SINGLE COMBAT A CARADOSSO NOVELETTE by F.R.BUCKLEY

15¢

Adventure

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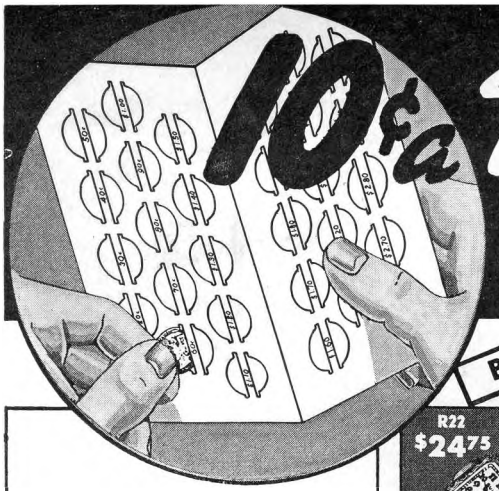

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BULOVA ELGIN GRUEN KENT BENRUS

Yes—only 10c a day on my SAVINGS BOOK PLAN will buy your choice of these nationally known watches. It's simple—here's how you go about it...

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Send coupon below with a dollar bill and a brief note telling me who you are, your occupation, and a few other facts about yourself. Indicate the watch you want on coupon, giving number and price.

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I'll open an account for you on my SAVINGS BOOK PLAN, send the watch you want for approval and

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MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE

A Savings Book will be sent to you to help you save your dime each day. YOU PAY MONTHLY by money order or check. Try this easy, convenient method that has helped thousands to own fine watches without burden on the pocket book or savings.

Jim Feeney

FREE TO ADULTS

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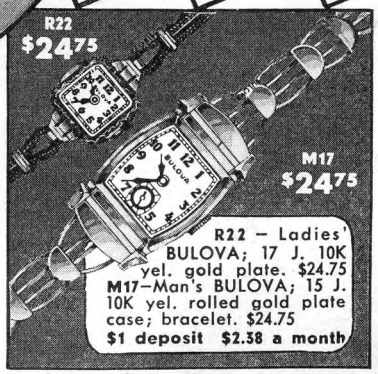

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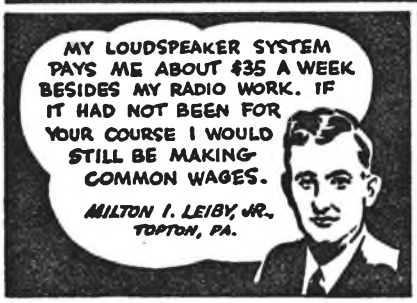

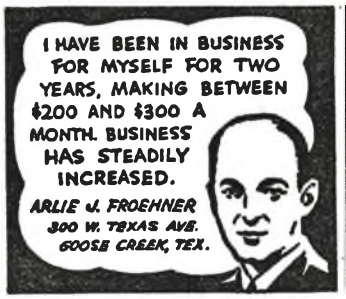

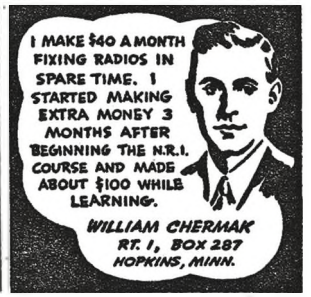

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If you're looking for a quick way to better pay, and a chance to get a good, permanent job in a field of real opportunity, here's the formula that has worked for the men you see above, and hundreds of others, too. It's not a "miracle cure" nor a "long-chance" operation. It is a time-tested, practical way to make $5 to $10 a week extra a few months from now, and to prepare for a full-time job paying up to $50 a week as a Radio Technician or Radio Operator.

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OCTOBER ISSUE ON SALE SEPTEMBER 10TH

Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

Vol. 105, No. 5 for Best of New Stories

September, 1941

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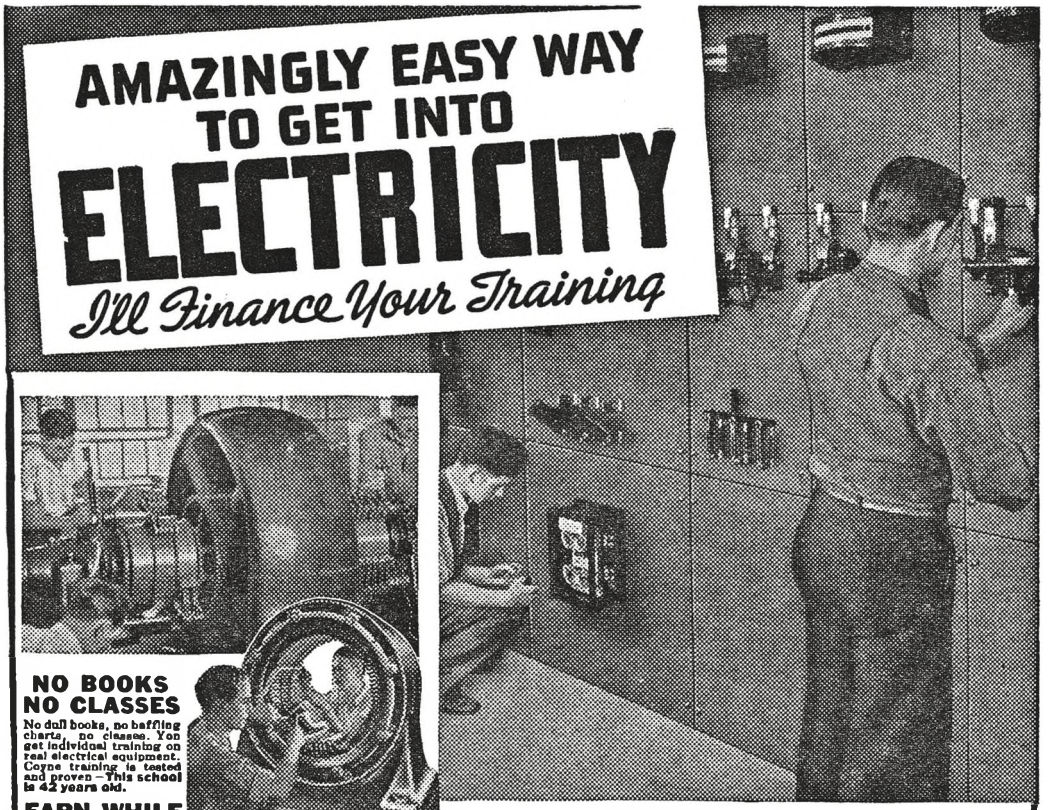

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ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

IF YOU'RE a camera fan and have to count your pennies—

Request:—A long time reader of *Adventure,* I would like to avail myself of the opportunity it extends me to get some badly needed advice on a subject which has interested me deeply but upon which, thru contradictory advice, I have become badly confused. Namely, photography. I haven't much to spend on my hobby so it behooves me to get organized for best results with least outlay.

If you were planning an extended trip where limitations of space or weight would permit you to take only one book, covering all phases of photography, selling at about $1.50, what book would you take? Bearing in mind that you were an amateur, unversed in the technical aspects of photography. That is a large order but is the type of information I have been unable to get elsewhere.

My equipment consists of one very old Conley, 4x5 plate Camera. Regno shutter 1 sec to 1/100, T & B. 3¼x4¼ Wollensak Velostigmat lens Series 1, F6.8 No. 7344. It is equipped with cut film holders and adapters which permit the use of 3¼x4¼ cut film.

One (also very old) Pony Premo, shutter by Rochester Optical Co., 1 to 1/100 T & B and lens labeled simply Bausch & Lomb, Pat. 1891. The shutter is jammed and the plate-holding back is gone but otherwise it is in better shape than the first mentioned camera with rack and pinion focusing, front and side elevation.

One very ordinary but very good Eastman V. P., about which there is no mystery and my latest acquisition, a Detrola, Model HW, F4.5 lens by Wollensak. Detrola shutter /25 to 1/200 T & B and cable release. 16 exposures on V. P. film. Optical type Exposure meter built in.

I have a tripod for the large boxes, a darkroom and all the various impedimenta of developing, including tank. So much for that!

Would it be possible to have the shutter of the Premo repaired and use it as an enlarger with satisfactory results considering the old lens?

Would it be worthwhile to have the back replaced on the Premo, buy a new lens retaining ring and fit it with the lens from the Conley (and shutter of course)? It is a much better box in many ways.

Or—would you advise forgetting that the old cameras ever took pictures and by ripping and lens switching, convert the best parts of each into one enlarger?

The amazing results I have had with the Detrola, indicate that it is the one I will be depending on for pictures. The prints are small, however, which leads to another question. Would it be possible to rig a projection printer from the Eastman V. P.? I mean considering lens, shutter and focusing not my ability to rig such a gadget. It would be nice to have clear, sharp prints about 3¼x4¼ but such printing, by commercial outfits, runs into money.

I am confused on the film I should use. Can you explain, so a layman can understand, the respective merits of Panchromatic, Orthochromatic, Plenachrome, Marvelchrome and Verichrome film? Which is fastest in daylight? Which is the best for detail so that enlargements will be sharp? Must one sacrifice speed in film for detail? Could you give me a brief treatise on film? Which to use, when and for what?

If you were allowed to own only one filter, which color would you decide upon as being the best for all around use? Why? Just what is their purpose?

Montgomery Ward offers adapter,

(Continued on page 8)

YES, BROTHER... LIFE GOES ON!

"Take it from me, brother—I *know!*

"Seems like yesterday, I was buddies with another young chap in the shop. One day at lunch hour, he said to me, 'Ted, I figure the only way to get ahead on this job—or any other—is *training!* Why, if they offered me a foreman's job today, I couldn't handle it. Don't *know* enough! But I'm going to learn! I'm signing for an I. C. S. Course!'

"I said I might do the same—but while I was hemming and hawing, the old world was moving along . . . *fast!* Today, my old buddy is General Superintendent, and I'm still on the same old job!

"Brother, Life won't wait for you! If you're going to amount to anything, ever, the time to start is *right now!*"

• • •

That's a sad story—but true! Don't let it happen to you! Start *now* to get the specialized, up-to-date training that will make you eligible for the bigger, better paying jobs in your field. The coupon below will bring you complete information on the International Correspondence Schools—the Schools that have helped hundreds of thousands of ambitious men to better jobs. The time to act is NOW!

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(Continued from page 6)

choice of medium yellow, dark yellow, red or light green filter, retaining ring and lens shade for $2.49. Would you buy it if the more expensive outfits were out of your reach? They are Albert filters and Tenite shades.

Where one has plenty of cash, it is no chore at all to assemble a first class outfit but where one has to count the pennies it behooves one to buy right or build right the first time. I doubt if my whole outfit cost more than twenty dollars but I have some new wrinkles in my brow and some of its contraptions that didn't work, just about undid the thrill of the one or two that did. If your advice can spare me a few wrinkles or if you can suggest some contraptions that will work, I will be everlastingly obliged.

—Baden Powell,
3114 North Alder St.
Tacoma, Washington

Reply by Paul L. Anderson:—I am sorry, but it is necessary for me to begin breaking your heart—there is *no* book on photography, selling for $1.50, which is what you want, or which will do you much good. However, there is a book which will tell you all you want to know—but it sells for $4. It is THE NEW PHOTO SCHOOL, by Hans Windisch, and you can get it from The American Photographic Publishing Company, 353 Newbury Street, Boston, Massachusetts; they will mail it to you on receipt of the price. When you get it, you're going to say: "What! Four dollars for *that*! Robbery!" For it's 5½x8 inches, and ⅝ of an inch thick. All right: restrain yourself; by the time you have learned all it contains, you will know more about photography than 99 44/100% of the amateurs of this country—it is a corker! Then if you can afford to spend $2.75 more, get the Kodak Reference Handbook; it is jamfull of information. By the time you have absorbed what these two books contain, you will know all that is necessary to make the very highest class of photographs; they are two thoroughly fine jobs of work — concise, compact, and full. But you must *study* them, not merely read them.

About your cameras. Frankly, if I were in your place, I'd save up my pennies, sell all the present equipment for what I could get (or use it for trading purposes) and buy a Kodak Monitor Six-20, with F/4.5 lens and Supermatic shutter. This lists at $42.50 (less about 10%) and has a Kodak lens, as good as any in the world, a shutter with speeds from 1 second to 1/400, takes eight pictures, 2¼x3¼ on a roll of film, and is in every way a honey. The pictures are large enough to see when you make contact prints, and can be enlarged to any size, if desired. No one knows better than I do the heart-break it is to try to work with unsatisfactory equipment, and I would certainly try hard to get this outfit, rather than patch up your old instruments.

As to the enlarger. Content yourself with 2¼x3¼ contact prints, with an occasional drug-store enlargement, until you can save up money enough to get a Kodak Auto-Focus enlarger—list $40—and use that. If you are ingenious and clever with tools, you can take your old cameras, reassemble the parts, add a lot, and make yourself an enlarger which will do the work, and cause you to dance on your hat every time you use it. I have done this, and have seen it done, and what with the cost of extra materials, and the paper you waste, you don't save a thing as compared to buying the machine mentioned. The Kodak instrument will enlarge 3½ diameter which means from 2¼x3¼ up to about 7x10, and it is a joy to work with.

Films. Every film is sensitive to violet, which is one of the components of white light. By adding certain dyes to the emulsion, it can be made sensitive also to green, the second component of white light, and then we have what is called an orthochromatic film. Verichrome and Plenachrome are trade names for films of this class. By adding certain other dyes, the film can be made sensitive also to red, the third component of white light, and then it is called panchromatic. Agfa Superpan Press, Eastman Super XX and Panatomic X, and a host of others are of this class. For 99% of landscape and portrait and general work, an ortho film is all right; once in a while you need a pan. *But*, the pan will do everything the ortho will, and when you need the reserve sensitiveness, you have it. If you are going to enlarge more than about 5 diameters, and are going to use glossy paper, then you must use a fine-grain film, such as Panatomic X. But all the fine-grain films are relatively slow. And unless you are going over 5 diameters, you don't need them; if I were you, I'd

(Continued on page 122)

I'm Drafting Men

-WHO WANT NEW BODIES!

and in just 15 minutes a day I'll prove I can make you A NEW MAN

I'M "trading-in" old bodies for new! I'm taking men who know that the condition of their arms, shoulders, chests and legs—their strength, "wind," and endurance—is not 100%. And I'm making NEW MEN of them. Right now I'm even training thousands of soldiers and sailors who KNOW they've got to get into shape FAST!

How do YOU measure up for the defense of your country? Have YOU the strong shoulders and back that can haul for miles Uncle Sam's standard 61 pounds of Army man's equipment? Or if home defense presses you into service, have you the he-man strength and tireless energy that double-shifts of working and watching may call for?

Now As Never Before You Need a Body That's Ready for ANY Job in National Emergency!

"GOD BLESS AMERICA"—yes, we all pray that. But it's the BODIES of America's MAN-POWER that must make that blessing safe. Where do YOU fit in? Are you ALL MAN—tough-muscled, on your toes every minute, with all the up-and-at-'em that can lick your weight in wildcats? Or do you want the help I can give you—the help that has already worked wonders for others, everywhere?

All the world knows I was ONCE a skinny, scrawny 97-lb. weakling. And NOW it knows that I won the title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." Against all comers! How did I do it? How do I work miracles in the bodies of other men in such quick time? The answer is "Dynamic Tension," the amazing method I discovered and which changed me from a 97-pound weakling into the champion you see here!

In just 15 minutes a day, right in the privacy of your own home. I'm ready to prove that "Dynamic Tension" can lay a new outfit of solid muscle over every inch of your body. Let me put new, smashing power into your arms and shoulders—give you an armor-shield of stomach muscle that laughs at punches—strengthen your legs into real columns of surging stamina. If lack of exercise or wrong living has weakened your inside. I'll get after that condition, too, and show you how it feels to LIVE!

These Are Atlas MEN!

5 Inches of New Muscle!

"My arms increased 1½". chest 2½", forearm ⅞". "—C. S., W. Va.

What a Difference!

"Have put 3½" on chest (normal) and 2½" expanded".—F. S., N. Y.

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I don't ask you to take my say-so for it. I'm ready to PROVE it with actual photos of men I have rebuilt. What "Dynamic Tension" has done for them it can certainly do for you. In just 15 MINUTES A DAY. See how. See RESULTS. See my book! It's yours FREE, but you must act AT ONCE. Times are moving too fast to put it off a single day. Mail this coupon NOW to me personally: CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 83J, 115 East 23rd St., New York City.

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I want the proof that your system of "Dynamic Tension" will help 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 TRIAL OFFER.

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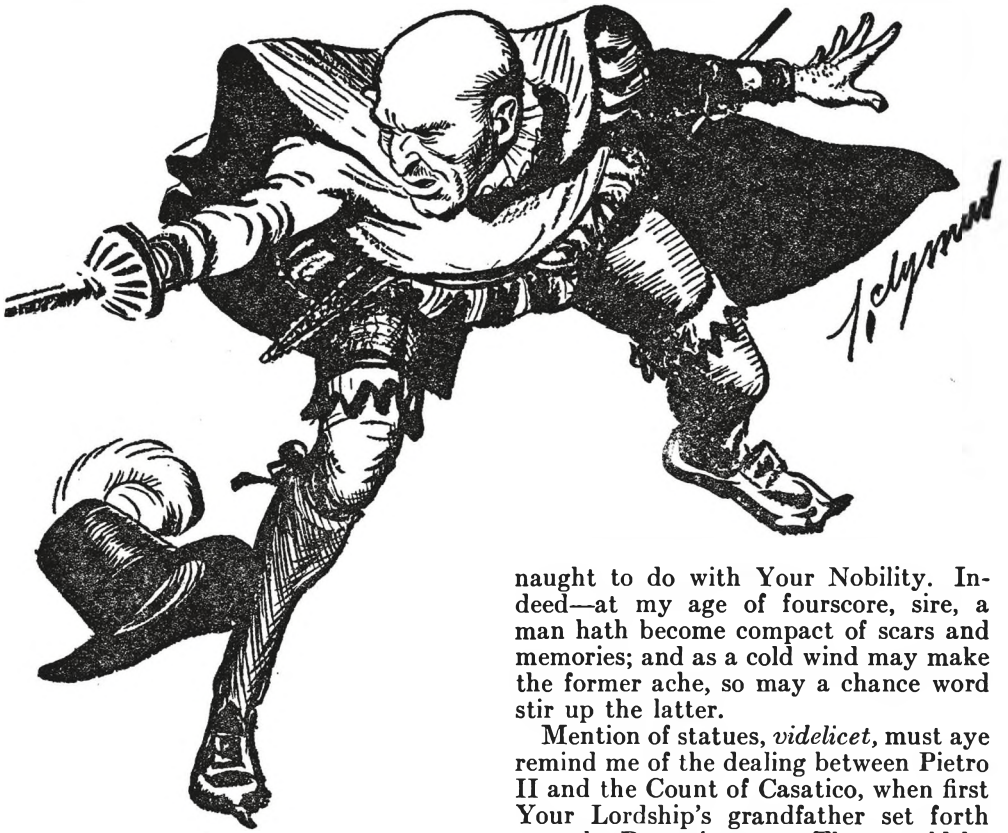
SINGLE COMBAT

A Caradosso Story

By F. R. BUCKLEY

I took Baltazar's left ear off entirely and asked him if he had a wife.



TO HIS Especial Good Grace, my Lord Duke Pietro IV of Rometia; from Luigi Caradosso, sometime Captain of the Guard, these:

Sire;

Humbly acknowledging the favor of Your Lordship's courier of this xvj day of January (albeit the man seemed to take this cottage of mine for a pot-house and his horse ate the bark off my best tree)—I do protest that here is some mistake; some small error on Your Highness' part during the gracious visitation of last week.

What should this aged heart do but rejoice to learn of the love of Rometians for Your Grace—even without me there to kick loyalty into 'em? And why, hearing that the merchants wish to raise a statue to Your Serenity's grandfather, should I roll mine eyes like a gored bull?

If I did—and it is not for a pensioner to contradict his lord—the motion had naught to do with Your Nobility. Indeed—at my age of fourscore, sire, a man hath become compact of scars and memories; and as a cold wind may make the former ache, so may a chance word stir up the latter.

Mention of statues, *videlicet,* must aye remind me of the dealing between Pietro II and the Count of Casatico, when first Your Lordship's grandfather set forth to make Rometia great. That would be in 1533 or thereabouts; I was a stripling just as old as the century and poison-proud to be captain of the guard so young.

As for Pietro, who used this pride (like every human weakness) for his own ends —well, Your Grace hath seen his picture. And in a former dispatch I have told how by choice he gave audiences in a tower-room whence a shaft descended to the torture-chamber; it was here he received me one fair forenoon—sitting with his feet on his great oak table, listening to the moans of certain tax-defaulters down below.

"Close the door," says Pietro, meaning the door at the mouth of that shaft; and as I did so there came from the dungeon a shriek that crisped my hair. I hear it now and have crossed myself; but then, with a reputation and three wives to cherish, I could give no sign.

I marched smartly back to the far side of the table, saluted and stood at ease. His Grace regarded me humorously with those red-rimmed eyes of his — I re-

call moreover that he was drawing a pen slowly between his teeth and meditatively spitting forth the feathers. Aye, he did that trick during all the years I was with him—sometimes, since his death, I have wondered if he is doing it in his present abode.

But I do not think so; for the reason that only angels have wings.

"That was well acted," says Pietro at last.

He jerked his head at the shaft-door, and showed his yellow teeth.

"But the stout bearing of other folks' pain is the easiest part of building a duchy, Captain."

THAT, in the short time I had been with him, had been his tale by day and by night—how Rometia must grow, must swell, must take in new lands and new peoples and how lesser lords must become vassals of His Grace. Indeed, at first acquaintance I had respectfully thought him mad, so really did he seem to believe that Rometians were of better blood than folk ten miles away; but he had not roared and danced up and down and battered the table in this matter more than five or six times ere I saw he was playing a part. The reason for which being that whoso betrays his friend and cuts his throat and takes his purse, Your Highness, is a bad man and shall go to hell—whereas he who breaks a treaty, kills a thousand men in war and adds devastated lands to his own is a savior of his people, or at least may be proved one before the Council of Nobles.

I trust I do not make myself too clear.

It was of the Council of Nobles that his lordship now spoke; feather-down flying from his lips like a snowstorm and his eyes that had been humorous hardening like ice.

"Didst hear yon puppy from Casatico at Council yesterday?"

Having been on guard behind His Grace's chair, of course I had; so came smartly to attention and saluted. Pietro allowed no voice to intrude on his thinking.

"His father must choose to die just now, the damned weakling," says my lord (though the fever, that year, had left many folk little choice in the matter), "and this Francesco must come to the throne with his college notions. Talking of leagues and treaties—just when I must have more land. For my poor subjects."

He took another pen and stripped it; then suddely blew out all the feathers and flung the shank on the floor.

"Well, ape, dunderhead, fool!" he shouted at me. "Hast any word to say, or have I hired a mute for my guard-captain, as well as an imbecile?"

Ah; but he paid high wages.

"We have the best cavalry and the most infantry hereabouts," says I, "and if Your Lordship so desires, I make no doubt—"

"How many guns have we?"

"Four, Sire."

"And how many hath Casatico—Francesco, that sweet boy? How many, dolt?"

I saluted, my throat full of sand.

"Sire, I—"

"You know not. But *I* know. His fool of a father, God rest him, made playthings of them; collected 'em as better men collect women—had men down from Germany to cast the cursed things, with his coat of arms on the hindside and God knows what foolishness, all in bronze. He hath ten."

Cannon meant little to me—or to any soldier—at that time, though the burghers of Florence had been using them. It is aye the *dilettanti*—the enraged amateurs—who bring the novelties into war; had strife been limited from the beginning to professional men, I doubt not we should still be armed with clubs—and I should have a dozen less wounds to irk me.

"I will engage that with a fair field for many cavalry," says I, light-heartedly, "we could—"

His Grace dropped his feet to the floor and stood up screaming.

"*Thou'lt* engage! Glory of Heaven—was I put in this world as a feeding-trough for idots? What befell the Count of Costecaldo last year, with *his* cavalry and a fair field?"

I had heard; but it was not such hearing as an officer of horse would care

to remember. So I said I had been in His Grace's services but six months.

"Aye," says he bitterly, "and every day wasted. Well—my lord of Costecaldo engaged his cavalry to ride down those guns; he pretended to a claim on Casatico, the villain. And they blew his whole force into scrap-iron at three hundred paces. What it cost him in horseflesh and spoiled armor, I shudder to think; and had Casatico had sense to counter-attack, the fool, there might have been a strange change of lordships that day."

I WAS reflecting that there there had been men on those horses and inside that armor—but as Your Grace knows, I had been badly brought up. In a convent. True, I had been a free-lance for some years, but sometimes—

"And now his son," grinds out Pietro, "must leap up in Council and demand peace. A league of all against the attacker of any! And those dotards, without an ambition among 'em, listened to him like the Gospels. 'Od's wounds, 'tis enough to drive one mad!"

"Did not Your Grace—" says I, the words jerked out of me by amazement.

"Did not my grace spring up and applaud the notion?" says he slowly, taking another pen. "Aye, indeed. *Someone* in this duchy must have vision, Captain, beyond—beyond the hair on his own nose. Did I not moreover drink a flagon afterward with Francesco—that sweet boy? Surely—and told him that peace is the yearning of mine own heart. The truth, too, God witness me! Given the lands I need—for my poor people—and the monies to maintain them, stab me if I'd ever make war again."

His Lordship grinned and put the pen to his lips without biting it.

"But as Francesco said—that sweet, sweet boy—there be evil men about; of whom, in his ignorance, he may even have thought me one. I doubt some enemy may have belied me, Captain—perchance my lord of Costecaldo in his envy. At all events, the young man remained of few words—mighty suspicious-like—until I offered him thee."

I thought I could not have heard aright.

"Offered him *me,* Your Highness?" I gasped.

"Aye, Captain," says Pietro, biting the pen, "having so well disciplined my forces, y'are to go to Casatico—fear not, I'm the paymaster—and make his young lordship's troops more like an army, less like a mob. In token of the love I bear him—and for protection against the wicked men aforesaid."

His Grace sat again in his great chair and raised his feet to the table.

"If thou'lt step forward and incline one of thy vast ears," says he, "I'll tell thee why."

I stepped forward; and Pietro regarded me steadfastly, chewing meanwhile on his feather.

"All beard and breastplate," he muttered—one of his dark sayings that no man might understand. And then aloud to me: "Nay, Luigi; on second thought, I'll tell thee nothing—save to remember who pays thee. Report to my lord Francesco tomorrow. Dismissed!"

II

I HAD not been to Casatico before; got there the next afternoon, leaving Luca, my lieutenant, in charge of the guard at home. It proved to be a pleasant-seeming town, albeit not a soldier's city; but after all—in fifteen years of free-lancing I had found merchant- warrens that for sport surpassed garrisons.

This place (according to the man who settled me in my quarters at the citadel) thrived on wool-jugglery; I forget what its inhabitants did to the stuff, but whatever—the greatest trouble of the citizens since the Costecaldian was the trading of the next town, Bonelli, in the same goods. Seemed that the lord of that place owned a pass through the hills and exacted tolls—all very cursed dull; and my servant's word that this lord was young and warlike cheered me not at all. From my window, which looked upon a court, I could see our regiment of cannon, their German stinkmakers still polishing and tending the ugly brutes; and methought, who would dare to ride against such an array?

Further to which melancholy, I learned that my lord Francesco had been at school with Enrico di Bonelli, and was at that moment visiting him with intent of bosom friendship! My lieutenant told me—a plump man with eyes like a happy cow; I groaned in the spirit and, until evening when his lordship should return, went forth to walk about the town.

The sun was sinking—it was summer, and seemingly some kind of saint's day; howbeit, many burghers had closed their shops and put on holiday clothes and taken to strolling in the city square. At one end of it there was a fountain; at the other a company of musicians who played pipes and viols as the dusk drifted over the town. Here and there in a workshop window a light gleamed, and from time to time the walkers and their wives would stop and crack jokes upon the industry of the workers.

It made me feel very lonely, Your Highness; and that is why I said to the girl outside the bake-shop that it was a fine evening. She was the only woman I had seen unescorted; and if, when she agreed as to the weather, I asked her to agree to a stroll upon my arm—oons, why doth a man wear a beard?

Yet of a sudden, my whiskers seemed to fright her; she shrank back against the bake-shop wall just as there came from its doorway a tall youth with a feather in his hat—wearing his sword, however, as though it belonged to someone else.

"What's here?" says he; and the girl, without words, raised a finger and pointed at me. I assure Your Grace I had done no more than I have recounted; but as I say, this was no soldier's city. Politeness was not understood—and then , of course, the slash Onesimo Vasta (God receive him) had laid across my brow, was scarce healed.

"This is my betrothed," says the young man; making, however, no motion toward his hilt.

That surprised me—then.

"Sir," says I, hinting at his duty by touching mine own blade, "evidently I have been at fault. And will give every satisfaction."

Still he moved not.

"Nay," says I, "since fighting is in some sort my trade, I'll use dagger against sword."

Corpo di Bacco, now he seemed to be growing pale!

"And fight with the left hand," I offered, but he paled more still. Some score of the people promenading had stopped and were murmuring among themselves.

"Good friends," says I, turning toward them in an ecstasy of boredom, "I acknowledge my fault toward this young man. I have insulted his sweetheart. Look you: the last amends. I will fight his sword with my bare hands. Now!"

I had laid hand to the buckle of my belt, to disarm, when a flicker of the forty eyes before me made me turn about—quickly, or I should not now be writing to Your Grace. For may it be believed that this townsman had not only taken my offer—shameful enow—but had also drawn and made to run me through the back? And may it be further believed that as I leaped aside to save myself, the onlookers laughed?

There be merchant towns and merchant towns.

That was Casatico; the very soul on't.

Not that I had time to contemn it them—this murderer that would have been, now feared for his own life and was besetting me with blows. 'Tis true that he had no skill of his weapon—used the edge when the point would have finished me in a moment—but still any one of his wild hewings, unavoided, would have split me to the teeth. And I was unarmored, and I would not, for my pride, go back on the promise to draw nor sword nor dagger; I must leap and crouch while that crowd, much swelled, howled with merriment.

Yet was there hope, I soon saw, for that mine adversary was in a sweat—two sweats; one of unwonted exercise and one of dread. And the latter (as I have found in my time) cometh first to the palms of the hands, so that hilts slip—that, and not vanity, is the reason why I had the grips of mine covered in velvet. My young assassin was holding plain steel, so that when—suspecting his condition—I left him a

"I'll fight with the left hand," I offered, but he paled more still.

fair blow at my skull, he fumbled and almost dropped his sword.

Which gave me the chance I had awaited—I stepped forward, smote him on the nose, took his weapon and flung it on the bake-shop roof and was just about to read him a lecture on cowardice, when all of a sudden what does someone do but bawl like a calf for the watch!

THE watch! To interfere in such a trifling affair! Sire—I was hurt in my feelings; and when I turned my face toward the shouter, behold a dozen other voices took up the cry. And then a dozen more, until the whole square was a-hubbub and my protests could not be heard.

I had just seized a citizen by the collar, so that my good-will and ill-usage should be known to one at least, when moreover this watch came; a sergeant and four men armed with arquebuses, at the run.

Well—I'd fought such odds before; and was preparing to resist oppression with a rush and cuts at their knee-joints, when the sergeant stepped forward and—stap me!—began to talk.

"Captain Caradosso?" says he.

"The same," says I, noting that while his men had their pieces leveled, they had their fingers well away from the locks, "and cursed near slain, my first day in your city."

But he looked at my late adversary, whose nose was bleeding all over himself and his neighborhood.

"It is forbidden to fight in the city streets," says the sergeant heavily. "I must request that you give up your sword and submit to arrest."

The crowd of citizens had drawn away as if all six of us had the plague. Now a moan of chatter ran through it—one would have thought that being arrested was some disgrace. As indeed they considered it in that city; no one had had spirit enow to get hanged for years and years; nay, I found later that the cells, even, had cobwebs on their keyholes!

"Y'are a prompt fellow," says I to the sergeant; meaning that it was a pity he must waste time fighting me, "but—"

"I was at hand," he replied, "because his lordship is returned from Bonelli and requires thy presence. I think he meant alive; but alive or dead, the order was to bring thee, Captain."

He stepped a little aside at this—out of the line of fire; and I saw his men lay their fingers delicately on the trigger-guards. Moreover, it was to be noticed that if now I rushed—bent, as I must be to avoid the volley—this sergeant could run me through from side to side. And if by some miracle he missed, and the arquebusiers likewise, 'twas sad odds but I should be chopped to pieces by the citizens, who had drawn swords and were handling them like meat-axes.

So loyalty seemed the thing. I laughed, clapped the sergeant on the back and said that of course if His Excellency wanted to see me—

"The sword, Captain," says the fellow, holding out his hand; and there was naught to do but draw and give it to him.

"And the dagger?" he continued in his obstinacy; so there I stood disarmed. Only time that ever befell me; only time I was in such a city as Casatico, I thank God! Sometimes in dreams I see those dish-faces about me and awake gasping.

They marched me off—five men only, arresting Luigi Caradosso!—but, Sire, there was more in't. Somehow I could feel the sureness of all those shop-keepers that no man could kill the watch—any more than anyone could overthrow their fat placidity; and for a quarter of an hour perhaps even I was in that frame of mind.

Within which time I had been duly delivered into the presence of my lord Francesco, reported upon by the sergeant and left—with my sword and dagger staring me in the face from the table before his lordship.

"So, Captain," says the Count, looking from me to them and back again. "What will the Duke say to this?"

He was a warm-skinned young man, notable for broad shoulders on a long body and a very broad smile, in which he now showed white teeth.

"What *would* the Duke say, rather," he changed his dread question. "I'll not

report thee—this once. Customs vary from town to town, Captain; my folk seem to take no pleasure in blood and death—in which I'm with 'em. As for love, they have it all confused with altars; not bake-shop walls."

O TO HAVE told him the truth about his people—and the bake-shop wall as well! How they delighted in blood and death, so long as their hides were not endangered; how their esteem of love fell short of fair fighting for't.

But under Pietro II, to argue was to hang; I was trained to salute and hold my peace.

"Take thy weapons," says my lord. He was wearing a long furred robe; holding the borders on't with his two hands as he watched me rearm myself. And so young and quizzical he looked, smiling with his head on one side, that for an instant my heart went forth to him—until I remembered that I was on duty.

"I myself have made mistakes," says he, "notably concerning your lord Pietro. I thought him a bad man—and my lord of Bonelli a good one. I speak frankly to thee, Luigi Caradosso—I am very new to lordship and very glad to have thee here. I trust I may profit more from thine aid than hath Enrico di Bonelli from the aid thy good Duke hath sent *him*. Guido Gennaro, thou knowest?"

I had not known of the sending, but certes I knew this Gennaro—as slimy a serpent as crawled.

"And what—under favor—hath Ser Guido attempted at Bonelli?" I asked.

"I know not; but sure his function would be to counsel reason and forbearance toward Casatico. For what else should the good Duke have sent him?"

I wondered inwardly; for what indeed!

"But my lord Enrico is more forward than I have known him heretofore—which is much. Seemed as if he would take *all* our trade—more tolls than ever on our wool crossing the hills through that pass of his. And poor Messer Gennaro there in a corner, wringing his hands—"

Aye, methought wringing his hands to urge that the last *soldo* be wrung from this innocent.

Francesco laughed, shortly.

"Well—no more statecraft today," says he, stretching. "I deserve a holiday, equally with my folk—eh, Luigi?"

Never had lord spoken thus to me before; I felt quite strange as I saluted. And stranger still as his lordship slipped out of the furred robe and into a shabby sort of jerkin. Hose of burgher quality he was wearing (I now saw) already; he reached for a cap that had seen better days—and oons! Sire, as he stood there ready to go out, I was better dressed myself, than he was.

"Thou'st found one evening in my city wearisome, seemingly," says he. "I've found a month in this castle wearier still—all alone. So it's been my habit to go forth by night to see what my folk are doing—while they know me not. And to learn what they would have *me* do."

He twisted his face wryly.

"I am not much beloved," says he. "It seems they'd have had me spend their money on flummery—processions of accession, and fireworks and the like. Too late now. But I think I have made some good laws."

His pride (I found later) was an edict that children should not work at the wool-carding. Later I learned also (and Your Grace shall see) how grateful were the parents of Casatico.

"We'll go forth tonight, hey, Luigi—to the quarter by the south gate; drink a stoup of wine, perchance, and see what like are the folk thereabouts."

"Rogues," says I; because (why is unfathomable) rascals do always congregate toward the south.

"Maybe," says my lord, "but still they are my people; still I must govern them, like the rest. We'll go forth by the private stair—behind this curtain. Follow me."

Yet when we were in the street, naught would satisfy him but I must walk by his side, like an equal; which I did, more passers-by eyeing me than looked at him. And down and around and about miles of mean streets we walked, while he discoursed of the sickness of

thieves and cutpurses—how they needed governance as fevered folk need physic—talk beyond all sense, with ropes so cheap; until at last we stood in the bright moonlight outside a mean wine-shop.

"We'll take a flagon here," says he; and now I wondered urgently, was he lunatick? Or (since he was noble) some little confused in his wits? A captain, not on field-service, to be drinking with a lord! And for himself—with cellars full of wines that made my mouth drip to think on—to be seeking ullage!

But he walked into the shop, and lest someone scratch his skin with some knife and get me hanged, I must needs follow. And then for a moment I thought I'd found the method in Francesco his madness—because in the arbor behind the tavern stood this girl Bianca; daughter of the taverner and a fine wench. I knew her better later, but that's another story; the present matter was that as she turned from serving a half-drunk lout and fixed her great eyes on his lordship, I perceived she knew him not.

Nor he her, I saw likewise.

"Wine?" says the girl.

"If you please," says I, sitting across the board from Francesco.

"And for me also!" shouts the drunkard at the end of the table. He swilled down the pot he'd just received and held it out to be refilled. "And let thy finger dabble in't, *Bianca mia,* to sweeten the damned stuff."

THIS being garrison gallantry of the old sort, I turned to look at the man; and certes he was no citizen. Knew too much, judging by the look in his blear eyes; moreover his face was leaner and more scarred than is the fashion among wool-carders. His shoes were broken, he was covered in dust—and I saw he wore his rapier bravo-fashion, bare, in loops.

He waved his hand at me.

"Ha, Captain!"

"Less noise," says I sternly, at which he laughed.

"When I'm in thy troop, God forbid, I'll take orders," says he, staring however at Francesco, "not before. And I'm on my way to where there's better business than *thy* kind, Captain."

I had some thought of cutting his ears off, for thinking what I had thought about his lordship some minutes agone. But Francesco's hand shot across the table and fell upon my wrist, and then Bianca came back with the wine and made me breathless, so that I did naught but shudder as that foul grape-juice ran down my throat. I coughed at it, and my lord laughed, and so did the drunken bravo as the girl set his drink before him.

"New to bear-leading, eh?" says he to me. "Touchy, ha? Well, we're but human."

Francesco, bending his ear toward the talk of the tavern—absorbed therein, it seemed—heard him not; and after that grip on my wrist, I dared not rise again to—explain.

"But thank God I'm a *man,*" mumbles the fellow. "I can make love for myself. No led-captains for me—hey, sweetheart?"

Whereat he tried to put his arm about Bianca's waist. With the skill of long practice she avoided this; but he was on his mettle, got somehow to his feet and made after her again. But though I was interested and rose at once, I found myself an ell behind his lordship—aye, an ell and an action because behold, by the time I'd got my second leg over the bench, Francesco had reached the table-end, seized the man by the collar and flung him on his back.

"*Per la—*" bawls the ruffian; on reflection I will not write down for Your Highness what he said. Oaths in such strings are now out of fashion, and though the rogue yelled for half a minute, all he conveyed was a certain displeasure. I think, even so, he would have continued some time more had not my lord bent down, seized him again—by the hose and the scruff of the jerkin this time—and flung him into the street.

"Shall I stab him, sir?"

Francesco made no answer. Instead, he followed, white-faced, into the alley; where the soldier was picking himself up, sword in hand. The drinkers were crowding about—thieves all, if ever I saw such, but at least they did not bel-

low for the watch; I had pushed to the front of them, glad to be having a tussle that evening after all, when I was pushed aside and my place taken by Francesco.

"But my—sir!" says I.

"Well?"

He had his sword drawn.

"Your worship cannot fight over a—"

"Silence!" says he, with a look that froze me. Oons, and I knew he was not fighting for a pot-house wench, but for a subject—a woman—but ere I could clear the matter in my mind the drunkard was upon him.

Not drunk now, judging by the style of his attack—and by that same token, a trained swordsman. I can feel now the sinking of the stomach I had when he loosed the *colpo di Bentivoglio*—that delicate putting of point under breastbone which was then all but unknown in the north; and once more the breath halts in my gizzard as I recall how his lordship foiled it. There is but one way it can be foiled—I should have to show Your Grace—and 'tis a parlous operation; he who bungles it hath no chance in this life to try again.

But his young lordship made no mistake; nay, turning the bravo's blade under his left arm, he took a masterly step forward and brought his own down thwack on the fellow's head. The blow had power to split a tombstone, yet—all that befell was that the man's hat flew off while he himself staggered back into the ring of onlookers. Alack, the stroke had been with the flat of the blade; to suspect accident was impossible—and instead of taking his foe off balance and spitting him like a goose, Francesco dropped his point saying: "Now, fellow—"

Madness!

For of course the man was in no mood for converse. Nay—he passed his hand across his eyes, raised his left arm for balance (he had not troubled to do that at first) and came forward weaving a little on his feet, in a style I knew well. The strange thing was, though, that my lord, just home from school and without a scar on his face, seemed to know it likewise. And began weaving in his turn—left foot for right, right foot for left, circling the one way just (to the handsbreadth) as his adversary circled the other; with a spring in his step that reminded me of His Grace the Duke's black panther.

"Come, now—" says Francesco; perhaps seeing, as I saw, that the man had left his spring of foot and life in the wine-shops. He meant, come now, come listen to reason, let us shed no blood; but the fellow took it as another invitation. Flat-footed, yet wondrous quick, in he came indeed; and from his mixing of cuts and thrusts I saw that he was old at the trade. I will confess that in defiance of all decency (but he was a bravo, no doubt on't) I slipped my sword out and, holding it by my leg invisible, stood ready to intervene should his lordship be in trouble; 'twas shame, even so, but—Pietro II was a stern master and I had my families to think of.

HA! I need not have troubled myself! Backing and sidestepping—always just out of reach when the bravo lunged—Francesco was soaking up the man's strength as dry ground soaks up rain. And the rogue was weakening; he had his mouth open and was roaring like a horse—but I knew that in a little that state would have passed; he would have gained his second breath; and if my lord (as I horribly feared) were then to continue in this bloodless style of battle—"

Now was the time to kill him; before he should try the worse of his tricks; and as Francesco foiled an attack in prime, I shouted this advice from a dry throat.

" 'Tis a bravo, sir—a paid killer!"

"I'm much of thine opinion, Captain," says my lord, "and—so—we will spoil his trade."

At that word *so*, his lordship's blade had licked out, as 'twere carelessly—but as he said *trade*, behold the bravo dropped his sword with a clash to the cobblestones! Only one curse he gave—with no more than three or four saints in it—and clasped his right wrist with his left; and then my lord Francesco was beside him, laying his noble hands on that vile flesh.

Lord, lord, the things I have seen in

my time! 'Tis almost worth while to have lived. . . .

Well, as I say, there stood Francesco, grasping the bravo's wrist and by the light of the moon examining the wound he had made.

"Naught severed but the tendons," says he, as if 'twere a satisfaction to him; snatched a scarf from a bystander and bandaged the hand up! Is it believable? Yet so he did; bystander and bravo alike standing silent. I think they may have felt his lordship in their bones —strange, when he was doing a menial office for a rogue; yet I felt it too.

At last he turned to me and I had the devil's task shifting my sword from hand to hand so that I could salute. Even so, he saw, and shook his head gravely.

"This fellow will not fight again. Hast any money, Luigi?"

"A—a little, Sire."

"Take him to the south gate, give him a florin and put him without. Learn an honest trade, thou man."

I saluted, and—what was very strange —so did the bravo.

"I'll see thee in the morning, Captain," says my lord. "And meantime—remember the law about brawling in the streets."

His eyes twinkled at me; then he glanced at Bianca, behind whom now loomed the bulk of her father in the tavern door; then he turned on his heel and walked away.

I flung the bravo forth of the south gate postern and, wishing heartily that I was back at free-lancing (where a man may be slain, but is not like to be puzzled)—went back to my quarters in the castle.

III

I HAD little sleep that night; wondering what schemes Your Grace's grandsire had in mind; what my part therein might be; and what sort of troops I should find on my hands in the morning.

I had told the cow-like lieutenant that I would inspect the guard two hours after sunrise; wished, when I saw them, I had made it dawn—they might have looked better.

For there I beheld them—about two hundred infantry, a hundred horse and of course those German gunners with their guns—all drawn up before me—*me!*—in dirty armor; in lines that bulged and wavered and with one fellow actually talking in the ranks!

Naturally I knocked him down and sent him to the cells on bread and water; I dealt after my fashion with others too; but oons! Discipline seemed to slip off those fellows like water from a duck's back. At last, hoping that baking might soften them, I retired from the parade for a stoup of wine—and to question the lieutenant.

He asked me, had I not forgotten the order to dismiss—knew nothing, evidently and seemed to glory in it.

"We of Casatico," says my officer—God help me!—proudly, "take not kindly to soldiering."

" 'Tis to be seen."

"We have better things to do. 'Tis true *I* am a soldier—but 'twas not ever thus with me, Captain. The trade failed, but in former days I was a potter."

A potter! And to be my second-in-command was a poor exchange! I was wordless.

"Casatico," says the lout, like a child reciting a lesson, "is a merchant city."

" 'Tis not uncommon for merchants to be robbed," says I.

"We have guns and a guard to protect us, Captain; as my lord of Costecaldo found out—hee, hee! Our merchants can pay."

I thought of Pietro II—His Grace seemed to be grinning over my left shoulder that very moment — and breathed very deeply through my nose.

"So," I said. "Very like. Ha. And thou takest that pay, Lieutenant?"

"Aye," says he, grinning.

"Then go earn it. Take place with the troops on parade."

He saluted—without the grin.

"Until what hour, Captain?"

"Until further orders. Dismissed!"

I sat there pondering (and, I will not deceive Your Grace, drinking) for some little time more; it may have been two or three hours. At all events, the sun

was high—and hot—when a messenger arrived to summon me to audience with Francesco; and, glancing out of window as I laced my stomacher, I saw the troops had melted into a much better frame of mind. As I passed along the battlements on my way to the Count's wing, they came to attention far more smartly than they had when they were fresh, in the coolth; and I laughed as I gave them the order to break off.

Five minutes later, I felt not quite so pleased with myself; for who should be seated beside Francesco—having entered the castle without my knowledge, and so without ceremony of drums, trumpets or presented arms—but that demon for all ducal pomp, my master Pietro II!

He was plainly dressed, as if to ride ahorseback—usually he traveled in silk and a litter with an escort of fifty men; his eyes were redder about the rims than ever, and I was in dread to meet them. Saluting midway between the two lords I saw, however, that Francesco was smiling.

"His Grace hath surprised us, Captain," says he.

Pietro was looking down at his fingers interwined, not at me. I breathed again.

"With news," continues Francesco, "too urgent for couriers and vital to our state. Thou'st inspected the forces. What like are they?"

This was a delicate question, from their master. As I drew breath on it, Pietro looked up at me for an instant.

"They—they can take the field," says I.

"Against Bonelli?" asks Pietro, looking down at his knuckles again. "Four hundred horse there."

I THOUGHT I saw the plan. Pietro had said he must have Casatico. Bonelli was to be the hammer to crush it for him. I was to report on its weakness or the contrary. Ha! Six months had I been within stink of statecraft and thought myself able to fathom my lord of Rometia! O human vanity! Ha, ha!

"We have the guns, Sire," says I, partly as assurance to Francesco, partly as a reminder to His Grace.

Francesco arose, walked over to the window and stood staring into the courtyard where those guns were.

Luigi Caradosso

"Death—blood—widows," says he in a low voice.

"At Bonelli!" says the Duke.

"Here too. Enrico will not charge like my lord of Costecaldo—this will be no war of one volley. 'Twill be a long slaughter—there will be levies of the townfolk, young men will leave the shops to return no more, sweethearts will weep—"

The Duke raised his red eyes to me and wagged his head ever so slightly.

"Natheless," says he, as one talks to a child, "if Bonelli declares war, my lord, what's to be done?"

"I could give him the price he asks for the use of that pass of his."

"He would take it as weakness," says the Duke sharply, "and demand more still. And what would your lordship's subjects say to that?"

Meseemed that if they were as loath as they seemed to fight for their livelihood, they had little right to complain; but 'twas no affair of mine.

I thought of Guido Gennaro, certes counseling yon lord Enrico toward war —while I, likewise Pietro's man—headed the opposing army.

My brain curdled.

His Grace arose.

"I must be going," says he. "There is no rest from lordship, good my lord."

"So I find," says poor Francesco heavily. "It was kind in Your Grace to ride to warn me. Captain—turn out the guard."

Pietro held up his hand.

"With permission," says he, "coming without ceremony—in pure love for your lordship—I would depart as I came."

He had twenty men in full armor by the main gate, I found; but that was pretty loving, for him.

"If I could be granted a favor, 'twould be that the captain here ride with me some part of the way—he hath left certain small matters I would discuss—"

"The captain has heard," says Francesco.

"I am your lordship's debtor," says the Duke, kissed him and away we went.

I rode by His Grace's side—not even a horse-length behind; that was the order; upsides with a nobleman again! And for a mile or two we went in silence. Then: "Gennaro hath reported from Bonelli," says His Grace. "What news of Casatico, Captain—save that his lordship fought a street brawl last night, over a tavern-wench, with thee for a second?"

He knew it already! Since—I've wondered how well he knew yon bravo; but then I had the simple wish to cross myself.

"*No* news," says he, looking at his horse's ears. "Well—I expected as much. Or as little. From thee."

What to say to that? Nothing.

"Pity for this war," says the Duke, "but according to Gennaro, 'tis not to be avoided. Heigho! The Casatici will not be pleased. 'Twill mean more taxes."

I said naught. Francesco had spoken of the blood and widows.

"Art on quite brotherly terms with my lord," says Pietro, "sharing his night-adventures and so forth—well, ape, is't so?"

"Scarce that, Your Highness. I—"

"Hast told him of the feat that took mine own eye, causing me to pay thee twice thy worth? How thou avoided war once on thine own account? How thou fought Simon Boccanegra?"

That had been when I was a *condot-*

tiere. Simon's troop (God rest him!) had rivaled mine, and at last there had been the question which of us captains should be employed by Venice. So rather than that our commands should fight, destroying each the other, I'd proposed single combat betwixt Simon and me; and had killed him with my new cut just above the gorget.

"I have not told him, Sire."

"Only time ever thou used brains in all thy life," says His Grace, "I'd think thou'd boast of that, instead of—Halt the escort."

I raised my arm as he reined in. He sat there in a dust-cloud, staring at me like a basilisk.

"Well—get back to Casatico," says he through his teeth, "and tell my lord of thy duello eftsoons, idiot! Tell him!"

IV

WHICH I did in due course; but ere the course fell due, I was to learn more about the town of my adoption. And about Your Grace's grandfather, whose shadow seemed somehow to hang over the city; yet 'tis of the city I write, because towns make their governors—not the lords the towns. I think this is why the proverb hath it that countries get the rulers they deserve.

Howbeit—during the next week, while I was working on that lamentable guard like the devil on dead sinners, Francesco was away, inspecting crops or some such foolishness in the countryside; four men and a sergeant for escort.

I had little time to wander in the town; but wherever I went, meseemed that the common folk, knowing not Pietro nor Francesco neither, were loving toward His Grace and notably cool toward their own lord. Of course they would say naught before me; but one day, coming off parade after teaching the guard pretty memorably whom else they had to fear beside their Maker, I found sitting in my quarters a fat man with a bull neck; none other than the tavern-keeper of the south gate—Bianca's father.

Who at sight of me arose (it was as well, since he had been sitting in my chair) and with a dirty finger-nail traced a figure on my table top.

I looked at it—'twas very faint, two crooked lines, one across t'other like the spokes of a wheel—and then at him, thinking he was demented. Your Grace will see that in this affair I wondered oft if folk were lunatick; as I say, I was unused to statecraft.

"Understandest not?" says he, as if I'd been his brother. "Ah! His Grace hath not made thee one of us."

"It would be beyond his power," says I, restrained by that name, though, from flinging the fellow downstairs.

"'Tis for civilians only," says he, with more respect.

"What?"

"This sign by which we agents of His Grace may know one another. The Captain's work will begin, doubtless, when we have finished ours."

"Agents!" says I—not caring to learn too much of what he meant. "Are there many of ye?"

"Some handsome few." He leered at me, and my flesh crept. "And some in furred gowns and gold chains, too, Captain—all anxious that His Grace be not belied."

I began to see why the shadow of Pietro lay over the town.

"Well, I'm not one of thy nest of adders," I told him. "State thy business here and begone."

"'Tis a private matter," says he, writhing like a snake indeed. "I mean—'tis not on his lordship's service."

"Which lord?"

"My lord of Rometia's—who else?"

"Who knows?" says I, disgusted.

"Look, Captain," says the man—hesitating; aye, I grant him that. "I know who was with thee at my tavern t'other night."

"Marvelous."

"There's not a dozen folk in the town *would* know milord at sight, for all that," says the man sulkily. "None in the tap-room knew. Not even my daughter. Though of all the men who drink with me, she looked favorably for the first time on *him.*"

"Did she send thee here?" I asked, my heart sinking.

"Oons, nay! Nay! 'A's a strange

wench; seems hardly like mine own flesh and blood—"

"True. But come to the point—father."

"I am a poor man," says he, spreading those dirty hands of his, "and methought that if his lordship had liked Bianca—"

"She'd go to him?"

"Nay, nay, Captain! She—"

"What then?"

"Methought," says he, writhing, "that were some half-dozen armed men—in masks—to burst into my poor house one evening, at the hour when the watch is being changed—and carry the girl off, what could I do?"

"Save take compensation from his lordship?"

He writhed and smiled.

"Again," says I, "which lord?"

The smile vanished like magic.

"His *young* lordship," says he, eyes flickering anxiously over my countenance, "though look you, Captain—the ravishment might serve our own lord, too. After a little, I could seem to learn what had befallen my daughter—and it might help arouse the people."

"They seem sulky enough already," says I, marveling how man's image hath changed from its Original.

"Our work!" says this monstrosity, pointing to the figure on the table-top. "But milord Francesco hath helped us well. Hee, hee! No coronation—no wine in the fountains—to save us taxes, quotha!"

"Spit not on the floor!" I warned him—just in time.

"Then again that law whereby a man must hire workmen while his own children play in the streets. Ha! There would be no such foolery under my lord Pietro!"

THE slimy double traitor! Or triple, was he? My head and my stomach alike swam at sight of him; and he took my silence for reflection.

"Well? 'Tis nearly noon, sir—trade is heavy at the tavern—will the Captain—"

"Speed thee back to thy den of infamy? With pleasure," says I, rising.

And thrust his bulk to the head of the stairway and kicked. It was a spiral stair—not very long, but ill to fall down; I know, because as I walked back to my room I heard my guest saying so, very loud and with a certain lack of piety.

'Twas not, even so, these words of his that made me feel as though I were living in the bottom of a cess-pool. After all, in my years as a *condottiere* I had heard the imprecations of many a stout fellow with his entrails on the ground—and of hundreds of the slightly wounded, who swear much worse. But in the field I had not found treachery, nor fathers trying to sell their women-folk; and 'twas these latter matters that seemed still to thicken the air of my quarters and make the sun shine green through the window.

I sat down and my chair seemed no longer to fit me; I poured out a stoup of wine and it had no flavor; I tried to puzzle forth the state of affairs—and how I might come out of it with honor—and could make no sense. Pietro's having agents in Bonelli—agents again in Casatico, of whom I had known naught; this taverner—and his fellows would be like him, from what I had seen of the town—ready to betray His Grace, to whom already they had betrayed their lord, for a few greasy florins—

I know now that in statecraft the right hand may never know what the left doth; which is just as well, when the one is murdering while the other picketh pockets. But then, in my ignorance, I was dismayed; and rose not from that condition when my servant filled the doorway, saluted (guardsmen forgot not such things any more) and announced importantly: "Captain to His Lordship at once!"

I got out of the chair feeling heavy-headed and heavy-hearted as well. It was a bright day and the pigeons on the battlements shone like oil on water; yet I walked like a man who hath dread news awaiting him.

And so I had.

Francesco, in his cabinet, was pale; he had a parchment in his hands which, without a word, he handed to me. It

had just come, evidently; smelled still of the courier and was hard to unroll.

"Bonelli!" says Francesco—in case I could not read.

But I got the parchment flattened and scanned it masterfully.

Aye—'twas from Bonelli sure enough. It was a declaration of war.

V

THE sun had set—blood red, as was very proper—before pity (or hunger) drove me to tell his lordship how I'd replaced war with single combat, yon time I slew Simon Boccanegra. 'Tis true I had Pietro's order so to do; but on the other hand, bitter training had taught he not to speak of mine own affairs to a lord.

Even to Your Grace, now, I write wondering whether some chance word may not cost me my pension. . . .

But then I had been hungry all day; and since I spoke not till vespers, when Francesco rose looking so sickly-ill and leaned in the embrasure of the west window, I think I was somewhat moved by pity. There he had sat, ankle-deep in maps, written proclamations and dispatches, getting paler and paler as he planned campaigns starting ever from the wrong end and meeting all my suggestions with the answer that they would shed blood!

"I've no taste for this sort of business, Luigi," says he. "It was my desire to be a doctor."

"A physician?" says I, unbelieving—for what should a noble have to do with folks' sicknesses? Yet I recalled how he'd bandaged yon bravo—after wounding him as neat as any chirurgeon.

"Even so," says my lord. "I was near my degree at Padua when my father died; and now—I must send men forth to be broken, instead of healing them."

"But," says I weakly (that was hunger), "we have the guns."

"Abominations! Are not the Bonelli men, too?"

What could I reply? There was no denying it; yet how could a soldier admit it and earn his living?

'Twas now I rose from my chair and took a deep breath—Francesco heard, turned in his window-nook and fixed upon me eyes that seemed larger than ever. My own Duke Pietro's eyes, in emergency, were used to seem smaller and to move, as 'twere, closer together.

"If so be it might interest Your Excellence," says I, "there is a means by which I once averted a small war—or a great brawl between little armies—"

And I told him the tale—I mean, of how I had fought poor Simon Boccanegra. Far was it from me to be boastful in my mind—I was obeying orders; looking forward not at all to fighting single-handed for Casatico and its backstabbers, it *soldo*-pinchers, its traitors, spies and daughter-vendors. How was I to know, moreover, what sort of champion Bonelli might contain? And further—who was to pay for the added peril to my skin? Naught was to be looked for from Pietro, I well knew; and a certain glow in the eyes of Francesco, increasing as my story progressed, made me fear he would expect me to serve humanity for nothing.

How wrong was I!

And how much more akin than I had thought was His Grace of Rometia to His Highness the Prince of Hell!

'Twas not until I'd ended that I dreamed any but myself might face the duello; Your Lordship's grandfather had known otherwise ere ever he commanded me to tell that tale.

Aye; before last week's visit "in pure love" he had taken the measure of his young lordship—had known that he would be afire to take Casatico's battles on *himself!*

I stammered protests, all of no use.

" 'Tis my work," says he, "and my lord of Bonelli likewise shall not refuse. Luigi—thou'lt ride over tomorrow, bearing my defiance."

"But, Sire—" says I, hopelessly.

"Well? No more of *thy* fighting."

"It may be," says I, dazed, "that my lord Enrico is not, like yourself, a man of arms."

"He was at school with me in Padua," says milord, "and there was aye question which was the better swordsman. Even Fogliati, our teacher, could not decide."

Fogliati! That explained the *colpo di Bentivoglio* so sweetly parried. This would be a fight indeed—but oons! I mistrusted that messengership.

"Why so glum, Luigi? Canst be my second, man!"

"That will be very well, Sire," says I, "but—to tell the truth—"

"Well? Is't so hard for thee?"

"Lords shedding their own blood instead of their subjects'—it hath not been done afore—"

"Time it began, then."

"But the Council of Nobles, Sire! Each will see his own sk— his worship put in danger if the common folk have such an example. And bearing this challenge for your lordship—"

He nodded and snapped his fingers.

"Very well. I see. Thou'd risk thy life but not thy livelihood. Aye. 'Tis simple enough—I'll ride myself, this night, and defy my lord Enrico to his teeth."

"But, sir, we are at war!"

He looked at me sadly as he slipped out of his gown and rang a little silver bell for his servant.

"I will enter Bonelli under a flag of truce," says he, "and thou shalt carry it for me, Luigi Caradosso."

VI

IT WAS four leagues to Bonelli, and all the way Francesco—regardless alike of his nobility and of the peril into which he was riding—talked of the joys of being a physician.

I was glad when the night came down upon us, so that his words proceeded less evidently from a gentleman who could hire leeches by the score—and hang 'em if they displeased him. Even when mine eyes no longer belied mine ears, though, I still longed for the simpler days of free-lancing—before the Venetians had caught us in that swamp. Then I had been left for dead and come cheerily alive again; whereas meseemed court life was like to leave me lunatick, with no remedy.

"Ah, couldst thou have seen my old master," says his lordship from the darkness. His *master!* "Giovanni di Pescaro, God bless him. 'Twould have warmed thy heart, Luigi—wherever he went, poor folk stretched out their arms to him; the crippled smiled; mothers brought their babes—"

Aye—and to my confusion he went on even beyond infancy. To Your Grace, who was brought to earth by a man-doctor (that same Angelo who was later to deliver Your Highness' heir) it may seem strange, but in those days such matters were the province of women only; and a man might be hanged for meddling therein.

"There are the braziers on Bonelli ramparts," says I, thankfully, when at last he paused for breath.

"And have been, the last two miles," says milord. "Well, Luigi—I have tried to succor my people as a lord may—saving them taxes, protecting their women and children—and they hate me. Or at least they love me not. When I rode through the country to see what crops they had, how they were housed—"

He stopped, and I asked myself what 'a God's name he'd expected? Of course the wretches thought he was making a tax-survey—as Pietro II did sometimes, when his assessors reported not enough.

"It is hard," says his lordship, "to live without love."

Sire, I became moistly warm all over.

"There's a girl in a wine-shop at Casatico," says I, "indeed, the one for whom Your Worship fought—"

He laughed.

"Nay, nay, *Luigi mio;* thou mistakest. I was born in the sign of Aquarius. The water-carrier; water to the fevered, belike. And at a guess, thou in the sign of the Centaur—half man, half beast; the Archer on horseback. Eh?"

"If so," says I (for he had hit it), "your lordship might be well advised to let me do the fighting, and give me water afterwards. Or my opponent. Whichever of us can drink."

Pietro II would have given me water for that speech—bread and water; ten days of it. But then he would never have spoken to me thus; nor cared when I was born, so long as I was there to do his bidding.

My lord laughed again.

"Shout that we are a flag of truce, Luigi," says he, "and show it. I would not have petronels shooting at us from the walls; and I hear my lord Enrico hath been buying cannon lately. I see why, now; but let's hope—"

Now a sentry roared for us to stop. I yelled right lustily in return; took the white flag from my saddle-bow and waved it from side to side. Which lacked dignity, but I mistrusted those cannoneers with their new toys.

So after a few minutes, the postern opened and out came the gate-guard, running; their *cavaliere* shocked (as well he might be) at this spectacle of a lord about his own business. At night, too; it was the custom in those days that the fate of peoples must be settled between fixed hours—when the negotiators had well dined and before their minds were invaded by any distracting thoughts of supper.

The officer, at last admitting us under heavy guard, grumbled something about comings and goings, which I did not then understand; but at long we came to the citadel and at last into the presence of Enrico, Count of Bonelli.

And of whom else?

Aye; it seems to me now only to have been expected, but then I wanted woundily to cross myself. For just as he had sat in Francesco's cabinet, so sat His Grace Pietro II here.

Not in the least dismayed by this meeting, either. He rose on the instant, came forward and embraced Francesco.

"Now, gentles!" says he. "What is here, your lordships? Is this a sign that my mission of peace may yet succeed?"

I LOOKED at the Count of Bonelli, crouched in his chair and making no move to rise; and methought, nay. He was a dark-complected fellow, below the middle height, I judged; squat, with extreme long arms. Fellows so built are to be mistrusted in sword-play, because always one misjudges their reach; moreover I have aye looked with disfavor on very thick, low-growing black hair such as Enrico's, for that it betokens both strength and endurance; there is no finishing with such men.

"Sure between such fine young nobles as your worships," says Pietro, "there must be some accommodation without war. Think of—"

"Under favor," says Francesco, his eyes on my lord of Bonelli, " 'Tis I who have made the concessions till I can no more, and my lord here who hath declared war. Now I am come to propose an—arrangement. Ser Enrico and I have fought before; I ask him to fight again. And spare our peoples."

"O gentlemen—" moans the Duke Pietro, clasping his hands; and from the shadow of a corner came his creature, Enrico's counselor, that slimy Guido—and clasped his hands too.

As for Enrico, he smiled; evilly, I thought, but then I was not in his service.

"Single combat?" says he. "Back to the days of chivalry, ha? Where is this fight to be? And when?"

I doubt me Francesco had not thought of that; but he was equal to the question.

"Why not here—and now?"

"But—my lords!" says Pietro in a seeming agony. "This may not be! Disputes between lords must come before the Council of Nobles!"

"Saidst but a minute ago, Your Grace was president thereof," says Enrico, getting out of his chair and his robe with one motion. "That should suffice. I'm not to be bearded in my own town; I'm ready to face the Council hereafter. Your Grace and Guido here and this captain of his lordship's can be my witnesses."

I saluted and they all looked at me.

"Well?" says Enrico, glowering.

"With permission," says I, "there's none to face me, your worships. If the captain of Your Excellency's guard—"

"Never fear."

He pulled a rope that hung down from the ceiling; and at once the door flew open.

"Baltazar!"

A very large man stamped into the room and saluted. An old soldier, I saw on the instant; and I suppose he saw the same of me.

"My lord of Casatico and I," says Enrico, "are to try a little sword-play, Baltazar, and the captain here would not be left idle. For the honor of the guard."

Baltazar saluted again and looked at me. Alack for him! His eyes moved slowly.

"There's little room and much furniture here," says Enrico. "If we went into the long gallery? 'Tis just without."

Francesco nodded; Pietro moaned again, muttering some ineffectual petitions; Enrico's man brought him a sword —a lovely blade, Spanish by the look of it—and we went forth. The young lords first, because Pietro would not lead to such a business; then His Grace, still wringing his hands; then Baltazar and I.

"Is it to a finish?" he asked in a hoarse whisper.

"Between *them*—yes."

"Old style or new?"

He meant, sword and dagger or sword alone?

"New. Their lordships learned from Fogliati."

"But I did not," grumbles Baltazar, "nor thou. I feel naked without a knife. Cannot *we* fight decently, as we were brought up?"

I'd no time to answer him, so showed my empty belt; and with a heavy sigh he took forth his own dagger and laid it on a marble balustrade. Their lordships had already taken position facing each other, and Francesco was undoing the laces of his jerkin. The gallery was lighted by a great candelabrum overhead; its downcast light made Enrico seem to grin.

"Will not your lordship divest?" asks Pietro in a trembling voice. He had taken position in a great carved chair there was; and appeared suddenly very old and helpless, as well as unwilling. Ha!

Enrico bounded his blade-tip on the flags.

"Nay, Sire. I am somewhat subject to the cough, and this gallery is draughty. My lord Francesco would not wish me to risk my health?"

Baltazar chuckled and winked at me —we, too, were facing each other now; of course in full uniform, though I had rolled up a palm's breadth of right sleeve.

"Are we ready, then?" demands Francesco; not so lightsome in manner as his foe.

"I wait," says Enrico. "Will His Grace give the word?"

Pietro seemed like to weep.

"O gentlemen!" says he. "Let me beseech you! For the last time! Is there no compromise?"

"Casatico can cease invading Bonelli, and selling goods for naught and driving my folk to ruin," says Enrico.

"Your lordship could cease robbing my merchants' pack-trains at the pass!"

Pietro looked from one to the other and shook his head.

"What must be, must," he mumbled —rather in haste, it seemed to me. "On guard!"

We all took position.

"Fall to!"

POOR BALTAZAR! Without his dagger to balance him and foin withal, he was like a storm-smitten hay-rick, all o' one side; I sent in a thrust or two to warn him of my mastery, then held him

in play while I watched our betters.

And they were worth watching; even by one who, like me, scorned *dilettanti*. These had been well taught and both had great natural abilities—that was to be seen in their differences of style. Your swordsman with no taste for the game will parade ever as his master posed him; whereas Francesco and Enrico circled each other looking as different as a horse and a scorpion. I mean—Enrico, squat already, crouched still lower as he came into action; Francesco, tall by nature, stood to his full height and kept his head back.

Long after, I was to learn that he fought best mounted; that in the view of Fogliati, his teacher, he was second to Enrico, afoot. To be plain and in order with Your Grace, Pietro II had sent to Padua and learned this already, ere ever he brought this duello to pass; he knew it as he sat there, wringing his hands and with a prayerful look on his countenance.

Ha!

Suddenly, from his crouch, Enrico made a leap forward, his blade going high; and I swallowed my spittle as I saw Francesco parry low—about the level of his loins. Yet there was a clash of steel and Enrico fell back—aye, 'twas a trick of his that Francesco had remembered; a feint that would have left *me* bleeding to death on the floor.

This was indeed no battle of babes—my lord of Casatico was master of the unexpected, likewise. With a spring, he sent in a cut at Enrico's head and, as 'twas parried, brought his sword-tip back in a *rinverso tondo* that would have left most men—aye, me among them!—playing football with their own heads.

Enrico dropped down almost to his knees, and as the stroke whistled over him he drove straight upward at Francesco's belly.

What to do with that, I wondered in the twinkling of an eye? But Francesco knew. His blade being out of bounds, he brushed that stroke aside with his left arm and brought his weapon back with a drawing cut across Enrico's shoulder—I saw the cloth part and thought to find blood on the marble when I looked again (Baltazar was bothering me some little at the moment)—but there was none. Nay, the cut had not reached the flesh; and my lords were now in a confusion of bladework like needles in a box. Up they went in passadoes for the throat; down they came in campaigns for each other's knee-joints—and between such forays they would drive like madmen for the heart or the sword-arm, with such profligacy of motion that the eye was dazzled. 'Twas while I was learning—yes, learning, I!—that Baltazar shore the tip off my right ear; I took his left ear off entirely and asked him if he had a wife.

"Aye—and four children," says he, kicking the ear away lest he slip on it.

"Then think of them and be reasonable," says I. "Fellows of a trade should not quarrel."

This was at half-sword and in a low voice—I did not want Pietro to hear. We went back to blades' length thereafter, and I saw my Lord Duke chewing his thumb-nail. This was his habit when he could not get a pen.

"Ah!" cries he, suddenly, rising in his chair.

And there was that to cry out about, it seemed to the corner of mine eye. As best I could view the matter in an instant, Francesco had pointed a *stoccado* straight into his adversary's breast—too high, to be sure, for the Bentivoglio, too far to the right for the common heart-stroke; but a hard point to the breast-bone which shook Enrico di Bonelli to the heels.

"*Now* will he bleed," methought, "and slip in his blood, and then—"

But he did not; and a dire, dire thought crossed my mind. And, some time after, the mind of Francesco, it seemed. For, working poor lumbering Baltazar around till I could see—fighting him was like going to the races with a child in one's hand—I perceived my young lord's eyes harden.

"Enrico—" says he.

Enrico grinned—the lights overhead magnifying the shadows of his face—and launched a most terrible attack. I do not think, Sire, that ever in my life have I seen one more furious and skill-

ful. 'Twas as though he had determined to end the fight then, at whatever risk—and risks he took in abundance. Guard he abandoned altogether; all that protected him from a dozen deaths was Francesco's need to parry that rain of blows. Aye, mostly he was cutting; but from time to time a parried stroke would turn into a lunge, and the lunge—I saw this with mine own eyes—into an upward slice with a thrust at the end on't; unheard of.

Pietro II was on his feet, his mask of age and weariness laid aside, his teeth in his lower lip; and I saw that yon viper Guido Gennaro had crawled from the shadows and was standing beside him.

"Ha!" says Enrico—and I looked at him.

SIRE—he was standing there—I can see him now—with that blue Spanish blade of his halted in a high parry, and the white line of Francesco's sword lying across it, the point invisible. As I have said, the lights were above us; Enrico's jaw cast a heavy shadow on his throat, and 'twas into this shadow that my young lord's point had vanished. Aye; he of Bonelli, stepping back from his assault, had misjudged Francesco's reach in the counter-stroke—or maybe his own wrist had tired more than he knew.

At all events, he had swept up a thrust in third too far or not far enough and taken the point in his neck—to the left side, under the ear. And as Francesco withdrew his blade, at last came blood indeed; enough to atone for those white strokes on shoulder and breast-bone; blood in spurts—Enrico clapped his hand to the wound.

But my lord of Casatico sprang forward, dropping his blade; seized his late foe in his arms and bore him bodily into the cabinet.

"Send for aid!" he shouted, as I disarmed Baltazar. "Water! Linen! Thou, Caradosso—"

But I was needed by my own Lord Duke, it seemed. He was staring at me with ominous eyes; and now he crooked his forefinger.

"Go thou," says I to Baltazar, and he hurried away. I would I had been in his shoes, for Pietro's gaze and that beckoning finger liked me not.

Then again, 'twas repulsive to stand before His Highness alongside of that asp of a Gennaro.

"So!" says Pietro. "Fools!"

He raised his hand and, with a spitting noise like a cat, buffeted Gennaro in the face; he turned also toward me, but struck me not. And that was as well, because had he done it (perhaps I was wild from the sword-play) I would have stabbed him, Your Serenity, and gone whistling to the gallows.

Perhaps I will cross that out ere I send this; he was Your Grace's grandfather and I am on pension—and besides, what am I writing about?

Statues.

A statue to this same Pietro II.

Ha!

"Apes!" says he, being then very much in the flesh, "why was I not told of this? Thou, Caradosso, saw him fight; didst not know he was a bravo, a killer? Am I to be served thus, ye slobbering idiots?"

"Sire—" whines Guido Gennaro.

"Silence!" shouts His Grace. "'Tis thou art mostly to blame! Forty ducats for thy journey to Padua—fifty for the bribe to Fogliati—thy report that my lord Enrico could kill this popinjay at leisure; and look at him! Stuck like a pig!"

I think he would have slapped the wretch again; but at this moment his eye caught something beyond us and his face softened instanter into a sweet sadness. And there were footsteps (of course I dared not turn) and Francesco came to stand, head hanging before His Grace.

"'A's dead," says he, heavily.

Pietro blinked, licked his lips, then stretched forth a hand and laid it on the young man's shoulder.

"Grieve not. I will be thy witness—"

"He was wearing a coat of mail," says Francesco, looking up at the Duke, who swallowed in his throat.

"A—a coat of mail, say'st thou?"

"Chin mail. Under his shirt. That's why my small cuts and thrusts that

should have disabled him without killing, failed."

I think His Grace had been about to swear ignorance of that armor—he had need to, in my opinion—but he saw that Francesco suspected him not.

"And then," says Pietro reverently, "he must needs scoop the steel into his own neck. God's vengeance, good my lord!"

Francesco looked down at the floor.

"I am sorry for't," says he. "I tried to stop the bleeding, but 'twas the brain-artery—"

Pietro patted him fatherly on the shoulder, those red-rimmed eyes of his shuttling ever about the hall.

" 'Twas ordained," says he, as though thinking of something else, "and we must govern ourselves accordingly. The county must not be left masterless—too many evil men about—my lord of Costecaldo—"

He licked his lips.

"For the time, I had best take over the lordship," says His Grace. "The Council can arrange the true succession later. By chance I have a couple of hundred horse at Monterosso—"

Monterosso was two hours' ride from Bonelli; scarce an hour from Casatico, across the border. Had Francesco been slain, as His Grace expected, Rometian cavalry would have been in the town by midnight.

As it was—

"Captain Caradosso," says the Duke, "ride thou and bring yon guard-detachment here."

VII

WHEN did Pietro think of the next step in his plot?

Who can guess? Belike he had a best and a next-best scheme of action ever in his mind from the start.

Of course, once he had marched those troops into Bonelli, the place was his forever; chatter the Council of Nobles never so. But 'twas Casatico he'd wanted; that being a rich town, and on his flank for defense and a fine advance post for attack—say on Montemurlo.

And after this filching of Bonelli, he could not hope to acquire it without war—open war, to be approved by the Council. As president thereof, he could manage the approval; but as to the war itself—Casatico still had those guns.

Had Francesco fallen in that duel, His Grace would have seized both city and cannon and turned the latter on Bonelli; as 'twas,, he had added to his lands and his horse and foot, but still he had not wherewithal to fight artillery.

I remained in charge of our new protectorate—Baltazar now my lieutenant, and Guido Gennaro creeping about the affairs of state; and in the peace that now descended on the land I had time to ride over to Casatico. I could not, of course, present myself to his lordship; but methought that if I lounged about the great square, he might see me from a window and call me in.

I liked that young man.

Moreover—to my amazement—so did his subjects, seemingly, nowadays. For when (having spent a week organizing my forces and what not) I did at last ride into Casatico on holiday, behold a great meeting of citizens being addressed by a venerable merchant with a long white beard. He was on a dais, not far from the castle walls, and to either side of him sat other notables with more fur on their garments than on their heads.

The speaker had fewer teeth than he was born withal, and I must needs force my way through the crowd before I could hear him; when I'd done the which, I was in the front row—and cheek by jowl with that pot-house traitor—Bianca's father.

He looked at me very sourly, and in that moment I recalled what he'd said, drawing yon crooked cross on my table; many agents of the Duke in Casatico and some in furred gowns.

Natheless, these on the dais seemed more than loyal.

"He hath saved our sons from death and us elders from ruination!" bleats the gowned ancient above me. "Are we to let our thankfulness for this pass unmarked?"

"Nay! Never!" yells the tavern-keeper at my elbow; and the crowd took up the shout. Given a loud enough voice to

lead 'em, crowds will shout almost anything.

"Y'have heard the gentles who have spoken afore me," cries the old man. "Ye know what 'tis proposed we should do to show our gratitude; ye know how —er—how little it will cost us—"

"*Viva, viva!*" shouts the inn-keeper, and the crowd echoed him again. As for me—I was about to defend my left ear from his roarings when a touch fell on my arm; I turned, and it was one of the servants from the castle.

"His lordship would see thee, Captain," says the man. "Forthwith."

"What's all this pother about?" I asked, as we threaded our way though the crowd. "Can it be that these loons are indeed thankful? Hath human nature changed in a week? Are they to love a good lord while they have him?"

"Seems so," says the servant. "They're to build a statue to him in the square."

That startled me.

"A statue? Of a living man?"

"So. His lordship would not, at first, but His Grace—"

We came to the door-guard here and a soldier took me in charge. So, unable to ask more questions because of discipline, I puzzled through all the long corridors and up all the stairs, what Pietro might have to do with this monument and what had changed Francesco's mind concerning it.

Until I was ushered into the cabinet; then I knew. Aye—there, once again, sat my dread Duke; over by the window, looking down on the cheering crowd—with his arm about the shoulders of Francesco, looking doubtful and uneasy at his side.

Seemingly the mob had come to agreement while I was on my way upstairs; the cheering began to die, the meeting to disperse; my lords rose and turned back into the room.

"'Tis a mighty honor," says Pietro, "and well deserved."

Francesco looked at me.

"It hath never been done before," says he. "How thinkest thou, Luigi? They want to stand me in the public square. A statue."

Pietro's eyes warned me to hold my peace.

"Not *thee*," says the Duke, "but thy deed, Francesco *mio*. Wilt be shown sword in hand—lordship defending its people. Modesty is well enough, but think of the effect on other nobles! The example to them!"

Francesco was still looking at me; I must answer him something.

"Your lordship hath done what never lord did before," I therefore said saluting.

"I—had wanted the people to love me," says he, looking down at his table and blushing. "This may—that is— And 'twill cost them nothing. Those Germans my father brought hither—"

Still he looked at me—oons, Sire, with respect, it put me in mind of a dog looking up from the bottom of a well. Meseemed he did not want this statue; and for all the look in Pietro's eyes—after all, I had no orders—methought I would put forward one thought against the project.

"The cost of the stuff for the statue will still fall on the citizenry, my lord?"

Pietro's gaze, for one moment, made me wish I'd been silent; but then it softened amiably—almost into ordinary malice—as he put his arm again about Francesco's shoulders.

"His lordship hath even spared his people that cost, Captain," says His Grace, like a sucking dove. "Safe in their love, secure in the peace that now reigns in the country, thank God—he is going to melt up those guns."

VIII

NEED I say more?

I have writer's cramp such as I would not wish to the devil; but — Your Grace is young, and some day (after I am gone, I hope and trust) there may arise hereabouts another such as Your Highness' grandfather.

So I will tell the story to its end.

I rode back that day with Pietro to Rometia—in a silence from whose depths he chuckled from time to time.

And within three months—I think it was three; 'twas in good campaigning weather such as comes with the first frosts—troubles began to rise again

about that pass in the hills behind Bonelli.

Pietro, it seemed, was all for settling the questions of tolls and armed guards about a council-board, but somehow the council never convened—and meantime the peoples of both towns were raging to settle the matter once for all.

Not by war—the only recourse. By some magic to be worked by my lord Francesco, for choice. Merchant cities —*pfui!* I spit ye forth.

Came the day when I rode over with His Grace the Duke to Casatico, and for the first time saw that statue of Francesco in the square. I should have been on guard the day 'twas erected, of course, but I'd been sick. Of a pain. Of a pain in the heart, as I remember it —I had a twinge now, as I surveyed the mass of bronze.

Ten guns!

"They are driving me," says Pietro—who had hanged a dozen peasants, that last week, for saying they could not pay taxes. "I am their protector, Francesco. The Council of Nobles will hold me responsible for Bonelli's well-being."

"And me for the well-being of my folk," says Francesco, "which may not endure if we must pay the tolls demanded. Why, they are higher than—"

"Sending armed guards with the packtrains is invasion of our territory," says the Duke, and Francesco looked at him long—as if he saw him for the first time. As indeed he did, though still not clearly.

" 'Tis sad if the Council, with all its counseling, should be the force to drive us to harsh measures," says he slowly.

"Does your lordship threaten me with war?"

Pietro leaped to his feet as he said that, and Francesco rose too. O he may have yearned to be a physician, that young man; but he had been born to lordship and betrayed not his blood.

"Sire," says he, "does a lamb threaten a wolf?"

"So!" says His Grace, hissing. "So!"

All his kindness (he meant) had recoiled on his aged head; he was an ill-used benefactor; and in this character appeared, some days after, before the Council of Nobles, whose greybeards pitied him.

Then there was a fight between the Bonellian guard at the pass, and the soldiers with one of Francesco's packtrains; it chanced that the Bonelli men had been reinforced, that day, by some of our own from Rometia. . . .

And so, of course, one brisk morning —after couriers, then heralds, had gone to and fro—there was I, at the head of our ducal forces, advancing upon Casatico in a state of war; and there, across our path, lay Francesco's pitiful army with himself in command.

Now I doubt not that Your Grace, brought up on romances in the fashion

of this day, will expect some happy miracle to override Francesco's lack of cannon and the presence of four of ours —two on either flank. I would have welcomed some such thing myself, but there were no miracles in 1533—indeed, I never came across any in all my active service.

There was just Fate; and it seemed oftener against a good man than for him.

It seemed like fate—and 'twas certainly the Duke's intent—that Francesco should die in that battle; and yet, methought, that were a pity; we would see, I said to myself, giving the order to charge. By rights, considering the disposition of the forces, Francesco should have charged us—and I had seen him raise his arm and spur forward; but the troops had not followed him. Nay, there were to be no miracles that day, for sure; just some damned hard, risky work for Luigi Caradosso.

There they sat, those Casatico cowards, their front line visibly wavering, while our guns sent four balls into them at an angle. The range was long; the shots approached the cavalry skipping along the ground; and—if the men raised their eyes from that menace, here were we descending upon them at full gallop.

THEY would have broken anyhow—for (I'll make no mystery to Your Grace) Pietro's envoys, that tavern-keeper and his like, had been busy among them, with present bribes and promises for the future. And it had been arranged outright that at our onset these swine ahorseback should flee—leaving Francesco to be slain in battle and sparing us damage to armor and horseflesh.

'Twas my lord Duke's excess of caution—his mistrust of his own traitors —that spoiled the plan; he must make the rout sure by bringing his guns into action. But the result—I could have foretold it, had he been open even with me—was that instead of running away orderly, those half-trained troopers fell into utter confusion; the front rank trying to go back, the wings turning inward from those cannon-balls, the rear-rank standing fast—

I could see Francesco, *povero!* trying to rally them—and I saw one lout, in his panic, hew at his lordship with a sword. But this time the poor lad must have known—for long he must have suspected—what treachery encompassed him; he may well have been sickened of mankind and life.

I have felt so myself, at times. . . .

At all events—Francesco now turned from his struggling fleeing troops and rode forward to meet our column—single-handed!

'Twas what I had expected, more or less. And in the expectation, I had told my lieutenant that I might be detained and had armed myself with a bishop's whip. The lieutenant was an old friend, a grave for secrets; as for the whip, Your Grace, it is a steel chain with a spiked ball at the end on't.

I despise such things as a rule; but they have their uses. The use of this one was to be laid about the sword-arm of Francesco as he hesitated about running me through; whereafter—the move being safe—I hurled myself out o' saddle atop of him and bore him with a crash to the earth.

On either side, our cavalry swept past; and as I lay there, struggling with his lordship, I heard the clangor as they smote the Casaticans—my lieutenant was now in command, of course, and he knew naught of our agreement with them. We had, in any case, no orders to spare them—it had been their duty to get out of our way. . . .

"Sir, sir," says I, strangling his lordship some little—he was squirming like an eel, "you have been betrayed."

"I knew it ere we rode out," gasps he, "but—"

"Then—'twas very—foolish to ride—at all, your honor," I told him. And as he struggled more, "Sir, y'are tiring me. Must I—stab thee? Or—take prisoner —for Duke Pietro—to strangle? A minute's reason—'a—God's name!"

He lay still and I released him—we had been lying in the midst of a swath of men mown down by those cannon-balls. As soon as he was free, my lord crawled over to a fellow that lay groaning and began to minister to him—aye, he cut the bridle off a dead horse, put

it around the man's leg that was shattered and twisted it tight with a bit of broken lance-shaft.

"Better be doing that—at Padua or Urbino," says I, "than throwing away thy life here—for nothing. There are worse men than thee for grass to grow out of, my lord."

He stopped and looked at me; I pointed to the walls of Casatico. The gates were open; our men were within; and a patrol was coming forth to scour the—the battlefield, God save the mark.

"Death for thee—or life for the many thou'd save as a physician? There's no more lordship of Casatico. Which, sir? There's no time!"

He stared at me still for a second; then grasped my hand very hard, rose, seized a horse that was grazing near—and was gone. Before even I could ask him to wound me slightly, in explanation of his escape; wherefore I had to do it myself—an awkward task, that cost me more blood than it should have.

Also that patrol seemed to have no eyes in any of its heads—wandered all over the field ere it came to me; so that I regained my wits only as my litter was being borne through the Casatico town square.

MY CARRIERS halted; because behold! His Grace my Lord Duke Pietro of Rometia was there, sitting a white horse at the base of Francesco's statue, and in the presence of a victor, wounded are out of place.

Everyone in the square was standing still, the populace and His Grace's guard alike. And I perceived that a rope encircled the neck of that statue, with two horses standing ready to pull thereon.

"*Viva, viva il Duce!*" shouts a voice in the crowd; and with a turn of the head I saw it was my tavern-keeper, there in the front rank again.

"Viva, viva!" yelled the mob; and Pietro, grinning, raised his hand. The men at the horses' heads cracked their whips, the ropes around the statue tightened—and then down with a crash went the effigy of Francesco on the cobblestones. The cheers at this were deafening; 'tis strange what pleasure mankind gets from seeing something thus destroyed.

Pietro raised his hand again, the tavern-keeper bellowed for silence and the cheering ceased.

The Duke sat there grinning, his eyes moving from side to side of the assemblage.

"Good people," says he at last, "y'are delivered."

He did not say from what, but they cheered again.

"Henceforth, ye will be under my protection. But I would not have ye blame me," says His Highness, licking his lips, "for the woes left by your late lord. Much that he did must be undone—and the undoing may be grievous to some of ye. For instance, 'twill cost money; wherefore if the taxes are raised somewhat—"

He paused at this and there was no cheering.

"—ye will well understand. This monument to sinful vanity—this statue—must be cast into guns again for your protection; I must bring the casters back from Germany, whither your late lord wastefully dismissed them; that will be costly. Fourteen *soldi,* instead of ten, must be the tax on a *soma* of wine."

I marveled why, having conquered these vermin with their good will, the Duke should be mocking them; as a rule a victor's new taxes are shyer than violets. But he went on and on—until at last there was a stir in the crowd and a venerable merchant stepped forth. I think he was the one I had seen speaking on the dais that time.

"But, Sire—" says he; and the tavern-keeper, that had been fidgeting ever since his lordship spoke of that tax on wine, stepped forward and stood by him.

"Well?" says Pietro sweetly; but ah! 'twas to be seen he had been awaiting this.

"—'twas understood that we should have *less* taxes—that our present imposts should be reduced—that our children should be allowed to work as they're accustomed—"

My lord Duke turned his head, looking slightly behind him; and from behind came suddenly a crash of fire.

There had sat two of his familiars—those fellows who lurked of custom behind the tapestries in his room in the White Tower; and these fellows had in their hands smoking pistolets.

The tavern-keeper, his face a mass of blood, spun round and fell full length; the old merchant, looking very astonied, clapped hands to his belly and lay down upon the cobblestones, kicking and groaning.

"Hath any other," asks my lord, "any complaint against me?"

There was a dead silence.

"That's well," says His Grace, gathering up his bridle. "Then—to your homes, people! Go!"

I NEED scarce tell your Grace—who is still lord of Casatico—what military service the town hath had to perform since then; what sieges it sustained as Pietro extended his dominions; how it lost its trade.

It would have done better to keep those guns—and Francesco.

What became of him?

Often I wondered; and after I had returned from six months' discharge (for letting him escape; my wound saved my neck)—I made inquiry; but there was no news.

And the years passed, and I forgot him; and Pietro II was slain by that cross-bow bolt, trying to take over Montemurlo, and Your Grace's father came to the throne and wed; and in due course Your Nobility was born.

I was still on guard—outside the bedchamber that night, and much flustered by the comings and goings of women. It was a surprise that a man should emerge—though I'd heard a physician had been summoned in the night; a man with a small beard he was, with a bundle in his arms.

"Well, Luigi Caradosso," says he, "we meet again!"

Aye—'twas he; Francesco di Casatico that was; but looking happier than ever I'd seen him.

"Behold thy future lord!" says he, laughing; and held Your Highness up in front of my breastplate. "Baby—behold thyself!"

Then he wagged his head and looked me in the face.

"These be the only monuments worth having," says he. "Better than bronze. Eh, Luigi?"

Well, being still strong of arm and of ambition, I did not think so then; but since I have been living in this cottage while daughters of mine—and sons, too—ease the age of men their mothers may have married, I am not so sure.

Your Grace is newly a father, and should know.

Aye.

I promised Francesco (he hath another name in medicine) that I would say naught of his history; but Your Grace hath demanded otherwise—unwitting—and you are my lord paramount and he is not.

He is indeed naught but Your Lordship's physician-in-ordinary, who saved Her Grace and the baby last month.

Even as I

Remain ever

Your Serenity's

Faithful humble servant

L. CARADOSSO

Captain.

QUEEN BESS FOR ENGLAND

By DANIEL P. MANNIX

AS THE two men came towards her across the close-cropped English lawn, Queen Bess leaned forward on her weathering block and eagerly beat the air with her great, sickle-

This time a black box was flung from the plane.

shaped wings. For two weeks the daily German bombing raids had been coming closer and closer to Falconmews Hall, and one after another the Master had liberated his famous stud of hawks until now only Queen Bess was left. She was the last of a long line of falcons that had sunned and preened themselves for generations under the copper beeches of the old grange; a line unbroken since the days of the great Tudor queen herself.

For many days the Master had not flown her, and Queen Bess was becoming as restive as any other professional athlete condemned to a life of loathsome ease. But at last he was coming for her again. To her delight she saw the lure bag slung over his shoulder. She knew that bag always contained the padded leather lure from which she was fed. That meant they were going out on the moor once more, probably after black grouse. Queen Bess ducked her head and raising her crest, crowed happily.

Unfortunately, the Master had brought with him the man who had been staying at Falconmews for the last fortnight. Queen Bess did not like this stranger. He was too loud, moved too quickly and was too aggressively friendly. Like a true Britisher, Queen Bess was grudging with her friendships and disliked attempts to rush her off her powerful feet. But the prospect of flying once again made her forget everything else, and when the Master held out his gloved left hand, she gladly leaped the length of her leash to his fist, snatching up the bit of meat she knew she would find there.

"If you Englishmen could handle planes as you can animals, I would not now be a fugitive from my native Norway," said the friend bitterly. He was watching the Master slip his fingers under the falcon's wings in order to feel her hard flight muscles.

"Good God, man, I should say you were in comparative luck! As soon as your leg mends, you can get out and have another crack at them!" The Master's voice was savage.

"You did your duty at Dunkerque." The Norwegian's eyes fell for a moment on the Englishman's empty right sleeve.

"I wish to heaven I'd either died there or come away clean! What good is a blasted cripple like me? All I can do is sit here like an old woman and listen to the damned Jerries bombing one village after another."

"You can still fly your hawks," suggested the other.

The Master exploded, "No, by God, I can't! Not in these raids. I'm not going to take any chances with Queen Bess. This is her last flight!"

The hawk was crouched on the Master's fist like a sprinter waiting for the starting pistol. The Norwegian shook his head. "Somehow I can't see that bird in a zoo."

"No, and you never will! We'll take her out for one last hunt over the moors and then turn her loose. She isn't safe here."

"Yes," the other agreed. "Those last bombings were too close. Your home will go next, I'm afraid."

The Master's hand shook a little as he untied the hawk's leash from the iron ring around the base of the block. "Yes, the bombings seem to be headed this way." His voice was a trifle husky. "It's a pity. I'm rather attached to the old place. Hate to see it knocked to pieces like that. Well, shall we go?"

The Norwegian nodded. With his mouth, the Master pulled from the vest pocket of his jacket a little leather hood with a tuft of brightly colored pheasant feathers at the top. Holding the tuft in his teeth, he slipped the hood over the falcon's head. Bess balanced on one foot and scratched the velvet-covered side of the hood in irritation, the brass bells on her feet tinkling as she did so. Then she shook herself like a dog, "roused" as a falconer would say, and settled down quietly on the Master's fist.

The falcon felt herself being carried across the great four acre lawn. The joyous barking of Steak and Kidney, the two setter pups, came to her and she heard the Master say, "Yes, yes, you're going, but down boys, down!" Then she heard the familiar noise of a car door opening and closing, and the murmur of the engine. The crunching of the gravel drive turned to the gentle whirr of the high-

way and Queen Bess sat as contentedly as a stuffed bird until the car stopped. Then she roused again, and strained her neck trying to see through the soft darkness of the hood.

Suddenly she was unhooded but she did not wink in the abrupt blaze of light. The pupils of her eyes adjusted themselves painlessly and instantly to the sunshine. Steak and Kidney were already out, frolicking around on the soft moor grass. The Master, of course, was there and so was his guest. As far as they could see the country rolled away in great fields of white heather, broken only by the chalk rock formations that protruded through the covering mat like a baby's first teeth. In the distance, so far away it mingled with the misty purple of the horizon, was the sea. They could just make out the silver ripples shivering over the blue water behind their weaving fence of foam. To the north lay a great range of hills, streaked golden and ebony by the late afternoon sun, which was just beginning to sink behind them.

"Those hills stretch for twenty miles," said the Master nodding towards them. "Many's the time Bess and I have spent the day there with the dogs. We'd leave before the dawn and watch the sun come up over the sea. Bess would fly in the morning and then we'd all four eat lunch somewhere in the hills. In the afternoon I'd go swimming in the firth while Bess bathed in one of the little fresh water streams that flow into it."

"You English have lived a gentle, simple sort of life," said the Norwegian. "I suppose your father and your grandfather flew their hawks over these hills much as you do."

"As a matter of fact, falconry has been something of a tradition in my family. You know we owe our home to it." The Master smiled as Queen Bess stretched her beak out and nibbled at his chin. It was the falcon's only way of showing affection.

The Norwegian looked up questioningly, and the Master went on, "Oh yes. You see our original ancestor was some sort of minor bloke or other at the court of Elizabeth. One day his hawk took the quarry right out of the claws of the Queen's bird. Her Majesty was so impressed she rebuilt Falconmews for him —the place had become a ruin—and made him Falconer Royal. So our hawks got us our home."

"And Falconmews is more than your home," said the other. He glanced sideways at the Master. "It's your religion."

The Master smiled a lop-sided smile. "Pity," he said casually, "to realize that after four centuries one of Mr. Hitler's little lads can wipe it off the map in two minutes with one of his bombs. And probably will in the next day or so. Well, shall we put Queen Bess into the air for a last turn?"

Without waiting for an answer, he unfastened the falcon's leash from the swivel that held it to the jesses. . . . those leather straps around a hawk's legs which are never removed even when she is flying. Then he slipped away the swivel itself and raised his gloved hand high in the air.

Queen Bess stretched out her long, racing wings and felt the air with them ten-

tatively. The Master gave her a little toss and the hawk sprang upwards, heavily drumming with her curved pinions until she had gained a little momentum, and then speeding over the moor like a piece of slate skipped across water by a boy.

"How wonderfully she can fly!" exclaimed the Norwegian. "If only a plane could be built like that!"

"There'll never be a plane that can fly like a falcon!" said the Master proudly.

THE two men watched Queen Bess skim along a few feet above the waving heather. Then the hawk turned, banking so suddenly her lower wing tip almost touched the ground. But the great bird could judge her distances literally to a fraction of an inch. Back she came towards the two men, rising slightly to zoom over their heads. The Norwegian ducked instinctively as the hawk whizzed by, her blue-black talons missing his head by inches. The Master smiled and stood steady. He knew that the falcon never miscalculated. He waved and shouted to the dogs, "In, boys, in!"

The two setters began to range out through cover. At the sight, Queen Bess rose higher and higher into the sky by a series of great rings.

"I have seen aeroplanes mount like that," said the Norwegian, watching the falcon intently. "But I always suposed a bird flew straight up."

"Small birds can, but a falcon's wings are so long she has to ring up," said the master.

The falcon continued to rise. Now she was so high she looked no bigger than a butterfly. Light scuds of clouds drove between her and the earth. The dogs were working the cover industriously. As they ranged farther and farther afield, the hawk followed them, hundreds of feet above their heads. The two men came along more slowly.

"When will she reach her ceiling?" asked the Norwegian.

"Her ceiling?" The Master looked puzzled and then his face cleared. "Oh, you mean her point of pride. In a few minutes now. She's 'waiting on.' "

"I suppose she is zooming to get the altitude on her quarry," suggested the Norwegian.

"Well, yes. A falconer would say she was reaching her pitch to be ready for the stoop," agreed the Master.

There came an interruption. Kidney had found a fox earth and began to investigate. Steak continued to range deeper and deeper into the cover. Aloft, Queen Bess saw with growing irritation she would not be able to keep track of both dogs. She knew well it was Kidney's fault; he wasn't attending to the job at hand. At last, in a burst of anger, she swooped out of the sky in a long glide. The astonished Kidney heard the swish of wings and felt a sharp box on the ear from the falcon's half-closed fist. He yelped in pain and surprise and shot off into the heather after Steak. Her feathers trembling with annoyance, Queen Bess mounted again and floated high above the heath, watching every move of the dogs with her marvelous, telescopic eyes.

Suddenly Steak came to a stop, his tail beating wildly, his whole taut body an appendage to his eager nose. Kidney came bounding up and stopped to honor his friend's point. Steak took a few, stiff-legged steps forward, circled too and once again honored the point. Both dogs stood motionless, their jaws working.

The Master lifted his field glasses and studied Queen Bess' position. She had drifted down wind a little. He reached inside his lure bag and took out a little leather sack, covered with grouse wings. To the bag was tied a long leather line. The Master swung the lure a few times above his head and instantly Queen Bess came swooping up wind. Every day she was fed bits of meat from that lure and she recognized it at once.

The Master waited until the hawk was in position and then rushed into the cover, shouting to the dogs that came leaping behind him. Before he had taken a dozen steps, three black grouse leaped out of the heather and flashed away across the moor. High above them, the hawk began to fly, but as with an airplane, her height was so great she seemed barely to move.

"They're getting away!" cried the Norwegian.

"Not yet!" corrected the Master.

As he spoke, Queen Bess closed her wings and began to drop through the sky. So fast did she come that she seemed to be falling in a series of great bounds. She fell head first, her wings folded close to her sides, her tail guiding her in the tremendous dive.

"By God, she's power diving!" shouted the Norwegian.

"She's stooping!" cried the Master.

NOW the grouse realized their danger, but it was too late. The plunging hawk was almost upon them. She singled out an old cock that was slanting down with outstretched wings towards cover. As the falcon hurtled down upon him, the grouse tried to shift from the blow. He tried to fall into a slip but had not quite the courage to wait until the hawk was so close upon him that she could not recover herself. Without checking the momentum of her dive, Queen Bess swerved slightly. To have attempted to seize the grouse at the speed she was going might have seriously injured her. The hawk knew this, so instead of attempting to grab the game bird, she delivered a terrible blow with her hind talons as she hissed past, a blow backed by all the terrific speed of the stoop.

Both men could hear the sound of the blow. A burst of feathers leaped up from the grouse and then settled slowly through the air like brown snowflakes. The cock dropped like a stone, as dead as if hit by both barrels of a shotgun.

"That was a perfectly executed cut-down power dive, with strafing, as we airmen say," said the Norwegian with a smile.

"A clean kill," said the Master with satisfaction. "It is always a clean miss or a clean kill with hawks. There are never any injured birds that escape to die slowly of gunshot wounds."

Queen Bess was going too fast to stop at once, but she made a great circle around the moor and came floating back on outstretched wings, "hedge hopping" over the heather, turning her head backwards and forwards as she searched for the dead bird. When she spied it, she backed air rapidly with her wings and dropped down to vanish among the high weeds.

The Master marked the spot and made for it slowly, speaking reprovingly to the overly eager Steak and Kidney. Queen Bess lifted her head from pluming the kill, a breast feather still sticking to her half open beak. The dogs approached to sniff and the falcon lifted her crest slightly and turned her back to shelter her prey with half open wings.

"Heel, boys, heel!" cried the Master and the dogs fell back. Reaching into his lure bag, the Master took out a piece of pigeon breast and holding it in his gloved hand, slowly aproached the hawk. Queen Bess gave a little crow and leaped to his fist, dragging the grouse along with her. She bolted the titbit and then went to work on the grouse in earnest, the Master supporting both the live bird and the dead one on his arm.

"Can't she be taught to retrieve?" asked the Norwegian.

"A hawk never retrieves," explained the Master. "They kill only when hungry and kill only for themselves. They must always be given part of their kill, otherwise they consider themselves robbed and the next time you fly them, they don't return."

"Why do they ever return?"

"For food and from habit. Queen Bess knows there is always food for her in my lure bag here." The Master touched the leather bag hanging at his side. "And in her own way I rather fancy she's as fond of Falconmews as I. Falcons do grow attached to a place, you know. A pair will return year after year to the same nesting site. She's lived at Falconmews for some ten years now and I like to think she'll be sorry as I to see the old place turned into matchwood."

"Who knows, perhaps she can save Falconmews as her ancestor did four hundred years ago," smiled the Norwegian. "Well, my friend, turn your little air fighter loose and let us return. It is growing late."

"Right you are," said the Master, but he hesitated. He ran his hand over the bird's firm breast and fingered the strong flight feathers. "I mended that feather last winter; she broke it rook hawking," he said, smiling slightly. "I did a good

job. Not that it matters now." Queen Bess paused for a moment to wipe her bill on the Master's glove and then resumed her meal. "I hope she stays on the moor where she'll be safe," continued the Master regretfully. "But I know she won't. She'll come back to Falconmews, bombs or no bombs, and die in the ruins, just as I will," he concluded quietly.

The Norwegian shifted his feet suggestively. The Master straightened. He took out a small, sharp knife and cut the leather jesses from Queen Bess' feet. He was about to cut off the bells also, but hesitated. "I'll leave the bells," he decided. "Not much chance of a hunter seeing her, but the bells will show she's a trained bird."

Gently he replaced the bird and her kill among the long shadows of the heather. "Come on," he said quickly to his guest. Silently the two men turned away and walked back to the car, the dogs following them. Steak stopped once and looked back as if to say, "Haven't we forgotten something?" but the Master called him back to heel.

At the car, the Master unstrapped the lure bag and flung it into the back. He reached inside his pocket and pulled out the ornate little green and red hood. He stood for a moment turning it over in his hand. Then he tossed it into the heather.

"Let's go," he said briefly.

QUEEN BESS paid little attention to the car driving away. She finished what she wanted of the grouse and then began to look around. The Master was gone. Queen Bess was surprised and annoyed. She spread her wings and soared up into the darkening sky to look for him.

But he was gone, definitely gone. Gliding around in the thin evening air Queen Bess pondered what to do. Far away a line of trees showed dark on the low hills. Towards these she flew, angling with her wings for currents in the light breeze. She reached the trees just as the sun dropped behind the hills, cutting off the bright gilding of the slopes as suddenly as if a switch had been thrown off. Bess pitched in the upper branches of the first tree, a giant oak, and folding her wings, fell asleep.

She was awakened early the next morning by a curious humming noise. Queen Bess shook herself and looked around to see what had disturbed her. At first she could see nothing but a foraging party of passing rooks that dropped out of the sky like black confetti and circled around her tree at a discreet distance, cawing loudly. The humming noise grew louder.

Then she saw them, great black hawks infinitely bigger than she was, all flying in formation like wild geese. As they flew they made the moaning purr that had first awakened her. She watched them as they moved steadily across the sky at a great height, higher than she could attain at her best pitch.

Like all falcons, Queen Bess was curious. Ignoring the rooks, she took off from the tree and began to mount in the cloud flecked morning sky towards the bombers. They were far too high and far too fast for even a falcon to reach, but she followed them at her best speed and Queen Bess' best speed was well over a hundred miles an hour.

The strangers were headed towards her old home. Queen Bess flew hard in an effort to catch up with them, but before they reached the old Elizabethan grange, the giant foreign birds passed over a little village. Three of of the black hawks left their formation and began to circle above the thatched cottages. The falcon redoubled her efforts to reach them before they "stooped."

Fortunately for her, the strangers did not wait until she could come up. Suddenly these curious creatures laid a cluster of giant black eggs over the town. Queen Bess paused in astonishment.

The next thing she knew she was being twisted and flung about like a swimmer in a whirlpool by the force of the explosions. The falcon fought with all the power of her mighty wings to pull herself out of the deadly aerial undertow. At last, half stunned and with ringing ears, she managed to escape. She flew unsteadily to a little glade some distance from the burning town, and there half fell onto the broad branch of the nearest tree.

She sat there panting for a long time. Occasionally the distant shocks of the explosions swayed her on her branch, but she was too tired to fly on. But finally the ringing in her ears grew less and she was even able to manage a feeble rouse. Then a shadow flashed across the tree.

Queen Bess looked up. A smaller one of the black hawks was swooping over the glade. The falcon eyed it doubtfully, expecting any moment to have it drop some more of those terrible black eggs. But the strange hawk simply circled about as if it were waiting on.

Then Queen Bess saw her Master's guest come quickly out of the glade and wave to the hawk. It swooped low over the field, just as Queen Bess sometimes did herself when her Master shouted to her. It zoomed up again, "cast up" a falconer would have called it, and then came back. This time a black box was flung from the plane. Tied to the box at the end of a long string was a fluttering white thing which opened suddenly and floated the box gently to earth. The Norwegian ran out and picked up the box but not before Queen Bess saw it contained something alive. At any other time she would have flown over to investigate but now she was too exhausted by her experience to take any active interest.

The Norwegian waved to the hawk and then quickly hiding the box under his coat, hurried back towards the shelter of the trees. Queen Bess understood it all now. This man was a falconer. In fact, he must be a very expert falconer indeed, judging from the size of the hawks he flew. Still, thought Queen Bess, she would like to see one of those monsters do something really useful like catching a grouse. Even eagles were too big for that and if you can not catch grouse, what good are you? At least, that was how Queen Bess felt.

IN A LITTLE while, the bombardment stopped but Queen Bess stayed all day in the little grove. But by evening the hunger pangs drove her out to forge over the moor.

She was unused to hunting without the dogs and now she circled helplessly, hoping some grouse would be thoughtful enough to flush below her. But the grouse had not the slightest idea of taking to the air while that shadow of death hung over them. At last, she determined to return to Falconmews. There would always be a meal awaiting her in the Master's lure bag. So leaving the moor, Queen Bess pivoted in the air and sailed back towards her home.

She soared over a series of plowed fields, each furrow throwing a long shadow in the twilight, until finally she saw ahead the long line of copper beeches she knew so well. Rising over them, she floated above the lower garden and there, etched in India ink against the dying sky, was Falconmews. It had been untouched by the raid. Queen Bess circled it twice before she came upon a light high up under the eaves. By beating hard with her wings, she was able to climb almost perpendicularly up the side of the ivy covered wall and alight upon the sill of a tiny turret window, nearly frightening a passing bat to death as she did so.

Panting, she looked in. Below her was the great hall of the grange, dimly lighted by a few candelabra on the long banquet table. Queen Bess knew the room well. Often, after a long day's hunt, the falconry club would meet here for dinner. The enormous fireplace would be set roaring and the men would lounge around in front of it, cooking their damp, gaitered legs and sipping their hot drinks as they discussed the day's flights. The hawks sat around on the backs of the carved oak chairs, comfortably preening their feathers in the warmth while the dogs dozed on the hearthstone. On the walls hung the mementos of famous flights; herons taken in passage at the Loo in Holland, wild ducks that had been overhauled only after a two hour flight, even fox heads, taken by the Master's grandfather with a golden eagle in Tibet.

Tonight, the room looked vast and barren. A little group of men in uniform sat about the dead fireplace. The Master was there and also the Norwegian. Very faintly, the sound of the Master's voice came up to Queen Bess.

"It was a bit of luck that attack today passed us. But I suppose there's

no way of guessing what the Jerries may do tomorrow, is there, Colonel?"

Slowly the man addressed uncrossed his legs and swayed the drink back and forth in his hand.

"We can only hope our luck holds." he said at last. "With that ammunition and the spare plane parts stored in the cellar, this house would be a rich spot for a bomb. But we'll hope they don't know about it. I'm rather inclined to believe they don't. Otherwise, we'd have gotten ours today."

The Norwegian rose and stretched. "I think I'll turn in," he said casually. "Anyone else coming?"

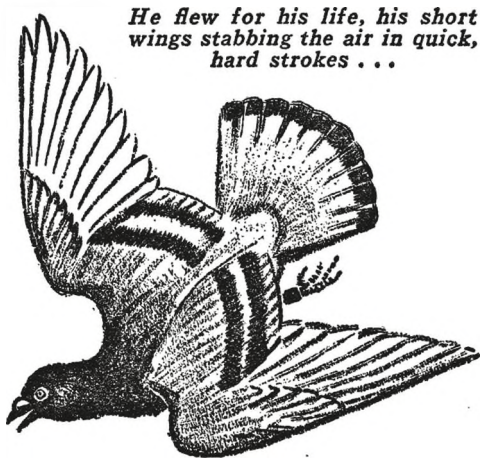
The officers glanced at each other and shook their heads. "You go ahead," said the Master. "I'll be right up after you. Got everything you want?"

"Oh, rather!" said the Norwegian. "You chaps have been too kind to me. Good-night."

Queen Bess watched the man limp across the floor. At the door he hesitated a moment, and looked back. "I say, there is one thing. I may take a stroll tomorrow. This confounded leg of mine stiffens up if I don't force myself to use it. I thought I might take along a flask and a sandwich. Have you an old bag you could lend me?"

The Master laughed a little bitterly. "Take the lure bag there. I've got no further use for it."

"Thanks, I'll do that, then," said his guest. "It's big enough to hold a three course dinner. Well, good-night, gentlemen."



He flew for his life, his short wings stabbing the air in quick, hard strokes . . .

The door closed behind him. From her high perch, Queen Bess watched until the little party broke up and the lights were blown out. Then she tried to forget her burning hunger cramps in sleep.

LIKE all birds, Queen Bess awoke at dawn. It was her second night out and she had not eaten for forty-eight hours. The great falcon sat there, sullen and disconsolate, watching the little chaffinches chase each other over the dew-covered lawns. They were so small as to be beneath her notice, but she watched them hungrily.

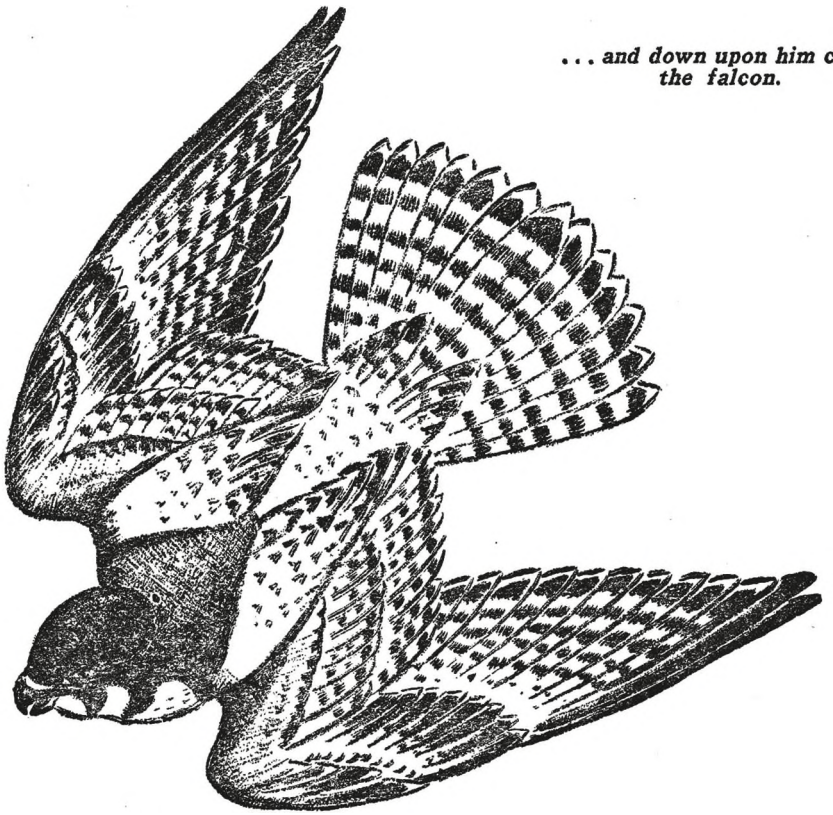
Suddenly she saw the wicket gate in the east tower open quietly. The Norwegian came out. Queen Bess eyed him indifferently and then abruptly she tensed into interest. Over his shoulder he was carrying the lure bag! To Queen Bess, that lure bag meant only one thing, food. The man vanished almost instantly into a little grove of ash, but Queen Bess sprang from the windowsill and floated eagerly over the woods. With one great ring she soared high above the trees and hung there in the sky, waiting.

The man was walking quickly now with only a hint of his limp. In the middle of an open field, he stopped. High above, Queen Bess was waiting on in the sky. The man looked around. There was no one in sight. The trees hid him from the house. He opened the lure bag.

Queen Bess saw him reach into the bag and take out the black box that had been dropped to him from the giant foreign hawk the day before. The man broke open the box and took out a pigeon. He fastened a tiny metal capsule to her leg, and took a quick look around. Then he tossed the bird into the air.

The pigeon fluttered up like a blown bit of white paper. She got her wings under her and began to circle to get her bearings. At that moment Queen Bess stooped.

She came down from that terrible height at a speed that cut the cold morning air like a plunging knife. She was rested, she was hungry, and she was at the height of her powers. Those three



. . . and down upon him came the falcon.

things make a falcon terrible. How fast can a falcon stoop? No one knows, but a stooping hawk can play around a freely falling object as though it were hanging motionless in the air. Airplanes have power-dived beside falcons and their pilots believe the birds' speed was over two hundred miles an hour. Nothing that flies can avoid that awful plunge except, perhaps, a first-class homing pigeon.

But the pigeon which the man on the ground had just released was such a bird. He had been as carefully trained for his part in World War II as any other cog in the great Nazi war machine. For months before he had been entrusted with military messages on long flights back to Germany from Poland, from Norway, from France. He had been attacked by falcons before.

He heard the whistling of the stooping falcon's wings while she was still high above him. There was no time to reach cover but the pigeon did not lose his head. He flew for his life, his short wings stabbing the air in quick, hard strokes and down upon him came the falcon.

Most birds would have become panic stricken with that diving death plunging through the air upon them. But the pigeon actually slowed down his racing stroke as the falcon hurtled down on him. He was nerving himself for a shift. If he made it too soon, the hawk could alter her course and still strike him. If he made it too late, he would never see his beloved loft in Germany again.

The hawk was upon him now. He could see her yellow legs crouched under her body, ready for the blow. The wind of her descent was actually fanning his feathers when the pigeon acted.

Suddenly he folded one wing half under his body, leaving the other sticking stiffly out. The result was a sudden spiral twist, "a barrel roll." Quess Bess shot by and instantly the pigeon jerked himself out of his maneuver and tried to drop into the grove of trees.

But Queen Bess had not spent five

years hawking over English downs and Scottish moors for nothing. Using the terrific momentum of her stoop, she zoomed up again and prepared for another dive. Again she came down like a blue flash of lightning. Again the pigeon shifted but this time the falcon's hind talon raked him and sent him reeling. A puff of feathers sprang out from the homer's side.

The falcon towered up from below. For a moment it seemed as though the pigeon were in her claws, but at the last second, by a miraculous jerk-climb the pigeon saved himself. Then the little bird began to rise swiftly in a series of circles so small Queen Bess was unable to follow.

The falcon did not try. Instead she turned and flew deliberately in the opposite direction. Most birds would have been tempted to forsake the dangerous ringing and drop towards cover, and Queen Bess would have been back at once in a long dive across the sky. But the pigeon was not deceived. Instead, he continued to mount desperately, although the hawk was nearly a quarter of a mile away and had apparently given up all idea of the hunt.

Then Queen Bess began to swing back in a huge circle. The pigeon knew well that when the hawk had completed that great curve, she would be above him. Turning, he flew with all his strength towards the distant towers of Falconmews.

Across the sky dove Queen Bess. If an observer had been watching the pigeon only, the little bird would have seemed to be flying almost faster than the eye could follow. But compared to the hawk, he was standing still. Yet the gallant little homer reached the grange ahead of the falcon . . . but only just ahead. Like racing planes they banked around the nearest tower, the hawk losing slightly on the turn. Across the slates they sped, their shadows suddenly appearing on the roof beneath them and as suddenly vanishing as the birds ducked and twisted around the chimneys. The homer was beginning to weaken. Suddenly he tried a head dive down the side of the wall, hoping to shake the falcon off in the ivy. Right behind him came Queen Bess.

IN THE great hall, the Master sat moodily with the officers' mess at breakfast. The wild ringing of the hawk bells came to them through the half-open leaded glass windows. The Master made a bolt for the lawn just in time to see the pigeon make a dash across the terrace. Queen Bess overtook her in mid-air and the two birds came tumbling down together, the homer unhurt but held fast in the falcon's talons.

The Master lifted them both. Queen Bess was too exhausted to do more than cling to her quarry. Very gently, the Master released the homing pigeon.

Then he saw the metal tube on the pigeon's leg and gave a low whistle.

Twenty minutes later Queen Bess sat upon the dining-room table bolting a half-pound of steak. Beside her the pigeon lay panting in a covered basket. By the fireplace, the staff, in grim undertones, discussed the message.

"We'll make some alterations here," said the colonel. His voice was almost casual. "Change the location of the munition dump. Have a few Spitfires waiting."

He scrutinized the message again and there was no casualness in his tone as he addressed the Master.

"Do you recognize this writing?"

The Master nodded his head. There was bitterness in his voice and eyes as he spoke.

"The Norwegian," he said. "The wounded aviator who's staying with me. Obviously a German agent."

There was a long silence in the room broken only by the ringing of Queen Bess' bells as she attacked the meat. The colonel looked across the room at the hawk and smiled tightly.

"We'll have a little talk with this so-called 'Norwegian' when he gets back from his walk," he said. "Lucky for all of us your hawk brought down this pigeon. Your place'd be kindling by tomorrow, I fancy."

The Master drew a deep breath. His eyes became suddenly moist as he looked at Queen Bess.

"Yes," said the Master slowly. "For the second time a falcon has saved Falconmews."

CHARGER ON A STRICKEN FIELD

By FAIRFAX DOWNEY

Carbines of the firing line blasted back the red men.

A FACT STORY

THE Battle of the Little Big Horn is a crashing finale to the career of a soldier who deserved, like Marshall Ney, the title, "Bravest of the Brave" — Lieutenant Colonel, Brevet Major General, George Armstrong Custer. It is a tragic but glorious tradition of a regiment, gallant in defeat and death, a regiment which today still swings into saddles and follows the guidons—the 7th U. S. Cavalry. It is also the story of a horse named Comanche, and with Comanche it may begin—as it ends.

TRUMPETS at Fort Abraham Lincoln, Dakota, early on the morning of May 17th, 1876, sang *Stable Call*—

Oh, go to the stable,
All you who are able,
And give your poor horses some hay and some corn.
For if you don't do it,
The captain will know it,
And you'll catch the devil as sure as you're born.

Soon, down the picket lines, brushes clicked on currycombs as the troopers of the 7th groomed the horses they would ride out shortly on campaign against the Sioux and Cheyennes. Yonder under the brisk strokes of an officer's striker, the light bay coat of a charger glistened and shone. The gelding Comanche, originally bought by the quartermaster at St. Louis as a troop horse, had been purchased from the government at his cost price of $90 by Captain Myles W. Keogh. Comanche was no fine piece of horseflesh like Custer's Kentucky thoroughbreds. Keogh could not afford such. That thirsty Irish soldier of fortune, former member of the Papal Zouaves and veteran of fighting in Africa and our Civil War, drank up his pay as fast as it was doled out to him by his striker to whom he gave it since he could not trust himself not to spend it all on a wild spree. But Comanche was sturdy and intelligent. In his veins ran the blood of steeds the Conquistadors had brought from Spain, and through them he could claim descent from the chariot horses of the Pharaohs and the Arab barbs of the Saracens. The bay gelding knew the trumpet calls, every drill movement, and his place at the head of the troop. Since 1868 he had served his master loyally and he would be faithful to him unto death and beyond.

The minutes fled in the rush of preparation. Now it was time. Comanche was saddled and turned over to his rider. All twelve troops present, the regiment formed up for review by bearded, kindly General Terry, the expedition's commander.

Thus the 7th Cavalry began its ride into history. In column of platoons the regiment made the circuit of the post. At its head rode Lieutenant Colonel Custer, debonair as usual in buckskin campaign suit, wide sombrero, red bandana—all but the flowing yellow locks which recently had been cropped close. He must still have shuddered to remember how nearly he had missed riding here. He was but lately returned from Washington where he had testified in the impeachment trial of Secretary of War William K. Belknap. There was graft in the Indian agencies, as Custer charged, and corruption aplenty in Grant's administration, personally honest though the President was. However, Custer's testimony had been hearsay, and he had deeply offended Grant who had forbidden him to accompany this expedition. It had taken fervent pleas by Custer to Sheridan and Terry to win their intercession and a reversal of the order. But surely all would be well when the dashing leader of cavalry rode back from this campaign, restored to glory and favor by such a victory as he had won on Civil War and other Indian battlefields.

The fine mounted band recalled one of those victories now, blaring *Garry Owen,* the brisk tune to which the regiment had charged a Cheyenne village on the Washita. Standards and guidons fluttered bravely. The squadron, troop, and platoon commanders sat their chargers proudly. There rode swarthy Major Reno, inexperienced in Indian fighting but the bearer of three Civil War brevets for galantry in action. White-haired, husky Captain Benteen, with bulldog jaw and the glint of hate in his eyes when he stared at Custer's back. Captain Yates and Tom Custer, the Colonel's brother, both blond and handsome. Towering Adjutant Cook of the flowing side-whiskers. Calhoun, who was Custer's brother-in-law, Smith, and Moylan, who had risen from the ranks. Lieutenant Donald McIntosh, a half-breed Indian. Such able young officers as Godfrey and Hare who would one day wear a general's stars. Nowlan and De Rudio, former Papal Zouaves like Keogh. That favorite of all the regiment, Benny Hodgson, and Varnum, his boon companion, commanding the scouts. Jack Sturgis, son of the absent Colonel of the 7th, and John Crittenden,

temporarily transferred from the 20th Infantry.

Veteran sergeants and corporals watched the alignment of the ranks—600 men in army blue, booted, spurred, armed with carbines and revolvers. Only flashing sabers were missing from the 7th's martial panoply. Not even Custer carried one. Left in his quarters was his Civil War trophy sword, its Damascus blade inscribed with the legend: *Draw me not without cause. Sheathe me not without honor.* For sabers had been ruled out as outmoded weapons, their clatter betraying any intended surprise attack and useless compared to the swift bullet. And yet when a man stood at bay, his last cartridge gone—

Custer's charger curveted to the music. Keogh's Comanche shook his head and marched to its spirited rhythm along with all the horses of the regiment, matched in color in each troop. Trim, formidable, the regiment flowed on. A casual eye might not discern chinks in its armor, gaps in its strength—that it was armed with single-shot Springfields instead of the repeating rifles many Indians had bought from traders; that cartridge cases were too soft and would stick in overheated breeches; that only twenty-eight out of a complement of forty-one officers were present, the absentees, including its colonel and two of its three majors, being on detached service; that forty per cent of the regiment were recruits. These facts the men of the 7th knew and, being soldiers, accepted as beyond their control. If these defects and deficiences led to disaster, their blood would be on the head of a nation that reduced and neglected its Army.

Now the band struck up *The Girl I Left Behind Me.* It was too much for the watching women who fled indoors, eyes streaming. Clear of the fort, the regiment halted, and married men were permitted to break ranks to say goodbye to their families. It mounted again and closed in on General Terry and his staff. Into the column swung three horse-drawn Gatling guns, the pack mules, detachments of the 6th, 17th, and 20th Infantry guarding the train of 150 wagons; 175 civilian employees, among them another brother and a nephew of Custer; Mark Kellogg, newspaper correspondent, taken along against Sherman's orders; Arickara scouts.

A dust cloud hid the troops, but the people at the fort were granted one more view—a mirage which reflected the 7th Cavalry, each horseman distinct, marching off through the sky.

Miles lay behind when the column camped for the night. Next morning the paymaster disbursed two month's pay, having been prevented by General Terry from paying off the previous day. Troopers, sullen because they had missed a debauch in the saloons and dives of Bismarck—a "bust" which would have crammed the guardhouse with drunken men unfit for duty—tucked away the currency in waistbelts. In a few weeks now green bills would flutter on the prairie grass of the valley of the Little Big Horn or be used by Indian children to decorate their toys.

The lovely Mrs. Custer and Mrs. Calhoun, who had been allowed to accompany the column this far, bid their husbands farewell and rode back under the escort of the paymaster. Hoofs thudded and wagon wheels creaked, as the march was resumed.

So Custer and the 7th Cavalry rode on toward their destiny, on toward the Little Big Horn.

HORSE, foot, and transport, the column pushed on. By mid-June it was in country where hostiles might be expected to be encountered. Terry sent Reno and his squadron trotting southward on a scout. They discovered a wide Indian trail leading west toward the Big Horn Mountains. Reno did not follow it, an opportunity Custer confessed he would not have passed up, but properly rode back to report.

By ill fortune Reno missed another vital piece of information. On June 17th, 1876, he was not many miles distant from the Rosebud River where General Crook was suffering a repulse at the hands of Chief Crazy Horse in a battle which forced him to retreat two days' march. Terry was counting on Crook's support and vice versa, yet neither of

these department commanders was informed of the other's movements. Difficult and dangerous though liaison was through this wide, rough territory, its maintenance was of primary importance. Closer collaboration might well have made the difference between costly failures and success.

But with a third column, that of Colonel Gibbon with the 17th Infantry and squadrons of the 2nd Calvary, Terry did effect a junction June 21st, at the confluence of the Yelowstone and Rosebud rivers. There the two commanders and Custer conferred in a cabin of that invaluable supply ship, the *Far West*. A plan of campaign was developed, and Terry's written order given Custer to take the 7th, strike the trail Reno had found and close in on the Indians in conjunction with Terry's and Gibbons' troops. Converging by timed marches, the two commands were to be in position on June 26th at a point on the Little Big Horn River to catch the Sioux in the jaws of pincers.

"The Department Commander," stated a section of Terry's order to Custer, "places too much confidence in your zeal, energy, and ability to wish to impose upon you precise orders which might hamper your action when nearly in contact with the enemy."

Plainly Terry, who had not previously fought Indians, left the veteran Custer a certain amount of leeway. Yet instructions were definite that Custer should not follow the trail if it led to the Little Big Horn but should turn south, communicate with the second column and wait and attack in concert with it.

Custer was offered the three Gatling guns but refused them because their teams were condemned cavalry horses "another shameful government economy" and because he thought wheeled vehicles might not be able to negotiate the broken country he must traverse. He also declined to take Major Brisben and his four troops of the 2nd because that officer was sometimes so severely afflicted with rheumatism he could not ride and because he, Custer, wanted it "to be a 7th Cavalry battle."

Fateful choices, these. Some of Custer's reasons were undeniably cogent. No fault of his was government policy which foisted poor horses on a fighting force and left unretired an officer who, brave though he was, was unfit for the field. And yet the risks might have been well worth the taking. One more squadron and three machine guns spitting 400 shots a minute at a massed foe—and the Battle of the Little Big Horn might have been a different story.

One last review. A gallant sight as always, the 7th rode by. The wind whipped out the folds of the regimental standard and Custer's own headquarters flag, red and blue with silver crossed sabers, carried by stalwart color sergeants. The band, left behind in garrison, could not play the regiment by with *Garry Owen* this time, but massed trumpeters raised their instruments and blew a stirring march. Troop after troop, scouts, pack train streamed by. Custer, eyes alight with pride, turned out to salute General Terry and Colonel Gibbon.

Good-bye and good luck, they bade him. And Gibbon called after the impetuous commander: "Now, Custer, don't be greedy, but wait for us."

Yellow Hair wheeled his horse, waved and shouted back: "No, I won't." You could take that two ways.

On toward the fatal field, rode the 7th.

IT RODE hard and fast. Thirty miles or so a day was not excessive for veteran cavalry, but there was many a green man and horse in the regiment and they had come a long way from Dakota. It told on them, but the pace was pushed, and only the pack train, which lacked the efficiency of Crook's, slowed it a little.

There were omens, untoward happenings which would have aroused forebodings in Roman legions marching against the barbarian—which even in the year 1876 troubled matter-of-fact young officers. Custer was strangely subdued, he who was always buoyant at the prospect of battle. So unusual was his mood of despondency that one lieutenant remarked to a comrade: "I believe General Custer is going to be killed." And heads were shaken when the red and blue banner in front of the commander's

tent was twice blown down by the wind.

The regiment struck the half-mile wide trail of an Indian village on the march, reported by Major Reno. One day, two, a third they folowed it. Now, scouts declared, it led beyond doubt into the valley of the Little Big Horn.

Custer stood at the crossroads of his career, a vital decision before him. To turn aside from the trail, as his orders required, meant a lost opportunity which might or might not be redeemed by joint-action with the other column. To thrust on ahead would be at least a technical disobedience of orders. Yet that might lead to a great victory, a triumph which would lift the cloud of official displeasure that had descended on him at Washington, and regain for him the honor and glory he had won so often in the past. The decision was his and his alone. How he reached it will never be known. But it was as prompt and determined as the downward swing of his arm signaling "Forward, march" straight along that broad trail into the Little Big Horn.

A night march on the 24th brought the regiment close to the divide separating the Rosebud and the Little Big Horn rivers. At dawn scouts summond Custer to the crest. Many Indians yonder, they told him—too many. The colonel's keen eyesight, aided by field glasses, could not discern what the scouts saw. The wide trail and the words of the scouts now were ominous, but Custer had no positive information. He could not know that this Montana valley held a village of 10,000 or more Sioux and Cheyennes, from 3.00 to 3,500 of them warriors under Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Gall, and other noted chiefs. Here were all the Indians who a week ago had fought Crook and his 1,200 men to a standstill —and hundreds more. And the strength of the 7th was 600.

Now Custer was in the presence of the enemy. Furthermore, he was informed that hostiles had been sighted on his back trail, proof that the Indians were aware of his arrival. Since Terry and Gibbon could not be expected for another day, Custer must fight alone now or let the Indians escape. By the marches bringing him to the scene ahead of schedule—marches which had tired men and horses, though not the iron commander—by those marches was the die cast.

George Armstrong Custer was never a man to draw back from a fight. If he remembered that day when he had charged the village on the Washita, and throngs of red men, whose existence in the vicinity he had not suspected, poured up the valley to counter-attack him, he put the thought aside. Hadn't he beaten them off and made a masterly night retreat before superior forces could trap him? Gone now was his mood of depression. The enemy was delivered into his hands. He would sweep down on their lodges and pony herd with the exultant cry, "Custer's luck!"

He called his officers to him. They heard his second fateful decision. He was about to divide his force. Five troops would accompany him, three Reno, and three Benteen, with the twelfth troop assigned to guard the pack train.

It was a tactic old as the history of warfare, dangerous but potentially tremendously effective — one often employed in the Indian wars. The framework of this entire campaign, with two columns in the field beside Custer's, was based upon it—and would fail to carry it through successfully because of lack of liaison, Crook's repulse, and Custer's premature arrival at the Little Big Horn. On the other hand, Custer had used the maneuver in the dawn surprise attack that had won the Battle of the Washita.

But this tactic demanded good timing, close coöperation, a knowledge of the enemy's strength and of the battleground. Mitch Bouyer, the half-breed scout, was the only man in the command thoroughly familiar with this country, cut by a river and gullies where the foe could lurk. He warned insistently of the Indians' overwhelming numbers until a contemptuous look from the colonel forced him to retort fiercely: "All right. I can go anywhere you can."

The 7th swung into saddles. Benteen and his squadron, followed by the pack train, moved off to the left. Reno and his troops advanced to strike the head of the village, assured by his commanding officer that he would be supported

"by the whole outfit." On Reno's heels rode Custer who soon swung away to the left for a charge on the end of the village. Beside him, guiding, rode Bouyer, grim-lipped, certain he was going to his death. Keogh, astride Comanche, Captain Tom Custer and the other troop commanders in whom the Colonel had highest confidence, Boston Custer, Armstrong Reed, the nephew, Kellogg, the correspondent, on a small gray mule, long legs dangling nearly to the ground.

The three columns disappeared from each other's view.

Beat of hoofs on the prairie and jangling accoutrements. Tightening of belts. Hands slapping loaded carbines and revolvers in their holsters. Tenseness in the pits of stomachs. Prelude to battle.

RENO went into action first. Riding out of a defile, he beheld the village, still two miles away. Sioux and Cheyennes sprang up in front of him by hundreds, whooping and shooting.

"Left front into line. Gallop. Guide right," Reno shouted and charged with his 112.

The horses of three troopers took bits in their teeth and dashed ahead straight into the red horde. One rider was swallowed up. Miraculously the other two ran that deadly gauntlet, got their mounts under control and, bleeding from wounds, rejoined the squadron. As the blue line galloped on, red waves enveloped it. They turned the left flank, smashed the Ree scouts in on the main body, swooped down through dust clouds on the rear.

Drive on through or make a stand? Reno looked about him. He never had seen such masses of Indians. There was no sign of Custer, who was still en route toward the other end of the village. The major made his choice, and whether he thereby threw away a victory or saved two-thirds of the regiment from annihilation is still hotly argued. Up went his right hand. "Halt. Prepare to fight on foot. Dismount."

"If Reno had continued to charge down the valley," Captain Moylan later declared, "we would have all been there yet."

Each horseholder took charge of four linked mounts. Carbines of the firing line blasted back the red men. With a loss so far of only a sergeant and a private, Reno retreated to a line of timber. At his back the river glistened in the glare of the mid-day sun.

Indian bullets buzzed like wasps. A trooper groaned, "Oh God, I've got it!" and rolled over lifeless. Other men began to drop. The Indian scout, Bloody Knife, was standing at Reno's side when suddenly his brains were spattered over the major.

Hold this strip of woods or retreat? Again the short, swarthy major was faced with a dilemma. Again his answer was: "Fall back."

Right or wrong — and this decision, too, is still vehemently disputed—Reno's conduct of the retirement was anything but creditable. Only the nearest troop heard the order and mounted up. Other troopers on the firing line looked up and began to follow suit. Reno did not stay to organize a rearguard to hold off the enemy. Pistol in hand, he led a charge, not forward but back through the Indians who had closed in on his rear along the river bank.

Some would brand Reno as a coward for several of his actions this day, despite his three Civil War brevets for gallantry. Others would defend him against the charge. Unnerved though he was at this moment—it's a staunch man who can keep calm when another's brains are splashed over him—Reno nevertheless was able to retain command and fight a way out.

But it was a disorderly retreat, and devil take the hindmost. A lieutenant and a group of troopers, cut off in the timber, were abandoned. Down to the river streamed the blue cavalry, forcing frantic horses to leap in from the five-foot bank. Indian fire took heavy toll. Red horsemen rushed in, dragged troopers from their saddles. They flooded over the fine old scout, Charley Reynolds, his rifle cracking to the last. They cut down Lieutenant McIntosh, commanding the rearmost troop, and mutilated his body the more horribly because of his Indian blood. The retreat was close to a panic now. Young Lieu-

tenant Varnum raced along the column, begging men to stand and save their comrades. "I'm in command here," Major Reno snapped at him and led on.

Through the river dashed the van and scrambled up a hill. More men and horses plunged into the reddening waters. Lieutenant Hodgson's mount was hit and sank. He grasped a troopers stirrup and was pulled through, but as he gained the further shore an Indian bullet killed him. His comrade, Varnum, weeping with grief and rage, emptied his revolver at savages far out of range. Three officers and twenty-nine troopers and scouts were dead, seven wounded and fifteen missing when the survivors, holding the hill, scanned their depleted ranks.

MEANWHILE Custer and his five troops topped the ridge and caught sight of his objective, the vast village. First a sergeant, then a trumpeter was sent racing back to Benteen and the pack train with its vital ammunition. Trumpeter Martin carried the dispatch, scribbled by Adjutant Cook, which was Custer's last message.

Benteen. Come on. Big village. Be quick. Bring packs. P. S. Bring pac's.

Benteen and his men came on, tired animals at the gallop. Surmounting a rise, they looked down into the valley where horsemen scurried through dust and smoke. Closer, on the same side of the river as his own command, Benteen saw blue uniforms on a hill—men on the defensive, in heavy action. It was to their rescue that he rode.

With vast relief, Reno received this reinforcement and the precious ammunition it brought. The fight on the hill raged on. Indians, in position on the commanding bluffs and ringing the defenders around, poured in a hail of lead.

Then, abruptly, many of the assailants melted away. For a time the hill garrison, though still besieged, had a breathing spell. But shortly they heard heavy firing up the valley. The crash of volleys punctuated it. Custer was in action.

The unfortunate Reno faced his third decision. March to the sound of the guns or stand fast? Anxious eyes questioned him. There were angry demands. Captain Weir began to move his troop off without orders. Reluctantly Reno gave a command to follow. His wounded were carried on blankets, the edges of each grasped by six troopers, thus kept out of the firing line. He could not gallop but must move at a foot pace.

Even if he could have gone on, he would have arrived too late. Indians who had dealt with Custer flooded back. Weir recoiled and the entire command was driven back to the hill, their retreat covered by a rearguard under Godfrey and Hare. All the rest of that day they fought for their lives. Before nightfall eighteen soldiers were killed and forty-three wounded.

All night they fought, a night hideous with the clamor of triumphant scalp dances in the valley where fires silhouetted leaping red figures. Trumpet calls roused false hopes; they were sounded by an Indian to mock the besieged. Yet there was one event of cheer. Under cover of the darkness, Lieutenant De Rudio and troopers who had been cut off in the timber and lain concealed there, crept out and managed to join their comrades on the hill.

They fought on through the next morning. Benteen was the bulwark of the defense. When the Indians surged up close, he led the gallant charges that met them head on and hurled them back. There were deeds of extraordinary heroism that would win medals of honor. Sergeant Hanley galloped after an ammunition mule which stampeded along the Indian lines, rounded it up and drove it back to the hill. Volunteers made dashes through a curtain of fire to get water for the moaning wounded and their parched comrades.

At last, in the afternoon, the Indians withdrew. All the big village slipped away, fired prairie grass blazing behind it. The weary troops on the hill, suspecting a trick, still stood to arms.

FOR Custer and the rest of the 7th Cavalry, the end had come soon after those distant volleys had been heard on Reno Hill the previous afternoon.

It is a story no soldier lived to tell. Stripped white bodies and where they lay mutely told the tale in part. More of it was related years later by Indian warriors when they deemed it prudent to speak. Therefore it is fragmentary and "seen through a glass darkly" for all the brilliance of the Montana sun that shone on that stricken field of battle.

We glimpse the tall, splendid horseman in buckskin riding over the ridge, his blue-clad column at his back—the gleam in his eye as he sees the big village from which old men, women and children are fleeing. Spurs into flanks and a thundering charge. Shots from a gulley athwart the squadron's front. A few gallant Cheyennes daring to make a stand against terrific odds.

An upflung arm in buckskin. Halt! Custer suspects an ambush. He pushes ahead, develops no serious opposition, mounts his men up and rides on. But now the war chief Gall is up, having blocked Reno out of the battle. So is Crazy Horse. All the furious Sioux and Cheyennes. They stream in through the treacherous gullies, fall on Custer's flanks, thrust mightily against his front.

One troop, then a second dismounts. They hold their ground while the rest of the squadron retreats up the slopes of a hill. Jaunty campaign hats, pulled low on bronzed foreheads, shade eyes that peer over the barrels of flaming carbines. Here and there a trooper digs frantically with a knife at jammed cartridge case. Men gasp and die horribly, wounded troop horses scream in agony.

Red charges wipe out Keogh's troop, then Calhoun's. Smith's gray horse troop is rushed and smothered. Surviving troopers higher up the slope lead their horses into a semi-circle to form a barricade and pistol them. For a time they fire over the shielding carcasses. They do not last long.

The wild, yelping hordes converge on Custer and a remnant making a last stand near the summit of the hill. Too many Indians—far too many—and Reno and Benteen do not come. Ammunition dwindles to a few last rounds. No quarter can be expected. Down the hill war clubs rise and fall to smash the skulls of prostrate figures in blue. Crazy Horse and Gall and Rain-in-the-Face wave their warriors on for the final deadly rush.

Perhaps Custer stands alone at last on that little knoll. Through the thick of the fighting in scores of Civil War and Indian battles he had borne a charmed life. One imagines him standing there, tall and soldierly, utterly fearless as always, his revolver blazing until two bullets with his number on them pierce his head and side and he falls.

It is all over in one brief, desperate hour. On the battlefield of the Little Big Horn, Custer lies dead and about him, like a feudal chieftain, the bodies of the men of his family, his captains and his men-at-arms.

TERRY and Gibbon came up the next morning, June 27th, 1876. Their scouts, fanned out ahead, galloped back to report the disaster to Custer and his command. Terry, relieving the squadrons on Reno Hill, answered their anxious inquiry, "Where is Custer?" with the heart-breaking news.

They buried Custer, calm in death, unscalped and unmutilated, and the 211 who died with him. They buried Reno's fifty-three dead and tenderly transported his fifty-two wounded to the *Far West*. Back to headquarters, to the widows at Fort Abraham Lincoln, to a deeply shocked nation, the wires carried the tragic word.

It was the greatest Indian victory, the Army's worst defeat.

The nation, hitherto so often indifferent or antagonistic to the situation in the West, was aroused at last. This war had not been forced by the Army but by the gold rush to the Black Hills. Men began to ask "whether a policy that sets opposing parties in the field, armed, clothed and equipped by one and the same government shoud not be abolished?" There lay the primary responsibility—"on the criminal policy pursued by the government during all the period of our Indian wars, a policy which permitted a maladministered Indian Bureau to sow the wind, and compelled

the Army to reap the whirlwind."

Yet the Army, in this particular campaign, could not be proud of the lack of cooperation between Crook's and the other columns. Custer's actions were severely censured by his superiors. Said General Sheridan, Custer's devoted friend and commander: "Had the 7th Cavalry been kept together, it is my belief it would have been able to handle the Indians at the Little Big Horn and under any circumstances it could have at least defended itself; but separated as it was into three detachments, the Indians had largely the advantage, in addition to their overwhelming numbers." And President Grant wrote in *The Army and Navy Journal*: "I regard Custer's massacre as a sacrifice of troops, brought on by himself, that was wholly unnecessary. He was not to have made the attack but effect the juncture with Terry and Gibbon. He was notified to meet them on the 26th, but instead of marching slowly as his orders required in order to effect the junction on the 26th, he entered on a forced march of eighty-three miles in twenty-four hours, and thus had to meet the Indians alone on the 25th."

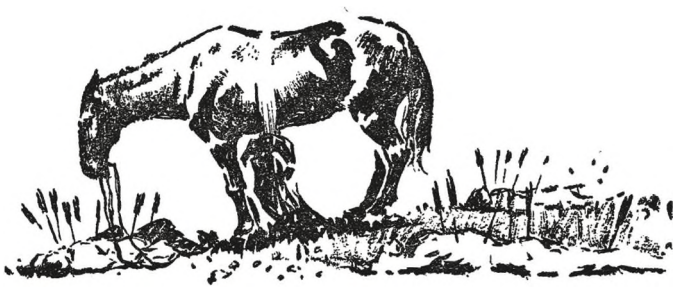
Reno's life was ruined as a result of the Little Big Horn. Although a week after the battle every surviving enlisted man of the 7th signed a petition to the President and Congress asking his, Reno's, and Benteen's promotion, the weight of condemnation in other quarters bore so heavily on him that he requested a Court of Inquiry. The court found that "while subordinates, in some instances, did more for the safety of the command than did Major Reno, there was nothing in his conduct that requires animadversion." Yet a stigma always clung to him. He ended by drinking himself out of the Army.

The story of the Little Big Horn is a page in our military annals, darkened by defeat and recriminations yet bright with the gleam of high valor. For years afterward its living symbol was the only creature left alive on Custer Hill—the horse Comanche. Keogh's charger, bleeding from bullet and arrow wounds, his saddle swung under his belly, was too severely hurt to be worth the Indians' driving off with the few surviving horses of the 7th. The faithful Comanche stayed on the field near the body of his master.

It was there that Terry's men found him, tended his wounds and led him slowly to the river boat. From its landing, he was carried in a wagon to Fort Abraham Lincoln, where for a year a sling supported him in his stall until he was healed. General orders were issued that he should never be ridden or worked. Saddled and bridled, he was led by a mounted trooper in all the 7th's parades. Sometimes he broke loose and took his place in drill at the head of his old troop. He could graze on gardens with impunity, and on pay days soldiers brought him buckets of beer. He lived to a ripe old age, dying in 1891.

Comanche was, and his memory is, a tradition of a regiment and of the Service.

On such thrives the spirit of the Army.



THE GENTLEMAN AND THE TIGER

By MAURICE BEAM

Without stopping the tiger charged. Zimmerman gained the foliage of the tallest coconut palm in one frantic and ignominious scramble.

A FEW minutes before the *Straits Queen* went down Zimmerman fed the tiger a pig. He did not kill the pig first but thrust it into the bamboo cage through the small door at the end, while the tiger dozed. Then, as the tiger turned and rushed at the squealing pig, Zimmerman took moving pictures of the assault, the kill and the beginning of the feeding. There was good light on the foredeck where the tiger's cage was lashed.

Zimmerman knew no feeling of cruelty in the act. He wished merely to doc-

ument the action of a tiger killing a pig. This tiger was a man-eater and also was interesting for other reasons. As a matter of fact, this was the biggest tiger ever captured. It was ten feet, four inches long from tip of tail to nose, weighed six hundred and seven pounds, had flat ledges of hard muscle eight inches wide on each side of the spine so that its back was nearly as broad as a Shetland pony's.

Zimmerman had notified the museum that this was a Bengal. Actually the tiger had been taken in the mountains south of Ringat, not in Bengal but in Sumatra. Yet the name was unimportant except for publicity purposes. Bengal meant a huge and ferocious cat. Here was such an animal.

After photographing the kill, Zimmerman handed the camera to Afu with orders to take it down to the cabin and stow it with the rest of the field equipment. Afu was the Malay boy he had hired at Batavia to accompany him to Auckland.

It was then that the first explosion came.

What hit the *Straits Queen* or what the *Straits Queen* hit Zimmerman never knew. It might have been the boilers. It might have been floating mines, since the Germans, it was rumored, had become active throughout the East Indies. Whatever it was, made no difference in the result.

Zimmerman saw Vonnort, master of the *Queen,* run to the radio room amidships. He followed. The operator clicked out an SOS. Zimmerman knew then that this was serious. He never again laid eyes on Vonnort nor upon any member of the crew. As he started below to collect what he could of his equipment the second explosion came.

A roaring flash demolished the stern third of the little packet and at the moment of its occurrence only Zimmerman and Afu were on the bow—the only men, that is. The tiger was there but the tiger was forgotten. And small wonder.

The camera flew out of Afu's hand. From aft, with other debris, they saw bits of bodies float upward into the sunlit air and they heard screams. Then a series of clattering splashes. The entire scene was no more than a kaleidoscopic impression materializing and vanishing, horrible but somehow impersonally so. The *Straits Queen,* loaded with scrap-iron far over her Plimsoll, went down like a plummet.

Zimmerman, stunned, recovered a measure of consciousness in the water. He was hanging to a splintered door torn from a lazaret. The door, hardly more than a large shingle, was almost submerged by the weight of his arms but it was enough to keep his head above water.

At first his surroundings were vague. There was the blue of the Arafura Sea and off to the north a small island. He was not at all certain he could reach the island. Concussion or shock had weakened him. The sun beat down fiercely.

He began a slow stroking with his legs, heading for the island. He proceeded a few yards toward that goal when he felt the lazaret door begin to sink. He thought the thing had become waterlogged and that he'd have to swim unaided. Quite coolly, he doubted his ability to do so.

THEN he saw what had caused the sinking. Afu's dark head bobbed into view at the farther edge of the door. Water streamed from Afu's hair and the water was pink. Afu had a bad cut on top of his skull. He looked very weak.

Zimmerman spoke. Afu blinked and tried to smile.

Zimmerman kept paddling with his legs. The door barely moved. It was now under water and sinking slowly. Afu apparently could offer no assistance.

Zimmerman gazed about in an effort to locate another bit of wreckage since it was at once clear that the door could support one but not two.

He saw nothing but the crested tops of waves and, over to the right, a shark's fin cleaving the water. Foam laved his face.

For another moment he weighed the matter. Then he gave the door a sudden jerk and pulled it from Afu's in-

effectual grasp. It bobbed to the surface, once more buoyant, or sufficiently so. Zimmerman turned his back on the Malay boy and began to paddle.

Afu made no sound.

It wasn't too far to the island and as he swam Zimmerman felt some of his strength coming back. He did not become panicky. The fact that there were sharks about gave him a second or two of concern, but reaching the sand settled that and he forgot it. After five minutes of rest and wiping brine from his smarting eyes, he felt all right.

His first active regret was for the loss of the tiger.

As for Afu, he felt no remorse. His action in pushing the Malay boy from the raft had not been bitter nor cowardly. It had been the inevitable result of scientifically reasoned necessity. Nor had the reasoning been hurried. It was part and parcel of Zimmerman's philosophy. The philosophy was founded upon immutable law. Under that law the decrepit, the weak, the aged, the unadaptable should be allowed to perish, would perish. Zimmerman had studied the jungle and he knew. Merely because it was jungle law did not lessen its validity. Afu had been caught in its coils.

Zimmerman surveyed his surroundings. His smooth mind fell at once into the groove of its accustomed imperturbable efficiency. It made no acknowledgment of the word fear. It never had. Fear, Zimmerman believed, was only lack of knowledge. He had knowledge, particularly of this sort of thing that faced him. He was a specialist in the study of nature in the raw, famous for so being.

His present situation, which might have seemed appallingly mysterious to an ordinary man, held no secrets from him.

Here he was upon a desert island, a horseshoe shaped coral atoll not much larger than a city block, containing by way of vegetation exactly five stunted coconut trees, one dead and one dying, a wilted copse of wild pandanus and a species of grass. On only one of the coconut trees was a cluster of nuts.

The pandanus was near the center of the island, farthest from salt spray. The trees were at the windward end, the seed nuts from which they had sprung having been beached there by tradewind induced currents after they had fallen from a trading schooner or floated to sea from distant islands. The seed of the pandanus and grass had been carried here adhering to the feathers or feet of birds.

Thus Zimmerman's knowlege dissipated mystery after one long and sweeping glance.

Ascending the short slope from the water's edge he came to the highest point, from whence all the island could be seen. Without moving from this spot he discerned the existence of one more fact.

HE WOULD not be forced to depend for water upon coconut milk. For here was water —that darkish area there on the lee side of the pandanus growth. It would be rainwater, and potable.

He walked to it, knelt, scooped a palmful and tasted. It was rainwater, slightly brackish but drinkable.

He came back to the beach. He saw nothing in the least remarkable or propitious about his discoveries. Only a stupid person would have expected anything else.

Moreover, there would be clams and mussels here for the digging. From pandanus and coconut fibers he could weave makeshift nets and with the nets catch coral-fish. Pandanus roots would supply salad.

Zimmerman put a hand into the pocket of his duck trousers and brought out the water-tight match case he always carried. It was nearly full. He'd start a fire as soon as the sun sank lower. A fire on the highest pinnacle of the land, kept burning through the night, would bring help. He was positive on that point, too. There was absolutely nothing to fear, even had he thought of fear.

He sat upon the sand. He wasn't hungry. He'd eaten a hearty breakfast only an hour before the sinking of the *Straits Queen*. He flexed his muscles luxuriously and smiled. The smile was

one of satisfaction, not mirth, for Zimmerman was not a humorous man. He was thinking of what a classic anecdote this experience would grow into, once it was related.

A castaway on a desert island. There had been endless fiction stories upon that theme but now he could tell one that was true. It would fit in well with those other legends of Zimmerman, big game hunter, museum collector, writer of books on far places.

There was Dorrance for instance. Dorrance was zoological curator for the museum which had purchased the big tiger. Dorrance was no more than a bookkeeper for science but he had a proper regard for heroism. He could imagine himself telling this to Dorrance.

"Alone on a desert island. It's something like death. One hears of it but one can never imagine it happening to oneself."

Dorrance would urge him to tell it, this new yarn brought back from the strange regions that Dorrance himself had never visited. Afterward, the museum board would hear it, too. He would tell it modestly. He knew how to imply menace without false dramatics.

"A silly episode, gentlemen, really. A happenstance without rhyme or reason. Left Batavia on the *Straits Queen* with the Bengal's cage lashed to the foredeck in a shady place. It wasn't the stormy season. Everything pointed to a dull and uneventful voyage. We'd be in Auckland in four days, transshipped and homeward bound."

Naturally, the board would inquire about the tiger. The tiger had cost the museum seven thousand dollars, what with the expense of his capture by the native beaters and the cost of bringing him home. Inquiry might be made as to Zimmerman's reason for taking the little coasting packet *Straits Queen* when both he and the tiger could have booked passage on a liner to Yokohama and thence eastward.

Thinking of this, Zimmerman shrugged. He had saved about seven hundred dollars by taking the *Straits Queen* to Auckland. The saving had gone into his own pocket, and fairly so under the terms of his contract. The loss of this valuable tiger was no fault of his. The *Straits Queen* had changed her course.

HE WOULD explain it all very casually.

"Instead of four days it was to require ten. The war, gentlemen. There was supposed to be danger from floating mines. So the *Straits Queen* went shaking her way across the Arafura Sea, north of Australia, and not on her regular route from Batavia through the Sundra Passage. Then the irony of it! The explosions, the wreck. A hundred miles northwest of Timor. And there was my desert island."

"And the tiger?" (Someone would press the point.)

"He went down with the ship." Zimmerman's shrug could be the most unanswerable gesture imaginable. "As did everyone else aboard her. I was the sole survivor. A leaky tub, the *Straits Queen,* as I learned too late."

What else could possibly be said about the Bengal? Regrettable, but there it was. The museum was rich. There were other tigers, perhaps not so large but—Zimmerman shrugged again.

"But weren't you frightened, Mr. Zimmerman—on an island so forlorn as that?"

The board members wouldn't ask such a question, nor would Dorrance. They knew him too well to suggest such a thing as fear. Some young girl listening to one of his lectures would ask it. Sure to.

"Frightened?" His wide gray eyes would perhaps twinkle. He would reply in his studiously laconic basso which audiences of women found impressive. "There was really nothing to fear. The radio operator on the *Straits Queen* had sent out an SOS. Just one, but it was enough. So. Within a day or so there would be a rescue ship. All that was necessary was to maintain a fire at night and fly a shirt on a pole by day. The ship would see a signal."

"Oh, how thrilling!"

He could visualize the little tremor that would go over the girl's pretty figure as she gazed up at him. He could

see himself smile in gentle deprecation. Tigerman Zimmerman. That was the ridiculous name the newspapers had fastened on him. His publishers hadn't discouraged it. The name Zimmerman and jungle animals, especially tigers, were nicely linked in the public mind. He had brought back alive a dozen of the finest zoological specimens in captivity.

Zimmerman became conscious of hunger.

He walked along the edge of the surf until he saw the tiny suction holes produced by retreating clams. Over one such hole he dropped swiftly to his knees and dug energetically with his big hands. The clam was only a foot deep; it came forth easily.

That evening Zimmerman built a fire of the dry grass which he found about the roots of the green. He dragged the bole of the dead coconut tree to the flames and propped its end on stones just over them. Presently it caught and glowed cheerily. He roasted four large clams and ate them. They were tough but nourishing.

Just before he lay down to sleep he walked to the rainwater pond and drank. After the salt taste of the clams the faintly brackish water seemed entirely fresh. He quaffed of it deeply.

Returning to the beach he lay down on the dry, powdery sand and for some minutes gazed up at the full moon.

He felt no qualms, none whatever. His diet would be monotonous, no doubt; the hours without companionship would drag. Yet much of such discomfort could be overcome by a systematic plan of existence until help arrived. He would keep himself occupied weaving nets. He would lie in the sun and plan the outlines of his next book.

That night he slept like a child. He awoke to comfortable warmth. The sun was two hours high. Not for another hour would the heat become noticeable. Within that time he would have prepared himself for the day's work. First eat, then bathe, then drink, then gather the necessary bundle of pandanus plants for the making of nets, then a shady seat beneath a coconut tree. Tonight he would dine on fish.

He leaped to his feet. Thought of the coconut trees reminded him that he should investigate the one which was dying. Perhaps he would need it for firewood in case the search for the wreck of the *Straits Queen* was delayed in reaching this obscure area of the Arafura Sea.

He walked leisurely along the beach to the tiny point on which the trees reared from the sandy loam.

THUS it transpired that Zimman approached the rainwater pool from the east after satisfying himself that it would be an easy task to fell the dying coconut tree for additional fuel when it was needed. Thus he saw the pool that morning from behind the sparse copse of pandanus to the east instead of from the open space to the south. Thus he saw the tiger first.

He froze in his tracks. A train of analysis, not fear, entered his mind.

Somehow the cage which had held the tiger had broken open or had been broken by the frantic struggles of the beast. As the *Straits Queen* sank, the tiger, a good swimmer, had swum clear. Following a night of threshing about in the sea, clinging instinctively to fragments of wreckage, the tiger had reached shore. With daylight it had found the pool of fresh water.

Unmoving, Zimmerman watched the tiger lift his head and open his jaws in a yawn. The mouth tissues were light olive green in color, the tongue gray and only faintly tinged with pink. Zimmerman, with his sharp and expert eyes could even see the darker rings of decayed flesh which circled the bases of the long, yellowish teeth at the gum line—bits of meat adhering from the beast's last meal. There were similar rings of poisonous putrid matter around the bases of the dagger-like, retractile claws.

Zimmerman began to chart a plan of defense. Unless he moved he knew the tiger would not see him, for the eyesight of the beast was not good at separating motionless objects from their backgrounds. Moreover, he had nothing to fear in the matter of being scent-

ed. Although the wind was at that moment blowing from himself to the tiger, the man odor would remain undetected. Principally, cats depended upon hearing to guide them to prey.

The tiger lay down and began licking crusted salt from his forefeet. Zimmerman stooped; then on hands and knees, shielded by the pandanus, he crawled back along the path he had just traversed, toward the coconut trees. Reaching the trees he stood for some seconds behind the bole of the largest one. The shock of his surprise had now disappeared. He concentrated upon the rather terrible problem which confronted him.

The problem was manifold. First, he must remain unseen by the animal for at least another twenty-four hours, until help arrived, for if the tiger learned of his presence on the island his chances for survival became lessened. Second, he must eat and sleep during that period in order to maintain physical and mental efficiency.

The tiger was not ravenously hungry for he had swallowed a prodigious amount of fresh meat yesterday morning when he had devoured the pig. Not until another day had passed would his appetite return in painful force.

Nevertheless the beast would begin to hunt this very evening. Throughout the day it would seek shade, near the pool and beside the pandanus growth east of the pool. But as the sun sank it would follow the urge of age-old instinct and commence its nightly stalking. It would follow the most open part of the tiny island, probably the periphery of the beach, for that was the way of this animal and all its kind. The tiger, Zimmerman well knew, has small intelligence and is not easily adaptable to changes of environment.

Zimmerman climbed the coconut tree. This was not a measure of complete defense but a makeshift, to give him time to form a plan. He was careful to keep the trunk of the tree between himself and the pool and he moved deliberately.

Seated insecurely among the coconut palm's fronds the best he could achieve was partial support for his legs as he clung for balance with outstretched hands and arms. Yet from this vantage point some twelve feet above the soil he was at least partially hidden and he could see with fair clarity the form of his enemy.

The tiger was still lying belly-down, licking his paws.

For a minute or two Zimmerman considered an idea. If he could feed the tiger on clams and fish, which he might easily catch, he could insofar keep the sharp edge off the tiger's hunger and thus render the brute relatively unaggressive. Yet almost with the birth of the notion Zimmerman saw its weakness. The tiger would defeat it. Such an effort would require long hours of effort and this the tiger would not allow.

ZIMMERMAN became wholly immobile. The tiger had risen and was moving toward the tree. The great head, low between the huge shoulders, was perfectly steady. The shoulder blades pushed piston-like up and down beneath the velvet of the striped skin.

Just at the point where beach sand met the thin, dry growth of grass, the tiger stopped. He stared straight at the tree to which Zimmerman clung. Zimmerman's eyes, fastened unblinkingly through foliage, missed no minutest movement. Then the tiger's gaze shifted to the surf beating unceasingly upon the sands.

It was as Zimmerman had foreseen. Only sudden motion would attract the beast's attention.

The tiger turned at right angles and passed within twenty feet, heading toward the spot where Zimmerman had slept, gliding along in a flowing ribbon of motion, legs on each side moving in unison, undulant muscles rippling the skin, tail stiff in an easy, shallow U.

Zimmerman felt a cramp in his right leg.

As the tiger neared the far end of the island Zimmerman came down out of the tree. Now was his chance to drink—before the animal rounded the curve of the beach and started back.

Stooping, Zimmerman made his way to the pool and drank. Then he re-

turned to the tree. Again he stood behind it. Another notion came. If he could build a platform in the tree he could sleep on it in relative safety. Unless driven by frenzy tigers did not climb trees. The scientific limit of their tree-climbing was a clawing ascent of large trunks with branches low enough to be reached in a single bound.

But a platform! Of what could he construct such a platform? He dismissed the idea at once.

The hours of afternoon passed slowly. Zimmerman spent most of them in the tree. Toward evening the tiger began its questing, as Zimmerman had foreseen. Only when the brute was at the opposite end of the island could Zimmerman descend to stretch his muscles.

Once he made a foray to the sand a few yards away. He saw no holes, however, indicating the presence of clams. He recalled then that during the heat this species of crustacea sought coolness deeper in the sand or beneath the surf.

By evening, Zimmerman was ravenously hungry. So was the tiger.

The tiger's foraging for food was an indication of its mounting appetite and as the sun sank the animal's increasing frenzy became apparent. It was as if some vague notion of its predicament had penetrated into its consciousness. Instead of ten minutes, the circuit of the island was now being accomplished in seven.

Then, half an hour before sundown, the tiger saw Zimmerman.

The beast had cut across the island to lap at the water in the pool. Zimmerman was out of the tree, scanning the sands to the north to see if cooler air had brought the clams back. The tiger came too rapidly to the edge of the vegetation. Zimmerman's head, moving, was instantly seen.

Without stopping the tiger charged.

Zimmerman gained the foliage of the tallest coconut palm in one frantic and ignominious scramble. He heard the raucous snarls below him and he felt the tremor which ran through the tree under the impact of the mighty claws. The tiger, reared on hind legs, spat upward and dug into the solid bark of the tree with long, hooking blows of the barbed paws.

OUT of reach, Zimmerman watched. Tigers did not climb trees.

Nevertheless the tiger continued to claw at the trunk until it was splintered along three feet of its length. Then he dropped to all fours, tail swishing savagely, and backed away. He stood glaring up at Zimmerman. The slanting rays of the sun glinted in the yellow eyes. Zimmerman shifted position to ease tension. The tiger snarled hideously.

The sun sank lower. The tiger lay down. The coral sand was dusty and dry. The tiger began moving its heavy body back and forth and sidewise, scrooging a furrow beneath itself. Then suddenly it rolled over, wallowing in the flour-like sand. Next it reared on haunches and shook itself daintily.

Zimmerman became hopeful. Ticks such as infested all wild cats, might distract the beast. His hope grew and was fulfilled. The tiger, growling, went loping toward the pool of water. Craning watchfully, Zimmerman saw his enemy enter the pool and immerse up to the neck. Hunger, for the moment, had become secondary to another physical discomfort. Dust baths followed by immersions were the defenses of the jungle animals against ticks.

Zimmerman slid slowly down from the tree top. His arms and legs were painfully cramped and his thirst was mounting. He did not, however, allow apprehension to fill his mind.

He stood behind the tree, with hands resting loosely against it. He could just peer over the fringe of grass and see the pool. The tiger was still in the water, only its head showing. Zimmerman had no difficulty discerning the half open mouth, the long yellow teeth and lolling tongue.

He considered. There was no sure method but the scientific one of judging the memory of an individual tiger. He tested his random hope that this one had forgotten him by moving away from the tree.

He saw the tiger's head lift instantly from the surface of the water, the huge shoulders gleaming as the water dripped from the sleek hide. He stopped and the tiger did likewise. He returned to the tree.

He did not allow his mind to dwell on his thirst. Instead, he concentrated, making a recapitulation of his position, guarding against wishful thinking and considering only facts.

It had now been a matter of about thirty hours since the wireless message had gone forth from the sinking *Straits Queen*. From Surabaya, Java, down through the Java Sea, into the Banda and thence eastward to the Arafura was a distance of approximately six hundred miles. Steaming at about fifteen knots an hour, one of the Dutch destroyers based at Surabaya could reach the vicinity of this island within forty to forty-five hours, allowing for delays in working through island channels in darkness.

The rescue ship, then, should arrive by tomorrow noon.

There was a possibility that a vessel nearer than Surabaya had picked up the message. Zimmerman, however, discounted this and allowed himself no hope as to such a likelihood. Most of the inter-island traffic was handled by small packets like the *Straits Queen* and by far the greater number of these were unequipped with radio.

His problem had now been reduced to mathematical clarity.

He must elude the tiger tonight and until noon tomorrow. He must spend these hours, or most of them, in this thinly foliaged tree which was his sole refuge. Sleep would be impossible. There was no sure method of securing himself amid these fragile fronds so that he would not fall to the ground during the unconscious movements of slumber.

HE HAD slept soundly last night. Therefore he foresaw no difficulty in keeping awake from now until noon tomorrow even in the uncomfortable postures to which the coconut tree would limit him. In fact, his very discomfort would be an aid to wakefulness.

As he considered each eventuality thus called up and scrutinized by his logical mind, Zimmerman kept his eyes on the fringe of grass slightly higher than the sand which lay between himself and the pool. When he saw the suddenly lifted head of the man-eater, he was fully prepared. Even as the beast gathered itself to charge, Zimmerman shinnied up the tree.

Once more the tiger's rush brought him upright at the trunk. There was something almost ludicrous in the single-minded automaticity of the great brute's actions. He repeated the same motions practiced before, just as they had been practiced by his ancestors for generations. As they affected Zimmerman they were as futile as ever.

"Psst!" hissed Zimmerman experimentally and the tiger snarled, striking uselessly at one of Zimmerman's feet.

Zimmerman began talking, deriving a certain enjoyment from his own scientific certainty and his own coolness. The Tiger was like a bull in an arena. His instinctive movements could be foreseen and charted. This *would* make a tale. Zimmerman could see Dorrance's round face and wide eyes as Dorrance listened.

"Treed, yes, like a possum by the hounds. I tell you it was laughable. There was the brute below me going through all its superficial tricks of attack but unable to reach high enough. Like something on a string, you know, something with a terrible but aimless blindness. If the tiger had had the least sense he could have leaped up and got me. I've seen tigers jump higher than that and farther than that. But that one didn't. He was relying on instinct and his instinct never told him how to rush that tree and claw me to the ground with a blow. It told him only to wait."

Zimmerman looked down. The tiger was waiting and very patiently. Lying again on his haunches with the yellow eyes fixed upward in unflickering intensity, with the gray-green mouth half open, he appeared as if he, too, were planning.

"Have you ever noticed, Dorrance? Cats really are among the dumbest creatures alive, yet they give an impression of great wisdom. As they contemplate you, you imagine that all sorts of sly and

subtle thoughts are going through their brains. It appears as if they were reading you. No wonder cats were objects of superstititous dread among inferior races. The Malays, for instance."

No, the tiger did not for one instant fool Zimmerman. At the moment, he knew, its mind was intent upon him merely because he was in sight and because the tree itself moved slightly under his weight.

He was not surprised when the tiger suddenly arose and glided gracefully down the beach. It was now nearly dusk. The tiger was answering the hunting call, though there was nothing to hunt. Zimmerman fell to wondering how soon the beast would realize there was nothing edible upon the island except the flesh of a human being.

That night held all that Zimmerman had ever known of horror. His thirst grew to become torture, aggravated as it was by the salty food he had eaten. Hunger sent pangs of pain through his body. The postures enforced by the flimsiness of his resting place sent darting cramps along his muscles.

WITH the rising of the moon the tiger began an even more concerted patrol of the island, keeping as its instincts dictated to the open path at the fringe of the grass. Once or twice it slowed hesitantly as it approached the tree, but did not look up. Apparently a vague recollection was bestirring the brain of the beast, a brain rendered febrile by the effect of this strange environment as well as the steadily mounting sensations of an ungratified carnivorous appetite.

Once, just before the moon set, Zimmerman watched his enemy cross the island diagonally and drink at the pool. The location of the water-hole, at least, had become fixed in the tiger's mind. It would remain so. No other animal possessed so keen a sense of orientation. Cats remembered places with infallible accuracy.

During the hour before dawn Zimmerman must have slept momentarily. When he realized the fact he was unnerved. Looking down at the end of a blank interval he saw the tiger at the foot of the tree. He did not recall having seen the beast approach.

The tiger sat staring at him, the long tongue curling suggestively around the lips, the eyes now dark brown in the early light.

Zimmerman shifted position and rather desperately scanned the sea in all directions. Only the slate-blue water of dawn met his gaze. Nothing else moved. His eyes re-focused nearer. Suppose, he thought, I should go into the water? Offshore a few yards I might find clams. I could eat.

Would the tiger follow him? It might.

He himself had verified instances of tigers swimming great distances. They did not fear water as some cats were supposed to fear it. Besides, this tiger had proven the fact again by swimming in from the wreck. That—

With a hideous snarl the big cat leapt to all four feet, legs braced wide apart, tail whipping like a long, striped snake. Zimmerman stared. For the first time a

feeling of near panic came over him. One of his legs had slipped off the palm frond which supported it. His foot dangled in midair. The slight movement had aroused the tiger.

But Zimmerman himself had not noticed the dangling foot.

He pulled his leg up sharply. It was cramped. He rubbed it. For the first time uncertainty came to him. All his plans, all his knowledge — what would they avail against the single-minded instinct of this brute if help did not come? He could scheme; he could dream of easy circumvention through use of reason and all would come to naught with a single leaping rush of the tiger.

He knew well how a tiger charged. Once, on a hunt, he had witnessed an attack upon a native beater. The animal had not sprung. It had charged, its hind feet never leaving contact with the ground. Its fangs set themselves deep in the native's neck. At the same moment the forefeet pushed the body in a powerful twist.

The victim's head was literally turned upon his shoulders so that it faced backwards, the spinal cord crushed by that single powerful turnabout. The luckless bush beater was dead before he fell.

An hour passed, then two. The tiger remained at the tree.

By noon Zimmerman began consciously to fight sleep. Phrases of what he would say to Dorrance suggested themselves to him. They provided a measure of relief from a feeling growing inside him, a feeling he had never known before.

"The rescue ship was slightly overdue. It occurred to me that perhaps the SOS hadn't been received. Perhaps it had never been sent. Suppose the explosion had already wrecked the sending apparatus?"

"Gracious!" he could hear Dorrance exclaim. "And the tiger right below you!"

"He wasn't moving. That was the devilish part of it. It appeared as if he'd finally realized I was his only chance for food. It had taken him a long time. Anyway, I had to fight off sleep. Once I lost consciousness I'd fall out of the tree."

He would, too. He couldn't lash himself to these fronds. They had no strength. Even awake it wasn't easy to maintain his balance without breaking them. . . .

In the heat of the mounting sun Zimmerman scanned the horizon. A cry broke from his lips and his bloodshot eyes blinked rapidly. Off to the east just over the line of water and sky, was a ship. He could see the gray smudge of smoke. Better still, he could see more smoke hovering in a long, gossamer canopy. The ship was moving. An island packet, probably, like the *Straits Queen.*

Zimmerman gave a shout.

The tiger snarled, watching him.

IT WAS a packet and it was about twenty miles away. It was the *Singapore Star* bound for Manila with a cargo of cement. It was slightly larger than the *Straits Queen,* manned by a crew mostly white. Its skipper, proud of his ship, stood on the bridge. He hated this treacherous area of the Arafura Sea, yet an SOS was just that.

The bosun was signaling from the bow. The skipper transmitted the signals to the quartermaster at the wheel.

The bosun shouted. "'S what 'tis, Cap'n. A man, b' God. 'E's 'angin' on to somethin' looks like a big basket. Two points t' stabbord. There!"

The skipper bawled an order and, amidships, men swung out davits to starboard.

"Lower away! Pick 'im up!"

Five minutes later Afu was lying on a shady part of the deck, gasping. The bosun was palming water and allowing the water to drip down Afu's throat.

The skipper bent down. "*Straits Queen?*" he asked tentatively.

Afu nodded.

"How far's th' rest of 'em?"

Afu's sun-blistered eyelids lifted and he regarded the skipper vaguely. The captain knelt to catch the low whisper.

"Ship blow up!" Afu gasped. "All gone."

"Gone, eh? How about this hunter, Zimmerman? Had a tiger." The master of the *Singapore Star* spoke impatiently. Already, he was overdue in Manila. Besides, he had been all but certain there would be no salvage in this. His sole hope then was a reward from this rich hunter,

Zimmerman. "You see hunter fella after ship blow up?"

"I see. Him on board. I touch board. Board sink. Him sink too."

The skipper called his bosun. "You know his lingo. Find out!"

The bosun questioned Afu. In a long, rattling gasp, Afu replied. The bosun lifted his eyebrows at the captain. " 'E says this hunter fella drowned. 'E says that's th' tiger's cage he floated on. 'E says he opened th' cage an' let th' tiger out an' then th' cage was a raft. 'Twas a cage, right enough, that he was on, Cap'n. Bamboo. Floats like cork."

The skipper called his radio operator. "Report that we've got one survivor. Th' rest are lost. We can't do more." He stared down momentarily at Afu. He wasn't surprised. These Malays spent half their life in the water. Water was their natural environment.

He gave an order and the *Singapore Star* swung on her keel and pointed northwestward.

Twenty miles to the east Zimmerman watched the smoke fade away. He looked down from the tree. His eyes were heavy. A queer, fatigued confusion filled his mind.

He spoke to Dorrance in silent words. "Ridiculous, really. There I was, the most intelligent of them all, the best, the most adaptable, the fittest. Yet it looked as if the tiger would win, would survive at least longer than I. Had I been wrong all these years? Was there, after all, something subtly fallacious about this dogma of the survival of the fittest? I asked myself—"

He did not ask. He stiffened, concentrating on the fight against sleep. He continued to concentrate.

Toward sundown he dozed. Losing his balance he clutched at a palm frond to save himself. That time he did.

But when the late moon came up he saw the tiger sitting on its haunches, waiting. By then sleep had begun to seem to Zimmerman the most valuable thing in the world.

Its value kept increasing.

THE PEACEFUL ADMIRAL JONES

By

LOUIS C. GOLDSMITH

THAT old river steamer looked good to me. In fact she looked like fifteen thousand U. S. dollars, if I could get her down near Kowloon and loaded with the guns, and then up past the two Japanese destroyers at the mouth of the river. That would be my profit.

"It is the Admiral's boat," Chung told me. Chung was acting as go-between agent in this deal with the Chinese river people. "He is trying to sell it but would not charter it for your purpose. He is a man of peace."

The Admiral. For some reason that name stirred my memory. Chung and I were standing on the Bund sidewalk, looking out across the boat-strewn surface of the Pearl River. The steamer was moored downstream, not far from the long line of old Chinese junks.

Then a terrible thing happened. Lee Wing's knife stabbed upward, slashing the officer's throat.

Those junks had been tied there as long as I could remember and I've been working in and out of China for the last ten years. They'll probably still be out there long after Japan is whittled down to her proper size. China is a country slow to change.

As so often happens when the mind is allowed to wander, memory stepped up with the information desired. I was sitting out on deck on one of the Kowloon-Canton riverboats that the English used to operate. McGregor, whose regular business was capturing and training elephants for teakwood logging in Indo-China, was having a lukewarm Scotch-soda with me when this old river steamer passed. Yes, this same old boat that Chung and I were looking at now.

A tall, gaunt figure had stood on the hurricane deck of the old hulk, hands clasped behind his back, feet wide spread. As he came opposite us he raised his hand in signal. The huge Chinese flag on his mast was dipped. To my astonishment a deckhand on our boat dipped the Union Jack in response.

"Since when," I asked McGregor, "have riverboats taken to saluting each other like men-of-war?"

There was an absurdity in this that McGregor acknowledged with a small smile. "Everybody salutes The Admiral's boat," he said. "They'd count it their own loss if they didn't get to."

"The Admiral?" I questioned. "Admiral of what?"

McGregor shrugged. "He's an Amer-

ican missionary. Works up and down and in and out of the Pearl River backwaters, among the river people. Quite a character, I assure you. Name's John Paul Jones." He swirled his whiskey glass to discourage a persistent fly. He looked up suddenly. "Come to think of it," he said, "that was the name of some famous English admiral."

"It *was not,*" I told him with considerable pride. "John Paul Jones was the first man to hoist an American flag on an American ship. He was a fightin' man from way back."

"Can't be the same chap, then," McGregor had commented dryly. "This one's a 'reverent,' a man of peace."

"WHERE'LL I find the man you call 'Admiral'?" I asked Chung. I was already sizing up this riverboat of his. She was a side-wheeler with two high funnels abreast, that stamped her as an old woodburner. The pole that had carried the big Chinese flag stood bare now, a white finger pointing skyward.

"Be careful, my friend," Chung warned. "To show interest in anything in China is dangerous now."

A big, step-bottomed powerboat came swirling up to the landing, its stern wave capsizing a small river *sampan,* throwing its squealing occupants into the muddy water. A petty officer of the Imperial Navy stepped out, followed by two marines who dragged a protesting Chinese between them. The officer stopped when he saw me, a question on his scowling face. What right did a white man have off of Shamin, the little two-by-four international island?

I bowed and Chung bowed, both of us very humble. That's part of the new order that is being established in the Orient.

After a moment's indecision they passed on. Chung was laughing in his throat. "It is a new worry we have given them," he said. "They are wild with it, questioning everyone they think might know. Did France sell to us the five destroyers that were reported to be in the vicinity of Rangoon?"

"That's absurd," I scoffed.

"My friend," Chung replied, "all things are possible in a nightmare. Isn't that what your people call a bad dream? Our enemies are having bad dreams, my friend. And now, if you insist, I will take you to the Admiral. Though it will do you no good," he warned. "The Admiral is a man of peace."

We stopped in at the Custom's building first. That is the way you find people in Canton nowadays. Either holed up on Shamin island or drifting around like ghosts through the familiar grooves of past industry. We found old Colonel Pennington there, arguing about clearances on a shipment of soy. You got the impression that he didn't care much one way or the other whether the shipment went through. There'd be no profit in it for him.

"Jones?" he repeated my question. "The old missionary chap?" Instinctively he glanced about for eavesdroppers. "Yes, Holmes, he's been to see me. About selling that steamboat of his." He made a wry face. "I'd jolly well like to get rid of our own boats."

"What kind of shape's it in?" I wanted to know.

"Condition? Splendid, I understand. She's copper-sheathed. The river people have been keeping it in repair for him. Good shipwrights, some of them, when they're not too busy with piratmg."

"Did he name a price?"

The gray, English eyes were troubled. "Five thousand dollars. Gold, mind you. The poor old chap needs it bad enough, but . . ."

He let the sentence trail off into regretful silence. There was no business in Canton now. No business except for the Japanese and little enough of that. Yet Canton used to be the trade port for all south China. It had once been called the treasure house of the world.

"Holmes," Pennington said abruptly, "that old man needs a friend. Y'see he bought that steamer himself, years ago, with money he inherited. Now he thinks he can sell it. The Japanese won't stand for that. Not unless he sells it to them, for some of their worthless sino-yen money."

We gradually picked up the story as

we went from place to place. Chung had a trusted friend in the China Travel Service. Not that there really is such a thing any longer in China. But the Cantonese always have to be busy, even though they must delude themselves into thinking they are doing something useful.

"The Japanese will take his face," this man warned. "It is better that he sells to them."

Yes, we learned that the old man was almost penniless. And the Japanese knew that he was trying to sell his boat to outsiders. They would soon start putting pressure on him. The English woman they had stripped naked in Tientsin is a shining example of the clever ways they have of 'taking face.'

WE SPENT the entire afternoon on his track. The old man had covered a lot of ground. And he was afoot, while we used rickshaws. We found his hotel, a dirty native place on Wai San Lo. He wasn't there but we saw his room, a filthy little cell with a mat bed. His only possession seemed to be an old leather suitcase and a huge dog-eared Bible almost as large as the suitcase.

Undoubtedly this last was a family Bible. My curiosity was fired by a sudden thought. Was it possible that the Admiral could really be a descendant of the famous Admiral John Paul Jones? If so there was no mention of it among the long lists of births and deaths written in the Bible. The last entry there recorded the death of: *Esther, my beloved wife, died this day, June 3, 1935, of the infection. Peace. . . .* The entry had been left unfinished. Perhaps the old man had rebelled against that in his bitter grief.

I tried to argue myself into believing that Jones would be all right. After all, he was an American citizen and the Japanese had to treat us softly or they might lose out on such vital things as scrap iron, airplanes and engines to copy, and high test gasoline.

But the thing was he'd been in China thirty years or more, practically living with these river people, moving from boat village to boat village in his steamer. It might not occur to him to appeal to our consul.

The only bright side to the picture was that he seemed to be known to the Chinese, not as the Admiral but as 'the man of peace.' After all, the Japs wouldn't be too rough with a meek old beggar like that.

Near dark Chung and I gave up the search and I went to the telegraph office and sent the usual code message to be held for call at my hotel in Kowloon. The skipper would stop by for it and know that I hadn't yet made the arrangements. He had his little tramp freighter anchored in Deep Bay, ostensibly getting a rust-chipping job and paint by coolie labor. It was a common enough thing to do and the guns and ammunition were well concealed under dressed cedar from Astoria. But he couldn't stall around there much longer.

It was almost dark when I left the telegraph office. I was startled when a lean-faced, broadshouldered Chinese touched my arm. "I speak you, Holmes," he said. It was a command, not a request.

"Use Cantonese," I told him, glancing around the almost deserted street. "I understand that fairly well."

Even before his showing difficulty with the Cantonese dialect, I took him to be a riverman. He was too cussed proud in his bearing to be of the land people.

The Pearl River people are almost a race apart from the Cantonese. It is seldom that they leave their boats. Fiercely proud of their river heritage, they never intermarry with other Chinese. One of them might be born and live and die without venturing a mile from the water.

"You have look for *Hái gün dijung dziang?*" he stated, rather than asked.

I nodded. Even then I noted that Jones, though he might be known as 'the man of peace' by town Chinese, was called 'Admiral' by the riverman.

"What you want him?"

"Look here," I said, in Cantonese, "what I want of Doctor Jones is my own business. I don't know you."

His answer to this came without hesi-

tation. "I am Lee Wing, bannerman of Chu Kiang people."

Say, did that bring me up with all sails fluttering! This tough lad used to be infamous as a pirate chief. Now he was headman of the Pearl River guerillas, fighting for the Kuomintang government, the Central Chinese government. The enemy would have given a pretty price for him. Strange thing was that indirectly my rifles and machine guns and ammunition were being purchased for his banner.

I didn't beat around the bush now. "I'm looking for your admiral, to charter his steamboat. I am a friend. You tell him."

He nodded at this and turned and swaggered down Ping Lo as though he owned the street.

A short, ugly little man in rusty black pajamas fell into place behind him. It was amusing the way he tried to match length of stride with him.

A half dozen other men filtered out of the shadows, forming up a rear guard. They'd been all around me as we talked and I hadn't known it!

THE next morning I got a false lead on a boat that might serve my purpose. It was across Honam Island. I couldn't go openly about this business so it was near sundown before I got back, the whole day wasted.

I was sure that Lee Wing would know where I was staying and tell John Paul Jones to wait for me on Shamin Island if he was interested in chartering his steamer. As a matter of fact he did wait for me and, without knowing it, I stood near him by the Japanese sentry at the French bridge.

I saw this tall man facing the Japanese inspection, on his way off the short bridge spanning the artificial canal. But it didn't occur to me at first that he might be John Paul Jones. He was too young-looking, too straight and vigorous in his bearing. I knew, from that Bible, that Jones was past sixty and I had conceived him as a stoop-shouldered old fellow with a white beard, probably.

As I stood there he stepped up to the sentry, removed his pith helmet and bowed deeply. He was clad in a shiny, ill-fitting blue serge suit; the kind that are donated for missionary barrels, after fathers have worn them to shreds. I could see the agitation on his lined face. He extended a thin, red-bound book, his United States passport.

An officer who had been standing near the bridge rail, stepped over, jerked the passport from the sentry's hand. The officer wore metal-rimmed glasses, thick lenses giving his eyes a bulging, fishlike appearance.

I sensed instantly that there was going to be trouble. I could see it in those bulbous eyes of the Japanese.

A moment before there had been only a few Chinese loitering about the place. Their number was increasing. Not only that but the majority of them were river people. It's easy enough to spot their breed.

"Your name?" the officer snapped,

He extended a thin, red-bound book, his United States passport.

his head slanted back to look up at the tall white man.

I waited tensely, certain now what the name would be. The mass of Chinese was pushing me nearer him. There were eight or ten soldiers there, but they made no effort to disperse the crowd. It was their purpose to have the Chinese witness this and the more there, the better.

"Jones," the man said. "Er . . . John Paul Jones, American missionary." His voice was very meek, his attitude humble. "You will find my military pass in the book, please."

I braced my shoulders against the shoving weight of the Chinese. After all there wasn't going to be any trouble here. This Jones was a man of peace, as they said. I had a vague feeling of disappointment in his groveling tone.

At a sharp command from the officer another soldier stepped over, began a systematic search of the old man's clothes.

"Ah! Fountain pen," the officer said, a greedy note in his voice, as the soldier handed him a black cylinder.

"No," Jones corrected. "Thermometer. For sick people."

"I see," The voice was severe. "But in passport, occupation say missionary."

It was evident that the officer was trying to cook up some reason for dragging Jones off to the *yamen* for a real heckling. "Is very irregular. Occupation say missionary."

Jones' voice was patient. "I do my poor best to care for the physical as well as the spiritual sickness of my flock."

I was only a few feet from them now, hemmed in on all sides by the curious Chinese. My eyes moved over the crowd. They were almost all of them river poeple. I felt anger growing in me. This poor old chap had given them the best part of his life; thirty years or more of it. Now they stood about like cattle, watching his shame.

"Look here," I said, knowing that I was a fool to butt in, "this man is just what he says he is. An American missionary. I'm a friend of his. He came onto the island to see me."

The officer looked at me, scowling. Having another white man there as a witness was complicating things. But apparently he had orders to give Jones the works.

"Remove coat," he snapped. "Remove shirt."

Jones removed his coat. His shirt was dripping with perspiration. The flimsy material clung to his body. He tore it under one arm in his nervous haste to comply with the command.

He tugged at the shirtsleeve, ripping it completely away from the rest of the garment. There was jeering laughter from the soldiers.

THE Chinese stood silently; watching, waiting. And then I saw Lee Wing, the pirate. Beside him was the ugly little man I had seen last night. Their faces were blank of expression.

"Your belt," the officer snapped.

It was getting near dark by this time. But I could see the perspiration trickling from Jones' face. His fingers moved slowly, unbuckling the waist belt.

The officer reached out unexpectedly, gave a quick jerk at the trousers. The Chinese covered their mouths with their hands, a gesture they have, that can mean many things. The trousers fell in a wrinkled heap about his shoe tops. His bare shanks were unbelievably thin.

The soldier had taken his coat and was searching it again. They had to carry out this pretense of a search.

The coat was dropped contemptuously in the filthy street. The officer reluctantly turned to stamp the military pass. Jones got his trousers up, tucked the shirt tail in and put his coat on without buttoning the shirt. His ordeal was over. And I could see that it had been a real ordeal for him. He might be a man of peace but there was still a lot of pride there.

His face looked greasy with sweat, in the dim light. He took the handkerchief from his outside breast pocket to wipe his forehead.

The officer had his back to him. But it was quite easily heard; the tiny, clinking sound of a jade piece as it struck the cobbled street.

"So!" The officer had turned, eyeing the round chip of rock. "You smuggle valuable jade from the foreign island."

Jones' voice was thin and quavering, the voice of an old man who was afraid. "No, Lieutenant . . . Your Excellency . . . it is just a gift from one of my people. A very inferior piece of jade, Your Excellency. I don't even recall putting it there in the handkerchief."

"You must come to the military *yamen*, for questioning," the officer decided, triumphantly. "You have lied to me." He motioned to the soldiers.

Two of them stepped forward, guns at trail arms, the bayonets making sharp, silhouetted points in the dusk.

A loud screech cut the air. Its abruptness had a blood-curdling, numbing effect.

"*Ah-ee! Ah-ee!* He murders! This big one will kill me!"

Pandemonium broke loose among the Chinese. The ugly little man shoved past me, crying out at the top of his lusty voice, pushing toward the soldiers, trying to dodge the wicked gleam of a knife in the hands of Lee Wing.

Two of the rivermen had picked the missionary up bodily. Others formed a wedge to clear a way for them.

I saw the men dodge past, following them. Then a terrible thing happened. Lee Wing's knife stabbed upward, slashing the officer's throat, catching for an instant under his chin bone, lifting him off his feet and backwards.

There were other knives out. It seemed to me as though the whole mob was armed with them.

One soldier brought his gun up. It was caught and turned. His mouth made a wide, black cavity in his face as the bayonet plunged into his own chest.

I struggled desperately against the arms that were circling me, trying to drag me away. Pain sent lights flashing through my head. I could feel my knees give even before full unconsciousness came on me.

I WOKE up with the sour, burning taste of *samshu* in my mouth. There was a small rush light on the floor. I recognized the ugly-faced one who kept pushing the bowl of rice brandy toward me. "*Dziu . . . liang-shàn,*" he insisted.

"Yes, it's good," I admitted, in Cantonese. "If you like it. But what happened?"

He giggled delightedly that I could speak Chinese. "You are friend for Admiral. So we bring you, too."

"Bring me where? Where are we now?"

"Bring you to *Esther,*" he said. He started talking fast then and I didn't savvy his dialect well enough to follow. But I could understand the elaborate pantomime.

There was the dark river, crowded with *sampans* of the river people, playing tag with the power boats of the invader. And during this confusion we had been spirited away. But where were we?

"*Esther,*" he said, impatient with my stupidity. He repeated it in a louder voice.

"Quiet, Wong," Jones cautioned, entering the room. "How do you feel, Brother Holmes?" he asked me. The dim, flickering light made him huge in the tiny space.

"I'd feel a lot better," I confessed, "if I knew where I was and what happened and why."

His voice was mildly reproachful. "My river friends will never learn that violence is an instrument of Satan. But they mean well. And they took you with me, thinking you were a friend and in danger. You are on my boat now, on the *Esther*, floating down the river."

I sat up and bumped my head and knew from that that I was in a ship's bunk. "Holy Patrick," I said, "that does tear it. They'll raise thunder when they catch us."

"They won't suspect that the steamer is gone until morning. My friends led them astray, up-river. Besides," the old man added, "this is my boat and I have done them no evil. Nor has any of my crew."

"How about this man here? And Lee Wing?"

He shook his head. "If you are speaking of that pirate, he is not on the boat. He is an evil man; a man of violence.

Wong is a good Christian, one of my first converts."

I didn't answer this. Wong was pulling the wool over the old man's eyes. He might not be one of Lee Wing's pirates but he'd certainly helped him with a fancy bit of killing.

"What do you plan doing?" I asked.

"We will stop at the lower end of Honam Island, where the river people have wood stored for my boilers. Then we will go on to Hong Kong."

He made it sound very simple.

"What about the two destroyers anchored at the river-mouth? I asked.

"But this is the *Esther*," he said, speaking the boat's name almost reverently. "It is a peaceful ship and we have done no wrong."

I was getting fed up on this talk of peace and right and wrong. There wasn't any such thing in all China. "They'll blast you out of the water," I told him. "They are jittery as the devil. The Chinese have spread a rumor that they've purchased five destroyers from the Vichy government of France."

"Five warboats for the Chinese?" he repeated. Despite his talk of peace there was an undertone of pleased excitement in his question. "I have heard that same rumor!"

I understood then that he had been so long away from his kind that he'd lost perspective. He could believe that silly story of the destroyers. But for that matter the invaders seemed to take some stock in it themselves. I suppose after putting out good money for a swarm of Chinese spies they had to believe them to a certain extent to realize on their investment.

"Can't we go on deck?" I asked. "Right now my head aches too much for any use. And somebody's got to be doing some thinking around here or we'll all be sunk."

HE GUIDED me aft, up onto the hurricane deck. Ahead of us was the texas, that we'd just left and forward of that, the wheel house. Same arrangement, you'll notice, as on any Mississippi steamboat.

There was no moon, but it was a clear night and I immediately spotted the Chinese flag. "The first thing I'd do," I said, "is haul that down, tie a rock to it and over the side."

"Strike my colors!" he exclaimed.

I looked at him. Here was a funny combination. A man who talked of peace, yet thought with the mind of a Navyman. Imagine a steamer flying the Chinese flag getting past those two destroyers downstream!

"You keep your boat up in good shape," I commented, changing the subject. The matter of the flag could wait until I'd gotten things straight in my mind.

He was very pleased with the compliment. "Oh, yes," he said. "We are proud of the *Esther*."

Again I detected that queer note of reverence in his voice. The Chinese are never very clean or tidy around their boats. Who did he mean by *we?* Then I remembered that last notation in his Bible: *"Esther, my beloved wife. . . ."*

I suppose that when a woman and man are together so long, so completely separated from others of their race, a very close companionship develops. And he and his wife had lived all that time on this steamer. Yes, he still thought of her as though she were living.

He was showing me about the ship. On the main deck, aside from a small cabin fitted as a sick bay, the whole space was an auditorium. He called it "the meeting place." There were blackboards, too, covered with childish scrawls. Evidently the room was used for a school as well as a church.

The squat, ugly little man named Wong stood on the foredeck with a sounding line, calling depths to the helmsman. We were barely moving, feeling our way through a backwater channel.

"There is a boat village where the wood is piled," Jones told me. "They will help us load it."

I had a good notion to go ashore right there and try to hire a boatman to take me the rest of the way to Kowloon. This crazy old missionary, with his talk of peace, was heading toward trouble. Serious trouble. Those destroyers down

there weren't going to ask any questions before they started whamming away at us. Just one sight of that Chinese flag would do it.

I don't know what held me back. Perhaps it was curiosity about this man with the name of a famous warrior and his constant talk of peace. That name, that protest against 'striking his colors,' yet his insistence on calling himself a man of peace. . .I should have known.

And I certainly would have left him if I'd spotted that cannon on the foredeck. But I didn't see it until me were out in the stream again, headed toward . . . well, toward quick destruction. I'd have given long odds on that.

It was a three-inch breech-loader, with a recoil slide. An old fashioned piece, of course. But deadly.

"What in thunder's this?" I asked.

We'd just come up from the engine room, where there were three men, all of them apparently engineers, oilers and stokers combined. Those three, with the helmsman and the little chap who'd handled the lead line, seemed to be all of his crew.

Jones patted the breech of the gun and there was a note of childish pleasure in his voice. "It's my saluting cannon," he told me.

"Loaded?" I asked.

"Oh, no," he assured me. We have only a few bags of powder and a few primers."

The little Chinese danced around excitedly, to get between me and the gun. "No catchee bullets," he kept repeating. "No catchee powder; no catchee bullets."

Jones touched his shoulder to quiet him. "We know, we know," he said reassuringly. He spoke to me. "Wong and I have been together for many years," he explained affectionately. "He is my Chinese brother. Once he saved my wife from drowning; another time from ruffians in Ta Shek. Of course the gun isn't loaded, Wong."

Nevertheless, I'd seen the coil of the firing lanyard. And I'd heard a lot of stories about these river pirates. That piece was loaded to the muzzle with rocks or scrapiron or homemade chain-shot. I was sure of it.

"Look here, Jones . . ." I began impatiently.

But he had his nose up, sniffing the air. "There will be a fog down at the river-mouth," he stated.

"Fog?" I repeated. To me that was like a reprieve from a death sentence. "Are you sure of that?"

"Oh, positive," he told me. "On a clear night like this, when the air is moist, you always find a shallow layer of fog. It's the cool ocean breeze."

"That gun of yours, Jones . . ."

Again I was sidetracked. "My gun," he said, fondly. "Yes, it *was* an extravagance, but Esther knew how much I wanted one. She bought it for me; an anniversary present. It was her own money," he hurriedly added. "And this is where we live." He opened the starboard door of the texas.

IT WAS quite a large room. And it had been fitted out by a woman; frilly curtains and all that sort of thing. There was a large picture that dominated the cabin. I thought it must be a picture of his wife. I wanted to see what she had looked like.

But it was the print of an old etching. A very cheap print, at that.

"Admiral Paul Jones," he said proudly, seeing my close interest. "You are familiar with his history?"

I remembered those famous words of his. I repeated them half aloud: "*I have just begun to fight.*"

"Yes," the old man said delightedly. "That was during his engagement with the English frigate *Serapis.* The *Richard,* his ship, had been pounded by broadside after broadside from the larger ship. It was leaking like a basket. The English commander asked him if he had struck. 'Never! I have just begun to fight,' the Admiral told him."

There was a brave ring to the old man's voice as he repeated the words. Then he saw my curious glance and must have interpreted it.

"No," he said, smiling, "I'm not a descendant. My father's name was Barnabas Jones. He was a steamboat man, back home. And his father came from England. I doubt if there is any rela-

tionship." This last was said in a regretful voice, as though he'd rather believe otherwise.

His father must have left this son quite a bit of money, I thought. He couldn't build and maintain a steamer like this with marbles nor small missionary remittances. But it was all gone now. That reminded me that I might still use this boat. And he could certainly use the money.

I had thought at first of offering to charter. But that would be a dirty trick to play. Even if they successfully ran the blockade the steamer would be an outlaw from then on. Anyway, I could afford to pay him five thousand gold for it.

The thought gave me a warm feeling of generosity. With his simple requirements that five thousand would assure him a comfortable old age.

"Jones," I said, "If you can get this boat into Kowloon, I'll give you five thousand for it. Five thousand dollars, U. S."

I'd expected him to be delighted and filled with gratitude. But he wasn't. After a thoughtful silence, he spoke. "Yes," he said, "I must sell it, I suppose. Our work here is . . . finished." His voice quavered. "But there is still so much to do . . . so many things."

I felt uncomfortable and tried to dispel this with my brisk, businesslike words. "Good," I said. "Now the first thing we'll do is shove that saluting cannon overside. And we'll yank down that Chinese flag you're carrying. And we'll get busy charting an inland channel course to avoid those destroyers."

He interrupted me. "Brother Holmes, why are you purchasing the *Esther?*"

"As long as you get your money, I don't see that it concerns you what I do with the old boat," I told him.

I shouldn't have spoken that way. He was nodding, as though to himself. "Yes," he whispered, "I suppose the *Esther* is old. And I am old." His voice strengthened. "Nevertheless, Brother Holmes, I must know why you want the *Esther.*"

I could have lied to the old duck, of course. But I didn't think it necessary. Most people change their high-and-mighty attitudes at the sound of money . . . big money. I told him straight.

"I've got a load of Krags and Mannlichers, some machine guns and plenty of ammunition in a freighter near Kowloon. Enough to fit out a small-sized army. They're for the river people."

He looked at me in shocked silence. "War," he said finally in a hushed voice. "War and bloodshed and misery!"

His words made me suddenly furious. "What have you got now but war?" I demanded. "And what'll you have if this so-called 'new order' is established? Slavery, that's what. The Chinese people will be enslaved, just as they are right now, up north."

"War," he repeated, as though he hadn't heard me. "No, I can never allow the *Esther* to be used for that purpose."

I couldn't argue with him. I was too blamed mad. I jerked the door open. "All right, you man of peace," I said. "If that's the way you feel, let them murder and starve those poor defenseless devils that you profess to love."

"Wait!"

I stopped, turning back into the room, sure that he had changed his mind.

"I am old," he said. "And I have been long away from the modern world. But I have read and heard and know what improvements have been made in warships."

I felt an uneasiness come over me. "What do you mean?" I demanded.

"Even though I sold you the *Esther* you would be unable to get your guns up past the two destroyers."

"But the inland channels!" I protested. "Chung, my go-between, assured me . . ."

He interrupted. "Perhaps he thought so. But modern warships have listening devices, you know. They might not be able to identify the *kind* of boat. But they'd know there was another craft in the vicinity."

"We couldn't get past? Even if it was foggy, as you say it will be tonight?"

He nodded, slowly.

Cold fear gripped me. "Then they'll stop us tonight!" I exclaimed. "We can't get by no matter how thick the fog is."

"I have no intentions of trying to slip

by them. After all," he continued, as though reading from a book on international law, "a blockade has been announced and established. They have certain rights of stopping neutral ships for identification and reasonable search."

Holy Patrick! Hadn't he heard that they'd fired on peaceful fishing junks? That they had sunk them and their crews, apparently just for target practice?

I definitely made up my mind then and there. "Have you got a small boat?" I asked.

He nodded. "We have Wong's fishing *sampan*."

"Then put me ashore," I begged. "Put me ashore before we reach the river's mouth."

He glanced up at the chronometer. "We should be in the river-mouth now," he said. "But if you wish . . ."

Wong opened the door, stuck his ugly face into the cabin. Fog made a blank, white wall behind him. "Marster; is searchlight, I think," he announced, matter-of-factly.

WE STEPPED out onto deck. The fog was dense in places but with open rifts here and there. There was a bright round spot in it to our port. An eddy of wind cleared a hole. The luminous white gave way momentarily to a blinding shaft that etched the form of the pilothouse in my eyes. I could see it even after the fog had blanked off the searchlight. And I could still see the large oblong of that Chinese flag that floated above us.

Jones' voice was calm. "Stop the engines," he directed. "They will want to board us for examination."

The Chinese cast a longing glance toward that cannon on the foredeck. "Maybeso give him salute, Marster," he suggested.

"No. No, Wong. They might misunderstand."

"Yes, it's possible they might misunderstand," I agreed, sarcastically.

For that, the Chinese gave me a venomous glance of comprehension, aware that I knew the gun was loaded for business. He turned toward the wheelhouse to obey Jones' command. His short body melted into the fog.

The deck quieted under our feet. With this it seemed to me the fog moved in closer, as though the vibration of the engine had kept it away. In late fall, in this latitude, it couldn't be cold and yet, as we waited, I had to clench my teeth to prevent them chattering.

"What now?" I asked Jones, pitching my voice low. I couldn't keep from worrying about that Chinese flag. If they ever got a good view of it we were as good as dead.

"We will speak to them," he said confidently.

I kept near him as he opened the wheelhouse door. The Chinese helmsman in there was old and skinny. Dim light from the binnacle accentuated the wrinkles in his face.

Leaning against the doorsill my hands encountered two thin lines that slanted down to a cleat. Flag halyards. Of course!

I jerked the hitch, working as fast as I could with both hands. I located the downhaul, gave out slack on the other line as I pulled. But I was forced to stop. Jones had come from the house, a metal voice trumpet glinting in his hands.

I backed up against the sill to hide what I was doing. A couple of more seconds and I would have had that Chinese flag out of sight. I didn't know whether that would do us any good. But the danger of it had been in my mind so long that it seemed very important at the time.

Everything was quiet. Ominously so. The silence; that and the fog, seemed to be choking me.

Jones had swung the voice trumpet to his mouth.

Abruptly sound and light came with numbing impact.

I went forward to my knees on the deck. Something covered me with hampering folds and I struggled frantically to get cleared of it.

"They shot our flag down!" Jones exclaimed, in a high startled voice. "They fired on us."

"Nonsense," I retorted, angry and frightened. "I pulled it down myself."

Jones untangled me from the thing and unsnapped the halyards. He stood uncertainly, holding it in his arms.

There was a slap of bare feet on the deck. It was Wong. "Marster, is stern-end meeting place all blow up." He relayed that news to us on the run, disappearing forward.

"It must have been an accident," Jones decided. "They were firing a warning shot over our bow. But we still have way on."

"Damned low for a warning," I said. "Let's get off this thing, Jones. They saw that flag."

He still held the flag bundled to his chest. "We must row over there and explain. Wong!" he shouted.

As though that was a signal, flame made a red glare in the fog ahead of us. The deck under my feet seemed to lift.

"He's fired the saluting gun!"

Nobody had to explain that to me. Our only hope was that the river man had missed his target. Whatever he had loaded into that three-inch piece couldn't penetrate the steel hull of a destroyer. It would only make them more certain to kill us.

"We must row over there and explain," Jones repeated.

ANOTHER shell screamed past, ahead of us. We heard a mighty *smack* as it struck and skipped across the water. They were estimating our position. I realized that. But at the time it didn't occur to me that their gunnery was based on the speed of a destroyer. I had comletely forgotten about those five ships that the Chinese were supposed to have purchased.

Wong joined us, chattering with excitement.

"Stay here, Wong," Jones said. "That was a very foolish thing you did. Now I must row over and explain."

Wong trailed behind us, disregarding the order. The lower deck—the deck on which they had loaded our wood—was only a few feet above waterline. A ladder, nailed solidly to the hull, let us down into the *sampan.*

Without command Wong took the two forward oars, standing up, facing forward as the Chinese do. Jones took the skulling oar in the stern. Fog drew its white curtain over us and I immediately lost all sense of direction.

I was hoping, praying, that Jones had also lost his sense of direction. I'd learned the futility of arguing with him. But there was a good chance that we wouldn't make contact with the destroyer.

Wong made a dim figure ahead, his body swaying against the oars. A projectile passed, with a noise like a swarm of bees. It was there and gone and immediately came the gun's report. Jones corrected his bearings on this.

I could see Wong plainly now and overhead there were stars. The fog was rifting, slowly clearing out. In a half hour, we could lose its friendly screen.

"Jones," I warned, "it's suicide for us to go over to either of those destroyers! Can't you understand that?"

He continued the jerky side movement of skulling. "We have done them no wrong," he said stubbornly. "This fog is confusing. Perhaps they thought we were an enemy ship."

Salvo fire drowned out his words. The concussion was terrific. In the silence that followed I could hear a rough, grinding sound.

"They're weighing anchor," he said.

The fog had closed down again and we were almost against the destroyer before I saw the black wall of its hull loom up ahead.

Wong broke into an excited stream of Chinese.

"Make that fool shut up," I warned.

The air was filled with screaming lead. There was the hard, chopping sound of an automatic rifle.

Wong had dropped his oars. He started back toward the stern of the small boat, holding himself in a queer fashion. "Marster . . . Mar-s-t-e-r." He pitched forward, full length.

The machine gun stopped its chatter. A searchlight made a white bulls-eye in the fog, swinging back and forth. And then it blinked out and I could see the hull making a slanting roof above us. We were under the stern counter.

Jones had been working over the boatman. In his excitement he had brought the large Chinese flag from the steamer. He made a loose pillow of this, putting it tenderly under the shaven head.

"Wong," he said, in a choked voice.

"Keep still!" I warned. "There's a slim chance of their not finding us."

I don't think he heard me. But his voice was quiet with its simple message. "Wong is dead!"

He looked about him in a dazed, awakening manner. "I did this," he said hoarsely. "I have been a fool."

There was a long silence, broken abruptly by the jarring detonation of a gun. I could imagine the confusion up there. The two destroyers must be burning up the air with an exchange of radioed inquiries. With this fog down that was the only way they had of communicating with each other.

Jones' voice startled me with its changed tone. It had the cold, savage drive of a commander of men. "Help me. We must reach the bow."

I thought I understood what was in his mind. They had pulled their anchor. Where we were, directly over the two propellers, was no place for such a tiny boat. The first half dozen revolutions would sink us.

Slowly, pushing against the destroyer's hull, we made our way up the starboard side. We stopped, only a few feet from the knife-like bow.

"Wait here for me," Jones commanded. He was standing up. He had taken the Chinese flag from under the dead man's head, wrapping its length around and around his body, like a huge sash.

The anchor hadn't been catted. Its giant flukes, dripping with mud, were only a few feet above his head.

He clutched the arms and raised himself. I was so mystified, so astonished, by these actions that I didn't protest. He disappeared into the mist above.

I SUPPOSE it's easy enough to climb an anchor chain. The heavy links would be almost like a ladder. But it must have been quite a feat, hampered as he was by that flag. I had thought of him as a feeble old man. Some inner drive gave him the strength of youth.

Time seemed to be standing still. But it must have been only a minute or so before I heard from above the muted sounds of a struggle. Then a body came down past me, barely clearing the gunwale. It wasn't Jones. The body was too short for that. I didn't even try to rescue it from the water.

I had been watching for Jones' return, my eyes on the anchor that hung above me. It started sliding away, seeming to move toward the bow. That puzzled me for an instant. Then I understood. The destroyer was getting under way.

I made a grab for the anchor arms and caught them. The little boat almost upset with my effort. My foot caught in the stern thwart. But I knew that I couldn't possibly hold on if they gave full speed. Not for a minute.

What in thunder was that fool doing up there? I wanted to call for him, urge him to return immediately. But that would bring certain destruction.

Then I heard the clink of chain against the steel hull. I pulled my hands from the anchor just in time and there, suddenly, he dangled. He swung free for a moment. I used his body to pull the boat up under him.

"Thank you, Brother Holmes," he said.

"What in the world did you do up there?" I asked.

He took the skulling oar, working it with quick, vigorous strokes. He didn't answer my question.

The fog was blowing away all right. Some places, I could look directly above and see stars.

"I think I can find the *Esther*," he said. "At any rate this fog will soon be gone."

"When it does clear," I warned him, "we'll be done for. Don't you understand, Jones? They thought they were shooting at those destroyers the Chinese are supposed to have. They'll be furious when they see it was just an old river boat."

"Yes," he agreed, "and they would sink her. I understand that now."

"Why do you say 'would'?" I demanded. "It's a certainty they *will*."

"Perhaps. But do you know that Wong fired a projectile at them? Or it may have been a number of small missiles."

"I tried to tell you that gun was loaded. But what of it?"

A solid glare of light swept over us, swinging, searching in the broken fog.

"That must be the other destroyer," I guessed.

"Yes," he agreed. He was panting a little now from his hard skulling of the boat. "Wong's gunfire wrecked their radio. I'm almost certain of that. While

Suddenly a great cloud of smoke billowed up from the destroyer, amidships

I was up there I could see them working on the antenna."

"The tide started in flood some time ago," he explained. "It runs fast here. They shouldn't have pulled their anchor. Nor gotten under way."

Salvo fire was replacing the single gunfire now. The other destroyer was returning that, with a vengeance. And I would have sworn they were shooting at each other!

"There's the *Esther,*" Jones said in a relieved voice. "It will soon be daylight. We will bury Wong then; bury him in the river, his home."

IN the tropics day comes with amazing speed. We could already make out details of the *Esther.* We had never gotten far from it. I took the forward oars and gave what help I could.

That thunderous roar of cannonading was behind me. I couldn't spare time to see what was happening.

Nor could I understand it. Granted that they had lost communication with each other; granted that one had changed its position without the other knowing . . . still the thing seemed unbelievable. Two warships of the same nationality wouldn't start shooting at each other without better reason.

The engine-room crew helped get Wong's body onto the steamer's deck. "He must have a flag," Jones said. "There are two more of them in the wheelhouse lockers. Wong shall have the largest."

I had turned to watch this queer sea battle.

Hope of safety was building up in me. "You're well equipped with flags, Admiral," I remarked. "There is that large one in the *sampan.*"

He gave me a queer look, shaking his head. "No," he said, "there isn't any flag in Wong's boat."

One of the destroyers was down at the stern and listing badly. The other one had turned and was bearing down on us, a white wave of speed growing at her bow. Her forward mast had been stumped off just a little above the bridge. Perhaps Wong's shot had done that.

"Look!" I shouted, hardly able to credit my eyes. "*Look there on her bow!*"

Draped over the bow of the Japanese destroyer was a Chinese flag!

Suddenly a great cloud of smoke billowed up from the destroyer, amidships. The explosion reached us a split second later. The force of its blast was enough to send me reeling against the deckhouse. The destroyer was literally blown in two pieces and it sank as though hidden cables jerked it down.

"Torpedoed," Jones said quietly. "Hate turned upon hate." His voice had lost that sharp vigor that it had had just a short time before. He started slowly toward the wheelhouse, an old man again, a man of peace. But I couldn't feel sorry for him. A man can live a lifetime in a few minutes.

The Japanese would never know what had happened out there, what stroke of fate had blasted two of their warships out of existence. Even though there were survivors from that short, furious battle they would know only that in the dark, fog-wreathed waters they had fired on a destroyer and the fire had been returned—by an enemy ship. That one thing they would be certain of, for they had seen a large Chinese flag draped over her bow. It was the death mark that had been put there by a man of peace.

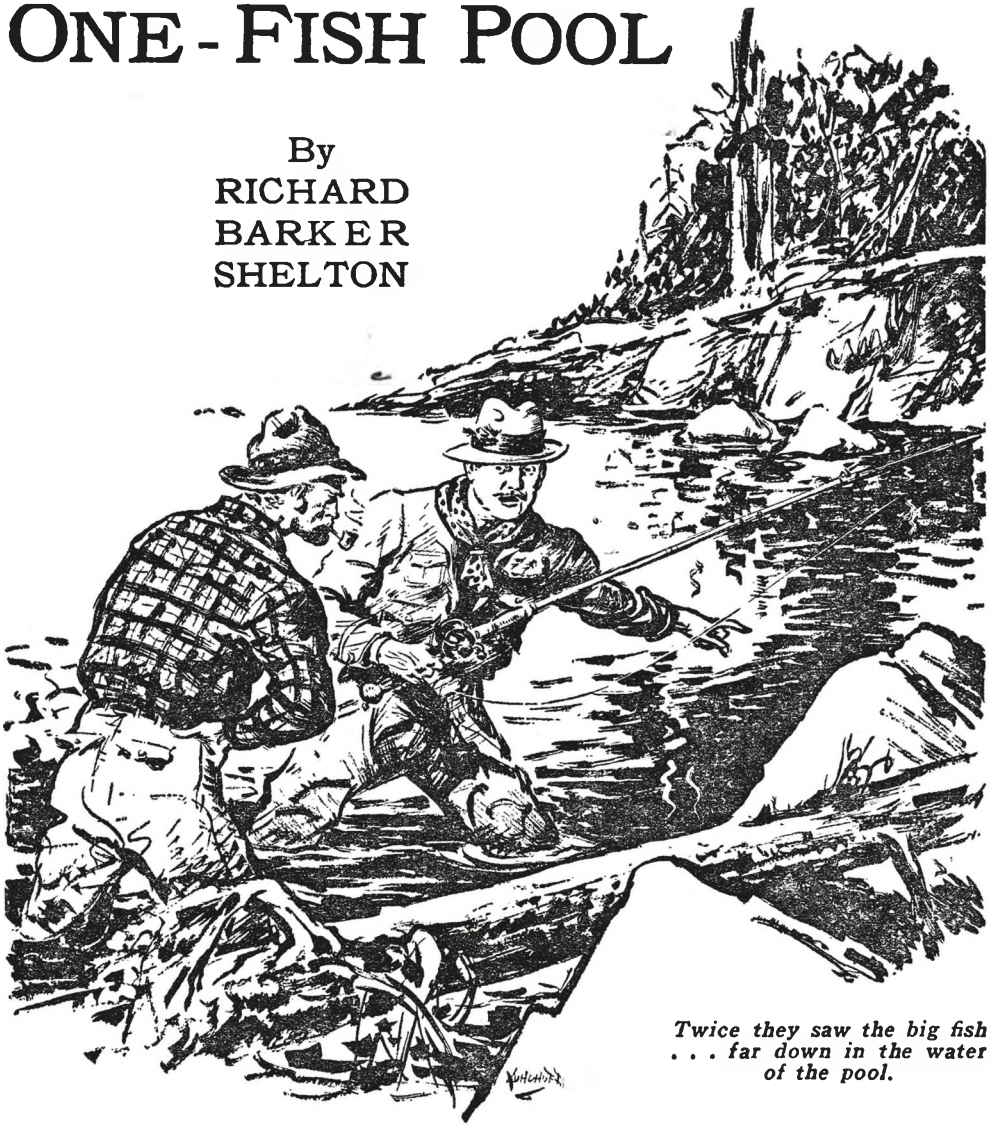
JONES stubbornly refused to sell me the *Esther* to carry my guns and ammunition in to the people of China. I wouldn't have had any trouble chartering another boat for the job, now that the blockade was temporarily lifted. But I bought his steamer that same day, through a friend.

He got enough from it to have assured him a comfortable old age back home in the States. But I suppose he had been too long in China—

Just a few months back I passed by a dingy little American mission, down on Connaught Road, in Hong Kong. The congregation was singing a Christian hymn, in Chinese. I recognized the tall, gaunt figure of John Paul Jones, leading them . . . The name of the mission was: *Good Peace in China.*

ONE-FISH POOL

By
RICHARD
BARKER
SHELTON



Twice they saw the big fish . . . far down in the water of the pool.

OCCASIONALLY, when conditions are right and his own mood of the moment somewhat more expansive than usual, Tom Lump tells the story. His version of the matter is always disjointed and fragmentary, for Tom Lump, at best, is a man of few words. Moreover, he is inclined to wander off on reminiscent tangents which have no bearing whatever on the affair at the pool in Lone Hawk River, and he is forever getting ahead of himself and finding it necessary to go back and sketch in hurriedly essential details he has omitted.

Since, too, he is one quarter Abenaqui, he can leave a story hanging in the air at any time, placidly oblivious of the impatience of his listeners, while he straightens out tangled fishing gear or adjusts to his satisfaction the mechanism of an automatic rifle. Time does not exist for him, and lack of patience is something he neither can nor will countenance. But, listening to his rambling story with all its lapses and lack of sequence, it is perfectly apparent the whole thing made a great impression upon Tom Lump.

Placed in proper order his grunted

and guttural outlines would translate approximately as follows:

ONE hot and sticky night in late July a car stopped in the untidy yard of Tom Lump's place. To get there it had traveled a long and narrow road, little more in places than a cart-path. It was a big car, of a make Tom had never seen before. Its wheels were fouled with black mud where it had jounced through numerous swampy spots along the cart-path road, and bayberry and sweet fern decorating its shining front fender told of the difficulty it had experienced in negotiating some of the sharper turns.

Tom shuffled out of his door as the headlights illuminated the clearing in which his house stood, the hemlocks behind it and the edge of Big Loon Pond beyond the hemlocks. A first glimpse of the house was not impressive. It was a one-story shack with several additions and a brace of lean-tos. Its chimney was a few lengths of tile pipe. A part of the roofing-paper which had covered the unplaned boards originally still remained, but there were too many unsightly bare spots where the unprotected boards were taking on the silver gray of long weathering. And wherever a pane of glass was missing from the windows, Tom had blocked the opening by the simple expedient of a stuffed-in gunny sack.

Tom Lump had neither wife nor children. He lived alone in the shack with a Manx cat, named Owen, and a Gordon setter whom he chose to call Nathan.

Owen and Nathan followed Tom to the threshold and discreetly remained there, inquisitive and expectant, as he strode in his half-shuffling, half-lurching manner towards the expensive-looking car in his yard.

A chauffeur in uniform sat behind the wheel, and a large man in an exclusive tailor's idea of what sport clothes should be, occupied the roomy rear seat. The latter opened the door and got out as Tom came forward.

"Good-evening! Is this Tom Lump's place?" he said.

"This is it," Tom admitted.

"My name is Ronald Bramwell."

Tom shook a small, flabby hand. His preference for hands was bony ones with a vigorous grip. This hand he had taken was limp and cold in his own. Something then and there told Tom Lump he was not going to like this man overwell. His natural reserve and caution were increased by this thought.

"Yes, sir," was all he said.

"Something I have heard at Gray's Lodge, where I have been staying the past week, has interested me tremendously."

"That so?" said Tom, politely noncommittal.

"It's about a pool up this way somewhere, with one fish in it—a tremendous fish which has become a sort of legend."

"Most likely you mean One-Fish Pool over in Lone Hawk River."

"Then there is such a place?"

"There's a place by that name."

"What about this fish that sticks around there?"

"There's those that says there is a fish like that."

"What do you say? You've been there often, I understand."

"I ain't never seen a thing in that pool. One of the fellers I took there—Melvin was his name—got all het up when he thought he got a squint at it. I guess, though, it warn't nothin' but a shadder he seen."

"You've fished it, of course."

"Not lately. I've seen it fished a good many times, though, by people I've took up there."

"Ever see a strike in that pool?"

"Never a sign of one."

"You don't believe anybody has ever seen that fish?"

"A number of folks claims they have."

"Do they say what sort of fish it is?"

"No one ever claimed to see it out of water, just got a glance at it on the bottom of the pool."

"You believe there's a big fish of some kind in that pool, don't you?"

"Couldn't say. I've heard talk about it ever since I was a boy. There's al-

ways apt to be some fire where there's a lot of smoke."

As they talked they had moved toward the front door of the shack. Bramwell sat down on one end of the step. Tom Lump squatted on the other.

"I've talked with three men who have tried that pool," said Bramwell. "One was Melvin, whom you mentioned a minute ago. He swears he saw the fish that day. He says it must have been better than six feet long. Another was a man named Coombs. You took him up there three different times, he tells me. The third man was a chap named Partridge. He went up with someone else."

"Yep. Coombs and Melvin went along with me. They was both to that pool a number of times."

"They say—and several other men I've talked to, as well—that fish will never be caught."

"Looks like they're right, too."

The chauffeur had switched off the headlights. A faint light glowed within the car, and by it he was reading a newspaper. Nathan came forward and sniffed around the newcomer on the step. Owen held aloof gazing at him with a pair of green eyes shining in uncanny fashion in the dark.

"I like to do things other people can't. I've been doing them all my life. This fish nobody can even get to strike has got me aroused. I'd like to haul him out of that pool."

"So would a lot of people," Lump observed.

SOMETHING about this man irritated Lump. Pleasant enough in his talk; not bad-looking either. Tom would have put him down as approaching fifty. Well-kept in every respect, a man who had taken good care of himself. Neither was he arrogant, openly or by suggestion. There was no reason why Tom Lump should not have liked him. But he felt he never would; that, as he came to know this man better, the distance between them would become greater; the common ground, which is the fostering place of all understanding and all friendships, would grow less and less attainable.

"I'm here to make arrangements with you about going up there," Bramwell made clear the real object of his visit tonight.

Tom Lump's first thought was to say he couldn't go. But there had been painfully few people to take into the woods that season, and an open winter had played hob with his usual revenue from his traps. Whatever else this man beside him on the steps might be, he gave every evidence of ready money and no haggling over advance fees for service.

"When?" Tom questioned.

"Tomorrow. Can you put me up for the night?"

"If you can stand what I offer you. How long was you countin' on stayin' at the pool?"

"Three weeks."

"You'll get good and tired of it before that."

"I don't think so. I want that fish."

Again Tom experienced a swift aversion for the man, so great at the moment he almost wished he had not accepted this commission. And yet there was nothing in the simple statement, come to think it over, which should have aroused his resentment. He had seen other men equally enthused over the legend of One-Fish Pool and equally eager to try their skill there. It had never before struck him as anything more than a laudable and normal ambition which he, on his part, was only too happy to further with every bit of assistance he could give. But for once he was setting forth reluctantly on this expedition of many precedents.

"Three weeks! I dunno as I got supplies enough to carry us that long," Tom reflected.

"I've brought plenty of supplies with me. Let's go over them and see if they're all right," Bramwell said.

He went over to the car, Tom trailing him and Nathan at Tom's heels. Owen, green eyes aglow, moved cautiously after them a few paces to the rear.

The chauffeur came to sudden life and opened the trunk on the rear of

the car. Out came bundles and packages of all descriptions and sizes. The floor by the rear seat yielded yet more, as well as being productive of a bulging club bag and a huge suitcase.

The three carried the bags and bundles into Tom Lump's littered kitchen. Presently twine was snapping and paper rustling and the table groaning beneath the weight of the things upon it.

"We won't need quite all that," said Tom mildly, "particularly when we've got to make Lone Hawk River afoot and pack along whatever we take with us."

"Afoot?"

"No other way. Where's your chauffy goin' to stay with the car while you're gone?"

"Back at Gray's Lodge."

"You better send most of this truck back there, then."

"Oh, we'll leave it here for you. It might come in handy sometime. How far is it to the pool?"

"Thirty-odd miles."

"Good footing?"

"Some of it is almighty tough."

"We can take it in easy stages. I imagine I'll be rather soft at first."

"There won't be no need of hurryin'."

So the car was sent back to Gray's Lodge with instructions to the chauffeur to return three weeks from the following Monday. Tom made some sandwiches and a pot of coffee and he and Bramwell sat on the steps afterwards smoking and exchanging experiences.

Later Tom conducted his guest to a husk mattress on a narrow little bed in one of the lean-tos. And after this he went shooting across Big Loon Pond in a skiff with an outboard motor, to make sure the fourteen-year-old son of a family living on the farther shore would see to it that Nathan and Owen were properly fed while he himself was away.

LATE in the afternoon of the second scorching day in the woods, Bramwell and Tom Lump were near enough to Lone Hawk River to hear the faint roar of swift water above the pool they sought.

Tom Lump had no complaints whatever to make about his companion on the trail. Soft the man undoubtedly was, but he was possessed, too, of a dogged courage and a pride which never failed him, no matter how much perspiration streamed from him and with what difficulty he fought for breath.

"Not yet," he panted over and again to Tom Lump's suggestion that it was time for rest. "Go on! If we rest every few steps we'll never get anywhere."

He was panting and mopping his forehead as they stood for a moment, listening to the murmur which Tom had just told him was born of the rush of live water above One-Fish Pool.

"Let's go," he urged. "If we hurry we can drop in a line before it's too dark."

"You've got the better part of three weeks to try that pool," Tom reminded him.

"I'll probably need three years for a fish like that."

"Lucky if you get him then," Tom said with one of his rare grins.

"Patience is what counts, patience and grit to back it up. That's what gets you the things the other fellow can't. And the things the other fellow can't get are the only ones worth getting yourself," Bramwell declared.

Tom Lump took in the other man from head to foot in a slow and deliberate stare. "I guess you've got your share of things like that," he said.

"More than my share," Bramwell admitted. "So many of them I'm on the lookout all the time for something else of that kind to try. That's what appeals to me about this fish we're after. And, my friend, whatever I have set out to do I have always done."

Tom turned and pushed on toward the river. It was the man's sureness of himself which had roused his antipathy. Spoken or unspoken, it was always flaunting itself in the face of others. He needed failure to make him human.

One-Fish Pool was beautiful in the glow of a hot sunset. It was nearly a

hundred yards across and at least twice that length. White water, making a great uproar, came rushing and tumbling and spuming over ledges for a good quarter mile above it. Once Tom Lump had sounded it with sixty-five feet of line before he touched bottom. The banks were undercut by the water to such an extent that in places they shook beneath the lightest footfall.

White pines surrounded it, many of them canting over it where their roots were washed loose. And in places they had toppled over and were bleaching in the pool.

It was far too dark to think of wetting a line tonight, so they fell to work building a rough shelter of hemlock boughs which would serve them as camp during their stay at the pool. Bramwell, despite Tom's protestations, did his full share of the work. A fire blazed cheerfully. The smell of sizzling bacon and boiling coffee offered their pleasant possibilities to the two hungry men.

"Good salmon pool about a mile below here," Lump said as they filled their pipes after the evening meal. "Then half a mile to the westward there's as sweet a trout brook as you ever run across. Once in a while we'll stop long enough to get a few fish from one or another of 'em."

"You go get 'em, Tom, when we need 'em. I'm going to stick to this pool as long as we're around here," Bramwell made known his intentions.

THERE began next morning an exhibition of determination and dogged persistence Tom Lump had never before encountered in all the men he had heretofore brought to this spot. And in the past twenty-odd years he had seen plenty of high hopes backed by patience and courage come to naught.

As soon as it was daylight Bramwell had a line in the water. Nor did he cease operations until long after dusk had fallen over the pool. This went on day after day. Tom Lump, himself the incarnation of patience, watched proceedings stolidly.

Only when they needed a fresh salmon or a few trout did he desert the patient, tireless figure haunting the pool, and then his excursions were limited to the time necessary to supply their needs.

Bramwell tried all conceivable spots on the bank. He crawled out to precarious perches on the bleaching tree trunks; he poked out on undercut banks which threatened momentarily to give way beneath him; he waded into the white water just above the pool to cast into the upper end of it, and was all but swept into the pool when he lost his footing.

He tried in endless succession all kinds of flies, all sorts of bait, all varieties of spinners and plugs and artificial minnows.

His equipment of gear was astounding, and he knew how to use it, Tom Lump's critical and watchful eye discovered.

So the days went past, endlessly alike as to Bramwell's activities, for rain or shine he was at it just the same. The time for departure was drawing close; in fact it was the day before they were to take the trail back.

Bramwell was heading for the pool after the mid-day meal. The camp was some fifty yards back of the bank. It was a clear, cool day, more like early September than mid-August. A succession of heavy thunder showers the previous evening and a gentle wind from the northwest, now practically dropped to a calm, had left the air clear as crystal and heady as wine.

Tom saw Bramwell rigging a spinner on his line. All at once the work stopped. Bramwell was down on his knees. He was craning far forward and peering into the water. Then he was up, creeping away from the pool with great caution, and immediately thereafter rushing towards the camp, beckoning excitedly to Tom.

Tom let go the fry-pan he was scouring. He hurried to the pool. On hands and knees he crept behind Bramwell to the edge, the earth shaking like jelly beneath them. But Bramwell did not notice this. He pointed to a spot some twenty feet away from them, towards the lower end of the pool.

"Look! There!" he whispered hoarsely, and even whispered as they were, the words trembled, like those of a man who was very cold.

Tom's eyes followed the direction indicated by Bramwell's shaking finger. The sun, behind them, sent bluish-yellow light into the clear water. And in the slanting rays of light Tom Lump saw a great shadow far down and close to the undercut bank.

"A root," he surmised calmly in an answering whisper. He would have crept back again, but Bramwell's shaking hand stayed him.

"Wait!" he urged.

Tom waited. That it was a root they were staring at he was now thoroughly convinced. Then something happened to change this opinion. The shadow in the water moved. It came upward a few feet, rolled gracefully, dived and was gone. A purl of surface water sent ripples circling across the pool.

Tom, with a half-audible grunt, moved backward from the bank. Bramwell, his hands steady now, a light in the steel-gray eyes that made Tom dislike him even more, changed the spinner to a hook and hellgramites, with a sinker above.

"WHAT was it?" Bramwell asked as they sat at supper that night.

"You tell me."

"Better than six feet long, or I'm a dwarf," Bramwell went on.

"All of that," Tom agreed.

"I've got to fly to South America the twenty-ninth." Bramwell said this as if he faced the greatest calamity imaginable.

Tom said, "Too bad," but he didn't mean it.

"But we've seen him, sure enough. And I'm coming back next summer and stay as long as I can. I'm coming every summer until I land him."

"Maybe," said Tom, without the grace or decency to conceal a perfectly apparent sneer in the single word.

"You watch."

"All right. I will."

They broke camp next morning and started back. When they reached Tom's shack the car was waiting in the yard. Bramwell packed his bags and said good-bye. He left a fee for Tom's services far in excess of what Tom had stipulated.

"You've earned it," said Bramwell. "We saw the fish."

"You've paid me too much," Tom grunted.

"Keep it. It's worth it to me. The fish is there. Next thing is to get him."

Tom shook his head. "Easy enough to say," he muttered.

"Next summer I'll be here early. I'll make arrangements to stay longer, six or seven weeks."

Tom said nothing. He may have said good-bye when he shook Bramwell's flabby hand. But, if he did, it was just a mutter. The car went down the cart-path which passed as a road. Tom sat down on the step and held council with Owen and Nathan, both of them overjoyed at his return.

He stroked Owen, curled up on his knee, and patted the muzzle Nathan poked affectionately under his arm.

"Queer feller," Tom spoke his mind aloud. "Got his mind set to catch a fish that won't never be caught in God's world. Better for him if he don't catch it. Needs something he can't do to make him more like other folks. Everybody ought to have a few failures to make 'em human."

Every little while that winter there came a box of something or other from Bramwell. Now it was canned goods, again it was the tobacco Tom favored, pounds of it at a time. Later still, as winter was waning, it was a lot of the latest tricks in fishing gear.

Tom trudged the fourteen miles to the general store and post-office in Ridgely to acknowledge the receipt of these gifts.

"Much obliged," was all he wrote in a painstaking and shaky scrawl.

MID-JULY brought Bramwell again. The same chauffeur drove him into Tom's yard in a new and larger car. Bramwell had brought along all sorts of supplies and presents for Tom. Tom

looked them over and grunted his thanks.

"Wisht you hadn't gone and done it, though," he ended.

"Why?"

"I dunno. Just wisht you hadn't." He couldn't very well tell Bramwell that all the presents Bramwell could buy would never change his opinion of the man.

They stayed at the pool that season until early September frost began. Twice they saw the big fish, but neither time was it more than a moving shape far down in the water of the pool. It was a repetition of the three weeks the year previous. Bramwell stuck close to the pool, trying everything in his equipment from early morning until dusk. The patience of the man got on Tom's nerve, himself a man of unlimited capacity for waiting.

"Looks like we'd have to put it off another year," Bramwell admitted.

"Most likely a good deal more'n that," Tom said.

"Never yet failed in anything I started out to do," Bramwell repeated as if it were some sort of creed with him.

"You've got your hands full this time," Tom pointed out.

"That's why I've got to do it."

Again that winter the supplies and presents came every now and then. Tom gave Owen a feed of canned corn out of one such bundle, and Nathan a goodly part of the chicken in glass jars.

"Mebbe you two like him better for this. I don't," said Tom.

A little later came the strangest present of all. It was a postal order for an amount that made Tom's eyes stick out. With it was a letter, urging Tom to spend two weeks as Bramwell's guest.

"I want you to back up my word that I have seen that fish in One-Fish Pool," the letter stated. "Besides, I want you to know my family. Somehow or other I want you to like me, as you never have. So come down and see me, Tom. I'll give you a royal good time. I think my family's estimate of me will influence your own."

Tom thought it over for several days. At last he decided to accept the invitation. Bramwell gave him a wonderful two weeks. The big house bewildered Tom at first. But Bramwell's wife was a woman who won her way into Tom Lump's heart at once. There was a son, in business with his father and very much like him, and a daughter, reserved, quiet, whom Tom sized up as trying to find a place in the world for herself, by her own efforts, and so far missing out in such an undertaking.

Downtown in the whole floor of offices Bramwell maintained for his various enterprises Tom Lump told the story of One-Fish Pool to important-looking men whom Bramwell introduced to him. He backed up Bramwell's assertion that he had seen the great fish.

"Yep we've seen him three times," Tom stated, and went into details about each occasion.

"Bramwell will catch him some day," was the general opinion.

"Maybe," was all Tom would say.

"Always gets what he goes after," one of these men declared.

"Ought to have one thing he can't do, hadn't he?" Tom mused.

"It's got to be an obsession with him, catching that fish. When he does, he's about through."

Tom gathered something of the same thought from Bramwell's family.

"He has been under terrific strain these past five years. He keeps driving on for just one thing—to finish what he has started at that pool you take him to each year," said Mrs. Bramwell.

"Don't let him get it," his son urged.

"When he's trying to do something almost impossible he is the most wonderful man in the world," the daughter confided to Tom in a moment of intimate conversation. "When he's done it he is unbearable."

Tom had a bewildering whirl of theaters and dinners and night-spots.

"I guess I better be gettin' along home," he said finally. "I ain't used to so many goin's on. I've had a royal good time. But I ain't goin' to overdo it and wear out my welcome."

"Stay a little longer," Bramwell urged. But once Tom Lump made up his mind he never changed it.

"Glad you could come," said Bramwell warmly. "Much obliged for making all these doubters around here believe there is a fish in that pool. How about me, now, Tom? Got a better opinion of me by coming here?"

"You've got too much," said Tom.

"I've got to have one thing more."

"Do you want that fish?" Tom looked fixedly at Bramwell. It was plainly a man-to-man question of the utmost significance.

"Got to have him, Tom."

"You keep on tryin', then."

"I'll do more than try. I'll get him."

"Then what?"

"God knows, Tom. But I'll be satisfied."

Tom Lump told Owen and Nathan all about it. "Got nice folks," he said, Owen in his lap, Nathan's head resting on his knee. "But they're sort of afraid of him. He wants one failure. Then they'll understand him better and he them. Wants a fish that nobody has ever been able to get a strike out of, and after that something else, and after that something further. There's a fence around him his folks or his friends can't never climb. He's lonesome and don't know it. Oughter to be a hole in that fence folks could crawl through and get near him. But they have to look across it at him, alone by himself inside it. Ho-hum! Suppose you ketched every bird you went after, Owen, or you run down every coney you chased, Nathan. Bimeby there wouldn't be no sense in tryin'. You'd know you'd do it before you started."

Like most taciturn men, Tom Lump could grow loquacious when he was alone. It helped him to think aloud. It showed up flaws in his evaluations and whatever philosophy he tried to shape for himself.

JULY brought Bramwell as usual.

"This is the time we get him, Tom," he predicted. His voice exuded confidence.

"Mrs. Bramwell is well?" Tom inquired.

"Wonderfully so. She took a great liking to you, Tom."

"Mighty nice woman. I liked your son and daughter, too."

"You made a hit with them. I deliver the regards of the family to you, now, before I forget them."

All the way to Lone Hawk River, Tom, the most unimaginative of men, had a quaint premonition; that Bramwell was right about landing the big fish this year, and that his own smoldering dislike would then and there flare into open and outspoken hatred.

But again it was the same old round of patient and persistent effort on Bramwell's part. They did not even get a peek at the hermit fish that season. Look for him as they would, there was never a shadow in the pool that moved and dove and sent purls of water circling on the surface.

August came and began to wane. Here and there a yellow leaf showed on stray maples and the foliage of the sweet fern was taking on its first shades of withered brown. Tom began to breathe more freely. Why he should ever have entertained for a moment even the passing thought that Bramwell would pull the great fish out of the pool this time he could not have told. Not given to uneasy premonitions of the sort, he could neither analyze them nor the causes of their inception.

"Maybe the old cuss is dead or gone somewhere else," Tom suggested one night by the fire.

"He's there," Bramwell declared.

"First season we ain't had at least one look at him."

"That doesn't mean a thing, Tom."

"You got patience beyond any I ever see before."

"That's what gets you things you go after."

"You ain't goin' to quit then, after this time? You're goin' to keep on comin' year after year?"

"Until I get him."

"Never doubt that, do you?"

"Never. There's no failure in my creed."

Tom knocked the dead ashes from

his pipe. Slowly he began to refill it. A sudden light had come to him. He wanted to like this Ronald Bramwell, he wanted to admire him, respect him, count him a warm and unfailing friend. The man had every quality to inspire such desire. And Tom Lump realized, too, that he had been trying hard for three years to do this. And it came to him, as well, in a flash of enlightenment, that he would keep on trying until Bramwell landed that fish. Then he would curse him and revile him and turn his back on him, provided it ever happened. He would have nothing to do with a man beyond the pale of failure, because such a man would be lost in his own self-sufficiency; he would need no friendship, no human ties. His life would be complete without them, justified in its own loneliness by its very refusal to accept failure in anything as a possibility.

Tom reasoned it all out in this vague way, there before the fire, and, glancing at Bramwell, fooling with an adjustable sinker he intended to try out on the morrow, it occurred to him he was looking at a man who paid too great a price for whatever he gained. And the price paid was a universal feeling among Bramwell's family and friends and associates identical with Tom Lump's unspoken aversion for the man.

AS they finished their midday meal next day, Bramwell as usual rushing through it to get back to the pool, Tom said: "We could use a salmon or two. Why don't you come down to the lower pool with me and hook a few? You've never caught a single fish up here yet."

Bramwell shook his head and scalded his tongue with his final quick gulp of coffee. "You go, Tom," said he. "I'll stick right here. Time's getting short again."

So Tom Lump, the dishes washed up, poked off downstream. His last backward glimpse over his shoulder disclosed Bramwell precariously perched far out on one of the toppled pine trunks, getting ready to cast to the middle of the pool.

The salmon were wary that afternoon. Moreover, the brisk breezes of the earlier morning hours had died out. The air momentarily grew hotter and more lifeless. So Tom Lump took his time.

The first dusk was making heavy shadows under the trees when he returned with his two hard-won fish.

Long before he could see the glint of the pool his sharp ears caught the plaint of a whirring reel and the distant splash of water. Lifeless air notwithstanding, Tom Lump broke into an awkward, shuffling run that took him over the ground at an amazing speed.

Then he saw it—the water of the pool churned to white froth; Bramwell retreating to firmer footing from the undercut bank; far down the pool a great dull brown shadow, bony plates on its side agleam with the rays of a sun far down in the west, showing momentarily on the surface as it rolled and was gone again. Bramwell had hooked his fish. He was shaking from head to foot. For that matter so was Tom Lump, crouched behind a nearby tree.

"God, man, you've got him!" he muttered.

Bramwell was saying aloud, unaware he uttered the words: "Steady! Steady now! Keep your head. Give him plenty of line, but not so much he can snag it!"

His trembling ceased. He became as calm and cold as if it were any ordinary fish he was playing. The line slackened, the rod whipped itself straight as the pressure was relieved.

"Quick! Take in your slack! Don't give him an inch of it. He's heading up the pool," Tom was muttering again under his breath.

But already Bramwell had anticipated these necessities. Tom got to his feet, started to rush to the pool. Then something stronger than his desire to be in at the death made him sink behind his tree again.

There followed a tense battle of an hour and twenty minutes. Time after time the great fish came to the surface, rolled and disappeared. He rushed from one end of the pool to the other. He sulked under the bank. The line missed snagging on the fallen trees by the barest fraction of inches.

Then slowly, quarter inches at a time, Bramwell took in line. It was so dark now that even Tom Lump's keen eyes, trained to all kinds and conditions of light, could scarcely make out the figure at the pool. Did he have his gaff? Was it where he could reach it? Yes, there it was, dangling from his belt. He must have hooked it there when the fish first struck. Surely he had not had time to do it since.

The line came in faster. Quick turns of the reel. A pause, the soft click of the reel again. And now there was a splash of water at Bramwell's feet. He lifted the stout gaff from his belt. Last slack of the line reeled home, he bent forward. Tom Lump sprang to his feet. Curses, anathema, words of bitterest reviling were on his tongue's end. He was about to shout them, full lunged, at that dim, bent figure in the dusk, outlined against the soft silver glow of the pool.

But they were never uttered. The gaff fell from Bramwell's hand. Out of his pocket came a knife, one of those hunting knives that thrust out a blade at the touch of a spring. The blade gleamed in the last faint afterglow of the twilight. The rod, bent double whipped straight. There was a prodigious splash. A length of waving line wrapped itself about a low-hanging pine limb above Bramwell's head.

Tom Lump grasped the tree trunk for support. He gasped out feebly an Abenaqui word he thought he had long forgotten. It was the name of the principal god in the Abenaqui hell. Bramwell, he saw, had sat down on the bank, his knees pulled up, his head held between both hands.

Then Tom Lump moved away, a swift shadow, into the deeper woods, from which he presently emerged close to their camping site with a lusty, "Hi! Hi, there!"

"Hello!" he heard Bramwell's answering voice.

"Where away?" Tom called.

"Down at the pool."

He was on his feet when Tom Lump

got there. He was taking down the rod. The gaff was hooked again in his belt.

"I had him, Tom," he said quietly.

"No!"

"Yes sir, I had him. Got excited at the very end. Snapped my line."

Once again Tom muttered that Abenaqui word he thought he had long since forgotten.

"Hook an old timer like that and lose him and you're done. Never get another chance," Bramwell observed.

"Naw. He'll never strike again. He'll remember this experience," Tom agreed.

"Right. Lost my chance for good. Well, that's that. Let's have some grub."

Bramwell led the way back to their little clearing. Tom busied himself starting a fire. Bramwell stretched himself out on the ground like a man physically all in.

But he was eagerly astir at Tom's call for supper. Tom filled their plates with salmon done to a turn, and corn bread and bacon. Bramwell ate like a man half-starved. Tom could not touch a thing. So he put down his plate and tried some coffee. He found he did not want that either. But he lighted his pipe when Bramwell, filled to repletion, struck a match for his own.

"Sturgeon, wasn't it?" Bramwell asked Tom.

"No doubt of it."

"How many of 'em did you ever know of before in this vicinity?"

"Three. All small ones," said Tom. "Lost him at the end of it?" he inquired after a pause.

"Had him way up. Ready for the gaff."

"Tough," said Tom.

"Part of the game," said Bramwell. He rolled over on his face, his head resting on one arm.

TOM washed up the dishes. Then he sat down near the motionless figure on the ground. He spoke Bramwell's name. There was no answer. He laid a hand lightly on Bramwell's shoulder. There was no movement of the stretched-out figure. Tom listened, his ear lowered to the head pillowed on one arm. The breathing was deep and heavy. Now and then there was the hint of a gurgling snore.

The last afterglow in the west faded. A million stars hung low in a sky of purple-black velvet. A cold wind fanned the embers of the dying fire into momentary flame. Tom went to the shelter of hemlock boughs, got a blanket, unrolled it and spread it over the inert figure on the ground. He was smiling as he did so and slowly nodding his head.

And as he stopped to cover Bramwell with that blanket, his fingers went swiftly to the hip pocket of Bramwell's khaki trousers, fumbled a moment, ever so gently, and came out with what they were seeking. Tom wanted that hunting knife, and Bramwell, when he discovered it gone, would understand. He would understand that a great and perfect friendship had begun between himself and Tom Lump.

WAGONS AWAY!

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

"Why, you damned murderers," said Morgan jerkily. . . .

FOR four long years the gold fever had tugged hard at young MORGAN WRIGHT. But the winter of 1852 found him still chained to the little New England town of Hadley, Mass. His pay as assistant to the smith in the mill meant a lot to his family—his stern father, SILAS; his grave, quiet mother, FRANCES; his young sister BETTY.

Silas Wright was reluctant to leave the frugal blessings of New England for the uncertainty and hardships of the great new West. Twenty years before, Morgan's uncle, ABNER WRIGHT, had gone west, and now they believed him dead. The only word they had had from him was a letter enclosing the deed to a ranch in California.

Then ONE-EYE POTTS came to town. Adventurer, hunter, gold prospector, guide—Potts was ready to go back west, after visiting his folks in Concord. He examined Abner Wright's deed, pronounced it a clear title to twelve hundred acres of land, and advised the Wrights to go west. At this crucial moment, came the dreaded layoff at the mill.

That settled it. And the Wright family made preparations to leave Hadley, in company with One-eye Potts. Though she had given him scant encouragement, Morgan regretted leaving SALLY BARNES, the Squire's daughter. When he said good-bye, she told him look up her cousin, FRANK BARNES, who'd gone west two years before.

By rail and stagecoach, they arrived at St. Louis. Potts then suggested that the family remain here while he and Morgan continue on to Independence to purchase supplies for the trek west. That night, Morgan, left to his own devices by Potts, was caught in the midst of a

. . . And then, like a cornered snake, Smith struck.

street brawl and his wallet, containing all the Wright funds—over $800—was stolen by a broken-nosed man who had been standing beside him. Desperate, Morgan kept the loss secret and, next morning, went aboard the boat for Independence.

In Independence, Morgan saw again the man who had stolen his money. The town marshal broke up the ensuing fight and, after identification, returned the wallet to Morgan. The thief, a man named HACKENSACK, and his companion—who turned out to be Sally Barnes' cousin Frank—were run out of town. A rumor spread that they were members of the Nighthawk crew—a band of murderous outlaws.

In the recovered wallet, Morgan found not only his $800 but 400 more—and an IOU for $1000 from DAN GRISCOM, a prosperous trader.

That night, Morgan Wright sat alone in camp outside Independence, after Potts had gone into town with a group of Pennsylvanians. A horseman came by and told him a man from Hadley was waiting to see him down by the storehouse. Morgan went there, to find himself ambushed by Hackensack and Barnes. When Hackensack shot at him and missed, Morgan pulled his own gun and killed Hackensack. Barnes fled. Morgan heard the excited voices of townsmen approaching. Determined to bring the Law to St. Louis, they would hang him as an example. Morgan leapt on Hackensack's horse and rode swiftly off toward the West.

PART II

MORGAN Wright rode fast and he rode far, but he did not ride well.

His horse was a magnificent black stallion, tractable and friendly, of remarkable speed and stamina, small in the muzzle and wide in the nostril. Little as he knew about horses, Morgan realized that he had a prize in this animal. To his delighted astonishment he found his advances met with obvious liking, even affection; it was love at first sight, and he repaid it to the full. In these vast spaces of loneliness, horse and man inevitably drew close together or else were enemies . . . even as man and man.

The saddle and accoutrements were Mexican, of magnificent carven leather mounted with silver, and were fitted with pistol holsters. Into one of these his own pistol fitted; in the other, he found its twin snugly nested. He could have asked nothing better.

Two nights and a day, riding fast and far but not well, sleeping dew-wet and chill, munching parched corn and jerked meat from the saddlebag. All thought of pursuit or the long hand of justice vanished with the eastern horizon. He followed the road, leaving it and skirting the parties of emigrants whom he overtook, pressing on he scarcely knew whither. With the second day, consciousness of disaster was growing strong and stronger within him.

The heavy teamster boots were not suited to the saddle, nor was he himself. Stiff and incredibly sore, he mounted with a groan this second morning and forced himself to ride on. The emergency rations assuaged the pangs of hunger but were far from satisfying. Thus far, the little he had picked up from One-eye Potts about lone travel had proven of enormous value; but, like the food in his saddlebags, it failed to cover all the circumstances of the case. He knew, too, that Frank Barnes must be somewhere over the horizon, though he had seen or heard nothing of the man.

The morning sun was warming and comforting; the day was still, motionless, heavy with the portentous silence of budding spring. Trees showed ahead, solid masses of them; to the left rolled the muddy expanse of the Kaw river.

A clack-clack of hammers grew upon the air. With it came a drifting odor of bacon and cookery that made Morgan's mouth water. He was too saddle-galled and stiff and miserable to care what happened, and made straight for the listless smoke that lifted above the trees. A dog barked lusty warning; figures appeared; he rode in upon two wagons camped beside a stream, somewhat off the main road. Here were six men hard at work, while three women and as

many children stared at him. Wheels were off the wagons; trouble, evidently.

Morgan dismounted stiffly, with many a grimace, as he replied to the greetings of the company. They regarded him curiously, but the dog accepted him and so did they. Three days out from Independence, and heading to meet a company from St. Joseph, they had encountered nothing but woe. He accepted cornbread and bacon only too gladly, and cast an eye at the work.

"What's the trouble?" he demanded, grateful for human company. They were city folks, he found, from St. Louis, who had outfitted at Independence in a hurry.

"These wagons are no good," said one of the men, despairingly. "Ain't none of us much account in fixing 'em, neither. The tires come off the wheels and the spokes swing around in the hubs, and we can't figure out how to make 'em stick. We got the outfit second-hand and sure got took in."

Morgan investigated, learned that the wagons had been stored under cover since the preceding fall, and found that the chief trouble was dry wood. The slackened tires could be easily fixed up by driving strips of hoopiron or even wooden wedges between tire and felloe, and false spokes did the business for the spokes that were reeling in the hubs. A good soaking in the river ahead, waiting to be crossed, would do the rest. He fell to work, showing the perplexed men what was necessary, but his gingerly movements had drawn attention to his own plight.

When he confessed his trouble, he was taken in hand amid roars of laughter. A tin of bear-grease was found, the soothing ointment was applied liberally, and when the wagons moved on with morning across the steep banks of the Waukarosa, he was comfortably berthed in a wagon-bed.

With the evening camp, he was offered a permanent berth with the grateful company, but refused. Anxiety pursued him; what he most wanted now was to get ahead to the mission station, locate Dan Griscom and turn over the I O U, and perhaps get on to Kearny with the trader's outfit. The crawling pace of these wagons irked him. Also, he had tasted the freedom of being on his own, the bruises of contact were wearing off, and he was resolved to establish his own independence of action before once more joining company with the family. His own future now belonged to him, not to them.

"It's mighty good of you folks," he said, "but I've got business ahead and want to get going. I guess I can sit the saddle, at least for a spell. Anyhow, I won't get toughened up by riding in a wagon. So I'll move on in the morning."

"And take some bear's grease with you," put in one of the women, with a laugh.

MORNING dawned gray, with clouds rolling heavily up the sky and storm threatening. The camp breakfasted, and the kindly crowd insisted on stuffing Morgan's saddlebags with cornpone and bacon. He saddled the black stallion and was saying good-bye when the furious barking of the dog and a shout from the man on lookout drew all eyes to an approaching horseman jogging in from the north.

The new arrival greeted them amiably and dismounted. He was a bearded, slatternly man who carried a rifle over his arm and refused to part with it. He had a wary, alert air, and gave his name as Walters. Morgan saw him eyeing the black stallion with astonishment and apparent recognition, which he quickly veiled.

"Glad there's some women-folks along," he said. "My brother and his wife are with our outfit, five miles off'n the road. Some fellers run off our mules but we got 'em back all except two; but Sue, she had right bad luck. She got too close to the fire and burned her clothes. She ain't hurt much but it makes her powerful short on clothes and I aimed to ask if you had anything you can spare. I ain't asking charity, mind; I got money and I'll pay."

Walters had already breakfasted and refused hospitality. The women got together and made up a bundle, while the men set to work hitching the teams.

Walters took the opportunity to approach Morgan, nodding to him.

"Fine horse you got there," he said. "Where you git him?"

"Independence," said Morgan shortly. The other glanced around, then dropped his voice.

"Know anyone named Hack, do you?"

"Might be I do," said Morgan, who was fully on his guard. "Feller named Frank was with him."

"Frank Barnes." Walters grinned suddenly, with open relief. "Where's Hack now?"

"Couldn't come. Hurt. Staying in Independence. You a friend of his?"

"Well, I reckon," said Walters emphatically. "Didn't send you to find me, did he?"

Morgan recollected those voices from the darkness, back at Independence.

"You're not the chief, are you?" he demanded cautiously. Walters grinned again and slapped him on the shoulder.

"That's all right, pardner; I see we're in the same crowd, so don't be backward. Now look, we got to talk fast," said he, with a glance toward the approaching women. "You ain't with this outfit?"

"Just stopped to help 'em fix a wagon," Morgan said briefly, "and get some grub."

"Fine. Ride along with me, then. Me and 'Rapaho Smith have got us some plunder; we follered 'em from St. Jo and snagged 'em proper. Injun driver, too, so it's all right."

He finished hurriedly and turned to the women, who pressed their bundle upon him and refused payment, though he showed his money and made honest offer. Morgan shook hands around, mounted, and amid shouted hopes of meeting again to the westward, rode away in company of Walters.

Morgan knew only too well, by this time, that he was in Nighthawk fellowship. Briefly, he entertained the notion of denouncing this ruffian to the men from St. Louis; then he dismissed it. He had no proof, and these others were not the type of men to think or act swiftly in emergency. Besides, curiosity gnawed at him. He did not understand the mention of Indians, and he could not tell how much of Walters' story was false or why the man had been so anxious to get some women's raiment. Everything about it was bewildering.

He did know, however, that he was in contact with these prairie pirates, and jumped at the chance to learn more about them. He was supremely confident that he could take care of himself. He had spent some time, this morning, loading the two double-barreled pistols, and the proximity of the weapons was reassuring.

"Concho sure handles good, don't he?" called Walters, drawing rein.

Concho. As Morgan repeated the name, the black flicked his ears.

"Better ford along here and git acrost," said Walters, heading for the creek. "We ain't more'n half a mile up. I told them folks five mile so's they wouldn't want to go along and look. Danged if we ain't got one o' Griscom's wagons, full o' plunder! We'll take the mules with packs of the best stuff. It'll tickle the chief a plenty, too. 'Rapaho, he drilled that Injun plumb center at a hundred yards, and I creased the gal by luck."

"Where's the chief now?" demanded Morgan.

Aimed to meet us at Laramie, but can't never tell about him," Walters rejoined, and spurred his horse into the lead.

Morgan followed into the timber, at the creek beyond, down bank and across and up the farther slope. Those few words had given him the picture. . . Two men, shooting down an unsuspecting teamster and a girl and looting their wagon. A girl? That sounded improbable, but no matter. Griscom. . . Here was the great thing! One of Griscom's wagons! Obviously, a wagon from St. Joseph, with an Indian teamster.

Morgan had not clapped eyes on Dan Griscom aboard the river boat, and since then had missed him; but he had heard so much of the trader from Potts, and had been so intent upon returning that I O U, that the name fired him with eagerness. He had the feeling that his own trail was destined somehow to mix with that of Dan Griscom. The name and the man appealed to his im-

agination. He had done what Griscom had done, mounting and riding off into the vague west, alone. Only now did he begin to appreciate the skill and experience and hardy spirit behind Griscom's nonchalant departure. His own departure had been otherwise.

Half a mile! This confession from Walters, delighted over his own shrewdness, caused Morgan bitter but vain regret. Like the others, he had supposed the ruffian's camp to be a full five miles distant; otherwise he must have promptly exposed the man for what he was.

WALTERS, who had remained in the lead, now waved his rifle and pointed to a mass of trees ahead. As he rode, Morgan removed one of his weapons from its holster and tucked it under his belt, just in case.

Into the trees now, preceded by a hail from Walters. The green-budding trees opened. Here was a wagon with no top, its carefully packed contents strewn over the ground, half a dozen mules nearby. At one side sat a drooping figure. Working over the goods and making up packs for the mules was Arapaho Smith. Sighting two horsemen instead of one, Smith caught up his rifle and dived for cover beside the wagon.

He emerged, sheepishly grinning, at the laughter and explanations of Walters. Morgan came up and dismounted. Smith stuck out his paw.

"Howdy, stranger," he said. "Recruit, huh? Yep, that's Concho all right. Where's Hack, you say?"

"Stayed in Independence; got hurt in a row," said Morgan forcing himself to shake hands.

Smith was a different type from his ruffianly partner. He was all buckskin and beard, and except for a pair of new and handsome moccasins, so incredibly filthy as to put even One-eye Potts far in the distance. Even his face was seamed and pitted with dirt and grease.

"Set and eat," said he, leading the way to a tiny, smokeless fire. "Got some prime coffee made, thanks to Griscom. Glad we got a third hand to help with them mules. They're skeery critters, but they don't stay locoed like oxen do."

Rifles were laid aside. The three sat about the fire. Smith sat Indian fashion, on his heels. Morgan accepted a mug of coffee, but his eyes were already seeking out that seated, drooping figure to one side. It was that of a woman. She was seated against a sapling; her arms were around it and her wrists lashed together, effectually anchoring her to the spot. Her head was sunk and Morgan could not see her face, but there was a splotch of blood dried on her black hair. Her garments were extraordinary, being of new doeskin highly beaded and ornamented.

He realized that Smith was talking about her.

"That gal will make a right smart squaw, but she needs a heap o' gentling. I can't do nothing with her. Why, I even buried her pa. Think of it, me burying an Injun!" Arapaho Smith, lighting his pipe from the embers, was obviously injured. "And she wouldn't let out a word! Looks to me, Buck, like she was more greaser than Injun."

"Well, you got two squaws already," observed Walters, "so I might's well have her. Don't worry, I'll break her! I've had truck with these high and mighty Injun gals afore now, and when I git through with her she'll lick my boots, you bet."

Morgan realized that the words were calmly serious.

"Nope, we got to ask the chief first," said Arapaho Smith, puffing away. "Anyhow, she ain't just Injun; she and her pa have some white blood. Ain't Injuns from these parts, neither. The chief might take it badly if'n we didn't consult him. We got them papers and money from the box in the wagon, too, for him."

Morgan spoke up.

"I'm supposed to reach the chief as soon as possible, with word from Hackensack and Barnes. Hack thought he'd be at Kearny."

"Liable to be anywheres now, with the emigrant season comin' on," said Walters. "All we got to do is ride west and we'll pick up word. Plenty of the boys scattered out. With you ridin' Concho, you wouldn't have no trouble finding the boys. Like me finding you.

Most like Hack figured it that-a-way."

Smith nodded assent to this, and knocked out his pipe.

"Well, let's us git our trap-line finished and move out," he said. "I've got the packs ready for the six mules, all the primest stuff in the lot. I busted in them wheels so's anyone would think some fool emigrant got stuck and give up. Burning the wagon would make too much smoke-talk. I see you got the women's gear."

"No trouble at all. A sun-bonnet and a couple dresses," said Walters, and rose. Morgan came to his feet also. He had hoped for some mention of the "chief" that would give a clue to the identity of the Nighthawk leader, but it did not come and he dared not ask.

"You're a likely young 'un." Smith was eyeing him attentively. "What's your handle?"

"Morgan."

"Well, you and him," with a nod at Walters, "can strip her and git her into proper clothes, while I 'tend to the packs."

"Strip who?" demanded Morgan. Walters, with a grin, jerked his thumb at the seated figure. The woman had lifted her head and was looking at them.

"Her. We can't take her along nohow rigged out like she is. That's howcome I had to find some duds for her, so's we wouldn't have questions fired at us everywhere. We'd better cut us some hefty switches and lay on to her good—gentle her at the start."

The Indian woman—good God! Why, they were in dead earnest—treating her like a wild animal! All the New England blood in Morgan suddenly flew into rebellion. Perhaps his bit of redskin inheritance—which rumor ascribed to Morgan's family—fired the spark.

Walters stared at him, slack-jawed. Arapaho Smith let out a growl.

"Hey! What's got into you?"

Head jutting forward, eyes ablaze, a flush clouding his darkly stubborn features, Morgan had flung off the mask. His brain leaped into tempestuous riot. His nerves were all a-quiver. The pistol that slid out into his hand was unsteady.

"Why, you damned murderers!" he said jerkily.

"Look out, he's gone loco!" exclaimed Smith, and took a step toward the rifles that lay together on the ground. Morgan threw up the pistol.

"Stop it! Don't move!"

His words got instant obedience. Smith vented a gusty oath. Walters, still staring, tried appeasement.

"Look here, feller, don't git ornery. You and us are all partners—"

"Partners? You cold-blooded devils, dont use the word to me!" cried Morgan hotly. "I'm not one of your infernal crew, thank heaven! I ought to kill you like I did Hackensack, like ravening wolves ought to be killed. But I'm not your kind. Clear out! Turn around and go, and go on foot without your guns. Clear out, d'ye hear? Get moving!"

Folly, like money, has no home; the whole value of experience lies in its bitter teachings. Morgan, pouring forth impetuous words, vaguely realized their futile worth. He had no time to think twice.

For Smith, with the sinuous whiplash rapidity of a cornered snake, moved and struck. A glitter left his hand. Morgan saw the knife glinting in air, too swift to evade. He threw up his left arm across his throat, and felt the searing stab of the steel. But, in the same instant, he pressed trigger and the pistol exploded.

He peered through the gush of smoke. The face of Walters grew upon him; with furious yell, the ruffian was plunging forward, knife in hand. Morgan fired the other barrel. The yell shrilled to a scream, and Walters went bounding away for cover of the trees. Neither mules nor horses were close enough to take panic at the shots.

WALTERS was gone, out of sight. The smoke was gone. Morgan shoved his empty pistol under his belt and stepped toward Smith. Quick concern tore at him with incongruous fingers for the man he had just shot; not pity, but a rapid desire to repair what he had done. Then it fled. Arapaho Smith was beyond repair. He lay with blood spreading over the front of his leather shirt and a wild dreadful glitter in his eyes.

"Drink!" he barked faintly. "Gimme

a drink . . . water, coffee, anything. . ."

Morgan stumbled hastily toward the pannikin by the fire and caught it up. The aching hurt in his left arm rose to a throb. The knife transfixed it, sunk to the haft in the flesh. Morgan seized it and jerked it out, scarcely noting the pain, and came back to the dying man with the pannikin. It was too late. Smith's eyes were staring, his voice came in a faint blur.

"Strong med'cine, strong med'cine," he muttered. He tried to swallow, failed, and slumped down with a long sigh.

Morgan stood up. Strong medicine—that phrase again! He stared blankly about, heard a voice, realized that the Indian woman was calling him, and his senses cleared. With the knife that still bore his own blood, he hurried to her and carefully sawed at the rawhide thongs between her wrists.

"You're hurt, you're hurt!" she cried. He felt sudden astonishment that she spoke English. She was free now, standing beside him. "Get out of that shirt, quickly! I can take care of the wound —quickly, before you lose too much blood!"

Yes, his left hand was dripping a crimson stream. With a grunt, he rid himself of the heavy shirt, and she helped him. Then he sat down, and found her at work instantly.

"It might be worse," she said, as she bandaged the torn flesh. "Later on, I'll do it again; my hands are stiff now."

He saw her now. For the first time, he was fully aware of her. A bullet had grazed her forehead, just at the hair line. Woman? No—a slim, deft girl. Indian? Impossible—she was no darker than Morgan himself. The soft doeskin was molded to the budding curves of her figure, and her face, between the two braids of black hair, struck out at him in haunting beauty. It was aquiline, delicately chiseled, filled now with conflicting emotions. When she met his eyes and smiled, the day took on new radiance.

"Careful, now!" She helped him put on his shirt again.

"Thanks," said Morgan. "I'm all right. But that feller Walters got away."

"I only wish he'd come back; there are two rifles here. But he won't."

She turned from him, swooped upon the fire, seized some fragments of food there and gulped down water from the pail nearby. She ate ravenously, wolfishly.

Morning peace and silence, storm in the sky, the animals grouped, the dead man lying stiffly repulsive. It was all hard to realize. Morgan stepped to the side of Arapaho Smith and sat down. The man's moccasins were brand new, the soles scarcely dirtied. He began to unlace them, and get off his own clumsy shoes.

"Let me help; my hands are all right now." She appeared abruptly and joined in the task. "It's all right. They belonged to my father—new ones he had just made. I'm glad that you'll be wearing them."

Morgan's embarrassment wore away. When he had donned the moccasins, he spoke awkwardly.

"Can't I do something for you? Your head's hurt—"

"The skin's scarcely broken; it's nothing at all," she said. "I heard what all of you said. They took you for one of their gang, didn't they?"

He nodded. "My name's Wright, Morgan Wright. I don't know what to do about all this. I'm anxious to find Dan Griscom; he's somewhere ahead of me. I ran into this feller Walters and came along with him. Say, you speak good English!"

"I've been at school in Santa Fe and St. Jo," she rejoined, "so I ought to be a little better than a savage."

"Oh, I didn't mean that," he exclaimed hastily. She laughed a little, watching his face.

"No, but you thought it. Look! I owe you great thanks—your appearance here, your horse, the way you have freed me —I'm bewildered by it all, I can't understand it," she said, gravely now. "Chiefly, I think, because you seem new to the plains."

"It's my first trip," he assented. "We're from New England."

"Then talk about it later," she cut in with decision, and pointed to the sky. "With storm coming up, we'd better get moving. If you want to find Griscom,

so do I. The most valuable part of the load is in these packs. We'd better load up the mules, take the horses, and be on our way."

"Yes, but you're a woman," said Morgan, frowning. "I'll have to put you somewhere, maybe with some folks—"

"Wake up, silly!" she broke in. "Put me somewhere, indeed! I can take care of myself far better than you can. We'll go find Griscom together. Can't do anything with the wagon, the wheels are broken. Do you know how to pack a mule?"

"Well, no," he admitted. "But I expect it's no trick. I'd better bury this dead man, I guess."

"Leave him alone for Walters to bury. He'll be back after we've gone, to steal what he can," she said with acid contempt. "No time to waste; let me take charge, and don't use your arm. Do you really want to do something to help?"

"Why, of course!" he responded. She gave him the razor-keen knife and pointed to the trees at one side.

"See those three big trees together? In front of them is a grave; you can't miss it, the earth's just been turned. Carve the name J. G. Mora on the center tree. I'm Diane Mora. And I'll thank you once more for doing this. When I need a hand with the packs, I'll call."

Morgan, in rather a daze, went to the trees and began the work.

Indian, indeed! Well, if that were true, he had never heard of an Indian like her. J. G. Mora, eh? Diane Mora—that was no Indian name at all. The work grew beneath his hand. A pitiful thing, that she must thus say farewell to her father, rudely shoveled into the ground before her eyes. It occurred to him that the two ruffians, thanks to her costume, had jumped at the conclusion she was Indian. More like Spanish or Mexican—greaser, they called it.

He stood by the mules. awkwardly, when they were ready to leave and she was kneeling at the grave, with her back to him. A pitiful thing, he thought again. But, when she rose and came to join him, there were no tears on her cheeks.

"You did it nicely. Thank you," she said, and smiled a little. But the smile held all her unshed tears.

CHAPTER VI

NIGHTHAWK'S TRICK

GRAY storm-scud in the sky, wind sweeping out of the north with a boding howl, they headed westward with the six mules and two pack-horses carrying rifles and blankets and supplies. Diane, with cool efficiency, said they would later angle into the wagon road where it crossed the Kaw or Kansas river at the mission station.

Indeed, her utter competence and ability left Morgan aghast, at first. No man could have thrown better hitches over the packs; she knew everything that had to be done, and did it while he stared in clumsy dismay. She laughed at his attitude.

"In two days you'll be doing it all yourself, or as soon as your arm's right," she said. They jogged along side by side, with Concho obviously joyous that his name was known and used. If she made no mention of her father, Morgan perceived that it was not for any lack of regard; she was stoically keeping her emotion under harsh control, that was all.

Indian? Well, that might be, said she; but actually she was a little of everything—American grandfather, a trader dead at Santa Fe; a French mother, also dead; a father, Mora, half Spanish and half American, with here and there bits of Indian ancestry. She had been returning now from school in St. Joseph, with her father.

"He brought me these clothes," and she looked down at the rare doeskin garments as she spoke, and bit her lip. "We were going to the mission station to meet Griscom, but were slow getting off; whether we'll meet him or not, I don't know now. He was taking some of his wagons to Laramie—they're leaving St. Jo now—and then heading south for Taos and Santa Fe. There's so much business on this Oregon trail, that the old Santa Fe trail is secondary these days. Well, my father was responsible to Griscom for these goods, and now I'm responsible for what we've saved, and the mules."

"Then, won't you join up with some company on the way?" asked Morgan. She gave him a glance of surprise.

"Why? We'll make better time, and the two of us can manage it. We'll make for the mission station first; we'll get there tomorrow. If Griscom's not there, we'll keep going. That is, if you want to do it."

"Oh, I'm agreeable!" said Morgan, inwardly overjoyed.

She had captivated him; he admitted it to himself frankly. Not until they were in camp that evening did she mention the murderous assault in the night —her father shot down, a bullet stunning her with its grazing impact, so that she was made captive without even a struggle.

That day's travel was, to Morgan, a revelation. The rain, that would bog everything in mud for the luckless wagons, held off until late afternoon. And from Diane he drank in so much information about mules and horses, camps and grub and cooking, that he despaired of ever putting it all into practice. He was no little surprised when he found that while he held her in admiration and staring wonder for her efficiency in this world of the prairies, she regarded him in return with something of the same feelings.

"It's all more amazing than you can realize, Morgan," she said, after he had frankly told her his own story. "Your medicine is strong."

"You, too?" he rejoined. "Potts said that. Arapaho Smith said it, before he died. You believe in luck, do you?"

"It's not luck," she said. "It's you, yourself. When you first came and sat down with those two men, I knew you were different, I knew help was at hand."

"You weren't looking!"

"I was too. I wondered how you were going to manage it. And then when you stood up and faced them, I was afraid for you—but I knew you'd do it. Strong medicine, Morgan! Even if you don't know the first thing about life out here, you'll come through."

"Thanks," he said simply. "I aim to, somehow."

With the heavy Mackinaw blankets brought from the wagon, the rain bothered them little that night, and they were off again with sunrise. Morgan had scant use of his left arm, but Diane had rebandaged the wound and it was in good shape. The rain held over into the morning, then cleared off by noon.

Shortly after, they sighted the red brick buildings of the mission station, agency and farm that served the Iowa, Sac and other tribes hereabouts. They rode in, found the German priest in charge, and talked with him. Griscom, said he, had left only yesterday, after waiting in vain for wagon or messages from St. Joseph, and had gone on to Fort Kearny.

"Then we'll go on too," said Diane staunchly.

Here they found themselves ahead of any wagon trains from Independence; here, too, Morgan came to definite realization of distances. It was over six hundred miles on to Laramie, less than two hundred on to Fort Kearny; but in all these blundering days, only a scant eighty had been covered from Independence.

"Never mind," Diane told him, as they headed out and away from the station. "From here, we get into the plains country proper. The tangle of rivers to ford, that holds up wagon trains so terribly, is mostly behind us now. Once we come into the junction of the St. Jo road, another eighty miles ahead, we may meet with some of Griscom's wagons; they jump off ahead of the emigrants sometimes, carrying plenty of feed for the teams We've got plenty here for the animals until we reach the junction, and from then on will probably find enough grass to take us to Kearny."

Morgan no longer wondered that so many wagons had "seen the elephant," as Potts had phrased it, and given up all hope. The road this far, with its numerous fords and river banks and the ground soft from spring rains, was a heart-breaking prospect for heavily loaded prairie schooners.

But, with the next day, all this was gone and he was in a different country entirely. Here was the high grass region, stretching on to Laramie; bare of trees, the tender green of new-springing grass spread as far as eye could see.

ARM or no arm, Morgan grimly pitched in—accomplishing his share of the job, learning to pack and to throw a hitch, learning to make camp, learning to stake out the animals and care for them, absorbing the thousand and one rudiments of what seemed the simplest tasks. And all the while the wonder of his two companions grew upon him—Concho the fleet and stalwart, trained to perfection, wise in all the ways of the prairie, and the girl Diane.

It was not her capability that he admired, but the girl herself; he divined far depths within her that left him abashed and baffled. The deep skies, the far horizons, drew them into intimacy. They were alone in this world of billowing cloud and unbroken vistas. She was like no woman he had ever known; she had no affectations, she was herself, unpretentious and unpretending, a good comrade unhampered by any consideration of sex.

Like Concho, she had much practical wisdom. Morgan helped her put fresh loads in the two heavy rifles, which were left on a pack-horse, well covered from any dampness. No use for them, she said, except in some emergency.

"There's little or no game along the wagon road," she went on. "Those pistols of yours are weapons enough. Even if we left the road and ran into buffalo, they would serve better than rifles; you can ride alongside a buffalo, pistol him behind the foreleg, and he's down. The ciboleros do that, or even use arrows."

"Ciboleros?" he repeated questioningly. She smiled.

"The Spanish name for buffalo hunters. My father used to be one. So did Griscom. He was great friends with Josiah Gregg, captain of all the Santa Fe traders. Poor Captain Gregg! He died two years ago in California, with the Trinidad company—starvation. And

he knew the wilderness better than most men. Some little thing went wrong or was overlooked, I guess. He was a great friend of our family; whenever he was in Santa Fe he would come to the house and talk by the hour. Once he gave me this."

She opened her doeskin shirt, slipped a worn buckskin thong over her head, and held it out. Morgan took it. On the thong was attached a little flat pouch ornamented with beads. He frowned at it, puzzled. "What is it?" he asked.

"Strong medicine, he used to say; very strong medicine." She laughed softly. "He got it from a Sioux chief."

"No, I mean what is the thing itself? What's in the pouch?"

"I don't know. He didn't know. Probably the Sioux didn't know—a pebble, a bit of earth, a bone—anything that was considered strong medicine. Most of the mountain men wear medicine pouches like that, Indian fashion. Put it around your neck, please; keep it. I mean it."

Morgan hesitated. "Apparently I don't need any medicine," he said whimsically. "This is an old keepsake of yours—"

"I'd like to give it to you. And," she added, unsmiling, "Cap'n Gregg used to say that those who have the strongest medicine run the greatest risks."

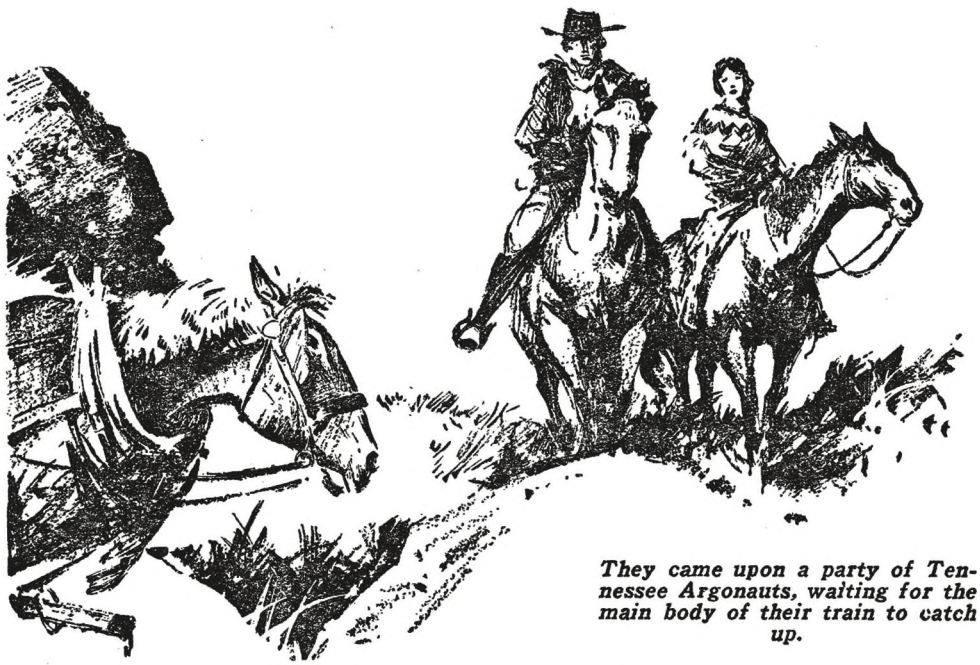
Seeing that she was in earnest, Morgan accepted the gift, took off his wide-brimmed hat, and settled the thong about his neck beneath his shirt. Those who have the strongest medicine run the greatest risks—the words grew upon him. They held a deep truth.

"I'll sure need all my medicine and then some," he said, "if the Nighthawks ever catch up with me! Do you know anything about them or their chief?"

"No more than you, nor as much," she replied gravely.

Another day and another, and not a soul seen along the way. They crossed the Vermilion and camped beside the Big Blue; on the morrow they would come to the junction with the St. Joseph road and, possibly, one or more of Griscom's wagons, to whom the mules and loads might be turned over. For this, Morgan longed most heartily. His arm was healing well; even so, the work with the packs was a sore handicap to them.

Yet they were making time, from a wagon-train standpoint. Wagons covered from ten to thirty miles a day, de-



They came upon a party of Tennessee Argonauts, waiting for the main body of their train to catch up.

pending on the terrain, but the average was low, due to accidents of travel.

Morning saw them over the Big Blue, fifty yards wide and three feet deep, the banks marked by a number of crudely tokened graves. Kearny and the Platte were a hundred and twenty miles on, but now the junction was close.

They came into it late in the afternoon, a heavily trampled road stretching eastward and blending ahead with their own, but empty, far as the eye could see. The gray sky was lowering, and a whistling wind bit out of the north.

"No wagons," said Morgan, drawing rein. Diane pointed on ahead.

"Smoke, however; there's a crick yonder. Somebody's camped by it; some old hand who knows the signs. We're liable to get nowhere, by the feel, and we'd better join up with whoever's ahead and get comfortable before dark."

They rode on. A line of sparse trees, well off the road, developed into two wagons, a knot of animals, and a group of eight men, who welcomed them with hearty greetings and wide-eyed stares at Diane. The eight were a party of Tennessee Argonauts, waiting here for the main body of their train to catch up.

"Had a terrible rain the other day," said one, "that played hob with the St. Jo road. Everything's slowed up back there."

"Have any wagons passed?" Morgan asked. "We're looking for wagons belonging to the trader Griscom, from St. Jo."

"Dunno," came the response. "Things are jammed up something frightful at St. Jo—all you can see back there is wagons. I hear tell some cholera's broke out, too. We got away from it all and got our outfits shook down, and we're waiting. Two of our crowd are out hunting, and they'd better get back afore dark or they're liable to be lost, with storm coming up."

The missing men, it proved, had joined the wagons en route from St. Joseph, engaging themselves as hunters and guides to the outfit, subject to the approval of the company when the delayed wagons caught up. As they were emphatically not greenhorns, and could take care of themselves, storm or no storm, little worry was spent on them by the others.

LIGHTNING split the blackening sky as they loosed the packs. The Tennessee men generously proposed that Diane take one of the covered wagons for her own use; this she refused. They had erected a tent just beyond the edge of the trees, for the night guard, and she asked for this if convenient.

"I certainly shan't turn you boys out of your cover," she said. "You're going to need it. I can do without, but if you can spare the tent shelter it'll be fine. This is going to be a two or three-day storm, by the feel of it, and there's no use taking the road until it's over. Better lash everything down tight, and make the stock safe as well."

It was so arranged and, there being plenty of wagon-room, Morgan's blankets were tossed into the nearer wagon. He could appreciate how these men felt about giving Diane a place to herself, and their awkward self-consciousness in her presence; she could not. She was far from ignoring the conventions, but they did not bulk large in her scheme of things, and she had no awareness of self.

The wind howled, but the rain mercifully held off until supper was past. They were all sitting about the fire singing to the twanging of a banjo, when it came with a rush—a stinging, icy rain that threatened to turn into snow. There was a scramble for shelter, a chorus of laughing goodnights, and the luckless night guards took up their duties. Morgan offered to make one of the three in order to justify his guesting, but the hospitable Tennesseans refused point-blank.

"Heard we was liable to git another snow up this way," said one of his companions, as they bedded down atop the load, under the canvas cover, "but hoped we'd miss it. Snow in May ain't no rarity in this country, I reckon."

"Your two hunters haven't come in, have they?" demanded Morgan sleepily.

"Gosh, no!" exclaimed someone, and sent out a hail to the guards, telling them to keep the fire going and have an eye out for the missing hunters.

Morgan was asleep before he knew it.

He wakened once. It must have been toward morning, for the rain had turned into a soft snow that drifted in cold upon his face, but the wind was howling worse than ever. He was conscious of movement about him, a stir in the wagon, and excited voices. At his drowsy inquiry, one of the men made response.

"It's them two hunters. I hear they fetched in some antelope meat."

Morgan wrapped up again, covered his head with the blanket, and gradually drifted back into slumber.

He and Diane had agreed to say nothing to anyone about her story, or the two men, Walters and Arapaho Smith, and her father's murder. To do so would serve no good purpose, Griscom being the person concerned most directly in the matter, and would only entail unpleasant notoriety among the Argonauts. So they had merely announced themselves as being in Griscom's employ and seeking some trace of him.

Morgan slept late, and with excellent reason. When he flung off his blanket and sat up, he perceived that the daylight was wan, snow being driven thickly down by a whooping blast of wind and filling the air. It was a soft, moist spring snow, but none the less it carpeted the ground with white.

Then he perceived something else. Seated on the wagon box and eyeing him steadily, was one of the Tennessee men, a drawling raw-boned fellow named Jeff.

"Oh, hello!" said Morgan, and yawned. "Storm's still keeping up, is it? Looks like I've overslept."

"Won't hurt none," said Jeff. "Stay sot."

"Eh?" Morgan blinked, surprised by a strange note in the man's voice and air. He reached for his moccasins, and Jeff spoke again.

"Leave 'em alone, Wright."

"What do you mean?"

Jeff hitched around a rifle that lay across his knees, until it covered Morgan, and the latter saw that his finger was on the trigger. And the hammer was back.

"What kind of a joke is this?" demanded Morgan. "D'you know that gun is cocked?"

"Sure is," drawled Jeff, his keen eyes alert. "And if you make a move, I'll blow the daylights out'n you. It's that kind of a joke."

Morgan stared. "Good lord, man! You're serious!"

"Yep. Got my orders. If you aim to go out, all right; a gun goes behind you and it stays close, and then you come back here and stay sot." Jeff shifted his quid of tobacco and spat out of the wagon's front, without taking his eyes off Morgan. "We got you and we aim to hang on to you a spell, till the other wagons catch up."

"Are you crazy?" exclaimed Morgan.

"Nope, not as I know of. Them two hunters come in las' night, they knowed you right off. Knowed your hoss too. And them mules you stole off o' Griscom."

Morgan relaxed, with a laugh of incredulity. Another of the party had come up and was standing by the tailgate of the wagon, looking in. He, too, carried a rifle. Morgan turned to him.

"What on earth is all this about?"

"Jeff was tellin' you," said the man, harsh hostility in his air. "If you want to get out and get you a bite to eat, come along. I'll watch him, Jeff. And mind your step, Wright! One move that looks like makin' trouble or escape, and you catch hot lead. We ain't lettin' any of you cussed Nighthawks slip through our fingers alive, you bet!"

Nighthawks!

"Will you kindly explain, while I get on my moccasins, just why you think I'm one of that gang?" demanded the bewildered Morgan. "And where is Miss Mora?"

"In her tent. Under guard, too," came the response. "I tell you, things have come to a mighty pretty pass, when a fine-lookin' gal like her can take up with the likes of you, and go drifting around the prairies! I wouldn't have believed it, only both our hunters knew you and told us all about you."

Morgan tugged on his moccasins. "What about me?"

"Bein' wanted for murdering a traveler at Independence and goin' off with his horse. Barnes recognized the horse right off, before he'd heard a word about you. No use you talkin', now. Save your

breath. Soon's you have a bite to eat, we'll hold a council and you can have your sayso."

Barnes! The name shut Morgan up like a clam. And the other man, the second hunter?

"Mind telling me who the other man is, with Barnes?" he asked.

"Buck Walters, he says his name is. Barnes knows him right well."

Morgan felt an insane impulse to laughter; he choked it down. He choked down the hot words that came to his lips. Save your breath! Good advice there. With an effort, he got himself under control, and climbed out into the driving snow.

The rifle followed him closely.

CHAPTER VII

THE DEVIL TO PAY

EVEN with the little he knew, Morgan could figure things out fairly well.

A little fire, fed with buffalo chips and small wood from the trees, was struggling for life. By it, Morgan gulped some coffee and cornpone left over from breakfast, then was rifle-escorted back to his wagon. On every hand he met looks of hatred and dark mutterings. The men with whom he had supped so joyously last night, were now bitter against him; one of them spoke viciously of stringing up the blasted Nighthawk to the nearest tree, and running the girl out of camp with horse-whips, snow or no snow.

Frank Barnes—fleeing desperately from Independence, no doubt heading for the St. Joseph road. Walters, in hot flight from that camp where his fellow-murderer had paid full price, also making north. The two, quite obviously, had met and joined up with these wagons heading west. And of course they had recognized Concho.

As he climbed back into the wagon, Morgan realized that any argument with his guards was useless and worse than useless. Even though his blood pumped faster at their words about Diane, he must control himself now, if ever; and after all, a young man and a young woman had no business riding across the plains together, at least in the eyes of men fresh from civilized conventions. He could not blame the Tennessee men, but he could blame Walters and Frank Barnes, with a bitter hatred so deep as to be beyond all words.

His glimpses of the tent had shown a rifle-armed guard at the entrance flap; Diane, evidently, was regarded as an abandoned and desperate creature.

The wet snow drove down endlessly on the shrieking wind. A month earlier it would have been a blizzard; now it was a tag-end of winter that would be melted off the earth a few hours after the storm ceased. From his wagon-prison Morgan could see the men moving about, attending to camp tasks and bringing in fuel. The man Jeff was again his guard. Morgan attempted no argument, gathering that a council would be held as soon as the two hunters, who were sleeping after their long ride, were awake.

Presently he saw them, dim shapes through the flittering snow; Walters, muffled and bearded, Frank Barnes burly and commanding as ever. Clear-headed now, comprehending the whole affair, Morgan watched them grimly. He knew Frank Barnes was responsible for this bold, clever move; the man was good at seizing occasions and twisting them to his own advantage. His charges would not hold water, of course, but would serve him excellently for the moment.

Leaving one to guard the tent, the Tennessee men gathered in at the wagon, all seven of them, bearded, resolute, hard-eyed, silent. Walters and Barnes strode up together. Walters eyed Morgan with a furtive jubilation, Barnes nodded in curt greeting. The men crowded closer to let them in out of the storm.

"Well, boys," said one of the Tennessee men, "let's decide what to do. Wright, these two men know you; they say you're one of the Nighthawks, that you murdered a traveler named Hackensack back at Independence, and that your mules and packs were stolen from Griscom. They've identified the brand of the mules as his. What you got to say?"

"Apparently you've all made your minds up," said Morgan bitterly.

"Nope, but we ain't taking chances. It's your ante."

Morgan met the fixed, glittering gaze of Barnes, whose cheek bore a fresh scar.

"Hackensack and Frank Barnes," he said slowly, "are well-known members of the Nighthawk gang. I killed Hackensack, yes, after he had robbed me and tried to murder me. Barnes was in company with him; looks like one of my bullets touched up his face a trifle, too. Walters and a rascal named Arapaho Smith murdered Miss Mora's father, who was a teamster in Griscom's employ. She has the receipts and papers concerning the wagon-load of goods, from which we salvaged the best in those packs. I know that you're all honest men, but you've let yourselves be made dupes by this scoundrel Barnes. While you may be slow to believe me, Miss Mora will verify all I say."

"We aim to ask her separate," spoke up the man Jeff. "But you and her have cooked up a yarn and will stick to it. What's this about her father bein' murdered?"

Morgan launched into his story, answering a running fire of questions, going into details—every moment more hopeless, more desperate. He was fully aware of the skeptical attitude of his auditors. They regarded him as a fanciful liar, they had made up their minds beforehand that he was guilty, and his words were worse than wasted. When it came out that he and Barnes were old acquaintances, Barnes was ordered to speak out.

"That's true." he said, with an apparance of reluctant frankness. "We're from the same town in Massachusetts. I hadn't wanted to bring it up, because what happened back there shouldn't be held against a man here in the west; but Wright was jailed back home for theft and suspected murder, and skipped out in a hurry between two days."

"Why, you condemned liar!" burst forth Morgan passionately, and turned to the men around. "Look! Tie up these two rascals; tie me up. Take us back to St. Jo, where Miss Mora is well-known, or back to Independence; my family's there now, with men who know me. Then you'll have the truth quick enough! Then you'll have proof and to spare!"

Barnes smiled sarcastically.

"Long way to go, isn't it?"

A chorus of assent went up. Jeff drawled out the common mind.

"Reckon we ain't that much interested, Wright. I vote we let things rest as they are till the rest of the wagons catch up, then put it up to the hull company. Your plunder and mules belong to Griscom, that's sure. We can take 'em along to Fort Kearny and hand 'em over to him or his men. What say, boys?"

There were quick growls of approval. Another man spoke.

"I vote for it! We don't want to act hasty, nor take no law into our own hands. Let's hold a reg'lar trial when the wagons come along. It's a ter'ble thing for a nice-lookin' gal like her to be travelin' with this feller, and not married neither; it's just contrary to all decency and hadn't ought to be allowed. But we'd better put it up to all of our company and not be hasty."

More approval. Morgan, darkly glowering, gained nothing by his silence; he was, in truth, too appalled by the direction of affairs to find any appeal or argument.

"Why not appoint Barnes to guard me, and Walters to guard Miss Mora?" he barked. "Then you'd be rid of us both, quick as they could pull a trigger! You fools, to let yourselves be duped by this slick Nighthawk!"

"You should have told your story first," spoke up somebody, with obvious truth. "Well, boys, let's go explain to the gal, then draw lots to guard 'em. I wouldn't turn a dog loose in this storm, else we could rope Wright to a tree and not bother with a guard. Time for that in the morning if the storm's gone."

They scrambled out, leaving Jeff and his rifle to watch the prisoner. And the keen-eyed, drawling Jeff was as impervious as a rock to any assault of words or arguments.

MORGAN, raging furiously but vainly, relapsed anew into silence. Time passed. He saw the troop of men come back to the other wagon and crowd inside;

Diane, evidently, had quite failed to convince them of error. Two of them came into this wagon, to relieve Jeff and to settle down writing letters home. They ignored Morgan and his questions, but kept a loaded rifle on the box seat. He was left to smoke and to curse their blind folly to his heart's content.

The snow thinned for an hour or two, then returned on a redoubled blast of wind that lasted through the afternoon, and changed gradually into a chill rain that kept up with no sign of relenting. By morning, the snow promised to be all washed away. Morgan saw no more either of Walters or of Frank Barnes.

The situation, at first absurd and incredible, hardened into reality and left him mentally stunned, incapable of coherent thought, unable to fix upon any plan of action. There seemed no hope in any direction. That Barnes would push malevolence to extreme, he was well assured—the man would do it if only in self-protection. Yet Morgan was worried less on his own account, than because of Diane, and the impossibility of reaching or having a word with her in this impasse.

Supper came with fading day, the rain pounding down in a steady drumming without end. Five of the Tennesseans, grouped under a lantern, played cards well into the evening, then two went out to take turns at guard, the others rolled up, and Morgan with them. Jeff, on his right, knotted a cord about Morgan's right arm and about his own left wrist.

"I reckon that'll hold ye quiet," he said, with a grin. "If you got to take a walk, I'll go along any time. All right, boys, douse the lantern!"

The rain thrummed down on the wagon-cover, incessantly.

Oddly enough, that knotted cord gave Morgan his first thought of possible evasion. It had not occurred to him before; now, however, it came into his mind and grew. He lay pondering it, while the heavy breathing of the men around deepened into snores. Escape? But did he want to escape? At first he recoiled angrily; to run would be cowardice! But would it, after all?

He relaxed again, under an overwhelming tide of despair. No use. Even if he could by some adroit miracle get away, he must abandon Diane; that was impossible. And to slip away into the night and the rain, afoot, would be sheer madness. He would be run down with morning; Barnes would see to that only too gladly. He would be run down and killed like a wolf. . .

"Morgan!"

The fancy wakened him from his drowsy reflections, the fancy of his name, breathed upon the night and the streaming rain. Diane's voice! She was free, she had come to get him away. . .

"Morgan!"

"What is it?" he rejoined softly, trusting to the snores around.

"Here y'are."

Diane? No. A man's voice, something reaching in at him, brushing his face; a hand, a hand holding a knife. He took it, his heart pounding, bewilderment enfolding him. He had the knife, all was silent again.

Escape! Jeff, beside him, was a regular human trombone. With the keen blade, Morgan severed the knotted cord, laid his blankets gently aside, and sat up. His moccasins were under his head for pillow. He drew them on and reached out for his broad-brimmed hat, and came erect, tightening his belt. Escape!

The drumming rain drowned out all sounds. Carefully, he stepped over the snoring Jeff and was at the tail-gate. The puckered canvas there was loose, was held open; a figure stood outside.

Next minute he was standing in the mud and the rain, free, incredulous, accepting the miracle and clutching at the dark shape beside him.

"Who are you? What's it mean?" he gasped.

"It's me. Frank."

Morgan absolutely froze. Frank Barnes! The other went on quickly.

"Listen, Morgan. I got to thinking of old times, see? I couldn't go through with it; I want to give you a chance and make up for everything. Now, there's two of us on guard. One's on watch by the tent, and I'm the animal guard. You go get your horse and slide out."

It sounded all right; the stock were out on lariats at the opposite side of camp from the trees and the tent. And

yet, as he listened, Morgan thrilled to alarm warnings that prickled through his brain.

"Why, Frank, this is mighty good of you!" He fumbled for perfunctory words, all the time aware of sharper and keener suspicion. Frank Barnes, he knew only too well, was capable of no such finer feelings as had just been voiced. Why, then—why? What was behind all this?

"I can't go without a word to her," he went on. Barnes interrupted.

"She won't come to any harm; I'll answer for it. Your saddle is with the packs, all covered over, this side the animals. I've put it ready to hand, on the outside of the pile. Careful; it's not far from the other wagon. Walters is a wakeful cuss and keeps his rifle handy, so be spry about it—"

That was just one word too much. Walters! Morgan came awake; one dreadful flash of comprehension burst across his brain. Walters! It was a plot to kill him, of course; to kill him in the act of escaping. Walters lay somewhere close to the covered pile of packs, rifle ready, protected from the rain. If anything went wrong with the plot, they would run him down with daylight and make sure of him. Silence him for good and all. So thinking, he gripped hard on the long handle of the knife.

"Where'll you be?" he demanded, leaning forward, tensed, balanced.

"I'll go talk to the guard at the tent," said Barnes. "Keep him from hearing anything when you get off—"

Morgan, with all his strength, brought up his fist—depending on the knife-haft. not on his knuckles. The blow was precise, and deadly. The cruel bone-and-metal haft crunched squarely against the chin of Barnes, driving his head back, ending his words with a gasp. He slumped down in a limp heap.

KNEELING, Morgan tugged out the man's shirt and slit it with his knife into lengths. He bound Barnes feet and ankles, bound strips about his mouth and jaw, then rolled him under the wagon—and stood up, trembling and shivering.

"Wrong, maybe—but I can't take chances," he muttered. "No more'n he deserved, anyhow. And if I'm wrong, then I'll know it quick enough! Know it if I'm right, too. Waiting for me to drag out that saddle, eh? Maybe. Saddle be durned!"

He pulled down his hat, turned, and made his way through the rainy darkness toward the tent.

That he was taking desperate chances, he knew well; if his suspicions were right, he could believe nothing Barnes had said. Fortunately, sheer luck came to his aid as he felt his way through the pitch darkness and rain. There was a little shower of sparks ahead; the guard at the tent had knocked out his pipe. Morgan halted, then cautiously circled, depending on the noise of the rain to cover up his movements.

Escape? Why not, if he could take Diane with him? He was in for anything that might offer, now, weighing no possibilities, seizing only what lay to hand. Foot by foot, he advanced, aiming to come upon the tent from the rear. A dark mass loomed, he struck against a rope—he had found it.

Feeling for the canvas slope, he slit his knife into it and put his face into the opening, with a cautiously breathed word.

"Diane! Diane!"

He heard a startled gasp, and slit the canvas to the ground. She was there, she was here at the slit, her hands were fumbling at his, she knew him; his name was on her lips.

"Careful!" he said, at her ear. "No talk. Come on. Horses."

She was out beside him, the rain pattering on her dry doeskin. He drew her away for a few steps, then halted.

"Know where the animals are? Come along. All right?"

"Yes," she said. "Yes, take my hand. I can find them."

They went together, wind and rain swooping wildly through the blackness. The smell of wet animals came to them; unexpectedly, they were among the mules and horses, who moved in startled stirrings. And then came a voice, the voice of Walters, confirming all Morgan's suspicions; it was lifted cautiously.

"Hey, Frank!" it said. "That you?"

"You go ahead," he cried. "They hit me, feels like."

"Shut up, Buck!" growled Morgan, and caught the girl's arm. He spoke to her, softly. "Quick! Get a horse. No time for saddles—I'll manage without."

They moved among the mules, oxen and horses. Diane had a horse's picket-rope. Morgan cut the rope at her directions, and she improvised a hackamore bridle, swiftly. Something blacker than the night muzzled them—Concho, in joyous recognition. Morgan freed him, and scrambled to the sleek wet back, holding the lariat and clinging to the wet mane. Diane was mounted now, they moved together from among the other animals, and came clear into the open.

Clear? The devil to pay! From beneath their very hooves scrambled a man with a storm of curses—Walters, lying in wait. He shouted alarm. His rifle split the night with red streak and gushing smoke; the horses leaped to the explosion and went streaking away in company. Another rifle and another. Walters had not been alone, then.

Morgan clung desperately, found Concho overhauling Diane, and managed to calm the big black into a smooth, level gallop. Diane was calling to him.

"Wind's from the north—keep it on your right cheek—stay close, head west!"

He tried to make response, but could not. The noise behind them had died out. He had all he could do to stay

seated. Desperately, he managed to slow Concho down further. He knew now what it was that had almost knocked him out of the saddle—knew from the warmth running down his back, knew from the pain that was making itself felt.

"What's the matter?" Diane was alongside. The horses were walking now; no danger of pursuit in rain and blackness. Morgan found voice.

"You go ahead. . . Guess I can't stick it out. They hit me, feels like."

A sharp, dismayed word escaped her. Then: "Did you bring that picket-lariat? Let's have it."

He passed it over, and she drew rein. Concho halted.

"Now climb down," she said briskly. "No talk, no protests! I'm not riding on. And for the present we're perfectly safe from anyone behind. We can't be seen, and the rain will wash out all tracks. Climb down!"

Morgan obeyed. She took the knife. From the lariat she fashioned efficient hackamores and hobbled both horses, then turned to him.

"Get your shirt off and do it fast. I'll have to work in the dark, but I'll do the best I can."

It was a grim and shivering five minutes, while her fingers explored.

"Here it is; I can feel the bullet," she said. "It's just under the skin. We'll have to ride on until daylight, then I'll cut it out. Must have been a small powder-charge in the rifle, luckily. That medicine I gave you was certainly strong! Hold still, now. I'll spare enough of this shirt to keep you warm."

Presently, with a compress in place, she aided him to the back of Concho. They rode on through the blackness, Morgan clinging desperately. The wound was hurting like sin now.

It hurt worse when, after interminable hours, they halted in the dawn. The rain was over, light showed in the east. He stretched out on his face, and quivered to the stab of the knife, but uttered no sound. A long breath escaped her.

"There—it's done. Not a bad wound, if no fever gets into it."

But fever was in it already, and Morgan rode on into the west with reeling senses and his brain in dizzy fantasy, babblings of old childish nonsense on his lips.

CHAPTER VIII

MAN OF STEEL AND FIRE

WHAT stuck in Morgan's memory was a face; a brown, fierce, hawk-like visage with glittering hell-eyes. It came and went; it was there when at last he wakened to full consciousness. He saw it above him, and the eyes were looking at him. But now it belonged to a man humped with a blanket over his shoulders, a heavy braid of black hair falling over each ear. An Indian.

The place, a lodge of poles covered with skins, the flap thrown back to a vision of sun and green prairies, and a boy herding some horses. Tongues clattered afar; this, then, must be an Indian encampment or village. Morgan looked down at himself as he lay. His body felt naked, but it had disappeared; rather, it had turned to curly brown-black hair. Then he perceived that a buffalo robe had been laid over him.

He reached up a hand, put back a corner of the robe, and from the Indian broke an exclamation. This movement had revealed the "medicine" about Morgan's neck, the tiny beaded pouch on its thong. The Indian rose and stalked out, pulling the blanket grotesquely about his hips as he went.

Looking around, Morgan saw his clothes in a heap nearby. He sat up, but it was with a distinct effort. Startled by his own weakness, he lay back again and sighed as he relaxed. No hurt in his back? That was queer! He reached around and found a half-healed wound, the bandage gone.

What the devil! Beard! He rubbed his chin amazedly. Time had passed, then. A figure darkened the lodge opening; it was Diane.

"Oh, hello!" exclaimed Morgan. "What's happened? Have the Injuns caught us?"

She dropped beside him, laughing excitedly, babbling joyous words, catching his hand and then feeling his forehead.

"It's gone, and your eyes are clear!

He wakened at last to find a hawk-like visage bending above him.

No more fever now, for the first time!"

"I'm all right, Diane. The Injuns caught us, did they?"

"No, no!" She drew the buffalo-robe over his shoulders again. "We met them; they're Sioux. Friendly, do you understand? When they saw the medicine I gave you, they recognized it; one of their chiefs had given it to Cap'n Gregg and it's famous. It has brought them good luck already, they say; plenty of meat, good hunting! We're their guests. They've helped me take care of you—two weeks and more, nearly three weeks, Morgan!"

Morgan stared blankly; it was hard to comprehend, all in a moment. Three weeks!

"The wagons?" he muttered. "The Tennessee men?"

She gestured widely. "Far away; no matter, forget about them! We're over north of the road, days from it, toward Kearny somewhere."

"Hold on, now." He frowned. One thing plucked at him insistently. He mouthed it with awkward words. "You say you took care of me? And I've been sick a while? But what . . . Why, I haven't any clothes on . . . You nursed me, and did everything . . ."

She read his acute dismay and embarrassment, and took his hand in both her own, and broke in upon him gravely, with steady shining eyes.

"Dear Morgan, remember one thing. It's the only thing I learned at school that's of any particular value. Mrs. Hicks, who kept the academy for young females, as they called it, used to say this: There are all sorts of disagreeable things in the world, but what marks a person of breeding is the habit of ignoring them. Do you understand?"

Morgan grunted. "I guess so. I ain't much for breeding, though. You reach me my pants and then clear out till I get into 'em, and I'll feel easier."

She laughed suddenly. "Oh, I'm so glad you're yourself again! Everything's all right now. Concho is here, and safe. Now remember to keep that medicine

covered and out of sight! Here are your pants, if you want them. I'll be back with some rabbit stew in no time."

She leaped up, dropped the garments beside him, and hurried out.

Morgan investigated. His money-belt was safe, his money untouched. His moccasins were new-greased and lissom. When Diane returned with a pannikin of steaming stew, he was limp and exhausted; but he was clothed in shirt and trousers, and contented.

She fed him; he watched her with hungry eyes. Her presence, her smiling radiance brushed away all worries. The strained, tense look was gone from her face; she was like a laughing child, intent upon him in a glowing intimacy.

"You're a thief," muttered Morgan, after the bowl was empty. Her gaze sharpened.

"What? What do you mean?"

"A thief," he repeated, sleepiness upon him. "A thief. You stole two stars out of the sky . . . your eyes . . ."

Smiling at the boyish fancy, he drifted off into slumber.

He wakened again to night, and voices. Diane was near him, talking with a deep-lunged man in a strange language. A tiny fire lit the man's face slightly; it was the hawk-like brown visage he had seen before. When Morgan stirred, Diane turned to him.

"Awake? Good. More food's waiting. You'll soon have strength back."

"Who's the Injun?" he asked, blindly swallowing whatever she gave him.

"This is his lodge. He's a sub-chief; he speaks Spanish but no English."

Having eaten, Morgan lay back and rested.

"We'll have to make plans," he said slowly. "I don't know what to do. I'll be branded everywhere now as one of the Nighthawks. My folks are going to feel mighty cut up about it. What about you? Going to find Griscom, still?"

"I don't know," she answered. "No telling where he is now. I've nothing to go back to Sante Fe for—time enough to think about that later. A few days more and you'll be able to travel. We can head for Fort Kearny; it's not far."

He faced this prospect with an access of panic.

"Don't you see? I can't! Everybody will be looking for me—"

"Attending to their own troubles, more likely," she broke in. "Don't worry about it. Some of this band are at Kearny now; they may bring news of Griscom. Remember, there's luck in leisure."

"My mother used to say that," Morgan rejoined. "But I'm not so sure."

Next day he was out and on his feet, but not for long. He lay drinking in the warm spring sunshine, watching everything around. Here were a dozen lodges, dumpy shuffling squaws, curious sloe-eyed brown children, dominating and unhurried warriors. He wanted to repay their hospitality with some of his money, but Diane prevented.

"They don't know what money is, Morgan. I've arranged everything. They'll provide us with whatever we need, and at Kearny you'll buy some tobacco and molasses. A guide will go with us, to bring back the presents."

THE days passed, strength returned, the sun warmed and invigorated him. Concho knew him again with obvious joy and recognition. Diane argued him out of his worry about showing up at Kearny. Any of Griscom's men would know her, she said; the mules and packs were safe in Tennessee hands; there was no danger that Barnes or Walters would dare try to make their outrageous accusations stick.

"There'll be a sea of wagons flowing across the prairie," she said, looking out at the green sunlit distances. "We'll not be important; we'll be no more than flying leaves in a forest. Not only gold-seekers, but army men and wagon-trains, Mormon settlers, traders. . ."

He could understand what heartsick emptiness must be in her soul. She had nothing, and no whither to go; she had momentary interest in him, in their situation, and beyond this was nothing.

"You're the one not to be uneasy," he said. He was answering his own reflections, for she spoke little and seldom of herself. "I know what's worrying you, Diane. A young woman all alone has a mighty tough pull, I guess."

She smiled at him. "No. Life's a good thing."

"Oh, sure! But we're friends; we're more than friends. We stick together from now on. Most likely we'll get track of my folks at Kearny; we may be ahead of them. Well, you throw in with us and head for California."

She sat motionless, looking out at the cloud-puffs hanging in the blue.

"I'm afraid that it isn't as simple as—"

"It is," he broke in. "Now look, Diane." He fumbled for words and then plunged, speaking his mind bluntly. "This here western world is new and different, but again it isn't. I was made for it. I'm getting to feel at home. I'm aiming to go ahead and live my own life; I've found you and I'm not going to let you go. You're not just a young woman, Diane. You—why, you're everything!"

She looked at him now, gravely, her eyes startled but tender.

"Morgan, you can't say such things."

"I can't pretend, either," he went on quickly. "You don't do it and I don't aim to. Let's throw it all away and talk honest. I like you more'n anyone I ever met. I'll be able to ride tomorrow. We'll head for Kearney and find a preacher there and get married; then we'll be partners and stick together always. Will you promise to talk honest?"

Her eyes were warm and lovely, and her smile tugged at him. She reached out and pressed his hand swiftly.

"Yes, I promise. But I won't talk now, dear Morgan. Nor you. This is no time; wait till we get to Kearny, then we'll settle everything. Agreed?"

He grudged assent; he was filled with the rush of his own sudden emotion, with his own boldness. But, meeting her gaze, he nodded. She leaned forward, and for an instant her lips met his. Then she sprang up and was standing, alert, as a chorus of yips broke from the boys guarding the pony herd.

"Somebody coming . . . Oh!" Three figures appeared on horseback, topping a distant rise. "The men who went to Kearny, Morgan! Now we'll have some news of Griscom!"

"And remember our bargain," he said. She laughed, blew him a kiss, and was off to join the rush of squaws and children and warriors, hastening to welcome the braves back from the fort.

Morgan waited where he was. He heard a chorus of fresh yells, saw the squaws scatter, saw the men abandon their unrestrained manners and come back to their own lodges. Behind the three braves, appeared two other figures riding—white men.

(To Be Continued)

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

THREE new recruits to the ranks of our Writers' Brigade this month. No novices but seasoned writers all, it struck us as rather odd that none of them had happened to appear in the magazine before. We're mighty glad that they've "joined up" at last and hope it'll be "for the duration"—and that a long one.

Daniel P. Mannix, who wrote "Queen Bess for England" says—

I first became interested in falconry while at the University of Pennsylvania. There were a number of boys there who had hawks and we used to correspond with falconers in England and Germany. Our apparatus, that is, the bells and hoods used on the birds, were made in Holland by a man, Mullen, whose family had been making falconry tackle since the Middle Ages. In old manuscripts written in the 16th Century, falconers speak of Mullen and his hoods. What has happened to him now, we do not know, but I hope some of the Germany falconers are looking out for him.

Falconry is difficult in America because of the many and very wise state laws which protect the peregrine falcon. A falconer must first get special permission to own a hawk from the state game commission. Then he must get a hawk. This means going over a two or three hundred foot cliff on a rope to take a young bird from the nest, or trapping with nets a wild hawk. The young bird is raised on a diet of pigeons or rats and mice and then given several weeks of freedom. The young falcon always returns to his loft, or mews, until he begins to kill for himself. When the hawk misses a meal, the falconer knows he has begun to hunt and prepares to trap him.

The trapping is usually done with a net. The bird is then hooded with a little leather cap that fits down over his eyes. The hood keeps the hawk quiet. After the hawk has learned to ride on the falconer's gloved wrist, the falconer unhoods the bird at night, usually by candlelight. The hawk is then carried three days and nights unhooded. Neither the man nor the bird sleep during this time and therefore the man is usually "spelled" by an assistant.

When the bird will eat from the falconer's fist, the man turns the bird loose in the mews and induces him to fly to

the gloved hand for bits of meat. Then the bird is tried outside, but with a long string fastened to him. When the hawk comes perfectly several hundred feet, the string is removed. This is the vital moment in training a hawk. If the bird "checks off," he is probably lost. If he comes in well, he is made.

Falconry is impractical for anyone who does not have several hours a day free. The birds must be continually exercised, and the falconer must live in the country. The charm of the sport lies in the wonderful work between the hawk and the quarry. As a means of catching game, it is very inefficient even compared to the bow and arrow. But its beauty and dramatic qualities have made it live on even with the deadly competition of the shotgun.

Mr. Mannix spent six months recently in the mountains of southern Mexico hunting iguanas with an eagle he had trained. The giant bird—he had a six-foot wing spread—was bitten badly several times in fights with the great reptiles. Many articles on animals and two books have appeared over his name since the day when—an 18 year old student at U. of P.—he sold his first story.

MAURICE BEAM, unlike so many men before him, found himself in anything but trouble when he caught hold of that tiger by the tail. Everything panned out beautifully, we thought, and the more such tales he twists (oh-oh—watch out for those puns!) the better pleased we'll be. Introducing the yarn and himself, Beam says—

The story "The Gentleman and the Tiger" almost caused what headline English would describe as a marital rift. The Mrs., you see, does not believe in the Darwinian theory about survival of the fittest through adaptation to environment. One time we got to arguing and I asked for a concrete example of organisms in an environment wherein the unfittest would win—and logically. She cast around for two days and came up with a highly civilized man and a tiger, both credible. Then the Malay boy wandered in also and—well, what do you think? Is there a law higher than the S. O. T. F.? Be careful what you say! You know what happened to the cop who tried to break up a family fight.

By training if not by inclination I am a newspaperman, having edited some, written quite a few, dummied a lot and headlined a host. The most fun I ever got out of it was being managing editor of a weekly for a year, a paper into which I could and did put anything I wanted. If you want to learn the newspaper business, get hold of a weekly.

Between being born in an Illinois corn-belt town and yesterday I have hoboed, sailed, sold books, painted tween-decks on a freighter, been tattooed in Tahiti, roughnecked on a rotary oil-rig, failed in business and sold some 75-odd stories including one mystery novel. That qualifies me as a writer even if I leave out everything but the business failure, doesn't it?

AFTER checking the extent of Richard Barker Shelton's writing production down through the years we felt that the author of "One-Fish Pool" was introducing himself with undue modesty when he said—

If anyone is interested in my misspent life its chronology runs somewhat as follows: ten years in Boston Public Library, ten years various Boston and New York papers, fifteen years as a free-lance fictioneer, and after I turned honest eight years in community work for Portsmouth, N. H. and the State of New Hampshire, and five years as director of publicity in Cambridge, Mass. (where I live now) for a group of utilities.

I have published quite a little stuff in my day. From 1903 to 1929 I made my living writing fiction, such as it was. First with the old *Black Cat*, later reams of fiction for the old McClure's Syndicate, *Red, Blue* and *Green Books, Everybody's, Collier's, Saturday Evening Post, etc.* Once I tried to list my stuff and found that in various magazines I had published over two thousand yarns (my files were incomplete) and over a thousand of syndicate stuff under my own name, Francis J. Hannigan, John Barton Oxford and Barker Shelton without the Richard. In fact in them old days I seemed to have hit practically all the publications of the day at one time or another, save Zion's Herald and Police Gazette, and I'm still hoping to cop these sometime before my finish.

I am old enough to know better—65

my next birthday—and should long be past getting a thrill at seeing my name on a by-line, but I confess I like to see it there about as well as I ever did and still break loose occasionally and shoot something out.

Well, more power to you, say we, and shoot it this way. It looks to us suspiciously like there was some kind of record hanging out there in the offing and we'd like to get in on the breaking of it.

F. R. BUCKLEY, despite the fact that his fiction is set against a background only slightly less than five centuries gone, is about the most modern writer we know. Just to prove again that there's nothing new under the sun he wrote "Single Combat" plus the following paragraphs about the story—

Rising again to defend Captain Caradosso from suspicion of prophecy—which has made monkeys of so many more modern military men—I should like to say that the old gentleman is writing, as ever, only of things which had taken place in his immediate vicinity. What we now call fifth column activity was a commonplace in the Italian wars of four-hundred-odd years ago; the Medici used it to retain and regain their power in Florence; Cesare Borgia, prototype of modern tyrants, was a leading exponent. In the classic cases of Imola and Forli, the cities gave up without a struggle, persuaded in advance that Cesare would be a milder ruler than their current lady paramount; and when this Caterina Sforza had shut herself up in the citadel, she was finally betrayed from within.

That the common people were worse off after a change of rulership than they had been before, seems a simple matter of arithmetic—they had to pay tribute as before and also the cost of their "liberation." And that Cesare, despite all his exactions and all the ruin he wrought, was still known as a liberator for years after his death, seems to prove the enduring power of propaganda on the mass mind.

It is interesting to note what happened in the case of one city—Urbino—whose inhabitants were too contented to listen to Cesare's siren song; or, as Machiavelli calls it, "the soft whistling of the basilisk in his cave." Against this town Borgia loosed a blitzkrieg—"arriving, horse, foot and artillery, before anyone knew he had marched"; and, having occupied the place without a struggle, passed on to other conquests. But within a few months, Urbino had gently but firmly eased him and his troops out of its borders, restored its former ruler and set an example which caused Cesare endless trouble elsewhere.

As to other points in the story—the setting up of monuments to living rulers was a comparatively common practice. At the beginning of the reign of Borso d'Este in Ferrara, for instance, the citizens set up a marble triumphal column—which, presumably, Borso did not think sufficiently personal. Anyhow, in 1454 he set up a bronze statue of himself in the market-place.

This gentleman's father had been a notable caster of cannon—and very much despised for his hobby by the other princes of the day. Just as generals and admirals of the present fulminate against aerial warfare, so did these gentry consider it "unworthy that a gallant, and it might be a noble, knight should be wounded and laid low by a common foot-soldier"—behind a gun. It was customary to prove this sense of the fitness of things by blinding and cutting off the hands of any cannoneers who might be captured.

As for the medical aspects of the yarn—I haven't by me the exact date at which a Dutch physician was hanged for disguising himself and attending an accouchement; but it is less than a hundred years since Semmelweiss was driven from the profession and into insanity for suggesting that perhaps doctors' coming straight from autopsies to deliveries (without washing)—might have something to do with puerperal sepsis.

Yes; sometimes one has to stare very hard at automobiles and airplanes, and listen very hard to the radio, to be quite sure which century one happens to inhabit!

FAIRFAX DOWNEY, who did the Custer article for this issue, also joins the roll of *Ask Adventure* experts this month. Field artillery and the cavalry arm are the subjects on which he will answer queries. We asked him for a note to include in this department and he wrote—

To rise and try to shine twice at one Camp-fire session is more than any man

ought to risk, especially when he puts his neck out on both counts.

My article on the Little Big Horn campaign may be read as a sort of sequel, a factual background, to L. L. Foreman's story, "Riddle for a Red Man," in last July's *Adventure*. But like any full account of Custer's last fight it must and does take a definite stand on certain disputed points in that tragic affair, points still under lively controversy. My judgments were formed on a conscientious examination of the evidence on both sides in the course of some years of research for a book in which this article will be a chapter. If you insist, the book's title is "Indian-Fighting Army," to be published this fall by Scribner's.

The second chance I've taken is in accepting an invitation to serve as an *Ask Adventure* consultant on field artillery, cavalry, horses and horsemanship. This gratifying though precarious editorial confidence is based, I suppose, on my novelette "War Horse" which appeared in *Adventure* last year. My credentials, such as they are, follow. My grandfather and father were officers of the U. S. Army and I was brought up in it. I learned to ride as a kid at an Army Post in Cuba in 1907. My field artillery service began with a National Guard outfit in 1915-16, the commanding officer being the present Chief of Field Artillery, Major General Robert M. Danford. I served as a lieutenant and captain in the 12th F. A., 2nd Div., A.E.F., and in the 31st F. A., I commanded a battery under Colonel, now Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson. Beyond draft age or acceptability as a volunteer in my present antiquated state, I'm holding down a sergeantcy in an infantry regiment of The New York Guard. But our post is a cavalry armory and I find I can still sit a saddle if the nag isn't too rambunctious.

If *Ask Adventure* questions prove too tough, I know some real experts who'll know the answers.

LIEUTENANT DURAND KIEFER, U. S. N., Ret. is the new Navy expert for *Ask Adventure*. He wrote "Destroyer for England" in the June issue and an account of his career appeared in this department at the same time. Fifteen years in the Navy make him a valuable addition to the roll of *A. A.* men, we believe. . . . Major Jean V. Grombach, *Ask Adventure's* expert on boxing and fencing, is on active service in the Army now, in charge of athletic activities at Fort McClellan, Ala. . . . . C. C. Anderson, our authority on Arizona and Utah, who has been keeping the Navajo Mountain controversy hot for the last few months, is also on active service. He's a first class petty officer in the U. S. Naval Reserve and writes "so the old desert rat has turned gob." Both these men will try to continue to handle their *A. A.* work as before but ask those who send in queries to be patient if answers don't come back by return mail.

FRITZ DUQUESNE is in hot water again. Boiling water this time, we suspect, for as we go to press the ubiquitous Captain has been garnered in by the F. B. I. along with 24 others in the current spy round-up. He's calling himself Frederick Joubert Duquesne now, but old-time *Adventure* readers will recognize him as the man who used to write African stories for the magazine back between 1910 and 1914 and about whom Arthur Sullivant Hoffman wrote an interesting article, "Adventurer and Avenger," for the April 1938 issue. We shall watch with interest what new material emerges about him to add to the already fabulous quota.

THE thermometer outside our window says 97°; it's the 3rd of July with a three day week-end ahead; the stack of mss. on the corner of the desk is less than a foot high for the first time in months; we're glad there are only four pages available for *Camp-Fire* this issue for it just isn't in us to put more material together.

We think we go fishing now!—K. S. W.

ASK ADVENTURE

(Continued from page 8)

stick to Eastman Super XX; it is fast, panchromatic, and sufficiently fine grain for all you want, and has good negative quality.

A ray filter is used because all films, even panchromatic, are excessively sensitive to violet and ultra-violet; the filter absorbs the excess of violet (and of other colors) and gives a rendering such as the eye sees. But you get astonishingly good results with Super XX, without a filter; still, it's well to use it when possible. But do not use any except a Wratten filter; unless a filter is specifically adjusted to the film with which it is to be used, it may easily be harmful rather than helpful. As to an all-purpose filter, the K-2 of the Wratten series is the one you want; theoretically, you should use an X-1, but you won't see any difference between them for ordinary work—not unless you make spectrograms on the film, or do some other work in which your rods have to be rendered exactly right. I have never yet found anything except a K-2 necessary, and I have made literally thousands of photographs, for exhibition and for sale.

For 15c you can get a booklet published by the Eastman Kodak Company, entitled KODAK FILMS, and for another 15c another booklet entitled WRATTEN FILTERS. These two will tell you everything that an ordinary amateur can use about the Kodak films and filters, and I may say that there are none better in the world; there are others as good, but the Kodak product has one big advantage over most of the others—namely, uniformity. I'd stick to them. But I must admit that Afga Plenachrome and Agfa Superpan Press crowd them hard. Windisch's book gives you the fundamental principles, but when he starts talking about specific products, it's German films, etc., that he discusses. However, the book is 99% general principles, and, as I said, very useful.

I hope that this information will be satisfactory.

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.

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.

Verl Erway, age 54, short and stocky, gray eyes, gray hair dyed brown, weight 164. Left Palm Beach, Fla., April 16, 1941, last heard of at Hopkinsville, Ky., April 18. Had planned to go to New York State near Elmira, and to Philadelphia by May 1st, by auto with unknown companions whom he picked up at Orlando, Fla. Any information about him will be appreciated by L. M. Dohner, 101 W. Hampton, Chestnut Hill, Phila., Pa.

Joseph (Jose) and Rose (Rosario) Ivorra, both Spanish, last heard of twenty years ago at Hetzel, West Virginia. Previously they lived in Philadelphia and Verona, Pa. They have several children. Any information about them will be appreciated by their niece, Mary Barcelo, 2308 So. Chadwick St., Phila., Pa.

Milton Frisby or Frisbee, age 29, born Dock Elijah Ledet, adopted by family named Frisby or Frisbee in Oakland, Cal. in 1914. Also Delores E. Ledet, age 31, thought to have been taken from Oakland to Lafayette, La. same year. Any information as to their whereabouts will be appreciated by their half-brother, H. S. Beall, 3004 St. Mihiel Ave., Norfolk, Va.

(Continued on page 127)

THE ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE is free, provided self-addressed envelope and FULL POSTAGE for reply are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries must enclose International Reply Coupons, which are exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.

Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

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ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure.*

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure.*

Basketball—STANLEY CABHART, 99 Broad St., MATAWAN, N. J.

Boxing—MAJOR JEAN V. GROMBACH, 113 W. 57th St., N. Y. C.

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Canoeing: *paddling, sailing, cruising, regattas*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 1325 So. Main St., Princeton, Ill.

Coins: *and Medals*—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., N. Y. C.

Dogs—FREEMAN LLOYD, care of *Adventure.*

Fencing—MAJOR JEAN V. GROMBACH, 113 W. 57th St., N. Y. C.

First Aid—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Fishing: *fresh water; fly and bait casting; bait; camping outfits; fishing trips*—JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

(Continued on page 129)

(Continued from page 124)

I would like to locate Walter P. Gallmieir, who was formerly a Corporal at Station Hospital, Fort Clayton, Panama Canal Zone, and since then, I have reason to believe, has been working for the Veterans Hospital somewhere in New York State. Any word as to his present whereabouts would be appreciated. Anthony P. Narkin, Headquarters Detachment, 57th Medical Battalion (Corps), Fort Ord, Cal.

Emory C. "Tex" Simmons, joined the U.S. Marines in October, 1929, spent one year on Parris Island and then transferred to Shanghai with the Fourth Marines, stationed with the Fourth Marines Band. Left Shanghai in 1933 to get paid off and went back to Texas. We were pals for four years but I got paid off in Shanghai and stayed there until just recently. Want to hear from Tex. Frank Burton, 207 N. Hobart Blvd., L. A., Calif.

I am very anxious to hear from my brother's son, Curtis Goodman, last heard from at Colinga, Cal. Also, my brother's grandson, Jack Graham, last heard about in Nowlin, S. Dakota; said he was on his way West to find his uncle, Curtis Goodman. Mrs. Louisa G. Marks, 817 Pleasant St., Des Moines, Ia.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

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W. C. Tuttle in "The Periods of Chesty Jones" gives us another hilarious episode in the error-laden career of those two umps in the Sundown Leeg; "The Ninety and Nine" is an amazing account of the fast disappearing tribe of Alucalufs who infest the Patagonian channels by Leslie T. White; Hoffman Birney's "Obsolete Equipment" is a stirring tale of radio communication in the Caribbean in war time; "Sermon in Stones" by Fred Gipson is an unusual Western; plus the departments and features you can find only in—

Adventure

On Sale September 10th

(Continued from page 126)

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U. S. Navy—LIEUT. DURAND KIEFER, care of *Adventure.*

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★New Guinea—L. P. B. ARMIT, care of *Adventure.*

★New Zealand: Cook Island, Samoa—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★Australia and Tasmania—ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge St., Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

★South Sea Islands—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Ingle Nook," 39 Cornelia St., Wiley Park, N. S. W.

Hawaii—JOHN SNELL, Hawaii Equal Rights Comm., Honolulu, Hawaii.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, New York City.

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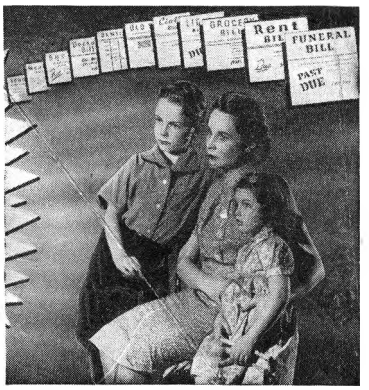

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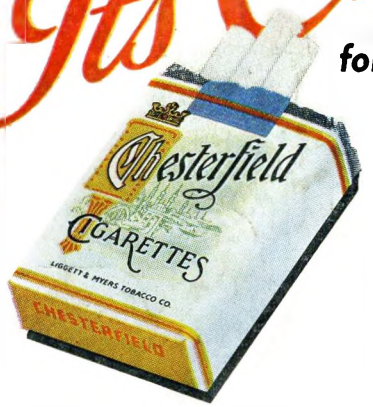

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