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Adventure
POPULAR PUBLICATIONS
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by GORDON MacCREAGH
TORPEDO
by RICHARD SALE
L.G. BLOCHMAN
H. BEDFORD-JONES
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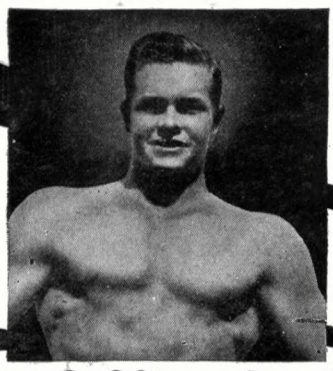
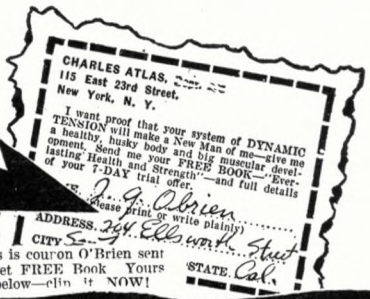
HE Mailed This Coupon



J. G. O'BRIEN
Atlas Champion
Cup Winner

This is an ordinary snapshot of one of Charles Atlas' California pupils.


CHARLES ATLAS,
115 East 23rd Street,
New York, N. Y.

I want proof that your system of DYNAMIC TENSION will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your FREE BOOK—"Everlasting Health and Strength"—and full details of your 7-DAY trial offer.

Please print or write plainly)

ADDRESS 264 Ellsworth Street

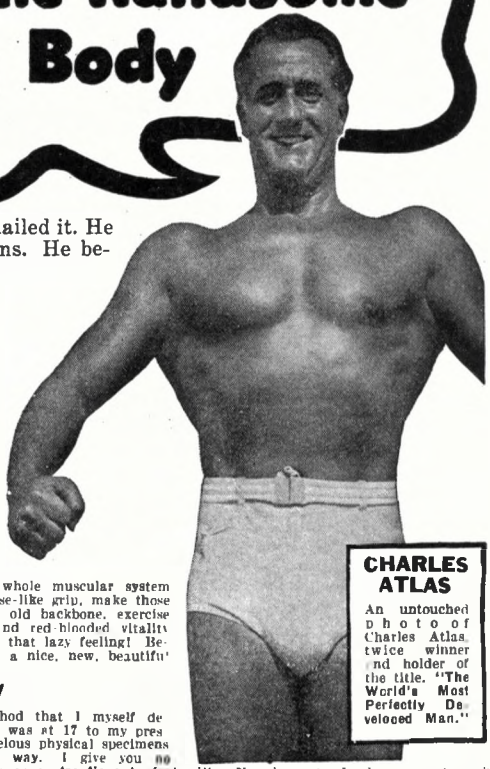
CITY San Mateo STATE Cal.

This is couron O'Brien sent to get FREE Book. Yours is below—clip it NOW!

...and Here's the Handsome Prize-Winning Body I Gave Him!

J. G. O'BRIEN saw my coupon. He clipped and mailed it. He got my free book and followed my instructions. He became a New Man. NOW read what he says:

"Look at me NOW! *'Dynamic Tension'* WORKS! I'm proud of the natural, easy way you have made me an 'Atlas Champion'!"
J. G. O'Brien.



CHARLES ATLAS
An untouched photo of Charles Atlas, twice winner and holder of the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

"I'll prove that YOU, too, can be a NEW MAN" — *Charles Atlas*

I DON'T care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add SOLID MUSCLE to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own home—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system INSIDE and OUTSIDE! I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new, beautiful suit of muscle!

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"Dynamic Tension!" That's the ticket! The identical natural method that I myself developed to change my body from the scrawny, skinny-chested weakling I was at 17 to my present superman physique! Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens — my way. I give you no gadgets or contraptions to fool with. You learn to develop your strength through "Dynamic Tension." You simply utilize the DORMANT muscle-power in your own God-given body—watch it increase and multiply double-quick into real, solid LIVE MUSCLE.

My method—"Dynamic Tension"—will turn the trick for you. No theory—every exercise is practical. And, man, so easy! Spend only 15 minutes a day in your own home. From the very start you'll be using my method of "Dynamic Tension" almost unconsciously every minute of the day—walking, bending over, etc.—to BUILD MUSCLE and VITALITY.

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In it I talk to you in straight-from-the-shoulder language. Packed with instructional pictures of myself and pupils—fellows who became NEW MEN in strength, my way. Let me show you what I helped THEM do. See what I can do for YOU! For a real thrill, send for this book today. AT ONCE. **CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83-L, 115 East 23rd Street, New York City.**

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Dept. 83-L, 115 East 23rd St., New York City.

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Make me Prove

THAT I CAN TRAIN YOU AT HOME FOR A Good Job in Radio

I TRAINED THESE MEN

Here is a quick way to better pay. Radio offers you the opportunity to make $5, $10 a week extra in spare time a few months from now and to prepare for good full-time Radio jobs paying up to $50 a week. MAIL COUPON. Get my Sample Lesson FREE. Examine it, read it—see how easy it is to understand. See how I train you at home in spare time to be a Radio Operator or Radio Technician.

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Broadcasting stations (882 in the U.S.) employ thousands of Radio Technicians with average pay among the country's best paid industries. Repairing, servicing, selling home and auto Radio receivers (there are 50,197,000 in use) gives good jobs to thousands. Many other Radio Technicians take advantage of the opportunities to have their own service or retail Radio businesses. Think of the many good-pay jobs in connection with Aviation, Commercial, Police Radio and Public Address Systems. N.R.I. gives you the required knowledge of Radio for those jobs. N.R.I. trains you to be ready when Television opens new jobs. Yes, Radio Technicians make good money because they use their heads as well as their hands. They must be trained.

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Nearly every neighborhood offers opportunities for a part time Radio Technician to make good money fixing Radio sets. I give you special training to show you how to start cashing in on these opportunities early. You also get a modern Professional Radio Servicing Instrument. My fifty-fifty method—half working with Radio parts, half studying my Lesson Texts—makes learning Radio at home interesting, fascinating, practical.

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MAIL THE COUPON. I'll send you a Sample Lesson and my 64-page book FREE. Learn about my Course; the types of jobs in different branches of Radio. Read letters from more than 100 men I have trained so you can see what they are doing, earning. MAIL THE COUPON in an envelope or paste it on a penny postal.

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I repaired some Radio sets when I was on my tenth lesson. I really don't see how you can give so much for such a small amount of money. I made $600 in a year and a half, and I have made an average of $10 a week—just spare time.

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I am now Chief Radio Engineer at Kankakee Ordinance Works and very pleased with my new position. If I had not taken the N. R. I. Course I might be digging ditches or perhaps unemployed.

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For several years I have been in business for myself making around $200 a month. Business has steadily increased. I have N.R.I. to thank for my start in this field.

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Goose Creek, Texas

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Every man likely to go into military service, every soldier, sailor, marine, should mail the Coupon Now! Learning Radio helps men get extra rank, extra prestige, more interesting duty at pay up to 6 times a private's base pay. Also prepares for good Radio jobs after service ends. IT'S SMART TO TRAIN FOR RADIO NOW!

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MR. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 1MS9
NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE, Washington, D.C.

Mail me FREE, without obligation, Sample Lesson and 64-page book "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No Salesman will call. Write plainly.)

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Name .....

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DECEMBER ISSUE ON SALE NOVEMBER 7TH

Vol. 106, No. 1 for November, 1941 Best of New Stories

Cover by A. R. Tilburne
Headings by Hamilton Greene, Lynn Bogue Hunt, Harry Burne and I. B. Hazelton
Kenneth S. White, Editor

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"THE JAWS OF DEATH CLAMPED DOWN ON ME!"

A true experience of BALLARD DEAN, *Kirkland, Washington*

"THE THING sprang out of the earth one bitterly cold evening as I was returning to camp after an all-day deer hunt," writes Mr. Dean. "I suffered excruciating agony, as it bit into my leg. It was a bear trap, illegally set for deer.

"FRANTICALLY, I TRIED TO GET LOOSE as the cold knifed through my clothing. With sinking heart, I found my struggles of no avail. In a few hours, if help could not be summoned, I would freeze to death. Darkness came on as I fought hopelessly with the strong steel jaws.

EN I THOUGHT OF MY FLASHLIGHT. There was a chance that other re- ning hunters might be in the woods. Flashing the bright beam off and on, my efforts were finally rewarded. Thanks to those 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries, two men saw my signal and rescued me from that death trap.

(Signed) Ballard Dean

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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 addressed to *Lost Trails* will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and for 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 for any other reason in the judgment of the editorial staff. No charge is made for publication of notices.

David Armstrong, son of a physician, was a Corporal in the U. S. Army, Signal Corps, Corozal, Panama, with me during 1930-33. He stayed in the Army a year longer than I. Last seen in Philadelphia, Pa., believed to have married, and now living in San Francisco. If you see this, Dave, please get in touch with your old friend. Louis M. Headley, 1204 N. W. 29th Ter., Miami, Fla.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Amos Leslie Ingersoll who was last heard of in Minnesota about 1917, please get in touch with Ellard L. Long, Newell, S. Dak.

My brother, William Ray Harvey, 52 years old. Was a private in Battery E, 348th Field Artillery, 91st Division, A.E.F. Reported dead in France in 1918. Was supposed to have been seen alive at Mountain View, Wyoming, March, 1940. Also, want information of William Harvey. Private in Co. G., 314th Infantry, 78th Division, A.E.F., 1918. Any information about these men will be greatly appreciated by George E. Harvey, 304—9th Avenue North, Nampa, Idaho.

John E. Vittitoe, last heard from around Pactola and Rapid City, S. Dak. If you see this, John, write me. Any information will be appreciated by C. R. Boone, R. 4, Box 135, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

My mother, born Mary Herrin in Island Pond, Me., married my father, William Foster, and they lived for several years in Bangor. I was the youngest of six children. When I was about two years old, my father, who was freight conductor for the M.C.R.R., was accidentally killed. That was about 1887. Soon after, my mother married Charles Leonard, a ship's steward, and went to Mass. I am now 56, and have tried for many years to locate their possible children. If any are living, or if any reader can give me any information about them, please write James Garfield Foster, c-o The Billboard Pub. Co., Cincinnati, O.

Information wanted about Caleb Hughes, age 47, World War veteran. He left home in Texas in 1921 and wrote brother in 1925 from some town in N.Y. and from Chester, Pa. According to War Department, he had been in Wilmington, Del. during 1929-30. He only went to fourth grade in school and had always worked on farm or ranch or done common labor. His mother is now deceased. Please communicate with Robert E. Mahaffey, Box 684, Oklahoma City, Okla.

Nat Williams, (generally known as 'Old Kentuck' while in the service), P. O. Box #276, Veterans Home, Napa Co., Calif., would like to hear from John W. Williams, (called 'The Psalm Singer' by his intimates), and Harry C. Morris, (a railroad man), both of whom served in Co. "H" of the 50th Iowa Vol. Infantry in 1898. Also Charles A. Moore, and Sgt. Joseph C. (Dago) Watkins, both of whom served in Co. "I" of the same regiment at the same time.

Cpl. Vernts or Verntz, Co. E, 1st. U. S. Engnrs., wounded in the battle of Ste. Mihiel. I have a photo taken of you at the time. You may have it if you wish. . . . During the last unpleasantness I was a 1st Lieut. of Inf. attached to the 1st. U. S. Engnrs. and in my official capacity carried and used a small camera. During the battle of Ste. Mihiel, in the neighborhood of Mont Sec, I think, I took a picture of a wounded American soldier surrounded by German prisoners. The kodak being of the "autographic" type, I noted on the film "Cpl. Vernts (z)". In clearing out an old trunk recently, I came across a print of the above and vaguely remember that at the time I took the photo I promised the wounded man a copy of the picture, if it turned out well. In the excitement of battle, and afterward I forgot all about sending him a print. Apparently, he was a member of Co. E. 1st. Engrs. or he might have been of some infantry outfit. H. S. Bonney, 1537 Euterpe St., New Orleans, La.

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Big working surface, all metal, compact, strong, quiet, rigid, attractive. Two metal wings, correct working height.

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For those who have no typewriter stand or handy place to use a typewriter, I make this special offer. This attractive stand that ordinarily sells for $4.85 can be yours with L. C. Smith for only $3.00 extra—payable 25c a month. *Quality built. Just note all its convenient features.* (See coupon.)

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This late L. C. Smith with basket shift is the machine used by schools, large corporations and business houses the country over. The perfect, all-purpose typewriter for correspondence, office work, billing, manifold work, etc. Has all modern improvements you need, stands hard service — IT'S YOURS AT ONLY $3.00 A MONTH.

WIDE CARRIAGE MODELS

Wide carriage L. C. Smiths for government reports, large office forms, billing, etc. The 14 inch carriage takes paper 14" wide, has 13" writing line—only $3.00 extra with order. The 18" takes paper 18" wide, has 16" writing line—only $5.00 extra with order. (See coupon.)

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Send me L. C. Smith (F.O.B. Chicago) for 10 days' trial. If I keep it I will pay $3.00 per month until easy term price ($38.85) is paid. If I am not satisfied I can return it express collect.

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Information you can't get elsewhere

THE life and hard times of a crustacean hermit.

Request:—I sincerely hope that you are the right gentleman to write concerning a hermit crab as a pet. A few days ago at a beach I caught one in shallow water. I would like all the information you could give me on such matters, as:

What would you feed him?

What way would you fix a fish bowl for the crab's best benefit?

Will he thrive in captivity?

And anything else you think would be beneficial to me in taking care of the crab.

Thanking you in advance,

—Louis DuPree,
908 W. 4th St.,
Greenville, S. C.

P. S.—Please hurry and write. He's liable to die any minute now.

Reply by C. Blackburn Miller:—Your interesting query pertaining to your captive hermit crab has just been forwarded to me and I am hastening to reply, trusting that my letter will reach you ere your crab sheds his last shell and departs for that crustacean Valhalla from which there is no return trip.

First and foremost, the question of diet is simple. They are fish eaters and most any variety are regarded as delectable morsels by these hermit crabs.

A fish bowl or better yet, an aquarium with a slanting bottom of sand where he can occasionally crawl out of the water if he should desire and rest on some rock. They spend most of their time beneath the surface, but I have seen them sunning themselves on a beach.

He will thrive in captivity provided you furnish him with a series of shells, all slightly larger than the one he now occupies so that he may choose a suitable one for his new home. Under favorable conditions these crabs appear to grow quite rapidly and they are very particular about choosing a new home. The shell has to fit him or he will have none of it and consequently it is better to have a supply on hand from which he can select the one most suitable to his individual anatomy. The Whelks, Crossbarred and Conch shells seem to be their favorites.

All the hermit crabs that I have ever known, all lived in salt water and I rather imgine that a saline solution would be necessary to his continued existence. I suppose, however, that you have provided such an element for his use.

I trust that this information may be of benefit to your guest.

HOMESTEADING on America's last frontier.

Request:—I am interested in obtaining information regarding homestead opportunities on Kodiak Island Alaska. This location has been recommended by the Department of the Interior as being exceptionally adaptable to livestock raising due to its mild climate and plenteous grazing lands.

My present capital is in excess of that recommended by the department as minimum for successful homesteading in the territory.

One important concern in the venture, is the cost and availability of transportation. I should, of course, make a

(Continued on page 116)

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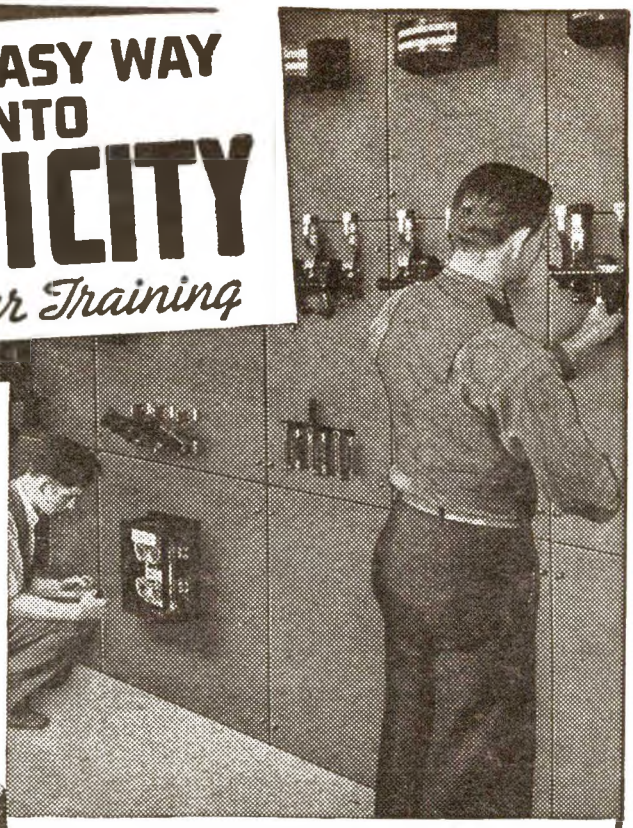
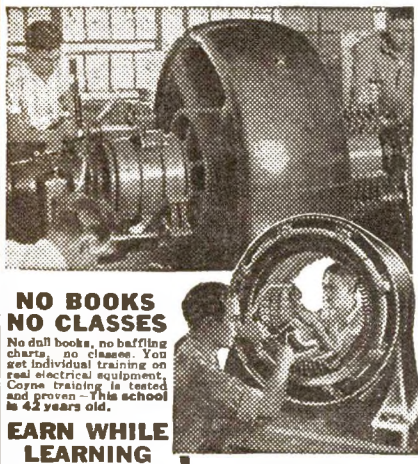
I'll Finance Your Training





NO BOOKS NO CLASSES

No dull books, no baffling charts, no classes. You get individual training on real electrical equipment. Coyne training is tested and proven—This school is 42 years old.

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If you need part-time work to help pay your living expenses I'll help you get it. Then, in 12 brief weeks, in the great roaring shops of Coyne, I train you as you never dreamed you could be trained...on one of the greatest outlays of electrical apparatus ever assembled, real dynamos, engines, power plants, autos, switchboards, transmitting stations . . . everything from doorbells to farm power and lighting . . . full-sized . . . in full operation every day!

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Armature Winder
Sub-Station Operator
Auto & Aviation Ignition
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Service Station Owner
Air Conditioning
Electric Refrigeration
Radio Servicing
and many others

Our Employment Bureau for graduates gives FREE lifetime employment service.

Learn Without Books in 90 DAYS

Get into the fascinating, fast growing, well paid field of Electricity—**a field that offers you opportunities and a future—in good times and bad times**—a field that is **a permanent necessity in prosperity or depression.** Here is **your chance to prepare yourself for a lasting permanent future.**

Here at Coyne, in **90 days**, you can train for your Big Opportunity by working on real electrical machinery. Here you learn airplane ignition, wind armatures, learn power plant operation, do house and factory wiring, etc. Coyne training is **easy to learn.** You "Learn-By-Doing", not by books. **Not a correspondence course.** You don't need previous experience or advanced education. With this brief description of my school **I want to bring out this important fact**—you **don't need much money** to get my training. I **have many plans to help the fellow** who needs training but hasn't much money. **Read all of this advertisement—then mail coupon for all the facts.**

H. C. Lewis

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GET YOUR TRAINING NOW... PAY FOR IT LATER!

Don't let lack of money hold you back. If you are between the ages of 16 and 40, you can **get this training** first and pay for it in 12 monthly payments—**beginning 60 days after your training period ends.** You'll be amazed at how little money you need to get Coyne training. If you need part-time work to help out with living expenses while you train, my employment department will help you find it. **Lifetime employment service after you graduate.** Mail coupon for all the facts.

Home of Coyne Electrical School

MAIL COUPON FOR FREE BOOK

I want to tell you my complete story—how I have helped hundreds of other fellows get good-pay jobs and how I can help you. I want to send you your copy of my Big FREE Book, packed with pictures of students at work in my shops. I want to tell you how you can "**Earn while learning**" and how I give my graduates **free employment service for life.** Send for my complete story. No obligation. No salesmen will call. Mail coupon today.

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COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
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THE "SOVEREIGN OF THE SEAS" could show her stern to any square-rigger... sailed 1478 miles in four days back in 1853! In those days captains lashed kegs of whiskey to quarterdecks . . . where the pitching motion *rocked* it to smoother flavor.

Try Rocking Chair...smooth and mellow as the wave-rocked whiskeys that inspired it!

RETIRED, these old salts "rocked the keg"—with a rocker replacing the briny deep! Mr. Boston took a leaf from their log! The *Rocking Chair Whiskey* he brings you today was inspired by famous "rocked" whiskeys of yore.

MR. BOSTON RECAPTURES the long-forgotten mellowness of whiskeys "rocked in the keg" *through controlled agitation in his special process of blending.* Get a bottle of *Rocking Chair* — and port your helm for solid enjoyment!

MR. BOSTON

ROCKING CHAIR

BLENDED WHISKEY

86 Proof • 75% Grain Neutral Spirits • Ben-Burk, Inc., Boston, Mass.

TORPEDO

By
RICHARD SALE

SHE DIDN'T have a memory, of course, but if she had had one, she would have remembered Robert MacFerson, despite the fact that he misnamed her. He was a Scotch-Irishman, and among the men who assembled her. "Michael," he would say, patting her air vessel, "take heart, ye'll be a thing o' beauty one o' these days. Aye, and wi' a sting o' death that'd put a viper to shame."

MacFerson held a real affection for her. He was a fine craftsman and he constructed her with slow, tender care. None of the others felt the same way. Her designer regarded her as an intricate piece of machinery. The other men saw her as their job; always, they were wary and afraid of her, and they treated her with fear.

Not MacFerson. You could always count on that affectionate pat in the morning and his cheerful burr-ish, "Good mornin' to ye, Mike, did ye have a good night?" Of course, the name Mike was out of the question for a ship is a she, and she was a ship of sorts. Nevertheless, MacFerson was fond of her, the only one. It was rare to find a man who did like her genuinely. In her lifetime, she met only two, and he was the first.

He took pride in her as she became whole. He bolted her nickel-steel air chamber to the inside of her balance chamber. He helped install all the gadgets of her engine room, the engine, fuel bottle, reducing valve, servomotor, depth-setting gear, the gyroscope, and the gyro-setting gear. After that her tail went on. She took form, but she was headless. There was some discussion as to what kind of head she would have.

"Dinna ye worry, Mike," MacFerson said. "It's a warhead ye'll hae if I ken

the meanin' o' the swift events. They'll be needin' ye for dirty work, me lad, and not for practicin' to see how ye run."

But nevertheless, she finally had a blowing head installed. This was a harmless type, for ordinary practice running, a thin steel shell filled with water to make it the same weight as a warhead, but containing a flask of compressed air and the necessary mechanism for expelling the water at the end of the run. Thus, buoyant, she would float and be found, and used again.

But one morning, within the week, they took Mike's blowing head off. It was quite sudden. For two days she lolled there on the racks without a head. Then the impetuous young fitter, Franken, wrote in bright red paint, on her steel shell, "Love and kisses to Kaiser Bill." And that explained why, the following morning, they started fitting her warhead to her. Five hundred pounds of TNT to be detonated by a pointed projection in her nose called a pistol, which—on contact with a target—would be depressed and would explode the load. She was no longer an expensive toy to be played with by ships of the fleet, to be used in practice running and in practice collision-with-target. She was real as death, for death rode in her head. She had taken four months and ten thousand dollars to build. There was war. She was to be about her country's business.

The day she left the arsenal, MacFerson tiredly patted her back. "So long, Mike," he said. "Dinna let down th' old mon when they send ye scootin' at th' Jerries. I'll be thinkin' o' ye."

They transported her to the submarine base, but she was not assigned to a submarine. Instead, she went aboard the U.S.S. destroyer *Blenham*, a brand-new three hundred and sixteen foot ship with four four-inch guns and twelve torpedo tubes in triple mountings. She was placed in one of the portside mountings, under the care of a torpedoman named Danny Varre. Next morning, the *Blenham* sailed her one thousand tons eastward into the Atlantic Ocean, and MacFerson's Mike was on her way to war. It proved to be a long road.

THE young lieutenant commander who mastered the *Blenham* remarked once during that year that only the depth charges and the torpedoes had managed the voyage without getting seasick. For a year, the destroyer corkscrewed her way around the north Atlantic, vibrant and nervous in her convoy work, and not once did she fire a torpedo. And only once did she fire a depth charge. Danny Varre, Mike's caretaker, transmitted the monotony to her. He cared for her gingerly, respecting her but never really liking her. Sometimes he would say, "Another day, old lady, and no luck. But one of these days you'll get into something big. Maybe a German battleship, eh? If Tirpitz ever sticks a nose out again. Ain't nobody seen him since he licked the British at Jutland." And then he would grin.

In the spring of 1918, Danny Varre was transferred, and the man who was to betray Mike, took charge of the forward portside tubes. His name, though unimportant, was Joe Mitchell, and he was a traitor to the service. She found that out off Bahri.

There were raiders in the south Pacific. That spring, the *Blenham* left Norfolk, Virginia, and headed south. She passed through the Canal, and then turned her sharp bow west for Hawaii. Recoaled at Hawaii, she went southwest for Tahiti. She was not alone. The *Boley* went with her. They were to aid the British cruisers who were searching out the German raiders preying on commerce from Australia to South America.

Off Bahri, an island of the Polynesian Sporades, the *Blenham* met the *Kronprinz Stuttger* one morning in May. The German was not an armed merchantman or a barque such as the *Seaddler* which Von Luckner had skippered. She was a light cruiser, having made a dash through the British blockade and reached open seas.

It was a brief action. Outgunned and outranged, the *Blenham* took a swift heroic beating, and finally made a courageous run at the *Kronprinz Stuttger* to discharge her torpedoes. This was a moment Robert MacFerson had put his heart into her for. The order came to

Mitchell: "Fire torpedoes." There was a grunt, a whiff of cordite in the air, and she dived into the sea with her sisters.

The young captain of the *Blenham,* bleeding badly from a head wound, saw her go and said, "Defective torpedo, damn it. Rotten luck." He died just as coolly a few minutes later when a salvo from the cruiser knocked the bridge to splinters.

But it was not rotten luck. It was design, the design of the traitor Mitchell, who had tampered with her depth-setting gear. When she struck the water, instead of running at a set depth, she broke from the sea and stood on her tail, and then dived in again and began to skitter like a dolphin. Her air lever, a projection which was knocked backwards as she left the tube, thus letting the compressed air into her engine for a fuel mixture, functioned perfectly. Her engine functioned perfectly. Her pair of screws turned against each other perfectly to cancel torque. Her gyro operated as it should have. But her fins and depth-setting gear had been set awry.

She made her run at thirty-six miles per hour, leaving a boiling white path behind her, but she behaved disgracefully, and the white wake looked ridiculously erratic. She missed the target completely, so badly that it was not even close, and she continued on her way through the sea while the *Blenham,* mortally wounded, burned and sank.

Mike had a range of seven thousand yards. She did not use over two thousand of this. The naval action had taken place just off the shore of the island of Bahri whose volcanic tuff peaks frowned down upon the whole scene. The torpedo, missing the German cruiser, hit the island. Normally, she would have exploded there.

But the surf was shallow, the sea was placid and when she came in to the beach, she failed to strike anything solid with her pistol, and thus stayed whole. She rode up onto the sand at full speed, clearing the sea, although her tail and screw still hung in the shallows, whipping the water into suds until her compressed air gave out. Then the screws stilled, and she went torpid from lack of air. She remained on that beach for three years before anyone ever found her again.

THE world changed a good deal while she reposed on that beach, wetted with rain, warmed by the sun, sometimes covered with the surf when the sea rode high in storms. But she endured amazingly well. When André LeFevre finally found her, the war had hesitated; been postponed for twenty years or so, and the earth was eighty-five per cent at peace. Back in the United States, a Mr. Coolidge was president. And in the cemetery at New London, Connecticut, Robert MacFerson lay dead in his grave, of influenza.

But LeFevre was to be the second man who loved her. He found her the day he crossed Bahri to the western side. He was a Frenchman, nearing thirty, who had come out to the islands to pass the rest of his life. He had served his country aboard the nine hundred ton *Aventurier* as a torpedoman.

The *Adventurier* had been a torpedo boat, under construction for Argentina, but at the outbreak of the war, the French Navy had taken her over. She had boasted four torpedo tubes.

So M. LeFevre recognized a fine torpedo when he saw her, and he decided that he would have her for his own. In the days that followed, he pulled her clear of the sea, using his bullocks, and one day removed her pistol and then her warhead, rendering her harmless. When the trek was finally completed overland in a cart, she was placed upon two small concrete posts on the front lawn of his home, and there she remained.

LeFevre always insisted that she made the finest decoration a front lawn could have. She sat above the green grass, pointing seaward. He made a false head for her, painted it bright red. He scraped and polished her daily until she shone like a mirror reflecting sea and sky. She looked stunning.

The Frenchman was amazed at the condition of her inner machinery, which he had examined in his shop when he was working on her. She was still a

workable instrument of war. But she was a better war monument for his Sporades home.

IT WAS not until nine years had passed that LeFevre, married now to a French girl, and father of four children, got the idea that Mike could do more than grace his lawn. As he grew older, LeFevre had also grown more boastful of his deeds in the war, until his eldest son had shown signs of doubting some of the tales. More than this, he had enjoyed a position of great respect among the native Vahitians as a warrior, which had dimmed through the passing of the years, as they grew used to him. And finally, despite four children, he was finding it difficult not to be bored.

So one evening, when Philippe, his son, said, "Papa, could you make this old torpedo work again?" LeFevre replied with dignity, "I could and will, and then you will see what one dam' fine torpedoman your papa was aboard the *Aventurier* during the war."

"It will be sport, it will be fun," said Philippe.

"It will be work," said LeFevre. "Attend me."

Next day, he patted the steel shell of the torpedo, and murmured, "Ah, *mon vieux*, can such as you anticipate the thrill again of plunging into the sea and riding your course to the target? Have you wished, perhaps, in these years, to be on your track once more, hungry for the belly of some ungraceful hulk? All that is gone, you should have tasted the Boche blood. But you will run nonetheless. But yes, I will make floating targets and we will shoot you at them, without your *tête de guerre*."

First, he sealed her sinking valve, the little valve which opens when a torpedo has finished its run. It opens and lets in the sea, and the torpedo sinks. Otherwise it might become a floating mine for both friends and foe. Or, as in LeFevre's case, he might lose her forever. In Papeete, to which he sailed once a week in his small ketch, he ordered a collision head turned out on a lathe at the machine shop. It was a most unusual order and they did not have the facilities for it, but somehow they managed to make the head, welding it together from smaller pieces of steel.

This LeFevre filled with cork (and water to balance the weight) and then it was fitted to the torpedo body. Compressed air was then pumped into the air vessel, hardly the original twenty-five hundred pounds per square inch, but of sufficient pressure to make the engine function with proper oxygen for mixture with the fuel.

Finally he added a pocket of calcium phosphide which lighted and thus facilitated finding the torpedo again.

He and his sons constructed a target of empty barrels, and towed them offshore some distance. The torpedo was finally trundled aboard a small motor launch he owned, capable of twenty knots, for he kept the American engine in good condition.

He made a wooden trough for the torpedo, finding it impossible to construct a real tube for firing by gas pressure. The idea was much the same as the Italians used against Austrian battleships early in the war. You aimed your launch on the target, then shoved your torpedo overboard *astern*, so that she started right ahead at the target. Only you were between her and the target and you had to get out of the way fast.

The day of the test, everything being ready, LeFevre and his son went offshore, intending to fire at the target with the shore behind, so that the torpedo would go aground if she missed, and not be lost.

They slipped her off the trough into the sea at fairly short range the first time, LeFevre knocking back her air lever with a hammer. Sight of sights, her screw churned the sea white and she was off! They followed her white path, and saw her miss the target by a hundred feet, but she did ground herself, and they did not lose her.

In the weeks that followed, LeFevre became so expert that he could hit any stationary target from two miles off. His fame went out among the islands, and people came to see the game. There was no one who wouldn't say that André LeFevre was the best damn torpedoman the French Navy had ever turned out.

WHEN the war resumed. Twenty-two years seemed so brief. LeFevre watched his son, Philippe, go off to France to the Navy to fight the Boche again, and he was sad. He stood on the grassy slope of his home and saw the ship for France sail west, and he wept and patted the steel skin of the torpedo, again on its concrete posts.

Yes, Mike was an ornament by then. It had been fine sport for many years, but then it palled. And her mechanisms began to go wrong and LaFevre did not know what to do about them. The gear was all delicate and could not be replaced in the Sporades. There were more and more misses, and then the torpedo's engine ceased to function. So LeFevre return her to the lawn.

He would sit out beside her during the bright evenings and look out across the sea. "Ah, *mon vieux,* they fight again," LeFevre would murmur. "And you, what of you, do you wish you were back in some torpedo tube, eh? Do you long for some American submarine and for the target you missed the first time? Aha, my child, I do not doubt it. And I make you this promise, if the Boche should ever show himself in these seas, old LeFevre will give you the chance to make up for your carelessness that first time . . . I will make you ready."

It was just a bit of braggadocio and mild for a Frenchman at war with the Boche again. For the fact remained that Mike's inner workings were dead. She was incapable of any sort of sustained run through the sea. She was old, very old. There was really no life left in her except for the five hundred pounds of TNT in her warhead, which LeFevre had always kept safely locked, along with her pistol. That and MacFerson's craftsmanship, and LeFevre's tender care of her shell was all she had left.

But it had been the right thing to say, and it sounded good and it made LeFevre feel better. He was getting old, he was far from the theater of war, and the torpedo was the only symbol he had that he was not impotent, that he could still deliver a blow for his country.

That same day, LeFevre brought out the warhead and went to work on the torpedo. By nightfall he had finished the job.

The following day, he hauled his small motor launch up on the railroad carriage where it fed into the sea, and under the hull, he fashioned two metal brackets, which he bolted into the keel of the boat itself.

It took some time after that to trundle the old torpedo down to the sea again and to slide her under the hull into the brackets. The natives from the island helped him, his sons helped him, and the women came to watch. With the torpedo in the brackets, LeFevre then shifted her so that the warhead protruded out in front of the bow of the launch, though she would be invisible under water. This done, the weight balanced as well as possible, he screwed the torpedo to the brackets, and then roped it and wired it for additional strength. At last, he screwed the pistol into the warhead, and the task was completed.

The launch was rolled down the track into the sea again. Though she floated lower in the sea, she was well-trimmed fore and aft. She was tied to a buoy in the cove and a red flag hoisted above her.

"You understand," Papa LeFevre told his sons, "this means nothing. *Rien.* It is only what we can do. Thus we are ready to strike a blow should God see it to lend us the opportunity."

So Mike was in the sea once more, her steel shell feeling the coolness of it. It had been a long time. It had been longer since she had felt the weight of her warhead, and the thread of her pistol.

The war continued, quietly enough. The radio told him that it was a phoney war, that troops in the Maginot looked across at troops in the Siegfried and nothing happened. So when France fell suddenly, that spring, the shock was terrific. And it could not be cushioned either, for on top of it he received the intelligence that Philippe LeFevre had perished in the sinking of the submarine *Persee,* on which he had been serving.

Then, one morning, the radio in Papeete announced that a German raider in the south Pacific had attacked the British merchantman *Castle Wing.* The

Britisher had sent her "S . . . S . . . S . . . attacked by raider—" and then gone silent.

A SHIP rose from the horizon in the dusk of the evening, two weeks later, flying a British flag. Papa LeFevre saw her come. He stood on the bluff where his house was located, and he examined this ship with his binoculars. He saw the guns she mounted fore and aft and amidships. He watched her for a long time. She came up from the southwest. She was a big merchantman, and very fast, and she was obviously armed to the teeth.

LeFevre called his sons as the liner dropped anchor no more than half a mile off the shore, at the fringe of the sweeping cove. "Henri, Sébastien, Pierre," he said, "look below and see yourselves a Boche, come to our little island of Bahri."

"But she is British."

"*Non*—she is Boche. My heart tells me."

"Will they shell us?"

"*Non*," said Papa LeFevre. "We are not worth the price of a shell. It is something else. I will go down and meet them. See, they are lowering boats to come ashore." He stared at the eldest—eldest since the death of Philippe—and murmured, "Henri, you will warm up the engine of the launch. It is possible I will be using the boat."

"Yes, Papa," Henri said.

She was truly German. For by the time LeFevre had descended to the shore, the Nazi swastika had unfurled from her mast, and there were four boats coming ashore. He was on the beach when they landed. They were manned by nondescript men in tattered clothes, by some women looking as tired and uncomely as women should not, and by German seamen and officers.

The officer in charge, a Lieutenant Busher, saluted and introduced himself and said, "We deliver these prisoners into your care, Frenchman."

"But who are they?" asked LeFevre. "And why do you leave them ashore here? And who are you?"

"This is the German raider *Togoland*," said the officer. "These are prisoners of war which we have acquired from the numerous ships we have caught and sunk. The ship is becoming much too crowded and their demands for comfort and food much too numerous. So we are freeing them by putting them ashore here, where, obviously, they will not starve."

"And you sail at once?"

"In time, in time," said the officer. "You have fresh water and food, no doubt. We will want much of both. Any attempt at resistance and we will shell this place to splinters. You will take these people to your place and my men and I will reconnoiter to assure ourselves of the safety of this island. It is Bahri?"

"*Oui*," said LeFevre. "And I make a protest. I wish to protest to your captain."

"Excellent," said the officer. "Swim out."

"I have a launch," said LeFevre. "I will go out and protest."

"That will avail nothing."

"Then I will barter with him. If he will give me tobacco, I will show him a storehouse of fresh foods that will more than replenish his wants. Including fresh pork."

"Good. In the morning we will come ashore for your stocks. Do you have a wireless?"

"No."

The officer smiled. "We will see for ourselves. I do not trust you."

They saw for themselves and then returned to the ship. The darkness had fallen swiftly, there was no moon, only starlight. From the beach, LeFevre could see the blacker bulk of the raider against the black sea. He had Sébastien and Pierre take the freed prisoners up the bluff to the house, while he himself whistled at Henri. Soon the launch appeared off the beach. LeFevre waded into the shallow surf and swam out to the launch. Henri drifted, powerless, until his father had climbed aboard. Then they started the engine once more.

"You will go ashore, *mon enfant*," said Papa LeFevre.

"I would stay with you, Papa," said Henri.

"Good, then. We will put her on the course and go over the side. She has always been true to her rudder. We will give her not too much power so there will be little torque. Let us go then." He started the engine and headed out toward the raider. When the bow was on the raider's beam, he lashed the helm and let the boat steer herself. They stayed a minute or so to see how true she was. Her course, slow with the weight of the torpedo, did not vary at all.

"Overboard," said Papa LeFevre. "Now it is up to the old one, may she not be cheated again." He and his son went over the side. They swam furiously back to the beach, and they reached it before anything happened. LeFevre stood there, wet, and wondered, fear in his heart, what had gone wrong. The TNT perhaps? So old it would not detonate? Who could tell what had happened to its molecules? It had been so long. . . .

THE torpedo, cradled in the brackets, sat quite firm and comfortably. It was twenty-two years since she had last made a track to the target with warhead. She did not move with half the speed she had once generated herself, the launch plowed along at ten miles an hour across the placid comberless sea.

She moved on the track, steadily, slowly, toward the target. No skittering this time, no standing on her tail. No traitor's hand to change her depth-setting gear. The hand of LeFevre had set her depth, fixed it, no change. The hand of MacFerson was waiting to be gratified, dead though it was.

The big ship loomed close, only a hundred yards away. There was so much of her when you got close. . . .

From the shore, Papa LeFevre saw the bolt of fire which cut the night in two. He felt the wave of concussion which came across the waters, and then he heard the tremendous thunder of the explosion while a ball of smoke shot skyward, bright, plainly visible, like a waterspout.

His son, Henri, shivering with excitement, clung to him, teeth chattering, whispering over and over, "*Ma foi, ma foi. . . .*"

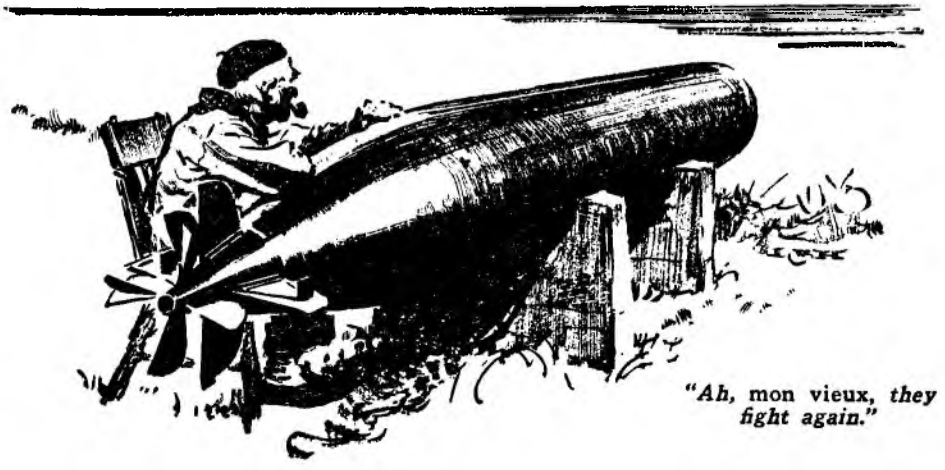
And finally, when the night was still again, and flames began to lick up from inside the foundering vessel, Papa LeFevre said, "It is all over, and she is finished."

"Our torpedo," Henri said, his voice quavering. "We will miss her, Papa."

"She was a fine torpedo," said LeFevre.

"We will miss her from the lawn," said Henri.

"True," said LeFevre, "but she had work to do, she had much unfinished business. It is what she was made for." He cleared his throat and stood erect. "Well done, old one. . . . For as torpedoes go, my son, she lived to a very ripe old age."



"Ah, mon vieux, *they fight again."*

THE PIED PIPER

A NOVELETTE

By

GORDON MacCREAGH

THE Police Commissioner's orderly brought the note. He was dressed in the simple khaki tunic, shorts and puttees that raised him from naked black savage to East African Constabulary. He did not therefore retire respectfully under a tree and squat, awaiting the white lords' convenience; he stood at the veranda rail—and grinned.

David Malcolm Munro was still new enough in Africa not to understand all the nuances of veiled insolence. Accordingly before Monty could summon a servant to take the note and relay it, thereby just as subtly avoiding the strain of direct contact with the Law, Davie took the note and read it. His bony horse face hardened in wary defensiveness.

"The de'il and a'!" he said. He had been in Africa long enough to know that the Law and traders were not on each other's preferred list. Accusingly he handed the note on to Monty. "What would the two of ye have been doing now?"

The Hon. Montague Forsythe remained at full length on his long cane chair. He maneuvered the fluttering paper with one hand as languidly as behooved emotionless aristocracy. He took another sip from the tall amber glass in his left hand, then passed the note on to Bubu Charlie.

OF NAIROBI • • •

"Can ye take it? Will ye now tell?"

"You got anything on your conscience, Bubu?" inquired Monty. "His Nibs wants us to come over *hima-hima* right away."

Bubu Charlie was on a similar chair with a similar drink. There was nothing aristocratic about Bubu, either in his chunky figure or his round face, as staringly expressionless as an owl's. Nothing of languid poise about him. He heaved himself out of his chair, the better to swear the sturdy independence of a free man.

"Tell 'im to bloody well go to 'ell. 'E ain't got a damn thing on us—at least, nothing new." Bubu stamped the veranda's length, muttering luridly. "No, not a damn thing. *Ruksa!*" he ordered the man. "Get out!" Then he complained to the others: "You'd think those blinkin' coppers would be grateful of the last turn we did 'em, and keep 'ands off us for a while."

"Governments," said Monty with the cynicism of disillusioned experience, "are never grateful." His smile was unregenerate. "If only those chappies were not so dashed hidebound in their silly prejudices they might know that association with so staunch a puritan as our Davie has quite reformed us."

"Reformed?" Davie snorted like a startled horse. "'Tis little enough the twain of ye show of reform, the whiskey pegs to your hand and it not noon. But do you not think we'd better go now, if but to keep the peace?"

"To hear the laddie prate of peace, you'd think he relished it." Monty and Bubu both laughed, recalling the damage Davie's hamlike fists had wreaked on various occasions.

With earnest conviction Davie said: "Ye will not be misjudging me now. A man of peace I am by raising and inclination. It is just that this seenful land has at times compelled a turbulence upon all of us. But this note is polite enough. And ye'll mind that the Book says: Make thy peace with thine adversary whilst thou art in the way with him."

Monty only closed his eyes; he had never read that book.

The African orderly understood none of it. But his own tribal tabus gave him a perfect understanding of class distinctions. He knew that here were three men of a breed that his master did not hobnob with socially. Offensive authority emboldened his voice. He said: "*Bwana m'kubwa ambia kwendeni hima.* The boss orders that you come at once."

Monty opened one eye. "The beggar's tryin' to be insolent," he said.

Davie knew that in Africa even a trader's prestige must be upheld. He made up for his earlier error. Davie Munro was a lad of proportions as unusual as his conscience. That is to say, not much more than an ordinary six feet in height. A loose shirt hid what might be below his neck; but from the shirt sleeves protruded hands; broad knobbly things covered with freckles as large as dimes and a twisted jungle of sandy hair.

One of those hands shot out, as suddenly swift as a gorilla's. It caught a fistful of the orderly's official shirt, jerked him in one enormous hoist clear over the veranda rail. The man let out a squeal like that of a snake-struck rabbit.

Davie's other hand swept his knees from under him, doubled him into the precise shape for successful kicking. Davie's foot booted him in the exact root of his African understanding. Like a rabbit the man rolled over the gravel of the compound.

"Noo," Davie called grimly after him, "run tell your master that we're coming."

The man's yells as he ran brought a fury of action. From behind the house, like watchdogs awakened to something they had missed, two stalwart black men came running, baying bedlam and bloody murder. They chased the fugitive well down the road before they could be recalled.

"All right, Gog! *Haie,* Magog! Let him go. Everything's all right."

"My word, laddie!" Monty creaked out of his chair. "You certainly announced yourself in peaceful manner. Come on Bubu, we'd better hurry before that cheeky blighter collects a dozen witnesses to lay a complaint we assaulted him with a derrick."

THE Police Commissioner was surprisingly affable. He said, "Sit down," and it was only a momentary hesitation before he added, "Gentlemen."

Monty raised an almost imperceptible eyebrow. Bubu's expression became the vacuous mask of stupidity that he had learned from long association with wily Africans. Davie remained as honestly hopeful as a horse who has received a kind word.

"There is a matter," said the Commissioner, "in which you, er—gentlemen, can be of, ah—assistance." That word came out with more difficulty than did the "gentlemen." The Commissioner was a commissioner of all the police of East Africa, not because he had been through the mill and learned the African police business, but because he had gone to a certain selected school in England and had passed certain examinations in Latin composition and Greek iambic verse. The British colonial system therefore regarded him as a very capable administrative officer.

He said: "You three seem to know quite a bit about getting around off the beaten track and, ah—about concealing your, movements—at least, so my men have reported quite often—I might say, in fact, rather too often."

"Thanks," said Monty, "for the compliment."

The Commissioner, for all of his ponderous knowledge of matters extraneous to Africa, was rated in his own caste of colonial officialdom, as a "jolly good sort don'tcher know." He extended his goodness just now to the lower brackets. He spoke with racial understatement.

"There is a little matter in which concealment is rather to be desired; in fact, an indispensable asset. I am therefore offering you a means of, ah—let's say, balancing your book with the Law and, er—gentlemen, I propose to take you into my confidence."

"Oh, oh!" said Monty.

"A certain Major Frazer of the military intelligence has acquired some quite important documentary evidence relative to enemy plans. He is at pres-

ent in enemy territory, disastrously immobilized by a broken leg. He is hiding in a native village across the Ethiopian border where, as you possibly know, there are still considerable concentrations of the enemy in their fortified outposts. Place called Rumuti."

Monty's face went as stonily blank as Bubu's. "We know it," he said dryly.

Davie added the heart interest to it. "Aye, and to our conseederable loss in goods and gear." Davie's interest became aroused on a matter of importance. "Would that be Major Frazer, now, of the Saltoun Frazers? I've heard tell he's a bonny piper."

"I wouldn't know," said the Commissioner. "But he is a Scotchman and—"

"Scot," Davie corrected him dutifully.

"What's that? Oh, er—well, of course, it's a sort of thing that might well be, ah—noised abroad. Ha ha, what? But in spite of everything the man is a valuable officer."

Monty and Bubu both helped the Commissioner to enjoy the subtlety of his jest. The party was verging upon the congenial.

"The point is," the Commissioner said, "we must get him out of there and get the evidence into the hands of the general staff immediately."

"We?" Monty seized upon the implication that he had already sensed.

THE Commissioner covered each one of them with a smile from which the mirth had gone. "It is not at the present time possible, nor expedient," he said, "to make a military attack in force. The matter has therefore been turned over to my department. It is not practical to send any of our official force, for there is no doubt that our every movement is watched. Therefore—" He let a gaze rest on them from which even the smile had gone.

Monty, when his pose of indolence was not involved, was never one to quibble over decisions. His "No!" came flat and unequivocal.

Bubu supplied the very logical reason. "And get ourselves shot for spyin' in enemy territory? Not 'arf, guv'nor."

"Yes," said the Commissioner soberly, "it will be admittedly a quite dangerous duty. But—"

Davie helped him out with the only and obvious reason.

"But since yon poor marooned mannie is a piper—"

"The more definitely no!" Monty finished it. "What I mean, dash it all, it's a breed that should be exterminated."

"I can see your point," said the Commissioner. "But"— and he was able at last to offer his concluding argument— "the government wants those papers and a service at this time to the colonial government would go a long way towards wiping clear the slate of three traders whose, ah—infringements, might I say, of the Law can no longer be countenanced."

"Oho!" Monty murmured. "The old iron fist in the silken glove. Might I ask, sir, exactly what crimes your department has pinned onto us?"

The Commissioner's face fell, but not his assurance. "Well, now, not exactly any. Your, er—talent for evasiveness, as I have said, coupled with your unusual knowledge of jungle conditions, have made you quite difficult to cope with. That is why I have sent for you."

"Thanks again," said Monty a little bitterly, "for the compliment. But you don't need three despised traders for your job. You've got some of the official élite who are uncomfortably good in the back woods; some of your game wardens for instance."

The Commissioner was patient.

"I have tried to explain to you," he said, "that official men are watched. The enemy spy system is most efficient. This rescue party must approach the border as an unobtrusive trading venture."

BY TWO great forces most Scotsmen are moved—Religion and Thrift. One of these stirred within Davie. Cannily he inquired: "In such case you would be supplying all the appurtenances of the camouflage, would ye not?"

"Yes," said the Commissioner. "In the circumstances we would provide a trade truck and sufficient stock to make it look right; and the matter is impor-

tant enough so that I would come with you, er—suitably disguised, of course, to direct operations."

"Weel now." Davie could see something to that. "Our trading so far has been no particularly grand beesiness. It has been no better than three private wars with the enemy gestapo, so to speak; and there's verra little profit in that. But if you will supply the goods and gear free of charge now—" He stropped his long nose with a calculating finger, incorrigible heredity breaking out. "Aye, and free of police interference, at that; we might well pick up a worth o' profitable beesiness on the way; and then, heigh for a grrand raid ower the borrder!"

"Man of peace," Monty growled. "Hear him. The deuce with that kind of business. A raid into enemy territory with just four men is a madness. If they caught us they wouldn't even give us a military shooting: they'd hang us without the pretense of court martial; and there's no profit in that, not even to satisfy a Scotchman."

"Scot," said Davie. And he added maliciously: "I've heard tell that in the old days when my folks raided your country across the border they always came away with something worth while besides the hard knocks."

"The deuce with it," Monty repeated sulkily and, "Same 'ere," Bubu said. "That's two against one, pal. This copper ain't got a thing on us; 'e can't bluff the likes of us."

"There is one other motive," the Commissioner said coldly, "though I hardly expect it to appeal to, er—the likes of you. It would be a patriotic service to the colony in a time of need."

Monty looked sharply at him from under frowning brows; his fingers twisted at his neat mustache. Bubu stared like a flashlighted owl.

Davie embraced the new argument with righteous unction. "Certainly. 'Tis the thing to do. Make our peace with the Admeenistration while we are in the way with him." He practically sold his partners as well as himself on the deal. "Two to one it is; but they'll see the right way of it, sir." Then he asked the question most important to any deal. "How much would the Colonial Government be paying for so dangerous a service?"

"There is no fund set aside," said the Commissioner, "for the hiring of extra-official help."

"There's no—" All of Davie's righteous fervor went from him with the gusty breath that exploded those two words. "Do you mean tae tell me, Sirr, that the penurious speldron o' Admeenistration wad expect a man toe stick his heid into a noose for—"

Monty's yell of laughter cut him short. "Sell us down the river, Scotty, would you? You'd bargain our life and soul away, eh?" His sudden revulsion was almost a hysteria. "We'll see the right way, will we? Well, my fine thrifty laddie, we have! We're on your side! Two reprobates and a pious profiteer together! Or at least—" He looked quickly at Bubu Charlie.

"Well, now," Bubu said, "seeing as 'ow it's a matter of doing our patriotic bit to 'elp the country out of a 'ole—"

Monty was suddenly abashed over any admission of sentiment. His laugh turned sour on the Commissioner. "The only reason we'd do it," he stoutly lied, "is if we didn't, your damned policemen would jolly well rig a frame on us for something we didn't." It sounded involved, even to himself, so he clarified it. "If you know what I mean."

"Yes," said the Commissioner, and his smile this time was not aloof. "I think I know exactly what you mean."

"When?" said Monty.

"Tomorrow at dawn," the Commissioner said. "Those plans are really very important."

Monty nodded. Bubu mumbled his acceptance of swift decision with "Blimey!" and Davie, dazed, followed them both.

CHAPTER II

OF BRANDY AND BRASS KNUCKLES

DAWN was ten hours distant yet and the three were in Nairobi Williams' bar, a jovial resort frequented by traders, white hunters, guides and what not.

But they were not jovial. The three were there only because Monty had insisted that any occasion rated a celebration. And tomorow's venture was indubitably an occasion.

Davie was the most incongruous note in the public's already well advanced discord. His long bony face remained as solemn as a horse; his massive shoulders were draped, rather than dressed, in his "going out" coat, a garment of stout homespun as serviceable and as shapeless as a horse's blanket. He sat at a marble-topped round table with his partners, a somber reproof to every man in the room, for no drink stood before him. Oblivious to the joviality about him, he stared gloomily into space and triple-tongued a thin bagpipe dissonance through his teeth. It was quite appropriately called, *The Muckin' o' Geordie's Byre*. The way he dragged out the dominant note and his frequent repetition of the intricate "haibeba hiechin"—a musical term understood only by pipers—made a lament out of it, which meant that the dark depression was on him.

Bubu Charlie, opposite him, remained unaffected by it. He was beyond being affected by anything. His round eyes were the glassily vacuous epitome of the common boiled owl.

Monty winced as at physical hurt over Davie's thin inharmonies; and regarding the morrow's prospect, he couldn't see very much to be jovial about himself, but he took his gloom in a different way. The devil was in Monty.

He said: "Your holiness hurts me, laddie, and my experienced eye shows me that it irks this genial assembly to boot. Why not astonish history, old man, by taking a drink?"

Davie broke his lamentation only to say dourly: " 'Tis little enough ye have to celebrate for this expedition."

"Granted, my dear chap. It has all the earmarks of a dashed unpleasant jaunt with stickiness looming large in prospect. But that bally copper rather had us on the hip, you know."

"Aye so. To be persuaded by a sentiment is a foolish weakness and ever disastrous to beesiness." Davie spoke a gloomy truth.

"Which makes us three fools together," said Monty cynically. "But come come, my dour Scot, taste just one wee nippie of this good unrighteousness and, presto, become human. The whole assembly is regarding you askance as a fabulous monster."

Davie let his eyes travel round the room, blankly somber as though looking for some unknown somebody who ought to be having a part in the mood that enshrouded him like a pall; but in all that assembly he was not really conscious of anybody at all. His eyes looked through them and through the walls and into a faraway misty somewhere that did not yet exist.

"It is in my mind," he muttered it darkly to himself, "that I will yet have the killing of more than one in this assembly."

"Good Lord!" Even Monty was startled. "Hey, Bubu, wake up! Scotty's got the jeebies on us again; sober and seeing horrors." The dark Celtic mood was wholly beyond Saxon understanding.

Bubu was sitting poker stiff in his chair; he never moved, never blinked. He uttered only the helpful word: "Gawblimey!"

"You need a bracer, old man," Monty told Davie. "It's the hideous prospect of a profitless expedition breaking out in you. Dammit, I need a bracer myself."

He poured himself one fit to brace a tottering structure, poured another one, fit for Davie's extra weight, and put it into Davie's hand, loosely unresistant on the table. The sheer conviction of his voice and act, the unhesitant naturalness of it or something, exerted a sort of hypnotic suggestion on a mind that was focused on a vagueness a million miles away.

Davie's thick fingers closed on the glass; he lifted it as Monty did his, tilted his head and tossed it down as did Monty.

THE smoky bite of it on an unaccustomed tongue brought Davie back from the infinite distances; his eyes came back from that other dimension

into which they had wandered. He gasped a great shuddering breath and let it out in a roaring cough that for a moment stilled the clatter of every voice in the bar.

"What was that?" he choked.

Monty only stared at him. "Good God!" he said. Then his wits recovered from their astound and he crowed the delight of the Tempter triumphant. "Fallen! Fallen from your high estate! You took a drink! Laddie, you're one of us!"

Davie tasted his tongue with a sour face. He looked about him as for some place to spit. But British barrooms stoutly mark their respectability by supplying no cuspidors.

"That was a drink, was it?"

"And some, laddie. That'll stiffen the old morale."

A pious upbringing through the formative years in a bleak creed is difficult to overcome. "Pah!" Davie swallowed the aftertaste with repugnance. "'Tis the devil's own stuff." The supporting thought came to bolster his conviction. "And expensive, at that. I'm no liking it."

"You'll like the next one better; and a couple or so after that, and you'll be normal. Overcome that corruscating righteousness, my dear chap, and you'll be fit to live with."

"'They that live with the brawlers,'" Davie quoted sententiously, "'are like unto them that love to riot in the day time.'" He relapsed into his gloomy regard of nothing.

Monty savored the pleasant aroma in his own mouth, leaned back and closed his eyes in dizzy meditation over such a mind.

"Fabulous," he murmured. "You're a fabulous monster. Nothing like you has ever been in Africa; and it's my headache to be your li'l guardian angel."

Davie saw no humor in the simile. He said: "'Tis a sacreleegious likening; for never was angel so close to drunk as yourself this minute." The unaccustomed fumes from his fall from grace heaved up to punctuate his reproof with a loud burp.

Monty opened his eyes, startled. He looked at Davie with an incredulous wonder. "Laddie, you don't mean to say that just one little snifter of the stuff has already—"

A wicked delight convulsed Monty. "Bubu, wake up and look at Scotty. Dashed if he isn't woozy."

Bubu remained as stiffly upright as an owl inexpertly stuffed. He saw nothing; but he gave intelligent variation to his earlier comment. "Gorlummy!" he remarked.

Davie's unreasoning mood of dark prescience began to merge into unreasonableness. The faraway searching look in his eyes came back to converge sternly upon Monty.

"Ye would not be laughing, now, at a man's releegious conveections?"

Monty's wide experience of liquor in its many manifestations was quick to recognize the earliest symptoms. "Oh, oh!" he said. "It'll take this one on the argumentative vein." And the thought appalled him. "Laddie," he said, "far be it from me to break up a party, but I think we'd better get out of here."

"Whit wey?" said Davie, his voice thickening to the ancestral burr.

Monty knew the cryptic phrase to mean, what for?

"Because," he offered the cogent reason, "Behemoth unleashed, old chappie, is apt to be a rather expensive jamboree. Quite ghastly, in fact."

That Davie was not functioning as cannily as was his wont was evinced by the fact that he ignored the horrid suggestion. "I wad no have ye be laughing." He ruminated over some possible hidden angle of insult.

"God forbid!" said Monty fervently. "I doubt there's anybody in Africa would find anything to laugh at in Behemoth in a belligerent mood."

But Monty, for once, was wrong about Africa. Somebody did laugh. The vast solemnity of liquor superimposed upon Davie's already lugubrious mood was a spectacle for the mirth of all Mammon. A big, swarthy-visaged fellow at a near table guffawed without any attempt to conceal the rancor engendered by Davie's earlier conspicuous abstemiousness.

"Oh, my good hat!" Monty mur-

mured. "The chappie actually wants to pick a fight. He's mad."

Davie looked at the man in heavy wonder. Slowly his mind digested the patent fact. "I'm thinking"— it rumbled deep in his belly—"yon muckle loon is laughing at us." He pondered the thought deeply. "And I'm thinking," Monty's startled conviction smoldered up in himself too, "the gomeril has been trying to give an offense this past hour; him and his ill-favored friends forbye."

Monty reached a none too steady hand of his own to clutch at Davie's sleeve. "You're mistaken, laddie," he said. "The chappie has some little joke with his friends; and what's more you're not in any—none of us are exactly in a condition to do justice to any argument; and if you ask me, those lads look to be a right insurgent gathering of ruffians in their own right. No, they're not laughing at us."

THE man at the other table cheerfully belied the assertion by showing big white teeth. He said something and one of his friends twisted in his seat to look. A lean-boned face, this one, as truculently reckless as the other, was hard bitten. He, too showed teeth, little even ones, through a thin smile.

"A man o' peace I am," Davie rumbled portentously, "and a man o' my ain self-respect forbye." He picked Monty's hand from his sleeve and put it away on the table as carefully as though it were glass. He pushed himself up and, with an abnormal steadiness planted his feet in long, dignified strides to the other table.

"Oo-ooh, my sacred aunt!" Monty moaned.

Bubu signified his awareness of events by uttering the word, "Gawstrikemedead!"

Davie stood over the other table, an impending statue of disapproval done in granite. The men—there were four of them—were startled at his massiveness, but Monty's estimate of them was acutely right. They were not people easily cowed. Three of them looked to a fourth, a tawny ferret of a man, who seemed to have the say-so on things. That one told Davie in a precise Oxford English: "This is not exactly the spot we would choose; but if you want it, you interfering fool, you can have it."

Davie drew a breath that hummed through distended nostrils. He waggled a thick finger under the man's nose as reprovingly as his own father had many a time done, leaning from the pulpit almost into the front pew. In the same resonant idiom that had so sternly exhorted himself he began to tell the man: "*Ge b'e neach a their r'a brathair—*" and then he remembered that these men were practically heathen beyond understanding; he changed to something more intelligible, the finger punctuating it like a truncheon. "Whosoever shall say to his brother, thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." The breath steamed from his nostrils. "Aye, and worse; for I am a man o' my ain self-respect."

The four were in no wise afraid of hell. The spokesman said: "Why, the man's a damned preacher."

"My word!" Monty moaned. "Now they've done it."

The insult to the cloth rocked Davie back on his heels like a blow. As from a blow he came back, a little unsteady on his feet, but invincibly back. "Whoso blasphemeth," he pronounced the ultimate judgment, "let him be put to death."

His huge hand took a fistful of the man's vest and shirtfront and in one tremendous snatch dragged him out of his chair and clear over the table to execute the judgment enjoined by the inexorable Book.

"Whee-ee!" Monty's bibulous laugh rose in crescendo. "If we're in for it," he screamed loyally, "here goes my share towards battle, murder and sudden death."

He shoved himself up to unsteady feet, took the whiskey bottle by its neck and flung it at the enemy. It pinwheeled a golden spray as it sped, missed them by a yard and exploded like a bomb on the wall behind them. The big fellow with the teeth shoved clear; he twisted half around to get his weight behind it and swung a fist almost as big as Davie's full and fair onto Davie's jaw.

The blow would have rocked a large horse. It rocked Davie; though not so much as had the blasphemy. His spare hand closed on another fistful of that one's shirtfront. And like cymbals he clashed the two men together.

Without a word of concert, with the silent fury of wolves accustomed to hunt in a pack the other two flung themselves into the struggle.

Monty supplied the necessary noise. "Whoop-ee!" he yelled. "Come on, Bubu! Our pious Scotty's on a fighting jag."

"Plurryhell!" said Bubu; but he stood to his feet as stiffly as any patriot who hears the clarion call of duty.

At that moment the table, the storm center of Davie and the four, crumpled; its legs of iron bent as in a fire; dust enshrouded the bodies above it like smoke. Monty plunged into it with the abandon of a fireman. Bubu waded into it blindly.

After Monty's first jubilant yelp the pile of bodies settled down to the strained grunting and the occasional smack of fist on bone. Presently the whole heap heaved itself up like a dust-devil of wind-whirled debris and staggered, twisting, across the room.

The other patrons of the public took no part; they attended as carefully to their own business as hard bitten men

His spare hand closed on another fistful of that one's shirtfront.

do who know that fighting is not play. As the tornado approached they moved and gave it its right of way.

Tables, chairs, suffered a tornado's destruction. A corner of the bar wrenched free with a frightful splintering of wood and a crashing of glass. With single unanimity the storm gyrated away from that danger. Suddenly out of it came Bubu's infuriated cursing.

"Ow-oo! The bloody blighters got brass knuckles. That ain't no fair fighting."

Davie seemed to be the storm's nucleus, a sort of Samson between the pillars of the arena at Gaza; a Samson shorn of his strength; tottery on his feet, blinded with dust and unaccustomed fumes, bowed down with the weight of Philistines upon him.

So it came to pass that the Philistines prevailed, and getting their antagonists down, they treated them as Philistines naturally would. The finish might have been as deadly as when a wolf pack wins; for the five had suffered their share at the hands of the three and their rage was insensate. But Nairobi Williams knew when a fight in his house had gone as far as might be safe; and it was the business of every decent man to see that another was not kicked to death when he was down.

Other hands joined into the melée, other bodies piled on; sucked, as it were, into the vortex. The tornado took on a definite direction, towards the door. A neutral patron obligingly opened it and the trading company of Munro, Forsythe and B. C. was ejected, three as thoroughly beaten men as were ever thrown out of Williams' bar.

CHAPTER III

MORNING AFTER

IT WAS a tribute to the stamina of righteous living that Davie was able to get up at all next morning. It was characteristic of righteousness that he had no sympathy at all with the fruits of sin and mercilessly woke the others to face stern duty.

"Up, sots, and gird you. Shamefully beaten we were last night and by shameful means of pocket weapons. 'Tis up to us to call those wastrels to an accounting and us in our full senses."

Monty groaned, then murmured from his stupor: "Man of peace."

"Aye, a man of peace I am," Davie insisted doggedly. "But the three of us have our self-respect to win back, without which we would be no men at all in this turbulent land."

Monty groaned again. "Cursedly right, old chap. But it makes a deuce of a morning after." He heaved himself to his elbow and opened one painful eye. With some difficulty it focused on Davie's face, then batted several times in shocked wonder before it closed again for good. Monty fell back. "Good God!" he said. "You're the ancestral dream. You've been beheaded and stuck on a pike over the drawbridge gate."

"Aye," said Davie grimly. "The wages of sin. That's what the brass does to a face. You'll be seeing yourself and Bubu presently and then you'll know what we have to pay back."

"*Mea culpa,* old man. My fault entirely. I shouldn't have let you guzzle it. But, dammit, how could a fellow know a derrick could be so weak in the head?"

"*Let* me?" The unforgiven treachery smoldered in Davie yet. "Ye befooled me to it while my mind was set to a something that's beyond the reach of me yet, and that's another thing for which I'll be paying ye back some fine time."

Bubu Charlie showed his amazing grasp of happenings even out of his last night's vacuity. "Scotty's bloomin' Gypsy teacup twisted around, that's all. 'Ad the 'orrors, thinkin' 'e was going to kill somebody; 'stead o' which those ruddy blokes come bloomin' near to murderin' us."

Davie relapsed again into a gloomy introspection of the thing that he could not understand.

"I say, old chap." Monty's voice came plaintively from his bed. "Hadn't we better postpone this war while we build up our resources? What I mean, I need a hair of the dog before I can ever get up. Oo-ooh, I wonder if those

blighters have broken anything in me?"

"No ye don't." Davie was inexorable. "Ye have nothing to celebrate this black morn but shame; and it's long enough I've been in Africa to know that the bracer before noon means the headache by midday."

Painfully Monty pushed one leg out of bed as an interruption came—a crunching of wheels on the gravel, the toot of a horn and a commanding voice.

"The de'il!" said Davie. "I had forgotten." He went out to the veranda.

THE Police Commissioner was there beside a two and a half ton truck. High on doubled springs, with a canvas roof and a wide clearance between chassis and ground, it was a typical trader outfit, adapted to go anywhere over any sort of ground.

The Commissioner saw Davie and said the same thing that Monty had: "My God!" Then he nodded. "I might have known you fellows were involved. I understand there was some little disturbance at that Williams' hangout last night; but it was all cleaned up before my men got there."

"Yes," Davie said. "A leetle disturbance."

"Well, here we are," said the Commissioner. "Dawn, and I hope you chaps are ready to go."

"Oh aye, to go after your Major man. With the dawn, ye said, did ye not?" Davie cast about his mind for excuses. "We-ell now, the goods and the gear for trade; we have still to collect up some few things."

"Not a thing." The Commissioner was confident. "I promised to supply the outfit and, ah—in the urgency of the circumstances we—that is to say, the Administration felt we could be quite generous. You'll find a very complete list of everything to make the trip look thoroughly genuine."

"Oh," said Davie. "Aye, so indeed." He could think of nothing plausible; his pious upbringing with its insistence upon truth hampered him. He wished that Monty might come to aid with some glib excuse. He called back over his shoulder. "Monty! Here's the Commissioner. Oh Monty!"

But never a sign of Monty. Not even a groan. Davie had to confess.

"We-ell now. We'll be going all right. But we have a wee matter of business to attend to first."

"Business?" The Commissioner was frowning. "How long will it take?"

"I can't rightly say. Perhaps as long as a few days."

"But my dear sir!" The Commissioner was aghast. "You can't do that. This affair is urgent as I explained to you. Those papers are of vital importance—"

"Aye so. But—"

"But there can't be any buts. A patriotic duty such as this outweighs any private business. I thought you men had understood that."

"Aye, a duty." The word stabbed into Davie's conscience and turned itself around in the wound. "We-ell, let me think now."

"There's nothing to think about. Even traders ought to understand that."

The dogged frown begot by the neces-

sity of facing a disagreeable task hung over Davie's bleached sandy brows. "Do you not be so free with miscalling traders, my fine man. I was thinking that maybe our private affair could be postponed."

"That's better." The Commissioner was so ready to be mollified that Davie cannily suspected some catch to it. "That's much better. So you will go?"

"Aye, we'll go." There was no enthusiasm to Davie's concession. But the Commissioner made up for it.

"Splendid. How soon can you leave?"

Decision having been made, Davie was committed to action. "Inside the half-hour."

"Very good indeed." The Commissioner cleared his throat. "There is just one thing. I—er—I have to tell you that I shall not be able to accompany you." He looked at Davie anxiously, as though that announcement would dash the whole program to the ground.

"Oho!" said Davie. "Well, we'll likely travel the faster for it," he added bluntly.

The Commissioner looked more affronted than relieved. But he owed an explanation.

"Yes, I have to tell you—in confidence again, of course—that Secret Service has a tip that a new covey of enemy saboteurs has slipped into the colony bent on some sort of devilment and I must positively be on hand with every available man to organize their roundup. I can't even spare you a substitute in my place."

"We-ell." The faintest wrinkle of a grin cracked Davie's solemn face. "What I've seen of policemen in Africa, one would not be so very useful on a trip of this kind. Now—no need to keep you. I'll get my partners up and we'll bring you back your Major laddie with his budget of meelitary papers."

"Splendid, my dear sir. You will be doing a patriotic service to the colony."

"Aye," said Davie lugubriously, "and little enough profit there is in patriotism. But ye have our word on it!" And he gave himself the satisfaction of the malicious qualification: "A trader's word, and the worth of that is for you to worry."

DAVIE went back into the house and it was immediately clear why he had got no help from Monty and Bubu Charlie. The evidence was there, glasses and a decanter, the hair of the dog that had bit them. Davie looked at the supine heaps of his guardian angels on their beds; he could hear their breathing as though devils were choking them. He shook his head and muttered, "*Oran'g ol dibhe laidir.*" It was not the profanity that it sounded; it was an excerpt from that book that could be made to fit any human circumstances; it meant only, *The song of the drunkards.* But Davie's intonation made of it a sorrow and a reproof.

"The de'il!" he said. His fingers slowly opened and flexed again and came to grips with nothing. He stepped stiff-legged across the room and back and across again; through set teeth he triple-tongued one of his rhythmic tunelessnesses, this one appropriately called, *Empty's the Flagon an' I'm Fou.* It brought its inspiration and decision. He went outside.

"*W'askari!*" he shouted. "*Njooni!*"

The brawny black boys Gog and Magog came stumbling from the line of huts behind the house, yawning and still rubbing sleep from their eyes. They looked at the new truck and their eyes blinked in wonder at its really lavish outfit.

"*Bado,* laddies!" Davie told them. "*Hima sana! Enda zake!*" It was execrable Swahili, as bad as most white men ever learn. But the boys, accustomed to mispronunciation and uncritical of grammar, understood it to mean, "Hurry. Plenty. Away going." It was beyond Davie to explain that it operated the same way their own car did; but he pushed Gog into the driver's seat and indicated the wheel and clutch. No mechanics were Gog and Magog; they were *askaris,* spear fighters. But Africans of the fighting tribes can learn to drive a car as well as can Arabs; that is to say, like the very devil. They can't repair so much as a flat tire, for mechanism is an art for civilized fingers; but they can certainly push a wagon through hell and high

grass. Gog grinned. "*Shauri m'zuri* damfine," he said.

"If you knew what we were headed for you'd not be grinning so cheery," Davie said. It didn't matter that they didn't understand. "*Watumia,*" he said. "The servant boys. Go get 'em." He went back in.

He stood and looked at Monty and Bubu. Then he shrugged and hoisted Monty over one shoulder, Bubu over the other with as much distaste as he would two sacks of manure. He carried them out to the back, hoisted them into the rear seat of their own battered open car. He went back in for the things that both of them treated as sacred and never left to anybody else's care—their rifles—and his own bagpipes. Methodically he looked into the truck to make sure that it contained everything else that might be essential; then he grunted, took the wheel of their own car.

"All right," he called to the African boys in the truck. "*Tuwende,* let's go."

CHAPTER IV

SAFARI

MORNING came up, cool and peaceful, over the tall flat acacia tops and threw enormous heaving shadows of rattletrap open car and light truck across the empty plain. By the time those shadows, shortened to nothing, marked noon, the safari was already a hundred miles from the turmoil of town. Truly travel was vastly different these days from the old-fashioned footslog of the motorless past when twenty miles was a good day's going.

There was no road, of course, but an experienced man could pick a way where the wheels would jounce least over the tussocks of stiff bunch grass.

Davie was not exactly experienced, but he had watched the thing done before and his hundred miles was good going. Yes, safari on wheels was easy. Though some of the hazards of Africa still remained.

The truck that lumbered behind suddenly roared to frightened speed. It careened past the car, seemingly on only one wheel at a time.

Gog was as rough handed as any spearman could be expected to be with a machine. Magog, the other warrior, sat beside him and yelled advice as to how the thing should be done. Five camp boys clung as miserably as circus monkeys to whatever hand- and foothold the truck offered and yelled their share of advice.

All of them as the truck teetered past, yelled advice to Davie. "*Kifaru kinawinda!*" they yelled. "*Hima enda-kassi!*"

Davie didn't know what a *kifaru* was; but he knew that *hima* and *enda*-something meant hurry; and the truck was setting an example that anybody could understand. Davie accordingly stepped on it. His little experience had already taught him that when Africa calls suddenly for speed, the safe thing to do is to wait not on the order of your going but to up and go. He had no opportunity to look behind to see what potent thing urged the stampede; his whole faculty was concentrated on looking ahead to see what to avoid hitting.

Monty's voice rose from the back seat, rasping and dry and full of tribulation. "Dash it all, old man! D'you have to drive so devilishly when I've got a head like a calabash?"

"*Kifaru!*" Davie shouted and kept his attention on his wheel. "I'm not knowing what it means but it sounds like the de'il was on our trail."

Monty foggily absorbed the situation for a full minute. When his voice came again there was no surprise in it; he had encountered the thing before.

"Oh, *kifaru.* A rhino. Dashed nuisance those brutes are." Another furious minute lurched by before his voice jolted painfully again.

"All right then, my doughty laddie; you know a—a lot of prayers; you keep right on sayin'—all of 'em that we don't run into a blind pocket. Because—if that fellow catches up he'll bally well knock us into match wood."

Davie panted through set teeth: "I've no time to—I'm busy."

The monstrous pig squeals of the great beast's rage and the pounding

of its feet could be heard mingled with the rattle and crash of the careening car. The morning sun glinted from its upflung horn like a great black sabre. Monty was astoundingly able to chuckle.

"Slippin' from grace again, laddie. They used to—tell me—there was always time—to pray. So then it's up to the old reprobate, eh? Stop him with a bullet. Rather more competent." He struggled to rouse himself, groaned, grunted in anguish to the car's jolting. He had to acknowledge his unfitness.

"I say, Bubu," he asked. "Are you fit to shoot?"

Bubu's voice came profanely. "Gawstrewth! I couldn't 'it a blarsted 'ouse if it was a standin' an' me flat on my belly."

Monty gave in to fate. "Well then, it hangs upon the weak thread of our prayers, Bubu." But he cheered up. "And on our laddie's stout arm and canny judgment."

Judgment—or luck—held good through the twisty lanes between the thorn scrub; machinery and gasoline eventually outlasted muscle and wind, Two tons of car outraced two tons of snorting brute—and then had to keep going another two miles before yells and dire threats could induce the truck ahead of it to come to a stop.

MONTY, now that the danger was past, could decently admit its real menace. "Pheew!" He dabbed at his forehead with a spotless white handkerchief. "Damned brutes! When they're sulky, which is nearly always, they'll charge any scent the first stray wind brings 'em if they don't like it; and they seem to have a holy hate of petrol. I've known 'em— Remember it, Bubu? A pair of 'em once—ho-ho, they ruined Biashara Mason's whole expedition. Jolly well wrecked him. Had to go home on foot and lost the whole season."

Bubu could laugh too. "And we copped 'is whole bloomin' trade route."

The two of them climbed gingerly out of the car, to sit immediately again upon solid ground that didn't heave and hurtle under them. Monty laughed again incautiously—and clutched immediately at his head to keep it from rolling off. He opened his eyes carefully and took in the landscape.

"I judge," he said, "that our persistent policeman twanged on the old patriotic heart strings, what?"

"We-ell now, not exactly that." Davie wouldn't confess it. "But when ye see the outfit of trade goods the Admeenistration supplied ye'll understand we ought to make a fine profit in trade as we go. So I just collected the boys and came. I was not knowing just where this Rumuti place is, and the two of ye deesgracefully useless; but I took the general direction of the border and here we are."

"And very efficiently done too, laddie. I'll not deny I'd rather be here, contemplating a profitable trade jaunt, than hunting vengeance on that gang. We'll make a peaceful trader of you yet. What did I tell you, Bubu, about the possibilities of our lamb when we first took him under our wing?"

Bubu stared round-eyed at Davie and gave his solemn opinion to Monty. "Soon as Africa 'as undermined 'is principles 'ell be a bloody pirate."

"A fine wing ye took me under." Davie snorted down his disapproving nose. "A grand help, the both of ye, in the doings of the night."

"There are people," Monty said slyly, "who rush in where guardian angels fear to tread. But here we are, safe from the perils of man and beast and the sun a brazen ball in the zenith, as the hardy explorer chappies say; so I'd call it just time for refreshments. How about it, Bubu?"

Davie's face cracked like cement under ice pressure.

"A little noonday observation, eh, Bubu? Since our good mentor admits midday as the permissible time."

The cracks in Davie's face opened up in successive lines that began at his mouth corners and worked up past his nose and spread around his eyes.

"For the sake of guardian angelic effeeciency," he said, "the one thing I did not, in my hurry, bring, was a drink."

"You didn't— Good Lord!" Monty's jaw hung open. He rasped the unshaven bristliness of it with shaky fingers. "Bubu d'you get that?"

Bubu swore for a heated minute ad lib. "It's the come back 'e said 'e owed you for getting 'im blotto, I suppose. Yer cawn't beat these bloomin' moralists for 'avin' narsty thoughts."

Monty pulled his jaw down and let his teeth click together several times as though the exercise might stimulate thought.

"This is a pretty ghastly kettle of stranded fish. I don't recognize this exact spot; but I'll wager our pious laddie drove like the deuce to put ground between us and temptation. Dash it, I suppose it'll have to be a spot of tea, then, and a bloater for late breakfast."

"And a lot better," Davie said, "for the wits and the stamina of the both of ye. Which I'm thinking we may be needing."

"You're always thinking and you get the damndest ideas. What about?"

"About yon toughs back in the public. But let us not be building up a molehill; let us first eat, as ye may remember we've not done since twenty-four hours."

Gog and Magog served wilderness breakfast. Burly ruffians, both; brothers; they looked as exactly alike as two gorillas from the same bamboo nest. You told them apart by the distinetion that Gog wore two burned-out car light bulbs in the lobes of his ears for proud ornament and Magog's right lobe was stretched halfway to his shoulder by a hideous something sewn in the stomach of an unborn male child, that was a potent charm to save his life in the midst of battle.

Mighty hunters, spear fighters, they would not demean their manhood by serving any and everybody. But a man who could take them both and strangle them near to death—as Davie had done at their first meeting when they had rashly attacked him—was a Bwana in whose service loot was probable. So they cheerfully unlimbered a folding table from the car's trunk and camp chairs and all the impedimenta that white men must have for their eating, and served breakfast here with the solemnity of apes doing a new trick.

Monty and Bubu, revived by the hot tea and bloaters, but a bit rocky yet, would have lingered. But Davie was all for progress.

THE safari was lurching along in its new direction over a rougher terrain broken by outcrops of rock and sudden dongas where the fierce downpours of a thousand rainy seasons had scoured deep gullies into the red soil. Bad country for night travel; for a car could roll over an abrupt edge without warning, like driving off the end of a washed-out bridge.

Magog yelled from the truck. Monty looked back to see him point into the sky behind. A squadron of watchful specks wheeled high in the blue there, just as a similar squadron wheeled above themselves. The African vulture patrol.

"*Hmh!* Somebody coming our way."

Davie digested that a while and then put the practical question: "Why would anybody be coming our way when there was no way? I drove off to no place, wherever the jungle would let me."

"Might be just some hunter or other," Monty said, but he didn't sound as though he were convinced himself. He screwed his eyes as much in rumination as against the glare. "What was that unpleasant thought of yours, laddie, about our needing our wits?"

Davie asked another question. "Could anybody follow our wheel tracks over this dry grass land?"

"An experienced guide might. But who would want to?"

"Would those scoundrels we fought last night be experienced?"

"I doubt it. Tough as they were they looked and behaved like city-bred thugs. But why would they—" Monty suddenly whistled. "You mean we're on a job that would interest a spy? Well, well." Monty contemplated it and smiled then with a supercilious lift of his brows. "Following our trail, eh? Ours, d'you hear that, Bubu?"

Bubu didn't laugh. He said: "Scotty's

got more'n that on 'is mind. When 'e looks most like a beer wagon 'orse 'e's at 'is canniest. What you got, Scotty?"

"I've been thinking," said Davie. "The Commissioner told me a new batch of enemy agents had filtered into the colony and—"

"By God! You do get the damnedest ideas, laddie." Monty looked uneasily over his shoulder again at the high circling birds. "Yes, that might well explain how we didn't know more of so hand-hardy a crew. But what makes you think they might be on our trail?"

"I'm thinking only," Davie said, "it might be using our wits to pull a wee into the bush and hide till we see just who is following our trail that was going no particular place."

Bubu growled the racial confidence. "We're blinkin' well armed, ain't we? The three of us got no need to step aside for no blarsted foreigners."

All the same Monty appreciated Davie's caution enough so that when he came to a rocky shale outcrop that showed a thin crack down its middle he diverted his course to one side and drove ahead in silence.

The crack developed into a little fissure, the fissure to a gully, the gully to a dry donga forty feet deep that looked good for forty miles.

CHAPTER V

LEAD PARLEY-VOO

MONTY drove, dodging as the scrub patches would let him, for some five miles and stopped to look back again at the tell-tale specks that knew that where safaris went things always died.

"Gaining on us," he said. "Must be burning up petrol," and he grinned sourly. "They'll miss our trail on the shale rock and will be the other side of this donga. Just as well pull up and see who's who and parley-voo 'em."

He maneuvered car and truck behind the partial screen of a mimosa thicket close to the donga's edge and waited. Within the quarter-hour dust over the far scrub marked the oncomers' passage. Another few minutes, and the sun flashed every now and then on painted metal.

"See if you can recognize 'em Bubu. You have the eyes of me."

Bubu took the field glasses. He didn't have to wait long for a sight.

"It's that ruddy Dago Petrillo's outfit. No mistaking the built up sides to 'is wagon; always looked like a bloomin' armored truck."

"Dago Petrillo!" Monty's forehead wrinkled. "He's a trader and a damned rogue. Claims he's a Mozambique Portugee but he's plenty thick with Musso's officials across the Ethiopian border and— Come to think of it, he was in Nairobi Williams' public last night. Not sitting with those others but he mixed into the brawl toward the last and not for the purpose of aiding our cause. If our brass-knuckle gentry have hooked up with the Dago that explains how they managed to track us but it still doesn't add up. Why should foreign agents waste their time on us?"

"Ye forget we're on service of Government ourselves," Davie said sourly. "Mayhap they got wind of our errand for the Commissioner. "They seemed uncommon willing to pick a fight with us; and now they might—"

Monty looked at him, worried, quietly reached into the car for his rifle. "Just as well to be lying behind a rock," he said, "while we chit-chat."

It was, in very truth, just as well that they all did. For Dago Petrillo's outfit—the customary car and light truck—came bucketing along on the other side of the donga. Somebody spotted the half-concealed vehicles on this side, shouted a triumphant view halloo. The cars on that side squealed to a stop on hard-jammed brakes—and there was no parley-voo or chit-chat!

No talk of who and why. No argument. They shot on sight. And not, as amateurs, with rifle and pistol, but with the much more efficient tool of their trade—machine guns.

Like sudden tropic rain bullets tore into the truck's body, low, where one might be lying. Davie, prayerfully to Providence behind an ant hill, saw a line of white splinters fly out clear through on this side.

Rr-r-rang-ng! Into the steel of the car; and above them and reaching far behind them, the unbelievable racket bullets can make through dry twigs.

The ruthless brutishness of the attack numbed Davie. He had heard, like everybody else, tales of Gestapo methods, as unhampered by any civilized inhibitions as tribal warfare between naked savages. But he had found such tales difficult to believe.

Yet here the beastly thing was. All around him. Incessant. Not just one murderous machine. No single gun could spray so much lead at so many separate points. It seemed that each member of the opposing crew— Davie hoped there might not be more than the swart Petrillo and the four of the barroom scene—carried his weapon and blasted at random.

Davie could hear Monty's rifle on one side of him and Bubu's on the other. Himself, inexperienced in fast shooting, he didn't know how they were able to expose themselves even for a blind snap. As it was, their shots came erratically and all too few. You couldn't peer from behind a rock to aim a gun when a machine rained bullets at you.

AN extraordinary lesson in the concealment of wild things was revealed by the racket. Creatures of all kinds had lain close to form while the trucks rumbled past. Now their nerves broke under the unceasing noise. In ones and twos, everywhere, they jumped to their feet and raced away. Davie was dimly amazed at the number and kind of them, all fanning out from the common center. The only things too stupid to run were a pair of rhino.

Left-overs from prediluvian fauna, their dull brains made nothing of mere noise. Startled from their beds in the long grass, there they stood belly-deep, not two hundred yards from the shooting.

The wind was down from them, so they scented nothing; therefore did nothing. Their short-sighted little pig eyes revealed to them not even a blur of motion. Their big hairy ears flapped towards the meaningless sound. They snorted, trotted off a little way, turned to stare stupidly again.

Magnificently horned. Trophies to be coveted by hunter, or even trader, who could sell them to the Chinee apothecary in Nairobi to be ground up for some mysterious medicinal value. But traders just now were being more mercilessly hunted than beasts.

A camp boy's nerves broke, as had the other fleeing animals, under the zip and ping of random bullets too close to his concealment. He bleated terror and jumped to run for a better place just as unthinkingly as had the other dumb beasts.

So then the bullets from across the donga didn't have to be random. The poor fool hadn't made two strides before he yelled again and plunged like an inexpert diver, all arms and legs onto his belly in the dust. He must have been in full view from the other side. Davie's heart came up and choked his throat. The man's limbs jerked to the impact of tearing bullets, the sound of them like paddles beating into stiff dough.

Brute senseless it was, and brute merciless. There must have occurred a coincidental lull for reloading. It allowed voices to be heard. Callous laughter and the confident threats of men who knew their business and were deadly sure of doing it right. The careful Oxford voice of Williams' barroom came as a shock to show the three traders that they had been underestimating themselves.

"You'd interfere with our plans, would you, you damned civilians. Our agents could have handled your silly colonial police without any trouble. But you three had to stick your noses in. Well, here's your liquidation."

The very candor of the information showed how sure were these killers of their business.

With a sturdy surge of defiance, Monty called back: "You haven't got us yet, you bloody assassins."

Laughter broke again from across the donga. Unalloyed enjoyment of the situation. Then throaty voice: "We will though. Like we so almost did in the bar, only for damm't interference. You tell them, Fritz. We cut them in halves yet."

The accent could have been that of a Boer from the other British colony of South Africa.

Fritz told them in his clear Oxford voice: "You chaps aren't so very much smarter than your official intelligence boys. Helped show us on our way, in fact." He laughed again. "Saved us a bit of trouble, thanks. We'll just take you fellows en route and then pop along and collect this Major Frazer with his purloined plans."

"The de'il!" Davie muttered. So he had not guessed wrong after all.

DAVIE felt the normal urge of retaliation; only his sober self-consciousness checked at the futility of shouting from concealment at something he could not see. But the urge to see—if only to find some means of retaliation—irresistibly compelled him to raise himself to his knees and peer between two pinnacles of his ant hill that rose like a miniature mountain.

And he saw nothing. That is to say, he saw truck and car across the donga; that was all. No bold array of machine gunners lining the steep rift that was the only obstacle that kept them from charging the short distance and blasting all feeble rifle-armed opposition. Those men knew their killers' art too well; they shot from inside their truck, through slots.

And they saw the movement of Davie's head. Somebody yelled, high-pitched. "There's one of the—" A fusillade of bullets began to cut little chunks of the tough compound. Small rubble and furious live ants splashed down on the back of Davie's neck.

Monty's voice called from over towards the right. "This is getting hotter than we can hold. 'Fraid we'll have to fall back."

Bubu's voice, startlingly close to Davie, hidden apparently by no more than a clump of grass, answered him with indomitable profanity. "Bloody murder, I calls it. Blasted tommies come at a bloke like a Jerry pill box."

"We could jolly well do with a couple of those now," Monty called with a dry rasp in his throat.

An awful yell came from behind. Davie recognized the voice as belonging to Magog. A rage surged over him that drowned out all his canny caution. In some curious manner he liked those brawny brothers; there was something about the honest savagery of them that his own uncompromising soul could understand. He heaved himself up to his knees, and there was no knowing what madness he might have committed.

But Bubu Charlie's hand on his boot, reaching out of the grass, tripped him and Bubu's voice, cold with old experience brought sanity.

"Tyke it easy, chum. You'll see more'n one pal fall to lead before Africa is done with you. Nothin' as dirty as this maybe; but you'll see 'em."

Monty called again. "We can't hold this. Everybody back away into the deeper brush. Careful that damned truck doesn't see anything move."

Bubu's hand gave a tug on Davie's boot and was gone. Davie lay and looked fearfully over his shoulder at grass tops and low scrub. He saw nothing move. He began to inch backwards. He was grateful to the fiery ants that took their plentiful pay out of his neck for building so broad and tough a base to their hill.

A tornado of imprecations moved in the underbrush; it shouted and gibbered its rage as it retreated. Davie couldn't understand it; but the voice was Magog's. So that first had not been the man's death yell. Davie was grateful again and yelled in sudden anguish himself as a lusty soldier of the ant colony got a hold on a particularly tender spot.

Rustling and cracklings in the scrub and an occasional "Wo-we!" told where naked backsides shoved themselves through the tough vines of the wait-a-bit thorn. English was more directly blasphemous and even Davie gave vent to an overwrought tortured "damn!"

Monty's "Phe-ew!" evidenced a temporary letting up of immediate danger. He called: "How many of us got away?" and he repeated in Swahili. Grunts like hogs in the underbrush answered.

"So that's three poor devils down," Monty said. "We're lucky."

"Too blinkin' soon to count luck," Bubu grunted. "They'll climb the donga soon's there's no fire from the lip."

Monty rasped a grim confidence. "But they'll have to come at us through cover where we'll hear their every clumsy move. That'll even up a chance for us. Lie low and still, everybody."

CLIMB the donga they did, of course. There was a silence swallowed by the steep cleft; and then, as heads topped the nearer edge, a clamor of voices; just sounds high-pitched in nervous tension, no more coherent than hounds close to the kill and eagerly reckless. One of them sprayed a senseless blast at the tangle before him, aimed at nothing. The crackle of underbrush marked their forced entrances, as confident in their superiority as hounds eager to have done with their run-down prey.

But Dago Petrillo's voice screamed warning. "You can't do that here. Those fellas aren't fools. They'll shoot your teeth out an' call the shot."

Monty's whisper came grimly close to Davie. "Wish they'd only try it in this scrub. They'll find bush fighting something different to a Nazi or a Roman back alley. Lucky thing, laddie, your suspicions indicated putting a donga between us. Gave us a breathing spell."

The eager clamor at the donga's lip sublimated to a discontented murmur of argument out of which only an occasional angry oath was distinguishable. Then a jubilant yelp rose high.

"This will cut their base of operations."

The idea was good enough to call for yells of laughter. Confused shouts came.

"Look out, you damn fools! She'll certainly pop."

And then a muffled *whoo-oomm!* And more yells.

A thick black mushroom billowed up above the thorn scrub. A fierce crackle of fire. More joyous yells. Another heavy *whoo-oomm!*

"The cars!" Monty rasped. And then even he and Bubu Charlie, who knew the priceless value of cartridges, commenced to fire in random rage at the general direction of the triumphing voices.

Davie's thrifty soul blew up as blackly as had the gasoline. "*An Tighearn mallaichid*—" and then he let it go in shameless English. "The guid Lorrd damn their souls tae—"

Monty threw himself upon him to pin him down. Davie heaved up to blunder on to some utterly hopeless he didn't know what. Monty callously tapped him on the back of the head with his gun butt and brought him down asprawl.

"Bloody fool!" he growled. "They'd

cut you in halves. Lie low, laddie. It's all we can do and hope to live."

A rattling stream of bullets into the brush impinged the grim truth of Monty's warning through Davie's reckless impulse. Bubu still fired blind from cover. Blind bullets streamed back in his direction. Then Dago Petrillo's voice in high argument. Then the sudden cessation of both as the killers wisely saved their own hides by dropping back into the donga. Only the crackle of the burning cars remained.

CHAPTER VI

RHINO JUSTICE

LIKE furtive bush pigs rallying to the herd center, cracklings converged through the brush. Monty detailed Gog to creep to the donga edge and keep a watch on the enemy doings. Magog was still champing rage like a wounded boar. Let *him* go, he clamored. Let *him* keep watch. But give him leave and he would do more than watch; he would crawl right into the camp of those murderers and do them a damage commensurate with his wound.

Monty beckoned him. The whole side of his face was a gory smear of clotted blood and debris from the bush; but he gibbered and growled as ferociously as any Gargantua. Monty stripped the man's loin cloth from him and left him stark naked.

"Spit on it," he ordered.

Magog hawked and copiously spat. The other camp boys willingly contributed. It was insanitary; it was loaded with all the billion germs that medical science attributes to sputum and, likely enough, would have killed an effete white man as quickly dead as a snake bite. But it was the only liquid available—and African camp boys don't know that they ought to die from germs.

Monty swabbed the clotted mess with his frightful rag. Magog squatted as malevolently motionless as a carved juju. The swabbing presently revealed that death had missed him by little inches. At least a couple of bullets must have raked close on each other and they had cut away the lower half of the man's ear.

But it was not disfigurement or pain that kept Magog in a ferment of promised vengeance. He had another good ear left, he growled, and what functions did ears have but two—to hear with and to carry ornament. He could still hear just as well; but it was his ornament that was hopelessly ruined; his charm; that filthy embryo witchcraft that was to save his life in battle. And now it was gone. The bullets had taken it with them and left him naked, as defenseless as a new born fawn.

The situation for everybody was not one that left room for unnecessary sympathies. "Aye," said Davie with the beginnings of a callousness that the jungle subtly injects into every man who goes into it. "Aye—if the full grown young of a gorilla could be called a fawn. But tell him, if we ever get out of this, I'll buy him another charm for the sheer unwhipped courage of him."

Ungraciously Magog accepted the promise. How would he ever know whether the new charm would be as good as the old one? For the only proof was trial and—here spoke African logic—the old had proven itself, hadn't it? It had saved his life. Its value now was greater than ever before while he often wondered about its efficacy. Another charm might be good; but who could tell? This was the one for which he would still find some way of vengeance on those people who shot at men without first holding wordy argument to heat the blood.

Davie left Magog to his complaints to intrude a pertinent and coldly practical question. "Just how much chance have we of getting out of this?"

Monty shrugged rather hopelessly. "Pretty slim, old man. Come night, we might sneak out and make some distance; but with daylight they'd quarter the plain and run us down like rabbits. Gunmen, they are, not very bright; but they could do that."

"Why could we not hide up in some thorn patch?"

"The blamed birds would give us away. The vultures. You can't hide anything from their eyes. Dago Petrillo

knows enough for that. Safer to stick it out in the scrub. We're in the beginning of jungle country here and we know the jungle like those with Petrillo don't. The Commissioner gave us that much credit."

"Why not they?"

Monty shrugged again. "When they had African colonies they could have picked plenty of tough lads with experience. But these Nazis, Fascists, whatever they are, are a new generation. These killers are strong arm men from their city streets, risen to power in their party. So the jungle is on our side."

Davie remained cannily cautious. "Aye, but the Fascists have had Ethiopia eight years; time enough to train men."

But Monty was sure now of his reasoning. "That explains Dago Petrillo; and if you ask me why no more like him, I'll remind you that these young Nazis are proud devils, confident as hell—God knows they've had little enough to smash their conceit so far. They want to do it all themselves; their own way; they've got to be the Godalmighty boss; get all the credit."

Davie was nodding slow acceptance of that. Monty clinched it, grinning hardily. "And if you ask me again, Jerry doesn't think much more of his ally as a fighting man than we do. So Petrillo's their guide, no more."

Davie's caution was convinced. "So the jungle, barring Petrillo, is on our side."

"We can't bloody well eat and drink the jungle," Bubu grunted. "Not a patch no bigger 'n this with no water 'ole. Soon as them 'ighaenas gets to thinking, they'll bring their truck around the donga end. They'll blitz it through this scrub and drive us into the open where their tommy guns 'll cut us in 'alves like 'e said."

Davie whistled thin discords. There was no inspiration in them. "So it's us on foot and this little patch of jungle against them on wheels and with the best modern tools of murder."

"Nor don't you forget that Petrillo knows the jungle too," Bubu helped.

"Yes. That's why they had to hook up with him." Monty screwed his eyes in tortured contemplation. "If we could eliminate Petrillo I'd almost call us even. Laddie, you've sprung some God-given ideas on us at times; can't you, er—pray for an inspiration or something?"

Davie pondered it; and the only thought that came was from the devil direct. His eyes turned to where Magog sat brooding sullen vengeance. Magog, born in the jungle, knew it like an animal. Magog could creep through the night with a spear—Davie tore his eyes away and shook that thought from him.

Monty's eyes had followed Davie's; they were easy to read. Monty rose to a flash of his bitter cynicism. "The old inhibitions, eh? We can't take a dirty leaf out of their assassination book." His helplessness flared to rage. "Dammit, a man should leave 'em at home when he leaves civilization. I've said it before and it's gospel truth; the fellow who fights no rules in Africa has all the advantages. Try and think of a better one, laddie."

Helplessness left Davie morose. "Let your guardian angels do it. I'm going crawling to see if anything is left of our gear."

IF A granite block could melt, Davie's hard eyes would have dissolved in tears. He felt the heart-riven sorrow of a thrifty race over the destruction of material that had cost money; but a matter worse than that weighed on him. In that car that had gone up in a whooomm of flame had been his precious bagpipes. Enough to stir any good man's mind to prayerful thought of vengeance.

He crawled cautiously to the bush fringe with an indomitable faith in a Providence that he could not make himself believe would so utterly desert a man. Something, he fondly felt sure, some little salvage must be left out of two separate vehicles hastily fired and left to burn. But that hope was only because his sparsely economical upbringing had never encouraged experience with such prolific agents of sin as are automobiles; he just didn't know what gasoline, once started, could do.

The enemy car and truck had wisely moved away from the donga's lip. Davie could see the truck roof and the tail of the car sheltered in an acacia grove a couple of hundred yards away, just far enough to make rifle sniping not too easy, close enough to keep an eye on the surrounding plain till the gunners would have formed their plans for the intensive rabbit hunt; the rabbits meanwhile as securely penned as any in a patch of corn field with open country all around where swift coursing hounds could run them down.

Davie therefore, was able to crawl close to the black skeletons of their transport; not too close, for the ground was still hot; rubber still burned gummily in acrid stenching circles. Salvage there was none. Davie, poking about the outskirts, snatched his hand from something hot. It was an exploded brass cartridge; and there were others; many others; they lay in confusion as they had jumped when the heat set them off.

"The de'il," Davie muttered. At least half the uproar of machine gunning must have been their own cartridges aimlessly exploding. Aimlessly but not harmlessly; for they were the extra cartridge supply. Davie's hand went to his own clip belt; he still had two strings; but then, he hadn't been firing as had Monty and Bubu.

"The verra de'il an' a'!" he muttered.

Another point, and a damaging one, for the gunners. Across the donga he could see nothing of them; stupid they were and they didn't know the jungle but they had sense enough to keep under cover; probably, Davie thought, in the truck.

The only life he could detect was those same two beasts stupider than the gunmen, that pair of rhino, dark bulks above the grass; they might have been rocks but that they moved as they browsed.

A thin smoke rose above the acacia tops. Davie's stomach suddenly felt empty to remind him that smoke must mean a meal in prospect. Hot anger deepened the raw sunburn on his face. The effrontery of it! Lunch before the hunt! When would he be able to lunch, and how? It must be a meal in prospect, because now he could see something else moving; a speck far away that quartered the ground erratically as does a hunter. That must be Petrillo, the guide fellow, drawn so far to find some one of the meat creatures frightened away by the fusillade.

A thin seam cracked Davie's face. There was a certain justice in that; a sort of hoist with his own petard—having to go foot-slogging over the empty plain under a brass sun because you had scared your game away. A good thing that only black savages would attempt to eat rhino.

Justice — petard — rhino. The three began to associate themselves in Davie's mind to a common trend of thought. He scowled out at the backs of the ugly beasts. If intensity of concentrated thought, as his good uncle the deacon had beaten it into him, was prayer, Davie prayed for a coherent inspiration.

His scowl on the beasts was so intense that they must have felt it; for one

of them raised its head out of the grass; its great horn turned this way and that as it sniffed the air in belligerent suspicion.

Things were working in Davie's mind. His lips pinched hard on a windy whistle of his pipe music. The tune was called, *The De'il in the Kitchen.* Scots for a bull in a china shop.

From Dago Petrillo's direction a thin shot sounded. The beast only swung one ear towards it, then buried its head again in the grass. Davie scowled through the haze shimmer towards Petrillo. Presumably he had shot something. He would skin it, butcher it, and come trudging back with a load of meat. There would be time if—if only the formless gropings in Davie's mind would come to a head. His lips formed the words of his tune.

"The De'il sat high on his ain lum tap,
"Hech how! Black an' reekie.
"Ye may dine wi me if ye come to stap
"In ma kitchen sae black an' reekie."

The thing was appropriate to Davie's dark ruminations. They jelled. He let himself go with a wild "Heugh!" and the ancient battle cry of his clan, *"Creag na theine!"* The rock is afire, it meant and presaged doings equally phenomenal.

Davie backed hurriedly away from the donga edge. "We and the jungle against them," he was mumbling. "By glory, if it can but be done!" He scuttled heedless through thorn and vine to the hideout. "Lorrd make the thing possible."

NEITHER Monty nor Bubu were there; they had gone scouting on their own accounts. But Magog was there, still grumbling and aching now with the throb of his wound. Davie accepted Magog as a bright answer to prayer. He and his brother Gog, crafty hunters, would be the men to do the thing anyhow. Davie squatted and talked; a language of no inflections, no construction, no faintest approach to grammar; only sparse nouns and infinitives skewered together with the wooden gestures of a dour man who was never meant to be an actor.

It consisted of the word, *kifaru,* and the words for wind and for scent and for rage, and the new word, *othomovil,* which every African knows to mean a truck.

Magog got it; his burning desire for vengeance helped his understanding, and he was all eagerness.

"*Yakini,*" he said. "Certainly. *Twaweza tendeka.* Sure it can be done."

"Difficult," Davie warned. "Dangerous."

But Magog spat. "*Kéfule,*" he said, which signifies the extremity of contempt, and he said ferocious things about the machine shooters that Davie couldn't understand. Then he called Gog and jabbered at him, and Gog grinned hugely and said. "*Shauri mzuri damn,*" which even Davie now knew to mean, a damn good job.

The two of them dropped down the steep donga and up the other side. It was an object lesson to Davie to see how one second they were there and the next second only the grass moved and then even the grass didn't move.

"Laddies," Davie muttered, "ye may be as mad as myself, but ye are twain fine scoundrels. If I had but the woodcraft, I'd be with ye."

He looked anxiously at the thin smoke that rose above the far acacia clump. It blew almost directly towards himself. The black backs of the rhino pair were away out in the plain to the right. If only they were here—that is to say, Davie amended his thought quickly, on the other side of the donga but nicely down wind from that camp. It was a grand idea. It was inspiration. If only the thing could really be done! "If only the jungle will do its part! Lorrd, let—" Davie checked himself guiltily; he didn't know whether a man could rightly pray for death and destruction.

The jungle stretched peacefully out into the distance. Only the grass tops moved. Whatever might be moving under cover, the wind nicely riffled over all telltale motion. Not that those city gorillas would ever know about watching grass tops or birds rising from them. Away out where Dago Petrillo had been

was nothing; he must be immersed in whatever task he had.

Time crawled along and each second of it was a double hammer stroke in Davie's breast. "It's too difficult," he moaned. "Too dangerous."

And then a white tick bird rose from its hunt for lice in the folds of one of the rhino's backs and hovered, squawking. Both beasts lifted their heads out of the grass and snuffled the wind. Nothing happened. And both bent down again to feed.

But the bird continued to squawk. Up again came one of the heads to snuffle. This time the brute moved forward, its flared nostrils twitching to catch the faint something that was in the air.

It was too faint. The brute stood awhile, looking this way and that; then it bent down again. Only to fling up its head presently with a snort and swing its great fringed ears forward like airplane detectors. It trotted forward, circling to locate whatever vague thing had disturbed it.

"By God!" Davie shamelessly took the Name in vain and aloud. "They're doing it!"

The rhino kept circling with the doggedness of ill temper.

"The guid Lorrd shepherd them!" Davie babbled to himself like a lunatic. "They're luring yon beastie where they'll catch the wind from the camp. Oh, braw laddies!"

The wind kindly bent the thin smoke column in this direction. Davie's racing imagination was sure that even he could smell the truck.

THE rhino was too far to the right yet; but it was smelling something it didn't like. That vague scent that disturbed its feeding was man! Its great head high, the brute followed the fleeting whiffs. In short rushes it worked always towards the donga. Its tail stood stiffly out of the grass in annoyance. With its great horn at the other end it looked like a truck itself—a field radio transmitter in maneuvers.

Davie could see the flare and twist of its nostrils now as it swung to catch the scent; he could hear the explosive snorts of its angry exhalations. And then suddenly the brute caught it full; unmistakable unwashed man sweat on an eddy of the wind. And right close before it. Too perilously close. One of the men must have misjudged his distances in the tall grass. The rhino let go a succession of furious reports like the back fire of a truck and charged blindly at what the wind brought it.

A black form jumped out of the grass like a jack-in-the-box and raced madly from it.

Over good ground a good man—a very good man—could just about keep ahead of a rhino's charge. Over tussocks and tangled grass roots a man, however good, must presently inevitably trip. Davie felt his heart hammering suddenly in his throat.

And then another black form jumped from the grass all spread-eagled, waving arms and legs, forty feet to one side.

The brute plowed to an uncertain stop. Its dull mind was perfectly ready to accept this intervention as the smell that it had chased a second ago.

Both black forms raced for the donga. The brute pounded after them; mercifully erratically; it zig-zagged after whichever one seemed for the moment to be nearer.

So both men reached the donga, slithered over the edge like apes that could find roots and protuberances without looking.

The brute behind them could sense only sudden disappearance. But it knew about steep dongas. It set its great feet before it; they plowed deep twin furrows in the ground, and there it stood. Bewildered; baffled; a malignant mountain of rage with nothing to vent it on. Its little piggy eyes glittered over empty nothing. It tossed its head, snorted; there was no scent to follow.

And then the wind riffled obligingly over the grass tops. The brute wheeled as surprisingly fast as a horse might. There was the scent again. Man! Many men! Smoke! Gasoline!

From another direction. But what did that matter to a rhino enraged by tantalization and furious over bafflement?

It squealed and charged off on the

maddening aggravation that the wind brought it.

For the first time in breathless minutes Davie was able to look towards the camp. It had been an ache in the back of his mind that even if his audacious inspiration could be made to work, there would stand an embattled array of machine gunners ready to pour a rain of bullets. But there stood only one man, and he empty handed.

The earth tremors of a rhinoceros charging about would have brought Dago Petrillo out on the instant, rifle in hand. But Petrillo was a couple of miles out on the veldt, cutting up meat.

So there was just the one man, standing there in wonderment, not understanding very much of what all this jungle disturbance was about. And there was the jungle doing its implacable share.

Two hundred yards. About twenty-five seconds for a rhino that was good and mad. The man stood stupidly staring for a good fifteen of them before he turned towards the truck and yelled a warning to his friends who must have been comfortably inside. Only the muffled shouts of slow mental reactions came. The rhino, two tons of blind rage, snorted its staccato reports, down horned and charged slam-bang into it as recklessly as another truck driven by a drunk driver and oblivious to consequences. The crunch of the impact was like a car accident.

EXACTLY what happened, Davie could not see entirely; for low scrub hid the truck's body. But crashings of destruction and the rhino's squeals and the shouts of men came in confused uproar. Splinters of wood flew high. Bonging noises of hard horn against metal. Rending crashes. Shrieks. A man running wildly. The rhino's rump backing out, plunging forwards to charge again.

An awful yell. More squeals. Then a monstrous sight; the rhino backing away, backing, tossing its head high to throw off a something that hung on its horn and impeded its vision.

The thing was a man. It spun on the horn, jerking spasmodic limbs like a beetle on a pin.

Then somebody fired a shot. A stream of shots. The rhino squealed again, charged ahead. More shots. The receding drumming of great feet on hard ground.

And there was Davie on this side of the donga, a phenomenon of African destruction himself, lying on his stomach, lunatic, firing methodically away at the settling dust where no man could be seen to shoot at.

It was Monty's boot on his trigger hand that stopped him, and Monty's voice. "Cut it, laddie! Get a hold of yourself there. Don't let the thing get your nerves. Though, by God, it's as grisly as anything this country has ever shown me." And Monty was coolly sardonic. "Besides, laddie, you're most unthriftily wasting cartridges."

Despite the boot that rasped his wrist into the dirt, Davie was able to jerk out the bolt, slam in and fire a last shot. It was not till his magazine was empty that he let his gun be taken from him. He got up. His first coherent words were for Gog and Magog.

"They're fine muckle rogues. And a grand job they did. Tell them, if we ever get out of this—" and he quickly corrected that. "Tell them," he said with hardy confidence, "*when* we get out of this, I'll buy the each of them the dizziest blanket in Nairobi."

Both the muckle rogues grinned wide lips away from strong white teeth. But Magog's twisted to dogged discontent. A gaudy blanket was any man's ambition, he said, and the *Bwana Chatu* was as munificent as he was wise in ideas. But a blanket couldn't pay for an ear charm of which he already felt the loss, for had not the *kifaru* nearly got him? A proper charm would have to be made with due and proper witchcraft before he would feel safe.

"Tell him I'll hire him, for this day's good work, a witch doctor for a whole week," Davie said.

In a week, Magog grumbled, a charm might be built; but it was the inevitable law of charms that a new one, to be any good, must be contributed to by the person who had destroyed the last one;

preferably some intimate portion of him, and that was still to get. An ear would be good; but— He mumbled on.

"Blimey, if our Scotty ain't slipping," Bubu said. "First shooting wild at men in cold blood and now givin' away blankets an' buyin' witchcraft."

"Better get back into cover," Monty said, "before our luck turns. This kind of a thing is too good to last. And let's get some little explanations of all this."

THE return into the bush tangle was different from the first precarious backing away when bullets chipped twigs and splashed dirt all around them. Noticeable was the dogged cheerfulness that just one stroke of luck could bring to three men lately in the gloom of depression and not by any means yet out of a desperate hole.

Davie drew in a long shivery breath and let it out, shaking the grisly happening from himself as a dog shakes water. He breathed deep to wash the past out and leave it behind him, then forced himself back to the practical consideration of the immediate future.

"So then I'm thinking we can be like up and on our way."

"'E's still dizzy," said Bubu, "with the 'orrid sight of what the jungle can do. Bunnies, pal; they'd cut us down like innocent bunnies as soon as they'd catch us on the open plain."

"I had not the plain in mind," Davie said. "I was thinking we might keep to what jungle we can find and be on our way to yon Major lad; he being a bonny piper and well worth the rescuing."

"The damnedest poor reason I ever heard for a madness." Monty was keyed up himself to be quickly exasperated by a senseless sticking to the single idea of impractical getaway. "This is only the beginning of jungle country; it comes in patches, can't you understand? Long before we'd get into continuous rain forest they'd catch us. We can probably count on their truck being pretty thoroughly wrecked; but with their car they'd round us up between jumps. Can you get that into your thick Scotch head?"

"Scots," Davie established the important point. "And a braw fine one I'd be if I could be as often right as the English always think they are. But listen now. I'll give ye, when sober as now, the better of me with the rifle; so I'm not sure. But what I was shooting at when ye so superiorly stepped on my hand was the tail end o' their car that ye'll maybe have noticed sticking out of the bush; and if our luck was riding as fine as it looked, I think I managed to put a hole or two in their tank."

Monty stared at him for a long half-minute as wide-eyed as ever Bubu was in his best characterization of an owl. Then, "Whee-ee!" he screamed. "And no petrol nearer than three hundred miles!" He recovered himself with quick abashment to regard Davie with the awe due to canniness.

"Laddie," he breathed it at last. "I repent. I roll in the aisles and confess my sins. I believe in prayer and you're its answer. There's never been anything like you in Africa. Bubu, what did I tell you?"

"If you an' me," Bubu said, "'ad never lost our 'eads, like 'e don't, we'd be the bloomin' Sultan o' Zanzibar."

"So then," Davie harked back to the practical, "if they're afoot and we're afoot—"

"All they've got on us is their tommy guns." Monty said it softly, like speaking of miracles not quite to be believed. "And we—" He patted his hands suddenly over his pockets. "Bubu, how many cartridges you got left?"

"Nary a one. Else I'd ha' picked me off that blighter that run clear of the rhino. But tommies or empty 'ands, I'll tell you this: them back-alley shooters would never be able to follow our foot trail."

"Aye so. But yon Dago that's their guide might."

"Yes." Monty screwed his eyes in thought. "If we could eliminate Petrillo, I'd call us, empty-handed and the jungle on our side, an even gamble."

"Aye," said Davie. "And what would we eat in the jungle with our empty hands and never a cartridge to fill them?"

"Hell," Bubu was boiling up to the hardy stimulus of the venture. "We'll

go bushman. There's grubs under roots and lizards in the thickets and anything we could knock over with a rock and—no end o' good muckin's. Anybody knows the jungle like us can live off of it."

Davie's Adam's apple pumped up and down while he swallowed down the thought, found a more palatable one. "We-ell, yon Frazer lad will have a supply of cartridges at any rate. So the sooner we get started the better." He was able to grin. "At any rate we'll be traveling light, all our possessions in our empty hands."

"To invade enemy country," Bubu said with brutal frankness. "Foot-slog it is. Hup, hup, hup!"

CHAPTER VII

FOOT-SLOG

THERE was no possible difference of opinion about it. All of them knew, by the time they arrived at the Ethiopian border, that it took tough men to travel the jungle on foot. Tough multiplied by all the opposition of Africa to do it empty handed.

It was not a question, on the British side of the border, of any danger from hostile natives—although any African can remember his grievances if there are enough of him and they catch the white man shorn of the things that give him his dominance. But jungle tribes are as varied as the animals that are their neighbors—some, cautiously furtive, like the little foxes, preferring to slip silently away when trouble came; others, fierce like the predators—like the Turkanas who had spawned Gog and Magog.

It took craft to keep going; all the hardy craft with which the Police Commissioner had credited them. It took strong bodies and strong stomachs; it took cajolery; it took humiliation before supercilious savages who condescended to supply food to indigent white trash; it took guts.

But they were there at last, at the Ethiopian border by Lake Rudolf. Ragged and foot-calloused and thorn-scarred; but there. And the luck that goes with all those other things—before Fate catches up—had come so far with them.

"From here on it's *simillia m'kia washetani,*" Monty said. It was the common Swahili caution. "Look out for the devil's tail." He grinned at Bubu. "So far has been easy going."

Davie took it as seriously as a sermon. "We'ell, I would not exactly be calling it easy; if ye'll mind, for example, what a sickness we took of those roots that our blackamoors said were monkey potatoes."

Monty groaned. "They're a weird race—and I'm not meaning blackamoors. What d'you know of this Rumuti village, Bubu?"

"Not a bloomin' thing. Only that it's somewheres along this Kassi River that's fuller of bloody big crocodiles than a reptile farm, and we better have the boys make a juju offering so we don't have to ford it."

"What about the people? Fightin' Ethiops?"

"Not as I know. Pretty miserable lot, what I've 'eard tell. Ethiop-conquered an' their noses rubbed in the dirt; then Eytalian-conquered an' kicked in the beneficial spot every time a patrol come along to show 'em who's boss."

"Hm-mm! Sounds not too bad—if they don't take us for strays from a patrol. We ought to be able to catch some local chap and persuade him we aren't friends of the boss. Get him to guide us."

"I would be thinkin'," Davie offered, "that yon is just what this Frazer must have done; him with a broken leg and yet alive."

"Believe you're right, old man. Laddie, our troubles, I think, are just about past. All we must do is watch the old step and not bump into a patrol, which ought to be a safe bet, since every soldier they've got is concentrated in their border outpost forts, as the Commissioner said."

"Let us hope to the guid Lorrd so." Davie was slipping into the accent of his gloomy heredity.

"What are you so dashed pessimistic about? This is good country we're coming to; foot hills! no kifaru; no lions; no

tsetse fly. Our troubles are over; forget 'em."

"I'm no forgetting," Davie said moodily, "there's still the matter of seeing the killing o' mair nor one o' yon assembly in Williams' barroom."

"Good Lord! That haunt again? Have I ever told you before, you get the damnedest ideas? Come along, Bubu, let's get the boys to smell us out a guide."

A GUIDE, however, was as difficult to find as was food. That border country lay under the blight of ruthless conquest—known to civilization as "colonial expansion"—overlaid again by the scourge of innocent by-standing between two civilized powers. The jungle people, furtive as the animals, hid themselves as successfully as the other tree and woods dwellers.

But twisty little tracks were there, vague winding things, barely more than animal runs. You had to stoop to animal-eye level to see them, and then you looked into dim tunnels that wound whichever crooked way the vast tree trunks let them.

Rain forest, this; encouraged to lush growth by the wet clouds that swept up to the foothills and there burst. The sun never saw these twisty tunnels; its light filtered green through a high mat of leaves where you knew there was life only because things screamed up there as death struck. Everything had its enemy, forever hungry. The birds had their bigger birds, the little furry creatures had their tree cats, the monkeys had their great snakes.

It was Davie's first experience. Bending low, squeezing his bulk through a path meant for much slenderer passage, he *ouched* as thorns took their toll. He gave them the worst description he knew. "This good country place where our troubles are over, 'tis more grasping than a tax collector."

Bubu behind him grunted cheerfully. "That all you're worryin' about? Better set your wits to wonderin' be'ind which next tree some baboon will be waiting with a poisoned spear. Or a leopard," he added thoughtfully.

Monty ahead panted: "Worse than that is you never know where some of these jungle johnnies have left an unsprung man trap."

A man trap was a deadly contrivance of springy bamboo, topped with a head of sharp spikes and cunningly set to whirl up and smash a stooping man just where his face would be.

"Quit giving Scotty the creeps," Bubu grunted. "Be glad for Gog and Magog ahead of you."

"L'il black guardian angels," Monty laughed back.

Davie never knew that they were making light of their own anxieties in order to improve his initiation.

Progress was slow, halts many. At one time a liana vine tendril, reaching out like a live thing to find something it could take hold of and climb to the light above, tentatively caressed Davie's leg, cold like a snake. Davie yelled. When evening camp was made he was sweating with more than exertion.

Night in the jungle was another trial for nerves. For at night the jungle woke up. An unknown army of unseen things squeaked and shuffled and howled, appallingly close in the black shadows that crowded in on the little circle of campfire so that it could barely breathe enough to consume its allowance of wet sticks.

Davie, holding himself to rock control, found a grim measure of comfort in it. "This ally of ours," he said. "This fine jungle; 'tis not so comforting a hymn of praise for our city-bred killers."

Monty barked a short laugh. "This is African Valhalla. The gods of Africa live here. Tough gods; but they sometimes show favor to tough men—if the men can bluff them that they're tough enough to deserve it. It's called jungle luck."

JUNGLE runways, however twisted, all must lead somewhere. It was on the second late afternoon that Bubu suddenly sniffed a new taint in the decaying air.

"Comin' to a native village," he announced.

Monty took it in gratefully too. "Yes. Can't mistake that good old stink."

And then suddenly they were there. The path opened up like a railway tunnel into light. Cur dogs yelled their coward frenzy, ready to run at the first stoop for a stone. Pendulous-breasted women snatched up naked brats and peered anxiously from huts with their own later inherited memories of possible need to bolt into the bush. Flare-nosed, heavy-lipped men with spindly legs apathetically accepted whatever visitation it was that the white lords brought them this time.

A typical deep jungle village, buried in its own backwardness, squalid, heaped in filth, steeped in superstition. There was the usual witch house, festooned with juju skins and goat skulls; there where the hill fell away in a little ten-foot cliff, was the usual crocodile pool, depository of offal and an occasional sacrifice whenever things went wrong—not enough rain or too much rain, or epidemic; anything that disturbed the slow drag of life.

"If we rate any luck and haven't lost our way, this ought to be it," Monty said. He called a man who might have been an ape.

"*Mji huyu jina lake?*"

The man understood enough of Swahili. "This village name Rumuti."

Monty stretched his shoulders and took in a grateful breath of the local effluvium. "By gad, we've done it! Now if only Frazer is still here—" He fired questions at the man. The man pointed, apelike, with his chin to a hut.

"The gods are with us. Come along, you chaps."

Inside the hut, their eyes blinking to the dimness, the three presently could discern a man, a white man, lying on a white man's bedroll stretched on the mud floor. A couple of chop boxes, a small tin trunk in a waterproof canvas case, some duffel bags, all of a size such as safari porters carry on their heads, lay along the circle of the wattled wall.

There was nothing else; no furniture, of course, only a built-in bench of split bamboo slats. Anybody could see that the man had escaped with his life and the most meager equipment, and barely with his life, at that.

At the noise of their entry the man opened his eyes.

Monty, riding high on his enthusiasm of achievement, offered the cheery greeting out of Africa's history that has become standard for such occasions.

"Doctor Livingstone, I presume."

The man showed no surprise nor excitement; he was too weak for either. Then he closed his eyes again. His breathing came in stifled little gasps.

"Oh, oh!" Monty quickly knelt down beside him; he had seen enough of African sickness and had enough of his own to be a more than capable amateur. "No worse than fever," was his quick off-hand diagnosis. "Let's hope. And a deuce of an inflammation in his leg." He flared to the exasperation of efficiency over brute stupidity. "And burning up in this closed sty. Go get a couple of women, Bubu—and water. Laddie, the quinine."

Every man of the three carried, fitting snugly to his belt, a leather kit pouch fitted with the minimum essentials of African travel—snake bite, iodine, stick tape, bandage, quinine. Monty shook out a stiff forty grains.

"D'you think he will be all right?" Davie asked in a bedroom whisper. "Well enough to be moved?"

"It's on the laps of the gods, laddie—but this one's a tough man."

Bubu came back with two scared-looking women carrying big clay pots of dirty water. Monty's eyes flashed around the hut; then he coolly ripped the skimpy cotton apron from one of the women, left her naked; he folded the filthy cloth, soaked it in water, laid it over the man's forehead.

"Now fan him," he ordered the women. "One of you fan and the other keep dripping water on that cloth and on his leg. In relays; don't ever stop." His eyes searched the gloom again. "Bet they haven't even fed him. Weak as a cat. Bubu, go find his boys and kick them here; he must have had some camp boys ever to get here. Davie, laddie, kick out half of that wall so we get some light and air into this den."

Davie put his knee to the wattle; it

went through the rotten stuff in a smoke of dust, acrid with the dung-and-mud mix with which it had been plastered.

Bubu came back and reported: "Three boys brought 'im in, left 'im and ran away."

"They would," Monty growled. "Hunt through his duffel and see if he had any tinned stuff."

The search brought forth a litter of indigestible luxuries—corned beef, potted meats, sardines. Then. "Glory! Here's Bovril!" Bubu exclaimed.

"Good. Get a broth started."

"And here's cartridges!" Davie didn't know but that he had found a greater life-saver.

Bubu pounced on them, took them to the light. Then he cursed long and bitterly. "They're .303! Nor I don't see any rifle." He dashed out.

Davie fingered the things, a little bewildered. Monty gave the grim explanation. "Government regulation; and our bright little bureaucrats don't let civilians carry .303 calibers."

Bubu came back still swearing. "'Is blarsted boys stole it along with whatever else they could carry away."

"Swine!" Monty gritted. "We're dashed lucky in our Gog and Magog. Better a pair of loyal ruffians like them than all the lawfully registered tame servants in the colony. A white man abandoned by his native boys, unless he knows his little onions, is a goner. Come on out, you chaps, and let's look over things. *Fan* him," he snarled at the women.

OUTSIDE Monty mopped his forehead. "Well, it could be worse. I think all he needs is common sense treatment. But we daren't move him till his fever breaks and we get some grub into him. That shot of quinine ought to do it one way or the other by tomorrow."

Davie whistled. "Could it be much worse? A delay here?"

Monty looked at him moodily; he understood. "Don't croak, you morbid Celt. Bubu, how d'you figure the best way to get him out?"

"Make a stretcher," Bubu said promptly. "Commandeer a dozen o' these monkeys with panga knives; cut a path."

Davie was studying the muddy river. "Maybe there's a canoe—or we might make a raft. The river flows somewhere into Lake Rudolf, and the lower end of that is in British territory. 'Twill be a route different from our late trail, and the sooner away from that, the better."

"Cheerful blighter, aren't you?" Monty said. "But it's a canny idea. Let's go see what's what."

Submissive men with the pot bellies and lean limbs that betokened malnutrition showed them wretched dugouts that would precariously hold two men, had no more than a hand span of freeboard, and were little better than crocodile lures. They were that miserable village's best.

"Stretcher and raft it will have to be," Monty said. "And it's busy little fingers we'll have tomorrow, and I, for one, will drop dead for want of a rest and a—I say, Bubu, I don't suppose by any godly chance this chappie had a bottle of anything in his kit? No? Well, his damned boys must have swiped that along with the rest. I'll say it again, we're lucky with our pair of honest savages."

The honest savages seemed to know by some primitive instinct that the occasion was favorable. Magog came and directed earnest talk at Davie. Monty whooped sardonic enjoyment.

"He says that you are a man who understands about such things; so won't you, as white lord, commandeer a goat from the village for Muungu?"

"Which hungry fellow is that?"

"Muungu," Monty explained, "is the universal jungle god. He lives, in this village, in the crocodile pool; he takes the form of one of them. So they want a goat for the local witch doctor to make a juju sacrifice to him in thanksgiving for his protection through the perils of the jungle and as insurance for the future."

Davie recoiled from the thought. "I'll have none of any such seenful idolatry."

"Trouble with you godly folk," Monty told him sourly, "is, you're too bally bigoted. Your inbred ideas are the only ones. God will defend the right, and you're right. Well, these fellows have

their own set of gods and they need something to pep up the old morale just as much as white men do."

It was logic. It was practical common sense. Davie had to acknowledge the weight of those twin great forces that ruled his own reactions. "For morale, eh?" He pondered it. Then he shrugged. "We-ell, messguided they are, but they've been staunch lads. I'll go with him and get a goat."

Monty's cynicism could enjoy the point gained. "Our Scotty's slipping, eh Bubu? Africa is undermining him same's the rest of us. Go to it, laddie. Myself, I'm dead on my feet for sleep right now; but we'll have to take turns sitting watch on our man to see that those women keep fanning and the one doesn't snaffle her wet shimmy off his face and put it on again."

"Let you two sleep. I'll watch," Davie said.

Monty yawned hugely. "Dashed if there aren't some advantages to traveling with a derrick."

So black men howled and pranced through the night and the drums throbbed and muttered their blood-stirring rhythms and Davie, sitting at the sick white man's hut, watched from afar the fantastic moonlit ceremony of giving a screaming goat to great saurians that surged up from the pool like trained porpoises in a marine zoo.

CHAPTER VIII

A QUESTION OF INHIBITIONS

THERE is a Swahili proverb: "Who knows how the gods will accept a gift, for they are as unpredictable as women."

This morning they seemed to be satisfied. The day broke fair and the sick man's fever broke with it. He was able to open his eyes and presently to sip some Bovril extract.

"Don't know when I had the last," he whispered; and he had no illusions. "I suppose my men bolted."

"Right. But they did do as much as inform some official, and the news was telephoned in. You're Frazer, of course?"

The sick man nodded weakly. His eyes moved slowly over the ragged forms. "So you fellows came along. Thanks and all that. A tough trip, what?"

"Not so bad," Monty characteristically underestimated it.

"Are you a military raid or—" Frazer seemed to be wondering about the remnants of unmilitary clothing and the incredibility of anything else. "Who are you?"

Monty only grinned.

Davie tried the man as eagerly as anyone searching a co-religionist in a pagan land: "*An t'slainte am bheil e maithe?*"

"*Tha mi maithe*— Yes, a lot better thanks and—" Frazer's eyes lit up. "Good heavens. You have the tongue too! You chaps are miracles in every way." His eyes closed weakly again over the wonder that had grown out of his hopelessness of many days; he lay like a man knocked out.

"Get away, you thick Highland ox." Monty shoved Davie aside. "Cut the barbarous persiflage. A man needs to be a lot stronger before he can stand that sort of savage excitement. Get along to your stretcher building."

"'Tis done. Bamboo poles and the duffel bags; 'twas easy. We're working on the raft now, Bubu and I. That I doubt we can get done before dark for waiting on the blackamoors to twist ropes of cane peelings."

"Means we can't get away till tomorrow." Even Monty was uneasy. "If our luck holds."

Unpredictable the gods are— Or it might have been that all the luck that could be bought by just one goat was used up. It is one of the working principles of idolatry that whether the deity be a juju or a high moral precept, sacrifices to it must be constant.

It was still daylight when a frightened boy came running from herding the family goats down the trail. Pop-eyed he announced that more white men were coming.

"The de'il himself!" Africa was fast teaching Davie to accept a personal force of malignance. "He's caught up with us!"

Monty's action was instinctive. He snatched for his rifle. Then he flung it from him in a rage of bitter futility; he cursed the military big wigs' prohibitory ammunition policy and their unshakable enemy all in one breath.

"Blasted thick-wit brass hats! Damned if I ever thought those swine would have the guts to keep after us afoot."

There was no need to speculate on whether the white men might be any other than enemies. Any white men in that place would be enemies. No time to plan.

A muffled rattle of shots came through the trees and a pitiful bleating of goats was an announcement as clear as any official executioner's.

Davie rushed to the sick man's hut, trundled him, bed roll and all, into the ready stretcher. Frazer groaned his anguish. Davie hoisted the bundle over his shoulder like a giant roll of carpet. Empty-handed as they had come out of the jungle the three men backed hurriedly into its shelter again. Only Davie risked a call.

"Gog! Magog! *Hima-hima.* Here."

Truculently the two of them answered. "We stay and watch. They will not know us from the men of this village."

"Dago Petrillo will," Davie had the thought. The two brawny rogues unwillingly joined in the hiding.

Then the other white men debouched from the path and everybody could see how it was that they, afoot, had braved such a trek.

FIRST came four sullen natives each one carrying a goat that still dripped blood from its close row of tight little blue holes; then came Dago Petrillo, on his own feet, a tommy gun in his hands.

Then more sullen natives, carrying head loads of chop boxes; behind them the man Fritz with tommy gun. But barely on his own feet. His arms were round the shoulders of two sweating black men, their hands clasped beneath him to make as much of a seat as possible. He hobbled with them, reached the clearing and they let him sink to the ground just like so much other freight. A dull fury overlaid the exhaustion in his face.

There came more sulky natives with chop boxes; they, with their labor of forcing their loads through the jungle trail, more thorn-whipped than Fritz. Behind them two other white men in worse case than Fritz, nerve-wracked to the point of screaming murder with those hair-trigger guns. A ruthless convoy of forced labor.

"Aye so," Davie whispered, ruthless himself. "Our fine ally, the jungle, did well by us; but, a peety, our good *kifaru* didn't get but the one."

And Monty swore. "I knew damn well that Dago was no Portugee. A Fascist from right here in Ethiopia, that's what he is, and he's brought the conqueror methods right with him. Enforced labor of enslaved peoples. White or black, it makes no difference. Efficient as hell and—hellish."

Certainly it was efficient. All you had to do was have overwhelming superior force and know the ropes. Tommy guns were the force and Petrillo knew the ropes.

The villagers stood about in the white eyed do-nothing attitudes of oxen. Things were happening too fast for them to assimilate, and who could understand the meaningless wars of white men anyway?

"I knew it!" The conviction hissed between Monty's teeth, hard on his lower lip. "They'd never have moved a mile without Dago. Look at 'em."

If their motives could rate any sympathy, the others would have been something pitiable to look at. Exhausted physically they were, but their nerves had suffered much more of a strain than their bodies. Theirs was the kind of—call it courage, perhaps, for none of them were cowards—that could face their chance of bullets, of the hot, shouting death that they knew as military men. But the dim crawling menace of the jungle, never knowing from where, with what weapon, fang or claw or poisoned spear, the ever-impending uncertainty of things about which they knew nothing; that could tear nerves ragged.

Dago Petrillo called the head man. The three could see the man jabbering, pointing with his chin, first at the hospital hut, then at the jungle where they had taken shelter. They saw Petrillo tell the other three.

"Duck!" Monty warned quickly.

Just in time. The gunners galvanized out of their weariness to defensive action. Their energy had not recuperated to the extent of anything so active as leaping to their feet; but from where they sat all three of them blasted loose in erratic bursts at the blank wall of greenery that crowded in on them.

The same kind of blind barrage that they had put down at their onset by the donga. The inescapable difference was that their action here was defensive, not aggressive. They remained tense fingered on their triggers and looked to Petrillo for directions.

And that was another inescapable difference. Leadership had passed from Fritz. Fritz and his fellows' tough confidence was feeling the numbing handicap of ignorance. They were in a world about which they knew nothing and the only means of finding out, language, the power to ask questions, belonged to Petrillo. Their faces twitched as they looked to him. Petrillo went into the hospital hut and rummaged about. He came out to shout a gleeful announcement. The gunners roused themselves to the first satisfaction they had shown since they came out of the jungle, but they still sat and trained their guns at its dark shadows.

"Rattled bad," Monty exulted. "As bad as I've ever seen a tenderfoot. Never thought they'd have the guts to face it. Complimented. Didn't know we were so important."

Davie intruded the thought that they had all, in their mad dash for cover, forgotten. "Aye, we or those meelitary plans of Frazer's that brought us here."

Monty and Bubu gawped at him and then for the first time had opportunity to turn their attention to the sick man. He had managed to unroll himself, he lay, pain twisting his face. He could read the question in their eyes. He nodded.

"In that steel uniform case; and—really very important to our defense."

"Aye," Davie chewed on that. "I hoped they might be, perhaps, in a pocket," and he gave the dire conclusion of the thought that had eluded their haste. "I had hoped we might be able just to pick up and steal away on our fine raft."

Frazer lay looking up into the three unwashed, stubble-grown faces, one as inflexible as the other. He didn't ask their decision.

"Sorry," he said.

"So we'll e'en have to fight it to the finish."

"Damn it all," Monty grated. "If we only had a gun!"

DAGO PETRILLO knew enough about the jungle not to attempt any hurried departure in the coming night—as why should he? He knew the hidden men to be as impotent as rabbits. He barked orders at his slaves. Sullenly they set to opening up chop boxes, unlimbering camp cots.

"If maybe we could steal a gun while 'tis dark," Davie thought aloud.

"My dear fellow! They're not fools. Dago knows all about night watch."

"Aye, 'tis Petrillo is their vulnerable heel. A blackamoor now, with a spear belike—"

Monty and Bubu stared at him. Davie couldn't see their faces in the gloom but he knew that they credited him with the same monstrous thought as once before. He explained hurriedly. "I was meaning that our braw lads, jungle men, might get near enough in the dark to steal a gun and, armed with a borrowed spear, might have courage enough to try it." And yet he could find grim justification for the possible outcome of such an attempt.

He rumbled then in his throat, out of the memories of his pious raising. "But these, as natural brute beasts, shall utterly perish in their own corruption. The murderer shall surely be put to death." He could find them by the dozen in that implacable Book.

Bubu said, "Strike me dead if ever I thought that there book had such right ideas," and he engaged in fierce colloquy with Gog and Magog. Those brawny

Africans found nothing monstrous in any sort of ideas about doing away with their enemies, and they could thoroughly understand every desirable phase of a crafty night stalk. Their eyes glittered. "*Yakini!*" Sure it could be done; and "*Gefule!*" What would there be to fear from a drowsy watcher? But there they suddenly balked over a very practical inhibition of their own.

"Nay, Bwana, it could be that that white man may die in the fight; and your white man police always then catch and hang the black man."

It was unhappily true. White man prestige had inexorably to be held up before Africa's millions, and where the fate of nations is in the balance, colonial justice has been known to be weighted by administrative expediency.

"Still," said Gog and Magog with stout loyalty, "if the bwanas would give the order and would afterwards protect them from the police—"

"Good God, no!" Davie shuddered at condoning such a possibility.

Monty gave his cynical shrug. "Yes, they're a handicap in Africa."

"What?"

"Civilized inhibitions. I think I've mentioned it before."

"Or at any rate," Bubu growled, "we couldn't guarantee to protect 'em from the blarsted po-leece."

So Gog and Magog virtuously thrust away from them a thought that had its own distinct appeal.

The little group had to crouch in futile impotence, so close that they could see the dim glow of a fire, and they knew that Dago Petrillo sat somewhere in the shadow keeping a long night watch in which the city trained gunners would be useless to help. Their conception of safety was inherent to a locked room; and, as a matter of fact, they had already had their cots taken into shelter of a commandeered hut.

Out of a long hour of crawling silence Davie said: "I would be hoping we have not put ideas into our blackamoors' heads."

"We?" Monty shed responsibility. "I never let white man ideas out before natives. They're too simple and direct thinking a people."

"What ideas?' Davie was shocked.

"About condoning witch doctors and luck charms." Monty could not forbear from his jibe at inhibitions. "But scratch you a bed and turn on all the prayers you know for tomorrow's luck. I'll see to Frazer."

CHAPTER IX

"US AND THE JUNGLE"

THAT same night Dago Petrillo disappeared! There was no noise, no fight. Morning came and he just wasn't there. White men, whether in the barricaded hut or in the surrounding jungle, knew nothing.

Gog and Magog knew nothing. They said: Some wild beast of the jungle perhaps, while that man unwisely dozed at the watch. Or Muungu M'bulu, the crocodile god, had been known before now to come and take his own sacrifice at the hour when the *bundi* owl screamed the warning for all things to hide while the night spirits passed. And, come to think of it, had not the *bwanas* heard the *bundi* and some small disturbance in the pool?

Davie stared at them, shocked to his very marrow. "Good God!" he said. "Good God! I hope—"

Bubu Charlie said: "I ain't askin' questions; but if the gods of Africa gives us a break I'll buy fifty bloomin' sacrifice goats for the witch doctor. Only it's a damn pity that Muungu couldn't 'ave copped 'is gun."

Monty accepted the gods as they were. "You can't argue with Africa," he said softly. "A gun could be hanging evidence. And that—" he suddenly looked at Davie with an expression that belied his studied poise—"makes two of the assembly at Williams' bar. How many more, I wonder, before we're out of this mess?"

Davie forced that practical side of his mind to accept the least shocking possibility. "Aye, some wild beast o' the jungle most like. If we could but help the good jungle now—"

The jungle didn't need much help. It had its own weapons that gunmen

couldn't see and therefore couldn't riddle with bullets—subtle weapons that were impervious to bullets anyway.

They came out of their barricaded hut—and they were suddenly up against the numbing shock of blank ignorance in the midst of knowledge. Something had happened in the night. They didn't know what; they didn't know when; they didn't know how—and they had no possible means of finding out.

They huddled together, their guns wavering every which way, as though the whatever-it-was could reach out of its silence at them too. They didn't know in what form, from where, what sort of thing to guard against.

Everybody else knew. Every sullen black face had furtive knowledge written on it as unmistakably as on a troop of apes that have perpetrated a mischief. Fritz rushed to seize an unfortunate native. He shouted questions at him. His mates added their frantic threats. The man couldn't enlighten them any more than could an ape. They knew he couldn't; but they kept on shouting; their voices rose in pitch to the timbre of hysteria. The rage of impotence pushed Fritz' impulses from reason to habit.

"You won't talk, eh?" He slammed his gun barrel to the man's ear. The wretched fellow dropped.

It was brute senseless; there was no reason to it; but reason had been driven out by the cold pinch of fear. The men drew together; they sent nervous looks over their shoulders looking for they didn't know what. They knew only that they stood suddenly awfully alone, isolated by the impervious barrier of language.

"Aye," Davie growled, savage in his own impotence. "'Tis the weapon the Lord Almighty used at the Tower of Babel."

The men turned their clamor upon each other. They shouted guttural-toned suggestions to each other, arguments, counter suggestions with helpless gesturings. It was Fritz who rose to a final initiative and set to beating men indiscriminately to pick up bundles of camp gear. His urge to get away from that place was a blind frenzy.

"Gawd strike 'em!" Bubu expressed a horrified anxiety. "They may get away with it yet."

Davie was whistling harshly through his teeth. "Not if the whole village would be quietly deserting and hiding in the bush."

Monty was for once in no mood to offer any extravagant compliment; he said only: "It's an idea, laddie. We'll try it." He stood up and cupped his hands to his lips; and then a flash of caution reminded him. "Better take cover." From behind a tree he shouted: "*Ohé*, head men! Councillors! Let all men listen."

THE gunmen of course had no faintest idea of what the shout said; but the timbre of the voice was unmistakably white man. On the instant one of the gunners left his slave driving and poured a stream of shots at the sound. He even ran to the clearing's edge to push boldly into the jungle from where he knew no bullets could come back at him. He cursed a whimpering frenzy at the vines that tangled his knees and gave his game time to escape.

Magog most circumstantially had sometime during the night acquired a spear. "*Waga huyu!*" he grunted. "Kill this," and he threw it.

A spear unfortunately is more easily deflected than a bullet. It missed, but it clinked into a tree stem not a foot from the gunner's face. His shock of surprise broke from him in a strangled shriek; he forced his way out of the growth and sprinted back to the open center. A shoulder and half a sleeve of shirt remained dangling from a thorn as big as an iron spike.

Magog guffawed fierce delight. All three gunners poured a screaming stream of lead at the sound.

"Careful, fool," Monty told Magog. "Or you'll be needing a charm for the other ear. Use your great mouth to advise the men to run and hide themselves in the bush."

The idea required only the germ to be planted. African porters throughout generations have dropped their loads and run for the bush.

The gunners, lips strained away from their teeth, clung to the tactic that they knew. Wherever a shouting of advice or encouragement came from the jungle, they clustered to pour machine bursts at the sound. That was all that they knew to do.

Behind them black men backed away towards the sheltering trees. Women with pot bellied young clinging over their hips furtively scuttled from their huts. Their animal stealth was a revelation.

The frenzied firing came to an end only when there was nothing more to shoot at. No more shouts of advice from the jungle. The tearing bursts of fire and the rattle of bullets into riven wood ceased and silence closed down like a door; the silence of the jungle where even the insects have temporarily been frightened to concealment. Then one of the shooters let out a strangled yelp of discovery.

"*Gott im Himmel!* They are disappeared! We are alone!"

The three of them crowded together, back to back, eyes staring out like cattle when lions stalk them and there is no way open to run. They stood like that, nervously shuffling their feet, staring out at the jungle that walled them in with its immensity of the unknown.

The situation was a grim impasse. Three murderous men isolated in the bright sunshine, surrounded by silent enemies who would kill them out of hand if they but could, and by the more silent jungle that could, and in its own good time by its unknown methods surely would. The three of them in the meanwhile too deadly with their weapons to be attacked.

One of the men's nerves let go in impotent rage, the big swart man of the barroom with the confident teeth.

"*Verpflucht!* We must get out of here!" he shouted.

A wretched native showed himself at the jungle edge. Moved by an ill-advised thought to retrieve some prize possession from his hut, he made a foolish bolt for it.

All three gunners up and blasted at him as though he might be a whole tribe rushing to attack. Their concentrated fire just about cut him in halves. He fell, his torso at an impossible angle.

Only silence crowded out of the jungle.

Raggy nerves broke again. "We must get out!" the same man gibbered. "Here we die!"

FRITZ cursed him silent, but his eyes turned towards the dark tunnel of path through which they had come. Common impulse, unspoken, urged the three of them. Crabwise, trying to look in every direction at once, they edged, at hair trigger tension, towards the opening. They attempted to take nothing with them. Escape was the paramount impulse. They crabbed warily into the path.

Davie heaved himself up like a bull rising from cover. "Could we but work around there fast and borrow us the loan of a spear we might find chance to waylay them before they could shoot."

"Bushwhack 'em, and the hell with inhibitions," Monty said. "Come on."

But the jungle was doing its share. A fearful shriek came out of the tunnel, a burst of shots, more shrieks; and then Fritz and one man rushed out; they dragged the third man with them, reeling on his feet, bleeding a stream from his side.

They reached their center of isolation, let the man subside to the ground.

Bubu swore. "Gawblightem, they brought 'is gun along."

Fritz was swearing a steady stream of incoherent sounds. The other man; a lean overstrung gutter rat, turned a twisted face to meet he didn't know what crowding menace. He was hysterically crying.

The jungle stood unmoved, impervious, silently waiting.

A honey bird, bold in the stillness, came fluttering, chirruping its squeaky insistence that the humans come and hew into the hollow tree to open up the hive that it had found. Fritz flashed up his gun and poured a blind blast into its movement of the twigs.

The wounded man lay and bled slowly. A red smear spread into the sand. His pals dared not take their eyes

on the jungle. Fritz' face was as wet as his remaining pal's. Of tougher fiber, he wasn't crying; he shivered. He was sweating cold.

Bubu hawked and spat. "Whoever got that one got 'im right. But I'm afraid we got a good spearman's widow to pay off."

Davie got up off his stomach and took position behind a tree. "I'm thinking the time is right for the whole payoff. They're beat by all the things they don't know." He called: "Oho there, Fritzie!"

Fritz' gun muzzle swung to the sound; he crouched, flashing looks over his shoulder as though to shoot and run. But even he was realizing the futility of shooting at the jungle. And where could he run? There was only the jungle.

"Ye are beat by the jungle," Davie called. "And ye have just gorilla wit enough to know it. Wise would be to quit before a worse comes."

Fritz looked slowly round to his remaining pal; his tongue kept licking out over his chin. The other only gasped at him the shuddery sobs of a cruelly beaten child.

Fritz called back in his carefully trained English accent: "What's your proposition?"

"We make no proposition," Davie said. "Only that you lay your guns out and stand fifty paces clear."

Fritz' eyes flickered under his blond brows this way and that; he raised his head from between his shoulders and looked about him; around the clearing, up to the towering tree-tops, at the wet green shadows of the undergrowth.

He jerked his head to his fellow. The man picked up the dying one's gun. They shambled out towards the jungle; not too close; they laid down their deadly arsenal and hurried back to their center of isolation.

"So that blinkin' well ends it." Bubu breasted into the brush.

"Wait!" Davie's canny caution had an arresting thought. He called again. " 'Tis not so easy as that, my fine murdering mannie. Ye'll likely have others hid about you. So ye'll step forward once more and stand away naked."

There was only a half-minute of hesitation. Fritz looked about him again as though a miracle might transform trees to sentry boxes and shadows to dark doorways and spew forth friends. The other man was already peeling his clothes.

Sullenly Fritz came forward and stripped. A well-muscled brute he disclosed himself; the other one was plain under-nourished alley rat. Both wore shoulder holsters—far from empty.

"Laddie," said Monty, "what a head!"

Bubu crashed through the brush and leaped on the weapons. He shouted the fierce joy of a man rehabilitated. "Blimey, a man's a poor thing in Africa without a weapon."

Fritz and the rat stood with their hands up, grotesquely naked, shamefully poor and beaten things without their weapons.

"Aye," Davie breathed. "Aye. Us and the jungle. The fine, brave, beautiful jungle! No need to hold them up, Bubu. They're peetiful naked beasties; and worse off than beasties, they can't bite nor scratch nor run, for here is no place the likes of them dare to run. What of the wounded one?"

"He's dead," Monty reported, and he counted ominously: "Three!"

CHAPTER X

DAVIE MUNRO—WITCH DOCTOR

THE jungle crackled on all sides and spewed forth black men and women. They howled around the prisoners with the abandoned ferocity of vengeful baboons; they made obscene gestures of derision at their nakedness. One overwrought man with a blood vengeance to pay, rushed in to perform an immediate amputation with a spear. Monty shoved him off. The man, berserk, heaved the spear up against interference. Monty adroitly kicked him in the stomach.

The mob howled and jumped in the air; they would have torn their helpless enemies into gory shreds with their hands and teeth as baboons do a trapped leopard. It was the regrettable job of white man inhibitions to fight them off.

The mob gathered in a lowering herd,

jabbering; the shrill voices of their women incited them to rush again to vengeance.

The rat gibbered abjectly. Fritz, surrounded by humans once again instead of empty jungle, protected even by white men, was recovering some of his tough composure.

He shrugged. "All right, your cards win. So what do you propose to do about it?"

Bubu could with difficulty keep his hands off him. "We ought to bloody well turn you over to them."

"Indeed?" Fritz rolled a sour eye to him. "But you won't." Fritz had a certain wicked confidence.

"And that's the damned pity of it." Monty was striding about in a fury of helplessness; he fondled a captured gun. "And I suppose you know we can't very well shoot you out of hand either?"

Fritz had the hardihood to smile at him, quite politely, and he disclosed then why he could feel so securely tough.

"You wouldn't do that. Because I think we can bargain."

"Bargain? Why, you damned Hun, you have no more to bargain with than—"

"You are forgetting the plans that your Mr. Frazer so cleverly stole."

All three of them stared at him in sudden cold horror.

Fritz accepted their consternation with an even colder assurance.

"You don't suppose it's still there, do you? Come, come, my good amateurs. The very first rule is to search for papers. I put that valuable little tin box away last night before I went to bed—somewhere in the surrounding landscape. There's quite a lot of it too; the landscape, you know."

They only stared.

Fritz smiled. "So we shall bargain, eh? Of course I shall accept your word as British gentlemen that you will hold to the terms."

The effrontery of the man, using that icon of his caste, left Monty speechless. Bubu could swear and effectively did. Davie stood heavily before the man, thinking.

Finally he said: "Ye will tell and no bargain."

Fritz' smile turned ugly. "You think so? We have some quite persuasive methods in our own code, but I flatter myself none of them would make me, er —squeal."

GOG and Magog looked on. They could understand no word, but their African sense of gesture and tone made it clear enough that Fritz balked at something.

"A hot spear blade in the pit of the arm," Gog said softly.

Bubu grimly translated.

Fritz' eyes dilated, but he knew how squeamish men, other than gestapo agents, could be. He licked his lips but his teeth showed through. "The blacks might," he said, "but you chaps won't. You haven't got what it takes."

Monty prayed aloud. "Oh God, relieve me of all inhibitions."

Davie advanced on Fritz. "We maybe haven't; but the jungle is belike still with us."

He slapped Fritz open-handed across the side of his head so that the tall fellow's knees bent under him. He twisted an arm behind, clamped a hand on the back of Fritz' neck, and ran him, all naked as he was, to the river, to the little cliff of sacrifice.

"Aye so indeed," he told his victim. "The blacks do it to a goat, that's a cleaner beastie than you."

The lowering natives suddenly yelled excited approval. Monty let go a whoop just as excited. "Bubu," he yelped, "I don't know what our madman is going to do; but it'll be good for a sick man to see. Come get Frazer, stretcher and all; better than medicine for him."

Fritz strained desperately back against Davie; but he was a long way short of that good mechanical law about an immovable object meeting an irresistible force. His yell came louder than the howling mobs.

"You won't—*Gott verhüt' es!* You can't shove me in!"

Davie shoved him inexorably to the brink. He slapped him mightily again over the neck and knocked him down. He took a hold of one naked ankle and kneed Fritz' hulk to the edge.

Fritz' screech as his body went over was like a man cut in half by bullets. His fingers clawed frantically at the flat rock face to find a hold. Davie coolly tramped on them. They let go. The sudden drag of Fritz' weight nearly pulled him from his own balance.

Davie lay on his stomach on the brink. Fritz dangled by the ankle from his two hands. Ten feet high the little cliff was. Fritz' face hung a bare three from the water, closer to horror than he had ever been in the callous dungeons of the gestapo.

Black men lined the edge and jumped up and down; they stamped, they yelled, they whistled like any other gallery in the enthusiasm of a thrilling exhibition.

A long V furrow began out in the pool. Other V's raced it. Fritz' bellow was frothy with the emanations from his inverted carcass.

The nearest V broke in a splash. A great gray snout heaved up with a gape like a step ladder. Fritz' screech shrilled high above the audience's yelling.

Davie grunted with the effort of hoisting Fritz' bulk clear. The row of big teeth clanged shut with a distinct jar to the air. The crowd groaned. Somebody found a drum to make the sacrifice right.

"Will ye tell?" Davie panted. "Ye're a muckle heavy beastie and—"

Another nimbler brute made its rush, surged up a full head length. Even Davie let go a little yelp as he strained Fritz' face clear by only inches. Fritz bubbled words; indistinguishable slobberings.

"Aye, ye've dished it out," Davie panted. "Your methods in your own code are persuasive, eh? But here's jungle persuasion. Can ye take it? Will you now tell?"

The slobber became desperately coherent. "Buried—the hut—next ours. *Ach du seeliger Herr*!"

Davie strained his neck over his shoulder. "I'll no believe the lowrie till ye go see. Make it fast, Monty."

The veins in his forearms stood out thick and blue. His knuckles were white disks in the freckled hairiness of his hands. "I misdoot I'll be able to get ye up," he cheered Fritz. "If ye've by any chance not lied."

A RING of cold golden speckled eyes watched the dangling nakedness, waiting for just another inch or two of give in the muscles that held him. Fritz bellowed and bubbled; he tried to claw himself up his own body with his hands. Davie shook him to babbling limpness.

The gallery howled for more action. Davie hung on, panting.

The speckled eyes just waited. A swirl in the water showed where some other brute fought for a favorable spot.

Monty's yelp came shrill in triumph.

"And just about in time," Davie grunted. He couldn't hoist Fritz' bulk up; the long strain on his muscles had been too exhausting. But he swung him; got him to pendulum, all sprawled out like a giant spider against the cliff face. The cold golden eyes followed like novelty Swiss clocks. Till Davie got the swing of it, gave a last mighty heave and rolled with it.

Fritz' naked body topped the edge, slithered on the rough surface. The audience moaned disappointment.

Fritz lay as exhausted as Davie; spasms of shuddering shook him; he still bubbled and belched; blood oozed from innumerable small gashes along his whole naked front.

Davie sat up. "Ye have luck, my fine murderin' mannie; more than ye know or deserve. I nigh took up more than I could hold."

Monty helped him to his feet. "Laddie," he said, "if you had been raised in anything less peaceful than a parsonage damned if I wouldn't be jolly well afraid of being partners with you."

Davie wiped his hands on his breeches seat. "Feugh!" he said. " 'Tis a greasy unwashed beastie."

"Leave him lie," Monty said. "Come along now and celebrate; the major and all of us; the man is practically cured. Everybody satisfied and happy."

"Celebrate?" Davie was puzzled.

"Absolutely, old fellow. These jolly gunmen of ours traveled like bally sybarites. Wine, no less."

Davie let himself be led. Frazer was able to sit up and only an occasional sudden grip of his jaws showed that he suffered. Tin cups brimmed with some-

thing ruby red and tempting to men who had lived native for many days. But a flash of racial caution checked Frazer.

"Let us first be sure that the papers are still there. Will one of you open up the uniform case?"

All the others held tin cups; so Davie put his two thumbs to pry up the tight fitting lid. And there they were, right enough, a bundle of soiled papers wrapped with string; abstruse figures, plans, hand-scrawled maps.

"Thank God!" Frazer said gratefully. "These may mean more than any of us can guess."

But Davie was looking at something more important. In that uniform case, fitted with its leather gaskets to preserve its contents from an inclement climate, reposed, as befitted valuable objects, another bundle; fluted tubes, silver-mounted wrapped with tartan ribbon.

Davie's eyes glittered on the things. "Aye," he murmured. "Aye so." The hardness of his face softened. "Aye so, indeed." He spoke as softly as though in a church. "A bonny-looking set." Reverently he lifted the collection out, fitted tubes together, moistened reeds with his tongue.

Frazer observed his expert handling with astonishment. "Man dear," he dropped into the appropriate idiom, "ye'll not be telling me ye have the great music, too?"

Davie beamed on him. "Aye, the *ceol mór*." And he remembered to ask the belated permission for handling another person's sacred objects. "I may put finger to your chanter?"

MONTY'S face twitched in premonitory suffering as though it was he who had a broken leg. His protest was a feeble attempt to stem a force as cataclysmic as a flood.

"Good God! I'd forgotten about the thing. The only real reason Scotty ever came. But not now, laddie. I mean, not here. What I mean, we've got a sick man on our hands."

There exist, for a piper, things too lofty to be susceptible to insult. Davie beamed on Monty too. "A celebration," he said, "was your own fine idea."

"My sacred aunt!" Monty moaned.

Davie rose grandly to his feet. Benignly he told Monty: "And ye'll mind perhaps the true tale o' the Scot that was dying in hospital; till they asked him his last request, and he said he'd like to hear a skirrl o' the pipes—and it cured him."

"I know it," said Monty brutally, "but all the other patients died. This is going to be positively ghastly."

Davie smiled on him. His eye lit on Fritz, shuddering to raise himself at the little cliff's edge. His smile turned malignant. "Yon loon destroyed my set," he growled. "For which he has not suffered any proper penalty."

"But this is an inhuman punishment, don't you think?"

Davie ignored Monty. He turned to Frazer with the befitting courtesy.

"Your ain tune. *Lord Lovat Frazer o' Saltoun*."

He filled his lungs with a breath such as a three-minute diver must take and blasted the village clearing with sound.

Monty covered his ears with his hands.

Davie stepped the precise cat-footed march to the tune, ribbons flying to wind, silver mountings winking to the sun, his ragged rump swaying to the lilt of it as though he swung the kilt. A grotesque and an incongruously grand figure of a man.

Frazer leaned back with closed eyes; he took in the ecstasy of it with long peaceful breaths.

Monty moaned.

Bubu's long experience in Africa had rendered his Cockney ears practically immune to dire sounds. He could still think. A thought had taken root in his mind and was blooming apace.

Bubu carefully guarded their deadly guns and on them the idea blossomed. A use for them not as deadly as the gunners deserved but as poor a personal satisfaction as inhibited man must accept. He leaned over and roared in Monty's ear above the din.

"They'll ruddy well dance to it."

Monty opened only one eye out of his screwed up face.

"It's an old American custom," Bubu yelled. "I seen it in the pitchers."

With grim purpose he rounded up the two killers. At muzzle of one of their own guns he herded them before Davie. "Dance," he shouted at them. "'Op, yer ruddy Nazis."

They only looked at him in cringing apprehension. "Jump, will yer!" Bubu yelled. "'Ot foot it."

He touched his finger to the trigger. Bullets, nine to the second, splattered gravel around their feet.

They jumped. Naked as frogs they leaped.

"More and 'igher," Bubu yelled.

Gravel cut at the naked ankles like hail. The two men jumped more and higher. The village came to watch. Black men clapped their hands to the rhythm and howled.

Davie obligingly stopped his march, stood and faced the exhibit. He took the blow tube from his lips; his weapon screamed on the single piercing E note. "*Ghillie Callum.* The sword dance," he shouted. He turned to faster rhythm.

"Gun dance," Bubu yelled. "Stay with it, gestapos; I ain't any too expert with this machine."

WHEN the naked white men dropped in an extremity of exhaustion that not even close bullets could revive, the black men would have joyously continued the

"Jump, will yer!" Bubu yelled. "'Ot foot it!"

jamboree. But Davie lifted his left arm from the bag. The uproar ceased. Only a tingling in the ears remained and the disappointed cluckings of the naked audience.

Monty came to Davie with a thin cup. "Laddie," he said, "I can forgive much for that. Let bygones be bygones."

"Man," said Davie sternly. "Stand away from me. The once that ye befooled me to drink, look what a trouble grew of it. And let you not forget that we yet have two devil-contrived prisoners to watch."

Monty flouted any such restraint. "The damned prisoners have reached the end of their murderous rope, old man. Let 'em lie or grovel or crawl. They can't escape. Where can they go? There's only the jungle, and that they'll never dare face. We'll take 'em yet to their judgment, which we all agree with Bubu will be never the half of what they deserve."

"Not the bloody tenth of it," Bubu growled.

"So drown the sorrow in a dram, laddie. Just a wee one is surely indicated in the circumstances."

Davie let the tin cup be put into his hands. Bubu gawked at him. Monty's eyes sparkled as on that potent evening in Williams' bar, with the sardonic gleam of the Tempter triumphant.

Davie raised his arm with the cup. "To our good partner," he said. "The jungle!" and he poured the wine slowly, like drips of blood, to the ground.

Magog, gaping with the other jungle men at the white men's ever inexplicable doings, could see that some rite was being enacted by Davie who had understanding about such things. He judged the hour right to intrude a small ceremonial of his own.

In the matter of charms, Magog said, a man, to serve bwanas who lived so dangerously, must be protected by a good charm. The Bwana Chatu had promised to pay a witch doctor for a first class sorcery; and the Bwana was in agreement that a good charm should be built about a nucleus of some portion of the last one's destroyer.

Davie muttered that he supposed he had promised some such thing; in the enthusiasm of admiration for a brave deed he didn't know exactly what he had said.

Well then, said Magog, his face an African mask, it so happened that one of the men in the village had found a piece of that first man whom Muungu M'bulu took in the night. Most fortuitously it was the very piece that did the shooting; it would be the one perfect thing for a charm. He held a grisly crooked white something in his palm.

"Now therefore," he proposed, "if the Bwana will but command the witch doctor of this village a potent charm can be built forthwith and I shall be safe through all the dangers that still watch for us in this enemy country."

The thing was the three bones of a finger! The inference was gruesomely obvious that it must be a trigger finger.

"Guid Lorrd save us!" Davie recoiled from the thing. "How fearsome an idea! Where got ye that?"

"Nay, Bwana," Magog insisted blankly. "A man of the village found it by the edge of Muungu M'bulu's pool. That man is now dead. It was the same who made a dash for his hut and was cut in half by bullets."

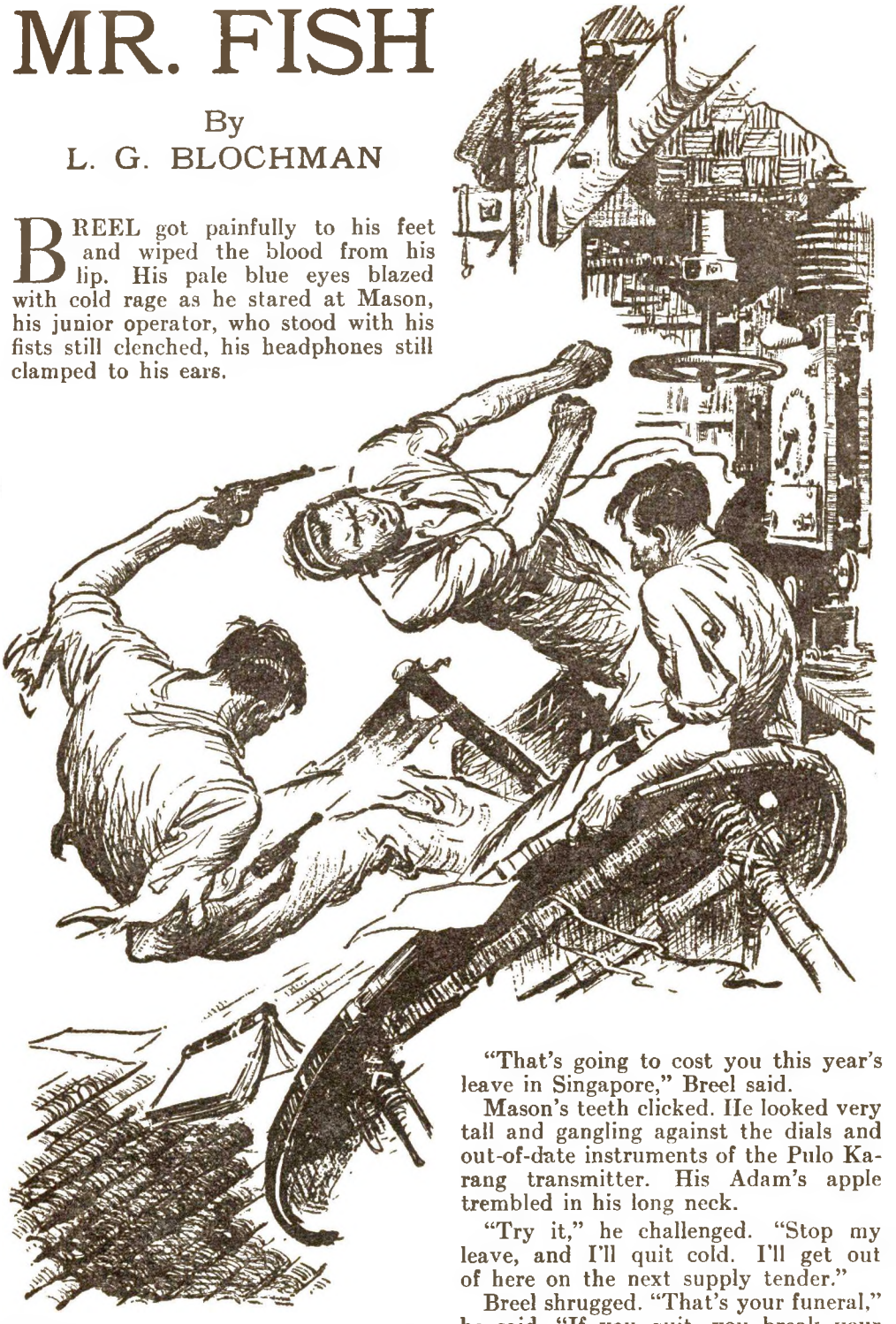
"And all the police in Africa," Monty said softly, "will never get any other story."

"Lorrd preserve us!" Davie shook his head to clear a fog of thought. "What white man will ever understand Africa?"

MR. FISH

By
L. G. BLOCHMAN

BREEL got painfully to his feet and wiped the blood from his lip. His pale blue eyes blazed with cold rage as he stared at Mason, his junior operator, who stood with his fists still clenched, his headphones still clamped to his ears.



Mason sprang up, snapping the cord of his earphones, and the pistols thundered.

"That's going to cost you this year's leave in Singapore," Breel said.

Mason's teeth clicked. He looked very tall and gangling against the dials and out-of-date instruments of the Pulo Karang transmitter. His Adam's apple trembled in his long neck.

"Try it," he challenged. "Stop my leave, and I'll quit cold. I'll get out of here on the next supply tender."

Breel shrugged. "That's your funeral," he said. "If you quit, you break your contract—and lose twelve months' pay." He strutted from the room, his square,

stocky figure rigidly erect. Breel was once a sergeant-major and had never quite gotten over it.

At the door, without turning around, he announced: "By the way, Mason, I hate your guts."

"That makes it mutual," Mason replied. He sank limply into his chair. The lights flickered and dimmed as he closed the switch and reached for the key to start sending the midnight weather report. His hand shook, and it was only his fingers which pressed out the barometer reading, wind direction and velocity, wet- and dry-bulb temperature. His mind was occupied with the thought that had haunted him for months: he was going to kill Breel.

Mason supposed it was normal for two men to despise one another after enduring each other's exclusive company for a year. Although the two wireless operators did not live in complete physical isolation at Pulo Karang, for all practical purposes it was complete. There was Douro, the half-caste electrician, who lived down the hill from the wireless station with his brown wife and brood of naked brats, but he belonged neither to the white colony of two nor to the Malay fishing village of fifty at the end of the island. Breel would not allow Douro inside the bungalow except for electrical purposes, and Mason, after two visits, gave up going to the Douro shack; the smell was too much for his stomach.

As for friendly contact with the Malayan population, that, too, was forbidden by Breel. Breel felt personally responsible for upholding the dignity and superiority of the white race on Pulo Karang, and lectured Mason constantly on the danger of revealing any human trait which might destroy the god-like quality of the European in the East. It was the question of racial relations which brought the two operators to blows.

First, Mason had started fishing for *kakap* as a relief from boredom. Breel made him stop; he must not lower himself by doing, even for sport, what the natives had to do for a living. Mason gave up fishing, but not before he had made friends with two Malay girls—appealing, golden-skinned creatures with red sarongs wound about their lithe young bodies, and fragrant yellow *ilang-ilang* blossoms in their black hair. The girls began coming to the wireless station when Mason was on duty. Their visits were quite innocent, devoted largely to increasing Mason's Malay vocabulary, hitherto limited to giving orders to the houseboy. But when Breel found the girls, he had thrown them out, with definite and profane instructions never to come back.

"The island's too small for that sort of thing" Breel smirked to Mason. "You can't get away with it. Can't you wait until your holiday in Singapore?"

It was then that Mason hit Breel.

THEY had never come to blows before, but they had been on the verge for months. They had always fought over the supplies which arrived every eight weeks with the mail tender. Breel did not consider them communal supplies. He insisted that each man drink from his own whiskey bottle. He kept track of the tins of Australian butter that Mason consumed, and doled out the cigarettes, pack by pack. When Mason exhausted his tobacco ration a week before the tender arrived, he went smokeless. Breel would not share his own cigarettes; a man must learn to be provident.

They quarreled violently when the durians were ripe and Mason asked the houseboy to get some of the big green prickly melon-shaped fruit. Breel refused to allow durians in the bungalow. They smelled like cheese.

They wrangled over the maintenance of the wireless transmitter, which consisted largely of apparatus dating back to the days of the rotary spark gap and the first audion-bulb detectors, when sending a radiogram was like an electric storm complete with ozone. They never agreed on how the log should be kept, but Breel was always right.

They used to fight bitterly over the chessboard, until they no longer played together. Mason now had several games in progress with operators on other islands, most of them Hollanders at Dutch

Indies stations. He felt much closer to these men he had never seen, than to the martinet he lived with.

It was during the ten days that they had not spoken a word to each other that Mason first thought he would probably kill Breel some day. He knew that Breel would not kill him, although the chief certainly detested him just as thoroughly. Breel was a much better hater than Mason. His nature enabled him to keep his hate on a high plane of virulence; he would never descend to a personal expression such as murder. Breel would rather drive a man crazy by constant, petty irritations. It was not he who had first indulged in physical violence; it was Mason.

Mason did not regret hitting Breel; it was inevitable. Even if Breel should successfully rob him of his holiday—and it was only the thought of the month in Singapore that had kept him sane this long—he did not regret it. He would have to kill Breel, that's all. That, too, would be inevitable.

When Mason finished sending the weather report, he threw the switch. The lights went up. He took off his headphones and put them on the table, diaphragms out; he could recognize his call letters across the room, if anyone tried to raise him. He wiped the perspiration from his ears, lit a cigarette, and walked out the back door to stop the generator.

Breel always insisted they use storage batteries at night, except when they were working DX, because the noise of the gasoline engine kept him awake. Well, that didn't matter now. Nothing mattered now. Mason decided not to stop the generator after all. He stood in the doorway, smoking.

The breeze had dropped and the night was sticky and oppressive. The sky, ablaze with white-hot stars, seemed close enough to touch, but the Pongsu Light, swinging its warning beam over the dark rim of the sea, was far away. Pongsu Light stood on the Yellow Shoals, a cruel ten miles of rock and coral that churned the China Sea into a dismal froth just beyond the horizon from the Pulo Karang wireless station. The light was built too low, and ships out of Java or Singapore or Borneo ports could not see it in thick weather until they were almost upon it. In thick weather, mariners always asked for a radio bearing from Pulo Karang. The role of radio lighthouse was the chief reason for the existence of the wireless at Pulo Karang—the weather data was routine, and the storm warnings in typhoon season were usually superfluous—and it somehow instilled a feeling of responsibility in Mason. He never saw a wisp of smoke against the sunset sky, or a caterpillar of light crawling along the horizon at night without a sense of warmth, a realization that he was partly responsible for the men in the hull he could not see. Nobody would be asking for bearings tonight, however. The weather was crystal clear.

Mason threw away his cigarette and went back to his desk. He got out the chessboard with numbered squares, set up the men and put on his headset. He had an unfinished game on with a brass-pounder at PKE, but the static was bad and he couldn't raise Amboina. He tried the Royal Dutch station at Tarakan, which was closer, but Tarakan was busy on 600 meters with a long inventory of Borneo petroleum. There was nothing to do tonight, apparently, but think up ways of killing Breel.

IT SHOULD be simple enough. Breel was so sure of himself, so confident that Mason was completely under his domination, that he would not even be suspicious. His own irresistible will would cow insurrection; his authority would protect him. Mason didn't even consider such underhand methods as shooting him in his sleep. Not only would that be cowardly, but it would be messy. After all, Douro and perhaps a Malay or two would have to help bury Breel, and while Mason was sure the chief operator did not have a friend in the island, it was best not to furnish any evidence which a simple-minded islander might unwittingly repeat to a possible investigator. Breel would be buried and well on the way to dissolution by the time any investigation could be begun, but still. . . .

Strangling would be best. It would give Breel a chance for his life—not much of a chance, true, but at least he would die facing his enemy. And his swollen, discolored face could pass for electrocution or one of the many tropical diseases which strike and kill like lightning. . . .

"Mason! Why's that bloody generator running?"

Mason jumped from his chair and turned around in a single movement. Breel was standing behind him, his bare torso glistening with perspiration. He was clad only in the blue silk sarong he wore as a dressing gown. He had walked from the bungalow next door in his sandals.

"The battery's down," Mason replied.

Breel glanced at the chessboard. "Don't waste petrol!" he ordered. "The Dutchman's got you checked in two moves. Shut off that bloody generator."

"Shut it off yourself."

The two men glared at each other.

Mason took a step forward. This was as good a time as any. Why not do it now and get it over with? The little Hitler with the blond fuzz on his bare torso thinks he can stop my holiday in Singapore, does he? He thinks he's going to rob me of a year's pay, does he? We'll see—

"Well, what are you goggling at?" Breel demanded. "Are you going to shut it off?"

"No," said Mason. "I'm going to strangle you."

"You?" Breel gave a short, mirthless laugh. "You won't strangle me. You haven't got the guts."

He turned and walked away. Mason let him get as far as the door before he shouted "Breel!"

Breel did not turn back. The screen door closed after him with a *ping!*

Mason felt a strange weakness in his knees. He sat down. Perspiration suddenly sprang into being on his high forehead, at the roots of his curly brown hair, in the palms of his hands. Why had he let Breel walk out like that? Was Breel right—that he hadn't the guts to strangle him?

Nonsense. He wasn't afraid of Breel. He wasn't afraid of anyone. There was plenty of time. The tender wasn't due again for three weeks. Breel would be dead before that.

Mason sat for a long time listening to the panting of the little gas engine that ran the generator.

THE sun rose from the cobalt sea, flinging long shadows of the wireless masts across the flame-colored lantana that covered the hillside. Mason looked at the chronometer on the wall and wondered what had happened to the houseboy. Ali usually brought over a cup of tea from the bungalow every sunup, to see the operator on duty through the last hour of his watch. He was half an hour late.

Mason was about to go off duty when he heard excited voices coming up the hill. Taking off his headphones, he went to the door. He saw the houseboy running ahead of a group of fishermen who were carrying something heavy.

"It is a drowned man, Tuan," the houseboy shouted. "They found him on the beach near the village. He was washed up by the tide."

"Why not bury him where they found him?" Mason asked.

"Because he is not drowned dead, Tuan. His heart still beats."

"Why are they bringing him up here?"

"Because he is an *orang inggrish,* Tuan."

"Englishman, eh?" Mason came down the steps from the radio station to see what the Malays had brought on their litter of casuarina branches. It was a European, all right, but not a very prepossessing person. The man's white ducks and bright silk shirt were wet and outlined spindly legs and a paunchy body. His dark hair was plastered across his face. Mason brushed the hair away, and the man opened his eyes and looked at him dully. They were bulging eyes, like the eyes of a deep-sea fish. His mouth, too, was piscatorial in outline—an inverted crescent, like the mouth of a shark. The resemblance was noticeable to the Malays, too, for one of them said: "*Orang ikan*—man fish."

Ali, the houseboy, shook his head reprovingly at this lack of respect for a

white man. "*Tuan Ikan,*" he corrected. "*Mr.* Fish."

The Malays laughed.

"How do you feel, old man?" Mason asked.

Mr. Fish closed his eyes again. He said nothing.

"Take him into the bungalow, Ali," Mason ordered. "Give him some tea with plenty of brandy in it. Wake up Tuan Breel. I'll be over myself as soon as Tuan Breel relieves me."

It was half an hour before Breel came into the station to take over. He said: "I caught Ali giving my brandy to your house guest. You forgot that you finished your own brandy last week."

"That's a hell of a way to act with a shipwrecked sailor," Mason said.

"Your friend is no sailor. He has soft hands, like a bank teller's. And I doubt if he's been shipwrecked either. At any rate he hasn't been long in the water. I took his pulse. It's perfectly normal."

"I suppose he just came to Pulo Karang for a holiday," Mason said. "Been reading about the island in the resort literature."

"Wherever he came from, you'll have to feed him out of your own rations. You brought him to the bungalow. Get out of that chair, Mason. I've got to send the morning weather."

Mason walked over to the bungalow he shared with Breel. Mr. Fish was asleep in his bed—and Mason was forced to admit that Breel was right about the man not looking utterly exhausted—so he stretched out in a chaise longue on the veranda, and fell asleep himself.

When he awoke, shortly before noon, he went in to look at his uninvited guest. The man's eyes were still closed, but he had apparently been awake—and taking liquid nourishment. There was a bottle of Mason's whiskey beside the bed. Mason didn't mind investing a few quarts if he got a little congenial companionship out of it. Talking to someone besides Breel might keep him from going crazy—or committing murder. It would be awful, though, if Mr. Fish should turn out to talk only Russian or Czech or Icelandic.

Mr. Fish opened his eyes and looked at Mason. "Hello, Botsford," he said. "How do you like Singapore?"

Mason breathed more easily. The man spoke English. "My name's Mason," he said. "And you're a long ways from Singapore. This is Pulo Karang."

Mr. Fish shook his head. "How did I get here?" he asked.

"I was just going to ask you the same question. They found you on the beach. Did your ship go down?"

Mr. Fish shook his head again. He looked at Mason dully. "I don't understand."

"Let's begin at the beginning. First, what's your name?"

Mr. Fish frowned. Then he closed his eyes, as though in pain. "Strange," he said. "I can't seem to remember very much."

"We'll call you Mr. Fish," Mason said, "because you—because you came in with the tide."

Mr. Fish smiled faintly. It didn't improve his appearance much. His upper teeth showed, but his mouth was still an inverted crescent. "I was talking to Botsford," he said. "He'd just come back from Singapore."

"From Singapore to where? Manila?" Manila was a good guess. Mr. Fish showed traces of an American accent.

"To Los Angeles," said Mr. Fish. "He'd been traveling in the Orient for our firm."

"What firm?"

"I—I wish I could remember."

"You've got plenty to remember between Los Angeles and Pulo Karang," Mason said. "But don't worry. It'll all come back. Have another drink, Mr. Fish."

MR. FISH had another drink, but nothing at all came back. Nothing came back, in fact, during the next two days. He roamed the island with a dazed look in his eyes, made serious inroads into Mason's liquor supply, ate heartily, and tried unsuccessfully to remember who he was and how he came to be lying on the beach at Pulo Karang at dawn. Breel paid no attention to him except to insist that he wear a jacket—bor-

Breel snatched the binoculars from Mr. Fish's hands.

rowed from Mason—at the dinner table. When Mr. Fish could recall his name, Breel would send word to the world that he was alive and at Pulo Karang. In the meantime there was little to do except listen to the news reports for announcement of a man lost overboard from some ship; there was none.

Mason welcomed Mr. Fish's friendship. The puzzle of the man's identity and arrival on the island was a strong tonic—almost enough to keep his mind off his antipathy for Breel. Almost, but not quite. Breel would never pass up an opportunity to make himself unbearable, and redoubled his index of orneriness whenever Mr. Fish was around. Mason thought that Mr. Fish's bulging eyes seemed to light with an unaccustomed gleam of awareness whenever the feud flared up. And afterward he would be more friendly than ever toward Mason.

He came to the wireless station when Mason was on duty. He studied charts, seeking some clue to his predicament, he said, in the location of Pulo Karang and the steamship lanes that passed near. He thumbed through the log, looking for a name or a word that might lift the veil from his memory.

"I notice you talk to lots of steamers," he said one afternoon. "Ever talk to the *Lombok?*"

Mason knew the *Lombok.* She was on the Batavia-San Francisco run, with calls at Manila, Hong Kong, and Honolulu. She had steamed past only a fortnight ago, perhaps less.

"What about the *Lombok?*" he asked. "Were you a passenger on her, Mr. Fish?"

Mr. Fish shook his head. "I don't think so," he replied dreamily. Suddenly he turned sharply to Mason, and all the vagueness seemed to have gone out of his face. He said: "You've been damned decent to me, Mason, and I'd like to do something for you in return. Why do you stay in a place like this?"

"It's a job," Mason said. "I can't spend any money here. I get a month's holiday with pay every year. And at the end of three years when my contract's up, I'll have a nice piece of change put away."

"You also have Breel," said Mr. Fish.

Mason looked at him curiously. "Meaning what?"

"I've noticed." Mr. Fish smiled his fishy smile. "Even a man without a memory could see that you and Breel are going to tear each other to pieces. Why not chuck it and come away with me when I leave?"

"I'd starve," Mason answered. "I'd lose a year's pay, and maybe I couldn't get another job because I jumped this contract. We'd make a fine pair in Singapore—a brass-pounder without a billet and a man who forgets who he is."

"We wouldn't starve," said Mr. Fish. "Think about it. I'll tell you more . . . when I remember. . . ." His eyes grew dull again, and he left without further explanation.

A few minutes later, when Mason went to the door for a breath of air, he saw Mr. Fish on the veranda of the bungalow, staring out to sea with Breel's binoculars. Looking in the same direction, Mason saw a fleet of half a dozen Malay proas flying before the wind. At a distance, they seemed to be larger

than the high-powered craft of the Pulo Karang fishermen, and their sepia sails were cut differently from the triangular sails of the proas which sometimes passed on the way to Yellow Shoals for *bêche de mer.*

As he was looking, Mason saw Breel come out on the veranda and snatch the binoculars from Mr. Fish's hands.

THAT night, during Breel's trick at the key, Mason was lying in bed, listening to the hot rain pounding on the corrugated iron roof and gushing off into the rainwater tank in back. He was pondering on his strange conversation with Mr. Fish that afternoon, trying to decide just how much memory Mr. Fish had really lost, when that gentleman appeared in person. Mr. Fish carried a bottle and two glasses.

"Join me in a nightcap, Mason?" he suggested.

"Sure," Mason said, "but we'd better go lightly on that stuff for a while, or it won't hold out until the tender comes."

"This is Breel's," said Mr. Fish, flourishing the bottle. "He's got plenty." He poured out the whiskey. Then: "I'm beginning to remember things, Mason," he resumed. "I think I remember that the steamer *Lombok* was due to sail from Batavia four days ago. Is there any way that you can find out if she actually sailed?"

"She sailed," Mason said. "I heard her giving her position this afternoon."

"Good. Then she ought to pass this way tomorrow night."

"Tomorrow night late," said Mason, studying Mr. Fish over the rim of his glass. "Why?"

"What are the weather prospects for tomorrow?"

"About like today. Rain squalls, off and on. The rainy season is about starting."

Mr. Fish seemed very pleased. He nodded, got up to close the door, came back to push the Dutch-wife out of the way so he could sit on the edge of Mason's bed.

"Look, Mason," he said in a confidential tone, "ships coming up past Yellow Shoals often ask radio bearings from you, don't they?"

"They sometimes get one bearing from us, yes. They need two bearings, of course, to plot their position."

"Where do they get the other bearing?"

"One of the Borneo stations, usually."

"You hear them, of course?"

"If I'm listening."

"If the ship asks you first, you could stall them so they would get the other bearing first, couldn't you? So you would be able to plot the ship's position yourself?"

"The *Lombok* you mean?"

"I mean any ship."

Mason finished his drink at a gulp and put it down on the night table beside his bed. He stared at Mr. Fish.

"I suppose I could, yes," he said after a moment.

"In that case you could calculate exactly how many degrees a bearing could be falsified so that a navigator might think he was heading for Yellow Shoals, change his course, and pile right up on the reef. Or could you?"

"You mean you want me to give a false bearing to the *Lombok* so she'll pile up on Yellow Shoals?"

"I didn't say the *Lombok,*" said Mr. Fish.

"I did," said Mason. He swung his feet over the edge of the bed, and reached for the bottle. "And I'd say further, it can't be done."

"Why not?"

"Two reasons. First, they can check back by taking their own bearing on Pulo Karang."

"They couldn't if they didn't hear your signal—after you've taken a bearing on them," said Mr. Fish softly.

"Second, they've got Pongsu Light to keep them off the reef."

"What if Pongsu Light isn't burning tomorrow night?"

Mason looked blank. "Why shouldn't Pongsu burn tomorrow?"

"Because this is a very big job," said Mr. Fish. "Because every man in it knows his part and every part has been thought out in advance and in detail. I'm offering you a part for yourself. For ten minutes' work, you will receive

enough money to live on for twenty years."

"Why does the *Lombok* have to pile up on Yellow Shoals?" Mason demanded.

"Because she is carrying 20,000,000 florins in gold from the Bank of Java to the Federal Reserve Bank at San Francisco. Will you take your share, Mason?"

Mason looked out the window. Pongsu Light was hidden by the curtain of rain.

"Look," Mr. Fish continued. "You're living in hell on this island. I'm not only giving you a chance to escape, but I'm going to make you rich—because you're a decent guy."

"How are you going to get off?" Mason asked.

"The same way I came. Ever hear of the Orang Laut? I guess they call them Orang Bajo around here. The sea people. They've been pirates for centuries, and they're the best sailors in this part of the world. I've been months collecting this fleet, from Celebes to Sumatra. Afterwards, they'll scatter again, so the gold will never be found in any one place. Of course we'll have to hole up in some Laut village for a few months, till things blow over, but it will be worth it. How about it, Mason?"

Again Mason looked out the window. It was a tempting proposition, and he felt he was going to accept. He wondered, however, what would happen if he were to refuse. He turned suddenly and pulled open the drawer in the night table, where he kept a .38 revolver. The revolver was not there.

He looked at Mr. Fish. Mr. Fish grinned with his upper teeth. Mason shut the drawer.

"All right," said Mason. "I'll do it."

THE warm rain was still streaming down when Mason went on duty again. The wild almond trees beyond the bungalow were tall, dripping blurs in the gray dawn. Sea and sky merged in a single leaden universe.

The first thing Mason did when he took over, was to open a little cabinet which held an extra set of 5000-ohm phones, spare fuses, fixed-condenser units, and a 9-millimeter Luger pistol. The Luger was gone.

Mr. Fish had done a thorough job of preparation, all right. It was just as well Mason had said "yes" to him last night. Better to be with him than against him. He knew what he wanted and he was going to let nothing stand in his way. A sly, determined, and clever person, Mr. Fish, and a good man to tie up to. A good way out of the Breel situation, too. Wonder what Breel would say when he found both of them gone?

The rain continued intermittently all day. The sun came out for an hour at a time, and the islands lay steaming in the hot glare. Then the inky clouds would close in again, sweeping more rain across the sullen sea. It was dark long before nightfall, and the scudding clouds were frequently edged with the violet of lightning.

Mason tried to sleep when he came off duty for the afternoon, but could not close his eyes. He had no appetite either when dinner time came. At eight o'clock he left Mr. Fish drinking his whiskey and crossed to the station to relieve Breel.

Before he took the operator's chair, he looked at the log. There was no mention of any exchange with the *Lombok*.

"Nobody ask for bearings?" he inquired.

"Didn't see it in the log, did you?" Breel took off his headset, stalked out.

Mason adjusted the phones to his ears, but did not sit down at once. He twirled the crank above the desk, pivoting the directional loop aerial on the roof. A brass pointer swung across the indicator dial in front of him as he cranked, marking off compass points. He had it all worked out in his mind, knew approximately the bearing he would give the *Lombok* when she called. He was just rehearsing, swinging the loop for maximum loudness on the signal that was coming in, when suddenly he was aware that Mr. Fish was standing beside him.

"The *Lombok*?"

"Not yet. Just a tanker talking to Balik Papan."

Mr. Fish helped himself to a chair in the corner where he could watch both doors and Mason.

Mason slipped the receivers off his ears to his temples and mopped himself with a handkerchief. The wind was making a row outside in many keys. He could hear the thrashing branches of the wild almond trees, the minor sighing of the casuarinas, the scream of the guy wires of the antenna mast. There was a sea running, too. He could hear the surf shuddering against the steep south shore of the island. He said: "Not very good weather for it."

"Weather can't interfere," said Mr. Fish. "They don't make better sailors than the Orang Laut. Nothing too rough for them. Don't mind a little wetting, do you, to gain financial independence?"

"I was just wondering if they could make the ship after she hits."

"They'll make it."

The chronometer on the wall ticked away the night. No call came from the *Lombok*. Mason heard an American freighter out of Zamboanga, an Australian going into Sandakan, a China Coaster bound for Hong Kong. But no *Lombok*.

At ten o'clock Breel stormed into the station, his hair uncombed by the wind, his thin lips grim, his arms swinging.

"Pongsu Light is gone!" he declared.

Mason felt something turn hard and cold inside him. "Probably the weather," he said.

"Weather, hell!" said Breel. "Visibility's damned near perfect. Pongsu is dark."

MASON slid his phones tight against his ears. He thought he recognized his call letters. "What do you want me to do?" he asked. "Go out and light it with a match?"

"I want you to send out a CQ," Breel said. "Warn all mariners that Pongsu is dark."

Mason did not reply. He leaned forward to twist his condenser dials a hair's breadth.

"Well?" Breel demanded.

"Hold it," Mason said. "Somebody's asking for a bearing."

"Bearing, hell. Break in with your CQ."

"They're asking PKC for a bearing." Mason could feel his heart thumping violently as he worked the crank that turned the overhead loop. He tried to concentrate on the indicator crawling over the compass points, but he could not help being aware of Breel's eyes burning into him.

"Break in, I tell you. Can't you hear me, Mason? I said break in!"

"It's the *Lombok* asking a bearing," Mason repeated tonelessly, still working the crank for maximum volume. He heard a chair scrape on the floor and knew that at last Mr. Fish was getting up.

"What's the matter with you, Mason?" Breel demanded. "You're shaking like a leaf. You've been drinking too much. Here, let me in there."

Mason did not move. He did not even turn around. He heard Mr. Fish walking toward him. He could feel the senior operator's breath on the back of his neck.

"Get away from that key, Mason, and let—"

"*You* get away from the key, Breel." Mr. Fish spoke at last. His voice was hard and metallic.

Mason whirled. He saw the Luger and the .38 gleaming in Mr. Fish's hands. He saw the expression freeze on Breel's face.

"Well, well!" Breel tried to sneer but his lips seemed paralyzed. "Two-gun Fish, eh?" He stepped between Mason and the menacing gun muzzles. "Tell them Pongsu Light is gone, Mason," he said, scarcely moving his mouth. "Or I will."

"You'll back up in that corner there," Mr. Fish corrected. "Stand away from that key. Go on, back up, Breel. The cards are stacked against you, but I'm giving you a chance for your life. I'm counting to three before I blow you out of there.

"One."

Mason saw Breel's shoulders square a trifle; otherwise Breel did not move. He could see the taut downward curve of Mr. Fish's shark mouth, the deadly determination in his bulging eyes. The

receivers vibrated with the signal from the *Lombok,* repeating his call letters over and over, buzzing in his ears like a fly in a bottle.

"Two," said Mr. Fish. He came a step closer, moved a step to the side. Breel shifted his feet slightly to make sure he was still in the line of fire. Breel was protecting him—protecting *him,* Mason!

"Send it, Mason," Breel ordered.

Mason was cold and numb all over. The high whine of the *Lombok's* signal was dinning frantically in his ears. He closed his eyes. He thought he saw a ship wallowing through the hot smother of darkness, the seas piling over the bow; a ship plunging toward a reef, with a radio operator trying to get a bearing and the men on the bridge peering into the night for a light that was not there. . . .

"Three!" said Mr. Fish.

Mason never knew exactly how he did it, but as he saw the tip of Mr. Fish's tongue reach through his teeth to make the *th* in *three,* he flung Breel aside and sprang into a blinding sheet of flame, snapping the cord of his earphones, throwing out his hands, swallowing the stink and thunder that poured from the pistols. He felt something rip at his left hand, pound at his right thigh, just as his shoulder hit Mr. Fish across the chest, knocking him down.

He remembered sprawling on top of Mr. Fish as they hit the floor, coughing and gasping, reaching with hands that no longer seemed to belong to him, trying to spread-eagle Mr. Fish. He remembered, too, wrestling briefly before Breel jumped into the tangle of arms and legs. There were two more pistol shots.

Then a great searing pain welled up from his thigh to envelop his heart and brain, and then kept rising, spiraling upward, upward into dizzy, empty peaceful, silent darkness. . . .

WHEN Mason came to, he was still lying on the floor. His whole body seemed one throbbing ache. He turned his head—and saw blood. Beyond the blood Mr. Fish was lying on the floor, staring at him with bulging eyes that did not see. There was a peculiar eloquent immobility about the arm that stretched toward Mason.

The lights dimmed, and Mason thought he was going to pass out again. Then he noted the familiar rhythmic flicker, and understood. He lifted his head and saw Breel, without a shirt, seated at the transmitting desk, working the key like a madman.

With an effort, he sat up. The pain localized itself in his right thigh. He looked down and saw that his trouser-leg had been ripped away, and that a tourniquet made of part of Breel's shirt had stopped the bleeding from a long furrow in the flesh. Another part of Breel's shirt was bound about his left hand.

In the doorway he saw a group of dark Malay faces, peering at the scene in wonder, not daring to intrude upon the Tuans' domain. The faces vanished to make room for Ali, the houseboy, who entered timidly.

"Took you long enough to get here," Breel growled. "You're always raising hell with the *menchari* in the village whenever I want you. All right, go get Tuan Mason some brandy."

"Tuan Mason's brandy is all gone," Ali said.

"Who the hell asked you what brandy to bring? Bring the Tuan brandy. Quickly. *Lekas lah!*"

Ali made a quick exit. Breel took down the log book and made a long and detailed entry.

When the houseboy came back finally, Breel took the brandy and turned to Mason.

"Here," he said. "Sluice some of this down that swan-like throat of yours. Maybe it'll help. Can you stand on that leg?"

"Of course," Mason said. He proved it, although the pain made his lips white.

"Good," said Breel. "I'm glad there's nothing broken, so you can go to Singapore on the next tender. It might do you good to get away from here a little early this year. I know it will do me good."

"You could stand a little improvement," Mason said.

"Ali!" Breel commanded. "Get a couple of your friends to help and drag this *mayat* out of here." He indicated the dead man on the floor. "Bury him right away. I don't care where you bury him, but don't do it too near the bungalow. Might kill the trees and flowers. Did you get wise to what that crook was trying to do, Mason? He was trying to run the *Lombok* on the reef. She must have gold aboard or something. His accomplices probably put out the Pongsu Light—which I just reported, by the way. I told you he was no sailor."

"Stop boasting and give me those phones," Mason said, limping toward the desk.

"I'll finish your trick for you tonight," Breel said. "You can relieve me in a few hours if you feel up to it."

"I feel all right now," Mason said. Why did Breel think he had to baby him? "There's nothing wrong with me," he concluded.

Breel shrugged and took off the earphones. "That Dutchman at PKE wants to finish his chess game with you," he said. "I don't know what the hell you can do now, after you got your queen into an exposed—"

"My queen's not exposed," Mason protested. "My rook and bishop both protect the queen."

"Wait till the Dutchman moves his bishop."

"Look here, who's playing this game?"

"The Dutchman is. But I hope you don't call what you're doing playing chess."

"You get the hell out of here," said Mason.

"Gladly," said Breel, picking up his bottle. "I still hate your guts, Mason—but I'm glad you've got 'em."

"That makes it mutual," Mason replied.

He watched Breel leave, then closed his eyes in pain. An instant later he grabbed for the log book, hurriedly read the last entry: "S. S. *Lombok* . . . position . . . continued on course . . ." Thank God for that.

He wondered if Breel could guess how close he had been to betraying the men of the *Lombok*, for a handful of Mr. Fish's gold. Breel, damn him, had been ready to give up his life to protect those men, men he had never seen. It would have been just like Breel to have done it deliberately to shame Mason.

Mason had been ashamed, horribly ashamed, for the few awful seconds while Mr. Fish counted to three. He had redeemed himself, he felt, when he pushed Breel out of the way. It would rankle with Breel to feel grateful to a man he hated, just as it would rankle with Mason to feel respect for Breel. It would put their mutual dislike on a new level, a wholesome level. But it might be fun, hating as equals. . . .

Mason put on his earphones, gingerly, because his injured hand was throbbing violently, and called the Dutchman at PKE.

WAGONS AWAY!

IT WAS the winter of 1852, and the gold fever tugged hard at brawny young MORGAN WRIGHT. But the family needed his help and his father was reluctant to leave the frugal blessings of New England. Twenty years before, Morgan's uncle ABNER WRIGHT had gone west and the only word they'd had from him was a letter enclosing a deed to a ranch in California. Then ONE-EYE POTTS came to town. Adventurer, prospector, guide,

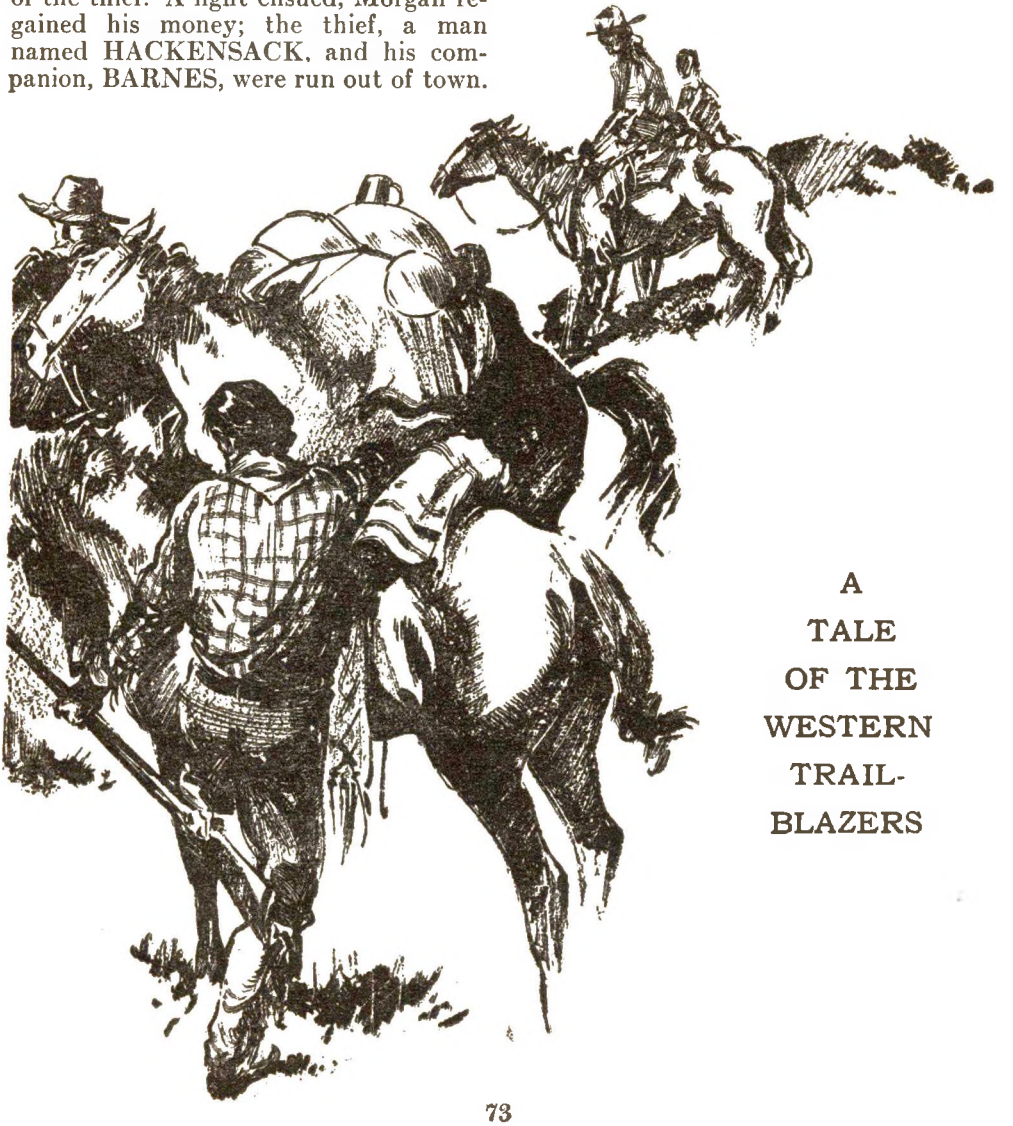
"There," said Griscom, pointing down at the bones and skulls, "are the fellers who headed for California."

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Potts was about to return to California. He pronounced Abner's deed a clear title to twelve hundred acres of land. At this point came the layoff at the mill where Morgan and his father worked. That settled it. The Wrights, including Morgan's mother and sister BETTY, made preparations to leave, in company with One-eye Potts.

They reached St. Louis by rail and stagecoach. There Morgan's wallet, containing the family funds, was stolen. Morgan kept the loss secret, went on to Independence and there caught sight of the thief. A fight ensued, Morgan regained his money; the thief, a man named HACKENSACK, and his companion, BARNES, were run out of town. A rumor spread that they were Nighthawks—a murderous crew of outlaws. That night, Morgan was ambushed by Hackensack. In the gunplay, Morgan killed Hackensack—and leaping on the outlaw's horse rode swiftly off toward the west.

After two days' hard riding, he no longer feared pursuit. He soon met up with one BUCK WALTERS. Recognizing Concho, Hackensack's horse, Walters took Morgan for a Nighthawk and, revealing himself as one of the band, led Morgan to his camp where



A TALE OF THE WESTERN TRAIL-BLAZERS

they found ARAPAHO SMITH, Walters' partner, and a captive Indian girl. When Morgan discovered that the two men had killed the girl's father, he denounced them as murderers. Smith flung a knife at Morgan. Morgan shot him and Walters fled.

The girl, Morgan learned, was DIANE MORA. She was part Indian, part French, part Spanish. With her father, she had been on her way to the mission station to meet DAN GRISCOM, a prosperous trader, when they were attacked by the two Nighthawks.

Morgan and the girl rode on together. They came upon a party of Tennessee Argonauts who gave them shelter, and awoke next morning to find themselves prisoners. Barnes and Walters had arrived in the night and told the Argonauts that Morgan was wanted in Independence for murder and horse stealing. That night, Morgan, escaping with Diane, was shot in the side. As he rode along, he grew steadily weaker. . . .

Morgan regained consciousness to find himself in a friendly Sioux village where Diane had brought him and nursed him through two weeks of delirium. Two white men rode into the village. They were Griscom and JUAN VACA, one of his men. Griscom told Morgan of his plan to hunt down the Nighthawks and Morgan agreed to join him at Laramie.

At Fort Kearny, Morgan found Potts and the Wright family. They all started out together, Diane included, for Laramie. Morgan had asked Diane to be his wife. And he had spoken to Potts about Griscom's plans and suggested that he join them. Morgan was still determined to help Griscom hunt down the Nighthawks, although he had heard that Abner Wright, who now called himself HERRICK, was their leader.

After a difficult trip, the wagon-train arrived at Laramie. There Morgan ran into trouble. A man called JOB FRANCIS confronted him, called Concho by name and accused Morgan of stealing the horse. A menacing crowd had begun to gather when Griscom suddenly appeared, proved he was Concho's rightful owner. Hackensack had stolen him.

Griscom gave Concho to Morgan, saying he owed him a debt for saving Diane, the daughter of an old friend. He told Morgan he would be over later, for a talk. Morgan started back to camp.

PART IV

WHEN he located the company, up the creek fork, he came upon a fine brawl. One-eye, prating of the difficulties ahead, had taken bitter umbrage to a recurrence of the Cassandra joke, with results little short of actual hostilities. Upon troubled waters, Morgan's news came like soothing oil. Griscom had promised to supply two additional wagons, with experienced teamsters to act as guides in Potts' absence. One-eye, retiring with his horse and few belongings to the refuge of the Wright wagon, was openly delighted at the prospect ahead.

Under the stars arrived Dan Griscom. He shook hands all around, asked questions, and showed a surprising interest in Silas Wright's yarn of the unseen farm in California.

"Don't you part with it to anyone," he advised. "You're lucky in having it; work it. Land out there is of no account now, but some day it'll have value. I'm pulling up stakes myself in Santa Fe and moving out to California, complete and final. People who don't go there looking for nuggets, are apt to find gold in other ways."

The Wrights, who were anxious to see the fort, departed with others of the company. Griscom settled down with Morgan, Diane and One-eye Potts, and lost no time in broaching what was uppermost in his mind.

"Diane, it's yours." In the starlight, he passed the girl an envelope. "Take care of that check; it's for over a thousand dollars. Your father gave me some money to keep for him, and had some more due as wages; you'll find a statement with the check. Now, are you for Santa Fe or for California?"

"California," she echoed. "Why, Dan, I didn't know there was any money—"

"Forget it. No time to be looking back," he cut in. "Do you know that I expected to meet you and your father at the mission station?"

"Yes," she replied. In the darkness, her voice sounded queer and strained.

"I don't s'pose you know why," Griscom said casually.

She was silent for a moment. Morgan became aware of tension, of an awkward and uncomfortable restraint in the air. Then Diane very quietly made response.

"I'm sorry, Dan. I didn't know until today, when I went over all of father's papers. I meant to give them to you back in the Indian camp; but you left there so unexpectedly that I clear forgot. I have them ready in the wagon. I'll get them now."

"All right," Griscom said. "And, Diane."

"Yes?"

"You mean that you found my last letter to your father, about meeting you both?"

"Yes. Today."

"Then forget it and keep your mouth shut," Griscom said in dismissal. Morgan wondered at the whole matter; what could have been the reason for that meeting, other than to head westward in company? Then he, too, dismissed the mental query as Griscom turned to him. "Morgan, did you fetch me a rifle from Kearny?"

"Sure. Got it in the wagon; your best rifle, your agent said."

"Good. We'll be wanting it. One-eye! Where are you?"

"Here," rejoined Potts, from the other side of the fire somewhere.

"Usual wages?"

"Ain't worried about the wages, Dan."

"All right. I wish you'd go back to the fort. Find my two teamsters. Tell 'em to join this company tomorrow, and wait at Hangtown for word from me. I'll have other wagons meeting there. Get my horse from them, and fixin's for the rifle. Then find the fort sutler. He's loading two pack-horses for me; ought to be finished pretty quick. Get 'em and bring them here. Tell Morgan's folks they'd better be getting back if they want to say good-bye, because we'll be pulling out in half an hour or so."

Potts grunted and shuffled away into the darkness.

"Do you always do things in a hurry?" demanded Morgan, laughing.

"If I don't, I regret it," Griscom said, an oddly savage ring in his voice. "I want to reach a certain spot along the Mormon short-cut at sunrise, to get directions from Juan Vaca. West of here is the old short-cut through the hills. It's too sandy and rough now for wagons—shorter for them to follow the river bend—but riders are sure to use it. Oh, hello, Diane! Thanks. I'm glad to have them."

He took the papers she gave him, and thrust them under his shirt.

"Did I hear you say you're pulling out now, tonight?" she asked.

"Yes. Suit you, Morgan?"

"I guess I've no choice," he said whimsically. "Sure. Suits me. What's the program?"

"I figure we'll head down to Bridger, over to Salt Lake, on to California by the old Donner route," said Griscom. "That is, after we leave this Oregon road at the South Pass. Rendezvous in California is Hangtown. Diane, you'll go on with the wagon and family. I'll get my Santa Fe affairs cleaned up at Bridger. Any objections?"

"None," said Diane. Morgan comprehended that Griscom did not want to touch upon the Nighthawk subject in her presence.

"Morgan, I'm not talking wages with you," pursued Griscom. "You and I are going into the trading business, when we reach California. A third of all profits to you. Agreed?"

"I can't do that," said Morgan, astonished. "I've got a couple hundred dollars, no more. I can't buy into your business—"

"No talk of buying," broke in the trader incisively. "You've got what I need more than money. I'm alone in the world, got no obligations, aim to tie up the future real solid. How's it look to you?"

"Sort of knocks me over," began Morgan. "There's nothing I'd like better, only—"

Griscom stood up. "I'm going down to the crick to soak up some water. You and Diane get your good-byes said 'fore the folks come back."

He strode away, lessened in the starlight and was gone.

"It's all sort of sudden," said Morgan,

turning to the girl beside him. "I aimed to talk with you. . . Why was it he wanted to meet you and your Dad at the mission station?"

"Nothing that matters," she evaded. "Nothing to talk about now. And there isn't anything for us to discuss, either; just to say good-bye. I don't like it, I can't help it, it means weeks of emptiness . . . "

But Morgan, meeting her lips beneath the cold stars, hoped that the man of steel and fire would remain down by the creek for a long time. And so he did.

CHAPTER XIII

BAD WEATHER FOR NIGHTHAWKS

THE three men rode on through the night hours, and the stars were cold. Not until they stopped, toward midnight, was any talking done, and then little enough.

"Figure to make time between now and tomorrow night, then no rush," said Griscom, as they ate some cold food and rolled up in their blankets. "Herrick's far ahead with his deviltry. He's bound to keep the trail to the South Pass. Chances are he'll go down by way of Bridger and into the Mormon country. May aim to plunder Mormon wagons; hard to say."

"Then you're dead set after him?" queried One-eye.

"You said it. Not him especially; the Nighthawks. Ain't said much about it," Griscom went on, "but they've done me a sight o' hurt. Looks like they've made a reg'lar campaign on my wagons and animals all along the line. If it hadn't been for them, I might ha' joined up with Kit Carson. He's aiming to herd big sheep flocks from Taos to California this summer. Sheep cost two-fifty a head there, and bring five to six dollars in California. Well, so long! See you at sun-up."

Morgan slept like a log during those hours.

Morning found them amid desolate, barren hills, following the old and disused Mormon trail cutting due west. With the sun an hour up, they halted and Griscom made his way afoot up the nearest hill.

At the summit, he halted a long while.

"Lookin' for smokes," One-eye explained to Morgan. "Vaca sends up a smoke at set times. Dan sees it, reads it, knows everything."

"What about Francis seeing it?"

Potts grunted in derision. His contempt for all Nighthawks was vast; they were parasites of the road itself. Few of them were plainsmen.

"Ain't nothing new," went on One-eye sagely. "River pirates, squawmen, border killers—mostly they stay close to liquor and women. Take Herrick, now—used to be Abner Wright. Why, he wouldn't know a rattler from a kingsnake."

Griscom returned.

"Everything good. No rush now," he announced. "They're making for the South Pass all right. We'll keep well behind. These three will lead us to the main gang, wherever it is."

They rode on, the packhorses in tow, through the sandy hills.

In these days of steady travel, Morgan learned many a trick of camping and craft, but only from One-eye Potts. Griscom seldom warmed; his flinty detachment seemed at times almost inimical, yet when he did thaw it was so completely and unreservedly that one forgave all else.

"He don't act right human, hardly, when he gets in one of his moods," observed Potts, the morning they came into the main trail again. Griscom was riding far in the lead; he often preferred to be alone.

"I like him," said Morgan, "shell or no shell."

"Oh, sure! Still and all, he just don't give a damn, seems like."

They had grown intimate with the trail; that night Morgan put the question direct. The Platte lay behind them and they were heading on for Independence Rock and Devil's Gate, now in the forefront of the rush. A tiny fire of buffalo chips died down as they sat smoking, and Morgan seized the moment.

"Dan, where'd you get your way of holding people off? Most times, you act

cold and hard and impervious, like an Injun chief; but when you want, you can make folks like you a lot. You're not any stone man, inside."

He sensed a sudden stiffening; then, after a moment, Griscom laughed softly.

"Maybe not. Think back, Morgan; what would have happened, back at Laramie, if I hadn't showed up?"

"I've thought of it more'n once," Morgan said frankly. "I'd have been in the soup. That skunk Walters had fixed it proper for me."

"And it was luck, your luck, that I was on hand. It was luck that you did for Hackensack; you've had a heap o' luck, if you want to call it luck. Some men are like that. I'm not."

He was silent a moment, then went on.

"When I was a kid, my folks died. I got kicked around plenty, till I learned to kick back and do it first. At fifteen, I was teaming for Cap'n Gregg; took my first trip out to Santa Fe with his wagons. Went up in the beaver country a year later with the mountain men; spent two years that trip, came out with bales o' fur, and got jumped by Indians. Lost every last pelt and just did save my scalp. Ever since, I've been fighting."

"But you have luck," argued Morgan. "You're no failure. You've done well."

"That's what you think," said the level voice in the darkness. "Oh, I can get ahead all right, makin' money and so forth! But not with the bigger things; not with what counts most. There, at every turn, fate's against me. If I put my trust in a man, nine times out of ten he cheats me. I'm not talking about you; but I'd gamble heavy that something will keep you from going partners with me in California."

"Nothing will," said Morgan quietly.

"Wait and see," came the bitter retort. "And now I'm turning in. Only place I come out on top, is in a fight. That'll be bad luck for the Nighthawks, you bet!"

WITH morning, Griscom had opened a door on his past and closed it only a whimsical smile and a gay comment on what he termed the silly talk; he had again, and as usual was quick to dismiss the subject.

They were skirting wagons, now; those that had won through in the van of the yearly migration. These thinned out to nothing. Next day they overtook the final group, the Peoria Company of California, brawny Illinois farmers whose sturdy horses had taken them into the lead. The horses, however, looked in bad shape; this was the first taste of real desert, with alkali springs and poison water everywhere.

One of the Illinois men rode out to meet them, as they skirted the wagon train.

"Hey! Is any of you gents named Griscom?"

The trader drew rein. Here was a message, it proved, from Juan Vaca, who had known that Griscom would be coming along. Francis, came the word, was pushing his animals hard and fast and recklessly; Griscom was to look for further news at Devil's Gate, from Jim Mapes.

Griscom asked questions. No, the Peoria man knew nothing about any Dearborn wagons, knew no one of Herrick's description. This signified nothing. Horsemen of all kinds had gone past the plodding wagons, groups and single men. Juan Vaca had halted deliberately to leave his message for Griscom.

The three rode on once more, Griscom now pressing forward full speed. Jim Mapes? To Morgan's query, One-eye spat and grunted a disparaging response.

"No-account feller, squawman. He built him a place on the Sweetwater, last year, up the valley from the Devil's Gate. I seen him when I come east, and a lousier place I never laid eyes on. He allowed lice didn't bite in the mountain air; maybe so. He done quite a bit o' trading with wagons comin' through, mostly jerked meat."

On and on. The interminable desert miles flowed past, the huge naked dome of Independence Rock bulked large ahead and dwindled behind. Morgan grew savagely impatient at being burdened with rifle and powder-horn and bullet pouch, when there seemed no

earthly use for the weapon. When he said as much, the others grinned.

"Used a rifle much?" asked Griscom.

"Yes, a lot. That was back home, though."

"Well, hang on to the iron. When you do need it, you'll need it bad."

Ashamed of his complaint, Morgan said no more. With each passing day, a truer intimacy grew among them. Griscom unbent; yet, the better he came to know the man, the more Morgan found himself baffled.

"I hear tell," Potts confided to Morgan one day, as they rode together, "that Dan aimed to marry some gal in Santy Fee and she up'n died of a sickness. Most like, that's turned him sour. He'd ought to look him up a likely Ute squaw, same's Carson and the other oldtimers."

"Including yourself?" asked Morgan. One-eye gave him a look and a snuffle, and made no response.

And suddenly he drew closer to Griscom. It came the evening before they reached Devil's Gate. He and Griscom were covering the packs, for rain threatened; One-eye had gone to inspect the ruins of a wagon, off the road, which might yield some firewood.

"Something queer about all this," said Morgan, straightening up in the sunset. He spoke impulsively, carelessly, as the words came to his tongue.

"About what?" demanded Griscom in his challenging way.

"This. You running down the Nighthawks, spending time and energy." Morgan frowned, ignoring the flat, direct, glittering look; he was trying to find words for his rather vague thought. "About the Nighthawks themselves, for that matter, existing in such a wilderness as this. Don't seem to hang together, somehow; don't rightly balance, sort of. It's hard to say just what I mean. Ain't reasonable. . . . I guess that's the word for it. Won't do you no good to kill 'em off, if that's the game."

Griscom eyed him for half a minute, then spoke harshly.

"If you'd just lost something you set a lot of store by, if you were real bad hurt, wouldn't you grab at the first chance to work it off on a gang like this?"

"No," said Morgan slowly. "I don't reckon I would. Anyhow, I didn't mean your motives, Dan. I . . . Well, I don't rightly know what I do mean."

"I do," snapped the other. "I was afraid you'd be too hard-headed to swallow it, once you got to thinking it over."

"To swallow what?" Morgan echoed, puzzled. Griscom swung out his hand.

"All of it. That because I lost some goods and animals, I'd dive headfirst into a campaign of revenge! Well, that's true. Nighthawks? Hell! That's just a name given 'em by haphazard, back along the border. Won't do no good killing 'em? Certain sure. Might get back some horses and mules, some flour and bacon and trading goods. Huh!" His grunt was sarcastic. "Me puttin' my time in on such a trail! Not likely."

Morgan stared amazedly.

"Then what the devil are we doing here?"

Griscom's face cleared. He broke into a slow smile.

"We're getting better acquainted, for one thing. I'm right proud of you, Morgan, for dropping on to this thing. I was afraid you would, and I hoped you would, too."

"Well, what are you driving at?"

"Tell you tomorrow," said Griscom cheerfully. "This far, it's a hunch. Tomorrow, I'll know for sure, I hope, when we talk with Jim Mapes. I don't know the man, but everyone who passes here will be seeing him. Is that all you're puzzled about?"

"No," said Morgan, "though I'm not meaning to pry into your affairs. Seems to me thatanybody in big business like you, wouldn't swing all his affairs around sudden. If he meant to set up in California, he'd make his plans ahead."

"You do think things out, don't you?" commented Griscom rather acidly. "Well, my mind was made up sudden for California, that's all. The whole thing balances better'n you think. It's plumb reasonable, too. May not look reasonable to you that some rascally wagon-robbers from the settlements back on the Missouri would have their headquarters a thousand miles from nowhere in this wilderness—huh? But wait till tomorrow, partner. I'll find letters

waiting for me in care of this squawman Mapes, who settled here last year. Then we'll gather in the council lodge, smoke us a pipe around, and hold plenty talk. Suit you?"

To the smiling, springing word, Morgan nodded.

"Suits me, sure."

They were up and off with daybreak, pressing ahead fast, a scant ten miles left to go. Here was the Sweetwater; here, too, were naked rock masses on every side, an unbroken desert of sand and granite towering to snowy summits on the horizon, whence a bitter cold wind swept down. The rain held off.

There loomed Devil's Gate at last, a deep, narrow cut through the bald gray rock, a good four hundred feet in height, with the river gushing at the bottom. On, into the long valley beyond, and Potts let out a yip.

"There she be!"

MORGAN stared; a poor place, to be expectantly awaited. Under a craggy knuckle of rock crouched a miserable hut and corral that ran back into a deep recess of the crag. A few stunted cedars, two horses in the corral, a man, blanket-wrapped, who came forth and eyed them with inhospitable silence as they drew near. He retreated to his entrance, shook off the blanket, and revealed a long rifle at the ready.

One-eye was muttering to himself, and kicked his horse into the lead. He swung to earth, with an eager question.

"Howdy! Where's Jim Mapes?"

"I reckon that's me, stranger," came the response.

Potts gaped. "You're a liar!" he bawled out. "You ain't no more Mapes than I am!"

With a click, the rifle was cocked.

"Easy, now!" intervened Griscom, drawing rein and looking down at the man. "I'm Dan Griscom, the trader."

The slovenly, unkempt figure stiffened; the bearded, grimy features glinted startled alarm. The rifle jerked.

"Never heard of ye," growled the man. "You galoots git on your way!"

Griscom dismounted, balanced his rifle across his saddle, turned—and without a word leaped at the man. The rifle blazed and roared; through the gush of smoke, Morgan saw the man borne backward into the hut by Griscom, saw Potts go leaping after them. He caught the frightened horses, retrieving Griscom's fallen rifle, and as he came up to the entrance Potts looked out with a wave of the hand.

"Come on. We got the varmint!"

The interior of the cabin was vile; peltries of one kind and another, heaped in one corner, served as a bunk. The fireplace was in another corner and high off the floor, Mexican style. When Morgan entered, Griscom had just finished tying up the genial proprietor hand and foot with a lariat and his victim was cursing luridly.

"Not hurt, Dan?" Morgan exclaimed.

Griscom showed his sleeve, burned by the powder; the bullet had missed. He swung around to Potts.

"Thought you said Mapes was a squawman, One-eye? There's nobody else around here."

"Squaw and a couple of cubs last year when I come through." Potts wrinkled up his nose and sniffed. "Ain't been gone a great while; you can smell Injun plain. The squaw, she had a silver chain with a big silver medal—English. Likely got it from the Hudson Bay man up to Fort Hall."

"Well, my friend, you'd better make up your mind to talk instead of cursing." Griscom put his moccasined toe into the bearded face, not gently. "The pony express riders have left letters here for me. Where are they?"

The man on the floor spat a torrent of oaths and would not talk.

Potts, who had stepped outside, came back in.

"Dan, you and Morgan ferret around while I see what I can turn up inside here," he said. "If I ain't mistook, one o' them horses in the corral will interest you a heap."

Morgan followed the trader outside. They went around to the back of the cabin, and Griscom uttered a sharp exclamation as he looked at the horses. Under a shelter behind the hut were saddles and outfits. He turned to them, looked them over, and pointed to one.

"Juan Vaca's outfit. That's his horse —the pinto. Don't know the other one. Come on, let's explore—"

"Wait!" Morgan leaned over, his eye caught by something on the sweat-darkened leather of the saddle. "Look at this, Dan—here, it's fresher and redder under the horn." He lifted out a small woven saddle-blanket of black and white. "Here it is again around the edge. Blood."

"Sure enough. And that's Juan's blanket; Navajo weave. Come on."

They looked over the place, examined the recess in back of the shack, and found not a thing of interest. Griscom, bleak-faced, led the way back.

"Hi!" One-eye welcomed them with a yelp. Having tossed the heap of peltries aside, he had uncovered a rifle and "fixin's" and a heavy silver-mounted belt.

"Vaca's belt; blood on it," said Griscom. "What about letters?"

They turned the place upside down and found nothing until Morgan, going to the corner fireplace, dug into the miscellaneous ash, cinders and half-burned buffalo chips that filled it nearly to the brim. From under most of this, he raked forth two letters, unopened, partially burned. One of the heavy envelopes bore the still legible name of Griscom.

"Thanks. We'll save them till later." Griscom tucked them away. "Well, Juan Vaca got killed; that's plain. Likely he stayed behind to meet me, and Bigfoot Joe went on."

"But what about Jim Mapes and the squaw?" demanded Potts.

Griscom stared at him hard. "What do I care?"

"Quite a heap," said One-eye, and held up a chain with a dangling silver medallion. "Here 'tis. Somebody wiped her out and took this, wiped out Mapes. The kids, too. Then come Vaca's turn. The river's right handy and runs fast."

Griscom swung around to the man on the floor.

"You going to talk?"

"Go to hell!" came the snarling response.

"All right. Potts! Light a fire; put in anything you can find. I'll take off this gent's moccasins. Keep an eye on those horses, Morgan."

"What you going to do?" asked Morgan.

"Burn him. Got any objections?" Griscom snapped. "New England conscience hurt you?"

Morgan thought of the smiling, merry Juan Vaca, thought of the squaw and the two brats, and looked at the snarling, cursing thing on the floor.

"Not me," he rejoined. "Reckon I'd better lend you a hand, Dan."

CHAPTER XIV

A BIT OF PAPER

THE false Jim Mapes talked, in time.

According to his own tell, he had been recruited along the trail by Frank Barnes, and had reached here only two days previously, finding Francis and two other men occupying the place. Of Herrick he knew nothing. The intention was to steal Mormon stock and run it to California. Where the headquarters of the gang might be, he had no idea whatever.

Francis and his companions, being followed, had killed Juan Vaca; he had not shared in any murders. The others had then decamped, leaving him here to act as agent for the gang. Such was his yarn, and he stuck to it.

Griscom drew Potts and Morgan outside for a conference.

"We got a mixture of truth and lies here," he said. "We know Barnes and Herrick were far ahead of us with the Peoria men, their intended victims. And Francis wasn't any two days ahead of us on this trail."

"Looks like this man knows nothing about Bigfoot Joe," said Morgan.

"Correct. This varmint is lying. I expect he's been here quite a spell; prob'ly he killed the real Jim Mapes and all his family. Maybe Francis killed Vaca, who had stopped here to keep us informed. Francis might ha' doubled back and killed him."

"Might keep the fire going," suggested One-eye, "and persuade this galoot to reconsider his yarn a mite."

"No," spoke up Morgan. "I've had enough."

Griscom assented. "We ought to shoot him, but I'm not that hot blooded. I kind of hold with the Indian notion," he added defensively, "that it's wrong to take life without need."

"Injuns are changing notions about that, these days," grunted Potts. "Give this feller his gun, and I'll shoot it out with him."

"No. Give him his horse and head him east. If we meet again, he gets shot on sight. The place will be a heap cleaner without him. Then we can talk."

Thus, somewhat to the surprise of Morgan, it was done. And neither he nor One-eye were fool enough to ascribe the action to any weakness on Griscom's part.

They added Vaca's horse and outfit to their own, and over a belated noon meal Griscom deciphered the two partially burned letters. He smoked thoughtfully, began to speak, checked himself, and glanced at the others.

"I've got something to say," he announced, "but, damn it, this place lifts the hair on my neck! There's ghosts around, sure as shooting. S'pose we let the talk wait till later, and push on."

He rose and strode down to the river, standing there for a few moments, puffing at his pipe, letting water trickle through his fingers.

"Let him be," said One-eye, seeing the curious gaze of Morgan following the trim figure. "Funny feller, Dan. He's got him schooling somewhere, but he's part Injun in his heart. I bet right now he's talking to the Great Spirit, laying the ghost of Juan Vaca, like priests do over a corpse so's it won't walk."

Morgan smiled slightly. "I guess that ain't the purpose exactly, but probably it amounts to the same thing in the long run. And I don't mind saying that in spite of the daylight and naked rock and sand, this place gives me the shivers. Maybe it's just my imagination . . ."

"I'm sure glad to hear you say that!" exclaimed One-eye Potts, with an air of relief, and came to his feet. "Can't get out of here any too soon to suit me. Come on!"

In another ten minutes, they were off.

That night, beside a blaze of aromatic sagebrush, Dan Griscom for the first time plumped out the real purpose in his heart—suddenly, abruptly, without preliminary. That the death of Juan Vaca had been a deep blow to him, Morgan knew well, yet he evinced no rancor. He revealed a larger aspect in himself and his aims, combined with his usual cold practical precision, than Morgan had suspected.

"I had a hunch; these two letters have confirmed it," he said. "In the past couple years or so, a lot o' California gold has been lost. With no mint in San Francisco, it had to be sent east. There have been robberies in California itself, of course, but shipments have disappeared elsewhere; that's why insurance rates are so high. Some of the big gambling places have lost heavily in this way, too. These letters from Frisco check up on most of these losses.

"Then individuals have likewise been robbed; in the aggregate, such sums mount up high. Again, wagons and wagon-trains have been robbed of goods; some have completely vanished, other times the stock has been driven off and the wagons abandoned. Indians have been blamed, or Mormons or others. But here's the important thing: What's a man to do with the gold he gets this way, or with the goods?"

Griscom paused, lit his pipe, and proceeded.

"Stolen goods or cattle can be sold, to traders, in the Mormon settlements or elsewhere; and plenty's been sold. But gold has to go east to St. Louis. Now, I've had a hunch that this skulduggery isn't by chance. We've had plenty gangs on the Mississippi and west of it. If a gang was located, say, in the empty country between the Green River and the Sierras, it could strike anywhere it wanted, have markets fairly handy, and be unsuspected. Take the animals alone —think o' the thousands of head o' cattle you see anywhere along the trail, these days. Plenty are run off or lost. With the brands run over and changed, they can be herded and sold easy. There's a fortune in that end of it alone!"

Morgan spoke up, kindling.

"I get you, Dan! As for the gold, it must go east. Someone must take it. Why have Barnes and Tom Herrick and Hackensack been back east? We know that Herrick was run out of California; One-eye heard about it."

"Nothing was proved on him, by the tell," spoke up Potts. "They just run him out on general suspicion, like they done a lot o' fellers."

"And he's your uncle, Wright," put in Griscom significantly.

"Bosh!" exploded Morgan. "He's no more'n a name to us. If he's really heading this gang of murderers, I'd as soon as not go against 'em. But what's your main idea in doing it?"

"What d'ye hunt a grizzly for? Claws and pelt and fun," said Griscom. "Partly to work off my bad blood. Partly 'cause I owe them varmint a debt, and a blood-debt. Partly 'cause they're bad for the trading business and fair game for anyone that wants to take a whang at 'em. But mostly, I allow, because whoever does run 'em down is going to make by it."

"How come?" grunted Potts. "Ain't no rewards out that I know of. Nobody to post rewards in this country. No law 'twixt the Missouri settlements and the Sierras."

"If my hunch is correct," said Griscom quietly, "their headquarters ought to supply about the biggest rewards ever was. Their leader, whether Herrick or another, has brains to spare. Not all the gold goes east, be sure of that! Then there must be trading goods and powder and guns and all sorts of plunder, not to mention stock and wagons. It don't belong to them nor to us. Some of it can be restored to the owners, but most of it can't. And that sort of stuff is better'n gold out west, let me tell you!"

IN THE silence that followed, Morgan debated the thing mentally. He was startled by the scope of it, by the frankly practical aspect of it; but his first reaction passed. Dubious morality? No. On second thought, Griscom had stated the case fairly.

"I ain't out to steal," he observed slowly, breaking the silence. "Nor you, I guess. But, as you say, they're fair game. We're risking our hides, besides paying heavy in time and work. If we get anything that can be identified, it goes where it's due; the rest is ours if we can take it."

"Right," said Griscom. Then the cackle of One-eye Potts lifted mirthfully. Griscom turned to him. "Well, you danged old galoot? What's tickling you?"

"A joke," rejoined One-eye, still cackling. "And it's prime, Dan, prime! It's like the story of them two Ute bucks quarrelin' over which one would lift Kit Carson's scalp; and he up and shot 'em both."

True enough, reflected Morgan. Here were three of them; Herrick's crowd must number anywhere up to a dozen or so. When he voiced his thought, Griscom assented calmly.

"Correct. More'n a dozen, maybe. I figure that right now they'll be all together, layin' plans for the spring campaign and so forth. One-eye, what you reckon Bigfoot Joe will do? We're not liable to pick up any trail, with rain threatening tonight."

"Think Injun," said Potts. "He trails 'em. Nothin' happens. You don't show up. He makes smoke, and you don't answer. He turns around and makes tracks for Bridger as the likeliest place to find you."

"That's the way I figure it," rejoined Griscom. "Ain't likely Herrick or his gang would show their faces at Bridger; not with old Jim Bridger pryin' into everything like he does! Same time, I figure their headquarters wouldn't be far west of there."

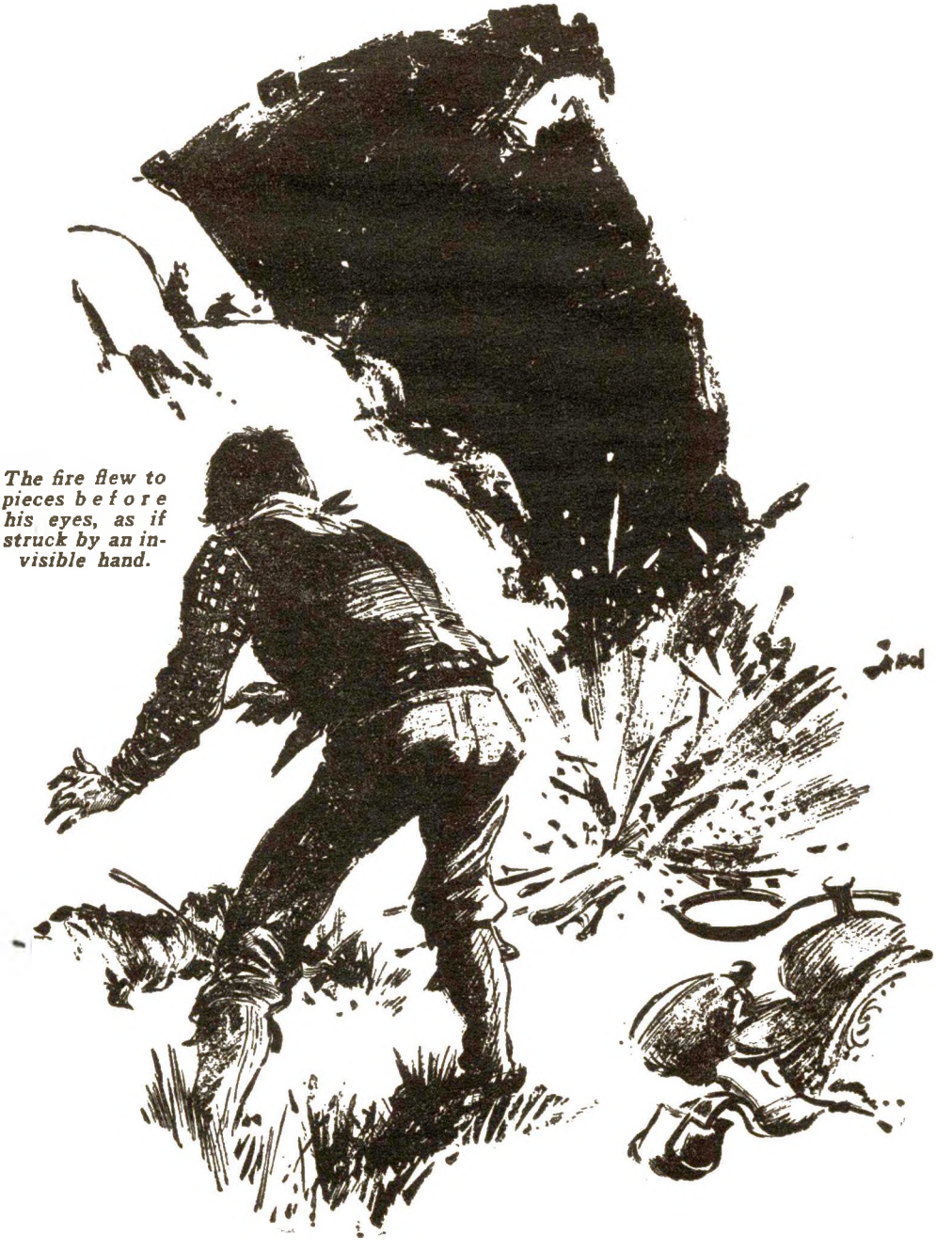
"Couldn't, account the salt sea and the desert, not to mention Mormons," said One-eye Potts thoughtfully.

"And since it couldn't, that's the very place to look," chimed in Morgan.

"Huh! You may have the right angle," Griscom said slowly. "I figure not, account of water and trails. The proper hideout for such a crowd is down along the Colorado country. On t'other hand, they wouldn't easy get in and out with goods and stock, down there. Durn it, One-eye, he's right! Instead of looking for a hideout, look for a place from

which animals and property can be disposed of—to the Mormon settlers, to the Oregon country, to California in the south, maybe! Yes, sir. We'll strike south from where we are and follow the Green right to Bridger. Most like, Bigfoot Joe and the men he's trailing have gone on to the Mormon road ahead."

"All of which," observed Potts, "ain't answering my argyment none. A dozen or so men can lift the hair of three or four fellers, especially if they're out to



The fire flew to pieces before his eyes, as if struck by an invisible hand.

lift hair. And Herrick's crowd are bad medicine. And they know somebody's trailin' them, too. So what's the answer, Dan?"

Griscom broke into a laugh, and rose.

"Maybe you'll get the answer, One-eye, at Bridger! Until then, sweat over it. Think you and I can jump off the road and find our way to Bridger?"

One-eye spat, and wiped his whiskers.

"If'n we can't, Dan, then we've sure been spoiled by civilization! Fact is, if I didn't have you and them pack-horses along, I could light a shuck and get there long ahead of you."

"Well, you have my permission. Bet you two beaver-skins you couldn't make good!" said Griscom, laughing again, seemingly in high spirits for once. One-eye Potts merely greeted the whimsical challenge with a grunt, and said no more.

Morgan wakened in the dawn-light to a sound of fluent cursing. He sat up and looked around. One-eye was gone, his rifle and "fixin's" were gone, his horse was gone. A cold squally drizzle of rain was falling, and Griscom, between explosions, was trying to get a fire started.

"The blasted old horn-toad took me serious!" he exclaimed. "Plumb gone, and no trailing him in this rain, either! Well, just for that we'll show him. Follow water down to the Green and the Green to Bridger—simple enough."

Simple enough, in theory; in practice, they were traveling up the mighty fifty-mile rise of land marking the Continental Divide, following the road for the South Pass and Sublette's Cutoff. To leave the road and the mounting upland, to plunge into the mountains that circled the horizon, would be madness; as Griscom explained, the shortest way was to get through or over the South Pass and then leave the road. One-eye Potts, he figured, must have done this—but One-eye was capable of anything.

So they headed on for the South Pass, and except for the road they followed, worn deep with the rutted trail of last year's wagons, Morgan would never have known it for what it was. The gradual rise of the ground, with mountains to north and south, was not the deeply cut valley he had anticipated. They were over the Divide before he was aware of it, and then were away from the road entirely and following a creek to the southward.

With the road, all sign of human existence dropped away. The mountains closed in upon them in majestic grandeur; day followed day in utter loneliness, and it seemed impossible that any Indian lodges could find place in this new sort of world.

He was surprised again at how little Griscom talked, at how little he himself cared to talk; idle speech and needless words appeared to have no place in these solitudes. Words were to use if need were, and not unless.

Griscom did no lingering, grudging even the darkness when they must camp; he was up and making ready before the first gray dawn, to be forging on as soon as it was light. On and ever on, winding along grassy valleys, following gloomy cañons; they came into the Green, as betrayed by its size, and next morning left it abruptly.

"Flows southeast hereabouts," Griscom explained. "Bridger is over on the head-waters, westward. Haven't been around here since I was a youngster; the mountain men all used to rendezvous at the Green River. Still, the lay of the land's clear. We'll go on through the hills, strike south and west, and we'll come to the head-waters sure enough."

GRISCOM, in this wilderness, was a different person. His moods fell away, he lost his bitter, challenging air; he revealed a gentle, almost tender, side of his nature that Morgan had scarcely suspected. Sentiment in Griscom seemed an anomaly, but the man was filled with it. When he spoke of Juan Vaca over the evening embers, or of Josiah Gregg, or of others who had taken the long trail, he showed it plainly. And, one night, he spoke of this without prompting.

"I never had much soft stuff when I was a young 'un," he observed. "Never had much since then, either. Reckon I was made to do without it—and hanker after it. That reminds me, I'm wadded with papers and receipts and so forth.

Better get 'em sorted out so's when we reach Bridger I can 'tend to business."

As he spoke, Griscom was hauling forth masses of papers from pockets and saddle-bags; his business and personal correspondence obviously received careless handling.

"S'pose this country will ever be full of people, like back east?" Morgan asked. "Is California empty like this?"

"Not much; Spanish been there a long while," Griscom rejoined. He laid some brush on the embers and sat staring into it. "I guess life must be hard, back east; never been there, but I hear there's not much chance for a man, any more. Everything crowded up. Well, the world's always been like that, I reckon —if a man wants a chance, he's got to make it. This country filled up? You bet it will be."

Morgan dropped off to sleep, his last memory a vision of Griscom sitting in the fire-glow sorting out and going over his papers, now and again tossing one into the embers for destruction.

He wakened to dimming stars, woodsmoke of the fire newly alight, and Griscom's voice blazing at him.

"Hey! Wake up and get things started, will you? One of the horses has broke loose and wandered off. I'm taking Concho and going after him."

"All right," responded Morgan sitting up. "I'm on the job, partner."

They had camped in a narrow cañon; the missing horse could not have gone very far. When the fire was built up a bit and breakfast under way and the blanket-rolls made up, Morgan's eye was caught by something white on the ground. Daylight was growing fast.

He picked up the white object—a bit of paper. He held it down to the light of the fire, and words scrawled in a large schoolboy-hand came clear.

> . . . if it be to her mind to marry me as you say. I will meet you at the Mission Station on the Independence road. Bring the wagon and all in it. We can be married there and go on to Ft. Kearny. Tell Diane I will make her a good husband and even if she don't love me now, in time. . .

Morgan's hand fell. He jerked his gaze away from the paper as he realized what it was; the truth came to him in one blinding flash.

Griscom had written this letter to Diane's father; it had been among the papers Diane had given him, back there at the camp on Laramie creek—her father's papers, saved from his two murderers. And last night Griscom had lost this letter, or perhaps had thought it burned. It had escaped him . . .

Morgan gulped. He remembered how Diane had looked at Griscom, that evening when he asked if she knew what was contained in this letter and why she and her father had been coming to the mission station. She had looked at him frankly, bravely, uncompromisingly, answering that she did. She had learned only that same day.

"So that's what he meant about losing things he'd set his heart on," muttered Morgan. "He knew she was in love with me. And he wouldn't let on to me for all the world. Wonder if I'd take it like that, if I found on reaching California she loved somebody else? Only that won't happen."

All clear enough now. Griscom had arranged with Diane's father, not with Diane herself; why, she had probably known nothing about it until she read this letter! What would have happened, Morgan wondered dully, if she and her father had met Griscom at the station? She might have consented; she might not. . . .

Morgan drew a deep breath. He leaned forward and laid the letter on the fire. It blazed up, lighting his face and figure in the gray dawn.

Something happened; the fire flew to pieces before his eyes, as though struck by an invisible hand. From the cañon walls echoed the ringing crack of a rifle; a wild and discordant whoop tailed it with human voice.

CHAPTER XV

MOUNTAIN MEN

ONE leap and Morgan had his rifle, uncovering it, catching it up, cocking it. He stood staring around, listening.

The whoop was repeated; he caught

something familiar about it. Then a bellow of laughter reached him, and derisive words.

"Cover up, you galoot! Where'd ye learn Injun fighting? Don't stand there like misery on a monument to make yourself a target! Hooray!"

Morgan faced around in the direction of the words.

"One-eye!" he cried out amazedly. "Is that you?"

"Me, you bet. Aimed to wake you up a mite. Maybe I ain't thankful to see you!"

It was One-eye Potts, indeed, wearing a wide grin as he came limping along, rifle over arm, from the direction of their back trail. Scarcely had he reached the fire when hooves drummed and Dan Griscom, riding Concho with the missing horse in tow, came at full speed from down the cañon. The rifle-shot had alarmed him.

"Reckon I owe ye two beaver, Dan," averred One-eye. "Lucky thing I beat the coyotes to that buffler you killed. I near caught up, but had to stop and eat. Why, by gosh, I been camped this night only a half-mile up the trail! Smelled your smoke as I come along, and sighted your fire, and had some fun. Made me feel good, you bet."

"But you lit out ahead of us!" exclaimed Griscom.

"Yep. Second night out I traveled in the dark, like a fool. Horse slid down a gully, throwed me, broke his leg. Broke my head, too. I didn't come around for half a day," said Potts. "Then I aimed to pick up your trail and finally done it, quite a ways back up on the Green. Had to hoof it fast to catch up; wore out my moccasins, dang it! How 'bout somethin' to eat?"

That Potts, afoot and hurt, should have been able to locate their trail in this wilderness, was cause for wonder; that he should have overtaken them by dint of hard travel and untiring effort, was little short of miraculous. Griscom merely grinned and treated it as a matter of course, but Morgan voiced his thought. One-eye winked and chuckled happily.

"I had a notion to steal one of your horses and win them two beaver after all," he said, "but I was just too danged joyful at seeing you to do it. Now I'll jog along on your extry horse. Ain't as young as I was, Morgan, but I can still foller a trail. Once you know the general lay of the land, nothin' hard about doing it. Dan, how soon will we get to Bridger?"

"Tonight or tomorrow, I reckon it," replied Griscom.

It was next day that Bridger broke suddenly before them, as they came over the crest and down the long descent from the north. Like Laramie, it seemed a miraculous thing set down by angelic hands in the midst of nowhere—the stockaded ramparts, gray and hugely solid, the bastions, the inward bustle, the Indian lodges clustered before the entrance.

The three rode in at the fort gate. This was Jim Bridger's private domain, and "Old Gabe" himself fell upon them with titanic joy, a gaunt, shaggy gray man like his ramparts. Here were trappers, halfbreeds, traders, Mormons. On all sides Griscom and Potts were met by a welcome vast and hearty. Sharply though Griscom demanded, there was no news of Bigfoot Joe, nor had Tom Herrick of Sacramento been seen here.

Others, however, were awaiting Griscom, with indifferent eyes for Morgan, with lusty profane greeting for One-eye Potts, with nods and few words and wide grins for Dan himself. Half a dozen men in all, shaggy, greasy fellows, half-Indian in attire and manner, uncouth in word and look; none of them young, all of them gray or white, with seamed faces, not clean. Strangely enough they had young eyes, the eyes of intolerant youth. They were not mellowed like the men getting on in years whom Morgan knew. They talked more by signs than in words.

Among them was a certain nameless similarity—perhaps merely the reflection of a grim efficiency. Jim Bridger had it, for he had been one of them; Griscom had it, for in his youth he too had been of their company. They were mountain men, the last of the beaver trappers—the hard-living, hard-dying brotherhood that had opened up all the western regions. This had been only a

few short years ago. Now they were scattered afar and gone, the beaver were gone, the wilderness itself was fast disappearing.

They gathered that evening with Bridger and Griscom, Morgan and One-eye in a glowering circle, tongues slow, eyes everywhere, pipes curling. Griscom sat unhurried. Words came from the others, curtly, amplified by sign-talk. There was an undercurrent of uneasiness. Their concern lay with the Mormon country. Clear down to Spanish Fork and beyond, the settlements were spotted; same way in the mountains, spreading everywhere.

Bridger fanned the flame with no uncertain spirit. Raids, feuds, troubles were arising, tempers were hot. If Griscom had a mind to do some straight shooting over yonder, plenty of it to be had; Mormons were worse'n Injuns, seemed like. Eyes went hopefully, eagerly, to Griscom, who shook his head.

"Not me, Jim. I've had some truck with Mormons back east, and in the wagons. Talk and rumors be damned! Fine people. But I aim to do some straight shooting, all right; that's why I got you fellers here. I've got my thumb on a loose screw. Worse'n Injuns, you bet."

He went on to speak of names that Morgan knew too well—Hackensack, Barnes, Tom Herrick of Sacramento, Juan Vaca. Potts interjected here and there. The thing began to take shape. "Old Gabe," a-grumble with trade whiskey, vented skeptic snorts. Griscom called on Morgan to describe Herrick. Morgan was suddenly conscious of eyes searching him questingly, and Griscom gave them answer.

"Wright's a partner of mine. Carries strong medicine, mighty strong."

"That's right," affirmed Potts. "Cap'n Gregg's medicine; come by it honest. His own was danged strong before then."

Eyes shifted, inquiry was satisfied. "I knowed Josiah Gregg right well," spoke up one man. "Give his medicine away, I hear tell. That's howcome he died in Californy."

Morgan spoke, describing Herrick, Barnes, the others he had seen. Arapaho Smith. . . The name and man were known. He had killed 'Rapaho? No loss. Jim Bridger took the word.

"Lemme orate! Holy cats, he was here in the fall! Not by that name; never heard of Herrick. Same feller, though. He showed up, time the last Mormon wagons were goin' through to the Salt Lake. Sold 'em horses—knowed all about horses. Had some mighty fine ones. Where'd a gang like that hide out, boys?"

Smoke curled, weathered faces remained stolid. Then a man spoke.

"Plenty land over west, 'twixt the Lake and the Humboldt. Likely places ain't many. Bad water. Sounds to me like it might be Nelson's mirage. Castle Rock."

TONGUES were loosened. Morgan gathered that Nelson, an old-timer, had been "got" by the Apaches last fall, down south on a gold hunt. Nelson had wandered far up this way and beyond, and had brought back tales. His pet one was about a place he had found west and north of the Salt Lake, a jutting castled rock between two hills, where there was fine water and a hidden valley, all unsuspected in that desert region. Just where, no one knew.

"Might be," said Griscom, nodding. "Herrick's been here; that shows we're right. Stick around till we hear from Bigfoot Joe. My notion's for straight shooting, and California afterward—the lot of us. Might he plunder a-plenty, better'n beaver, in that there Castle Rock."

One-eye pointed out, with sly satisfaction that no one else had noticed it, that if Herrick had sold horses here in the fall to Mormons, why had he not sold them at Salt Lake? If he had come from the west, then he could have saved himself quite a journey.

"Hurray!" broke in Griscom jubilantly. "You've hit it, you've proved it! If he'd showed up there, they'd have suspicioned something. They'd have known he didn't come from this direction. So he circled the Mormon country, showed up here, sold his horses and went on east!"

So it would appear; the assembly

broke up, somewhat cool to the prospect of California at horizon's end. Getting to be too many people there, was the opinion.

A day passed, two days passed. On the third, Bigfoot Joe showed up abruptly.

He was a stocky, full-faced man, brown as a berry, with lank black hair and blue eyes like beads. He spoke a queer mixture of English and Spanish; Morgan could not make head or tail of his talk. Griscom could, and excitedly sent Morgan to call the others.

They gathered, most of them bleary-eyed and much the worse for Jim Bridger's liquor. Griscom set forth the Delaware's findings; one and another questioned Bigfoot, and the trail began to come clear.

For there was a trail. Not much of one, and not known, but Bigfoot had read it and could find it again. Two light wagons had marked it; Morgan remembered the Dearborn wagons and the party Herrick and Barnes had been guiding. Horses had marked it later, four horses. Francis and three companions, Walters doubtless among them. Bigfoot had followed this trail westward of Bridger, after it left the Mormon road, until he saw there was no chance of it aiming at the Salt Lake; then he had come back here to report.

"Plain's daylight," announced Griscom. "Let's say Herrick's hangout is Castle Rock, whether it is or not; over in that country, anyhow. To reach it, he comes down by the Mormon road from the South Pass. He strikes off this road, avoiding Bridger, and heads west. He's found some pass through the mountains; he keeps north o' the Mormon country and the Lake, and comes around to Castle Rock. That spot is exactly what I'd figured out long ago—not too far from the California trail and California itself, not too far from the Mormon country, and not too far from the South Pass and the eastern road. Joe, ready to turn around now?"

"Sure," replied Bigfoot. "Tobacco gone."

"Plenty here; stock up. We'll eat, then shove off right after noon. Everybody get the kits ready. Two packhorses with grub will do us. You boys get what you need at the store and charge it to my account."

The midday sun was hot overhead when they rode out of the fort, with old Jim Bridger bawling a cantankerous farewell after them.

On the third day out, said Bigfoot Joe, he would have to pick up the trail and then follow it; meantime, he knew his way with exactitude. A Delaware, he had been for some years in Mexico, employed as trailer and Apache killer—so much per scalp delivered. There was a laugh as the men spoke of it. One of them sang out lustily to Bigfoot.

"Hey, Joe! You missed a bet. Back in the old days, Jim Kirker had the job, away back 'fore the war. He run down 'Paches for the greasers and made a good thing of it, 'cause why? No telling a greaser's hair from a 'Pache's, that's why! Kirker piled up ten thousand pesos 'fore they discovered it. You go back south and you can get rich."

Bigfoot Joe grinned. "That's why I not there now," he said. "Made plenty *dinero,* come away *muy pronto;* plenty Mekikano scalp, sure by God!"

Laughter roared to the skies. Bigfoot, playing the same old trick, had skipped out just in time, it proved.

Ten of them in all, mostly old companions, riding west into the naked hills with rifle over saddle as in bygone days; profane, dirty, reckless, hellbent, utterly efficient—men to whom the impossible was merely a spur. Once well clear of the fort and of the liquor fumes, they became loquacious, eloquent with song and story, rollicking and skylarking.

AT FIRST, Morgan was avid of their company, thrilling to their wild tales, envious of their magnificent woodcraft and sure knowledge of everything around; gone now was the last of humdrum eastern life, and he was upon the wings of adventure. Alluring names clicked on the tongue—Taos and Chihuahua, the Spring of the Dead Man, Carson and Frémont, Apache gold and the silver of Mexico.

But, with the days, he perceived the truth. These men lived in the past; to

them, Kit Carson was a youngster, Griscom a mere babe in arms. They still lived a life that had vanished, they were recapturing once more their lost youth; they were no more than dreams left wandering under the sunlight. But if this were their last trail, they could still shoot straight, and the Green River knives under their belts were razor-edged, and their gusty brag had somewhat remaining to back it up. Dan Griscom knew his business when he summoned them to meet him at Bridger.

On the third day, they halted on a hillside, and Bigfoot rode off to make a wide cast. Two hours later they sighted a smoke, and rode for it. He had found the trail.

To Morgan, it was less than nothing amid the stones and brush, though he could recognize it as a trail when they came down into a lush valley. The others could follow it without hesitation, however. Day upon day it led them westward, the Delaware always riding far ahead as advance scout. Griscom by this time was certain of his quarry.

"No rush," he said one night, over the tiny fire. "Herrick's making his plans and getting his men together. He won't start striking until the big mid-season rush for California is getting into its stride. First, most like, he'll do some raiding on the edge of the Mormon country."

"No plunder there," said One-eye Potts.

"Horses, maybe, or stock; and it'll get his hand in, get his men shaken down," Dan Griscom rejoined. "Also, it'll make trouble; set the Mormons against others. They'll suspect folks like Bridger. When feuds get started among honest folk, rascals reap heavy. Better keep your eyes peeled for game, boys. We've got light rations for a long ride."

A long ride, truly—not miles by the dozen, but by the hundred. A ride plunging through the mountains, skirting the north arm of the Salt Lake, thrusting out across the desert and into the more empty desert hills beyond.

Then, one afternoon, Bigfoot Joe came riding back to them. He had found something, he said laconically, and instead of taking them to the water-hole ahead, led them a little way from it and paused at the verge of a rocky dry wash. He pointed to wheel tracks here, and showed that they came from the direction of the water-hole. Then he pointed down among the rocks of the gully, where white things glittered in the sun. Morgan and Potts and Dan Griscom dismounted and clambered down, and stood over the white things. Bones and skulls.

"There," said Griscom, "are the fellers headed for California with their money! Picked clean by birds and coyotes, two-legged ones too. Died or killed at the water-hole and brought here in one of the two wagons, and dumped in. Don't matter now. Folks back in Peoria won't ask questions. Come on."

Morgan knew that his uncle and Barnes, between them, had done this thing. His uncle? No. Tom Herrick of Sacramento. He had no uncle. Those Peoria men, brought this far upon specious promises, must have grown suspicious or unruly. They were only six out of many thousands. Even if their home folks did ask questions, who would answer?

CHAPTER XVI

AMBUSH

SAGE and thorn, endless vistas of barren hills lifting interminably, lessening rations of jerky and parched corn, no water for two days. They were nearing the goal, it seemed, and there was no goal.

The possibility burst upon them suddenly; One-eye Potts voiced it in cold night-camp without preliminary. Yet it had been growing in other minds. Men had been riding silently, grim eyes scanning empty horizons, hope and belief lessening with the days, the faint trail ever leading onward and leading to nothing.

"Dan, I reckon we're skunked," said One-eye. "There ain't no Castle Rock."

Griscom's head jerked up, his eyes challenged, his voice lashed out.

"What ye mean?"

"We've come pikin' along on your say-

so; that's all right, we agreed to it. But no use wearin' blinders like horses back east. We built up a likely theory, sure. Trouble is, it was all theory. Now it's petering out, Dan. Fact is, I expect, Herrick and them other galoots are just headin' for Californy. They've got 'em a short cut, some old trail that cuts off the big bend in the Californy road and comes into it somewheres down the Humboldt."

"Reasons?" snapped Dan.

"Worst part of the whole Californy road is along the Humboldt and after, on the Carson and goin' through the mountains. Last year I seen wagons and loads abandoned there to make your stummick turn; fifty wagons to a mile, some places. Couldn't drink the river water account the dead animals in it. Forty thousand people come through, they tell me, and about half lost everything they had in that stretch. Herrick, he's got another trail, that's all. Last two days we been headin' southward. If there ain't no Castle Rock, we'll end up in Californy or hell."

Griscom pondered this. No one else spoke, but eyes shifted and met, slow nods gave assent. Potts had voiced a fear that was echoed from all the others.

Even Morgan could comprehend the meaning of this fear. If Griscom's theory were indeed a tissue of fancy, the ten were far closer to hell than to California, being near to the end of their scanty rations. It would be possible to turn back, head south and east, and make the Salt Lake and the fringe of Mormon country; to go on and strike the California road would also be possible. But, if the trail led by some as yet unknown way to California itself, instead of to the road thither, then the ten were lost men.

Griscom's head lifted. "Your notion don't make sense, to me," he said harshly. "I'm gambling on Herrick and his men. They carried no amount o' food. They avoided Bridger and struck off on this trail. Must be a reason, and I'm sticking to my reason. However, if you boys want to put it to the vote, I'm agreeable."

"Nope," said Potts. "So long's you read all the sign and still say go ahead, suits me."

Again there was agreement, by nod and grunt and gesture. Griscom's eyes flashed around.

"I say go ahead," he rejoined, firmly. "But not blind. Trail's plain for us all to read and follow. S'pose two of us go well ahead, half a day ahead—Joe and Morgan, say. Morgan's got the best horse. If they come on anything, Joe stays to scout, Morgan comes back to let us know. Providin' my notion's right, might come on some of that gang sudden."

"That's sensible," said someone. Bigfoot Joe looked at Morgan and grinned.

"Better sleep, hombre," he said. "Start early."

Early, indeed; they were off before the stars dimmed, following a long, deep valley from which it was impossible the trail would deviate, the horses picking their own way. Daylight had come before Bigfoot Joe was forced to seek the trail again. He found it, and they bore on steadily. It was wild, naked, barren country here, but wheels had gone this way.

They kept going, no talking, the Delaware well in the lead. The horses pricked up ears and quickened pace. Water appeared; not the usual waterhole of the desert country that lay behind, but a trickling spring from a hillside. It pooled, and was lost within thirty feet in the thirsty ground.

A brief stop here, a grunt or two as Bigfoot examined the ground. Water for the horses and the canteens, then on. The others would stop here longer to refresh their beasts, Morgan knew. This would give the two of them a long lead on Griscom.

He might have to prick back at speed, and kept the ground in his mind's eye as they plodded on, hour after hour. He was learning fast to read sign, to follow the faint trail; he would have no trouble doubling back to find the party. None the less, vigilance was the price of life, as Griscom was fond of saying.

THE hot noon, the searing afternoon wore on. The sheer monotony of sage and hillslope and dry wash was maddening; the horizon held nothing, the

near distance was empty, yet the trail led them ever onward, going now more west than south.

Suppose there were no Castle Rock? Then the party must push grimly through. Win or lose, the same goal beckoned: the Humboldt and Carson, and the white-topped wagons once more. These old men with the keen eyes were committed to California now, no drawing back! And, once the goal was gained, Morgan figured they should be ahead of the wagons. Reunion was then certain. . . .

All the leisurely jogging thoughts vanished like smoke.

The figure of Bigfoot Joe, ahead, suddenly rose full length in the stirrups, rose with arms outflung, with rifle falling afar—rose in one spasmodic jerk of the whole body, and then collapsed. Something shrieked in the air and tore at Morgan's hat. Concho reared abruptly, without warning; Morgan caught at the saddle-horn, lost his hold, went scrambling on his shoulders amid the brush. He gained footing and retrieved his rifle, and looked.

Bigfoot Joe suddenly rose in the stirrups, in one spasmodic jerk.

Two gushes of smoke were drifting up from the hillside rocks, just above. The *crack-crack* of two rifles sounded, even as he was catching up his own weapon. Morgan sank down and stayed down, heart hammering. Something moved on the hillside, and quieted again. He knew instinctively they must have thought him shot from the saddle, or hurt.

Concho had halted and was muzzling the shrubs, twenty feet away, out of reach. Bigfoot's horse was in a panic; it swung around and came careering back along the trail, eyes whitely rolling, a limp sagging shape dangling and jerking along from one stirrup. The foot came clear. Bigfoot rolled in the trail and lay there, a huddled mass of clothes from which life was gone. The horse dashed on, hooves clicking wildly, and was gone.

Morgan waited. His brain cleared; no need to ask who or why. Not even the Delaware had been conscious of any ambush. Dan Griscom's notion had been dead right all the time! But Morgan, afoot, was futile and helpless. He could call Concho, he could make a dash and climb into the saddle . . . not yet. Not with two rifles reloaded and waiting! First draw their fire, then make the dash.

The thing moved on the hillside. Morgan sighted carefully; he had no cover here except the scant brush. Not so good. Another movement, a man's head and shoulders. A man was uprearing to peer down. . . .

He squeezed, and the long iron roared.

Instantly, under the smoke-cover, he was four feet away; he had heard plenty of talk, these past days, about Indian fighting. One rifle cracked in return, the ball striking the loose rock where he had just been. One, not two. Then he could chance the other one! Squinting up against the sun-glare, he sighted a falling object, sliding down among the rocks; his bullet had gone true. As he moved, Morgan was conscious of a hurt in his ankle.

He abandoned the rifle, called Concho, started with a leap to make the horse's side. Instead, he pitched on his face and rolled over, one burning stab of pain shooting from his right ankle. He sat up, reached for it, and his hand recoiled from the touch. Now his rifle was beyond reach, his pistols in the saddle holsters, Concho still afar— Gritting his teeth, he came to hand and knees, desperate. The ankle was twisted, no more, but enough to mean life or death to him. He started for the horse, careless whether or not a bullet found him.

No bullet came. He had covered ten feet; Concho had turned as though to approach him, then halted and flung up his head. A mad drumming of hooves sounded. Morgan looked up, and his heart failed in him. Around the curve of the hillside two men were coming full speed, two riders, and the sunlight was full on the foremost.

Tom Herrick of Sacramento!

Morgan gulped, stood upon his left foot, frantically flung himself at the horse. Too late! He toppled forward, but they were upon him with a shout, and the dust swirled up around him as the horses stopped. That tremendous figure was out of the saddle and grappling him, only to desist in sudden recognition, and stand amazed.

"You!"

A long breath shook Morgan as he looked into the eyes of Tom Herrick. A breath of utter defeat; he was beaten, helpless, held as in a vise.

FROM the hillside rocks, a man was scrambling down, shouting something. The second rider, a stranger, had dismounted and was examining the body of Bigfoot Joe. He straightened up with a word.

"Injun. Hello! Who's this feller?"

The man from the hillside ambush pattered up, breathless, yammering something about Bill being dead, then fell silent and astare like the other. Tom Herrick released his hold and stepped back. Morgan, bad foot touching the ground, lost balance and would have gone down except that Herrick stayed him.

"Looks like I get the horse for nothing," observed Herrick. "Money in my pocket. You blasted fool!" he added with sudden savage voice. "What you doing here? Who's this Injun was with you? Speak up!" He reached out his

arm, gripped Morgan's shirt, and shook him. "Answer me! What you doing here?"

"You'd know, quick enough, if I had both feet and my rifle," spat out Morgan. "Must have twisted my ankle. That's what comes of wearing moccasins 'stead o' boots."

Even as he spoke, caution was flooding into his brain under the bore of those savagely suspicious eyes. He looked away, looked at the limp bundle of death in the trail.

"Poor feller!" he said. "He was a right good sort. Hired him at Fort Bridger to help run down this trail . . . heard of you there. You sold some horses there last fall."

Strangely enough, these last words seemed to ease the tension.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Herrick. "Here, get aboard my horse; you and me will have a talk. Your black's mine now." He turned to the men. "Bill's dead? Who killed him?"

"This feller," said the man from ambush, indicating Morgan. "We pulled down on the both of 'em. I missed this feller. He tumbled out'n the saddle but fit back."

"Good thing for you that you did miss him," said Tom Herrick. "All right, boys! Get the bodies under stones so's the birds won't gather. I'll send out a relief to take Bill's place. Lucky thing I was ridin' up this way and heard the shots. What made you shoot, instead of bringing in word? You had your orders."

"Didn't see them two coming," said the hillside man sullenly.

"Can't see only about five mile every direction from here, huh?" said Herrick acidly. "Asleep, that's what you were, both of you! You'll talk to the other boys tonight; if they vote to shoot you, it's what you deserve. Here, Wright!"

He gave Morgan a hand, boosting him into the saddle of his own horse, then swung aboard Concho.

"Get going," he said, and slapped Morgan's steed.

They rode on around the flank of the hillside. Once beyond earshot of the men left behind, Herrick spoke savagely and briefly.

"You blasted fool! We'll talk later; here's another of the boys. Keep moving, and think yourself up a good lie. Maybe you'll make me swallow it."

Another rider was jogging toward them. Morgan made no response, looked at the man, and saw that he was one of Job Francis' two companions met at Laramie. He let the horse jog on with him, while the newcomer fell in with Herrick, behind, and talked excitedly. Morgan missed the words, nor cared; he was gaping at the scene spread out before him.

No warning had come from the other side of this hillside; but here lay everything in open array, and Morgan fairly gasped as he comprehended it.

Off to the left a verdant strip caught the eye—the opening of a little cañon, well watered by its green appearance, where numbers of mules and cattle were clumped. In front of this, blocking it, rose a castellated butte with a long, naked talus slope; Castle Rock, none other! The story, then, was entirely true; and Dan Griscom's "notion" dealt with verity, not with vagrant fancy.

Not until his horse had swung around beneath that towering eroded mass of rock, did Morgan grasp the full value of this retreat for its present purposes. From outside, all looked blank and deserted. But from here, around the corner, the rock was vastly different. Here was no talus slope at all. Instead, the rock showed a tremendous fissure that split it from top to bottom; and at the bottom, whence a tiny stream emerged into the cañon and went its wending way, showed a waist-high wall of stones that blended with the rock behind, and in the wall a massive gate.

At the gate, Morgan found himself looking into the rock-fissure itself. Here, at first unseen, rose adobe walls made from the easily worked mud of the southwest; a building, and behind it a larger one, a storehouse of sorts, and beside these a corral where the sun penetrated not, a mass of wagons dimly visible beyond. There was no more to seek; everything was here, here in this vast crevice of the rock—if one could find it!

Tom Herrick shouted with stentorian

voice, and men came tumbling forth. Morgan recognized Buck Walters, gawking at him in amazed incredulity, and the bulk of Job Francis; and behind these, from the house entrance, the face of Frank Barnes looked out at him in bitter surprise and hostility. Three others he did not know; another with Herrick, two more back on the hillside. Ten in all.

He lowered himself carefully from the saddle and looked up at those staring faces of enmity, and the massive gate clashed shut behind him.

"Two of you help Wright inside," ordered Herrick. "Get some water and see to his leg, Doc. Walters, take some grub and go out and take Bill's place on lookout. I'll be along soon's I put up this horse. Put Wright in my room, Frank, and keep an eye on him."

"With pleasure." Frank Barnes grinned at Morgan. "I still don't believe it; but you look real enough, and ghosts don't limp. Treat him gentle, boys, and somebody take away that knife of his." He looked up suddenly at Herrick, who was riding toward the corral, and lifted his voice. "Hey, Tom! You know the rules, you made 'em yourself! You can't go against 'em!"

"What d'ye mean?" came back the menacing growl of Herrick.

"No prisoners here! That's the rule," sang out Barnes. "Don't matter who it is, neither. No prisoners here!"

"Right you are," rejoined Herrick. "But we got to find out how he got here, and what he's here for, so bear in mind that I'm the one giving orders, not you."

Morgan was aided inside, making no reply to the questions dinned at him.

CHAPTER XVII

MORGAN SPINS A YARN

THROUGH Morgan's brain echoed and re-echoed the singular words Herrick had flung at him in their one moment alone together.

"Think yourself up a good lie. Maybe you'll make me swallow it."

He saw now that this had been advice, kindly meant. Frank Barnes was, of course, an open enemy and in high power here. Herrick was undoubtedly supreme; but that talk about rules showed how his position might become awkward. It had not occurred to Morgan that Tom Herrick of Sacramento could prove anything except an enemy. Now, however, he began to think fast and hard.

"Don't matter who it is," Barnes had said. Began to look as though Frank Barnes knew just who Herrick was, and his relation to Morgan.

The room was big, bare, heaped with anything and everything, a pile of blankets and skins serving as bed, a folding camp stool as chair. On this Morgan sat while his ankle was examined and treated and bandaged by "Doc," a skinny, pallid little man who had evidently seen better days. To the queries, menaces and oaths of Frank Barnes, Morgan said nothing.

"You're all right," declared Doc, just as Herrick came striding into the room. "Got a twist, sure; nothing out of place. You can limp on it tomorrow, and walk on it the day after."

"That is, if he's walking," commented Barnes.

"Wear boots instead of those moccasins," said Doc. "Support the ankle better."

"I've got plenty," Herrick put in. He raked a pair of boots from a corner. "Here, Wright. Put these on. Now suppose all you boys clear out. Let me and Frank examine this critter and find out a few things."

Job Francis, crowded in with the others, grunted ironically.

"You don't reckon he come here friendly and amiable, do you?"

Morgan looked up at him and grinned. "I come, didn't I? And if I can act friendly to you and Buck Walters and this Barnes feller, can't you let bygones be bygones?"

Francis grunted again and led the way out. Barnes shut the door behind them and swung around, a sneer in his eye.

"Let's have the truth, Morgan. You don't fool me worth a darn. And you don't need to pretend, neither. I guess all of us here know the facts."

Herrick, stuffing a pipe, nodded. His fringe of black whiskers, his dark features with the austere shaven lip, were ominous.

"Right—no lies," he said. "When I got the message you sent by Walters, I knew you suspicioned the truth about me, Morgan. Frank knows it already. He come along with an Injun, Frank; follering the trail. Just the two of 'em. Injun got killed. So did Bill."

"You may trust your nephew," said Barnes, sarcastically, "but I don't."

Morgan eased back on the stool, comfortably. More than his own safety was at stake now; the lives of Griscom and the others hung upon his words. They knew he was tied up with Griscom, for Francis had learned this at Laramie. No petty lies would serve him here; he must get over with a whopper if he were to achieve anything.

"We're waiting," said Tom Herrick, getting his pipe alight. "Don't try to think up something smart. Who told you about this trail?"

The query sparked prompt reply.

"Man you left up this side Devil's Gate," said Morgan. "I dunno his name. The one who pretended to be Jim Mapes."

The words drew instant reward, in the shape of a quick glance between Barnes and Herrick. They knew that man, all right.

"You mean he told that vaquero of Griscom's?" prompted Barnes, narrow-eyed.

So they knew about the killing of Juan Vaca. Francis must have done that, just as the man had said. Francis had told them of being followed, then. Morgan met their gaze dully and shook his head.

"No, I didn't see him again," he said, mingling truth with fantasy for better credence. "I come along with Griscom. This feller, he talked to me after he'd killed Dan Griscom. Might ha' killed me too, only I told him who I was."

Barnes stiffened. "You mean to say . . . Griscom's dead?"

Morgan nodded wearily. "Ain't I telling you? This man had a rifle and used it, when Griscom jumped at him. Griscom allowed he wasn't Jim Mapes at all. That left me all up in the air, because Griscom had promised me a good job, and I had cut loose from the folks and the wagons." He looked at Herrick, half defiantly. "I didn't hanker to be any Nighthawk, and I don't now; but I figured if I could find you and you knew I'd keep my mouth shut, likely you'd help me on my way, or maybe buy Concho like you offered."

"Don't seem like you need much help," said Herrick dryly. "Nighthawk be durned! That's just a name, coined back in Missouri."

Another score for Griscom's theory, reflected Morgan. He endured the biting, questioning, searching gaze of Frank Barnes quite unruffled. He had found his role now, and perceived that it made a distinct impression.

"That ain't saying how you got here," said Barnes.

"Ain't I telling you?" Morgan rejoined petulantly. "That man told me about where to go; just foller your trail after it left the Mormon road, he said. I missed it and got lost and ended up at Fort Bridger."

Herrick started. "Huh? And I s'pose you blatted about me and the trail to Jim Bridger and everybody else?"

"Hell, no!" snapped Morgan. "Think I'm a fool? I asked after you, sure. Bridger didn't know your name but said a man of your description had been there last fall sellin' horses. I got talking with the Injun. I still had some of the money I got off Hackensack, and I hired him to find the trail and he did. We kep' going, and that's all. He reckoned the trail would take us clear acrost to the Humboldt, and that suited me if we missed you. And you had to kill him!"

"We sure did," Barnes said viciously, "and I ain't trusting my life to your sayso, not by a jugfull! You and me have met too often, back along the trail."

"You started it," said Morgan accusingly. "Or Hackensack did. I didn't have any quarrel till he robbed me. I wasn't lookin' for trouble, and ain't now."

"Something to that, Frank," put in Herrick judiciously. "Never mind about

what's past and gone. It was Hack's bad luck that he picked on Morgan; you joined in, and war is war. The feller that gets skunked has no kick coming."

"Well, you made the rules; you'll stick by 'em," said Barnes. "No prisoners."

"Who said Morgan's a prisoner?" rejoined Tom Herrick calmly. "Look'ee, Morgan. What's your say? You killed Hack. You killed 'Rapaho Smith. You've done us a sight of damage."

"I didn't do you any when we met at Kearny, did I?" retorted Morgan. "If any feller hits at me, I hit him back, that's all. Smith and Walters had murdered a man and were aiming to do a girl dirt; I took a hand, sure, and I'd do it again. Remember, I don't want a job here. I ain't anxious to be any Nighthawk. But I've cut clear loose from the family and I want to get on to California. That's my say. As for you," he added, looking up and meeting the narrowed gaze of Barnes, "I don't claim to like you and never did, any more'n you liked me; but I don't see as we need to go gunning on account of it. Walters come along, sick and hungry. Did I hand him over to a crowd that would have strung him up for a Nighthawk? No. And he paid me back by settin' Francis on me. Well, I been lucky. I'm here. And all I want now is to get on to California."

FROM outside came the lusty clangor of an iron bar being beaten. The sunlight was suddenly gone. Herrick started.

"Hello! Supper's ready," he said. "Now, Frank, let's not have any hard feelin's or any trouble. S'pose you tell the boys that Morgan's my nephew and no prisoner."

"It's us that'll pay for it, if he's let free to talk."

"Won't I pay for it too? Be sensible. I'll do nothing without consulting you, as second in command. We don't want to decide things in a rush. I'm sticking up for Morgan because he's my nephew, sure, and because he's talked straight. But don't think for one minute that I aim to risk my neck, nephew or no nephew. What say?"

"You win," replied Frank Barnes reluctantly. "I ain't holding no grudges. Ain't taking chances, either. Settle it tomorrow, then."

He opened the door and walked out.

"I'll give you a hand with the boots," said Herrick, laying his pipe aside.

He wagged his finger in a gesture of caution, came to Morgan, and assisted him to get into the boots. Already the injured ankle felt better, but it was badly swollen and too painful for use.

They left the room, Morgan hopping along and holding Herrick's arm. They passed several small rooms used as sleeping quarters, and came into a big chamber with a cooking fireplace in one corner, and a makeshift table for the company, who were all gathered here.

Barnes had carried out his instructions. In the eyes of Job Francis and of Walters lingered suspicion and a sullen hostility; but in the main, Morgan met with a lively curiosity as due the nephew of Tom Herrick. And Herrick himself, at head of the table, dispelled any awkwardness.

"It's all right, boys," said he bluntly. "Maybe Wright stays, maybe he don't, but in any case I'll guarantee that he's safe and won't talk. And my neck's just as tender as that of anybody else here, so take it easy."

A laugh went around the table. And Morgan, before the rude but hearty food, was too famished to worry about trifles. Presently, too, he was telling what news he had, both from the east and from Bridger and elsewhere. The talk waxed brisk, and it did not deal with the business of the gang. Morgan gathered that two or three of those present had just come from California; there was all manner of news from the diggings, and not stale either. Might be closer to the Humboldt and the western end of the line, he reflected, than Griscom had figured.

Of Griscom, he dared not think at all. He had to play his own part and not look beyond the immediate moment; he knew well that his every word and action were being watched by hawk eyes.

Before supper was over, relief guards having been sent out long since, Herrick brought up the question of sleeping on

duty. The man from the hillside ambush was forced to confess that he and the dead Bill had been taking a snooze. There was no sort of formality about the affair. Herrick addressed the company while he puffed at his pipe; it was obvious that he spoke with authority, but there was no evidence of any iron rule. Such men would have been quick to resent it. And the address was made with deft appeal.

"Boys, according to the company law, anyone sleepin' on duty gets shot. That's bound to be, even if it goes against the grain to shoot any of our own men. We'd all be in danger. S'pose Injuns or hostile whites had come along today, instead of a feller looking friendly for me? We'd likely have been in trouble. The vote's up to you boys, but my say is to let things slide this time. Bill's dead, and that's been lesson enough, looks to me."

There was hearty agreement, and amid rough joking the recipient of this leniency gave Herrick one look that told of heartfelt adherence. If Tom Herrick had any need of friends, as seemed rather unlikely, he had made one this night.

"You'll bunk with me for tonight, Wright," said Herrick. "Got plenty blankets. I want to talk family with you a spell. Frank," and his eye went to Barnes, "you know the plans. You and the boys talk 'em over, and we'll decide matters tomorrow. Might have been a bad notion to leave that man up at Devil's Gate; if he'd talk to Wright, he might talk to others. Then, if an Injun can foller this trail here, maybe others can. Looks to me like we might split up what we've got and light a shuck out of here, or hunt us another hole. Anyhow, talk it over. We got plenty of time to locate elsewhere before the main season rush is on."

He knocked out his pipe, gestured to Morgan, and rose.

Hopping back to Herrick's room, Morgan settled himself on a stool and got out his pipe, while Herrick lit a lamp. A gabble of tongues buzzed through the house, and Herrick quietly shut the door. As a door, it was a poor excuse, but served its purpose.

HERRICK opened up another stool, fitted with rawhide strip-seat, and planted himself firmly, his eyes glowering at Morgan; he stuffed his pipe again. His size, his forceful manner, his peculiar combination of brain and brute, impressed the younger man anew.

"I'm no fool or I wouldn't be here," he growled. "You are. I've saved your blasted neck; not because I'm a fool, but for reasons. Good ones. Now, let's see. Do you aim to sell that black horse for a thousand, to get your start in Californy?"

Morgan nodded. He had no choice. He could not fathom this man at all, could not discern his purposes or motives. He must play his part.

"Of course," he rejoined.

Herrick eyed him for a moment, with a sardonic glitter in his deep dark eyes.

"Stick to it, do you?" he grunted. A flicker of alarm ruffled Morgan's brain, but it passed as Herrick stretched out his long legs and grinned. "Morgan Wright, huh? Did you tell your Dad about me?"

"Yes," said Morgan. "I think he was sorry you left Kearny without looking him up."

"Maybe; more likely not," said the other. "Si always had a jaundiced eye where I was concerned. Had me marked down as a bad 'un, and he was right about it. Tell me; did he get the letter I sent him, with the Californy land deed?"

Morgan, somewhat relieved at the trend of subject, told what influence that deed had exerted upon their removal, and how One-eye Potts had translated it. A rumble of mirth shook Herrick.

"So One-eye is still alive and kicking, huh? He was a hellion with the women. Beats all how a rascal like him can handle 'em and honest men can't. But he never mentioned how he lost his eye? Nope, he wouldn't." Herrick laughed heartily. "A Ute squaw beat it out of him one day with a skillet—yes, sir! A Ute squaw. Well, I hope Silas hangs on to that there piece of land. It was come by honest enough, and it's prime land, prime. It'll make his fortune. Y' know,

I wasn't fashioned to settle down, like him. I'm restless. Just the same, I hankered to do him a good turn."

The man was reflective, morosely ruminant. He chewed his pipe and nodded.

"You give me a bad jump, there at Kearny, blatting out your name. I had cottoned to your horse; I like horses. Meant to steal him, if you wouldn't sell, but when I learned who you were, it was different. I skipped."

"And found better luck with the Peoria men, eh?"

"How d'ye know that?" snapped the other.

Morgan took warning. "Heard later, along the trail. From a trader, where you had stopped to buy supplies."

"Almighty smart young feller, ain't you? Curious about them Peory men?"

"Don't be silly." With a frightful effort, Morgan forced himself to be casual. "I'm curious about nothing. I'm out to live my life; yours is your own."

"I noticed you didn't do any hollering about me being your uncle. You got a lot of man in you, fool or not." Herrick's face cleared. "Take after your Dad a good deal, you do. Hm! Francis tells me that horse belongs to Dan Griscom."

"Did. Mine now."

"Oh, sure. Griscom's dead, huh? Well, here's a pencil; I'll find a scrap o' paper. You write me out a bill o' sale for the horse. I'll take the saddle as well. Give you another outfit in exchange." Herrick paused, scowling. "Maybe you'll turn up your nose at my money?"

Morgan shrugged. "Good money, ain't it? Don't worry me where it come from."

Herrick picked up a broad, heavy money-belt that lay on the pile of blankets. He opened one compartment and took out a fat sheaf of folded banknotes, and counted out the sum.

"There y'are," he said, handing them over. He took the bill of sale and inspected it. A grim smile twisted his lips as he folded and tucked it away, and looked at Morgan again. "So. I got to admire you, damned if I don't! You got the needin's."

"Eh?" Sensing a new edge to the voice, Morgan looked up. "What you mean?"

"Business," said Tom Herrick. "I never thought you'd put it through; selling the horse, I mean. So now let's us get right down to carpet-tacks. I've played along with you. I've saved your neck. I've satisfied Barnes that you're a stubborn, pig-headed fool. I've satisfied myself that you're nothing of the kind."

He paused, his black eyes once more alight with that sardonic glitter. Then it came.

"I know durned well you've been lying like a house a-fire," rapped out Herrick. "You took my tip to do it, and you done it. Now let's have the truth. Hear me? Out with it!"

CHAPTER XVIII

SHOWDOWN

MORGAN sat in frozen silence.

In the back of his mind rose, from some obscure source, the clop-clop-clop of a horse's hooves. He could think, now; he must think. It had been Bigfoot Joe's horse, pounding away on the back trail. These men had paid no attention to it. But he knew, most desperately, that this was the one slim chance of warning Griscom. Provided that horse kept to the trail he had come, he must meet Griscom's party unless he passed them in the night. This was a new and frantic possibility. Griscom would have stopped at that watering place; the horse might head for that. . . .

"Let's you and me get off on the right foot," said Herrick quietly, leaning forward, his voice dropping. "Barnes and the other boys have got their heads full just now. Come morning, they'll get ugly about you; that's certain. They're a bad lot. This is a case where dog eats dog every time. I don't aim to get et," he added grimly. "We've got a lot o' stuff cached away here, mostly from last year, but some cash and some gold has come in since. I've got the best of it here," and he slapped the big thick money-belt. Breaking off, he frowned at Morgan. "Well? What's in your

mind? Your face gives you away at times."

"Not only my face, I guess," said Morgan bitterly. "If I wasn't a bungler, I'd have got away, out there on the hillside."

"Correct. But that ain't what was in your mind, back of your eyes."

"No." Morgan met the glowering eyes squarely. "I was wondering how you could ride and live intimately for hundreds of miles with men, Peoria men—and then do what you did by that waterhole back in the desert."

Herrick looked hard at him for an instant, the shaven lips set thinly; then a change swept into the powerful face. It weakened. He looked past Morgan, eyes wide upon an invisible distance, reflectively. When he made answer, there was a slow, infinite regret in his voice and air.

"Frank swore up an' down they had jumped him and he had to do it. Warn't reasonable, but I didn't ask no questions. Y'see. I had rode ahead, not being certain about the next water bein' good or bad."

"It was pretty bad," said Morgan. "I remember."

Herrick merely nodded. "Yeah. Frank caught up, with the wagons. Sort of give me the crawls. I expect you think I'm a bad 'un all through, huh?" He switched his gaze to Morgan but paused for no reply. "Well, I'm here to say Frank Barnes and these other boys can give me aces and then win the game, at that sort of work. Not that I didn't take my split of the money, mind. But I got my soft spots; keep 'em covered up pretty careful, too—"

He broke off and drew a deep breath, and his gaze focused again on Morgan.

"You're holding out a hole card; don't deny it," he said softly. "I take a horse and go out every night, look at the guard, ride a spell. The boys know it. I can do it tonight. I can take the black. Nobody will suspicion anything. I can show you how to snake out of here. There's plenty horses up the hidden valley. 'Fore daylight, we can be so far on the way to Californy, you and me, that the boys will never catch up. Skunk 'em proper! I tell you, it's dog eat dog in this business. Now what's the truth in your story?"

Covering the opening with his palm, Herrick spoke softly.

Morgan's face lit up suddenly.

"Wait—wait a minute!"

He was certain of the truth in Herrick's words; the proposal was sincere. And why not? It could be worked, without warning Herrick now. There were animals, wagons, goods stored here; more than enough to repay Dan Griscom all he had lost and more, and reward One-eye Potts and the others most amply.

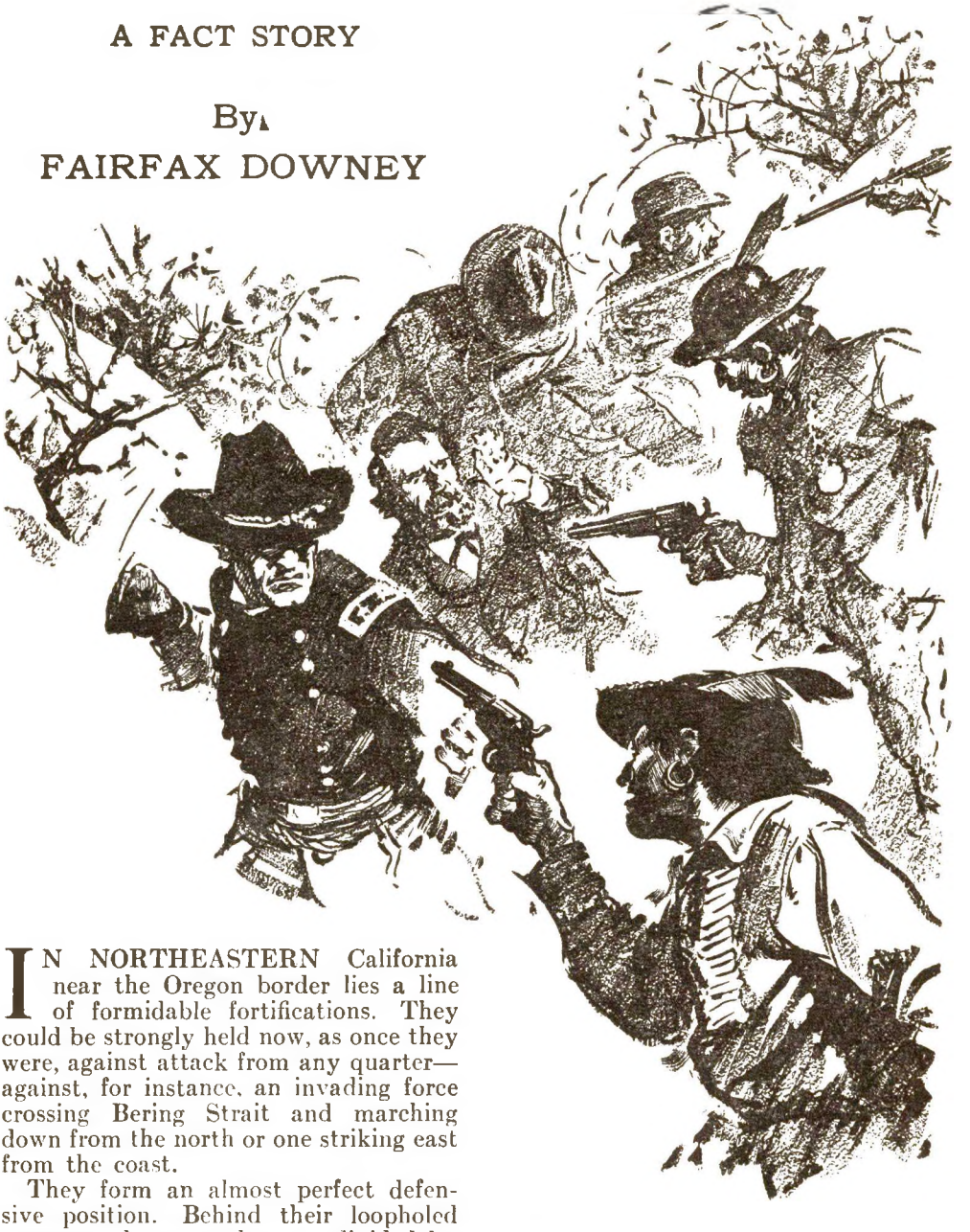
But, on the long ride, Morgan had reached a fuller comprehension of Dan Griscom's motives. For Griscom had changed. His first idea had been of repayment and rewards; now it was otherwise. His whole intent had crystallized into a savage and fixed desire to get the

(Continued on page 121)

Hell With the Fire Out

A FACT STORY

By
FAIRFAX DOWNEY



The old veteran started for his assailant, and again the red trigger finger contracted.

IN NORTHEASTERN California near the Oregon border lies a line of formidable fortifications. They could be strongly held now, as once they were, against attack from any quarter—against, for instance, an invading force crossing Bering Strait and marching down from the north or one striking east from the coast.

They form an almost perfect defensive position. Behind their loopholed parapets, deep trenches are divided by transversals into bays, isolating the effect of shellbursts. Barbed wire is not needed. Jagged, razor-edged rocks, studding the terrain, will slice to ribbons

the shoes and feet of infantry advancing in the open. Strategically located strongpoints, built of stone, command the few, narrow approaches. Wide fissures and chasms, unsuspected until one is almost upon them, yawn to trap tank or cavalry charges. Back from the front and secondary lines run communication trenches, some of them subterranean, to huge dugouts, ample for headquarters, reserves, and large stocks of ammunition and supplies. The overhead cover could defy dive bombers.

These magnificent, startlingly modern fortifications were not constructed by our Engineer Corps. They are natural. Centuries ago volcanic eruptions, spreading masses of molten stone over an area of seventy square miles, formed the Lava Beds which today are set aside as a National Park probably because, as has been said, nobody knew what else to do with them.

But the Modoc Indians knew. In 1872-73 they made the 12-mile-square section bordering on Tule Lake the Modoc Line. They forced the United States Army to abandon open warfare, as traditional with it as the Indians, and it was the red men who adapted themselves to trench fighting like veterans. A few score warriors and their families held this stronghold for months against overwhelming odds in "the most costly war in which the United States ever engaged, considering the number of opponents."

In this trench warfare, 1872 model, tanks were of course still far in the future. Neither side had machine guns. Dr. Richard Jordan Gatling had invented his 10-barrel, crank-revolved gun, with a rate of fire of over 400 shots a minute, in 1861, but it had been laid aside and only used recently by the French in the Franco-Prussian War. The Modocs, however, needed no machine guns. Traders had sold them good rifles, and hunting trips in the Lava Beds, of which they knew every inch, had made them better shots than most Indians. The deadly fire of their unseen riflemen, crouched in the stone entrenchments, caused this pre-historically prepared battlefield to be dubbed by our Indian-fighting Army—"Hell With the Fire Out."

A STRANGE tribe, the Modocs, and ill-fated, even for their race. For years they had fought the white man's advance. They had been victims of his blackest treachery when Oregonians invited them to a feast, vainly tried to poison them and then shot down thirty-eight tribesmen in cold blood. Finally yielding to the inevitable, the Modocs had gone on a reservation with their kinsmen, the Klamaths. Bullied by that more powerful tribe, the Modocs had returned to their old home only to be thrust out by white settlers. Repeatedly had these red Ishmaels been pushed back and forth. They were desperate when in 1872 the Indian agent once more ordered them back to the Klamath reservation. Part of the tribe refused, and the agent asked for troops to enforce his order.

Gen. Edward R. S. Canby, commanding the district, protested. Canby, thirty-eight years in the Army, West Point graduate, Civil War veteran, was a man of high character and strict sense of justice who had proved himself a good friend of the Indian. He preferred to settle the problem by placing the Modocs on a separate reservation and making no sudden move which might precipitate an outbreak. But the Indian agent's insistence left him no choice and he issued the order requested.

A detail from the 1st Cavalry trotted into the camp of the Modoc chief, Captain Jack, on Lost River soon after dawn on November 29th, 1872, while a posse of civilians invaded Hooker Jim's camp on the west bank at about the same time. The troopers faced the sullen Modocs who, unlike the picturesque Cheyennes or Comanches, had adopted the white man's clothing and hacked their hair short. Their features, more clearly than those of the plains tribes, indicated their Asiatic origin, bearing the fierce look of the old Mongols. As a squad advanced to disarm them, a warrior raised his rifle and fired. Cavalry carbines cracked in reply, and the fight was on.

Captain Jack, who had held aloof, ran from his tepee to lead the fight. The Indians moved quicker and fired faster. They killed a sergeant and severely

wounded seven troopers. Having crippled pursuit, the chief led his people to the Lava Beds. There he was joined by Hooker Jim and his band who had worsted the civilian posse in a fair fight, killing three. But these Modoes, during their retreat, had wantonly slaughtered seventeen settlers in their homes.

In the natural stronghold all was in readiness for a last stand, long foreseen, long provided for. Ammunition and an abundant stock of dried meat and roots were stored in the caves. Three adjacent lakes and their seepage were the water supply.

About seventy-five warriors, with one hundred and fifty women and children acting as auxiliaries as Indian families always did, manned the Modoc Line. Marching against them over the snow, detachments of the 1st Cavalry and 21st Infantry, supported by California and Oregon volunteers—about four hundred men—closed in on the Lava Beds.

Thus began a siege which, half-forgotten and little sung though it is, ranks as one of the most remarkable in history.

TO A cavalry officer with a classical turn of mind the Lava Beds looked like a segment of the *Inferno* on the mid-January morning when the first big attack was to be launched. Peaks of black volcanic rock jutted from the dense fog which lay like a sea of white smoke over all the pedregal. Troops descending from the bluffs suddenly vanished in the mist and over the shrouded gullies into which they disappeared the officer imagined the inscription Dante placed above the portals of Hell: "All hope abandon, ye who enter here." It was a foreboding soon too fully realized.

The two columns, advancing from east and west to form a junction, were cheerful as they groped forward. They joked, wondering if there were enough Indians to go around. Out of the rocks Modoc voices answered in English that they could whip a thousand soldiers. Then red spurts of flame stabbed through the fog, and men in the assault columns fired at the flashes. That was all of the enemy they would see throughout this bloody day.

With muffled booms mountain howitzers went into action. But they were few and, manned by pick-up gun crews, not trained artillerymen, they hurled their shells blindly into the opaque haze. Infantry and dismounted cavalry pushed ahead without a semblance of the barrages which would protect their grandsons assaulting German trenches in 1918. Gaps opened in the ranks. This enveloping fog they had counted on to cover them was all to the advantage of the enemy, familiar with the ground. The entrenched Modocs poured lead into the dim shapes looming up before them, shifted position and fired again. The toll of dead and wounded in the two attacking columns rose steadily.

They were brave, these men in blue, thrusting onward with the fog almost like a blindfold over their eyes. Sharp rocks ripped their uniforms to tatters, cut up their shoes. They kept going on bleeding feet. They even charged at a stumbling half-run straight into blasts of fire. Halted suddenly on the verge of deep chasms, they climbed down into them—and found themselves in a death-trap out of which they must fight their way against Modoc rifles flaming over the rim.

The fog lifted and lowered like a curtain. On the bluffs signal stations wig-wagged frantic messages across the Lava Beds. The advance had progressed little more than a mile. Once the converging columns were close enough to shout to each other, but the English-speaking Modocs broke in with confusing orders and blasted the flanks apart. And still the soldiers had not seen a single Indian nor hit one with their blind volleys.

Withering fire pinned the troops to the rocks as night fell. Sixteen enlisted men had been killed and forty-four and nine officers wounded. So exhausted they had to leave their dead, the survivors carried the wounded back to camp out of that fatal volcanic field.

The Army knew now what it was up against. Reinforcements were rushed to raise the strength of the force, of which General Canby now took command, to a thousand men. Cavalry and Indian scouts commenced to draw a cordon around the outer edges of the Lava Beds. A battery of mortars, capable

with their high-angle fire of dropping shells into the Modoc trenches, was ordered up. No one had ever imagined that mortars, unused since the Civil War, would be needed against Indians.

The Army, battered though it was, was set to try again when Washington ordered a suspension of hostilities for a peace parley.

THE triumphant Modocs, who had held their fort without the loss of a man, cynically agreed to talks which would give them a breathing-spell. Captain Jack, foreseeing final defeat, half hoped for some settlement; meanwhile he played for time and attempted to persuade tribesmen still on reservation to join him. But Hooker Jim and his party, believing they would be hanged for murdering settlers en route to the Lava Beds, not only would not consider surrender under any conditions but demanded a step which would place their chief beyond the pale also. They taunted Captain Jack until he consented to a plot which would use the peace parley itself as a deadly blow to the white man —which might even, they thought, end the war.

General Canby had felt it was a mistake to break off the fighting, once joined, and begin negotiations, but now, good soldier that he was, he made a conscientious effort to carry them out. He headed the commission which arranged to meet a delegation of Modocs in the Lava Beds. The group was composed of sincere friends of the Indians like himself: the Rev. Mr. Eleazer Thomas and L. S. Dyer and A. B. Meacham, both of whom had been Indian agents with records of fair dealing and sympathy with the red men. An interpreter named Riddle, who with his Modoc wife Toby was to accompany the commission, warned them urgently that treachery was contemplated. If they insisted on going, at least let them carry revolvers, he begged. General Canby refused to violate the covenant that neither party would be armed. He had dealt with Indians for thirty years, he said, and never deceived them. Meacham and Dyer, however, slipped derringers into their pockets.

Snowflakes drifted across the Lava Beds and a cold wind howled, as the commission on the morning of April 11, 1873, approached the meeting place between the lines. Anxious watchers at the signal station on the bluffs saw Canby, tall and soldierly in full dress uniform, and the others disappear behind a small tent craftily pitched to screen the tragic drama about to be enacted.

Revolvers bulked plainly under the shirts of Captain Jack and the five braves who confronted the commissioners across the campfire. There was murder in those glittering black eyes—a merciless determination to repay the treachery the tribe had suffered at the hands of whites. That these white men had proven themselves friends was not accounted now.

The commissioners, realizing they faced death, stood their ground without a sign of fear. Canby presented his terms: the surrender of Hooker Jim and his killers and return to the reservation. Captain Jack countered with a demand for the immediate withdrawal of the troops. On the general's refusal, two armed Indians crept out of the rocks. "All ready!" cried Captain Jack in Modoc. Every warrior at the council fire marked down his previously-appointed victim and whipped out his revolver.

Captain Jack leveled his gun at General Canby and pulled the trigger. The hammer clicked—a misfire. The old veteran started for his assailant. Again the red trigger finger contracted, and a bullet struck the soldier under the left eye. As he reeled, more lead thudded into him. The treacherous chief stabbed him to death, stripped the uniform from his body and put it on.

Dr. Thomas, the minister, had been on his knees making a fervent appeal for peace when the Indians drew their guns. A Modoc named Boston Charley deliberately shot him through the chest. The wounded minister raised a hand in supplication, pleading: "Don't shoot again, Charley. I am a dead man already." The Modoc cursed him and fired bullet after bullet into him.

Meacham, Dyer and Riddle ran for their lives with lead whistling past them. The last two escaped, Dyer hold-

ing off pursuit with his derringer. Meacham fired and wounded a pursuer but dropped unconscious with five bullets in his body. Boston Charley bent over him and had half scalped him when the valient squaw Toby's cry that soldiers were coming frightened the Indians into a hasty retreat. Meacham, saved, miraculously recovered.

At the first shots, the signal station had spread the alarm. Troops dashed up at the double, but the Modocs, pausing only to pick off a lieutenant, faded away into the fastness of the Lava Beds.

There could be no peace now. Grimly resolute, the Army mustered for the assault.

LITTLE cohorn mortars—their barrels only 30 inches long—opened fire, served by gun crews from the 4th Artillery, as two columns again pushed into the Lava Beds on April 14, 1873. The Modocs watched the projectiles soar over slowly in steep arcs and shot at them. One that dropped in a trench without detonating was seized by a warrior who tried to pull out its fuse with his teeth. It exploded, killing him and two companions. Other shells burst behind the breastworks, forcing the defenders back little by little. All that day and night, the next day and the next night, the mortars banged away, while the Indians, pounding hands against their mouths to utter hideous whoops, returned a furious fire. Several times they launched fierce counter-attacks which were beaten off.

Over crags and through gullies, the troops kept on. They lost eight killed and seventeen wounded, as Modocs fired through crevices point-blank in their faces. But their advance had cut the Indians off from the water of Tule Lake and on the morning of the third day they rushed the crater which had been a chief strongpoint. A few wounded held it to the last. There were found the bodies of three braves and eight squaws, who could fight as well as their men in extremities. The rest of the Modocs had slipped away through hidden passageways to another section of that wilderness of rock. A new citadel, a new siege. The whole bloody business must be gone through again, and perhaps indefinitely.

Now occurred the greatest disaster of the campaign. Capt. Evan Thomas, 4th Artillery, led a detachment of eighty-five men of his own regiment and the 12th Infantry on a reconnaissance to locate new mortar positions. Twice breveted for gallantry in the Civil War, Thomas was inexperienced in fighting Indians against whom artillery was seldom employed. The Modocs caught the unwary command, halted for noon mess in a gorge. Down from the rims above plunged a hail of bullets.

Gray-haired veterans of the Indian wars still shake their heads over what followed: a stain on the honor of the Army, the more bitterly remembered because such blots were very rare. More than half the detachment broke in panicky, cowardly flight under the shock of ambush in that gloomy, eerie place. Most of them were recent recruits who were only in the field because the Army, hampered by Government and public indifference, had been unable to muster sufficient seasoned troops to meet the sudden emergency in the Lava Beds. Yet recruits had given splendid accounts of themselves in other Indian fights.

The old soldiers stood fast around their officers. Captain Thomas disposed his remaining force in a hollow affording a little cover while two young lieutenants led their platoons in gallant attempts to storm the ridges. Modoc fire cut them to pieces. A few survivors reeled back on the main body. They were surrounded, and there was no way out. With his men dropping around him Captain Thomas coolly remarked, "This is as good a place to die in as any," and maintained the fire of his riflemen against the fusillade from above until he fell.

When relieving columns, struggling over the tremendously difficult terrain, reached the gorge that night, they found it strewn with crumpled bodies. Among the dead were wounded on whom the Modocs had not yet dared to creep up and finish off. It took stretcher-bearers thirteen hours to carry the agonized wounded five miles through a sleet storm back to safety. Casualties were five officers and eighteen enlisted men killed in action or died of wounds, and a surgeon

and seventeen men seriously wounded.

The Army had not begun this war. General Canby had first tried to prevent it, then given his life in a peace effort. Under pressure the Army had spent its blood in brave but rash assaults on an almost impregnable stronghold whose determined garrison should have been shelled and starved into surrender. Its reward was contemptuous verses in a San Francisco newspaper.

I'm Captain Jack of the Lava Beds,
I'm cock o' the walk and chief o' the Reds,
I kin lift the ha'r and scalp the heads
Of the whole United States Army.

GEN. Jefferson C. Davis, who had fought for the Union in the Civil War with an abiding personal resentment against the Confederacy's President for bearing the same name, took command and pushed his columns deep into the Lava Beds. They harried the Modocs night and day, drove some of them into the open, charged them with cavalry and captured their ammunition pack mules. Captain Jack, wearing General Canby's uniform, led mounted warriors in a whooping counter-charge but was hurled back after a sharp fight. Still the valiant chief held out, but Hooker Jim and his followers broke away and betrayed him to save their own skins. On June 1st, 1873, the last of the Modocs were rounded up.

Hooker Jim escaped his just deserts by turning state's evidence with some of his crew. His testimony convicted Captain Jack who with Boston Charley and two other Modocs was hanged for the murder of the peace commissioners. Indian casualties, plus the executions, were less than a fourth of the toll of eighty-two white men, soldiers and civilians, taken by the war.

The Modocs were moved to Indian Territory, a safe distance from the Lava Beds. National Park tourists, who wander through that natural fortress today, may reflect that it is still no place to allow an enemy to occupy.

THE OFF CHANCE

My thumb was ready on the hammer.

By JACK HINES

FUNNY thing, the chance you don't look for, never expect, that doesn't even surprise you when it hits you fair and square. Which has to do with a little gambler named Spike Lavin, who came down the Yukon when the Nome gold rush had simmered off a bit. He went too smooth and straight to get known much around town. But I knew him well up in Dawson City and Circle. A foxy little individual always in trouble, but too cute to do more to than hand him a blue ticket and run him out of town.

First thing I says to Spike Lavin when he comes mushing into Nome,

"Spike," I says, "no shennangin here or I throw you into jail until the first boat and shoot you out of the country complete." He's reformed, he tells me, and in three years proves it, so far as any of his old-time tricks coming to light.

When the sweepstake dog races started running he made most of the regular dog-punchers, like the down-coast mail carriers and such, look sick. His outfit of trail malemutes with a great lead dog named Trigger never ran out of the money and there was only one man in the Territory could beat the Lavin team. That was Eric O'Hane, the Shaktolik carrier. Eric never lived to run the last race in which he was entered.

The night before the race, which was a sixty-five miler down to Solomon and back, George Grigsby and me stood chinning with Joe Jourdan, him on his side of the bar and George and me foot-railing it. George was district attorney in Nome and I was chief deputy U. S. marshal. Well, we stand there watching the gamblers making book under the glare of Joe's billiard table lights, and up on the racing blackboard Eric O'Hane's team with him driving, was posted to win at even money.

That was about seven in the evening. George had a date to have supper with Eric up in his shack on the bank of Dry Creek. He wanted to take the betting odds up to him. That's why he was there. Spike Lavin was second choice to Eric's crack outfit, as he had been several times before in these down-coast sprint races. There were six or seven other entries, most of them long-shots.

"Well," says George, "guess I'll step up to Eric's before he comes tearing in here and dragging me out. He's got his dogs fed by now," he says, glancing at Joe's clock on the back-bar, "and our bacon and eggs are sizzling in the pan. Bet you on it, Joe," he says.

For a minute he stands there scratching his face for no good reason so far as I could see, and looking past the board to a corner where sits Spike Lavin all hunched up like a riding jockey, on a lookout stool where Joe's faro layout used to be when Nome was wide open. Naturally, Joe and me look over too and there he sits rolling a cigarette and giving us one of those sidelong looks. I see him now with that bag of Bull Durham, pouring and crimping with those thin wiry gambler's fingers. He's wearing a yellow mackinaw jacket that fits him like a blanket. One of them Garonne mackinaws from Quebec. All the same size and alike as peas. There must have been a dozen of them in Joe's place at that minute.

We had another drink, on Joe this time, and me and George went out together. I had to go to the jail to supper-spell one of the boys. When we got outside, there lay Trigger, Spike Lavin's racing leader in the snow waiting for Spike to come out.

I HADN'T been in the guard-room three minutes when the phone rings and it's George, hardly able to speak, telling me to get Doc Derbyshire right away, and that Eric is killed.

"Yes," he cries, "gone, Pete. He's gone. Get Doc Derbyshire," he says.

We were up there in no time with the Doc doing his coroner's job on Eric's body while George and me sat waiting for him to get through. Couldn't have happened more than twenty minutes or maybe half an hour before George got there. He looked to me like he'd just gone to sleep. Remember that curly thatch and his dark smooth skin? Old Doc, never saw him so nervous. When he had to pry Eric's fingers loose from a piece of mackinaw cloth he had gripped in his dead hand, the old man was near a break. They all loved that boy.

"Can't call my jury until after the holiday," he says when he got up from the floor. The next day was Lincoln's Birthday and the Solomon race to boot. "But," he says, "I find a knife thrust at the heart. Death must have come suddenly. Here, Pete," he says to me, "you'll be taking care of this." And he hands me the torn piece of mackinaw fabric. It was the breast-pocket flap of Eric's own mackinaw coat that he was wearing right then and there. . . .

You never heard such a singing of broken-hearted dogs as Eric's team out in the kennels. Don't tell me they didn't

know what happened. When Derbyshire left I went out to them, and only one or two had touched his rice and bacon supper. It wasn't even right cold yet.

George was sitting with his head down and his shoulders shaking when I come back to the cabin. I took him down to his quarters over Judge Crane's courtroom. "I'm going back," I says to him. He knew I would be wanting to nosey around for some lead to work on. Tracks and such things. We didn't one of us say who was in our minds. But only one man hit me. The same man hit George, too. Maybe you've guessed who. It stuck out like the handle on a coffee pot—but I kept still.

When I got through at Eric's shack, I went right up to Joe's to see if my Mr. Lavin would be still sitting there in the lookout chair rolling smokes and wondering what kind of a look he would be handing me this time in exchange for the one I'd be handing him.

On the way up, the fire-house bell began to toll and so did St. Mary's. It made a man's skin creep to hear those mourning bells. Started the malemutes wailing too. Over on the sandspit Charley La Farge's power-house siren began screaming bloody murder—which it sure was.

The news was all over town twenty minutes after the coroner gave orders to bring Eric's body to the morgue.

Trigger was laying right there where George and me saw him in the snow outside Jourdan's storm door. I had to jam my way through the gang that packed the saloon. Lavin was sitting in the same chair, just like we left him. I kept my eye on him, while I asked Joe on the quiet if Lavin had been gone while George and me were standing there earlier—or before. Joe couldn't say, but he thought he had been sitting there ever since sundown—still pretty early in the February afternoon.

So the little man's alibi would be pretty snug, and to give the devil his due as they say, I guessed maybe we were on a dead card.

The race was to be run under the auspices of the Nome Kennel Club, as it always had been, and Albert Fink, its president, was on the blackboard stand telling about Eric's sudden taking away and declaring that all money bet on him would be returned by the bookmakers and the entry withdrawn.

Spike Lavin jumped to a three-to-five shot and the betting was resumed.

LAVIN looked to me like most gamblers do generally, showing a dead pan, revealing nothing. I got right in front of him, saying nothing but looking plenty. He fished his tobacco bag out of his yellow mackinaw pocket and began rolling a pill as if I didn't exist. My steady sizing him up called for something from him. Not a bat of his close-set eyes, or a twitch of his lips did I get back.

"Makes it easy for you tomorrow, hey, Lavin?" I says to him. I always used to call him Spike, friendly-like since he'd gone so straight in Nome. I sharpened the "Lavin" now when I says it.

"Why me?" he says. "There's others running. What about McKeon's airedales?" he says.

"Say," I says, "let's you and me take a little walk." If he'd a balked I'd a taken him by the scruff of his mackinaw and dragged him out. But he come along sweet. "Have a drink?" I says as we pass the bar. He hands me one of those knowing sidelong looks and his lips twist into a foxy sneer. Smart little rat, he read my mind like an open book.

Outside, Trigger ran rings around us. He was hungry and man, that dog, like most malemute leaders, was crazy about his master, right or wrong—a great dog.

Of course, it got the town gabbing to see me go out with Lavin. But so far as getting anything on him is concerned I might just as well have stuck in Joe's. As a hawkshaw I'm still a pretty thick-headed cop.

When I came back from Lavin's shack to Jourdan's later, I told Joe that I only wanted to have a look at Lavin's dogs, like looking at a horse in the paddock. They had already been fed by Nah-Nah-Ko, the Eskimo boy who takes care of his team, and were all asleep. They didn't even bother to wake

up when we came to the kennel yard.

Then for my own satisfaction I ducked out of Jourdan's back door and went down the latrine steps out to the shore-ice, walked along a ways, with every step I took sounding to high heaven like glass bells ringing. Must have been thirty below that night.

I got back from the trip to Eric's shack the same way I went up to Dry Creek and stood by the lookout chair with somebody else sitting on it now—and I know damned well nobody noticed my getting out of Joe's or coming back.

They were all race-mad and betting-mad. They'd even forgotten, it seemed to me, about Eric O'Hane. So one point was settled. It could be done, and Trigger could be sleeping out in front all the time with no idea his owner had given him the slip for half an hour or so.

I went up to see how George was coming along and got down to figuring something out. Cold as a cucumber he sits there in his office next to his bedroom. The man's eyes were ringed tomato-red. He was waiting for me.

"A sly customer," I says, "done this."

"Yes, Pete," he cuts in, "it points that way if you got Spike Lavin in the back of your head. But unless he was seen to leave Jourdan's or was seen in the neighborhood of Eric's cabin, he's safe. His alibi is air-tight," says George. "You and I," he says, "could be sworn to testify we saw him in Joe's just about the time fixed."

Some years before we might have pinned the job on some knife-sticking Eskimo buck. I've seen them Snake River devils when they'd kill their own brother for a gallon of alcohol. You have too. George and me milled this angle over but it got us nowhere.

Well, anyway, the race came off and Lavin did his star jockey work with the fast Trigger leading his team. And what does he do but run the course down and back in five hours and fifty minutes flat for the sixty-five miles. He let Slats McKeon pace him all the way with those fast airedales, and passed him at Fort Davis to race under the wire in Nome a winner by ten sled-lengths.

AFTER the race a lot of that dead blood come to life that used to go piling around town with a hangman's rope wrapped around their waist looking for somebody to string up. Well, I stopped that right where it was cooking. Yes, sir, they were all for throwing Spike Lavin in the lock-up. It was the sorehead losers mostly and all boiling drunk at that. I had a job of it defending Spike Lavin from those locoed ex-vigilantes,

who had got to feeling their oats again.

"Take it easy, boys," I says to them. "Whoever done this, is going to get caught and don't you forget it. He can't get away, can he? Take it easy."

Lavin took it easy, too. He went along just as he always had, smooth as oil for over two months. If he'd ever made one move to hit the trail, I was all set for him. He had his two thousand he won on the race, a crack string of dogs, his trail cunning, but by crickets, I'd 'a got him if he went to McKenzie River. No, and he wouldn't a been the first one.

Well, get set for the funny business. That little chance thing that I opened up this Choctaw with. That screwy thing that don't surprise me any more when it pops up.

It was one late-April night when a chinook was tearing hell out of things. I was in Jourdan's just easy-like, talking to Joe, and him and me hoisting one now and then. It was good and hot in there and the gamblers were all playing pin-pool around the billiard tables—Spike Lavin among them.

On coat hooks along the wall, I guess every third coat was a yellow mackinaw. One of them was Spike's—which don't mean nothing now—but listen. Remember that old bearskin coat of mine? Well, I got her yet! I had her piled on the bar alongside me. It got along about eleven o'clock and I shake the bones with Joe for a night-cap, which I put down and started home for bed.

Now, you know a man who goes out of a hot saloon into a April blizzard without putting on his fur coat first, or any coat, is sure enough drunk or just plain loony for the time. Well, I wasn't drunk and don't think I was crazy—maybe a little mite absent-minded—but hang me if I didn't fetch up outside Joe's storm-door with my bearskin coat slung on my arm and I had to hug her close to keep her there at that. That old chinook was drifting in from Bering ice sumpin awful.

I made a move to swing the old coat over me and catch her in front like a cape. When I swung her, the wind caught me and her both, and over we went in the snowdrift right there in front of Joe's. Well, sir, that pile of wet snow was warm and alive, and who's sleeping there all snug and cozy, but Trigger. If he hadn't been a smart quick thinker, I might have had some trouble getting up without a dog-fight. Them tame wolves don't get soft-hearted when anything like a bearskin comes flopping around them during sleeping hours.

I did some quick thinking too. You know how them malemutes can smell out an enemy of their master's. What if Trigger smells me out that way? Damned if I don't unlimber a gat before I thought about getting up or putting on coats, or anything. Thank God nobody comes out of Joe's to catch the U. S. deputy marshal there upside down in the snow with my thumb on the hammer ready to fan on a great big gray friendly wolf who's doing nothing but slobber me with kisses.

Yes, sir! But I didn't know that Trigger had been sniffing at my vest pocket most of the time before he started peddling the bull to me. And then by cricket if that nearly human dog didn't go scratching at my vest pocket just like this. . . . Well, I ain't sitting here if he didn't. And sounds come from his throat like the gurgle of kids upstairs after supper. Yes, sir! And I got wise, thick-headed cop or no, and played my hand without no one telling from my face what was in it—except Trigger.

I PULLED that flap of mackinaw that Doc Derbyshire pried from Eric's dead hand out of my vest pocket all warm with my body and scented strong with somebody else's—and let the malemute have a good smell of it. Then he rips a cry aloft and snow flies in every direction from his fur and he's up on all fours, with me already beating it along Front Street with Trigger at my bearskin coat-tails. I had her caught at my neck and let the blizzard do her worst with what flew out behind. That kept the scent in Trigger's nose that he was after—and what a howl he was setting up. Well, he chased me bang into the dog-shed in back of the jail, and I locked him up.

Ten minutes later I was standing say-

ing nothing to Joe who's always wise and close-mouthed, making a drink last until Spike Lavin would be quitting pin-pool and going to the wall and taking his own coat from one of the hooks. I didn't aim to give that sharp little trickster a chance to grab any coat by arresting him in his shirtsleeves. Of course, there was the chance that he had made the switch long ago and that someone else was wearing Eric's yellow mackinaw that I hoped to find on Lavin's back now. Didn't mean much anyway except to clear up perhaps the point how Eric could have ripped off the pocket-flap of his own jacket. It was possible, too, that he might have been in the act of taking off his coat when he came into the cabin which would have him at a disadvantage—when his lurking murderer stabbed him to death.

I had to roll the bones with Joe twice and down two more hookers before the game broke up and Spike Lavin goes over, pulls out a Durham sack from the same mackinaw he had been smoking from all the time I had been watching him, rolls a smoke, lights it—and puts on the coat.

"Joe," I whispers, "get ready to duck behind the bar. There might be lead flying around." Joe savvies and says, "Go to it, Pete." So I steps over to Mr. Lavin and once more asks him quietly to take a little walk with me.

You never saw a rat jump quicker than he turned on me, but I flashed blue-lightning on him. That's what I call her and I don't think I could sleep good without this old pal resting under my pillow. Well, anyhow, I had him and holding on him I clapped the irons on his wrists and took him to the lock-up.

George was badly licked in the trial before he called Trigger the malemute to testify against his own master. Is there another case on the record like that? I doubt it. You never saw anything like Judge Crane's courtroom when I led the dog in. Albert Fink was Lavin's defense counsel and you know Finky, I guess the smartest criminal trial lawyer we ever had in the Territory. Even he quit on Trigger's testimony—being himself a great dog man.

There lay the two coats on the exhibit table and Trigger goes sniffing at them when I leads him up, and actually picks up Lavin's coat in his teeth, gurgling just like he did when he was pawing away at my vest pocket that night. The jig was up for Lavin and he turned white to the gills. He never did confess. We strung him up from the beam that sticks out of Bill Bunger's hayloft.

Oh yes—Trigger. It took Nah-Nah-Ko nearly a year before he quit pining for Spike Lavin. Judge Crane awarded all the dogs to the Eskimo boy who had fed them and cared for them all the while.

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

RICHARD SALE'S "Torpedo" which heads our contents page this month is not, strictly speaking, a short story at all but a *tour de force,* the biography of a deadly weapon. The author has the following to say about it and the guy who wrote it—

A fourth generation native New Yorker, I started writing when I was eighteen and have continued pleasantly and fruitfully up to the present, age 29. Have authored four novels, the first made into a movie "Strange Cargo," the last, my first mystery in book form, to be issued in February by Simon & Schuster and titled "Lazarus No. 7." I have done work for most of the magazines, *Saturday Evening Post, American, Esquire, Scribners, et al.,* and how the devil I missed *Adventure* before this I don't know. *(Neither do we. Ed.)* Hope I make up for it as time goes on. *(So do we. Ed.)*

Sports might be confined to lawn-mowing and tennis. I am excellent at the first and bad at the second, but I enjoy both. Then there is the thrilling pastime of cornering Japanese beetles on my grape arbor out here on Round Hill Road in Greenwich, where the grass grows greener and the corn grows taller.

Have done hobby work in recording, song writing, photography, model railroading and such, but do not have much time for any of them since I received my amateur radio operator's license, for I use my spare time now to keep my station W2NXL—dn 1 on the air from 160 to 20 meters. I have a four hundred fifty watt transmitter here, and work both wireless key and microphone as the case may be. I think ham radio is a wonderful thing, and it provides a tremendous backlog of emergency communications for this country in time of —not only disaster—but the failure of any normal means of communication. There are sixty thousand guaranteed dyed in the wool American citizen hams in this country, ready, willing and able to keep the communications ball rolling with their transmitters from five to one thousand watts when the time comes.

I eloped with Arline Clare Walker way back in 1931, while I was a sophomore at Washington & Lee University, and we now have two junior operators, Lindsey, a daughter, age 5, and Dickie, a son, aged two and a half, I have to mention the "half." He is very particular about that. And in closing, I must mention the dogs, Duchess and Patsy, a Dalmatian and a Cocker Spaniel. They are the ones who get me up at six in the morning so that I can start working on the old *machine d'écrire* early. They are good for production, and that is worth mention in this country today.

The idea for "Torpedo" came to me one day when I read that an old torpedo had been recovered by units of the fleet, and that it was still in workable condition. I wondered about the life of that instrument of war from birth to death, and gradually the piece evolved. There is no doubt that even the most deadly and inanimate things on this earth can acquire a personality and a character depending upon how much we, the living, put into them.

JACK HINES, whose Alaskan dog stories are almost as famous as London's, (two of them, "Seegar and Cigareet" and "The Blue Streak," though only short stories have been published as books) is one of the few writers about Alaska who can claim to be a sourdough and make it stick. He knows his background from the gold-rush boom days and hasn't forgotten how to yarn about it. He says—

I was born in San Francisco—English father, Holland-Dutch mother. Sailed to Nome, Alaska on May Day 1900 in a three-master loaded to the rail with lumber, mining gear and provisions. The voyage used up fifty-seven days from the Golden Gate to the open sea roadstead three miles off the Nome beach. The

wolf dogs immediately got in my eye and heart and during the seven continuous years I remained in the Territory I had hundreds of these brave trail kings. . . . During the last war was U. S. Government Engineer on a Tetra Nitra Aniline plant in Bound Brook, New Jersey. It's a far cry from Nome Beach to Palm Beach, where I live now and where, as I type this, the sun is roughing up the palm trees for the day. They actually have a rose tint to their swaying tops. The sea is like glass and there's a mama pelican sitting on the hurricane wall watching for his breakfast.

A far cry indeed! But it seems to have given Jack Hines a pretty good perspective on the frozen North and we don't care where he writes his yarns as long as they retain the chilly flavor of "The Off Chance."

JOHN SNELL, our *Ask Adventure* expert on Hawaii, has a new job. He is now Deputy Administrator, Defense Savings Staff, T. H. Like several other *A. A.* men who have recently gone into Federal service of one sort or another, he will endeavor to continue to act in his old capacity as expert for the magazine.

And speaking of Mr. Snell and Hawaii —Remember the letters we printed in the July issue on the employment situation in T. H. and the opportunities existing there for job-seekers? One was from Mrs. Wm. F. Elliott and the other was from Snell supplementing and corroborating in large measure the Elliott communication. Well, it seems we dropped a bombshell on Mrs. E. To-wit—

GENTLEMEN, PLEASE!

Remember the lady who wrote enthusiastically from Hawaii to remind you that there is still plenty of adventure to be found—over here? You wondered, after you published my letter, what the results would be.

Wait just a moment, until I push back that sliding pile of envelopes—it gets warm in here with all that mail piled up around me!

Every ship arriving brings me letters—from all parts of the United States. Letters I love to read, from people I'd like to know, every one of them. I'd enjoy being able to help them all find their adventure; I'd like nothing better than having time to talk to them and answer the thousand questions they have asked me. But I can't do it. One day last week I took the morning off and wrote seventeen letters, but I can't do that every day. I haven't time or energy for it. Another handicap is that not half of them sent return postage, but every one requested an immediate answer. If I could mimeograph a sheet and send it out it would be easier, but they all want to know something different.

I'm putting in the following paragraphs answers to the questions I've been asked most frequently, and I'll appreciate it very much if you can find space for it in your column and so give me some breathing spell from all these letters.

The worst first: living expenses in Hawaii are very high and continue to skyrocket daily. I should say off-hand that it costs twice as much to live here as on the mainland. Food is very expensive and not very good. Our fresh fruits (except tropical fruits, of which even lotus-eaters tire eventually) are brought in by steamer in cold-storage. They are picked half-green and the trip over, plus cold-storage, plus the heat of this island, are no help to their flavor when we finally buy them. The same applies to fresh green vegetables, which are worth their weight in platinum in the tropics. Eggs are 70c per dozen, butter the same, except cold storage butter, which costs forty-three cents and tastes pretty rancid. (We use it all the time). It costs me sixty-five dollars a month to feed three people, and we do not buy good roasts, expensive steaks, or many fresh vegetables. We eat from cans and supplement our diet with vitamin tablets.

Rents here are exorbitant: fifty dollars for a one-room apartment is about the lowest you can find now.

The climate is wonderful. Clothes cost less than on the mainland because we all, both sexes, wear washables. I haven't worn a coat for three years.

About the vegetation, scenery, distance from the mainland, expense of travelling over here, living conditions—any one who wants to know can find many books of information at local libraries. Our working hours are from eight to four or four-thirty with half days off on Saturdays. That does not apply to Defense Jobs, where overtime is the rule, rather than the exception. I'm listing a few recent books of information about Hawaii.

"Roaming in Hawaii," by Harry Franck; "Hawaiian Tapestry," by Antoinette Withington; "Hawaii—Isles of Enchantment," by Clifford Gessler; "Our Hawaii," by Erna Fergusson; "Hawaii—Restless Rampart," by Joseph Barber.

I suggest that those who want a closer touch with these islands might invest $1.50 in a month's subscription to the Honolulu Star-Bulletin or the Honolulu Advertiser, our two local daily papers.

When I wrote that letter to you I had in mind single men like the lad who wrote the inquiry which prompted my suggestion of this part of the world as background for adventure. And I meant single men who wouldn't mind being stuck way down under on one of the Line Islands for months at a stretch, in order to come out with a sizable stake and a lot of valuable experience.

Yes, there are jobs here, plenty of them. But the jobs which pay the money (and I reiterate) are for high skilled workers in various crafts and trades. Other jobs in Honolulu will pay about the same salary as similar work in any metropolitan city, with the added disadvantage of a much higher cost of living to boot.

So many people wrote asking me about working conditions here and about finding jobs in Honolulu. The procedure is the same as in any other city—you have to *be* here to find out. I know little about where to find work in Honolulu except what I read in the want ads. Readers seem to think I know just where to apply for work of all kinds. I even had a letter from one chap who wanted out of San Quentin on parole and enclosed a parole blank for me to fill out for him!

I wish I could tell you about those letters. My heart goes out to them all because I know just how they feel—stifled and longing for a chance to escape but not knowing exactly which thing to do first. But no one can do more for them than make the suggestion. It's up to every individual to do his own escaping. Thousands have come over here and managed to find a place for themselves in spite of many handicaps, but that is something which is entirely up to those who want to take the chance.

A slightly weary but still sincere aloha,
Mrs. Wm. F. Elliott.

Have a heart, guys! We don't wonder Mrs. Elliott's aloha is a bit weary. How's for applying for information in other channels and giving the lady a rest?

(Continued from page 8)

preliminary survey of the island before making any investment in tools, land, or equipment. Can you give me any idea of the cost of such a trip from San Francisco? I am an experienced seaman. Would it pay me to invest in a small workboat-diesel auxiliary—to transport supplies and equipment to the homestead site?

—Howard E. Kambach,
99 So. 7th St.
Newark, New Jersey.

Reply by Theodore S. Solomons:—San Francisco is a poor place from which to make a start to any part of Alaska, unless you happen to have a drag with some arm of the Salmon Fleet, some parts of which make a start from there, the majority of the outfits going from Seattle, which is the main headquarters for Alaska in all industries. Better go there, by all means. For another reason, you can obtain so much more, and more recent, information of every sort from Seattle. So many of the individuals and companies doing business in Alaska make Seattle their headquarters, or winter homes, if their activities are seasonal. You will find, too, more chances of getting second hand or reconditioned power boats or auxiliaries.

I cannot give you more than an approximate figure for steamship costs to Kodiak Island. The cost for fare will be from sixty to eighty dollars, including first class accommodations and extras. You can actually get there for less. Freight on your boat would be fairly high, I think, for it would take up a lot of space, "ship's option," you know; and handling charges.

It certainly would be advisable, if not actually necessary, to have a small power boat. Transport is king in any and every pioneer country, and in Alaska this is especially true. You would be able to find yourself a better spot and much quicker and less expensively than if you have to depend on existing public transportation, like steamers, boatmen, friends, and the like, or by taking long pack trips over the coastal areas of the Island instead of short "mushes" inland from your moored or stranded work boat.

In general I may say that southern Alaska is a wise choice. Elsewhere there are advantages of sorts, but the milder climate, rich soil and hunting and fishing resources, closeness to navigable water—ocean, mainly, are greater advantages in my judgment, and of course I know the whole country pretty well. Usually one today has to do a lot of clearing in homesteading and growing things. The meadow spots of any size have mostly been taken up, though the country as a whole has only begun to be really settled—and a small beginning at that.

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(Continued from page 99)

murderers of Juan Vaca, and the man Walters who had helped murder José Mora—a desire deep and bitter and steadfast as Dan Griscom himself. And Morgan knew now that Herrick had not shared in either of those murders, deep as his guilt might be elsewhere.

Morgan's head lifted abruptly.

"I'll take you up," he exclaimed, a new stir in his voice. "Yes, there's more I haven't told—a lot more. You can't make me tell it, either; even now, I'm not trusting anybody too far. Once we're out of here, under the stars, I'll come clean. How's that?"

"Fair and square!" Herrick came out of his chair and stood over Morgan, his hand extended. "Shake on it."

Their hands met. In those deep eyes, Morgan read all he wanted to know. He smiled, and the smile lit up his rugged, stubborn features.

"There's been a lot o' misdirected energy, seems like—if you know what I mean. Maybe we can salvage something worth while—Uncle Abner!"

The deep eyes warmed and glowed. "Maybe. We'll try, anyhow. What don't you trust about me?"

"You seem durned ready to skip out and leave your friends," said Morgan.

Herrick showed white fangs in a wide grin. "I told you it was dog eat dog, didn't I?" he said. "Take my arm. Hop over here."

MORGAN obeyed, and the other brought him to the interior wall, where clothes hung on nails driven into the adobe. Herrick ripped aside the clothes, to reveal a hole two inches across. Covering the hole with his palm, he spoke softly.

"This goes into the other room where Barnes bunks," he said. "Mostly, the boys sleep outside now the weather's turned warm; not him. I've stood here night after night, listening to Frank make his plans. Let's see if he's at it now."

He put his ear to the hole, listened, and grinned suddenly at Morgan. After a moment he stood away and gestured. Morgan took his place, leaning against

the wall. At once he caught, thinly, the arrogant and unmistakable tones of Frank Barnes.

"Buck and Francis and a couple of the other boys are in with me. Join us and you'll get your split but do it now! We're aiming to settle him in the morning, him and Wright both. Can't wait any longer. He's got the hog's share of everything we've taken. We'll give him a dose of lead and take it all back for ourselves. Yes or no?"

"Looks satisfactory to me," said another voice. "Like you say, something queer about this feller Wright showing up. . . ."

Morgan drew back. Tom Herrick replaced the clothes, shoving enough of them into the hole to plug it.

"Fixing to murder me, the skunks!" he said.

"In the morning!" added Morgan, staring.

Herrick grunted something, caught up the fat belt, and buckled it about his waist. He drew on a coat, and from the pocket took a heavy six-shooter of the "pepper-box" type so much favored at the diggings. He turned the iron cylinder, inspected the loads and the caps, and pocketed it again.

"If you hadn't turned up, I'd have killed Barnes and taken my luck with the others," he said. "Now it's different. We'll vamoose, and do it quick. See that window?"

It was a mere opening left in the wall. Across this opening, nailed to the adobe and leaving a gap at the top, was a strip of sacking.

"When you hear me go out the gate and it closes again, douse the light and pull off the sacking," Herrick directed. "This window's at the side of the house, around the end of the front wall. About a ten-foot gap between it and the stone wall out front. You get acrost and climb over the stones. Ain't high; you can make it.

"Most of the boys sleep outside, along the house-front, over on the other side the gate. They're out there now, talking. So you'll have to be mighty silent. Now, I'll ride off a ways, leave the horse, and come back to meet you at this end

the wall. Got it through your head?"

"Sure. And instead of these boots," Morgan said, "I'll tie up my ankle good and stout, and get into my leather leggin's again. They won't clump the ground like boots."

"Luck," said Herrick briefly. He walked to the door and slammed it as he departed.

Morgan got rid of the boots. He was far more at home now in the heavy moccasins which reached halfway to the knee. Taking a blanket from the pile, he inched over to where a number of rifles, pistols and other weapons lay carelessly in one corner. With a knife from this array, he sliced at the blanket. He soaked a strip in the bucket of water that still stood nearby, and wrapped his ankle firmly, regardless of the pain from the swollen muscles.

He waited beside the window, where he could hear a mutter of voices. Concho would have to be caught and saddled, of course. He could well appreciate that any attempt on Herrick's part to take out two horses, or to do anything unusual, would arouse instant suspicion. The men out there, luckily, were at the far end of the building. They must not see him, when he crossed to the waist-high stone wall that enclosed this whole end of the big rock-niche.

Morgan had the lamp at hand. He turned it down, blew it out, and caught at the sacking. It ripped easily away from the window.

A LITTLE thing, to squirm out of a window and drop a scant four feet to the ground. To do it silently was harder; every movement must be under strict control. To accomplish this, with one ankle screaming through every nerve if it touched anything, was an appalling task.

Morgan achieved it by slow inches. He was sweating with pain when at last he took the drop outward. Despite all his efforts, he came down full on the bad foot and pitched headlong to the ground.

It was horrible. He lay wrenched and shaken by stabbing fire that was past endurance. Hands clenched, breath sob-

bing in his throat, brain aflame, he lay motionless and silent. Nothing was worth this—nothing! Yet the agony dimmed, his brain cleared again. He could hear a grumble of voices from the far end of the house-front. The men there had not heard his drop.

Wiping the sweat from his face, he came to one knee. The earth was warm, the air was blandly pleasant. The moon, past its full, was not yet up; a clear and brilliant starlight rendered the night translucent to a mild degree; he could see the stone wall, ten feet away, but not in any detail.

By inches, again, he got over the wall's edge, swinging the bad leg clear most carefully, moving with utmost slowness. The stones were loose, but they were large rugged blocks, not easily dislodged. He was over, he was on his good leg, he straightened up and turned, still holding to the stones for support and leaning against them.

There was something black, a mass in the obscurity; not until it was close, did he know it for a man, moving silent as a shadow. It grew into the massive shape of Herrick.

"Take it easy. Have a tough time?"

"Sort of. Where's Concho?"

"The horse? Up ahead. Ain't far now."

They rested and went on, more rapidly as distance lent assurance. Another blur took form ahead, and Morgan spoke. Hearing his name, Concho came toward them with affectionate muzzlings. Morgan gripped the thick mane, the saddle-horn, and drew a deep breath of relief.

"Well, that's that," said Herrick with satisfaction. "Now s'pose you keep your end of the bargain, 'fore we make any plans."

"You haven't got yourself a horse?"

"Not yet. No rush. Moon won't be up yet a while. Anyhow, I've changed plans about that. Now let's hear it."

Without hesitation, Morgan laid bare the actual situation. He held back nothing, and laid emphasis on the fact that Griscom had no quarrel with Herrick personally. The older man listened, plucking at his beard, and made no com-

ment until Morgan had finished the story. Then he grunted.

"I know, I suspicioned something of the sort, right from the start."

"No telling where Griscom and the others are now," went on Morgan, "but I can answer for it that you're safe from them. What Dan wants, is to get the man who murdered Juan Vaca; and I can tell him who the man is. We can take the back trail and meet them."

Herrick broke into low, rumbling laughter.

"Like hell you can answer for anything! Think I'm goin' to trust my neck to them? Not much. We part right here. I'll get a horse and light out for Californy."

"Then take Concho. He's yours. But you've no supplies, no food!"

Herrick growled an oath. "It ain't only sixty mile to the Humboldt. Take Concho? Like hell. Keep him. Keep the money. It ain't all murder money, you fool. Now look! We been palaverin' too long. First thing we know, the moon will be up. No sense getting me a horse without a saddle. I'll hoof it over the hill to the lookout. Both them fellers have horses. I'll borrow one; they won't think twice about it. Then I'll come back here, and show you how to circle around the far valley, so's they won't see you."

"You really mean we'll part?"

"You're damned right," Herrick said roughly. "My neck's itchin' right now! Even if that Injun's horse did take the back trail and Griscom seen him, he won't make no trouble till daylight. Man wants daylight to shoot by. You can join up with him. Do whatever you durned please with Barnes and the other rascals. Good Lord!" he added sharply. "Look at the sky! Sure as fate, moon's comin' up over the hill now! Lucky we're out o' sight from headquarters—" He broke off and stood silent as though listening.

HERRICK was breathing harder. Morgan felt a prickling thrill, he knew not why. He looked up, and saw that the sky was luminous. All the upper

part of the towering split rock was suddenly in the moonglow. Behind the hill, the moon was nearly up.

Herrick swung around abruptly. "Catch hold. Up!" His voice had a savage ring.

Morgan was caught and hoisted. He got his bad leg over the saddle; the ankle struck, and he grunted with the stab of pain.

"Why? What the devil's wrong?" cried Morgan, bewildered. Moonlight was drenching all the rock above; it was stealing around them, slowly, swiftly. The tip of the moon was over the hill.

Herrick whirled on him with a brutal snarl.

"Ride, damn you! They've caught on you're gone, they'll be a-piling out!"

From around the hill came the distant crack of a rifle, then a second.

Herrick threw out his arm; his hand smacked down on the flank of Concho, full strength.

The astonished black plunged away. Morgan, one foot in the stirrup, heard a volley of yells and shouts as he clung desperately to reins and saddle-horn. By a miracle, he kept his seat as the horse flew. Then, to his voice and to his pull, Concho quieted and slewed around.

Morgan looked; a shout of futile protest burst upon his lips. Everything was distinct in the flood of light. A clump of mounted men was pouring down straight at the figure of Herrick, stringing out in a line behind. Barnes was in the lead.

A rifle crashed, the split of flame showed clear. Herrick's hand went up; a jet of flame and smoke, another, another—the pepper-box, of course. Gushing smoke surrounded him and hid him. Men and horses were falling, with scream and shout.

Four or five riders came clear, hurtling on and on, straight for Morgan. Suddenly he realized what was happening; Tom Herrick was being killed there, before his very eyes! He leaned forward and jerked out the two brass pistols

"Steady, Concho, steady!" he exclaimed, and took aim.

Barnes, Frank Barnes—the foremost of those riders. Morgan pulled trigger;

an empty click answered. Not loaded! Frantically, he tried the other pistol. It clicked. From Barnes came a wild and jubilant yell.

Something moved, among the rocks and brush to the right. A low voice spoke. A rifle spurted. Other rifles, to left and right, echoed it. Smoke clouded all the stretch. Barnes was gone, pitching forward. The whoop of One-eye Potts shrilled across the moonlight. The other riders were down, or their horses were down. Here were men running, reloading, urging forward—old men, keen-eyed men. Morgan gulped to the realization, and was aware of a shape uprising at his very side.

"Morgan!" Griscom's voice, Griscom's hand. "All right?"

"Sure! But they're killing him, Dan!" A gulp tore at Morgan's throat. "Herrick!"

One wild laugh and Griscom was gone, running after his men. One of the riders from around the hill had regained his feet; the running figures closed around him. there was a click and a clash of steel. He vanished. They hurried on.

Rifles were reloaded, now. They began to stream flame, here and there. On ahead, horses making back in retreat were hit; men came to earth. The running figures were after them, streaming away. Hooves clicked. From around the hill came two men at pounding gallop, old men, yelling deliriously.

"Got' em, Dan! Got 'em both—"

They pounded on, giving Morgan a whoop of greeting as they passed.

In the rear of it all, Morgan halted Concho and sat staring down. A hurt horse was trying to rise, kicking vainly. A hurt man was coughing horribly as he lifted on his hands and sank down again. Herrick had dropped more than one of them—there was Job Francis sprawled wry-necked and huddled, blood streaming over his dead face in the moonlight.

And there was Herrick, hat gone, pepper-box still in fist, flat on his back.

"I'll see to it that you're buried," Morgan said, and his own voice sounded queer to him. "I'll see to it. Good-bye. And thanks. Thanks. . . . Uncle Abner."

He turned Concho and rode on toward

the hidden niche where men were still dying.

GRISCOM was impatient. The fresh bullet-sear across his cheek lent him a sinister expression, as he eyed Morgan. "Hell! We picked up Bigfoot Joe's horse and pushed on, got here before 'twas dark," he said. "They had dropped Bigfoot into the gully and coyotes were at him; warned us a long ways off and we scouted careful. Come around and over the hill, t'other way; seen the lights here, went back, come ahead afoot. That's all there was to it. Now we got one man dead, four hurt—and you make a fool of yourself!"

Morgan smiled, wearily. Daylight was strong everywhere, sunlight was piercing into the empty window of the room, where the sacking had been ripped away. Herrick's old room. He and Griscom were here, alone.

On the floor lay Herrick's big fat belt.

"You don't savvy it, Dan," said Morgan. "I'm keeping what he gave me for Concho. He said it wasn't murder money. Maybe that was true; I don't think he was lying about it. But I'll have no part in all the rest."

Griscom emptied his coffee mug.

"Now, look," he said calmly. "We're partners. There's stock and wagons and no end of supplies, and this here money and so forth. Some we can return to owners, most we can't. There's no call for you to turn up your nose at it."

"Speak for yourself, Dan. I've said my say," relied Morgan, with finality. "What's your program? Only sixty mile to the Humboldt," he said. "Think we'd get there ahead of the wagons?"

Griscom nodded. "Likely. But the worst push of all for the wagons is from there on to Hangtown. We won't get away from here for three-four days—got to team up the wagons and load 'em. And there's the stock to be drove. All the brands on the animals have been gone over with a running iron; can't a great many be claimed. Might have saved one of this gang alive to make him talk and tell where the stuff came from. Too late now."

Morgan got his pipe alight.

"I'll buy into the business now," he said. "You take the thousand; I'll feel better about it."

"If you like." Griscom nodded absently.

"Well? You ain't said yet what you aim to do," Morgan prodded.

"Oh!" The other stirred. "I reckon we might shove straight through to the end of the trail and let the wagons catch up later—your wagon, I mean."

"Yeah, we might," assented Morgan. "Might wait for it at the Humboldt, too."

"Toss you a coin to see."

"Nope." Morgan drew at his pipe. Griscom looked at him for a moment, flinty hard eyes in hard lean face.

"Headstrong feller, stubborn as hell, ain't you?"

"Well, I got a job for you when the wagon does catch up," said Morgan. "Double job, for you and One-eye both. Most important thing in California Territory."

"Oh!" said Griscom, and suddenly smiled. His face warmed; all the hard look fled from it.

"Then you'll stand up with me, when we locate a preacher?"

"Proud to do it. You know, I've always thought a lot o' Diane. Knew her since she was a kid. . . ."

Griscom's voice trailed off. He was looking through the window-opening at the sunlight and the far hills; his gray eyes were unshadowed, untroubled, like the eyes of a boy. Morgan smiled.

"I guess the three of us will get on. Three make better partners than two. Oh, and here it is!" He broke off, fumbling in his pockets.

"What you lookin' for?"

"That thousand dollars. Here y'are. I'll feel safer without it. Too much money to be carrying around loose."

He extended the wad of notes. Griscom reached out for it. Their eyes met, they smiled; their hands came together in a quick, wordless grip of mutual understanding.

"Always did like a hard-headed man," said Dan Griscom, almost apologetically.

THE END

THE TRAIL AHEAD

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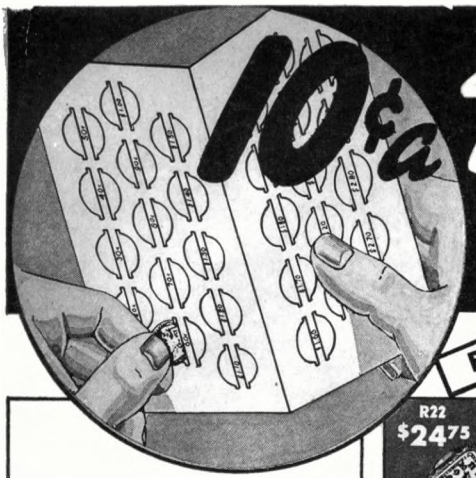

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