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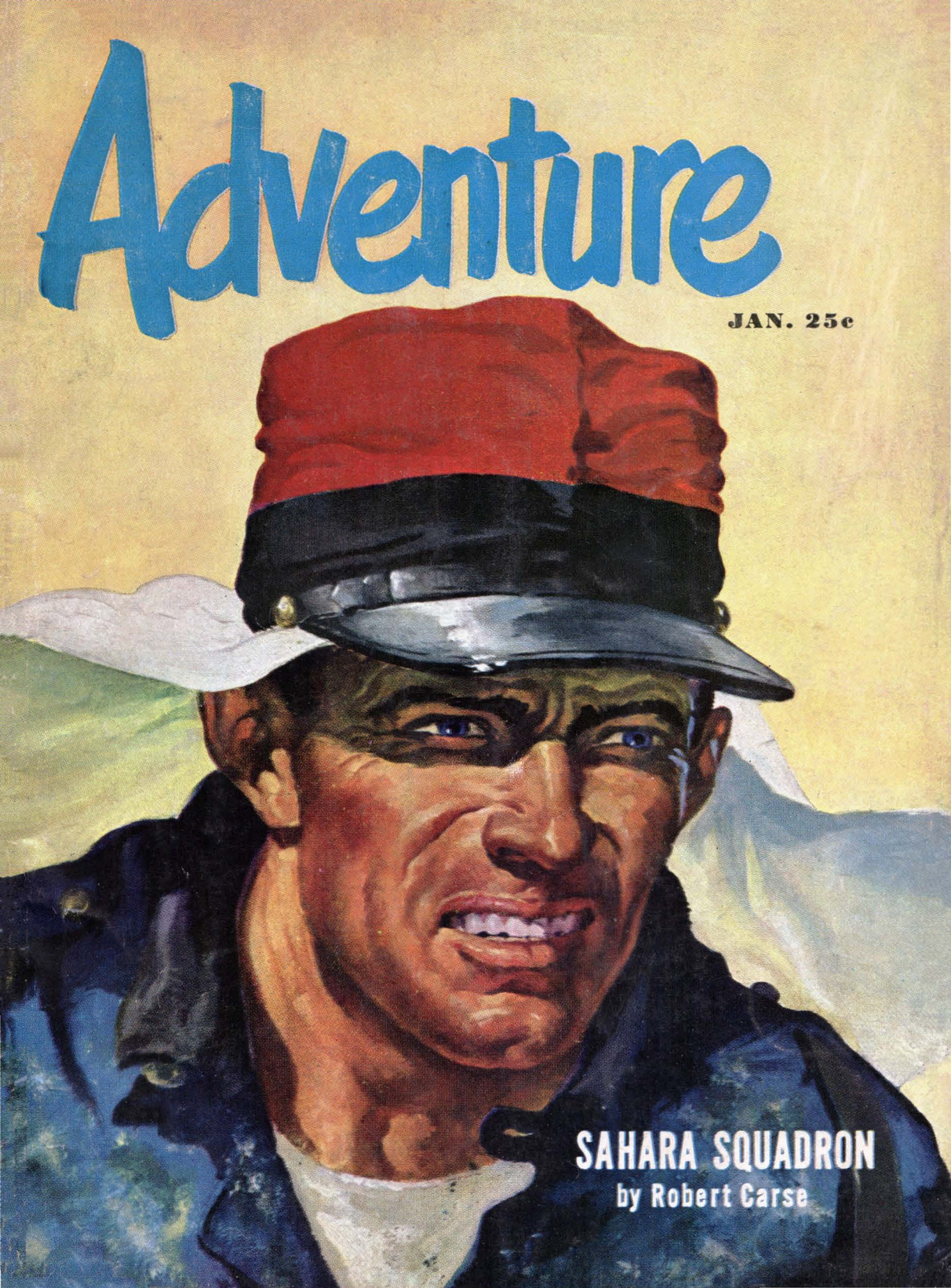

SAHARA SQUADRON
by Robert Carse

Adventure

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DEPARTMENTS

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The memory of what had happened at Bir Atouat lay across Lieutenant Moret's nerves like an open wound. And now, in the lonely desert post, he lived with Fear.

Sahara Squadron

by
ROBERT
CARSE

FLYING IN, coming back from the north over the vast, cruel spaces, Moret knew that the fear remained. Months of hospital and then leave hadn't helped; the Sahara still terrified him. Sweat was through the knees of his khakis and he was slowly shaken by a nervous tremor when the pilot put the plane down outside the oasis at Chinguil.

The pilot was in a hurry to get to Dakar. He thrust Moret's gear out and said, "All the best, Lieutenant." Then he opened the motors and was in the air.

Moret looked forward at the post. It was the same, squat and white and square in the glitter of the sun behind the straggle of the date palms and the cube-like native houses. Ouled was on the ridge to the north training a remount camel; he could hear the neighing of the beast and the curses of the old sergeant. A sick child cried, and at the well the rope creaked as the women pulled. This was it, he thought. This was where he must hide from the desert. He shuddered as he bent to pick up his gear.

The sentry at the top of the *mirador* tower had seen him. Commands were shouted in the compound and he made out the deep resonance of Dasigny's voice. The captain was calling for the guard. He was to be treated, then, as a returning hero . . .

Beckhoff and two troopers advanced to him. The sergeant major stiffly saluted, then smiled and shook hands. But the Chaambi were grave-faced, stolid when they took his gear. They were new men to him, obviously part of the replacements for the troopers he had lost in the action at Bir Atouat.

"The captain will be glad to see you, too, sir," Bechkoff said, striding stiff-legged beside him.

"How is he?" Moret said, his voice quite even and steady.

The little White Russian grimaced. "You know the captain, sir. Twenty-seven years out here is about enough.

But with you back now he might—"

"It will be the same routine all over again," Moret said and laughed. "Written reports every day, chess each night."

Bechkoff had fallen back. They were through the thin bars of shadow from the palms, had entered a lane in the barbed wire. Moret brought his shoulders square. Captain Dasigny stood under the arch of the gateway flanked by taut ranks of troopers.

Moret crossed the drawbridge surprised at the sound his boots made on the planks. He was used to wearing sandals when he passed here, he remembered, or else he was mounted on Talali. But Talali was dead, left with the others up in the somber reaches of Bir Atouat. The Draa raiders had hacked her down, crippled and killed her while he had rolled from the saddle, sprinted to get free.

That memory was no good. He should forget it as he should forget all of the action. It was finished, done, and he had tried his best to save the men and animals. He looked into Dasigny's keen eyes. His hand lifted and his boot heels clacked. "*Mon capitaine,*" he said.

Dasigny wore only the azure, silver-looped kepi to show his rank. The rest of his clothing was native, a loose jacket and trousers, wide sandals. The harsh planes of his face changed as he greeted Moret. He took the younger man by the arms and kissed him on the cheek. "You look fine, Lucien," he said. "You look fine. Come in. Guard, dismissed!"

They sat in the shadowed depths of Dasigny's room and drank tea thick with sugar the way Dasigny liked it. The tall, lanky captain leaned back, gazed at Moret. "Tell me about your leave," he said. "Your letters weren't much."

"Well, I got myself a girl," Moret said. "I met her at a dance one night at the St. George when they let me out of the hospital at Algiers. Then, when I was over in France, she came to stay with her family. We had a swell time on the Riviera."

"No Camel Corps officer," Dasigny said in his slow, deep voice, "should make the mistake of marrying. If you're a good one—which is what you are—the service takes all y o u r thought. If you're not, of course you simply get transferred and then it doesn't matter any longer."

Moret forced himself to smile. "My girl and I are far from the marriage point. Don't worry, sir." He rose to his feet then, beginning to feel a sharp sensation of unease. "Have you any immediate duty for me?"

"Nothing today," Dasigny said.

"Then I'd like to unpack my gear," Moret said. "I have some sentimental records for Bechkoff and a brute of a German-made poniard for Ouled. Also, there's some other stuff for the widows and kids of the men who were there at Bir Atouat with me."

"Aren't you all through with Bir Atouat?"

"After this," Moret said quickly, "I will be, sir."

"Go ahead." Dasigny's glance was oblique upon him. "But meet me on the terrace for dinner at seven."

"Yes, sir," Moret said. Dasigny suspects, he thought with alarm when he was alone. The man has been in the desert so long that he can sense at once what is wrong with you. But there's no place to go, nothing to do except to stay here . . .

It was customary for Dasigny to have dinner on the flat roof terrace just below the Western parapet. From there, he had often told Moret, he could watch the dunes that lay closest to the post and he could also admire the sunset. But tonight he seemed to give little attention to the crescent-shaped dune sweep or the splendor of the falling sun. He was unusually gay and talkative, reciting stories of his early years in the Saharan companies and his service before that with Moret's father in a Spahi squadron.

Moret sat silent most of the time. He was troubled by the references to his father. Dasigny was probing, he knew, trying to find just how much he had been affected by the massacre at Bir Atouat. That was natural, of course; Dasigny was his superior officer, should have an accurate appraisal of him. Yet he couldn't let the captain learn of his fear. If he did, Dasigny would be forced to transfer him out of the company in manifest disgrace.

Moret withheld himself from further conscious thought. He drank almost constantly from the bottle of rum on the low side table. In the courtyard, Beckhoff was playing the sweet-sad records, and in the married troopers' quarters the children wrangled happily over the gifts he had brought from the north. He made a sort of shield of those sounds, held them between him and Dasigny's words.

"I think," Dasigny said harshly at last, "that you're a good bit drunk. I've asked you twice if you'll take out a patrol with Ouled in the morning to look over the northern pasture grounds."

"Excuse me, sir. I'll go out the first thing in the morning."

"Then you'd better sleep right here the way I do," Dasigny said. "It's cooler than below. You'll be fresh when you go on duty."

Moret simply nodded, standing aside for the lame Peuhl servant. The Peuhl arranged piles of soft rugs and camel hair blankets, secured the mosquito nets. Then he salaamed to them and padded down the stairs. The two men stretched out within yards of each other in silence. Moret heard Dasigny's grunted sighs of first sleep, afterwards a low, murmurous snoring.

He cursed beneath his breath, remembering that even on patrol the captain snored. He looked up and in an attempt to induce sleep stared at the stars. They blazed huge and bright; Ursa Major hung like a glinting scimitar and the Pleiades were gem-clear. It was no different from the sky in the north, he thought. He and Berthe had swum and danced and made love under these constellations.

But against the walls of the sky here the desert cast an eerie flicker of light. It was a phosphorescent glow

that sent into bold relief the bodies of the sentries as they walked the parapets. Their bare, calloused feet gave a slick rustling that now seemed almost strange to him. Palm fronds rattled, scratched, chafed in the oasis. Far off on a ridge, hyenas screamed.

His hands tightened. He wanted to scream back, for his thought had veered suddenly to Bir Atouat. With a supreme effort of will, he drove away the memory. The fatigue of his day's journey rose blackly and he was able to sleep, dreaming of Berthe.

She was a blonde and small-boned girl whose laughter was always eager. He saw her in her little turquoise Bikini suit on the spring-board of the pool at Eden Roc. Then she was in his arms and they danced together over the softly colored glass tiles of the casino on the headland beyond Monte Carlo. They stood on the balcony of her family's hotel suite in Nice while he told her that he loved her and she lifted up on her toes to be kissed.

"Berthe, I love you," he whispered over in his sleep. It was then that he had almost told her about Bir Atouat. The words were a clamor he could hardly control. But he had decided that there was no reason why Berthe should know. It was all too terrible, too distant from anything in her life. Yet he could never forget. Never . . .

Bir Atouat was across his nerves like an awful wound. He had lost eighteen men there, every man in his patrol. Why forget? How? The Draa raiding party had come down swiftly out of the Spanish territory to the north. Their aim, as Dasigny had figured it from the reports, was to strike the salt mines at Agorott in the Djouf depression, loot, swing back and flee. So Dasigny had sent him to intercept them.

Moret pitched and mumbled in his sleep. The course of his dreaming turned to the action at Bir Atouat, formed a series of vivid sequences in his mind. He had nearly caught up with the raiders at the line of basalt cliffs below the place. The well was on the other side, and there he realized, the Draa would water and freshen their animals, put them in shape to escape him. But also if he failed to reach the well first, the Draa would destroy it to prevent him from getting water. His men and mounts would die before they could return to the post.

So he had chosen to risk the passage of the gorge between the cliffs. It was both a short-cut and a potential trap. There was no time to delay, though, and his scouts traversed it without finding sign of the Draa. He gave the order hoarse-voiced to advance and in a tense, shuffling column the patrol entered the gorge.

The pick of the Draa warriors were hidden high in the gorge. They were dismounted, and more than Agorott salt they wanted French guns and ammunition. They came running down from the maze of boulders after the opening volley.

It was a brief, violent fight among the tangle of dead and wounded camels. The Draa used the long knife close-in and the troopers were clumsy

in their haste to fire. He could smell the blood again, and hear the agonized cries, bring into vision the slashed and torn bodies.

He had fought his way free when Talali, his beloved camel, had gone tumbling in death. The Draa couldn't stand before the auto-rifle he carried. He reached the end of the gorge, came upon the rest of the warriors and their tethered beasts behind a dune. There was a moment in which he killed a dozen, maybe more of them, seeing them flop and twist in their blue-dyed robes, the war knots loose above the haggard, emptied faces.

But a Winchester shot struck him in the shoulder. He was knocked prone, could only crawl to a boulder, reload and defend himself until their survivors mounted and rode north. Then he went back to his men. Each one had been mutilated almost past recognition. They lay stripped, stark, guns and bandoliers and anything of value gone. Around them were the carcasses of the patrol animals. The gorge had become a ghastly and horrible grave.

He dragged away from it while the sun beat down on him like a tremendous piston and in the sky the vultures dropped black, swift. He sat on the cliff above the gorge and shot at the vultures, then the hyenas, the jackals. His ammunition gave out after a time, and during the night, part crazy, he stumbled into the gorge and clubbed about him with the auto-rifle stock.

Dasigny came there to find him two days later. His wound was bandaged and he was lashed howling to a pack camel. He wanted to stay, he said. It wasn't right for him to leave his men . . .

Moret reared erect and the stuff of the mosquito net ripped in his grasp. The howling he had just heard, he vaguely understood, was not that of memory. He had uttered it and he stood now teetering on the edge of the terrace. Dasigny was behind him, pulled him back; all along the parapets the sentries stood with their faces drawn sharp in alarm.

"Easy, *mon vieux*," Dasigny said in a low voice. "Be quiet, Lucien. You are with us at Chinguil, not at that place."

"I know," he panted. "You can let me go." But he was sobbing, locked inside yet with the horror of the memory. The great strength of Dasigny's hands forced him to a sitting position. "A smoke," the captain said, "and a small glass of rum, and then maybe we will talk. It is better usually to talk about such things."

They talked in a monotone, aware that the sentries tried to listen. "Once, after a combat in the Timitrin, I was like you," Dasigny said. "For days, I was out of my head, and for weeks I refused to ride on patrol. But, little by little, a man forgets. Your father was that way. He had his share of fear; yet, being a soldier, he overcame it. So will you."

"Yes," Moret said thickly, the taste of fear bitter in his mouth. "But what shall I do, Captain? For me, it's very bad."

Dasigny gently smiled. "Ride out

in the morning," he said. "Take the patrol to the pasture, and think of your father, your girl, anything but Bir Atouat."

"Thank you, sir," Moret said. But his lips were too numb to form a smile, and when he lay down again to sleep the fear was so huge that he couldn't shut his eyes. He gazed blankly at the sky waiting for dawn and the moment when he would have to go into the desert beyond sight of the post.

Scar-faced Ouled, the senior native sergeant, rode at his side on the patrol. Ouled was pleased with his gift of the German poniard, spoke of it as the camels raced straining in their morning freshness. But at the crest of the highest ridge past the post Moret slowed his mount. It was as if he had ridden against an unseen, enormous wall. "Take the patrol," he said to Ouled. "I have to go back to the post and change mounts. This beast doesn't suit me."

"Yes, Lieutenant," Ouled said formally. But there was a note of doubt, of almost open contempt in his voice. He waved to the troopers and at a rapid canter they swung down the far side of the dune.

Moret rode back slowly to the post. He came in under the arch and gave his mount to an orderly, hurried to get to his quarters before Dasigny saw him. But Dasigny was in the office busy with paper work. Moret closed the door of his hot, bare room. He squatted on the edge of the bunk and held his head in his hands.

You're a coward, he thought. You're no good. Then, silently, but with awful intensity, he started to weep. In the space of that morning while he stayed alone in his room he considered several times taking his service pistol and killing himself. But instinct kept him from it; he had enough reason left to jeer at the idea, recognized that for him suicide would solve nothing.

He got up and went to the desk in the corner, attempted to write a letter to Berthe, another to his father. They came forth from his pen in an incoherent, hysterical jumble. He tore them up, burned the fragments with his lighter flame.

Then he walked the room, over and back, over and back, hoping that motion would calm him. Get to understand yourself, he pleaded. Realize what's happened to you. He sought into his life to discover why he had come to the desert, applied for duty in the Camel Corps. It was mainly because of his father and the fact that in the old days his father had served in Africa. But while he had been at St. Cyr he had been greatly tempted to enter the engineers; many of his abilities seemed to suit him for such work. He should have joined the engineers, he knew now, and if he had everything might have been different.

His thought turned to his father. Later, when he became calm, he would write to him and explain. A man who had risen to the rank of colonel of Spahis, who had served in his time with Dasigny as a subordinate would

understand. Although he was retired, his father could go to friends in Paris, ask that his son be transferred to the engineers. There were only a very few officers like Dasigny who were content to stay on year after year in the lonely isolation of the Camel Corps posts.

But that was wrong, Moret recognized. He would deeply shame his father by the request. And if he were to write to Berthe and try to make her aware of his problem, she'd read his letter in shocked amazement. Berthe looked upon him now with admiring pride; he was to her pretty much of a hero. To find instead that he had failed to ride out on routine patrol to inspect a grazing grounds . . . such a thing would be beyond her comprehension.

Moret's hoarse laughter boomed in the room. You'll lose Berthe, too, he thought. So you don't write her, you don't write anybody. You stay right here and finish your time. Don't count the months. It won't help. What you have to do is keep Dasigny from sending you north as an acknowledged, useless coward. A transfer won't help, or even leaving the service, if that's on your record.

He brought himself to confront Dasigny in the courtyard in early afternoon. Dasigny gave him a grave, slow look and said, "I have some work that will keep you busy for the next few days. I want a complete new stores list made, all ammunition, supplies and equipment checked. Then there's need of extending the irrigation ditches through the oasis. Let's see what kind of an engineer officer you might have made."

Moret felt the swift rush of blood up into his face. Then he remembered that more than once in the past he had told Dasigny of his desire as a cadet to become an engineer. Dasigny was also moving on across the courtyard, calling to Bechkoff about a change in the picket lines.

He wants to help you, Moret thought after the captain was gone. The order was given to you as a mark of friendship. Dasigny just offered you a form of reprieve, some more time in which to put yourself straight. Get going. You have important work to do.

But in the next days he came to realize that no further opportunity was offered to him to lead a patrol. Bechkoff or Ouled took out the men when there was anything to be done beyond the limits of the oasis. This work he performed was elementary, shouldn't be his as the second ranking officer at the post. Still he was incapable of speaking of it when he and Dasigny had their usual evening chess games on the terrace. Dasigny had retreated into his habit of silence, sat saturnine and remote as they played. The fear was there between them, Moret recognized. Until he could master that, he was absolutely alone here.

He found sufficient determination to ask for another patrol after he had been back at the post three weeks. Dasigny was in his dusty office when he made the request. The tall old officer stood straight, holding in his

hand a message sheet just brought him by the radio operator from the room above in the tower. He gazed sharply at Moret.

"At present, there's only one patrol going out of here," he said, "and I'll lead it. This is an order for us to send a detachment of thirty men and an officer to join the escort group of the November salt caravan from Taoudenni. You will command the post in my absence. I'm also leaving Bechkoff and Ouled."

"Yes, sir," Moret said harshly. "But why don't you tell me that you consider me to be an outright coward and a man unworthy to hold rank in the corps? Why don't you send me where I belong—a hospital for mental cases?"

"Because," Dasigny said, "I'm not ready." He put the radio message down and his big hands clasped Moret's shoulders. "I'm not yet convinced that your condition is that bad. My belief is that you need more time here. You're all right, Lucien. You're considerably better than you were."

Moret laughed at him. He made a rough gesture of denial. "I can't sleep," he said. "The desert seems to creep up over the parapets and into my room at night. The people from Bir Atouat come with it. I see them and hear them. They—"

"Enough, Lieutenant," Dasigny said stiff-voiced. "Muster the men and animals for my detachment. Departure will be at noon." He had turned to the desk, his back to Moret. With a fumbling, jerky motion, Moret saluted, went forth into the blaze of sunlight.

He stood at the drawbridge when the detachment left. The sight thrilled him despite his feeling of deep frustration and dismay. Dasigny rode a huge dun battle camel in full caparison. The troopers were mounted on some of the finest beasts at the post, sent them forward after the captain in a wild gallop.

Moret thought suddenly of the salt caravan. That would make an even more exciting spectacle. Three thousand camels formed it to carry the precious product of the Djouf mines to the Sudan. The officers of the escort looked upon the semi-annual event as a welcome break from their ordinarily lonely lives. Around the campfires at night, there were long hours of talk, exchange of gossip. What would be said of him when they found that Dasigny was in personal command of the detachment from Chinguil?

Moret lowered his head to his chest, thrusting back almost blindly through the troopers off duty. Disregard the gossip, he told himself. The thing for you to consider is that you're in command here. Dasigny trusts you just that much. Then, starting up the steps into the *mirador* tower, he discovered that Bechkoff and Ouled followed him.

He wheeled around and faced them. "What do you want?" he asked nervously. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing is the matter, sir," Bechkoff said. Both he and Ouled rested

stiffly immobile, their narrowed eyes on him. "But we need to know how you want the guard set, the number of men for the picket line sentinels and for regular sentry duty."

"Figure it out between you," he said, the emotion so turbulent in him that he could hardly speak. For a moment, he had held the thought that Dasigny had given them secret orders to watch him, never let him out of their sight. "When the guard is set for the night, report to me. That's all, thanks."

He slumped back in Dasigny's chair in the office, hearing them go down the steps. You almost gave yourself away to them, he thought bitterly. Get back your confidence. You'll have to act very much better than this . . .

The Draa attack was made five nights after the detachment had left the post. Warning was only given when a sentinel on the picket line fired a shot. Then the warriors were sprinting along the row of native houses, bent, wraith-like figures in the darkness.

They got close to the drawbridge before they were brought under fire from the parapets. Some of them were armed with German potato-masher grenades. Gun smugglers must have instructed them, for they lobbed the grenades with skill. The blasts smashed part of the massive gateway, killed the radio operator and demolished his equipment in the *mirador* tower.

Moret went out with the sortie that drove back the Draa. He carried the same auto-rifle he had used at Bir Atouat and he was possessed of an enormous, raging hatred. From house to house and doorway to doorway, he pursued the tribesmen, killing them as they stopped to fight. Then Ouled joined him with a group of troopers and the Draa sheikh called shrilly to the remainder of the raiders to come away.

"You were a lion, *mon lieutenant*," Ouled said to Moret. "They ran from you like jackals."

"They're more than that," Moret said, his breathing a fierce sound. "But get the women and children out of those houses. Take some men and see if you can't save a few of the animals from the picket line. The Draa are here in full force. They want to take the post from us."

There were several more attacks that night, a particularly savage one at dawn. Moret walked the parapets and directed the machine-gun fire. You're not afraid, he kept telling himself. At least in this you haven't proven yourself a coward. Maybe it's because you hate those people so.

Bechkoff relieved him when the dawn attack had been repulsed. The little White Russian insisted that he get some rest. "Forget about everything except sleep. We need you, sir. You—" he smiled wryly—"make a very excellent host indeed for our guests."

"Then build a double sandbag barrier at the gate," Moret said. "Keep half the force on the parapets at all

times. Issue no more than a pint of water to anybody, including the wounded. That's the daily ration from now on."

The Draa came again to the assault at dusk. They bellied forward and threw grenades, lifted rude ladders to scale the walls. Three troopers were killed, seven wounded in that defense. Moret took over a machine-gun, fired repeated bursts hammering into the scrawny bodies, the upraised rage-tight faces. "For you at Bir Atouat," he whispered as the gun vibration shook his arm. "For you they killed." He loaded a fresh belt, traversed with care the lunging forms that dropped below the wall.

Throughout the night, the Draa kept from further attack. Their sheikh sent snipers forward and there was the nickering crack and whine of Mauser slugs in the embrasures. Men were wounded, killed; it was almost impossible to maintain crews at the machine-guns.

Beckhoff came with Ouled to where Moret crouched.

"This can't last, sir," the sergeant major said flatly. "They're knocking us apart. We can't keep on defending ourselves against their fire."

"What would you have me do?" Moret said, squinting from between his raw-rimmed eyelids.

"Give the order for a group to ride out. We have enough camels left to break through them."

"No good," Moret said quietly. "It would take too many men from the post. We'd be so weakened that the Draa could get over the parapets. What happened at Bir Atouat would happen here."

"You can't get Bir Atouat out of your head," Ouled said in a rough, strained voice. "This is a different kind of action."

"You're right," Moret said. He stood slightly stooped, his hand over the butt of the pistol at his belt. "Here we have women and children to consider. But get back to where you belong. When I want either of you, I'll send for you."

They searched his eyes for an instant more, then saluted him in silence, turned and were gone. He sat down again at the machine-gun, his hands lax upon the grips. Below in the courtyard the women huddled together, keening for the dead. The voices kept to a low, repetitive minor which seemed to pierce straight through Moret's brain. It became impossible for him to listen further. He sent a trooper for Bechkoff, told the sergeant major to take temporary command.

"I'm going to check over the ammunition supply," he said. "I'll be back in a bit."

"Yes, sir," Bechkoff said. But he gave Moret a strange look. "You all right?"

"I will be," Moret said harshly, "when I've found that we have enough ammunition. Save every round you can."

The post arsenal was in a thick-walled room across the courtyard. He walked past the weeping women, the frightened, rigid children to reach it. He shut the door behind him and

slouched against it, his flashlight beam wavering along the few cases left. Another couple of attacks, he thought bleakly, would expend that. Then . . . But in a far corner of the room his blurred vision fixed on a stencil on a box.

He went over and knelt beside the box, opened the lid.

It contained dynamite. Dasigny had requisitioned it for the work on a new well. There was enough, though, to blow up the entire post. Straight soldierly knowledge, he dully realized, had given him the power to refuse the noncom's demand to attempt a break-through. But it was his subconscious thought, his desire to be an engineer, that had brought him to the arsenal.

He had seen the dynamite there weeks ago while checking the stores list. Now he had tremendous use for it.

He saw the plan clearly in every detail. The Draa would enter pell-mell if they were allowed to storm the post. But they'd cluster in the courtyard before they started to loot. The dynamite could be thinly buried in the courtyard, the fuse for it led to the tunnel mouth. The tunnel would be dug down under the post wall to take care of the people until after the explosion.

A nervous rigor came upon him. His breath was held in his constricted throat. Blow up the post, he thought, and you're defenseless in the desert. You'll have nothing to put against the fear.

But you have to do it, for this is the time which Dasigny gave you. If you're right, if your plan works, the Draa will be paid for everything at Bir Atouat and here, too. Think of the dead, of the mourning women, the kids, not of yourself. Beside them, you don't count.

He walked back from the arsenal room and up the steps to the parapet where he had left Bechkoff. The White Russian lay with half his face shot away, Ouled over him.

"Well, you fixed this guy, Lieutenant," Ouled said.

"Be still," Morat said. He gripped the sergeant's arm hard. "Listen to me or we'll all be like him." Then he explained the plan.

Ouled shrugged as though he listened to the talk of a madman. "I'm willing to try," he said. "It's too late for a rideout and we die anyhow if we stay on fighting here."

"You must believe me." Moret stared steadily at him, then pointed to the people in the courtyard. "You must make them believe me, too. Start the tunnel as deep as you can go. The women can help and the kids and the wounded can fill the sandbags. We'll need the sandbags for this end, to hold back the concussion while we're in there. Call me when you're ready for the dynamite."

Ouled made a grunting sound. "You're a little bit nuts," he said. But he went down to the courtyard, and Moret could see his gesticulating, making known the plan. The women stumbled after him, came back with picks, spades, empty sacks for the sandbags.

Moret rigged long firing lanyards to the machine-guns while the tunnel was being dug. Then he sent the troopers down to aid Ouled with the tunnel mouth. The old sergeant joined him in the faint green dawn light.

"About fifty feet long," he said, "and most of it through loose sand. But will it work?"

"It should," Moret said tensely. He indicated the oasis. "The blue robes are almost ready for their really big attack. Fire a few rounds at them while I go and start planting the dynamite."

He had little time to bury the dynamite. The Draa had already begun to charge from all four sides. But he tamped down the fuse, brought the end to the mouth of the tunnel.

Then he told the troopers, "Take in the wounded first, next the kids and women. Quick!"

Some of the children whimpered in fright and a trooper with a bad chest wound let go a wild cry. But Moret didn't wait. He went back to the parapet, ordered Ouled into the tunnel.

Moret crouched and jerked the machine-gun lanyards, firing long, rapid bursts.

The Draa warriors closed quite swiftly. He could see the war knots and the hunched shoulders at the wreckage of the gate, then in the parapet embrasures. Your turn now, Moret, he thought, and sprang down the steps.

Mauser shots whacked the sandbags as he ducked into the tunnel. But he had his lighter aflame; the flame licked, caught the fuse. He pulled the sandbags into the shelving tunnel, jammed them together back of him.

Then he sprawled flat, his arms over his head.

The blast was shattering. Sense was slammed from him and he had the feeling that he was being tossed by a gigantic wave. But somewhere in the tunnel a trooper pushed through to the surface with a carbine butt. The unwounded men and the women crawled out.

Ouled came for him, dragged him through the hole. He lay gaping up at the pellucid sky.

"Look, Lieutenant," Ouled said. "Some are still alive."

Almost twenty Draa warriors staggered forth from the collapsed ruins of the post. They were dazed to a point past thought, and filled with horror.

When Moret led the troopers at them, they swerved away to their camels, capable only of flight.

They reminded Moret, as they ran, of desert partridges he had shot for sport. But these weren't partridges. They were supposed to be fierce warriors, raiders whose skill was known in all the Saharan reaches. He killed them mechanically, without pleasure. But he smiled. His fear was gone at last.

The Draa, fluttering, scrabbling across the sand, had taken it from him.

The Lord Treasurer of England summoned Captain Vambrace. "I've a mission calling for a swordsman and a gambler—but mayhap you'll be none too eager to accept it when you hear the details. If you succeed you will do England a great service—and if you fail the gallows will be your reward." . . . A classic story of swashbuckling swordplay and 16th Century intrigue.

Blood on the SWORDS

by
DONALD BARR
CHIDSEY

THE BIG FELLOW had but a single attack—a cross with his left foot and a high-starting, oblique, downward slash. Evidently some master had tried to teach him at least the *squalembrato;* but the result was indescribably awkward. Roger didn't even attempt to parry, didn't even take out his dagger. He was sorry he'd been fool enough to come to the field with this clumsy fellow. He had nothing against him.

Again the left cross, that high-reaching sword arm. Roger retreated a cat-step, and, moving only his right wrist, slashed open the muscles of the fellow's shoulder. He might easily have slid his rapier through the heart.

It ended the meeting. The big fellow fumed considerably, insisting that the fight be continued. His right arm was limp, true, and bleeding badly; but he would use his left; Captain Vambrace *must* give him satisfaction! Roger only sighed, turned away, wiped his blade with a handkerchief, and then sheathed, bowed, and rejoined Bones John and Walter, who were having difficulty keeping grins from their faces. The big fellow still was sputtering when these three started back for the palace.

"It will be a long day before that ruffler gives you the lie again," Bones John crowed.

But Roger Vambrace shook his head.

"Nay, I sicken of this. We do

naught here but play with toys like children."

They understood, and respected his mood. They rode in silence after that. Roger Vambrace, a fourth son, three years before had taken himself and his slender patrimony into France, where he had engaged exuberantly in the civil war, fighting for the Huguenots.

When a truce was arranged, he had traveled into Italy, and there he had studied not books and music so much as the art of the fence, under Manciolino and Marozzo, the Bolognese masters. Penniless, then, he had returned to his native land to become a gentleman-usher for some great nobleman.

He would have preferred Leicester or Christopher Hatton, or possibly even the arrogant Devonshire upstart Raleigh, but his family influence was sufficient only to get him a post under the Lord Treasurer, gaunt, prosaic, peace-loving Burghley. So that now, surrounded by his men, Bones John and Fat John, Walter and Andrew and Dover Harry—professional soldiers, former jailbirds who had attached themselves to him after the French treaty had left them without support, for they could not otherwise get back to their native land—now he was used most of the time as a mere messenger, a minor diplomat, a go-between. He might as well be a secretary! Or a common clerk. This was no existence for one who was perhaps as good a swordsman as the whole kingdom could show.

Back in the palace, they played *primero* at a halfpenny a point. Fat John and Andrew and Dover Harry, who because of other duties had been unable to witness the *duello,* only nodded and grinned when they learned of its outcome. They never had doubted it.

Roger played sullenly, slapping the cards upon the table; and because of this there was very little conversation.

These five attendants were not mere servants, yet neither were they gentlemen. Roger, though he called them by their first names, never "thou"ed them. By those of equal rank or lower they were saluted as "Master." They professed no fealty to Burghley, except as he was Captain Vambrace's lord. They served Captain Vambrace alone.

"Cards, cards, all the day long," Roger grumbled, "except when my lord finds some lackey's errand for me and—"

A servant was in the doorway. He stared at Roger. Roger rose.

"Doubtless a scolding because of the ruffle. Play on, lads. I'll rejoin you soon."

He went out, following the servant.

William Cecil, Lord Burghley, was longish, and thin, middle-aged, prematurely gray. By ordinary his expression was solemn as any bishop's, but this morning he seemed worried, cross.

"Another *duello,* I hear?"

"Aye, m'lord. There was naught else for it. The fellow—"

"No matter! I've something of

higher import here," he said quickly.

He was frowning a little. He started to wave a quill, schoolmasterlike.

"Now, heed me well, Master Vambrace. 'Tis excitement you've lacked since you've entered my service, eh? Often you've wailed for it?"

Roger started a polite denial, but the Lord Treasurer waved him to silence.

"Well, I've a mission calling for a swordsman and a gambler, but it comes to me that mayhap you'll be none too eager to accept of it when you hear the details."

"Try me, sir," said Roger brightening.

"You must first understand that this is confidential. Should there be scandal on it, your head and maybe mine, and sundry others, would pay the price, Master Vambrace."

He leaned forward, staring intently at Roger.

"You know that Frank Drake's in Plymouth, eh? He would sail, but as day creeps after day the wind stays full from the south, and Drake chafes. Doubtless you know of his plans and destination?"

"Not more than another does."

"But you know, I'll warrant, that he goes forth on no such peaceful trading voyage as he'd have the world believe. Nay! He goes to loot Spanish ships and sack Spanish towns along the Main. Eh, is this any secret? First he tells us that he would go to Ireland and help put down the rebels. With victuals enough to endure five months! Or he tells that he will fare for the New Found Land, to seek out a northwestern passage. In December! And when not himself or a one among his men hath heavy enough clothing to keep him warm even in England! Or else he gives it out that he projects no more than a trip of commerce to Alexandria, where he would load his five vessels with currants."

The Lord Treasurer did not quite laugh; but he snorted loudly.

"Currants! Think ye he requires two cartographers and a mass of prick-cards and plot-papers for the finding of Alexandria? Or a tall store of wild-shot, chain-shot, harquebusses, pistolas, corslets, for the loading of currants? And those forty-six cannons and culverins and demi-culverins and sakers—are they to be used, perchance, in the pursuit of merchandise?"

Roger was silent. He knew that Lord Burghley was opposed to the doings of this celebrated sea dog, who carried on his own private war against Spain in the New World, and that Burghley would, if he could, keep Drake in England. But he also knew that Burghley couldn't. The members of the war party were too strong for him; for they had invested in the undertaking. Indeed, rumor had it that the Queen herself was a shareholder to the extent of one thousand crowns.

Drake had slipped away the previous month. But rough seas off the Lizard had forced him back to refit; and now he was windlocked.

"Know ye also," Burghley was saying, "that with the coming of an ambassador from Madrid our England

is to resume relations of friendship with Spain, eh? Well, and he hath come, this Don Bernardino de Mendoza. But at the last hour, all unexpectedly, he decreed not to land at Dover, as had been his first intent, but at Plymouth. He's in Plymouth now. He hath been three days there, giving out that he wished to recover his land legs. Eh, but his eyes and ears have been open all that while, be sure of it! To him Drake's a common pirate. And tomorow he starts up for London."

Roger said, "Oh," thoughtfully.

"Is there need to tell you what this signifies? He will demand an audience with the Queen Majesty instanter, and he will be granted this for she'll not dare to deny it. He will bring loud objection to the Drake enterprise, demanding that it be dissolved. This too the Queen's Majesty will not dare to deny, for that would mean war and England is unready for war. So a royal courtier will be dispatched forthwith to Plymouth, and Drake's ships will be emptied."

Burghley leaned back.

"This will come to pass, Master Vambrace, unless it chance that Don Bernardino doth not get up to London until the winds have changed."

Then he told Roger what he wished him to do.

Roger Vambrace stood for a full minute in silence, thinking about this. Burghley watched him.

Roger said slowly, "If I fail, or if later I am recognized, or any of my men are recognized—"

"The gallows! It can be naught less. I'll vow perforce, for sound reasons of state, that I never sent you upon such an errand. And the Queen will cry that here's a villainous highwayman."

Roger nodded.

"I ask it, I do not command," Burghley pointed out. "The Queen's Majesty hath put this duty upon me because, being friendly to the Flemish commerce, and of the peace party, none would suspect a man in my service. I like it not, but her mind is fixed."

Roger said slowly, "I'll accept the undertaking, with all my men, if the Queen's Majesty herself will give me the command."

The Lord Treasurer nodded. He seemed to have expected this. He rose, and quitted the chamber by a panel door, which he left open behind him, discovering a narrow corridor. Roger heard the far sweet sound of a virginal. Presently this music ceased, and Burghley returned.

"Go in. She's alone."

Five minutes later Roger Vambrace was back, a shade pale and very serious of countenance for one usually so hale and gay. He merely nodded to Lord Burghley, who gave him a key from an olivewood box.

"God be with thee, my boy. I like it not, for methinks I send thee to death. But when the Queen's Majesty hath spoken—"

"Aye," muttered Roger. He bowed impeccably in the doorway. "A good day to you, my Lord."

Back in the barracks he went first to his goshawks. He could not take

them upon this journey, for they would betray his station, being valuable birds, survivors of a day more prosperous. One was a haggard, very swift and obedient, matchless in a strike. The other was younger, an eyas, gentle and affectionate as any kitten—except when she was aloft. Roger kept them in satin hoods, and from their legs dangled silken jesses terminating in little silver varvels which bore the Vambrace coat armor. " 'Twill be lonesome without you," he told them, and fondly stroked their necks. "But if I come not back, dears, ye go as my gift to the royal falconry, and sure there's no greater honor even for such as you, eh?"

He knelt in brief prayer, asking God to protect her gracious majesty, Elizabeth of England, and Beth and Marian, these being the goshawks. When he rose, suddenly laughing, he waved both arms.

"Harness and to horse, lads! At long last we face something more perilous than cards!"

They stopped about ten miles outside of Plymouth. It was midnight, foggy and cold; but the instant Roger gave permission they slipped out of saddle and fell into a ditch, to sleep soundly. They had been riding for fifteen hours without rest, even remaining mounted when they partook hastily of bread and ale at obscure inns. They had been careful to attract no attention to themselves. At the posting stations they had not even claimed the fivepence-a-mile rate allowed those who ride on state business, but had paid sixpence like private gentlemen.

Only Roger Vambrace remained awake, and groggily, stalking up and down the highway, he reviewed in his mind this curious mission. He had explained it to the others. He had told them—what they already knew—that relations between Spain and England at the moment were delicate, and Spain, much the stronger nation, was angry, demanding. The person of an ambassador is at all times sacred. The person of Don Bernardino de Mendoza should be triply so.

And of course, the kidnaping of even an ordinary traveler was a crime punishable by death.

He had explained that the guard of Queen's men would be small, only five or six. These fellows didn't know who it was who would attack them, but they knew that they should put up only a sham fight—and then turn and gallop away. Don Bernardino would be attended by numerous servants, but it was unlikely that many of these would be armed. Probably he would have several gentlemen with him, and these fellows, and the ambassador himself, represented the greatest danger.

On no account must any harm befall Don Bernardino or any of his friends! No Spaniard must receive so much as a scratch! Roger had prohibited the carrying of pistols, for fear one of his men might forget himself in the excitement and shoot somebody. He himself, however, carried a monstrous, and loaded dag.

Roger had also the key of a deserted manor house situated on a lonely spit of land extending into the sea, not many miles from where they now waited. This place had been stocked with food. How long they would remain there, with Don Bernardino as their prisoner, they didn't know. A few hours perhaps, or perhaps a few days, even a week. It all depended upon the wind.

When the wind was found to blow full and fair from the north, or from any other direction which would enable Captain Drake to clear his ships from Plymouth harbor, then Drake himself would lead a party of sailors to the deserted manor house, Roger Vambrace and his men would run, and Don Bernardino would be set free. The ambassador, after that, could not possibly get up to London before Drake had cleared the harbor.

Moreover, it was presumed that his objections to the expedition would be less heated by reason of the fact that Drake himself had saved him from the clutches of the highwaymen. The ambassador might suspect that the whole business was an elaborate plot; but what of this? He could prove nothing. And Queen Elizabeth, loud with apologies, simulating indignation, would send a messenger to Plymouth to halt an expedition already upon the high seas.

Of course there would be a hue and cry. All the south of England would be in a hubbub. But Roger could be confident that neither the Queen's own men nor the Devonshire deputy sheriffs would look for the missing ambassador in that deserted manor house by the sea. Only Drake would think of going there, at the proper time.

Roger sighed. True, he had been calling for excitement; but he didn't like this underhanded business—or the risk of being hanged as a common criminal!

It was bitterly cold. When he awakened the men, at the first signs of dawn, they were stiff, numb. They stamped up and down, flapping their arms, beating their hands together. The mist swirled languidly after each, making graceful little whirlpools. The wind was off the sea—if it had been otherwise all this would not be necessary—and it bit angrily at their faces.

He examined them, solemnly reviewed them. Each had a sword and dagger. Each was wrapped in a long cloak, and under that wore simple dark clothing. They had torn the badges, the Vambrace arms, from their left sleeves. Roger himself had made certain that his heraldic martlet, gules on a field argent, was not in evidence upon his own person; he wore no jewelry, and his doublet was an unadorned brown taffeta, his trunk hose plain brown wool.

"Your masks, lads!" Habitually he called them lads, though in fact he was the youngest of the group. "And mark that ye keep them well fastened every moment of the time!"

Each with a piece of black wool fitted over his entire face, they looked very grim and terrible in the early morning fog.

"There's hoofs," Dover Harry announced, "from the west."

Roger cried, "To horse, and get ye down to the next bend to keep watch. Let none see you, if 'tis not the party we await! But if it is, ride back to us instanter. We'll be hid in these bushes."

In concealment, and mounted, he looked carefully to the priming of his dag. For all the weather, he'd been able to keep the match aglow. He thought only to use the weapon as a possible threat.

The morning was very still, the narrow highway deserted. The fog, shoved by a moaning breeze, was restless, thinner. The light of the sun, though broken still, and blurred, was making progress through drear, low clouds.

Roger himself could hear the hoofbeats now. He tightened his mask, loosened his rapier.

Dover Harry came riding back along the side of the road, his horse treading the frozen grasses for the sake of silence. He whispered to nobody in sight, " 'Tis a great yellow coach-and-eight!"

Roger called softly, "Haste back of those pines. Out with your blades, lads!"

Roger's first impression of the party, as it came into sight through the now meager fog, was one of disappointment. It was much smaller than he had expected. Instead of twenty-five or thirty men, there were scarcely ten. Perhaps this was all the better for him: it would make the task easier, less confusing. Nevertheless, there was something strange about it.

Surely the Spanish ambassador, of all persons, would wish to make a display of magnificence. The very fact that he traveled in a coach at all, in this year of Our Lord 1577, was evidence of his pretentiousness. Roger had supposed that Don Bernardino would use the vehicle only to quit Plymouth, to pass through the principal towns on the way, and to enter London, and would ride in saddle the greater part of the journey, that being a more natural and far more comfortable mode of travel.

But he saw nobody who might conceivably be Don Bernardino, and a lackey led two horses by the side of the coach.

A poor procession, Roger thought. There was only a driver, and no footman at all. Most of the attendants seemed shabby, uncouth fellows, and only a few of them wore livery.

This flashed through Roger's mind, and for an instant he hesitated. Then he saw the Mendoza arms emblazoned in many places upon the enameled bardings of one of the led horses, and boldly painted upon the coach doors, and he saw a bisque-faced man with an exquisite black beard and enormous ear-rings lean out to call something to the driver. He spurred from cover.

"Hi! Hi-*yee!* Unsheathe and you're dead men!"

They were only six, but because of the suddenness of their appearance, the boldness of the attack, and the

great noise they made, they seemed like many more in that hazy light. Furiously they beat the servants with the flats of their blades. Loudly they called for surrender.

Three men turned and galloped away. The driver of the coach scrambled down and took to his heels. But the rest drew without hesitation; and soon the lonely road sounded like an armorer's shop or a smithy for the clang of steel on steel. A pistol exploded.

"Hi-yee! The rest of you, merry lads! This way! This way!"

He signaled to imaginary associates up the road. Three more men spurred away, filled with panic.

Roger made for the coach. The door opened, and two men appeared. One was a giant with a thick blond beard; he carried a pistol; he was roughly dressed, and there were gold rings in his ears. The other was the bisque-faced exquisite, a tall man with cold black eyes, a bloodless mouth, a chin tilted arrogantly.

This fellow was unquestionably the ambassador. His fingers and thumbs were ablaze with rings; the pearl-clusters in his ears and the strings of pearls around his neck were such as any king would be proud to wear; he sniffed unconcernedly at a gold-filigree pomander suspended from a chain of huge gold links which in itself was worth a fortune.

Yes, this was Don Bernardino de Mendoza, personal representative for His Most Catholic Majesty Philip II, by grace of God King of Castile, King of Leon, King of Aragon, of the Two Sicilies, of Jerusalem, Portugal, Granada, Corsica, Navarre, Toledo, Jean, Algarves, Sardinia, Cordova, Valencia, Gallicia, Muscia, Gibralta, the Canary Islands, the East and West Indies, and the Isles and Continents of the Ocean — Philip, Archduke of Austria, Duke of Burgundy, Duke of Brabant, Duke of Milan, Count of Hapsburg, Count of Flanders, Count of Tyrol, Count of Barcelona, Lord of Biscay, Lord of Molina, etc., etc., etc.

"Your arms," Roger cried, "or you die."

The blond giant swung upon Don Bernardino, raising the pistol. Roger saw that the watch was lighted, the striker cocked, and he realized with a gasp that the giant was going to shoot not at him but at the ambassador.

He was about ten feet away. He had his sword in his right fist, his pistol in the left. He threw the pistol.

It struck the giant's pistol, which exploded in that instant. The ball ripped a groove of splinters from the side of the coach, smashing the bright varnish like a mirror. It must have missed the bisque-faced man by less than the thickness of his hand; yet that man did not stir.

Roger dismounted, ran toward the coach. He couldn't understand this, but he knew that whatever had happened the person of Don Bernardino must suffer no injury. The giant drew, swung upon him with a curse undeniably foreign yet seemingly not Spanish. But Roger had no time for further thought.

Instinct prompted him to fight. But even in that amazing moment he did not forget his orders. He tried to keep the giant away, to disarm him without hurting him.

This was not easy. The giant, his face red with fury, charged on, slashing wildly. Roger might easily have run him through, but to trick the sword from his fist was far more difficult. He retreated, his own blade licking in and out, threatening, but meeting with no response from this blind, mad, bellowing bull.

Roger slipped into a low guard, dropped to one knee, made a perfect *stoccata,* slithering under the giant's blade and bringing his point within an inch of the giant's nose. It didn't frighten the fellow a bit, though it should have been apparent to any adversary that Roger could have run him through either eye had he wished to do so. But the giant charged on. Roger, exasperated, stepped back—upon a round stone.

For a fleet instant he lost his balance. The giant's blade shished past his left shoulder, leaving a sudden, intense burn. The giant raised it for another and more accurate stroke. Roger now had no choice. He could not retreat because he was too close, and because his balance was imperfect. Deliberately, if regretfully, he ran the giant through the right shoulder.

This had happened very quickly. Pistol smoke still was mingling with the milky ribbands of fog. Dover Harry and Andrew were pursuing four horsemen down the road toward Plymouth. Fat John was seated upon a stone, holding his right hand over a gunshot wound in his shoulder, and groaning. Bones John and Walter were hurrying toward their captain.

"It was very pretty swordsmanship," drawled Don Bernardino de Mendoza, negligently sniffing at his pomander.

Roger glared at him. Already he disliked this man intensely.

"Pretty! Why, the h u l k i n g fool—" He shook his head. "So that's the Euclidian Spanish rapier play I've heard so much about, eh?"

"Spanish?" Don Bernardino raised his perfectly p l u c k e d eyebrows. "Nay, but why think ye the brute's a Spaniard? 'Tis no flattery to my race, highwayman."

Puzzled, Roger bent over the giant. The fellow was alive, though his eyes were closed. His wound was not a serious one. Probably he was unconscious only from shock—the wind had been knocked out of him by the violence of his fall. Spaniard? No, certainly he was not that.

Bones John and W a l t e r had reached his side.

"Angels of grace!" cried Walter. "That's Van Boomstaat!"

Roger leaned against the coach. He was a little dizzy, not from the fighting but because of this whirl of events. He saw Dover Harry and Walter returning at a casual canter. He saw Don Bernardino flick a speck of dust from his doublet of turquoise Genoa velvet.

"Nay, I know not the scoundrel's name," Don Bernardino said as he

climbed back into the coach, "but by all the saints, I'm a-weary of highwaymen and cutthroats! Even in this land of barbarians, methinks, 'tis an overdose when a traveler is held up twice within the hour. Be assured," he added, leaning out of the coach window, "that you will all hang for it."

CHAPTER 2

BEGGARS OF THE SEA

The Dutchman stirred. Van Boomstaat! There was no more notorious pirate! He was a leader of that band loosely designated as the Beggars of the Sea, sailors without a country, Dutchmen and Huguenots who could not go home. A brotherhood of hate and desperation. In the case of the Dutchmen, Spaniards were the unforgivable enemy. Spaniards who had made the Netherlands an abattoir. Spaniards who, under Philip's lieutenant, the Duke of Alva, had governed with unparalleled cruelty and violence.

Van Boomstaat, like too many of his fellow outlaws, had watched his family cut away behind him. His father and mother, his two sisters and his wife, all had been slaughtered at the command of Alva. Since then Van Boomstaat, ranging the narrow seas, had shown no mercy to Spaniards.

Like the other Beggars he was careful not to attack English ships, however, and for this reason, and because of religious sympathies, these pirates were sometimes permitted to take temporary refuge in English ports, to restock and refit, to water their vessels, purchase gunpowder. Spain complained angrily, and Elizabeth issued orders, but the Beggars nevertheless continued to appear from time to time at Gravesend, Dover, Falmouth, Plymouth.

But none of them ever had gone far from his ship. Was Van Boomstaat's vessel at Plymouth now? Had Van Boomstaat left his deck to turn highwayman—on an English road?

Then Roger remembered that Bernardino Mendoza was a cousin of the Duke of Alva. And immensely rich.

Roger leaned into the coach.

"Now tell me, this man attacked you? He is not of your party?"

Mendoza's features were congealed with arrogance, as though with some colorless paste. He did not even trouble himself to turn.

"Nay, clod, and do you think he looks like a man one of my blood would choose as a coach companion?"

"I am no clod, sirrah!"

Mendoza sniffed at his pomander.

"Doubtless I do your English peasants great hurt by that. I should not class them with masked robbers."

Roger had forgotten the mask. He thumped the windowsill.

"This man kidnaped you! Did he say where he was going to take you, what he was going to do with you?"

For a moment the ambassador did not deign to reply. Then he murmured, "He pointed a pistola at my head and swore that if I showed resistance he would murder me. Sure-

ly I had no thought of blows with such a swine! And my retainers fled. What's more, the gallant guardsmen sent me by her Majesty Elizabeth—these fled also, like great cowards, without striking a true blow!"

Roger thought: Of course they had fled! They had been expecting an attack, and in the fog they didn't stop to distinguish the nationality of their assailants. The deed had been made very easy for Van Boomstaat.

"The fellow's French was such that I could scarce comprehend it," Don Bernardino drawled, "but he blubbered something about taking me to a place along the coast and there transferring me into his vessel."

Andrew cried, "He gets up!"

The blond pirate had risen, and stood swaying. Suddenly, with unexpected liveliness, he flung himself upon a horse and raced down the road toward Plymouth.

"Shall I after him?"

Roger shook his head.

"Nay. He's fresh mounted and our steeds are weary. I make no doubt his men are waiting nearby." He leaned into the coach again. "Were any of your retainers killed?"

The ambassador shrugged.

"Four or five. I could not be certain. I paid little heed to the brawling."

Roger groaned, withdrew. Now, no matter what occurred, he would be blamed. Now the kidnaping was unforgivable, unexplainable. He was tempted to flee with all his men. But Fat John was wounded, his shoulder broken. Besides, they would not be safe anywhere in England. It was best to carry through the original plan.

"Wouldst travel in the coach, John?"

Fat John had lost a lot of blood. His wound had been bandaged, but his face was white as death and wet with sweat. He merely glanced into the vehicle, and withdrew, wrinkling his nose.

"Ride with that perfumed popinjay? Nay, I'll go in saddle!"

Half an hour later they turned into a country lane. The fog had lifted. The breeze was stiffer off the sea, and sharp with the scent of brine. They moved slowly, a cumbrous procession consisting of a Spanish grandee, two led horses, six masked men, three of them slightly wounded and one with a broken shoulder, and a splendid, glittering coach-and-eight.

Weeds cluttered the approach. The house, half-way out on a bleak sandbar in the center of a forgotten bay, was a square, lugubrious structure crazily compounded of slats, stucco, and bricks arranged in herringbone pattern, with narrow blank windows, and many broken chimneys. In front was a dry fountain, centering a sad, neglected park. The wind moaned ghoulishly through the pines and leafless oaks.

The coach jolted to an exhaling, grateful stop. The horses, lost to all sense of grandeur, began to nose among the weeds, not too optimistically. Roger Vambrace dismounted, drew his pistol, stared thoughtfully at the house. He had been assured

that the place would be deserted—but the front door was wide open.

"Andrew, you and Bones John come with me. The rest remain here."

On foot, slowly, they moved toward the place. The front door had been broken open—that was obvious. It could have afforded but little resistance, for it was an ancient portal, and its rusty lock sagged in discouraged fashion. They entered a huge hall, unfurnished and very dim, the floor thick with dust. On the right they heard a curious scuffling sound. Roger cocked the pistol, stalked across the hall, and went into a large, high-ceilinged dining c h a m b e r. He stopped. Bones John and Andrew, immediately behind him, stopped at the same instant; and he heard them gasp.

"Faith of my faith," Andrew muttered. " 'Tis a ghost!"

Roger himself thought so, for a moment. But he didn't move. He stood with feet spread, watching a great wavering shadow.

The thing was full seven feet tall, and very broad. Dark, uncertain of outline, it swayed back and forth. It was making that scuffling sound on the floor, and this fact, more than any other, reassured Roger, for ghosts make no noise with their feet.

Somebody unseen in the deeper shadows of a corner whined, "Pray spare us, good my lords! It'll do ye no harm, I swear it!"

Roger took a step forward. The monstrous shadow appeared to collapse. It became a third its height.

Then Roger began to laugh. For as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness he saw that this was a bear. An uncommonly large bear, shuffling back and forth in the center of the room. A shabby bear, for all its impressive size, with brown coat sadly moulted, spotchy, mangy. On its four feet, it blinked up at Roger for a moment with tiny red eyes, then turned away as though in disgust, ambled to a corner, dropped upon the floor with a dull thump, and went to sleep.

"Pray be merciful, my worships! 'Tis no more than that we were benighted, and lost from a wrong turn, and we found ourselves—"

Roger called, "Come out of there! Come out into the light where I can see you!"

A small fellow in yellow homespun, very dirty, emerged trembling from a corner. He looked an Italian. There were little brass bells in his ears, upon his head a felt cap. He was badly frightened.

"Please, my lords, we were benighted and lost, and we came—"

"Strollers, eh?" Roger was trying to seem stern. "Know ye not the law about those who break into private homes of gentlemen?"

"Worshipful my lords, we were—"

"There must be others. You scoundrels never travel alone, I wot! Where are they, eh? *Speak,* you fool!"

"Nay, I know not! When we heard you coming the others offed it in haste. But my Bruno would never be budged, being nine parts of slumber."

"I'll fetch them!"

Roger went back to the entrance hall. He shouted loudly, raising a multitude of scared echoes which chased themselves back and forth through the remote recesses of the mansion.

"Come forth, s t r o l l e r s! Come forth, else I'll send my men after you with swords and cudgels!"

One by one, quaking, big-eyed with fear, they came—down the grand staircase, out of the kitchen, out of dim closets and hallways. There was a midget with a bright red turban wrapped around his head, and impish, alert, intelligent eyes. There was a man with a lute, one with a rebec, one who carried a long and rusty sackbut. There was a hulking, sullen-eyed fellow with a tattered tome he probably couldn't read—a false scholar, Roger placed him, who walked the highways begging for alms on the pretense that he wished to finish his studies at one of the universities.

"Abraham-men, eh?"

They all started to protest at once. Roger waved them to silence, frowning ferociously, walking up and down in front of them.

"Strollers! Beggars, I wot! Like as not lift purses when there's an opportunity, eh?"

The little man with the turban cried, "Nay, good m'lord, these are practitioners of the fine arts you see before you. Now if your worship would deign to witness an exhibition—"

From somewhere about his fusty person incredibly he had produced six small glass balls, and he started to juggle these. Even in that dim place they flashed bewilderingly. He threw them high, he threw them low, he threw them up from under his knees, he threw them behind his back.

Roger roared, "Stop that!"

The little fellow ceased instantly, and the balls disappeared as though by magic. With extraordinary nimbleness, his feet making only a faint thud as he landed, he performed a backflip. He spread his palms.

"Or mayhap your worship would prefer—"

He started to do cartwheels, without quitting his place in front of Roger. His tiny body whirled around and around, his scarlet turban flashing almost with the speed of the glass balls a moment earlier.

"Stop it, I tell you! It makes me dizzy!"

"That it doth, truly, my lord. But the quickness of the eye is such, in your true artist like me, that whensoever it seemeth to—"

Roger turned on his heel to hide a laugh. He stalked back to the entrance hall. There he found three sacks of food and a keg of ale. He smiled when he noticed that these were obviously ship's stores — hard bread, salted hams and fishes. It was not difficult to guess where they'd come from. One was open, half empty.

"So you've been at your thievery already, eh?"

"Good my lord, there's that about the belly of an artist—"

"Be silent!"

"Yes, m'lord."

He went outside. The others followed him uncertainly. But in truth, Roger himself was uncertain. The smile disappeared from his mouth when he saw the tall, stiff figure of Don Bernardino de Mendoza, and when he saw Mendoza's cold eyes. How he hated that man! He ordered the horses unharnessed and freed: they must keep themselves warm, for the stable in back was a ruins and open on all sides to the air. Gruffly he asked the Spanish ambassador to go inside—and he glowered after the man.

Bones John whispered, "What shall we do with these vagabonds?"

"We must keep them here, for that they've seen the coach."

"The hue and cry will have been raised anyway by the Spaniard's servants who escaped."

"Aye, but none knows we are here—none who shouldn't know. But if the strollers went babbling to a market cross of what they had seen and where they'd seen it, any deputy sheriff would be obliged to come for his own look. Eh, and then what, for us?"

Bones John shrugged. He loosened his mask, took it off for a few minutes now that Don Bernardino was no longer in sight. The masks were becoming irksome.

Roger had them haul the coach around to the rear of the house, where it would not be visible to anybody coming up the lane from the highway. The fact that the strolling minstrels had stumbled upon this place made him realize that others might do the same. Ordinary travelers could be chased away; but if they had seen the great coach, flaunting the Mendoza arms, they would have a tale to tell in the next village. All England, Roger thought grimly, soon would be seeking that coach.

It was as they were returning to the front of the house, after concealing the coach, that they saw one of the minstrels make a dash for the lane.

It was the sackbut player, and he hugged his long instrument to him as he ran.

"Hi!" Roger started after him. "Catch him! He mustn't get away!"

The fellow ran the harder. Like his companions, excepting the little imp in the turban, he had been paralyzed with fright by the masks. Unlike the rest, he now had recovered the use of his limbs.

"Stop!"

Roger dashed around a curve in the lane—and heeled to a sudden stop. The minstrel too had stopped, a few yards ahead of him.

The minstrel, poor, luckless man, must have thought that his evil day certainly had come. Behind him were highwaymen. Ahead, galloping down the lane with their swords bare were a dozen or more wild-eyed Dutchmen.

There was a shot, a terrific explosion. The minstrel caved in the middle as though struck by a great club, and sat down. He toppled over on his side, dead.

Roger's pistol roared, and the nearest Dutchman slid limp as a rag from his horse. The others reined vigorously, cursing. But they hesitated only for a moment; and then Van Boomstaat crowded to the fore, bellowing, and they charged again.

The moment was enough for Roger. He turned, was running back toward the house, chasing Andrew and Bones John and Dover Harry and Walter ahead of him.

They took a stand on the steps leading up to the gaping front doorway. There were eight steps, and they were wide, admitting of three men abreast with ample room for swordplay. Roger and Bones John and Andrew stood in front, the others were behind them. Even Fat John, in an agony of pain, managed to draw with his good arm and to post himself in the second line.

Roger was laughing again. Here was a fight! Here was no sneaking, under-handed business of sham assaults, sham defense.

The Beggars of the Sea dismounted, half falling from their horses, like men unused to the saddle. But they did not pause. Screaming, they dashed to the steps.

For a minute, two minutes, the fight was fast and noisy, and confusing. But though there were fully a dozen of the pirates, they could make the assault only three abreast. And though they carried heavier, shorter blades which might have been effective on a crowded deck, they were no match for the three cool rapier masters who met them.

Two of them tumbled promptly. Roger disarmed one and sent him backward with a hard, choppy head blow. Andrew ran one neatly through the neck.

Bones John slipped, was cut in the leg. Walter stepped forward, his blade ready; but Bones John was on his feet again, yelling defiance.

Van Boomstaat, who alone among the Beggars was armed with a rapier —he had taken it from Don Bernardino—thundered a command to retreat. The Dutchmen backed away, dazed, angry.

"Give us that Papist," cried Van Boomstaat, his face almost purple with rage, "or we'll slice you like pigs!"

Roger smiled behind his mask. He shifted his sword to his left hand, and raised his right hand to his face, placing the thumb firmly against the nose.

"Is that your answer?"

Roger delightedly waggled his fingers. Andrew and Bones John and the others were making the same gesture.

A volcanic roar burst from the pirate chief. "Like pigs!" He ran for the steps again, his rapier brandished high. "I said like pigs!" He reached the third step in one great bound. He didn't even seem to know that his left cheek had been laid open and his left thigh pierced before he brought down his first blow. His weapon crashed through Andrew's guard—and Andrew crumbled, tipped forward, and rolled to the ground, step by step, trailing blood.

Walter stepped forward to take his place. Then Walter backed, feigning fright. The pirate sprang up two steps and raised his blade—and Walter laid open his right arm from elbow to shoulder. The pirate, a look of blank astonishment on his face, fell back.

Because the Dutchmen were lower, it was easier to cut their faces and heads than their bodies. Roger Vambrace, rapier in one hand, dagger in the other, put two of them to flight with bloody cheeks and foreheads. A third seemed about to prove as easy—when a rotten board grated under Roger's foot, and he was pitched forward. He succeeded at least in falling inside of the Dutchman's wild cut, and the two of them thudded to the ground below. Roger rolled swiftly, and got up on one knee, shortening his sword. He was too late. The Dutchman, ignoring him, had bounded up the steps, had run Fat John through the belly when that veteran, stiff with pain, tried to block him, and had raced inside the house.

Roger went after him.

The Dutchman found seven men and a bear in the great dining hall. The bear was asleep, indifferent to battle. Six of the men, apparently strolling minstrels, were crouched in a corner, praying and weeping in fright. The seventh was the one the Dutchman had come for.

Don Bernardino de Mendoza was a fatalist, and a Spanish gentleman to boot. He would not run, or cringe; and weaponless as he was, it would be senseless for him to try resistance. He stood by one of the windows, with scorn the only expression in his black eyes, his hard mouth.

Van Boomstaat had said, "If we can't take him alive, kill him! We would kill him anyway, after we got the ransom!"

The Dutch sailor, then, knew his duty. He advanced upon Mendoza with his cutlass held high, and a sweaty grin slobbering his lips. Mendoza didn't move.

"Alva's kin, eh? Remember that fiend when I—"

Incredibly the thin young highwayman with the long blade was in front of him. He closed his eyes an instant, shook his head. He couldn't understand this. But if he must kill an Englishman first, in order to kill a Spaniard—. He jumped, aiming a blow at the highwayman's head. But he jumped full upon the highwayman's rapier, which slipped into his heart.

Roger withdrew the blade with a jerk.

Mendoza remarked, "It is curious that varlets in this barbarous land should be so clever with the rapier."

Roger was not one who listened meekly when men insulted him. Rage churned in his breast now, rose into his throat, seemed to be choking him like a hot gag.

"Nay, for that you'll answer to me in the field!"

"You address Mendoza, my dear criminal. Mendoza does not engage with highway robbers."

Roger ran outside. The Dutch-

men were backing across the park, around the fountain. Roger flew among them like a madman, cutting and thrusting right and left, cursing, screaming. They broke and ran.

CHAPTER 3

THREE DEAD DUTCHMEN

For all the season, that day was very long. The sun came out about noon, but it was thin and pale, worried-looking, and soon it crawled back behind a cloud and was not seen again. The air grew a little milder. The weathervane atop the stable — the only useful thing about that rotting, rickety structure—pointed persistently south.

Captain Roger Vambrace had organized his following like any commander of a besieged fortress. The Dutchmen had not reappeared, but there was evidence that they lurked among the pines around the first bend of the lane. If the builder of this manor house, whoever he was, had been inspired by tales of feudal warfare, he could not have selected a better defensive site.

The Dutchmen, even to get into the park, would be obliged to cross a strip of sand without any cover but two pine trees—a strip of sand not more than fifteen feet wide. Three or four determined men could hold them there. But a second line was the house itself. The eight steps leading to the front door were steep and wide. To get behind the house, back by the stable, the pirates would have to tread a soggy, marshy lane on the right; on the left the side of the house itself was flush with the shore.

Even if they got back there, surrounded the place, their advantage would be slight. The back windows, like the front ones, were high and narrow, and the back door was firm, well bolted.

Four Dutchmen had not retreated. Three were dead; the fourth, badly wounded, refused to say anything. Fat John was dead. Andrew too. And not a one of the others, Roger himself included, but had suffered some sort of wound.

Yet Roger kept them busy. Don Bernardino, listless, scornful, had retired to a room on the second story, where he had found a comfortable chair, and he sat there sniffing his pomander, disdainfully refusing offers of food. But the others had work to do. Roger kept at least two of his own attendants at the end of the lane, always with naked blades. The third was permitted to sleep. The vagabonds were made to search the mansion thoroughly, and they found two grimy crossbows, three dozen dull heavy quarrels, a couple of pikes, a billhook, two pitchforks, an axe, and some boards suitable for use as clubs. Roger had reloaded his own pistol, and Bones John had found another pistol and some powder and ball upon one of the corpses. To make a sort of barrier, an early obstruction in case of a charge from the lane, the two pine trees were felled in such a way that they stretched across the narrowest part of the sandbar. Roger as-

signed this task to the musicians—the hardest work they'd done, he guessed, in many months.

The bearwarden was too frightened to be of much assistance; the false scholar was surly, slow; but the midget was everywhere, cheerfully finding things, pointing out things—he had wondrously sharp eyes, and remained cool, so that he made a good sentinel.

Roger was afraid of a rush when night came. He permitted himself a few hours of sleep in the afternoon, but he was walking about, examining things, checking things, long before sundown.

The open ocean was not visible, even from the tip of the sandbar—an arm of land blocked it—so that a signal to a passing ship, assuming that some ship did pass, was not possible. That is, it was not possible unless—

"Think ye not we should burn the table, good m'lord! The wind's not strong off the sea now, and methinks the sparks would not fly to the house. But the blaze could be seen for many miles."

It was the midget, unaccountably at Roger's elbow. His beady eyes were upturned in question. But Roger shook his head.

The imp persisted, "It might fetch a sheriff's band."

"That," said Roger grimly, "is why we'll not do it."

"Ah," said the imp.

There was some silence. After a time the imp said casually, "You glance often toward that weathervane, good m'lord."

"You see too much. Stick to your balls, juggler."

"Ah, now that'll I do right merrily, good sir. For see—" he had them out, and was moving them brilliantly in the light of the dying sun—"there's always his art to soothe the soul of the artist. Ah, sir! You are such an artist with the rapier, for I have seen you fight, and so you will understand me! Now I make this ball disappear—"

"You talk too much."

"—And lo, another comes into its place! And another! Now whence come these, and whence do they go?" He had stopped juggling the balls of glass and was making them appear and disappear in an apparently unmoving palm. "Another, sirrah! Still another! And— But stay, what's here? Why, 'tis your own dagger, good m'lord! By all the saints, how ever did *that* come among my tossers?"

Laughing, Roger took it away from him.

"Nay, I know not. I felt nothing that you stole it. But then, I'd said when I saw you first that here was a very pickpocket, eh?"

"An artist, good my lord! No pickpocket, but a true artist!"

"Artist or not, get ye out to the felled pines with that pike, and relieve Walter. He merits sleep, that lad. Two hours of it. Begone!"

The sun, as Roger walked back to the house, was setting upon a weathervane inexorably pointing south.

For one thing Roger was thankful. The Spanish ambassador, who must at

all costs be kept unscratched, had elected to remain aloof and in seclusion, upstairs. Roger was without experience in controlling his temper, and the very thought of that high-chinned fellow made him tingle with rage. He did not blame Mendoza for refusing to fight him. In the Spaniard's eyes he was a mere criminal, a highwayman, adroit with his rapier perhaps but no meet opponent in the field for a grandee of Philip's proud court. But Roger longed to tear off the hateful mask, and to tell the ambassador who he was. Mendoza would not dare to spurn a Vambrace's challenge!

But this was foolishness, a ruffler's fury. Mendoza must not be hurt. And surely Roger, if he valued his life and honor, and the lives and honor of his attendants, must not reveal to Mendoza his identity.

When he prayed that night, alone in the kitchen, it was for the safety and long life of the blessed Queen, for the welfare of Beth and Marian—Were they contented in the care of a strange falconer?—for the souls of Fat John and Andrew, for strength to resist his impulse to kill Don Bernardino de Mendoza, and for a change of wind.

The sound of a shot brought him to his feet. He ran out of the house, across the park, and found Dover Harry waving a smoking pistol to cool the barrel. Bones John and the midget were nearby, squinting into the dark beyond the felled pines.

"Somebody was moving there. The midget saw him first, then John and I. Saw steel. So I fired to affright them."

Roger nodded. The lane showed nothing now. The whole world seemed utterly still. He saw that Harry and Bones John were drooping with weariness, and he told them to remain only a little while longer, and then he would relieve them. He wished to complete his prayers.

He hurried back to the house, went again into the kitchen, and fell to his knees in a prayer for the souls of the three dead Dutchmen.

Then he relieved Bones John and Dover Harry.

"Sleep near the door, with your blades out. There's no need for waking Walter. The pickpocket and I will keep the watch."

"Nay, no pickpocket, good m'lord! If it please your worship—"

"Sh-sh! We're here to watch, not to jabber of roadside tricks!"

Nevertheless, the little fellow was immensely entertaining throughout that vigil. His name, he disclosed, was Mite Wilson. He was not certain whether "Mite" was a real name or a nickname. He'd never known his parents, or any relatives. He prattled in a low voice of his wanderings in all parts of the kingdom, in the Low Countries too. He had wormed his way into many high households—if he could be believed—and had performed before many notables.

"Some day," he boasted, but a shade wistfully, staring out into the darkness, "some day, m'lord, I shall juggle my balls before the Queen's Majesty herself. They tell me she hath a fondness for true art."

"You'll hang from a country gallows before that," grunted Roger.

Yet he hoped that this would not come to pass. He liked the midget, had liked him from the beginning.

Mite Wilson, who seemed to have half the small objects in Devonshire hidden somewhere about his person, presently produced a pack of cards, and with these he did many astonishing, mystifying tricks. But all the while he was watchful. His voice never became loud, and never for long was his gaze taken from the dark of the lane-end. A curious little fellow, he seemed to have the instincts of a watchdog, to *feel* rather than to see or hear signs of danger. And when, toward dawn, he stiffened and was silent, Roger watched him anxiously. Roger himself knew no other reason for alarm.

"What ails you, pickpocket?"

"Nay, I know not, good m'lord. Something's amiss . . . but I do not know what it can be."

"Surely there's naught afoot out there?"

"Nay, not there. But something's amiss. . . . Good m'lord, may I go nosing and learn what it is?"

"Well enough. So that ye go not to sleep but return soon."

"Oh, I'll return!"

He scampered off, a ludicrous little figure of a man, toting a pike twice as tall as himself and almost as heavy.

Roger Vambrace waited, wondering. He looked to the priming of his dag, fastened his mask upon his face again. All desire to sleep had gone out of him, and he was nervously alert. Yet he did not see the midget return, and he jumped a little when the voice came at his very elbow.

"Good m'lord, there are three boats loaded with armed men, coming across the bay!"

Roger pushed him toward the house.

"Awaken everybody, but Harry and Bones John and Walter, first. Send those three to me here. Tell the others to be in readiness for attack, but to remain inside the house till they're summoned."

"They'll remain even then," said Mite Wilson.

With Walter, leaving the other two soldiers at the barrier, Roger encircled the house. There was no moon, and the stars were few, but the sky was paling into dawn and the bay was not altogether dark. Three boats, as the midget had said. Six or seven men in each. Roger and Walter, concealed by a corner of the stable, could distinguish their swords and muskets. They rowed very slowly, bent upon silence.

Roger waited until they were within fifty feet of the shore, and then he fired directly into the nearest boat.

There was a squeal of pain, a loud grunt, a splash. The boat stopped, and the others stopped behind it. Roger and Walter could hear whispers. Roger hastily reloaded the dag, and fired again.

The boats were turned about, and they made for the entrance of the bay.

"From both sides, eh? I tell you, Walter, my Lord Treasurer must be forgiven those months of idle peace, when he thrusts us into such a place!"

The house was fully awake now, but for some time there was no further sign of the Dutchmen. Then a small boat appeared at the entrance of the bay. It did not come within pistol-shot.

Two men, visible in its bow, were sounding with lead-lines. The boat after a time disappeared; and when the dawn was well smeared across the heavens, a pinnace poked her nose into that silent bay.

She was about thirty-eight feet over-all, half-decked, very slight of beam, low; she looked fast. There was a mainsail, partly furled, and a fully furled lateen; but four sweeps a side propelled the craft. She came slowly, ominously.

"A Dutcher," Walter pronounced. He had once sailed the narrow seas—indeed, Roger suspected that he'd done a bit of pirating in his time. "She'd carry twenty men, maybe more."

"Guns?"

"I make out a brace of perier slings forward. Iron pieces. Two-pounders, likely, or two and a half. They throw stone-shot."

The pinnace remained at a safe distance. An anchor chain rattled, and the sweeps were withdrawn. Roger observed that she was so placed that a ball shot from her, should it miss the house, or go over the house, would not carry in the direction of the lane. The three small boats trailed her as tenders.

Mite Wilson came on the run, did a handspring.

"Good my lord, they call for you by the barrier!"

Bones John and Dover Harry reported a voice beyond the bend, a voice calling for the leader of the Englishmen. Nobody was in sight.

John yelled, "Have out your message, Beggars! He's here!"

The voice came clear enough. A deep, booming voice, a Low Country accent, but the words were pronounced slowly and with care.

"The worshipful Captain Otto Van Boomstaat calls upon the chief of the highwaymen to give up his Spanish prisoner. An he does this, he nor any of his men shall be harmed. An he doth not, we will open fire upon him from the sea, and show no quarter in assault."

Roger smiled a tight smile. His men were looking at him; but they might have guessed the answer; for had not the Queen's Majesty herself, eyes flashing under that extraordinary wig of red, commanded that the person of Don Bernardino be kept from injury?

Roger cupped his hands.

"Inform the worshipful captain that my answer is the same—excepting that this time it shall be done with both hands, sirrah!"

There must have been some signal system between shore and pinnace, for the first gun spoke not fifteen minutes after this colloquy. The ball, or stone, tore through the top of the

tiny stable tower, filling the air with rotten splinters. Roger, who had been indoors at the time, hurried to the back of the house to find that the weathervane had been shot away, and, idiotically still upright, now reposed upon the roof of Don Bernardino's glittering coach.

Another shot came soon after. It was lower, and ripped through the stable, which offered no real resistance to it. The shot missed a corner of the house by scant inches and buried itself with a squdgy plop into the far shore of the bay.

Don Bernardino called from an upstairs window, "Another kidnaping, my dear criminal?"

Roger did not answer. He did not trust himself to speak to the ambassador again.

Four more shots were fired, with solider results. One scraped the roof, but each of the others tore into the house itself. One passed through both sides of Don Bernardino's coach, leaving neat holes, before it reached the house.

The musicians, the bearwarden and the false scholar had taken refuge in the wine cellar. Mite Wilson scurried back and forth, from front to back, from back to front, and in and out of the house repeatedly, with messages and information. He was entirely cool. He even paused occasionally to perform a backflip or a split, and much of the time he was singing a bawdy song under his breath.

Roger, whose chief concern was that the ambassador would be struck, kept only one man in the rear as a watch, and stationed the others in front, for it was from the front that the attack would come, he thought.

Once Roger went halfway up the grand staircase. His face was grim, his mouth tight; his eyes were almost closed.

He called, "The wine cellar is the safest place."

"Then run there and hide, my dear criminal."

"But the wine cellar would be safer than up there!"

He waited for a little while, but there was no answer to this second appeal. He went downstairs again.

For almost an hour there was no further shooting. Roger at first supposed that the pirates were merely permitting their perier barrels to cool. Then, after a time, he realized that they were waiting for him to surrender. They were confident that the breathless silence would do more to batter the courage of himself or his men than the very banging of the guns. They expected to see Don Bernardino start down that lane at any moment.

Well, they'd be disappointed! The suspense was horrible, but there were no steadier soldiers anywhere than Walter and Bones John and Dover Harry. And even the midget, grotesque little fellow though he was, and certainly useless in a real battle, showed no trace of panic, but hummed and warbled his way here and there as though this were Coronation Day on a village green with

business of the best and good wine flowing free.

Boom! The kitchen door showed a sudden hole, jagged at the edges, and the kitchen floor became thick with wood splinters. *Boom!* A chimney seemed to dissolve—but a moment later the bricks were rattling upon the roof or splashing one by one into the waters of the bay.

There was a pause for reloading. Roger started outside, to join the two men at the barrier. Mite Wilson skipped eagerly at his elbow.

Boom!

Roger stopped, jerked his head up.

"That was close," he muttered.

From the house came a strange sobbing sound, high and shrill, a broken squeal of pain. He frowned, puzzled. Even the imp, with his ageless, shrewd face, appeared to be mystified.

Then the explanation came to both of them at once. The bear!

Roger spun about, raced for the house. When he burst into the entrance hall he saw a curious and terrifying sight.

The latest shot from the pinnace had been a lucky one. It had passed directly into a rear window, whistled through the kitchen, shredded off a corner of a door jamb, ricocheted upon the floor of the common room, and skipped clear across the dining room, to bury itself into the panelling on the far side of that great chamber. Just before it had come to rest it had torn a groove of hide from the back of the sleeping Bruno.

For all this time the bear had been asleep. What to it were cannonading and the running-about of stupid men? However, when the shot scraped it, hot and lacerating, Bruno awoke in a rage. Now it was not the tame bear of the market-place, a creature to walk about waving its forepaws, keeping time to the melodies of treble viols, bringing coppers to the hat of its master.

Now it was again a beast of the deep forest, instinct with the hatred of humankind, a thing made mad by pain. Blind and unreasoning, it had gone into the entrance hall, had stumbled upon the bottom step of the grand staircase, and started up.

It was halfway up the stairs when Roger entered the house below. And at the head of the staircase, his face for once showing some expression, his eyes huge in amazement and perhaps even in fear, stood Don Bernardino de Mendoza. He had come from his room to learn, like Roger, the reason for those curious noises.

The bear saw him. Mendoza this time did not stand cold and fearless. Instead he ran. The bear ran after him.

And Roger ran after the bear.

Roger didn't have his pistol. Both pistols, at his command, were kept at the barrier in anticipation of a charge down the lane. He had only his sword and dagger. These weapons were out by the time he had reached the head of the stairs.

Mendoza had jumped into an empty bedchamber, was trying to close and lock the rusty-hinged door. Bruno rose upon his hind legs, fell

against the door before the ambassador could shoot the bolt. The door was flung open, slamming back against the wall, and Mendoza was hurled upon his back in the middle of the room. Bruno waddled toward him, preparing to fall upon him. Bruno's little eyes were red with rage; its forepaws waved wildly, seeking something to rend.

The rapier went in, came out. Bruno turned. The rapier went in again, came out again; and Roger sprang back. He wasn't quite quick enough. One swipe of the left forepaw sent the rapier spinning from his hand, and it clanged against the wall on the far side of the chamber. Bruno, nine hundred pounds of blood and saliva and bunched muscle, thudded forward with amazing speed. Roger sprang further back, slashing with his dagger. It caught and tore a forepaw. The other forepaw shot out. Roger ducked. The blow was a glancing one because of his movement, but it felt to him like the stroke of a sandbag. He crashed to the floor, and the room rocked, and black and red specks did an insane reel before his eyes. Dimly, as though through a pinkish haze, he saw the beast shuffle toward him; but he was too weak, too dizzy, to stir.

Then Bruno dropped—but sideways. And Bruno was still.

CHAPTER 4

THE BROKEN BLADE

Roger Vambrace rose very slowly, very carefully, for the room still rocked like the deck of a ship, and sometimes it moved back and forth in choppy arcs. He approached the bear from behind, gingerly prodded it, examined it.

Yes, it must be dead. One of the sword thrusts must have found the heart, and nothing but the tremendous vitality of the beast enraged by pain had carried it so far.

"Even the animals in this swines' homeland assault me."

Don Bernardino de Mendoza was on his feet, cool and assured again, brushing dust from his turquoise doublet. Unless perchance his buttocks had been bruised in the fall, he was unhurt.

"D'ye suppose the bear too had turned kidnaper, eh, my criminal?"

Roger stood with his feet widespread, waiting for his head to clear, trying to control his tongue. In back, the perier spoke again. *Boom!* The house shuddered, and there was a screech of agonized woodwork.

Roger said carefully, "No man has ever called me a criminal and a churl and a varlet, and then refused to face me in the field."

The Spaniard shrugged.

"A Mendoza does not engage with masked highwaymen."

"Nay, you know full well I'm no highwayman! I'm of blood as old as yours!"

Now the Spaniard smiled slowly—a thin, chilly smile.

"As to the blood, I cannot know. But I'd suspected that roadwork was not your customary vocation."

"'Tis unlikely we'll either come out

of this alive," Roger said bluntly. "They will rush us from both sides at any moment now, and fight as we may the place will fall. Three times, my fine grandee, I have saved your life, and I'm as sick of that as you are of being kidnaped. Now, was I to prove to you that my blood is gentle—"

He paused.

The Spaniard, his eyes narrow slits of blackness, nodded.

"Were you to prove that, then methinks it likely I would enjoy cutting you to ribbands."

"Good!" Roger clapped one hand upon the purse at his belt, where he carried his signet rings and other articles of jewelry which would identify him. His other hand went to the fastening of his mask. "Then know ye, Spaniard, that I am—"

Two pistol shots. Another. And another.

"Hi-*yee!* Captain! Captain! They come!"

Roger tossed a single word over his shoulder. "Later!" His mask remained upon his face, his rings in his purse, as he ran down the stairs out of the house.

The heavens appeared to have rained pirates. They were vaulting the barrier, running across the park. Bones John was down, and Walter and Dover Harry each was engaged in desperate combat with three or four yelling Beggars.

"Hi-*yee!*"

He met the first Dutchman as he ran around the fountain. With scarcely a break in his stride he stepped left, avoiding a cut, and sank his blade into a soft, giving body. A blade struck his neck, but with the flat. He spun around, slashing. Now he had two pirates in front of him, now one, now suddenly three. He saw open mouths, wild-staring eyes, beyond the blades. He did not dare to use the point in this position, but cut and slashed like any Channel pirate himself. The teachings of Marozzo and Manciolino were useless here; but the trained eye, and the quick wrist, were faithful companions in time of need.

One Dutchman went to his knees, dropping his cutlass, holding both hands to a red pulpy throat, while he coughed a great gush of blood which sprang out of him as though delighted to be released.

The other two stepped back, awed.

Roger saw Captain Van Boomstaat racing for the house. Roger forgot the two Dutchmen who faced him, and started after the Captain.

One pirate thought quickly, stepped forward, his cutlass raised. For an instant, as he turned to run, Roger was fully exposed. But the pirate fell back, shrieking with pain, when a huge, rusty pike was slammed against his shinbones. A preposterous little figure, scarcely four feet tall, scuttled away like a mouse.

Two other pirates reached the front door just behind Van Boomstaat, just in front of Roger. Roger cut one of them down, but the other struck him with a cudgel. The blow sent Roger spinning through the doorway. He tried to straighten, lift his sword. The

cudgel fell again, from behind him.

Roger went to one knee. But he rose, ignoring the man with the cudgel. He started up the stairs after Van Boomstaat. The ambassador! The ambassador must not be hurt!

Abruptly the world went black. He could see nothing, hear nothing save a terrible roar; yet for a little time he could feel his body, as though it were padded, not hurting him, thump gently down from a step to step.

When the blackness faded, and the roaring softened in his ears, he staggered to his feet again. Everything was curiously quiet. He made his way out of the house, around to the back. He saw two small boats moving toward the pinnace. In one of these, erect and scornful, with the pirate chief looming above him, stood Don Bernardino de Mendoza, representative of his Most Catholic Majesty Philip II, by grace of God, King of Castile, King of Leon, King of Aragon, of the Two Sicilies—

It did not seem amazing to Roger that he still gripped his own rapier. Nor that he was brandishing it, and wildly yelling wild threats, as he waded out into the water.

From one of the boats a laugh drifted back. The men still aboard the pinnace already were unfurling her sails, and the canvas appeared white and sweet in the sunlight, while Captain Roger Vambrace, waist-deep in water, yelled and screamed, waving his sword.

From behind him. "Hi, what's this? What make ye here?"

Roger didn't turn at first. He had heard the voice; but he was intent upon one thing only—the fact that the ambassador was lost.

"Get in there, Tom, and fetch the fellow. He's gone mad, I wot!"

Then Roger turned.

There were fourteen or fifteen men on the shore near the stable. All were armed, and obviously all were sailors. Roger never had seen any of them before, but he recognized the leader from descriptions. Anybody in England then would have recognized this leader.

A short man, thick-set, but round and firm and solid. He had little hands, little feet, yet his chest was a tun for girth. His face was very red, and his trig beard was bright red too, which served to make his eyes seem the bluer. He was bravely clad in dark purple silk slashed and paneled in peach, and his doublet was thick with gold lace, studded with rosettes of pearl. A silver whistle hung by a silver chain around his neck.

Roger splashed back to the shore, trying to run, almost falling forward in his haste.

He gasped: "The ambassador!"

"Aye, the ambassador. Where is he?"

Roger waved, panting.

"Van Boomstaat! They're taking him aboard! The ambassador!"

Francis Drake never was one for slow decision, for the wasting of time in crises. He had come to this re-

mote house in the expectation of supervising some solemn mummery, of chasing off Englishmen whose names he didn't wish to know and whose faces he didn't wish to see, of soothing the ruffled feelings of a grandee from Madrid. He had found a shambles, a park littered with dead and dying men, some in masks, some clearly Dutch sailors. He had found a house splintered and shredded by shot; a coach as full of holes as any Swiss cheese, and crazily surmounted by a weathervane; a young man wet with blood and sweat and sea water, who waved a bloody rapier and screamed something about the ambassador.

He didn't hesitate. Van Boomstaat, eh? It explained much. He had been wondering about the babbled tales told by those hysterical servants at Plymouth. The attack, from what was comprehensible in their stories, had been altogether too realistic. But Van Boomstaat? Ah!

There was a single rowboat left. Roger had not even noticed it.

"Tom! Watts! Crocker! Big Ned! at those oars! Hixon at the rod, Walsh and Little Ned with him! Nay, that's the sum, lest we sink the tub. The rest of you strip and swim it!"

Somehow Roger scrambled aboard. His rapier still in his right fist, his dagger in his left, he stood at the bow of that leaky, absurd little craft, alongside of England's greatest admiral.

"Straight for her, Hixon! Pull, you Devon hunks! Was it babies I picked? Pull!"

The anchor was up, and the pinnace was moving, but very slowly. Frantic men were shaking loose her sails. The lateen was fully spread, and filling. The mainsail rose jerkily. There was no time to man the sweeps, for Van Boomstaat had thrown into this fray every member of his crew, and these fellows had barely regained the pinnace when the rowboat navy was upon them. The waist rail was low, and Drake's men swarmed over it without a shout, but swiftly, efficiently. You knew that they had done this before. And Captain Drake himself, as in the past, was the first to go aboard.

With the battle, which was chiefly forward, Roger Vambrace had nothing to do. He made for the half-deck cabin, into which a moment before he'd seen a turquoise doublet disappear.

It was so much like a scene the previous morning on the highway outside of Plymouth! There was Don Bernardino, tall, erect, scorning to plead for quarter. There was Otto Van Boomstaat, a pistol in one hand, a sword in the other—and the pistol pointed at Don Bernardino. Van Boomstaat pulled the trigger.

The striker fell without a flash. The priming was wet.

Van Boomstaat lifted his sword—but Roger Vambrace was upon him by that time. There was no room for a stroke, a slash. The pirate thrust full-length. Roger lifted the blade with his own, out and away, and ran Van Boomstaat precisely through the heart.

He stared across the body at the Spaniard.

"And you still wear a mask," Don Bernardino whispered.

Roger took the mask off. He took the sword from Van Boomstaat's fist, the swordbelt and dagger from Van Boomstaat's waist; and these he returned to Mendoza.

"You'll meet me now," he said.

He didn't wait for an answer. He turned and went out on deck. He was not certain what he sought, but it seemed altogether natural to find Mite Wilson crouched in the rowboat which had brought England's greatest admiral to this pinnace. How the midget had contrived to get aboard, in the confusion, Roger didn't ask. But he didn't wonder about it.

"Hi!" he addressed the little man.

"Good m'lord?"

"Take the oars and wait for us. We'll return in a moment."

He went back into the cabin.

"Come."

"Your face is not unhandsome, and your swordplay is good for a mere Englishman, but I have not yet learned whether—"

"I'll enlighten you on the way. Come."

They were not noticed. Francis Drake and his men were calling upon the last bitter group of pirates to surrender. Drake's men were still climbing into the pinnace, but these newcomers emerged Triton-like from the very water itself, dripping, shivering, shaking the brine from their eyes; they had cutlasses clenched in their teeth.

When the small boat was halfway to the shore, somebody aboard the pinnace started to shout. But the three paid no attention to this. Mite Wilson was rowing. Roger was dumping the contents of his purse into Don Bernardino's lap. Observe! The signet ring, bearing the family martlet. The arms and crest upon this enamel plaque, the motto, too. Normans who had come over with William and had been great nobles even then. Lived there anybody from Madrid who dared to deny a Vambrace the satisfaction of arms? Don Bernardino tucked the purse, trinkets and all, into his own belt.

"It is well that I know at last who you are," he said coldly. "Should we perchance be prevented from fighting, 'twill identify you for the public hangman."

"We'll not be prevented from fighting! There's nobody ashore able to stop us, and we'll measure blades within the next two minutes!"

Mite Wilson didn't say a word.

They sprang from the rowboat. They walked across the stable yard, passing Don Bernardino's battered, chipped, smashed coach, still glittering in some places with its bright varnish. The weathervane showed very silly perched on the coach roof; its arm was broken, and with dogged persistence it continued to point south, though in fact the wind had been full from the north these past three hours.

The blades were measured. Each

was exactly 45½ inches, exceptionally long. Don Bernardino's, a Toledo, was slightly heavier, the hilt being encrusted with gemmery. Roger's was his favorite, a gray Bilbo.

"Here before the fountain? Will that suit your haughtiness?"

" 'Tis somewhat overthick with bodies, but 'twill serve." Don Bernardino was tucking in the cambric at his cuffs. "And indeed, Englishman, any place would be a good place to kill you."

"On guard, sir!"

The Spaniard saluted ceremoniously, while Roger, his blade poised, his dagger in position, waited motionless as a rock. Finally they clinked weapons.

Roger had been hot, for all that the day was December 13, but now a cold hand seemed to stroke the sweat from his limbs and body. His muscles relaxed, and excitement went out of him. His head no longer throbbed. His mind was as chilly and clear as a mountain pool.

He had heard much of the Spanish swordsmen, followers or direct pupils of the celebrated Geronimo de Carranza, who were exact and unhurried, mathematically certain of each move. He had known, somehow, from their very first meeting, that Mendoza would prove a true master. The man was long and steely, without an ounce of loose flesh. He held his dagger at his left hip, his rapier far advanced with the point directed at Roger's face. He began to take little steps, now to the right, now to the left.

Roger beat the motionless blade in front of him, half-lunged. The Spaniard flicked his wrist, and steel burned Roger's right forearm. He must be careful. The Spaniard resumed those mincing steps, like a man eager to break into dance. He moved around and around Roger, but his blade was motionless. Roger moved with him.

Again Roger went in. Again that flick of the wrist. This time Roger dropped his guard, caught the Toledo with one of his quillons. But it had been close.

Dangerous as a viper, this Don Bernardino. Don't try to feint, don't hope to bully him. He was coming forward now with minute cat-steps, his point unwavering. Roger watched that point, fascinated. It dropped swiftly. It rose. From a high tierce it slid in over Roger's blade.

Roger stepped back, caught the Toledo on his dagger. In affairs of honor against lesser swordsmen, Roger sometimes had scorned to use his dagger at all, both defending and attacking with his rapier. Now he was glad to have the shorter blade. There had been an instant when he might have crossed left, flicked a *stramazzone* to the Spaniard's chin. But that would be petty fighting, fancy fighting. What was a chin cut? Roger's point must have but one target, and that the heart. Nothing less. Nothing else would divert him.

Little Wilson, squatting by the fountain, watched all this with brilliant, beady eyes. He never said a word or made a sound.

Incredibly, inexplicably, Don Bernardino tried the same downthrust a

second time. Possibly he did this for the very reason that it would prove unexpected? Well, it did. Yet Roger was prepared against it. He caved his body, passed his left foot over, caught the Toledo on his dagger . . . Don Bernardino gasped, sprang back, trying to cross with his dagger to bring his rapier into defense line again. But Roger had streaked into a low, full lunge. His sword hand was higher than his head. His point perfectly found its mark on the left side of the Spaniard's breast—and snapped!

"*Mother of angels!*"

They fell back, both of them, Roger waving his broken blade, cursing wildly, and Mendoza dead-pale in silence. Men were pelting across the park, shouting, rushing between them. Mite Wilson danced up and down screaming, "He wears a brigandine! He wears a brigandine!"

Captain Drake himself pushed Roger back. Roger was storming, "You saw it, sir! The man's mailed beneath his doublet! You saw it! I had him full to the heart, and the blade scraped mail!"

He would have charged with his stump of a rapier, but Drake and others dragged him back into the house.

Roger dropped upon a step. It was inside of the house, in the dim entrance hall. He put his elbows on his knees, took his head between his hands, stared through tears of mortification at the broken sword which lay at his feet.

No sword left. Not even a sword! His good men all were gone—old-time cutthroats, yet withal soldiers of whom any captain in Christiandom might be proud. All were gone. Bones John and sighing Fat John, and Andrew and Walter, and laughing Harry of Dover. His sword was gone, and his soldiers. His honor. No doubt his life too—for he would be safe nowhere in England. Mendoza had seen him, heard his name. More, Mendoza had his rings with the Vambrace coat armor engraved upon them. Even the rings were gone, the plaques. Even his purse.

"Good my lord—"

The little fellow with the bright red turban. What was his name? Oh, yes—Wilson. Mite Wilson. He sat at Roger's feet like a faithful dog, looking up with troubled eyes. Roger nodded gravely to him.

"Yes, pickpocket?"

"Is it—do you worry about—about the purse?"

Roger shrugged.

"Aye, it contains my signets. But 'tis not merely that—"

The midget was fumbling in the folds of that all-containing garment, and soon he handed Roger the purse, filled as before.

"In the ado—When they came shouting there—I—I—It was a thought mayhap you'd wish this back, eh?"

"It was a good thought," Roger said, accepting the purse with a smile, "and I thank you for it—Mite."

After a time Drake appeared. He stood with his feet widespread, his

fists upon his hips, shaking his head as he stared down at Roger.

"We hauled the coach around, hitched the horses. His ambassadorship is sent on his way, with most of his servants too, for they'd trailed me a mile or two behind from Plymouth. So he's up for London. Methinks he'll not chatter overmuch about this outfalling, captain, for that he knows we all saw him wearing a brigandine while engaged in an affair of honor. And lucky for you that he did! It spares your neck, sirrah!"

"Nay, methinks my neck'll be hemped withouten it."

" 'Tis a certainty England's no place for you. And I cannot offer to take you to the continent, for I must away tonight while the wind holds."

"They'd pursue me to the continent. They'd pursue me anywhere, while the scandal's hot in the land."

Drake said softly, "The Indies, Captain, are a many long mile off."

"Eh?"

"Certs, Burghley will shed no tears if you do not return. A courtier could carry to him a letter of explanation which would reach London sooner than our fine-feathers ambassador. I've heard of you, Captain Vambrace, and methinks in what I'm about to adventure I could find full use for such a man."

"I haven't even a sword!"

"I have a hold filled with them."

"Nay, but I've no apparel!"

"I carry sixty-four doublets with trunk hose to match, but doubtless these would be not large enough. But I'd not trouble on that score. Spanish clothes are full in the fashion now, and methinks it likely we can soon supply you with many of these."

"My soldiers are dead! I've none to attend me! As a gentleman—"

There was a timid, eager tug at his sleeve. "Good m'lord—"

Mount Edgcumbe was afire from the sunset when the *Pelican,* 100 tons, 18 guns, Captain-general, Francis Drake, dropped down Plymouth Sound for the open sea. Her name soon was to be changed to the *Golden Hind.* Close behind her, neatly in line, were the *Elizabeth,* the *Marigold,* the *Swan,* the *Benedict.* They were not going to Alexandria for currants.

Far back of the hill, spurring to the eastward in front of a fan-shaped cloud of dust, a messenger carried a letter addressed to Lord Treasurer Burghley. Somewhere on that same road too was a weighty, cumbrous, ball-pocked coach drawn by eight horses, and in it a grandee of Spain chewed his lower lip in seething but soundless fury.

Roger Vambrace leaned against the poop rail, within sight of the waist where a quick-voiced midget, the center of a crowd, was doing astounding things with glass balls.

"Nay, not trickery, but art! True art is this, as the Queen's Majesty herself said to me when I performed before her last month. Observe this ball. Ah! where is it now? And here's another—but where hath it gone? My conscience! Who among ye will wager a ha'penny that this ball will disappear in less time than any bird can wink its eye, eh?"

Hank Weaver owned the town. Nobody sat in his chair and when he spoke the rest of us shut up. That's how it was. And then a lanky guy came riding down the road plucking on a banjo . . .

They Named It BANJO

by
ELI
FAIRCHILD

FUNNY NAME for a town, ain't it? Banjo, Wyoming. It ain't much to look at now, but back in those days, when we named it, it was quite a place. Cattle center for this whole section of the Territory, bustlin' and brimmin' over with the newness of the land and as rough and lawless as any place west of the Mississippi.

Folks thought some day Banjo would be a big place—mebbe big even as Cheyenne—but it didn't work out that way. The cattle boom died out and then the big blizzard kinda finished it off and if it hadn't been for the railroad comin' through here I reckon it would have been a ghost town long ago.

But as I say, in those days Banjo was quite a place, bustin' out with energy and the newness, before the land became overgrazed and the drought set in. Reckon I'm the only hombre left who remembers why we named it Banjo. May sound funny to you, but it's a right and fittin' name.

Like to hear how we happened to name it that? Pull up a chair, son. It's a kinda peculiar story.

A bunch of us were sittin' on the porch of the Palace Saloon—used to be right across the street there, 'fore it burned down ten-twelve years ago. It was a drowsy Sunday morning an' most of the decent folks was at church. The town was half asleep in the July heat. Seemed like the whole land was dozin' like a dog in the sun, like the whole land was a church, it was so quiet. We sat there jawin' lazily and the only motion in sight was the horses at the tie-rack swishin' their tails at the flies.

I recollect there was Doc Silvers of the Bar Q, Jim Hawyer down from Applegate's, and Roge Billings, Alec Masters, Bill Haskins and his son, Jake Foster of the Star, and some others.

And of course, sittin' in the arm chair by the door was Hank Weaver, his fat belly hangin' over his belt and his little beady eyes seein' everything an' him not sayin' much, just listenin', mebbe pullin' now and then at his scraggly mustache.

Nobody ever sat in that chair but Weaver. If he wasn't around, mebbe some one would sit in it. But it would be nervous sittin', 'cause mebbe Weaver would show up an' he didn't like anybody sittin' in his chair. There was never any question. It was Weaver's chair. He owned it just like he owned most of the land and some of us.

Nobody knew just how it came about. It was so slow and gradual, like a hand slowly closing around your throat. Weaver owned the biggest ranch around, the Anchor B, and most of our herds could have been added to his and you'd never have noticed his was any larger. He added to his range now and then, when he saw a piece of land he wanted, and if he couldn't buy it he'd get it some way or other and he wasn't exactly gentle about it. Mebbe he'd fence you in, or mebbe you'd find your herd ain't growin' like it should. Or mebbe, like he did to the Hendersons, he'd just tell you he'd give you two weeks to be somewhere else.

'Course it wasn't right, but in those days it didn't matter so much whether a thing was right or wrong. If the other hombre had the drop on you or was bigger and stronger than you, he was right if he said you were a Crow Injun. The law? Bless you, young feller, Weaver *was* the law!

He'd come down to the Palace every Sunday morning, sometimes alone and sometimes with one of his hands. He'd settle his bulk into his chair and we'd be quiet for awhile to see if he'd have anything to say. If he didn't say anything, we'd begin to jaw but if he opened his mouth the jabber would stop like it'd been cut off with a knife. I don't reckon he enjoyed our company any. He just liked to come down and throw his weight around and sense the fear we all had of him. Mostly he didn't say anything, just sittin' there, his big body fillin' the chair and then some, his little pig eyes looking out over the town as if he owned it—and he pretty near did. Close my eyes and I can see him, sittin' there braidin' a rope with his hands big as hams, an' the rest of us nervous, ready to jump if he said anything, hatin' him but scared to death to do anything about it.

This particular Sunday mornin' I'm tellin' you about, Weaver came down alone. Mebbe if he hadn't, things would've been different, but anyway, he came alone. We was sittin' there, not knowin' why we came, just sittin' there, listenin' to the quiet and jawin' a little.

We all heard it about the same time, I reckon. A clear silvery young voice, so faint and far-off it just bare-

ly broke the silence. Couldn't tell where it was comin' from. Seemed mebbe it was comin' from the sky, singin' so sweet and clear and the twang of a banjo with it. We all stopped talkin' and listened an' even Weaver raised his eyes. The song crept closer to us and then up at the far end of the street we saw him.

He was a young feller, sittin' straight as an arrow aboard a sorrel. His hat was tilted back on his head and he sang, pluckin' a banjo slung over his shoulder with a cord. His bed-roll was lashed behind his saddle and he looked as if he'd come a long way, judging from the white alkali dust that'd settled on him.

Anyway, he came down the road towards us, singing to himself as though he was a long day's ride from anybody.

"As I was lumb'ring down de street,
Down de street
Down de street
(plunk, plunk)
A handsome gal I chanced to meet
Oh! she was fair to view."
(plunk, plunkety-plunk, plunk)

His voice had a sort of plaintiveness to it and it gave me a good feelin' just to listen to it, the same kind of a feelin' I used to get when the range began to show green in the early spring and the country seemed about to bust with growin'. The young feller meandered down the road, the sorrel's hooves puffin' up little clouds of dust with each step, until he was in front of the Palace.

"Buffalo gals, can't you come out tonight,
And dance by the light of de moon?"
(plunk, plunk)

He gave a last twang at the banjo, pushed it around so it hung on his back, and grinned at us.

"Mornin', gentlemen," he said.

His face was a dark brown, not an Injun-brown but the dark tan you get from ridin' the range in all kinds of weather. His eyes were the bluest I ever seen, twinklin' with good-humor, and out from under his hat poked a few strands of red hair. He sat there easy-like, grinnin' friendly at us. He was tall and kind of lanky, not the lankiness of growin' up too fast but just loose and relaxed, lookin' like quick, smooth action waitin' to be needed.

None of us realized it, I don't guess, but we all waited for Weaver to reply. When he didn't, Doc Silvers said "Mornin', stranger," so quiet-like it sounded surly, since we knew if Weaver didn't reply, none of us should.

He swung down off the sorrel and looped the reins over the rack.

"Hope I didn't bother you none with my singin'," he said. "Sure like to sing. 'Specially on a mornin' like this."

He stood at the bottom of the steps.

"Name's Kennedy, but most folks just call me Banjo."

He looked from one another of us and now I think of it we must have been a sight, wanting to be friendly

and not daring to without some approval from Weaver, and our faces showing it. He was such a clean-cut lookin' young feller and his voice had been so young and fresh, I reckon I said what I said without thinkin' much about it.

"Why, no, Banjo," I said. "Reckon your singin' is 'bout the purtiest thing we've heard around here in some time."

Weaver grunted. He just grunted but he put into it scorn and contempt you couldn't miss. Banjo looked at him, steady, and the grin faded from his face.

"What's the matter, mister?" he asked. "Don't you like music?"

Weaver stared back at him, his jaw clamped hard and a sneer half hidden under his mustache. When I thought about it afterward I figgered Weaver liked his singin' just as much as we did. But *because* we did, he reckoned he'd set Banjo down some and show his authority, put Banjo in his place and at the same time set us down a little more firmly. Partly it was this, I reckon, but also it was just his plain, cantankerous orneriness. He stared back at Banjo, his little eyes hard and shiny.

"What do you mean," he grunted, his voice raspy, "comin' into town and breakin' the Sabbath with your damn caterwaulin'?"

Comin' from Weaver, this was kind of funny. Sunday was just another day to him. Banjo stared back at him, his face solemn. He looked like the sort of feller who wouldn't dodge trouble if it came his way, but he wouldn't go out of his way to meet it, either. I judged him right, 'cause his face slowly broke into a grin.

"Well," he remarked, "if you ain't the most unmusical feller I ever run into. But," he continued, "everybody can't like music—I ride a sorrel, mebbe you ride a paint. Sorry if I bothered you, mister." He moved up the steps. "Reckon I'll get a drink. Sun's been mighty hot and singin' sure dries out my throat."

Banjo didn't know it but this was just the sort of thing Weaver didn't know exactly how to handle. It wasn't hard to set somebody down who fronted up to him, but when a feller grinned and gave him an easy, joshin' answer it left him sort of strung up in midair—there wasn't really anything to hit back at.

He waited until Banjo was on the porch, and then he swung around in his chair and jammed his leg across the doorway and brought Banjo up sharp.

"I said I didn't like your caterwaulin'. I don't like your face nor the way you talk, neither. Suppose you git back on that horse and mosey along."

Banjo looked down at his leg, kinda surprised-like, and then looked at Weaver. When he answered, his voice was very gentle and soothin'.

"I said I was sorry my singin' bothered you, mister. As for my face, I don't reckon there's much of anything I can do about that, seein' as tastes vary so much."

Banjo jerked up the toe of his boot and caught Weaver's leg just under

the knee. He hoisted up and Weaver, caught off balance on his tilted-back chair, came crashing down on his back with a jolt that shook the breath from his body and jarred the porch.

"But I sure would like to have a drink."

He stepped over Weaver and entered the saloon. Weaver lay there, his big belly workin' up and down as he gasped for breath and his face gettin' red from the effort. He struggled over on his hands and knees, after a bit, and got to his feet. We kinda backed off from him, like we expected him to explode or something. His face was twisted with rage, and little bits of foam flecked his lips as he sucked in air. He steadied himself against the wall for a moment and then when his wind was comin' normal again, he kicked open the door.

We all ducked down. It wasn't healthy, in those days, to be standin' upright when you expected gunplay. A forty-five slug would go through those thin board walls like paper. Roge Billings and Jake Foster slithered off the porch and made tracks for the other end of town. They did the smart thing, no doubt of it, but they sure missed a show. The rest of us eased along the porch until we were under the windows and then raised our heads up real slow, wishin' our eyes were set in the top of our foreheads so we wouldn't have to expose so much valuable skin.

Banjo was leanin' against the bar with his back to the door, pourin' whiskey into a glass. He didn't even turn around when Weaver kicked the door open. The bartender backed away until he was up against the bottle racks and then he flattened himself against them like he wished he could get into one of the shelves. Weaver had his hand on his six-gun and if he hadn't known we were watchin' through the window, I believe he would've drilled Banjo in the back, then and there.

"You! You there!" he roared, fingerin' his gun and pullin' it half-way out of his holster so he'd have the jump on Banjo.

Banjo turned around, quick, with the glass of whiskey in one hand and Weaver found himself lookin' down the barrel of a six-gun in Banjo's other hand.

"Well!" said Banjo, very hearty and jovial. "If it isn't my unmusical friend! Come on. Have a drink with me. We'll talk about music, mainly banjo-playin'."

Weaver gulped, slowly clenchin' an' unclenchin' his hands, an' a red flush creepin' up from his heavy jowls.

"Bartender," said Banjo, not taking his eyes from Weaver, "give my friend a drink."

The bartender, his eyes bright with fear, glanced from one man to the other, wonderin' whether he'd get a bullet in the right or left side of his head. He reached down a bottle and poured a drink in front of Weaver, spillin' half of it on the counter with his shakin' hand.

"Come on, my friend," said Banjo. "Drink up."

Weaver didn't move.

"Drink up, I said," repeated Banjo.

Weaver reached up for the glass.

Banjo's six-gun roared, the tinkle of the shattered glass almost lost in the whine of the ricochet, an' whiskey splashed against Weaver's outstretched fingers.

"Whoops," said Banjo. "Sorry. Never know when these things will go off."

I'll admit that Weaver had guts. He didn't move a muscle. He glared at Banjo, his face a dull red mask of rage and his lips workin' over his teeth.

"Listen, cowboy," he said finally, his voice thick with fury, "I'll give you until tomorrow to clear this town. Tomorrow mornin', understand? Leave here before then or you'll stay here permanent, six feet under. Understand?"

"Why, sure." Banjo nodded his head. "I was goin' to move along this afternoon. Reckon now, though," he yawned elaborately, "I'll get me some sleep in the hotel yonder. Run along now. See you in the mornin', friend."

Weaver turned on his heel and slammed through the door.

You might be thinkin' we was all a passel of lily-livered critters for actin' the way we did. I mean, not standin' up to Weaver and tellin' him to go to hell. But you kinda got to look at it through our eyes.

When you've homesteaded a few hundred acres and you start to run some cattle on it, believe me the goin' is pretty thin for awhile. You work from light to dark, fencin', or ridin' herd, or brandin', or—well, the million other things to keep a ranch goin', and finally the place gets to the point where it's payin' for itself and your head's above water and all your work's beginnin' to pay a little bit, why then you know that you're over the hump and you've got somethin'.

And if you stood up to Weaver, you'd lose it, sure'n hell. You're just a little feller, with one-two hands, and what could you do against Weaver, and Anchor B with its thousands of acres and two hundred hands?

You kinda have to look at it like we saw it.

Anyway, Monday mornin' the whole bunch of us was in town. We drifted in early, not admittin' to each other we came to see the showdown but each of us knowin' that was why we were there. Guess you know, word gets around quick in a small town, so there wasn't any womenfolk about.

The sun was just perched over the mountains like a red-hot copper penny but you would have thought it was noon on Sunday. Me and Doc Silvers hunkered down on our heels in front of the Palace and the other boys were scattered around, talkin' quietly, and every one of us within easy reach of cover. Funny thing, to see all of us loafin' around and not one within fifty yards of the hotel.

Weaver rode into town after a bit. He'd brought two of his hands with him, a big, shifty-eyed feller named Clark and a man we called Frenchy

—gunmen, both of them an' armed to the teeth. They rode straight up to the Palace, lookin' neither right or left. They dismounted, tied their horses to the rack and stepped up on the porch. The men drifted away from them slow-like, until they was all alone, Weaver sittin' in his chair and his two hands at his sides.

It was kinda peculiar. Everybody sittin' around in the mornin' sun, everybody quiet, just waitin' and pretendin' they weren't, and Weaver sittin' in his chair like a chief executioner. He had a look on his face just plain dog-mean. And everybody watchin' the hotel.

Seemed like a mighty long time but I reckon it wasn't more'n an hour before the hotel door swung open and Banjo stepped out on the board walk. I could feel the tension in the air, the men near me breathin' quick.

Banjo didn't seem to take no notice. He glanced up the road, took in Weaver and his men and the rest of us, and sauntered to the edge of the walk. He stretched in the mornin' sun lazily, gaped a couple of times and then pulled his banjo around in front of him. He plucked the strings a bit tentatively, tuned up one of the pegs till it suited his ear, and leaned against a pillar. He twanged a few chords, and then, turnin' so he'd face towards Weaver, he began to sing.

It was a slow, mournful sort of song and the notes seemed to hang sad-like in the morning air.

"'Twas the springtime of the year,
I volunteered to drive the steers,
I'll tell you boys, 'twas a long hard go
As the trail rolled on into Mexico."

At the first chord from the banjo, Weaver rose and descended the steps into the road, Clark and Frenchy at his side. He paused and looked up the road at Banjo. He smiled, half-grim and half-expectant, his eyes almost amused. This was the sort of thing he liked; to set somebody down with the odds all on his side.

"I made up my mind in the early morn,
To leave the home where I was born,
To leave my native home for awhile,
And travel west for many a mile."

Weaver moved up the center of the road, slowly, one foot after another like he was enjoying it, his big hands swingin' just over his gun butts. Clark and Frenchy spread out aways from him. They moved up abreast of me an' suddenly I was ashamed of myself, lettin' them kill the kid without givin' him any kind of a chance. An' then they were past me, movin' slow and steady, an' I hated myself.

Banjo stopped singin', strummed a last chord, unslung his instrument and leaned it carefully against the pillar. He gave his hat a tug down over his eyes, hitched his thumbs in his belt and stepped out in the road, facin' Weaver. He looked awful young, standin' there, a slight grin showin' his white teeth against his dark face.

Happened so quick none of us after could tell exactly what did happen.

Couldn't get two fellers to tell the same story. Some said Banjo fired twice, some said three times, an' one or two said Weaver didn't even try to draw, leavin' the dirty work to Frenchy and Clark.

Anyway, Banjo was just standin' there eyein' the three of them and then suddenly he was down on one knee and his gun was out, blazin'. Frenchy doubled up, his hands across his belly. He hung there for a second an' then pitched forward into the dirt. Clark was spun around like a ten-pin from the force of the slug and I reckon he was dead 'fore he hit the ground. Mind you, neither one of them got their guns out. Weaver would have been a dead man if he'd been able to draw. He was caught, his hand just above his holster, starin' into Banjo's six-gun just like he'd been back in the Palace, and Banjo didn't fire. Banjo held down on him for a moment until he was sure Frenchy and Clark weren't goin' to cause any trouble, an' then he rose to his feet.

Weaver stared at him, standin' there with his shoulders sort of hunched up and the color drainin' out of his face. I could see the beads of sweat pop out on his forehead. He expected Banjo to put a slug in him—that's what he would have done if he'd been Banjo an' it never occurred to him that Banjo would do anything else.

But Banjo didn't fire. He walked slowly forward until he was in front of Weaver and he stopped, his gun on a line with Weaver's belt buckle.

"You're a pretty big man, ain't you, Weaver?" he said, his voice drippin' with contempt. "You figger you're the Lord Almighty around here, don't you? You decide whether people live or die, don't you? Well, there ain't nobody that big, Weaver, an' you'll find that out sooner or later. Mebbe sooner. Mebbe right now."

He motioned with his gun.

"Unbuckle your gun belt and let it drop. Move real slow and easy."

Weaver, movin' his hands slow and cautious, reached up an' fumbled with the buckle. His guns fell at his feet.

"Now move back."

Weaver stepped back a few paces an' Banjo moved up, hooked a toe under the belt and sent it clatterin' up on the board walk. He took off his hat an' sailed it in the same direction.

I figgered the kid had gone plumb loco, 'cause slowly, so's Weaver would get the full effect, he lowered his gun and tossed it after his hat.

"Let's see," he said, real softly, "how big you really are."

Weaver just stood there, not gettin' it. The two were about the same height but Weaver must have outweighed Banjo by a good seventy-five pounds, an' with his long arms an' enormous hands it looked like he could pound Banjo to a pulp without half trying.

Then a grin spread on Weaver's face, like he'd been given a present, an' he raised his clenched hands, big and hard as field stones, an' rushed at Banjo, bellowin' like some wild animal.

I'll never forget that fight if I live

to be a hundred. Banjo movin' quick an' easy, just out of reach of Weaver's wild rushes, throwin' punches so fast your eye couldn't follow them an' Weaver swingin' those ham-like fists that could have felled a steer. Banjo with his red hair gleamin' in the sun, every motion quick an' fast an' not wasted, like these locomotives that come through here now.

Weaver rushed at Banjo an' swung a punch that woud have torn his head off if it had landed, but Banjo slipped to one side and buried his fist in Weaver's belly up to his wrist an' you could hear Weaver's "oooof!" from one end of the town to the other. He turned, an' Banjo, quick as a snake, jolted his head back, an' then jolted it again before he got his balance. He rushed in, swingin', an' one of his punches clipped the side of Banjo's head an' sent him spinnin' into the dirt, but Banjo was up, sneakin' in an' out of his wild swings, a hard right to his face, an' out, an' in with a blow to his belly, an' out again.

I never seen anything like it. Ever seen a weasel teasin' a porcupine? It was like that.

Wasn't long 'fore Weaver wasn't movin' so fast an' his face looked like nothin' human, swollen and bruised, with one eye shut and the blood drippin' from his chin. Didn't seem like a man could take such punishment, but he kept comin' in, an' Banjo choppin' him up like cordwood. He fell once and lay in the dirt, breathin' hard.

" 'Nough?" asked Banjo quietly.

Weaver shook his head an' pushed himself up. He was partly feignin', 'cause he came rushin' and caught Banjo unawares. His rush carried them both to the ground an' he had Banjo in a bear's grip. Banjo had an arm free an' he wriggled himself around on top an' drove his fist into Weaver's belly, an' again, an' again. I could feel it from where I was.

They were on their feet again, Weaver staggerin' now, swingin' his fists slow, an' Banjo dancin' out of their way and waitin'. He saw his chance and stepped in. His fist landed flush on Weaver's nose an' I reckon Weaver's head hit the dirt 'fore his feet did. He lay there in the dust, rollin' his head from side to side, his face raw as a venison steak.

" 'Nough?" asked Banjo.

Weaver nodded. Banjo reached down and h'isted him to his feet.

"Git on your hoss," said Banjo, and half-drug him over to the tie-rack and boosted him up. Weaver sagged in the saddle, swayin' a bit, lookin' down at Banjo with his one good eye.

"Now git," continued Banjo, "an' don't fergit—there ain't nobody as big as you thought you was. Hear?"

Weaver nodded, an' Banjo pulled his horse around, faced it north and flipped the reins over into Weaver's hands. He slapped its flank an' the horse broke into a trot in the direction of the Anchor B, an' Weaver sittin' in the saddle like a sack of grist, his chin bobbin' on his chest. Banjo watched them, rubbin' the knuckles of his right hand thoughtfully, until they reached that bend in the road up yonder.

Weaver never bothered us much after that. He didn't come into town for a long while, an' when he did he couldn't seem to look any of us in the eye. Once or twice he tried his high-an'-mighty stuff. Once he told Doc Silvers to get a stretch of his fence repaired, 'cause some Anchor B cattle might stray through, an' Doc told him to go to hell an' if he wanted the fence fixed to do it himself. Weaver just looked at him and didn't say a word—didn't do anything neither.

Once he came into town on a Sunday an' I was sittin' in the arm chair by the door. He looked at me an' I looked back at him an' dawgone if I was gonna git up, an' after a bit he shrugged his shoulders an' sat down in one of the chairs near the end of the porch.

That's how it was.

Don't know which one of the fellers first started callin' the town Banjo but it caught on like wildfire an' 'fore long—well, the town was just Banjo, Wyoming. Seemed like none of the fellers could tell Banjo how they felt, but this was as good a way as any.

As for Banjo—well, he hung around for awhile. The fellers felt mighty small, I can tell you. They all knew in their hearts that they should have stood up to Weaver long ago, regardless of the risk. It took a red-headed kid to teach them that the big man, the strong man, is always right if he can beat you down. Sure, but if the little feller don't stand up and fight back, why then there ain't no such thing as right nor wrong neither, and there ain't no hope for the little feller nowhere . . . Was true in those days, an' I reckon it's just as true today.

X Marks the Spot

By HAROLD WILLARD GLEASON

X marks the spot where most of Bill was found,
Precisely, in this witness' estimation—
Though traces strewed the sands for miles around,
Spread broadcast by the fatal detonation.
The jury, fellow oil-men true and tried,
With due solemnity, quid-shifting pauses
And meaning looks, respectfully decide
Bill's end occurred through purely natural causes.
Peace reigns—no nerves were shattered by the shock,
Strange to relate, although the facts were dire.
In fact—a current fallacy to mock—
Since Bill blew out, the camp morale seems higher. . . .
Persistence is a virtue—but the fact is,
An oil rig's sort of snug for trombone practice.

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Blow, Bugles!

by
H. BEDFORD-JONES

BLOW, BUGLES, BLOW! Invisible clarions of destiny, unheard by men, announcing to future ages that the decrees of fate are immutable; that the will of the gods may tremble, yet can never be changed.

They blew in Egypt, those bugles of destiny, under the quivering white heat of the Sun-god, Ra; no man heard them, yet the world shook, and stars shivered in their courses and for a moment Kismet, the inexorable master of all men, seemed shattered and futile. This was the manner of it, as you may find written in the Coptic Chronicles by the holy man of Cairo, Sheikh el Mohdi, who saw these things with his own eyes—

Sultan el Khebir, the Great Sultan, ruled Cairo and all Egypt in those days. He lived in the fabulously luxurious palace of the Mameluke prince, Elfi Bey, and the eastern world trembled before him. Yet he was a small man, sallow, with lanky hair that hung about his face, and he suffered grievously with the itch.

With his army he had seized upon the riches of Egypt, had this sallow little Corsican, and now held it under the flag of France. His soldiers knew him as Bonaparte. As one of them wrote, *He won respect for his tactical genius, but he did not have the knack of making his men love him.*

This palatial headquarters was of three stories surrounding a glorious courtyard sweet with fountains and flowering trees. The richest shawls and rugs of the Orient, the most glor-

ious Persian tiles, were here; the woodwork was inlaid with ivory and pearl shell, carven marble columns supported the stairs, and the adjacent stable held the finest Arabian steeds. Amid this luxury was installed the insignificant little man who now called himself Sultan el Khebir, and whose artillery dominated the city from the high citadel above.

He lived alone with his aides. Sometimes he sought women, or they were brought to him, in this gorgeous palace upon the great Ezbekhieh Square. Few of them pleased him, he was always lonely, always seeking afar what he could never find—the love of men. He had only one comrade whom he trusted, General Junot, a gruff, illiterate, cynical fellow who had risen from the ranks.

It was the Seventh Year of the French Republic; that is to say, 1798.

The little Corsican had a superabundant vitality; he was in everything, went everywhere, plunged at whatever offered. Plagued by the itch, infected when deluged with the blood of a soldier whose head was carried away by a cannon ball, he was never still. Day and night he was on the go, planning, writing, organizing, riding, giving audiences, investigating strange and curious things and places.

He was a great believer in magic and sorcery and dreams, as the Arabs were quick to learn. There were Arabs and Turks in Cairo, and Copts by the thousand; the Copts were the people of Egypt, oppressed by the Moslems yet retaining their own ancient religion. Sultan el Khebir set them free and they became his friends and adherents; although, because he and some of his soldiers and generals proclaimed themselves Mohammedans, the Copts did not wholly trust him.

Here comes into the story Yussef Ali the Hazrami, a young man handsome and subtle, greatly gifted in many ways, who spoke excellent French. He had learned it in Stamboul, while serving the Sultan there, and he came to the headquarters sentries asking audience with Sultan el Khebir.

Now, this Corsican sultan and his officers and aides had never heard the famed proverb of Arabia, which runs: "If you meet a Hazrami and a cobra in your path, spare the cobra." A saying well founded, since the men of Hadramaut anciently won a reputation for audacity and bloody work that spread afar, if not so far as France.

Beauharnais, stepson and chief aide of the Corsican, talked with Yussef Ali, demanding his business with the commander-in-chief. Yussef evaded, but finally came to the point.

" I am come to offer him the greatest treasure and the greatest beauty in Egypt, hidden away by the lord of the Mamelukes when they fled. I can grant any desire of his heart."

The aide went back to give this message to Bonaparte, as the Corsican was now spelling his name. He was rather stiffish about it, too. In the matter of carnal desire, the Army of

Egypt affected no prudery whatever; but after all, Beauharnais was a stepson. The Corsican was married to his mother, Josephine.

Bonaparte interrupted his dictation to hear the message, and broke into a hearty laugh. In seizing Egypt from the Mamelukes, the army had taken over palaces and women and treasure galore, but was always on the trail of some new hidden spoil. That Yussef Ali was betraying some such loot to the conqueror, was obvious.

"Tell him," said the Corsican, "that if he can cure this damnable itch of mine, I'll give him a hearing. Have him searched for weapons."

"That has been done; he has none," said Beauharnais, and went out with his message.

Yussef Ali merely smiled at hearing it. "Cure the itch? By Allah, nothing is easier! It is written in the stars that my mistress would heal all the ills of Sultan el Khebir."

So the fellow was something of an astrologer? Beauharnais took back this word, and the Corsican ordered him to admit the Hazrami. A firm belief in destiny, a credence in the stars and what they said, was part of Bonaparte's makeup. The secretaries were dismissed, and with Beauharnais and a couple of guards on hand, Yussef was led into the courtyard with its fountains and soft cushions and splendid luxury. He fell on his face before Bonaparte, with a lengthy eulogy, which the general brusquely interrupted.

"If you have busines, state it! Who sent you here?" Yussef rose, with a certain dignity, as he faced the thin, sallow little man.

"The stars sent me, to give into your hand the greatest beauty and treasure of Egypt!"

"Meaning that you wish to betray someone or something, at a price," said Bonaparte with cynical comprehension. "Well, at what price?"

"Lord, the chief of the Mamelukes left this woman hidden in a secret palace; she is the most glorious of all women, surrounded by surpassing treasures! She has the secret of healing every ill; she has heard your name and will be dazzled by your splendor. I ask no price of your favor, unless you have an old and outworn horse or mule which Your Grace would turn over to me."

"As the woman is, so shall be the horse," said Bonaparte, then beckoned his aide down the patio, beyond earshot of the Hazrami.

"An odd affair, Eugene!" said he thoughtfully. "Woman and treasure, tempting, eh? A secret palace of the Mameluke chief, eh? Either it is a trap of some kind, or well worth while. After I speak with this rascal further, take him over to the Institute and have some of our savants test his knowledge of astrology."

He strode back toward the waiting Hazrami. Like his officers, he made an odd figure in his looted finery, a huge Mameluke saber clapping at his heels, jeweled poniard at his belt, a handsome cashmere shawl about his waist. He halted in front of Yussef and eyed him for a moment.

"Well? What do you propose?" he

demanded. "Speak the truth, and vou shall have the best horse in my stables. Lie, and you shall be beaten to death with the bastinado. Are you willing to take me to this hidden palace now, at once?"

"Allah forbid, master!" exclaimed Yussef. "It is guarded by Sudanese slaves, who keep lamps burning and ready; they are ordered to fire the house instantly, if the French enter. They must be surprised and killed either in the very early morning or during the siesta hour, when all the world sleeps."

This made sense. The woodwork of any Cairene house, after generations of this dry desert air, would go up like tinder at a spark of fire.

"Very well," said Bonaparte. "How to find the place?"

"It is in the Street of Victories, lord; not far from here. Directly opposite the Mosque of Sultan Debars are old and ruined houses. It is the quarter of camel-drivers. In one of the walls is a closed, solid door, on which is painted the Hand of Fatima, in blue paint. I shall be waiting to open this door to your knock, at whatever hour you say."

"Very well," said Bonaparte. "Now go and talk to some of my wise men about the stars, and when you return I'll set the time."

Beauharnais took the Hazrami away, and the Corsican sent for Junot, whose cynical devotion was more to his taste in this venture than the cold eye of his stepson.

Bluff Junot listened with a grin to the story. A man was sent to investigate; he came back reporting that the door with the so-called hand, in reality derived from the Arabic script of the word Allah, was precisely as said.

"An excellent place to hide luxury, amid these ruins," said Junot. "But this may be a trap; these Arabs hate us like poison."

"Nothing risked, nothing won," said the Corsican. "We'll test it out at dawn tomorrow. Have a dozen of your best men here before daylight. When this rascal opens the door, seize him instantly. We'll take no chances. Let each man have pistols and cold steel."

"Oh, I'm to be the one who risks his neck, eh?" Junot broke into a laugh. "Very well, I accept! And I'll have men posted in all the streets around, just in case this turns out to be some cut-throat project of assassination."

So it was arranged. When Yussef returned, after proving to several members of the French party of savants that he really knew astrology, if not astronomy, the rendezvous was made and he departed bearing a present or two. The handsome, intelligent Arab had made a deep impression on all who met him; but the Corsican cautioned Beauharnais to say nothing to anyone about the man or his errand.

"Our good Junot will investigate tomorrow," he said carelessly. "He rather suspects it may be a murder trap."

"More than likely," assented the aide. "You know how many of our

men suffered, until we made the chief Arabs hostages, and shot a few of them. One cannot be too careful."

Bonaparte was very cheerful that evening.

The Army of Egypt was not, as yet, at war with Turkey. The land had been seized from the grip of the Mameluke sultans, who were supported by wandering Arab tribes; but the Sultan at Stamboul was treated with great deference by Bonaparte, who made pretense, as many were in reality, of being a Mohammedan convert. Thus, except for the few Mamelukes who remained afar in Upper Egypt, with the cavalry in pursuit of them, Egypt was at peace. The French rule was completely accepted, and the horizon was untroubled by any foe, except the English fleet.

No wonder the sallow little Corsican was cheerful. In Europe, he had led France to a triumphant peace over all her foes, except England. He, the son of poverty and squalor, had become violently great, wealthy, assured; now he had seized Egypt, had made himself Sultan el Khebir. He did what he willed, good or bad. If he could not make friends, he could make himself feared—and he did.

Here in Cairo, he had shot Arabs and Mamelukes without cessation; every day firing squads had rattled away. Now they feared him, and all was calm. To him, life meant nothing, except his own. His was the supreme destiny. If an order sacrificed a thousand men, he gave it without hesitation or second thought. But neither he nor the clever surgeons could cure the itch that plagued him day and night.

At the back of his mind, it was the thought of this, rather than lovely woman or countless treasure, that most appealed to him in the story of Yussef Ali of Hadramaut.

In the grayness before the dawn, hooves stirred the dusty street in front of the palace; low orders sounded, parties of cavalry filed off into the city streets beyond the central square. One group passed directly to the Street of Victory and to the Mosque of Sultan Bebars where, well away from the mosque, the men dismounted.

Junot had neglected no precaution. Natives of the watch, under French officers, now appeared and reported everything clear in the vicinity. Bonaparte, muffled in a huge cloak against the morning chill, led the way down the street. Junot and the half dozen men fell in about him. There was the door painted with the blue Hand of Fatima, confronting them.

The Corsican rapped with his pistol butt. The door swung a little open, the voice of Yussef spoke, and Bonaparte made reply. The door opened wide and Yussef appeared; instantly, he was seized by two men. He put up no struggle, but looked about indignantly.

"Fools! Instead of fighting me, get inside and take care of the two Sudanese who are on guard! You will find them at the entrance to the stairs."

Junot plunged into the doorway,

with four men behind him, and vanished from sight.

Bonaparte waited, cursing under his breath. The two men holding Yussef stood immobile. Yussef himself listened in suspense. Nothing was heard, nothing happened. Then Yussef spoke quietly to the Corsican.

"When you are satisfied all is as I said, let me guide you and your men. Nothing here matters except the Lady Zaira and her quarters. Once you hold her safe, you hold all. The slaves will not leave. It is necessary only to guard the doors of her apartment."

Bonaparte nodded comprehension. Another moment, and a step sounded; it was Junot. He came back into the doorway. His saber dripped blood.

"Well, come along!" he exclaimed cheerfully. "Nothing to worry about."

A few slaves; two more Sudanese who had to be killed with the sword-edge; a groom who tried to escape by way of the stables and did not—that was all. In the stables, which formed an integral part of every wealthy Arab's house, were two magnificent horses. The house was a veritable palace of oriental luxury, but Bonaparte strode through it unseeing, and halted with Yussef Ali at the door of the woman's apartment on the second floor. Two girl slaves stood barring the way, obviously terrorized, yet determined.

"Lord," interrupted Yussef, translating their babble, "they say that Lary Zaira will descend to the courtyard in five minutes. It were wise to assent. The only exit from her rooms is by these doors, and these stairs to the patio."

Bonaparte, avidly curious, assented, and joined Junot in the courtyard. The men were stationed as guards outside. Junot smoked his pipe and chatted with Yussef, while the Corsican paced up and down.

Small as it was, the patio was luxurious. A plane tree rose beside the central fountain and orange trees perfumed the air. The stairs that ascended outside the house were of delicate marble arches and glowing tiles. Cushions and rugs of the finest and rarest weaves were heaped about the fountains. The lamps were of silver and rare glass, stamped with the arms of Memeluke sultans.

Yussef had said that Lady Zaira, like himself, spoke French and had dazzling golden hair. Now, this whole matter was in no way unusual. The Mamelukes, themselves slaves in the beginning, had women of all nations in the slave-marts of Cairo; and since taking the city, the French had unearthed some extremely curious cases, and had rescued a number of unhappy creatures. Nothing was impossible, as Bonaparte well knew.

Junot, with an exclamation, laid aside his pipe and stiffened. Yussef stood in an attitude of respect. Like them, Bonaparte lifted his eyes and then remained motionless, even incredulous. For Lady Zaira was descending the stairs, alone. And like other ladies of Egypt, she was veiled so closely that only one eye showed, though her garments were of filmy gauze such as the Pharaohs and their

laides had worn. Moslem modesty applied chiefly to the head.

Thus, her grace was apparent, and one could readily guess at the divine beauty of henna-touched feet and golden limbs. She came toward the fountain, saluted Bonaparte in the Arabic fashion, and made herself comfortable amid the cushions in the shade of the plane tree.

"Greeting, Sultan el Khebir. May Allah lengthen your days!" she said in French that was fluent, but badly accented. "I am your slave."

"No, no," said Bonaparte, seating himself beside her. "You are free, Zaira."

"Then I become a slave once more, in order to serve you," she rejoined. "This is your house; all that is in it belongs to you. And when you return, I shall reveal to you where the Mameluke treasures are hidden."

"Return?" echoed Bonaparte in surprise. He glanced at Junot; only the two of them had known of the trip in prospect.

"Yes." Her laugh was silvery-sweet. "You go to danger. Ask Yussef about the details; he discovered it in preparing your horoscope."

"Oh!" said Bonaparte. "Suppose you ask him, Junot. Keep him out of earshot."

"Not to mention myself, eh?" said Junot, in cynical good humor. He rose, beckoned to Yussef, and strolled away with him.

Bonaparte turned to the lady. "Zaira? Is that your name?"

"Yes. My mother was French, my father Circassian—a prince."

"Very well. Let me see your face. Unveil."

"Lord!" Hauteur crept into her voice; she recoiled a little. "Before other men, that is a crime and a shame! Upon your return, come to my rooms, and your will shall then be mine in all things. I have no desire except to serve you."

Bonaparte knew the Arab feelings about baring the face in view of men, and did not insist. Indeed, he had no chance, for now she extended her hand to him, giving him a large glass vial of dark liquid. He noted the slender beauty, the youthful grace of her fingers, and the immense emerald ring on her thumb, in native fashion.

"Yussef had told me of your trouble, my lord," she said, with a charming mixture of Arab submission and personal pride. "I am skilled in curing ills. My father taught me. Put ten drops of this in the water of your bath. Then bathe not again for three days. Then another ten drops; bathe not afresh for another three days. Repeat once more, and your sicknesss will be cured."

Bonaparte reflected that this would require ten days; it was the extent of his planned expedition away from Cairo. "In ten days, Zaira," he said impetuously, "I shall return. If you speak the truth, if I am healed and well, ask what you will of me and it shall be granted!"

"Lord, I ask only to serve your happiness," said she, and extended her hand. Bonaparte seized it and kissed

her fingers and she laughed a little. "But, my lord, do not forget the warning!" she added. "And leave guards at my house door, I pray you, for my protection."

With this, she rose and glided away, passed up the stairs, and was gone.

Junot brought Yussef Ali to the Corsican, and with a significant wink said Bonaparte had better question the man himself. Yussef, however, poured forth his story without questioning. Danger? Yes. He had seen in the stars that Sultan el Khebir stood in danger of death, within the next ten days. Death in what form, then? By drowning, said he, whereat Junot guffawed; but Bonaparte, who never ridiculed any prophecy, looked thoughtful.

"Where is this horoscope you have drawn?" he asked. "I'd like to see it myself."

Yussef spread his hands. "Lord, it is barely begun. A horoscope cannot be finished in a day's time; it requires much study. Any fool can set down the position and figures of the stars, but what makes an astrologer great is his ability to deduce the future from these positions."

"Very well; when can you bring me the finished horoscope?"

"In two weeks or less, master. I must go afar into the desert to work upon it."

"Then take the two horses here in this stable, as your reward," said Bonaparte.

"I must have a passport before I can leave or enter the gates," Yussef said. This was not entirely true, but since he wanted a passport, Bonaparte told Junot to give him one.

If Bonaparte was thoroughly alive to the proximity of a charming woman, he was also alive to the possibility of assassination. He not only set guards over the house of Lady Zaira, but he had it watched by Copts of his secret service. And before taking any of that medicine in his bath, he had a double dose of it given to a slave; finding no harmful results, he took it himself as ordered, and next morning left Cairo.

He had long planned this trip, to satisfy his curiosity. With three hundred men, he rode to Suez. He desired to see if anything remained of the canal of Sesostris, who had in ancient days connected the Red Sea with the Nile and Mediterranean. He found the canal and traced it to its end in the Bitter Lakes. What was more, he crossed the Red Sea, just as Moses had done, dry shod.

This curious feat was due to an Arab guide who knew where, at low tide, one might find dry sand all the way across. This was because the wind had pushed back the waters for the past day or so. So Bonaparte crossed, and went on to explore in search of the alleged Wells of Moses. Then he started back, and instead of imitating Moses, came close to sharing the fate of Pharaoh and the Egyptian host.

The tide had come in, meantime; and the Arab guide had stolen enough brandy to make him gloriously drunk. With the setting sun, darkness came down fast. Before the guide

knew himself hopelessly lost, the horses were swimming, the sandbanks were gone, and panic seized on everyone. Everyone, that is, except the sallow little Corsican, who calmly and quietly gave orders that resulted in safety to all.

"Well, I have come close to death by drowning," he wrote Junot, whom he had left in charge of Cairo. "Also, the itch has vanished, I trust for good. Thus it is evident that we have friends, not enemies, in the Street of Victories. Keep the house well guarded."

Almost upon the heels of this letter, he was back in Cairo himself, eager, brimming with energy. When the most pressing of public business was over, he plunged headlong into the question of Lady Zaira. Yussef Ali was still somewhere out in the desert, it seemed.

The spies had brief reports for him. No one entered or left the house except the two slaves who did the marketing. The guards had not been troubled. Lady Zaira had not been seen by anyone. Bonaparte's heart leaped; and next afternoon, although the promised ten days were not quite up, he rode unannounced to her house, left his guards outside, and entered.

Impetuous as he was, filled with impatient and awkward *gaucherie* that brooked no denials, he came to the door of her apartment. The slave-girls halted him. He brushed them aside, smashed open the locked door of ancient inlaid wood, and to his amazement found Lady Zaira awaiting him, veiled, seated on a divan.

"Greeting," she said, before he could speak. "Are you healed? Remember what you promised, if you came back cured."

"Oh!" He was taken aback, chagrined, dismayed. "True, I promised whatever you might ask. Well, I am healed! So what do you desire, fair lady?"

"Three days," said she, "before you ask me to unveil or show you the treasure of Mamelukes. That is all. You may come when you like; indeed, I shall be most happy to see you any time. But this is the anniversary of my father's death. Until another three days, my mourning will not be laid aside."

Bonaparte, sullen and a little angry, yielded. Almost at once, however, his anger was dissipated and a joyous amazement rose within him. For as he sat talking, he discovered that this woman had a vivid intelligence. Without apparent effort, she flung new light upon half a dozen of the social and economic matters that worried him.

He was, at this time, completing the organization of his Egyptian government. He had run into numberless difficulties of race, religion and custom that threatened his new administration from a dozen different angles.

To his startled questions, the Lady Zaira returned gay replies; but beneath her merry words lay sound sense and a remarkable appreciation of values. In effect, he found her an adviser worth all his council of wise men put together.

During the next three days, in the keeping of his promise, Bonaparte became a frequent visitor to the house of Lady Zaira. His best men were stationed there as guards. He came at any hour, always in a fury of haste, always departing calmed and advised. He brought her his troubles as they arose, and found them neatly solved for him. He talked with her lengthily, took her into his confidence here and there, forgot himself when he was alone with her and showed her the burning fury of spirit that underlay the outward semblance of the Corsican.

So the three days passed. Bonaparte had, actually, forgotten about the Mameluke treasure she was to turn over to him; he was thinking only of her.

He was furiously in love with a woman whose face he had not seen.

He admitted it frankly, when he came to her and asked her to unveil. She put up her hands and laid the veil away; for this was in the privacy of her own rooms. He looked into her face and kissed her fingers in passionate abandon.

"And the treasure?" she said, laughing. Her laugh was adorable.

"Devil take the treasure! All that matters is you," he cried.

"Then tomorrow, the treasure . . ."

Later, she looked into his face, as she lay in his arms, and whispered, "Promise me one thing, one thing!"

"Yes," said Bonaparte quickly.

"Tell me when he comes back, the astrologer, Yussef Ali the Hazrami," she said. Emotion swept her, agitation leaped in her eyes. "Let me know when he comes, at once! Promise!"

"Very well," said Bonaparte carelessly. "When he returns from the desert, you shall know of it at once."

She smiled again. For a moment she had heard, distinctly, the far off bugles of destiny that no one else could hear or imagine . . . those silvery voices blowing down the world their clarions of doom.

On the morrow a letter came from Constantinople to General Dugua, governor of Cairo. He read it and laid it aside, thinking little of it at the moment. Later in the day he was riding over to the suburb of Bulac, with Junot, to lay out the new barracks. He would speak to Junot of the matter then, he reflected. Time enough. There was nothing to warn honest, blunt Dugua that time lacked, that destiny was trembling, and that this day meant all things to him, to the Army, to France itself. So he did not hurry about telling Junot of the odd letter from Stamboul.

It was late in the afternoon, and they had agreed on the barracks plans, when Dugua spoke, remembering the matter.

"Oh, do you recall that I mentioned an Englishman, whom I met in Paris when he was a prisoner there? A man named Smith — Sydney Smith — a naval officer."

"I remember, yes," said Junot, laughing. "His escape back to England was something of a classic, eh?"

"Well, he is in Stamboul, some sort of emissary from England to the Porte," Dugua went on. "I had an

odd letter today from him, brought by a merchant. This Smith is very touchy upon his honor, you understand. He had heard of some scheme to assassinate Bonaparte, and wrote to warn me. Punctilious fellow, very."

"That's one name for it." Junot, who was not punctilious, grimaced. "What sort of scheme? Why should the Turks assassinate him, anyway?"

"They're afraid of him," said Dugua. "Oh, this was something about a clever fellow who spoke French; I forget the details. I sent the letter to the General's secretary. The fellow stood to win a huge sum from the Porte, if he accomplished Bonaparte's death inside another month. Our English friend said to have a care. The rascal is young, able and intelligent; he hates us bitterly."

"Did Smith give his name?" asked Junot carelessly.

"Yes. One of these blasted Arabic names. Hussein . . . no, Yussef, that's it. Yussef Ali, from a place called Hadramaut."

Junot drew rein sharply. His jaw fell; he stared at the astonished Dugua for a moment, then put spurs to his horse. But, even as he spurred, honest Junot knew that he must be too late, for Bonaparte had left headquarters a couple of hours before with Yussef the Hazrami.

Yussef had turned up unexpectedly. His pass got him through the outer guards at headquarters; then Junot himself had taken him on into the courtyard, where Bonaparte paced up and down dictating letters and orders. The Corsican swung about at sight of Yussef.

"So it's you, star gazer!" he exclaimed. "Where's that horoscope you promised?"

"Finished, and waiting for you, lord," responded Yussef, saluting low. "A scribe is making a fair copy of it now. Have my predictions been fulfilled? Did you find beauty and treasure in that house?"

"Oh, treasure!" said Bonaparte. "This is the day, yes. Lady Zaira wanted to be told if you turned up. I must send her word. Better, I'll go myself. The treasure, eh? Junot, come with me . . . no, no, you're going to Bulac with Dugua to see about the barracks. Go along. I'll have news of that treasure for you, tonight. Upon my word, I had forgotten about it! A dozen men of the guard, Junot."

Yussef asked permission to wash at the fountain. It was granted. He laid aside his long burnous and showed himself naked except for a loincloth, as he made his ablutions. Junot gave him a glance and a nod; anyone could see the fellow had no weapon of any kind.

Thus, with the mounted escort, Bonaparte clattered away toward the Street of Victories, taking Yussef along.

So the Corsican came to the house of Lady Zaira, sent the guards carelessly away, and entered in company with Yussef. The guards inside the place saluted, and informed him that the siesta hour was not finished, and that Lady Zaira and her women were

still asleep. At that, Yussef laughed.

"No matter, my lord!" he said. "I can show you the spot in the house where the treasure lies hidden, if you care to look with me. We'll have a surprise for Lady Zaira."

No suspicion occurred to Bonaparte. Guards were close within call; besides, he regarded Yussef as a faithful servitor and ally. He assented at once.

Yussef led the way. Instead of mounting to the quarters of the women, he went into the large reception room on the ground floor, guided the Corsican to the far corner and pointed to the fretted and inlaid cedar planks of the wall. Smiling, he pointed to two bits of carven ivory set into the wood.

"Press these, lord, and call upon Allah to reveal the secret!"

Bonaparte laughed grimly. "Give, O Allah, or I take!" he said, and leaned forward to press the two spots. With a grating noise, a door-like section of the wall opened, to reveal a high but narrow corridor that went into darkness. Yussel reached forward and took a glass lamp from a niche within, and set about striking fire.

"Careful, lord!" he warned. "Wait for a light, lest we find a snake or a scorpion. This opening widens into a small room, where the treasure is waiting us. And," he added, forcefully, "such a treasure as a man, be he sultan or slave, finds but once in a lifetime!"

The lamp blazed up. Yussef held it aloft, and a dozen feet away Bonaparte could see that the corridor widened. Yusef went ahead, and the Corsican followed, cautiously. They came to the wide spot. Here, indeed, was a tiny room about eight feet square. It was quite empty, except for a box that stood in one corner. Upon the box lay a pair of immensely long Arab pistols, inlaid with silver, and a horn of powder.

Yussef went straight to this box, set the lamp on it, and busied himself.

"Well?" demanded Bonaparte, impatiently. "What are you doing?"

"Putting fresh priming in this pistol," said Yussef, and swung around. The light struck upon his face; a new face, radiant with hatred and suppressed fury. The pistol lifted in his hand. It covered the Corsican.

"Fool!" snarled Yussef. "No one can hear; no one will know! You came here to perish, do you understand? Everything was done in order that this moment should come to pass, this moment when you die!"

The truth flashed upon Bonaparte. He was lost, and knew it—utterly lost. True, he had his long poniard, but the pistol would flash death before he could use it. He stood irresolute, sweating, aghast.

Yussef laughed curtly. "Sultan el Khebir!" he said in cruel mockery. "In the moment of death, you see the truth, eh? You hear the wings of death's angles; listen, listen! You can hear the bugles of destiny blowing as you die, your accursed life cut short—"

A rush of soft naked feet in the darkness; a voice crying sharply.

"Yussef! Wait, wait!"

She was there, in the passage. Bonaparte could see only a flash of white, but he could sense her perfumes. He cursed under his breath. Her presence there cut off all escape. He had been on the point of a desperate dash for it. Useless now! Of course she was in the plot, too.

"You must not!" Her voice lifted shrilly with its frantic, imperative urge. "He is not what you said! He is no cruel monster. He is a young man filled with greatness! I cannot let you do this thing. Stop it, stop, do you hear?"

From the Arab came an explosion of furious speech. A wild cry broke from Lady Zaira. Suddenly she came between Bonaparte and the light. The pistol roared; smoke and flame gushed out.

The Corsican, flung back against the wall, gripped at his long dagger. The lamp had been knocked over; everything was dark, and in this darkness, Bonaparte struck out blindly. He did not, at once, know what had happened. He found Yussef grappling him, striking at him with the pistol, and felt his own blade drive into the man, again and again. The pistol fell, then Yussef crumpled.

So passed the moment that should have changed the history of the world.

Presently Bonaparte stooped to the lifeless thing at his feet. His hand touched her hand; it was cold. The bullet, meant for him, had killed her.

He stepped out of the passage into the large room, and closed the door behind him. There was no alarm. Nothing had been heard. For a space he stood there motionless, staring at the sunlit courtyard and the fountains. He recalled the words of Yussef, now so ominous and significant . . . "such a treasure as a man, be he sultan or slave, finds but once in a lifetime!" And that mention of curing all ills . . . Fool, fool that he had been! This Arab, so sardonic and assured, had told him the truth and he had been blind to it!

Then he saw Junot coming through the courtyard, running, calling. Bonaparte strode out to meet him. With a panting gasp of relief, Junot plunged to a halt at sight of him.

"Then I am in time!" he exclaimed, his voice shaken with relief.

"In time for what?" demanded Bonaparte.

"To warn you! That rascal Yussef was an assassin!"

The sallow Corsican regarded him impassively. "So I have already learned, my good Junot," he said. Clasping his hands behind his back, he looked up at the sky. A deep breath shook him. "He is gone. And she . . . she is gone also. They will not return. Have this place closed up and the doors sealed, and left so."

He was silent for a moment while Junot stared at him wide-eyed, uncomprehending; but then, Junot seldom understood this strange little man.

"The bugles of destiny!" Bonaparte continued slowly. "Singular words! I wonder what he meant by them?"

The world would know, one day.

When the author of this article suggested doing a piece on the technical terminology of the sailing fraternity, it sounded like a fine idea and a real boon to those of us whose understanding of nautical phrases includes "splicing the main-brace" and little else. Mr. Ford, incidentally, is our Ask Adventure expert on Globetrotting and Vagabonding, and founder of the Globetrotters' Club with headquarters in London. An ex-Britisher, now an American citizen, he has traveled in twenty-eight countries, has served as mate of a three-masted schooner and skippered his own deep-sea yawl.

SAILS TALK

by NORMAN D. FORD

FAR TOO few sea story readers are able to appreciate the finer points of the action involved because they're not familiar with nautical terms nor with how sailing ships are handled. In order to visualize what went on aboard a ship in battle, for example, or in heavy weather, and just what advantage may be gained by masterful maneuvering, some understanding of the theory of windships and the jargon of sailors is essential.

Originally, all sailing vessels were essentially *square rigged* but as these vessels were very sluggish in traveling against a wind, a modification was arrived at known as the *fore and aft* rig. These are the two principal classifications of sailing rigs, and depending upon the number of masts and arrangements of sails, there are many varieties of rig falling under the heading of each. Under square rig, we find *full rigged ships* and *brigs,* while under the heading of fore and aft rigs there are a great variety of *cutters, sloops, ketches, yawls,* and *schooners.*

Then, there are many rigs in which both square and fore and aft sails are incorporated such as the *bark, barkentine,* and *brigantine.*

When speaking of the rig of a vessel, we mean a descriptive name for

A Fact Story

the shape, arrangement and number of her sails and spars. Nowadays, sailing vessels are referred to almost exclusively by the name of their rig but before the 18th century, ships were more often described by terms associated with their build and function. Hence, by the term *frigate*, one cannot really picture her rig for a frigate was technically a cruising warship carrying guns on one complete deck, although at different periods throughout the centuries, a certain type of rig was assumed when speaking of a frigate.

Nowadays in the same way, we speak of a tanker (function and build) as being a motorship (means of propulsion, i.e. rig in olden days). Such terms as *galleon, pinnace, frigate, line-of-battle* ship, etc., are all functional terms and refer more to the job which a ship was built to do rather than the number and arrangement of her sails and spars.

In his book on nautical anatomy, Sir Alan Moore says that terms used to describe ships "are often capricious, inconsistent, and changeable." Nothing could be nearer the truth for only a real student of nautical history can tell what rig an 18th century frigate was likely to carry.

But no matter how many masts or sails a vessel carried, or whether she was square or fore and aft rigged, the same elementary principles were used in handling her as in all other sailing craft and it is a knowledge of these that can really benefit the sea story reader.

To understand how a ship travels under sail is most easily comprehended by using a fore and aft rigged vessel as an illustration. A ship sailing downwind just sets her sails and is simply blown along in the direction she requires to go but traveling upwind is a rather more complicated procedure.

To grasp this principle, it is necessary to realize that all sailing vessels have a very deep keel which prevents them from moving sideways through the water. Hence, they can only go ahead or astern. When sailing broadside to the wind (nowadays called *reaching*) the keel prevents the ship from being blown sideways (*making leeway*) and by adjusting the sails at an angle of about 45° to the wind, the wind is caused to strike the sails obliquely thus causing the ship to move forward in much the same manner as a wooden wedge will slide away if you lay it on a smooth table and press downwards upon its sloping edge.

Now, if the ship is steered closer to the wind so that it is heading about 50° from the direction of the wind, and if the sails are hauled in closer than 45°, the same effect is produced as when the ship was reaching. Of course, as the angles of deflection are smaller, the mechanical power of the wind is diminished and the ship will go more slowly but it will nevertheless go forward at an angle of about 50° from the direction from which the wind is blowing.

Now, we have our ship actually moving upwind, though at an angle such as a zig-zag road makes up a

mountainside. And just as the road has to zig-zag to reach the top, so the ship must do the same if she wants to reach a point dead to windward. This method of progression upwind is known as *tacking*, or *beating to windward*.

At each turn of the zig-zag course, the ship has to swing round, bringing the wind from one side to the other. During this period, she will be heading directly into the wind and will, of course, receive no aid at all from the wind.

The ship's own weight and mass must carry her along during this time when all her sails are flapping and flogging uselessly and this maneuver has to be carried out as rapidly as possible. It is known as *going about* and is generally preceded by the order "*stand by to go about*" followed by "*let go and haul*" or the cry "*lee O!*" when everyone is ready at his station.

During the time the ship is turning into the wind from one tack to the next, she is said to be *in stays*. Sometimes, a vessel will refuse to *carry her way* right round on to the other tack and will lie helplessly heading into the wind with no way on at all. This situation is known as *missing stays* and the ship is then said to be *in irons*.

After a brief period, the vessel will commence to gather *sternway* and rudder can then be put on to bring her back on her former tack whence she will once more gather *headway*. Needless to say, being in irons is an exceedingly precarious position to get into during a sea engagement.

While a ship is doing her tacking, she is said to be *close-hauled* because her sails are hauled in close to the rail thus allowing her to point up towards the direction of the wind while still receiving the maximum amount of propelling force. There is a point, however, where a ship cannot lie any closer to the wind and where her sails begin to shiver and become useless. This point occurs at about 40-45° off the wind for a fore and after and about 65-70° for a square rigged vessel.

Nowadays, modern Bermudian rigged yachts will lay much closer but such rigs were undiscovered in the earlier days of sailing.

When a ship is sailing as closely as possible to the wind while still keeping her sails filled, she is known as being *clean full* or *full and bye* while if the helmsman lets her come up too close and allows the sails to shiver, the captain will growl: "*Bear away* and *keep her full*, you're *pinching* her."

Readers should note at this point that *sheets* do not refer to canvas sails, which misbelief is common among laymen. Sheets are the lines by which the sails are controlled and the sails themselves are always spoken of as such.

It is fairly easy to steer a ship close hauled since little damage can be done to the rigging by poor helmsmanship but while steering downwind—known as *running* or *running free*—the helmsman must be more careful. With the sheets of a fore and aft rigged vessel eased right out

so that the sails are spread before the wind, a catastrophe can occur in a strong breeze if the helmsman is careless and allows the ship to fall off her course so that the wind threatens to catch the sails on their opposite surfaces (known as *sailing by the lee*). Then, the sails may crash across to the opposite side of the ship with terrific force, which may very well damage the spars and rigging if not altogether dismasting the vessel. When the sails crash across, the ship is said to *jibe*.

Sometimes, when changing course while running, it is necessary to jibe purposely for the only other way to get the sails across is to haul in the sheets and go about. When jibing is preferred, the sails are hauled in as far as possible and the arc through which they will swing is made as narrow as can be managed. An emergency jibe made without having time to let go the weather backstays is generally known as *jibing all standing*.

Square rigged vessels follow closely the principles already described for fore and aft rigged ships, the only differences being that when going about, the sails must be hauled round manually instead of swinging across on their own as they do in a schooner. And it is impossible to jibe a square rigger for her sails cannot crash across from one side to the other. Instead, the wind merely gets around on their fore sides and begins to blow the ship astern. The situation is then known as being *taken aback* and this is an even worse predicament in battle than being in irons.

Some unwieldy square riggers, and badly balanced fore and afters too, will not go about since they refuse to point up into the wind. When changing from one tack to the next such ships must therefore jibe instead even though they may be sailing close hauled. First, the sheets are eased and the helm altered so that the ship *bears away* and *pays off* till she is running free, then she is jibed and close hauled again on the opposite tack. To pass from one tack to the other, therefore, such a ship must sail round in almost a full circle. This maneuver is known as *wearing ship* and was sometimes resorted to by even the handiest ships when it was advantageous during battle.

Due to the heavier work entailed, square rigged ships are slower in handling than fore and afters and require bigger crews. Square rigged warships used to have very large crews indeed so that the sails on each mast could all be trimmed simultaneously instead of one at a time as on a lighter manned merchant ship. As a result, square rigged warships were able to maneuver very quickly and could be put about almost as rapidly as a fore and after.

Square riggers performed best when running before the wind where their great squaresails could catch more wind than the narrower sails of a fore and after. But when close hauled, a fore and after could sail some 15-20° closer to the wind while still keeping clean full. It is thus evi-

dent that a fore and aft rigged vessel could easily escape a square rigger by beating to windward but if she were already to leeward of a square rigger, the latter could easily run her down.

Steering orders in sailing ships are not given as left or right, or even as port or starboard, but as up or down. These orders refer to upwind or downwind and are given to mean that the tiller is to be put up towards the wind or down away from it. If a ship has the wind blowing from her port (left) side and the order "up helm" is given, the tiller is put to port. This turns the ship to starboard (right). When a wheel is used on a sailing vessel, as is usually the case in all ships of any size, the wheel is moved to make the tiller obey these same movements.

When a sailing ship has the wind blowing from her port side, the port side is referred to as the *weather side* and all rigging on that side is spoken of as the *weather rigging, weather shrouds, weather backstays,* etc.

The opposite side is of course the *lee side* and rigging on that side is termed the *lee rigging, lee shrouds, lee backstays, lee fore bowline,* etc. With the wind blowing from the port side, the ship is on the *port tack* and vice versa, although the ship itself need not necessarily be tacking when such reference is made, for at all times save when the wind is dead astern, it must be blowing from one side or the other.

In considering the effect of battle or heavy weather damage to a sailing ship's sails and spars, it is well to remember the first principle of sailing, which is that a ship pivots upon her mid section just like a weathercock. And if the foremast and its sails are shot or carried away, a ship will act just like a weathercock and lay heading upwind with her remaining after sails performing the same duty as the tail of a weathercock in keeping her in irons. Similarly, if the mizzenmast and its sails are destroyed, she will head downwind and cannot be made to head in any other direction.

In heavy weather, when the wind becomes too strong for her usual number of working sails (known as being *under all plain sail*) ships take in their upper sails and when the wind grows stronger still, they are forced to roll up part of the remaining sails in order to reduce their area. This procedure is known as *reefing*. Finally, in winds of hurricane force, all sails have to be taken in, or will be blown out if left set, and with no sails set, ships are said to be *under bare poles*.

Unfortunately, sail knowledge is all too fast dying out in this machine age and with it goes the breath of the most romantic and exciting eras of seafaring adventure. But provided you can understand the principal nautical terms and can picture in your mind's eye just what a sailing ship can do and cannot do, you will be able to appreciate to the full the many excellent historical sea stories which have been, and fortunately still are being, written.

Back in the August issue we announced our intention to reprint some of the classic yarns from the files of Adventure. And when the letters started coming in, requesting this or that author's works, the name of Gordon MacCreagh (who writes of Africa with the color and authentic touch of first-hand knowledge) was close to the top of the list. This story is one of a series he wrote about a fabulous white trader called Kingi Bwana.

Slaves for Ethiopia

by
GORDON
MacCREAGH

THE RAID was perfectly timed and faultlessly executed. It had to be; otherwise it would never have caught King as completely as it did.

It wasn't King's fault. King was a prisoner—on a basis of parole, it was true, but none the less a prisoner of his British Majesty's East African police, charged with heinous crimes, not the least of which was entering jealous British territory without a passport from over the controversial border of even more jealous new Italian Ethiopia.

Captain Hawkes, with two native constables, all as ragged and battle worn as King himself, commanded the might of Empire. So King, with his big Masai henchman and the six that were left of his sturdy spearmen, slept the sleep of the careless in safe and well-policed British territory.

It was then that the raid came. The raid was commanded by Ibn Faraq the Fatherless, with some fifty hellion Arabs as hard-bitten as himself. It was one of those things where fools rush in where angels fear to tread and often enough accomplish what wiser angels would not attempt.

Not that Ibn Faraq was anybody's fool. With the stigma of Fatherless upon his youth he had to be as clever as a devil and as ruthless, to rise to the eminence of best hated slave trader in all southern Arabia. It was just that Faraq didn't know about things and people along the Kenya-Ethiop border.

But that didn't deter Faraq for a minute. Slave raiding over the Ethiop border and then juggling the catch back and forth over the line as pursuit threatened, had been a profitable

game for men who were bold enough ever since the border had been argued about.

In the good old days of the Ethiopian regime, nobody on that side of the line cared an awful lot, and dusky Ethiopian *Rases* who had slaves of their own were not averse to a little clandestine connivance, despite the death penalty decreed upon slave trading by their enlightened Haile Selassie.

In those days the game had been easy. But now that Italy was master, things were tightening up, even though the border was still far and roads were not at all. The Hadramaut market offered ever better prices, and every Arab knows that Allah created Africans for the purpose of being slaves.

So Faraq the Fatherless swore by the Prophet's coffin that was suspended in midair in the revered borderline between the empires of men and angels that he would go and look over for himself, this border between the empires of Italy and England, neither one of which he revered at all in these troubled days when men didn't know upon just whom Fate was laying the favorable finger.

When Faraq swore by the coffin he no longer hesitated, for he had much experience about the close connection between vacillation and coffins. So he loaded his fifty good men and fifty good Japanese rifles into his big sailing dhow that was now lying up in one of the creeks behind Port Durnford, and here he was, savage enough at the scarcity of good slave meat to tackle anything — and what matter if a couple of white men slept so carelessly in this wilderness? Faraq had much experience, too, in the technique of night raids. The first thing King knew about it was a muffled yell from a startled police sentry who should have been awake; and before he could swing his legs free of his cot, the tent in which he and Hawkes slept peaceably together collapsed upon them like a net, its ropes cut, and strong arms and legs swarmed all over it, flattening out cots and poles and everything under a smothering blanket of canvas.

King had caught leopards in that kind of trap—strong canvas that fell at a given word upon night creatures nuzzling over bait, and strong men who then rushed out and swarmed all over it. He preferred canvas to a net for the reason that a leopard's claw—or a lion's—might puncture the canvas but couldn't rip it.

Out of the wreck of his smashed camp cot, in pitch blackness and smothered by heavy bodies that swarmed all over the tent, the best that King could do was writhe like a grub in its cocoon till, inch by straining inch, he was able to work a hand down to his hunting knife and stab blindly at lumpy weights that pressed over his face. Somebody yelled in an agonized pitch, hot blood came through the gash in the canvas onto King's face, and then more weights pinned him hopelessly down. Somewhere in the choking blackness of dust close beside him he could hear

the angry splutters of outraged imperial dignity.

"By Gad, I— Somebody will smart for— Ugh! Some of these border tribes need a — Oo-oof! — damned good lesson, by Jove."

King saved his breath. He had no illusions about dignity. He knew that people who jumped white men's tents at night were not worrying about anybody's distant retaliation.

His limbs were limp with sheer suffocation before he was dragged from the trap, swathed with ropes, as he had himself many a time dragged a furiously fighting leopard.

Faultlessly executed. With the exception of the men whom King had stabbed through the canvas, the whole affair had been bloodless. Slave meat was valuable cargo these days. Not like the extravagant days of Tippoo Tib, whose Zanzibari Arabs used to come howling with fire and sword and trade musket into an African village and counted themselves well paid if fifty men out of a hundred lived and lucky if as many as half of those ever reached the market. Nowadays a live slave was worth very much more than the free marauder who might have died capturing him.

Even Barounggo, the big Masai, stood trussed, wrist and foot and knee, and the broken haft of his spear twisted the cords behind his back. An Arab was balancing the great blade of it, smiling happily.

"A guard put to this stub of a haft," he was saying. "And this thing will make a fine sword for me.

Faraq the Fatherless was well pleased. He sat on a pile of the white men's hurriedly collected camp gear as on a throne, his elbow on one knee, his fingers clawing gently through his beard, in thoughtful appreciation. A long lance leaned against his shoulder. A horseman in his own country, he retained here, where the tsetse flies killed off all horses, this symbol of desert manhood.

Torches lit the scene. Black shadows, dingy whites of the Arabs' clothing that billowed ghostly in the night wind, red lights on their Japanese rifles, already rust-spotted. At the outer edge of the torch flare lumpy shadows were already captured slaves, crouched in stolid African apathy. A line that glittered in and out amongst them was a chain to which each man's wrist was handcuffed.

Faraq's heavy-lidded eyes glittered like the metal as he nodded. "These he men worth the catching, not like these scrawny villagers of the last two weeks." The metallic eyes stopped their roving on the Masai; white teeth flashed out underneath them. "That one alone, well tamed and delivered safe in Hadramaut, will pay half the cost of the hunt."

Barounggo saw that the chief spoke of him. He glared back. Fierce in his pride, he growled an announcement that ought to correct this foolish mistake.

"I am Barounggo. *Elmoran* of the Masai. With these six *askaris* I serve the Bwana Kingi."

Faraq lifted an eyebrow at one of his men, who understood Swahili. At the man's translation his smile was

wider. "*Yah, Ahmakhat.* Tell the fool that the Kaid of Tefalit will bid as high as two hundred English gold pieces for him."

Barounggo's muscles, already swollen over his cords, bunched so that the lights glinted off them as hard as from the guns. The Arabs behind him laughed. They had tied many a strong man before this.

Barounggo swallowed down his personal rage for a later reckoning. First to correct this mistake. He knew what was proper. It was not fitting for a white man to announce himself. Let this mad Arab but know who was who, and the thing would be settled with apologies and surely with gifts to pay for indignity; though for himself blood would be the only apology.

"This white man," he announced, "is the *Bwana wa policea* of the *Britisi serkali.*"

"And that," Captain Hawkes told King with an angry satisfaction, "will change the fellow's tune in a hurry."

Faraq the Fatherless only rolled his eyes sourly to rest on the bedraggled majesty of the Law. He looked at the officer without expression and without comment. Barounggo's eyes rolled in wonder. The long-reaching might of British law and order was something that even King didn't buck.

"This one," Barounggo intoned it as a good servant should. "This one is the *Bwana n'kubwa Kingi,* whom all men know. *Mwinda ya ndhovu, na wagasimba, na pigana ngagi na mikonake,* hunter of elephants, slayer of lions, who fights gorillas with his hands." The extravagant titles rolled sonorously forth. "Who shoots and does not miss. Who burns up his enemies. Who—"

"By Jove!" Hawkes was still confident enough to let go a short laugh. "You'd think the colonial police are nothing here. Is the man reciting your deeds or is he just bragging?"

The recital brought response, though not as overwhelming as the Masai had expected. The Arab who knew Swahili and the East African Who's-Who cried out, "*Wah, Allah!*" And he told Faraq quickly, "*Har'm.* This one is forbidden. Evil fate comes to those who meddle with him."

Faraq, who knew nothing of Africa, said only, "Peace. I am not a fool to hold white men. Nor will anybody buy them in any market. Take the two out and turn them loose. The rest we hold. Away now. Swiftly."

That was the faultless technique of Tippo Tib, whose reputation was that a million slaves had passed through his hands—a well planned raid, well executed, and away before pursuit could be organized.

A chill dawn, dripping dew as heavy as light rain, slanted its light on King and the representative of Empire, crouched under a huge wild fig tree for its protection. Alone in an empty plain that undulated away to every point of a dusty yellow horizon; foodless, fireless, weaponless, stripped down to every last item of any value. The raiders had taken everything and gone.

Alone as far as human companionship or aid went. Game was plentiful enough and with an instinct of security that must have been instilled by the devil they browsed closer than Hawkes had even seen them. King could have thrown a stone into a herd of Semmering gazelles.

Utterly alone and utterly forlorn. But King was able to grin at the police officer. Hawkes was savagely furious. His ruddy British complexion was blotched white with anger, his fingers kept twisting his once trim military mustache. It was King's grin that broke through his control to flare out: "I suppose you're grinning, you damned Yank, because you think I won't be able to take you in now. But no fear, my lad, I will." It was anger and pride speaking. King could have taken and broken the man over his knee almost as easily as could the Masai. His hard lips spread a little wider and he settled his big shoulders back, like into an arm chair, amongst the great flaring roots of the tree.

"You don't mean that, copper."

"Oh, don't I? By gad, if it takes the whole British army, I'll—"

"Yes, yes, I know." King's level brows went up, half mockingly. "I've heard it all before. But you've forgotten one thing."

"I'll take you in if it's the last thing I do before I have to resign my job over this disgrace."

"You've forgotten that those filthy pirates have my man Barounggo and six of his men. I can't go with you now—not yet"

Hawkes looked at him as though he had been physically hit, and then his normal redness flushed deeper.

"Sorry, old man. I was talking rattled. A thing like this happening, don't you know. Really awf'ly sorry. Two of my men taken too. But, dash it all, what can we do?"

King's smile hardened.

"Go after 'em," he said quite simply.

"Of course, old man. Certainly, and all that. But placed as we are—empty-handed, you know—"

"You forgot one more thing."

"What?"

King's eyes narrowed, as though contemplating the not unpleasant prospect of possible action.

"That my other man, the Hottentot, is about due to meet us somewhere along this trail with that new English rifle that you touted so high that I had to send for it."

Hawkes clapped his thigh. "That's true, splendid! We'll be able to feed ourselves and—" Hawkes' enthusiasm went out cold. "If those bloody bandits don't catch him as he comes along, all unsuspicious."

"Not that one." King's grin went sidewise at Hawkes. "He won't be lying up any place, safe in charge of your British law."

Hawkes took the thrust with a chagrinned grimace. "*Mea culpa,* old chap, and you don't have to rub it in. I suppose I'll have to offer my resignation and all that. But anyway, if he comes through—"

His jaws tightened. "We'll be bound to catch a native runner soon-

er or later and send him in to Todali outpost with a wire for reinforcements, and I'll at least take my men back with me."

"By the time your official reinforcements are organized," King said with conviction, "those fellows will be to hell and gone with no trail behind 'em. That's plain raiding history. You go tag along with your platoon and won't dare cross an international border. Me, I've got to step right after their trails while they're high and going."

"But dammit, old fellow, what can the two of us do against them? Fifty of 'em, well armed."

King grinned at him, almost fondly. "So you would bull-dog along, eh?"

"Well, er— If you're so blasted bent on being crazy, what the deuce else can I do? Though damme if I like it. That business you dragged me into against those juju devils was shivery enough, even with all our men. But two of us! Alone!"

"Us, *and* the Hottentot," King said. "And he'll have his own gun, that military .303 that you insist I must have stolen, since they're not for sale, though I can show you where you can pick up a hundred of 'em. Maybe you'll get a chance to use it and show how well a soldier can shoot. Though I'm hardly figuring on that." He stared hard-eyed into the distance, his mouth a thin crooked line. "It'll all hinge on that new rifle. If it's as good as you say—" He shrugged useless speculation from him till the rifle should come. "Come on. We'll build a high smoke for the Hottentot, and if you must eat, I'll show you how to snatch *mjumbakaka* lizards under rocks. As good as frogs' legs at time."

CHAPTER 2

FOOLS RUSH IN

It was afternoon before King jumped up with a glad "Ha!" A black speck like an ant was crawling over the rounded top of a far *kloof*. "He has made wonderful time; we've that much luck with us."

The Hottentot put on a spurt of sheer bravado and arrived at a trot. A small man, as wizened as a monkey and as wiry; he was dog weary but as cocky as an ape that has performed a good trick. He panted his first complaint.

"This new gun, Bwana—it weighs at least two pounds more than any proper gun should. Carrying it and my own and cartridges has broken my liver. There should have been a camel.

"It was good running, Apeling," King said. "There will be a new blanket with zig-zag stripes, and the extra weight will be equalled in tobacco."

"*Whau! Assant, Bwana.*" The little man wriggled his quite surprised thanks, suddenly abashed at the munificence of the reward that his complaint had craftily played for and that he had never expected to come so easily. "Where is that great oaf Barounggo and his *askaris*? Can I not be absent a few days but that useless

fighting man leaves his master in a plight that one would expect of bushmen savages?"

King's lips bit hard and all the angles of his face stood out like strained muscles. Soberly he told the Hottentot about the raid.

"And therefore," he said grimly, "much depends upon this new gun."

The Hottentot's pose of jealousy of his master's other servant's mere brawn was forgotten in quick concern. All his actions were those of an enraged ape. He jumped up and down grimacing with his mobile lips. He threw clods of earth in the direction where the slayers must have gone.

"Then for what do we wait, Bwana?" he chattered. "Let us away. We can raise the tribes against them. Look, Bwana." The little man's mind raced as alertly as a goblin's. "On the Ethiopian side the Ras Woilo; for a promise of aid against the Aitalian conquerors, will lend us a hundred of his spearmen who hide in the hills."

"Even that I may do yet," King said without a qualm. "I wait only for this gun. Observe now, Kaffa." His eyes roved far to pick out at suitable mark. "That broad acacia trunk; five hundred yards I guess it, and full five hundred I shall need. Go and hew me the bark from it at man height, so that the white shows clear for a space the spread of your two small hands and stand then clear to signal. But first eat. There are fat lizards in the hot ashes."

Kaffa spat disdain. "What is food, Bwana, that it should delay vengeance? A man hunting blood eats when he may, or the day after that. I go. A space of one hand spread, Bwana, is better for a sighting. What is five hundred yards to the Bwana Kingi?"

Hawkes looked after the little trotting figure.

"By Gad!" he said. "How do you get them that way, my dear chap? We can't."

King laughed shortly.

"You fellows rule them," was all the explanation he gave. He took the new rifle from its canvas case. His eyes sparkled over it like the sun on its fine mechanism. He talked to himself and it rather than to Hawkes.

"Jeffries magnum .300, eh? The best long range big-game gun in the world, are you?—Ten pounds without scope, twelve with. Well, you'll be needing all of that for your power. If you're as good as you look—" He squatted down on a low termite mound and scuffed holes for his heels.

Hawkes ventured criticism. "I say, old man. Hadn't you better take the prone posish to sight at five hundred?"

"Live targets," King grunted at him. "Fifty of 'em, coming yelling at you with guns that are no old trade gunk, don't wait for you to take prone positions in between getting up and running."

He snuggled his eye down to the scope and then cocked his eyebrow over it at Hawkes. "Damn if this thing ain't as good as any German scope I ever looked through."

It drew Hawkes like a defensive wasp. "Well, rather, my dear chap."

The feel and balance of the gun chased King's somber mood from him as though he might have been fondling a beautiful woman. He grinned at Hawkes' patriotic stuffiness and adjusted the scope to five hundred and snuggled down to it again. The slash of white on the acacia stem looked about as big as a watch. The Hottentot stood appallingly close to it, nonchalantly at ease.

"Damned little fool," King muttered. "He does that just to brag about me. Some day he'll—" But he fired.

The Hottentot took off his loin cloth and stood naked. He waved it in a weird wig-wag system of his own. King grunted and twiddled the micrometer mount.

He fired four times. The Hottentot pranced like a naked imp and wig-wagged wildly. King stood up grinning happily.

"You Britishers always did build a good bull gun. So then I guess we're set."

"If you say so. But, er—won't you let me in on a little bit of your mad program, Yank?"

King's deadly mood came down upon him again.

"Sniping," he told Hawkes grimly. "Ever see the damage and demoralization a good sniper can do? I'll pick 'em off, by God, till they'll talk terms. Harry 'em back and forth over the border. I may even have to enlist with the old rebel Ras Woilo against his new white masters. But I'll get my men back."

Hawkes stared at him.

"I suppose," he mused aloud, "that's how you get 'em to be that way." Then he shrugged. "Well, I'll be having to resign anyway. So—"

They shook hands on it.

King was counting cartridges when Kaffa came back. He whistled tunelessly through his teeth. "Only five packets. Fifty thin rounds! And five of 'em fired on sighting in."

"And fifty raiders with modern rifles," Hawkes gloomily added up the mad prospect.

Kaffa stood on one leg and scratched at his knee with the other, squirming like a monkey on a tight rope. The little man understood English, though he tried never to let on about that.

"What evil is on your mind, Implet?" King demanded.

The Hottentot looked far afield and his little black eyes were inexpressibly mournful.

"Fifty," he said, "was all that that Inglesi shopkeeper would deliver with the gun, saying that he required to keep the balance for other such guns. Therefore, Bwana," he brought his scratching foot down and stood ready to jump, "knowing that Bwana must have a need, or he would never have sent me for the gun, it came into my mind to steal two packages." He produced from his meager loin cloth two flat packets of shells.

"Whee!" King whooped. "Twenty more shots!" And then he forced his expression down to seriousness. "For that, little devil's spawn, this hidebound policeman will put you in jail; or at least will fine you much

money after restitution is made. But, for this once, I will myself pay it."

"By gad!" Hawkes was as ill at ease as the Hottentot. "I suppose I'll have to lag him. Clean up the job and all that before I resign. But the fine is on me. Really, old fellow, I insist."

King cuddled the extra cartridges.

"Maybe," he said, "you won't have to resign. Still an' all, sixty-five shots allows all too little for misses. Guess we'll have to live on lizard meat."

Hawkes twisted his raggy mustache to its best semblance of good form.

"Good enough grub for the last few meals of three crazy men," he said.

The next day's sun was beginning to throw long shadows before them when Kaffa pointed silently to the sky. King considered the birds wheeling in high watchfulness.

"Ha! Not anything dead, or they'd be dropping. Not game, that high. Men."

"And camped," the Hottentot supplemented, "or the birds would not be so many. And who but a slave train would camp this early?"

"Come on," said King through his teeth. "Edge over to that hill."

He said nothing more till they crouched on the hill's top and looked over the plain to a straggle of men under a group of far mimosa trees. Then he said, more as a statement than a question.

"You Britishers got an old law, haven't you, that a slaver can be shot on sight?" The distant men, hard black and white in the direct sun, looked like little penguins.

"Why, er—I don't know. I—"

"You pulled it on the old blackbirders often enough. What d'you figure the distance?"

Hawkes judged it with military precision. "Seven hundred, I'd say. But, dammit man, you're not going to try from here? Out in the open hilltop like this? They'll rush us like howling dervishes. And no defensive works."

"Majuba Hill," King told him.

"By Gad! Were you at Majuba? But you couldn't have been, what?"

"Before my time." King was kicking heel holes for himself. "But from all the telling, there were some Boer Africanders dug no trenches at Majuba; only defense was clean shooting." He was shuffling his buttocks into the stiff grass. "And the best they had was old Mannlichers, nor any scopes, either." He clicked the scope up to the seven hundred. "And the light is perfect, smack on our back, and the wind dropping to nothing for sundown."

The Hottentot stood as motionless as a well trained caddie, awaiting the drive. In a low monotone he said: "That tall fellow, Bwana, who stands clear of the tree there."

Hawkes fidgeted with the rifle that he had taken from Kaffa. He drew the bolt, made sure that he had five in the magazine, pushed one into the chamber, sighted in the direction of the far mob.

"Crazy Yankee blighter," he kept grumbling.

King turned one sardonic eye on him. "Better hold it till they're into two-fifty. Those open army sights are something sinful on shells beyond. And if we can't stop 'em then, I hope you can run just a leetle faster'n them. You know any prayers?"

He brought his eye down to the scope. His teeth clicked together with the soft cluck of the set trigger. His breath held tight and he pressed the last fraction.

The tall fellow who stood out alone just disappeared into the knee-high grass.

"Oh, shooting!" Hawkes breathed. "Shooting indeed!" Just as though commending a grand play at cricket.

There is—and unfortunately so—an astounding callousness that descends up on men after they have once justified to themselves the need of taking human life.

There was no more question in King's or the police officer's mind as to the propriety of their lone-handed war than there was in the Hottentot's.

"Hell!" King grunted. "I've seen even soldiers score a stationary target at a thousand. But it won't be so easy now."

Thin cries floated back to them and men scurried as aimlessly as ants. In the tenseness of waiting even the Hottentot was whispering. "They have not seen yet whence came the death. Look, there stands another one staring."

King fired again. That one disappeared into the grass.

"Spotted us now, by golly!" His tight grin was on his face as though painted on a robot of steel and wires. "Here they come."

Men streamed out from the camp, yelling, waving guns. There must have been full thirty of them, every one fiercely bent on achieving the honor of annihilating the three on the hill. Some stood long enough to fire aimlessly.

"Dopes!" King fired again. His words formed themselves in his throat rather than on his lips. "They'll learn to run zig-zag before we're through." He fired. "And near half a mile is a lot of running in stiff grass." He fired again. "Ha! Atta gun! Hundred percent so far. Whites o' their eyes, hell. But—" Again. "They got guts."

With merciless method he picked the foremost runners so that those behind could see them drop. But they kept coming, yelling hoarsely. Bullets began to kick dust and to buzz like wind-driven hornets. King was not ashamed to duck after each near one had passed, but he held grimly to his position.

Hawkes cursed him.

"One lucky hundred and eighty grains is all they need, chum." But with obstinate pride he sat stiffly upright alongside of King and made a point of it to expose himself every bit as high.

The Hottentot had no traditions of national pride. He lay as flat as a beetle. King's words, his cheek distorted hard against the butt comb, came as a hissing jumble. "Try your luck, soldier. It's stop 'em now or

run like hell." And then, "Whoopee! They're winded and down to a walk."

Hawkes began to shoot. King was too furiously busy to look, but mechanically he kept grunting, "Watch shells. No ammunition train behind us."

Suddenly the Hottentot leaped high and waved his arms. The men below them were dropping to the grass for cover from the murderous accuracy of the fire from the hill. King snatched out a hand to the Hottentot's ankle and jerked him sprawling.

"Monkey head!" A bullet passed. "Whit!"

"By George, we've got 'em!" Hawkes laughed with the cracked exultation of men in the hot surge of battle. "We've got 'em. They've no cover!"

From their eminence they could look down on the shadowed depressions in the tall grass. Hawkes dropped to the regulation prone position and picked out his targets. King grunted and followed suit. Lying down, the Arabs were shooting closer than even a madman could afford to deride. The furious speed of King's movements settled down to cold method.

"Whoever runs now won't be us, by God. Allow to shoot just over the grass tips, and it ought to get 'em in midspine."

A few hot seconds ago it had been yelling figures full of furious life that disappeared every now and then into the long grass. Now, every now and then a yelling figure lurched out of its shadowed depression and dropped back to make a new sprawled shape.

It takes hard disciplined troops to stand that sort of thing—troops of the sort that had died in their thousands and stuck to it and finally won the murderous hill of Majuba. These slave raiders were not of that breed.

Somewhere out of the grass a man wailed. *"Wah Allah kerim!"* for God's mercy and protection, and jumped up in a frenzied dash for the camp.

Hawkes whooped and let go. The man curled like a rabbit and rolled for yards.

That was the break of panic. One after another, and then in a yelling mob, the Arabs jumped and raced for their lives, each frantic not to be the hindmost; and behind them came the devilish bullets, smashing at their backs.

King sat up and fondled his rifle like a lover. He said in plain hard American, "That's learned the dogs some."

Hawkes was breathing normally again. He paid King the highest compliment he knew.

"By God, sir! You should have been a soldier. Your selection of position and tactics were masterly."

King turned and peered through his rifle barrel into the low sun before he grinned complete satisfaction at what he saw and said, "God forbid. I may get my tough sledding against your damned officialdom, but I'm my own boss." He looked down over the late skirmish ground, now in the shadow of the hill, and grinned

out wide. "I'm a trader. Come on, Kaffa."

"What mad thing now?" Hawkes had to know.

"Rifles," King said curtly. "You soldiers leave 'em on the battleground. Not me. There's no government buying mine. Should be about twenty scattered around — and cartridge belts. Sun smack in their eyes, we're safe as bugs in a Kavirondo blanket."

The official in Hawkes rose to protest. "You can't trade rifles in British East."

"Copper," King laughed at him. "You'll never know where I trade 'em." And darkly he added, "I may have to trade with rebel Ras Woilo if I can't win my boys back any other way."

"But—Dammit, man." Hawkes' whole credo was violated. "You can't do that—arm natives, you know, against white Italian rule."

"Yeah," King snarled, "and the Arabs are brown and my Masai and his boys are black. But they're *my* boys! Get it?"

"By Gad!" Hawkes breathed. "Yes, I think I see. You still should have been a soldier."

"C'mon," King said roughly. "I got to get those rifles and find a cache for 'em before the lions come around. An' then we'll have to hustle up a good roost in a tree."

Later, examining those good Japanese guns, he shook his head. "Pity. These cartridges and all. Damn, if it wasn't for lions we could annoy those fellows a whole lot all night."

Faraq the Fatherless was no fool. Lions, he knew, could be a menace to a few men at night, but not to a caravan. In the darkness he silently folded up his tents and slipped away from under rifle range of that accursed hill.

With daylight King didn't even bother to go up and scout. He looked for circling vultures and laughed. "African spotter planes. And there'll be other hills behind 'em, and three good men can always outwalk a caravan. C'mon, let's hunt lizards."

There was an element of the terrifying in that remorseless pursuit. If not for the fear it engendered in the raiders, it would have been ludicrous—a raiding army running before three. Not that those fierce Arabs would ever had admitted they were running. But Ibn Faraq cursed savagely and judged it wise to make for safety with what winnings he had. True, slaves were worth twice as much as free guards, and his slaves had remained immune; but if he should lose many more of his guards, there could still be naked spearmen by the way who would lash themselves with howling and drums to a frenzy of retaliation.

So Faraq lashed his slaves with whips and blows to make the best speed that could be beaten out of them. And King laughed grimly and presently topped a hill behind them.

Moving men with their slender height were of course more difficult to hit than moving game at the same distance, but King's sniping remained

deadly. He didn't hesitate to lie down now in the prone position for long range shooting.

"None of 'em fool enough to try rushing us again, is my bet. And even soldiers can target at a thousand feet, shooting this way. Hell, I'll even call the shot."

The Hottentot, like a top grade caddie, called it. That one with the black cloak, Bwana; he will be a chief."

The black cloak lurched forward before its owner ever heard a shot. The three could see a furious scurrying along the length of the black line that was slave meat, could see arms rise and fall, knew that the arms held whips.

The column drew out of range. Men milled behind it in a confusion of distant yelling. King risked a long shot at running game. The Hottentot clucked querulous disapproval. King only laughed in short barks. There would be still other hills in a three weeks journey between here and the coast. A lot could happen in three weeks.

It could happen, of course, to either side. And Faraq the Fatherless had not attained his rank through any fatalist habit of letting Kismet do whatever it would to him. Faraq drew some of his men together and harangued them.

It was the Hottentot whose monkey alertness first spotted Faraq's manipulation of Kismet. When they next caught sight of the caravan it was well out of range; but Kaffa, whose eyes had never been ruined by education, peered at it under his hand and then gave of the education that he knew.

"Bwana, the dust that they made rises not so high. Therefore it is in my mind that they travel not so fast."

"Ha! Getting tired out," Hawkes said.

"And Bwana, they pass close to that hill ahead of us, which a wise man must to do; yet it is in my mind that Arabi surely have learned to be a foolish thing chief is surely not a fool."

"By Jove! I wonder what's ahead. Maybe a war party."

"Not ahead. It is in my mind that the men who walk are fewer in number; yet we have not slain so many."

"Aha!" King stopped dead. "Little wise ape, there will be two blankets and enough tobacco to buy a little ape woman. Not a fool, surely, is our slaver."

Hawkes did not as yet get the Hottentot's devious reasoning. "What's the delay?"

"Ambush," King whispered. "Waitin' for us right along the track we'll take for that perfect sniping hill. So we just won't. We'll circle, and maybe we'll spot something from that *kopje*. Bet they'll be lying up in that patch of *nyika* grass."

They were. A dozen of them, lying in wait with the crafty vengefulness of buffalo. When a flanking fire broke on them from the hill that they had never suspected they fired no shot in return. They bleated and ran like woolly sheep, their billowing *jellabahs* marking them out against

the yellow grass for the slaughter.

"Apeling," King told the Hottentot, when he dared waste no more cartridges on the range, "there will be two women and the price of a cow."

The next high ground showed the caravan headed due north and hurrying like haartebeeste harried by lions. King looked for the distant scurrying figures, and his mouth twisted hard with a disappointment that was none the easier to take for all that he knew it had been bound to come.

"Here's where you're through, Britisher," he growled. "They're working the old trick of heading for the holy Italian border line that you dassent cross without your permits and your passports and all your mess of official red tape. Guess it's a lone hand for me from now on."

Hawkes watched the slave train go and his frown echoed, showed the struggle of the ingrained law-abidingness in him. His shoulders jerked in a short shrug.

"I'm through anyhow." His anger flared out. "And damn your eyes, Yank, don't you forget there's two of my own men there whom I dashed well will take back or stay here with 'em."

King reached a long hand to the other's shoulder and shook it.

"There's times," he said, "when I think a soldier is pretty near as good as a free man—even a British soldier."

"Come on," Hawkes said brusquely. "We can get another pot shot or two in before dark."

The Hottentot let it slip once again that he understood, though he pretended that he spoke only out of his observation; and as always, he shrouded his words with the circumlocutions of native thought.

"It is in my mind, Bwana, that the Bwana Mwewe, in his eagerness for slaughter, has forgotten *mwewe's* wisdom."

Mwewe meant hawk, so the Bwana Mwewe was as inevitable as though so designated by his sponsors at his baptism.

"What now, Little Wise Ape?" King was never so cocksure as to pass up anybody's advice. "And let it not be an impertinence just because a little wisdom has newly earned you a cow."

"Nay, Bwana, no impertinence." The little goblin stared with solemn eyes. "Who in all this land would offer an impertinence to a *bwana* of the *policea,* when even the *mkubwa* Kingi shows him respect—without fail?" He remained carefully just out of King's reach. King, out of the corner of his eye knew it. So the Hottentot went on to expound his observation. "Only it is in my mind that when *mwewe* is hot in the hunting, the quail hurry to cover beneath the bushes; whereupon *mwewe,* being wise, hides behind a tree; and when the birds, feeling themselves safe, emerge to fluff their feathers in the dust of security, *mwewe* swoops to great slaughter."

"By jove!" Hawkes' military mind grasped the simile quicker than did King. "The fellow is right. Bring up the artillery when the enemy thinks

he's safe over the line. Biff 'em when they're bivouacked for breakfast. Demoralize 'em no end. By gad, I'll buy the boy another cow!"

CHAPTER 3

LAST STAND

The demoralization that Hawkes predicted was as complete as anybody could have hoped. Bivouacked the slave raiders were. For breakfast, for rest, for surcease from that relentless harrying against which their only retaliation was impotent rage.

At the edge of a water hole they sprawled, under trees. Careless smoke went up from cooking fires. Safe. Over the border—well over it, where there could be no doubt about international lines, where the government headquarters were a month's journey away and where foreign officialdom dared not follow.

A perfect spot, such as slave raiders had picked throughout the long years.

When the first man suddenly pitched on his face over his own cooking fire and a full second later the far pop of report came, there followed a full five seconds of unbelieving silence. Then men scuttled for cover, throwing dust from their heels like veritable quail. A full second later their screams floated back on the morning breeze.

A bold few, enraged to desperation, started a half-hearted charge towards the hill. They could see nothing with the sun in their eyes; but there was a hill and from it the sniping must come. So they charged, yelling, brandishing guns.

But first one man dropped, and then another, and the charge broke up and streamed back to the water hole, where there were trees with fat trunks behind which to shelter.

"They've learned," King breathed.

Frantic whips rose and fell. The slave column, like a long black snake, writhed into broken movement and staggered away. White draped figures straggled after them, northwards, away from that deadly range. Fires remained burning; pots remained over them; lumpy bundles remained on the ground.

Kaffa scurried over the deserted camp with all the inquisitive ardor of a baboon turning over rocks for grubs. He came to report with as much glee as one that had found a locust colony.

"Loot is here, Bwana; four good daggers and seven cloaks that smell bad and a sack of wheat meal and cooked food in the pots which they will not have had time to poison. Only the meat that scents the air is that man whose face fell into his own fire."

"Pah!" Hawkes grimaced. "I had been thinking of venison." But his instinct was to turn to the strategic value of things. He was exultant. "Victory, by Jove. Victory with captured commissariat."

King remained dourly dissatisfied.

"This is coming too easy," he said. "Africa isn't that kind. That slaver devil will be dealing some hell out

of the deck yet." Savagery bit through his voice. "And he still has our men. Let's eat and on."

The next hill showed how sorely the relentless sniping had taxed the raiders. A little straggle of men was walking across the plain—plodding slowly and openly on the back trail.

King jerked his shoulder to throw off his rifle sling with an expert movement that slapped the gun into his hands.

"What fancy trick now?" he wondered.

But Kaffa hopped on one leg in excitement and said: "Bwana, that tall fellow amongst them who walks like a stork, nobody could be so ungainly but our Bukadi; and that other who leads with his head low, that one is surely Ngoma, the trail smeller—and they come unbound, as free men."

"Eight of them." Hawkes' voice broke high in its tenseness. "Capitulation, by gad! Return of prisoners."

King's voice was hoarse. "What of Barounggo, little ape? Do you make him out?"

The Hottentot stopped hopping. He peered under his hand. "Nay, Bwana, that great oaf I do not see." His voice was anxious. "And his form surely would stand out from the rest." He tried to be optimistic about it. "Perhaps he follows with a message."

King walked the hill top with long strides; his scowl was deep cut in his face.

The men plodded to the hill top. Two of them came to attention and saluted Hawkes. The other six said, "*Jamba Bwana.*" But there was no big-toothed grin of greeting on their faces.

"What of Barounggo?" King snapped at them.

Ngoma, the trail leader, reported, "Bwana, that man who has no name, having no father, said, 'In the name of Allah let there be peace.' And he said, 'Tell those white men,'—and he cursed you in the name of many devils—'tell them that no man who has fallen into my hands has ever escaped alive. Yet I do what I have never done. I return eight of those whom I have taken.' "

"What of Barounggo?" King snapped again.

"Barounggo, Bwana, is a l i v e, though beaten with many whips; for one who beat him came too close and Barounggo, his hands being chained, smote him with his foot and that man died on the second day in great torment."

"What of Barounggo?" King thundered at them.

"Barounggo he holds, saying that his price alone will pay the cost of his losses. Therefore, he says, let there now be peace, lest a worse thing happens."

"Peace?" It exploded from King. "While he holds Barounggo? I'll—" His shout choked down to a small dry question. "What did he mean, lest a worse thing happen?"

"That we do not know, Bwana. He is an evil man and his rage is like a trapped leopard's."

"By God, if he—" King took a huge breath to hold back futile threats. His men shuffled uneasily be-

fore him; it was not their fault, of course, that their great Masai leader was not with them; but they felt as privates must who have accepted liberty while their officers have been held.

The lines of King's scowl remained just as deep, but the shape of them began to change to his thin, hard-lipped grin. He said, "All right, you men. There will be a running for this day and this night and the next day. Kaffa knows where rifles are hidden. With them you will be men once more."

Kaffa jumped high and screamed his sudden exultation. The men stood and stared like oxen with white rolling eyes till the significance of it broke on their slower minds. Then they shouted their cavernous African laughter.

"Give us but a bellyful of meat, Bwana, and we run for a week of days and nights. Free men we are, but our manhood remains bound in the iron chain of those Arabi dogs who eat women's food. Give us meat as we are accustomed and we run for the slaying."

"By gad!" Hawkes murmured. "If we could put that spirit into a regiment!"

King's grin broke sardonically on him. "You heard what they said? Free men. They don't fight on order from far away politicians. This is their own grudge fight."

Hawkes frowned at that blasphemous philosophy, but he didn't argue.

"With weapons," he said, "you'll have a small army."

"I'll have?" King's cold stare matched Hawkes' frown. "What about you? You've got your two back."

Hawkes turned to his two men, his voice crisp.

"T'shun," he told them. "Take orders. You two will go with these men. What this little Hottentot commands, you will obey."

The two saluted. King laughed at the gaping men.

"All right, Kaffa," he said. "Away. You have a *Jaipani* rifle. Feed the men well. By tomorrow's falling sun we expect you to catch up with us. We shall leave a well marked trail, so that there may be no delay."

Kaffa laughed. "Nay, Bwana—what need of a trail? Not a man here but will smell his way back to the vengeance."

King and Hawkes squatted alone on a hilltop that King had warily chosen with the sun at their backs. Hawkes frowned down at the slave raider encampment, a mile away.

"The blighter is getting clever. Plenty of trees for cover and a good water hole. Dashed good defensive position."

King's eyes ranged over the hazy landscape. He cocked one eyebrow at a far herd of galloping zebra.

"Scented lions," he commented without interest. "Probably lying up in that *donga* waiting for supper time." With a little greater interest he pushed his chin towards a thin plume of smoke above the foothills

to the north. "Probably Ras Woilo's rebel guerillas waking up to the doings over the border."

"Ras Woili!" Hawkes' interest was much greater than King's. "Ha! Then we have 'em. The Ethiops harryin' 'em from that side, and our own fellows ought to be along this evening with those rifles."

King shook his head. While his big Masai remained a prisoner his experience of Africa could conjure up a hundred deviltries.

"Not that easy, soldier; not in Africa. And the Ethiop can't change his habits any more'n his skin. It'll take 'em a week to get organized anyway; and what's more, if Woilo cuts in, there'll be complications—like rifles, and your damned official conscience. It was all you could stretch to come over the border into foreign territory. If I have to make a deal with Woilo, rifles for help, you'll kick like an eight gauge full choked." The grin came sourly though. "Besides, I'm a trader. I don't want to have to lose the good couple dozen rifles I've won to date. We'll play our own hand."

But Hawkes remained full of optimism. "There'll be eleven of us. Eleven men with white leadership have won a province in Africa before now." But the precariousness of the empty wilderness injected its note. "If nothing stops our fellows from getting back."

That was one point on which King had no fears. "Not around here, nothing will. Not those boys, with what they've got on their mind."

Nothing did. Though darkness had come and King's pessimism about African mischance was crowding down on Hawkes before King said; "Ha! Hear 'em?"

All that Hawkes could hear was the hoarse snuffling of a brace of hyenas.

"That'll be them." King said. "The brutes following along their flank, hoping for someone to drop dead." On the farther side of the hill, away from the scattered glow of the encampment, he built a small fire. And in another half hour dark forms emerged into its light.

"We would have been here sooner, Bwana," the Hottentot reported, "only that the lions were unexpectedly many and the game therefore few and far and these great louts demanded meat for their running like empty baskets that have stood idle till the ants have eaten their bottom out. Six and twenty rifles, Bwana; not a one lost; only a porcupine had found one hiding place and eaten up three good cartridge belts."

Hawkes chuckled. "Twenty-six! I hadn't realized our sniping had got so many of 'em—I should say, your sniping, old man."

"It was a good running," said King. "There will be gifts for each man."

"It was nothing, Bwana," the long-legged Bukadi boasted. "When a man's belly is full, what is a little travel? We be ready to go as far again."

"That's good," King said dryly. "Come then and look the other side of this hill."

The men stumbled after King to where a view of the further plain showed pin points of fire. Angry growls came at the reminder of their shameful captivity.

"So have they always camped in their security. *Whau!* Let us fall upon them, Bwana, while they are fat with sleep."

King shook his head, slowly, regretfully. "Not that easy. Give 'em a chance and those men can fight like devils. There's not enough of us to take that kind of a chance. But the crowd of us together can maybe spoil their beauty rest some."

Hawkes saw the immediate military value. "Those johnnies have slept in peace all these nights while we've been roosting in trees. We've never dared to make a thorn *boma*, against beasts for fear they'd send out a scouting party and find it. A little of this night medicine ought to jolly well bring 'em around to talking terms."

"Come ahead," King said shortly. "Keep together. Who straggles will be lion meat."

It was when they could distinguish dim forms amongst the fires that King halted his party. "One good thing, we know that the slave chain isn't being coddled by any fires." He gave his simple instructions to his men. "Shoot, drop immediately flat, and crawl two hundred yards. So, if they charge out into the darkness, we be somewhere else." And he grunted with a grim vindictiveness. "Show these jaspers something about night raids."

The plan was as perfect as Faraq the Fatherless One's original raid and as faultlessly executed. The fusillade that crashed out of the empty darkness was answered by seconds of stunned silence; then came yells that were more startled than fierce, and scattered shots stabbed savage tongues in the vague direction of the darkness that was empty as it had been before. Those African *askaris* knew things about crawling through high grass that Arabs could never understand. Bullets flew futilely over where the raiders had been, and the raiders were belly flat and well away from there.

Well and thoroughly away before King halted them again. Not much could be distinguished of the camp; fires still glowed, but no indolent forms were in their light.

"I don't know that this nets us any score," King said. "Maybe your two policemen can shoot in the dark, but my boys are spearmen; they couldn't hit a hill in broad daylight. But it's morale we're aiming at more than men. Ready, everybody? Shoot when I do, and away again."

Somebody must have hit something, for a shriek came that was more than just rage or fear. King laughed. Bullets came where he had been, but nobody showed a head. It takes a peculiar kind of courage for men to charge out into a blackness where guns might be waiting.

Round at the farther side of the water hole King called another halt for another volley. Hawkes was jubilant. "This is the technique, my boy. Nothing like night sniping to smash

morale. I've seen even our own men raw and ragged after a night's persistent attention by Waziri tribesmen up in our Afghan frontier."

"It's too easy." King remained obstinately pessimistic. "You're talking about an organized army that can afford to lose a few hundred men. We can't afford to lose one. We're too blamed vulnerable. Anything happens to me, and what then?"

It was not complimentary, but Hawkes knew well enough that only King's craft and experience had put life into their amazing campaign. He said nothing. King grumbled on. "These Arabs aren't anybody's fool. Give 'em time to think, and they'll hatch out a devilish idea or two for reprisal."

A little later he was able to point to proof of his foreboding. It happened on the farther side of the water hole, out in the direction from where they had first fired into the camp. A chillingly brief and admonitory frame of the African night. Just three short sounds. The harsh, *waugh, waugh*, of a lion and a single hoarse shriek. That was all.

"What was it?" Hawkes whispered. "What happened there?"

King barked a short laugh. "Somebody hatched an idea that didn't work only because he didn't know Africa." He let the Hottentot translate the tragedy. "And how do you read that, little Apeling?"

Kaffa moaned the crooning noise of a frightened monkey. In itself it had an eerie sound, coming disembodied out of the blackness into which he merged. "I read it, Bwana, that a man crept out to lie in wait where we might return; but the lion found him first."

"A *wahabi*," Hawkes breathed. "I've seen 'em do it before."

"What's a *wahabi*?"

"These Mohammedan johnnies. Some fellow's rage will drive him fanatic and he'll take oath on his knife blade to go out and get an enemy or die."

"Well, that one died," King said. "But they'll be hatching other things. Ready *W'askari*? Another volley and keep up the merry game. Yet let no fool become careless."

The game might have gone on all through the deadly night, but that Faraq the Fatherless, desperately gathering his wits in between the sporadic volleys, proved King's contention that he was nobody's fool. A voice called out from the blackness of the camp, where all fires had now been smothered.

"Give ear and consider. We lie behind a barricade of iron and meat. A rope of slaves surrounds us. Chained two deep they sit. Shoot them, if you will. Those that die will still sit, wedged between their fellows." And another voice laughed like a devil assured of many souls.

"So!" It hissed from King. "That's one good one they've hatched. This was too easy to last. Nothing to do but get back to our hill before daylight. Let 'em catch us on the open plain, and we're cooked."

It was on their own safe hill that the next good idea hatched. They were almost at the summit, walking at their ease, when a rifle spat out of the darkness. King heard a smack beside him like mud spattering on a wall, a strangled grunt from Hawkes, whose dark bulk lurched up against him.

"Get him!" King roared. He snatched at Hawkes' sagging form. The other dark shapes were already roaring response and rushing forward. The rifle spat again. The ground thudded under racing naked feet. King lifted Hawkes and plowed on for the top. Beyond him the pack of fierce voices bayed on the quest, casting criss-cross over the hill's dome, till one yelled the find and all the others converged in chorus to be in on the kill. Blows thumped dully; steel-shod rifle butts clacked together in their eagerness; a voice yelled horribly above the roaring of furious men.

The Hottentot loomed close out of the dark. "The man is pulp, Bwana. What of the *Bwana Policea?*"

"A fire! Quick!" King ordered. "Below the brow, where they can't see it."

Hawkes' voice came, shaky but game. "Another *wahabi,* by gad. And that one got through."

King was cursing himself in a fury of profane self blame.

"Couldn't expect to—guess this one." Hawkes offered comfort.

"It's out-guessing the other fellow that keeps me alive in Africa," King said savagely. "Quick with that fire, Kaffa. Where are you hit?"

"Left shoulder. But I'll be—all right, old man. I've—stopped 'em before now."

The sputtering fire began to show up a smudge on Hawkes' coat.

"A knife, Kaffa," King swore again. "Thank Pete we got this much." He sawed at the coat and the shirt beneath it. There was only one hole, and that was bad. An emergent hole on the other side, however torn, would have given King less anxiety. He made a pad of the material he had sawed out, yanked out his own shirt tail and ripped it to strips.

"You've stopped 'em," he said through tight bitten teeth, "where you've had a hospital corps behind you." He set to bandaging the pad in place with his ripped shirt tail.

"If those swine hadn't looted everything in my kit, I could do an amateur job on you with the boys holding you down." He cursed the inadequacy of the shirt tail and tore out his shirt front. "Iodine, anyway. This isn't so easy. Not even a canteen of water nor a blasted thing to carry any in." He tied the crude bandages tight. "Stop bleeding, anyhow. There. We'll have to get you down to water. Mean open plain in daylight—wide open to have 'em rush us. Hell! What a gaudy mess!"

Hawkes felt that he had to apologize. "Sorry, old man, and all that sort of thing."

King stalked back and forth, swearing. This smashed his every plan. His savage temper at the contumacy of Africa broke from him in explosive bursts. "I knew it. It was

coming too easy. Now, by God, we're stymied."

Hawkes now appeared somewhat embarrassed.

"I'll be all right, old man," he insisted weakly.

King never believed in belittling danger just for the comfort it might offer.

"Don't fool yourself, feller. You'll be a lot worse before you'll be better. This is Africa. Heat, dirt, bugs —and not even a pellet of quinine. You can't fool with that sort of thing. I'll have to rush you in to where you can get some attention."

"Oh, but I say, old man!" Hawkes suddenly understood the reason for King's impotent fury. "You can't do that. Your Masai. They've still got him."

"Think I don't know it?" Helpless, King set to pacing the ground again. It was maddening, how far reaching could be the results of a simple wound where the ordinary aids of civilization were not at hand, how out of all proportion to its intrinsic damage. After a fury of pacing King stopped and looked down at Hawkes' dim form in long silence.

"Really, old fellow," Hawkes assured him. "I'm feeling quite chipper. I'll do all right till you get your man back."

King's voice softened.

"You've got your guts, soldier. But wait till the sun gets up tomorrow. Wait till it begins to inflame. Fever, festering, gangrene. I've seen 'em all happen."

"Perhaps," Hawkes said hopefully, "something will turn up tomorrow."

But his eyes were bleak.

But something did turn up in the morning. A man called excitedly from the lip of the hill. "Men come from the camp, Bwana. Not for war. They carry a white flag."

King snatched up his rifle and ran to look. From the top he called back to Hawkes. "Two of 'em. With a burnous tied on a pole."

"By Gad!" Hawkes was still well enough to get up and totter to see for himself. He was there before King, intent on the approaching figures, knew it. King growled at him.

"Pulling the old bulldog stuff, eh? Don't forget, soldier, every move you make will pile a degree onto your temperature."

"Gad!" was Hawkes' only response. "A flag of truce! I jolly well knew that last night would knock an awful hole in their morale. A delegation to talk terms, by Jove."

"Talk something, sure enough. But I see nothing to crow about yet." King's eyes narrowed on the two men; and as they came closer his eyes widened to stare.

It was no mere delegation; it was Ibn Faraq in person. Tall and darkly vindictive, he stood and stared at King, leaning on his long desert lance from which the dingy rag of burnous fluttered. His eyes, bloodshot with barely controlled rage, moved from King to the group of men behind him. Their fierce mutterings affected him

not at all. His eyes passed on to rest on Hawkes. Their expression changed no whit from their scowl of hate. His lips moved, but his anger made his sonorous Arabic tremble. His fury at his own lack of control exploded from him in a harsh grunt that his interpreter understood.

"The *Djeeb al Rais* says," the man translated, "that he has made here the only mistake in all his career; that he has learned now many things about the Bwana Kingi. He believes that your word given is given and stands good."

"Surrender and asking terms," Hawkes said. "Don't grant any."

"Not that easy." King's morose frown of the last two days was giving place to the hard-mouthed grin that faced impending action. To the interpreter he said, "*Ataka nini?* So what?"

"He has learned that you set great store by the Masai; that you value him more than all these men who were returned free, and that therefore, rather than the peace that was offered, you risk further fight—and wounds." The interpreter's eyes dropped to Hawkes' shoulder.

"*Ataka nini?*"

"Therefore the chief says, if you will give your word to the bargain, he will fight you for the liberty of that one man against the liberty of all these men. If you win, your man is yours and your word will be to go in peace. If he wins, he takes these and goes in peace. Man to man, hand to hand, the chief offers to fight you for this stake as men fight."

"Oh, I say!" Hawkes ejaculated. "What I mean, that's a bit thick."

King still grinned. "Why should I fight for what is mine to take?" And he bluffed. He pointed to the thin smoke columns in the far hills. "The Ras Woilo has my messages and is already on his way with at least a hundred men."

Ibn Faraq barked instructions.

"He says, 'I have observed, and therefore I come this early morning to offer this bargain!' "

King grinned and shrugged, and the Arab barked again.

"And he says, 'If the Bwana Kingi is afraid to fight for this stake that I offer as a man, to win or to lose, one thing at least is certain. By the Sacred Coffin I will surely slay that Masai before the Ras Woilo comes!' "

The grin jerked out of King's face. He stared under knit brows at the Arab. Faraq the Fatherless stared unblinkingly back. There was no doubt that he would carry out his threat. A captured slave meant only a certain money profit to him. King turned slowly and stared at his men behind him. They stared back like oxen, uneasy and silent, their eyes rolling white while they knew that King deliberated their fate. King's eyes dropped from them to Hawkes.

The Arab barked again behind him.

"He says," came the interpreter's voice, " 'Only I do not want the white man. He may sit where he is, or he may crawl, or he may fly. His fate will be in the hands of Allah, who is sometimes merciful.' "

"Don't consider me in this thing,

old chap," Hawkes said, as though talking about some sporting proposition.

King scowled on into the ruthless responsibility that was being thrust upon him. Lives hung on not only what he would decide to do, but how well he could do it. He swung back to the interpreter, his shoulders hunched forward as though he were already in a fight.

"Tell him, yes, I'm a whole lot afraid, and for a whole lot of things. And tell him that I can make no bargain for these men. They are free men, not slaves. But for myself, I will make a bargain. I will fight him for my Masai alone. If he wins and if he can thereafter take these men again, their fate is in their own hands."

A barely perceptible smile flicked across Ibn Faraq's face before his quick, growled acceptance.

"He says, 'I agree to that bargain. Provided that the fight is as men fight—man to man, with lance and knife.' "

"Good Lord!" Hawkes pulled himself to his feet. "Don't do it! Man, that's an awful chance to take. His own weapons, and—"

"Have I any other choice?" King snarled a question that needed no answer. "I've got to get you to a doctor, starting now—slung in a hammock on a bamboo pole. What kind of a chance would we have in open ground—with their merry turn to do the sniping?"

He swung back to glower at Ibn Faraq's complacent confidence.

"Tell him I'll call his play. Man to man, like he says. Only tell the devil I have learned nothing about him or his word but evil, and even if I trusted him I wouldn't trust his other devils. Therefore I add this to the bargain. Let him bring the Masai, alive and free, to stand as the stake for which we fight; and let him bring not more than ten of his men to watch the fight is fair; and I'll fight him for that stake, with any tool he likes—lance or knife or empty hands and teeth."

Ibn Faraq's saturnine smile came all the way out.

"*Mas-Allah!*" he exclaimed.

King knew that common Arabic expression. Praise be to God.

"He says," the interpreter added, " 'I will be here within the half hour.' " Ibn Faraq smiled upon King once more and turned to go.

"And tell him," King shouted after them, "to bring a spear—the Masai's spear. I don't trust any weapon of his."

A silence came down on the hill like the silence that had gripped the slavers' camp when bullets came out of the night. Hawkes broke into it.

"Good Lord, man! You've allowed him the choice of his own weapons. The fellow is a lancer by his long training. You should have—"

"Swell chance I had of anything else. D'you know how many shells I got left? Just six!" There was a grim little joker there that King could suddenly laugh at. Now that the thing was done, the heady recklessness of men who are ready to fight settled

on him, and with it came the bare-toothed grin of fighting men.

"You said it. He's a lancer, a soldier on a horse. He's got no horse here, and all that his weapon has is length. I've lived on my own two feet and kept out of the way of things for a long time."

"And you pretend you never take a chance." Hawkes could see no humor in any of it. "Crazy Yank!"

CHAPTER 4

"MAN TO MAN IT IS"

Well within the half hour a cluster of figures emerged out of the shade around the water hole and headed for the hill. There was nothing hesitant about them, nor anything serious; they came, rather, as to an exhibition. The wind brought bursts of laughter that replied to jests.

"Pretty damn sure of things, huh?" King's eyes narrowed, as he saw a burly figure amongst them that was certainly no Arab.

The Hottentot hopped on alternate feet, but his little round eyes were as bad as a chimpanzee's looking out on the world's inexplicable mysteries. He pleaded pathetically, as for the boon of a banana.

"Bwana, the word of white men is a god that we do not understand. Let that god's anger be on me who have no gods. Give me but permission to shoot at him as he comes near. With six shots out of one of his own *Jaipani* rifles I might surely hit him before he could run out of range. Moreover, Bwana, how can one man give a word for another? I have given no word."

King laughed at him. "A fine casuist school you have studied, Implet." But his laugh turned ruefully to Hawkes. "Not the first time in Africa that silly civilized inhibitions leave the white man out on the limb."

Hawkes shifted his position on the ground and winced. "And that," he said grimly, "is the real white man's burden."

The Hottentot stared mournfully at them.

The gang came to a straggling halt. Boisterous, unruly, their open lips and wild eyes showed excitement, but no anxiety; they jostled each other and laughed at their own jokes.

"The bounder has brought the toughest ten of his gang," Hawkes said gloomily.

King laughed. "Figures to take nine of us back."

Only Faraq the Fatherless stood unsmiling amongst his men. His dark temperament, unlike a white man's, was settling down to surly rage for the vengeance to hand.

King's grin on him was ugly. "The bargain was that the Masai should stand free as the stake for this fight."

Ibn Faraq lifted one satanic eyebrow to his interpreter. The gang opened up. A man cut the ropes that were biting into the Masai's arms.

"The man is a mad bull," the interpreter said.

The Masai dropped to his knees before King and put his great arms around King's thighs; he bent his

forehead to touch his master's waist. King could see on his naked back the raised welts, as thick as a finger, of hippo hide whips. The Masai's voice vibrated deep.

"Do not do this thing for me, Bwana. The man is a spearman and has a devil besides; and what does Bwana know of spear play or of devils?"

King put his hand on the big fellow's shoulder. His voice was unnecessarily rough.

"Up, old warrior! Have we not seen blood together before now? And what insult is this? Have I not seen enough of your spear play to have learned something?"

"*Aie, Bwana!* But it was much blood of other people and little of ours." The Masai straightened up and worked his big shoulders, tentatively, as though uncertain whether they were free. "*Hau Bwana!* I breathe the first whole man's breath in many days." His submissiveness became the fiercely eager challenge of an *Elmoran* who has had the hot bravado to go out alone with shield and spear and slay his lion.

"Bwana, make another bargain with this Fatherless One. Let me but put haft to my spear and let me fight this hunter of men and his ten while Bwana stands free and applauds the slaughter."

The man stood superb in the sun, black as an old iron, his great muscles throwing blacker shadows on his naked skin. King shrugged wryly, "Barounggo, old Blood-Letter, I'm afraid this clever Arab thinks he has a better bargain than that."

"Then Bwana, if he will be afraid of such an offer, let him take me and go in peace to his own country, according to his own offer. I will yet escape and devastate the land."

What King did was a very undignified thing for a white man in Africa. He reached his hand to grip the Masai's shoulder and gave it a little shake. But he spoke to him as an African can understand.

"Braggart," he derided. "Must we listen to your boastings all day? Go rather and cut a straight branch to fit your spear—not too long, and heavy in the butt, as who knows better than yourself. Go swiftly for the *Bwana Polícea's* wound must not sit in the sun."

Faraq the Fatherless stood and scowled through all this delay. His face was masked black with hate. King grinned hardily back at him.

It began to be apparent that the white man's cheerful recklessness was more disconcerting than the Arab's ferocious scowl. The boisterous confidence of Faraq's followers began to ebb from them; their faces darkened and their loud voices fell to low mutterings. On the other hand, King's *askaris* began to grin sheepishly.

"*Kefule!*" the lanky Bukadi suddenly guffawed aloud. "What has been this fear of ours? Barounggo is here and the Bwana is here. It is well. Let us sit and watch."

The Hottentot shrilled at them. "And forget not that I, too, am here.

Oxen that ye be without the wit of the lice in your heads. Wisdom it is and not brawn that accounts for any of you being here at all."

"When the monkey is contented," Bukadi said, "the leopard must indeed have lost his claws." The men hunkered down, as callously content as for a cock fight.

The Masai came back. His great three feet of spear blade was fitted to a stout pole, peeled white, barely longer than the blade itself. He balanced it critically in his hand. His dark face seemed to be satisfied, but he had a complaint.

"A fair balance, Bwana, and with a good weight to push the stab home. But the steel spike for the butt end was lost by these desert baboons, who know not what makes a good spear."

King took and hefted the thing. It must have weighed all of seven or eight pounds. "The hell with an iron spike." He spoke more to himself than to the Masai. "A good thick butt with honest weight to it would suit me all the better." He turned to grin, hard eyed, at Ibn Faraq.

"All right, guy," he said in English. "Man to man it is."

It came to Hawkes suddenly that he had been thinking that the Masai's savage menace was something stupendous as he shouted his challenge. But he saw King now as physically hard and as grimly competent a fighting man as all his military experience had ever known.

King remembered a last detail. "All men stand back twenty paces, and no man interferes."

"By Jove. I'll see to that—Kaffa bring me a rifle." Hawkes pushed himself to a sitting position. "I can shoot one-handed at range. I'll dashed well see that nobody interferes."

Ibn Faraq threw off his burnous. He was every bit as tall as King, a lean, stringy man. With his long lance he could outreach King by a good half length.

The Masai gave soft advice.

"The body sways inside of the foolish point, Bwana, and the Masai blade then slashes up from groin to chin."

Ibn Faraq didn't grin, but his eyes contrived to glitter through his scowl. He held his lance as a horse lancer should, under his right arm.

"Aa-ah!" It rasped from King. "That's what I'd hoped." He held the Masai spear as Barounggo never in his life did—with both hands wide apart, slanted across his body.

Hawkes let out a whoop. "I knew it! The bayonet stance, by Jove! I knew you must have been a soldier!"

Ibn Faraq showed a surprising agility in a sudden leap forward and a vicious thrust, swift and straight at King's chest. The neck of his lance clicked against King's haft, between his wide-spread hands, and slid past him.

"Now!" Barounggo roared. "Now to rush in and rip the bowels from him."

But King was not quite familiar enough with the weapon to have been that fast. He circled warily on light feet, suddenly enormously confident

in his ability to fend off a savage point by the method evolved by white men, even though the instrument was not precisely a white man's. He grinned out of the corner of his mouth toward Hawkes.

"Wrong, buddy. Never a soldier, but—" He fended another furious thrust, and this time lunged full arm with his point. It fell just short of the Arab's throat. "Hell! Another couple inches and I'd've nailed him." He found time to flash a look at Hawkes.

"—But I've played around with soldiers here and there, and some of 'em pretty near persuaded me that a bayonet was better'n a spear—Ha!" He clicked aside a long thrust. "Overreach that way again, and I get you."

He was out of reach, cat-footing around for an opening. "Met some good men amongst soldiers—even Britishers."

Ibn Faraq's rage at the unexpected resistance to what he had counted a sure thing exploded in incoherent blasts of speech.

The interpreter's voice was shaky with apprehension. "He says, men talk less and fight more."

King deliberately grinned at the man's fury. Ibn Faraq replied with the worst insult he knew. He spat at King's face. Truer than his furious spear thrusts, it got home. King's eyes blinked. Faraq shouted and drove with all his weight and reach for King's body.

By a miracle of luck King was able to sway inside of the point before the lance rattled along his defending haft. King grunted with effort as he swung the butt up and forward. It crunched full onto Faraq's mouth.

Had it been a rifle butt, it would have smashed the man's face in. As it was, Faraq this time spat teeth.

His men clapped their hands to their own mouths in their racial gesture of astound. Howls of delight came from the *askaris.* Barounggo roared advice. King could distinguish out of the uproar only Hawkes' restrained and distinctive "Go—oo-od shot, old man."

Ibn Faraq's rage, while it hampered his thinking, did not deprive him of the ingrained technique of spear and knife. King, of course, had given no further thought to the knife provision of the terms of this duel; but Faraq's dagger was in his sash. With his left hand he drew it and held it flat along his palm.

The Hottentot's shrill yelp came. "*Similia jumbia, Bwana!* He is a thrower!"

And at that moment Faraq saw his chance and threw, a swift underhand fling for the belly. King, catfooted, was able to snatch his stomach aside, but it left him hideously off balance. Faraq roared triumph and lunged fell length. The lance point flicked through King's leather belt like through wet paper. King felt a searing fire streak along his ribs; in a fractional second that lasted a year he felt the point push through his skin again somewhere farther back and felt wood rasp along bone.

Faraq roared again and lurched forward, his spear in both hands, shoving it on and grunting with the effort of each heave.

King's hands on his spear were all wrong for any kind of a thrust at the oncoming enemy. They had slipped together at the neck of the blade; the haft hung in his hands like a club.

He used it like a club. As Faraq lurched in, he swung it in a desperate arc. It cracked hard over Faraq's ear.

Faraq staggered and went down. But he still held his lance; lying prone as he was on his back, he tugged to free it. Its very length impeded its withdrawal; but the leverage of it, fast through King's clothing and side, twisted King excruciatingly this way and that.

Until suddenly Faraq's own struggles twisted King directly alongside of himself. King heaved up his spear with both hands and drove down at him. The great blade slipped through his chest and back and two feet into the ground beyond.

Faraq's last fury croaked from his throat in great strangled heaves. Impaled like a noxious beetle on a pin, his arms and legs flung out in spasmodic jerks and his back arched mightily to free itself from the earth to which it was nailed. Then blood began to slowly push out around the blade.

"*Whau!*" The Masai's great shout broke the silence. His *askaris* leaped forward, solicitous all together to support King. Hawkes, who should have been lying down, was with them, pawing at King with both hands, one of which ought to have been in a sling.

King pushed them testily from him. "What the hell! Stand off, you gorillas! It's only through the skin—I think." He tried to break out of the press, but the lance, grotesquely horizontal in his side, held him as in a yoke. "Get this blasted thing out." He tugged at it himself, but pressure of skin and clothing held it hideously fast.

"Away, cattle! Away!" Barounggo knew much about spears and their handling. "A spear through meat is no new thing. A knife here!" Like sharpening a giant pencil, he cut through the shaft. "Hold fast, Bwana. Just while a man may wink one eye." He gave a jerk. It twisted King agonizingly around. He was not ashamed to yell. But the thing was out.

Barounggo ran the knife through coat and shirt and kneeled to peer through the flap. With expert callousness he poked an unsanitary thumb at the bleeding gash in King's side and followed the ribs around to the other hole eight inches farther back.

"Skin and some meat," he announced. "It is nothing. It bleeds. We have seen blood before, Bwana. It was a good fight, though shamefully inexpert. I must give Bwana some lessons with the spear."

King was aware of Faraq's ten picked ruffians slowly moving away. They went backward, their eyes bulging at the incredible things that were happening. Barounggo's great arm was around King, offering support.

King pushed from him. Those men must not see any weakness.

"As far as your camp you have safe conduct," he called after them. "Such was the bargain. After that follows vengeance." He grinned hardily at Hawkes. "Tit for tat, soldier. I'll have to have your shirt tail for a bandage."

He was talking to avert fuss over himself, and nobody knew it better than Hawkes. So Hawkes laughed weakly, a little hysterical with reaction and rising temperature.

"Now I have to take you in to a doctor," he said.

"Yeah?" King remained unnecessarily tough. "We'll see who takes whom—and I think I can eat. This thing came in the way of breakfast. Hurry, Kaffa. Fast travel is before us."

While they ate, King gave instructions. "The vengeance must follow fast, Barounggo, before those raiders may reach the coast. How many are left?"

"But twenty-four men, Bwana. It was a shooting that melted men's liver." The Masai breathed hugely through distended nostrils. "Ow, Bwana, I smell the killing afar. Swift it will be, for many dishonors mark my shoulders to be washed clean in men's blood."

King's eyes wrinkled in a brief and utterly callous satisfaction. "Good, I can leave you only four men. Four I must have for hammock porters, for who knows, I may myself be sick. You will have to raise the herdsmen of Bunwelo to cut the raiders off, for they will surely flee across the border again from Ras Woilo."

"Surely, Bwana, the spearmen of Bunwelo will delay these dogs while I cut them down. But Bwana does not come? It will be merry killing, and this wound is but a spear hole such as we have seen many a time."

King's smile was quizzical.

"I am a prisoner of the *Bwana Policea* here for crimes against the British Empire that he has yet to prove. So is Kaffa, for the heinous matter of stealing cartridges that have gone to saving the lives of two constables of the *policea*."

"Oh, I say, old man!" Hawkes shuffled as uneasily as did the Hottentot. "I can't—What I mean, old fellow—come to think of it, I don't know that I can prove anything; you're so bally evasive. But I suppose I'll have to go through with the regulations—before I resign."

King's smile grinned at him wide open. "Come to think of it, soldier-copper, you won't have to resign. You don't know what's been going on, nor yet where you are; you're delirious." He amended grimly, "Take it from me, fella, with that bullet in your shoulder and the kind of travel that's ahead of us, you will be good and plenty off your head by the time I get you in—if either of us gets in."

"I'm afraid so. It's beginning to throb already. But my official report—"

"By the time you'll be well enough to make any official report, fella, the newspapers will have made it for you.

I'm just a ruffianly trader that you were sent out to pinch. I've got no official conscience to keep me from lying to your sacred government, and to the papers, like every lowdown trader always lies. The report will be that you've cleaned up a slave raid gang and turned loose a hundred slaves. You're too sick to know which side of the border. Time I'm through, you'll get a promotion."

"Really, old man." Hawkes was shocked at blasphemy against sacrosanct institutions. "I can't allow—I mean, damn it, you do it all and what do you get out of it? Only official trouble."

King laughed. "I've had it before. And I've already got what I'm going to get." He inhaled deep satisfaction and grimaced as he clapped his hand to his side. "I've got my men back." And he pointed a hard brown finger on Hawkes' chest. "I repeat, I'm a trader. I get, besides, fifty good rifles."

"Oh, come now, my dear fellow. I can't—I mean, you're a crazy Yank and all that sort of thing, and you don't understand our official code. But you can't mean to tell me—"

"Is that hammock ready, Kaffa?" King called. "Hurry it along. We got a sick man here. He's raving."

The Honest Buccaneer

By A. HYATT VERRILL

Oh, the British be for England,
The Dons, they be for Spain;
But I be for the Indies, lads,
An' fields o' sugar cane
What goes to make the good old rum
To drown all care an' pain.

Oh, some be for a life o' peace
Wi' never danger near;
But I be for the rovin' life
Of honest Buccaneer,
A-fightin' o' the bloomin' Sons
An' never knowin' fear.

Oh, some be for the mountains
An' some be for the dales;
But I be for a tidy ship
Wi' guns along her rails
An' a handy crew o' likely lads
For hoistin' of her sails.

Oh, some be for a uniform
An' some be for a gown;
But I be for the Spanish Main
A-cruisin' up an' down
An' scuttlin' o' treasure ships
An' sackin' many a town.

Oh, some be for the pistol
An' some be for the gun;
But I be for the cutlass
A-flashin' in the sun
When there's prizes to be taken
An' fightin' to be done.

Oh, some be for the red wine
An' some be for the beer;
But I be for the good old rum
What warms yer soul wi' cheer
Aye, rum's the proper tipple, lads
For every Buccaneer.

The Camp-Fire

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

Well, how do you like the streamlined 1951 model of *Adventure*?

When we marked our fortieth anniversary of publication in last month's issue, we told you that while we were proud of this magazine's record of four decades of continuous publication, we had no intention of looking backward, and hinted that certain changes were being contemplated to keep *Adventure* right up to the minute. We hope you'll agree that this more compact form. with its better-quality smoother paper and clearer type, is a long step in the right direction. Frankly it is our aim to attract a much greater number of readers who will enjoy the kind of yarns published here—to make *Adventure* a treasury of the finest masculine reading, in current and classic fiction and fact. You will be the final judge of that, and we know we needn't *ask* for your comments this time!

We are mighty pleased to announce that Roy Tinney, who has been on our "Ask Adventure" staff for a good many years, has consented to take over the gun department of the late Donegan Wiggins. As for Judge Tinney's qualifications—although he has served as our shotgun expert, he says that he is basically a rifleman and pistol expert. He is a life member of the National Rifle Association, the U.S. Revolver Association, National Muzzle Loading Rifle Association, and the Canadian Civilian Association of Marksmen. He is secretary of the American Academy of Arms, counsel to the American Gunsmiths Guild and a member of the Outdoor Writers Association of America.

Here is Judge Tinney's interesting letter—

Out of my regard for "Ol' Man Wiggins o' Oregon" I will take over the job he laid down so suddenly and at such an inopportune time. We were working together on a national level—on problems pertaining to the police reserve phase of the current Civil Defense Program. A veteran of the Mexican War taught me wing shooting with a flint-lock fowling piece by the illustrious Joseph Manton and I hunted birds when they were still plentiful, yet I am basically a rifleman and a pistoleer. Have been adding to my reference library for the past fifty years. When his heart began to bother him, Don Wiggins told me he hoped I would carry on where he left off.

The son of a pioneer minister, Don first saw the light of day near "Boot Hill" where the famous and infamous gun fighters who died with their boots on were buried. When Eastern youngsters were learning nursery rhymes, Don was taught to chant:

I'm wild'n'wooley an' fulla fleas,
I'm hard t'currie above the knees,
I'm a she-wolf from Bitter Creek
And it's my night to H-O-W-L!

His tutors were Old Timers; soft-spoken bronzed gentlemen who had helped open up the west; followed the Oregon Trail in covered wagons. Thus did he learn "the true religion."

He answered questions sent in by guncranks less than a month before his stout heart failed to function. His files contain letters from all over this ball o' mud; from soldiers and sailors, hunters and target shots, from nabobs and obscure men. Without leaving his native land, Ol' Man Wiggins o' Oregon became a guncrank with an international reputation, a citizen of the world.

Time and again I have watched him demonstrate the quick draw. He would pick up a hard lump of dried mud with his right hand and toss it in the air. With the same hand he would draw his gun from the shoulder holster under his coat. The gun would bark and the clod disintegrate.

Wiggins was feared and respected by every crook in the Northwest. There was a bank robbery that brought on some lethal shooting. Wiggins brought in the leader of the gang without warrant, handcuffs or assistance. The prisoner rode beside Don on the front seat of "Chunk o' junk," Wiggins rusty-trusty flivver. When a newspaper reporter asked that public enemy why he came in so quietly he explained, "I gotta chance in court."

Don was one of the few men who could speak and write "Chinook," the *lingua franca* of the Northwest.

I'll close by repeating the final four words of his last letter to me written shortly before his death:

"Kla-how'-ya" (good-bye friend)
"Till'-i-cum" (side-kick and companion)
"Hi-yu'" (much-plenty)
"Sko'-kum" (strong-brave-great)

And while on the subject of "Ask Adventure" we also want to report that Thomas Bowen Partington, our expert on the British Isles, has very kindly offered to take on additional chores for this department. Since he has spent many years in the Orient, and is currently lecturing on the Far East and Far Eastern affairs, Commander Partington will be glad to handle queries on China, Japan and Hong Kong. He will also furnish information on Gibraltar, Malta and Cyprus. These areas have been added to his listing in the A.A. roster.

In accordance with old *Camp-Fire* custom, Eli Fairchild, author of the unusual Western story in this issue—"They Named It Banjo"—rises to take a bow on the occasion of his first appearance in *Adventure*.

I have come to the conclusion that I am Mr. Average personified. With perhaps one exception—I am a considerable rarity in that I am a native Californian who is also the great-grandson of a native Californian.

I was attending the University of Southern California when Uncle Sam tapped me on the shoulder and I was in the Army for five years to the day, without, I might add, doing any irreparable damage to either side. I must hold some sort of record. I was in six different branches of the service and held eleven different ranks. It was with only mild surprise that I found

myself a captain in the Signal Corps when I was discharged.

I never went overseas, but I came very close to it. My outfit even got on the ship. The ship even sailed, from San Francisco bound, so we thought, for the Philippines. We were somewhere in the middle of the Pacific when the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor. The ship halted, thought matters over for a couple of hours, and then turned back to San Francisco. I disembarked and spent the rest of the war in Texas.

I am married to a very wonderful girl and we have a youngster, a human dynamo aged two and a half. Both my wife and I, being Republicans and tending towards the conservative line of thought, believe that it is extremely doubtful that he will ever be President. Maybe Secretary of State or Vice-President, or Governor of California. President, no.

When H. Bedford-Jones wrote that story about Napoleon ("Blow, Bugles!"—page 56) he was asked if the yarn were true. The notes that follow were his reply to that query—

This story, freely adapted from Arabic or rather Coptic sources, is the first to deal with the subject in English; though much of the voluminous writings of Sheikh El Mohdi, who knew Napoleon quite intimately, have been published in French translation by the famed orientalist, M. J. Marcel.

Is the story true? Quite simply, I don't know and don't care. Still, there is some curious internal evidence. Chief among this is the account of the historic Red Sea Crossing.

Queerly enough, it seems most unlikely that Sydney Smith's sense of honor would have caused him to send a warning. I grant this. I even advance it as one of the evidences that truth is stranger than fiction. For this is precisely what Sydney Smith did a little later on, when Kleber was the victim of treachery and the Englishman's honor forbade him to have any part in it. And it will be recalled that Kleber, who succeeded Bonaparte in command of Egypt, was murdered by an assassin instigated by Stamboul.

Headed for the best-seller list or we miss our guess: "The Tin Trumpet of China" (Duell, Sloan & Pearce) by George C. Appell, *Adventure's* Foreign Legion expert. It's a close-up of war in the Far East that is filled and overflowing with the tastes and smells of combat. The action is concerned with the Jap invasion of China in 1938, but the eternal realities of war are here in all their grim fascination—the casual cruelty, the unexpected gallantry and humor, man's need for love in the face of imminent death, the enormous value of little things where life itself is cheap.

Appell, who served as weapons officer with the Chinese Combat Command in World War II, knows his setting first-hand. "The Tin Trumpet" is not a lengthy book—but it packs the wallop of an M1 rifle bullet.

That just about winds up the *Camp-Fire* for this month. To our old readers: Hope you approve the changes in your magazine—if not, let us know. And to our new readers: Welcome to *Adventure*—you'll find you're in good company!—K.W.G.

ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

La Légion d'Etrangères.

Query:—In the past several years that I have been in the U. S. Marine Corps the French Foreign Legion has popped up in conversations a good many times. However, there is quite a tendency to disagree on the subject. Therefore, it is with great anticipation that I grasp this opportunity of acquiring some "straight dope" on the following questions:

1. What is the chief incentive for joining? Is it true that men are shanghaied?

2. What is the pay of a private, corporal, sergeant, etc. (in American dollars)? Is it true that members receive wine and tobacco rations?

3. Are men signed up no questions asked? Are citizens of the U. S. permitted to join? What are the lengths of the enlistments?

4. Is it true that the penalty for going "over the hill" is death before a firing squad?

5. How are commissions obtained?

6. What are the possibilities of engaging in combat? Desert duty?

7. What part did the FFL take in World Wars I and II?

—Cpl. N. A. Lewis
Parris Island, S. C.

Reply by George C. Appell:—The chief incentive for joining these days is the desire to soldier. About 60 percent of the Legion is made up of former Germans from the broken Wehrmacht. The remaining 40 percent is made up of those who join a Corps for personal reasons Women, debt, fear of some sort harassing them and causing them to change their ways of life. It is not true that men are shanghaied into the Legion.

The pay of non-coms has changed twice recently, and I am finding out what it is today and will so advise you It used to be: private—twenty cents a day; corporal—thirty-five; sergeant—depending upon service and rating. And wine and tobacco rations are issued at all posts. No other military body in the world has its creature comforts taken care of so ably as does the Legion, and that goes for food—(Legion food is the best food in North Africa)—equipment, wine and women.

Yes, men are signed up with no questions asked except for one inclusive question: Name and occupation.

A citizen of the U. S. joins at his own risk. In joining the Legion, he swears allegiance to a foreign flag and that renounces allegiance to the American flag. Length of enlistment in the Legion is five years; recruits can join at a number of places: headquarters in Sidi-bel-Abbes, just south of Algiers; a mobile recruitment van in Germany; recruiting offices in Paris; headquarters in Marseilles at the dock of Légion D'Etrangères; Saigon, in Indo-China.

The maximum penalty for desertion is death. However, it depends upon the circumstances under which

a man deserted—such as, under fire, imminence of attack, etc.

Commissions from the ranks are rare. Men have been commissioned on the spot for a deed of great valor; other men stay in the Legion a lifetime and never make pfc. Legion officers are Regular Army Frenchmen who serve voluntarily.

Possibilities of combat are—these days—p r e t t y good. Indo-China, where there are 10,000 Legionnaires posted, has combat 24 hours a day, all year. Intermittent skirmishes occur all the time in North Africa.

The Legion, in World Wars I and II, performed the same function: to bolster the French and Allied arms wherever such bolstering was needed. In World War I, the Legion fought mainly in Europe. In World War II, it fought all over the world.

An unusual analysis of the mysterious properties of Time.

Query:—I am a science-fiction fan. I especially like time travel stories, but they confuse me terribly. First I read "The Time Machine" by H. G. Wells. He, through his character, says that time is a fourth spatial dimension, different only in that our consciousness moves along it.

That sounds fine. But then I read another story. It says that time is a spiral, like a bedspring. Then I look into J. W. Dunne. He says there is another time timing this time. Then another time timing the time that is timing this time, *ad infinitum*.

Now I hear that Albert Einstein has theories about time too. What is Einstein's theory of time? Does it permit time travel in any form?

—Herbert DeLey
Altadena, Calif.

Reply by John W. McGrath:—It is true that Albert Einstein has theories anent time, but as far as I can ascertain, none of my breed have any concrete data on his revelations. However, here is my theory of Time.

Time has finality for each of us, however eternal it may (between philosophers) appear. Time, however dim, in essence, the concept of the term may be, has a real existence for us. To Herbert Spencer, it was a First Principle, a mystery.

As he says (with explanations by me in brackets), "While on the hypothesis of their objectivity (the idea of something outside ourselves), Space and Time must be classed as things, yet we find that to represent them, in thought, as things, is impossible. To be conceived at all, a thing must be conceived as having attributes." (To endeavor to conceive anything which has no size, is neither large, nor small, has no color nor taste, is neither dark nor light, has no weight nor any qualities which appeal to the senses, and has no visual representation which can be fixed in the mind, is to leave an absolute blank; no conception at all.)

Nor are Space and Time unthinkable as entities only from the absence of attributes; there is another peculiarity, familiar to readers of metaphysics, which equally excludes them from the category. All entities which we know, as such, are limited; but of Space and Time we cannot assert either limitation or the absence of limitation. We find ourselves unable to form any image of unbounded space, and yet unable to imagine bounds beyond which there is no space. And we labor under like impotencies in respect to Time.

This treatment may be poor satisfaction to you, even as it is to me, because, my stomach tells me when it is *time* to eat.

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