," growled Roark, "and let's be off. I know when the game's up. You're all right, but this thing's unmentionable."

And he glanced disdainfully at his former partner. Then he turned to Keating again with a faint, twisted smile.

"I hope you'll find that thousand he gave you easy spending, and the other four thousand that's in the registered mail."

"Hardly," said Keating. "Hardly. And yet as good as the stuff I won from him at the Pacific Club. That was a darn good place you picked for shoving the queer."

THE TAPIR

by Arthur O. Friel

Author of "The Sloth," "The Armodillo," etc.

THAT is a queer thing, *senhores*. You say that the tapir, so common here in South America, is found in no other continent except Asia, and there only in a section which you call Malaysia; and that place is thousands of miles from our Brazil and across a vast ocean. How could our tapir have gotten there? He never could swim so far!

Oh, I see. Pardon my foolish question. Long ago there were tapirs all over the world, but now they have died out almost everywhere? Yes, I can believe that, for the tapir has no defense except his thick hide and his habit of jumping into water when attacked; and both animals and men must be able to defend themselves, or they will be wiped out by others which are more fierce and better armed. So perhaps the odd part of it is not that there are so few tapirs on earth now, but rather that there are any at all.

He is a shy fellow, the tapir. He needs to be, for he is hunted both by beasts and by men. Among the wild Indians of our jungle, as you perhaps know, the greatest hunter is he who can find and kill that big thick-skinned animal with funny nose. The prowling jaguar, too, is always eager to make a meal from him. Possibly you two North Americans also, during your explorations here at the Amazon headwaters, have slain a tapir or two for the sake of fresh meat. Yes? Then I need not tell you any more about that animal, for you probably know as much about him as I.

Still, I can tell you a tale of a tapir tonight, while this steamer slides along down the Amazon, which probably will amuse you. You have seen the tapir, observed his ways and tasted his flesh. But did you ever find one up in a tree, moaning and weeping from love?

Yes, it sounds ridiculous. But let me tell you, *senhores*, if ever I meet another love-sick tapir I shall go straight away and leave him, unless I am willing to get myself into trouble. And this is why:

ONE day in the flood season I was paddling down a swollen little river among wild hills in the Javary region—whether it was in Brazil or in Peru I do not know, for I had been on a long rambling trip into unknown country and neither knew nor cared where the boundary might be. With me was a fearless young comrade named Pedro, who, like myself, was a rubber-worker on the great *seringal* of the Coronel Nunes. The floods having stopped our work in the swampy lowlands, we had taken a canoe and gone out to seek adventures—and had found them. And now, having used up nearly all our cartridges in a battle with head-hunting savages, we were on our way back to the headquarters of the *coronel*, paddling with our regular long-distance stroke and expecting nothing at all to happen. But suddenly from the jungle near us came a mournful sound.

We held our paddles and looked. Only a few feet away was the hilly western shore of the stream, thick with bush. The sound had come from there, seeming to be a little distance away from the water and quite high up in the trees. We could not see anything in the tangle overhead, nor hear anything moving there. So after a minute I said softly to Pedro—

"Only a sick monkey grunting to himself"

He nodded slowly, as if in doubt, and continued squinting upward. I stroked again with my paddle, intending to go on. But before I put any power into the push the noise came again. I halted my arms.

"O-ho-o-o!" wailed a voice. "Oho-oo! Boo-hoo-hoo!"

We looked and listened. There was no sign of any man being in this place, but the voice was that of a man crying. It was a heavy voice, which ought to belong to a strong man; yet it was snuffling and sobbing there in the bush like that of a woman. To me, and I think also to Pedro, that sound was more dreadful than a cry of pain or a scream of fear; for it seemed that the man must be in a terrible condition to break down in that way. We turned the canoe, which had been drifting down the current, and silently paddled back.

Pedro, in the bow, jerked his head toward the shore. Looking closely, I saw what I had not noticed before—a quiet creek almost hidden by big drooping palm-leaves. We slipped the canoe through these leaves and stopped short. A few feet ahead of us was another canoe.

Then the voice came again. It was up over our heads.

"Oho-oo! What shall I do? I cannot live!" it sobbed.

More than twenty feet above the ground we spied a sort of house built in the branches of a big tree—a hut made from split palm logs and palm leaves. Up the trunk of the tree ran a stout notched pole making a ladder, such as we rubber-workers use in high tapping.

"The man must be dying alone up there, poor fellow," said Pedro.

I nodded. We stepped out on shore and went to the pole.

"What is the matter, friend?" Pedro called.

No answer came. There was a dead silence. Then we heard a slight movement up there, and out from a doorway at the top of the ladder came a head. We saw a dark face, with black hair and eyes. It peered down at us, and we started back. Then, without replying, the man swung himself out of the hut and came down the pole.

"*Por Deus!*" muttered Pedro. "He is not dying, nor even sick. He is as big and healthy as—as a tapir."

It was so. The fellow was so broad and heavy that it seemed as if the pole, stout though it was, ought to snap under him. Yet he was not clumsy; he came down so easily that we knew his muscles were strong and worked smoothly. I began to believe that there must be some one else up in that house, for it did not seem likely that this big man would have been moaning and blubbering so. But when he stood on the ground I saw that his eyes were wet and his face streaked, and the corners of his mouth turned down as if he were ready to start crying again.

As I looked at him I could not help grinning—partly because I was relieved, partly because his doleful face looked funny to me, and partly because Pedro's chance remark about a tapir was so near the truth. Above his heavy body and thick neck was the face of a tapir: for it was much narrower at the jaws than above the eyes, and the nose was so long and curving that it seemed to be not a nose but a snout. And, as I have said, the face was very dark, as the face of a tapir would be. He was a *caboclo*, with some white blood in him. Still, he looked like a good-natured young fellow, and he was not enough of an Indian to keep from showing his grief.

"What is the matter with you?" Pedro repeated. "We thought you were dying."

The other's mouth worked, and he sniffled.

"Maybe I am," he said in a choked tone. "I think I shall die. Oh, my poor little Belliel Ah-hoo-wow!" He began to bawl.

"Your poor little belly?" demanded Pedro. "What ails your belly? It looks very healthy to me. Have you swallowed a live turtle?"

I snickered, and the tapir-man himself laughed. In the middle of a wail he changed his noise to a snort, and that in turn became heavy laughter. But then his mouth turned down again.

"You do not understand," he said. "I have lost my so-beautiful Bellie. It is a great misfortune, and not a thing to laugh about."

"Lost your appetite, do you mean?" asked my comrade. "That is nothing to make so much noise over. And I do not think your belly is so beautiful. It sticks out too much."

"No, no, you have it wrong!" the Tapir protested. "It is true I have no appetite—I have eaten nothing today, except some *chibeh* and a few handfuls of *pirarucu*-fish and some monkey-meat and a few other things. But that is because they have shut up my little Bellie for so long and will not let me have her. Even when they let her out I can not have her—ah-hoo!"

"Stop that noise!" I ordered. "And stop your weeping also—it is wet enough here from the rains. Now tell us, what is this Bellie that gives you so much trouble? The matter must be serious if, as you say, you can not eat more than two men need."

He nodded as quickly as his thick neck would let him, and told us:

"Indeed it is serious. My Bellie is a girl who has come to womanhood and should be given in marriage, but her father has not made ready for the feast, and so she is shut up. And the father does not favor me, but will give her to Gastoa. So you see it is a terrible misfortune."

"So I see," I said, "although I do not yet know just what you are talking about. Why is your girl shut up, and what has the feast to do with it? Tell us all about this matter. We are Pedro and Lourenço, *seringueiros* of Coronel Nunes. Perhaps we can help you."

He looked at us as if a little doubtful.

"I do not think you can help me," he said. "What I, Deodoro Maia, can not do for myself is something no strangers can do for me. And perhaps even if we could free my Bellie I still should lose her. She likes men who are tall and handsome."

He looked at Pedro as he spoke. Pedro made a very low bow.

"Thank you, friend Deodoro," he laughed. "But have no fear. Girls do not interest me much. And if they did, I think perhaps I could get one without stealing her from another man."

Deodoro thought this over and nodded again.

"I think that is true," he admitted. After looking at both of us a while longer, he said: "Yes, I will tell you all about it. Will you come up into my house? I have some *cachassa*, but no tobacco."

"And we have tobacco but no *cachassa*," I replied. "It is a fair exchange—a smoke for a drink."

So I climbed the ladder and entered his house. He and Pedro followed.

IT WAS dark inside the place, for it had only one small window-hole, its doorway was hardly big enough to let the tapir-man in, and the daylight outside was dull. Yet the hut was comfortable enough, and it was dry. When we were all inside Deodoro lifted a jug from a dim corner and passed it to us. After a good pull at the *cachassa* which it contained we sat down on the floor, with our backs to the wall, and tossed him the makings of a smoke. He could hardly wait to roll the cigaret before he lit it.

"Ah, that is good!" he grunted, sucking a huge drag of smoke down into his lungs and blowing it slowly out. "I have not had a smoke for days."

"That may be one reason why you have felt so badly," I told him. "It is a mistake to be without tobacco when you are in trouble. A drink and a smoke will go far toward easing any kind of pain."

"That is so," he agreed. "But I have been so miserable that I did not think of it. Besides, there is only one place where I can get tobacco—that is at the town; and Gastoa and his brothers and Bernardo, the father of my Bellie, drive me away from there."

We said nothing, but waited. Sitting in his big hammock, he puffed at the cigaret until it burned his fingers. The tobacco soothed him, as we knew it would; and with the smoke, another drink, and somebody to talk to, he became quite cheerful. Then he told us of his trouble.

He, Deodoro Maia, was a native of a small *caboclo* village some miles to the west, on another little river. The people of this town were jealous of their women and watched them closely. The young girls, who were only children, had nearly as much freedom as the boys; but from the time when a girl reached womanhood until she was married she was watched continually—and after marriage too, for that matter. And it was the custom among these people, when a girl was old enough to take a man, for her parents to make a feast, and a celebration was held and every one was told that the girl now could marry.

Now this custom, like many others, had both a good and a bad side. Whenever a girl grew up the whole village could have a merry time at the celebration. But the rule of having a feast at that time was so strong that unless the girls' parents were able to give that feast she could not be declared marriageable. In that

case she was in a bad position; for she was no longer a child, with the child's freedom, nor yet a woman in the eyes of her people—she was nothing at all. Because of this, and also to keep her always guarded, her father would shut her up until he could give the usual feast.

This did not mean that she only had to stay in the house. A cage would be built—a tight, strong cage of woven cane inside the house—and she would be put into that cage and kept there like a beast. She might have to stay in that thing for many days; there was no escape for her until the feast was ready. Deodoro told us that sometimes a girl would be shut up so long that when she came out her copper-colored skin had faded almost to white.

Now Bernardo, father of the girl whom Deodoro wanted, was lazy and drunken, and meant to use his pretty daughter for his own benefit. So he intended to give her to a fellow named Gastoa, who was considered rich in his own village and had brothers who might help support the old drunkard in idleness; at least that was the father's plan. The man Gastoa was known to be cruel, and the girl feared and hated him; but that made no difference to old Bernardo, who thought only of an easy life for himself. He was so worthless, though, that when his girl-child turned into a woman he had nothing with which he could give the feast. Worse yet, he would not do enough hunting to get the monkey-meat usually dried and kept for the celebration. He only shut the girl into a cage and kept on drinking and sleeping.

So the moons came and went, and poor Bella—or Bellie, as the Tapir called her—was still a caged woman with no prospect of release.

The girl's mother did all she could for her. She worked hard to grow enough green foods for the feasting, and she tried to get Gastoa and his brothers to kill monkeys and salt away fish. But Gastoa was so sure he would have Bella in the end that he could not see any use in doing so much work for her, and so he and his family only laughed and sneered and did nothing.

And then a misfortune came to the crops. A herd of peccaries got into them and tore up almost everything, so that Bella's family had hardly enough left to live on, and all hope of the celebration was destroyed until new crops could grow.

WHEN this happened Bernardo flew into a drunken rage. As might be expected, he vented his spleen on those who were not to blame. He beat his wife, and then he dragged his daughter out of her cage and beat her too because she was causing so much trouble to him. While he was still ugly Deodoro came in. A fight followed.

Deodoro, hoping to win the girl for himself, had done the thing which both Bernardo and Gastoa refused to do—he had hunted monkeys, birds, and fish, and dried or salted their meat. He had been very quiet about this, doing his work here at this house which he had built up in the tree, where nobody would be likely to find him. Now, with some of the best pieces of meat, he had gone back to the village to tell Bernardo he would give all he had toward the feast if he could have Bella for his own. But he came at a bad time, for, as I have said, Bernardo was ugly.

When he heard the young man's proposition he called him a vile name and kicked the meat into the dirt, where some dogs snatched it and ran off with it. Then he ordered Deodoro out; and when Deodoro hesitated he struck him. This was too much for even the slow, good-humored tapir-man to stand. He hit back and then started in to give the old fool the best thrashing of his life.

If he had been let alone he might have beaten some sense into Bernardo. But Bernardo, getting the worst of it, yelled for Gastoa to help him. Gastoa came, and his brothers with him, and jumped on Deodoro. They gave him such a beating that he was lucky to escape alive. Then they threw him out of the village, warning him not to come back.

In spite of this, Deodoro went back—though he took care not to go openly. Several times he went by moonlight, late at night when he knew the village was asleep. He even succeeded in talking a little with the girl through the thin cane wall of the house, and offered to cut a hole there and take her away with him. But, though she hated to be shut up so, still she wanted to be made a woman with the usual ceremony, and she would not consent to running off to some unknown place where she could not see the people whom she had always known. Besides, she did not think very seriously of Deodoro. Nobody did, he said.

When we asked him why this was, he said it was partly because of his white blood. He was neither a full-blooded *caboclo* nor a white man. His mother's father, he said, had been a white Brazilian trader who stayed for a time on that river while buying sarsaparilla for the market. Before his mother was born this man sailed away, and he never came back. So the girl was laughed at by the others because she had no father, and when she grew up she was sneered at because she was half white. In the same way her son Deodoro was laughed at in his turn, though his own father was a *caboclo*. The only one who did not jeer at him, he said, was the girl Bella, who sympathized with him when the rest mocked him.

This story made us sorry and angry—sorry for the young fellow and angry at those who had treated him so. We saw that he was not by nature a fighter, and that, with the whole town against him and the girl unwilling, he felt that there was nothing he could do but stay

in his tree and be miserable. He was much in need of help.

"The big question is, does the girl care for you?" said Pedro. "Does she want you more than another?"

Deodoro stared out of the door awhile before he answered.

"I do not know just what she wants," he said then. "I do not think she knows either. She has not seemed to think much about men. I know she likes me as well as any one, and much better than she likes Gastoa. She does not like him at all."

"She likes you but she does not admire you," said Pedro. "Then you have two things to do—to free her and to make her respect you. Women admire men who are strong and bold. Be strong and bold, friend, and she will realize that you are a man. Now she thinks of you as a boy. Am I right?"

The Tapir thought again and agreed.

"You have it right," he said. "But what can I do? I can not go into the town and shoot everybody that tries to stop me from taking her away. My bullets are all gone."

We laughed.

"Of course you can not," said Pedro. "That would be a blundering way. Even if you shot down the whole town you would not win what you want most—the girl herself. She would then fear you more than she fears Gastoa. You want her to admire you, not to be afraid of you. Now let us try to make a plan."

So we talked about different ideas that came to us, but none of them got us anywhere. At length I said:

"We are wasting time. You and I, Pedro, have never been at this place where Deodoro lived, and all we know about it is what he tells us. We might sit here and talk for a week, and then go there and have our great idea smashed by some little thing none of us had thought of. The one thing we are sure about is that first the girl must be gotten out of her cage. The best way to get that done is to go ahead and do it."

Deodoro nodded seriously, as if I had said a very wise thing. Pedro laughed, but he agreed.

"That is the best plan of all," he said. "Let us go with God and trust to luck."

We arose and turned toward the door. But Deodoro halted us.

"Wait," he said. "I am feeling much better, and I think I can eat something before we start. I have all the meat I saved for the feast—except the few pieces I lost at Bernardo's house—and now I shall not give any of it to those who have not treated me well, but will keep it for myself and Bellie and my friends Pedro and Lourenço. I think we had better have some of it now."

"You have spoken most wisely, friend," Pedro answered with a grin. "My comrade and I have not been eating much for the last few days. We have been on a long trip and our supplies are nearly gone. So we shall not throw your meat to the dogs as Bernardo did. But where do you keep it?"

"Since you are my friends, I will show you," he replied with a sly look.

Lifting a couple of the split palms that made his floor, he brought out meat.

"See, my floor is double," he explained. "The big branches of this tree hold up my house, and between the branches I have made boxes, and then covered branches and all with my floor. It is a good way to hide things."

"Deodoro, you are one of the cleverest fellows I ever met," said Pedro. "Few men would have thought of such a thing."

Deodoro's face beamed. Probably it was the first time anybody had ever praised him; and somehow he seemed to grow bigger as he thought about it. Pedro gave me a slight wink, and I saw what he was trying to do—to make this shy, downcast fellow think well of himself. And indeed, *senhores*, that is a thing that has much power to help or harm a man; for if he does not feel himself to be the equal of other men, who else will believe him to be so? Seeing Pedro's thought and realizing its value, I changed my own manner toward the young tapir-man and no longer treated him as a boy.

We went down the pole, built a little fire and ate. Pedro and I were hungry, and we did not spare the meat; but I do not believe that both of us together ate as much as Deodoro put away alone. When the food was gone he was still hungry, and he climbed the ladder and brought down more. This time he brought down his jug also. We found that it held more *cachassa* than we had thought, but we emptied it. Then, feeling quite merry, we got into our canoes and pushed out into the river.

WITH our new comrade leading, we paddled down-stream until he swerved to the left. Up another quiet creek we followed him. The stream widened into a long swampy lake which seemed to have no end, for it wound along among the low hills so that whenever we thought we had reached the end we found that there was more of it. At length, when we had about concluded that it was no lake but a flooded arm of the river ahead, Deodoro led us into another narrow stream. Down this we went, and soon we came out into another river.

"It is not far now," said Deodoro in a low tone. "It is only a short paddle up-stream."

"Very good," Pedro replied. "But why do you speak so quietly? You are not afraid if the whole world hears you."

Again Deodoro seemed to swell.

"No!" he agreed, and his heavy voice boomed like a gun. "I do not fear any man!"

He began paddling again with a bold stroke.

As he said, it was not far to the town. We heard it before we saw it. Shouts and laughter came to us, and then some one began to beat a drum in Indian time. Deodoro suddenly stopped paddling.

"There is a celebration," he said. "I wonder—it can not be—it is not possible that Bernardo has made the feast!"

"If there is a feast, so much the better," I said. "Every one will get drunk. Is it not so?"

He nodded.

"Then it will be easier for us to do what we come for," I explained. "When all are drunk, who shall stop us?"

He made no answer. We saw that he was worried, thinking the noise might mean that his girl was given to the man Gastoa.

"Come, comrade," said Pedro. "We are stopping here as if we were afraid."

The hint was enough. Deodoro's head came up, and he swung into his stroke as if he owned the river. Pedro let out a yell, and we joined in. Shouting and paddling hard, we surged up to the town like men sure of a welcome.

Like all towns in that region, it was on a hill above the reach of any floods. In the dry time it probably was some distance from the stream, but now the high water made it easy for boatmen to land beside it. As we stepped out on shore the drum-beating stopped. Several men came to meet us, and some barking dogs rushed at us.

Pedro knocked the dogs aside with his rifle. I had no gun, for I had broken mine and lost it in that fight with the headhunters of which I have told you. But I had two good feet in heavy boots, and I used them. One of the dogs, an ugly brute, snarled as if about to spring at me, but I kicked him again so hard that he yelped and retreated. At this, one of the men scowled at me in evil fashion.

"Kick my dog again and you will get yourself into trouble," he growled.

"I am used to trouble," I retorted. "And I kick an ugly dog wherever I meet him—whether he stands on four legs or on two."

He glared and took a step toward me. Then he halted as if not quite sure of himself. After glowering at me for a minute he shifted his gaze to Deodoro.

"You Deodoro!" he snarled. "Did I not tell you not to come back here?"

"You did, Gastoa," answered the tapir-man. "But you see I am back. I think I shall stay, too." His voice was strong and steady.

Three other men scowled when they heard this. I judged that they were the brothers of Gastoa, who had helped to beat Deodoro and drive him out. More *caboclos* had gathered around us now, and among them I noticed a short, piggish-looking man of middle age who seemed quite drunk. Pointing at Deodoro, this man yelled:

"Throw that one into the river! Throw the others in! Drown them all! What business have they here?"

Gastoa and his brothers growled again, but they did not quite dare to rush us. We stood shoulder to shoulder, and they could easily see that we did not intend to be driven away without a fight. Before they could decide just what to do Pedro spoke.

"Is your name Bernardo?" he asked.

The drunken man blinked at him.

"Yes, I am Bernardo."

"I thought so," said Pedro. "I had heard that in this town lived a man named Bernardo who was a know-nothing and a drunkard. I knew you must be the one, because nobody but a drunken fool would try to drown strangers who came to trade and make his town rich."

Bernardo became furious. He screeched that Pedro lied. But the other men looked at us with a new expression in their faces. Then one of them roughly told Bernardo to be quiet; and when he kept on yelling two others shoved him away. By this time every one in the place was there at the shore. They all stood staring, and I saw some whispering to one another.

"Is that the truth?" demanded Gastoa. "Have you come to trade?"

"You do not think we came to look at your handsome face, do you?" sneered Pedro. "Who is the head man here?" I will do my business with him."

THE crowd opened, and out stepped a man who was rather old but looked strong and shrewd.

"I am chief," he said. "I, Araujo."

His sharp eyes went to our canoe, which now held only the few supplies that remained after our long trip.

"If you come to trade, where are your trade goods?" he asked.

"Greetings to you, *compadre*," said Pedro, as if the head man were no better than the rest. "Surely you do not think we would bring our goods in that little canoe. It will take a big *batelao* to carry the things we have for you—that is, if we decide to trade with you. This is not a small matter of wax and salt fish."

His insolent manner made Araujo frown, but I could see that he and all the rest were impressed by it and by his big talk. I had no idea of what tale Pedro intended to tell, but I saw he had made a good beginning; so I tried to look like an important trader, instead of what I was—a bush-tramp with hardly enough food and cartridges to get home on. The thought came to me that Deodo o might show surprize and betray us. But a glance at him showed me he had more sense than that. His

face was like wood, and he was looking straight ahead.

"What do you want for this *batelao* full of riches?" asked the head man.

"We will talk alone with you about that," Pedro told him. "We do not do our business on the river-bank. And before we do any business at all we want food for ourselves and this guide of ours, Deodoro."

Araujo looked us all over again, staring hard at Deodoro, who stared back at him. Then he nodded and turned away. We followed him, and I noticed that the crowd now was looking in friendly fashion at our Tapir companion and sourly at Gastoa. The reason was easy to see; they believed Deodoro had brought us there to make them rich, and that Gastoa had angered us and might have lost them their chance to trade. I had hard work to keep from grinning.

"You have come in time to eat at the feast," said Araujo. "This is a feast-day here. A girl has come to womanhood."

"What girl?" asked the Tapir.

"Not the one you are thinking of," the old man answered. "It is the youngest daughter of Fontoura."

"Oho! So you have a girl here, Deodoro!" teased Pedro, as if he had not heard of it. "You sly fellow, why did you not tell us?"

Deodoro looked queerly at him, but made no answer. The head man chuckled.

"There are several men between him and his girl," he explained. "And the girl has not yet been made a woman. So I would not say that he has any."

We had gotten away from the crowd by this time, and he stopped.

"Now you can tell me your business," he said.

"*Amanha*—tomorrow," Pedro answered. "I never do business on a feast-day; and since we have been lucky enough to come at a time of merry-making, we will join you in it. Tomorrow, when I have rested, we can talk of this matter."

Araujo scowled again. So Pedro added—

"Today it is enough to ask you whether you can get sarsaparilla roots, and perhaps Peruvian bark, for us from the forest near here."

The face of the chief brightened.

"Yes, yes! There is much in the hills above here."

"Then our guide has not lied to us," said Pedro, as if well pleased. "Perhaps you have heard of the big new company of Englishmen who now are working out of Tabatinga and preparing to buy these medical things for the markets in Europe?"

Araujo had not. Neither had I, and neither had Pedro. But the chief now thought he understood.

"And you are the scouts of this company," he guessed. "You are very welcome. We can make much trade for you. What do you give for those roots?"

But Pedro shook his head.

"*Amanha*," he said again.

So, seeing that he would talk no more of business that day, Araujo told us the town was ours.

The drum started up again, and others joined in. Men came to us with liquor and meat, and we ate and drank well—for we had paddled several miles since eating at Deodoro's tree-hut, and our appetites again were strong. Every one made us welcome—that is, all but Bernardo and Gastoa and his gang. They stayed by themselves, talking angrily and drinking much.

I was glad to see that they drank, for I felt that they were the ones whom we needed to watch most, and hoped that in the end they would make themselves senseless. If we waited until night, I thought, it should be quite easy to get the girl out of her prison and escape with her. But Deodoro spoiled that plan.

Before long the *caboclos* formed for a dance around the drummers. It was not much of a dance. They only trotted around and around, yelling and laughing, and dropping out one by one for a drink now and then. Araujo, the chief, trotted with the rest, tooting solemnly on a little tin whistle he had gotten somewhere. Some of the men shouted to us to join in, and I saw several young women making eyes at Pedro; but we said we were tired and squatted by ourselves, smoking and watching. Then Pedro said to Deodoro:

"Now is a good time for you, comrade, to slip away and talk to your girl. She must feel very badly at hearing all this merriment, knowing that it is for another girl, while she remains cooped up. She ought to be ready to run away with you now. If she is, tell her that at the right time we will take her where she can be happy."

The young fellow started to rise. Pedro grabbed him and pulled him down.

"Not like that!" he cautioned. "Do not get up and walk away in plain sight. Creep around behind us and then crawl behind this house at our backs. After that you can walk."

The big fellow grunted and obeyed. Like the tapir he resembled, he was not very good at creeping. He made some noise as he went. But nobody seemed to notice his going. Between the liquor and the dancing, the *caboclos* now were getting quite drunk and thinking of nothing but their own fun. So our companion got away without being seen.

We sat for a while longer watching the circling crowd. Then Pedro said:

"They are a worthless lot, Lourenço. Even if we were the traders they think us to be I doubt if I should want to do business with

them. They look lazy, mean and treacherous. They have no welcome to a stranger unless they hope to make something from him, and their laughter now is only the kind born of drink and drums. I shall be glad when we are out of this place. This is the first time I ever took a hand in a woman-stealing."

"That is the way I feel too," I agreed. "I am not afraid of them, but I dislike them all. And unless Deodoro's girl is better than the women I have seen here she is hardly worth our time and trouble."

"He thinks she is," he laughed. "And every man must be his own judge in such matters. But I wish he would come back. I want to get up and walk around—those drums make me restless. If we do that, though, the *caboclos* will notice that he is gone."

It did seem that Deodoro had been gone for some time, and as the throbbing of the drums went on I too wished I could move around. A few minutes later I was moving around more than I had expected to.

A YELL broke out. The dancers stopped. We hopped up. Then, before a house near the water, we saw men fighting and a girl running toward the stream.

"The fool!" snorted Pedro. "He has let her out too soon!"

We ran toward the struggle. So did every one else. One of the fighting men broke away and dashed after the girl. Another fell backward and lay still. But there were four of them left, and three of them were attacking Deodoro. They were Gastoa and two of his brothers. The man on the ground was the third brother.

As we reached them, Gastoa himself went down. The Tapir was fighting only with his hands, but those hands were terrible enough.

He got a clumsy swing into Gastoa's face, and it cracked like flat wood hitting water. Gastoa fell like a dead man. After he was down I caught a glimpse of his face. It looked as if a real tapir had jumped on it—mashed flat.

Pedro and I knocked down the other two men and yelled to Deodoro to run. All three of us jumped for our canoes. We ran into the girl and the man who had seized her. She was screaming and trying to escape. The man was her father, and he was striking her brutally in the face and body.

Pedro, the quickest of us three, reached them first. He jolted Bernardo in the head with his rifle-butt, and the drunkard fell sprawling. Without a pause Pedro snatched the girl off the ground and kept on running. But the crowd was almost on us, and as we slowed at the water's edge they caught us.

"Go!" I grunted to Pedro. Then I yanked his gun from his fist, whirled and struck around me. Men fell, but others swarmed in. I heard grunts and blows beside me and knew somebody was helping me to fight, but I had no time to see who it was. I thought it must be Pedro. Later I was surprized to find that it was Deodoro.

Pedro had hastily pushed the girl into our canoe and then turned back. But Deodoro, thinking only of getting the girl away, shoved Pedro backward so that he tumbled into the canoe, and then he heaved the boat out into the river. In falling, Pedro hit his head hard against the bottom of the canoe, and the blow stunned him so that he lay there a few minutes while he and the girl drifted away down-stream. Then the fighting Tapir wheeled back to help me hold off the furious crowd.

Between us we did some rough work. But we were outnumbered; and to tell truth, *senhores*, I never got such a beating in my life. I have fought hard before and since that time, and have had far more serious wounds than I received then; but those *caboclos* knew how to hit where it would hurt. If they had had their weapons they would have cut me to pieces. But none of them had stopped to pick up a knife, and now they could fight only with hands, feet and teeth. Those were enough.

Somehow I did not think of shooting. I could not have shot well if I had tried, for they were too close. They wrenched at the gun while they beat me, and how I kept it I do not know. But I did keep it, and slugged around me with muzzle and butt. Finally, though, they knocked my legs out from under me. I fell hard, and they jumped all over me.

I kicked and squirmed and bit, but they had me. Then suddenly I felt a tremendous tug at one foot. I went sliding and bumping down the bank with two men hanging to me. Blows sounded and the men fell away. Somebody tumbled me head-first into a canoe. The canoe slid outward.

A raging yell sounded behind me. Sitting up, I found myself afloat. With me was the Tapir. His face was battered and his big snout was gushing red, but he was as strong as ever. He had grabbed a paddle and was shoving the boat down-stream with strokes so powerful that the dugout seemed to leap from the water. As I looked at him he grinned through split lips.

"I had to pull hard to get you out of that tangle," he said. "You seemed stuck to the ground."

I tried to answer, but all I could do was to make a wheezing sound. The wind was beaten out of me. So I sat still while my breath came back and my head grew clear. I saw that the *caboclos* were jumping into boats and coming after us. Then we caught up with my own

canoe, where the girl was crouching and Pedro was getting up and reaching for a paddle.

Pedro had a surprized look, as if wondering how he had come there, but he wasted no time in talk. Scooping up a handful of water, he threw it on his head and then began to paddle hard.

I looked for a paddle too, but there was none. Deodoro was using the only one in this canoe. I still had the rifle, though; and, seeing that the maddened men behind were gaining on us, I began shooting. I did not shoot to kill, for I do not like to kill men if it can be avoided. At the same time, I shot close enough to make them think I meant death.

Aiming carefully, I sent several bullets thumping along the sides of their dugouts. They slowed up at once. Some yelled to stop, others shouted to go on, and they paddled both ways at once—some trying to keep after us and others backing water. While this was going on we drew away fast.

THE Tapir swerved into the bank and up the same stream we had traveled before. Pedro followed. For some time we kept on at the same rate of speed, and then we came out into the long crooked lake. There we stopped, listened—and heard nothing.

"They have given up," panted Pedro.

The Tapir shook his head.

"They have gone back for guns, and they follow," he said. "But we can dodge them. There is more than one way out of this lake."

Looking around as if to get his bearings, he pushed on again. Down around a bushy point we went, and there turned sharp to the right. A short arm of water ran that way, and we traveled down this until we seemed about to bump the shore. Then he swung to the left, and we were in a quiet, winding stream. There we stopped.

I got up with grunts and groans, for I had been sitting still and my bruised muscles had stiffened so that each one had a pain of its own. Deodoro grinned again. The grin annoyed me.

"Now," I demanded, "tell me why you got us into all this trouble. Why did you not come back to us and wait until we were ready?"

"You said yourself that the first thing to do was to free Bellie, and that the quickest way to free her was to go ahead and do it," he answered. "So I went and did it. And your comrade Pedro told me to be strong and bold. Have I not been strong and bold?"

His face and voice were so serious that Pedro and I laughed.

"More bold than we wanted you to be," I told him.

"I am sorry you got hurt," he said. "But I went and talked to Bellie and found her mad to get out at once. So I thought I had better take her before she changed her mind, and I cut a hole and pulled her through. If Gastoa and his brothers had not sneaked up just then we should have gotten away without trouble. And nobody would have thought you two traders had anything to do with it, because you were sitting in plain sight all the time."

"I see," I said. "And now that we are all here I think you had better take your girl and let me get into my own canoe."

We had been holding to bushes while we talked, and now Pedro drew our canoe up beside me. For the first time I had a good look at the girl, and after that look I did not blame Deodoro for wanting her. She was very pretty. True, she looked thin and weak, and her skin seemed pale; but I remembered that she had been caged for a long time, and knew that a healthy life outdoors and plenty to eat would quickly make her plump and strong. Her eyes and mouth were beautiful, and she looked no more like the other women we had seen than a butterfly looks like a mud-worm. Remembering the evil face of Gastoa and the brutality of her father, I was glad I had gone to help her, even though I now was full of aches and pains.

Then I noticed something that was not so pleasing. She did not want to leave Pedro and come to Deodoro. She looked long at Pedro, then glanced at the tapir-man and wrinkled her nose. I too looked at both the men, and saw what a difference there was. Pedro was a graceful fellow, with merry brown eyes and curly hair; and he had not been hit during the fight, so his face was not marked at all. Deodoro, with his clumsy-looking body and lank hair and big nose, was not a beauty at any time; and now his eyes were swollen so that they peered through slits, and his whole face was bruised and bloody.

It came to me, too, that though Deodoro had given the girl her chance to escape from the house, it was Pedro who had attacked Bernardo when she was being beaten and had run with her in his arms to the water; so that she might easily feel that it was the handsome stranger who had saved her. Besides, she had not seen Deodoro's fine fight at the house, because then she was running for the river. And she probably did not know much about his battle on the bank, for then she was floating away and we were all tangled up in a fighting knot. Poor Deodoro! Everything seemed to be against him.

Whether he saw all this I did not know, but I hoped not. When the girl made no move to change canoes I spoke gruffly to her, telling her to make room for me. She rose then, though slowly, and took my place without a word.

As I settled down and picked up my paddle I heard voices out on the lake. We slipped

the canoes silently down-stream and looked. The Tapir was right—two boatloads of armed *caboclos* were passing, the men working hard and looking ahead. Others came behind them. We kept very quiet until they were gone.

"They will go down the lake to the end hunting us," said the Tapir. "Then they will work back and search all the coves. We shall be at my house long before they have finished here. Are you not glad to be free, Bellie?"

The girl made no answer. Her eyes came again to Pedro's face, and then she looked down into the water. Deodoro looked long at her, then at Pedro, then at me. His face grew sad. With a deep sigh he pushed his canoe against the slow current, and we passed silently up the creek.

After a time we came into a network of winding water courses without any current that I could see. Deodoro hesitated several times, but seemed always to pick the right one. At length we found ourselves again in flowing water, and now we went down-stream instead of up. At length we entered the river on which Pedro and I had been traveling that morning.

There our leader turned downward, and we saw that he had brought us out above his house. Keeping near the left shore and watching sharply for *caboclos*, we soon reached the little inlet masked by the palms.

"Now you are safe, Bella," I said when we stepped out on shore. "See the fine house Deodoro has built for you up here in the tree, where you can always be dry and comfortable. It is much better than any house in your town, and you will never have to live in a cage again. He has much meat too, and you and he will have plenty to eat. You will be very happy here."

"Do you two stay here also?" she asked.

"No," I said. "This is Deodoro's place. We must go on, for we live far from here."

She glanced once more at the house in the tree. Then she cried:

"I do not want to stay here. I will not stay here! Take me away!"

We all stood silent, staring at her. I wanted to scold her, but knew that would do no good. So I said the first thing that seemed best.

"We can not take you away today, Bella—it will soon be night. And we two are not going until tomorrow. We shall rest and eat here. Tomorrow we shall see what is best to be done. Now go up and see what a fine house that is."

She stood still, stubbornly, until Pedro also told her to mount the ladder. Then she obeyed, climbing as if afraid she would fall, but going upward until she got into the hut.

"*Nossa Senhora!*" muttered Pedro. "Now this is a pretty mess! After all our trouble she wants to go back home."

Slowly the Tapir shook his head. His face was full of pain.

"No, it is not that," he said. "It is as I told you before we went. She likes tall handsome men, and I am not tall nor handsome."

He swallowed hard, as if trying to keep from crying. And then, through his teeth, he added:

"She wants to—to go with you, Pedro. If she will—be happier with you, comrade, then—then you had better take her with you."

He choked and turned away.

For an instant Pedro stared. Then he sprang and caught him by the shoulder.

"*Por Deus*, you are a man!" he said. "Why, comrade, I do not want your girl! I do not want any girl at all. And you are wrong—she does not want me either. She may be interested in me because I am a new man whom she has not seen before, but after I am gone she will quickly forget me."

But Deodoro shook his head again, and so did I. I had seen women fall swiftly in love with Pedro before this—women who knew more about men than this little girl-woman knew; and I felt that Bella would not forget him so quickly as he said, and that neither she nor Deodoro would be happy because of this. When Pedro asked me if I did not agree with him, I said no.

"There is some truth in what Deodoro says," I told him. "If she had not seen you she might have been happy with him. I think our work is only half-done. We have freed her, but how are we to make her satisfied?"

He scowled and stood thinking. Then his eyes began to twinkle, and he threw up his head and laughed.

"Deodoro, let me talk to you," he said. "Lourenço, climb up and talk with her so that she will not overhear us. Ask her if she would like to go away with me—but try to show her that she would be foolish to do such a thing."

I DID as he said. Up the pole I went, and in the hammock I found the girl, looking very small and sad and dissatisfied. When I came in she brightened up and glanced beyond me as if expecting some one else. Seeing that nobody followed, she seemed disappointed.

"The others will be up soon," I informed her.

Then I sat down against the wall, grunting from the pain of my stiff muscles.

"I am very lame," I went on. "Still, I am glad I am alive to feel lame. If it had not been for the splendid fighting of Deodoro I should probably be dead—and you would be back in your cage, to be beaten by your father and given to Gastoa."

She turned more pale at that thought, but looked surprized too. And she asked what Deodoro had done that was so brave. So I saw that I was right—she did not realize what a fight he had made. Taking care not to praise him over-much, I told her how he had fought

off the gang of Gastoa and then battled beside me so that she could get away, and how he had pulled me out when I was down. Her big dark eyes grew larger as I talked.

Then, when her mind was full of this new fighting Deodoro, I suddenly asked her whether she would like to go away with us.

"My friend Pedro likes you," I said, "and if you want to go with him we can fool Deodoro in some way. You might not be happy with Pedro, but——"

"Why not?" she cut in.

"Well, of course he is a handsome man," I pointed out, "and other girls like him very well, and you could not expect him to give all his time to you. He would not stay with you as this simple Deodoro would do. And he likes his fun with men too, and so he would drink and gamble with them. And he is restless and will not stay long in one place—and you know he would not want you trailing after him everywhere. If you expected him to be as faithful to you as Deodoro would be, you might not be happy. But if you are willing to be reasonable about those things we can take you away when we go. He is keeping Deodoro down below while I ask you about this."

Senhores, that gave her a good deal to think about. At first she looked as if she wanted to cry, and I felt sorry for her—but I did not let her see that. Then she asked the question I expected.

"If he wants me, why does he not talk to me himself instead of sending you?"

I laughed as if that were a foolish question.

"Because Deodoro would probably fight to keep you, and Pedro knows how hard he would fight. Pedro probably would get his handsome face hurt. And besides, what is the sense of fighting over a woman? Deodoro thinks you are the only pretty woman in the world, but Pedro and I know you are not."

She looked at me then as if beginning to dislike me. Before we could talk more we heard Pedro's voice down below, and it was loud and ugly.

"Then if you have more *cachassa,* why did you not say so?" he demanded. "I want a drink and I want it now! After we have gone to that dirty town of yours and brought back that female for you, I call it shabby treatment to try to hide your liquor!"

"You can have a drink if you want it," came the voice of the Tapir. "But do not speak so of my girl. She is not the kind of girl that a man like you ought to talk about."

"Bah! The world is full of girls, and not one of them is worth anything. I want that drink!"

"Then come up and you shall have it."

I stuck my head out of the door beside me and looked down. Deodoro, I noticed, had washed his face and looked much better. As he came upward and saw me he grinned. Pedro, behind him, winked at me. But when they came into the house their expressions had changed. Deodoro looked very serious, and Pedro scowled.

The Tapir lifted part of his floor again, and this time he pulled up a jar which he handed Pedro. My partner seemed to take a huge drink. When he passed the jar to me, however, I found that very little of the liquor was gone. I took as much as I wanted, and then held it out toward Deodoro. But Pedro snatched it and appeared to swallow about half of what was left, making a guzzling noise and letting some of the *cachassa* drip off his chin. The girl watched all this, and a look of disgust crept across her face. The thought came to me that my comrade's actions must remind her of her drunken, worthless father.

Then Pedro slumped down beside me and rolled a cigaret. Usually he was very deft at making a smoke, but now his fingers seemed clumsy. He spilled most of his tobacco, and then he snarled. He tried again, and made a worse mess than before. Finally he ordered me to make his cigaret for him. I did so, but I took my time about it. Then he abused me because I was so slow, and growled once more at Deodoro because he had not been more free with his liquor. After the cigaret was lit and going well, though, he quieted somewhat.

None of us spoke while he smoked. Deodoro watched us solemnly, and I saw the girl studying him and Pedro in turn. Pedro's face grew more heavy, as if the *cachassa* were working on him. Presently he began to leer at Bella.

"Think I will take you down-river with me, girl," he said roughly. "You do not want to stay here and you do not want to go back to your cage. You have to go somewhere, so come with me."

She looked him straight in the eyes. Then she said—

"I do not think I want to go with you."

"What!" snapped Pedro. "Do not be a little fool!" He looked at Deodoro and grinned in a nasty way, as if the liquor had given him courage which he had lacked before. "You, Deodoro, you can stay here with your *cachassa.* I am going away with this woman of yours. I am going now!"

He lurched up and staggered toward the girl.

Then the Tapir moved. He swooped at the rifle Pedro had left leaning against the wall. He jammed the muzzle into my comrade's stomach, and I heard the hammer click back.

"Stop where you are!" he ordered. "You shall not take her away. She is too good for you."

Pedro stood very still, staring down at the gun as if stricken with fear. I got up as quickly as I could, drawing my machete, for I did not like the sound of that hammer going back. But before I could get within arm's length of Deodoro the girl jumped at me.

She came so suddenly and swiftly that before I realized it she had knocked my bush-knife from my hands. With another lightning move she threw it out of the door, and I heard it thump on the ground below. Then, her face full of fury, she warned me—

"Keep back or I will tear your eyes out!"

I kept back. Her nails were very long, and I had seen how quick she was. Her sudden action had taken us all by surprize, and we stood staring at her. Then Deodoro spoke again to Pedro.

"If she wished to go with you and if you would be kind to her I would let her go. But I know you have other women. You boasted about it when you first came here and drank my *cachassa*. You said you only played with women, and that when you tired of one you left her and got another. You will not do so with Bellie."

Pedro made no answer. He looked at Bella. She looked back at him as if now she hated him. To Deodoro she said:

"You are the only honest man I know, Deodoro. I will stay with you and be your good girl. Drive these two into the river! This one is no better than the other." She pointed at me. "He wanted me to fool you and run away with them. Drive them out!"

"Get down the pole!" grunted the Tapir savagely. "Bellie, stay here!"

Pedro glanced at me and jerked his head toward the door. We went down the pole, Deodoro still covering us.

"Do not touch that machete!" he warned, as I stepped toward my knife. "Go to your canoe."

"Come, Lourenço," whispered Pedro. "He will follow."

So we got into our canoe. Deodoro came down, picked up my weapon and stepped into his own boat.

"Out into the river!" he commanded.

Pedro, looking much afraid, splashed his paddle quickly into the water and we moved outward. Behind us came the Tapir.

AS WE went down-stream I felt the canoe shaking. I could not understand this until I looked at Pedro. The drunken look was gone from his face, and, though he made no sound, he was laughing so hard that he could scarcely use his paddle.

"Over to the right, where you see that *massaranduba* tree," came the voice of the Tapir.

We turned to the place. Below the tree we found a little cove which twisted around like a hook. At its end, where it could not be seen from the river, was a small hut.

There we got out. Pedro leaned on his paddle and laughed again. The Tapir, grinning, handed us our weapons.

"You can sleep dry here, comrades," he said. "I built this place while I was hunting monkey-meat. I do not think the men from the town will come to this river until tomorrow—the darkness is coming. If they should come, they will not find you here."

"Be careful that they do not find you either, friend," Pedro answered.

"They will not find us. If they do they will be sorry."

He spoke with a calm strength that made me think what a difference a few hours had made in him. That morning he had been a blubbering boy. Now, with the knowledge that Bella was his own and that he could thrash any two of those *caboclos* who had made his life and hers so wretched, he was a man. Rather slow of thought, perhaps, but able to take care of himself from this time on—that was the new Deodoro who now talked so surely and called us "comrades." His eye was steady and his head was up, and he feared no man.

"I am sorry that I had to drive you out in such a way," he went on. "You are the first men who ever did anything for me, and you have done the greatest thing any man could do for me. So I do not like to seem ungrateful, even though you understand and know that I am not. If ever I can do anything for you, Pedro and Lourenço, call on me and I will do it, not matter what it is."

He grinned again.

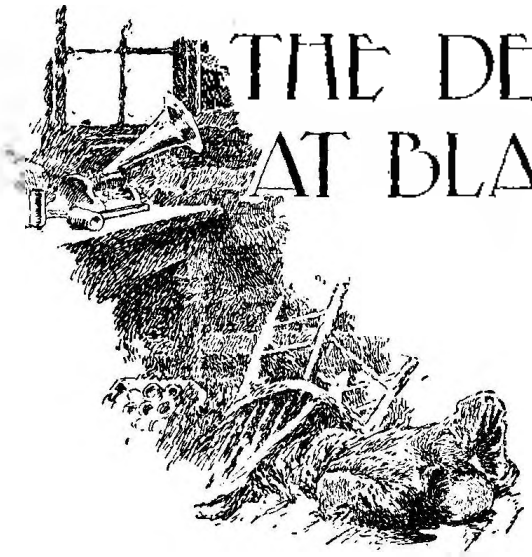
"That was a very wise plan of yours, Pedro—you know women better than I do. But Bellie nearly spoiled it all when she jumped at Lourenço. I almost forgot everything you had told me to say and do."

"So did I," admitted my partner. "After she did that it was not really necessary to talk about the women I had abandoned—ha ha ha! I nearly laughed in your face. But she is all yours now, friend. Treat her well—but be strong and bold, strong and bold!"

"I will," the Tapir promised earnestly. "*Adeos!*"

He stepped back into his canoe and left us.

Pedro took cartridges from a pocket and reloaded his rifle.



THE DEATH ANTHEM AT BLACK MOUNTAIN

by Robert J Horton

Author of "Checkers at Hungry Horse," "Trails of Silence," etc.

WHEN the news flashed through the Little Belts that the lid had been taken off at Kingsville every man in the high hills knew there would be trouble. Wide-open gambling had been tabu in the little mountain town since the days when silver had dropped out of sight and the wild life of the near-by camps had died. But now and again the old order of things had been revived and each occasion marking the lifting of the lid had seen its finish in a tragedy.

Consequently no great excitement was evinced when, within three weeks of the time the word was passed along the lone trails that "she's wide open" and going strong, the intelligence was received that Rand Baltry had been murdered.

Shot down from behind while sitting in his cabin on the east slope of Black Mountain above Kingsville, the old man hadn't had the ghost of a chance. The bullet evidently had been sent on its foul errand through an open window. And a quantity of gold dust which the old man was known to have had in his cabin had disappeared—dust that he had sweated blood to pan from the shallow bed of Weasel Creek, which trickled down from a shoulder of the mountain where it joined the Tenderfoot divide.

This was early Tuesday morning.

The stud-poker tables had been crowded the night before. Baltry had played for a time, paying for his chips with little pinches of dust. He had lost a little, quit the game and gone home. He played more for amusement than anything else.

There were others, however, who didn't play for amusement; cold, silent men who gambled to win, one way or another. Some of these lost also. One of them at least lost all he had. He had left the tables, secured his horse and vanished. He hadn't been seen since before daylight Tuesday morning. This man was "Wild" Ralph Warner.

And soon after dawn, Charley Yeag, coming down from his lead claims high up on Black Mountain, had found the lifeless body of old Rand Baltry with a bullet in its back just under the left shoulder-blade.

Shootings, even killings, were not unusual in that country. But to shoot a man in the back; to kill him without giving him a hint of a chance—and for a mere thousand or so in dust!

Indignation ran high in this instance.

"We oughta make up a posse an' light out after this Warner person," said Pete Burcher when facts concerning the murder became known in Kingsville. "A man what would turn a dirty trick like that oughta be strung up."

But Pete was the only one openly to accuse Warner; and it was decided to wait for the authorities from the sheriff's office in Great Falls.

When authority came late that night it arrived in the person of Boyer—man-hunter of the silent trails—who always was assigned to a case like this which led away from the prairie towns into the vast hidden reaches of the high hills.

BOYER found Kingsville quiet, literally resting on its elbows after the tragedy. The lid once more was tightly clamped down; no rustle of cards, no rattle of chips. And over the little mountain hamlet hung a pall of thick, yellow smoke—like a shroud—obscuring the stars and the moon. It was August; the forest was dry as tinder; and somewhere across the Tenderfoot Divide a fire was eating its way into the timber.

The mountain officer quickly ascertained the nature of Baltry's death. The cabin had not

been touched since the body had been discovered. The old man had been sitting by a table with his back to an open window.

Upon the table were a lamp and an old box-type phonograph, of which there were hundreds in the lonely, widely separated cabins of the mountains. They form means by which music can be packed into almost any section of the hills, and are for that reason greatly favored.

The machine had run down on the cylinder record, which was adjusted—proof that the old man had been listening to its music when death leaped out of the night.

The floor planking beneath the single bunk in the cabin had been ripped up, disclosing the empty hiding-place of the old man's gold.

Charley Yeag explained how he had happened to find the body. He always stopped there on his way down from his place higher on the mountain. He was coming down just before dawn and had seen the light burning. He had received no answer to his hail so he had gone over and found his friend dead.

Yeag had never been known even to have a gun—but suspicion would not have attached to him in any event. Yeag's eyes were right.

Boyer knew men. He wasted no time here. Having completed his inspection by lantern-light, he ordered the body held at Kingsville until the coroner should arrive in the morning, and directed that the cabin windows be boarded up and the door locked with a padlock which he provided. He put the key in his pocket.

Then he went back down the mountain to Kingsville.

"Harrigan," he said to the man who ran the place in which Baltry had played, and where the gambling had been the heaviest, "I'm not going to make any bones about the card-playing. That isn't my line. If the sheriff wants to make trouble for you for running a gambling-place up here he can do it himself. But I want a list of the heaviest losers in these last games and I want you to be sort of careful in making it out. Don't overlook anybody—understand?"

Harrigan understood. More than that, he knew Boyer. He wrote out a list which contained possibly a dozen names. Boyer scanned it closely.

"You say this man Ralph Warner lost his whole chunk last night?"

"Everything he had," said Harrigan.

"And these three others went broke too?"

"They sure did."

"But Warner lit out," mused Boyer. "He's the same Wild Ralph that raised that rumpus over on Smith River last Winter, ain't he?"

"Same guy," confirmed Harrigan. "He follows the card-games."

"And got several notches on his gun handle maybe."

"I've heard he has. From what I seen of him around here I wouldn't want to get into any trouble with him."

"Have a man get my horse, Harrigan, if you've got a man working here you can spare. I sent him down to the stables before I went up on the hill. He's had about six hours' rest; that's all he needs."

Boyer joined the little group of men who had remained up all night while he was making his investigations.

"Any of you boys see Ralph Warner leave last night?"

Several spoke up in the affirmative.

"Don't suppose any of you happened to be outside when he left town so as to notice which way he went?"

"He took the Weasel Creek trail up Black Mountain," said Pete Burcher. "I tried to get up a posse to foller him but they crawfished."

Boyer went outside and waited until a man brought his horse. He swung quickly into the saddle. Then he called to Harrigan—

"Get the sheriff on the forest phone after daybreak and tell him I've gone after Warner."

GREAT clouds of swirling smoke were hurdling the divide on a freshening wind as Boyer urged his horse up the steep trail toward the summit in the early morning.

He flung himself from the saddle and led his mount, plunging and snorting in the smoke-fumes, up the final slope, and then swung north on the rocky ridge of the divide.

Choking and gasping, he fought the smoke for two miles along the ridge until he reached a point north of where the fire seemed to be raging in the far-flung timber below, and where the atmosphere was more clear and the sun shone dimly through the soaring smoke-pall.

Below him, eastward and southward, the darting tongues of flame were eating through the slender green timber, which here seemed mostly jack-pines with an occasional patch of what appeared to be lodge-pole.

The fire was burning westward and northward; and the timber threatened was in the shape of a huge triangle with the rocky ridge of the divide on the east and a long series of high, limestone cliffs on the west leading to the apex in the north.

Razor Creek, on the south, flowing west to merge with the distant Smith River, formed the base. The fire had started somewhere along the north side of Razor Creek.

The Forest Service men evidently were not worrying much about this particular strip of timber, for its value was negligible even as a watershed. The fire would burn itself out as it reached the barrier formed by the limestone cliffs in the west and the high, bare, rocky ridge in the east, and would creep northward, gradually narrowing.

Boyer unslung his binoculars, and in rifts in the smoke he saw the forest men on the divide far south of him. They were watching—prepared; and if the fire started to leap the divide and get into the big, valuable timber on the east slope a warning would be dispatched to Kingsville and every available man requisitioned to fight it.

But the trailer's interest was not centered in the forest fire.

Somewhere out there below him was a man he was after; a man he wanted for murder.

Boyer searched the timbered area north of the fire with his high-powered glasses in a futile effort to get some trace of the fugitive. He returned his glasses to their case and did something which at once stamped him a past master at tracking men in the wilderness. He mentally put himself in the shoes of the desperate fugitive.

All his life Boyer had lived in the high hills and in the lone prairie country that stretched eastward to the purple buttes and beyond. He had tracked men and trapped them from the Musselshell to the Peace River country far north of the Sweetgrass Hills. He knew the Montana mountains, the Badlands, the prairie country from the Missouri to Milk River, and had followed the lone trails with the North West Mounted far into northern Canada.

He knew the ways of the men of the silences.

Wild Ralph Warner had twenty-four hours' start.

"He wouldn't go south because he'd be sure to meet up with the forest men," said Boyer to himself; "and he didn't want to be impressed into fire-fighting maybe; and he wouldn't want to answer any questions. To go south would be taking chances."

He scanned the country to the north.

"If he went north he'd have to go down and cross Band Creek when he reached the end of the limestone and hit the trail toward the Falls. He didn't want to do that; too many people on *that* trail."

Then Boyer's gaze again traveled westward.

"Warner's figured he could cut through that triangle of timber and dodge around the south end of the limestone into the Smith River country ahead of the fire," he reasoned aloud.

In a moment the man-hunter measured the distance across to the limestone and noted the advance of the flames from the south. The wind was blowing from the northwest, partly against the fire's advance, and a storm-signal in itself.

"If I can make it across and far enough south I can get up those limestone cliffs and have a clean trail to Smith River."

Without another moment's hesitation Boyer swung into the saddle and turned his horse down into the triangle of timber ahead of the fire.

ASHES and flying embers dropped about him as he cut through the open spaces in the timber and made for the limestone some five miles away. He was on a line much farther north than that which probably had been followed by Warner, because the fire had advanced rapidly during the night. He paid scant attention to the flying sparks and embers and the heavy gusts of smoke until they began to increase in number. Soon he found himself turning to a northwestward course to get farther ahead of the fire.

It was noon when Boyer reached a low ridge in the center of the triangle of timber-land and paused for a breath of clear air. Even as he looked about him a shower of sparks and a blanket of smoke enveloped him. He held his horse with some difficulty.

And then he became aware of the disconcerting fact that the wind was changing. It was veering slowly to the southwest, sending the flames racing almost directly toward him. For the first time since he had swung down from the top of the divide he began to have a concern for his own safety.

He unslung his glasses and again swept the timber-land in the west as yet untouched by the fire. Had Warner, then, got through?

Whether Warner had managed to slip around the southern end of the limestone cliffs or not, it now was vividly apparent to Boyer that he couldn't expect to perform that feat. Already the flames had licked past the point where he had thought he would be able to climb the limestone barrier and make for Smith River.

Suddenly he gave vent to a startled exclamation and kept his glasses trained on a point at the base of the limestone cliffs almost directly west of where he was standing.

On a steep, short slope leading from the timber and directly under the cliffs he saw the figure of a man stumbling along the corrugated side of the slope.

"Afoot!" Boyer ejaculated.

And immediately he was in the saddle, urging his mount toward a point somewhat north of where he had seen the figure.

Warner, if it should prove to be he, had lost his horse and been cut off from rounding the southern end of the limestone. Now he was fleeing northward, searching for a favorable place to scale the limestone wall that reared straight above him.

The clouds of smoke that rode on the wind, now blowing almost a gale from directly south, blinded the man-hunter as he charged through the timber; but the roar of the flames drowned the sound of crashing branches and snapping twigs and the dull echo of his horse's hoofs. The fire was gaining headway fast.

It seemed hours to Boyer, although it was in reality but a comparatively short time, before he came to the west edge of the timber and

brought up before the towering cliffs of limestone.

He whirled his horse to the south and started down the broken land under the cliffs.

At the first turn he came upon the man he sought.

Wild Ralph Warner looked up in startled fashion to find himself staring into the menacing black aperture of a gun held by a steady hand. Slowly his gaze traveled to the dark, stern features and steady, gleaming black eyes above it.

"Boyer!" he exclaimed.

"Glad you know me, Ralph," said Boyer, slipping out of the saddle without failing for an instant to keep the other covered. "Does away with explanations. I'll take your gun—that's it."

Boyer snapped the cartridges out of the other's weapon and thrust it into a side pocket of the ordinary coat which he wore.

"Too bad you ever learned to pull a trigger, Ralph," he said quietly. "I'll have to arrest you for the murder of Rand Baltry yesterday morning."

Warner remained silent, staring sullenly.

Boyer felt rapidly about his prisoner's person.

"Haven't got the loot on you, eh? Where's your horse?"

"He bolted in the timber when I dismounted to climb a tree and get my bearings," replied Warner.

"I see. Carrying the plunder, too. Well, he'll turn up, maybe. That was a dirty trick, Ralph—shooting the old man in the back.

"No—never mind; no remarks. We've got to get out of here. The fire's whipping up in mighty fast shape. I'm not going to take any chances with you in a time like this; turn around and clasp your hands behind you—that's it."

Boyer snapped on the handcuffs.

"Get up there in the front of the saddle," Boyer commanded. "Colonel can carry the two of us out of this, I guess."

But when they had mounted and Boyer turned the horse toward the east he saw to his dismay that the fire had already crept along the western slope of the divide and they were cut off in that direction.

"Jupiter! We've got to head north!" he exclaimed as he drove home his spurs.

WITH the fire now raging to the south and east of them, and escape in the west cut off by the high limestone cliffs, it became a question of racing northward to the apex of the triangle, where they could hope to gain the divide where it joined with the cliffs and go down the other side to Band Creek and safety.

"They back-fired on this side of the divide," said Ralph as he leaned forward in the front of the saddle to hold his place.

"I guess they did," agreed Boyer. "Wanted her to burn off before the top-fire came along and blew over into the big timber t'other side. My ——! She's coming like an express train."

Burning branches and huge fagots hurling sparks in all directions swirled by them in the wind, and the air was so thick with resinous smoke that they nearly smothered in the intervals between the puffs of clearer atmosphere.

Through pure accident they came suddenly upon a spring at the edge of the timber and Boyer, dismounting, threw off his coat, and, cramming Warner's gun into a trouser pocket, dipped the coat in the water and threw it, wringing wet, to his prisoner.

"Tie it around your face," he shouted, catching the reins just in time to prevent the horse from bolting.

He ripped off his woolen shirt, soaked it in the water and tied it about his face under his eyes, which were red and smarting.

Once more they plunged forward in the lee of the cliffs. Not once did a favorable place for an ascent of the limestone show along the sheer face of the rock wall. The flames to their right came nearer and leaped ahead of them. Sparks and burning embers multiplied, while overhead marched the never-ending columns of thick smoke.

The flight had become a race with the fire to gain the apex of the triangle, the northern end of the limestone, first.

They swung into the timber at a point where it ranged across their path flat up against the cliffs. When they emerged and plunged across an open space and on to higher ground under the limestone wall Boyer saw the flames racing ahead of them toward the base of the limestone where it met the divide. There was much timber massed in below the apex.

He reined in the horse. The animal had long since began to show the effects of the smoke and of the double load he carried.

"We're trapped!" shouted Boyer above the roar of the flames.

Then he dismounted. From a pocket he brought forth a key-ring, selected a small key and unlocked the handcuffs that held Warner's hands and arms behind his back.

"A jury has the right to pass judgment on your life," said Boyer in his ear; "but I haven't. It's each man for himself."

With that Boyer grasped the reins of his horse's bridle and started north, leading the animal. There was just a chance—a slight shadow of a chance—that he could get through to the top of the limestone on this side of the dense pine growth below the apex before the fire reached there. But for once the animal objected to being led.

"All right," cried Boyer, looking at the beast with reddened, smarting eyes. "No time to argue now. I'll take time to take the saddle off and then you can go it alone."

He started to loosen the cinches when Warner came running up.

"Come on! Ride him—I'll show you the way out."

He started back toward the place where they had passed the pine growth which ranged up against the limestone.

"In there," he shouted, pointing. "You missed it. I knew that place was there and was heading for it. Come on!"

Boyer shot one hasty glance backward where the flames were licking at the timber under the point where the limestone and divide came together—where he had hoped to escape—and, leaping into the saddle, urged the horse along behind Warner.

Warner led the way into the pine growth, and Boyer noticed something he hadn't seen before—a trickle of running water. Even as he saw it Warner turned west and they entered a narrow canon which seemed virtually a gash in the limestone wall.

Boyer had to dismount. The horse, with reins wrapped loosely about the saddle-horn, followed Warner as he climbed up the steep bed of the narrow creek, hardly a yard wide. Boyer brought up the rear.

In half an hour they emerged upon the flat tableland that reached westward from the flat top of the limestone cliffs; where the air was clear and pure, and the afternoon sun was only partly obscured by the smoke veil drifting upward from the fire below.

FOR a long moment they sat and rested. "Ralph," said Boyer finally, "how does it come you didn't tell me about that way out when we passed it?"

"Because I was wearing the bracelets," said Warner simply.

"And if I hadn't taken them off you'd have let us get caught in the fire?" asked Boyer, surprized.

"Oh, ——! I knew you'd take 'em off when you saw it looked like we couldn't get out," said Warner, rolling a cigaret.

"How'd you know that?"

"Because you're a man, even if you are the law," said Ralph, putting a light to his smoke.

Boyer considered this. He was in a difficult position. Wild Ralph still was his prisoner, though he was not now adorned with handcuffs. But Warner had just saved his life.

Warner had had ample opportunity to sneak back to the pine growth and escape by way of the narrow canon hidden by the timber without Boyer's knowing where he had gone. Just as easy as not he could have left Boyer to his fate. But he hadn't chosen to do this. And he was under arrest charged tentatively with murder!

"Look here, Boyer," said Warner, slowly exhaling thin streams of smoke from his nostrils. "Don't think I'm tryin' to pull the innocent; but what time and where was Baltry killed?"

"I don't know your game, Ralph, but I'll answer your questions. He was killed early yesterday morning—before daylight—in his cabin on Black Mountain. Shot in the back."

"Why? Any reason?"

"A sack of gold dust that I suspect is tied to the saddle of that horse of yours that bolted."

Warner laughed.

"I only hope you find him, Boyer, because the only thing you'll find on my saddle is an old yellow slicker tied on behind."

Boyer remained silent considering his problem.

"I know why you think I did it," continued Warner. "Because I lost my pile at the stud tables and lit out before daylight."

Boyer nodded.

"It looks bad, Ralph."

Warner pointed over the edge of the limestone where the smoke rolled upward from the triangle, now a seething mass of flames.

"I could have left you down there in that," Boyer."

"I might have got out some way," Boyer evaded.

"Never! You couldn't have made it if you'd got to the upper end before the fire did. It's as bad up there as it is south of here on this side. I know this place in here like a book. Crossed here many a time. You couldn't have got out."

"Well, then, if that's the case, why didn't you leave me down there and sneak away?"

"Because now you'll listen to reason," said Warner earnestly. "If I'd pointed the way out when I had those bracelets on I'd have gone to the Falls to stand trial. I didn't know what it was about—that's the truth; but I wasn't taking any chances just the same.

"I knew you'd cut me loose when you thought we didn't have much of a chance. An' I got you out of there because I knew you'd listen to reason and because I wouldn't deliberately kill a man without giving him a chance."

Boyer shot a quick glance at him.

"Well, Ralph, what was your idea in hitting out of Kingsville the way you did?"

"I was making straight for Smith River the quickest way I could get there. It's my old hangout. I've got an uncle with a ranch over there who stakes me now and then when I go broke. Sometimes I get lucky again and pay it back the way I get it, and sometimes I have to work it out. It all depends."

"And you was beating it over there to get a fresh stake?"

"Exactly. And listen here, Boyer; you probably never saw me before; just knew me by description and the reputation they give me down there in Kingsville. But I knew you, like everybody in these hills knows you; and you've got a reputation for being square and knowing men. All right. You don't think I'd pull you

out of that fire or look you square in the eyes if I'd shoot a man in the back, do you?

"Boyer, that makes me sore. I don't mind being arrested; I've been arrested before. And I don't mind being accused of a legitimate murder—I've killed a man in my time. But I gave him a chance to draw, by ——. Boyer, I wouldn't shoot a man in the back."

Boyer gazed steadily into the man's eyes.

"You was in a mix-up over on Smith River last Winter, wasn't you, Ralph?" he asked quietly.

"A shooting scrap in a card game. A man accused me of mixing the deal on purpose, called me a name and went for his gun. I might have mixed the deal; but I wasn't what he called me and I don't intend to let no man beat me to his gun if I can help it. I shot him in the shoulder—in front."

Warner's eyes did not waver as Boyer looked at him.

"If you didn't kill old man Baltry have you got any idea who did?" asked Boyer.

"None at all."

"That makes it harder, Ralph," said Boyer at length. "Here's your gun. I've got to be traveling."

BOYER stayed that night with a sheepherder on the flats below the triangle six miles north of where he and Warner had escaped from the burning timber. By the light of the camp-fire he studied the list of the men who had lost heavily in the poker game the day preceding the death of Rand Baltry.

He was satisfied that Warner had not turned the trick. He knew too that he could get Warner again if he wanted him.

Then he began to reason; to put himself in the other fellow's place. If Warner had so chosen he could have held the old man up, taken his gold and fled without killing his victim.

But dead men do not disclose the identity of those who rob them. Thus Rand Baltry's lifeless body could not point out the man who had taken the gold dust—even though that man had remained in Kingsville.

Early in the dawn Boyer was on his way. He went east, followed down to Band Creek, crossed the creek and headed back up the trail to Kingsville.

The fire had burned itself out in the triangle. Most of the smoke pall had lifted. The sun shone brightly over the timbered ridges in the east and slanted across the rocky ridge of Tenderfoot Divide. A turquoise sky arched above the glistening peaks.

It was late afternoon when he reached Kingsville. He put up his horse and went immediately to Harrigan's place. There was a crowd of men before the bar.

"Did you find Warner?" asked a chorus of voices.

"I did," said Boyer.

The men looked at each other significantly as Boyer went to speak with Harrigan at the end of the bar.

"Took him down to Milford probably," said one.

"And now he's gone to tell Harrigan that the lid's got to be kept down tight," said another.

"No need for him to do that," sneered Pete Burcher; "the sheriff's already done that. This town's a dead one now. I'm off for Canady where they's something doing, tomorrer."

Harrigan walked around from behind the bar as Boyer left the place.

"Let's have some music, boys," he suggested, and started the old-fashioned box phonograph that occupied a place on a table before the bar. It was of the type similar to hundreds which are used in the high hills to while away lonely hours.

The men became jovial and tune after tune was played, mostly rag-time, while the men drank and joked and quietly discussed the supposed capture of Wild Ralph Warner.

After a time Boyer reentered the place and joined the men at the bar. His keen glance quickly roved over those present.

"It's a long chance," he whispered to Harrigan as he ordered refreshment for all present.

As the men were being served Boyer stepped back to the phonograph and changed the record. He started the machine, dropped the sound piece midway of the record and stepped back to the bar. The men were raising their glasses.

In an instant the room was filled with music; not rag-time this, but an anthem—a glorious, old-time anthem that swelled and vibrated with full notes.

The men before the bar paused in startled wonder. Then a glass crashed to the floor.

Pete Burcher turned toward the machine to find himself looking into Boyer's gun.

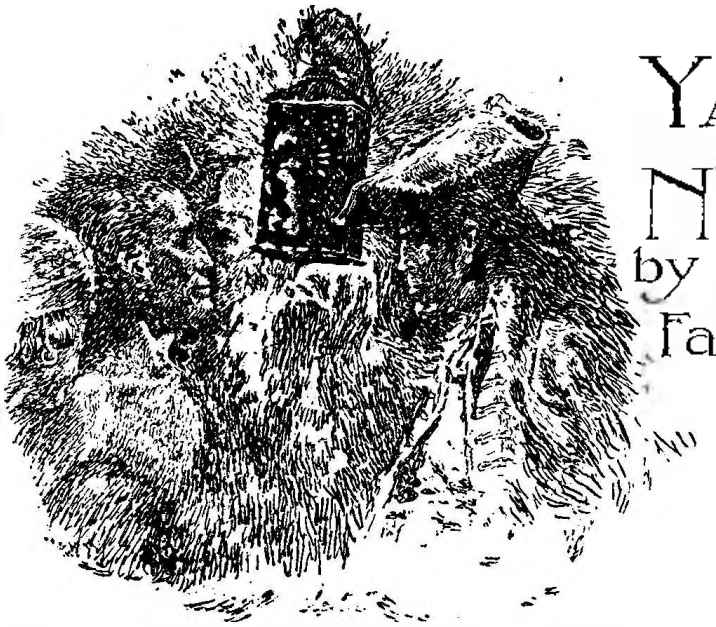
"Nervous, eh, Pete?" said Boyer quietly. "I thought maybe somebody would recognize that tune. It's the tune old Baltry died by— None of that!"

Boyer's gun cracked and Burcher's right wrist dangled, dripping blood.

"I'll take your gun— that's better. Let's feel you over. Ah! Got it in a money-belt, eh Pete? You should have lit out yesterday when you had a chance. Farewells are costly sometimes. We'll be starting for the Falls now."

On the way out Boyer dropped a crumpled piece of paper upon which were written a number of names. A man picked it up.

"Look here," he said, surprized; "here's a bunch of our names with Warner's and Pete Burcher's at the top. I wonder now if some of us hadn't ought to feel lucky!"



YANKEE NOTIONS

by

Farnham Bishop

Author of "Wood and Steel," "The Rest Cure," etc.

"NAT GRISWOLD, by Judas!" cried Captain Bartley as the light of an upheld lantern revealed the face of the man just brought aboard by the jolly-boat's crew. "You Yankee sneak, what are you doing here at Pelican Island?"

"Listening to you swear by your patron saint, Bartley."

Naked, unarmed, and alone on his worst enemy's deck, Griswold smiled as the other burst into a roar of blasphemies and clapped his hand to the hilt of his cutlas.

"Go ahead—pull it out and hit me with it; that's a brave boy!" continued Griswold softly as if to encourage a frightened child. "Don't be afraid, Bartley; two of your men are holding me."

For a long ten seconds no man spoke or stirred on board the *Rover's Delight*. All hands had gathered in the waist about the captain and the captive. Above their heads the spars and rigging of the pirate brig scarce moved against the tropic stars, so easily did she ride at anchor in the little land-locked harbor of Pelican Island.

Starlight and the dim glow from the tiny holes in the iron battle-lantern gleamed faintly on the brass hilt and half-drawn blade of Bartley's cutlas, the tarnished lace on his coat and tricorn, the jagged teeth behind the snarling, bearded lips. The nude body before him, instead of standing out pale and distinct, was as brown as any Indian's.

The feet, planted parallel with each other, the slender, sinewy limbs, erect carriage, high cheek-bones, and long black hair clubbed with an eelskin after the fashion of 1784, would have made any one doubt that Griswold was a white man had it not been for a two weeks' growth of strong black beard. His eyes twinkled in the lantern-light as if he were enjoying some delightful but entirely private jest.

"You're trying for it!" cried Bartley, slamming his blade back into its scabbard. "For a swift and easy death, and by——, you came near getting it! Now answer me straight and civil, or I'll trice you up to the shrouds and put a red-checked shirt on your naked hide! What have you been doing here on my island?"

"Waiting for you to come and careen."

There was a stir and murmur among the crew at this.

"Silence!" commanded Bartley.

The utter stillness that followed at once was proof of uncommon discipline for an outlaw craft.

"Who told you of my secret careening-place?"

"One of your pirates——"

"Stow that word!" thundered Bartley with a tremendous oath.

"One of your privateersmen, I should have said," Griswold corrected himself humbly. "Of course you are a privateer, Captain Bartley. Were you not issued letters of marque and reprisal by the Continental Congress in '75? Before that, I remember, when I was a junior sophister at Yale, you were the loudest-shouting Liberty Boy in all New Haven. No truer patriot ever helped burn a Tory's barn or hustle his helpless wife and daughters on the Common. Do you still sail under the Rattlesnake Flag, Captain Bartley?"

"I'm not denying I was once a —— Yankee rebel like you," answered Bartley in a tone that he tried to make indifferent. "But that's all past and done with——"

"Of course—ever since you besought and received his most gracious Majesty's pardon, and thereafter cruised and plundered on what you esteemed the winning side as merrily as you had done on the other. And now that the war is over you are cruising and plundering still. A most private privateersman!"

"And what are you," demanded Bartley, "but a sneaking, lawbreaking smuggler? Now that you've got your cursed independence, you're a foreigner and forbidden to trade in British waters by the Navigation Acts. Here in the West Indies you're fair game."

"Aye, for the King's frigates and cutters; but not for you. While Kingston folks want Yankee notions I'll manage to land my cargoes and run the risks of the trade. But you're too smart to run any risks like an honest smuggler or an old-time buccaneer. You never trouble an English ship, and who cares what you do to Americans, Dons and Frenchmen?

" 'Let 'em catch and hang their own pirates!' say the governor of Jamaica and the admiral of the station, thinking of the late war and chuckling together over their port.

"And since Congress sends no more armed ships to sea, while the Spanish frigates idle in Havana harbor and King Louis' cruisers are few and slow, these are merry times for Captain Bartley of the *Rover's Delight*. It was a rare ill wind for you that brought the old *Raisonable's* head-sails round the point when you had laid me aboard off Cape Maysi and thought my vessel was your prize.

"You cut the grapnels in time to show your heels to the French frigates; but you left one of your wounded behind on the *Naugatuck's* deck. The French doctors healed him in the hospital at Port au Prince, where the *Raisonable* took us—and there I sold my cargo at better than Kingston prices. Having little love for you and less for the gallows, your man told me of Pelican Island. And so I am here."

GRISWOLD stopped as if there were nothing more to be said.

"Go on," growled Bartley. "What the devil were you up to, splashing about like that beneath my bows?"

"It was the shark that was doing most of the splashing," said Griswold almost apologetically. "The first I ever saw here. He must have followed you in this afternoon—it would pay a shark to cruise in your wake. I caught the white flash of his belly as he turned over and rose up below me; so I dived down and ripped him open as I'd seen the Jamiaca boys do. It took more than one slash to finish him; and by that time your jolly-boat was right on top of me. As soon as I came up to breathe after the last dive somebody grabbed me by the hair, and a couple of others helped him haul me aboard and take away my knife."

"Here it be," a deep voice spoke from the shadows.

A thick fist and hairy, tattoed forearm were thrust into the lantern-light, displaying a ten-inch blade still red with shark-blood. A braided lanyard hung from the sword-like hilt. Craning forward, the ring of pirates studied the weapon with keen professional interest.

"A broken hanger ground down to knife-length," commented one.

"Aye, and by a master hand," said its new owner proudly. "Sharper than broken glass."

"Thank you," said Griswold. "I did that myself just to pass the time."

"—— you and your time-passing!" thundered Bartley. "Answer me quick and straight or I'll gut you with your own knife and heave you back to the sharks. You didn't swim here all the way from Port au Prince for the fun of shark-fighting under my bows. Were you trying to cut my cable or sneak aboard and cut my throat? And where's the craft you came in, and how many men came with you? Answer me or die!"

"Death is no nearer me than it is to you and every other man aboard this brig," answered Griswold in solemn tones that were all the more impressive after his own levity and the other's ungoverned rage.

The night was hot, but more than one of the pirates shivered at the sound of the baneful words.

"The *Rover's Delight* has made her last cruise and dropped anchor in her last harbor. She and all on board her are doomed to perish within the hour. Death lurks beneath her keel, even as the shark, but for whose presence you would have died unwarned!"

This fearful and mysterious prophecy, spoken in a deep slow voice, carried conviction and terror to many of the hearers; a fleeting, intuitive knowledge that the speaker's words were literally true. It was more than superstition; it was as if these debased and brutalized men had acquired some of the true brute's protective instincts in exchange for their lost manhood.

" 'Tis the divil's own brig!" cried an Irish voice. "And if the divil's waitin' to drag her down be the keel it's not me will be staying on board this night."

"Out boats! Out boats and leave her!" rang the general cry

But Bartley beat back the rush with the flat of his cutlas and roared them down with soul-shaking oaths and unshaken common sense.

"Call yourselve seamen?" he concluded. "Is the brig afire or pounding on a lee shore, that you're so crazy to leave her? Or is she lying safe and snug in her own haven with three clear fathoms betwixt her keel and a sandy

bottom? Can't you see that he's trying to frighten you into going ashore, where there's—— know how many Yanks and Frenchies waiting for you in the dark and under the trees?

"Here, you!" he demanded, pricking Griswold's bare breast with the point of the cutlas. "How much of a force did you bring with you from Port au Prince?"

"Two full companies of *Infanterie de la Marine!*" replied Griswold in the crisp voice of an adjutant making a report.

"The *Raisonable* was too big and slow for this sort of work," he continued. "Moreover she had not a *matelot* to spare for a landing-party. So the soldiery sailed for Pelican Island in a Haitian schooner, and I let my mate take the *Naugatuck* back to New Haven and came with them to see the sport.

"The plan was that the schooner should set us ashore and leave us for a month, while she returned to Port au Prince. Our pilot—the man you abandoned on my deck—swore that within that time you would surely come and careen your brig, as she was getting slow and foul. You came, and according to our plan we lay quiet in the woods while you kedged in and came to anchor at sundown.

"We knew that you would keep your crew aboard and sober tonight, and tomorrow morning run the *Rover's Delight* ashore at the mouth of the creek, heave her down and scrape her bottom, keeping everybody hard at it all day to get the work done before the big carousing in the clearing tomorrow night. Then would be the time, when you were all blind drunk and your weapons scattered hither and yon, for the soldiers to surround you and settle the business with the least trouble and expense.

"That was what I thought, and so did the French officers—all but one. And that one outvoted me and all the rest, for he was our commander. Major D'Hannibault, his name is; a girl-faced, eighteen-year-old younger son of marquis; a child scarce fit to be an ensign, but set above veteran captains older than his father because his birth is noble and theirs is not.

"He turned up his pretty nose at our plan and cried it to scorn. He had not come to catch drunken men asleep and drag them off to prison. He was not a low-born cur of a bailiff or a constable, *morbleu!* He was a soldier of France, a noble, an officer of the king! He stood there and prattled away about the splendor of battle and the glory of war.

"None of his officers dared gainsay him; it would have cost them their commissions, poor devils, and they knew it. And as soon as I tried to put in a word D'Hannibault told me to my face as politely as you please that he feared he must dispense with my advice as this was an affair for the military.

"I don't mind telling you, Bartley, that that, and the way he said it, made me mighty hot.

" 'Look here, major,' I told him. 'I served in the corps of sappers and miners from Long Island to Yorktown. I know all about the splendor of battle and the glory of war—I wintered at Valley Forge. If you insist on having a perfectly needless fight, go ahead.

"And just to show you that I can be as reckless of my own life as you are of the lives your king has entrusted to you, I'll bet you a hundred louis d'or I can swim out and cut the brig's cable. Then the set of the ebb will beach her on the point, right under the new battery."

"What's that?" gasped Bartley. "What new battery?"

GRISWOLD looked extremely annoyed.

"I shouldn't have said that—it slipped out. However, there's nothing you can do about it, and no harm in telling you further. We found those long eighteens you'd mounted to defend the harbor mouth, and hauled them across the point to where they can rake the anchorage from the prettiest screened emplacements I ever built. Naturally a boy like D'Hannibault can't have a toy like that without wanting to play with it."

"I'll play with him! I've a long Tom forward, six twelves a side——"

"And no target to train them on," Griswold finished for him. "You'll waste your broadsides scattering sand and cutting down cocopalms while the French gunners pound you to pieces. Here in this narrow cove you've no more chance than a chip in a bucket of water. There's not a breath of wind to give you steerage-way.

"If you try to kedge, your boat-crews will be picked off by the musketeers ashore. You dare not land and try to storm the battery. Your fellows are bold enough when it comes to scuttling a helpless merchantman, but they'll never face trained troops in a stand-up fight.

"And you can't stay here. Soon enough you'll find yourself cutting your own cable and drifting down to your doom with a bonfire blazing to show you clear, and another adrift in your wake."

"What do you mean—a bonfire adrift in my wake?"

"You know the wreck of the bark you beached and plundered at the mouth of the creek?" asked Griswold, nodding toward the head of the narrow estuary. "There's a fine big fire-raft moored behind it, all ready to be lit and shoved off. I drifted down from there myself just now, and the current carried me slap against your bows. That's how the fire-raft will come at the end of the hour I told Sergeant Tissot to give me to return in. It must be nearly time now."

"Then, by ——, I'll have you bound hand and foot and heave you into the hottest blaze of it when it comes alongside!" vowed Bartley.

Brave through he was, Griswold could not entirely repress the shudder that ran through him at this fearful threat. Bartley saw him wince and pressed his advantage shrewdly.

"You got me into this, Nat Griswold, and you'll get me out or roast alive!"

"But how?" cried Griswold. "But how can I do that?"

"That's for you to find," answered Bartley. "Best be quick about it, for once that lubber casts off his fire-raft 'twill be too late!"

Knitting his brows, the prisoner thought desperately, while those about him stared anxiously, now at his face and now at the dark silent shore.

"I have it!" Griswold exclaimed. "Put me in the jolly-boat with some one you can trust and row me down to the point, where I can call to D'Hannibault on the shore. Sooner than suffer me to be burned to death he'll agree to let you go. Will you swear to set me ashore free and uninjured if I persuade him to pass you out to sea?"

"I'll swear it on a dozen Bibles!" assented Bartley. "I'll go with you myself. Into the jolly-boat with him, you two," he added to the pair who were holding Griswold's arms. "To battle-quarters, the rest of you. Cast loose and provide, run out the guns, keep silence and stand by till I return."

With two men at the oars the jolly-boat put off from the brig. Griswold and Bartley sat side by side in the stern-sheets, the former on the port side, the latter to starboard. The pirate's left hand grasped the tiller; his right reached across his body and pressed the cold muzzle of a pistol against Griswold's naked flank.

"Sit tight and keep your hands on your knees," Bartley warned him grimly. "Make a sound or a stir and you're a dead man."

Rowing with the tide, they soon drew near to the long, curving point of land that all but closed the entrance to the harbor. At any moment a challenging, "*Qui vive?*" might come from the shore.

"Where's that ——battery?" demanded Bartley in a hoarse whisper.

"A little farther along," murmured Griswold.

"Way enough! Rest on your oars, lads. Here, stroke, take this pistol and keep him covered, while I give the Frenchies a hail."

Standing up in the stern-sheet, Bartley filled his lungs and shouted through cupped palms:

"Ahoy the shore! Ahoy there!"

There was no answer.

"Ahoy there, Dannybow!" he roared.

Silence. Griswold shivered slightly as he looked at the dim figure of the pirate who sat facing him, the starlight glinting faintly on the barrel of the pistol. Was that other gleam from the brass hilt of his own knife in the fellow's waist-sash? It was too dark to see——

AND then it was dark no longer! A sudden flash of ruddy light lit boat and bay and shore. Griswold could see the little bloodshot veins in the staring eyeballs of stroke and bow as they looked beyond him at the incredible sight astern.

They saw the stout hull of the brig broken in two amidships and hurled high in the air by a foaming mountain of water crested with leaping flames. Black against the glare, topmasts and yards, each trailing fragment of rigging, flew like giants' javelins. Bowsprit and poop sank down and away from each other, till they stood nearly at a right angle. The jagged plank-ends showed clear at the upheaved end of each half of the brig. Between them a volcano was erupting through what had been the waist of the *Rover's Delight*.

Hypnotized by the fearful sight and dazzled by the glare, the pirate holding the pistol had neither eye nor thought for the prisoner he was supposed to be guarding. Without stopping to look behind him Griswold struck. His left hand knocked aside the pistol as his clenched right swooped up against the open-mouthed starer's drooping chin.

Snatching his own knife from the stunned man's sash, Griswold threw himself sidewise against Bartley, who was still standing upright, and now looking back over his right shoulder. The sudden impact bowled the captain over as the bow man fumbled at his belt. Bartley and Griswold came down together on the starboard gunwale, capsizing the jolly-boat and spilling the four men into the water.

Not till then did the sound of the great explosion reach their ears, so quickly had Griswold acted at the first warning flash. As they struck the water they heard the mighty roar go thundering past before they sank down to silent depths below.

The splash of falling fragments and the screaming of frightened gulls greeted Griswold as he reappeared. Swimming like an otter, he grasped the jolly-boat's painter, pulled himself up and lay face down on the bottom of the overturned craft. Two others came to the surface and swam after him—Bartley and the bowman. Stroke, knocked unconscious by Griswold's fist, had drowned without more ado.

Holding his knife ready, Griswold watched the two heads come bobbing to the attack. First swam the bow man, holding a dirk in his teeth; Bartley floundered after, handicapped by the length and weight of his cutlas. The first pirate was within arm's length of the boat

when up from beneath it rose something long and white that snatched him down in a flurry of red-stained foam.

"Ha' mercy!" wailed Bartley, losing his cutlas as he opened his mouth to speak. "Ha' mercy! The sharks! The sharks!"

"Come aboard," invited Griswold, slinging his knife by the lanyard. Reaching down, he caught the other's coat collar as he came alongside.

It was well for Bartley that he did, for just at that moment the great wave thrown up by the explosion reached them and lifted the jolly-boat high on its foaming crest. Clinging to the keel with one hand and both knees, Griswold hung on despite the heavy drag of the other's body.

It was not for long, for the shore was near, and the wave was bearing them toward it at racing speed. Carrying the overturned boat far up the beach, the wave receded, leaving them high and dry.

Slipping down to the sand, Griswold dropped astride of the prostrate Bartley's chest, knelt on his biceps, and grasped his wrists with fingers that felt like iron pincers.

"Do you yield?" he asked softly. "Or must I break a few of your bones to mend your manners?"

"I yield," grasped Bartley. "I've felt your strength—you could shred a man to oakum with those fingers."

Releasing him at once, Griswold rose and patted the stranded jolly-boat.

"A good little craft. Tomorrow we'll fit her with a mast and sail from the wreckage of the brig and make shift for Port au Prince, where they'll hang you according to French law. Come, let's to camp."

"Where is your camp?" asked Bartley, "and what's happened to the Frenchies, that they're still keeping so quiet?"

"They are dead," answered Griswold solemnly.

"Dead?"

"Aye, dead as your own crew. You and I, Bartley, are the last men left alive on Pelican Island."

"OUT there, beneath that coral reef a mile off-shore, lies brave young D'Hannibault, with all his men. A hurricane caught us on the way hither from Port au Prince, dismasted the schooner, drove her on the reef and ground her to pieces before we could launch a boat.

"I alone won through the surf and reached the shore. That was two weeks ago. There I was, naked as you see me now, without a comrade or a weapon, to meet the *Rover's Delight!*

"But there were plenty of shellfish and fresh water beside the yams you'd planted for your crew and the pigs you'd turned loose in the woods. I needed no clothes; my skin tans but does not burn or blister in the sun. I picked up an old broken hanger that one of your men had thrown away and ground it to a point while I thought out a plan.

"I'd served in the corps of sappers and miners with Captain David Bushnell and Sergeant Ezra Lee, who cruised under-water in the Connecticut Navy's submarine machine, the *Turtle*, in '76. I'd helped Bushnell make the floating engines that he blew up the British shipping with at New London and Philadelphia. And I guessed I could make and use that kind of a Yankee notion myself.

"Gunpowder I needed—and found kegs of it stored at your shore-battery. Clockwork—you'd left behind a fine London-made chronometer when you plundered that bark up-stream, like the dead-reckoner you are. An auger—all Chips' tools were scattered over the lower deck where they'd spilt his chest, hunting for treasure. A gun-lock—I found an old rusty pistol with half a barrel blown off, and scoured it bright with sand and canvas. Oil—caught a fat fish and tried him out. Ropes—plenty on the bark. An empty barrel—you'd left me a hundred.

"All was ready a week before you came. I'd swum all over the harbor till I knew just where to shove off from the shore for the ebb to carry me and the barrel against your bow. It floated awash and no one spied us. There was no bump as we fetched up, either, for I fended off with my legs.

"I could hear the men on deck swearing over their dice as I set to work. I'd rigged a stirrup on the barrel to keep me afloat. I screwed the auger as far as it would go into the brig's timbers to serve as an anchor for my machine. Then I slipped out of the stirrup and pulled the coil of anchor-rope over one end of the barrel and the plug out of the bung-hole. Clapping my ear to the staves, I could hear the clock-work begin to click within. Then the buoyancy-chamber filled and the barrel sank till it fetched up at the end of the rope. I'd allowed enough for the tide to carry it under the brig till it lay below the magazine in the waist. If it hadn't been for that shark——"

Bartley interrupted him with an incoherent burst of admiring oaths.

"And you stood there on deck," he marveled, "talking away, when you knew that —— —— thing was under your feet, ready to go off any minute!"

"I had to spin some sort of a yarn to make you set me ashore," said Griswold. "And I'd fixed the clock-work to run an hour before it would pull the trigger and snap the flint-lock. Plenty of time for me to think up some kind of a notion."

THE McINTOSH

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

Charles Beadle

Author of "The King's Sword," "The Bowl of Alabaster," etc.

I MAY explain that in those days of which I write I knew nothing at all of adventure, but I had decided to adopt it as a profession. That's how I came to be in Suez, which is a forsaken hole but as good a jumping-off place for the East—Africa or India—as anywhere else.

After poking about for a few days and finding it only a weak imitation of Port Said I made up my mind to get out by the first steamer coming through the canal. This proved to be the S. S. *Umbanghu*, a squat tramp.

I paid up my account, which seemed rather a respectable thing to do for a determined adventurer, and wandered down to the jetty where I found a small Greek agent putting off. He didn't want to take me but I thought better to argue the point on the way and stepped into the boat, suggesting that he would be at pains to put me out. He shrugged his shoulders somewhere around his ears and accepted fate or whatever he called it. As soon as I had scrambled up the rope ladder I made straight for a stocky, grizzled man on the bridge, whom I took to be the skipper.

"Mornin', cap," says I cheerfully.

"An' who the —— are you?" The shaggy eyebrows twitched irritably.

"Me? Oh, I'm your new passenger as far as—your destination, wherever that may be."

"Passenger! What in the month o' May d'you mean? Think we're a crimson purple liner out o' Liverpool or what? —— my eyes, sir, we're an honest tramp; that is, honest west o' Suez."

As he turned to the little Greek agent there was a gleam in the weather-beaten eyes which confirmed my suspicion that some of the English have a sense of humor.

"Who the mischief is he, Mr. Ricardo?"

"He gennelman come from Cairo. He say he come passengaire. I tell him no passengaire. He mus' wait for linaire. But he say no. He have what he call hunch. Nossaire? Yessair?" quizzically to me.

"That's right," said I.

"He say he have hunch he come dis boat."

Ricardo's shoulders convulsed.

"He come 'long my boat. He biggaire man dan me."

"Humph."

The captain looked again at me.

"You're an American, ain't you?"

"Surely."

"Thought so. Been there. Sorry, can't be done. Better wait for the Austrian or German Lloyd. Now, Ricardo——"

"See here, cap," I interposed, "I want to come along. I—I'm willing to pay fare and for privileges——"

"We're not passenger, I tell you."

"Mebbe not," I drawled, "but mebbe I can work—on the ship's roll at any rate."

Captain Smith looked me over again and smiled.

"Where d'you want to go?"

"Wherever the good God takes me."

"Right! But what about your dunnage? Can't wait to send for it."

"I've got it with me."

Captain Smith grinned this time.

"That's American all right. You're fourth

engineer. Sleep in the chartroom. Now get off the bridge. Ricardo——"

"Have a cigar, cap?"

THE captain took one and I retired from the bridge to take stock. Beneath the upper bridge I found the charthouse, a cozy little room containing a table, bookcases filled with charts and nautical books and a cushioned locker.

I dawdled round the iron decks smoking, watched the little Greek clamber down the sides with five perfectly good dollars and grinned. A bell clanged somewhere away below and was answered by the heavy snort of steam and the tremor of the engines.

As I stood watching the ship's bow slew against the flat land of Suez into the shimmering expanse of the Red Sea I recollected that I was an engineer, and, walking around the lifeboat, stuck my head within the upper skylight. The hot smell of steam and oil didn't seem good, but as I listened to the pounding of the engines a rasping drone rose and became intelligible:

> "Ma faither was a braw cock lairr-rd;
> Ma mither came fra Perr-rth.
> Aiblins Ah'm no' a sonsy lad,
> A bungfu' fra ma bairr-rth!"

"Suffering cats," thought I, "what a lingo! Sounds Scotch, but anyway it's a lament all right. Lordy, I suppose I'm of Scotch descent myself," I reflected, "but never did I suspect that we were such a dismal race. I wonder if anything is the matter with the man or whether he thinks he's singing."

I turned away, a little depressed, to meet the captain descending from the bridge.

"Ha! Ha!" said he, grinning like a friendly terrier. "Here's our friend Paul Jones! Come into the chartroom, lad, and we'll sign you on."

He glanced up at the incandescent sky.

"I think the sun's over the yard-arm, so maybe we'll seal it with a glass of grog. Be——"

He stopped with one foot over the sea-step.

"You don't come from them prohibition States?"

"Virginia," said I, smiling.

"Ah!" sighed the captain. "I mind when I was in Portland, Maine, and be —— they drank the ship dry!"

A Chinese steward appeared noiselessly in the doorway.

"Tell the chief to come up for a grog. Grog; savvee? That's the only way to get the McIntosh under an hour or two."

The skipper laughed as he reached for a bottle and glasses.

"Did you say Macintosh? That happens to be my name too," said I.

"What? McIntosh? Be ——, you'd better not tell him or there'll be red murder aboard! Why, lad, he's *the* McIntosh, he says, although personally I think he's a vat. But he's a great lad, is Mac, when he's drunk; and be —— no mortal's ever seen him sober."

Terms were amicably arranged for the trip. As the captain had hinted, the signing on was purely a farce as the regulation of the Board of Trade scarcely worried them east of Suez.

As we were drinking to the agreement the glare was blocked out of the doorway by a tall figure clad in blue dungarees with short cropped blond hair and enormous yellow mustaches, viking-like in the size and droop beyond the line of the prominent chin. As the man strode in and sat on the locker-seat I noticed the high cheek-bones and the great shoulders, the manner in which the length of limb was controlled, which somehow reminded me of my own native mountains.

"Mac, lad, this is your new fourth—for the trip; you understand? If you don't like him you'll put him on as a trimmer," added the captain, grinning slyly, "and if you do maybe you'll drink with him."

I was very conscious of the turquoise blueness of the eyes which regarded me.

"Ah'm pleased to meet ye!" said the Scot dourly. "And where w'ud ye be fra?"

"Virginia."

"Vir-rginia! Ye'd no' say!"

The eyes twinkled slightly as he raised his glass.

"Well, here's to the Buickskin! Man, cap'n, but he's got the luik aricht! I mind the firrst voyage— But whhat will ye name be?"

"Macintosh," said I, conscious of a kick on the leg from the captain.

"Macintosh did ye say, laddie?"

His eyes had become like matrix.

"I did. Julian Perton Macintosh."

"An whoo was ye fairther?"

"Julian Baird Macintosh."

"And whhere did ye fairther get the Macintosh?"

"Now, now, Mac," interposed the captain, "I won't have anybody insulting my guest. This is my ship and——"

"Aricht, mon. I'll no huirrt the puir body."

"Look here, cap, Macintosh is my name," said I firmly, "and if this gentleman doesn't approve I'm perfectly willing right now——"

"Be quiet, lad," admonished Captain Smith. "Now, Mac——"

"Mon!" exclaimed the Scot, thumping a fist like raw beef ribs upon the table. "D'ye no ken that Ah'm the McIntosh of McIntosh? Mebbe Ah'm juist an engineer and mebbe juist no'."

He rose to his height imperiously.

"But Ah'm the las' of the clan McIntosh and any wee body whoo——"

I ROSE to my feet.

"Now, look here, Mr. McIntosh, I've as much right to my name as you have——"

"Now stop it, you two fools!" exclaimed Captain Smith. "For ——'s sake, have I got to fight all the Smiths in the world?"

"That isn't the point," I began. "This gentleman——"

"Ah'm telling ye that Ah'm the las' o' the McIntosh and any puir body whoo——"

"Sit down, Mac," commanded the captain and added: "When a Macintosh goes to America it becomes a raincoat. Now, shut up!"

My temper isn't too soft, and anyway we both had Scotch blood. I pushed around the back of my swing chair.

"My name, suh—" I drawl slightly when I get mad— "is Julian Perton Macintosh, and, suh, I am at the service of any man who wishes to dispute my right."

"Och," commented the bony Scot, pulling at one enormous mustache, "ye sairtainly are fu' o' bluid an' spunk, ma young blaw-in-ma-lug! Aricht, cap'n, we'll no be fechtin' the noo."

He sank down leisurely.

"And hoo will ye be spellin' yon name, Meester Buickskin?"

Still standing with one hand on the table and eying the Scot, I spelled the name slowly.

"Och, mon, we've been clishmaclavering fo' nicht! Yon's no' *the* McIntosh!"

I stared bewilderedly.

"Sit down and have another drink," said the captain. "If you'd said you spelt your name with an 'a' I'd have told Mac here and he'd not be after your blood."

"Och," said the McIntosh contemptuously, "an' whhat wud ye Southrons know, ye puir gaberlumyies stravagin' the airth!"

His cluster of raw beef-bones clumped across the table.

"If ye're no' a McIntosh ye're ilka clan, Ah'll dare swear by the kinderlands o' Mahoon. Ye've got the height; aye, an' ye've got the spunk; and a buickskin can na be sae far fra a Redshank (Highlander)! Will ye no' shake?"

"Sure I'll shake," said I a little embarrassedly, dropping my hand into the hairy paw extended. "But I don't understand now what the —— made you sore. Was it just because my name is the same as yours?"

"Same as ma ain!" exclaimed the Scot.

His eyes glowered for a moment.

"Am Ah no' tellin' ye ye're no' a McIntosh?"

"Oh, shut up, Mac," said the captain, grinning covertly, "and have a drink. Don't take any notice, lad. Nobody understands Mac any more than his outlandish lingo."

"Och, ye wee blastie!" ejaculated the McIntosh to the captain. "Ye nobbut a puir body o' a Southron. Misteer Buickskin, ye'll ha' noticed that where'er ye go ye'll find the bluid cock o' the airth? Ye ha', Ah make no doobt? Noo Ah'll give ye a toast that ony a guid Scot'll drink: Ta ower the water! Na clink ye glass wi' yon loon. Ah'm o'erfond o' the mon, but he's no' a Scot."

Still puzzled and rather amused, I drank as bidden. The McIntosh tipped his glass as if he were pouring the liquor down a well.

"Ah'm obleeged ta ye, Meester Buickskin," he continued, "for the pleasure o' drinkin' wi' a brither. Many a mon's guid company, but he's no sae guid as a Scot. If ye're no' o' the puir clan of McIntosh ye'll sairtainly be o' the hinder end. But ony man whoo hasna smelt the bonny braes o' Ochils has na ony susceeptcebcelitics to the vairtues."

As if absent-mindedly he helped himself to another stiff whisky and swallowed it.

"And where will ye be going?"

"Where are we bound for, cap?"

"Durban."

The McIntosh regarded me steadily.

"Ah obsair-rve ye're a man o' pairts. 'Tis only a fule whoo kens where he wud be going."

He paused a moment and glowered doubtfully.

"Ah'm wondering if ye'll have a lug fo' museec?"

As I glanced at the captain questioningly the Scot broke into a doleful song.

"D'ye ken R-robbie?" he demanded when he had finished, pouring out another drink.

"Some."

"D'ye no' like him?" suspiciously.

"Sure I do."

"Aweel," added the McIntosh, rising, "Ah'll be awa', and if ye' ha' a lug fo' museec come awa' below after six bells an' Ah'll seeng ye some o' ma ain songs."

"Oh, my ——!" muttered the captain, who had his hand over his beard.

"And whhat are ye haverin' at noo?" demanded the McIntosh from the doorway. "Ah'll have ye to know that R-robbie wasna the only poet that came fra bonnie Scotland, an' R-robbie was no' a Redshank, the puir wee bodie!"

II

WHILE we were thumping through the heat of the Red Sea I learned more of the McIntosh and learned to like him. When I had paid my footing by listening politely to weird laments which he said were of his own composing, the McIntosh would entertain me with stories of the forays of the clan McIntosh, bloody and furious tales. I could never make out whether they were genuine family tradition or taken from records such as Walter Scott used; sometimes the latter

suspicion was uppermost, for the Scot would betray scraps of ancient and modern lore that only a deeply read student could possibly have known.

This fact, connected with the statement that perhaps he was "juist an engineer and mebbe juist no'," whetted my curiosity. But any further than that I could not dig. Of himself the man would never talk, and on any attempt to probe, no matter how politely, he would respond by immediately beginning to sing. Some system!

The amount of whisky he consumed was incredible. Yet he never appeared actually drunk, and his professional work was above reproach. I remarked one day to the captain that Mac would surely kill himself drinking liquor so freely in the tropics.

"Not he," said Captain Smith, smiling. "You don't know Mac. Why, lad, he was suckled on whisky. He'd drink the devil under the table in hell.

"I've known Mac these five year off and on. He'll never see fifty again or I'll eat my own charts; and look at him! He doesn't look a day over forty.

"He hasn't always been at sea. Once or twice when he was off his guard he let out technical knowledge that no sea-going chief ought to know.

"Of course he's crazy; but, lad, what's that to do with us? He never stops long in one ship. Shouldn't be a bit surprized to have Mac disappear at any port.

"I mind I picked him up first in Singapore. My chief had died of cholera, and when I goes to the consul he puts me on to this crazy giant. What his last ship was or why he left her I don't even know to this day. His papers were all right.

"As soon as he comes aboard he starts trouble with me—just because I'd signed him up as M-a-c-Intosh."

The captain grinned and bit off a cigar end.

"Well, I had to threaten to put him in irons. He invited me to get the ship's company to help me! Well, a skipper meets all sorts in this wet world. I wanted a live chief for the engines, not a crazy lunatic in irons.

"But I got mad, too. I told him that while on board he'd have to do his job, and at the end of the voyage if he wanted a row he could have it ashore. He told me exactly how he could pick me up with one hand, said he liked me even if I wasn't a Scot, and went to his job."

"Oh, just bluff then?"

"No, sir. There's no more bluff in Mac than beer in his boilers. He's got some queer kink in his brain, I guess.

"That trip, as it happened, we had a holy mob aboard—pilgrims for Mecca, y'know. Cholera was floating round, and they took a holy panic into their heads and wanted the ship to put into Parang and started a riot when I refused.

"You don't know 'em, eh? Well you've missed something! I held 'em up with a gun, but Mac here, the darn fool, starts dancing; yes, be ——, dancing, I'm telling you, like a bear on hot bricks.

"Then when he'd got their attention well on him he lets out a screech enough to scare the fish outer the sea and charges 'em with bare hands! You've seen his hands, eh? Be ——, they must have thought their own pet devil was after 'em! I laughed so much I couldn't hold the revolver.

"But the ruddy fool goes whooping and yelling—guess he thought he was having a border raid or something—and threw a lot of the poor devils overboard. Well, I had to turn back and pick 'em up—those who weren't drowned. But there was never a murmur after that. They were more scared of him than of fifty plagues.

"And when I told him off for being such a bloomin' idiot for not using the steam-hose pipe as I wanted he called me a poor wee body—y'know how he talks—and that the English hadn't 'any meetaphysics.' Yes, Mac has a sense of humor away down under that hide of his."

"I've noticed it," said I. "Five days after you told him he suddenly began to make weird noises and told me I might be a wee bit r-raincoat even if I wasn't a whole macintosh, and roared like a bull."

"Eh, they're a queer race, the Scots. But y'know there's sometimes I think that maybe Mac's never grown up properly or maybe has a throw-back to some bleedin' ancestor of his, for he seems to think life's nothing but one foray after another."

"Yes, that's so. Perhaps that accounts for his mania about Highland history. I just can't get him. One moment he seems a boozehound and the next— Do you know, cap, I've caught him talking with scarce an accent at all—no more than many a Scotch professor I've met, and——"

"Have you ever heard him swear real mad? Why, lad, he's just incomprehensible. Must be Gaelic or something. It's not French nor any of the lingos of which I've picked up a smattering. Aye, but he's a white man an' all—that he is!

"And his knowledge of Border yarns! Have you ever read Scott?"

"Sure I have; but have you ever mentioned Scott to Mac? It's almost like calling a white man a nigger in the South."

"Yes, I know. I'm a bit of a border man myself, lad. Geordie, y'know—from the Tyneside. Talkin' an' all, what would you be doing so far away from home?"

"Oh, I don't know," I replied, a little embarrassedly. "Just wandering around."

The little skipper eyed me quizzically.

"Finding out where you belong? Is that the idea?"

"Yes, I guess it is. I sorter wanted to wander some."

"You're like Mac a bit. Born outer your century. Same for me, I guess, else I shouldn't be foolin' round at sea. Crazy guys, as you say over your side; eh, lad?

"Eh, but I wish I had the old days back. Clipper days; none of your dirty steam where there's nowt doing. It's good to be young with the world to kick an' all."

A TREMENDOUS roar startled us. As the noise continued the engines began to slow down. We ran out of the charthouse. From the open skylight rose volumes of steam. With a muttered oath the captain made for the engine-room gangway.

"Stop there," he commanded as I followed him. "You'll be in the way. Keep out."

I obeyed, but I stuck my head in the skylight. I couldn't see a thing for the steam. I pawed at my eyes and withdrew.

As I wondered what had happened, pacing about the deck I was conscious of that queer lame feeling as the ship slid slowly through the water. The engines had stopped.

Presently the density of the steam lessened and I saw the tops of the cylinders emerging like mountain-tops through clouds, and heard voices away down below.

After a while the captain clambered up the ladder from the depths. His eyes were swollen and red. Behind him came the McIntosh, his face looking like a lobster ready for the dish. But the captain was swearing so healthily that I guessed that the accident was not serious.

"What's happened?" I asked as we moved behind the McIntosh, who was striding to the chart-house.

"Bust the ruddy steampipe."

"Can they repair it?"

"Dunno till Mac gets enough spirit in him to see again. It's a —— nuisance an' all. Well, Mac, what d'you think?"

"Hoo the de'il can Ah think when Ah can na see to find ma mouth, ye loon?" demanded McIntosh, raising the glass to his lips.

"Do you think with your stomach?" I inquired.

"Ou, aye, ma bairnie. D'ye no' ken ye maun ha' ye thochts i' the belly afore ye ken spit 'em i' the mouth? Och!" he ejaculated, pawing his great mustaches tentatively. "Ah was at havers less Ah'd lost ma head sporran!

"Aweel, cap'n, Ah'm afeerd we'll ha' to run for the nearest poort. We can no more than patch her a wee. There never was an engine built onywhere but i' the Clyde worrth mor'n a bawbee. And where wud we be the noo?"

"Somewhere off Beira," answered the captain.

Mac considered, meditatively pouring out another whisky.

"Ou, aye. We'll ha' to wire to Delagoa for a spare pairt and bide a wee."

Captain Smith swore.

"Tch! Tch!" the McIntosh reproved. "Ha' ye no thocht for the wee bairnie?"

Captain Smith swore again.

"Ou, aye, it's all ye wud say and muir. Ah'll awa' and get the lassie wi' splints on."

He reached the engine-room in four great strides, and immediately from the depths I heard the droning voice rising:

> "Ma faither was a braw cock lairr-rd;
> Ma mither came fra Perr-rth.
> Aiblins Ah'm no a sonsy——"

The captain looked at me and laughed.

"Now what the —— can you do with a wild galoot like that!"

Two hours later we bagan to make way again under half-steam, for the McIntosh dared not give her full pressure. At ten o'clock next day we were anchored before a town straddling its tiny self like a dazzling white bird across a sand-bar at the mouth of the Pungwe River. As the gig was being lowered to take the captain to the mole the McIntosh appeared on deck.

"Ah'm lookin' for a cateran to gang ashore wi' me," said he.

"Wull ye come?"

"Sure," I assented, wondering what a cateran might be. Later I found that it was a Highland freebooter.

"Eh, but you're a brave laddie," said Captain Smith, grinning. "If you knew Mac half as well as I do you'd know you'd better throw a bucketful of reis into the harbor and save the close view of a Portuguese jail."

"Ye maun na scairt the bairn," reproached the McIntosh solemnly. "These Englishmen are owerfond o' haverin' o' their home sweet home."

"All right," laughed the captain. "Wait for him, lad, and I'll be bailing you out before the day's twenty-four hours older."

A couple of hours later I embarked with the McIntosh, who looked like anything but a ship's engineer in his immaculate lawn suit and Panama, a cigar stuck in his sporran—as he called his great mustaches—and a mighty flask bulging from his hip pocket. To enliven the long pull to the mole he obliged with a new ditty which was evidently his own:

> "A braw galoot was the Portugee.
> He clasped his dirk an' he put to sea.
> Put to sea, did the Portugee.
> Oh, the Portugee, he put to sea.

"He passed the Hor-rn and pursued his nose.
This black-avised chief smelled like a rose.
Red was his nose, just like a rose;
Like a rose was his purple nose.

"He sailed the sea till his guts were dry.
He drank sea-water and longed to die;
Longed to die, for his guts were dry;
His guts were dry, so he longed to die."

"For why are ye greenin', ye marauderin' caterans?" demanded the McIntosh of the grinning seamen. "Wud ye no' lang to die an' ye guts were dry?"

"Not 'alf," assented a cockney sailor, and the rest guffawed.

"Row, ye de'ils," roared the McIntosh at them. "Ye can na row na mair than a Hielan' donnal wassie. Mon, but ye ower set the r-rhythm o' ma museec."

Nevertheless he continued with the sad adventures of the gallant explorers, and by the time we had reached the mole he had reduced the ship's company to half by various grim and awful scourges of the sea. On the top step we were stopped by a Portuguese soldier in white smothered in gold lace and borne down equally by an enormous hat and rifle nigh as big as himself.

"Mon, ha' ye seen the like outer a buik?" exclaimed the McIntosh delightedly.

"Sheep?" demanded the soldier, pointing a brown hand and a cigaret at the ship.

"Ou, aye," assented the McIntosh, and began to sing:

"Ma faither ha' ten thousand sheep
On the bonny banks o' Doon.
But ha' none at a' ye ken
Ah'll hie me off and droon!"

"Sheep?" persisted the little man, grinning amiably.

"A muckle o' sheep, Ah'm tellin' ye."

"*Si, si.*"

I rushed to the rescue, whereupon the soldier stepped aside.

"Och," said Mac, shaking his head, "yon mannikin makes me owersad. Ah'm juist nobbut but a wee bairn wi' ma tin sogers. Ah'll sing ye a lament," he added.

"No, no," I interposed hastily. "Let's get aboard this outfit here and go to the hotel."

THE McIntosh consented to mount a garden seat, set upon a trolly on rails, pushed through the streets of Beira, which are ankle deep in sand.

"Ah'm a wee roupit i' the thraggle," complained the McIntosh, caressing his brawny throat; and he thereupon proceeded to moisten his "thraggle."

As our trolly came round a corner we saw advancing a most dignified being in immaculate white uniform more heavily laden with gold lace than the "tin soldier" on the mole—no less a person than his Excellence el Capitân General Porfirio Fernandez Diaz, I learned later.

"Och, laddie!" exclaimed the McIntosh, clutching his flask in ecstatic delight at the approaching magnificence. "Ha' ye e'er seen sic a wonnerfu' speectacle o' glory on airth? Ma certie, but he's mair magneeficent then the Lorrd Provost o' Edinboro ugh toun."

"It must be the governor," I suggested.

"Governor, ye senseless loon! Losh, man, but yon's the Archangel Gabriel, Ah mak' no doobt at a'! Wae's me, for ma sins are coom upon me."

As it happened in that street, there was no handy siding for the two trolleys to pass, and in such case it is the etiquette for the lesser personage to dismount while his natives drag the trolly off the rails. Officialdom is paramount so that there was no question of a nicety of rank.

Our boys stopped the machine and stood waiting for us to get off. But the McIntosh seemed in a trance of admiration. Grasping what was expected I stood up, touching him on the shoulder.

"Come along, chief; we'll have to let this bird pass."

"Sit ye doun, Buickskin!" exclaimed the McIntosh. "For why wud ye no' admeer sic a grrand speectacle o' meelitary pomp?"

"Oh, come on," I urged as the soldiers and boys about began shouting and waving their arms. "It's no use arguing with——"

Without removing his fascinated eyes the McIntosh's great hand bore heavily upon my shoulders as he said:

"Ah'm the McIntosh of McIntosh! Ha' ye no reespect for ma deegnity? Wud ye ha' me gi' the richt o' the causey (street) to yon potato bogle wi' the whirligigums? Hoot, mon! Quit ye phraisin'!"

The governor was now halted immediately in front of us. To the uproar from the indignant escort was added the vociferous explanations from our own unhappy natives, who dared not attempt to thrust our sacrilegious selves from the machine. Face to face sat the McIntosh and the governor, and as he stared into the angry black eyes in the swarthy face the McIntosh grinned, still gripping my sleeve.

"Ah'm *the* McIntosh," roared the Scot above the babel. "Git oot o' ma way, ye black-avised rapscallion."

Furiously the governor twirled his black mustaches upward, and as furiously the raw-beef hand of the McIntosh pulled up first one and then the other of his own great blond mustaches which touched either temple. The uproar grew. Our three natives bolted beneath the wrath of his Excellency.

"Come on, Mac; there's no sense in—" I was protesting when the irate governor thrust out a dramatic hand toward a building immediately upon our right, above the gate of which were gilded arms.

Instantly the door opened, and to the assistance of the escort poured out a stream of police who charged recklessly. The McIntosh rose with a mighty screech and began to yell:

"A braw galoot was the Portugee,
He grabbed his dirk and he put to sea.
Put to sea, did the Portugee.
Oh, the Portugee, he——"

They were upon us. Now I was an amateur and had no intention of aiding the McIntosh in disturbing the peace, yet I couldn't stand being hauled off. But the sudden capsizing of the trolly from the other side upset my intentions and I was shot forward into a bunch of bristling soldiery. I let out a right and left and then found myself pinned against a white gate by a circle of bayonets.

Jabbering ferociously, they tried to urge me through. Their bayonets were too long for my fists. It was too much of a joke to pull my gun, so I used my feet.

Then I caught a vision of the MacIntosh coming toward me amid a swaying crowd up to his waist, and in his great arms was the wriggling form of his Excellency the governor.

I began to laugh. Then just as I had swung one of my little men aside by seizing his rifle-muzzle the whole bunch surged against the open gate with the McIntosh trumpeting like a elephant and the governor squalling. Following the Scot's example, I picked up my victim to use as a battering-ram to prevent being forced through the gates when the McIntosh turned and hurled the governor into the midst of his men.

As he stooped to pick off the two heroes clinging like leaches on to his legs there was a general rush by the screeching crowd, and as we were swept inside the great gates slammed.

III

INSIDE was a sandy square formed by whitewashed, barrack-like buildings of one story, into which the two unarmed policemen had disappeared at high pressure.

"Now," said I, "what the —— are we going to do, Mac? There'll be the —— to pay for this! His Excellency——"

"Och, I'm hotter than ma own furnaces. Wait till I can think a wee," said he, lugging out his gigantic flask. "Mebbe the loon will be calling up his army," he added, stroking his great mustache into place and straightening out his rumpled and torn clothing. "Be the hinder end o' Mahoon, I'll have the law on 'em for damages."

Outside a terrific commotion was in progress, the hoarse voice of the governor bellowing orders which apparently nobody wanted to obey. In a far corner of the square another hubbub arose, evidently from the guardhouse.

"Come on, Mac," said I impatiently as he continued placidly to smooth out his ruffled plumage. "We can't stay here. If they don't put us in jail for months for this jag they'll fine us the Lord knows how much."

"Assaulting the governor? Och, he's no' worth more 'n aboot ten thousand reis apiece."

"Ten thousand!" I echoed, aghast. "But, man, where are we going to get that money?"

"Hoot mon, 'tis no muir than five-and-twenty pound."

"What! Ten thousand reis is only a hundred and twenty-five dollars?"

"Ou aye; but Ah've no mind to pay for a wee bit dance wi' a gay Portugee! Ah'll luik aroond."

We walked across the empty square, conscious of eyes from the corner watching us. As we approached a light voice cried out—

"Hullo, you fellows."

"Where are ye?" called the McIntosh, wheeling about. "Ye sound like a white man."

From a window on the right a hand was waving. We went across to the window at a run as the voice continued:

"The ruddy sons of goats have got me here. I'm a prisoner."

"What are ye?" demanded Mac beneath the window.

"English. Let me out, for —— 's sake."

"Bide a wee," said Mac and proceeded to investigate the door, which was locked from without.

As he turned the key a new uproar of protest came from five of the police gesticulating wildly in front of the guardhouse. Mac turned, bellowed and made as if to rush at them. As they disappeared promptly a small fair man in a dirty suit of khaki with rumpled fair hair emerged from the room.

"Oh, thank —— you've got me out!" he exclaimed. "How did you get in here without——"

At that moment, amid shouts and screeches from without, the big gates began to open, revealing what appeared to be the head of a small army in column formation.

"Quick!" shouted the little stranger. "I know."

He darted toward another tall door in the near corner of the square.

"Come on, Mac," I urged, dragging him by the sleeve. "We can't fight unless we use a gun, and that——"

He consented to follow me, shouting incomprehensible epithets of defiance over his shoulder. The stranger had already opened the gate which led into another and larger

square. As we entered, the column of tiny soldiers broke into a double, uttering ferocious cries. As we slipped through, our guide, who evidently knew his whereabouts, shot the big iron bolt into place.

"They'll have to go round the square to the far high wall," he commented.

We ran swiftly across the square to the far wall.

"Oop wi' ye, Buickskin," said Mac, and, cupping my knee, hoisted me on top.

The little man followed, and together we yanked Mac up. On the other side was a narrow, sandy lane with a similar wall opposite.

"What's ower yonder, ma wee blastie?" demanded Mac as the little man started down the lane.

"Not there! Not there! Why, that's the governor's palace!"

"Aweel it's no' there the mannikin wull be luiking for us," decided Mac instantly. "Oop wi' ye, ma bairnie.

And, catching the late prisoner by the seat of the pants, he lifted him on to the wall.

"Awa' wi' ye, Buickskin, if ye'd no' pay for ma fun."

Seeing sense in the plan, I followed mighty quick.

"But," began the prisoner as the McIntosh straddled the wall, "I tell you we can't hide here. I know——"

"Don't ye blether wi' me, ma son!" retorted The McIntosh.

He dropped over the other side, plucked the protesting man from the wall and set him on his feet. "We got ye oot o' jail, Ah'm thinkin', and ye'll no' go back an ye hold ye gab an stick wi' us."

We found ourselves in a garden fairly thick with palms and tropical stuff which I'd never seen before. Following along the wall, we came to the back of a house, whitewashed like all the rest, with a barred window giving on the garden. The McIntosh peeped inside. He drew back, making a sign to be silent.

"Yon's four bairns having a wee bit game. Mebbe we'll join 'em. Awa' follow me!"

"Look here," interrrupted the stranger but talking softly, "who the —— do you think you are? I'm about fed up——"

"Are ye wild to be back in yon hoose? Hoots mon," retorted the McIntosh in the same strain, "if it's a fecht ye wud have——"

"Listen," said I, recollecting my own experience with Mac. "Not so much hot air. If you fellows want a fight, wait till we're out of this; otherwise we all three'll be back in the pen."

Mac glowered at me and at the bantam-like small man.

"Ou aye," said he. "Buicksin's richt. We ha' got to lie low a wee, or lose our bawbees, ye ken. Noo awa'!"

He began to explore cautiously along the wall of the house. I whispered to the pugnacious Englishman to keep quiet until we were free.

"You're American, aren't you?" said he. "You're all right. But this blighter's got too much of an idea of his own importance."

"What the —— 's the good of getting mad at him and trying to bawl him out now? Anyway we rescued you——"

"Quite all right, old man," said he quickly. "Let's cut the cackle. Come on!"

WE HASTENED after Mac, whom we found dourly beckoning to us from a vine-clad porch.

"Buickskin," he whispered, "and you, ma mannie"—pointing a bony finger at an open door from which we could see the four card-players—"ye take a mon each, ye ken, and Ah'll joist the ither sorners. But there maun na be a clishmaclaver, ye onnersten'."

"Wait, Mac," I whispered. "I've got a gun. I'll——"

"Ou aye," he whispered back; "but, laddie, ye might let it go off. Ah've no mind for murthering the puir beasties! Mon, but they'd cost a thousand reis!"

Now to tell the truth, although I felt a bit sore at that time, I'd never handled a gun overmuch, so I gave in. As a matter of fact he didn't give me much chance of arguing the point.

It was a way Mac had, I discovered.

He crept softly toward the door like an enormous half-starved wolf and we two stole behind him. As our shadows darkened the door four black muzzles like greasers' looked up. In a bound Mac deftly caught the two nearest by the throats and I leaped upon the next. A startled squawk came from one of them, but which one I never knew.

Mine was an agile little runt and wriggled like a snake. His darned neck was so sweaty or oily that I could scarce keep my grip on his throttle while I tore off the handiest thing, the sash about his waist, to gag him. When I turned the Englishman was binding his captive with the cloth on which they had been playing and Mac was squatted on the floor in a corner with the black eyes of each victim staring desperately over each red wrist, and their white-trousered legs plunging frantically in the air like trapped rabbits.

"Wull ye tie the wee puddocks?" inquired the McIntosh. "I can na take ma hand off their weasands."

I hastened to fix up one and the Englishman attended to the other. After we had dumped the four of them in the corner, one on top of the other like so many bales of cotton, Mac squatted down and solemnly took a long swig from his flask. He sighed and stared at the

Englishman, who was wiping his forehead with a handkerchief meditatively.

"Ye're no' so bad," said the McIntosh, solemnly thrusting the bottle at him.

"Thanks," said the other, and drank. "Phew, that was —— good. I haven't had a drink for two days."

"And for what wud ye be there?" demanded the McIntosh.

"Oh, that's a long yarn," said the stranger. "I'm much obliged to you two fellows for getting me out. My name's Forsayth. Here, stop it, you bally idiots," he added to the prisoners, who were wriggling about in their corner like a can of fish-bait. "Who are you?"

"Forsayth," repeated the McIntosh. "Ye'd no' say? Hech mon, but ye maun be a Scot."

"My father was. What about it? Who are you?"

"Me? I'm the McIntosh"; and with a convulsion of the great mustaches he added, "and ma wee frien' here is the r-raincoat!"

Forsayth, leaning against the window, looked at me inquiringly.

"Is this a joke?" he inquired politely.

"Och mon!" exclaimed the McIntosh. "He's no' a Scot. Hech, the mon's just a Southron, for he can na see a joke!"

I introduced myself, ignoring Mac's peculiar form of humor.

"I'm on board or I was on board," I added, wondering by the look of things when I was due back, "the *Umbanghu;* and Mac here's chief engineer——"

"Mebbe Ah'm juist an engineer and mebbe juist no'!" interrupted the McIntosh.

I smiled and Forsayth smiled.

"You're certainly a couple of quaint birds even for this forsaken side of Hades," he remarked. "Are you the second mate or something?" he inquired of me.

"I'm supposed to be the fourth engineer," I explained a little uncomfortably. "I sort of started wandering round, and——"

"*Por Deus!*"

THE exclamation ended our polite conversation; for standing in the door with the startled expression of a scared cat about to spit was an officer, glorious in epaulettes and lace with a sword almost as big as himself. We three rose as one with the consequence that we hit the doorway together, creating a confusion which gave our visitor time to recover and take to his heels.

I was the first to break away and went after the funny flying figure in the bright sunlight with its sword dangling like a wooden tail and Mac at my heels. My long legs have brought me cups at college, and they brought me this time up to the fugitive just as his cockaded hat fell off, revealing a most respectable-looking bald head.

But as I caught him under the armpits he let out such an appalling screech for help that I was sure they had heard it on the boat in the harbor. In our eagerness to carry the wildly struggling man back to the shelter of the room and quiet his cries at the same time we nearly tore him in two. However, Mac tucked his body under one arm and I hung on to his head with my hand upon his windpipe.

But we were too late. Before we could get out of the garden we heard cries behind us and there appeared a half-dozen or more native servants, men and women.

"It's no good!" exclaimed Forsayth. "We'll have to get out, for they'll bring the whole blessed army here!"

"Ye richt, mon," agreed Mac. "Let the wee blastie free, Buickskin," letting go of his captive. "We can na tak' him awa' wi us, an' he'll roon faster than a lizard. Bide a wee, ma mannie," he added, clutching the shoulder as I let go the head; "mebbe yon dirk wull make a canny souvenir."

He flashed out the scarlet-faced officer's sword. The officer, spluttering oaths, took no pains to conceal his violent desire to get out of sight.

"Now," said I, "where to?"

"Make for the hinder end o' the garden," said Mac, leading the way at a lope. "Mebbe we'll find anither hoose."

We hurried along the wall and came to another running at right angles. The uproar among the domestics had grown louder and nearer; evidently they were being driven on by the officer man at least to keep us in sight while some one brought up the police. As we paused in the corner the McIntosh whispered:

"Hoots, mon, there's on'y one place they'll no' be speiring for us in a' the toun, and that's where they want to put us. Awa'!"

I grabbed the idea and so did Forsayth, and over the two walls we went again. They must have hunted out every man, dog and woman in the place after us, for the jail seemed entirely deserted. However, we did not go exploring back into the inner courtyard where we had found Forsayth; but, locating a large room which seemed to be an office of some sort, we locked the door on the inside and sat down to decide how we were to get out of a mess which seemed to me to be growing worse every minute.

"Aye, but it's awfu' hot!" remarked Mac as he dragged out his flask again. "Noo mebbe ye'll tell us what kind o' a body ye are, Meester Forsayth?"

IV

FORSAYTH looked at me and then at the giant figure of the McIntosh sprawling on a cane chair, meditatively wiping his great mustaches with a scarlet silk handkerchief.

"Awfully good of you fellows to lug me out of jail," he began. "I suppose I ought to thank you and that sort of thing."

He cocked one leg over his chair-arm so that he could keep an eye on the window.

"And as we seem to be more or less comfortable here perhaps I ought to tell you what you've done."

"Lordy!" said I, "You don't mean to say you're a thief or a murderer?"

"Not in the meaning of the act," said he with a grin. "Besides in this glorious country both those occupations are government monopolies. According to them I've been trespassing on their preserves. That's why they arrested men when I was drunk and banged me in jail on a general charge of drunk and refusing to fight. They just want to keep me quiet for a few weeks."

"Well, if you weren't guilty," said I innocently, "why didn't you appeal to your British consul? There's one here, isn't there?"

"Oh, yes; there's one here, my dear babe. Quite a nice chap too. Dined with me the evening they pinched me."

"But then why——"

"Hold yer gab, ma bairnie!" interposed the McIntosh. "There was never a braw cateran was owerfriendly wi' the provost, ye ken. Let the mon ha' the word."

"Well, you see," explained the Britisher indulgently, "this country is peculiar. There are occasions when——er—it isn't healthy for the government to interfere with certain speculations, so then they have a trick of arresting you on false charge so——"

"I get you," said I. "A frame-up."

"Yes, I've heard that term. Well, to get along with the yarn. I've been trading and shooting up the Pungwe Valley for some years. The Portugee ain't an adventurous beast these days, whatever he was before. Up-country they don't give a —— for 'em. Usually when they try to send a punitive expedition they get wiped out. You see, their officer people are born-tireds; they insist on going into battle in *machilas*—hammocks, you know—which is very comfortable but not conducive to military discipline and that sort of thing.

"Well, away up I became friendly with a certain chief, and he and I went into partnership in ivory and gold. Now according to the Portugee law we're supposed to hand over about fifty per cent.—or I am, for a native isn't allowed to have any at all.

"Well, my friend the chief—he's quite a good chap even if a bit rough at times—doesn't see the point. Neither do I. If a government runs a country they ought to provide certain things—protection if you like—in return for the taxes, what? Well, up there or within twenty miles of here they have no more power than I have in Timbuktu. Of course the customary way is bribery, but their hands are too darned large and besides—" he grinned—"that don't appeal to my Presbyterian conscience."

"Ou, aye," agreed the McIntosh with a convulsion of his mustaches. "Ah'm wi' ye. Sic wud be reelations wi' publeecans an' seenners, Ah mak no doot!"

"That's it," agreed the Britisher. "Well, the row started some time ago. I was pretty well established up there at Umfangala. We'd done a fairly decent trade with ivory and had sent several loads out through Umtali. The rail runs up from here to Rhodesia, you know, through Umtali. Then old greedy Porfirio Diaz got wind through his native spies——"

"And whoo wud Meester Porfeerio be?" inquired the McIntosh.

"Oh, old Porfy's the governor—little fat chap with bloomin' great whiskers like yours, only as black as a nigger's."

"Why, that must be the man you assaulted, Mac!" I exclaimed. "He was the governor, I'm dead sure."

"What's that?" demanded Forsayth eagerly. "This Highlander here assaulted him? How?"

"Ou, aye," the McIntosh admitted. "But 'twas naething ta blaw aboot. The galoot wud na give us the right o' the causey an' I had ta remove the wee mannie."

"He picked him up in his arms and threw him at his own soldiers," I explained and began to laugh at the recollection.

"Then they lugged you both in here, I suppose?"

"They did nae sic thing," denied the McIntosh. "The army pushed us in and slammed yon gates."

FORSAYTH looked at the McIntosh. "I can imagine!" said he, and laughed. "Once more I'm much obliged to you."

"But what were you saying?" I interrupted.

"Oh, yes. Well, we were doing a pretty fair trade as I told you when old greedy, your intimate friend, heard of it through his native spies. He sent up a funny little devil with ten pounds of gold lace on his unwashed neck to demand that I turn over the gold dust, which according to him I had stolen from his territory without a license.

"Well he got rather offensive. My friend the chief wanted to fry his toes for him, a little trick he had learned from the Portuguese; but I had scruples and merely spanked him and shut him up in a hut to cool off. They're apt to get frightfully excited, you know."

"Well, of course he came back down here with a yarn that I'd defied the whole majesty of Portugal invested in the vast paunch of Porfy himself *et cetera ad nauseam*. Porfy prances about and talks to the British consul,

who of course replied that he didn't know anything about me, which was perfectly true as he'd never even seen me; moreover, that he had had no evidence at all that I was a British subject.

"Porfy got more news from a servant of mine who had bolted and spread a report of the fabulous amount of gold I'd hidden away up there. Probably a vision of himself with all that gold plastered all over him worked him up to such a state that he decided he couldn't trust any of his deputy thieves, so up he comes himself.

"Lord, he was funny! He came on the rail with two trucks of troops as far as Manzani—nearest station to me, you know—hammocks and tents and —— knows what *impashle* necessary to support his dignity. Then he squats down and summons me to appear.

Forsayth laughed.

"As a matter of fact I hadn't known that the idiot was there until he sent the message. I immediately sent the gold out of reach and told him he could come and fetch me if he wanted to. I had my camp well fixed in a *kopje* which with my own men I knew well that all the bally Portuguese couldn't shift me from without artillery."

"But why," I interrupted again, "didn't you send the gold out through Rhodesia—Umtali you said, didn't you?"

"Very good reason, my son. We British run our territory on business lines. I don't mind paying my ten per cent. or whatever it is for a claim in which I'm protected, as I've inferred before. But I do object to paying an ad valorem for passing through with gold which I didn't get in their territory Follow me?

"Another thing was that I didn't want advertising and making a second Klondike of it. There isn't the gold anyway to pay a mob.

"Well, to go on. Old Porfy threatened to start a regular war. I sat quiet and left matters to my partner for the time being.

"Now Porfy is a greedy old bird and wanted to bag all the loot for himself with the natural consequence that his lieutenants weren't dying to get shot or speared. He sat around and did what he thought was besieging me. Then he sent a private messenger suggesting that we split the difference. I told him to go to blazes; but I kept that letter, you bet!

"Then he really got mad. Burnt several *kraals* down in the valley and collared a chief who was allied to my partner and bastinadoed him to death because he wouldn't play traitor.

"Then I began to get my shirt out. I warned him that if he didn't play fair I'd raise the whole country against him. That scared him a little. I had trouble in holding my partner in. Naturally he wanted revenge.

"It's a —— of a country up there, you know, and the way Porfy handled his troops was a crime. He simply asked for a massacre."

"Now a Portugee's a Portugee, but a white man doesn't like turning natives on to massacre whites. He had about a hundred Portugee soldiers with him and about four hundred blacks. If it hadn't been for my chief friend I'd have slipped out and let him take the bally place, for the gold wasn't there, as I've told you. I wasn't taking any chances.

"Well, he simply forced it. I had to let the natives defend themselves as best they could and sent a warning to old Porfy that if he attacked me personally I would fight."

"Well, they tried to take the place. It was a silly business. I sat up in a baobab watching the whole show. Very few Portugese got hurt because as usual the officers remained in their hammocks and the men were always covered by the blacks."

"Well, after that he returned here, informing me that I was an outlaw and that I was to be taken dead or alive. Of course that was bunk. He hadn't forgotten his letter and he knew I would keep it. It was the gold he wanted.

"Then he tried other tactics. Sent a creature they call Matakini—the jigger flea, y' know, which burrows in your toes and lays eggs. He's a cross between a Portugee and the Lord-knows-what. He turned up at my place as a trader. I had known him as a trader before; but I didn't know then, although I suspected it from the first, that he had been bought by friend Porfy.

"FIRST of all he tried to turn the natives against me. He could speak the lingo like one of 'em. Then he tried to burgle me, although again the gold wasn't where he thought it was.

"After that he tried to poison me and the chief as well, but he merely killed a couple of native dogs. I told him to get out and he tried to knife me. Well, we had a little scrap and he went off with a bullet in his thigh.

"Then old Porfy tried another game. He lay doggo for a while and then succeeded in pinching a load of ivory I was sending out through Umtali. Somebody gave me away. Of course I didn't try to send it by rail from Manzani, but sent it by porters to the first station over the border.

"I tried a raid to get it back but I was just too late. His people had got it away by rail, and we arrived just in time to see her steaming away round a bend bound for old greedy's pocket, for I'll bet that not ten reis of that goes into the government's treasury. He got one over on me that time.

"Before this row started and he got wind of what was going on I used to come down here for supplies—cheaper here direct from the boat than paying transport at Umtali. Afterward for a while I was forced to go there. But after

the pinching of my ivory I decided to come in here as if nothing had happened.

"But first of all I slipped over the border and sent his compromising letter with a bunch of other papers to care of the consul here with instructions to keep them for me and waited for his acknowledgment. Then I came straight on down. As soon as I stepped off the train here they arrested me.

"They searched me of course. All they found was my official receipt from the British consul for certain papers. They knew what they were, you bet.

"Well, they took me to old Porfy. He tried to talk it over. I merely grinned and refused to talk until I had my ivory back. He stormed and threatened, but he had to release me.

"I made straight down and located my ivory—down there on the goods track—and camped near it. I couldn't lift it on my own and went off to think the matter over.

"Well, then I slipped up. Usually I don't touch liquor, but living up there, you know, a fellow gets a sort of thirst as well as a hunger. I dined with the consul that night and he's sort of lonesome-like and we made a regular night of it.

"After I left him I got an idea into my head to have another drink and went into one of the dens here. Well, you know a fellow's bound to make an ass of himself occasionally. I did, and got myself into a row with a drunken Swede off a ship.

"The bartender started to be insolent—because we were making a noise, I suppose. Don't quite remember. Anyway I let out. These bally Portuguese are darned fragile little animals. He got hurt and bawled for the police."

I laughed, for Forsayth wasn't so very big himself.

"There you are," he said. "Of course they had found the excuse they were looking for to bottle me up."

"But couldn't you have used the threat of the governor's letter to get out?" I asked.

"Could have if I'd had half a chance, but they kept me mewed up there, you bet. That was just what they wanted. I'll bet a hundred quid that as soon as I was safe under lock and key old Porfy send half a regiment scuttling up the line after that money—if he doesn't go himself."

"But what's the use of that if they don't know where it's hidden?"

"Get my servants, my boy, and tickle up their imagination with hot irons. They know well enough that some one or two of them must know."

"Aweel, an' what wud ye be doing the noo?" demanded the McIntosh.

"Well, thanks to you chaps I'm free—or practically so," he added with a laugh. "Unless we get bagged again I shall make tracks tonight to see what's happened to my camp by the station yard. If they've pinched my boys and gear as well, as they probably have, I'll have to get back somehow up the line."

"Take to the rods?" I suggested.

"Yes, if there's no other way."

"Hoot mon, ye ha' no imageenation," said the McIntosh.

"No what?"

"Imageenation, Ah'm telling ye. Luik-a-here, the Buickskin and masel' ha' naething to do for mebbe a couple o' days. Ah'm juist an engineer as Ah've told ye. Ah'll drive ye awa' oop the line an ye want. There's mebbe an engine or twa 'i the station yard."

"By ——, you're a sportsman!" exclaimed Forsayth. "If you do you're welcome to twenty per cent. at least."

"Awa' wi' ye! Ah'm no' a cullion! Buickskin here wud like to see a wee bit o' the country. Wud ye no', Buickskin?"

"Sure I would!" I agreed, laughing.

V

BY THE time Forsayth's yarn was finished the sun was setting. Cautiously pecking out of the window, Mac reported a couple of little men lounging about by an open door farther down rolling the eternal cigaret with one hand.

We decided to wait for the time the *gendarmerie* would probably be occupied with dinner and bolt under cover of darkness by way of the wall into the quiet lane between the palace and the barracks. Then we held council of ways and means. The police had taken Forsayth's weapon, but the McIntosh had his toothpick, as he called it, and his beef-bone fists. I had my gun. Arms we must get, also food.

Forsayth knew a small saloon on the outskirts of the town kept by an Irishman who wouldn't give us away—the man, he said, who was to look out for a suitable boat in which to ship the gold when he could run it through.

By this time I was mighty hungry in spite of the clammy heat. Trumpets blared close to hand at the sunset, and we heard voices shouting commands and the sound of marching.

Presently more trumpets tooted a signal which we reckoned was the mess-call. A few figures moved across the end of the yard in the short twilight, and when things seemed fairly quiet we slipped out and across to the wall, dropping into the narrow sandy lane without seeing a soul.

As we plodded along in the hot dark in the wake of Forsayth I heard the McIntosh chuckling to himself, evidently hugely delighted with the prospect of some amusement. And I felt good too; for certainly the cards to instruct

me in the gentle art of adventure seemed to be falling mighty well.

I had often wondered before exactly how a fellow counts adventure, but I have learned later all you've got to do is to find the likely environment and sit and wait. But one thing is; you can't make it. Some are lucky; others not.

Under Forsayth's leadership we avoided the one main street where the shops are and the trolley runs, dodging down dark alleys and through the red-light district as they call it. Once we bumped right against two little brown devils, but they seemed too interested in smoking and chattering to notice us; anyway they probably thought that we were just three ordinary foreigners from some boat or down from Umtali.

We reached the saloon of Forsayth's friend. As Forsayth was well known and I was less conspicuous than the McIntosh, I was elected to go ahead to see who was there. Under the lamps on the patio were a couple of British sailors and another foreigner; and within, I caught sight of a small, red-haired man with a cropped bullet head.

As there was little chance that any one but a Portuguese would run off to give us away we three entered boldly. As soon as he saw us the host began to laugh, but led us quickly into a private garden at the back.

As Forsayth introduced us the bullet-headed Irishman who had been a sailor before he started this caboose in Beira, looked us over and began to laugh anew. It appeared that he had already heard of our—or rather the McIntosh's—exploits with the governor. There were a dozen versions of the story, all exaggerated of course, but which had been received riotously by all the foreign element in the town.

Also old Porfy, as Forsayth called him, had offered a reward of some thousands of reis to any one who captured us or led to our capture. On the quay was a special guard specially armed, said our host, with a Maxim-Nordenfelt.

Captain Smith had been in the bar not an hour ago. He had been tickled to death by the yarn, but was anxious about the safety of his chief, whom of course he did not want to lose.

As we were stowing away a not bad-tasting mess of Portuguese stuff O'Grath the host told us that when we had upset the governor he had been on his way to the railway station for up-country and had left about an hour ago, evidently after he had got over the McIntosh's embraces.

"There you are!" exclaimed Forsayth. "What did I tell you! The old devil's gone up after my—" he stopped cautiously and concluded—"goods. Probably been torturing my servants while I've been in jail and taken them with him."

"Ou, aye," assented the McIntosh. "I ken yon cullion. Ye say he ha' juist gone the half-hour? Losh, mon, what a peety; for we cud ha' driven the old pirate ou ain sel's."

"Lordy!" cried I enthusiastically. "That would have been a wonderful stunt."

"Ou, aye," grumbled the McIntosh dourly; "but we're owerlate for the fechtin'."

While we sat on under the warm stars with a few mosquitoes buzzing around, Forsayth got all the news possible from O'Grath, arranged for a parcel of food and borrowed a couple of revolvers for the McIntosh and himself—with of course ammunition and a wire-clipper. Forsayth wouldn't drink anything except wine; he said he had already paid too dear for indulgence in liquor. With such adventure ahead I fought shy of even the light claret; but the McIntosh gullet was of course busy, and he took care to secure an ample stock of the host's Scotch.

Now Beira's main life is at night to about five in the morning, when all strangers are in the town and most Portuguese are busy bleeding or trying to bleed them and the police are on hand to see that they get odd cigarets and general backshish. The moon was due about four. It's light would be of use once we had secured an engine, but the approach had to be made in the dark. So at three we slipped out of the back into the sticky night to the tinkle of a mandolin somewhere, the yell of a cricket and the regular pulsing throb of millions of frogs in the swamps around the town—a kind of bass accompaniment to the shrill mosquitoes.

THE McIntosh and I had no idea of the lay of the land and just slogged along in the sand after Forsayth. After about half an hour we seemed to have left the town and were slithering along, apparently in the open, in a swarm of mosquitoes.

"Wull yon scutts ha' a guarrd on the sheds?" I heard the McIntosh inquire.

"Supposed to," replied Forsayth, "but they're usually asleep or playing cards, particularly when old Porfy is away, because he always takes his horde of generalissimos and the whole shooting-match with him."

Presently through the night miasma I caught the loom of some white buildings and the red glow of a fire.

"That's the goods and engine-sheds," whispered Forsayth. "Station to the right there in the open veld. That's the guard by the fire. They seem to be awake for a wonder. No sign of my camp. That —— old swine's evidently pinched the lot."

"Hadn't we better scout around and come in on the other side of the trail?" I suggested.

"Gude! The laddie's richt," assented the McIntosh. "For we'll ha' ta tie oop yon wee mannikins against they start a concerrt. Ou,

laddie," he added with a sigh, "but Ah'm fair bursting wi' song."

And he began to chant beneath his breath:

"A braw galoot was the Portugee.
He drew his dirk an' he came for me.
He came for me, that Portugee
That Portugee he came for me.

"I stroked his nose and pulled his lug,
An' slapped his face and gave him a hug—
Pulled his lug and gave a hug;
Gave him a hug and pulled his lug!"

"Sssh," expostulated Forsayth as the McIntosh's enthusiasm began to grow. "Follow to the right. We'll circle the shed and come round on 'em."

We worked our way around along the swamp-edge in a swarm of mosquitoes. What little noise we made shuffling over sand and swamp was safely drowned by the row the frogs made.

We reached the sheds and peered around the corner. Twenty yards away five soldiers squatted in the lee of a fire playing cards. I was so bathed in sweat and bitten to death that I began to lose a little of the enthusiasm for adventure.

"Wait a moment," whispered Forsayth. "I want to see if my bally ivory is still here."

He disappeared into the darkness. I heard his boot kick metal which clanged, but the frogs were helping us. He returned in about two minutes, saying that the wagon was still there. After a whispered discussion we decided that Forsayth, as he spoke the lingo fluently, should be the spokesman in holding up the guard.

As a matter of fact between those blessed frogs, the hum of mosquitoes, the shrill of crickets and the interest those fellows had in their game, whatever it was, we could have galloped up. They didn't see us until the three of us were poking our guns under their noses.

The expression of those five swarthy faces in the firelight was so funny that I could scarcely hold my gun for laughing as Forsayth advised them what they ought to do. And they did it—*pronto!*

One by one they stood up and I disarmed them. Yet although they were scared to death not one dropped his cigaret. When they were standing in a row like naughty children Forsayth jabbered at them.

"They say," he interpreted, "that the engineers and firemen and cleaners have all gone into town to gamble as old Porfy is away. That's luck. For they might have raised a —— of a shine and brought down the army."

"Ou, aye," said the McIntosh skeptically. "Mebbe's aye or mebbe ev'ry son of a goat's no' gone for a wee bit booze."

"That's right," agreed Forsayth. "I say, you two, look after these fellows and I'll run over and see. I know where the bunk-house is."

He ran off and returned in less than a few minutes with a lantern and three bewildered-looking buck natives.

"Look here," said he, "we'll turn 'em into stokers."

Having rounded up the guard—Forsayth knew that the relief would not turn up until four o'clock—we were pretty well free. We herded them into the engine-shed and made the soldiers load fuel-wood—of course under my gun—while the McIntosh examined the engine and Forsayth superintended the natives stoking the furnace. The moon was already over the tree-tops when a sufficient head of steam was on to get under way.

"Look here," said Forsayth, "the guard will probably be a bit late. Let's try to hitch on my load of ivory. We'll have to do a bit of shunting, but I'll go out with this fellow here and switch the points and cut the telegraph wires."

"Aw' wi' ye," assented the McIntosh. "Buickskin, make the loons put a' the guns in the cab and keep ye een for the guard. Ah'll tak' the blackamoors and run her oot."

WHEN I had placed all the rifles and bandoleers in the cab the McIntosh started the engine out of the shed. Lordy, I thought that the first exhaust of steam sounded as loud as a big gun.

Meanwhile Forsayth had gone off with one of the native cleaners to fix the switches and I was left with the lantern and the five little soldiers. I never knew before what a row shunting makes.

While Forsayth seemed to be yelling his head off and Mac was making that engine do trapeze stunts I peeped through the gates of the shed and caught in the rising moon the glint of a body of white-clad soldiers coming from the town. I called a warning as softly as I thought would carry, but the only answer was a terrific snort of the engine and the clash of metal, followed by an oath from Forsayth to the effect that the coupling had broken.

There was more snorting and clanging. I peeped again. The relief guard was mighty close. I had just shouted, "Shall I come along, Mac?" when I heard a yell from the guard marching across the swamp-road. They had discovered that something was wrong. Then above the row of frogs, mosquitoes and the shunting came Mac's voice at full blast:

"My faither was a braw cock lair-rd;
Ma mither came fra Per-rth.
Aiblins Ah'm no a sonsy——"

"He's crazy," I thought, and figured that we ought to leave that ivory and get. I couldn't

speak to my prisoners to tell them what to do, but I opened the door and pointed. They understood and went with a rush.

I left the lantern in the shed and ran along the track to where the engine was bumping against the truck of ivory, with Forsayth between the two swearing like a fireman.

"We'd better get," I bawled. "The guard's here."

"Hold 'em off," he yelled back. "I'm roping the —— thing."

"Coom oop here, Buickskin," shouted the McIntosh. "On the tender, mon, and sprinkle 'em a wee wi' ball."

As I clambered, up came a hullaballo from the guard, who had encountered the released prisoners.

"A minute more and I'll fix her," yelled Forsayth. "Keep 'em off."

I seized a rifle and banged into the air rapidly to make as much noise as possible. The McIntosh thrust a rifle into the hands of each of the two natives who had been stoking for him. They couldn't understand what he said, but they got the idea and promptly began to shoot—not in the air but to kill.

A yell was followed by a command, and a volley whistled over our heads and spattered on the cab of the engine.

"Ah didna tell ye ta mak' murder, ye rapscallions," roared the McIntosh, and hit up their rifles, pointing in the moonlight at the engine-shed.

The natives, not comprehending, ceased fire, jabbering excitedly. Came a yell from Forsayth:

"All clear. Let her go!"

The McIntosh sprang back into the cab as another volley spattered and whistled. The jerk of the engine nearly threw me off my perch. Then against the moon appeared Forsayth, waving his hat derisively at the little white figures running, shouting and firing wildly along the track.

For a few seconds they gained on us as the engine gathered way; then they ceased firing and raced level as she bumped across the points on to the single main line. I heard the McIntosh's roar of delight as he broke again into his favorite chantey.

They fired a futile volley or two after us, but we were quickly out of range, rocking at speed as the McIntosh forced her through a swampy jungle. Once we were steadily under way Forsayth and I squatted on top of the tender's stacks of wood and smoked while Mac from his cab yelled defiance at the rising moon.

That rush through the miasma of the swamps alongside the Pungwe River—too fast for the mosquitoes to keep up, fortunately—was quite enjoyable. Just as the sun rose we hit a cutting and dashed past a few sheds constituting a station of a Portuguese fort that, Forsayth said, was situated on the river about five miles away. After that we began to rise gradually on to firmer ground and more timbered forest, when we pulled up to cut the wires again.

According to Forsayth there was no fear of meeting any train, for the biweekly express from Umtali was not due to leave until the noon next day. So it was that on rounding a long curve where the rail wound up a valley to climb on to the next plateau we were surprized to see in the distance an engine with two coaches approaching.

"Now what the devil can that be," exclaimed Forsayth, standing up to view the better. "Slow her down, Mac, until we find out who they are."

Very slowly, hoping that they had not noticed us, we crept nearer. Fortunately the track wound so much between the trees, seeking the easiest incline, that we had a good glimpse right across the valley.

"Holy suffering snakes!" exclaimed Forsayth. "It must be old Porfy coming back. Quick; stop her, Mac, and run back to that last siding. That's our only chance."

The McIntosh pulled her up as soon as he could and we started back, rocking with such speed that I thought she would jump the rails every moment. We gained a good deal. Forsayth was off the engine as she slid past the switches and lugged them over. We had just bumped a bit roughly against the wooden buffers when we heard the other fellow coming. We herded our stokers under our guns on the far side of the tender so as to make her appear like an empty engine. Naturally not expecting anything, the other train did not slow up. Peeping round the edge as she slid past, Forsayth swore.

"It isn't Porfy's outfit, and it isn't a regular. What the deuce can she be? There were soldiers on board too. Come on; let's get along, Mac."

We shunted back to the main line as rapidly as possible, and in case they might have got sort of curious the McIntosh let her out. But just at noon as we were lunching we swung round a curve to see ahead of us four stationary coaches.

"My hairy aunt!" yelled Forsayth from the top of the tender. "There's old Porfy's coach. He's broken down. But how the Michael and Henry are we going to get by?"

The McIntosh slowed down the engine and clambered up for a look. We could see what appeared to be a camp of soldiers in the bush to the right, and dim figures in white on the platform of the coach.

"Ou, aye; that's ma guid frien' Porfy, as ye call him," assented Mac as he descended. "Yon's the second time the wee mannie

blocks the r-road. When ye ha' a wor-rm in the causey ye maun poosh the laddie oot!"

VI

WE HELD a hasty council and decided that as it was noon old Porfy would probably be lunching in his private coach. He would have no reason to keep a guard actually on board, and more than probably his generalissimos would not be armed with more than their usual swords and possibly a gun or so. As the McIntosh pointed out, the last people on earth of whom the governor's party would think would be ourselves; more than probably they would imagine that it was their own engine coming back for some reason.

The McIntosh, chuckling with delight, put her at normal speed and broke into joyous song. As we came out of the belt of trees into open sight of the camp he whistled shrilly. We whites hid ourselves in the cab, making one of the natives, under a gun, lean prominently out on the foot-plate for all to see. As we approached we slowed down as if about to pull up.

"D'ye mind whaat the track wud be like beyond?" asked the McIntosh.

"Not sure," replied Forsayth; "but I think it's fairly level grade and a fairly straight run for a mile or more."

"Tell this native to wave his arms and grin as if he was tickled to death to see 'em," I suggested to Forsayth. "He looks more like a frozen corpse."

We could see the soldiers squatting round their fires, engaged in eating and smoking, with their rifles stacked in more or less military order near to them. The figures in white on the platform of the first coach, which was evidently the dining-car, had disappeared within. My native waved a stiff arm in obedience to Forsayth's commands, but nobody appeared to take the slightest notice of us, evidently thinking that we were about to draw up.

As we drew in, the McIntosh slowed her down to a fast walk, enough to give a healthy jerk on contact. A figure possibly remarking that we were apparently very clumsy in approaching so near his Excellency's coach, got up and began to shout instructions.

The next moment we hit with a fair bump. As the coaches got in motion, there immediately rose an indignant clamor from the party within, echoed by cries from the camp. Naturally the train-crew had been too lazy to set the brakes.

The McIntosh jerked open the throttle. The engine snorted and the wheels raced—gripped; and we followed up with another good push which started the coaches going fairly.

With this second concussion my native fell off the foot-plate. However, that didn't matter now. As we charged again, snorting like a furious buffalo, a crowd of excited figures appeared pellmell upon the platform of Porfy's coach, yelling wild curses and instructions.

Had they got on to the idea of what was happening they still would have had time and safety to make a jump for it on to the grassy way. But, perhaps naturally, they could not grasp the truth; and they certainly were too excitedly indignant to reason—oh, far too excited! I could see old Porfy, his bald head shining and his furious black mustaches standing almost on end, waving fat hands wildly in the air.

At the third collision I gasped, for we nearly lost him over the side. The weight of his tummy was his center of gravity, which I think saved him for us.

We were now about fifty yards away, and this time the engine raced after and got contact with the coaches, and the speed was jumping every yard. Behind we could see the whole army streaming from their camp, some runnning futilely up the track, others around the native who had fallen off.

At first I couldn't make out why they didn't fire, but I suppose they were scared of hitting the governor. In another two hundred yards we were going far too fast for any of the governor's crowd to risk a jump.

To the triumphant screaming of the whistle the McIntosh broke into song:

> "A braw galloot is the Portugee.
> He drew his dirk and he came for me-e.
> Came for me, that Portugee.
> That Portugee, he came for me!"

Within half a mile we were rocking with speed and out of any possible touch with the camp. The dancing-party on the platform were still yelling, but at one another, each apparently screaming advice and orders.

As we had not yet revealed ourselves and the native had fallen off they must have thought that they had been kidnaped by a runaway engine; yet, although they perhaps could not catch Mac's wild chant above the row, they must have wondered at the insistent whoops of the steam whistle.

THE next move was to take them prisoners. The two remaining natives declaring themselves joyously willing to help us, stipulated that Forsayth should take them under his protection; but as they were Shangaans, a tribe whom Forsayth said were utterly undependable, we couldn't take the risk.

After they had stoked the furnace full we tied them up so that they couldn't, even if they knew enough, get at the throttle. Then just as the McIntosh was slowing her down a bit to a speed that prevented any attempt at jumping

we spotted a courageous generalissimo climbing on to the engine from Porfy's coach.

"Och, bless the wee mannie!" crooned the McIntosh. "We maun na scairt him."

We didn't, until he approached in the door of the cab revolver in hand. But three guns poked under his nose startled him so that he nearly fell off the foot-plate. Forsayth invited him to join us. He did, bewilderedly expostulating and threatening us with the wrath of his Excellency O Capitao-Geral Dom Porfirio Fernandez Diaz, Governor of Beira and the Lord knows how many castles in Portugal.

Still as Mac remarked Portugal was "sair far awa'," and Porfy himself so close that possibly we had better go and see him. We tied the general in the immaculate white uniform—considerably greased from his adventures over the engine; gold lace as well—beside the natives and thoughtfully added a gag.

Then with a last defiant screech on the whistle, and opening the throttle a little so as to keep the engine close up against Porfy's coaches, we presented ourselves, the McIntosh and I on one side and Forsayth on the other. We had arranged that simultaneously we should fire over and around just to put the fear of God in them; but the clear vision of old Porfy's whiskers beneath his enormous gold-plated helmet tickled my vanity as a marksman and I tried to put a hole in the latter.

The result of the volley reminded me of a conjuror's trick: "Now you see it! Now you don't!" They were there, five of them, and then they were not.

Scrambling swiftly along the foot-plates, we leaped on to the platform. As arranged, I threw myself at the door, and Mac and Forsayth slid along the footboards and poked their guns through the window, Forsayth yelling that they were to put their hands up.

At the first attempt the darned door didn't give. I heard a shot and an uproar and charged again. The door gave.

Inside I almost fell on the four generals or whatever they were grouped gallantly around the fat figure of Porfy. At one window was Forsayth with his gun, but minus his helmet; at the other was Mac with both arms in the window, a gun in one hand and an officer's saber in the other, roaring incomprehensible sounds.

As I distracted their attention I noticed that one man's hand was bleeding at the wrist and his revolver was on the floor. I jumped and put my foot on it. While Forsayth was shouting in Portuguese one bravo tried to draw his sword, but the McIntosh with a howl poked him in the ribs with the saber. Jabbering and swearing, they submitted.

"Disarm 'em," shouted Forsayth to me, "while we hold 'em!"

I did. They all had swords and two others had revolvers, but only the one had been quick enough on the draw to knock off Forsayth's helmet, and I noticed with joy that the governor's magnificent head-gear was on the floor of the swaying car with a hole through the brass fixings. As soon as I was through and had them coralled in a corner the McIntosh and Forsayth entered respectably by the proper door.

"Aweel, ma mannie!" exclaimed the McIntosh, twirling his enormous mustaches toward his temples in mockery of the little governor's hirsuit decorations. "An' hoo are ye the noo?"

But the little fellow, more furious than scared, spat back like a tormented cat.

"Let's lock 'em in the next coach," suggested Forsayth, "and pull up to couple the engine properly."

Portuguese cars are built on the Indian plan; each small coach is divided into two with sleeping-berths longwise like our Pullmans. Into one of these we ordered them, still fluent in language. While Forsayth and I guarded them Mac climbed back and slowed down.

Fortunately the track going up-country is on the up-grade; otherwise he might have had to chase the coach with speed on all the way back to the coast.

As soon as we stopped and the coaches were properly coupled to the engine the McIntosh and I went along to examine the other carriage while Forsayth kept guard over the prisoners. The two compartments of the first one were empty save for the belongings of the staff. The next compartment communicating with the second coach was evidently the sleeping-quarters of old Porfy himself.

The blinds of the windows of the last were down. As the McIntosh rattled the handle we heard an extraordinary moaning noise. Wondering what on earth could be within, the McIntosh put his great shoulders to the door and forced it.

For a few moments we could not see in the comparative gloom. Then I heard an unintelligible oath from Mac, accompanied by another wailing sound.

Lying on the floor of the compartment, the berths of which were piled with liquor and general stores, were the figures of two natives, bound. At first I didn't comprehend why they were there, nor particularly why the balls of their eyes rolled wildly like a terrified animal's. When I did I was nearly sick.

VII

UP TO that moment the McIntosh, like me, had taken the whole adventure as a joke, but after—I don't know now how he was restrained from—well, beating up the governor and the staff at the least.

To Forsayth the affair was not so surprizing.

Although he had already hinted that they would probably fry the feet of his servants to force them to reveal the hiding-place of the gold, I had vaguely imagined that he had exaggerated. He hadn't. On the contrary.

I admit I would dearly have loved to riddle that fat hide with holes. But one atrocity doesn't justify another, although I did experience for the first time the lust to kill—in a bloody way too.

We interviewed the governor and his staff right there. Exactly what Forsayth told them I couldn't follow, of course, but the McIntosh's gray-blue eyes and beef-rib fists surely put the fear of God in those pretty gentlemen.

However, it was no use trying to make a public scandal of the matter. As a matter of fact, Forsayth said, in Portuguese circles such was not at all considered anything out of the ordinary. I realized then that the Portuguese certainly had been in Africa since the fourteenth century and apparently had never got out.

As we went on we discussed what we should do and unanimously adopted the McIntosh's plan.

We arrived at Manzani about sunset. Here Forsayth rounded up some of his people and unloaded his ivory, arranging that he would be waiting for it on a certain date at a certain village over the border in British territory.

We armed some of his people and put them as a guard over our Excellency and his amiable cutthroats—I couldn't even think of him any more as just old Porfy. Next morning at sunrise we had another interview ccompanied by copious ink and paper, of which the governor was persuaded to use quite a quantity.

After Forsayth had sent a head man to his friend the native chief with instructions to clear over the border with all that was his, we ran down the line to the place where the gold was hidden. The McIntosh insisted upon showing the gold to the Meester Porfeerio—as he persisted in calling him—who had ceased to chatter so volubly and had grown more whiskers and a putty complexion.

Then as we fled back to the coast the McIntosh—if I am to tell the truth—indulged in deliberate torture. Nearly all the way he made the five generalissimos sit in a half-circle; and, holding "Meester Porfeerio" upon his great knees, thrust whisky down his throat at intervals and tickled him in his fat ribs. But never once did Mac break into song.

What else Mac did I don't know, but by the time we arrived at Beira station, where apparently the whole army was gathered to greet us, Dom Porfirio Fernandez Diaz looked more like a gibbering ape than a man.

As Forsayth explained from the balcony—one hand holding a gun and the other waving sealed documents in their horrified faces—the most illustrious Captain-General had been gracious enough, in return for services rendered, to grant us a pardon and a permit to leave the country without let or hindrance with all our possessions free of customs dues; and moreover, so great was his affection for us, his Illustrious Person would accompany us in his private launch to the honorable steamer that waited us. Then the McIntosh returned from the engine, and, pulling up his enormous mustaches above his bony cheeks, began to stroke the bald head of the torturer of natives, who visibly trembled.

IT WAS not until we were off Durban, where Forsayth was due to leave for Rhodesia, that once again I heard rising through the smell of oil and steam the doleful lament:

"Ma faither was a braw cock lair-rd;
Ma mither came fra Per-rth."