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by JOHN D. MacDONALD

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Ice Trap

by RUSSELL W. LAKE

Winter evenings were long in Beaver Creek, so the boys sat and talked by the hour about the big stranger Charlie and Smokey had found frozen solid up near Fort Yukon.

THEY FOUND the Swede neatly wrapped up in a cake of ice at the edge of a lonely little stream a hundred miles below the Yukon. If ever there was an unlikely place to find a man, either alive or dead, that was it, yet there he was sure enough. From the looks of things he had refrigerated several months at least.

Charlie and Smokey Joe ran on him by accident on the way back to Beaver Creek after wintering at Fort Yukon. Beaver Creek diggings itself was to hell-and-gone back in the wilderness but at least there was a trail running to it, such as it was, and men had scouted the territory round about. That made it civilized, and quite different from the Swede's primitive resting place. Charley and Smokey were interested in primitive areas where nobody had been before. As Charlie always said, you never know where you'll find a strike. They pop up in the damnedest places. Look at what that lazy Carmack ran onto over on Bonanza Creek at Dawson. Nobody in his

right mind would ever expect to find gold there. And look at what Perce Flory had done last fall right at Beaver Creek, staking out a lousy dry gully that nobody else would look at twice, and coming up in two months with enough yellow stuff to buy the camp's goldanged saloon, which was a sore point with Charlie.

With these thoughts and purposes in mind they shoved their dog team into the wild country and had a rough time of it getting through, what with the frozen creeks never running in the direction they wanted to go, and the precipitous hills standing around frowning at the approach of foolhardly beings who had more guts than sense.

Plodding down a twisting creek late one day, Charlie and Smokey Joe pulled over in the lee of an overhanging bluff to get out of the icy wind that bore uncomfortably upon them from the northeast. Charlie went to gather firewood and Smokey unloaded stuff from the sled and took care of the dogs. It was getting pretty dark. The ice on the creek was covered with hummocks like white graves stretching along and they built their fire between a low one at the edge of the bank and the protecting bluff. When the fire got going good and began to push back the shadows, they saw the Swede.

"Lookit that!" said Charlie, pointing to the mound of dirty ice. "That's a man, or I'm the south end of a reindeer."

Smokey came over and peered with him. "Me too," said Smokey.

The grisly thing was looking right at them, lying on its side with blue eyes wide open.

"Reckon he's dead," said Smokey.

That fact, being self-evident, required no answer and Charlie let it go at that. They sat down side by side and regarded the thing. He had been a big man with heavy shoulders and body, and legs like tree trunks. He had straw colored hair, light blue eyes, and a broad face, thick featured.

They called him the Swede because he looked like a Swede. Big Olaf, down at Beaver Creek, was a Swede and looked something like this fellow —washed-out hair and eyes like skim milk and a big nose. So they called him the Swede and the Swede he became and forever after was, regardless of his ancestry in a prior state when he walked among the living. Charlie and Smokey Joe sat there ruminating with the pleasant heat of the fire warming their backs, speculating idly on who he was and how come he had ventured 'way off here and by what means he got dead. Such speculation of course profited them nothing except to pass away the time and it was too cold for that, so shortly they turned away and cooked supper and ate it while the Swede stared fixedly at them out of his cake of ice.

Charlie and Smokey had seen death before, both violent and natural, but never had they been subjected to such a lugubrious scrutiny by a deceased person. No matter which way they turned, those blue eyes bored in.

After supper they took the dogs and moved down the creek a ways and let the Swede stare at something else.

In the morning however they came back and chopped him out of the ice and loaded him onto the sled. It was still four or five days to Beaver Creek and all the way down the Swede just kept looking. A thing like that gets on a fellow's nerves. After a day or so of it Charlie and Smokey got to wishing they had left him in his ice overcoat where they found him. By the time they got to Beaver Creek they repented ever having seen him at all; it just occurred to them they would have to bury the carcass, unless they could talk someone else into it which was unlikely, and the ground was frozen awful solid.

Sure enough, the men at the diggings came out in force to view the Swede and to stand around wondering, but when it came to the question of putting him into the ground, they washed their hands of it. Figuratively of course, it being winter and water scarce. Charlie and Smokey Joe labored two days up on the hill building fires and digging, and building fires and digging, until they scooped out a hole big enough to hold him.

Then they came down to Perce Flory's Beavertail Saloon and ranged up to the bar, vowing that in the future the entire population of Alaska, present and to come, could kick off and pile up knee deep, and Charlie and Smokey would let them lie. All they got out of carting this one to camp was considerable hard labor. The pockets of the Swede had produced nothing, absolutely nothing, not even a jackknife. Even the rifle they found buried in the ice nearby wasn't much good any more. When they got him down to camp they thawed out the gun and forced open the lever and found a spent shell in the chamber. The big lummox had shot himself right between the eyes and blown a piece out of the back of his head.

Charlie was disgusted and Smokey was disgusted too. Not only had they gained nothing of intrinsic value, but also had received no practical aid from the men of Beaver Creek, not even the dubious moral support of their presence while digging on the hill. Except Big Olaf, who lumbered up for a last look as they shoveled clods of dirt back in. But Olaf was no company at all, at any time. He had difficulty getting his tongue around the language with the result that he sometimes went for days without saying anything. He just came up and looked at the Swede and went back down again, shuffling in that heavy, methodical way of his.

"Maybe somebody oughta go see the marshal," suggested Perce Flory who owned the Beavertail Saloon and of course could not be expected to leave.

Charlie reared back. "Not me," he said.

"Me neither," said Smokey.

"We found him and we brung him down and we dug a hole for him without no help and, by godfrey, somebody else is gonna go see the marshal." Charlie glared from one to

another, his red beard standing out from a belligerent chin.

"Yeah," Smokey said, slamming his fist upon the bar.

This was greeted with unmarred silence. Going to see the marshal was a man-sized job on account of the nearest law man being a hundred and fifty miles distant. The way was rough, the snow was deep, and it was mighty cold outside.

"Somebody'll be going down that way one of these days," Perce said soothingly. "Ain't no hurry nohow. The Swede laid up there a long time and I reckon another couple months won't hurt. They'll never find out why he killed hisself anyway."

That was good enough for the men of Beaver Creek, sprawling lazily in the warmth of Perce's stoves. Sure, no use making a special trip. Perce Flory had not been around the diggings long but assumed natural leadership in things like this. It was he who had come into camp late last summer, without a dime as he freely admitted, and staked out the gully-claim that was the talk of the camp. Within two months he had enough to buy the saloon from old Jeb Hannagan who wanted to give up and go Outside for good. But before that Perce had been smart enough to keep still about it until he had his sacks all filled. He loaded his dust into a sled after the first big snow and said he was going out to have himself a time, promising Jeb he would come back. He did, too, and paid spot cash from a roll of yellowbacks that would choke a moose. Perce renamed the saloon the Beavertail to commemorate, he said, his arrival here when he had been completely flat and offhand he couldn't think of anything flatter than a beaver's tail.

His lucky strike in the gully was the source of much chagrin to those who had been around two or three years and walked past it a million times. Within two hours every wash, every gulch, every dip in the land up and down the creek was taken. All were complete fizzles except perhaps Nick Solata's which showed a bare trace of color and might produce day wages for a little while if a man worked hard enough. But nothing like Perce's, in fact there was nothing like it anywhere on the creek. You never know where you'll find the stuff, as Charlie always said.

Charlie poured himself a big slug out of the bottle and fell into moody contemplation of the amber liquid that glittered and sparkled like good whiskey in the lamplight.

"It's a danged funny thing, though," he mused, "how in tarnation the Swede got where he was, off in the middle of nowhere like that. I'd kinda like to know what made him plug himself."

"No skin off your nose," said Perce.

"I know, but it's a danged shame for a feller to kick the bucket all by himself with nobody even knowin' how come. Don't seem right somehow. I feel sort of responsible, seein' as how it was me and Smokey that

seen him first. Seems like by rights I oughta be chief mourner, and how you gonna mourn for a feller when you don't know why?"

"Does seem right sorrowful, when you put it that way," said Cock-Eye Higgins. "Reckon it's plenty lonesome dyin' anyway, but it's a damn sight worse when you're all by yourself. When I cash in I hope there's a hell of a crowd around to give me a send-off."

"Yeah," said Charlie, settling heavily against his elbows on bar.

"Don't go getting a cryin' jag on," said Perce. "He was just some no-account Swede that got himself lost. You ain't never going to know the why of it. You don't know his name or where he came from or where he was going. You don't even know whether he was a Swede or not. If he was, he's better off dead. Never was a Swede that was worth a damn."

Perce was a long, skinny fellow with a bony white face and a flourishing black mustache that came down at the ends. He had little black eyes and big yellow teeth. He turned his eyes now on Big Olaf who sat stupidly at a nearby table. Perce had been riding Olaf pretty hard all winter.

"How about it, Olaf?" Perce said, grinning. "The mug of him shows he's some kind of a Skandahoovian but you oughta know for sure. What was he, a Dane, a Swede, a Norwidgian—or just plain Bohunk?"

Big Olaf lifted his eyes to Perce and slowly let them fall. He stared at the floor gloomily. They didn't know whether he was pushing the answer around in that slow brain of his, or trying to figure out how to say it.

"Ay tank he bane Svede," said Olaf.

"Well, Big Olaf oughta know," said Perce. "Even a dog knows his brother. So he was a Swede. But who? Where'd he come from? You ain't never going to find out. Might as well forget it."

"I'd kinda like to know," said Charlie.

"Me too," Smokey said.

"Aw, he was a yaller-haired Injun that never saw a lookin' glass before," Cock-Eye chuckled. "Saw himself in the river one day and that ugly mug of his scared him to death."

"'Twasn't that way a-tall," Charlie grinned. "He didn't scare the hole in his head. Looked in that water and figgered he'd be prettier with three eyes so he ups and puts one there."

"You galoots got it all wrong," said Perce, showing his yellow teeth. "He was just a-walkin' along pert as anything and all of a sudden a little bird comes by. The bird took one look at him and set down on a stump and begun to cry. The Swede says why you bawlin', little bird? And the bird says it's on account of I feel so sorry. I always cry when I see a Swede. And the Swede says me? Holy Smoke, am I one of them things? Well, I'll be damned. And he set down alongside the bird and cried too. Then he gets up and says well, the least I can do is make one less damn Swede in the

world and he lays the gun against his head and the little bird pulls the trigger and flies away happy."

That was how it started. There wasn't much to do around Beaver Creek at that time of year except drink and fight. At the tag end of the season a fellow gets all fought out and then there is nothing left but whiskey guzzling, with nothing at all between guzzles. It had been a long winter and time was heavy and the dead man provided welcome diversion. From then on they spent the long hours wracking their brains to provide explanations, reasonable and otherwise, of the life and works of the defunct Swede.

Some pretty good stories came out of it, good as you would read in a book. In fact, some of the more earnest citizens dug up the old dogeared magazines around camp and pored through them again for ideas. One fellow would get the story started and when he got stuck another would take it on from there. Perce, especially, was good at it. He was that kind of fellow anyway, quick and witty and full of strange sayings. He had been everywhere and done everything —pearl diver in the South Seas; gun runner in South America; opium peddler in China; faro dealer at Monte Carlo (so he said); camel driver in Egypt; hashslinger in Seattle.

Quite a man, Perce Flory. You could always trust Perce to keep the story hopping by coming up with some outlandish idea nobody else ever thought of.

Charlie entered into the spirit of it, putting in his two cents' worth whenever he got an idea that somebody else had not already worked to death, but it was different with him. Charlie was serious. "I'd kinda like to know," he said again and again. "I'm getting so I feel sort of friendly toward the Swede, seeing him first and all, and I hate to think of him layin' up there on the hill with nobody knowing nothing about him."

"You ain't never going to either," Perce said on one occasion. "Ain't no way of finding out."

"Maybe if we talk long enough we can figger out something for the poor cuss."

"Naw," said Perce. "Tell you what we can do, though, we can set down amongst ourselves and make up a man out of our heads, and reasons, and what he did and why he did it, and things like that. And when we git through that'll be it. That will be the Swede."

"That's what I mean," said Charlie. "Better than nothing, ain't it?"

"Yeah," Smokey said.

Almost everybody got into it at one time or another, most of them many times. Especially Perce and Cock-Eye and a crazy kid called Pokey on account of he always went at a trot. Those three dreamed up some mighty strange characters and it got to be quite a competition among them to dope out the strangest.

But out of the entire crowd, only

Big Olaf kept wholly still. He had no ideas to present, or maybe didn't know how to say them; anyway he was the only one of the lot who didn't put forth at least one. He just sat with his big hands resting palms-up in his lap and a stupid look in his face. He would turn his big, slow eyes on the speaker and hold there until the man finished and then move his colorless gaze to the next one. There never was any expression in Olaf's face; they never knew what he was thinking or whether he was thinking at all. Maybe that was why he always irritated Perce. Perce liked people to respond, to answer, to laugh at his jokes.

As Charlie said, Olaf ought to have been the one to talk. "You know more about him than anybody," said Charlie. "Bein' a brother Swede, and all."

Olaf looked at Charlie for a minute and moved his massive head from side to side, and that was all they ever got out of Olaf. He was a huge man with a craggy face and eyes deep-set under overhanging brows. He looked like a monstrous and ferocious gorilla but there never was a more peaceable man than Big Olaf.

If the Swede up on the hill could have been some of the things their stories said he was, he would have been quite a character to know. They had him everything from a beachcomber to a Swedish Duke, from a stewbum to a sky pilot, from a slopgut on the waterfront to a society jewel thief.

It was all very enjoyable and helped a lot to pass away time. Especially when Pokey or Perce got started, or Cock-Eye. Pokey had the edge. He put out some of the doggonedest yarns. It was he who thought up the Swedish Duke theme and played it for all it was worth when he saw it was going over big. In his enthusiasm he carried on and on with a recital of intrigue, swords and daggers and black cloaks and a fair damsel in distress.

Most of it came out of a book he had once read, but they didn't have to know that.

When he finally got his nobleman and the damsel out in the clear and going away together into the sunset, he stopped and leered at Perce. It was the best account yet and he received the plaudits of the assemblage with self-conscious pride.

"That's good," said Charlie. "Good enough. Maybe we'll make that the Swede. Except how in tarnation did he git way over here in Alaska territory and why did he plug himself in the head, especially with a woman like that around?"

Pokey wrinkled his brow. "That's the sequel, sort of," he said. "I just told you the first part and I'll think up the rest of it when I get a little time."

Perce smarted in fuming silence. "Aw, that ain't much of a story," he growled. "It ain't reasonable. Who ever heard tell of a man like that? The Swede wasn't that good lookin' and his feet was too big for them sword fights. He'd of got himself all tangled up in his leggins."

"Maybe you can think up a better one," smirked the proud Pokey.

"Sure. Sure, I can. If I couldn't, I'd drown myself."

"I thought that was pretty good," said Charlie. "I'd kinda like to think of the Swede as bein' that. Reckon we won't have to go no farther, boys. We got our Swede."

"Hold on, there," said Perce. "You ain't going to let your Swede be no simperin' dood acting like a ring-tailed monkey in a beehive!"

"Pokey's Duke was awful good," Charlie defended. "Don't reckon you can think up a better one than Pokey did."

"That's what I say," said Smokey.

Perce looked desperately at the circle of bearded faces, all expressing approval of things as they were. Pokey preened himself and giggled.

"You ain't heard no decent story since we started this!" Perce flashed, stung to the quick. "Leastwise, none that I ain't told you. And this drivel that Pokey just got through with stinks like an Injun fish camp in the middle of summer. Ain't no wet-eared kid can tell me anything about story-tellin'. I'll figger one out that will knock his kitin' from here to Beaufort Sea! You listen good, Charlie—here is your Swede, by gum!"

They settled back to be entertained. Perce was awful clever at spinning yarns and this one ought to be a humdinger now that he had real competition to work against.

"This Swede wasn't no Duke at all," Perce began. "He was the son of a rich galoot that made steel or something over in Sweden. Always had a pokeful of money and lived in a big mansion with drapes and things hanging around and even jewels in the candlesticks."

"Same thing," said Pokey. "You're copyin'."

"Ain't neither. Like I said, this kid had everything handed him on a silver platter but he was the kind that didn't like none of it. Read too many books, I reckon, and got too many ideas about roamin' the world and doing things he couldn't do home in sassiety. So he runs off to sea. This kid's name was Sven. He had a pardner, another kid in the neighborhood of the same stripe as him, so he takes this other kid along, see? They run off together and go to India. After ramming around India for a while they got on a boat and took off for South America. In South America they got mixed up in a couple revolutions and near got their fool heads blowed off but they come out all right and went to work on a coffee plantation.

"Them kids was both big bruisers and got themselves in plenty of fights. Always stuck together and I reckon one time or another they licked most everybody in South America. If one got mixed up in a crowd too big to handle, he'd whistle and the other would come a-whoopin'. Them knife-throwing geezers down there didn't stand no show agin them two. They'd knock their heads to-

gether and tie 'em up in knots and leave them moanin' in the street. You never heard tell of such fighting. It was always Sven that got into hot water, he was wild as they make 'em, and then his pardner would come and boost him out of it.

"Where you found one you'd always find the other around somewheres close. They was real pardners. Got along fine until one day they got stuck on the same gal. A little she-devil she was, down around Brazil someplace, with dancin' eyes and laughin' mouth and black hair that curled and waved and kept blowing in your face like spray. She was built like a woman oughta be built. She wound both them kids around her little finger and got 'em so mixed up they didn't know which was what.

"You'd think they'd go to fighting, wouldn't you? Not them two. They talked it over and decided one would have to leave. They goes to the gal and she can't make up her mind so they goes back and goes to rasslin'. Not hurting each other, just rasslin'. They rassled all one afternoon and finally towards evening Sven got his pardner down. Sven decided afterward his pardner decided to let him have the wench.

"Sven went down to the boat to see the pardner off and they made a deal, see? They'd deep in touch and the first one to make a certain stake would hunt up the other and they'd both go back to Sweden.

"Sven didn't stay around there long anyway. The little devil pulled a knife on him one time and he figgered she was not the type for him. So he took off and went to some South Sea island and got in some copra deal by lickin' the boss. He made a pile of dinero there and some more in Australia stealin' sheep. After that, he sailed for China. Wandered all over Asia and them places and up north, making money hand over fist and leaving just ahead of the law."

Perce paused to wipe his face with a bandanna and to look triumphantly at Pokey who slouched in his chair, disbelieving. All the others were listening in rapt silence.

"Damn poor story," said Pokey. "Ain't no suspense in it."

"Shut up," said Perce. "There is, too."

"Reckon that sounds about like the Swede," Charlie said with enthusiasm. "Big man, looked like a fighter. Had a devil in his eye. But you gotta get him to Alaska, and dead."

"I'm coming to that. Gimme time. Like I said, Sven made a pile of money and finally got his stake. So he started out to hunt up his pardner as the agreement was when they parted. He came over from Siberia and landed at Nome. His pardner was in Skagway, or somewhere down that way, and Sven took out up the Yukon to see what it was like instead of going around by boat.

"In Nome he run onto a feller by the name of Jim, a right nice feller named Jim. They got to talking and

the upshot was they went up the Yukon together. Real friendly they was, and Sven done a lot of palavering about where he'd been and such. Just like a big kid, so tickled he'd made his stake first before the pardner. He had so much money he bought a little boat and they came up in that and when they got up north of here, danged if they didn't hit a log and run a hole right through it. Smashed up so bad it wasn't worth fixing so they left it there and started out afoot.

"On the way down they got lost and wandered off where Charlie and Smokey found him. Sven was a big man, big as they come, but like all Swedes he didn't have enough sense to pound sand in a rat hole. Big and dumb, that was Sven. He kept running off at the mouth about his money and this pardner of his'n. They was going back to Sweden and show his old man they could make money too, all alone and without no help whatsoever. Just a big kid. But big as he was, Sven was no walker. He had feet like canoes and they kept hurting all over and he'd set down and take off his mukluks and rub 'em and lay back and snore like a thunderstorm. Couldn't stand walking nohow.

"Now this Jim was a fine feller, and plenty cagey. He was one to watch his chances and not let none go by. He'd been around some too and wasn't nobody's fool. So one time when Sven was snorin', Jim he snuck up and skinned the moneybelt right offa him. That's how the Swede got killed. He didn't plug himself like you say. Jim did it. Sven woke up too quick and jumped for Jim and Jim grabbed the gun and let him have it right between the eyes. Then Jim went down to Cordova and got to New York and set up in business.

"Sven landed smack in the crick and when it froze the ice pushed him up like a hummock and that's how come he had an ice coffin. But you should have seen them feet. They stood up like sails on a windjammer and he was just a-layin' and a-starin'. Jim never forgot that starin'. Never forgot them feet either. All Swedes got big feet but Sven had the biggest feet a man ever had. Fact they was so big that five toes wasn't enough and he had six on the right one."

There was a sharp clatter off at the side and they turned to look. It was Olaf's chair which had overturned and slid against the wall. Olaf came across the open space faster than they ever had seen him move. Perce got up and stood like he was paralyzed, his little eyes growing wide and round. Olaf's hairy hands closed on Perce's neck.

"You bane Jim," Olaf rumbled.

Perce screamed and twisted, clawing at the hands that were squeezing the life out of him. He was like a child in the grip of a gorilla. Charlie and Smokey and Cock-Eye and some of the others pulled and jerked at Big Olaf while Perce's face turned purple and his eyes seemed ready to pop.

It took a bottle, and another

bottle, and finally a leg of a chair before Olaf went down.

Next afternoon they took Perce up the hill to a big tree that had a spreading branch. They set up a wooden box and lifted Perce upon it and put the rope around his neck and over the limb and pulled it tight against the trunk.

"You can't do this to me," complained Perce. His white face was ghastly. "I didn't do nothing any of you wouldn't of done. It was only a dumb Swede."

"We don't hold with murder," Charlie said firmly. "Especially when it was my Swede you killed, the one I lugged all the way down here and dug a hole for all by myself. Me and Smokey."

"Who's gonna kick the box?" said Smokey.

He looked about the circle but all of them studied their feet and refused to meet his scrutiny. A gleam of hope came into Perce's eyes.

"See what I mean?" he said. "You all know I done right. Lemme down from here, boys, and we'll all go have a drink on the house."

Olaf pushed through the circle and stomped forward. Perce shrieked in terror and kicked at him wildly. Olaf drew back a big foot and slammed it against the box so hard it sailed.

Afterward they went down and helped themselves generously to Perce's stock. They didn't say much, just stood against the bar and drank. Charlie broke a heavy silence.

"Anyway, I don't feel so much like a damfool as I did, passing up that washed-out gully where Perce was supposed to have made his strike. Makes me feel better to know he didn't make no strike."

Olaf stared moodily at the top of the bar, a whiskey glass engulfed in his paw. After his brief explosion he had relapsed into his stolid silence.

"There's something I ain't got in my head yet, Olaf," said Charlie. "Perce got so scairt he owned up to killing him all right but how did you know that Jim was Perce and Sven was the Swede, and it was a true story?"

"Yeah, how did you know?" said Smokey. "Was you the pardner?"

Olaf pushed the glass of whiskey away and plodded along the row of tables to the door. Those close by heard him mutter thickly: "Sven bane my brother."

It has been estimated that a peregrine falcon when striking its prey attains a speed of 150 m.p.h., and an aviator relates that on one occasion he was diving at a flock of ducks at 175 m.p.h. when a hawk (probably duck hawk) passed him as though the plane were standing still, and struck one of the ducks! The swift is able to accelerate to 100 m.p.h. or more, and on a straightaway this little bird is perhaps the fastest of all, the duck hawk attaining its terrific speed in a stoop analogous to the power dive of an aircraft. —*From the files of "Ask Adventure."*

This is the story not of a hero but of a heel. As such, it's a bit out of line for an Adventure *yarn, where the main character usually turns out to be a pretty good joe, at least in the end. Maybe we should label it an off-the-trail story, a phrase that has been used in this magazine for many years to describe an unusual piece of fiction. Anyway, it was too good to pass up—hero or heel, we thought you'd want to meet the inimitable Major Stacey Barnett.*

Path of Glory

by JOHN D. MacDONALD

HE CAME WIDE AWAKE, all at once, all of a piece. In the back of his mind was a black velvet backdrop. Red neon against it. *XP-181.* Just that. There didn't have to be any other words there. You didn't have to tell yourself that, after four days of taxiing it to hell-and-gone all over the lake bed, you had to yank it off the ground today.

So he lay there for a time and listened to his body. All of it. Big slow pump of the heart. Blood stir. He tasted the rest that had soaked into it. No burn in the throat. A good day. It had to be a good day.

He bounded out of bed. He was a little man of twenty-eight, trim-bodied, cat-quick, with high hard cheekbones deep tanned, black hair parted low on the left, a crisp military mustache, the unforgiving eyes of a gambler.

He showered, shaved closely and carefully, trimmed the mustache a bit. He liked to spend a long time in the bathroom. He liked lotions and astringents and unguents. He liked his body and his reflexes, and he gave himself the attention any excellent piece of equipment should merit.

Laura had put bright insignia on the fresh uniform. Everything was right but the wing. It was too close to the top of the pocket. He moved it up an eighth of an inch, squared his shoulders and stood in front of the mirror. Gold leaves glinted.

"Hello there, Maje," he said softly.

He went down and sat in the breakfast nook. Laura had heard him on the stairs and the moment he sat down she brought the tall glass of fresh orange juice. He looked at the kitchen clock and checked it with his watch. The clock was two minutes slow. It said three after ten.

"You must have kept the kid quiet for a change," he said.

"He was good this morning," she said and turned back to the stove.

Once upon a time there had been, within Laura, a quick hard passion. Then came three years of constantly weakening spirit and defiance. Now there was nothing. When she thought of it, which was very seldom, she wondered that a person could become nothing. If he were completely a man, you could fight him with a woman's weapons. But he was more than a man. He was a controlled entity, with a man's cruelty, a woman's intuition, and the ruthlessness necessary to wield them cleverly, constantly.

So after a time you ceased fighting.

She brought him the eggs and bacon and turned away quickly because she did not like to see him eat. He was precise, surgical, almost dainty.

"Where is he?"

"I let him play outside. I told him to be quiet."

"Oh. You told him to be quiet."

She turned and looked at him. "When you go out, tell him he was good."

"A reward, you might say?" he said, smiling.

"Never mind. Never mind," Laura said.

He drank his coffee quickly, set the cup into the saucer without a sound. He dabbed his lips with the napkin and threw it behind him.

He went to her. "Going to wish me luck today?"

"Good luck, Stacey," she said automatically.

He kissed her cheek. "Thank you, my dear. Thank you."

In the hallway he put the cap at precisely the right angle and went out into the garage. The car top was down. He backed out. The boy stood by a tired rose bush, fingers in his mouth. Major Stacey Barnett tried an

experiment. He turned and looked long in the other direction. When he glanced back, the boy was gone. What could you expect? He had Laura's eyes. As spiritless as hers. Nothing to fight against, not any more.

It was four miles to the gates. Stacey drove with the effortless precision with which he did every physical thing.

He slowed at the gate. The guards stepped forward. As Stacey Barnett returned the salute, they waved him on. He turned off his motor.

"Sergeant, has there been a change in the security regulations?"

"Sir, I thought that since today's the day you . . ."

"You're not being paid to think, Sergeant. You're being paid to check passes. Check mine."

"Yes, sir." He stepped to the side of the car and took the pass. He handed it back after looking at it carefully, stepped back and saluted.

Major Barnett returned the salute and drove through the gates. As he was getting out of the car near Administration after putting the top up against the sun's heat, Palmer, the assistant adjutant came running out.

"Major Barnett, sir. The General wishes to see you."

"Any special general?"

"General Balch, sir."

"Thank you for being explicit, Lieutenant."

General Balch was hunting for something in one of the lower drawers of his desk. He lifted his head and saw Barnett in a stiff salute. "For God's sake, Stace, sit down and stop playing tin soldier."

Barnett sat down, crossed his legs, adjusted the crease in his trousers and said coolly, "Lose something, General?"

"Out of cigars. Thought I had some in here. Well, skip it." He grunted and pushed himself erect in the seat. His face was red. "How's it going to go today?"

"I can't tell much about flight characteristics until the aircraft is in flight."

"Kinda thorny today, Stace, aren't you? We want a Mach two out of this one."

"If it's built into the ship, you'll get it, General."

"Something I want to talk to you about. Lot of brass here today. I don't care how you act toward them. That's your career, not mine. But selected press boys will be on tap. Now don't do a freeze job like last time. Understand?"

Barnett looked at his fingernails. "What do you want me to do?"

"Smile. Be affable if it kills you."

"And get a big write-up as soon as the release is given, General?"

"Why not? Will it hurt you?"

"It might."

"Explain that cryptic sentence, Major."

"The Air Force, sir, has a strange habit of passing over officers who've gotten more than their share of publicity. As far as the press is concerned, I'm going to be the little

man who flies the ship. They can make their story out of the ship."

"They like color, Stace."

"You've given them plenty of color, General."

"Say the rest of it," the General said in a taut voice.

"You made BG in forty-three. I can still see only one star, sir."

"You S. O. B.," General Balch said tonelessly. "Someday I'll find out what makes you tick."

Barnett smiled meagerly. "There's no mystery. I just test aircraft. I'm a specialist. And I want all I can get out of it, sir."

"Maybe you'll get what Sheffer and Wadrith and Markson got."

Barnett's eyes narrowed a fraction of an inch. He tilted his head to one side as though listening. "Would you like me to think that you hope so, sir?"

"Get out of my office, Major."

Barnett had his hand on the knob when Balch said, "Stace!"

"Sir?"

"Good luck today."

"Thank you, sir."

He walked through the white-hot sunlight, by the sprinklers that turned slowly in the middle of the small patches of green. He went into the Kanteen and took the end stool. Betty came over at once. He could see that she had been crying.

She came to him and said, "God, Stace, all night I couldn't sleep thinking of how . . ."

"Shut your silly mouth," he said with a trace of primness.

"I can't help it, Stace." She was a pretty brunette in a crisp yellow uniform, her mouth somewhat wide and slack.

"You've got to help it."

"But I . . ."

He reached across the counter and gripped her arm. He saw her go white around the mouth with the pain. He smiled up into her eyes. "Either you stop, this minute, or the most you'll ever see of me is what you can see right now across this counter, Betty."

"You mean it, don't you?" she whispered. "I'm all right if I keep my mouth shut and don't make a fuss. I'm——"

He shrugged, let go of her arm, picked up a newspaper and opened it. She stood looking at the back of the paper a moment, rubbing her arm.

"I'm sorry, Stace," she whispered.

"Then be good, will you?" he said absently. She brought him coffee. He folded the paper and put it where he could read.

"Will I see you, after?" she asked.

"You might. I don't know yet."

She watched him for a time and then went away. She wasn't in sight when he paid the check and left. He went to his locker and put on white coveralls, walked through the passageway into the hangar where the XP-181 sat, a long, evil, silvery, gleaming thing with a hungry look about her scoops.

The men working on her were laughing. They hadn't seen Barnett.

"Tell me—so I can laugh, too, boys," he said gently. The laughter stopped at once. He looked up on the wing. "Come down here, Jessup."

The lanky man swung himself down onto the concrete. There was a smudge of grease across his cheek. Jessup was a civilian.

"How far has she been checked?"

"Eighty percent, Major," Jessup drawled.

"Hydraulic gear?"

"Took special care on that, Major."

"Then check it again."

Jessup flushed. "I just told you I checked it, Major."

"Not with me looking over your shoulder, you didn't. And just for luck I want the fluid all pumped out, strained and replaced."

"Hell's bells, Major! I can't . . ."

"I'm perfectly willing to tell the General that I won't attempt to fly it unless it's checked according to my instructions, Jessup. Any questions?"

Jessup looked down into the Major's cold eyes for long moments. Then his shoulders slumped. "I'll get to it," he said.

"You'll get to it right now," Barnett said quietly.

At five minutes of two Barnett rode in the jeep out to where the ship stood waiting. He was clad in the bulky pressure suit. The press was waiting. Washington brass stood around. As Barnett was helped up into the cockpit the last thing he heard before the canopy came down was one of the generals explaining—"Major Stacey Barnett. The best we've got."

He fastened his connections for heat and air, checked oxygen, radio, mike position, note pad. He worked the controls. This was his small world. He fitted into it the way a small dark animal will fit into its winter burrow.

At three minutes past two, three minutes behind schedule, there was an indescribable sound. Part roar, part scream, part whistle. It was clearly audible over a circle with a five mile radius.

They stood and they watched. All of them watched the incredible silver dot climbing on its twin flames. General Balch watched with his lips sucked hard against his teeth. Jessup watched, gently thudding a wrench against his thigh. Lieutenant Palmer watched without expression. Betty stood out in the sunlight, her fists hard against her breast. The sergeant at the gate watched, looked away to spit, found the climbing mote of silver and watched some more. Laura stood in the front yard, her hand shading empty eyes. The boy stood in the driveway, ten feet from his mother.

He had looked where she pointed, and seeing it, he made a little sound in his throat.

Everyone who watched had a look of waiting. Quiet waiting.

And then the small boy, suddenly, said, "Ah!" It is the sound that children make all over the world when the rocket, reaching apex, bursts with a hard white light.

He grinned excitedly at his mother. She had not moved, except to fold down the sunshield hand so that now it covered her eyes.

The author of this novelette, H. Bedford-Jones, was one of the most prolific, as well as talented, writers in the field of adventure fiction. Over a period of thirty years he wrote dozens of absorbing yarns for this magazine. This is one of his best. In "The Pistol of Mendoza," Bedford-Jones combined all the elements of a great action story—color and excitement, characterization, authentic background and a swift-paced plot that carries you along all the way through. In short, a classic in its field.

The Pistol of Mendoza

by H. BEDFORD-JONES

CAPTAIN MACKLEM, blue coat buttoned close, hands clasped behind his back, turned and squinted into the wind, and his lips moved in unheard words. It was a way he had. Bully Macklem was at his prayers again, the men sneered.

It was a wind-ruffled afternoon, and His Britannic Majesty's corvette *Scorpion* rocked slowly to a listless sea. Her captain's gig had been lost. Her long-boat was coming back from a rather frowzy vessel, a quarter-mile distant, now lifting patched brown

canvas to fill away westward into the eye of the Atlantic.

Sullen, oily water ran off to east and south, where the horizon was blued by the swampy coastline of West Africa, all Portuguese territory, and the mouth of the Rio Grande, and the horror island of Bissoa.

Captain Macklem eyed his lieutenant sourly as the latter came to the quarterdeck.

"Well, Mr. Nickerson? She was another Portuguese, no doubt?"

"Just that, sir. Papers all in order. Two hundred and forty slaves aboard. The *Esperanza* by name, Jose Mendoza master; and never have I seen a more villainous rogue, sir, than this same Mendoza."

Captain Macklem nodded. "We're helpless, of course. Portugal can ship to Brazil all the slaves she pleases from this hell-island. Only two years ago, in 1815, we had to pay her £300,000 indemnity for molesting her damned slavers. Our orders, consequently, are most strict."

The lieutenant rubbed his nose, hesitant.

"At the same time, sir," he ventured, "there's something devilish odd about that ship yonder. Job Backus had my stroke oar, and swore he had served aboard her. He said she was the *Pilgrim* of Bristol, twenty years ago, when the Bristol merchants handled most of the slave trade."

"That, Mr. Nickerson, is a chapter of British history best forgoten," the captain said testily. "The *Pilgrim* of Bristol town—arrgh!" His growl was like a curse.

His gaze went to the slaver, which had filled and was standing away. He was a long-nosed man, acid of word and look, graying and desperate. The Napoleonic wars had ended and this corvette was his final command. Once back at Portsmouth and paid off, he would rot out the rest of his life, and he knew it well. Every war fills the world with old soldiers, old seamen, rotting out their lives. But Captain Macklem took it hard; a hard, grim man who faced his fate with bitter and uncompromising eye, humorless and bleak.

Captain Jose Mendoza also had a long nose, in fact an exceptionally long nose, but he had a sense of humor to go with it. This, at first glance, was surprising. As he stood looking back at the corvette and chuckling, he was no figure of mirth. To all appearance a slovenly fellow in dirty garments, bristly black hair framed his brown face, and his long down-curving nose was flanked by evil laughing eyes. But the eyes were gray and the long nostrils were thin and hard, and the words he uttered were English.

"Handsomely done, Peake!" he said to the bosun at his side, a thin, melancholy rascal with the devil in his face. "It's no glory to trick a starveling lieutenant, but the shadow he casts holds the King's Navy and the gallows to boot."

"You and I, Cap'n Tom, have tricked them devils many a year now," the bosun said. Mendoza

clapped him on the shoulder heartily.

"Aye, and shall again, lad! This time we've a fortune below decks, and more to come." The gray eyes swept the slatternly seamen and mates, who were all scum of the west coast, with open contempt. "Another four days we'll have our proper crew back, all slaves gone, the ship herself once more, and heading back to Bissoa for a new load. Well, I'd best get out of these stinking clothes and have a talk wi' the Frenchman."

Peake turned suddenly and caught his arm. The evil, mournful eyes searched him, the scrawny devil's face showed agitation.

"Cap'n Tom! Don't trust them Frenchies!" he broke out. "Don't trust 'em for nothing!"

Mendoza grinned, showing white massive fangs. He laughed, and the huge gold hoops in his ears shook to his mirth.

"Trust 'em!" he said in a scathing tone. "Lad, did ye ever know me to trust anyone—even you? If they can bilk me, let 'em do it. Here's a game of treachery and murder, and I'm better at it than the best of 'em! Now we've got a new way to trick Britannia, to scoop a fortune from under her very nose; and the Frenchmen will profit by it also."

"Just the same, they hate you for burning that St. Malo ship off Bahia," muttered Peake. "And we han't got our own crew, mind."

"A good thing, or that lieutenant would have suspected something." Mendoza chuckled again. "He didn't see the Frenchman?"

"I didn't take him in the cabins at all," Peake replied. "He said the captain of the corvette is the one who blew Ruiz, the Cuban, out o' the water last year. Cap'n Macklem, by name."

Mendoza stood stock-still for an instant. Something flashed across his face and was gone, leaving the mahogany wrinkled and ugly again.

"Macklem!" he said under his breath. "By the lord, it can't be! But it is. Macklem! Well, let it pass."

"Ye knew him, Cap'n Tom?" queried Peake, who had not missed the flash.

Mendoza nodded.

"Aye. Twenty odd years back, when I was a lad. Never mind. Hold the course for half an hour more, than swing up for Point Concepcion and the Frenchmen."

He went below at his easy swinging stride, a hulking, powerful figure.

In his own cabin, he stripped off the filthy garments so well suited to his role. His body was whiter than his face, far whiter, not too thickly matted with coarse black hair, starred here and there by scars, and was a rippling mass of cordage. It belied the seamed and viciously lined features, for it was a fairly young body, alive with a vital energy.

Dressed now in loose white silk with huge gold buttons, Mendoza passed into the main cabin. Here a

swarthy, pudgy little man with black mustache and beard sat drowsily over a table littered with papers, near the stern windows, and jerked up at sight of him.

"Ha! All clear, Captain?"

"Of course." Mendoza dropped into a chair and reached for a Havana from the open box. "How are you making out with the scheme, Dubois?"

"I do not understand it too well," the Frenchman said. "I do not read the English writing. But I can hear the tinkle of gold," he added, laughing, his eyes searching Mendoza.

The latter nodded and relaxed, pulling at the cigar.

"It can be briefly put, my friend," he said amiably. "You're agent for Lasalle, Kervenec and Lebreton; the three of them are now under Point Concepcion, which we'll reach by morning, if no more British ships appear. They don't dare put in anywhere for slaves, and if they did, the Portuguese have swept the country clean at the moment. The barracoons at Bissoa are filled. But the British don't dare interfere with an honest Portuguese slaver, taking blacks to Brazil, as you've just seen for yourself. I've explained it before."

Dubois gestured. "Certainly, but I had drunk a bit too much, Captain."

"You agreed, none the less. You smelled money. You've the stink of it in your nostrils this minute," Mendoza said with unconcealed contempt. "I can get you cargoes; no one else can. British ships are everywhere along the coast, and your men daren't risk it. By the time they lay up, barter for a cargo, get the slaves collected and shipped, the British get wind of 'em and nip them. But I'll turn this cargo over to Lasalle, and off he goes. Next week, I'll fill Kervenec, and he slips away. The week after, Lebreton does the same. At that rate, we'll empty the Bissoa barracoons. This was all arranged with Lasalle long ago; that's why you were sent to Bissoa to meet me."

They talked on. Dubois, recovering from a tremendous three-day debauch, could not comprehend the savage and indomitable driving energy of Mendoza, who had filled his tiers and left Bissoa before the average slaver would have started negotiations.

Fortunes were in plain sight for any who could seize them. Cuba was avid for slaves; the French islands, almost depopulated by the wars, needed slaves bitterly for the sugar plantations, and prices were at peak. A single voyage meant wealth.

England, however, had gone abolition, and other countries followed suit. Portugal alone stuck out for the trade, and did openly what others could only do at risk and venture. The three French vessels awaiting Mendoza were entirely safe, for the moment. Even if a British cruiser came upon them, they could not be touched, unless they actually had slaves aboard.

"They nearly nipped Lebreton four months ago," said Dubois, grinning. "He was too smart for them.

Got all the black ivory over the side and gone before they got him, and they could do nothing. Not one of the blacks floated, luckily."

Mendoza sneered. "You call that smart, eh? You would, Frenchy."

"*Monsieur,* I do not like your attitude," said Dubois, brindling a little.

"Be damned to you," Mendoza retorted carelessly. "What you and yours like is nothing to me. Now, we'll be at Concepcion in the morning. It's fairly safe. There are no slaves to be had in that district, and the British don't look for any slavers there. Let's get the accounts checked over, so Lasalle will have nothing to do except pay the money and take the slaves. Here's the Portuguese manifest."

They worked, while the *Esperanza,* filled with the groans of men and women, stood up the coast. She had not always been the *Esperanza,* nor had her master always been Jose Mendoza. This was his present name, and he had all the papers in proof of it; he had them in proof of other names as well.

As they dickered, he regarded Dubois with complacent assurance, and made no mystery of his own methods. His own crew were waiting at the tumbledown Portuguese factory of Santa Cruz. He had put in there, shipped this rascally crew, made changes in the appearance of the ship, and headed for Bissoa.

Rid of the slaves, he would pick up his own men, alter the ship's rig, and return to Bissoa for another cargo. Not that the alteration of rig would avail in case of search, but the British would only come after him when he left the slave-island—they had to get their man with slaves aboard. A different rig would cause confusion to British minds. Also the *Esperanza,* rid of slaves, would sail for Bissoa as a Portuguese frigate.

"I believe in being slippery before the times comes," said Captain Mendoza swigging a draught of rum.

Dubois shot him a sleepy but malignant glance. "That won't help you if fate's against you."

"Fate!" Mendoza leaned back laughing. "Fate be damned! I'm my own fate, you plump little pigeon! Eh? What the devil's up?"

He stiffened, listening. A burst of voices from the deck, a sudden heeling of the ship as she shifted course. The pound of feet came in the passage, and the cabin door was flung open. Peake stood there, and touched his forelock.

"A boat, Cap'n!" said he. "We're standing for her. A boat with a man lying in her."

"Good!" said Mendoza, and was for the deck with his swift, lithe stride.

He took the wheel himself, impatiently brushing aside the steersman. His strident voice sent a torrent of Portuguese along the decks. The men, in deadly fear of him, leaped alive; Peake's raucous and bitter accents lashed on the orders like a whip.

Yards swung; canvas filled and backed. With a precision that seemed miraculous, the ship swung down on the little open boat. The man in her was nearly naked, dark of hair and shaggy beard, but alive; he caught the line Peake flung him, as the ship swung around and almost touched the little boat for one motionless moment.

Dubois eyed the figure at the wheel, powerful hands and sardonic eye—a figure incredibly sensitive to wind and water and thrust of canvas. A shout from Peake, and Mendoza swung the wheel, bawled out orders. The men pattered to lines and pins, the ship moved again, the castaway was being hauled in over the rail, and the open boat danced away upon the sunset wake. Peake came aft and knuckled his forehead.

"Did ye mind the boat, Cap'n Tom?"

"You fool, I was minding the ship!" snapped Mendoza.

"A captain's gig, sir, out o' the Royal Navy. The man's gone to pieces, will need a bit of care before he can talk. He's had a heavy touch of the cat. Back's all raw."

"Give him what he needs, bose. Bring him aft when he can talk. And iron him."

Dubois, who understood English vastly better than he spoke it, was very curious. As he stood beside Mendoza at the weather rail, looking back at the sunset-reddened wake, he voiced his curiosity. Why on earth should a poor devil of a castaway, at the last gasp, be thrown into irons? It was a strange procedure, since Mendoza knew nothing about him.

"I can guess," said Mendoza. The ship was standiig on her course once more, the sun was dipping under the western rim, all was well. He turned to Dubois, leaned idly on the rail, and reflectively cleared his mind.

The British corvette, standing on and off Bissoa, had known the *Esperanza* was there, had deliberately waited for her and caught her. A French or Danish or American slaver would have been lost; the *Esperanza* could not be touched. Here was a man, apparently a deserter from that same corvette—but was he?

"Chances are that he's been drifting about, waiting to be picked up by a slaver," said Mendoza. "A man planted there, d'ye see? Waiting to make himself useful. A spy."

Dubois rolled helpless eyes to heaven. "*Monsieur*, such a theory is insane! It's quite contrary to all reason!"

"That's why it's worth considering," Mendoza rejoined. "Only the unexpected are dangerous—hello!"

Voices, up forward; a burst of tongues, a wild despairing shriek, a black object that flashed from the forecastle hood, went leaping to the rail, then curved overboard and was gone. Mendoza stared down at the water, at the wake. A girl, he knew at once; one of the younger slaves. She did not reappear. No head showed in the wake. Once they went over, they were gone, deliberately staying under to drown.

He faced around as feet pounded

the deck and a storm of voluble voices poured aft. Here was Peake, all the devil in his lean face heightened. Two of the hands were being dragged along by four other men, all talking fast and furiously. Mendoza leaned back on the rail, his saturnine features calm.

"What is it, bose?"

"These two, sir. They had taken a slave to the foc'sle; that prime young 'un, the chief's daughter. She got away and went over."

A brief, terrible indictment. All knew the strict orders; the two men blatted out hasty lies, voluble pleas, offers to make good the loss. They, like this makeshift crew, were riffraff of the coast. Mendoza listened, a smile twisting his lips askew, his gray eyes boring into the two. To their desperate pleas, he nodded.

"Of course, of course," he said calmly. "I'll not punish you for so slight a matter. It was, however, your fault that the girl finally got away."

The two rascals brightened. Yes, of course it was their fault, but—

"Very well," said Mendoza. "Go bring her back."

Staring amazement, sudden comprehension, bursting terror, and then shriek upon wild shriek. Peake, belaying-pin in hand, hit one of the two over the head and he was flopped over the rail. The other man broke loose and hurled himself at Mendoza, knife in hand.

Mendoza straightened, stepped out to meet the rush, met it breast to breast. His long arms whirled and dropped home, his fluid body bent like a bow. He flung the man across his hip and sent him clawing over the rail; the falling scream ended abruptly.

"Come along." Mendoza clapped Dubois on the shoulder. "Let's go down and have one drink before dinner. We must mark that girl off the manifest, too, blast it!"

CHAPTER 2

The main cabin, where Mendoza and Dubois lingered over their evening meal, was curiously at variance with the ship's externals. Here all was neat, ship-shape, with panels rubbed down and brasses burnished. A large lamp slung in gimbals lit the cabin.

Two men brought in the castaway, irons on his wrists and anger in his eyes. Mendoza stretched out his legs comfortably, picked at his teeth with a fork, and regarded the fellow appraisingly. A bold, chancy man, he decided, and not a liar.

"You're no Portuguese, nor is your name Mendoza," said the man bluntly. "I saw you swing that fellow across your hip. You learned that trick in the west country and nowhere else. I should know, being a Devon man myself. The name's Dick Grennan."

"Aye." Mendoza disdained denials. "Who kissed your back, wi' the cat?"

"That devil Macklem," said Grennan, growling a vicious oath. "Fifty lashes, and for what? Losing bal-

ance with his slop-bucket, to a roll of the ship, and soiling the deck! Cap'n Macklem of the *Scorpion*—arrgh! A damned martinet, bloody cruel, with a stone for a heart!"

"He was right," Mendoza said calmly. "If it'd been me, now, you'd ha' got a hundred lashes, and brine well rubbed in to boot. A seaman should know how to keep his footing."

Grennan eyed him uncertainly.

A sullen fellow, thought Mendoza, rebellious and bold enough, who had been a trouble-maker aboard the corvette, no doubt.

"Have ye never," went on Mendoza, "been taught how to address a ship's master?"

"Aye," Grennan snapped. "You've ironed me. Take off the irons, let me ship with you, and I'll know my place."

"You'll learn it if you don't," drawled Mendoza. "Not so fast, now. Why would I want a lad like you aboard? You've deserted one, you'll desert another."

"Give me decent treatment and see," came the reply. "I was pressed, hit over the head and flung aboard, d'ye see? Aboard a damned King's ship—rotten water, rotten food, triced up to a grating and given the cat on any pretense, worked to the bone, the heart choked out of me, the corvette alive with fever, and a captain who's killed two men with his cruelty since we came on the station!"

"How do I know you were not set adrift to play the spy's part?"

"That's nonsense," said Grennan. "If the word of a Devon man means aught to you, I'll promise you faithful service."

"The word's good, but why should I want you?"

"Because I'm a gunner's mate, and I know all the plan of that accursed cold-hearted Macklem to catch slavers. Three French slavers are up the coast now, near Concepcion."

Mendoza chuckled, and cast the startled Dubois a quizzical glance. He made a gesture to the two men guarding Grennan.

"Take off his irons. Bring rum. Sit down, Grennan, and talk with us."

"Aye, sir, and thank you kindly."

Grennan touched his forelock and sank gingerly into a chair, because of his raw back.

Rum came, and Mendoza primed him to drink, talking of this and that, and after a bit the rum took hold of him. He talked of his escape from the corvette, his hopes of reaching the Portuguese factory at Bissoa or up the river, and finally of what Mendoza desired. By this time he was maundering and fuddling out everything he knew, and there was no trickery in him.

Macklem knew of the three Frenchmen and meant to get them, once they had cargoes aboard. The *Perseus,* fifty-six, was standing off the cape, close in of night, far out of days, her presence unsuspected.

Another frigate was on the way from Sierra Leone. Macklem was cruising between Concepcion and

Bissoa, and had men ashore at both places, blacks, ready to bring him word when the three Frenchmen took slaves aboard.

"The blasted Cornishman thinks he's smart, eh?" sneered Mendoza. Grennan looked up, blinking, in maudlin astonishment.

"Who told you he was a Cornishman? I didn't, so help me! And blow me if you haven't the look of him, sir—"

"Out of here, you dog!" blared Mendoza. "On deck! Find Peake. He's bose and acting mate. Tell him I said to take care of you. Shake a leg! Lively!"

Grennan staggered up, touched his forelock, and departed unsteadily.

Dubois sat anxiously fingering his black beard and prating of British frigates. True, the three Frenchmen had guns and were fighters, but they dared not match themselves against a fifty-six, with a corvette to boot. Mendoza snarled a contemptuous oath, spread a chart on the table, and pricked at it with his knife.

"Look, simpleton! We'll be at Concepcion in the morning. Lasalle and the others are in the river mouth, inside the bar, sheltered by the cape. The blacks Macklem has stationed there are at the village—a certainty. It's a small village, not worth raiding, but we'll wipe it out and get a few dozen slaves. That will take care of Macklem's informers. By noon, my cargo will be out and aboard Lasalle's big craft. He'll get off on the instant. I'll slip on north to the old factory at Santa Cruz, ship the guns and crew I left there, and return as a Portuguese vessel of war."

"And what then?" demanded Dubois.

Mendoza winked jovially. "Wait and see. I've got guns and men, wi' money and trade goods under hatches."

"You'd be a rich prize for the English, Captain."

"Aye; or for your three French friends! Try it on, my lad, and you'll feed sharks. I'm not trusting myself among you three, never fear. I'll stay outside the bar, and the blacks can go to your ships by boat. You'll go ashore and send Lasalle out to dicker with me, and he'll stay aboard me until his blacks are all shifted. Well I know your three don't love me, but money's the persuader of all things. Now clear out."

To this unceremonious order, Dubois departed, bristling and darting black-avised glances behind him. Mendoza ignored the man completely, and fell to studying the chart.

The light of the swinging lamp, striking down from above, intensified the harsh, lean lines of his face—the scarred cheek, the nicked ear, the slitted graceless eyes, the cruelty of the mouth under that long nose. He twisted his mustaches as he sat, rubbed his shaven bony chin, then the rings danced in his ears as he leaned back.

"Good!" he muttered, and reached for a Havana. "Macklem, eh? Fine

upright gentleman, who never took a crooked step and never spared a man who took one! I'll twist your tail, my lad; I'll black your eye this cruise or my name's not Tom—Jose Mendoza! Mendoza's as good a name as any, aye! And before I'm done with you, I'll let you know who turned the trick."

His gaze flitted up as the door opened. Peake came in, nodded, shut the door and came forward to the table. Mendoza indicated with his finger the rum and the cigars.

Peake slumped down, swigged a dram of liquor, and jabbed a Havana into his face. His devil's eyes warmed a little on the gaze of Mendoza, as though this man were the only thing in life which could touch his dark soul.

"Rest you, lad," Mendoza said. "I'll take the deck till morning watch."

"Aye, sir," replied Peake. "It's about the Frenchie. He's had talk wi' the men now and again; there's summat fishy about him. All the Frenchies hate you like poison, since you burned that Malouin off Bahia."

The shaggy brows of Mendoza drew down.

"Aye, but they must play with me. We'll be rid o' Dubois in the morning. How like you the man we took aboard?"

"He's good," said Peake emphatically. "Main good, Cap'n Tom."

"I thought so. He brought news; no matter now. You're done up. Get to sleep. Come morning, do exactly as I say in all things. Give this fellow Grennan pistols, and trust him to stick with us. I have every step figured. We'll get Lasalle aboard here and keep him safe till all's done. We've great things ahead, bose! I'll make ducks and drakes of the Royal Navy."

A snarl curled Peake's thin lips. "Amen to that, sir! The men are muttering because o' them two we put overboard. They'd murder us if they had a chance."

"They'll not have it. Go to sleep. I'll take the deck."

Peake rose and went wearily away to his own cabin. Mendoza slipped a greatcoat over his thin garments, wound a scarlet handkerchief tightly about his head and knotted it, thrust cigars into his pocket and sought the deck above.

The stars were all ablaze, the wind was holding steady, and the frowzy ship labored on toward Cape Concepcion. Mendoza, killing the slave stench with tobacco, prowled the quarterdeck and thought ahead to morning. Everything was perfect. Nothing could go wrong, and this news about Captain Macklem filled him with a grim delight.

He might better, however, have thought back to the evening, and the few words he had exchanged with Dubois.

Concepcion, as it was then known, was a shoaling cape whose curving headland protected the Rio Negro and its morasses. All the coast was swamp hereabouts, fever-ridden and

sure death to whites, except the island at the mouth of the Rio Negro. Here was a small native village, and here, inside the bar, was anchorage for the three French slavers, two ships and a large schooner, whose topmasts showed above the trees.

The *Esperanza* cleared the cape with sunrise and stood in for the bar, with a light breeze. Mendoza was at the wheel. Peake was on the foc'sle head, and Grennan with him; all hands were mustered, standing by the braces.

Seeing a couple of canoes coming out from the island, Mendoza chuckled. He would fool those black rascals this time, and the white rascals as well, having no intention of crossing the sandbar into the river mouth. Dubois came on deck and joined him aft, hands in jacket pockets. The sun, coming up across the swamps, was a blinding, dazzling mass of molten brass.

More canoes came out, paddles flashing. Mendoza was holding, not for the channel but for a point close to it. Drawing nearer, the sand spits to right and left opened out, and the lagoons behind them, fringing the coast. Mendoza flung a glance at Dubois, whose eyes were bright, his cheeks touched with color.

"You've a touch of fever, eh?"

"I? No, thank God!" said Dubois devoutly.

Mendoza shrugged and returned his attention to the shoals. Presently his voice fled down the deck. The men jumped to the lines; the canvas fluttered. A dozen boats were now poised outside the bar, waiting to see what the white man would do. There was no surf here, thanks to the curving headland.

Again Mendoza's voice crackled, for the last time. Peake was ready. The anchor was let go, and splashed heavily; her way almost lost, the ship swung gently as the bower took hold. The canoes came darting forward with a chorus of shrill cries and eager greetings. Mendoza, abandoning the wheel, went to the rail. Dubois followed him. The half-caste mate and several of the men gathered close. Dubois glanced at them, licked his lip with a red tongue. One of the men came close and handed him something—a short iron belaying pin.

Mendoza had cupped his hands to his lips and was shouting at the boats below when Dubois hit him. He was still wearing the crimson silk kerchief about his head. Dubois lashed out swiftly, frantically, with all his scant weight in the swing. The iron smashed Mendoza at the back of his skull.

The force of the blow knocked him forward, head and arms over the rail, senseless.

For an instant, the world stood still. Dubois was poised, breathless, jaw fallen; to him it was incredible, as to the others who stared. The unbelievable had happened. A blow, a feeble, puny blow, had destroyed dominance and mastery.

Wakening came with a sudden pealing yell of wild ferocity, from forward. Peake had seen the hap-

pening. He was coming down the deck with long leaps, a knife glinting in his hand, his cadaverous features distorted and convulsed. Dubois, enthralled by that motionless shape lying across the rail, quite ignored the menace. Roused from stupefaction, he flung himself at Mendoza, beat at him with ineffectual blows, and accomplished nothing but to slide the unresisting thing farther across the rail until it slid from under his hands and was gone overside.

Peake, seeing this, yelled in mingled fury and anguish—yelled in mid-leap, not a dozen feet away, coming like a madman and too late. Dubois swung around in panic. He lashed out with the iron pin, and struck Peake in the face; then he was down with Peake atop, down and screaming as the knife sliced into him.

The mate leaped suddenly. Two other men leaped. They closed in on Peake as he stabbed the life out of Dubois, and their knives were reddened instantly. Peake never rose from that deathly embrace. He groaned, moved feebly as the others drew away, then he sank down and relaxed, as though holding the dead Dubois in his arms, and moved no more.

Forward, a pistol barked, Grennan was in the bows, closed tightly by figures ringing him in. His second pistol crashed out. Two of those men staggered away and collapsed; the others killed Grennan with bitter steel.

Babbling voices rang along the deck. The swarthy mate stilled them swiftly, gave his orders, pointed to a boat coming out across the bar with flashing oars. The men fell to work, getting a ladder over the side. Heads dotted the rail, and the mate stared over a long while, seeking some sign of the vanished Mendoza but there was none.

The canoes had drawn away at the first sign of conflict. The sight of Mendoza, struck down while calling to them, had been enough, the sight of his falling body, the splash when he struck and disappeared, caused them to hang back and see what happened. They were poor devils of half-alive Negroes from the village on the island, and sought no trouble.

Lasalle, one of the two men in the stern of the boat, shouted at them, at the vessel, and called the name of Dubois. The mate, standing on the rail, made reply. Lasalle turned to the red-headed Kervenec, who sat beside him. They spoke together while the boat came on. Lasalle was lithe and young and dark; Kervenec bald and red-bearded.

The *Esperanza* tugged gently at her cable, bows to the shore, for the tide had begun to ebb. The men were taking in her brown canvas.

The two French captains came over the rail. They looked at the bodies; they listened to the swarthy mate and grinned faintly.

"Dubois was a fool," said Lasalle. "But perhaps he had his reasons, to get ahead of us. Perhaps he was a braver man than we thought him!"

"*Oui-da,*" grunted Kervenec, in name and accent eloquent of the Brittany shore. He drew his short, bulky figure into the main-chains and waved a handkerchief as a signal. The third Frenchman, Lebreton, caught the signal and started at once with four more boats from the island. Those three had well arranged all contingencies.

Lasalle talked with the mate and crew. He was smiling, handsome, suavely dominant; he had them eating out of his hand in two minutes, with his talk of easy money and women awaiting them if they shipped aboard the French vessels. A yell of applause, and decision was made. They would ship, aye! As for the *Esperanza,* devil take her!

Thus, from a single tap with a belaying pin, the ripples were widening in the pool of destiny. These men were returning no more to the Santa Cruz factory. The crew left there, the great hopes waiting there, the clever schemes of Jose Mendoza, were all washed away in one instant of time.

And none was left alive to tell of Grennan's information, or the plans of Captain Macklem.

Presently, in the main cabin of the *Esperanza,* the three French captains gathered. Their crews were hard at work; the slaves were being transferred, and boats were plying busily. And the three captains were delighted with their findings, for the *Esperanza* was indeed a rich prize.

"What to do with her?" said Lebreton, frowning. He was a skinny, dried-up little man, like the kernel of an ancient nut; he was very wise and full of old experience.

"This Mendoza was no better than a pirate, but that will not excuse us if the British find her in our hands. They have no mercy whatever on pirates, and would seize that excuse to extinguish us. Perhaps we should tow her across the bar, into the river."

"Why trouble? We're doing all right," Kervenec declared. "We can take everything out of her here, then burn her. We know from her crew that a British corvette stopped her off Bissoa, and no other English ships were around."

"Shall we divide the slaves, then?" asked Lasalle. "We'll only get eighty apiece out of this lot. We could be gone tomorrow, head up for the factory at St. Louis and get enough more there to fill the tiers."

"Better still, leave tomorrow night," Lebreton suggested. "Fire this ship when we go; any English ships would be attracted by the light. We can slip through to St. Louis under cover of night, with scant danger."

After the usual French argument and discussion, this plan was adopted; they decided to split the slaves three ways; also the trade goods and money found aboard. In their eager lust for loot, and the satisfaction of their rabid hatred for Mendoza, all three were blind to the fact that they might have profited largely by let-

ting him live. They themselves dared not go near Bissoa, where slaves were cheap and plentiful; and while the plunder was large, their ultimate profits from Mendoza would have been tremendous.

When they came to the iron box containing all the papers of Jose Mendoza, the three men were amazed. A vague conception came to them of his daring, his resource, his possibilities, at the sight of the documentation which assured the *Esperanza* and her master of passing under various names and flags.

"The *Pilgrim* of Bristol," mused Lebreton, fingering one document. He spoke and read English perfectly. "Look! This must have been her original name. Here is the bill of sale for her, too; she was owned by an Englishman. That boatswain of Mendoza's was an Englishman—the thin rascal. Could he have been the man?"

"Perhaps Mendoza was English, in the beginning," suggested Kervenec, yawning.

"He? Bah! I've talked with him a dozen times," Lasalle put in impatiently. "Portuguese, I assure you. What's the name of the English owner, Lebreton?"

Lebreton pondered the writing.

"Macklem," said he. "Thomas Macklem, master mariner. The name seems familiar, vaguely. I wonder why?"

"Ha! I know!" The red-haired Kervenec exploded. "That accursed *Anglais* who was at Senegal when we were there! You remember him, Lasalle? It was before Lebreton arrived at the rendezvous, but we were talking about him often. He commanded that corvette, the *Scorpion*."

Lasalle burst into a laugh. "Right, right! You know the story his men told us about him? How he stands on deck and looks into the wind, puts his hands behind his back, and curses silently? Bully Macklem at his prayers, the men said. It was a great joke. And this is the same name, perhaps the same man?"

"No, not the same man," Lebreton said patiently. "I shall keep these papers, gentlemen, with your permission. They may come in handy sometime. Who knows? Many Englishmen bear the same name. It is nothing at all. And these papers are old, fifteen years old or more. Shall we cast dice for the pistols?"

All three admired the pistols on the table, with envious eyes. The pair had come from Mendoza's chest, with the iron box of documents. Pistols exquisitely made, adorned with a massive silver chasing from which some name had been erased.

To all three it was obvious that Mendoza had looted them somewhere and kept them for himself.

Two pistols, three men. Dice were found and thrown. Lebreton won one of the brace, and Kervenec the other, and both were extremely proud of their loot.

CHAPTER 3

Jose Mendoza, sliding off the quarter-rail, sprawling into the water and

down, assuredly made no conscious effort to avert the final indignity of life.

The immersion, however, shocked him back into an automatic, animal sort of action. It was not the first time he had gone off a ship's rail. The group of canoes were all clumped off the starboard. The tide had just turned to ebb, so that the ship's stern was seaward. It was sheer blind luck that, coming up under the overhang of the stern, he caught at the port side of the wide rudder-post and clung; it was the only possible thing at which he could catch. And, hanging there, he was quite invisible.

It took him a long while to realize this; he was slow to reach coherent thought. When he gained enough strength to call, no one heard him, for the deck above was a rocketing babble of voices. Something splashed into the water, and something else. When Mendoza saw the dead bodies of Peake and Grennan floating past him to the sea, he called no more.

With this, he knew the worst and faced it.

His brain was in a terrific dither. Thanks to the handkerchief-knot, the iron pin had not smashed his skull, but, hitting low down near the neck, it left the nerves of action paralyzed. That pudgy little Dubois should have fumbled his one blow to the only spot in this steely body that it could effect, was ironical.

Hour after hour, Mendoza clung like a limpet. His brain had wakened effectually. The voices from deck and from the water told him all he needed to know. When, as sometimes happened, a boat rounded the ship's stern, he sank quietly under water and remained until it went past. One such boat carried the body of Dubois; by a sentimental quirk, the three captains had determined to bury their agent ashore. From the voices of the rowers, Mendoza learned that Dubois had also perished in that moment of mad killing.

The time came, with the sun climbing toward zenith, when he could cling no longer.

Under this Afric sun, however, all work had to end toward noon. A few men remained aboard the *Esperanza* to feed the remaining slaves and act as guards. The boats pulled off for the river-mouth and the island and the three French vessels. Those left aboard here, shunned the hot deck. Silence, broken only by the melancholy voices of slaves, held the bay and the ship and the lagoon shores.

The tide swung around to flood.

Mendoza could hold on no longer. He floated. The ship was gradually turning with the flood tide, swinging on her single hawser; he floated past her and away, a red spot in the water because of the scarlet kerchief that still bound his head. There was none to see him as he drifted.

When he reached the shore, he crawled up along the white sand and dragged himself in among the scrub and brush, but dared not stop here. Against the torturing pain, his harsh

will fought and fought, driving him on. He dared not rise; he made a trail in the sand like some stricken animal. On across the sand to the shallow, brackish lagoon, on through the water again. Trees and shelter awaited him with vivid green breath. He made it at last, crawled up among the trees, and sank on his face with a groan.

It was sunset when he wakened from the slumber of exhaustion.

All the world was ruddy, red with the sunset glow. He sat up, neck and head stiff and sore, but he was himself in many respects. Hunger tore at him. He was no stranger to a little pain. He rose and moved cautiously through the brush.

Here, now, was the river; it opened before him as he stood, glaring. Hatred and fury lifted into his brain, but he checked them with iron reserve. His gray eyes flitted about, noting everything, from the trees stirring in the cool onshore breeze of evening to the men moving about the island and the ships.

The island was a large one, splitting the wide, sluggish river channel and rising above the marshes roundabout. Mendoza found himself opposite the northern shore of it. The three French vessels were moored against the south bank; he could see only their topmasts above the green. The village was at the western tip, close to the river entrance, and canoes were there in numbers. A stockaded village; the pleasant aroma from many cooking pots came to him with tantalizing insistence.

So did a woman's laughter—not the mirth of blacks, but the clear, ringing laugh of a white woman, with a few French words. He saw her, now, on the island's tip; a slim shape in white, walking with the lithe, handsome Lasalle and the stocky, red-headed Kervenec, whose red-fringed poll glittered in the afterglow from the sky. They disappeared.

Mendoza's lip curled savagely. He looked past the village to a few huts among the trees. Fowl in plenty, pigs rooting about, manioc patches, cooking pots! A rousing chorus of men's voices caught his ear. Frenchmen were ashore, feasting, drinking, carousing. And he, hurt, alone, was unarmed and prey for any who found him.

He waited, while twilight gathered down the eastern sky to fight the glow of departing day. Presently he perceived that he was close beside a beaten path; it meant little, until a canoe with four figures aboard paddled out from the village and headed straight for him. He drew back into the brush, clawing up a jagged lump of stone. Sudden savage hope stirred in him, for he knew better than to tempt the crocodiles by swimming this river; the canoe was landing straight before him. Two laughing wenches from the village, and two men. The mate of the *Esperanza* and one of the crew. Mendoza recognized them, and his eyes gleamed.

The four landed. They started

along the path, the girls in advance, the swarthy half-casts following. Something, perhaps a spring, lay at the end of this path. Perhaps some trysting place for lovers.

The two black girls, laughing, decked with flowers, bodies agleam with palm oil, came opposite Mendoza and passed. The two men followed; Mendoza found himself quivering at sight of the swarthy mate, but he waited a moment, then rose and stepped out into the path behind them. They glanced around, saw him, and stood stiff with incredulity, fear. Their hands began to move; their faces were frozen, their eyes rolling. Wordless, he let fly with the jagged rock; it struck the mate full in the chest.

The mate tottered. Blood gushed from the swarthy face, from staring eyes and ears and nostrils. He fell, convulsed; Mendoza leaped at the other man bare-handed. A knife flamed and fell. The man screamed. The two girls, looking around, burst into shrieks and went like wild things into the brush.

Mendoza throttled the man and dropped him, dead. He bent over the mate, but the latter could only whisper faint words; the crushed chest would finish him soon enough. With a knife now at his hip, Mendoza turned and went back along the path to where the canoe lay, and stared over at the village. No alarm had reached there; darkness was closing down and the light of torches was flickering above the voices of carousing men.

In the canoe was a goodly load—cooked flesh and yams, palm wine, a bottle of rum, everything a starving man could desire. Mendoza sat on the gunnel and began to eat and drink, wolfishly.

The food effected a change in him. Until now, he had been like a hurt animal. The fact of survival, the killing of that swarthy mate, and now the food and drink, combined to rouse his deadened brain and senses. He began for the first time to comprehend his situation and meet it with reason.

Iron hard though he was, he needed more rest and recuperation; the recent effort had left him exhausted, quivering with pain from neck to spine. He needed safety, and there was none. Sooner or later those two black girls would reach the island with their story. With a gesture, he swept Santa Cruz, his own ship, his own crew out of the picture; that place was a good two hundred miles to the north, a full day's sail and more with the ship.

He might steal a boat and make it, but that would be a desperate effort, and he was far from desperate, given safety and rest.

A blow for the dead Peake, aye! And for himself, not dead. He was not in shape to strike it, but somehow it must be struck, now or later. He remembered the laughing woman he had seen. A woman aboard one of those French vessels? Then she could be of only one sort.

With a grim, shaky laugh he emptied the rum bottle, and stood up.

The canoe he managed to shove out, and scrambled into it, paddling awkwardly into the darkness.

His brain was at work with automatic precision. Safety? Only one place to find it now. Those two girls, the dead men, would get a search under way before long. Safety lay in the one spot no one would dream of searching. Now that he was fed, he wanted rest again; rest and a bit of palm-oil to limber up his neck and head. Nothing else mattered just yet; the business of vengeance could wait a bit. All else was vague. Grennan, Captain Macklem, the fine scheme he had thought up—these things were beyond his immediate horizon as yet. Thought of the woman tugged at him, but with curiosity rather than desire.

He paddled around the end of the island, and sighted the three vessels, lying close together. No need of caution here; it was only too obvious that everyone must be ashore, except the slaves, who lay chained. The ruddy light of torches filled the island; the sound of raucous voices, the flat beat of drums, the monotonous chanting of women, hammered on the air. The three vessels were moored close to the shore, where the channel ran deep; they lay bow and stern along the high bank.

Mendoza swung the canoe in close. A mutter of derision came to his lips.

"Damned lubbers, to call themselves seamen! Everything in a mess, cordage all over the place, ladders down; any black thief could come aboard, and who'd know? Not a line flaked down on deck, I'll warrant! All in a bloody mess."

He thought, achingly, of the ship that had been the *Pilgrim,* of Bristol, with every least detail shipshape, with Peake's trilling pipe handling everything navy style. A slaver run navy style! Again he laughed, shakily. His hands, upreaching to the tangle of cordage, were shaking. The rum had died out of him and he was in the grip of fever. Lying in the brush all afternoon must have started it.

He was aware of distorted thoughts and wildly inflated delusions. In a species of desperate panic, he pulled himself upon deck and stood looking around. Not a soul here, as the shore reflections showed; the smoky radiance danced along the deck, and he moved slowly aft with it. A dim recollection came to him.

At Fort St. Louis, at the French factory, he had been aboard this ship, when he talked with Lasalle and arranged matters. He remembered, now, the amazing slovenly decks and the huge after-cabin space where Lasalle lived like a lord. Handsome, lithe, debonair Lasalle, "the son of Satan" they called him in the Antilles.

Mendoza came aft and then halted. He was quaking with fever, and cloud-shapes roamed his brain; but instinct still guided him. Something moved out there on the dark water under the stars, a canoe, a big canoe

with six men paddling. Mendoza stared at it and saw that it was heading out toward the bar and the sea. A canoe, going to sea at night? Something clicked vaguely in his brain and then was gone, with the monstrous fever-fancies chasing away coherent thought. He turned down the after companionway. A lantern burned in the passage below.

Lanterns burned in the cabins. He remembered now. The two big stern cabins. He looked around; this was where he had talked with Lasalle. On every side was luxury, careless and slovenly luxury. Bottles were racked on the wall. He went to them, fingered them, took one from the rack and clawed at it. Brandy—that was what he needed to kill the fever! But the cork would not draw. Angrily, he knocked off the bottle-neck against another bottle, and gulped down the fiery liquor. It hit him like a blow and momentarily cleared his head.

There was Lasalle's sleeping compartment in an alcove. He turned away and staggered to the other cabin. He walked in, blinking. This was not so large, but the soft radiance touched upon silks and pillows, and the air was redolent of perfumes. Here was no bunk, but a real bed bolted to the deck. Mendoza blinked at it in astonishment. He was all in a whirl, now; he took another swig from the brandy bottle, and this finished him.

Setting down the bottle carefully, he made a sweeping bow to the empty bed.

"My dear lady, your accusations are highly unjust," he said in English. "However, I quite understand. That rascally virtuous brother of mine, blast his dirty heart—ah, such language! Pardon me, my dear. At least, this is my house, and this is my bed, and whether you're in it or not can't be helped. I'm dog tired. I killed Sir Eustace this morning, have ridden all day from London, and must ride farther at dawn. Egad, madame! Duels are certainly a nuisance. However, I want to sleep, and since you're my wife you'll have to put up with my company. We may, however, dispense with the light."

He reached out to the swinging lantern and doused it. Carefully, he removed the red kerchief that girded his head, unbuttoned the huge golden buttons of his disheveled white garments, and with a long sigh of unutterable relaxation climbed into the bed.

He was, of course, quite mad; but from another viewpoint, perhaps he was quite sane.

Ashore, the evening progressed merrily.

The blacks of the village, together with scattered parties who had come down the river to trade with the white visitors, gave themselves over to a frenzy of joyous misrule. They found themselves suddenly wealthy in trade goods, for whites seldom came here and slavers almost never, because of the scarcity of population along the marshes; but these three

ships had been liberal with goods and liquor.

Tonight, in consequence, was an extravaganza of feasting, drinking, and prolonged dancing. Every soul in the place, young and old, was seized by mad abandon.

The riffraff crew of the *Esperanza* fitted in perfectly with the riffraff crews of the three French vessels, who were by no means all Frenchmen. Grouped among the trees, they drank and caroused and crammed themselves, roared bawdy songs, pursued half-complaisant black girls in a wild saturnalia of mirth, and joined in the interminable dances. They were at one with the villagers, distinction of color forgotten.

The three captains and a woman sat apart, with the wrinkled old village chief, who understood none of their talk but grinned amiably at them as he quaffed his rum.

The woman sat beside Lasalle, but her eyes, now and again, touched upon those of the dried-up Lebreton. She was a handsome piece, high-colored, with brave black eyes and wide, generous mouth, and a gorgeous feel for the right clothes that somehow lent her an air of virginal innocence—perhaps because her gaze was so level and unafraid.

Certainly she was not afraid of Lasalle. The two of them had been almost literally at daggers' points for some days. Nobody knew why, but wise old Lebreton could guess. Weary of each other, that was it, and nothing could be more bitter or deadly than such a feeling between two such persons. Lebreton encouraged it, at least for her eyes to see. A deft word, a look, nothing more.

Lasalle suspected nothing. Kervenec mopped his bald pate and saw nothing, but Rosa saw and knew, and smiled. If she were but rid of Lasalle and his swaggering possession!

"We're all thinking the same thing," broke out Kervenec, suddenly, blurting the words in a rush. "Me, I'm no man for hints and sly words. We'd be fools to go up the coast hunting full cargoes, when we could slip over the bar tomorrow night and stand for Cuba with full tiers! What's against it?"

The impatient words provoked startled silence. Lasalle frowned and stroked his lean cheek, shot a glance at the grinning old chief and voiced reply.

"Two things against it. First, the unwritten law of the business; the village or chief who shelters you must be inviolate. We depend on these coast people to gather us cargoes from the back country, hence they themselves must never be touched."

"Bosh!" said Kervenec. "This is no regular station. These cargoes come out of these swamps, and you know it."

Lebreton leaned forward. His soft, gentle accents always commanded attention.

"Quite true, my friends. Remember, too, there are no other villages around here. With certain precau-

tions, there should be no one at all to tell tales of what happened. This is an island, you know."

His words were filled with terrible implications. Rosa spoke out sharply.

"You can't mean it! These people are friends. We're their guests."

Lebreton turned to her, beaming. "True! Therefore, we present them with the blessings of civilization. Plantations, in the new world, a happy, carefree life, no more swamps and fever! Lasalle, what is your second objection?"

"That these blacks are fever-ridden. They won't fetch a high price."

"Then," said Lebreton pleasantly, "we should see to it that they are sold to dealers who come aboard us. Sell them before we unload them. And, at worst, the average will be brought up by the freight with which Captain Mendoza so kindly provided us. Kervenec, do you think it could be managed?"

"Oui-da!" jerked out Kervenec disdainfully. "Of course! In another two hours they'll be easily handled. There are over three hundred of them here; enough to give us a very good cargo all around. And we have plenty of men, remember."

"This is a despicable thing," said the woman deliberately. "You cannot do it, you must not do it! These black people trust us—"

"Mind your own affairs." Lasalle stood up, eager, virile, harsh of word. "Come along, Kervenec; we'll arrange everything with the men. You stay here, Rosa, and keep your mouth shut. Watch her, Lebreton. She'd be glad enough to tip off the blacks, if she could."

The two moved away. Rosa looked after them, a hot flash in her eyes. Lebreton looked at her, and smiled, shrewdly, understandingly, contentedly, as one who sees deep plans coming slowly but surely to fruition. She, turning, met his gaze and his smile for a long moment. Then he spoke, quietly.

"No hurry; the poor devils will not wear themselves out for some hours. I'll see you safe aboard before anything happens."

She merely nodded to this.

"You've had trouble with Lasalle for some time now," Lebreton went on in his gentle way. "That's too bad. I don't like to see trouble among my friends. It would be very sad, for your sake, if anything happened to Lasalle; he is young, headstrong, violent and very sure of himself."

She studied him in silence. She had a vivid intelligence, and could appreciate such words and all their implications. "That," she replied, "is what the English captain said."

"What English captain?" rapped out Lebreton, gentle no longer. She shrugged lightly.

"The one who was at Senegal, just before you came there to meet us. He commanded a corvette; a man with a long nose and a bitter ego. He told Lasalle that some day he would be too cocksure and would be hanged."

"Oh!" said Lebreton. "Captain Macklem?"

"Perhaps that was his name. They said a funny thing about him, his men did. That he would face into the wind and mutter curses on all the world, so bitter was his heart. At his prayers, the men called it."

"I've heard that, yes," assented the other softly. "It is a fine large ship, this one of Lasalle's. It is much larger and better than my old schooner. He is a very lucky man, eh?"

Meeting his gaze, her lips curved in a slight, flashing smile.

"Perhaps an unlucky man. Eh?" she suggested.

Lebreton chuckled softly. "We shall see, my dear, we shall see." He gave her an exploratory glance. "You were impressed by that English captain, yes?"

She nodded. "At least, he does things. Lasalle strikes fine poses—well, enough of him! Tell me, what are you going to do now?"

That was a mistake. Lebreton withdrew into himself; he never told anyone what he was going to do. The other two captains were returning. Smiling, Lebreton sipped his drink and threw dice across the rough board. The others came and sat down; all was arranged. The dice? One word led to another. Lasalle was a plunger; in no time, he and Lebreton were hard at it—the stakes, blacks taken from the *Esperanza*, a dozen at a time.

Rosa looked on, unable to divine why Lebreton let himself be cheated. He must have known, yet he staked and threw and lost repeatedly. Kervenec, pawing his red beard, mopping his bald pate, kept warily out of it. Lasalle won and won, with a passionate abandon, a laughing exultancy. Lebreton became hard and tense with continued losses, but now and again his gleaming eye went to the woman with a twinkle.

An hour passed. The stakes were doubles. Lebreton was losing every black he had aboard, his whole share of the loot; he was desperate. All around was maintained the interminable drumming, the chanting, the dancing.

Interruption came. A black man ran hastily to the wrinkled chief. Voices exploded; the singing and dancing were checked.

Lebreton, who spoke most of the west coast dialects, exchanged some hasty words and turned to the others.

"Sequiera, the mate of Mendoza's ship, and another man of his crew, went somewhere with a couple of girls. The girls just came back. They say a forest devil killed both men."

Lasalle grinned. "Good! I expected to have trouble with that fellow Sequiera. Now he's out of the way. Jungle devils, eh? They did us a good turn. Well, Lebreton? Your throw."

Lebreton pushed the dice aside and cursed.

"I'm done. You and your damned luck! I'll save what little I have left. When do you want to move the blacks to your ship? First thing in the morning?"

"If that suits you."

"Whatever you like. We've still some to take out of the *Esperanza.* Then, this crowd. Looks like a full day's work ahead, if we're to get away by night."

"Can do. Must do," said Kervenec, frowning uneasily. "Must get rid of Mendoza's ship at once. Scupper her, then burn her. Attend to that, with morning. Well, suppose we get up some more of that Madeira; we'd best wait an hour or two longer before going at the business here."

So agreed. Rosa stood up.

"I'm leaving," she announced, and gave Lasalle an angry glance. "You're not. I'm not sure that I want anything to do with you—ever! Captain Lebreton, will you see me aboard the ship?"

"Oh, with pleasure!" said Lebreton silkily.

Lasalle laughed heartily as they departed. A lucky man, Lasalle!

Triumph was in her heart when she stepped into the cabin, and finding it dark, went back into the passage for the lantern there. She knew everything, now. She knew why Lebreton, that wise little man who was not nearly so old as he seemed, had lost his slaves at dice. And, comprehending his shrewdness, she hummed a gay little air and was well satisfied. It was like Lebreton, to want this fine big vessel loaded in every tier when he took it over; he thought of everything!

So she hummed, lightly, gaily, with cheerful anticipation of a new life ahead. Then she froze, as a voice came from the big bed, a voice speaking English words.

"Is that you, Peake? You'll have to give me a hand, lad. I've a touch o' fever. Get me something for it. And rub my neck; it's too stiff to move, Peake! Do ye hear me, lad?"

She still stood frozen, till he repeated the question. Then she stirred.

"Oh! Yes, yes, I hear you," she said—in English.

She moved forward and looked at him with wide eyes. He lay half naked across the bed, face down, head part way over the side so that he need not twist his neck. The lantern-light revealed the white, powerful body, the fever-ague, the white clothes with gold buttons at one side. Fever! Comprehension seized upon her; apparently casual, he was really talking in a dream. She saw that his eyes were wide and staring, but conscious of nothing before them.

Abruptly, she wakened. Fever medicine? It was always at hand; the Peruvian bark was ready. She mixed the bitter draught and came to him, helped him to one elbow, held the cup to his lips, aided him to drink. He sank down as before. Presently she sat beside him a jar of ointment in one hand, the other gently rubbing the bruised and swollen head and neck. He sighed a little and relaxed, and talked fresh.

She made answer. It was not a conversation. What she said, though she spoke English, seemed not to reach him; the sound of her voice

was comforting, that was all, as her deft fingers, rubbing in the unguent were comforting. In his vagrant, fitful fancy he took her for some other woman he had known long ago, and realizing this, she laughed softly.

"You'll soon be well enough, my dear," said she, "and the amazing thing will be all a dream again—to you and to me alike. I never thought to speak English more; these ten years I've spoken scarce a word of it, from the day they stole me away from the farm down the coast near Devonport! And if you ask me, I'd deny it with an oath as strong as your own; the smugglers, and the French ports, and the long voyages with St. Malo captains, and never a sight of English skies again. Who are you, strange Englishman? Tell me who you are!"

She bent lower, murmuring the words again; then she saw that he was asleep. And, from the island nearby, all the fiends of hell suddenly began to sweep the air.

He slept on and on, despite screams and panic, as the drums ceased and the dancing blacks went into chains, and those who would bring no price on the Cuban block were silenced forever. Some fled, some fought; but the canoes had all vanished and the refuge of the swamps could not be reached.

An hour saw the last of it. Under the torches near the landing were drawn up the long files of shackled black figures, men and women and children; the dancing and the palm oil, the jungle and swamps, the male and female drums, were all behind them now and forever. Only the young and sound were here. The old and useless were heaped inside the village stockade with the wrinkled chief, most of them dead or dying.

It lacked an hour of dawn when the final count was checked over and the three captains sat down to a last bottle of wine under the smoky torches. The terrible sound of sobbing and lamentation had died to a low and incoherent moaning. Except for guards posted, the crews of the three vessels had gone to rest.

"Well, it's done, and a good job." Kervenec lighted a Havana and wagged his red beard. "If you'll listen to my suggestion, the rest is simple enough."

"Let's have it," said Lasalle, fiercely dark and weary.

"I've got my share of the *Esperanza* aboard," Kervenec said. "What remains, Lasalle, is yours, thanks to the dice. Suppose I clap my third of this black ivory under hatches and get off?"

Lasalle frowned, but Lebreton nodded in his sage way.

"Why not? Nothing more here for you to do," he said. "We load these cattle aboard and put a match to the village. Lasalle, you can do that while I send ashore what's left on the *Esperanza* and her cabin stores, and scuttle her. We can all get away well before sunset. I'll trust

you, Lasalle, to make a fair division of these slaves."

"Well enough, in that case," Lasalle's face cleared. "We can get off before noon, if we go at it properly. I'll send my men and boats to help you, Lebreton, at the *Esperanza* and Kervenec's men can load all these fellows here aboard our three craft. Eh?"

"Not bad," said Lebreton, with a nod. "But don't load any aboard mine. Take out what I've got there now, since you've won them. Hold the rest till I get back. You see, I've got some notions about slave stowage I want to try out; I want to stow 'em myself and make some changes in the tiers."

Lasalle shrugged. "As you like. Then we'd better get an hour's sleep, and hit the work about dawn. The sooner we get these cattle stowed, the sooner we can burn the village and be rid of it. Want to sell your share here, Lebreton?"

The wizened little captain started. "Eh? Sell? Why, I don't know—"

"Thanks to Mendoza, we've got money enough. It'll give me and Kervenec full cargoes if you do. But no haggling! I'm too damned worn out to play fishwife. Set the price—take it or leave it! Yes or no?"

Here came weariness, gusty impatience, opportunity! Lebreton gripped at it with both hands! Kervenec hesitated and agreed. A price was arranged on the spot—Kervenec and Lasalle to buy Lebreton out, with money and goods, and themselves take all the slaves. On this they parted, and the invisible, insatiable processes of destiny had moved a long step forward.

Kervenec was to load and be off, Lebreton to finish the *Esperanza* and get away later with Lasalle. By this reckoning, Lebreton would leave in his schooner without a slave aboard and therefore with no fear of the English; a shrewd bit of work, perhaps, had he not been an ambitious man with plans of his own.

So Lasalle stumbled aboard his own ship and down the companionway with weary feet, and Mendoza heard him come.

In the darkness before the dawn, heavy with the miasmic smells of river and marsh, Mendoza wakened. He heard the heavy, tired steps drag into the adjoining cabin; after this, voices in harsh, passionately shrill outburst, voices that lifted, fighting against each other violently, to end in a wild, stifled cry—and silence.

Silence.

Now, Mendoza heard all this in a vague and uncomprehending way. This cabin was dark, and he had no memory of it; he tried to think, to recollect, and his last coherent memory was of trying to get aboard this ship, shaking with fever-fancies. The fever was gone. He had sweat heavily; his head and neck felt warm and comfortable. He touched his neck and his fingers slid in salve of some kind. Someone had taken care of him.

Of the woman, he had no memory

at all, or of English speech with her, until his brain sharpened on the picture of a woman walking on the beach.

It would have seemed an odd thought that a few words in the darkness with an unknown woman might have affected her life, swung its course about, and ended it abruptly. At the moment, his thought was of himself, and his errand here.

He moved about, found himself a man renewed, and his fumbling hands came upon his clothes, folded at the foot of the bed. He recognized the feel of the big golden buttons. He got off the bed, stood up, stretched himself, and sniffed. Dawn must be close; he could smell it! Taking the clothes, he got into them, thoughtfully knotted the red kerchief about his head, and turned to the faint slivers of light marking the edges of the door to the adjoining cabin.

Steps sounded, heavy and uncertain steps. The door was kicked violently open, so that it flew back almost against Mendoza and hid him. The tall shape of Lasalle strode in, carrying something which he took to the bed and laid down. He was cursing under his breath, and went back again as he had come, quickly, pulling the door shut behind him.

Mendoza went to the bed and felt what lay there. He knew blood when he touched it, and death; he drew back, scowling, seeking some comprehension. Lasalle must have killed this woman—why? Who was she? Questions labored in his mind. An odor caught his nostrils, and he stopped, following it. The woman's dead hand, her limp fingers—ah! Salve! The same ointment that was on his own neck! She, then, had taken care of him!

He sat down on the bed, amazed and marveling. He touched the woman's hand, as though in mute grattitude; he touched her other hand, and found it clenched on a knife-hilt. The knife was warm with blood. She had killed herself, then?

It was of no importance; he gave up trying to figure out anything at all. What rushed back upon him now were his own affairs—the murder of Peake, the loss of his ship, the three Frenchmen who had done for him. He had a knife for a weapon, but he disdained knives.

"Ahoy, Lasalle!" It was a roaring bull-voice that came from the next vessel. At the stern-window of his adjoining cabin, Lasalle made response. Kervenec was hailing him. Kervenec damned sleep—the dawn was close; he wanted to fall to work and get away.

Their talk conveyed to Mendoza what he most needed to know. He sat quiet on the bed beside the dead woman, and listened. Now he remembered the boat-shape with six paddlers, sliding out in the evening across the bar; the black men planted here, going out to take news to the *Perseus*. So these three devils had jumped the village to fill their slavetiers, eh? And Kervenec wanted to get away. And with Grennan and Dubois dead, there had been none to

tell of Captain Macklem's shrewd plans to nip slavers.

Mendoza grinned in the darkness. He heard Lasalle's steps, as Lasalle went up on deck and damned sleep in his turn; and laughter came to him as he sat, grim harsh laughter at thought of what would greet the fleeing Kervenec, making with his load of slaves for the Middle Passage.

"Let him go—why not!" thought Mendoza, himself once more. "Aye, good riddance! They'll grab him fast enough. That'll set him down once and for all. My man's Lasalle, and the slimy little devil Lebreton. Somehow I must get 'em both! Hm! Let Macklem or the *Perseus* get Kervenec then; I'll get the other two—and take this craft. Take her and go pick up my own crew. This is a better ship than the old *Esperanza.* Twenty guns and a fast sailer. Haul up for the north—that'll fool Macklem, damn him! Why did Lasalle kill the woman? Or did she kill herself?

The dawn lightened, outside. Men were at work. In the cabin, Mendoza sat beside the dead woman, and his face, drawn, unshaven, grim, was horrible to see.

CHAPTER 4

At last it was done.

Morning was not far advanced. Kervenec had his boats out with lines to tow his ship across the bar, his tiers crammed to the hatches. The last of the *Esperanza's* blacks had been transferred, but Lebreton was still with her, sending over cabin stores. The deck of Lasalle's vessel was a welter, hatches off, slaves being stowed, men moving between ship and shore, where many of the village blacks still remained chained.

Kervenec was away, with a last shouted farewell, boats and ship moving down the sluggish channel. Lasalle inspected the slave tiers with his mate, a huge hairy Creole named St. Martin. A bit of crowding, as he pointed out, and the trick was done; they had quantity here if not quality.

"No use my trying for a bit of sleep until we're away," said Lasalle, as they came back on deck. "Get the last of those slaves aboard, St. Martin, and fire the village. What about our men?"

"Half away," said the mate. "Four boats gone to the *Esperanza,* for cabin stores from her, and some extra water butts to replace those wormy ones of ours."

Lasalle nodded. "Pass the word that as soon as Lebreton shows up, he's to be sent right down. I have to check over the stuff in the cabin, make payments to him and get rid of him; then we'll get off. How soon can you be in shape here?"

St. Martin appraised the deck, the men, the slaves yet ashore.

"Half an hour," he said, rubbing his massive bluish jowl. "We'll need to fill those fresh butts and stow 'em, you know, after the boats tow 'em along."

Lasalle turned aft. "I'll be at work. Let me know when all's ready."

He went down to the main cabin, his own cabin. Here the deck at one side was heaped with stuff taken from the *Esperanza*, small chests of coin and some of the more valuable goods. This was the payment to be made Lebreton for the slaves. It had all been listed and the list lay on the table, for checking by Lebreton.

"May have trouble with him," muttered Lasalle looking around. "Blast him, he'll want a word with Rosa before he goes."

From a sling hanging on the wall, he took a brace of pistols and went to the table. Sitting here he carefully loaded the pistols, testing the flints, pouring in priming, then laying them aside and blowing away loose powder. He took a Havana from the open box and lit it at the still burning lantern, then turned out the lantern and stepped to the stern window, looking out at the river. The tramp of feet on the deck above, the long miserable agony of black men and women echoing through the vessel, formed a background of sound that blocked out any slight noises.

"Blast it, I'm dead! Should have got some sleep last night," Lasalle muttered. "Well, it must be done sometime. Might as well get rid of her now—"

He swung around with sudden decision, then saw Mendoza.

His black eyes flew wide. All the color drained out of him. Mendoza sat at the table, holding one of the pistols and looking at him with a snarling sneer that twisted the wide mouth awry beneath the long pendulous mustaches. The unshaven features were lopped off above by the flaming red kerchief· they were cruel, merciless, intent

"The devil!" gasped Lasalle, and straightened. He lifted one hand and brushed it across his eyes. "I'm seeing things. You're drowned. Go back, go back!"

Mendoza sat silent, motionless. In reality, he was listening to a thud of feet on the companion ladder, in the passage; a man at haste. The feet came to the door, the door flew open, and into the room stumbled the mate, St. Martin.

"Cap'n Lebreton is coming!" he exclaimed sharply. "It looks queer. He's got his own boats with him. No sign of ours, or of the butts. I thought you'd better—"

His voice failed, as he comprehended the awful fixed stare of Lasalle, as he saw the scarlet-topped figure sitting at the table. Recognizing it, he stood with jaw fallen.

"Do you see it, St. Martin?" The voice of Lasalle lifted in shrill accents. "Is it there? Do you see Mendoza's ghost?"

St. Martin quivered. Mendoza turned head, looked at him, spoke abruptly.

"Shut the door!"

The mate reached out and slammed the cabin door. His hairy figure came awake all at once.

"Mendoza!" he cried. "Ghosts don't talk. It's you, you!"

"Aye, you murdering hounds," said Mendoza, without heat. He seemed to loom greater in the growing daylight because of his very calm; his presence, his personality increased upon the room. "You've looted my ship. Your man Dubois murdered me and murdered Peake. You had it planned. Well, I've got it planned now."

He cocked the pistol in his hand.

"Mendoza!" Lasalle fluttered into life. He took a step forward. "Look here, listen to me! I—I thought you were a ghost!"

Mendoza's snarl deepened into grim mirth.

"You'll know better in a minute. As for you, St. Martin," and he turned his head to fling the mate a glance, "I'll give you your life, provided you obey me. Not that I love you, but I'm taking you and this ship, and I—"

His head jerked around. Lasalle was darting at the wall, where weapons were racked. Mendoza lifted the long-barrelled pistol and squeezed the trigger. A flaming roar filled the cabin; Lasalle was enveloped by the rolling gush of smoke and then was out of it, on the deck, prostrate.

St. Martin dove through the fumes. Mendoza had misjudged his man; now St. Martin made the same error. He let his great bulk drop bodily on the seated Mendoza, snatched with one hand at the second pistol, and got it.

Two men and chair, all down in a crash, flailing the deck. This was bad luck for the burly mate; a terrible gasping groan burst from him as the hot barrel of Mendoza's pistol slapped him across the face.

Few men had any luck by getting Jose Mendoza on the floor. True, the pistol in his mate's hand exploded. Mendoza felt the searing burn of the powder, felt the stab in his right eye, and knew the bullet had missed. He got to one knee and struck, with savage ferocity. A cry burst from St. Martin as his arm snapped under the blow of the iron barrel, and the pistol dropped from his hand. Mendoza struck the broken arm again, and the cry became a scream of agony. He struck St. Martin across the face, across both eyes, and came to his feet, lithely erect.

Feet were thrumming the ladder, and excited voices shouted questions from the passage, but none dared open the door. Mendoza drove his foot into the ribs of the groaning, bloody wreck and spoke sharply.

"Tell them to clear out! Quick!"

He leaned over and wrenched at St. Martin's arm. A wild cry, and the mate obeyed the order. Another voice came from the passage.

"Captain Lebreton is coming aboard!"

At Mendoza's prompting, the shuddering mate gave the order: "Send him down here! Alone!"

The feet departed. St. Martin got to one knee, clawed himself up at the desk. His shattered arm hung limply. He groaned with mortal agony; his face and eyes dripped blood, which blinded him.

"There's a chair by the stern window. Get into it and stay in it," Mendoza barked. He kicked aside the splintered flinders of his own chair, dragged up a stool to the table, and went to Lasalle. The slow steps of St. Martin shuffled along toward the stern window, and with a low groan the mate collapsed there. He was broken.

Mendoza wiped tears from his eye. Blind? Very likely; the burning pain told him that the eye might well be closed for life. He blinked, from the other, down at Lasalle. Morning sunlight filled the cabin; the powder fumes had eddied away though the acrid smell lingered, and Lasalle's lips moved faintly as he looked up at Mendoza. No sound came. The heavy ball had struck him in the chest; he was finished.

Recollecting the other cabin, Mendoza went to it with his swift, lithe stride, pushed open the door, and glanced around. He found what he sought—a little jar, open, on a chair beside the bed. He brought it to his nostrils, and nodded. The salve, right enough; whatever it was, it could do no harm. He dug a finger into it and rubbed some across his burned eye. The lid was swollen, but almost at once the burning pain vanished. Good stuff. With a mere glance at the stiffened figure on the bed, a glance of gratitude, he swung around and went back into the other cabin and sat down on the stool. Both pistols he put on the table. They were empty, but who would know?

The hard touch of booted heels resounded from the passage. The door swung open and closed again, and Lebreton stood there, looking around.

In that dried-apple face, Mendoza perceived that he had a man to deal with. He had heard much of this Captain Lebreton, and he knew now that the tales were true.

The latter, in one sweeping glance, took in the dead Lasalle and the drooping, blood-spattered St. Martin, and the seated figure at the desk. He showed none of his amazement, but spoke curtly.

"Who are you?"

"Cap'n Mendoza of the *Esperanza.* Sit down, Lebreton. I see you're wearing one of my pistols. Keep your hand off it or I'll kill you before your time. Sit down, I say!"

Lebreton did not obey the harsh words; instead, he complied with them, pulling up a heavy chair and reaching for a Havana from the open box. Mendoza appraised him with a grim comprehension. By his very deliberation, Lebreton betrayed his heart-hurried inward excitement. He seated himself and nodded at Mendoza.

"I've heard of you. We thought you were dead."

Mendoza regarded him across the table with that sneering, twisted snarl, one eye was closed, the other glittered with a gray and narrowed glare. The silence became heavy. Lebreton chewed at his cigar, and

gestured toward the figure of Lasalle.

"This explains the shots, eh?" he observed. "By the way, there should be a lady here. Would you have any objection to her presence? It might help us to adjust matters."

Mendoza laughed harshly, lifted the pistol in his hand, and cocked it.

"None. Go and bring her—she's just as Lasalle left her. First, take that pistol of mine from your belt and lay it down. And careful how you do it."

With a smile, a shrug, a lift of his brows, Lebreton stood up, took the long silver-mounted weapon from his belt, and put it on the table. He stepped to the adjoining cabin, passed inside, and after a moment came back and returned to his chair.

This time, his poise was broken. His weathered face was white and sparkling with sweat, his eyes were terrible, his breath was whistling.

"Lasalle, you say?" he broke out. "Ah! If I had dreamed! If I had suspected! She was one in a thousand—"

His voice broke. Mendoza eyed him, comprehending him better now.

"A bullet will adjust all matters between us, Lebreton, when the time comes. For the present, I prefer to make use of you. I'm taking this ship—and you."

Lebreton stared at him then began to laugh in chaotic, unrestrained mirth.

"This, it is droll!" he cried, between burts of laughter. "You, take this ship! I suppose you were not drowned, but got ashore. And now you're here. And I'm here, after making such careful plans—for a woman that is dead, for a man that is dead! But she's gone. She was worth the whole damned thing."

He threw out his hands in a despairing gesture. Mendoza, in these words, perceived the man's acumen, and his plans that had gone amiss. Meant to kill Lasalle, eh?

"How did you expect to take this ship?" he demanded. Lebreton shrugged.

"Simple. It's as good as done now. Half the crew are away, scuttling and burning your ship. My men are here, aboard, in charge. My mate has the deck now, while we talk. I see you've even saved me the trouble of dealing with St. Martin, yonder."

Mendoza looked at him with the baleful one-eyed stare. Now, as before, he seemed to grow upon the cabin. The weakness of Lebreton's stricken laughter died away before this presence. Lebreton stirred, bit at his Havana again, began to chew at the weed. He pulled himself together and leaned forward.

"Your ship is scuttled, is burning now," he said quietly. "So you are Mendoza! I suppose," he went on, speaking English, "you were once Captain Thomas Macklem, eh?"

"Oh!" said Mendoza. "Been through my papers, have you?"

Lebreton nodded.

"You need bear me no ill will for what happened to you," he said. "Lasalle planned that with Kervenec. If you had not been killed as you were,

it would have been done after you landed here. This is a better basis for adjustment than a bullet."

Mendoza sensed truth in the words. This man was scarcely the sort to utter a cheap lie from any feeling of fear.

"You're not a bad sort," he said slowly. "I was sorry about—her, whoever she was. She did me a good turn."

"She was one in a thousand," Lebreton said simply. "She deserved better. I should like to see that she had burial ashore, before we go."

"We?" echoed Mendoza, the word sharp with sardonic inquiry.

"If you wish it, why not?" Lebreton spread his hands. "Perhaps the circumstances admit of an adjustment. My plans are fluid."

It was as though the dead woman stood between them, holding out a hand to each. The hatred in Mendoza's heart had ebbed away. A certain mutual respect and liking had invaded the room.

There was a scuffle on the floor. Lasalle was beating the air with his hands, his face convulsed as his spirit fought against death; then his hands fell and he became quiet. St. Martin, by the stern window, moaned piteously. His chin lowered on his chest and he slumped a little, unconscious. Mendoza ignored them and still stared at Lebreton.

"My plans are not fluid." The harsh voice struck out upon the silence. "My own crew is ashore, up the coast, at the old Santa Cruz factory. I mean to pick them up before hauling away for Cuba."

Lebreton nodded, as though to challenge.

"Why not?" he said in his gentle way. "I'm sure they're good men; your name is famed. Some of my men are good. A few of Lasalle's are good. They could stay. The rest could go ashore at Santa Cruz. We could share all proceeds equally, you and I, at Cuba. If we then desire to stay together, a basis could be arranged; either another ship could be obtained or not, as seems best. It would be an honor to be associated with Captain Jose Mendoza."

No threat here, but Mendoza was acutely conscious of an unwonted precaution stirring within him. To kill Lebreton and force the crew—it could be done, of course.

It must be done. Yet it would be touch and go. With one eye gone, he might have trouble. And here was an offer that appealed.

"Why, damn it, you sound as though you meant the words!" said Mendoza. Lebreton gave him a smile and a gesture and a soft word.

"I do. If I did not, I should long ago have taken advantage of the fact that your two pistols are empty. There is no priming in the pan of either."

Mendoza broke into a harsh laugh. Here was a man he could admire.

"You're efficient, Lebreton. I like your fancy to bury the woman."

"Thank you. We can be away in half an hour, if you agree. We've

a rendezvous with Kervenec, off Cuba—"

"Kervenec won't be there," said Mendoza abruptly. "He has another rendezvous he doesn't know about yet. With the *Perseus*, fifty-six. If we hold in close to the coast, we should make Santa Cruz all right."

Lebreton stared. "An English frigate?"

"Yes. Tell you about it later. Suppose we bury her and get away from here." Mendoza picked up the pistol from the table. "There should have been two. Where's the other?"

"Kervenec has it."

Mendoza started slightly. "Kervenec! Well—" He broke off, and a laugh shook him. "Damned good thing for Kervenec, then, that he won't fall into Macklem's hands! Here, my friend, with my compliments."

He extended the handsome pistol. Lebreton's face lighted up; he understood the implication of the gift, and he was delighted. He said as much. The two men rose and their hands met.

"Only," said Lebreton, with a shake of the head, "it is never wise to plan too far ahead. One never knows. Here is proof of it. None of our plans have gone through."

He checked himself, as though he had been about to add: "And none will."

Captain Macklem, blue coat buttoned close, hands clasped behind his back, turned and squinted into the wind and his lips moved in unheard words; it was a way he had. Bully Macklem was at his prayers and with some reason this time, sneered the men and they were right. Reason enough lay astern.

The *Perseus* lay there, for one, with a shattered mizzen and a cloud of men aloft at repairs. Kervenec's ship lay there, too. Kervenec, bulldog that he was, made a fight for it, knocked out the frigate and ran, and came slap into Captain Macklem's arms. Macklem's carronades cut his rigging to ribbons, killed half his crew, and Macklem took the ship back to the frigate and went bowling in after more prey.

Not that Kervenec came with his ship. He had gone at the first broadside.

"Mr. Nickerson!" Turning abruptly from his familiar occupation, Macklem beckoned his lieutenant. "The pistol you brought back, the one now below—from the body of the slayer himself, you said."

"Yes, sir," Nickerson said briskly. "That brought out the story, sir, about how they had pirated the *Esperanza* and so forth. He had got the pistol from her, they said."

"Then, if we're right, we should find the two other slavers plundering her under Cape Concepcion this minute?"

"Right, sir."

"Wrong, Mr. Nickerson. Right, I admit, if we were there this minute; we're far from there. Those chaps are far from fools. We'd be

fools if we went there expecting to trip them up. We'd not get there till sunset. The orders are to use my own discretion."

"And very luckily so, if I may say as much."

Macklem's bitter gaze looked past his long nose, boring into the lieutenant.

"You've a right to your own opinion, Mr. Nickerson; keep it close, by all means. If those Frenchmen run slap out to sea, the *Perseus* will trip 'em up."

"And a bloody good job—"

Nickerson checked himself amid awful silence. Macklem was staring at him with hard, grim eyes, and had stiffened with cold wrath. His voice came like a whiplash.

"What was the word you used, Mr. Nickerson?"

"I—I forgot myself, sir," stammered the lieutenant, shrinking.

"You forgot yourself!" said Macklem, gray eyes ablaze. "I believe, sir, you are aware of my regulations regarding low language, and the number of lashes to be applied for each word used. This vile term, which you have borrowed from the lowest classes—ah!"

Nickerson rallied. "You mistook me, sir. I meant the word literally, not as an oath, having in mind the bloody decks of the slaver I so recently visited. It was my hope, sir, that the other two Frenchmen would meet a similar fate."

Captain Macklem stared him down for a long moment.

"Oh, indeed!" he said at last. "That is very plausible, Mr. Nickerson. I shall accept your explanation. As I was about to say, we shall head up for the north—say, for the old Portuguese factory at Santa Cruz. It is my impression that these other Frenchmen may prefer not to follow this Kervenec, but may scatter. Hold the course northeast by a half east, for the present."

Captain Macklem went below. A grin passed down the decks, as Lieutenant Nickerson mopped his brow.

Afternoon wore on. The breeze was from the south and west, steady but light—just the trick for the little corvette with her big spread of canvas, and the worst possible for the heavy slaver running north along the coast. It was four in the afternoon when they had her in full view.

"In two hours," said Macklem, a snap of satisfaction to his words, "her canvas will be down or else blown away. She has a familiar look, Mr. Nickerson. Can you place her?"

"Aye, sir, slave tiers filled. She's the Frenchman we spoke at Senegal some weeks back; her master was a cheeky rascal you had some words with."

"Ah! Lasalle, of course. And, as you say, full up; I told the beggar he'd come a cropper, and now it's come. He was one of the two at Concepcion, according to the information from Kervenec's hell-ship."

It was quite obvious to any eye that the stars in their courses had decreed

a sure and certain end to the slaver. Run she could not, and was caught on a lee shore. All this coast was high and rocky, with no river mouth to give shelter or refuge. When a gun barked from the corvette, the slaver hoisted Portuguese colors and held on.

"She'll not pull that game," said Captain Macklem, a glint in his gray eyes. "I know better. Papers be damned! She's Lasalle's ship. But we'll not hull her. That's past any Christian man, with tiers of poor black wretches lying below decks."

Also, as a graceless midshipman muttered to his mate, no Christian man would knock a good prize about if he could help it. Slavers meant hard money to those who took them.

The guess of two hours was correct, almost to the minute. The sun was still above the horizon when the corvette was close enough to hail, all her signals and guns disregarded; and destiny was manifest. Macklem himself sent the final hail aboard, and was answered by midship ports falling along the slaver's rail.

"Slovenly rascals," said Macklem calmly. "Let 'em have it—quickly!"

Another crew, well trained—such a crew as waited at the old Portuguese factory of Santa Cruz—might have succeeded in this desperate trick. A quick, crippling broadside that would cut up spars and rigging, and a night's run ahead to safety. The men aboard Lasalle's ship, desperate or not, were not the type of crew to accomplish such work. Not when they dealt with Captain Macklem who was always one minute ahead of any other man's trick.

The corvette blossomed with gust of white smoke; with mathematical precision, she swung into the wind, came about, bore under the slaver's stern, flung her other broadside aboard, and bore up again to overhaul her prey. The piping of bosun's whistles, canvas filling and flapping and filling again—a scant five minutes in the doing, like the toy ship-pictures on a tactical board shifting about.

Not a gun from the slaver answered. That first blast of grape from close aboard left her deck a bloody shambles; the second, from aft, raked her stern cabins and entire length of deck a second time. Spars and canvas tumbled and crashed, leaving her in a wreck and a welter. Horrible evidences of humanity emanated from her—a shrieking of hurt men, and from her lower decks a sustained screaming of terrorized blacks.

"There'll be a few hundred blacks to be set free from chains at Sierra Leone," said Captain Macklem. "You'll go aboard her at once, Mr. Nickerson."

There was little wind, and the two craft lay close. Nickerson took the surgeon with him, and it was a good thing he did. The sun was sinking under the water when he came back with his report. Fifty-two killed, as many wounded; a double crew aboard the slaver, it seeemd.

"Her captain, one Lebreton, was killed at the first fire, sir," Nicker-

son said, and hesitated. He showed a pistol wrapped in a cloth. "An odd thing, sir; I took this weapon from his body. It's a duplicate of the one you have below, the one Kervenec carried."

Captain Macklem examined the silver-mounted pistol.

"A very odd thing, Mr. Nickerson, far odder than you realize," said he.

"But that's not all, sir. Captain Mendoza is aboard—the master of the *Esperanza,* the Portuguese craft; the one we stopped, you know, and that was pirated. He's aboard there, and this pistol belonged to him. He's hurt. A splinter ripped up his leg. And that's not all, either. Here are papers I took from Lebreton's body. English, sir—"

He paused, caught a glimpse of Macklem's face, and turned away discreetly.

The commander was still scrutinizing the handsome pistol; oddly enough, his bitter gaze was fastened on that portion of the silver mounting where some old inscription had been erased. Perhaps he was trying to reconstruct what had once been graven there, graven no doubt upon both these pistols. A mutter came to his lips.

"Thomas Macklem, R. N. A gift from his loving—"

With a start, Captain Macklem looked up suddenly and cleared his throat.

"Singular, very singular! The *Pilgrim* of Bristol—I suppose you read these papers?"

"I had no time, sir," said Lieutenant Nickerson, wisely.

"Hm! I must go aboard this fellow myself," Captain Macklem declared. "When can you have this slaver in shape to proceed to Sierra Leone?"

"Her rigging needs a bit of doing, sir; before morning, easily."

"Very well. Get aboard with some riggers. I'll give you instructions later. And I'll go also."

Thus, with daylight passed under the horizons and lanterns burning in the shattered main cabin where Jose Mendoza sat with his left leg in bandages, Captain Macklem walked into the cabin, his trim martinet's figure buttoned tightly. He looked around. The stern windows were knocked into a gaping hole; two dead men lay piled at one side, and it was not for a moment that he saw Mendoza. Possibly he felt the deadly, silent gaze, for he swung around and looked squarely at the sitting man.

The ship, rolling heavily to the listless sea, creaked and groaned, as the black folk in her vitals groaned, and the wounded men on deck; she was all one frightful wrench of agony. Mendoza's features were unshaven and haggard, but his one eye met the bitter gaze of Captain Macklem, and moved not. Two long-nosed men, singularly alike.

Alike, yet at vastly opposite ends of earth, the one trim and uniformed, the other shaggy and unkempt. Yet

the one grew, and the other did not. The features of Mendoza, immobile and scarred, made themselves felt. They held the scars and the knowledge lines of having lived fully.

"I can fancy what's in your mind to utter," said Captain Macklem suddenly.

"You can't," rapped out Mendoza harshly. "I'd sooner be the damned chap lying in hell than the prig lying in Abraham's bosom who refused to give him a drink of water."

"I thought it'd be something of the sort," Macklem rejoined acidly. "So you're Jose Mendoza, are you?"

"I am. Legally enough."

"I believe these are your papers." Macklem extended a greasy wad. "They were found among others. I have burned the others. They concerned a man who was in the Royal Navy years ago and who skipped out before he could be hanged. Deserted his family. Too bad to have the name bob up again publicly."

"Gentle, virtuous knight!" The voice of Mendoza was venomous. "I know another man. He married his brother's widow—after his brother was declared dead. He had made love to her long before, in an upright Christian manner, so that she hated her husband. He's the model of all virtue."

Silence fell upon the cabin once more. The one man standing, self-possessed, icily calm; the other sitting and ablaze with the flames of hell. Something emanated from each of them, and mingled, and filled the dark cabin, a quivering deadly force. Hatred, so utter and absolute as to tremble in the air.

Captain Macklem drew a quick, sharp breath and spoke crisply.

"You're in a peculiar position, Captain Mendoza," said he. "Apparently your vessel, which I stopped the other day outside Bissoa, was pirated and plundered by French slavers. If you appear against them in any Admiralty court—"

Mendoza broke in with a snarling jeer.

"Then the name of Thomas Macklem must come out, eh? Well, you're wrong. I'm worse. I'm a slaver myself. I was pirated, but I pirated the thieves. This is my ship. Chew on that, you white-livered reptile! The one thing you fear in life is disgrace. You'll get a bellyful of it when I walk into your precious Admiralty court!"

"I've no intention of letting you," said Captain Macklem.

"What?" Harsh mirth filled Mendoza's voice. "What? You'd have the guts to kill me? You, a murderer? Don't make me laugh. You couldn't do that."

"Naturally, I couldn't." Macklem spoke with slow distaste.

"Precise arbiter of the law!" jeered Mendoza. "Whited sepulchre filled with dead men's bones—and by God, how they'll haunt you in hell! Your cold-hearted legal brutality has murdered many an honest man, and you're too damned dishonest to admit it! Why, I'll laugh at you out o' the lowest pit in hell!"

"If you've finished your ribald

profanity," said Macklem stiffly, "I'll ask you to realize that I must protect my name, my family, my future."

Mendoza's lip twisted in a grin.

"I see. You're getting at a smooth excuse for some greater deviltry, eh? Same old jolly brother. Lip-slobbering prayers—"

He checked himself. The lantern swung to a slow roll of the ship, lighting the face of Captain Macklem and suddenly showing how gray it was.

"I shall greatly exceed my authority in hanging you," said Macklem gravely.

"Ho! So it's talk of hanging, eh?"

"In thirty minutes, exactly."

Again they looked at one another.

"On what charge?" rapped out Captain Mendoza, astonished.

"None of your business. I'll attend to that later." Macklem unbuttoned his jacket and hauled out a thick watch and glanced at it. "I have two ways of protecting myself and those whom I hold dear. One is to hang you. If you prefer the other, the choice shall be yours."

Mendoza leaned back, with a raucous laugh.

"Oh! You'll be dramatic and leave me a loaded pistol, no doubt!"

"Don't be absurd." Macklem frowned slightly. "You're a man who clings to life with both hands. I say frankly that I shrink from the necessity of hanging you. If I were to say that I should like to save you, I think you would disbelieve me."

"You're bloody right I would, old chap," sneered Mendoza. "What! Give you credit for an honest thought, an honest action? Never!"

"And yet," said Captain Macklem, throatily, as with an effort, "perhaps you should."

"Bah! Let's have your blatherskite nonsense over with!" said Mendoza, "Name it!"

Macklem gestured toward the great hole where the stern-windows had been, with the tangle of cordage and lines hanging over it.

"Your leg is hurt, but not broken, the surgeon tells me. Below there, in thirty minutes, a boat will be lying—a boat, empty, with oars. Nothing else. You can take that boat and go, or you can come on deck with the squad and be hanged, as you please."

Mendoza stared at him.

"Why, you damned hypocrite!" he said slowly. "You think I'll wash your blasted conscience clear, do you! Let's see. An open boat, off this coast—no place to run, no ship to pick me up—either rot under the sun at sea or drift ashore and be scragged by the first blacks to find me—that's the mercy of certain death that you offer me! Behold, a man with heart of true gold!"

Under the slow, scathing scorn, Captain Macklem turned toward the door.

"That is the expected reaction, Captain Mendoza, from a Portuguese slaver," he said. He went to the door and paused there. "Had

you been a man of any other type—for example, a seaman of English extraction—one might expect different things. You might even reflect that the slow blight of years, bringing old animosities to a head this night, could have possibly produced changes. You might, more concretely, reflect that any open boat usually carries mast and sail under the thwarts, that the coast is within sight, that the night is long and has just begun. Even, perhaps, that the half-ruined old factory of Santa Cruz is not very far away. But I cannot expect you to overpass the bounds of hatred, or to give any credit for anything to other men or to the God whom you despise. Good night, Captain Mendoza. The thirty minutes will soon be elapsed."

Upon the deck, where the surgeon still worked, where Nickerson and the riggers were at work, where lanterns bobbed and men groaned, Captain Macklem picked his way with firmly precise tread aft. He cast an appraising eye along the work, and under his presence men toiled the harder. He strode aft and turned, away from the lights, and sniffed the breeze that drifted up from the south.

He beckoned a bosun's mate and gave him certain crisp orders, then paced up and down the quarter-deck as though it were his own. After a little he glanced at his watch under a lantern, and resumed his pacing.

Suddenly he halted. A queer, scuffling sort of noise came to him, apparently from under the ship's stern, where a tangle of cordage clung upon the shot-broken rail. A shuffling noise, such as might be made by a man settling himself down into a boat.

Nickerson came tramping aft, with a squad of men. He pointed to the tangle of cordage.

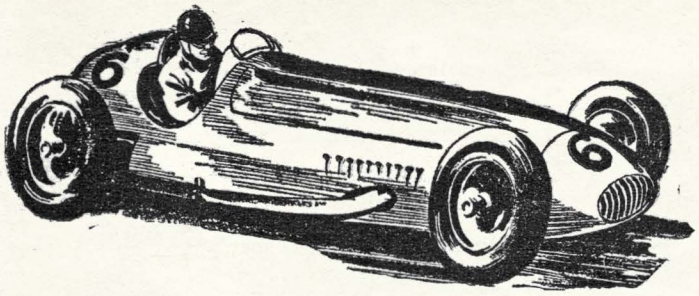
"We're getting all clear, sir—"

"Let this wait," barked Captain Macklem.

Astonished, the lieutenant drew his men away. Captain Macklem, a lonely figure, turned and squinted into the wind, and his lips moved in unheard words; it was a way he had. Bully Macklem was at his prayers again, muttered the men along the deck.

And for once, they were more right than they knew.

Although the invention of cannon is credited to the Arabs in the 12th century, it is to the Chinese that credit must go for first use of their own invention, gunpowder, in the propulsion of missiles in war. About 969 A. D. in the reign of the Emperor Fai-Tsu they attached rockets to their war arrows and gained a great increase in speed, range and killing power—the dawn of the age of artillery. *—From the files of "Ask Adventure."*



From goggles and duster to all the comforts of home—a saga of speed plus automotive genius.

Speed Through The Years

by

WALT WOESTMAN

"YOU WERE doing eighty in a sixty mile zone. Let me see your driver's license."

These words, spoken in the chilling voice of the law, have long since replaced, "Where's the fire?" or the classic, "Who do you think you are, buddy—Barney Oldfield?"

Today the name of Barney Oldfield no longer carries its old-time magic. But back in the early 1900's, Barney—complete with goggles and big black cigar—was a legendary figure, the original "speed demon" who set one record after another in his snorting "Peerless Green Dragon" racer. As for auto races—we still have them. But except for the 500 mile Memorial Day race at Indianapolis, they are taken pretty much for granted.

It was not always so. Back in the days of such cars as the Locomobile, Simplex, Lancia, Rambler, Chalmers, Lozier, Mercer, Pope, Thomas, Stutz, Stoddard-Dayton, Michigan, Milac,

A Fact Story

Maxwell and many other names which the old-timers cherish, auto racing was followed with avid interest by the motoring fraternity. The various contests were looked forward to in eager anticipation. And the results were blazoned in headlines across the front page.

In 1895 an exhibition race was held from Chicago to Waukegan and return, and a few actual automobile races had already been held in Europe, but the first actual contest in the United States was run in 1896 from Chicago to Evanston, a distance of 26 miles over the winding dirt roads of the period.

This inaugural race was won by Frank Duryea in a car of his own design (which later became known as the Stevens-Duryea) at an average speed of five miles an hour—about one-quarter of the actual top speed of the car.

Both Chicago and Providence, R. I. claim the honor of holding the first automobile races on a circular track. As the sport of horse racing had long been in favor it is not surprising that the first auto races were run on these same horse tracks. The year was still 1896, and it might be of interest to note that both steam and electric cars were winners in many of these early events.

It was not, however, until after the turn of the century that any great speed was obtained in an automobile. In 1901 Alexander Winton built the first car of any speed and turned the one mile track at Cleveland, Ohio at 57 mph. Shortly after, Henri Fournier did a mile straightaway at close to 70 mph.

This so impressed Barney Oldfield, then a bicycle racer, that he decided to be the first man to turn a circular track at a "mile a minute" speed. But it was not until 1903 that this ambition was realized, when he did 60½ mph driving Henry Ford's famous No. 999 for one lap of the old Indianapolis mile track.

In the meantime the first car had been driven across the continent. This was a Winton, driven by Crocker and Johnson. The trip took a bit over two months to complete and was, naturally, the first transcontinental record.

The next year, 1904, saw the top speed of automobiles climbing rapidly. Ford built a duplicate of "999," which he named "The Arrow" and on January 12 he made a straightaway run of 91½ mph on the frozen surface of Detroit's Lake St. Clair.

On August 8, 1904 on the Detroit mile horse track Charlie Schmidt drove a Packard for a distance of 1,000 miles in 28 hours, 53 minutes and 38 seconds, which breaks down to better than 30 mph.

Exactly twenty days later Barney Oldfield had what was possibly the first serious wreck in the history of automobile racing. The car was the famous Peerless Green Dragon, in which Oldfield had already set a number of records.

The place was the World's Fair Park mile track at St. Louis and the occasion the Louisiana Purchase Ex-

position, better known as the St. Louis World's Fair.

The crowd was lined entirely around the track, which had been well watered to keep down the dust. Oldfield crashed through the fence and into the spectators on his first attempt at a new record. The Green Dragon was completely wrecked. Two of the spectators were killed but Barney Oldfield, with the luck which was to stay with him all through his many years of racing, walked away with a few minor bruises.

Probably the best remembered of the many road races over a closed course are the Vanderbilt Cup classics. Originally these races were run in the vicinity of Hempstead, Mineola, Jericho and points farther north, in Nassau County on Long Island. A part of the original race was run over the Jamaica and Hempstead "wooden road," which consisted of planks laid over the Long Island sand to make a course of exactly 30 miles.

The first three of these races were won by foreign cars. In 1904 Gale Heath, driving a Panhard, averaged slightly over 50 mph to cover the 285 miles. Henry won the 1905 race in a Darracq at a speed of 61½ mph and Louie Wagner, also in a Darracq, took the 1906 race. This was lengthened to 298 miles and Wagner averaged 61 mph to win it.

These Vanderbilt Cup races became so popular that other communities bid for them. The last one was run over an 8.4 mile course at Santa Monica for a distance of 294 miles and was won by Dario Resta, in a Peugeot, at an average speed of 87 mph.

The year of 1908 was highlighted by the longest automobile race ever run—New York to Paris, a distance of 13,500 miles. Cars of several nations were entered but one lone American car finished the actual race. This was a Thomas-Flyer driven by Monty Roberts and George Shuster.

The Mercedes, a German entry, arrived first in Paris but it was then proven that the car had been shipped by rail from Pocatello, Idaho, to Seattle, Washington, thus avoiding the worst parts of the United States roads. This disqualified the German entry and left the Thomas-Flyer as the only other car to finish.

It would be difficult for today's motorist, with his "eighty miles in a sixty mile zone," to believe that any automobile could navigate the road conditions encountered in 1908—the heavy rains and the mud of Russia and Siberia; the deserts which had never seen an automobile before. The Germans had bought up the entire supply of gasoline in Vladivostok and days of idleness were spent waiting for a supply to be sent to the American entry. But Roberts and Shuster, without any shipping of the car except by boat as was done by all entries, reached Paris 171 days after the start from New York.

In the meantime other races were going on. And the speeds were climbing. Ralph Mulford, with Harry Cobe driving relief, drove a Lozier

for a full 24 hours and found that they had covered 1107 miles on the Coney Island mile dirt track. This beat the former record of 993 miles, which had been made on the mile track at Milwaukee.

The Indianapolis 2½ mile speedway was opened on August 19, 1909. This first race was for a distance of 250 miles and was won by Bob Burman in a Buick, but Barney Oldfield turned the fastest lap with a speed of 83 mph.

1910 saw the beginning of the board tracks on a large scale and there was scarcely a city of any size which did not boast one. On April 8, Barney Oldfield made a one lap record of 99 mph on the Playa Del Ray board speedway in California, driving a Benz.

Of the many board tracks the 1½ mile track at Amatol, New Jersey, was undoubtedly the fastest ever built. It was here that young Harry Hartz drove a Miller for 300 miles at an average speed of 136 mph—an American record set in 1926 which has never been bettered.

The board speedways had a great vogue, but exposed as they were to the elements, they soon deteriorated. Vibration loosened the boards, which when replaced made for much unevenness of surface. Holes appeared which some of the drivers failed to miss and the older tracks were torn down to make room for various other projects.

Probably the last race ever run on a board speedway was on September 2, 1929 when Louis Meyer won the 200 mile race on the Altoona 1¼ miler, with an average speed of 112 mph. His car was a Miller, which seems to have been the prime winner on all of the board tracks.

But the advent of the board speedways did not stop the other automobile races, especially the road races. Possibly the best known of the cross country races were those run between Los Angeles and Phoenix. The last of these was won by Oldfield driving a Stutz at an average speed of 29.2 mph for the distance of 671 miles. Present day motorists make the run from Los Angeles to Phoenix in from eight to ten hours, but the distance is much shorter and the highway entirely paved where, in former years there was only mud and deep sand.

The board tracks are gone. There are very few road races run in this country now and most of the older dirt tracks are a thing of the past. But one road course will live on forever. In 1885 Clay Kellog and Robert Taylor laid out an exact circle of approximately three miles in circumference for the exercise and racing of their horses. During the years of 1913, 1914 and 1916 a series of automobile races were run, after paving had been completed. This track is now the center of the city of Corona, California and it is only natural that Corona should be named "The Circle City."

Aside from the Indianapolis 500 mile classic there is left only one of the famous old time racing events.

This is the Pike's Peak Hill Climb,

which was first run on Labor Day in 1916 and which has been run every Labor Day since, with the exception of the war years. While this is actually a run against time, with the cars starting at five minute intervals, the interest is tremendous—and is growing from year to year.

And this is the lone remaining race in the United States where weather conditions never interfere. There are no grandstands except the precipitous slopes of America's most famous mountain. And while the race may start in the bright Colorado sunshine it is not at all unusual for the cars to cross the finish line in rain, sleet or snow.

In recent years racing cars are all handbuilt "Specials," but this has not always been the case. With very few exceptions the early records were made with factory built passenger cars from which the body had been removed and two bucket type seats installed. And the majority of the cars entered in the races were owned and entered by the manufacturers.

Speed, at that time, was of more value—from a sales angle—than comfort. However, as time went on the matter of reliability entered strongly into the sales picture. Therefore many long distance runs were made with credit points given not only for speed but also for the least number of repairs and adjustments made to the car and engine.

In the first Indianapolis race of 500 miles, all the starters were stock pleasure cars—factory stock with the exception of the body. Ray Harroun driving a Marmon won this event at a speed of 74.59 mph.

The engine was of six cylinders with a bore of 4½ inches and a stroke of 5 inches. This gives a total engine displacement of 447 cubic inches. Not until thirty-five years later did another six cylinder engine win the 500 mile race.

In 1946 the late George Robson drove a specially built car equipped with a Sparks engine to victory. This engine with its bore of only 3.205 inches and a stroke of 3.750 inches gives a total engine displacement of a mere 183 cubic inches or less than half of the size of the Marmon of 1911. Robson's speed for the 500 miles was 114.820 mph, not the fastest time for this event, but as this race was run immediately following the close of World War II there was hardly sufficient time to make the proper preparations.

The speed runs of the early racing cars had much to do with the perfecting of the modern engine, and the knowledge gained from these races is also reflected in the appearance of the present day automobile.

The original race car body usually consisted of merely a hood over the engine, two bucket seats and a huge gasoline tank; the pleasure car of the period differed but little. Most cars had no doors, and windshields and top were supplied only as accessories, at an additional cost.

As the racing speed increased some thought was given to "wind resist-

ance," which later led to streamlining of the body. This streamlining is now quite apparent in the design of today's sleek pleasure cars.

The cross country races and reliability runs soon led to the perfection of stronger—and lighter parts such as axles, spindles, springs and frames.

Higher road and track speeds naturally demanded higher engine revolutions. It was soon found that the heavy connecting rods and pistons would not stand these high speeds, so as the engine speed increased, the bore and stroke were reduced in order to lighten the rods and pistons. And, strange as it seemed at the time, it was found that the engine horsepower rapidly increased with the engine speed. The metals available would stand only so much and no more, so new metals were developed. Crankshafts were accurately balanced in order to overcome excessive vibration. Aluminum pistons replaced the cast iron type.

As the engine revolutions continued to climb, oil and fuel consumption became a problem. Piston rings had always been turned with a plain surface from cast iron; now steel rings were developed.

It was found that a higher ratio of compression increased the power of the burning fuel, so the automobile manufacturers—with racing competition becoming keener—gradually increased the compression of the engines.

But at these higher ratios the cylinder charge would either detonate or preignite. This is the so-called "ping" of the present day. Gasoline manufacturers experimented with various addatives to their product and a better method of distilling the crude oil. With the addition of lead and a better method of distillation we now have our present "high octane" fuel.

With speed and power increasing by leaps and bounds, racing proved, at the cost of a number of lives, that braking power must keep pace with other improvements. Pierce Arrow, which had been using bronze liners on the brake bands, changed over to a woven asbestos liner with imbedded wire. Other manufacturers followed with various other linings.

Four-wheel and front-wheel brakes had been suggested, and even tried, to a very small extent but the fear of an accident from a sticking or locked front wheel brake kept the manufacturers from adopting them. Again it was a racing car which proved that four-wheel brakes could be safely used and the automobile manufacturers soon supplied them as standard equipment.

While it is almost impossible to compare the top speeds between the early race cars and those of the present day, it may be noted that while Duryea, in 1896, averaged but 5 mph in a road race, Captain Eyston, on September 16, 1938, covered the South Run of the Bonneville Salt Flats at a speed of 358.6 mph. And on August 23, 1939 John Cobb did

the same stretch in his Railton Red Lion at an astonishing 368.85 mph.

Most of the early automobiles are now long gone from the highways, but there are a few present-day cars which gained their fame on the speedways and road racing courses.

The 1904 Cadillac was a one cylinder affair which was often raced with fair success. The present model Cadillac which now carries an eight cylinder engine—it has gone as high as sixteen cylinders—again proved itself in the 1950 Mexican road race, and as a strictly stock sedan. In 1904 the Cadillac developed seven horsepower and sold for $900. The latest Cadillac develops in the neighborhood of 200 HP and you may price it at the nearest Cadillac dealer.

Buick was another leader in the racing field in the early days of the sport, as was Packard and, to a lesser extent, Studebaker. Over 2,000 different makes of automobiles have been manufactured in the United States and the majority of the earlier cars were raced, either by the factory or individuals. They ran the gamut of the alphabet from Abbott to Zip but now any schoolboy can name all of present American makes.

Of course the manufactures now have their own testing and proving grounds, and do not as a rule enter cars in speed trials, but they still adopt improvements made by the individual race car builders. For example, the modern racing car as a rule uses an alcohol mixture for fuel. When the time comes—and it will—that your passenger car will use other than gasoline for power, remember that the fuel was perfected in racing cars.

Meanwhile, as you cruise along the highways in your sleek, streamlined automobile with its powerful yet economical engine, at speeds from 80 to 90 miles an hour—don't believe the speedometer when it indicates 100 mph, they are notorious liars—give a thought to the racing drivers of yesterday and today.

And, as the speed cop writes out your ticket for "80 mph in a 60 mile zone" give another thought to the four-wheel brakes which brought you to the safe, quick stop. All of those things were made possible by the sport of automobile racing.

Speed through the years has meant more than that. It has meant the modern automobile.

A Belgian official, on arriving in the Congo, was skeptical of drum stories. He tested the chief of Imono thus: "I want you," he said, "to send a message on your drum to the chief of Etata and tell him to send me immediately four chickens, two ducks, one goat and twenty-seven eggs. Also, two arrows and a broken spear." Etata was seven miles away. The drummer tapped his drum; in amazingly quick time the precise quantities asked appeared. And, the official said, he had posted soldiers along the path to make sure that no runner carried the message by word of mouth.

—From the files of "Ask Adventure."

Famous Military Corps

4. THE MACEDONIAN PHALANX

During the brief period when Thebes assumed the leading role among the Greek cities, Epaminondas made her position possible by the use of his Theban Phalanx and demonstrated conclusively to Sparta and Athens the effect of a compact well drilled force hitting at any point on a line of infantry.

When Philip, of Macedon, was gradually making his country the successor to Thebes, he adopted the Theban Phalanx but changed and improved it in accordance with his own ideas.

The number of files was increased to sixteen and instead of the conventional Greek spear, Philip placed in the grasp of the phalangites the *sarissa* or Macedonian pike which was twenty-four feet long and when couched for action projected eighteen feet in front of the soldier. As two feet was the interval between files the spears of the five files behind him projected in front of each front rank man.

The phalangite soldier was fully equipped in the defensive armor of the regular Greek infantry and thus the Phalanx presented a ponderous and bristling mass which as long as it kept its order compact bore down all opposition.

Under Philip and Alexander, the Phalanx was a regular professional body drilled in the intricate movements that such a body must perform.

Under Alexander the Phalanx consisted of eighteen thousand men divided into six brigades of three thousand men each. These were subdivided into regiments and companies and carefully trained to wheel, to face about, to take more ground or to close up as the emergency of battle required.

In the intervals of the Phalanx regiments Alexander placed troops, differently-armed, whose duty it was to prevent the line being pierced or taken in flank and which were withdrawn when the Phalanx prepared to receive a cavalry onslaught.

After the death of Alexander and the dismemberment of his Empire the Phalanx ceased to be a regular force and became a militia.

When it faced the Roman legions it had become an unwieldy body and the battle of Cynoscephalae proved that the Roman order of battle had superseded the Greek.

by

HOWARD R. VOIGHT

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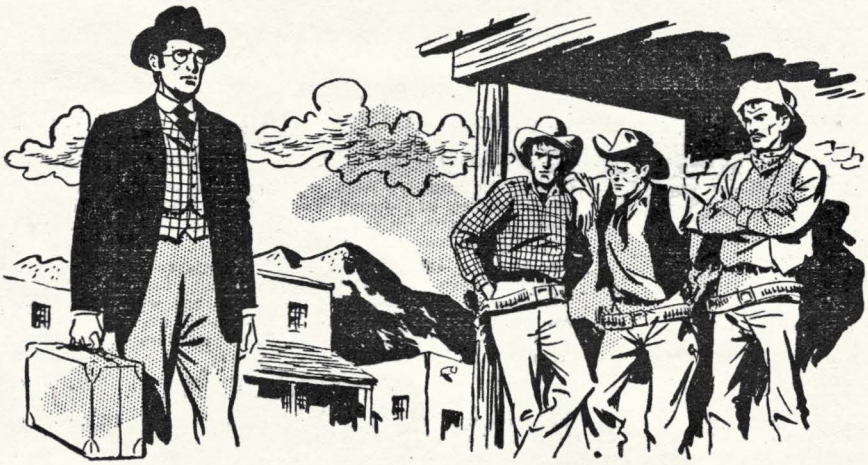
If you like your Westerns liberally choked up with gunsmoke and sprinkled with dialect, this one is not for you. H. H. Knibbs wrote, with a dry humor, about men who acted and talked like human beings—sometimes timid, sometimes full of braggadocio like the rest of us. In this yarn, you'll meet Young Hardesty, one of Knibbs's most popular characters, and you'll also meet an Easterner named Borden, who had a lot to learn. He learned fast when he hit the town of Bowdry, where men were kind of outspoken and prone to act on impulse—and their impulse when they first saw "The Town Man" was to laugh right out loud.



The Town Man

by

HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

YOUNG JOE HARDESTY was in Bowdry on business. Back at the Mebbyso Mine, his partner Bedrock was waiting for some supplies.

Bill Tandy, Wash Billings and a half dozen Bar Cross cowhands from Redbank were also in town, but not on business. They were on pleasure bent. Some of them were already bent. As Young Hardesty didn't play

cards, get drunk, or otherwise conform to their social standards, the Redbank crowd had never taken him seriously. Yet Young Hardesty was known in Bowdry as a tough kid.

The supplies failed to arrive on the morning freight. Young Hardesty loafed on the station platform.

Bowdry simmered in the desert haze. Uptown, Bill Tandy and his outfit were keeping the Silver Dollar bartender busy.

Meanwhile the ten-fifteen passenger train arrived. A tall, slim neatly-dressed fellow disembarked. He was so obviously a city man that Young Hardesty wondered who he was and why he had stopped off at Bowdry. The train pulled out, leaving a mail sack and two huge trunks. The stranger stood staring after the train. Finally his gaze swung round to the dark young fellow in Stetson and overalls. "Could you direct me to a hotel?"

"Sure. That's the Bowdry House, yonder. Ain't any other."

"Thanks." The town man's smile somehow made Young Hardesty feel a little more friendly.

"Been here long?" queried the town man, adjusting his glasses.

"Since eight this mornin'."

A kind of lost look crept into the town man's eyes as he gazed about. "It's all so new to me, you know, this Western scene. You see, I'm from the East."

"Yes, I see. You could have missed Bowdry and done better."

The town man was about to ask why when he was interrupted by the noisy arrival of several Redbank cowhands. Bill Tandy cocked his hat over one eye. "Fellas, it's alive!"

"It can talk, too," said another.

"Wears spectacles and a boiled shirt." Wash Billings walked round the town man, inspecting him solemnly. "Pink face and blue eyes. And it wears gloves." He snatched a pair of brown kid gloves from the town man's coat pocket.

The town man, who had thus far ignored Billings, flushed. "Beg your pardon. But those are my gloves."

Young Hardesty surveyed the Redbank hands. Aware that their hazing was merely an excuse to involve him, he accepted the challenge.

"Suppose you hand them gloves back," he said quietly.

Wash Billings stared. "Suppose you go plumb to hell."

Bill Tandy grinned. "Stay with it, Wash. Don't let that dude buffalo you."

Young Hardesty pushed back his hat. "It's me you're talkin' to. Just what you goin' to do about them gloves?"

Just drunk enough to be careless, and aware that he had to either back down or make good, Wash Billings slapped Young Hardesty's face with the gloves. Bill Tandy's grin faded. Monte Ray, behind him, fingered his belt. Before Billings could make a move, Young Hardesty had him covered. "Hand 'em back!" The dark eyes behind the cocked six-shooter obviously meant business.

"The hell I will!" Nevertheless Billings had sense enough to see that the joke had turned sour. His fellows were keeping mighty still. With a curse he flung the gloves down.

No one seemed to actually yearn for the gloves. The town man picked them up. His blue eyes unafraid, he nodded toward the group. "If you gentlemen don't object, I think I'll go to my hotel."

Young Hardesty ignored the Redbankers. "Them your trunks?"

The town man came to with a start. This young fellow, who so obviously had intended to shoot the man called Wash, was now quietly inquiring about baggage.

"Yes," said the town man hesitatingly. "But what's the matter with leaving them just where they are, at least for the present?"

"They might get sunburned." Young Hardesty signaled to a bewhiskered individual in a rattletrap express wagon. "Hey, Jake. Back up your hearse and pack these here trunks up to the Bowdry House."

Jake responded nimbly. Young Hardesty and the town man started to walk toward the hotel. Behind them trailed the Redbank hands, unloading sagebrush humor in an endeavor to provoke Young Hardesty to argument. But he let the hazing slide off the back of his neck. He had taken up for the town man. His job was to see him safely corralled.

Town man and tough kid marched into the Bowdry House.

"This fella wants a room," stated Young Hardesty.

"But first," said the town man, "can't I persuade you to indulge in a little refreshment?"

"I take it you mean liquor."

"Absolutely! I may be a little awkward when it comes to handling intoxicated cowboys, but I'm not the least bit afraid of a bottle."

His elbow on the conventional bar, the town man seemed to feel more at ease. Young Hardesty flipped his drink down and grinned. "What I mean, don't you let them cowchases worry you. You figured they was tryin' to push your hair back. But it was me they was proddin'. If you hadn't been talkin' to me, chances are they woulda left you alone. When Bill Tandy and Wash Billings are lookin' for trouble they don't go gunnin' in no henhouse."

The town man took his drink. "I suppose I did act a bit like a chicken. You see those cowboys rather took me by surprise. As I plan to be here for some time, what would you suggest?"

Young Hardesty laid a dollar on the bar. "Another drink."

"Excellent idea! I—if you don't object, that is—" The town man handed Young Hardesty's dollar back to him. "I should like to finance our introduction. My name is Borden."

"I'm Joe Hardesty. Mostly Joe."

"Back home I'm Will to my friends."

"That's tough. But mebby it ain't your fault."

Change for ten dollars was coming

to the town man. He gestured toward it. "What shall we do with this?"

"If it bothers you to pack it around you could drop it into the spittoon. Or mebby hand some more of it to this here orphan asylum."

"Orphan asylum?"

"Any man that ain't got a home and has to bush in a hotel is a plumb orphan."

"Then I think I'll take another drink."

It was pleasant in the barroom. The young Westerner seemed exceedingly companionable. The town man said he had come West for the sake of his health.

Young Hardesty nodded. "Don't let anybody take it away from you, mister."

"I don't quite get that."

"What I mean, just lay low till Tandy and his bunch leave town. They been here a couple of days, rarin' around and gettin' their belly full of splinters. A couple of days more and they'll drift back to the Cross B and start chasin' cows' hind ends around the country. Then you can kind of speculate around town and nobody'll grab your gloves or bother you."

The town man pondered. A rather pleasant haze seemed to envelope the surroundings. The bar seemed more polished. Life seemed rosier. Yet even though the cowboys had been merely using him as a means to provoke this Young Hardesty chap, the fact remained that the unwashed Mr. Billings had deliberately snatched the gloves from his pocket. The thought rankled.

The town man removed his glasses and put them into his pocket. Peering into the bar mirror, he adjusted his tie. He drew a deep breath and nodded as if to himself. "I suppose I'll have to do it."

"Hey! Where you goin'?"

"I'm going," said the town man with great deliberation, "to speak to Mr. Billings."

Young Hardesty had no intention of letting the town man tangle with the Redbank crowd, nor was he especially anxious to tangle with them himself. He urged the town man to remain in the hotel. But the other was firm in his resolve.

They stepped out onto the street, walked toward the end of town, the Easterner peering here and there, trying to locate a stocky, unshaven cowhand known as Wash.

"Don't see him anywhere about," he declared. "Have you any idea where we might find him?"

"Probably he's in church, hidin' out."

"Really, I can't swallow that one."

"Mebby he's in the Silver Dollar windin' up his clock."

"That sound reasonable. I saw the place as we came from the station." Borden swung about.

Young Hardesty turned with him. "Honest, fella, I wouldn't do any combin' this evenin'. Wait till your liquor dies out. Then if you feel hostile you can hunt him up."

"The difficulty is that when the liquor dies out I don't feel hostile."

The town man straightened his shoulders. "Joe, I like you. You're breezy and all that sort of thing. But I have a rather silly notion that I must talk with Mr. Billings. To save you embarrassment I shall hunt him up by myself."

"All right. I'll go notify the coroner."

"Oh, I don't intend to kill Mr. Billings. But I do intend to let him know he can't filch my gloves." With a nod and a wave of his hand the town man started toward the Silver Dollar. Young Hardesty took up a hole in his belt and followed. The tall Easterner was becoming a heavy responsibility.

Grouped at the bar stood the Redbank crowd. Farther along a solitary figure leaned against the end of the bar, toying with an empty whiskey glass. So hard had his companions ridden him about his take-down by Young Hardesty that Billings had got lugubriously drunk. He straightened up.

A cheer broke from the Redbankers.

"Here's your friend!" they shouted. "Mebbyso he fetched little Wash a box of candy."

"Mebby he come to apologize for takin' them gloves away from Wash," cried a facetious cowpuncher.

Wash Billings ceased toying with his glass. Young Hardesty noted Billing's attitude and moved into the room. The town man stepped up to Billings. "Mr. Billings, I have a proposition to make. Lay aside your firearms and we'll settle this, man to man."

"That's the talk!" cried Tandy.

"If possible," added the town man, "without resorting to force."

"Backin' down, eh?" sneered Tandy.

The town man's pink cheeks grew pinker. He turned toward Bill Tandy. "My argument it not with you, sir. It is with your unwashed friend."

The Redbankers hooted and yelled. Wash Billings slammed his gun down on the bar. Thick-necked, broad and heavy, he looked like a bulldog glaring at a greyhound. Expecting to see the tenderfoot turn and hightail it for the open, the Redbank crowd was surprised when Borden coolly raised his hand. "Just a moment. Will you apologize for snatching my gloves?"

Billings swung for the town man's head. But somehow the head wasn't there. A long, slender arm shot out. A campact fist landed with a smack on Billing's right eye. The Redbankers roared with delight.

Billings jumped in, both arms flailing. A wild swing took the town man on the jaw. Billings, in turn, received a stiff punch in the stomach.

His battered eye meant nothing. But that punch in the stomach made him feel queer. He crouched, his hands open.

Borden knew that if this gorilla ever got hold of him it would be just too bad. Consequently he sidestepped Billing's next rush; putting all he had into a straight left, he again took Bil-

lings squarely in the stomach. Billings bent double. With the blind deliberation of a transatlantic passenger who can no longer put off the inevitable, Wash Billings leaned against the bar and became desperately sick.

The Redbank crowd stared. How could a slim, pink-faced dude like that put Wash across the ditch? Aside from a slight swelling on his jaw the tenderfoot seemed uninjured, and evidently ready to go on with the argument. Young Hardesty hoped that Borden would make his getaway while the going was good.

Calmly wiping his hot face, the town man turned to the Redbank cowhands. "Thanks for having remained neutral." With a stiff nod he strode out.

"Where did you learn them punches?" said Young Hardesty as they walked briskly toward the hotel.

"Gymnasium. I'm no boxer, but I picked up a few of the rudiments."

"Now I thought all the time it was the liquor."

"It was. Once started, however, I was obliged to continue. A chap has to back up his potations."

"Meanin' whiskey?"

"Yes."

"I didn't size you up right," declared Young Hardesty. "My mistake."

"Thanks. Now that it's all over I feel rather squiffy. I think I'll go up to my room and rest."

Young Hardesty sauntered over to the livery. The rest of the day he kept off the street. He hoped the Easterner would also lay low. The Redbank boys would josh Billings so hard he would either have to clean the tenderfoot or quit working for the outfit.

The following morning the eight o'clock freight failed to bring the expected supplies. Young Hardesty had waited three days. He decided to return to the Mebbyso Mine. On his way from the station he called at the hotel. Borden was dressed, but lying on the bed. The color had faded from his face, save for two bright spots beneath his eyes.

"Beg pardon," he said as a fit of coughing overcame him. "Morning."

"Feelin' kind of poorly?"

"Rather down. Just before I interviewed Mr. Billings yesterday I foolishly put my glasses in my pocket. During the argument they got smashed. I spent most of the night worrying about them."

"And coughin'," said Young Hardesty bluntly as he noted the handkerchief Borden had taken from his lips.

"Oh, that? I'm used to it. But my glasses—"

"Coughin' makes a fella empty and weak. What you need is some hot coffee and grub."

"I'll ring for breakfast. Will you join me?"

"You'll have to ring the fire bell to get your breakfast sent up in this dump. I eat at the Chink's."

"Lead on. And damned be he who cries enough."

In spite of his joking, it was evident that the town man was in poor shape. Young Hardesty had seen other pilgrims like that. Up and coming one day, the next, down and discouraged.

"Grand idea, breakfast," said the town man as they sat in the Chink's place. "I imagine the food isn't half bad, either."

"You can eat the half that ain't bad," suggested Young Hardesty.

Borden managed to eat a fair breakfast. He felt better.

"Now what you propose?" he said as they left the restaurant.

"Me, I'm goin' to hook up and drive back to the Mebbyso."

"I'll go along and watch you hitch up."

The town man helped Young Hardesty harness and hook the team to the wagon. The tenderfoot was handy with hames and traces. Young Hardesty concealed his surprise. Suddenly it occurred to him that the half-obliterated trade name on the wagon was Borden. The town man himself was gazing at the name.

"Ever see one of these here rigs before?" said Young Hardesty.

Borden smiled. "My uncle manufactures them. I worked in the factory for a while."

"Well, anyhow, they make good wagons," declared Young Hardesty.

He climbed to the seat. "I reckon I'll pull out. If I was you I'd kinda keep off the street for a couple of days. It might be healthy."

"I appreciate your advice. But if I stay in my room I'll feel as if Mr. Billings whipped me. No, I'm afraid I can't do that."

"You don't sabe them fellas, mister. They'll fill Wash up on liquor and tell him he's plumb disgraced, lettin' a tenderfoot wallop hell out of him. They'll be joshin', but Wash will take it serious. When that Bar Cross bunch is liquored up, most anything is like to happen."

The town man gazed thoughtfully at Young Hardesty.

"How much," he said finally, "would you charge to take my trunks out to your mine?"

"What good'll they do you out there?"

"That depends. What would you charge for board and lodging for a person seeking the Fountain of Youth?"

"We ain't got no fountain at Mebbyso. Got a hell of a good spring, though. Say, do you want to come out to the mine?"

"Of course I should not want to bother you or your partner."

"Bother nothin'! What I mean, they ain't no doctors or drug stores, and no eatin' houses or hotels. And they ain't no place where you could get your pants pressed whatever."

"Even so—"

"Likewise you're a sick man."

"That," said the town man gravely, "is why I want to get away from things. My physician told me to go West, preferably to Arizona, and live in the open. Sleep on the ground, and all that."

"Well, we got plenty of ground."

"And I'm not a pauper."

"I ain't so awful strong on religion myself."

"I was never more serious."

"Well, hop in. I'll take a chance."

"That's awfully good of you! Do you think we might look after my baggage?"

"Sure. I plumb forgot them trunks."

"Understand, I'm not running away from Billings. I'm simply taking the line of least resistance."

"Like that fella yonder." Young Hardesty gestured toward a figure that had emerged from the Silver Dollar and was weaving across the street.

"Looks like Mr. Billings—breasting a hurricane," remarked Borden. "Will he sink, or ride out the storm?"

Somewhat to the discomfiture of the town man, Wash Billings came to anchor in the doorway of the Bowdry House. Young Hardesty drove up to the curb and stopped.

"I'd kind of step around him," he said as Borden got out of the wagon.

The town man tried to do so. But Billings, drunk and belligerent, barred his way.

"Gangway, please," said Borden quietly. Billings leered. He made an unforgivable remark about the town man's ancestry.

"Sorry," said Borden tightly. He planted his fist on Billings' jaw. Billings went down and out. The town man went into the hotel.

The local hardware man came up. Young Hardesty had an inspiration. "Help me pack him into the wagon, Becker. I'll take care of him."

The hardware man was only too willing to oblige. A few seconds later Borden came out. His trunks were loaded in. Several of the Redbankers had emerged from the Silver Dollar and were gazing toward the hotel.

"I reckon we better get a move on," said Young Hardesty.

Borden climbed in, gestured toward Billings. "Just what do you intend to do with this?"

"I'm leavin' it out on the flats a piece. A walk'll do it good."

As they drove past the saloon a Redbank hand invited Young Hardesty to step down and have a drink. Young Hardesty declined with thanks.

"Takin' momma's boy for a ride?" called the Redbanker.

"I sure am," Young Hardesty grinned. "But he's goin' to walk back."

"Who's your lady friend?" called another cowhand.

Borden flushed hotly. "I think I'll get out and speak to that chap."

"Not this journey." Young Hardesty swung his whip. The team jumped.

Borden turned in the seat. "I'm leaving town," he called out to the Redbank hands. "But I'll be back."

About three miles south of Bowdry Young Hardesty pulled up. The dazed Billings was deposited on the sand. Considerably sobered up, Billings got to his feet. He glared at the

town man, at the wagon, at Young Hardesty, and finally at the distant town of Bowdry shimmering in the morning sun. With a curse he named Young Hardesty and the town man collectively. Young Hardesty laughed. "Bowdry is north, mister."

Billings jerked his gun from its holster. The town man went white, expecting to see young Hardesty drop. But the hammer of Billings' gun fell with a dull click.

"You can't do that!" cried the town man. He leapt toward Billings. Again the hammer fell on an empty chamber.

Young Hardesty shrugged. "Knowed you would try that, Billings. Your gun is empty, same as your head. Get goin'."

Young Hardesty climbed back to the high seat. "Come on, Borden. You ain't paralyzed, are you?"

When the town man turned to look back, Billings was tramping across the desert. Borden heaved a big sigh. "My Aunt's bracelet, but some of these persons are wild and careless! That man would have shot you."

"Only I emptied his gun when Becker and me loaded him into the wagon."

"And he would have shot me. He's a dangerous person."

"Oh, I dunno." Young Hardesty's gaze was fixed on the horses' ears. "If I hadn't knowed his gun was empty when he went for it, mebby I'da took a hand."

"Oh, I see."

"I'da had to spoil him. I didn't want to do that."

"Your discretion is commendable."

"Mebby. Only I don't know what you're talkin' about."

The wagon rumbled and bumped along the desert road.

"What I mean," said the town man finally, adopting Young Hardesty's mode of expression. "You're a wise bird."

"Huh! You ought to met Old Bedrock."

"I hope to. I think we'll get along famously."

Upon arrival at the Mebbyso Mine, the excitement and novelty which had sustained the town man evaporated. After shaking hands with Bedrock he stretched out on one of the cots.

"No supplies?" asked Bedrock.

"Sure. Plenty." Young Hardesty tallied on his fingers. "Two trunks, one tenderfoot, tobacco, bacon and that bag of canned stuff. Ain't that enough for one haul?"

"We're needin' that cable and the powder bad."

"Sure. But I wasn't goin' to bush in Bowdry all summer. Anyhow, I had to fetch Borden out here to keep him from gettin' massacred."

"What you been up to now, Joe?"

"Just passin' the time of day with Bill Tandy and Wash Billings."

"Anybody get hurt?"

"Hell, no! We was just playin' around."

Borden was not too weary to smile. If Young Joe called it just playing around, what would it be like when he got down to real business?

Bedrock took Young Hardesty

aside. "Now you've got him here, what do you aim to do with him?"

"Why feed him up, learn him the country, and get him tough. He'll do a heap better out here than he would in Bowdry. Anyhow, he's kind of interestin' to have around." Young Hardesty recounted in detail their recent experiences. Old Bedrock smiled to himself. Evidently the town man wasn't quite so much of a liability as he had appeared to be when he stepped wearily from the wagon. In any event it would be good for Young Joe to have the companionship of the younger man.

"He ain't any too stout," said Bedrock. "Suppose he should cash in?"

"He ain' goin' to cash in," declared Young Hardesty. "He's goin' to take a holt, and get goin' good."

Resting on the cot, the town man was aware that the partners were discussing him. He could not hear what they said, but their lowered voices and their gestures made it plain. Already he had taken a fancy to the rugged Bedrock. And young Hardesty was a hummer. In tune with their mood, the town man himself felt that he would never have a better chance to get strong and look forward to a real future. As to what it would be he hadn't the slightest idea. Let that skein unwind itself. He would follow his luck, play the game, and see what happened.

When old Bedrock and his partner worked they worked hard. Occasionally, when a good excuse offered, they took time off. And they had never had a better excuse to do a little loafing than when the town man began to unpack his trunks.

"Where you goin' to put your stuff?" said Young Hardesty.

"In my tent."

"Where the hell is your tent?"

"In the big trunk. Also my air mattress and cooking utensils."

"You ain't got a horse and saddle in the other trunk, mebby?"

"Fact is I had to leave my saddle horses behind."

"Say, you ain't a circus rider, are you?"

"No. I did some jumping and a little polo before my Nemesis overtook me."

Borden hauled a silk waterproof tent from the largest trunk. Young Hardesty stared. "Hell, that ain't no bigger than a dish rag. Mebby you sleep on your belly and cover your back with it."

"It expands. Balloon silk, you know. No pun."

Out came an air mattress, an air pillow, blankets, tent stakes, axe, a nested cooking outfit—all the necessary and a lot of the useless plunder sporting goods houses sell to willing purchasers. The thirty-thirty high power had just come into the market. When Young Hardesty saw Borden's rifle, a light little gun of small bore, he sniffed. "Good for rabbits."

"No. Bad. These soft-nosed bullets tear things up scandalously. I'm told they are powerful enough to kill grizzly."

Bedrock and Young Hardesty ex-

changed glances. Kill a grizzly with a pea shooter like that! Young Hardesty itched to try the rifle, but his pride forbade any show of curiosity.

Young Hardesty inspected the aluminum outfit. "Them cookin' things, one fittin' inside the other, is all right when they're clean. But when you get 'em smoked up and you put 'em together you mess up the clean inside of your pots."

"Right you are. I hadn't thought of that."

The next trunk was unpacked—hunting boots, a mackinaw, heavy sweaters, a chamois vest, woolen pants, flannel shirts, and innumerable gadgets. The pocket compass, Bedrock declared, would come in handy.

The hunting knife was too big, but it might do as a kitchen knife. He averred that in that country the rod and line was a total loss.

Young Hardesty eyed the huge pile of plunder. Borden suggested that they try out the rifle, but neither Bedrock nor Young Hardesty accepted the invitation.

Borden loaded the Winchester, pulled up slowly and let go at an empty tomato can about a hundred yards down the flat. The can jumped. So did Young Hardesty, at the harsh snarl of the high power.

"Sure sounds wicked," he said. But that wasn't what was in his mind. The tenderfoot had hit the can, first shot. Hadn't raised the sights, either. Young Hardesty ran down and inspected what was left of the can.

"Set up another, about a hundred yards farther out," called Borden.

Again the town man fired. The can jumped from the rock on which Young Hardesty had set it.

"Powerful little gun," commented Bedrock. "I heard of 'em, but I didn't believe it. What say if we go up to the spring and clear out a place for your tent?"

Young Hardesty began to make mental adjustment. This town fellow wasn't just all fancy clothes. He owned horses, could shoot, knew how to hook up a team, and he sure could punch. If his lungs held out, he'd make a hand. And that little thirty-thirty!

"Say, Borden, where's your glasses?" he said, grinning.

The town man stared at his questioner. "Glasses? Why I had forgotten that I ever wore them."

"Wonderful air we got out here," said Bedrock.

"Remarkable! I think the physician that prescribed glasses for my stomach trouble really began at the wrong end. Up to that time I had nothing wrong with my eyesight!"

"Mebby now your stomach will get all right," suggested young Hardesty. "You weren't wearin' your glasses when you put Wash Billings out of business."

Possibly it was the altitude. Maybe it was simply self-expression. The town man flung his hat high and whooped like a boy out of school. "Down with dark thoughts! Up with the tent!" He paused, gazed reflectively at the mining partners. "My Aunt's bracelet! I should have let them sell me that folding bathtub."

Young Hardesty gestured toward a smoke-blackened wash tub near the leanto. "We got one. Only you have to do the foldin'."

Like the thermometer, Borden had his ups and downs. Following a deer hunting trip over the mountain, he was obliged to rest in his tent three days. He read, and chatted with old Bedrock. The town man came to appreciate and understand Bedrock's substantial character.

"Medicine in bottles," Bedrock told him, "only puts your germs to sleep for a spell. What you need is to get stout enough so the germs can't dig into you. I never took no medicine, and I never had a sick day in my life."

"But you've got a constitution like the United States."

"Better. It ain't got any amendments hung onto it."

As the days went by, the town man became accustomed to the silences, the loneliness—for there were times when he felt exceedingly lonely. Although he gained no weight, he was far stronger than when he came to the desert. Occasional bad spells disheartened him. It was then that Young Hardesty "rode him hard to get him out of the bog." When Borden offered to pay for board and lodging, Young Joe refused with profane emphasis. To square his conscience Borden kept the camp in food at his own expense.

The idea of settling on the abandoned homestead south of the mine appealed to him. He wanted to be his own man, go and come as he pleased, loaf when he felt like it and tramp around when the impulse took him. He had no definite plan for the future except to get strong enough to reasonably hope he might have a future. The doctors back East had given him two years to live. Some six months of the two years had gone. In the serenity of the hills and desert his mental outlook changed. He no longer worried about his health. He forgot the calendar.

With lumber hauled in from Grant, and the help of two natives, the town man set about to build a cabin on the homestead south of the Mebbyso. When completed the structure was nothing more than a spacious rough board shack. But to Borden it was an ideal accomplished. His own labor and sweat had gone into the building of it. He owned it. It was his home. With his voluminous camping equipment he was able to manage nicely. In the new corral loafed a stout saddle horse, purchased by the Easterner for trips over the mountain. Bright Navajo blankets, books and a rough stone fireplace gave the main room a comfortable, settled look.

Meanwhile the town man began to realize that he had no definite objective in life. Tired of doing nothing, Borden finally decided to make a lone trip over the mountain. Early one morning he saddled up, and with food, canteen and rifle, he set out. Reaching the crest of the range, he sat his pony, gazing across The Other

Valley. It was big country. He was alone. Never had he felt so independent, so much his own man.

Hitherto, Young Joe had always been his companion. But when you traveled with him you simply followed, did as he did. Alone, a fellow didn't have to keep to the trail. He could poke around and discover all sorts of interesting places.

Yonder on the far slope of the valley, for instance, was the grave of a prospector who had been murdered by an escaped convict. And down the valley in the rock stream bed was the spot where Young Hardesty and a cattleman named Wilson had lain behind a boulder and battled for hours with the Rucker boys. Still farther south was the trail from the old Rucker ranch to Grant. It would be great to camp somewhere in the valley a night or two, and then take the trail to Grant and so on around to the Mebbyso. It would beat traveling in books all hollow.

As Borden put his horse down the western slope, he jumped a buck. Unaccustomed to shooting from the saddle, he fumbled. The buck bounced into the brush and disappeared. Still farther down the slope the town man spied the buck partly concealed in a clump of brush. Stepping down from his pony, he took careful aim and fired. The deer dropped.

The buck might be wounded, might jump up and run. Borden approached cautiously. The deer didn't jump and run. He wished that it had. He had shot a fawn-colored short yearling branded Bar Cross.

Unaware that cattle from the Bar Cross sometimes strayed east into The Other Valley, the town man was puzzled. He knew that shooting cattle was a mighty serious matter. Of course if there had been anyone about, he would have explained the mistake, and paid for the yearling. But there was no one about. And there lay the dead animal. Borden shrugged. This exploring on one's own wasn't always so joyful.

For a moment he thought of taking some of the meat for supper. Young beef was just as good as venison any day. But somehow Borden wasn't meat hungry. With a regretful glance at the dead animal, he rode on down to the valley floor. Bedrock and Young Hardesty would give him the laugh when he told them. But why let his mistake spoil the journey? He would simply charge it to profit and loss.

Intent on keeping his bearings, the town man was unaware of the two cowhands riding down the far slope of the valley. Finally he saw them, was about to call them over and explain the situation, when he was overcome by a desire to vanish from the scene. He wasn't afraid of the cowhands, but his pride forbade confessing to such a blunder.

Unaware that the men were looking for strays, he thought that the chances were a hundred to one that they would discover the dead yearling. They were coming down the slope toward the river bed. He had

been moving toward them. He reined to the left and began to ride down the valley. In doing so he made his second mistake. He had awakened suspicion. Folks traveling open country didn't avoid one another without some important reason.

He thought he heard a faint halloo. Somehow the call, which he would have welcomed under other circumstances, now made him feel guilty. All the while he was aware that he was acting foolishly. Yet he couldn't bring himself to the point of reining round and facing the music. He had lost interest in exploring The Other Valley. He rode on.

So keyed up was he that he almost anticipated the second halloo—no shout of greeting, but a terse command to halt. Borden turned in the saddle. From the hillside near the spot where the dead yearling lay, one of the cowhands was waving at him.

If they wanted to talk, let them catch up with him. He wasn't traveling fast. In any event, why should he pay any attention to a couple of cowhands just because they happened to be riding in that territory? Running away—for in spite of his reasoning that was exactly what he was doing—only served to increase Borden's feeling of guilt. He was now on the defensive. If those fellows back there happened to be Bar Cross cowhands, let them prove he had shot the animal.

The sound of a rifle shot ripped through the silence. With a quick twist and dive sideways Borden's pony shied. Striking a boulder alongside the trail, the slug had whistled off at a tangent, passing close to Borden's head. Borden found himself sitting dazedly in the sand of the river bed.

"They shot at me!" he kept telling himself. He got up stiffly, limped to the pony and took his rifle from the boot.

From the beginning the mistakes had all been his. He had acted like a tenderfoot in running away from something he could easily have faced and explained. Yet he let all reasoning go by the board. The cowhands had shot at him. If they wanted a fight they could have it. Anything that might happen now could not be called any kind of mistake. This was open battle.

He led the pony to cover, before he himself lay down behind a boulder, peering round it to see what the men on the slope were doing. One of them, rifle in hand, was standing in plain sight. The other semed to be bending over something on the ground. "I'll just drop a shot close enough to them to let them know they can't scare me out of the country," muttered Borden.

He took his time, aimed low. Striking a flat rock in front of the man standing, the high power thirty-thirty zinged into pieces. One of the fragments ripped across the top of the other man's head as he bent over the dead yearling.

The cowhand grunted and dropped in his tracks.

"I killed him," thought Borden. "I aimed too high."

Borden's stomach felt empty and queer. An hour ago he had been riding happily down into The Other Valley filled with a sense of freedom and elation. Now he felt like a fugitive, a murderer. But there was no use thinking about it now. He was in it up to his ears. He would have to work out of it somehow.

"If I should kill that other fellow," he reflected, "the authorities will hang me. If I get out of this alive, I can claim self-defense. But to drop two of them . . ."

It didn't occur to the town man that he himself might get killed, until a shot from the slope struck the boulder behind which he was lying, and a shower of granite dust stung his face. That was a close one! He drew back, wondering how a bullet could travel at that angle when the man who fired was directly ahead of him up the slope.

A chill ran down Borden's back as he realized that the shot had not come from directly ahead, but from far to the right. He was being stalked like some dangerous animal. Dangerous animal? Well, wasn't he? What difference was there between himself and some wild thing hiding from death? Cornered, it fights, not necessarily to kill some other creature but to save its own life.

The town man shifted his position. Moralizing wasn't getting him anywhere. Now if Young Joe Hardesty had been in his position he wouldn't have moralized; he would have given all his thought to getting out with a whole hide.

The sun burned down. Borden's shoulders itched. He grew thirsty. He wanted to light a cigarette. More than all he wanted to stand up, see what was round about him, not lie belly-down behind a rock like some escaped convict. But he dare not move. The man hunting him might be anywhere along the hillside, waiting for a chance to get a clear shot. Within a few seconds the other man almost got his chance.

Borden flinched as the slug ripped his sleeve. On his upper arm was a welt from which a drop oozed like red sweat. It was merely a surface wound, but it stung like fire. Again he squirmed round to another position. If he could only talk with the other fellow, explain things.

Borden tied his bandanna to his rifle barrel and raised it as a sort of flag of truce. The response was prompt. A slug whistled over his head and splattered on the rock behind him.

"To hell with chivalry!" he muttered. "To hell with the consequences!" And Borden knew how it sometimes comes about that an innocent man turns killer.

A ghastly business, this. Why, those fellows must have taken him for a cattle rustler! For the first time since the killing of the yearling, Borden got hold of himself, employed cold reason.

The cowhands must have been in

the valley when he fired. Being human, naturally they wondered what he was shooting at. Undoubtedly their first hail was a friendly gesture. A little later they had come upon the dead yearling, hallooed to him to stop. He had paid no attention. They had fired a shot to halt him. He had returned their fire, and dropped one of them. From their point of view they were in the right. He was a trespasser, a cow thief. Naturally the surviving cowhand wouldn't let up till he got him.

It was all a sort of nightmare, unreal, impossible. What would be the outcome? He had not alone shot a steer—he had killed a man. Long before coming to the West, Borden had read of this sort of thing, had been amused but never greatly impressed. Now he was actually in the thick of it himself. There was no romance in gun smoke. Gun fighting was a squalid, miserable business—butchery. In comparison, a stand-up fight with fists was a wholesome, hearty affair.

The sun bore down upon him as he lay behind the boulder. The silence was so deep, so all-enveloping that he felt like a castaway on a rock in some vast, motionless sea. He would have welcomed hand-to-hand conflict. This lying still, waiting, got on his nerves. He raised on his elbow, shouted at the top of his voice, "Come out into the open! Show yourself! I'll meet you and have it out with you."

But no sound came. The silence seemed even more intense. What was the other man doing? Was he sneaking round, waiting for a chance to shoot him in the back? Borden glanced behind him. There was nothing in sight down the dry, winding river bed save the hindquarters of the pony as it stood in the shade twitching flies.

Inaction became unbearable. Borden rose on hands and knees, peered round about. Glancing toward the eastern slope of the valley, he was able to outline two horses, partly concealed by the brush where the dead yearling lay.

The noon sun had cast a heavy shadow across the spot where the cowhand had fallen. Borden couldn't make out whether he was still there or not. But the other man was somewhere in the brush, on foot. Hitherto the town man had been watching the eastern side of the valley from which the shots had come. He turned and glanced across the river bed.

Standing in plain sight behind him was a squat, dark-haired man in greasy jeans and black cotton shirt. "Stick 'em up!" said the puncher.

The town man didn't have a chance to use his rifle. He rose stiffly, his hands above his head.

"It had to be you, didn't it?" Relief and sarcasm mingled in Borden's voice. The other man was Wash Billings.

"I ought to plug you," said Billings. "But seein' you put me down in Bowdry when I wasn't in no condition to help myself, I'm just goin' to beat you to nothin'."

"Just a minute," said the town

man quickly. "I shot that animal up there by mistake. Took it for a deer."

"Mebby you took my pardner for a deer, likewise," growled Billings.

"Remember, you fired first. I shot low, purposely."

"Low hell! That slug tore the whole top of his head off."

The town man went white. "If that's the case I'm willing to stand trial. I didn't shoot to kill. You fellows started this. I can claim self-defense."

"You're goin' to need all the self-defense you got, right now!" Billings stumped up, his Winchester on the town man.

"Go ahead. Shoot if you've got the nerve!" cried Borden.

He could hear the blood sing in his ears. With hands clenched he faced Billings.

Even that thick-skulled individual knew that this town man was not afraid. And because he wasn't, Billings himself grew furious. To kill him with a shot would be too easy. He would knock him down, beat him, trample him into the sand.

Billings swung the short saddle gun. The blow would have brained Borden had he not flung up his arm and ducked at the same time. The barrel of the carbine took him on the shoulder, a glancing blow that all but paralyzed his arm.

So vicious had been the swing that the carbine slipped from Billings' grasp and clattered on the rocks. The town man struck out once, but the punch had no steam. Bending, he jumped in, grappled the cowhand round the waist. With a quick twist he shot his hip under the other's belly and heaved. Billings fell hard, but bounced up and came at the town man, murder in his eyes. Both went down, the town man underneath.

"Got you where I want you," panted Billings. He grasped the town man's hair and pounded his head on the ground.

Borden could not see, could scarcely hear or feel. There was a warm, salty taste on his lips. But deep down, a still unquenched spark faded and glowed. He wouldn't give in. Dimly he realized that this was the way wild animals fought—fought to kill that they might survive.

With a last, almost superhuman effort Borden drew up his knee. Billings groaned, let go his hold. Borden felt that the suffocating weight was gone. Slowly he raised his head, managed to turn on his side. By degrees his senses returned. Billings lay on his back, his mouth twisted in a queer way. His eyes were open, yet he seemed unable to move.

The town man staggered over to where the Bar Cross man's carbine lay, picked it up and turning moved slowly back to Billings. He said nothing, simply stood looking down at his enemy.

"Why don't you plug him? You'll never have a better chance." The words were distinct enough, but seemed to come from far away. Still dazed, Borden did not even turn his head. His job was to see that the man

on the ground didn't try to get up.

"Reckon you got mauled pretty bad." Again the voice. Borden looked up. A few yards away Young Hardesty sat his pony, grinning.

A kind of dull fury overcame the town man. He had been fighting for his life and here was his friend Joe grinning at him.

"Plug him?" said Borden. "I killed one of them. Isn't that enough?"

"You mean Tandy? Hell, he's got a crease in his scalp, and he bled plenty, but he ain't down for keeps."

"Thank God!" gasped Borden. Clutching at the air, he staggered and dropped.

"Fainted just like a lady," said Young Hardesty.

But there was no humor in his eyes as he watched Billings get painfully to his knees, and finally stagger up the river bed toward the horses. The Bar Cross man hadn't even stopped to look for his carbine.

Young Joe wondered where Borden had hit the puncher to jolt him out of his senses like that. Tandy up in the brush with a rip in his scalp, Billings crippled, and the tenderfoot down and out. Hell of a mess! And there would be more of it. Billings would lay for the tenderfoot, bushwhack him, sooner or later. The Bar Cross puncher was a sour, sullen hand. Now Bill Tandy was different. He was wild and full of hell, but he wasn't one to hang in the brush and drop a man. Yet it was a sure bet he would tangle with the town man next time he met him.

Young Hardesty took his canteen, dashed water in Borden's face. Finally the town man sat up. That he was dazed and bewildered was natural enough. But when he rose and stared at Young Joe as if the latter were an utter stranger, Young Hardesty was worried.

"Get on your horse and we'll drag it," he said, picking up Borden's rifle.

"Certainly!" It was only too evident that Borden was delirious, didn't know what he was doing. He stared at Young Joe with unseeing eyes. "Certainly, I'll go. But first I'd like to ask you a question."

"Shoot."

"Kindly tell me which way is North."

When the town man awoke in his cabin next morning, he was too sore and stiff to wonder how he got there. The smell of bacon and coffee assured him that he wasn't dreaming. At the fireplace knelt Young Hardesty, manipulating a skillet.

Borden lay watching him. Slowly yesterday's events shaped themselves. He recalled the shooting of the yearling, the battle with the Bar Cross hands, and the arrival of Young Joe. There his recollection ceased. Dully he realized that he had got himself into a nasty mess. He had half killed two Bar Cross men. Chances were they would do a better job in his case if he ever met them again. He wondered when that would be, and what would happen. Meanwhile he felt weak and desperately hungry. Moreover, as Young Hardesty often said,

there was no use packing your troubles around in plain sight.

"Hello, Joe," said Borden. "How did you get here?"

"Chambermaid. Don't you recollect hirin' me?"

"I do not."

"You'll pay me my wages, just the same."

Borden grinned. His rifle hung in its accustomed place over the stone mantel. On a peg near the bed were his clothes.

"Tidy person," he murmured.

"I notice you ain't so loco this mornin'!"

"Was I loco?"

"Crazy as a seam squirrel."

"A what?"

"A seam squirrel. Pet name for a louse."

"Thanks. Say, Joe, open up. Talk."

"You better toss some of this into you first," said Young Hardesty, fetching coffee. "Here! Lemme give you a hand."

Propped up in bed, Borden gazed about dizzily. After the coffee things weren't so bad. Yet he was willing to let Young Hardesty do most of the talking. Young Hardesty didn't say much. And he didn't need to ask Borden many questions. From what Young Joe had seen he knew about all that had happened. While he considered Borden's predicament serious, he made no comment. Nor did Borden himself. He did, however, ask what had become of Wash Billings and Bill Tandy.

Young Hardesty assured him that Tandy would be all right when somebody—and he didn't give a damn who—took a few stitches in his scalp. As for Wash Billings, the last Young Hardesty saw of him, Billings was limping up the river bed.

Young Hardesty cleared away the dishes and tidied up the cabin. He took the bucket and went to the spring. Borden lay gazing at the ceiling. Battered, bruised and weak, he still clung to his sense of humor.

He had made a ridiculous mistake. It had all but led to a tragedy. But having missed tragedy by a thin squeak, it was ridiculous. Borden let his fancy roam.

Out West there is a tenderfoot,
Will Borden is his name.
He goes around a-shootin' steers,
Instead of shootin' game.

That's what the whole county would be thinking, if not reciting.

When Young Hardesty returned from the spring, Borden was asleep.

As soon as he was able to be about, Borden wrote to the Bar Cross owners, offering to pay for the yearling. Weeks went by and he received no answer. The letter, as often happened in that desert country, either went astray or was lost. Finally the town man decided to go to Bowdry and personally interview one of the Bar Cross owners, who lived there.

Young Hardesty went with him, not because, so he said, he yearned to go, but to keep Borden from shooting up the town.

Their horses at the livery, Borden and Young Hardesty stopped in at the Silver Dollar.

"We'll have that drink you didn't take last time you was in here," said Young Hardesty, grinning.

Borden stood gazing at the floor. "X marks the spot where he fell." The town man was making light of the Billings affair, yet he didn't forget that the present, easy road might have an abrupt turning some day. Borden raised his glass. "Well, Joe, here's to a happy future."

"Suits me," said Young Hardesty. He set his glass down as a noisy group of riders stepped from their ponies at the hitch rail.

"It says on the calendar it's Thanksgivin' Day," murmured Young Hardesty. "Mebby so."

They stumped in—Tandy, Monte Ray, Billings and a half dozen more Bar Cross hands. They hadn't been in town for a long while. They were obviously ready for a good time. The town man noted that Young Hardesty had his back to the bar and both hands free. Borden himself nodded to the cowhands. 'Morning, boys! Will you have something?"

Silently the cowhands moved to the bar, called for their drinks. Glass in hand, Bill Tandy walked up to the town man.

"About that mistake I made, over in the valley—" Borden began.

Tandy frowned. "You got me, stranger."

"The yearling. You see—"

Tandy closed one eye. "Listen, fella. I got pitched, and busted my head on a rock. Wash got kicked in the belly by his hoss." Tandy lowered his voice. "I didn't report no dead yearlin'. Just try and see how good you are at forgettin'."

"My letter," said Borden, "must have gone astray."

"I didn't get no letter," said Tandy blankly. "What you talkin' about?"

Borden got it. Neither Tandy nor Billings wanted their fellows to know that a tenderfoot had again got the best of them. Why, if Tandy meant what he said, the whole miserable affair was settled! No lawsuit, no trouble, no dead yearling to pay for. Still a mite skeptical, Borden raised his glass. If Tandy drank with him, that would seal the bargain. But Tandy first had to have his little joke. He gestured to Billings. "Come 'ere, Wash. Meet my friend, Mr.—"

"Will Borden."

"Bill!" roared Tandy.

Ringleader in their escapades, what Tandy said went. The sullen Billings slouched up and shook hands stiffly with the town man. But there was no heart in Billings' handshake. He was still willing to carry on the argument, and would be, as long as he lived.

Tandy silenced him. "That's done buried. And this ain't no diggin' party. If you can't take your medicine and smile, fork your horse and fly."

Borden entertained liberally. He felt that he was making up for his blunder in The Other Valley. Young Hardesty stood in, drank sparingly, and wondered what there was about

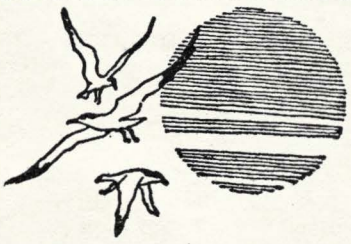
Borden that made folks like him.

Why, even the Redbank rawhides had taken him up. And they weren't joshing, at that. To the contrary, they were joyously and deliberately getting drunk with the tenderfoot. Young Hardesty kept on the edge of things. He had no special liking for cowhands of any brand. Maybe folks liked Borden because even if he wore a small belt, he had guts. If he stuck around a couple of years and didn't get bumped off, or bust his neck down a mine shaft, he'd make a pretty fair hand.

About an hour later Young Hardesty and the town man emerged from the Silver Dollar. The sun was bright, the air clear and cool. Borden gazed out across the desert, at the distant Pinnacles shimmering in the sun.

The boisterous welcome of the Redbankers made him feel that he had been accepted—that he would do. He might never become a cowpuncher or a mining man. But he would get to know these folk as he adjusted himself to their ways.

Nor would he lose anything by so doing. To the contrary, he would gain much. Back East he had merely been skimming the ponds and shallows. Here he was in the middle of the stream. The current was somewhat rough and swift, but he liked it. Of course there would always be Billings. East or West there always is a Billings. But that kind of snag could be dodged if a fellow kept his eyes open.



Rover's Way

by BILL ADAMS

Give me the gray goose weather, dark clouds hiding the sun,
Wind o'er the wintry heather, dales where the foxes run,
The flooded creek high-raging on its way to mother sea,
And the gray goose freely soaring, honking his cry to me.
Give me his harsh note coming bold from the cloud o'erhead,
The flap of wild wings drumming when the evening sky glows red.

My sires were free-foot rovers in days of long ago,
My true love's not your clover, but winter's whirling snow.
—With sea fowl shrilly screaming above the sea's dull roar,
No star above me gleaming, a thousand leagues from shore—
I'll pass as passed my forebears, beneath some storm-swept sky,
Aboard a brave ship sinking with torn flag flying high.

Gallows Fever

The legend of John Brown's body a-moldering in the grave began at Charlestown, Virginia on the second of December, 1859, when that fervent abolitionist was hanged in accordance with all the precepts for legal strangulation. Historians and partisans were quick to seize on the event, but another little drama enacted at the same time escaped their notice.

Somberly dressed and of bleak appearance, John Brown walked slowly toward the scaffold, alone with whatever thoughts possess a man about to die. Briefly, disdainfully, he glanced at the audience gathered to watch the hanging, an audience composed of military men, government officials, and some others tinged with necromania.

Lest some attempt at rescue might still be made, a platoon of cadets from nearby Virginia Military Institute was detailed to attend the ceremony. Their commander, Thomas J. Jackson, was alert for signs of disorder.

Muffled drums rolled softly as the prisoner mounted the platform. The black hood was settled about his head. One cadet ran a finger around his stiff collar as if to loosen it, his face paling as he nervously anticipated the moment when the trap would be sprung.

At the moment when John Brown's body plunged into eternity, the nervous cadet slumped to the ground in a dead faint. But not until the pendulum-swinging body had been pronounced dead did anyone take notice of the prostrate cadet. Then the commander stepped towards the boy: "Water. Get some water here."

A bucket of water was splashed over the youth. Shaking his head, the cadet mumbled, "Sorry, sir. I'm all right now." Looking into the wondering faces of his fellow cadets, he shamefacedly apologized for his unsoldierly conduct.

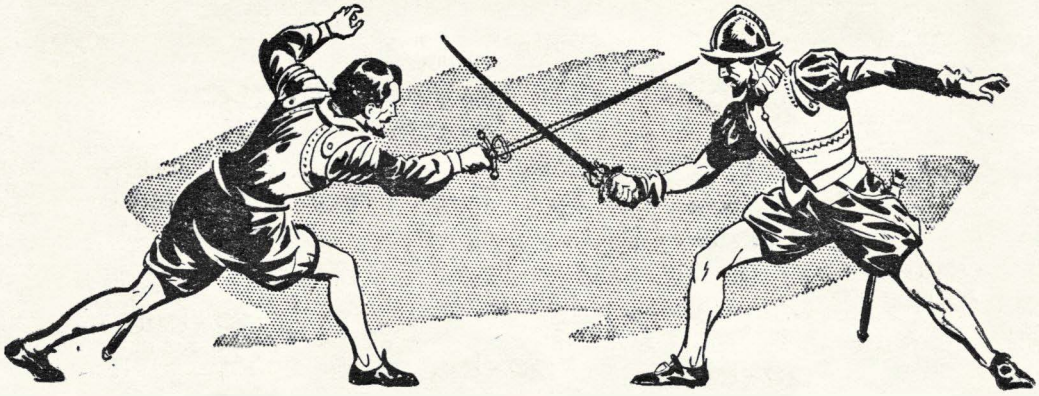
Jackson patted him on the shoulder. "Of course, my boy, I understand. Death is not a pleasant thing in any form, but sometimes it must be faced."

Mentally, the cadet vowed he would discipline himself to overcome such a feminine weakness. And his success in that determination was to be responsible for one of the blackest pages in history.

The officer lived to gain fame as "Stonewall" Jackson.

On April 14, 1865, the cadet demonstrated publicly how well he had schooled himself in the sight of death. He entered the Ford Theatre in Washington, D. C. with the full knowledge and anticipation that a man would die before his eyes. And the man did die: Abraham Lincoln. Cadet and assassin were now merged. When that shot was fired another legend began, that of John Wilkes Booth.

by BOB YOUNG



The Swords of Cortez

by

WILLIAM S. FURNO

In which Hernando Cortez, by a master stroke, averts disaster, crushes treachery and insures the success of his Mexican expedition.

FELIPE AQUILAR, lately captain of Don Diego Colon's troops on Hispaniola, blew on the dice for luck, shook the cup vigorously, and rolled four sixes. He grinned across the blanket at Piero Mazzoni who muttered strange Italian oaths and took the dice in his turn. Hernando Cortez had banned gambling within the confines of the newly founded settlement of Villa Rica de Vera Cruz, and the pair were rolling the spotted cubes under a huge rosewood tree at the furthermost edge of the forest.

Felipe, a lean, lithe Spaniard with neat mustachios and pointed beard, had given up his command on Hispaniola and had thrown in his lot with Cortez when the latter had sailed from Cuba on November 18, 1518. Piero, a native of Pisa, had also served the Admiral of the Indies, and had joined his friend when Felipe had enlisted with Cortez. The armada had sailed from Santiago de Cuba with Cortez as captain-general

despite the efforts of Bishop Fonseca, President of the Council of the Indies, and of Governor Velasquez of Cuba to remove him from his post. Felipe and Piero had been of invaluable service to Cortez on that occasion, and the captain-general had rewarded them by making Felipe his trusted aide and employing Piero as a sort of bodyguard for both. And so well had they served Don Hernando that the Spanish soldiers called them the Swords of Cortez.

"You've bewitched the dice," the huge Pisan grumbled. "There's four sixes on the cubes and you get them all."

Piero scooped the dice into the cup and held it to his lips. He mumbled a brief incantation over the cubes and then rolled them out on the blanket. They squatted on all fours and looked at the dice. Three two's and a one stared up at them like so many tiny, unwinking black eyes. The Pisan groaned and swore. Felipe unsheated his poniard and cut another notch in his tally stick with relish.

"There's five gold images and two ingots on this tally," Felipe chuckled, leaning back and rubbing his cuirass against the bole of the tree to relieve the itching of the armor. He palmed the cup and rattled the dice industriously. "Before evening, *amigo,* I'll send you back to camp in the clothes your mother gave you at birth," he jibed. "I'll win . . ."

Felipe's voice trailed off into nothingness and he stared hard at the polished surface of his comrade's breastplate. His back was turned to the forest and the Pisan's eyes were on the blanket. What Felipe saw reflected in Piero's cuirass caused him to leap to his feet and draw his sword.

"Draw, Piero!" he shouted, whirling about.

With a quick sweep of his sword, Felipe knocked down the blade of a masked soldier who with three others had sprung from the woods with the evident intention of killing them as they bent over the dice. With amazing speed for one so huge, Piero bounded to his feet, his blade appearing in his hand as if by magic. Then he joined Felipe who was skillfully parrying the thrusts of the four attackers.

Relieved of part of the burden, Felipe wasted no time in idle words or fanfaronades. He measured his man, flicked his point at his face and then dropped to one knee and lunged. His long Italian blade ripped into the soldier's belly beneath the cuirass and stood out at his back for half its length. Wrenching the blade free as his man began to fall, he slashed a second across the knuckles of his sword hand as the man sought to hamstring Piero. A point punctured Felipe's thigh and his leg gave away momentarily. The attackers redoubled their efforts to complete their work, but Piero had swung into action and his blade held them back until his comrade had recovered the use of his leg.

"Ha, dogs!" Piero bellowed, un-

able to remain silent even in battle. "You've picked a fine twain on which to try your tricks. You'll find the steel of Castile and Pisa hard to digest, I warrant you!"

"Lay on, Pisan, and save your boasting for tomorrow," Felipe advised him, as he sliced neatly through a soldier's gullet. "That's two I've bagged and you haven't tallied yet!"

Stung to action by Felipe's words, the Pisan swung a mighty cut at his adversary's head. The blade missed the neck and sheared through the fellow's arm just below the shoulder. The soldier shrieked in agony and clutched at his gory stump. Then Piero's blade caught him under the armor and laid open his abdomen from side to side. The soldier groaned and fell to the ground. The remaining attacker dropped his sword and fled into the woods with Felipe at his heels. As the soldier entered the forest, Felipe lunged with his long weapon and succeeded in sinking an inch or two of the point in the man's rear. Not having the fear of death to lend him wings, Felipe soon lost his quarry in the dense underbrush and returned to the scene of the battle.

Piero was bending over the man he had disemboweled. The soldier was still alive and was endeavoring to speak. Felipe rolled up the blanket on which they had diced and slipped it under the man's head.

"Tell us why you tried to kill us?" he asked gently.

The soldier tried to moisten his lips, but could utter no word.

"There's no time to get a priest," Felipe said. "Confess, *amigo*, and it will be credited to your account in Purgatory."

"The—the Swords of Cortez must die first!" the soldier suddenly gasped, as if repeating an order. "Then we'll—"

A rattling sound came from the soldier's throat and a stream of blood gushed from his mouth. His head fell back on the blanket and he died without another word.

Felipe turned from the soldier and hastily examined the hole in his leg, but found it of no consequence. He tied his kerchief about his thigh and promptly forgot the wound.

"First us and then the captain-general, no doubt about it," Felipe ruminated, tugging at his mustache. "This means a bit of work for you and me, Pisan."

"The arm of the Bishop of Burgos is long," Piero said thoughtfully. "Through his henchman, the Governor of Cuba, it reaches even to the land of the Aztecs."

"The Bishop's hatred for Cortez will cease only when he is dead," Felipe said. "We'll need a warrant from His Excellency, Pisan. We may have to arrest persons who hold high rank in the expedition."

"Then why do we stand here chattering like fishwives? Let's go, *muchacho!*"

"To headquarters!" Felipe cried.

They whirled and strode rapidly toward Vera Cruz.

On arriving at headquarters—a small building of sun-dried bricks—

they gave a report to Hernando Cortez of what had taken place under the rosewood tree. The captain-general listened attentively to their story and then drummed thoughtfully on the small table he used for a desk.

Cortez presented a commanding figure even when seated. He was about thirty-four years old, not a big man, as men go, and his face appeared kindly and of good humor. But his dark, piercing eyes and bearded, resolute chin gave evidence that he could be stern and cold and as hard as steel when occasion demanded. Behind Cortez stood the Aztec maid, Malinche, and seated near him were Bernal Diaz, the scribe of the expedition, and Francesco de Morla, the hero of the battle of Cintla.

Cortez had landed on the coast of Yucatan in March of 1519. After subduing the Tabascan Indians, he had sailed to the mainland and had landed near the site of Vera Cruz on April 21, 1519. Although he had no authority from Governor Velasquez or from the crown to do so, he founded the settlement of Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz at a distance of about half a league from Quiahuitztlan, a pueblo of the Totonac tribe who were friendly to the Spaniards. Cortez had recently sent a message to Montezuma asking for permission to visit him in the City of Mexico, and he was awaiting the Aztec emperor's reply.

It was now late in July and Cortez had decided that morning to send a letter to the emperor Charles V asking for permission to explore and take possession of Mexico in his name. The letter also petitioned the monarch to approve of Cortez' acts and to appoint him Captain-General of New Spain. As a large amount of the treasure taken by the expedition was to accompany the letter, Cortez had every hope that his petition would be granted by the king. His flagship, *La Capitana*, was ready to sail and would leave the harbor in the morning. Cortez planned to await the reply of Montezuma and then march to the city on Lake Texcoco regardless of the nature of the emperor's message.

Don Diego Velasquez, who was nominally Cortez' superior, had gained control of Cuba by using the same tactics as those now being employed by Don Hernando. Velasquez, sent out by Admiral Colon to conquer Cuba, had been appointed its governor, answerable only to the king, through the influence of Bishop Fonseca. The admiral had been left holding an empty bag and deeply in debt for the men and ships he had sent out. It seemed fitting to Cortez, who was a friend of the admiral, that the wily governor should be made to swallow some of his own medicine.

"The followers of Velasquez are planning a coup, that is evident," Cortez said at last, ceasing his drumming. "They wanted to get Felipe and Piero out of the way so they could strike at me."

"Of what company were the soldiers?" de Morla asked.

"They were crossbowmen from the

company of Don Jose Ramirez," Felipe replied. "But that doesn't mean that their captain is guilty. The plotters had the whole army to choose from."

"Don Jose is fiery and full of temper," Bernal Diaz said. "But it's not likely he'd plot against the captain-general."

"*Per Bacco!* You don't know the wily captain as well as I do," Piero put in vehemently. "I've heard him say that Don Hernando should be sent to Cuba in irons for repudiating Diego Velasquez and appealing directly to the king!"

The dark-eyed Malinche, who had received the baptismal name of Marina, nodded her head vigorously in agreement with Piero's words. She had learned many words of Spanish, and had got the gist of the Pisan's remarks. Felipe tugged thoughtfully at his beard. It was rumored in camp that Don Jose's nose had been put badly out of joint when Cortez had given Malinche to Alonzo Puertecarrero who was to sail aboard *La Capitana* as Cortez' emissary to the king.

"Vain talk, *amigos,*" Cortez said crisply. "I need proof before I can act, and even then I must use great care in handling the affair. We are too few to quarrel among ourselves. We must stick together or the Aztec priests will offer our hearts on the bloody altars of Huitzilopochtli, their god of war!' He remained silent for some moments, looking searchingly at Felipe who squirmed a bit but said nothing. Then he said, "I'm going to inspect *La Capitana* after supper and I want you men to come with me."

"With your permission, Excellency, I'd like to hunt down the soldier who escaped in the forest," Felipe said quickly.

Cortez hit the table with his clenched fist and smiled at his aide.

"I knew it, by the Cid!" he cried. "That blank look on your face didn't fool me one bit. You've a plan, eh, Felipe?"

Felipe nodded. "I've a clew—a very slender one, I'll admit, but it may lead to something. Give us a warrant to search the huts and to make arrests if necessary, and we'll do the rest."

"Can't you use another man, Captain Aquilar?" de Morla asked eagerly.

"Piero and I work best alone, señor," Felipe said, shaking his head. "You'd better go with the captain-general aboard *La Capitana.* The plotters may try to harm him on the way."

"You're right, Captain," de Morla agreed. "Bernal and I will go with Don Hernando."

Cortez took up his quill and wrote busily for some seconds. Then he sanded the paper and gave it to Felipe.

"Your warrant, Captain," Don Hernando said.

Felipe took the warrant and thrust it under his breastplate. Then he and Piero rose and bowed.

"We'll report when we've found something we can sink our teeth

into," Felipe said. "Until then—*adios!*"

Felipe and the Pisan entered the cantina on the outskirts of Vera Cruz—a hastily erected, barn-like building of adobe, and found a number of soliders dicing on the rude tables. The lookout had signaled that all was well, and the soldiers, after casual glances in their direction, resumed their games. They knew that the Swords of Cortez liked to dice as well as any man. Felipe and Piero had visited many places in the settlement where soldiers spent their evenings, but, after observing closely the individuals in each hut, Felipe had shook his head and they had gone on to the next.

The newcomers lounged idolently against the wall and watched the games, as if weighing the skill of the players before risking their gold. Felipe's gaze roved from one cuirassed figure to the next, and he chuckled when a husky arquebusier damned the captain-general for making them wear their armor even when no danger threatened. Then Felipe's sharp eyes came to rest on a crossbowman playing at the table nearest to them. The man displayed a peculiarity that interested Felipe immensely. The bowman stood constantly erect while the other players sat at their ease on rude stools.

"Prepare for trouble, Pisan," Felipe whispered, from the corner of his mouth. "I'm about to stir up a hornet's nest!"

Felipe walked toward the soldier and then appeared to trip clumsily over his own spurs as he passed near the table. He fell heavily against the bowman and took great care to sink a bony knee in the small of the soldier's spine.

"*Caramba!*" the bowman hissed, whirling on Felipe. "Are you the king that you need the whole room to walk in? If it wasn't my turn to dice, I'd teach you a lesson in manners!"

"I'm sorry, *amigo,*" Felipe said suavely. "I didn't know bowmen rode horses and that you were saddlesore. *Hola*, Piero, seat this caballero on his stool and tell him I humbly beg his pardon. He appears unable to sit of his own accord and we'll help him!"

Piero obeyed without question. He seized the bowman in huge hands that could bend a horseshoe with ease and sat him on the stool with a boneshaking thud that jarred the cantina from ridgepole to sills. The soldier uttered an agonized howl and tore away from Piero's grasp.

"Pisan dog!" he snarled. "You'll die for this! At them, *amigos!* Now's our chance to finish what I failed to do today! Our birds have fallen into our laps!"

The bowman's three companions sprang from the table and drew their swords. Evidently the bowman had lost no time in making new recruits, Felipe thought, as the soldiers advanced on him and Piero with naked blades.

Piero, who was older than Felipe

and had fought in many tavern brawls, leaped to a nearby table and seized a stool in each hand—unceremoniously dumping their occupants to the floor of the cantina. Then he joined Felipe who had engaged the bowman and his companions. Using one stool as a shield, Piero flailed about with the other, not being too careful whether he cracked the head of an enemy or that of a soldier who was trying frantically to get out of the way.

While Piero played havoc with the attackers, Felipe maneuvered the bowman into a corner and endeavored to disarm him with all possible speed. He wanted information and the soldier would be of no value to him if dead. Piero would take care of the others. He knew the Pisan's strength and what he could do in a fracas of this kind.

Nor was he wrong in his estimation of the Pisan's fighting abilities. Piero sent two of the attackers bleeding to the floor and pressed a third against the wall where the soldier was defending himself against the Pisan's attack with difficulty. The *cantinero* and the soldiers who were not concerned in the fighting had made a mad dash for the door when Piero had commenced laying about him with the stool. They had jammed in a solid mass at the doorway, but had finally succeeded in forcing their way out of the cantina. Night had fallen, and they stood out in the moonlight listening with awed ears at the din within the building.

The Swords of Cortez, aided by an oaken stool, were making short work of their attackers.

Inside the cantina, Felipe ran his weapon down the length of his opponent's blade until the hilts locked. Then he twisted suddenly and the bowman's sword flew from his hand and clattered to the floor. Piero, who had knocked his man senseless with a well-directed blow of his stool, came up and grasped the soldier just as the latter extracted a paper from his morion, tore it into bits, and then crammed the fragments into his mouth.

"Choke him, Piero!" Felipe shouted. "Don't let him swallow that paper!"

The Pisan immediately clamped a large hand about the bowman's throat, but not before the soldier had succeeded in swallowing several times. Piero squeezed the bowman's neck and pried open his jaws with the fingers of his other hand. He fished about in the soldier's mouth with his forefinger and thumb and extracted a bit of soggy paper. Then he handed the fragment to Felipe. Felipe carefully unfolded the scrap of paper and scanned the writing it contained by the light of the tapers hanging overhead. Two names were written on the paper which appeared to be the upper corner of the sheet the bowman had swallowed.

"The names remaining on this list—they're the names of those who plot against Cortez, eh?" Felipe asked of the bowman.

The soldier shrugged his shoulders.

"Hum-m-m-m, stubborn, eh? Perhaps Piero can persuade you to tell us who hired you to kill us and of what they plot against the captain-general. Twist this knave's arms, Piero. When his bones begin to crack and the ligaments tear loose from his shoulders, he'll be glad to talk."

The Pisan grasped the bowman's wrists and forced his arms behind his back. Then he began to twist the arms until the elbow joints popped with the strain. Beads of sweat formed on the soldier's forehead and rolled down his bearded face. His eyes darted about the cantina as if seeking an avenue of escape. Then he groaned in agony as Piero continued to twist, and struggled vainly in the huge Pisan's iron grasp. His breath came in great gasps and his body quivered from the pain of strained tendons. The bowman was near the breaking point, and Piero, who knew the signs, applied a bit more strength.

"Enough!" the bowman gasped at Felipe. "I'll talk. Tell this big ape to loosen my arms before they part company with my shoulders."

"Ease him a bit, Pisan, but not completely," Felipe ordered. "He'll talk much better if he's reminded of what will happen to him if he lies. Out with it, bowman! The name of Don Jose Ramirez was on that scrap of paper!"

"I knew it," Piero muttered wrathfully. "That fiery young dandy has envied Cortez from the beginning and he's the ringleader of the Velasquez faction in the camp."

"I've been watching Ramirez," Felipe said quietly. "I knew he was up to something and that he would strike when the time arrived." He turned to the soldier. "Tell us of Ramirez' plans, bowman."

"Don Jose hired us to kill you and the Pisan," the bowman began. "With you out of the way, he was going to abduct Cortez tonight, seize the flagship, and sail for Cuba. There he would turn over to Governor Velasquez the treasure, the ship, and the captain-general. Ramirez hoped to gain favor with Velasquez and to obtain from Cortez' successor a higher rank in the expedition."

"*Madre de dios!* And we stand here chattering like monkeys in a palm!" Felipe exclaimed. "Cortez has gone aboard *La Capitana* and his only protectors are de Morla and a scribbling clerk who isn't even a soldier of the expedition. We won't bother with these knaves, Piero—they'll keep. We'll go to headquarters, and may Our Lady protect the captain-general if he hasn't yet returned. I'm afraid he's fallen into the hands of Ramirez and his henchmen!"

When Felipe and Piero arrived at headquarters, they found their fears justified. Malinche made them understand with many gestures that their great chief, Malinzin, had not yet returned. Piero looked at Felipe and raised his brows interrogatively.

"Round up a squad of de Morla's footmen," Felipe ordered sharply.

"Quickly, Piero! Bring them here with all speed. We're going aboard the flagship to rescue the captain-general and to arrest a band of traitors. The name of Gonzalo de Moraga, sailing master of *La Capitana,* was also on the scrap of paper!"

Felipe waited outside headquarters until Piero returned with a dozen foot soldiers of de Morla's command. After telling the men what was expected of them, he strode rapidly toward the harbor with Piero and the footmen following closely at his heels. Arriving at the harbor, Felipe quickly commandeered two boats, and the party rowed out to the flagship. They approached the caravel silently and the boats were drawn alongside the vessel with a minimum of noise. A rope ladder hung over the ship's side and, after whispered instructions by Felipe, the party climbed quickly to the deck.

A number of sailors were on the open deck, working by the light of the ship's lanterns, making the vessel ready for her voyage. Their officer came forward as Felipe and his men clambered over the rail.

"Ah, there, de Moraga, a beautiful night for our work," Felipe said carelessly, as the officer drew near and peered at him nearsightedly. "The others are with our prize, of course?"

The sailing master chuckled. "We had an easy time with Don Hernando and his friends. They're in the cabin below the poop castles. Ramirez and the others are with them. But you came near being late, *amigo.* We were preparing to lower the boats and tow the ship out into the bay."

"We were detained by an affair on shore," Felipe said significantly.

"Ah, Aquilar and Mazzoni, eh? Good. I'm glad you got them. Don Diego Velasquez will reward you well for that deed. If it hadn't been for those two, Cortez would never have sailed as commander of the armada."

"How can a few men pull this heavy ship from small boats?" Felipe asked curiously.

"The rest of the crew are in their quarters," the officer said, amused at this landsman's ignorance of things nautical. "They'll be out to give a hand when they're needed."

Felipe's hand, which had stolen to the hilt of his poniard, came up suddenly and the officer found himself looking at twelve inches of glittering steel that menaced his gullet.

"Call your men and get down into the boats we just vacated," Felipe hissed. "Quickly! We've no time to waste on you!"

The frightened sailing master found voice enough to call his men, and seconds later he and the astounded sailors were huddled in the boats. Felipe hoisted the rope ladder to the deck and then assigned two men to guard the door of the crew's quarters at the fore part of the ship. Then he led his men toward the officer's cabin situated below the high stern castles of the caravel. But before they reached the cabin, the door opened and Don Jose Ramirez and a dozen Velasquez adherents emerged from the portal.

"*Carrajo!*" Ramirez swore, draw-

ing his sword and wrapping his cloak about his left arm. "The Swords of Cortez have escaped our bowman and have come to visit us in force. At them, *caballeros,* or we'll hang at the pleasure of Don Hernando!"

The two parties engaged and pandemonium broke loose on the narrow deck. Groans intermingled with shrill Castilian oaths, seasoned occasionally with rumbled Pisan imprecations. The confined space of the deck permitted little maneuvering, and the fighting was largely a matter of standing in a small space to kill or be killed as the case might be. The marvelous swordsmanship of Felipe now stood the attackers in good stead. Several men went down from his lightning cuts and thrusts and the ranks of the defenders began to thin. Piero, too, took his toll. The Pisan was given more to hewing with the sword and did not possess the skill of Felipe with the point. But his enormous strength more than made up for what he lacked in dexterity, and he brought down his man nearly as often as his more agile comrade. The footmen of de Morla added a few to the score, and within a quarter of an hour, the numbers of the defenders had been reduced to four. Felipe had succeeded in isolating Ramirez and was pressing him hard.

"Yield, Don Jose," Felipe advised, parrying a thrust aimed at his throat. "You know the skill I have with the blade. I can kill you at leisure, but the captain-general wants you alive. Yield, or I'll cripple your sword hand for life!"

Felipe's blade became a living thing as he cut a ruddy cross on Don Jose's forehead and then drew a thin red line across the knuckles of Ramirez' right hand. Don Jose tightened his grip on the sword and lunged at Felipe's heart—forgetting in his anger that his adversary was protected by Milan steel. Ramirez' blade snapped short at the hilt and he threw down the useless weapon.

"I yield, and my men will do the same," Don Jose growled at Felipe. "Tell your cutthroats to stop fighting."

But Don Jose's men had preceded him in giving up the battle. Piero and the footmen had the rest of the defenders lined up against a bulwark, and the huge Pisan was busy taking up a collection of poniards and swords. When the enemy had been disarmed, Piero threw the weapons into a large hogshead at one side of the deck and then joined Felipe at the door of the cabin.

"Bind him, Piero," Felipe said, pointing at Don Jose with his sword. "I trust the word of a *caballero,* but it's better to render this one harmless. Work quickly, huge one. Then we'll free Don Hernando and his friends."

Piero bound Ramirez with strips torn from his own cloak and sat him on the floor with his back against the bulwarks. Then he followed Felipe into the cabin.

Cortez, de Morla, and Bernal Diaz were lying on bunks fastened to the

walls of the cabin. Their hands and feet were bound with rawhide thongs and gags of cotton had been thrust in their mouths. The keen poniards of Felipe and the Pisan made short work of the thongs, and the three captives sat up and rubbed their cramped limbs.

"By Our Lady!" Cortez swore, when he could speak. "I'll hang Jose Ramirez and his villains tomorrow at dawn from the highest tree in the forest! I'll invite our Indian allies to the execution and let them see how Hernando Cortez deals with traitors. It may prevent them from attempting the same kind of treachery on a future day!"

Felipe grinned. Cortez seldom lost his temper and was a consummate diplomat. But the thought that he had narrowly escaped being turned over to the tender mercies of Governor Velasquez had aroused his just ire.

That the captain-general fully intended to hang Ramirez and his henchmen, Felipe had not the slightest doubt. But he also knew that Don Jose had powerful friends among the officers, and to hang him would precipitate civil strife in the army. Felipe had braved Cortez' anger before, and he decided to brave it again in the hope of saving the expedition from disaster. Cortez' dream of conquering Mexico might well hinge on the fate of Don Jose Ramirez.

"Excellency, on second thought, don't you think it unwise to hang Don Jose?" Felipe asked quietly.

The others stared at him with open mouths. They would no more have thought of contradicting Cortez than they would think of ordering the sun to rise in the west.

"*Peste!*" Cortez roared. "Am I to be bearded by my own aide? I'm the commander of this expedition, señor, and I'll hang Ramirez from that same rosewood tree under which you and Piero love to gamble!"

"Then you may as well throw your scheme of conquering the Aztec Empire out of the window, as I throw away this useless paper," Felipe told Cortez bluntly. He tore to bits the warrant Cortez had given him and tossed the fragments from a porthole.

"How can you be sure of that?" Cortez asked, springing from the bunk and pacing the cabin with quick, nervous steps. "Is the expedition going to fail because I hang a traitor?"

"When you hang Ramirez, you'll make enemies of his friends and incur the odium of others who are waiting for you to do something that will give them an excuse to depose you," Felipe said firmly. "You yourself said this evening that we were too few to quarrel among ourselves."

Cortez halted his pacing and gazed piercingly at his aide. Felipe was aware that men had become great leaders because they knew the faults of others and used the knowledge to their advantage. Cortez was a great commander because he not only saw and took advantage of the weaknesses in others, he was able to see the faults existing in himself.

"You're right, *amigo,*" Cortez said, laying his hand on Felipe's shoulder. "Forgive me—I was carried away by my anger. I'll turn Ramirez loose with a lecture and confound my enemies. But this isn't the end, Felipe. They'll plot all over again and seek to thwart my dream of conquering this great land for Carlos V. The intrigues of Bishop Fonseca and Governor Velasquez will never cease until they have ruined me."

"I know of a way that would make treachery among the troops almost an impossibility," Felipe said slowly. "But it's a drastic measure and . . ." He looked around at the others.

"Tell us of your plan, *amigo,*" Cortez said, his eyes glinting.

"Scuttle the fleet!" Felipe said tersely.

"*Madre de dios!*" Bernal Diaz wailed. "Would you sever the only tie that binds us to civilization?"

"But it's also the tie that binds the Velasquez faction to their master," Felipe said quietly. "Remove this temptation from before their eyes and they'll follow us to the conquest of Mexico like lambs, instead of plotting to seize the ships to return to Cuba!"

Cortez smacked his fist hard into the palm of his hand. "By our patron, Saint Peter, Felipe, you've thought of the one sure way to end all strife—at least for some time to come. I'll order the captains to remove all supplies and movable goods to shore. We'll sink the ships tonight, *amigos,* leaving only *La Capitana* afloat!"

On the 18th day of August 1519, Cortez led forth his army to fulfill his promise to Montezuma that he would march to the City of Mexico. The Spanish forces consisted of four hundred and fifty men in complete accord, twenty horses, and six cannon. They wound gaily out of Vera Cruz and started the long march to Lake Texcoco—a direct distance of one hundred and sixty miles. Several hundred Totonac allies followed in the wake of the white men, and fifty chiefs carried the baggage of the officers. At the head of the small column of mounted men rode a smiling captain-general, and at his side were a bearded Spaniard and a huge Pisan who were known proudly throughout the army as the Swords of Cortez.

The civilization of the Maya Indians of Yucatan at its peak, 200 A. D. to 600 A. D., compared with contemporary civilizations, surpasses them in some aspects of astronomy and mathematics. The Mayan priests with the naked eye established laws of the universe which the white man was only to discover with the aid of powerful astronomical telescopes: and the perfect Mayan calendar is many centuries older than our own.

—From the files of "Ask Adventure."

The Camp-Fire

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

At first thought, auto racing may seem to have little to do with the average man, but after reading Walt Woestman's informative article—"Speed Through the Years"—in this issue, it was clear to us that in its early days auto racing was a lot more than just a thrilling sport. It served also as a laboratory in which was developed the modern car, which has become an integral part of the lives of most Americans and has contributed immeasurably to the prosperity and expansion of our country.

The racing of cars at high speed in competition, under incredibly difficult conditions, glaringly revealed every mechanical flaw—often at the cost of the driver's life. The angle that fascinated us particularly was to see, from Woestman's account, how as these "bugs" were ironed out one by one, the solution of each led directly to a new problem. For example, as speed increased, braking power had to keep pace; as compression ratios were stepped up, better fuels had to be developed—and so on and on, in a story of continuous improvement—and lessons which were learned the hard way, were quickly applied to stock cars.

So, as we roll along a four-lane highway in today's almost trouble-free family sedan, we can thank not only American automotive genius but also the daredevils who rode the cockpits on those early dirt tracks and cross country races.

Woestman adds a word about his article—

> In "Speed Through the Years" I've tried to cover as much territory as possible without running into too many words. I've left out any mention of the European Grand Prix races. European racing is run on an entirely different basis from ours. They don't, as a usual thing, have any dirt track races. Their formula is different from ours, with the limit now being 91 cubic inches—for blown engines—while ours is 273 inches. All of their engine sizes are given in millimeters and their distances in kilometers. I'm not enough of a mathematician to convert mills to inches and kilos to miles. I know

Adventure readers too well, and I'd be caught-up in numerous letters!

The denouement of William S. Furno's tale—"The Swords of Cortez"—is based on historical fact. Cortez did actually scuttle his fleet at Vera Cruz to prevent his more fainthearted adherents from any thought of turning back from the conquest of Mexico. The author appends these interesting background notes—

In regard to Cortez destroying his ships, most historians agree that the captain-general thought up the idea. However, for the purposes of my story, I delayed the sailing of *La Capitana* until after Don Hernando's decision to scuttle the fleet. Actually, the flagship sailed for Spain several days before the vessels in the harbor of Vera Cruz were sunk. The date of the sailing was July 16, 1519. Although the idea of sinking the ships occurred to Cortez himself, I like to believe that a Felipe may have been present on that long-gone night, and that events happened in the manner in which they are described in "The Swords of Cortez."

Cortez' decision to scuttle the ships came as a result of his discovery of a plot among the partisans of Governor Valesquez to seize one of the vessels and sail to Cuba. The captain-general apprehended the conspirators and they were quickly brought to trial. Two of the plotters were executed, one was condemned to lose his feet, and several others were ordered to be severely whipped. The ringleader of the plot, a priest named Juan Diaz, escaped a just punishment by claiming benefit of clergy, as was usual in those days.

The discovery that there were malcontents in his ranks who might seriously hamper his plans to conquer Mexico greatly disturbed Cortez, and he decided to remove at once the means by which the Velasquez partisans might desert the expedition and return to Cuba. Rather than risk desertion by a portion of his army, the captain-general resolved to destroy the fleet which had brought him from Cuba to conquer a mighty empire for Spain. The captains of the vessels, staunch supporters of Cortez, readily fell in with his plan. They solemnly reported to the captain-general that the ships were worm-eaten and unfit for the sea. Then one night near the end of July 1519, nine ships were sunk, and but one small craft was left afloat.

When news of the scuttling reached Cortez' troops, they promptly broke out in mutiny. That their commander had destroyed their only means of escape from a strange and hostile land, appeared to them the act of a madman. To them, it seemed that nothing remained now but to await death at the hands of the savage Indians, and they sought to lay hands on the man who had knowingly ordered the ships to be destroyed. "Their general," the soldiers said, "had led them like cattle to be butchered in the shambles!" *(Decian que los queria meter en el matadero." Comara, Cronica, cap. 42.)*

Cortez' presence of mind did not desert him in this crisis. He speedily allayed the tumult, and then made an impassioned speech to his assembled troops. The captain-general's words must have touched the right chord in the breasts of the soldiers, and, as he spoke, their resentment gradually melted away. Once again visions of future riches and glory floated before their imaginations, rekindled by the

eloquence of a master orator. Their enthusiasm revived, and, as he concluded, they testified to their change of feeling by their shouts of *"Viva Cortez! A Mexico! A Mexico!"*

And a word from Bob Young who contributes "Gallows Fever," the brief account of a little-known incident which occurred at the hanging of the abolitionist fanatic, John Brown.

Thomas Jonathan Jackson resigned from the Army in 1852, but until the outbreak of the Civil War he taught natural and experimental philosophy and artillery tactics at VMI. He went with Virginia when it seceded, entering (then) the service as a colonel and being commissioned a brigadier general in July of 1861. He was later nicknamed "Stonewall" because of the stubborn military defense he put up in the first battle of Bull Run.

As described in "Gallows Fever," John Wilkes Booth was also among the 1500 spectators at the hanging of John Brown, held at high noon on December 2, 1859.

Booth came of parents who taught him never to destroy any living thing. Although he didn't hew to this philosophy entirely, the sight of death was strange, foreign and shocking to him, which accounts for his reaction to the hanging.

We are sorry to announce the resignation from our Ask Adventure staff of Charles H. Knickerbocker who has served very ably as our expert in the field of piracy and buccaneering. Dr. Knickerbocker has been recalled to active duty with the Army. At the same time, we are fortunate in that A. Hyatt Verrill, whom Dr. K. himself described as "the leading living expert on pirate history," has kindly consented to take over this department.

And speaking of Mr. Verrill, we have just received a letter from him commenting on Webb Garrison's article—"Disaster at Martinique"—which appeared in the April issue of *Adventure*. Mr. Verrill was an eyewitness to the Mt. Pelée eruption, and one of the first on the scene thereafter, so we can accept his testimony as conclusive. Here's what he writes—

I have just read with much interest the article "Disaster at Martinique," in the current issue of *Adventure*. Mr. Garrison did not mention several events fully as interesting as the rescue of Ciparis, such as the heroic action of the captain of the *Roddam* who took his ship to safety in St. Lucia although suffering third degree burns, with men burned to death beside him on the bridge and with his ship on fire, or how the steward of the *Roraima* saved the lives of passengers in their staterooms.

At the time of the eruption I was residing in Dominica, barely fifteen miles from Martinique, and from Morne Tablette at the southern end of the island we had a splendid view of the eruptions.

There are also a few inaccuracies, or rather I might say, omissions, in the story. Mr. Garrison states that there was little apprehension among the inhabitants of St. Pierre. As a matter of fact, there had been terrific earthquakes for weeks and the people were panic-stricken and anxious to leave the town but were prevented from doing so by the authorities who

insisted there was no real danger. Nevertheless, hundreds of the people *did* slip away, some going to Fort de France and other towns and villages on Martinique and many more crossing to Dominica. The author also implies that the eruption was not accompanied by any explosive sound. However, there *was* a terrific detonation that shook Dominica and caused us to think the crater of Dominica's Boiling Lake had erupted. Not until fishermen reported the vast masses of dust and smoke over Martinique did we realize what had taken place. I was a member of one of the first rescue parties to reach the stricken city and was present when Ciparis was taken from his dungeon. The fact that the grating to his cell faced toward the sea is what saved him. Mr. Garrison states that no one knows what happened to Ciparis after he recovered. Actually, he was for several years a sideshow attraction of Barnum and Bailey's circus. I visited the show, and somewhat doubtful of his identity, talked with him in his native Creole patois. His scars would have proved his identity but also he had official documents bearing out his claims.

Ciparis, however, was not the only person in St. Pierre who was saved. In one small house we found a three months old infant unharmed and crying lustily although its mother and the other children were burned to a crisp. The child was taken to Fort de France and, I presume, grew up and may still be living.

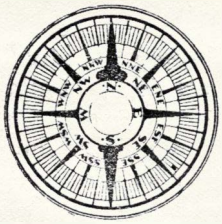
Mr. Garrison mentions some of the "freaky" results of the blast. There were many remarkable things that took place. In one office we found flimsy papers on files absolutely undamaged, although a few feet distant a big safe was a shapeless mass of molten steel. In the Cathedral a marble cherub that formed the font of water was untouched and water still flowed, although the rest of the building was in ruins. A huge statue of Christ on a headland by the harbor mouth was still in place but had been turned completely about and faced inland instead of toward the sea. Beyond a doubt, these freak occurrences resulted from the electrical phenomena that accompanied the blast. Many of those killed but not burned or mutilated were doubtless killed by lightning while others were killed by poisonous gas but were not struck by the incandescent dust and flame.

Today St. Pierre is again inhabited. There are few remaining traces of the holocaust of 1902, but Pelée still rumbles and spews ashes and mud and lava bombs and at any moment may go into violent eruption. I took a great many photographs of the eruption and the stricken city, most of which were given to Dr. Hovey of the American Museum of Natural History, but the one I prize above all others showed what to my mind was the strangest of all the "freak" occurrences: a saloon chair of the *Roraima* carried aft and deposited unharmed astride the jackstaff at the steamer's stern.

In an item which ran in the Ask Adventure Department recently, a reader wanted the facts about a career as a Forest Ranger. In his reply, Arthur H. Carhart mentioned a booklet—"Careers in Forestry." Mr. Carhart has had so many requests for this booklet that he has asked us to tell you that if you're interested in obtaining a copy it may be had free by writing to the Information Division, U.S. Forest Service, Washington 25, D. C.

—K. W. G.

LOST TRAILS



NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry will be run three times. Requests by and concerning women are declined, as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

Sister and brother-in-law of Clyde Earl Johnson would like to hear from anyone knowing his present address. He was last heard from in April of 1945. At that time he was working on the railroad at Richmond, California. He usually goes by the nickname of "Pat." Send information to Ora M. Groom, P.O. Box 257, Glasco, Kansas.

Will anyone knowing the location, past or present, of Lt. Winfield Samuels, Co. B, 503rd Parachute Regt., who was wounded on Corregidor, please communicate with Lt. Jack Herzig, c/o Beetha, 37-15 81st Street, Jackson Heights, New York.

Would like to contact George A. Rhodes, my father. Born in Chicago 64 years ago, had lived in St. Louis many years. Has three adult children. May be working as printing pressman or construction camp cook. Due to imagined difficulty may be using name Frank Miller. Eugene Rhodes, 5214-48th S.W., Seattle, Washington.

Would like to hear from anyone knowing the present address of my brother, Frank Grizzell. He has not been heard from in ten years. His last address was Baltimore, Maryland. Please send information to John W. Grizzell, Route 1, Ben Hill, Georgia.

I would like to contact Bryant Clontz. Lost track of him before World War I. I believe he was in the Marines. Write Gordon M. Clontz, General Delivery, Canton, North Carolina.

Leslie Londo, Lt., U. S. Army Air Corps, was stationed at Hamilton Field, California, in 1943. Later we lost touch when I went overseas to the C-B-I Theater and he, I understand, went out to a base in the Pacific Islands. He was a writer in civilian life and his home, I believe, was in Michigan, possibly Detroit. I should like to communicate with Leslie again, and if he, or anyone who knows him, should see this notice, please write to John Crane, P. O. Box 330, San Francisco, California.

I would like to know the whereabouts of Douglas Duff, possibly of North Carolina, age about 32-34. Anyone knowing his address or having information concerning Duff, please write to H. L. Manry, 1225 Palos Street, Athens, Tennessee.

I hope that through your magazine I may get in touch with one who was kind to me during a difficult time. His name is S. B. "Bud" Norstrom, who lived in Los Angeles until 1930 and had been a driver for a laundry. Please write Jack Ferry, 25 Arcadia Terrace, Santa Monica, California.

ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

Casablanca—boom town.

Query:—Back in 1943-1944, I spent a considerable amount of time in Casablanca, French Morocco. And I have always been interested in returning.

Do you have any information concerning conditions there now, and would I be able to find a place to stay?

I am also interested in the city of Tangier, Spanish Morocco, and would like all the information that you may have at your disposal concerning passport and visa requirements. As I understand it, no passports or visas are required for Tangier.

Also, just outside of Oran, Algeria, there is the city of Sidi-bel-Abbes. Can you give me any information concerning this city? The size, distance from Oran, the population by races or nationalities, and isn't the French Foreign Legion training base there?

—Richard C. Nafe
South Bend, Indiana.

Reply by H. W. Eades:—I believe that French Morocco is "booming" right now and that Casablanca has more than doubled its population since the war. Population in 1946: 551,000, of whom about one-third European. There is a British colony numbering about 2,000 people. Accommodation in this city is probably crowded, as it can be expected to be in any rapidly growing place.

Sidi-bel-Abbes had a population of 65,500 in 1947. It is on the main Mekinez-Tunis railway line 48 miles south of Oran. More than half the population is European and it seems to be growing, although not with the mushroom growth of Casablanca. It is the chief town of an arrondissement in the Dept. of Oran, and is 1552 feet above sea level. It is the headquarters of the 1st Regiment of the French Foreign Legion. The town is encircled by a crenellated and bastioned wall with a fosse. Two broad streets traverse the town from east to west and north to south, the latter dividing the civil from the military

quarters. Much of the town's activities center around catering to Legionnaires.

Tangier had a population in 1941 of about 100,000, mostly Moslem or Jew; there is a British colony numbering about 1,200. French, Spanish and Arabic are recognized as the official languages. The Tangier zone is ruled by an international body, British, French and Spanish, the existence of which is recognized as temporary. The territory is neutral and demilitarized. Tangier has a mixed tribunal dealing with all cases involving foreigners, except subjects of the U.S.A., which has not adhered to the international convention and still has capitulatory rights. The same applies in Spanish and French Morocco, where U.S. citizens are tried before their own consular courts. Since U.S. citizens have extra-territorial rights, passports are neither recognized nor required. Before leaving for the country, it would be as well to check on this point.

Casablanca is a modern city for the most part. Tangier is an old one, and a seaport with a reputation something like that of Port Said in the old days before it was cleaned up.

The sea rovers.

Query:—I am interested in the Vikings, and would like to know some things about these pirates of Europe.

First, I would like to know something about their weapons, and ships. The way they lived on their ships and their tactics in attacking the villages of Europe. How did they live in their homeland? And I'd like to know something about their raids on England, France and Germany during the 10th century.

—Lowell Erickson
Kansas City, Missouri

Reply by Charles H. Knickerbocker:—The Vikings were a group of Norse seamen who infested the coasts of Western Europe in the Middle Ages. The word "Viking" means sea rover in the Scandinavian dialect. The Viking ships were tiny craft, long, narrow, and drawing only a few feet. The ships were pointed at both ends. They had a single mast with a large square sail, but the primary motive power was oars. The early Viking ships had a crew of about sixty with ten oars on each side, the crew rotating at the oars in shifts. By the middle of the eleventh century, when the Vikings were at the height of their power, the ships carried a couple of hundred men and thirty or forty oars to the side. No slaves were employed at the oars—the crew were free men and trained warriors. Along the sides of the ship were hung the shields of the crew, each emblazoned with a colorful emblem. The chief weapons of the Vikings were swords, axes, javelins, spears, and arrows and the men customarily wore shirts of chain mail.

The Vikings were not individual sea robbers. They were carefully governed and regulated. They were pirates chiefly to supplement the resources of their cold and barren homeland. It was part of national policy to colonize wherever possible, forming independent little communities to serve as bases for future raids.

One of the earliest Viking raids was in 795 on an island in Dublin Bay. The leader of this raid, one Turgesius, made further raids in Ireland until he became ruler of almost half that island. From Ireland, the Vikings made raids of Scotland and won control of that country's entire west coast.

In the ninth century, the Vikings raided the important rivers of Western Europe: the Seine, the Rhine,

the Somme, the Scheldt. They overran and settled Normandy, from which their descendants launched the Norman Conquest. In the next two centuries, Viking power extended to Spain, to Italy, to Northern Africa, Iceland, and Greenland.

One of the famous alliances of the Middle Ages, the Hanseatic League, was formed primarily to oppose the terror of the Vikings. Lengthy wars ensued between the Vikings and Hanseatics, in which the Hanseatics finally gained the upper hand. The Hanseatics, however, subsequently became formidable pirates in their own right.

Plenty of pilots.

Query:—I have four years' training under the G. I. Bill and would like to know what chances there are of getting employment if I took a course in flying at the present time. Is there any chance that the war will increase possibilities of employment? It makes no difference to me where I would have to travel. In short I want to know what are chances at present and where would I possibly look for employment after graduation.

I am a veteran of last war, five years in the infantry; am 28 years old; have not completed high school but have done considerable studying. I hope you can enlighten me somewhat before I go ahead and jump into something that might not get me anywhere.

—George B. Shippey
Chester, Pa.

Reply by O. B. Myers:—I would not advise you to take a course in flying with a hope of thereby getting employment as a pilot. The good jobs for pilots, with the commercial air lines, all call for at least 1000 hours of prior experience, much of it on multi-engine aircraft. A course in flying would give you only the bare minimum of 35 hours or so necessary to solo and get your private license on light airplane types. To proceed to get the needed instruction for a transport license, and then the further experience required, would involve a prohibitive cost.

These good jobs are practically all filled from the ranks of former Air Force or Navy fliers, who of course accumulated their air time at Government expense. There are normally enough of these ex-military pilots floating around to more than fill the demand for the lesser jobs as well, such as crop dusting, charter, flight instructors, etc.

With your education and background you would probably get employment much quicker and easier by means of some training in mechanical work, leading to aircraft mechanic, engine mechanic, electrical or radio specialist. Such courses are still available at many good private schools under the G.I. Bill, jobs are always plentiful in both military and commercial fields, and the demand will certainly be heightened by the war emergency.

Pioneer cookery.

Query:—I would like to know the step by step procedure for making the old-fashioned *Indian corn maize*, sometimes called *Pinole*.

How long will it keep from spoiling? How is it best carried? How much of it should a man eat at one time? And what kind of corn is best to use?

—Charles W. Dow
Westbrook, Maine

Reply by Paul M. Fink:—Pinole, rockihominy, nocake, etc., is all the same thing, corn parched and ground. It was in use as a travel food by the Indians when the whites first came, and was soon adopted by the hunters and woods-runners, being a food best suited for their purposes, weighing little as compared to its food values. and being so easily prepared.

To make it, take well-dried white corn and parch in a shallow pan in the oven at moderate heat until it turns to a light golden brown. Stir several times in the process so all grains will be evenly parched. Then grind to a coarse meal, much coarser than the corn meal of the stores. A shade coarser than drip-ground coffee is about right. The old time coffee grinder, if set up fine, will do the trick.

This will keep indefinitely if kept from moisture, and can be carried in any tightly tied bag. Generally it is mixed with water—cold—and drunk, two or three tablespoons to a cup. Even if you have no other food, four ounces of this three times a day will keep you going. In pioneer days maple sugar was often mixed with rockihominy, making it more palatable as well as adding to its nutritive qualities.

Where Indians fought in the Civil War.

Query:—I would like very much any information you might have on the Battles of Pea Ridge and Cross Hollow. I can find very little information on these two Civil War battles. I have just recently moved down to this region and would like more information than is available here.

—Gus T. Watts
Pea Ridge, Arkansas.

Reply by R. G. Emery:—During December, 1861, Union generals Pope and Prentiss succeeded in restoring Federal authority throughout the north and central portions of Missouri. The Confederate general, Price, held out at Springfield but, late in January, '62, General Curtis, U.S.A., moved against him with 12,000 men and 50 guns.

Price retreated to Arkansas, where he was joined by McCullough. Both of them came under the command of General Van Dorn, the Confederate Casanova. Curtis—an excellent soldier—pursued until he reached the high ground in the Ozarks called Pea Ridge. (The subsequent battle is called "Elkhorn Tavern" by some historians.)

Here Curtis entrenched and waited. After putting out security detachments, he had 10,250 men and 48 guns.

Van Dorn succeeded in collecting 20,000 troops plus 5,000 tame Choctaws and Cherokees, commanded by a Massachusetts adventurer named Pike. A well-executed march brought him into Curtis' rear. (Van Dorn was a very able commander, when he took time off from pleasanter pursuits to prove it.)

However, the nature of the ground was such that his enveloping force became split. On the first day—March 7th—his left succeeded in crushing the Union right but his own right was separated and beaten. McCullough was killed.

The next day—the 8th—Curtis extended his line and enveloped both of Van Dorn's flanks. A murderous enfilade from both right and left drove the Confederates from the field. Van Dorn lost 5,000 men; the Federals, 1,350.

It was a well-fought engagement on both sides. It was unique in Civil War battles because of the presence

of the Indians. However, they didn't prove to be of much use. They hadn't, evidently, yet been civilized to the point where they saw any sense in facing artillery. At the first discharge, they reverted to the bushes. Also, the battle ended the serious phase of the war in Missouri.

I am unable to discover any reference to a battle of "Cross Hollow." Could it be, locally, part of the same terrain?

Biggest battlewagons ever built.

Query:—I would like to know, what was the largest battleship ever built? Also please tell me five or six more, next in size, and owned by what nations?

—Emil Archambault
Los Angeles, California

Reply by Frank Herold:—Here's the seven largest battleships ever built (see below) and I'll throw in a very brief history of the first three because they aren't afloat anymore. Also bear in mind that I don't have access to what battleships may be behind the "Iron Curtain."

The YAMATO was commissioned in secrecy in the Kure Navy Yard, Japan, on December 17, 1941, just ten days after Pearl Harbor Day. She was sunk by planes of the U.S. Fleet in the East China Sea on April 7, 1945. Bombs had her pretty well crippled. She was listing heavily to port with the armor belt on the starboard side high out of water. Torpedo Squadron 9 then "hit her in the belly" on that side and she slowly rolled over and sank. She had about 2500 officers and men aboard; a total of 280 survived.

The MUSASHI was completed in August, 1942, and was a sister ship of the YAMATO. On October 24, 1944, she was sunk by bombs and torpedoes from U.S. Naval Aircraft in the Battle for Leyte Gulf.

The SHINANO was intended and designed along the same lines as the YAMATO and MUSASHI but during her building it was decided to convert her to an aircraft carrier. When completed she was much larger than our MIDWAY class. She had a standard displacement of 59,000 tons, fully loaded tonnage was 71,890 tons, and she had a speed of 27 knots. She was commissioned on November 18, 1944 and it was decided to move her from the Yokosuka Naval Dockyard to the Inland Sea so that she'd be at a place not subject to as many air attacks. She was enroute to the Inland Sea with three destroyers escorting her when the U.S. Submarine ARCHERFISH sent her to the bottom with torpedoes on November 29, 1944, just 11 days after she was commissioned.

You may confirm any of the above by consulting "Jane's Fighting Ships" at your public library.

NATION:	NAME OF SHIP:	Tonnage: Standard	Tonnage: Loaded	Length Overall:	Beams:	Largest Guns:
Jap	YAMATO	64,000	70,800	863′	127′	18.1″
Jap	MUSASHI					
Jap	SHINANO					
U.S.	IOWA	45,000	52,000	890′	108′	16″
U.S.	NEW JERSEY					
U.S.	MISSOURI					
U.S.	WISCONSIN					

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American Folklore and Legend: *Songs, dances, regional customs; African survivals, religious sects; voodoo*—HAROLD PREECE, *c/o Adventure.*

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, *c/o Adventure.*

Auto Racing—WALT WOESTMAN. 2310 Midlothian Drive, Altadena, Calif.

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, c/o Adventure.

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Mattawan, N. J.

Big Game Hunting in North America: *Guides and equipment*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Boxing—Col. JOHN V. GROMBACH, c/o *Adventure.*

Camping and Outdoor Cookery—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Canoeing—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E. Prince Albert, Sask., Canada.

Coins and Medals—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th, N. Y. C.

Fencing—COL. JOHN V. GROMBACH, c/o *Adventure.*

Fishing, Fresh Water: *Fly and bait casting; bait casting outfits; fishing trips*—JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

Fishing, Salt Water: *Bottom fishing, surf casting; trolling; equipment and locations*—C. BLACKBURN MILLER, c/o *Adventure.*

Fly and Bait Casting Tournaments—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Globetrotting and Vagabonding—NORMAN D. FORD. c/o *Adventure.*

Hiking—Dr. Claude P. Fordyce, c/o *Adventure*

Horses and Horsemanship—JOHN RICHARD YOUNG. c/o *Adventure.*

Lost Treasure: *Tales of lost mines and treasure*—RAYMOND DOW, 2922 164th St., Flushing, N. Y.

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling: *Regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, c/o *Adventure.*

Piracy and Buccaneering: *Exploits, plunders, lives and deaths of pirates in history and legend*—A. HYATT VERRILL, Box 1211, Lake Worth, Florida.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *American and foreign*—ROY S. TINNEY, Brielle, N. J.

Shotguns: *American and foreign; wing shooting and field trials; gunsmithing*—ROY S. TINNEY, Brielle, N. J.

Skiing—WILLIAM C. CLAPP, The Mountain Book Shop, North Conway, N. H.

Small Boating and Cruising: *Skiffs, sailboats, powerboats, outboards*—COL. ROLAND BIRNN, c/o *Adventure.*

Songs of Campfire, Foc'sle and Bunkhouse—HARRY KIRBY MCCLINTOCK, 3911 So. Pacific Ave., San Pedro, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 2, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., N. Y., N. Y.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal; customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Entomology: *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: *The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Forestry, Tropical: *Tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, care of U. S. Forest Service, Glenn Bld., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *Reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, c/o *Adventure.*

Horology: *The science of time and timekeepers*—JOHN W. MCGRATH, 434 W. 120th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Mining, Prospecting, anad Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America, Prospectors' outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, c/o *Adventure.*

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *History, operation, broadcast, short wave; Television*—DONALD MCNICOL, c/o *Adventure.*

Railroads: *In the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St. Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling: HAPSBURG LIEBE, c/o *Adventure.*

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

United States Army—COL. R. G. EMERY, *U.S.A. Ret.*, c/o *Adventure.*

United States Coast Guard—LIEUT. C. B. LEMON, U.S.C.G., Ret., Box 221 Equinunk, Wayne Co., Penna.

United States Marine Corps—MAJ. ROBERT H. RANKIN, U.S.M.C., c/o *Adventure.*

United States Navy—FRANK HEROLD, 1647 Charon Rd., Jacksonville, Fla.

Merchant Marine—KERMIT W. SALYER, c/o *Adventure.*

Military Aviation—O. B. MYERS, c/o *Adventure.*

Federal Investigation Activities—*Secret Service, Immigration, Customs, Border Patrol, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, c/o *Adventure.*

The French Foreign Legion—GEORGE C. APPELL, c/o *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask., Canada.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, c/o *Adventure.*

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

★New Guinea—L. P. B. ARMIT, c/o *Adventure.*

★New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa—TOM L. MILLS, 41 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★Australia—ALAN FOLEY, 243 Elizabeth St. Sydney, Australia.

★South Sea Islands—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, Taylor Memorial Home, 79 Lagoon St., North Narrabeen, N.S.W., Australia.

Hawaii, Christmas, Wake, Canton, Midway and Palmyra Islands—CARL J. KUNZ, 211-3 Naska, Kahului, Maui, T.H.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** *Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya*—GORDON MACCREAGH, c/o *Adventure.* **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans* — CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, c/o *Adventure.* **4** *Bechuanaland, Southern Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, c/o *Adventure.*

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

Asia, Part 1 ★*China, Japan, Hong Kong* —THOMAS BOWEN PARTINGTON, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., London, W. C. 2, England. **2** ★*Siam, Malay States, Straits Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, Ceylon*—V. B. WINDLE, Box 813, Rancho Santa Fe, Calif. **3** *Persia, Arabia*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, c/o *Adventure.* **4** *Palestine*—CAPTAIN H. W. EADES, 3808

West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **5** *Afghanistan, Northern India, Kashmir, Khyber Pass*—ROLAND WILD, Savage Club, 1 Carlton House Terrace, London, S.W.1, England.

★ **The British Isles; Gibraltar, Malta and Cyprus**—THOMAS BOWEN PARTINGTON, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., London, W. C. 2, England.

South America, Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile*—EDGAR YOUNG, c/o *Adventure*. **2** Brazil—ARTHUR J. BURKS, c/o *Adventure*.

West Indies—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, c/o *Adventure*.

Baffinland and Greenland — VICTOR SHAW, c/o *Adventure*.

★ **Newfoundland**—CAPT. LEO C. MURPHY, J. P., Great War Veterans' Office, St. John's Newfoundland.

Mexico, Part 1 *Northern Border States*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. **2** ★*West Coast beginning with State of Sinaloa; Central and Southern Mexico, including Tabasco, Chiapas, Campeche, Quintana Roo and Yucatan*—WALLACE MONTGOMERY, Central Sanalona, S. A., Costa Rica, Sinaloa, Mexico.

Canada, Part 1 ★*Southeastern Quebec*—WILLIAM MACMILLAN, 89 Laurentide Ave., Quebec, Canada. **2** ★*Southern Ontario*—HARRY M. MOORE, 579 Isabella, Pembroke, Ont., Canada. **3** ★*Northern Saskatchewan; Indian Life and language, hunting, trapping*—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E., *Prince Albert, Sask., Canada.* **4** ★*Yukon, British Columbia, Northwest Territories, Alberta, Western Arctic*—PHILIP H. GODSELL, F. R. G. S., 531 A. 15th St., South, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada.

Western U. S., Part 1—*Pacific Coast States* — FRANK WINCH, c/o *Adventure*. **2** *New Mexico: Indians, etc.*—H. F. ROBINSON, 1412 West Fruit, Albuquerque, New Mexico. **3** *Nevada, Montana and Northern Rockies*—FRED W. EGELSTON, P. O. Box 297, Elko, Nev. **4** *Idaho and environs*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill. **5** *Arizona, Utah*—C. C. ANDERSON, 616 N. 3rd St., Phoenix, Ariz. **6** *Texas, Oklahoma*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Eastern U. S., Part 1 *Maine*—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. **2** *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, P.O. Box 716, Woodmont, Conn. **3** *Chesapeake Bay and tributaries; inland waterways, New York to Florida*—COL. ROLAND BIRNN, c/o *Adventure*. **4** *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C., S. C., Fla., Ga.*—HAPSBURG LIEBE, c/o *Adventure*. **5** *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountain south of Virginia*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

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