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RED STAR MAGAZINE

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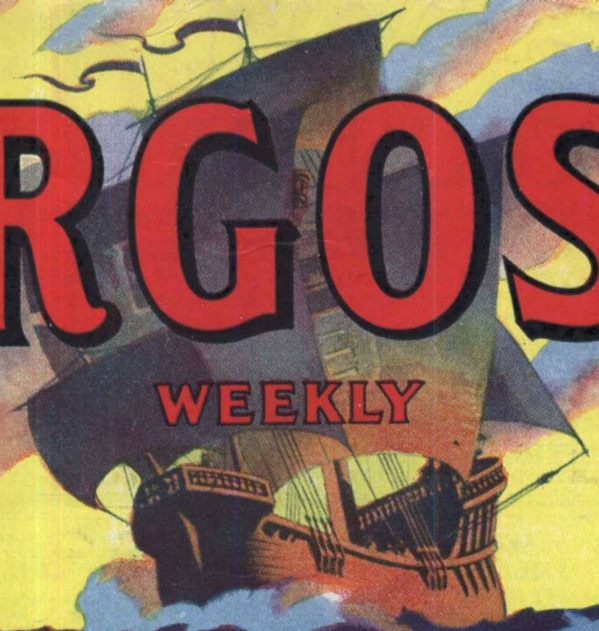
WEEKLY

OCT. 5



## CROOKED CARIBBEAN CROSS

*Smooth Kyle in a Mile-a-minute Novel of Nazi Intrigue Menacing the Americas*

*By* Borden Chase

## APPOINTMENT IN OCTOBER

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*By* Charles Marquis Warren

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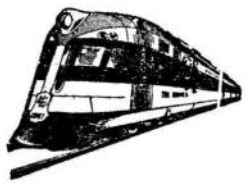

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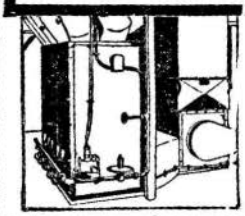

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# ARGOSY

## America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

Volume 302 · CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER 5, 1940 · Number 4



*This magazine is on sale every Wednesday*

*A* **RED STAR** *Magazine*

**THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 Broadway, NEW YORK, N. Y.**

WILLIAM T. DEWART, President & Treasurer — WILLIAM T. DEWART, JR., Secretary

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE, 111 Rue Réaumur

LONDON: THE CONTINENTAL PUBLISHERS & DISTRIBUTORS, LTD., 3 La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C. 4

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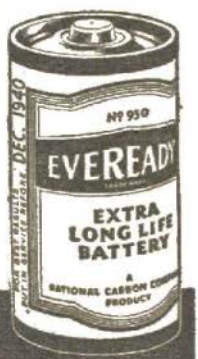


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# CROOKED CARIBBEAN CROSS

## *Smooth Kyle in a Mile-a-minute Novel of Nazi Intrigue Menacing the Americas*

## *By* Borden Chase

### CHAPTER I

#### THE GUNS WENT DOWN

SMOOTH KYLE rested his elbows on the table top and looked curiously at the people in the little café on West Forty-sixth Street. It was the usual collection—smart guys and chumps, people who belonged, and others who were just passing through.

He tasted his drink, put down the glass and watched a neatly dressed man with iron-gray hair and a good jaw step in from the street. It was Inspector McNeary of the Treasury Department. And McNeary was Smooth Kyle's boss—quiet, efficient and smart enough to know all of the questions and most of the answers.

He blinked once, squinted across the tables in the dimly lit café and headed toward Smooth.

" 'Lo, feller," he said quietly. "How've you been getting along with the Esquimos in Alaska?"

"Swell," said Smooth. He pointed to an empty chair. "Sit and rest while I tell you all about the love life of the seals."

"That all you learned while you were there?"

"That, and a few other things," said Smooth. "For instance, on a clear day in Nome when the wind blows from the west, a man with a good nose can smell the Russians making borscht in Cape Dezhnev. And when Bering Strait freezes over he can walk across and grab himself a bowl of it."

McNeary laughed and seated himself. He nodded to the waiter and ordered Scotch and soda. Then he, too, rested his elbows on the table and looked casually about the café.

"Learning your geography, eh, Smooth?" he said at length.

"Learning plenty," said Smooth.

"Such as?"

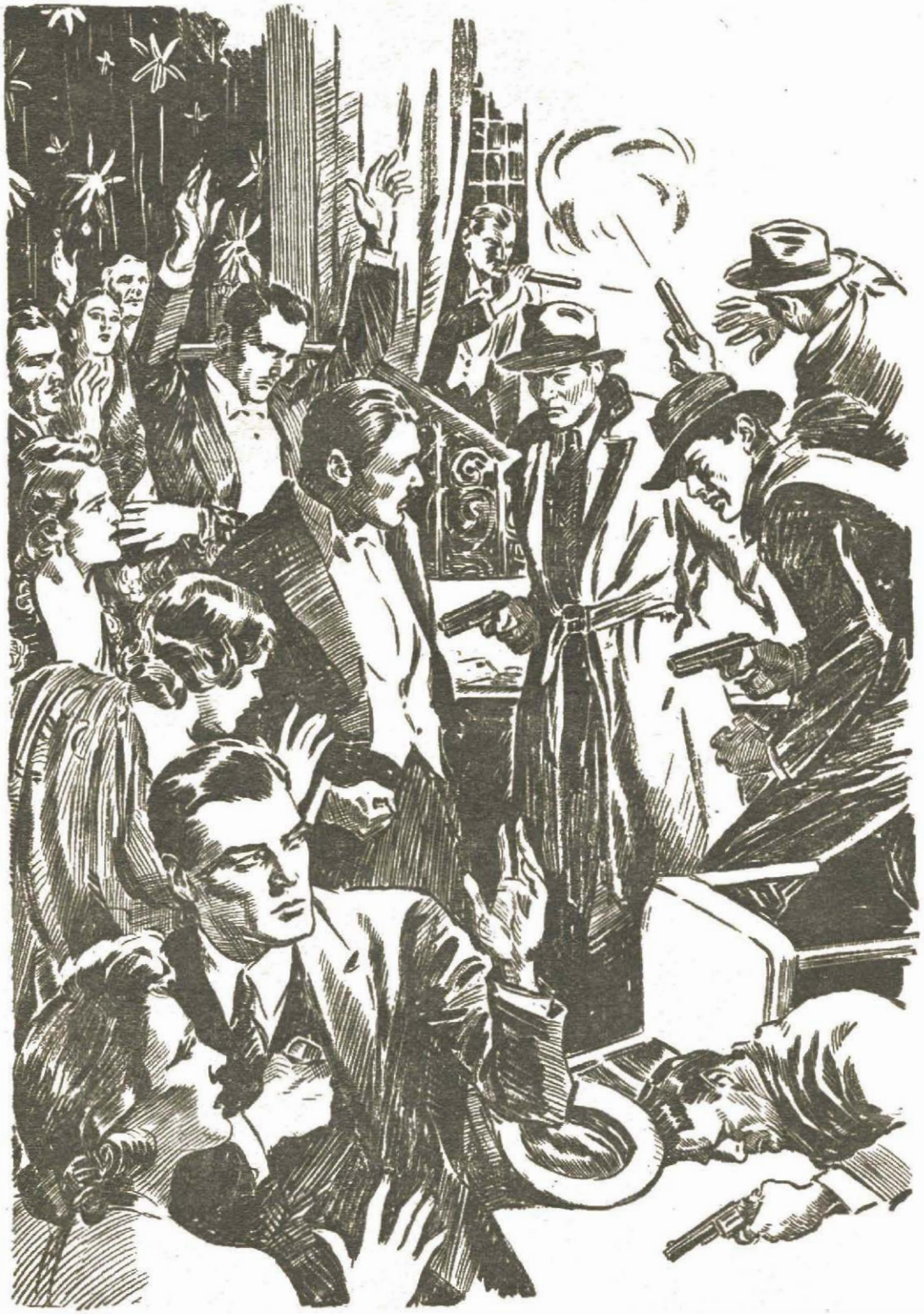
"Oh, just that it might be a good idea for some of the Congressmen to spend a few weeks in Alaska before they make any more speeches—especially that guy who keeps yelling America is protected by three thousand miles of ocean."

Smooth twisted his glass and made a pattern of wet rings on the table top. "We may be three thousand miles from Europe, Chief—but it's only fifty-four miles from Alaska to Russia. And the Soviets are building landing fields on the Cape and in Kamchatka."

"You're sure?"

"It's in my report," said Smooth. He tossed a manila envelope across the table. "There's some stuff in there about the Kuril Islands, too. They belong to Japan. Our Congressmen might be surprised to learn how close they are to the Aleutian Islands—which belong to us."

He watched McNeary read the closely typed pages of the report and realized the Treasury man had aged. McNeary's hair



The blow-gun breathed again, and another of Clipper's men started to fold. Smooth's gun was out now; but Maria cried, "No! They're using *curare!*"

was grayer. His eyes were deeper beneath the heavy brows. His hands were steady as they held the report, but there was a tenseness about them that was new.

Smooth saw McNeary glance up occasionally, and soon he saw bewilderment in the Treasury man's eyes.

"Something bothering you, Chief?" he asked.

"Yes," said McNeary:

"Isn't the report complete?"

"Too complete," said McNeary.

"I don't get you."

McNeary put down the report. "You've done it again, Smooth," he said quietly. "You've been using a gun instead of your wits."

"Me—use a gun?" said Smooth in surprise. "There isn't a word about shooting in that report."

"There is, for anyone who knows you," said McNeary. "This paragraph on page three—I'll read it: 'There was a forced landing in Novo Mariinsk. A patrol tried to confiscate the plane. I explained that we needed the plane and finally persuaded them to let us return to Alaska.'"

McNeary folded the report and put it into the envelope. "So you finally *persuaded* them to let you return, eh?"

"Sure—I persuaded them," said Smooth. "They weren't such bad guys, once we got to know them."

"And what happens when they make a report to their government?" asked McNeary.

"Oh, they won't make a report," said Smooth quietly. "I realized it might cause trouble, so I persuaded them not to make any."

McNEARY sighed. It was the long-drawn breath of a tired man. "I hardly know what to say to you, Smooth," he said at length.

"You were sent to Alaska on a very simple mission. Complaints had come to us that Japanese fishing fleets were encroaching upon American waters. You were sent to Alaska to investigate and report on that and nothing else. Now you return with a report on Russian and Japanese landing fields!"

"Well, I had a little spare time," said Smooth, "so I figured I'd save somebody else a lot of work. We always did that in the old days, Chief."

"The old days are gone, Smooth," said McNeary. "This is a different world—a world at war."

"And I don't like it," said Smooth.

He hunched his shoulders and leaned forward on the table, studying the man before him. Yes, McNeary had aged. Smooth recalled the days when this tired man had laughed long and loud as he read Smooth's reports.

Those were good days—days when the Treasury agents were busy with counterfeiters, smugglers and dope peddlers. But things were different now. Smooth and his chief were being bounced around from one department to another, and always there was some brass hat to shake a stern finger and say, "Remember, gentlemen—we want no shooting, and no trouble!"

That always handed Smooth a laugh. No shooting and no trouble. And then he'd be tossed into the arena with a crowd of double-crossing enemy aliens who were trying to destroy the very country that had given them a chance to make a decent living.

If he got the goods on them and made an arrest, some clever lawyer would convince a jury these people were good Americans who simply wanted a change in government—and the crowd would be turned loose to go on with their work. Rats . . . "What's new in town, Chief?" he asked. "Do I get a chance to spend a little time on Broaway?"

"You've got a job, Smooth," said McNeary slowly. "And it's a New York job. That's why I sent for you."

"Swell," said Smooth. "What's the set-up?"

McNeary put the manila envelope into his coat pocket and looked thoughtfully at his drink. "I've just been to Washington trying to cover up some of the trouble you caused on your last job. They admit

you did nice work, but they don't approve of your methods."

"Why not?" said Smooth. "No jury is going to turn that crowd loose."

"Hardly," said McNeary. He smiled for the first time. "There were no defendants left—after the smoke cleared away."

"We kept the bomb-sight from being stolen, didn't we?"

"Yes, you did that, Smooth," said McNeary. "And for that reason I've persuaded them to let you handle this case. I've also promised you'd keep in close touch with me and wait for orders before you decided to, er—*persuade* anyone to behave."

"That's fair enough, Chief," said Smooth. "Now what gives?"

MCNEARY took a gun from his pocket and placed it upon the table. He half-turned, blocking the view of anyone in the café, and pointed to the gun.

"Look it over," he said.

Smooth picked it up. "A forty-five automatic, eh? Standard make—there's a million like it. Who owns it?"

"Reno Cordoza. Remember him?"

"Big Reno?" said Smooth quickly, and he laughed. "What's that chump been doing?"

"Oh, nothing much. He was picked up for assault and he had this gun on him. No license, so he's in the Tombs waiting to be arraigned on a Sullivan Law rap."

"That's nothing new for Big Reno. He's been working as a bodyguard for gamblers ever since Prohibition. The Tombs won't bother him, so long as he can take his shoes off."

Smooth laughed again. "Reno always used to complain about his feet. Claimed he could never get shoes big enough to fit him. Not a bad guy, either."

"Not any worse than most of them," said McNeary. "But he's got Washington mighty worried right now."

"How come?"

"This gun," said McNeary. "The Police Department made a routine check on the serial number."

"Who bought it?"

"The purchasing agent for the Government of Great Britain."

Smooth's eyes widened. "You mean England bought this for use in the war?"

"Yes."

"Then how did Big Reno get it? Was he in Flanders?"

"Of course not."

Smooth shrugged. "I suppose somebody clipped it on one of the New York docks—a broken case while the ship was being loaded."

McNeary shook his head. "Definitely not! That was a rush order. Special guards went with it from the factory to the dock. Not a case was broken, and not a case was missing when the ship left port."

"Maybe someone brought it back from England," said Smooth. "You know how guns bounce, Chief. We've traced an automatic twice around the world in less than a year."

"I know that, Smooth. But this gun wasn't brought back from England."

"What makes you so sure?"

"Because it was shipped to England on the *Clivedenning*—an ammunition carrier that made the trip without a convoy."

"And?"

"And the *Clivedenning* was torpedoed; she went down with all hands."

Smooth dipped one hand into his coat pocket and took out a silver cigarette case. He opened it and looked casually at the inscription engraved inside. It read: *He's a mug but I love him. . . . Gilda.*

Smooth offered the case to McNeary, took a cigarette and snapped the case closed.

"How do you know the *Clivedenning* was torpedoed if all hands were lost?" he asked at length.

"A radio message—two of them, in fact. One reporting the submarine, and the second reporting the ship was sinking before the lifeboats could be launched."

"And you're *sure* this gun was aboard?"

"Positive!"

"It doesn't make sense," said Smooth finally.

"That," said McNeary, "is why I want you to talk with Reno. He knows you and he knows you come through on promises. I think he'll trust you, Smooth."

"Maybe. What's the deal?"

"Simply this," said McNeary. "If Reno tells us all he knows about this gun we'll drop the charges against him. If not, we'll lock him up and throw the key away."

Smooth shook his head. "That won't do it. Big Reno doesn't scare easy. He'd laugh at us, if he had a good reason to keep his mouth shut."

McNeary shrugged. "That's why I sent for you. Play it any way you want, but find out how Reno Cordoza got that gun."

"And that's all you can tell me?"

McNeary glanced at his watch. "That's all *I* can tell you. I'm expecting someone here in a minute or so who may know more about it."

"Who?"

"Well," said McNeary, slowly, and he smiled, "this person has been a great deal of help in other cases. In fact, I honestly believe you would have been killed long ago if it weren't for her."

"For *her?*" cried Smooth. He stood up quickly and reached for his hat. "Hold everything, Chief! Did you send for Gilda Garland?"

"What's your hurry? I had a date with Gilda the night you sent me to Alaska. And I—"

"And you forgot to phone," said a quiet voice at his shoulder. "Sit down and relax, handsome. You weren't missed."

## CHAPTER II

### THIS GUY WON'T SING

SMOOTH sat down. Then he turned to look at the tall blond girl who stood at his shoulder. Gilda Garland—the girl who had once matched wits with the Treasury Department and led a dozen agents a chase that lasted for months.

It was Smooth Kyle who had finally caught up with Gilda, and it was Inspector McNeary who had given her the chance to work with the law instead of against it. Since then, Gilda and Smooth had worked as a team whenever the going got rough.

Gray-eyed, beautiful and wise in the ways of midnight Manhattan, Gilda was known and respected by the fast-thinking crowd who made Broadway their home. Owner of a successful dress shop on Madison Avenue, she was now quite satisfied to let the Treasury Department take care of its own problems.

But Smooth Kyle prevented that. Time and again Gilda had seen him walk himself into a spot where only luck and a fast gun could bring him out. And more than once, Gilda had been the one to hold that gun.

She seated herself next to Inspector McNeary, drew off her gloves and folded them on the table. Then she looked casually at Smooth Kyle.

"You need a shave, darling," she said. "Are you getting careless, or do the Esquimo girls like men with beards?" Without waiting for the return crack, she motioned to the waiter. "Coffee—for three."

"I'll take Scotch," said Smooth.

"You'll take coffee, handsome," said Gilda. She looked meaningly at McNeary. "You'll need it, too, when you hear the latest on Reno Cordoza."

McNeary leaned back in his chair and watched the smoke lift from the tip of his cigarette. Smooth passed his case to Gilda. She took a cigarette, waited until Smooth had lit it and then looked at him quizzically.

"Lord knows why they've put you on this case," she said at length. "If I'm any good at guessing, the setup is tough and needs someone with brains to crack it."

"Flatterer," said Smooth easily. "Too bad you're out."

McNeary put up his hand. "Quit it, you two," he said. "I've got to get back to the office with this report. Just now I'd like to hear what Gilda learned about Reno Cordoza."

"Fair enough," said Gilda. "Big Reno used to work for Jack Degan, the gambler, until Degan got killed. And—"

"And he used to work for Fay, and Diamond, and Rosenthal," added Smooth. "That's ancient history, beautiful."

Gilda lifted the coffee that the waiter had just set on the table. She balanced the cup thoughtfully and measured the distance to Smooth's head.

"Do you keep quiet, or—"

"You win, gorgeous," said Smooth.

"Degan got killed," Gilda continued, "Reno had trouble finding a job. He borrowed from everybody in town and then left Broadway. Not long ago he turned up again, paid all his debts and started spending.

"He was throwing a party in one of the Fifty-second Street clubs when he got into an argument with Marty Doyle and—"

"Do you mean Marty Doyle who runs the big money games?" asked Smooth.

"Is there any other Marty Doyle?" asked Gilda sharply. She turned toward McNeary. "I don't know how the argument started but I've asked Marty to meet me tonight and give me the story."

"Nice work, Gilda," said McNeary. "How about Big Reno—can you think of any way to make him talk?"

"That all depends," said Gilda slowly. "If you think this case is as important as the last, I *know* I can make Reno talk."

McNeary half-closed his eyes and looked at the girl who sat next to him. She was smiling now—an easy smile. But the Treasury man knew Gilda was telling the truth.

Secrets carefully hidden from the law were seldom secrets to Gilda. She had too many friends. Too many of Broadway's tight-lipped gentry were under obligations to Gilda Garland. When she asked questions—someone always knew the answers.

"You can make Reno talk?" asked McNeary.

"I can," said Gilda, "if you say it's necessary."

Something in her voice kept Smooth from making the laughing remark that was on his tongue. Instead, he asked: "How are you going to do it, beautiful?"

"It won't be hard," said Gilda slowly. "Jack Degan's brother is a pretty tough actor. For months he's been trying to find out who killed Jack so he can square things. I could tell him the answer, and Big Reno knows Degan would believe me."

"You mean Big Reno did it?" asked Smooth.

"I might mean that."

McNeary nodded. "All right, Gilda; go to it. Talk to Reno and tell him anything you want. But for the safety of your country, *make him talk!*" He stood up and motioned to the waiter, then turned to Smooth.

"I'll get the check. Go down to the Tombs with Gilda."

Gilda was already walking toward the door. Smooth watched the eyes of every man in the cafe turn to follow her. And he agreed with their judgment. Gilda was big time; and Gilda knew her way around.

But Smooth was always worried when she moved into a case with him. In spite of her reputation for cleverness, Smooth had seen Gilda use methods that were almost as direct as his own. She could handle a gun and had little hesitancy about using it when things got warm.

And for some unknown reason Smooth had an idea things were going to get very warm before this case was written off as closed.

HE HAILED a cab and gave the driver the address. Then he seated himself beside Gilda and waited for her to speak.

The cab crossed Sixth Avenue and stopped for the traffic light at Fifth. Gilda opened her compact, studied the tip of her nose and dabbed a bit of powder on it. Still Smooth waited. The cab reached Park Avenue and swung south.

"Why so silent?" he asked at length.

"Just thinking," said Gilda.

"About what?"

"You."

"Am I worth it?"

"I wish I knew," said Gilda wearily. "Sometimes I wonder why I don't get sick and tired of waiting for you to grow up."

"Now what have I done?"

"Oh, it isn't so much what you've done," said Gilda. She looked at Smooth and smiled a little. "It's just that you're—well, it's just that you're Smooth Kyle. I know you won't change. I know you'll never be any different. And sometimes I wonder when someone is going to pull back the sleeve of an automatic and snap a bullet into the chamber with your name written on it."

She put one hand on Smooth's arm. "What would I do then, Smooth?"

"What would you do?" said Smooth slowly. Then he laughed. "Why, you'd probably knock the gun out of the mug's hand before he had time to pull the trigger."

"Stop clowning!"

Smooth lost his laugh. "But why so serious all of a sudden?" he asked. "This job looks like a pushover."

"Does it?" said Gilda quietly.

"Well—doesn't it?"

"Not to me," said Gilda. "I was asking some of the boys about Reno—asking about his new boss. No one could tell me."

"So?"

"That means Reno isn't working for any of the regulars—none of the fast money crowd. Still, he's been spending more than usual and carrying a gun that's supposed to be at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. McNeary isn't telling all he knows, either. Nobody is—not even you, I suppose."

"I'm not holding out," said Smooth. "I don't know a thing." He sat quietly for a time, watching the crowded sidewalks and passing traffic.

"McNeary's worried; but then with half the world at war you can hardly blame him. He's been handed jobs on which the safety of the country depended. Then he's been told, 'Work carefully. Don't insult anyone. Don't hurt anyone's feelings.' And now he's afraid this will develop into the same sort of thing."

"Why do you say that?"

"I don't know," said Smooth doubtfully. "Just a hunch, I guess."

"Funny," said Gilda. "I've got the same sort of hunch. I can feel this case building into something big, but I can't put a finger on any definite reason."

"Then suppose you let me handle Big Reno?"

"Why?"

"Well," said Smooth, and he turned to grin at the tall girl beside him, "I hate to break down and confess, taffy head; but somehow, I wouldn't like to see you get hurt."

"And you're afraid I might?"

"A little."

"Then how do you suppose I feel about you, chump?" said Gilda. She leaned forward and tapped on the driver's shoulder. "Whip up the horses, Oscar. The lady's getting sentimental."

"How's 'at?" said the hackman. "I didn't get you."

"Let it go," said Gilda wearily.

THE cab raced south on Lafayette, swung over to Center and stopped at the Tombs Prison. Smooth paid off the driver while Gilda looked at the mirror in her compact. Together they walked into the old building and Smooth headed for the warden's office.

Five minutes later a guard led them along the rows of ancient cells to the one occupied by Reno Cordoza. The big man was stretched at full length on his bunk and when Smooth called him by name, Reno swung his wide feet to the floor and yawned sleepily.

" 'Lo, Smooth," he said. "Long time no see, feller. Where you been keeping yourself?"

"O, here and there," said Smooth. He nodded to the guard. "Open it up. We're going in."

The cell gate was opened and Smooth stepped inside. When Gilda followed him, Big Reno quickly took a comb from his pocket and ran it through his hair.

"You should a tol' me you were comin', Gilda," he said. "Look—I'm all shabby, an' everything."

"You look all right to me," said Gilda. "Sit down and take it easy. Smooth wants to ask a few questions."

"Smooth does?" said Reno. His eyes opened in surprise. "What's Smooth want with me? I ain't in on a Federal rap. Just Sullivan Law, that's all."

"My questions are off the record, Reno," said Smooth. "You know I don't use double-talk, and you know I don't lie. So you can believe me when I tell you I'm not here to pin a rap on you."

"Yeah, I can believe you," said the big man slowly. "I know you now for about ten years—maybe more. Know you ever since you shoved a taxi on Broadway. I ain't never caught you lyin', Smooth."

"And I'm not going to start today," said Smooth. "All I want is the name of the man who gave you that gun. That puts you in the clear: no Sullivan rap—nothing."

Big Reno smiled. "Sorry, pal. I' ain't talkin'."

"Not even if you draw a ten-year jolt?"

"Not even."

"In that case," said Smooth slowly, "we'll turn you loose at ten o'clock tomorrow morning."

"Come again," said the big man suspiciously. "What's the catch?"

"Give him the sad news, Gilda," said Smooth.

Gilda dipped into Smooth's pocket and took out his cigarette case. She offered it to Reno, helped herself and handed the case back to Smooth.

"The sad news," she said slowly, "is simply that I happen to know who killed Jack Degan. And I'm passing that news along to Jack's brother tonight."

Smooth watched the big man's eyes. They narrowed, and Reno Cordoza got slowly to his feet. He stared at Gilda, started to say something, then turned away. For a moment he paced the cell, muttering quietly to himself. Then he turned to face the blond girl again. There was fear in his eyes now.

"Look, Gilda," he said at length, "I ain't never crossed you. I ain't never crossed Smooth. What you want to get me killed for?"

"I don't want to," said Gilda. "And if this were an ordinary setup, you know I wouldn't cross you, Reno. But this is big—very big. I'm not sure, but I think it has something to do with the country."

"The *what?*" cried Reno. "Are you gone nuts?"

"Maybe," said Gilda. "But if you don't come through, Degan will be waiting for you in the morning. And you know I don't use double-talk, either!"

The big man rubbed his head slowly. Smooth could almost see the thoughts assembling in his mind. It was a slow process. Big Reno had never been known for his brilliance. A good man with a gun, and a man who knew how to keep his mouth shut under pressure—that was his reputation. Now he was struggling with an idea. Slowly it took shape. He turned and pointed a heavy finger at Gilda.

"You sure about that safety of the country stuff?" he asked. "You ain't tryin' to get me to rat on a guy, just for some lousy Federal rap?"

"I've told you the truth, Reno," said Gilda evenly.

BIG RENO paced the cell. He shook his head and rubbed his eyes. He turned, started toward Gilda and stubbed his toe against the bunk rail.

"Me feet!" he wailed. "Always, I hurt me feet." He sat down on the edge of his bunk and reached for his shoes.

"Just wait'll I get these brogans on then I'll give you the straight of it." He yanked on one shoe, stamped his foot and reached for the other. This one went harder. Reno shoved the foot into place and stamped again.

"Ouch!" he yelled. "Always, I hurt me feet! This shoe got a nail in it a mile long!"

He pulled off the offending shoe and threw it across the floor. Smooth grinned. So did Gilda. They waited until Reno had rubbed the injured foot. Then the big man leveled a finger at Gilda.

"Promise I get sprung out a here, an' you won't cross me to Degan!" he said slowly. He turned to Smooth. "You, too, Smooth—give it to me straight!"

"You've got my word for it, Reno," said Smooth. "Who gave you the gun?"

"Well, it's like this," said Reno. "I'm hittin' it tough an' I meet up with a guy who wants to crack into the gamblin' racket. He's got plenty money—but plenty! He figures I know the trade so he asks me t'—"

Big Reno slid slowly off the bunk onto the stone floor. It was as if he had fallen asleep in the middle of a word. His eyes were closed and his body had slumped into that peculiarly relaxed pose of a heavy sleeper.

Smooth dropped quickly to one knee and pulled open the big man's shirt. He put one hand firmly against Reno's ribs, then leaned forward until his eyes were close to the man's mouth, waiting for even a slight breath to register on the sensitive nerves.

None came. And there was no heart movement beneath Reno's ribs.

"Tell the guard to get a doctor—fast!" he said. "Either I'm crazy, or this guy is through!"

"Maybe it's both," said Gilda. She stepped out of the cell and hurried along the block. . . . Doctor Mattern, the prison physician, was an easy-going man who had seen many strange things happen in these ancient cell blocks. He knelt beside Reno and pushed a stethescope against the big man's chest. For a moment he waited. Then he folded the rubber tubes and put them into his pocket.

"Dead," he said casually. "Heart failure, probably. You'd be surprised how many of them go that way." He looked up at Smooth. "Was he important to you?"

"Very," said Smooth.

"Too bad," said the doctor. "He won't tell you anything now."

GILDA wasn't listening. She had knelt beside Reno and was now looking curiously at the toe of the big man's right sock. It was white lisle, clean except for a small round spot of red. This was damp, and in the center of the spot was a darker stain.

Gilda touched it with the tip of a gloved finger. A black, sticky substance clung to the glove.

"Break a cigarette and give me the paper," she said to Smooth.

"Now what?" he asked, and did as Gilda instructed.

"Just a guess." Gilda took the white paper and transferred the sticky substance from her glove. Then she folded the paper and handed it to Dr. Mattern. "Have this analyzed, will you, Doc? Somehow—I don't think Big Reno died of heart failure."

"Why don't you?" asked the doctor.

"Well, it doesn't add up," said Gilda. "Reno wasn't excited; didn't have brains enough to get excited. He had just decided to tell us something we wanted to know. Then he put on his shoe, yelped about a nail in it and kicked it off. A few seconds later he was dead."

"Well, what of it?" asked Mattern. "Heart failure can strike a man at any time." He smiled. "Even from such a slight cause as a nail in his shoe."

"Far be it from me to argue with a man about his trade," said Gilda. "But even though I'm not a shoemaker, I know there aren't supposed to be any nails in the *tip* of a shoe. And that's where Reno got clipped."

Smooth looked quickly at the big man's foot. "Check, beautiful!" he said, and reached for the offending shoe. "Nothing like being sure, though."

He started to put his hand into the shoe but Gilda was faster. Her purse swung and knocked the shoe from Smooth's hand. As it hit the cell floor Smooth turned to look at her curiously.

"What is it?" he asked. "Do we play games?"

"Figure it out, handsome," she answered. "If it killed Reno, it might make you sick to your tummy."

She picked up the shoe and held it over the bunk. Then she shook it gently. A short thorn, like that of a rose, dropped onto the blanket.

"Nice guessing," said Smooth. He broke the paper from another cigarette and

picked up the thorn. "More of that black stuff on the point. How long before you can tell us what it is, Doc?"

"I'm not sure," said Mattern. He looked closely at the point of the thorn. "You say it was only a few seconds after Reno put on his shoe that he died?"

"That's right."

The doctor shook his head. "And this thorn only pricked the surface—couldn't have been deep. Hmmmm! That sounds like—no, I don't want to make any guesses. Give me an hour or so and I'll tell you definitely."

"That's fair enough," said Smooth. "But keep it quiet, Doc. Pass the word that Reno died of heart failure, then call me in an hour and give me the story."

"Where can I reach you?"

Smooth turned to Gilda. "Where are you going to meet Marty Doyle?"

"In Lindy's."

"Good enough," said Smooth. "We'll he there, waiting for your call, Doc. In the meanwhile I'm going to have a chat with the keeper of the bees. Who's on duty?"

"Jeff Monahan."

"Thanks," said Smooth. He took Gilda's arm and walked with her along the cell block. "As for you, beautiful—how's about bouncing up to Lindy's? I'll catch up with you later."

"Sure you can take care of yourself alone?"

"Aren't you?"

Gilda smiled. "You're like a big kid, Smooth. If there's trouble in town, somehow or other, you find it. Try to keep alive, will you, Chump?"

## CHAPTER III

### THE SOUTH AMERICAN WAY

SHE left him, walking quickly toward the Center Street door. Smooth hurried to the principal keeper's office and sent in his name. Jeff Monahan—stout, genial and gray-haired—stood and put out his hand as Smooth came into his office.

"Don't tell me we've got someone down here that Uncle Sam wants," he said.

"You used to have," said Smooth. He seated himself facing Monahan. "Big Reno just eased out—heart failure, or something. I want a check on his visitors. All of them."

"Big Reno's gone, eh?" said Monahan. He touched a button on his desk. "He was in on a gun charge. What do you Federals want with him?"

"Oh, just curious."

An assistant came into the office and Monahan asked for the names of Big Reno's visitors. A moment later the clerk brought a typed list of names. Monahan showed the list to Smooth.

"Now let's see," he said slowly. "We've had Reno since Tuesday. His first visitor was his lawyer—Ramon Obalda. He was here about fifteen minutes. Then Hymie Gabbit, the bail bondsman, dropped in. Reno didn't want out—said he'd wait until he was arraigned. The next day Steve Dreyfus came in. You remember him?"

"Used to work for Larry Fay with Big Reno?"

"Yes. Smart guy, too. He quit Fay and went into the gambling racket for himself. Don't know what he's doing now but he seems to have plenty of money."

Smooth penciled the names on the back of an envelope. "Obalda, Gabbit, Dreyfus. Any other visitors?"

"That's all I have here." Monahan looked again at the list. "Oh, yes—Obalda came back a few hours ago but didn't stay long."

"Obalda, eh?" said Smooth slowly. "And you say he's Reno's lawyer?"

"So he claims."

"Do you know him?"

"Not very well," said Monahan slowly. He rubbed one ear thoughtfully. "He's been in a few times to see clients—a Cuban and two men from South America, if I remember right. Not a bad lawyer, though. I think he sprung all of his clients."

"Have you his business address?"

"Yeah; here it is," said Monahan. He copied the address on a slip of paper and tossed it to Smooth. "But why all this interest in Big Reno?"

"Just a routine checkup," said Smooth innocently.

"Routine, my eye!" said Monahan. "What's the story?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, Jeff," said Smooth as he started toward the door, "we have secret information that Big Reno was *actually* the Queen of Ethiopia in disguise. We're not sure, but that's the story."

"Queen of—" Monahan grabbed an inkwell and Smooth ducked through the doorway.

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AN HOUR later Smooth Kyle stood near the checkroom in Lindy's and looked over the tables in search of Gilda. He saw her off to the right at a table near the rear wall.

Facing her was Marty Doyle, dark-haired and bronzed. He was smiling and his teeth met in an even line. Not a bad-looking man, Doyle.

Smooth tossed his black hat onto the counter and started across the restaurant. Half of Broadway was there, and every second man at the tables nodded or called a quick hello. Smooth answered most with a casual wave, stopped to shake hands with a music publisher, and walked to Gilda's table.

"It's a wonder the Shuberts don't grab you two for a musical," he said easily. "How do you keep your figure, Marty?"

"'Lo, Smooth," said Doyle. He pushed back a chair. "Not looking so bad yourself. Gilda tells me you've been chasing Esquimos in Alaska."

"That, and learning how poker should be played," said Smooth. "How's your game going—or is it going?"

"Is that an official question?" laughed Doyle.

"Strictly off the record," said Smooth as he seated himself. "The Treasury Department doesn't care how many chumps you take, just so long as you write it on the tax form at the end of the year."

"Why remind me?" said Doyle. He gestured toward Gilda. "The lady tells me Big Reno cashed his last stack. Too bad. Reno wasn't such a bad guy."

"Is that why you took a sock at him?"

"Oh, that," said Doyle. "Reno and I had a little personal quarrel. Didn't amount to much, though."

Smooth studied the man who sat across the table. Marty Doyle had been running a game for a good many years. He was known in New York, Saratoga and Miami Beach as a man who kept an honest wheel and always paid off. Smooth remembered him from the old days—an easily smiling man who seldom if ever lost his temper.

Still, Marty Doyle could get rough if the occasion demanded. He paid his debts and expected others to do the same. If they didn't . . . Marty had his own way of collecting.

Now he was smiling as be twisted his glass and watched Smooth from the corners of his eyes. Gilda was studying a menu, but occasionally she turned to look warningly at Smooth.

"I haven't told Marty why we're checking on Reno," she said casually. "Naturally he doesn't want to talk himself into trouble. He feels that anything he says will be used against him."

"How come?" asked Smooth. He glanced at Doyle.

The gambler shrugged. "Gilda says Reno dropped out with heart failure. Maybe so; but I'd rather wait for the official verdict before I talk."

"Why? Do you think it might have been something else?"

"I don't think," said Doyle flatly. "Me, I'm keeping out."

"Guess again," said Smooth. "You stepped into the picture when you hit Reno. There must have been a reason."

"I didn't like the color of his eyes."

"Look, Marty," said Smooth evenly. "You and I have no quarrel. Be smart and keep it that way."

"Or—"

"Look, guy—" Smooth started.

"SETTLE down, children!" said Gilda sharply. "You're not running the only game in New York, Marty. I've been checking with Tom Benson and some of

the others. All of them had a grudge against Big Reno. If you hadn't fought with him, someone else would have taken a crack at him. Now all I want to know is—*why?*"

"Why not ask Benson? I expect him to join me here in a few minutes."

"Never mind Benson," said Gilda. "I know you, Marty—and I think you're the sort of man who would be glad to help out if he knew he could do his country a favor."

"Do his *country* a favor?" said Doyle. One eyebrow lifted. "I don't quite get you, Gilda."

"Then suppose I tell you Reno was carrying a gun that had been shipped to England and—"

"Hold that, Gilda!" cried Smooth. He caught her arm. "McNeary didn't want that information spread all over town!"

Gilda reached forward and pushed back the cuff of Marty Doyle's coat. There was a long white scar that ran back from his wrist.

"Where did you get that, Marty?" she asked.

"In the Argonne. I was a little slow with my bayonet."

Gilda smiled at Smooth. "Marty is one of the New York boys who came home with a D.S.O.—for bravery under fire. I don't think he'd sell out his country, Smooth."

Smooth looked at his drink.

Doyle pulled the cuff over the scar. He finished his drink and put the glass down firmly. "No, Gilda—I don't think I would. And what's more, I'm not interested in Reno's gun but if I know anything that will help, you're welcome to it."

"Thanks, Marty," said Gilda. "All we want to know is *why* you hit Reno."

Doyle drew a deep breath. "Reno used to work for me," he said slowly. "He worked for Benson and most of the other boys who run games in town. Then he got unreliable and we couldn't trust him.

"He checked out of town, but came back a few months ago and started to spend. Soon I started to lose customers. So did Benson and all the others. Not many—but important players."

"Who were they?" asked Smooth.

"I'll come to that later," said Doyle. "Not long ago, we found Reno was steering these people to another game. That was legitimate, but we wanted to know who was the opposition. I heard it was a new syndicate—people who had never been in the business before."

"And they could compete with you and Benson?" asked Gilda in surprise.

"Compete with us?" laughed Doyle. "Why, that crowd would rent a penthouse on Fifth Avenue, pour a hundred grand into equipment and furnish entertainment that cost another ten thousand."

Gilda's face showed her disbelief.

Smooth shook his head. "That doesn't add up, Marty. A game can't run long enough in New York to pay off that sort of an investment."

"I know it, Smooth," said Doyle. "And for a while we figured a crowd of amateurs were going to take a fast beating and fold. Instead, the cops would close one place and in a week this crowd would open another layout that cost twice as much."

"What did Reno say about it?" asked Gilda.

"That's just the trouble; Reno wouldn't say anything. When I asked him who was running the game, he laughed and promised me I'd be out of business before the end of the season. I got a little high and took a sock at him—and that's the story."

"Not quite all of it, Marty," said Smooth. "About those big money customers. Who were they?"

DOYLE frowned. "That's the strange part of the setup," he said. "Some of my best customers have been the crowd from South America. Tom Benson's too, for that matter. There's a set that comes from the Argentine each year and brings a heavy bankroll. We get a few from Brazil, and for the past few years ten of the heaviest players have come from Bolivia and Chile.

"Reno Cordoza knew that crowd well;

spoke their language. He steered them all to this new layout."

"South Americans, eh?" said Smooth slowly. "And those were the only customers you lost?"

"No," said Doyle. "We lost some of the Washington crowd—men from the embassies. But come to think of it, they were all representing South American countries."

"Sort of chummy," Gilda said.

A waiter came to the table and bent over Smooth's shoulder. "A call for you, Mr. Kyle."

"Thanks," answered Smooth. He stood up. "Don't run away, Marty. I'll be right back."

He followed the waiter to the phone booth, closed the door and picked up the receiver.

"Kyle talking," he said.

"This is Doctor Mattern," said the voice on the wire. "Gilda's hunch was right, Smooth. I've analyzed that substance and it appears to be *curare*—one of the most deadly of all poisons."

"*Curare?*" said Smooth. "Never heard of it."

"It's made by the Indians of South America," said the doctor. "They dip their blow-gun darts into it and use it for hunting, or fighting. Recently, the medical profession has been experimenting with it as a cure for nervous disorders but there hasn't been much of it brought into the country."

"What part of South America does it come from?"

"Oh, from a number of places. Ecuador —almost any of the countries bordering on the Amazon region. I understand it's also used in Bolivia and by some of the natives in Chile."

"Thanks, Doc," said Smooth. "Keep it quiet and write Reno off as a heart failure until you hear from McNeary."

"Glad to," said Mattern. "But you'd better watch your step, Smooth. *Curare* can kill in seconds, and it needs only a scratch. Anyone who plays with that stuff means business."

"So do I, Doc," said Smooth.

## CHAPTER IV

### TOO MUCH TALK

HE HUNG up and left the booth. A few of the figures were starting to add up. Not many; but enough for a start. Reno Cordoza had come from South America. And recently he had been working for a new crowd of gamblers catering to South American spenders.

He had been killed with a South American poison a few hours after he had been visited by a lawyer named Ramon Obalda —probably another South American.

Smooth glanced at the envelope on which he had written the names of Reno's visitors. Hymie Gabbit could be marked off; Hymie was just a bail bondsman who needed a customer. Obalda was due for a visit in the morning from Smooth.

But there was one name on the list that needed immediate attention: Steve Dreyfus, the gambler.

Smooth went back to the table and found Tom Benson had come to keep his appointment with Marty Doyle. Benson was a big man, known more for his activities at the race tracks than for the games he ran in town. Has was tall, blond and deeply tanned. Smooth had met him five years ago at one of the Florida tracks.

Like others of the gambling fraternity Tom Benson talked little about himself—a few words about his early days in Wisconsin, a job with a circus—that was all. He had run his race track winnings into a sizeable stake, opened a room in Miami Beach, and then moved north with the season.

Since then he had operated in friendly competition with Marty Doyle, Steve Dreyfus and the others who catered to the big-time spenders who liked to gamble. He nodded casually when Smooth came to the table, then turned to Gilda and continued his quiet-voiced conversation.

"As I was saying, Gilda, Marty and I don't mind if new people break into the game. That happens every year. But Reno's outfit has us stopped. We can't figure it."

"Why not?" asked Gilda.

Benson's laugh was short. "The score doesn't tally. From what we can figure, they spend more than they take in."

He turned to Smooth and looked at him thoughtfully. "I'm afraid you're wasting time with Marty and me. Still, I might be able to give you a lead. Have a talk with Steve Dreyfus; maybe he knows something."

"Why do you say that?"

Benson shrugged. "Oh, just a guess. But Steve seems to have found some new friends and—" He winked at Doyle.

"Steve Dreyfus, eh?" said Smooth. "Any idea where I can find him?"

Benson laughed. "Is that supposed to be a gag?"

"No."

"Then turn around and look at the pair in the booth near the corner."

Smooth turned quickly and found a pair of jet eyes looking at him across the width of the restaurant. Steve Dreyfus seemed to be all eyes. They were large and shaded by heavy brows. His face was chalk white and his lips were full and curved. Iron-gray hair formed a tight cap on his head, and his face was expressionless as only a gambler's can be. Dreyfus looked as if he'd been embalmed for a year.

HE SMILED now and nodded. Then he lifted a thin white hand in a casual gesture of greeting. Smooth nodded, then glanced at the girl who was with Dreyfus.

She, too, was dark. Her hair was the blue-black shade of the tropics. Her eyes were dark and very much alive as she looked at Smooth.

Dreyfus said something quietly and the girl smiled. Then Smooth saw she was beautiful—even more than beautiful. He looked at her for a moment and turned to Tom Benson.

"Is Dreyfus running a game?" he asked.

"Not just now," said Benson. He glanced at Doyle. "Steve had a place in Miami Beach last winter but he hasn't opened in New York."

"And he isn't doing anything?"

"We don't know what he's doing," said Marty Doyle sharply. "Steve has kept away from the crowd lately. He was never exactly sociable, and now he talks less than ever."

"Who's the girl?" asked Smooth.

Gilda laughed. "I thought that was coming next," she said. "Would you like to meet her, Handsome?"

"Oh, in a business way," said Smooth casually. "Who is she?"

"A little number from South America," said Gilda. "Her name is Maria Valera—and she sings."

"Where?"

"Nowhere just now. She was at the Conga Room but it closed for the summer."

"Maria Valera, eh?" said Smooth slowly. "And she comes from South America. I wonder if she knew Big Reno?"

"Why not ask her?" laughed Gilda.

"Not a bad idea, beautiful," said Smooth. He stood up. "Keep the home fires burning and I'll be back."

"Why bother?" said Gilda. "We're doing nicely."

Smooth patted her cheek and crossed to the table where Dreyfus and Maria Valera were sitting. The gambler stood and put out his hand.

"Glad to see you, Smooth," he said. "Are you going to join us for a while?"

Smooth shook hands with Dreyfus and looked at the girl. "If you don't mind."

Dreyfus laughed. "Meet Miss Valera, a very talented young lady." He turned to the girl. "This is Mr. Kyle; Broadway knows him as Smooth Kyle."

"It is so nice to know you," said Maria. She lifted one hand and smiled. "Steve tells me you kill people for the Government. That is interesting—vary!"

Smooth looked questioningly at the gambler and Dreyfus grinned. "I told Maria about some of your jobs for the Treasury Department. I hope you don't mind."

"I don't mind," said Smooth slowly as he seated himself, "but why all this business about killing people?"

Dreyfus spread his thin hands in a quick

gesture. "Maria jumped to conclusions. In her country government agents use rather direct methods, I'm told."

"And where is your country, Miss Valera?" asked Smooth.

"I come from the mountains," said Maria. "From LaPaz, in Bolivia. You know that country, perhaps?"

"Not yet," said Smooth. "But I'm learning. A friend of mine is teaching me. His name is Reno Cordoza."

He watched Maria and Dreyfus as he spoke the name. The girl's eyes widened a trifle and she glanced at the gambler. Steve Dreyfus used that easy smile of his and studied the tip of his cigarette.

"What Smooth means," he said slowly, "is that he's been handed a new job. In some way it concerns Big Reno. He thinks it may concern Maria Valera and Steve Dreyfus, so he's being very direct as usual."

"I do not understand," said Maria.

"Neither do most people—especially those who try to outsmart him," laughed Dreyfus. He turned to face Smooth. "I hear Big Reno cashed his chips while you were visiting him today."

"Where did you hear that?"

Dreyfus shrugged. "Most of Broadway knows it. Anything that happens in the Tombs reaches Times Square in less than an hour."

Smooth nodded. "Fair enough, Steve. Now suppose you tell me the rest of it."

"WHY not?" said the gambler. "You've come here to learn who Reno worked for; that's why you and Gilda are with Marty Doyle and Tom Benson."

"Remarkable," said Smooth. "Keep talking."

"Well, Marty and Tom told you Reno was taking the South American trade to a new spot. Then you saw me with Maria. I'm a gambler—two and two make four—and here you are."

Dreyfus spread out his hands, smiling.

"That gives you an A on your report card," said Smooth. "Now where do we go?"

Again Dreyfus laughed. "Oh, I could hand you a stall but it wouldn't do any good." He turned to Maria. "You see, Smooth Kyle knows just about every taxi driver and doorman in New York. They like him and so do a good many other people who work at night. When you and I leave here it will be only a question of minutes before Smooth knows exactly where the taxi dropped us."

"Just like that," Dreyfus added.

"This is very strange," said Maria slowly. She pouted and made big eyes at Smooth. "You are a good detective—so!"

"Simply wonderful," said Smooth. He faced Dreyfus and his eyes were serious. "Thanks for the build-up, Steve. Now suppose we forget the double-talk and get down to business. You can save yourself a lot of grief by telling me what you know about Reno. Who was his boss?"

"Why not come along with us and meet him?" suggested Dreyfus. "Maria is working at the club, and so am I—in a way."

"What club?"

"Oh, it has no name. This week we're using Martell's old spot on Madison Avenue. You remember that one, don't you?"

"Naturally," said Smooth. "But where do you fit? Doyle told me you weren't working."

"I'm not—exactly," said Dreyfus slowly. "I've been employed merely as an advisor. I run a wheel occasionally, but most of the time I simply show the owners how to operate in New York."

"Who are the owners?"

"Joseph Garado and Miguel Panza—two men from South America. I don't believe you've ever met them."

Maria's mouth was open in amazement. She reached forward and caught the gambler's hand. "What is this?" she cried. "In New York it is not legal to gamble. It is a crime! And now you tell this detective where we work! He comes there! He make the arrest!"

Dreyfus put one hand over Maria's. "Smooth isn't that kind of detective," he said. "He's a Federal man, and he doesn't care how many games are running in New

York—just so long as they keep clear of the Government."

"It is crazy!" said Maria in bewilderment.

"Of course," Dreyfus answered.

"I agree with you," said Smooth. "But it saves all of us a lot of trouble." He stood and pushed in his chair. "I'll drop around to see you, Steve. About midnight—maybe later."

Dreyfus stood. "Any time, Smooth. You're always welcome."

Smooth walked back to the table where Gilda, Doyle, and Benson were finishing their meals. And as he walked he realized that Steve Dreyfus had taken the play away from him.

The gambler was smart. One of the fastest thinkers in the trade. It hadn't taken him a moment to guess he was on a spot. But why had he opened up so quickly?

"Why the frown, handsome?" asked Gilda as he seated himself. "Didn't she have a telephone number?"

"Eh?" said Smooth. "Oh—that! I must be slipping, beautiful. I forgot to ask."

"But you *did* find out where she was working?"

"Of course," said Smooth. "There's a game at Martell's old place. She's working there and we're going up to hear her sing. That okay with you?"

"Martell's place?" said Doyle quickly. "Who's running the game?"

"Garado and Panza. Ever hear of them?"

The gambler shrugged. He looked at Benson. "I pass—never heard of them."

"Neither have I," said Smooth. He turned to Gilda. "I'm going to ask McNeary to make a fast check and meet us after the show."

"What show?"

"Any show, beautiful. You name it and I'll buy the tickets. And you'd better go easy on that roast beef. It makes girls round in the strangest places."

Gilda sighed and shook her head. She turned to the gamblers. "He's crazy, but I'm used to him now, so what can a girl do?"

## CHAPTER V

### I LOVE A CROOKED WHEEL

McNEARY was waiting in the lobby when Smooth led Gilda from the theater on Forty-sixth Street. Moore's Restaurant was nearby and the Treasury man suggested a drink. At a table near the corner of the bar, he opened an envelope and spread out a few sheets of paper.

"Here's the story, Smooth," he said. "An autopsy shows Big Reno died from *curare* poisoning. So far as we have been able to learn no one was in his cell other than the people you listed. A checkup on Reno puts him in Havana six months ago. He flew there from Florida, stayed a month and returned."

"What about Maria Valera?" asked Gilda.

"She's been in New York less than a month," said McNeary. "She's a native of Bolivia and was singing in a city called Arica in northern Chile before she came to America. She flew from Arica to Cuba, stayed there a short time and then flew to New York."

"Did you get anything on Garado and Panza?" asked Smooth.

"Joseph Garado," said Inspector McNeary slowly, "is a South American gambler who used to operate in most of the big cities in Brazil, Argentina and Chile. He's a native of Bolivia."

"And what about Miguel Panza?" asked Smooth.

"The same," said McNeary. "He's a native of Bolivia and used to run a place in LaPaz."

"It sounds screwy to me," said Smooth wearily. "Why should two guys from Bolivia come to New York and try to crack into the gambling racket here?"

"That's your guess, Smooth," said McNeary. "But I can tell you this: Washington has authorized me to let you have a free hand in the case. Don't stop working until you have found out where Reno Cordoza got that gun."

"What makes it so important?"

"Bolivia," said McNeary. "How much do you know about that country, Smooth?"

"I'll answer that," said Gilda quickly. "He knows one dark-eyed girl named Maria Valera—period, paragraph!"

McNeary smiled. "Suppose you both let me tell you a few things about Bolivia—things in which Washington is *very* much interested."

"Let's have it, Chief," said Smooth.

"To begin with, Bolivia produces just one fourth of the world's supply of tin. That happens to be one of the few minerals not found in North America. The chief source of supply has been the East Indies and China where the tin was mined and sent to England for smelting."

McNeary looked thoughtfully at Gilda and then turned to Smooth. "Both of you understand why it may become impossible at any moment for us to secure tin from this source. That leaves only Bolivia."

"What's the setup down there?" asked Smooth.

"In 1924 an American corporation bought the Llalagua and Uncia Mines and secured control of about eighty percent of the tin production of the country."

"Then why worry about tin?" asked Gilda. "It seems we can get all we want from Bolivia."

"Under ordinary circumstances, we can," said McNeary. "The tin is low-grade but usable—somewhat on the order of the oil we *used* to get from Mexico. However, you may recall Mexico expropriated her oil wells."

"But isn't the Government of Bolivia friendly toward the United States?" asked Smooth.

"The present Government—well, yes," said McNeary. "But in 1937 an American oil company's holdings were seized by Colonel David Toro, who was then Provisional President. Four months later Colonel Toro was succeeded by a new leader, Lieutenant-Colonel German Busch, Chief of the General Staff."

"German Busch, eh?" said Smooth. "And that's the name of Bolivia's President?"

"No," said McNeary. "General Quintanilla followed Colonel Busch; and a few months ago General Enrique Eneranda took office as President."

"How do you keep up with them?" Smooth laughed; then he looked thoughtfully at McNeary. "Quite a place, Bolivia. Petroleum, tin—"

"Rubber, tungsten, lead—and a population of about three million," added McNeary. He looked at his glass and twisted it slowly. "Half of the people are Indians, but the whites are highly cultured. In fact, one of their universities is three hundred years old."

And then, as if thinking aloud, "Most of the foreign population happens to be German. More than three thousand of them."

"Any Americans?" asked Smooth.

"Fewer than five hundred," said McNeary.

HE TOOK a pencil from his pocket and sketched a rough map of South America on the back of the manila envelope. "Bolivia has no seaport. It reaches the Pacific through Chile, by railroad and air. That's rather an interesting country, too. Something like two hundred thousand Germans in Chile."

He put the envelope into his pocket and smiled. "Of course, all of this may have nothing to do with our case, but the fact that Reno and his associates are natives of Bolivia—"

McNeary spread his hands in a questioning gesture and stood up. "We're worried, Smooth. Watch your step."

"That the best thing I do, Chief," said Smooth.

He walked with Gilda to the street, watched McNeary head toward Broadway and then turned to the taxis that lined the curb. An undersized driver was leaning against the fender of the third cab. His nose carried the dent of a fist and the puffs under his eyes indicated he had been in more than one or two fights. He grinned when Smooth motioned to him.

" 'Lo, Smooth," he said. "Somethin' I can do for you?"

"Yes, Fisty," said Smooth. "I've been looking for Clipper Delf. Is he still in retirement?"

"In what?" said Fisty.

"In jail."

"Oh—retirement! I get it!" Fisty widened his grin. "Clipper was sprung about four months ago. He's in town."

"What's he doing?"

"Restin', I guess. I ain't heard no complaints from the dice games."

Smooth opened the cab door and motioned to Gilda. "Climb in, Gorgeous. Fisty is going to take us to see an old friend of mine."

"What about your date with the Bolivian nightingale?"

"Oh, I'll get around to that later." Smooth winked at the driver. "Make it fast, Fisty. It might mean a couple of bucks."

"Consider it done," said the driver.

The cab rolled east, crowding and jostling as Fisty fought the traffic. It reached First Avenue, swung north and passed the quieter stretches beyond the arch of the Queensborough Bridge. At a warehouse corner it turned east again and stopped in front of a small cafe near the river.

Fisty got out, nodded to Smooth and walked into the cafe. A moment later he returned with a tall, lightly built man in a dark suit. Clipper Delf walked as if he were moving to music. His steps were even and easy, like those of an athlete or a professional dancer.

"GOOD evening, Smooth," he said. His voice was soft and hardly above a whisper. "And Gilda—well, I haven't seen you for ages and ages."

"Thanks for nothing," said Gilda. "I'm not ages and ages old, Clipper."

"My error," said the thin man. "Perhaps the time seemed long simply because I haven't seen you."

"Nicely done," Gilda said, laughing. "And you, Clipper—have you been keeping in the clear?"

"Oh, moderately so, moderately so." He turned to Smooth. "I'd ask you to step inside but the place is a bit noisy. Could we drive west to some more elegant bistro?'

"Sorry, but I haven't time," said Smooth. "I was passing by and I remembered you like to play a little roulette on occasion."

"Ah, yes," said Clipper gently. "Roulette—a most delightful game. But I didn't think anyone was running a wheel in town this season."

"You should keep up with the times," said Smooth. "I've been told a new syndicate is operating Martell's place on Madison Avenue. In fact, I'm on my way there this evening."

Clipper Delf lifted a questioning eyebrow. "Martell's place, you say? I know it well—oh, very well."

"Then why not come along later and try your luck?"

"You—er—wouldn't object?"

"Not at all," said Smooth. "I know how lucky you are at roulette and I hope you win tonight—using your usual system, of course. But I can't guarantee you won't lose. The new owners seem to be rather dangerous men."

"Danger—always danger," said Clipper mournfully. "Ah, well—a man must live, I suppose. Thank you for the information, and if there is any little thing I can do—?"

"Not a thing, Clipper," said Smooth. He motioned to the driver. "Madison and Sixty-second; we'll walk from there, Fisty."

"Right!" said the driver.

Smooth winked at Clipper and watched the thin man bow gracefully to Gilda. Then the gray-eyed blonde leaned back against the cushion and crossed her hands over one knee.

"Give, handsome!" she ordered. "What's the deal?"

"Deal?" said Smooth innocently. "Why, I didn't know there was one."

"Oh, of course not!" said Gilda sarcastically. "But I happen to know Clipper Delf's system as well as you!"

"And not a bad one, I might add."

"Not bad until he meets someone who is faster than he is with a gun. You know as well as I do, Smooth, that Clipper Delf has been sticking up gambling joints for years. That's how he got his name. Now you tip him about the game at Martell's place. And Gilda wants to know—how come?"

Smooth laughed. "Oh, it just seemed like a good idea. You see, Gilda, that gun of Reno's might be just a stray. It might have nothing to do with this South American crowd. Then again, it might be one of many. So, I figured Clipper Delf could help me find the answer."

"How?"

"I don't know," said Smooth simply. "I haven't guessed that far." He leaned forward and tapped the driver on the shoulder. "Hop over to Fifth and stop at the Plaza. The Fifty-ninth Street side."

"Why the Plaza?" asked Gilda quickly.

"Business," said Smooth. "I have to see someone."

THE cab turned into Fifth Avenue, rolled south to Fifty-ninth Street and circled to the side entrance of the hotel. Smooth stepped out, told Fisty to wait and hurried into the hotel.

He paused at the cigar counter to buy cigarettes, opened the pack and filled his case. Then he walked slowly to the Fifth Avenue entrance and strolled down the broad steps. A cab rolled up and Smooth reached for the door.

"Over to Madison," he said.

"Okay, Smooth!"

"Huh?" said Smooth. Then he looked at the driver. "Well, I'll be a—"

Fisty's grin was wide as he looked out from the driver's seat. He reached back, swung open the door and grinned again.

"Gilda figured you'd come out this door," he said. "She told me she'd meet you at Martell's joint."

Smooth climbed in and sat down. Martell's was exactly where he *didn't* want Gilda to meet him. When Clipper Delf arrived there would probably be trouble, and Smooth didn't want Gilda mixed up in it. So he had tried the oldest of gags—and drawn a blank.

The cab stopped at Sixty-second Street and Smooth told Fisty to wait. He walked south, glancing at the building entrances until he came to one that was familiar. A braided doorman in gray and gold reached for the handle as Smooth turned toward the door.

"Good evenin', sir," he said. "A grand night, so it is."

"Personally I think it stinks," said Smooth casually. "Or would smells be a more elegant word, Radigan?"

"Wha—?" The doorman looked closely at Smooth and a grin touched the corners of his wide mouth. "So 'tis you, Smooth. He pulled the handle and stepped inside with Smooth. "An' what would you be wantin' wid this joint, now?"

"Oh, just looking around," said Smooth. "Did Gilda come in yet?"

"She did not," said Radigan. "I've not seen her in weeks."

Smooth grinned. "Perfect!" he said. "When she gets here, tell her I've left with Miss Valera. When she asks where I went, tell her I bounced up to give Harlem a whirl."

"Two-timin', eh? said Radigan. "You'd best look out when she catches up wid you." Radigan leaned closer. "The wheel upstairs is wired, an' the sticks are hold-outs. 'Tis the fastest clip joint I've ever seen, no less. Watch yer step, Smooth."

"Thanks—I will," answered Smooth. "Who runs the place?"

"A pair of guys named Garado and Panza, no less. I never heard of them in me life until Big Reno put me on the door."

Radigan shook his head. "Too bad about Reno. May the Lord have mercy on his soul—murderer that he was. And not a bad guy, either." The doorman walked across the hall and nodded to the elevator boy. "Take this gintleman up to the top."

Smooth stepped into the elevator and the car lifted quickly to the top of the shaft. It was a ten-story building with an elaborate penthouse that had often been rented

by gamblers during the lax days of Prohibition.

Lately it had been empty. Police activity had closed most of the larger places in New York, and any games that were running were operating on a one-night basis—and simply. But this place on Madison Avenue was different. Definitely!

## CHAPTER VI

### BLOW DOWN, DEATH!

WHEN the elevator door opened Smooth saw a layout that would have made any of the old places look like second-rate dives. The roof had been grassed and the guests sat at tables under gayly colored umbrellas. The lights were soft, and beyond a crescent-shaped flower bed five musicians played the soft, rhythmic songs of South America.

Money had been spent on the place—big money. Smartly costumed girls stood at the check room in the reception hall and smiled at Smooth. A beautifully gowned girl came toward him and asked his name.

"Kyle," said Smooth. "Mr. Dreyfus expects me."

"Ah—of course." She motioned to a tall girl with auburn hair. "Carmencita—will you see that Mr. Kyle is made at home? Perhaps he would like to drink while he listens to the music."

She turned again to Smooth. "Carmencita will take good care of you, *señor*. I will tell Mr. Dreyfus you have arrived."

"Don't hurry," said Smooth. He looked appraisingly at Carmencita. "I'll be here quite a while."

" 'Ow nice," said Carmencita. She put one soft arm through Smooth's and walked him toward the garden. "We will sit under thee moon, eh, *señor*? And we weel 'ave one, maybe two dreenks, eh?"

"Not a bad idea."

Carmencita laughed. "I 'ave many good ideas, *señor*."

"And rather a cute accent."

"You like eet?"

"Very much," said Smooth.

He walked with Carmencita to a table and glanced casually about the roof. The garden had been carefully shrubbed: wide hedges lined the four sides, preventing anyone from going too close to the low rails that guarded the roof edges.

There were few direct lights. Small lamps were concealed in the flower bowls on the individual tables, and the small dance floor was lit in soft-colored tones.

Certainly it was no place for pikers. Smooth wondered what manner of men came here to play the tables.

Two were seated at an adjoining table. They were carefully dressed in evening clothes and they spoke quietly as they sipped their drinks. Their conversation was in Spanish, and the girls at the table spoke in the same tongue.

Four more were at another table. They, too, spoke the language of South America—a Spanish into which had crept many words of the natives and not a few Anglicized expressions.

There were some who spoke in a harsher tone: a guttural Spanish that was punctuated with short, heavy snatches of laughter. These guests were fair-skinned men, some with close-cropped hair and heavy hands. Their attitude was one of forced joviality.

Smooth turned to the auburn haired girl. "Have you been long in New York?"

"Oh, no," she said. "My home ees in Chile—in Viña del Mar. That ees near Valparaiso. You have been there?"

"Unfortunately—no," said Smooth. "But I notice most of these girls are South Americans. Is there any reason for that?"

"Why not?" said Carmencita. She smiled. "Most of thee guests are from South America—so, we make them at home."

"Not a bad idea," said Smooth. He pointed toward two blond men at a far table. "Are those gentlemen from your country?"

Carmencita looked, then her eyes went blank. "I do not know thee gentlemen. And eet ees not permitted to talk of thee guests."

SMOOTH grinned, then looked up to see Steve Dreyfus and Maria Valera coming toward him. He stood, bowed to Maria and motioned to chairs at the table. Steve pulled one back for Maria.

"Glad you stopped in," said the gambler. "Has Carmencita been taking care of you?"

"Very nicely," said Smooth. He glanced at Maria. "I hope you will sing before I leave. Anyone as lovely as you must have a beautiful voice."

"You speak like one from my country," said Maria. She looked intently at Smooth. "For that, I will sing for you."

She walked to the orchestra. After a word with one of the musicians she stepped onto the small floor and started a low-voiced Latin song. Smooth pulled his chair closer to Steve and rested one arm on the table.

"Not bad," he said quietly. "Not half bad, Steve. But I don't understand how the owners can spend this much money on a spot that can't run more than a week."

Dreyfus looked sharply at the auburn-haired girl and moved his head in a gesture of dismissal. Carmencita stood, smiled at Smooth and left the table. Dreyfus turned to face Smooth.

"Why not tell me just what you're after?" he said evenly. "I know it has something to do with Big Reno, but I can't guess past that."

Smooth shrugged. "Oh, I merely stopped in to meet the owners, and maybe try the wheel for a turn or two."

"You don't want any part of these wheels," said Dreyfus.

"Thanks," said Smooth. "But what about the owners?"

"Why do you want to meet them?"

"Curious—that's all."

Dreyfus leaned closer. "Look, Smooth. I've been around long enough to know that no one ever tangled with the Federal crowd without gathering plenty of grief. I know you, and I don't want any part of the stuff you dish out. So don't get me wrong, feller."

"Keep talking," said Smooth quietly.

"It's simply this—I stepped into a soft touch in this setup. Two men came to me and asked me to show them how to operate in New York. Stacey Bellville introduced me to these owners in Havana—you know Stacey." He paused.

"I know him," said Smooth. "Used to run a game in New York. He's been operating in Cuba for the past few years."

"That's right," said Dreyfus. "Stacey introduced me to Garado and Panza. Said they were heavy with money and anxious to run a game in New York.

"I told them the smart way to work but they insisted upon a flashy layout—said they didn't care about expense. They claimed they could get enough South American trade to make it pay."

"And is the payoff all they expected?"

"No—it isn't!" said Dreyfus. "That is, I haven't seen enough cash to justify the expenses. But I don't know how much paper the owners are taking."

"What kind of paper?"

"Mortgages, perhaps." Dreyfus shrugged. "Garado okays the credit and he seems mighty liberal. But that's his headache. He pays me off in cash so I've got nothing to worry about unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless there's something behind this that might be interesting to you Federal men."

"And you think there is?"

"That's what I'm asking you."

SMOOTH lifted his glass and smiled at Maria who had finished her first song. She smiled in return and started a second. Smooth turned to the man beside him.

"You sound smart, Dreyfus—almost too smart. Suppose you *act* smart and tell me the serial number of your gun."

"My gun?" said Dreyfus.

"Your gun!" said Smooth.

Dreyfus lifted his hands in a questioning attitude. "I'm naked, Smooth. I'm not packing a gun. Give me a frisk if you don't believe me."

"I believe you," said Smooth. He stood up as Maria finished her number and came

toward the table. "Let's go inside and watch the wheels go around. And while we're there, see if you can dig up Garado and Panza. I'd like to meet them."

He turned to Maria and complimented her upon her singing. The girl smiled, took Smooth's arm and walked with him to the gambling rooms.

A wide doorway led in from the roof to a vestibule. Dreyfus opened a second set of doors and they stepped into a brilliantly lighted room with heavily draped windows. Two dice tables were at the far end and along the sides of the room were blackjack and birdcage games. Two roulette wheels were in the center and a dozen guests were playing for small sums.

There was real activity at one dice table and Smooth walked toward it. Dan Partridge, a fast man with a stick, was in charge of the table. He saw Smooth and his eyebrows lifted. He looked at Dreyfus and the gambler nodded. Dan shrugged and swung the curved stick across the table to scoop in the dice.

Smooth watched his hands. The fingers were muscular like those of a musician. They lifted the dice and spun them to the player. There was real money down there now and the player was breathing on the dice before he threw them.

"*Nueve!*" he said, and spun the dice.

"Six," droned Dan Partridge. "And the point is nine."

The stick went out and Dan reached for the dice. Smooth saw those strong fingers lift them, palm them and substitute another pair. The cold dice flicked onto the table and rolled to the player. Partridge slid the stick through the hand that held the palmed dice. And Smooth knew a small compartment had opened and received the dice, holding them safely out of sight until they were again needed.

"*Nueve!*" said the player.

"Seven," droned Partridge. "And seven loses."

Again the stick went out, clipped the loaded dice and spun them into the dealer's hand. The switch was made before the next play and Smooth grinned.

"Perhaps you would like to play?" asked Maria. "A vary interesting game, this craps."

"Oh, very interesting," said Smooth.

HE WATCHED the player who had just lost motion to Steve Dreyfus. The gambler excused himself and went to the table. There was a moment of quiet talk and Dreyfus nodded. He left the room and soon returned with a short, heavy-shouldered man.

"Who is that?" asked Smooth.

"He is Señor Garado," said Maria. "He must say if the credit is good for Señor Aldoza. Poor Señor Aldoza! He lose and he lose—always he lose." Maria laughed and winked at Smooth. "But Señor Aldoza do not care. He is rich. Vary rich! He owns the mine in Bolivia."

"Is that so?" said Smooth.

"Yes, and Señor Aldoza is politician, too," said Maria. She nudged Smooth's ribs knowingly.

Smooth watched while Aldoza spoke quickly with the owner. Garado smiled indulgently and patted the player on the shoulder. He nodded to Dreyfus and turned to the dealer.

"You will please to give Señor Aldoza credit for an additional ten thousand dollars," he said. "It will be all right."

Then the owner turned and came toward Smooth. Steve Dreyfus walked beside him, talking quietly.

"I want you to know Señor Garado, Smooth," said Dreyfus. "Señor Panza will be here later." He turned to the owner. "This is Mr. Kyle, an old friend of mine."

"So pleased to know you, Mr. Kyle," said Garado. "I hope you find everything to your satisfaction."

"Everything is perfect," said Smooth. "I've never seen the chumps fall so fast."

"Chumps—fall?" said Garado. His dark eyes went round. "I do not understand."

"Neither do they," said Smooth. He glanced at his wrist watch and then looked across the room. "I suppose this is your busiest hour, isn't it?"

"That depends," said Garado. He turned in answer to the call from a roulette dealer. "Ah—you will pardon me."

He left the dice table and moved across the room, his short body swaying above the drive of his muscular legs. Smooth saw the dealer hand him a slip of paper and point to a player who was seated between two dark-haired girls. The player's eyes were bright and he was laughing as the girls urged him to double his stakes. He pointed to the empty space before him on the table and spoke rapidly in Spanish. There was more laughter, and Garado nodded. Again the wheel turned.

"I see you've got Jim Pader on the wheel," said Smooth. "Looks as if you've rounded up every fast dealer in town. But what about the card games? Could I have a look at them?"

"Why not?" said Dreyfus. He turned to Maria. "Would you mind taking Mr. Kyle into the card rooms?"

"I would like to," said Maria. She put her arm through Smooth's and walked with him toward a closed door. "You play the cards—no?"

"Oh, muchly," said Smooth. "Casino and Steal-the-Pack are my favorites."

"I do not know these games."

SHE moved in against Smooth as she passed a group at a roulette table and her hand touched the holster under his arm. Smooth looked at her and the dark-haired girl smiled. She said nothing but opened the door and walked down a short hallway to a room where four groups of silent men sat at card tables.

Smooth followed. One glance at the players told him these games were for real stakes. He stepped into the room and followed Maria to a small bar near the draped windows. A dark-faced bartender set up drinks and Maria seated herself on one of the high stools.

"Why do you come here?" she asked quietly.

"Curious."

"But what is it you expect to find?"

"Almost anything," said Smooth. He glanced again at his wrist watch, and as he did, the door opened and Clipper Delf stepped into the room. "Yes—almost anything."

Clipper Delf left the door open, stepped to one side and leveled a gun at the players.

"So sorry to interrupt," he said quietly. "Everything will go nicely and no one will get hurt if you gentlemen act sensibly."

A swarthy man leaped to his feet and reached toward his hip pocket.

"Don't try it!" snapped Clipper.

The man got his gun clear just as Clipper's gun went off. The sound of the shot was loud in the room and the swarthy man looked stupidly at a stain growing on the sleeve of his coat. His gun was on the floor and Clipper's automatic was lined on his chest.

Maria's fingers gripped Smooth's arm. The girl's eyes were intense. There was no fear in them but a terrible excitement was building. She turned from Clipper to look at Smooth.

"You are afraid?" she whispered. "Is that why you do nothing?"

"Maybe," said Smooth.

He lifted his hands and looked hard at Clipper. Thank-you Daly stepped into the room—one of Clipper's men. A gun was in his hand and he moved it slowly as he lined the players against the wall. His other hand scooped the cash from the table.

"Thank you," said Daly. "Thank you, gents. And now the collection will begin."

Smooth grinned. He winked at Clipper and the gunman motioned toward the door. Smooth took Maria's arm and walked slowly across the room, his hands held at shoulder level.

He stepped through the doorway and lowered his hands.

Maria followed him to the large room and stood with him at the entrance. Four men were lining the players and girls against the walls while two others held guns.

Smooth recognized them as members of Clipper's mob—expert gunmen who made

their living stealing from gamblers. They were working quickly and efficiently, gathering the money and jewels deposited upon the table.

"You are one of them?" whispered Maria.

"Me—one of Clipper's boys?" said Smooth. He grinned and shook his head.

"Why you don't shoot them? You are afraid?"

"Lady, I never mix into other people's business. That's a smart idea and you ought to try it."

As he spoke Smooth heard a light sound that was familiar but confusing. In the quiet room it seemed as if someone had blown a speck of tobacco from his lips—a slight puff of quickly expelled air.

Immediately following it one of Clipper's men said, "Hey! What gives!" He turned, and Smooth saw Red Bradley put one hand to his neck and pull out a short-feathered dart that had buried itself in the skin.

THE gunman looked curiously at it. "Which one a you mugs is gettin' smart?" he asked. He lifted his gun and swung it slowly. "Lay off the stickers or you get hurt!"

Again there was the sound of a puff of air. A second dart lodged in the cheek of a gunman who was lifting a roll of bills from a roulette table. He jerked the dart free, lifted his gun and leveled it at a dealer.

"Nix, Charlie!" cried the dealer. "I didn't do it!"

"Then who did?" asked the gunman.

There was no answer, but the dealer was pointing toward the first gunman who had been hit with the dart. Red Bradley had dropped his gun and he was slipping to the floor in the curiously relaxed fashion of a man who has suddenly been overtaken with sleep.

"Get Clipper!" called the second man. "Get him an—"

He, too, slipped quietly to the floor. And as he did, a third member of Clipper's mob tugged viciously at a dart that had imbedded itself at the corner of his mouth. He pulled it free, lifted his gun and emptied it at one of the drapes. The heavy hanging sagged and Smooth saw a dark-faced man stagger forward and crash to the floor.

Other guns were talking, now. Clipper Delf had sprinted along the hall, pushed past Smooth and Maria and stepped into the big room. He stood flatfooted, looking quickly about. He saw two of his men down and a third crumpling. Then he, too, heard the light puff of air and saw a dart strike a fourth man.

Smooth's gun was out now. He started forward into the room but Maria caught his arm.

"No!" she cried. "Keep back! *Curare!* They use *curare!*"

"Then it's time they learned better manners," said Smooth.

**TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK**

# Appointment in October

By CHARLES MARQUIS WARREN
Author of "Bugles are for Soldiers," "Then I'll Remember," etc.

**This is the story of two brothers whose paths cross one bright and shiny day on a diamond. The World's Championship is at stake, and a base-hit or a strike-out at this moment will make or mar five lives. Batter up!**

## I

AT A quarter to ten, the Royal White slid through the car-laden sidings of Pittsburgh, dropped the city behind and accelerated its speed in preparation for the long flat run which eventually sweeps into Midwestern City.

The interior of the Special was warm and brightly lighted and in the twin club cars immediately behind the engine there was very little hilarity; which was not as it should be.

Saul liked the club to be hilarious when it wasn't on the field; he believed it relaxed the players without enervating them. His method had always clicked before. A pennant and four world's championships in a row in the seven years since he'd been piloting the Bombers. That was how well it had clicked.

It was a feat even the sports writers granted would never be excelled—unless Saul did it himself. They said he was on his way to a permanent niche up in the Cooperstown Hall of Fame. If he took his fifth consecutive series on Saturday it wouldn't be surprising if Saul moved right into that select company of baseball immortals which included such names as Tyrus Raymond Cobb and Abner Doubleday.

The set-up was right. The man on the street was eating and sleeping the Series. It wasn't often in a man's lifetime that a Series ran neck and neck, coming up to the seventh game all even at three apiece. It was an event; something a man could remember and refer to, and tell his grandchildren about.

But, here, in the club car something was very wrong and Saul couldn't seem to get his finger on the pulse of the trouble.

He stood beside a table in the first club car, listening to the constrained hum of conversations as groups of the players played cards.

He was a towering man, seeming aloof and alone because of his height. His chest was strong and he had a fine head thatched by prematurely silver hair which became him and of which he was justly proud. His face was pleasantly weathered and sensitive-boned, and had escaped the layers of raw sun that turn the skin of all baseball men the color and texture of wattles on a turkey's neck.

Through the soles of his shoes he could feel the steady vibration of the floor as the streamliner rushed him towards whatever the Park and Saturday held for him. It was exciting, and gave him the feeling of standing still and watching greatness race towards him. It had to do with the gentle jerking of the floor beneath his feet. It was a pleasurable sensation which for the moment induced forgetfulness of the understanding he had for his players and the knowledge that they would be unable, for some reason, to win for themselves or him on Saturday.

And forgetting, he smiled: an inward smile of competence which had no foundation in conceit. At times such as this, it

He saw Steve's arm go up and back, his leg kick out.
He thought, I've got to kill it; and knew he could

was gratifying to allow his thoughts to retread the years. It was an indulgence he permitted himself whenever he felt on the threshold of a new and greater achievement.

He'd had less than the average boy's dreams of success and consequent fame. Perhaps his height had had something to do with it. It had brought him awkwardness as early as grade school when it was merely beginning to touch him. That it did not overcome his love for baseball was simply because there could be no physical handicap great enough to suppress that passion.

But he did not do well as a player.

Always, in the bush leagues, the minors, during the long trek up, he had been the leader, the captain, the manager; never the star. Head and not hands. Now he was who he was and was known for doing what he'd done. And Saturday would be the ultimate.

Beneath his feet he could feel the train gather speed and the motion brought him back to the confines of the club car.

Without moving his head his eyes sought out his players, the expressions on their faces, the movements of their hands, the position of their feet under the tables. These things gave him his insight to the conditions of their minds and he read

them as a parent reads the silent mouthings of its child.

They were very quiet.

HE BEGAN to move down the aisle, patting pairs of shoulders lightly, impersonally, his hand gentle; murmuring a careless word of praise here and there. It was never his habit to chide.

"You went nice in there today, Pickles. Some great pickups."

Pickles Dill, the first baseman, looked up from his cards and a nervous grin cut the red leather of his big face.

"Hell, Saul. Nine putouts. I didn't earn my dough. All those guys did was lift tomato cans." He kept grinning, as though he had to put his mind to it.

Saul smiled and moved on. The thing was, not to show them his own strain; to think of other things.

"Who's winning, Joe?"

Joe Dugan jumped, then squirmed self-consciously in his chair.

"Uh?" He looked up blankly at Saul. "Oh. Me, Saul. I guess."

"Get at 'em, Joe. Like today

"Yeah. Yeah, Saul; like today."

Dugan had started four twin killings this afternoon. He was jittery, waiting while the statistics experts scurried through the books to see if that wasn't a Series record.

Saul moved to the end of the car.

At the last table Ken Wilson, the right fielder, sat playing solitaire.

"How's it feel, Ken?"

"Okay. A lot better." Wilson's smile was tired.

That was the trouble; they were all tired. Months of pressing with the chips down, struggling to live up to the murderous reputation of the Bombers, keeping out in front by a margin that had never been heard of—while the nation watched with its mouth open.

Saul himself could feel the relapse that stirred within his players. Exhaustion had crept in—a solitary game too soon—and the Bombers had lost their detonating *caps and become duds.*

"Can you walk?"

"These things help. I'm not used to 'em yet. I'll get better at it."

Wilson reached down for a pair of crutches beside him. He stood up, hopping on one foot, balancing on the crutches.

"Better sit down. A tough break, Ken. I'm sorry."

Wilson grinned wryly at him.

"You shouldn't be. Me and that fence teamed up to give young Saxton a break. And he did plenty all right for you."

Saul didn't answer. He began to move hurriedly He moved into the second club car, annoyed with himself for not thinking of the kid earlier.

The second car contrasted to the first. Here the hilarity was genuine. Cigarette smoke was thick in spite of the air conditioning.

He moved carefully, synchronizing his steps with the motion of the car. Reporters' voices lifted to him in good-natured chiding. He heard their sounds over the smoke, over laughter and joking and clacking portables.

"What's the matter, Saul? That fifth consecutive look out of this world by now?"

"I'm using a lead here says the Bombers have misfired when it gets so you got to pull a rookie out of the bag to win for you. Like today."

Saul moved to the end of the car.

THERE were three people at the last table. They were playing fan-tan quietly. This was the youngster's family. Mack's family. A part of it.

He smiled at the small elderly woman who sat facing him.

"Don't guess you'll know exactly who to pull for Saturday, Mrs. Saxton."

She looked up and returned the smile. She had fine eyes and he could have covered her entire face with one of his big palms.

"I've figured out a way, Mr. Poindexter."

She seemed pleased that she had been *able to figure it out. A little proud.*

"I can pull for just my boys and that way it won't matter so much who wins. Just them." Her smile vanished and she added quickly, I don't mean that if you lose I don't care."

He grinned.

"That's pretty neat figuring."

"This is my youngest, Mr. Poindexter. Teddy."

The healthy-eyed boy on her right stood up at attention and made a sort of salute which had no ostentation about it. He was about fifteen and had on the uniform of a military academy.

The boy said. "Mack was swell in there today, wasn't he, sir? He won the game."

"Teddy." Mrs. Saxton said quickly.

"He had it today, son."

Saul looked at the girl on Mrs. Saxton's left and said, "What did you think of him?"

"I don't know. He was good today. He helped you. Would he be good every day?"

She regarded him with that same level discerning gaze he had noticed she used on Mack the few times he had seen them together. There was something speculative and frank about it, something that disarmed you and said, "Play it fifty-fifty with me and I will do the same with you."

"That's something," he said slowly, appreciating her question, "I couldn't have told even about the Babe, until after he'd been in there a season—and maybe done a repeat season."

"I know that. It would take him at least a season—perhaps a repeat season—to be worth something to you. We've talked about that. It means more seasoning in the minors, doesn't it?"

She gave him her frank smile. The freshnes of her young mouth startled him.

This was Mack's girl and there was trouble here. Ordinarily he did not meddle with the personal affairs of his players, but Mack's problems had suddenly assumed importance to the club and so they touched Saul himself.

He wanted to say something kind which would soften the doubt he knew to be in her, the fear.

He said, "He was under a severe strain today. First time at the plate in the majors and it had to be a World Series. He came through. I think if he comes through Saturday we can pretty well get a line on him."

He had the pleasure of seeing her smile and the warmth of the frank eyes resting upon his.

"Thank you," she said. "That means a lot."

"Where is he?" he asked.

"In the next car. By himself. I wanted to see him but I didn't know if you'd let me."

Saul felt pleased. He'd done a nice thing. A very nice, warm thing.

"I'll see."

He moved out onto the vestible platform where the sound of rushing air and furious clicking of metal made him think of the pandemonium which had greeted the youngster's ninth inning single that afternoon.

He watched the light-clusters of a tiny town flick by in the darkness and debated whether he ought to go in and speak to the youngsters freely.

He hesitated before opening the door. He suddenly felt a little funny. He didn't know how to define the feeling but it came to him that it must be a kind of fright. Or fear; fear wasn't as harrowing as fright. He couldn't make it out but it affected him in his diaphragm.

He went quickly over recent ground to detect the origin of this feeling. He placed it at the moment when the youngster had gone up to hit in the ninth that afternoon.

He couldn't quite get hold of the feeling or the reason for it; but he knew that he had better think a moment before he went in to see the boy. . . .

## II

ALONE in the Pullman except for the porter who had begun making up berths in the rear, Mack Saxton sat close to the window and swore, the sound of it quiet and audible only to himself. The

words of Shorty Newsome, sports columnist of the *World*, were still ringing in his ears. The words had left him stunned, a cruel disappointment numbing his senses.

The porter walked up the aisle, a towel in one hand, a black crayon in the other.

"I waited till Mist' Sho'ty got through ---could you aut'graph yoah towel foah me now, Mist' Saxton?"

Mack drew his eyes from the window. It was a physical effort.

"You don't want me, Steve Saxton."

"No, suh. You. The boys on top. You won foah us today an' Sat'idy you do it again." He kept grinning.

Mack took the towel and the crayon. He wrote his name on the edge of the towel and handed it back to the porter.

"Thank you, suh."

"You're welcome. It's probably my last act as an authentic celebrity."

The porter stared.

"Yes, suh."

He's surprised, Mack thought, at my using a word over two syllables. Ball players aren't supposed to. He felt a sour grin on his lips.

They told of the Saxton boys' lack of education: and that was a mistake.

It was only Steve, Mainstay Steve Saxton of the Blues, who was academically amiss. Mack and Teddy Saxton never said, "That high hard one come at my head in the sixth," because they knew that the past tense of the verb come is came and was invented to be used as such. They had attended a school where things like that were important. Steve had made certain the school emphasized such things before he sent them there.

"I got a surprise for you, kid," Steve had said that day six and a half years ago. His words were like his motions out on the mound, unhurried and even.

They were in the town's high school gymnasium because it was winter and snow was deep on the ground.

"Somethin' you brought me?" Mack had been fourteen and eager. "Maybe Bill Terry's bat—an' you got him to put his name on it?"

"Nup, nothin' like that."

Each winter Steve was continuing his education of Mack's bat and by now Mack could hit nearly everything his celebrated brother threw, which was better than most of the National League had managed the season before.

"What's the s'prise, Steve? What's it? What's it?" He felt excited and ticklish.

"Well, I reckon you won't guess." Steven's deep tan looked distinguished in the dead of winter. "You'll be at that Lankhurst come this Fall."

Mack's eyes goggled.

"Lankhurst *Military* Academy?"

Steve grinned. "I paid up your first year 'fore I come down."

Mack remembered the mixture of joy and thrill and sudden apprehension which came to throb inside him. Lankhurst Academy and uniforms and parades and his own rifle with a bayonet.

Then the misgiving, swift and incredibly sharp.

"But they don't play ball so good there. An' the high school was good enough for you."

Steve said gravely and mysteriously, "No. I ain't—haven't—been much to point at when I'm not out there throwin' 'em. You go, Mack boy. And anyways, Lankhurst'll play better ball with you hittin' .650 for 'em."

So he had gone. And there were many things he did not regret about it.

THE papers had come to calling Steve Mainstay, by then. That was the year he pitched the glory road, winning 27 and dropping 4. And it was also the year he pitched his arm off, and those who worry about that sort of thing shook their heads sadly.

But the following year Mack was commissioned in the Military School, which necessitated a new wardrobe of uniforms, and he met Laureen and had to stand her expenses when she came up for frequent Lankhurst hops. And Teddy was growing smack into military school age himself and wanted to go where Mack was.

So Mainstay buckled down and hitched the Blues to his belt and dragged them to the pennant, pitching 24 and 8 and making people shake their heads in wonder.

The Blues dropped that Series despite Steve's two wins. But Steve made up for it by bringing Stella home for the first time.

She was as delicate as he was lean and hard. Mrs. Saxton—running out of the bakery which was where the parlor should have been—wiped her floury hands on her apron, took a breathless look, put her arms around Stella and said, "You're beautiful!" which nearly did justice to Mack's opinion of her.

"Steve's luckier than he knows," Mrs. Saxton said. "You'll be good for him. I can tell looking at you. I hope he'll be as good for you."

And Stella smiled and said she wasn't worried about that.

Mack liked her.

But she was worried about Steve. She didn't parade her worry for the family. Sometimes she would confide in Mack because she found she could never talk too much about Steve to Mack.

She told how each night after he'd taken his turn that season, she had rubbed his arm with liniment and gently patted him to sleep when the inflamed ligaments would act up to keep him awake. The arm wouldn't heal; he needed rest, and they were calling him out three times a week.

She told Mack other things too. Things too intimate to speak much about to Mom Saxton or even Steve himself. How she and Steve wanted the baby and maybe the down payment on the house in Underwood Court near the Park in Midwestern City.

"It's not much," she said, "but it's time we were starting. There's no telling how long his arm will bear up. It's a bad arm." There was worry in her eyes, but eagerness touched them too. Eagerness for the two plans she was anxious to launch before it was too late.

Mack wished her luck and when, the next year, Mom's rickety business began to creak, he felt their disappointment as if it had been his own. Because he knew what Steve would do.

Steve and Stella put off the baby and the down payment and mended Mom's bakery school as Mack graduated. And the next season there seemed to be a little trouble with Steve's arm and he did 15 and and 12 which was the first time others considered he hadn't pulled his weight. . . .

A MOMENTARY ascension of wheels wheels on track preceded the closing of the door ahead and Mack looked up to see the tall silver-crested figure of Saul Poindexter coming down the aisle.

Once again he was struck by the incongruity of the shadows about Mr. Poindexter's mouth and eyes.

For a fleeting moment this afternoon he had viewed that same expression. It was during the last of the ninth, in the dugout, when Saul had nodded to him. The winning run was on third.

"Wilson's ankle won't stand up under him. You go up there and hit. Don't be jittery. It won't be the end of the world if you don't get one. Wait for a good one and hit away."

In the tight breathlessness of the moment, while the loudspeaker announced his name, Mack had looked at the nakedness of Saul's face and it gave the lie to his words. It would be the end of the world for Saul if Mack didn't get one. And then Saul's lips were forming inaudible words.

"Bring it across. Good luck, Saxton."

Mack had delivered. Afterwards, in the showers, Saul had patted his wet shoulders and the empty expression was gone and he was smiling.

Now, in the Pullman, it was back again, more pronounced.

Saul didn't sit down.

"Mack, your young lady's in the car ahead. I told her I'd send you up. Make it short. It's time everybody's in bed."

Mack got up.

"Thank you—Saul." He hoped Mr. Poindexter wouldn't feel he was taking

advantage of what he had done for him this afternoon. He'd only been with the Bombers the last three weeks, up from the minors when the Bombers clinched the pennant and strengthened their quota for the Series.

He started up the aisle.

"Mack."

He turned.

"I was going to pep-talk you, like a school-boy coach before the game. But we're both too old for that. And we're professionals." Saul sat down.

He raised his face, his eyes searching Mack's for what he could find.

"The club is due to crack. That isn't news. It isn't their fault. I haven't any blame for them. It's awkward, having to come to a new man and ask. . ."

Mack waited, wanting to ease the moment with a word and failing to find the word.

"Wilson's out for good. You haven't been with the club long enough to absorb its exhaustion. Saturday you might have the courage, maybe the right amount of unconcern—"

"No. I'm a long way from unconcerned."

"Yes, I know. We all are. We each have our own reasons, our own pressure." Saul's eyes found his hands and his voice was gently rough. "You try, son. You try in there Saturday." It seemed there was a lot more he could say, but wouldn't. He raised his head and looked at the window, watching the moving dark. Mack could see a muscle become rigid at the side of his neck. Or maybe it was an artery throbbing.

"Go along. Do what you can, Saturday. After ten minutes go to bed. We all need sleep."

Mack walked up the aisle. Remembering what Shorty Newsome had said, he felt sick.

Saul sat motionless. He looked at his big hands. He tried projecting his thoughts to Saturday but unaccountably they slipped backward to the four preceding World Series and what a snap they had been. He couldn't understand what was the matter with him. He felt suddenly angry. He thought he'd turn in, and got up. It was surprisingly how tired he was.

## III

MACK entered the club car and found his mother, Teddy and Laureen finishing their game of fan-tan.

He looked at Laureen longer than the others. It made him a little breathless to look at her.

Mrs. Saxton smiled at him.

"Steve and Stella are there by now," she said.

Laureen put down her cards, her glance lifting to him.

"I saw Stella at the hotel before they left," she said. "I took a good look—and it startled me. She looked tired. It made her eyes so old. She isn't as old as it made her look." Laureen kept watching him.

He knew what she was thinking. In her mind's eye she was exchanging places with Stella, and the outlook was frightening.

"It's seeing Steve bumped like that," he said. "That's all. She isn't used to it. He's never dropped one in a Series. And now two straight. It made her look that way. It isn't often Steve is lifted in the fourth."

He had a peculiar feeling that the three of them knew he was lying and that they felt it kinder not to let him know.

"He's just beginning to be bumped," Laureen said. "Last year it was noticeable but gentle; this year it's been obvious—and hard. What has he to show?" Her direct gaze held on Mack.

"Steve's tired," Mrs. Saxton said quickly. "Next year will be his own year. His and Stella's." Her eyes reached to Mack's for confirmation.

He thought of saying, *Maybe there'll be a next year—for him and Stella. But it won't be much of a year—in Columbus.*

But there was that fine look of hope in his mother's eyes and he said instead: "Next year ought to be a big one for them. They rate it." The words caught hard in his throat because they had a lie in them. Next year would be lousy.

He said, "I have to get to bed."

He kissed his mother, touched Teddy's shoulder and walked down the aisle. He hadn't looked at Laureen. He hadn't wanted to see what he knew would be behind her eyes.

On the vestibule platform he hesitated, staring out the door window. One of the doors behind him opened and he felt the familiar pressure of her firm slender fingers on his arm.

"Don't be upset, Mack."

"It's all right. I'm tired, I guess."

The pressure turned him toward her. She was smiling.

"It isn't as impossible as we've thought. Mr. Poindexter told me. And he's the one who makes decisions. I thought it would help you to hear."

" I know. It's up to me."

"He said that if you went well Saturday—"

He shook his head, looking at her, feeling the excitement she always stirred within him; feeling it in spite of the small panic which had taken hold of him.

"I know the score, Laurie." Bitterness touched his words, pulled at the corners of his lips. "If I come through Saturday it mean I'll be a permanent piece of Bomber furniture. We'll be in." He closed his hand over the fingers on his arm.

"It means we'll skip the bushes. No tank leagues and tank towns for you; no road trips in a jaloppy bus, no two-bit night games and cheap hotels and waiting for a scout to come down and knowing they don't come that far down." He took her hand in both his own. And it means you won't get to look and think like Stella —the life gone out of you."

"You're bitter."

"I'm sensible. I'm a link in the Bomber chain: they won't sell me and they haven't room for me. I don't want to grow a long white beard with you in some honky-tonk town waiting for somebody on this club to grow a long white beard."

Her eyes took hold of his, a hurt in them; her voice was small.

"You don't have to have any of that. I believe in you. So does Steve, and he knows. Saturday you can show—"

"LOOK, Laurie." He pushed her out to arm's length. "Listen. You gave me three years. I gave myself three years. That was more than enough. Now they're up. I had the bushes. I know them. I wouldn't ask you to have any part of them. It wasn't so good even alone. I saw players' wives down there. Some of them hoped—the young ones—but not for long. The others, they were down-graders and they were thankful to be in any league at all. I was a part of that, except it wasn't so bad because I was alone. Now I'm up, with a chance at staying."

"A fine chance, Mack. Because you have it."

He said bitterly, "A fine chance."

He looked away from her and said quickly, "Look. The job in the plant down home is still open. Mom told me. And it's not the worst in the world. I can learn to manufacture salesbooks. I can see that they're set up and cut and margined and printed as well as the next guy. That way we won't have to bother with tinhorn leagues and salary cuts when the gate is low and bum meals and wondering how many thousands of years it'll be before we go up."

Gently she disengaged her shoulders.

"What it is, Mack?" she asked quietly.

He didn't look at her.

"I can't play Saturday."

"What do you mean?"

"Shorty Newsome, reporter on the *World,* told me. A few minutes ago."

"Is he running this club?"

He took a short breath.

"Steve's going to pitch against us Saturday."

"Oh."

The clicking of wheels on track seemed to fling itself at them and became unbearable.

"They haven't anybody else," Mack said. "He's always been pretty reliable in the clutches."

She nodded. She didn't answer.

"Maybe he can even win for them and that would mean another year up here. Maybe doing relief, but drawing big time salary. And it'll be his and Stella's year. They've earned it."

Now he looked at her. He could hear the harsh ring of his words, like the ring of a bat when it connects hard.

"I can blast him every time I come up and that's bound to touch something off, in us or in him. That's the easiest way for a pitcher to lose a game—by having one man consistently hit him. Maybe I can show my appreciation by knocking him out of the park Saturday, out of the league and down to Columbus. That's what I can do. Or ride every time I come up, leaving it to the others, and Saul will send me back down—where I belong if I do a thing like that, and I can't go down again, I couldn't ask you—"

She placed a finger over his lips.

"It's late," she said softly. "You musn't talk any more. Please, not now."

She came close to him and he couldn't see her eyes because she did not look up at him. He felt himself shaking a little. He felt the resilience of her body as it fitted snugly and briefly against his. Her lips were on his own and then she backed away and turned quickly from him, reaching for the club car door. He heard her quiet words.

"Go to bed, Mack. Sleep, darling."

Then she was gone and he began to feel his body stiffen so that it did not shake any longer and he had difficulty finding the handle to open the Pullman door. . . .

## IV

THE Park had become a living, roaring thing, raring on its hind legs, alternately thundering its approval and shrilling its denunciation.

To Saul, sitting in the dugout behind third base, the hysteria had a peculiarly terrifying effect. The scoreboard in deep center showed the first of the fourth coming up and the Bombers behind, 0 to 2, and this was the final and deciding game of the World Series. Of almost everything.

The sun touched the diamond, brightly warm.

He watched Pickles Dill lace a line drive which, had it been another inch over the third baseman's head, would have gone for a triple, and Joe Dugan spanking a ground-hugger to short to wind up the first of the fourth. He felt ticklish inside his stomach.

Trotting out to his position in right, Mack Saxton picked up his glove, took his sun glasses from his hip pocket and adjusted them under his cap. He was careful not to look at the tiers towering before him and the bleachers behind. Seeing so much humanity lumped around him like that was apt to bring a jolt. The incessant roar of it was jarring enough.

At the plate, the Blues' batter swung and Mack was moving to his right and edging in three steps before the bat had completed its swing. It was a lofter, high and lazy, easy to gauge and handle. He closed the fingers of his glove around it, held it a moment and tossed it in to Dill at first. Behind him the bleachers jeered to a man. One gravel voice stood out above the rest and over and over demanded the whereabouts of the *"sen-say-shun-ul Thursday rookie we heard about."*

It got to him, all this. It was big and it could be merciless. It was the symbol of greatness, of the ultimate. He wondered how Steve had stood up under it for so many years.

Maybe it was a difference in temperaments, like yesterday morning when the Bomber Special had pulled into Union Station. Steve and Stella had been among the crowd that swarmed along side the incoming Pullmans. Mack had to fight his way through to them. A wild-eyed fan had jostled Steve with an eager, "One side, buddy; I got to get this guy Saxton's autograph. He's Mainstay's brother!"

And Steve, grinning, had said, "Sure, fella. That must be somethin', for a fact," and had stood aside.

Perhaps if you expected nothing, nothing hurt or unnerved you.

You couldn't tell about Stella. She had started to flare up and tell that autograph fan a thing or two, but then she'd glanced at Steve and relaxed, and even managed a smile as Mack came thumping up to them.

In the afternoon, at Laureen's request, Steve took the family in his '37 sedan to see the house he and Stella had been so long on the point of buying.

Walking up the gravel path which led to the neat suburban development, Laureen asked quietly, "Stella, would you do it again? Would you let Steve?"

Stella's face became tight. She said, "Yes," almost defiantly and linked her arm in Steve's. He cupped her hand in his big one, winked at Laureen and said, "Sure, what else?"

The houses were individual, with small treeless yards. There was a large Old English-lettered sign proclaiming this Underwood Court, A Location that Counts, $7250, Convenient Payments.

Mrs. Saxton looked at Steve and looked away. Her voice was gentle with what Mack hoped was pride.

"It's nice. Nice and respectable. Which one belongs—did you and Stella pick?"

Steve laughed. "All of 'em. I reckon each one at some time or other."

Stella said quietly, "At first it was that one on the corner, the one that has the swing on the porch now. Last year it was this one—across the street—where they've grown a garden. This Spring we thought the one next to it. They've built a picket fence. The yard looked better without it."

"Mr. Duke, the agent, tells me they only got one left," Steve said. He looked around, nodding. "This is a good spot. They go fast."

Teddy said, "They all look alike to me. I thought a ball player like you would have a mansion or something; maybe a ranch, like Ty Cobb."

Mack said quickly to Steve:

"You're practically buying furniture. What with your Series split and a bonus for winning tomorrow—"

"Sure." Steve's grin didn't alter. "I'll pitch 'em home tomorrow." He looked down at Stella. "And next year we'll fill in that blank, fancy, won't we, honey?"

FOR a moment Stella couldn't answer. She looked at him as though something tight in her were about to burst. Then she turned and there was a wet calm in her eyes as she faced Laureen.

"There won't be any next year. Not for us. Do you suppose Steve doesn't know? Do you think he's so easy going and unconcerned because he never *knows* he has a worry? Next year we're going down — Columbus — maybe Chattanooga, because we're washed up here."

Her glance sought Mack.

"He won't win tomorrow; we shouldn't try to fool ourselves—or Mom. You'll knock him out of the box before he's picked up the resin. Steve taught you to do that and you have to do it. That's what ball players are paid for."

Except for Steve's gentle "Take it easy, hon," there was no other sound.

"You asked me if I'd do it again." Stella's eyes swept to Laureen's face and fastened. "Yes. Yes, I would. There wouldn't be any choice—even doing it over. There were things to be done; there always are. Now they're done and Steve's turn at bat is due, but there won't be any turn. There won't be any blank contract to fill in and sign for next year. Not that he ever filled one in. Just signed. He was never much on self-promotion. Perhaps I should have stepped in; but it seemed more important that things went along as he wanted.

"He took what they offered and it was half what the papers printed. Not even you knew. The club wasn't drawing too well. But do you think the club will hold him next year for old time's sake? For half his salary they'll buy a youngster who can win. They have to. It's their business the same as base hits are yours. They'll see tomorrow that he hasn't just slipped. He's through."

She was not looking at them now; her eyes were on the ground.

Laureen said quietly, "You think he will win if Mack doesn't play?"

A bright tinge of shame caught Stella's cheeks and with an effort she regulated her breathing.

"I think," she said, "I've talked too much, and foolishly." Her lips formed a small smile. She looked up at Steve and her eyes said, "I'm sorry, hon. I'm ashamed."

Mack looked for a time at the words Convenient Payments on the sign. A quiet sound pulled him around and it was Stella, crying gently into the comfortable pad of his mother's shoulder.

"There, it's all right, Stell; it's all right." Mrs. Saxton held her tightly and looked above her into the bewildered face of Steve. Her fine eyes were shining. "Let it come, Stell, it's been inside so long. Steve will be fine tomorrow. He can do anything. He always has. You know that, child. You and I know that. Why, he's—he's Steve."

Steve's lopsided grin touched his face, lighting it.

"Sure, hon. Hell." He extended his big left arm and looked at it. "There's plenty of old hop left in her. Plenty for tomorrow and plenty for next season." He opened his fist, studied it and then self-consciously thrust it into his pocket. "You ain't thinking one rookie could scatter that flipper tomorrow, hon?" He laughed. "Hell," he said. "That's funny." His voice retained the laughter after his eyes had lost it.

Teddy scrutinized the ground at his feet. Laureen put her hand on Stella's shoulder and then withdrew it and began walking down the path toward the sedan.

"I guess there ain't time to go lookin' through the house," Steve said. "It's near supper."

Stella was quiet but Mrs. Saxton still clasped her.

"There. Now that's over, it looks better, doesn't it? A good cry has a way of washing things soft and clean. He doesn't need us worrying over him. He'll be fine."

Mack saw that she was no longer looking at Steve, but at himself, and that the shine in her eyes was due to the wetness of them. "He'll be fine tomorrow," he heard her say.

He turned and followed Laureen, an emptiness seeming to jog inside his body as he walked. It occurred to him, revealingly, that the manufacture of salesbooks would not be as unpleasant as he had thought.

THE innings ran along with a precision and pace that left the Park breathless at what it beheld. The Bombers were checked. The mighty guns were popping them into the air and beating them into the dirt whenever the clutches came up. In the sixth the Blues picked up another run and it was 3 to 0.

In the seventh Mack punched a single to left that sent Joe Dugan, on second, scampering for home. The Blues left fielder came in fast and threw a strike to the plate, catching Dugan in a whirl of dust for the third out. The Park went crazy.

Mack continued running to his position in right. He glanced at the scoreboard and the realization of what was transpiring came to him and he cupped his hands and shouted a plea to the Bomber pitcher.

His own showing wouldn't be remembered as outstanding enough to displace Ken Wilson in the line-up next Spring. He wondered how it was affecting Laureen. Was she, like himself, aware that adequacy wasn't enough? He kept remembering her face as he had seen it last night in the hotel lobby when he showed her the headlines in the late-night edition.

Her eyes had lighted as though a strain in her had been released, and her smile had been a thing to see. She had gone over the headlines again. *"Herrick Draws Final Assignment for Blues."* Then she was looking at him, her eyes fresh, eager.

"Mack, that means Steve won't pitch. . . ."

"Yes. And Herrick worked Thursday. Uncle Charley must be desperate. He must have decided there's nothing left in Steve."

The eagerness was gone from her face. She said, "Poor Steve—Stella."

"A guy has to come to it some day. All the while he's climbing, he knows there'll come a time to slide."

"But this is better, if it had to be at all. This way you won't—we won't. . . ."

"This way I won't be giving him a shove. Yes." He took her hand. "You came in here to ask me, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"You didn't want me to knock a man out with the punch he taught me."

"It wasn't just that. He—he's done so much, he and Stella . . ."

"Well, I was going to ask you the same thing. We could have caught the train tonight."

Oblivious of where they were, she kissed him.

"You'll be out there tomorrow, with no strings. You'll make out, Mack."

She stood away from him and offered her warm smile.

"Perhaps afterwards we can do a little helping, less receiving. It's our turn. They'll need a little—in Columbus."

He had thought of that this afternoon, running out into the roar that greeted the Bombers' appearance for pre-game warm up. But the eager satisfaction of last night had ebbed when he saw Steve, his jacket on, walking to the dugout bench. Steve lifted a hand, winked solemnly and offered, "Four for four, boy," which was a ball player's exhortation for a perfect day at bat.

A man like that wasn't apt to welcome help—even in Columbus.

An infield pop-up ended the seventh inning and Mack jogged towards the dugout. It occurred to him that he wouldn't get to bat in the ninth. He handed himself down into the dugout, having the quick thought that Steve was probably feeling sorry the game was going in such a manner that Mack couldn't put up a better exhibition. . . .

## V

SAUL could feel it coming over him, implacably, and he fought against it, using a steeled indifference to militate against whatever it was. He stretched his legs and stiffened the muscles in his thighs. Ordinarily that relaxed him. But not now.

"We'll get 'em this time," little Joe Dugan said as he piled into the pit. Under his sunburn, his face was white.

"Hell," Pickles Dill growled, "we always been lucky in the eighth. Somebody get on; save me a crack." He kicked his cleats against each other nervously.

Saul nodded. The Bombers went out and went down, one-two-three.

It was stealing to him again, that nudity of spirit which he could not define. What, he wondered, in the hell was the matter with him? Involuntarily, as though to conceal a disfigurement, he dropped his face to his hands, his elbows on his knees, and sat very tight and still.

And the explosion caught him unaware.

Artie Herrick, the Blues pitcher, had set down the first Bomber to open the ninth.

The second Bomber slapped a single to center and before anyone realized what had happened Pickles Dill caught hold of a fast one and dropped it over the right field wall and when the swarming players had ceased pumping his hand the score was 3 to 2 and only a run separated the Bombers from tying it up.

Herrick succeeded in forcing the next batter to ground out and with two down and the paths clear, the park relaxed and expelled its breath. It had been close and you could never count those Bombers out until the last—

Herrick put too much hop on his twister and it nicked the shoulder of the man at the plate. Apparently unnerved, he lost control and passed the next two on straight balls, loading the bases. The sudden quiet in the park became intolerable.

Mack selected a bat and walked slowly toward Saul for instructions. There was a funny feeling inside him, tight and windless. It was a good feeling. Then he winced and turned half away. The look on Saul's face was there again.

"Bring them in," Saul's voice said. "Pick

one out and ride it. You know what it means. That's all." The voice made you think of a man very sick.

He walked unhurriedly to the plate. A humming went up as the park recognized the man who had delivered in the pinch Thursday. Then the roar swelled to a deafening acclaim which was more than he felt he deserved and which made Mack lift his head and look.

Steve was strolling in from the pen. He hadn't had sufficient time to warm up but he was coming in regardless. Even from this distance Mack could see the right side of his jaw methodically working a cut of tobacco.

Mack knelt and sanded his hands and bat while Steve tossed up preliminary pitches. He tried keeping his thoughts detached, as though the man warming up were any one of the big time hurlers he knew by reputation only.

The din of the park did not abate. Programs had been consulted and the identity of the two men facing each other brought excitement verging on hysteria.

Flash bulbs went off in barrages as photographers shot from all conceivable angles. A newsreel camera on a small dolly pushed forward. Steve's name, over the amplifier, was swallowed by the voice of the park.

It made Mack slightly ill. He stood up.

He took off his cap and wiped his forehead with his arm, but fresh sweat immediately formed and there were quick intakes of air in his mouth and nose as though a bellows were working in his stomach.

The umpire stooped over and dusted off the plate and then said, "All right," and took his place behind the catcher.

Mack did not at once step into the box. Carefully he looked everywhere except at the waiting figure out on the mound. He could see Steve plainly enough without looking.

THEY were in the gymnasium again, he and Steve and Teddy, that winter's day, and Steve was saying, "I paid up your first year 'fore I come home." And he was at Lankhurst with a group of cadets inspecting a fifty-dollar check from Old Mainstay which made it possible to bring Laureen up for that first June Week.

He was home for Christmas, the Christmas Stella had planned on the baby, and Steve and Stella and the family were watching Mom show off the rejuvenated bakery while Teddy tried not to look conspicuous in his new uniform. And Steve with his lopsided grin, saying, "Glad you like it, Mom. You're my girl." And Stella's eyes shining and wet, with what Mack had then thought to be happiness. "It's wonderful, Mrs. Saxton," she kept saying.

He was at Underwood Court and looking at the Convenient Payments sign and at the houses which were alike except that some had porches and some didn't. And the way Steve and Stella inspected the houses, critically, as though the present tenants weren't doing their best by them.

The roar of the crowd, like the booming of some distant surf, brought him back to the park.

He could see Stella's face now, although he did not glance toward the boxes, and it was worn and tired with an infinite patience, and perhaps her eyes were closed. "You'll have to hit him," she had said. "That's what ball players are paid for."

He could see Mom—she'd be next to Stella—and maybe her eyes were shut, too, but more likely they were wide and on him and her lips would be forming words. "Don't, Mack. Not to him. Not to Steve." He could almost hear her.

And Laureen—there beside them both. He could not see her quite so clearly. He didn't know about Laureen. She was strange to him at times, with a positive way of her own, a way that might be entreating him or deploring him.

The umpire said, "Get up there. Play ball."

And for the first time he raised his eyes, adjusted the peak of his cap, and looked out on the mound at Steve. Uncle Charley, manager of the Blues, had faith in Steve yet; or was it hope?

Steve seemed a long way off. He nodded almost imperceptibly and appeared to grin; and Mack thought he saw him wink.

For a moment Mack stared back and then something inside seemed to crack and he was walking deliberately toward the mound, his bat hanging in his hand, and an uproar cascaded from the tiers and sustained itself until there was a vibration of sound which could be felt. And over—or through—this as he walked, a remembered voice spoke within him: "Don't watch my wrist. Keep your eye on the ball, all the way, even after you've started your cut. That way there ain't nothin' I can throw that you can't wallop." The voice was inside him, inside the years it had taken for the man facing him to mould and nurture and polish him.

And now abruptly that voice was alive and its level tone penetrated the din.

"What is it, boy?"

He stopped a foot in front of Steve. The park was wild.

"I'm going to hit away."

"Sure, boy. That's what you're there for. Get back 'fore you get into trouble for this."

He had to raise his voice.

"It isn't fair to you. Take yourself out. Let him send in somebody else. Somebody with an even chance. I can hit you, Steve."

Players from both dugouts were converging on the mound. One of the umpires was saying, "What's the trouble, break it up," over and over. Uncle Charley's face appeared, red and round, and his eyes sought Steve, eyes that were desperate and stricken. The Blues first baseman shoved Mack and growled, "What goes on, you lookin' for somethin'?" Cameramen, unrestrained, were pushing through the gathering knot of men.

"Mack." It was Saul's voice, sounding thick. "What in the name of—"

"He's ridin' Steve," a Blues player shouted. "Tryin' to rattle him. Let's mob the—"

Mack's eyes searched his brother's face. He thought he saw his lips form the words, "Good luck, boy—both of us," and then players from both sides were jostling them apart and Steve was bending over for the resin bag.

Saul walked at Mack's side.

"I know it's a spot, Mack. I'm going to let Heinie Parker—"

"Let me stay," Mack said. His face was white. "I can bring them in. I've got to."

For a moment Saul looked at him. Saul's face was haggard, empty.

"You stay. Heinie's weak against left-handers." He walked toward the dugout, turning his head once to look at Mack.

MACK took his place in the box. The park, sensing something it had no understanding of, took on a deadly hush, the hysteria gone.

Mack watched Steve wind up with his deliberate, easy motion. The arm pumped once, twice . . .


# Kidneys Must Remove Excess Acids

## Help 15 Miles of Kidney Tubes Flush Out Poisonous Waste

If you have an excess of acids in your blood, your 15 miles of kidney tubes may be overworked. These tiny filters and tubes are working day and night to help Nature rid your system of excess acids and poisonous waste.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Kidneys may need help the same as bowels, so ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(ADV.)

*I can kill it, Steve. I can pick out one I want and ride it against the wall and you know it. Damn you, you know it. We're a run behind, but any one I pick we'll be one, two, maybe three ahead and you'll be throwing for Columbus. I've got to have a turn just as you had yours. Laurie has to—as Stella did, no matter what's gone before. You'd be the last one to take away—*

He saw Steve's arm go up and back, his leg kick out. He lifted his bat an inch from his shoulder for greater and swifter leverage.

*I've got to kill it.*

And he knew he could and would.

The ball came down the alley, looming large and turning lazily. Yet it *whopped* like a shot in the catcher's mitt. He tightened his belt, jerked at the peak of his cap. He had let that one go without offering. Steve must have wasted one testing him. The catcher had taken a step out to get it.

He looked out on the mound and something turned over in his chest. Steve was looking toward the Blues dugout, nodding almost imperceptibly. Uncle Charley was standing up in the pit, nodding back. The park was roaring one incessant, gigantic plea.

Steve was throwing again.

Incredulity stirred in Mack's head as the catcher took another step out and caught the ball. Steve must have gone out of his mind. The bases loaded, the tying run on third—

For a moment the park was silent, unbelieving. When the third pitch-out came down the park came to life and the thundering rumble turned the sweat on Mack's body cold and then dry.

The rumble was for Steve Saxton whom they had loved and applauded so many countless times and who was now doing an incredible thing. The bewilderment in the park had turned to hurt and now to rage.

Mack looked at Steve's face. It was impassive, only the jaw worked methodically and gave it a semblance of animation. He wasn't working like a pitcher who had blown up, who was sweating to regain his control. He was cool, precise, deliberate.

The ball came again and Mack was walking dazedly to first. The tying run came trotting in and the Bombers had emptied their dugout and were hollering and dancing and flinging their arms around the tying run as he came grinning towards the bench.

Steve stood very still out on the mound, his arms folded, his eyes on the next batter coming up, the condemning din of the park blanketing him.

To Mack he seemed alone and tragic out there. He wished Steve would look over at him so he could see Steve's expression. There was no one warming up in the Blues bull-pen. The players on the field were shouting encouragement, not seeming to realize that their win was gone, the game knotted.

Beside him, the first baseman yelled, "All right, Mainstay, get at him! This is the last one you'll have to get, boy!"

Every fan in the park was standing up, the better to hurl their fury on the solitary man on the mound.

Then Steve was bending for the resin, catching his receiver's signals, deliberately winding up.

He got the count to two-and-one and then the batter lifted a high infield pop and the inning was over. Steve turned and trudged toward the dugout, lifting his head once so that he received the flood of abuse full in his face.

The heavy part of the Blues' batting order was up and the first man doubled to left. Mack caught the next hitter's high fly to right and held the runner on second with a nice throw to third. The park was pleading again.

It happened then. A long single to right and the run was in and there were new World's Champions on the throne for the first time in four years.

As he trotted toward the dugout Mack saw the fierce, exultant crowd which surged across the field to get at the man who had singled. He saw something else.

It made him feel funny and clogged up in his throat. Over by the Blues dugout, forgotten and unnoticed by the swirling crowd, Uncle Charley—his fat little face twisted between laughing and sobbing, his voice lost in the bedlam, his chubby arms outflung—was dancing a ridiculous jig with Steve Saxton.

## VI

MACK thought about it taking his shower. His movements were sluggish, as were the movements of the other Bombers, and it seemed as though the defeat hadn't really become a tangible thing yet.

The fans would never thank Steve Saxton. But both clubs knew and understood.

It had taken nerve and will and a self-belief that must have broken the heart of a lesser man than Steve. It had not come of desperation, that intentional walk. It had come of the years that were in his head and arm; the years that had made him great and the years that had taken the greatness from him, leaving only heart.

There wasn't a man on the Blues' exhausted staff who could have halted that ninth inning Bomber rampage—except the veteran who'd led them for so long. He must have talked with Uncle Charley and got his permission and then they'd counted on the heavy Blues batting order coming up.

Mack dressed slowly. He felt a little sick. He couldn't see Saul anywhere in the dressing room. He wondered how the manager felt. . . .

* * *

In his hotel Saul packed hurriedly, conscious of the gradual recession of the sun's light from the room. He piled the luggage on the bed and surveyed the room for any overlooked article. The way he felt seemed to sing inside him.

He called the desk to inform them he was checking out and asked for a bell boy.

The bell boy came in and Saul gave him a dollar bill.

"Take these and put them in a taxi."

He put on his hat and coat and went out into the corridor. A smile pulled at his lips and he felt foolish at not being able to control it. He walked briskly down the corridor.

It was a ridiculous way for a man to feel, he thought; when the man had just lost a chance at immortality. But it was good too, the best he'd felt in five years. It had started exactly when the infielder had caught that pop-fly and the realization came that he had lost. He didn't intend to lose the feeling. He liked the sense of relief, of freedom from the insecurity that always gripped a man who made his happiness depend on uninterrupted superiority over others.

In the face of the loss he'd realized that nothing but success had ever caught up with him. He'd had no chance of becoming familiar with failure. It hadn't balanced. That was what had been the matter with him. It was lucky this came before it was too late, before it caught him in the flat-footedness of middle age.

Stopping at a door at the end of the corridor he raised his hand to knock. . . .

* * *

Mack Saxton stood in the thickening shadow of his room gazing unseeingly out the window. He did not hear the first knock on the door. Without turning his head he said:

"What did you say, Laurie?"

"I said the bushes couldn't be as bad as you said. You were lonely."

"They're bad."

"You had them alone. You never tried them with me."

He turned. He didn't look directly at her. He could see his mother sitting on the edge of the bed. He couldn't make out her eyes. Her face was lifted toward him.

"I like the sound of the job at home," he said. "It grows on me. None of these ups and downs. That's important.

"You won't like it; not ever. You'll just be doing it."

Suddenly he understood that she meant it. He looked at her and she smiled, the frankness of her touching her smile. Her voice was candid.

"I want a chance at those bushes—with you. We'll work up. That way we'll like what we get."

Mrs. Saxton turned her head. "There's someone at the door, Mack. Probably Teddy, finished collecting his autographs."

He looked at Laureen. He put his fist on her shoulder and hammered gently. "Thanks." He tried to grin. "But no bushes for you. You're not in that league." He went to the door and opened it.

SAUL came in, blinking, as Mack switched on the light. He nodded to Mrs. Saxton, who nodded back, and stood with his right hand straight down, holding his hat. His height seemed to fill the room. He was looking at Mack.

"I was leaving." He smiled foolishly, as though a rehearsed speech had slipped from him. "I depended on you—I don't guess I hid it very well; maybe it put too much strain on you and that wasn't very fair. I'd have asked the same thing from any of the others in that spot. It was important. There wasn't anything else that important. And that's wrong."

He looked uncomfortable. His breath came behind his words, pushing them out.

"When your streak is broken it gives you a breath and a chance to take account of things. I'm not doing this very well."

He stopped and his eyes searched them and at last caught and rested upon Laureen as though she had held out a hand.

He reached in his pocket and there was a fold of white paper in his great hand. He held it out to Mack.

"You're not worth it, I guess—not yet. You will be."

He backed to the door and put his hat on.

"That isn't entirely gratitude." His smile was no longer foolish. "I'm grateful only to a point. Any hitter who commands enough respect from Steve Saxton to draw an intentional pass with the bases loaded, forcing in the tying run . . . I don't want that hitter anywhere in this league except with my club."

He opened the door.

"I have a train to catch. I'm going away, a sort of vacation. First time in ten years I haven't spent the winter figuring how to win the next summer. Lots of things I've wanted to do. I think now I'll do them." He looked pleased. "Take it easy this winter. I'll want more weight on you in St. Petersburg next spring."

There were two small sounds: the shut of the door and then Laureen's soft crying.

Mack heard neither. He unfolded the paper in his hand. He looked at it for quite a while.

Laureen had a handkerchief. She said, "That's better. I'm sorry." She had stopped crying.

Mrs. Saxton stood beside her. "I would have been disappointed if you hadn't. Stell and I did when Uncle Charley handed Steve his. We embarrassed Teddy."

Mack kept looking at the paper. Hastily scrawled words constituted a rough facsimile of the contract Saul would mail him next spring. The salary didn't look as though it entailed bum meals and cheap hotels, bus trips and an endless waiting.

It occurred to him that he would like Steve to see it.

"No," Mrs. Saxton said. "Not now. They'll want this evening alone. It's the beginning of their year."

Laureen said, "They won't be at the apartment anyway. Real estate offices have odd hours." Her voice was soft as though a vague contentment had become real.

Mack moved toward her.

"You're happy, aren't you?" he said.

"Can't you tell?"

"Yes." He felt her fingers in his, firm and cool. "Can't we eat somewhere and celebrate—quietly, or maybe a little noisily?"

She nodded, smiling, and then looked at Mrs. Saxton.

"No," Mrs. Saxton said. "Teddy and I want to go to a cafeteria. We don't have one at home. We like to stand for

a spell and choose outlandish things that don't agree with us."

Laureen got her coat. Mack took her arm and opened the door. Mrs. Saxton sat on the edge of the bed.

"Not too late," Mrs. Saxton cautioned, but the door closed without their having heard, and it did not matter.

* * *

For a moment she sat still. Then she got up and switched off the light. Teddy would wait until the last player, passing through the lobby to dinner, had signed his scorecard; that would give her a chance for a brief nap. It had been a strenuous day.

She turned the spread down so as not to muss it. Smoothing her dress with her hands she lay down carefully.

She was glad Mack had a good girl, like Steve's Stella whose face had changed so when she waved Steve's contract in the air that Mrs. Saxton had been startled into crying, "Why Stell, you're beautiful!"

She was glad she had made herself wait until Laurie decided for herself. It had been an effort not to tell the girl what Mr. Poindexter had said about the contract for next year. Laurie had waited in the clubhouse for Mack to dress and hadn't been at the gate when Mr. Poindexter came out. She'd asked him to wait before he said anything, and when he came into the room he had even waited for her nod before he went ahead.

So Laurie had made the decision herself and it was fine that Mack had a good girl. But everything was a matter of time and course, she thought; days and weeks and years. Sometimes they gentled you; sometimes they struck at you savagely; and sometimes they saddened and hurt you.

Right now, she concluded, they were treating her family very—she searched drowsily for the word and the one that came to her was—good.

Presently she slept.

# Rebel Take Arms

Donall was already in motion, the Claymore out. Bone cracked like dry wood where it struck

By ROBERT CARSE

DONALL KENZIE knows well enough that this is the crucial day for Scotland. The war of 1745 is almost done; and on Culloden Field above Inverness, Bonnie Prince Charlie is bringing the clans to meet the army of Lord Cumberland.

But not until the battle is nearly done—and lost by the Scotch—does Donall see his brother MARTIN, who has been long at his studies in Edinburgh. Now he comes to take the men of Clan Kenzie home; and Donall reviles him, calls him renegade.

With them, in this agonizing night of retreat from the British, they take GEORGES RENEC, a Frenchman who has fought side by side with Donall because he loves liberty, in whatever land he may find it.

AT HOME in Glen Cluagh, Martin calls a clan council, warns them all that to fight the English will mean defeat—and forfeiture of the Glen to the Crown. But even as they consider this, they see a flame; the English are approaching, burning homes as they come.

Driven by a feeling of rage and helplessness, Martin goes to meet the advancing patrol, asks them to avoid a fight with his clan. Then—a musket shot, from the Kenzie lawn, killing one of the advance guard. Now there is no holding back from the Red-coats.

In the ensuing fight the clan is beaten, the house burned. Donall and Renec, who have fought side to side, escape with KIP, the piper; but Donall is captured by a British detachment and taken to Culloden House.

HERE things happen that he will remember bitterly for the rest of his life. Scottish women are outraged; the house is pillaged. Donall goes berserk, but is overcome and bound; and he escapes only after a fight in which he leaves his brother Martin

This story began in last week's Argosy

wounded. His brother, the Kenzie, who has dealt with the hated English!

"Bad luck, traitor," is Donall's parting thrust as he makes good his escape.

He finds Renec and Kip waiting for them; but before they can reach the French ship on which they are all to escape, they are met by another group of Redcoats. Donall throws them into confusion, then joins his companions; and together they board the *Aventurier*.

The corvette had been bought and outfitted by Renec, out of an inheritance left by his mother; and he had brought it to Scotland for the use of the Bonnie Prince Charlie. But the Prince will no longer be able to use it.

NOW, says Renec, they can go with it anywhere in the world they choose. "But first," he adds, "you're going home to Bezaude with me. We'll lie in the sun . . . until we weary of that. Then . . . set out to seize the world."

So now, leaving the cabin full of Irish and French who had survived the defeat at Culloden, Donall watches Scotland retreat beyond the horizon rim. Scotland, which is no more his world. . . .

## CHAPTER VI

### TIPPLERS' HOMECOMING

STEPHANIE was her name. She was Georges Renec's sister and the loveliest thing Donall Kenzie had ever seen. A lot of things were filled with beauty here at the Renec home in the valley of the Loire, but to him Stephanie seemed to represent all of them.

He met her the first day he and Georges arrived from La Rochelle and the *Aventurier*. They were tired from their journey in the clumsy post-chaise they had taken at the port, still strained, shocked by their experiences in Scotland, and a bit drunk with the wine they had consumed at every tavern along the way.

When they left the post-chaise and went up the long avenue to the château, neither of them could walk straight. They kept knocking into each other, and Georges mumbled, "Straighten out. Have to. My father's strict old fellow, and my sister Stephanie—she's younger than I, but smarter—doesn't like drunkards at all."

"Very good," Donall said. "Just keep off my feet. Walk on your own. Then we'll be able to meet family in review formation."

The château had wide terraces before it, and the building itself was broad-winged, with rounded towers at each end. The tall doors and windows were open to the spring sunshine, and dogs within the house heard their approach, sprang forth barking.

Georges toppled over a marble bust on one of the terraces as he tried to welcome the dogs. The base shattered, but the bust remained intact.

Donall picked that up, placed it on a balustrade. "Like the Bonnie Prince," he said. "Down, then up again. Here's to the Prince. *Vive le Prince!*" He had drawn his sword, and was saluting the bust as Stephanie came out the door.

Georges ran and kissed her. "Fooled you," he said. "Back alive."

"Obviously," Stephanie said. "But who is your comic companion without trousers?"

"Donall Kenzie of Glen Cluagh," Georges said. "Splendid Scots gentleman. My friend. Fought with me for Prince Charles. But in his country men don't wear trousers. They wear kilts. You know that, though; you know that—"

"This isn't Scotland," Stephanie said.

Donall Kenzie had heard her. He sheathed his sword, brought his heels together, stood as if on parade. They'd told him, he remembered, that some of these French lasses were saucy. Here was one with plenty of snap, and as pretty as you'd like. He looked squarely at her, his glance bold and searching.

STEPHANIE was small. Her body was delicately built, and yet not frail. Her hair was black, worn low about her narrow face. Her eyes were gray, possessed of a dark luster. "M'sieur Kenzie," Georges said, "I wish to present you to my sister, Stephanie Renec."

Donall deeply bowed, tripped over a fragment of the bust standard and almost fell.

"Come in, you two," Stephanie said, "and have some hot food. You both need it."

Angry humiliation brought sweat to Donall's face. He stopped Georges as they followed Stephanie into the hall. "I won't sit at table with her in such a condition," he said. "Look." He pointed down at his ripped kilt, his split brogans.

"I'll find you clothes," Georges said. "You're of a size that can wear my trousers and boots."

"No," Donall said. He spoke loud enough for Stephanie to get the words. "A Kenzie of Cluagh wears his kilt wherever he goes. You may have a servant fix these, but I'll stay in my room or bed until they're ready."

Georges looked around perplexed at his sister. "Where's father?" he asked.

"Gone to Paris on affairs of business," she said. "He won't return until tomorrow. You'll have time enough to get sober."

"One of your suitors must have jilted you," Georges said. "You're as sour as English cider. Come on, Donall. I'll find you a room, and then we'll have a drink and some food by ourselves."

They slept throughout the rest of the daylight hours. It was the servant returning with Donall's repaired clothing who awoke them. "Dinner is about to be served, M'sieur Georges," the servant said. "Mademoiselle Stephanie is expecting you."

"Tell her we'll be there," Georges said, "but that we hope she's in a better temper than this morning."

Stephanie sat alone in the great drawing room as they came down for dinner. She looked carefully at Donall's kilt and brogans. "I had my own maid shine those buckles," she said. "They'd turned almost black, and they're made of pure silver."

"They're an old pair I left at home when I went to serve the Prince," Donall said. "I've had no others since, so they got in bad repair."

Georges had gone over to his sister, pinched her cheek. "This is how I like you and why I love you," he said. "What caused all your bad humor before?"

"News father gave me," she said. "He's in Paris to see about getting title to more land in Martinique. He wants to increase the size of his holdings in the West Indies Then he plans to go out there and live for good, take me with him."

Georges laughed. "And you think you won't like the islands? There's more to do there than in this sleepy place, more even than in Paris. You'll find yourself a wealthy planter for a husband in Martinique. A man who will have estates as great as some grand duke here and over which you can rule in the same way."

"But I don't want to rule as a grand duchess," Stephanie said. "Let us go in to dinner."

GEORGES had several sorts of wine served at dinner, did not let Donall's glass stay empty. He talked to Donall and his sister of the campaign of the Bonnie Prince. His voice became hoarse, vehement. He splashed wine across the table, at last could not rise from his chair.

"Accept my apologies for him," Donall Kenzie said to Stephanie. "He has had a very rough time of it in Scotland, and is not fully recovered from his wound."

Stephanie stood motionless by a door to the terrace. "Take him to his room," she said. "Then rejoin me if you wish. I shall be out here."

There was dew on the grass of the terrace. Donall traced her footsteps through it. She was at the far side, gazing out at the valley lowlands and the river. "You have seen France before?" she asked him.

"Never, mademoiselle," he said.

"But would you think me foolish to desire to stay here?"

"No," Donall said.

The valley was banked by opalescent, slowly drifting mist. The level fields with their patine of dew, the smooth surfaces of the river, took up the moon gleam. Along the avenue and the road beyond, the poplars formed geometric and still soft patterns.

A hush was on all the landscape. Birds sounded sleepily, cattle lowed, and in the

fields rose the choruses of insects; but no sound was separate or sharp.

"It's a fine place," he said. "The quiet is almost like music."

"You say that," she said, "because you come from war."

"And from Scotland," he said. "From the Highlands. There's never quiet in my mountains. The wind is loud at night, and dogs chase deer. And often by day men chase men."

"The English should change that last," she said.

"Only," he said, "after they've killed many more men. They burned my home to the ground before Georges and I left it."

She glanced up at him. "Georges was a good soldier?" she said.

"Very good," he said. "At Culloden Field, and at Glen Cluagh, he did all any man could. But the English—" He halted, knowing that rage was coming on him again and that his face was convulsed.

"M'sieur Kenzie," Stephanie said, "tell me of that in the morning, when you've had a night's sleep. Would you like to take me for a boat trip on the river in the morning? Our river is best seen by sunlight."

"That would be a great pleasure for me," he said.

"For me, too," she said. Then she curtsied in answer to his bow, was quickly gone into the house.

## CHAPTER VII

### SCOTS ARE NOT SLAVES

WILLOW branches trailed the water of the river, making a faint green shadow against the sun. Donall Kenzie stopped the boat there and brought the oars inboard. "I'd like to talk with you," he said to Stephanie.

"You can't talk and row, too?" she asked him.

He made a gesture with his powerful hands. "You make me forget most of my French," he said. "You make me—"

"Embarrassed," she said.

"Yes," he said; "that's right. But I don't know why."

"I'll tell you," she said. "You think you're quite a man only for the reasons you wear that kilt and your name is Kenzie."

"We Kenzies admit to being proud," he said. But he flushed as he said that, sat forward so he could look more fully into her eyes.

She rested in the stern-sheets, a cushion behind her back, a parasol across her knees. She had worn a big-brimmed hat as they left the house, but since taken it off. The morning breeze had loosened her hair a bit, and the sun breaking through the branches of the willows brightly touched her face.

She knows she's lovely, Donall Kenzie told himself, and she's out to make you squirm for letting Georges get drunk.

"I'm sorry about Georges," he said. "But he had a right to a few glasses after what happened in Scotland."

"Georges went to Scotland of his own free will," Stephanie said. "He took a cause that was not his own. If his side lost, he shouldn't be too deeply disappointed. He's a Frenchman, not a Scot."

"Prince Charles' cause is any man's," Donall said, his voice hard. "With the Stuarts returned to the throne, Scotland would really live again."

"But I hear," Stephanie said, "that there's small chance of that. France won't help the Stuarts further, and your own people are broken."

Donall sat very still. Angry sentences formed, then passed in his brain. He had the desire to reach forward, take her by the shoulder and shake her.

But she's no Highland crofter lass, he thought. She's smart as you, maybe smarter; and you must give her proper answer, first reckon it for yourself.

He sought power now, he realized. That was what he wanted, the kind of power the Southrons had held at Culloden Field. Bravery and loyalty weren't enough. It was Cumberland's hired dragoons, his cavalry and great, well-fed army that had smashed the starving clans.

Money had done it for Cumberland, and

money would do it for him, Donall Kenzie.

There was no more reason to try to restore the Stuarts to their throne or make Scotland free. That dream was finished. But somewhere in the world there must be a place where a man like him could create a haven, a new life, for his people.

So he must make money, for it was the one power stronger than all others, and when he had it he could call the clansmen, arm them and defy the rest of the world; even put a Stuart on the throne he designed.

He looked at Stephanie and almost smiled. Don't tell her yet, he warned himself. Let her think what she wants, because now you know, and her thoughts won't really change you.

"And Scotland?" the girl said.

"Scotland will never be happy under English rule," he said. "Even if they dominate us by force, the men of the clans will seek a leader of their own kind and blood."

"Foolish," she said. "The English are too strong for you, and have proven it. How could it ever be otherwise?"

"I don't know," he said without emotion. "I'm an exile. Some, including my brother Martin, took the side of the English, sought to get me to accept the peace."

"I admire your brother for that," she said. "He must be a man of sense."

"He's a disloyal dog!" Donall said. Thought of Martin suddenly roused his anger, made his hands knot and tighten. "A Kenzie's loyalty should be for his own, the Highland folk."

"You mean," she said, "that you'd like to remain semi-barbarians. Scotland can't live without support from outside. My father has told me that for years your people have gone increasingly into debt."

"True," he said. "But is that cause for us to lose our independence to a nation we hate?"

"There's a man here in France named Voltaire who's written well of your kind," she said. "He once said that people will continue to commit atrocities as long as they continue to believe absurdities."

DONALL lifted the oars, shoved clear out into the stream. "We waste each other's time," he said. "And you make me very angry. If your brother weren't my friend, I'd take you over my knee and give you a good drubbing."

"No, you wouldn't," she said. "You're afraid of me, although you're supposed to be a great, rough soldier. You're nothing but a man with a sword for sale. Why not throw it away, and attempt to build your life in peace in a place like this?"

Donall gazed around him. The mid-day drowse was over the valley. The poplars and willows were as immovable as trees cast from copper. At the mill downstream the wheels were stopped. The miller lay upon the bank, his blue smock spread like a woman's skirts, his straw hat over his face. Swans moved above the mill-race, white and stately, but their cries were vacant, senseless.

"Living by the sword is good enough for me," Donall said. "What would you have me do—stay here and tend swans, sprawl asleep beside the miller?"

"You could spend a far worse life," she said. "Peace is never worth much until you've lost it."

They had drawn alongside the little landing-stage below the château, and Donall made fast the boat, helped her to the path. But she did not move on; she waited there for him.

"I'm sorry, Donall," she said when he was close. "Perhaps I've been too hard on you. Let me tell you that I'm worried by Georges. He's another who's just drifting through life, easily tempted to fight for causes whose purposes he doesn't really understand."

"He'll drift no more if he stays with me," Donall said. "In Scotland he learned to be a fighting man, and his sword will get him what he wants from life."

"Or what you want him to get," she said, her eyes narrow and keen.

"So?" Donall said, and caught her, lifted her clear from the ground. "Are you a soothsayer, to read all my thought?"

"Go ahead," she said. "I can't fight

against you. Kiss me, if that will do you any good. You're a handsome enough brute. I've kissed uglier if smarter men."

He kissed her once very hard upon the mouth, then let her go. She stood from him and nodded toward the house. "We must go back," she said. "It's luncheon time and my father has returned. That's his carriage there."

M'SIEUR RENEC was a man possessed of a grave manner. He sat straight in his chair in the drawing room after luncheon and talked in measured words to his son and Donall Kenzie.

"You've come from a war that your side lost," he said. "Now you should think of the future. Georges, by your own admission you've spent every *sou* of your mother's inheritance upon the ship you bought to help Prince Charles. And you, Kenzie, own no more than your sword and clothes.

"Well, let's be practical. Let's try to repair the damage that's been done. How would you both like to work for me on my plantation in Martinique?"

The two younger men kept still. Georges stared at the floor, and Donall stared at Stephanie, in the next room.

"You can't be afraid of work," M'sieur Renec said. "You, who were brave enough to follow Prince Charles. How about it, Kenzie?"

"If it pays well, sir, I might," Donall said. "Money is what I'm after right now. My piper, Kip, is waiting for me in a tavern at La Rochelle. I'll need money to get him out of there, and to take care of other needs."

"You'll be well paid," M'sieur Renec said. "And I'll find a place for Kip, too. Martinique has use for a lot of men, with sugar at the present price. But how about you, Georges?"

"I propose to call my life my own," Georges said. "In Martinique, I'd still have to take my orders from you."

M'sieur Renec smiled. "Independence is a virtue," he said. "You own that ship, the *Aventurier*. But you can do nothing with her without money and a crew.

"I'll take the *Aventurier* off your hands. I'll hire a crew and sailing master for you. Then you and Kenzie and his man will sail aboard her for the West African coast, load a cargo of slaves there for me. Bring those slaves safe to Martinique and you'll both be independently wealthy in your own right. You'll be able to buy shares in my estate, call yourselves your own masters for life. A deal?"

Georges shook his head. "I've got no liking," he said, "for any money made from the handling of slaves. Let other men do it. But that's not the trade for me."

Donall Kenzie was up, moving from his chair. He signed to Georges, walked beside him to the far side of the room.

"*Ecoutez, mon ami,*" he said. "Other men will sell and profit from those slaves if we don't. Remember what you saw at Culloden, and at Glen Cluagh. Think of all your old Highland comrades who today are hiding roofless and starving, without even the price to take them out of Scotland."

He put an arm on Georges' shoulder, and his voice deepened. "If we go through with the deal your father suggests we'll have money not only for ourselves but for the clansmen. With the money we'll make, we can buy land out there in the West Indies where the clansmen can come and live.

"We'll bring them in the *Aventurier* or in other ships, and their wives, their families. We'll set up a government of our own, of free men who owe allegiance to no one but themselves. And our power won't only be in our swords, but in our wealth—the wealth any men need to be free. It's our chance, and we'd be stupid cowards not to take it. Tell your father you'll accept!"

A line came between Georges Renec's eyes. "Don't be too hasty, Donall," he said. "You have never seen these black people who are sold as slaves. I don't think you realize what slavery means to them."

"And you?" Donall said. "You can weigh whatever that is against the misery and the subjection of the finest folk in Scotland? Make your choice, soldier, and make it fast."

*"Bon, alors,"* Georges said. He turned to his father, bowed. "I agree with Donall Kenzie. We'll go. We'll bring your slaves to Martinique."

"Excellent," M'sieur Renec said. He was watching the tall man in kilts, had seen Stephanie come out from the music room. "If you're interested in what Stephanie might tell you, Kenzie, she's sailing for Martinique with me next month. I'm selling this house and we're going to live permanently in the islands. It was Stephanie who suggested that you come out there to work for us. You're sure about your decision?"

"I've no doubts at all," Donall Kenzie said. He crossed and shook M'sieur Renec's hand. "Scotland is lost to me as a home, so now I'm forced to find a new one. The West Indies will do me fine."

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE DRUMS SAY, "GO!"

IT SEEMED to Donall that the voice was just an echo, came to him through thundering of the fever in his brain like some of the other old memories. But then he recognized that Kip spoke, and Kip stood beside him.

He raised up, swung out of the swaying hammock and put his feet to the deck. "What's wrong, Kip?" he said.

"A lot," Kip said, "or I wouldn't hae disturbed ye. But Mister Georges and the captain are noo awa' frae the ship fair many hours. They're up in that village tradin' wi' the black chief, and the mate's worried after them. He's asked me to find what ye think o' it."

"Give me a hand to the rail."

He stood swaying at the rail, his eyes narrowed as he stared ashore. Africa lay six miles stern of the *Aventurier*. The great, sluggish river at whose mouth they were anchored spewed a stinking smudge of mud and rotted jungle vegetation upon the sea. The jungle was a thick green and inscrutable barrier wreathed in coils of mists which to him carried the miasma of death.

He could not see the village that M'sieur Renec's sailing master had chosen for their trading. That was higher up the river, beyond the bar and blocked by the jungle.

But he could hear the drums, recognized now that for some time he had listened to them in his fever.

The drums had a heavy reiteration. They repeated the same rhythms, and his brain began to ache with their shock. "How long have they been playing?" he asked Kip.

"Syne last night," Kip said.

"The same tune?"

"I'm no' sure, Donall. But do ye talk wi' the mate, an' he'll tell ye better than I."

Donal pushed from the taffrail, turned to cross the poop deck. Houdet, the mate, rested by the quarter rail. He wore a cutlass, and there were pistols in his belt. He didn't like this man, Donall thought as he moved toward him, nor did he like anything that happened here.

The *Aventurier* had been loading slaves for three months. He had been sick with the fever from almost the first week, but even in that time he had learned he had been wrong in his conception of the black people who were brought aboard as cargo.

They were a proud people, tall and strong, and they strained against their chains. Sigaix, the sailing master hired by M'sieur Renec, had done the trading ashore for the original groups, sent them out in separate boatloads.

Sigaix was a tough, bitter-mouthed man, and he had given orders that the slaves be shown no mercy. They came overside lashed by whips, stumbling in their chains, some of them already dead from exhaustion and the mistreatment they had received in the village of their captors.

His whole nature had revolted at the sight of them, Donall remembered. He had likened them at once to his own people in Scotland.

They, too, were being oppressed by a stronger, more powerful force. Their homes were gone, their lives shattered. They had fought hard against the men who had de-

feated them, for many of the warriors bore the wounds of battle.

But they were as helpless as the folk of the clans after Cumberland, with the strength of all England behind him, had won at Culloden.

This was the same thing that had happened in Scotland, he knew, except for the fact that these people were black and their fate was to be taken in chains from their homeland to an existence they could not even begin to imagine.

HE AND Georges Renec had protested to the sailing master after they had come to realize the suffering of the blacks. But Sigaix had laughed at him and Georges.

"I'm hired by M'sieur Renec and not you two over-grown children," Sigaix said. "M'sieur Renec knows what he's doing, and so do I. Work with me me if you want, but don't try to go against me. I command here, and I'll have you dumped very neat and quick over the side."

He had been already weak, stupid with the fever then, Donall recalled, or he would have fought Sigaix for those words. The next day he had become badly sick, not been clear in his head for more than a few hours since. Now Georges was ashore with Sigaix, and quite probably in danger.

"What do you make of the drumming?" Donall said to the mate.

Houdet twitched at the brim of his straw hat. "Nothing good," he said. "I think we've overstayed our time here. Sigaix was a fool to go ashore again, especially with young Renec."

"Why did he take Renec?"

"Because he was forced into it," Houdet said. He gestured forward and at the main part of the ship. Tall stockade walls of stout logs braced by chains had been built thwartships below the poop and the fo'c'sle-head. They closed off all of the main deck, made of it a prison.

Hundreds of blacks, men and women were confined within that space. Shackles were on their wrists and ankles; they made a rough clanking sound over the deck planks. It was strange, Donall recognized, but the sound they made had the same rhythm as the drums ashore.

"Make more sense," he told Houdet. "How was the captain forced into doing anything by Georges Renec?"

"The youngster insisted that we'd bought a lot of sick slaves from old Moloo, the village chief. He told the skipper that they would have to be put ashore and freed. So he's gone to talk to the chief."

Donall Kenzie swore in slow, explosive words. "That's a damn' dangerous thing to do," he said.

"Ask me," Houdet said, "and I'll tell you that your friend has gone off his top a bit. The Slave Coast is too much for him. He pulled a pistol on the skipper, and kept it on him. That was the only way he got Sigaix to go ashore."

"I understand why he did it," Donall said. "He and I aren't the kind to oppress any innocent people. We saw enough of that when the English came into Scotland.

"But don't bother about that pistol you're trying to draw. My piper carries a pistol, too. He'll drill you pretty before you can do any damage. Step along and get a boat ready. You and I and the piper are going ashore."

Cords flexed in Houdet's throat. "Easy," he said. "Take it easy, will you? Look down there at them, the blacks. Those drums have got them worked up fine. They're all but ready to jump the stockade and take after us. Murdering all hands is no new trick out here."

"Step along," Donall said, "and get a boat ready." He pointed to the swivel guns mounted on the poop and fo'c'sle-head, the huge cannonades in the waist.

"The boatswain and the crew can take care of the blacks. I want my friend back aboard. Then we're pulling out, leaving this place."

"All right," Houdet said. "But watch out for Sigaix when you meet him. He's a hard man when he's crossed."

Donall smiled, and let his fingers go down to the Claymore hilt.

THERE was a swivel gun mounted in the bow of the boat that took them ashore. But Houdet and the sailors who worked the sweeps were very nervous. They kept staring at the river banks all the time, muttering to each other in quick, colloquial French that Donall Kenzie did not fully catch.

But Kip sat beside him, and Kip had brought his pipes.

"Get up your wind," Donall told Kip. "Pipe a tune that Georges will hear. I do no' care what happens to the cursed captain, but I well want Georges out of there."

Kip played a strathspey. It cut sharp through the drum pulsing, rose clear. The drums slowed. Big black men who carried shields and spears ran down from the village stockade to the bank. They made threatening motions with the spears and shouted at Houdet.

"Want us to go back," Houdet said.

"*Au contraire*," Donall said. "Head in for the bank."

He leaped ashore, stood quietly until Kip joined him. Houdet was sending the boat back toward the middle of the river. The other boat from the ship waited there, and he pulled alongside of it.

"Only safe place," he shouted. "Don't delay in the village, Kenzie."

Donall did not answer him. He walked in stride with Kip up the path to the village. The warriors had become silent, but kept close on either side. They were smeared with clay paint, Donall noticed, and some of the older men wore necklaces made of teeth and leopard skins about their loins.

"A fine-set lot," he told Kip.

"Fine enough," Kip said, "tae give us a wee bit brawl leavin' here."

Then they were at the gate of the first stockade, passed in through the second. There were nine stockades all told, and they found Georges Renec and the captain, Sigaix, in the last one.

Georges was trying to talk with a skinny black man seated in a vast chair. The black man had a cocked hat upon his head, a stained and torn British naval uniform coat about his shoulders. He looked ridiculous, almost stupid; but his little, bloodshot eyes were very sharp.

"I'm glad you're here," Georges said to Donall. He did not turn, kept watching the man in the chair. "The chief is pretty stubborn about doing anything for those sick folks. He says he doesn't want them back, and that if we brought them ashore again they'd still be slaves."

Donall Kenzie let his breath go in slow exhalation. He was still shaking with the fever, wet with sweat. But he made his voice sound firm as he said, "What do you think, Sigaix?"

The captain was like a man on the point of death. There was no color in his face. He looked behind him constantly at the drummers and the warriors who filled the gate to the other stockades.

"I say we should get out of here," he said. "Just as soon as we can. The chief is ready to make trouble. He wants much more than we'll be able to pay if he takes back the sick folks for healthy ones. But we must give him something—a couple of ankers of rum, half a dozen bolts of cotton and case of tobacco, at least."

"And who'd pay for that?" Donall said.

"Georges and you," Sigaix said.

"Out of what?" Donall said.

"Out of your shares of the profit from the slaves."

"There'll be no profit from them," Donall said. "The whole lot of them are to be left here. Tell the chief that. Give him to understand they're all to be returned to him."

Sigaix opened and shut his hands. He made an almost supplicating gesture. "*Nom d'un nom!*" he said. "Get it straight, will you? All this tribe are slave-traders. That's how they live. They go out and capture their neighbors in battle to sell them to the ships.

"Our full lot can't be returned. The tribe wouldn't take them. If they did, they'd have to feed them until the next ship puts in here. And the baccaroons are full now. I know. The chief and I—"

Donall hit Sigaix an uppercutted blow.

It knocked the man reeling and backwards among the negroes at the gate. Then he shoved Georges Renec and Kip. "Over the back wall," he told them. "Quick!"

HE WAS already in motion, the Claymore out. The chief was rising from his chair, a brass-bound pistol in his hand. Bone cracked like dry wood where the Claymore struck. The chief's lopped hand dropped to the dirt, the spatulate fingers still tight about the pistol.

A lot of the warriors formed in solid ranks to keep them from the rear wall. But Donall hacked sheer through the elephant-hide shields, the spear shafts.

Kip and Georges Renec were right behind him. The piper used his broadsword in real Highland style, sweeping it shoulder-high in short, swift arcs. Georges Renec had a pair of double-barrelled pistols, and when he had emptied them brought up his own sword.

There were only eight or ten warriors who finally faced them back against the wall; and they broke, then ran. "Up," Donall said. "Up, for your hides!" He hefted Georges Renec, leaped in unison with Kip.

He cut himself cruelly on the pointed logs of the stockade top. But the other two were down and safe, and he dropped next to them, spears making a drumming whine overhead.

Warriors with bows and muskets followed them to the river. They screamed in their rage, and the boat crews heard them. Houdet brought the boats about, headed them inshore. Fuses sputtered blue in the brassy sunlight, then there was the crash of both swivel guns.

That had the sound of death for sure, Donall thought, prone in the trail with Kip and Georges Renec. The charges of grape shot and iron scrap swept into the warriors fan-wise. The blacks fell one against the other, squirmed for a bit and were still.

Donall looked back at them once before he climbed into the boat. He wanted to remember this, he told himself. A swivel gun was a handy weapon, and one he as a soldier should learn to handle. . . .

"Where's the captain?" Houdet asked when the boat was back in the middle of the river. "What happened to him?"

Georges Renec had reloaded his pistols. He trained the pair of them on Houdet. "He's in the village with Moloo," he said. "Moloo may live, but he won't. He got the same sort of ticket you will have unless you get smart fast. Row for the ship!"

Donall grinned at Renec. "Africa has made a real tough man out of you," he said.

"I don't know," Renec said. He brought one hand down against his side. "I got a spear blow there during the scramble. Maybe Africa will be the end of me."

Donall examined the wound. It was deep, and dark arterial blood pumped from it. "Don't bother now," Georges Renec said. "Wait until we're aboard. All I want to do is get out of here, never see this place again."

*"Bon,"* Donall said. But he stared hard-eyed at Houdet. "Tell the men to pull faster. This lad is in a bad way."

"But where are we bound?" Houdet said.

"Martinique," Donall said.

"Then we'll deliver the blacks after all," Houdet said. "We'll make our profit on the voyage."

"Wrong again," Donall said. "We're selling no slaves in Martinique. But those black folks aboard will find a better life somewhere in the islands than they have in that land back there. Understand me?"

*"Oui,"* Houdet said. *"Oui, m'sieur."*

## CHAPTER IX

### TOGETHER WE CONQUER

GEORGES RENEC was slow in dying, died in agony; for the spear that had caused his wound had been treated with some sort of poison. He lay for a long time held by coma, then suffered awful convulsions.

But in the last minutes he was able to speak to Donall Kenzie. "Take care of

yourself and the blacks," he said. "Don't let anybody change you in your purpose —not even Stephanie."

The boatswain sewed the body in weighted canvas, let it slide from a hatchboard into the sea. All of the crew stood at the rail to watch, but there was no Bible in the ship, and there was no prayer said. Kip's piping was the only mark of ceremony, and the notes of the lament rose high above the flat splash of the body.

Donall Kenzie made a sign to Kip to silence the pipes, turned slowly aft. His sorrow was too great for weeping. He had never had a friend like Georges, he realized, and now he was utterly alone.

Kip was brave and faithful, but only in the sense of a willing follower.

Houdet and most of the other men in the ship had been brutalized by their years in the slave trade, thought of no more than making money. Now they hated him for the stand he and Georges had taken in relation to the blacks, and Houdet was open in his threats of what would happen if the cargo wasn't delievered to M'sieur Renec.

There was a ten-gallon anker of rum belayed to ring-bolts abaft the wheel, and Donall picked up and filled the pennikin, drank it neat. But the rum had no effect except to increase the constant ache in his brain. You're lost, he thought. Your world's gone, your life has no meaning.

Memory came to him of Culloden Field, the staggering files of the clans, the faces of the dead, the smashed bodies. Then he saw Glen Cluagh, and his home in flames. His hands tightened and his jaw muscles locked as he recalled the Scottish ladies stripped, shamed by Cumberland's men.

It would have been better, he thought, to have died right there rather than to go on living. Since then, he had only tricked himself with his own stubborn ambition; brought pain, and death to other people.

Perhaps Martin had been right. Perhaps he should have subdued his nature the way his brother had, become capable of accepting English rule.

That girl he had met in France, Stephanie, had told him he was drifting through life. He had been secretly amused at her then, believed her wrong. But now it was he who was wrong, and Georges who was dead, all through his wild dreaming of power.

He passed his hands over his face, pulled his bonnet further down. That familiar gesture of arranging his bonnet gave him a sense of individuality, made him recognize that he was still young and strong. He cursed himself for his dark thoughts, called forward to Houdet.

"You must teach me more of navigation," he said when the mate stood beside him. "Now you and I will have to run the ship between us."

"True," Houdet said. "But the first job is to take care of the blacks. The yellow fever has broken out among them. Those sick folks should have been left ashore. If the fever spreads, we're all finished."

"You mean," Donall said, "that Renec was right when he insisted they be returned to Moloo. And you mean that you're afraid to go into the stockade with the blacks."

"Have that your own way," Houdet said. "But they still need help. Will you give it to them?"

"Yes," Donall said. "Tell the battswain to get them up out of the holds and on deck."

Two men of the crew armed with muskets and cutlasses opened the gate into the stockade for him. "Lock it behind me," he told them. "It'll take care of myself."

THE blacks came up out of the 'tween-decks in long lines. Their fetters had created raw, suppurating sores, and they stank. But the men looked at him with unafraid eyes; and the tallest of them, a powerful and handsome man, spoke to him in French.

"I'm Bakatar," the black man said. "In my country, the Fon country, I was a chief. These people here now call me their chief and ask that I tell you we are dying."

"Your people won't die," Donall said. "I've come to see they don't. Nor will you be sold as slaves. When we reach the islands, you'll go free."

Bakatar indicated the stockade walls, the swivel guns, the guards on the fore and after decks. "White man," he said "I was captured once before and kept for almost a year in the baccaroons at Dahomey. It was there I learned to talk this language, and to see how your people cheat anybody, even themselves. I doubt your words."

"Then all of you will suffer," Donall said. "I talk truth when I say that I want you to go free. But a lot of the men in the ship don't. Their idea is to sell you as slaves."

Bakatar's deeply set eyes narrowed. "I was badly wounded when I was brought to Dahomey," he said. "As soon as I had my strength, I escaped. But if I escape again, it will be for good. You will have to do much to show me you are not out to betray me."

Donall laughed, and then bent down, unlocked the man's ankle fetters. "Come on with me, Bakatar," he said. "Help me with the sick folks who're still in the holds."

Bakatar raised is chained wrists. "How can I help while I carry these?"

"I can't unlock them," Donall said. "The end links are forged tight. But I have my sword. Spread your hands, and brace yourself."

The other blacks had crowded close, formed a tense and staring ring. Bakatar stood at his full height, spread his legs to the pitch of the ship, held his arms so that the heavy chain was taut.

"Ready?" Donall said.

"Ready," Bakatar said.

Donall brought the Claymore down in a great blow. Sparks flared from the chain and the broad blade. A grunt forced through Bakatar's lips. Blood brightened the wrist flesh where the chain held. "Again," he said. "It needs another blow."

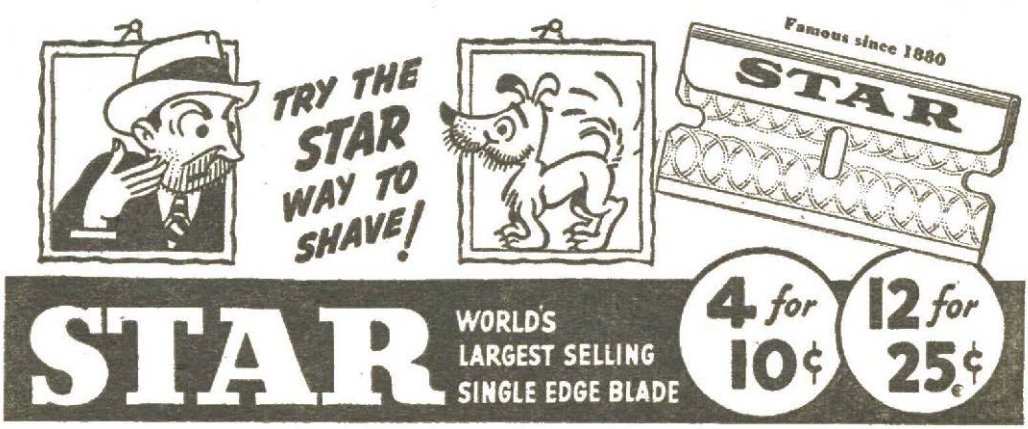
Here, Donall thought, was a real man. That last blow would have snapped an ordinary man's wrists like sticks. "It's lucky," he said, "that I've got a double-bladed sword. But here's the other side. Stand firm!"

He went up onto his toes for the blow, waiting for the pitch of the ship to give him added momentum before he struck. Then he swung the sword with every ounce of his strength. The chain rent in the middle, slacked cleanly broken.

"You're a man," Bakatar said smiling, "who knows the use of a sword. Now let us take care of the sick ones and carry them up on deck."

HIS shadow spread flat on the deck, mocked him with its immobility. You can't get away from it, he thought. You can't get away from this ship. Even death won't free you.

This is all that's left of Donall Kenzie



of Glen Cluagh, the man who had the idea the world could be turned on the point of a Claymore.

He looked forward, his puffed eyelids making his vision unclear. Kip sat close, nodding in exhausted sleep. Beyond Kip the crew lay in various contorted attitudes on the deck. Some of them were dead from the fever, some of them were dying, and the rest were drunk.

Houdet was one of those who were drunk. He hunched against the quarter rail mumbling. The words he unceasingly repeated were, "Shouldn't have let them up on deck. Let them die in holds. Damn' blacks brought us fever. Fever that's going to kill us all."

Donall Kenzie awakened Kip, gave him the wheel. Then he went to Houdet and pulled him erect by the hair of the head. He slapped Houdet's face hard. "Get sober, you slob," he said. "Wind's coming. Look there to the north."

Houdet looked and laughed. "Wind sure enough," he said. "But who's going to handle the ship when it comes? You and your piper are the only men who've got any strength left. But why don't you use the blacks? Sure—why not? None of us is going to live anyhow."

He slipped out of Donall's grasp, rolled headlong and unconscious. Donall stepped past him to the stockade gate, opened it.

The Negroes had made their deck space clean during the weeks they had been allowed topside. But the windless heat, the scarcity of food and water had also weakened them. Only Bakatar and about ten other men were still capable of motion.

"Now it's your turn to help me," Donall said to Bakatar. "We'll have to sail the ship between us. Wind will be here soon."

Bakatar nodded. "We won't fail you," he said. "Tell us what we should do."

The cool, high sweep of that wind made the ship heel and rush. But Donall had been given time to show the black men how to handle the braces and halyards. The ship stood away west, spume-crested at her forefoot, licking aft along the runs in rainbow radiance.

Donall smiled at Bakatar. "What we must do now," he said, "is raise another ship and get more food and water. Then we'll head straight for the islands."

Bakatar's face was grave. "I believe you to be an honest man," he said. "But I still don't trust these others. What will be the future of my people in the islands except further slavery? How can you set us free?"

The thought that had been slowly forming in his brain came clear to Donall Kenzie. It was so distinct, so logical that he laughed aloud.

"Bakatar," he said, "I am a man without a country, too. Back in my land, my people were beaten by those who possessed much more power. They set about to enslave us in their own way, or kill us if we didn't submit.

"I was lucky enough to escape, and I took with me the dream that somewhere in the world I might gather enough wealth to make a home for my people. That's why I'm in this ship; why I came to Africa to buy people like you as slaves.

"I'd never before seen Africa, or a black man. I had no idea that your people, too, are brave and strong, have only been trapped by those who are stronger.

"But now I know what I should do, and you should do. Out there in the islands we'll make a home for your people, and for mine. We lack money, surely, but we have this ship, the guns it carries, and our strength. We're men who are unafraid, and men like us possess power in ourselves.

"Together, we'll get what we want from life. Trust me, will you? Take my word you'll go free?"

Bakatar gave him his hand. "I've got reason," he said, "to trust you."

## CHAPTER X

### BE A GOOD PIRATE

THEY were well over a thousand miles west of Africa according to Donall's rough reckoning when they raised the English ship. She came up fast astern of them

out of the scarlet sunlight spread on dawn.

Kip went aloft to study her, shouted to Donall that she carried the English ensign.

"English or not," Donall grunted, "she's going to supply our needs." He let go a shout for Bakatar and the other black men, put over the wheel on a course that would bring the *Aventurier* alongside the English vessel.

She was a smart brig, freshly painted, every sail hauled tight. Her captain wore a powdered wig, and his face shone as red as an apple. "Sheer off, Frenchy!" he shouted through his cupped hands from the quarter deck. "I'm in special cargo and hold up for nobody."

" 'Tis no Frenchy I am," Donall said, "and you'll hold up for me. My folks have sore need of supplies. Send over food and water and you'll be paid in gold."

"Be damned, you black-birder!" the English captain said. "Starving is what your kind deserves."

"Listen to me!" Donall said. "These blacks are free. They're no lot of slaves."

But the brig was standing off, her canvas full. She came about, cut across the *Aventurier's* bow and was gone, her crew jeering at the rail.

Donall did not speak or move for several minutes. Every man in the ship, white and black, was looking at him. He'd failed, he knew, and they blamed him for it. Well, they were right. He had asked them to trust him with their lives.

Then he saw that Houdet smiled.

He walked down the ladder to where Houdet sat on the main hatch. "You've drunk up all the rum," he said, "but still you seem happy. What's so funny?"

"You could have had that brig if you wanted her," Houdet said. "This one carries twice the guns she does. While we were alongside, you could have blasted the sticks right out of her."

"That would have been a pirate's job," Donal said. "I meant to make a square deal with the Englishman."

The other man shrugged.

"What difference," Houdet said, "between what we are now and pirates? The Englishman passed you by for a black-birder, left us to starve and thirst to death."

Donall gazed forward to where the brig's topsails lay luminous against the horizon line. "We'll never catch him now," he said.

"We won't while the wind lasts," Houdet said. "But the wind won't last long. It will fall before night."

"Then what?" Donall said.

"Then you can overhaul him," Houdet said.

"How?"

"By putting your precious blacks in the small boats and towing the ship. The Englishman will never figure you for that. It's his idea you're a real slaver, are afraid to let your blacks out on deck. And now the blacks are in fit shape again; they could bring us up alongside the brig."

"That would have to be done after dark," Donall said. His voice was eager, his hands tense. "But the brig's already over the horizon, and it will be dark in an hour or so. . . . You'll fight, Houdet, to help take the English ship?"

"Sure, I'll fight," Houdet said. "I'd rather die by shot or the sword than by thirst."

Bakatar listened calmly as Donall explained it to him. "You white men have your own laws," Bakatar said, "and they make small sense to me. So I'm willing to join you in this. But it won't be easy."

"Nothing in life is easy," Donall said. He laughed. "Will you tell your people, or must I talk to them?"

"I will," Bakatar said. He looked intently at Donall. "Somewhere, you must have suffered a great deal. You're quick to hate those you think are your enemies."

"A girl in France accused me of much the same once," Donall said. "But now let's catch that brig."

THE wind failed before noon, and they immediately put the boats overside. Bakatar sent his people, men and women alike, down to take the oars. "Our women

are as strong as the warriors," he said smiling. "And they will learn just as fast how to row."

He crouched in the ship's bow, his knees locked about a drum that had been brought from Moloo's village. He started to play it after Houdet and some of the sailors had gone into the boats to handle the tillers and towing lines. The notes he struck at first were slow and soft. Then they became deeper, took a more rapid cadence. His people looked up at him—their faces, their eyes fierce.

"If we catch the brig," Donall said, "the price of it in Martinique will make your freedom certain."

"Good," Bakatar said. "But they don't need to be told that. They work because they're proud."

The oars met the water in absolute unison, straightened, lifted, returned. Sweat was on the black faces. Muscles corded straining on the lean arms. The ship moved, and the drum beat changed. It was no longer a challenge. It was a call of triumph, of victory.

Donall turned away aft. There were tears on his cheeks. Those black people in their magnificence had made him weep.

The night was no cooler than the day. But now they could see the English brig, becalmed there ahead of them, her canvas slack. "We've got her," Donall said to Kip. "She's ours."

"But yon cateran who commands her can put out boats, too," Kip said. "How can we stop him frae doin' that?"

"With these," Donall said. He put his hand on one of the great midships carronades. "Go fetch Houdet. Make him to understand I want powder and shot on deck, and men to work the pieces."

The English captain had heard the drum Bakatar played, seen the slow-dragging boats. He trained his after cannon on the *Aventurier*, let a round shot go through her upper rigging.

"Och," Donall grunted. "You've asked for it twice. You're making pirates of us against our will. So take this!"

He aimed at the square poop overhang of the brig, and his shot ranged deep into the hull. "More like that," he told Kip. "More! Then we'll haul close to her and board."

"You're a hard mon," Kip said as he squinted to fire his own piece.

"So," Donall said. "I lost what softness was left to me at Culloden. Take his rudder from him. Tear him apart!"

The captain of the brig handled his guns well. He riddled and sank three of the *Aventurier's* boats with loose shot, kicked the mainmast overside in fouled wreckage while his own boat crews tried to haul clear.

But the *Aventurier* came on, slow and yet irresistible. Bakatar still played the drum, and the black people drove the oars with unbroken strokes.

Donall sent round after round through the brig. Her after works were punched into shambles, her rudder and wheel gone. Most of her main guns were silenced, and the men who were alive on her decks were clumsy in serving those who remained.

"We can board her now," Houdet came to tell Donall. "We've got enough weigh to come alongside. Call back the boats."

Bakatar rose stiffly from the drum. "My people are good people," he said.

"If they can fight as well as they can row," Donall said, "between us we'll easily whip the Englishman."

KIP had brought cutlasses and pikes on deck. He rationed them out to the black people as they came back from the boats. They took the weapons in their hands and laughed, straightened their wearied bodies.

Donall and Bakatar were walking among them, and Bakatar told them how the English ship could become the price of their freedom.

"Enough," Donall said. "We'll have to go." He had the Claymore out, a brace of pistols in his belt.

The two ships were gradually swinging together. They collided without shock until the main yards locked and Houdet slung over a grapnel across the other rail.

Donall let go a great, racking yell. He lifted the Claymore gripped in both hands, leaped to the brig's deck. A pistol flared in his face. Muskets, swivel guns flung flame.

He killed the man who held the pistol, gutted him in an upward stroke. Then he was knocked backwards, and felt iron hot along his skull.

Kip saved him; hauled him back and aside. Kip and Bakatar and the black people were all down on the English ship's decks. The blacks fought with a cold and quiet fury. They kept together, the men in one group, the women in another. Foot by foot, they fought their way aft.

Donall used his bonnet as a sponge to stop the blood flowing over his face. He drew deep breath, and found strength again in his body. "Let us turn forward, Kip," he said. "If this is to be won, we must do our share of it."

The fouled rigging and canvas on the foredeck kept him from striking out with the Claymore. He slid it into the scabbard, took a marlin spike from a pinrail, and then brought his dirk, his beloved *skean dhu,* from his stocking top.

A lot of the English were hidden among the wreckage forward. They had muskets and fired them repeatedly as they gave back toward the fo'c'sle-head.

"Slow," Kip warned. "Slow, mon. They ken weel there's no' many o' us here against them."

"Aye?" Donall said. Then he straightened from his crouch, went hurtling over the foremast butt to where the English knelt.

Those men had just fired their muskets, were reloading. He took one with the marlin spike, another with the dirk. Blood madness was on him now and he screamed his family battle call. The English sailors marked him by it in that confused light, sprang in to kill.

He gave them the dirk, striking as he had at Culloden Field, without conscious knowledge of his blows. But the Englishmen went down, and they did not move after he had struck.

Kip was there, killing, too, and suddenly there were no more Englishmen. They were all gone from before him, and those who were on the fo's'cle-head held their hands high, called heavy-voiced words of surrender.

"Take care of them, Kip," he said. "Make sure they do no' lie."

"And you?" Kip said.

"I'm going aft," Donall said. He had seen the English captain in the light of the side-lanterns on the poop. " 'Tis the captain I want, for if I'm to be a pirate, I'll be a good one."

"Ye'll be a vurra gude one, aye," Kip said.

But Donall Kenzie did not answer. He was running aft, the smell of blood and powder and hot metal strong in his nostrils, the sounds of death reverberant in his brain.

**TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK**

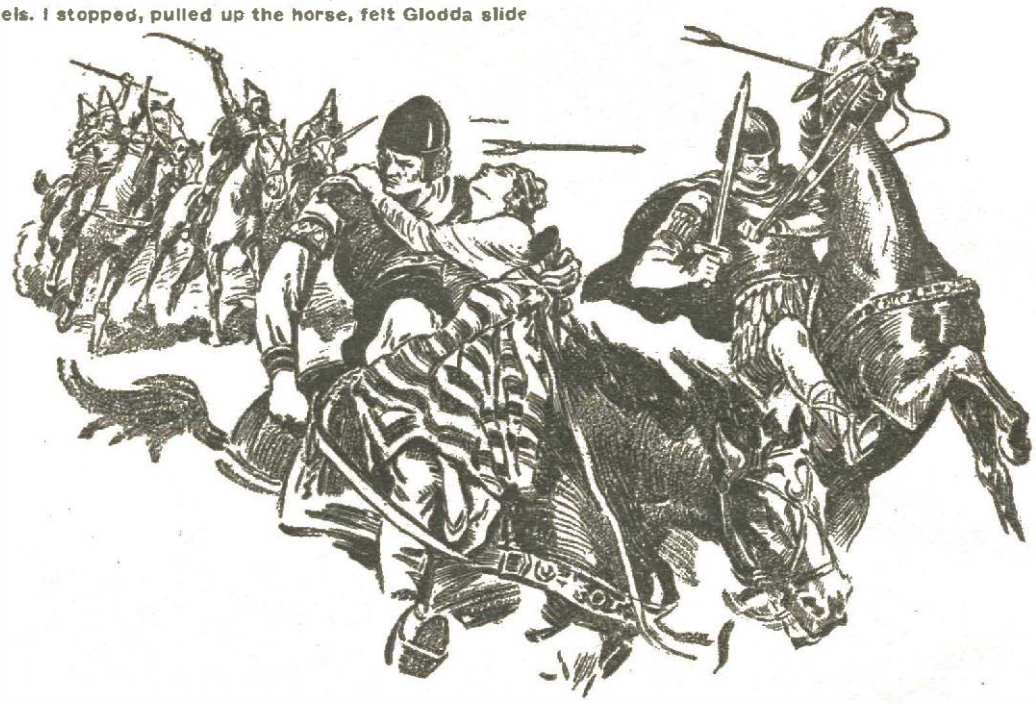

# "I Talked with God"

**(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)**

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am hap y as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You too may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 7, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 7, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

Arrows hissed past us, and the pursuit was at our heels. I stopped, pulled up the horse, felt Glodda slide



# The Golden Empress

**Joel Quaite, time detective, finds his beloved Neith—a reincarnated Neith—as he searches in Byzantium for the truth about Theodora, gutter-waif, circus dancer, and Empress**

By FREDERICK C. PAINTON

Author of "The World That Drowned," "A Package for Paris," etc.

## FOREWORD

**IN THE year A. D. 2500 all the peoples of the earth were five feet tall or less. They possessed the so-called Carveth "efficiency body," just large enough to keep healthy, and the enormously enlarged skulls that became a foot in diameter by the year 2340.**

**All races and nations were united in The Earth Union, and science ruled the universe. Desiring to investigate the mysteries and alleged myths of past history, Professor Anthony Modesta invented a time machine which could project human beings into any past period.**

**For such "time detectives" he needed men who were six feet or over—monstrosities, freaks in 2500. Joel Quaite and Tex O'Hara, chosen to be Modesta's time detectives, entered the time machine and went to Atlantis. They arrived as Atlantis was being destroyed by earthquake, fire and flood. With two Atlantean girls they floated on the newly made sea when the Helkes equation of the time machine whisked them back to the New York of 2500. However, they are discontented in New York where their size makes them freaks, and wish to return through time to Atlantis.**

## I

HIGH overhead a full moon painted with quick-silver the javelin spires of New York's gigantic sky-scrapers. To my left, as I lowered our yellow helicopter plane, I could see a London air express gliding off like a black bat

with a hundred yellow eyes. It was midnight and elsewhere the great city was dark and silent.

The helicopter settled quietly on the landing stage of the Solar Building, sixteen hundred feet above the lower level. Directly ahead, on the one hundred and eighty-sixth floor was Professor Modesta's laboratory. I took out the skeleton key I had had made for the laboratory door.

T x broke the silence between us that had lasted since we had decided on this desperate undertaking.

"Joel," he said, "are you sure you can send us back to Atlantis? Suppose we wind up in time a thousand years off?"

I smiled grimly. Modesta had told me that it was impossible to return. But I still thought he lied because there were obscure periods of history he wished us to visit to bring back facts for his new "History of the World." That's why we were here tonight; to steal a ride through time to Atlantis. I fitted the key in the lock.

"There must be an adjustment on the time machine," I said, and gently opened the door.

We went directly to the huge box of oxydyl-duro which had transported us through time as an air ferry takes you from New York to Moscow. As I have said before, there were no dials, valves, tubes; no indication of how it worked or was controlled. The door, thick like a refrigerator's, was open. Inside was merely eight square feet of white durolo. No conduits led away from it.

My eye encountered a door to the right. "Let's look in here," I said. "St. John and the girl, Stephanie Claire, wore refractor suits as protection against the cosmic rays. Maybe they had to work behind a durolo wall, too."

Before me opened a white room that had one or two dials, and switches. On a durolo table a sheet of paper was held down by a duraluminum key.

I recognized Professor Modesta's handwriting on the paper. Eagerly I read:

"Allegations for Joel Quaite and Tex O'Hara to verify (532).

"(1) History says Theodora, wife of Justinian, Empress of Byzantium, was a nude dancer in the circus, the third daughter of Acacious, Keeper of the Bears (*Procopius' Secret History*). Was she? Was it possible for a circus wanton to become the greatest power in the world. Or was she, as some say, daughter of a senator and an aristocrat?

"(2) She is accused (by Procopius) of pride, avarice and cruelty. Her defenders say she was generous, forgiving and pious.

"(3) Was she, or was she not, secretly in love with the greatest villain of history, John of Cappadocia? The best time to examine her record is during the Nika revolt of 532."

I read in disappointment. Nothing about how the time machine worked. I left the paper and turned to the dials and gauges.

One read, "H. E." which probably referred to Helkes' equation, the control that enabled us to stay in the past only thirty-one days, four hours, eight minutes and twenty-six seconds. A gauge read, "CRF" and was set at 5-03-02. Another marked "Control" was at 1250. Ah, that was the time control. I turned the dial until it read 2432.

"If that's the time in space control," I said, "I think I've set it for 2432 B.C."

"Why can't you set that Helkes equation contraption so we can stay longer than a month?" Tex asked.

My hand was picking up the duraluminum key. I had seen where it fitted into a slot marked "Neutron Disintegrator." "I don't like to monkey with it," I told Tex. "We might get stranded in time—and never be able to get back."

I FITTED the key to the slot. I picked up a notebook of gold-beaters' skin and a pencil made of leather winding. These Modesta had left for my notes. I stood for a moment looking at the neutron disintegrator. Tex looked at me. We were both thinking the same thing.

One turn of that key would release forces equal to forty billion degrees of sun heat. If we made an ignorant mistake we would

THEODORA

be instantly destroyed. My heart pounded excitedly. I grinned sickly at Tex. "All I have to do is turn the key," I said.

Tex grinned back, his eyes unafraid. "We're going to Neith and Tara. What are you waiting for?"

"Stout fellah," I said, and reached for the key. "You get in the oxydyl-durolo box," I began, "and—"

"You fool!" yelled a harsh voice. "Don't turn that key."

I whirled. Pelham St. John, Professor Modesta's assistant, was running toward me, quivering with fury. Behind him came Stephanie Claire, swathed in durolo, only her eyes showing through the mask lens.

St. John, with his gigantic head and boy's tiny body, was no match for my strength. But he tried to pull me away.

"Do you realize what you're doing?" he snarled. "Professor Modesta spent a lifetime building this time machine. It is the only way of investigating the past and finding *the truth*. You are probably the only two freaks who can go into the past and survive. With the machine ruined and you two dead—the *real* history of the past will never be known."

"Neith, Tara of Atlantis," I began. "Let us go there—then we will let Modesta send us anywhere—"

"Impossible," cried St. John.

A sudden reckless fury engulfed me. "We're more than automatons," I cried. "We're human—and we're going to Atlantis."

My hand shot up, turned the key.

"Oh!" cried Stephanie Claire, "you've released the power."

St. John's hand fought with mine to turn back the key.

"Get in the box, Tex," I cried. "It takes eighty seconds for the power to work."

My hand rested then on the Helkes equation dial. As St. John gave a terrific pull, dial and all came away in my hand. I turned and ran to the box.

Stephanie Claire raced beside me. She, too, was a freak, almost as tall as I.

"You've broken the Helkes equation," she gasped. "If you go—you may never come back."

"In this place," I said bitterly, "I'm a freak—a monstrosity. So what if I don't come back?"

Tex was in the white box, his face pale, his eyes shining.

"You come, too," I said to Stephanie. "Come to men and women like yourself."

"No," she said. "I promised Professor Modesta that I would stay—and marry St. John."

I plunged into the box.

"Then shut the door," I said calmly, "before the unleashed power destroys the box."

For a second her slender tall body was silhouetted against the light. Then she said, "God bless you and keep you, Joel Quaite," and she slammed the thick door.

We crouched there, trembling. Swiftly I told Tex of the smashed Helkes equation control.

"Maybe," he said, "maybe that'll bust the machine—it won't send us back—"

He stopped speaking and suddenly yelled, "It's come, Joel—I feel like I'm dying inside."

Once again I felt destruction from within, knew a blast of incredible superhuman heat. Then I was conscious of nothing at all.

## II

OVER me the stars pulsed coldly like naked hearts, and around me was a thin snow. A bitter wind blew across the night, sent shivers up my spine. I came out of the blankness of nothing and with

a sudden rush of memory set up. Had I spanned four thousand years of time? Had I returned to Atlantis and Neith?

I got to my feet, shivering in the wind.

Gradually I became aware of a crimson glow across the night. Across a line of jagged and domed roofs, flames mounted into the sky. A huge fire, as if a large city blazed. I tugged excitedly at Tex who lay beside me.

"We made it, Tex. We're in Atlantis. Remember the fire from the earthquake? It still burns. Only the water hasn't come yet. We can still find Neith and Tara—only we have to hurry."

He jumped up, shivering. "It seems damned cold for Atlantis," he chattered.

"The earthquake changed the climate," I said.

But now I perceived that the buildings, too, particularly a huge domed edifice that climbed into the sky like a series of soap-sud bubbles, were strange and unfamiliar. My heart constricted. Where were we? What had happened?

On my left I saw the gleam of water—the sea. I headed in that direction—and nearly tripped over three dead men sprawled in the road.

They had been stabbed. Beneath their heavy green cloaks they wore armor, helmet, breastplate and short skirts covered by steel plates fastened to the cloth. Nearby lay several short swords. But this was not Atlantean armor. That had been of bronze—this was either of steel or iron. I couldn't stifle a groan of despair.

"What's the matter, Joel?" Tex called.

I didn't reply—I couldn't tell him my hideous suspicion. He muttered: "A guy needs some protection," and unfastened the woolen cloaks from the dead men and handed me one. The warmth was grateful.

While I stood trying to pierce this mystery I heard a sudden groan. A weak voice moaned, "Help in the name of God, the Father, or I die."

We groped in an alley and came upon a man horribly wounded. His body was covered with rusted, dented armor and his right arm had been nearly lopped off. Arterial crimson spouted. Hurriedly, I made a tourniquet of his cloak. He groaned, "God's benison upon you. Those accursed Blues had done me in otherwise."

"Blues?" I repeated, wonderingly.

"None other," he said weakly. "Four days ago it began in the Hippodrome when—and honestly, mind you—the Greens won a chariot sweep. Rather than pay their wagers, the Blues began a quarrel that went to the sword. From that it has become revolution. The Vandals and the Goths are led by Glodda of Britain. We, the Greens, fight to save our lives. It is madness and all Constantinoplis is in flames."

"Constantinoplis?" I cried. "Tell me, soldier, what year is this?"

"What year?" the soldier repeated. "Are you mad? All men know these are the ides of Januarius, and the year of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, 532."

My hands flew to my pockets and came out with the gold-beaters' skin notebook, the pencil, Modesta's memorandum on Theodora and a news-reel cosmo-projector. This contrivance, in 2500 A.D., had taken place of the old-fashioned newspapers and gave talking, technicolored pictures of news events. Besides that I had a Teonray flashlight. I flashed it on, read Modesta's memorandum.

The soldier moaned in fear. "Are you devils to make light out of blackness?"

I flashed off the light. "Tell me," I cried tensely, "do Theodora and Justinian sit on the throne of Byzantium?"

"Aye," moaned the man. "Curse them both—they grind us to dust beneath their greed and cruelty."

The old soldier mumbled on. He cursed Tritonian, the Quaestor; and coupled the name of John of Cappodocia, the Praefect with foul oaths. He spoke of the oppression of the people by their rulers. What he told Joel and Tex made it very clear how a circus brawl between the Green and Blue factions had flared up into revolution.

*"Nika!"* (*) the old fellow mumbled.

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(*) Nika, meaning "vanquish" became the name of the Byzantine rebellion of 532.

"Woe to the vanquished—that is the Blue cry."

I heard, yet it seemed I did not listen. I was crushed by the realization of our plight. I looked at Tex. His eyes gleamed, a queer smile twisted his lips.

"Modesta wins after all," I said. "I must have made a mistaken on the dials."

"Joel," he said, "if you busted that Helkes equation, then we're stranded here—in time—for good?"

I forced a smile. "Maybe Modesta can fix it," I said, but I didn't believe it.

"Well," said Tex, forcing a grin, "this looks like an interesting time and place, and—"

HE BROKE off suddenly. Across the night came the shrill cry of a woman for help, keening through the deadly metallic clatter of clashing sword blades. The sound came from the main road along the sea wall. My hand flew to my pocket—touched only the cosmo-news-real-projector.

"Tex," I said, "we forgot to bring guns."

Tex had run to the corpses. Now he handed me a short-bladed Roman sword, a long thin poniard. The cry for help rang out again.

"We need some practice with these," Tex grinned, "if we we're going to be here indefinitely."

We ran toward the clash of steel. As we rounded the corner we saw a man fall suddenly, pierced through by a sword. He had been guarding a woman whose slim-cloaked body was now pressed against the wall of some palace. She had a dagger in her hand and it was upraised, ready to strike down the first attacker who touched her. Four men, one holding a blazing, smoking torch, faced her.

"She's slim and well-made," said one of the men, a short stocky fellow, with an ugly, deep pocked face, "and if her face matches, then by God's holy wounds, she's mine first."

He approached the woman.

"You fool," she muttered tautly, "be about your business and leave me to mine."

But the stocky man in armor snatched the cowl from her face. It was not a girl's face but that of a mature woman of such glorious, haunting beauty that it held us all spellbound. Her pale skin was creamy, her long-lashed eyes dark and voluptuous. The brows were black over them and met above a small straight nose. Her sensuous lips were red and full.

"By Bacchus!" chuckled the stocky man, "she's exquisite."

He tried to seize her in his arms but she slashed down with her dagger. The man jumped back quickly to escape the thrust.

"If I have to split your craw," she said, "I will do it gladly."

The stocky man cursed and said to one of the other men, "Kyrill, seize her from behind."

"Let's go, Tex," I said, and sprang forward.

I was familiar with epees and fencing positions, but in order to see better I took out the electric torch. Before I could flash it on, they heard the patter of our racing steps and turned.

The stockyman in armor yelled. "Two cursed Greens, comrades. Here's sport. *Nika! Nika!*"

As he screamed the battle-cry, he and his three companions rushed at us. I parried a downswept blow that would have split my skull to the neck, and drove the first man to reach me back with a straight-arm thrust that tickled his jugular vein. What might have happened after that I do not know, for as I switched on the electric flash to give us more light to fight by, the man yelled in utter fright. The light blinded, dazzled him.

"Deviltry!" he yelled, terror plain in his voice. He turned and his short legs twinkled as he raced away. In a split-second the attackers had vanished in the night, leaving their smoking torch behind.

Tex laughed. "Boy, they won't stop for hours. And just when I was getting the hang of this toad-sticker, too."

I turned to the woman. In the electric torch's vivid light she was as delicately

modeled and exquisitely formed as a cameo.

"Who are you?" she whispered, fear touching the softness of her voice. "Whence comes that light?"

I tried to explain, but she did not understand. She said only, "Magic! You possess such a power as does John Cappadocia."

I shrugged and fell silent.

"My guard is dead," she said. "And no one's life is safe tonight." She pulled out a clinking chamois bag. From it she took three gold pieces, then put one back.

"See me to my dwelling—and these shall be for you."

I smiled at Tex who nodded and said, "We've got nothing else to do."

"Put away your money, lady," I said. "We'll see you home."

Almost covetously she put away the gold. "By Him Whose Blood shall save me," she muttered, "two men in Byzantium who refuse gold. It's unbelievable."

She laughed loudly, covered her face with the cloak.

"Come," she said, "and I will find a better reward."

We fell in beside her and hurried through the night—the most amazing night I was ever to experience.

## III

SHE was in haste and in no mood to talk, but she did answer some of my questions. She told me that the "Blues" and "Greens" were circus factions whose charioteers wore these colors. And such was the Byzantine's faith in his own that he fought for it, died for it, supported political officers who wore it.

"Now," she said bitterly, "because they hate John of Cappadocia, they revolt against the good, Christ-loving Basileus, Justinian, and wish to make Hypatius and Pompey emperors."

Hypatius and Pompey, it appeared, were two nephews of a dead emperor named Anastatius.

I knew my history and recognized this as one of the periodic palace revolutions that tore the entrails from the Byzantine Empire and finally destroyed it.

I remembered now Professor Modesta's questions about Theodora. I had nothing to do and a lifetime in which to do it. So I decided to investigate Theodora, chiefly to keep from going mad.

"Was Theodora a naked dancer in the circus?" I asked. "Was she as vile as they say?"

Her stride tripped. She recovered, said. "Who says Theodora was vile?"

"History," I replied. "Was she daughter of Acacious, the Keeper of the Bears?"

She ignored the question. "What else does history say of Theodora?"

"That she was greedy, revengeful, proud and cruel. That she wasn't beautiful but really a wanton."

The woman had paused now under a high wall. She took out a gold whistle and blew upon it softly. Amazed, I saw a large wicker basket, attached to a rope, descend slowly.

The woman waited until it struck the ground beside her. Then as she climbed in she said, "For men like you, I know one who will pay much for an important task. I will have the basket lowered. You will be drawn up in it."

She whistled again, and the basket ascended in the night.

I shook my head. "Someone rich and intriguing," I grinned. I was getting curious over this affair. The disappointment of finding ourselves here, not in Atlantis, was fading.

The basket descended again and I sent Tex up. There was no sound from above but the bumping of the basket as it came down again.

As I neared the top I heard oddly shrill feminine voices crying, "Who is this one? He weighs like lead."

I stepped out of the basket and through the window—and froze—amazed.

A hundred large wax candles sent a soft glow across a richly furnished room. I saw a dozen very fat men holding the rope while another, fatter than all the rest, stared at me with piggish eyes.

"What a big, fine man!" he tittered. His voice was high, shrill.

The woman said, "John, the Eunuch, silence! Take your eunuchs and go to the Gynacaeum. Speak to any one of this—and I'll flog your feet to ribbons."

The eunuchs genuflected.

"Oh, most Christ-loving beautiful Basilissa!" they chanted.

I started violently. Basilissa! The title of the Empress of Byzantium!

I swung on the woman who had thrown back the cowl. She was smiling at me.

"Who are you?" I muttered.

"My name," she replied, still smiling, "is Theodora. The same Theodora you say history calls a wanton."

WE SPENT the next two hours in the palace of the Byzantine Caesar, Justinian. In that time, much of absorbing interest occurred. But with so much to tell, I must summarize only those events which bear directly on the incredible episode that followed.

We sat, Tex and I, in the palatial rooms of Theodora. She had put on a shimmering dress of gold and jewels and on her fair hair was the diamond-studded diadem of the Basilissa. On her tiny feet were the purple buskins that only the ruling family may wear. In those moments, when slaves were not burnishing her hair, polishing her fingernails, spraying her with heavy exotic perfumes, she asked about my past, and to impress her I attempted to overwhelm her with facts about the Earth Union.

I did not (fortunately for us all) show her the cosmo-news-projector.

"But who is Basileus of this Earth Union?" she asked. "Who is the master?"

I explained that we had a democracy, elected a president and a board of directors of all the old nations.

"And do women take a hand in the government?" she asked.

I told her of famous women statesmen, women financiers, women in the arts.

"Then," she said, "had I lived in your time, I would be president, and possessor of all the wealth."

I grinned, nodded. "You are simply the astute business woman of your time."

"Now," she said, "we fight for power. Those who hate me would undermine me, blind me, cast me forth." Her eyes flashed. "They shall fail. I break the power of this rebellion by the old Roman axiom—'divide and rule.' "

Before I could learn more a man entered. The sight of him made her crouch, almost like a cat with its back up.

"John of Cappadocia!" she muttered. "What are you doing in the Gynacaeum?"

"To save your life, Most Holy Basilissa."

His voice was deep, but was it not also mocking? I stared at this great figure of history.

As Byzantine men went, he was handsome as a Greek Apollo. Tall, with a warrior's body, a noble face, he looked the patrician. But there was mercilessness in his hawk-like nose, cunning and ambition in his flashing eyes.

Theodora's purple shoe tapped the floor. Her nostrils flared with anger.

"I go now to Justinian to have him remove you as Praefect," she said.

John of Cappadocia smiled.

"Too late, beautiful Basilissa. Already Justinian fears for his life and prepares to flee to Egypt. You are to go with him."

"Who advised such a mad course?" she blazed.

"Belisarius, our brilliant Strategus, says he has not enough troops to defend the palace. The revolt grows. Pompey and Hypatius will be named the new emperors —and the palace will be attacked tomorrow."

"And who leads these revolters—you?"

"I?" Cappadocia thrust his hands palms outward. "You know it is Terenti the Isaurian who leads the citizens; Glodda leads the Goths and Vandals—"

"Glodda!" cried Theodora. "You love that Briton gladiatress. You would use Pompey and Hypatius as tools to seat yourself on the throne—and then wed Glodda. You are behind all this."

"You sadden me with such false charges." Now I knew Cappadocia was mocking her. I knew more. Theodora loved Cappadocia and, for some reason, he had

rejected her favors. She hated him and this Glodda with jealous madness.

She turned to the door.

"All your cunning, all your magic will fail," she said. "Here is magic greater than yours."

She gestured to Tex and me, and we followed her.

WE CAME, after endless passageways, to a huge, high-ceilinged room, one side of which was almost completely taken up by a huge fireplace, wide enough to accommodate whole tree trunks.

Men were here in golden armor; guards were thick with spear and sword; their weapons glittered in the glow of three hundred huge wax candles. In a single round-backed chair, covered with purple cloth, a man lounged. He was partly bald, wizened, and his face was tired and disillusioned. But on his feet he wore the purple buskins of the emperor, and men spoke to him timidly and bowed to the floor.

At the sight of Theodora, his eyes glittered and he jumped up. He looked sixty, but he moved with the agility of a man half that age.

"Beloved," he cried, "where have you been? We have not a moment to spare."

He kissed her hand. His gaze was fond, trusting. Whatever else history may say, Justinian the Great adored this former circus dancer.

"Much had to be done," she said, "and, Caesar, I have been about your affairs."

"Affairs?" he repeated. "Wife, I have but one thing important to do and that is to get at once to the Bucoleon, board a ship and flee this accursed place before it is too late."

"So you would let John of Cappadocia drive you from the throne like a beggar fleeing from the guards," she cried.

Justinian flushed. "Belisarius says the city is united against me. He has but three thousand troops. Against a half-million—they are useless."

A man in gold armor, fat and jovial of face, came forward gravely and genuflected.

"Most Christian Basilissa, show me one chance of success and I, Belisarius, will die to keep you on the throne."

She smiled coldly at the great Byzantine general. She pulled Justinian to one side and they whispered together for several moments.

"It's like a labor strike back home," Tex said. "But who will they throw to the dogs?"

"*John of Cappadocia*," I said. I was interested in the events as a man watches a play in the theater. But I did not see—then—how they concerned me.

Presently Theodora gestured. We bowed to the emperor, who nodded carelessly.

"These men have a magic light," said Theodora. "They can go unmolested through the city. They can carry out my plan, and by dawn the revolt will be smashed."

I wondered what her plan was. But she did not explain then.

Justinian said uneasily, "Suppose you fail?"

Then Theodora gave utterance to the statement that Procopius in his *Secret History*, and Gibbon in "The Decline and Fall of Rome" have preserved immortally.

"Most beloved Caesar," she said in a ringing voice, "death must come to us all, but those who have reigned should never survive the loss of dignity and dominion. Beware that the desire for life does not expose you to ignominious exile and wretched death. For me the throne shall be, if He who shall save me so wills, my glorious sepulchre."

He stared at her and I saw him catch fire from her imperious beauty and resolution.

"So be it," he said. "Send these men forth and let them do as they may."

She turned to me, her eyes aflame. "You do not wish wealth, you say, but I can offer you gratitude and the power of the throne's protection. Help us this night and whatever else history may say of Theodora, it will never deny her grateful patronage to you."

I looked at Tex. He shrugged and

grinned. "Why not? We've got nothing else to do."

"Basilissa," I said, "we will do as you wish."

"Then come." Her hand rested lightly on my arm and we went to the Gynacaeum.

"What are we to do?" I asked.

"Abduct this cursed Glodda and bring her to me," Theodora replied.

## IV

FOUR hours later—it was close to dawn—Tex and I stood again at the window where the fat eunuchs held the waiting wicker basket.

Theodora pressed into my hand a bagful of drachmae.

"But spread them thinly," she warned. "Zoe's people are rapacious."

I felt like laughing. With her throne at stake, Theodora still guarded a gold piece with miserly care. She sensed my amusement and flushed.

"I begged my bread in the Hippodrome as a child," she said. "For years, in Egypt, I knew no bed and nearly starved. You come to feel and bite a gold piece—after that."

I thrilled. "Then you are the daughter of Acacious? You did come from the gutter to a throne?"

"Yes," she said, "and on the throne I'll stay." She thrust me to the basket.

"Remember, have Zoe spread the word that Justinian and I have always supported the Blues. Why should they unite with their enemies, the Greens? Get that done—bring me Glodda—and I will rebuild Constantinoplis to please myself. Now, go and His Sainted Mercy, Our Saviour, look after you."

A moment later I was in the street, fully armored, and Tex stood beside me. Theodora had given me a map, so now I headed through the Court of Daphne to the Triclirium.

We had not gone two hundred yards, however, when shadows suddenly blocked our way ahead. I switched on the electric torch. The bitumium rays blazed like daylight.

"Dispense with your magic, Sir Strangers," said John of Cappadocia's voice, "I come as a friend."

He advanced boldly into the light. His men cursed in fear and hung back.

"What do you wish?" I said quietly.

"Your favor and support." He smiled easily. He had a fifty drachmae gold piece in his hand. He was palming it, making it vanish and reappear in a twinkling. So, I thought, that sleight-of-hand gets him a reputation as a magician. I waited.

"The Sacred Palace walls have ears for me," he said. "I know you go to stir up strife between the Blues and the Greens. To abduct Glodda and take her to Theodora and torture and death."

"Your spies are thorough," I said.

"When a man lives on the brink of a precipice," he said grimly, "he cannot seize false roots."

I waited again.

"I have sent a man to warn Glodda," he went on, "but that will be useless. She had a dream a few nights ago in which she was abducted. You probably do not understand the import of dreams to Byzantines."

"No," I said.

"Theodora dreamed she would be empress and the belief kept her alive when she would have died. Porphyrogenita dreamed she would die on a certain date—and did so."

He sighed. "Signs, portents, dreams. Byzantium lives by them. And so your magic light will prevail over all I could put in your way—and you can seize Glodda. Unless—" he paused.

"Unless we sell out to you?" I murmured.

"Gold won't buy you. You haven't the temperament to handle power. But I can offer you wealth, nobility—and leisure to run a laboratory to seek new miracles."

"No," I said.

He sighed again. "I thought so. In a moment I shall order my men to charge and slay you. They will probably fail. If they do fail, will you tell Glodda one thing?"

"What?" I asked.

"If she can escape you, she is to flee—to far off Britain. If she is captured, I shall see she has a quick poison. Tell her also not to trust Terenti."

Almost on the same breath his voice rose to a shout.

"Treason! Charge, soldiers of Byzantium, and slay the intruder."

HE DREW his sword in an instant and lunged at me, hacking, murderous intent in his every lineament. I barely had time to parry the thrust and had his men charged with him, that would have been the end of us.

But as I bounced around, parrying and lunging, the flashlight beam danced up and down. I happened at the same moment to catch John of Cappodocia a glancing blow on his helmet that drew sparks. The soldiers shrank back. Cappadocia laughed.

"Good blow, and you win. My message to Glodda, remember."

He jumped back out of the blinding light. His men had already fled. And in another instant he had vanished, too.

Tex sheathed his sword.

"He's a funny monkey," he muttered.

"Not funny," I rejoined as we walked on, "but devilish clever. He's up to something. He's got some scheme. I'd like to know what."

"Oh, well," said Tex, "if we play ball with Theodora and eat like we did tonight, we've got little to fret about."

We went on, in silence, to the Numero of the circus.

Under the cold moonlight the vast stands loomed emptily; the track around the gaily decked pylons was empty of chariots. From within the door to the performers' quarters came the raw scent of animals. A lion roared and a bear growled. And a huge yellow-bearded man, as Nordic as a Viking, stood guard at the portal.

"We wish to see Zoe, chief of the gladiatresses," I said.

He glared suspiciously, but led us within. Here was a vast, smelly room, lit by rush torches and wicks floating in oil. And men and women of rough mien drank and ate before a roaring fire. One of these, a tall, big-chested woman with huge legs and heavy thighs and shoulders, came to us.

I showed her the sacred image which Theodora had given us, to prove we came from her.

"From her?" she gave a start and pulled us to one side near a great bench. "Well, what?"

She listened as I outlined Theodora's plan and burst into a booming laugh. "Ah, she was always the fox. I'll have five score spreading the word. Wait."

She summoned the huge Viking. "Hogarth," she roared, "when Glodda spat on your love, you wanted revenge. Here is your chance."

The Viking listened, eyes glowing, huge knuckles crackling.

"Aye, I'll like that," he said. "Let us go now."

As he spoke a tiny figure darted out from under the bench and ran to the door.

"Basil the Mime," shrieked Zoe. "The cursed spy for Glodda. He heard, and he goes to tell her. Stop him, Hogarth."

But there was no stopping that dwarf. He was gone in a flash, and when we reached the street to the Forum of Constantine he had vanished.

"Aye," muttered Hogarth, "but I know a short cut—we'll still beat him. Come."

He ran and we could only follow.

"Who is this Glodda?" I panted.

"A cursed Angle of Britain, who is mad, but beautiful," he replied. "She talks of equality of man—equality of woman." He laughed. "She says some of us should not be slaves. And I would have taken her to wife—and I, free." He laughed again—not a pleasant sound.

"Say, Joel," said Tex, "I kind of like this Glodda."

The Viking grunted. "She says the Christian Christ proclaimed men equal. She is mad but—" He broke off suddenly and yelled, "By Thor's Hammer, what is this?"

We had rounded a corner that brought us into a triangle of cleared land lying between the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn harbor. In modern Istanbul it would

be about where the Sultan's seraglio stands.

Here was a vast throng of perhaps twenty thousand people. Hundreds of torches lit their upturned faces. Beyond, on a dais, stood a man and a woman. They both wore armor and you could tell which was the woman only by her slim legs and rounded thighs.

"Glodda and Terenti," said Hogarth. "By Wodin, she's planning something."

"We can't arrest her and take her out of twenty thousand people," I said.

Hogarth pushed through the crowd and Tex and I followed. As we got closer I could see the man, Terenti, gay in the green silks of a professional charioteer. He was popular and bowing to the crowd's cheers. Then I got a good look at Glodda. I saw, as she removed her helmet, the bronze hair which was like the flame of a torch. The dark velvet eyes, the alabaster skin.

I staggered, as a dizziness assailed me. I felt Tex's arm grip me.

"Look," I gasped. "That girl. It's *Neith!* My Neith!"

## V

I MUST have gone mad. I know I was fighting, pushing, driving my way to the dais. Tex was beside me. Then I vaulted two men, reached the dais, and seized the slim glorious body in my arms.

"Neith!" I cried. "At last I've found you."

For one breathless instant she stayed in my embrace, her lips on mine, her warm white cheek to mine. Then, with a thrust, she sent me hurtling back. Her eyes blazed, and her hand swung and slapped me halfway across the dais. A howl of surprised, delighted laughter greeted this.

"Run him through, Glodda," howled the mob.

"Hush!" she cried. "It is but a trick to turn us from the task. Have we, or have we not proclaimed Justinian and the unspeakable Theodora dethroned?"

"We have."

"And shall we name Hypatius and Pompey our Christ-loving Basileus to give comfort and security to us and freedom?"

"That we shall."

"Then rally our friends. Tomorrow we march on the Palace. If Justinian and his wanton wife do not leave—we'll drive them out."

A roar went up like thunder.

All this occurred while I regained some measure of sanity. Now, as Terenti yelled, "I'll get the weapons," I went to Glodda.

"Don't you remember anything?" I cried. "That night in Atlantis—the earthquake—the flood?"

She stared at me, came closer. "I thought it a trick, but I see you are mad. God's holy benison keep you—and go in peace."

I did not go; for here was the end of my quest.

Is there a spiritual manifestation called reincarnation? Is there a transmigration of souls? I do not know. All I knew then was that here, inches from me, was not Glodda, the gladiatress, but Neith, the Atlantide. How could I make her see that?

For the moment I could only bow humbly and say, "We are not mad, but only wish to follow and help."

She gave me a curious look. "Then come," she said kindly. "I will see you are not harmed."

In a daze of torn emotions I went with her. Forgotten was Hogarth, Theodora, all of it. What became of the Viking I knew not and cared less.

I stood beside Glodda (to give Neith her reincarnated name) when the tiny mime, Basil, brought warning.

"Do not trust these men, Glodda," he cried. "They conspire with Zoe and Theodora to capture you. Remember, through Zoe, Theodora murdered her own *son*—think of what will happen to you if you're caught."

Glodda said to me sternly, "Is this true?"

"It was true," I replied. "But it is not true now."

"A traitor to both sides, is he?" sneered Terenti. "They're dangerous—act now, Glodda, while you have time."

His inference was plain; the drawing of a jeweled poniard was plain. But before either Tex or I could draw to defend,

Glodda said, "Put away your weapon, Terenti." She gestured to me and we walked a way off together.

"Perhaps you are not mad," she said keenly. "The subtlety of the Byzantine brain perhaps has worked out a new scheme. I will listen."

I looked confused. She stamped her foot impatiently.

"Speak! When you spoke to me on the platform, what did you mean?"

THE words tumbled eagerly from my lips—everything from the moment Professor Modesta made me one of his time detectives to investigate the obscurities of the past. I could see she did not understand, was even skeptical until I came to the meeting with Theodora, the encounter with John of Cappadocia.

"John of Cappadocia! That charming rogue!" she exclaimed. "He grinds us down with taxes and blames Theodora and Justinian. Well, we shall see what he does with a new master."

I knew then that Theodora's suspicions were correct. Cappadocia secretly supported the rebellion. A twinge of jealousy swept me.

"Don't trust him," I said. "He gives loyalty to no one."

She ignored this.

"And Cappadocia told me to tell you not to trust Terenti," I added.

"I trust no one but the people," she said. "They have naught to lose but misery and wretchedness." She suddenly muttered, "By the Druid's oath, I shall be glad to leave their scheming, return to Britain where men have single tongues."

On that she walked away.

However, she gave orders that we were not to be molested, and we were present when Hypatius and Pompey were brought out to the cheers of the mob. They were two boys of twenty-odd, pale and fearful, yet hoping, too, that fortune would bring the purple buskins.

Tex muttered, "A couple of lily-fingers, Joel. She's headed for the double-cross, and trouble."

At another time his archaic words would have amused me. Now, I only frowned, thinking hard of what I might do to help her.

I never got the chance.

All during the morning I had been puzzling about Cappadocia's cryptic warning. Why had he wanted Glodda to flee? Despite the unwieldiness of the mob, Glodda and Terenti between them had it under control. If they stormed the palace, it must fall. And I knew enough of history to know that in a palace revolution such as this, once the palace falls, success is attained. If Glodda took the palace, then Hypatius and Pompey were Caesars. John of Cappadocia, having backed Glodda, would be powerful in the new administration.

Then why had he warned Glodda through me? What was he planning?

I got the answer to that too late.

Just before dusk Terenti made the suggestion that swept Glodda and the mob like a flame.

"Let us crown Hypatius and Pompey in the Forum of Constantine," he yelled. "And march to the palace and seat them on the thrones of the Caesars."

It was a good move, the spectacle would gather a hundred thousand people. Fired by their act, this mob would tear the palace stone from stone. But I scented a trap without knowing why.

Tex said, "Jeepers, a big crowd in a small corral means easy handling."

The scheme flashed complete to my mind.

Glodda was crying, "On to the Forum of Constantine!"

Already the mob had raised Hypatius and Pompey to their shoulders, temporarily crowned with laurel leaves.

I sprang forward. "Glodda," I yelled, "don't. It's a trap—you—"

Theodora's and Cappadocia's spies were plenty. Someone hissed, "The cursed Greens!"

A blow felled me to the ground. Half-dazed I heard Tex yell, the thud of a blow. Then, as I got to my knees, the hilt of a

sword struck me between the eyes. This time I lay where I fell, senseless.

## VI

IN a corner a rat sat on his haunches, gnawing on something he held in his forepaws. His eyes reflected a yellow light caught from the flame of a smoking rush flare. I watched him for a while, feeling a tremendous lassitude, and was amazed to find that it was all I could do to raise my hand.

At the movement of my arm there was a stir beside me. Tex said in a strained, taut voice, "Thank the Lord, you've come around, Joel."

I turned to look at him. I saw then that I was in a large oven-shaped cavern made of Roman half-brick. Bars were across one end. There were perhaps thirty men and women in it. There was no light save from the smoking torch.

"I don't feel so well," I said.

"You're lucky you're alive," Tex said. "You've been out of your head for nearly two weeks. I thought you were going to die."

"Where are we?" I asked.

"About as deep down as you can get," said Tex drily. "The lower tier of Theodora's private dungeons under the palace."

Memory struck me. "Glodda?" I cried.

At the sound of her name she came across the rotten foul straw and knelt beside me.

I said weakly, "I tried to warn you—it was a trap."

"I have listened to you for days," she said gently. "I understand much—now."

She went on to explain the trap; how with the main force of the rebellion in the Forum of Constantine, Belisarius and his three thousand veterans of the Persian and Illyrian wars, closed in and destroyed thirty thousand persons.(*) The Syrian slingers smashed the first defense, the Vandal archers completed the panic, and the heavily-armed Byzantine Legions hacked until the Forum was a ghastly shambles.

"John of Cappadocia had sold out to Theodora," she concluded, "and his man, Terenti, made the suggestion of the Forum. Only the Greens were butchered."

At the horrible memory she burst into tears.

But I was concerned only with her. My eyes switched to Tex. He shrugged.

"Most of the other prisoners were tortured and butchered. I don't know why they passed her up."

I wondered about that—about their sparing Glodda, the ringleader. Why?

I found out two days later.

Stronger now, I was summoned by the guards, literally dragged up endless flights of stone steps. Then I stood blinking in the presence of Theodora. She was in the act of kissing John of Cappadocia as the guards forced me to genuflect. She turned, looked at me, her nose wrinkled, and she waved a scented handkerchief before her nostrils.

Cappadocia smiled. "Matters take strange turnings in these times," he murmured. "You should be where I am, and I should be the grovelling wretch."

"And may yet be, dear Praefect," said Theodora.

She took from his pocket my flashlight.

"Why you are treacherous dogs I know not, save that you are infatuated with Glodda. Your magic light does not work for us. Tell me its secret, and you and Glodda shall suffer only quick poison. Fail and you shall be flogged to death."

I smiled. "The woman victor in the Earth Union always has mercy."

"The more fools they, for the enemy rises to strike again." She handed me the flashlight. "Make it to work."

A glance told me it was impossible. The bitumium hair-wires of the bulb had been destroyed when I fell. Without another, three thousand years away, it was useless.

"I cannot," I said.

"You lie," she cried passionately. "The people curse me now. With that as a holy emanation from Heaven, I shall be saint in my lifetime. Make it to work."

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(*) Procopius sets 30,000 as the total of the morning's massacre. Marcellinus, a later writer, says 40,000 and Theophanes 45,000 to 50,000.

I repeated that I could not.

"I shall make you," she muttered. "Take him below. I come in a moment."

"But without me, dearest Basilissa," murmured Cappadocia. "Glodda has the body of an angel. One hates to see a work of art destroyed."

I WAS shoved out of the room, hustled to the dungeon. My mind was in a turmoil. Glodda to be tortured, tortured to make me do the impossible. The thought made me shudder. Somehow, some way, I must prevent it.

But with the palace overrun with guards and soldiers, how? Hundreds against one! And yet, once beyond the walls of Theodosius, in Pera, the world was ours, Tex's, Glodda's, mine.

A surprise, a scare to their superstitious souls. I suddenly remembered the cosmo-news-projector. I clapped my hand to my pocket. The very thing!

But it was not there!

I groaned as the guards flung me headlong into the cell. I lay on the filthy straw. Tex and Glodda bending over me. A new thought struck me. Theodora wanted light; she must have the cosmo-news-projector. I would explain its workings, substitute it for the flashlight. I staggered to my feet. Even as I did so, the barred door opened. In the huge room outside stood Theodora.

Her face was implacable, her eyes flashing hatred.

"Bring her out," she called.

Glodda was seized, dragged past me.

"And him also."

I was brought out and Tex stood beside me.

"We could make it quick by wading in with both fists," he muttered.

"Theodora," I called, "that light cannot be repaired. But another, the cosmo-news-projector, throws almost as much—and pictures besides. Where have you put it?"

She did not understand. "You falter," she said. "Flog her."

The room was admirably fitted for torture. Handcuffs and leg chains hung from the wall. There was a steel helmet that could compress a man's brain to madness by a turn screw. There was an iron collar that could hold you on tiptoe to breathe and strangle you when the feet grew numb and failed you.

But the sight of Glodda's bared, beautiful back sickened me. I clenched my fists in frenzy. I tensed to jump at the flogger and his torturous cat-o'-nine-tails. But as he bared his arm and I started forward, Tex grabbed me.

"Here," he said. "I took it off you when you were sick. It gouged your side."

He handed me the cosmo-news-projector. I nearly fainted. The torturer cracked his ugly weapon with thunderous reports.

I whispered to Tex, "Leap up, put out that torch—and fall down in a fit. Yell!"

He did not know what I intended but he obeyed instantly. He gave a shout like a wild coyote's. He lunged upward, tore the torch from its sconce, and fell to the floor, rolling its flame out, howling like a banshee.

"A holy man who sees the coming of ghosts," I yelled. And with that I pressed the button of the cosmo-news-projector and directed the beam to the darkened wall.

## VII

THANK God, the cosmic-ray machinery functioned perfectly. On the wall came suddenly a brilliant light. Then, in natural color, came the president of the United States and of the Earth Union. He was laying a cornerstone for the Earth Justice Building. A dull subject, yes, but tremendous then.

"Fellow citizens of the Earth Union," came his sonorous voice, "we are gathered here this day for a memorable occasion. . . ."

He spoke English, and his words meant nothing. An instant later he spoke unheard anyway. Men screamed and bawled like calves.

"The second coming of Him to judge the quick and the dead," howled one.

Under cover of the noise I called to Tex, "Free Glodda. Get swords. Be ready to go fast."

If that dull scene produced chaos, the next made panic. Into the dungeon suddenly came eight madly running horses. It was the Florida Derby at Hialeah Park in Miami, brilliant in colored silks, the narrator's excited voice spilling suspense as to the outcome. But to the superstitious, terror-struck soldiery in the room it was charging cavalry.

"Christ's army charging to kill evil," one screamed.

There was a mad rush to get out of there. Men were trampled, killed even, in the hysterical fright. The scene shifted to the launching of a great ship.

Tex grabbed my arm. "I got Glodda. She's fainted. She's as scared as the rest."

By the light of the projector I saw her in his arms. I saw Theodora sink to the floor on her knees, head bowed to her clasped hands, praying a rapid, *"Ora pro nobis."*

"Carry the swords," I said, and took Glodda. I shut off the projector momentarily and we went out of there. Oh, the blessed fragrance of keen, biting night air! The feel of Glodda's warm body against mine. Tex took the cosmo-news-projector, and presently was back, not with three horses but *six!*

"A long fast ride, and they'll bog down," he said.

I tell you that at sight of us in the Sacred Palace yard, seasoned veterans ran like babies. Some hurled themselves to the ground and lay as if dead. Belisarius appeared to still the tumult and the cosmo-news-projector flashed once—and he vanished.

Yet when, mounted at last, we trotted from the yard to the Pera bridge road, we were pursued. A moment before I had laughed joyfully and said, "Every soldier in Byzantium will be under the bed by now."

Nonetheless, we saw under the cold sterile moonlight the flash of accoutrement of some twenty men. We reached what is now the Galata bridge to Pera well ahead of them, but on the steep escarpment of the other side we lost ground. Glodda had not recovered her senses and my horse carried double. At the crest we saw a mile ahead the beacons of the gate through the wall of Theodosius.

I tried to shake Glodda to her senses. I was partly successful but she was in no condition to ride. Under my cloak her arms crept around me, her dear face was against my neck.

Her voice was warm.

"You are a genie who makes warriors come out of nothing," she said, "but if you can do that, then what you say of knowing me long ago is also true."

I laughed exultantly. What mattered it now if I was stranded in the trap of time? Her voice was unafraid; it held a tender accent that told me all I wanted to know.

"In Britain, we three against all," I laughed. "We'll give modern civilization to the Gauls. We'll make your people masters of the world."

ON WE rode. A glorious gallop toward the flaring beacons. At a moment like that a man knows no fear. He understands no defeat. He rides the confidence of victory.

Yet before we reached the gate, prepared to startle those Byzantines out of a year's growth, arrows hissed past us, and the pursuit was at our heels.

Tex's horse was transfixed by an arrow. He plunged to the ground.

"Keep going," Tex yelled. "I'll hold them."

But I stopped, pulled up the horse, caracoling.

"Down," I said to Glodda, "and fear nothing you see."

I felt her slide, jumped myself and jerked out the cosmo-news-projector. I hurried to stand beside Tex, sword in the other hand. I clicked the switch, but all I succeeded in doing—having no reflector wall—was creating a multi-colored light that lit up the pursuers.

The man leading the group, laughing with sword upraised, was John of Cappadocia.

"These are vandals who fear neither God nor man," he laughed, "and long ago the Patriarch said my soul was doomed to perdition as an unbeliever."

Yet his men hung back somewhat, dazzled, I suspect, by the blinding light. But how long would that hesitation last?

Suddenly I shifted the projector beam squarely in John of Cappadocia's eyes. I sprang forward and aimed a blow at his steel casque. He dodged nimbly. His parry held me fast. Then suddenly he dodged another blow—not mine. Beside me, hacking at him, was Glodda.

"Glodda!" he cried and fell back, sword point lowered. He seemed utterly astonished.

She waited, ready. Tex suddenly appeared on his flank.

I laughed and said, "Your Vandals may get us, Cappadocia, but we'll get you first."

He did not seem to hear.

"Go you with this man willingly?" he asked Glodda.

She did not hesitate.

"Even eagerly," she replied steadily. "Before him was nothing—without him nothing also is."

It was awkward phrasing but she meant it. You could see that in her eyes, the slight smile on her lips.

John of Cappadocia sighed. "By Bacchus!" he muttered. "Know you why I am here?"

He did not wait for an answer.

"The thought of Theodora flaying the skin from your soft white back drove me mad," he said. "I gathered these Vandals to raid the dungeon and release you."

"To what end?" Glodda asked. "Both of us would have died."

"No," he said quietly. "Both of us would have lived—together, inseparable. We would have fled to the Vandals."

Glodda stared incredulously.

"You would have given up—praefect, wealth, power—Theodora?"

"Such," smiled Cappadocia sadly, "was my intention." He sighed again. "But if it is this magician you love, then I must return and fasten on my golden shackles and smell Theodora's horrible perfumes until I sicken of it and plot against her again."

I looked at the man, amazed. History had painted him ruthless, ambitious, mad for wealth. These he might be, but he was also a man. He loved a woman enough to yield everything.

"I could take you," he said thoughtfully, "but you wouldn't come willingly."

"I'd die first," said Glodda.

"Well, then," said John of Cappadocia, "your decision stops me from being the greatest fool of the Byzantine world. Mount, all of you, and I will escort you to the gate and see you through."

AND he did just that. The guards never questioned him, the Praefect. He rode through until we stood on the Illyrian road.

"One thing, Quaite," he said, and my name came haltingly from his tongue.

"Yes?" I said.

"That miracle machine. With only the cabals of a scheming patriarch and Theodora's jealous fits, I have little to keep me from being bored. Your machine—it will make the golden bonds of Theodora's love and Justinian's trust endurable."

On a sudden decision I handed him the projector, told him how it worked. It would run, I said, for some twenty more hours.

He nodded, turned his horse. His eyes rested momentarily on Glodda.

"The unattainable," he murmured, "how man wishes for it!"

He rode back with his Vandal archers. We rode steadily ahead, making good time now that Glodda had her own horse. We were silent for some time, I content to feel Glodda's soft hand in mine. But I saw Tex's horse-like face and a thought I had held recurred.

"There is reincarnation, Tex," I said, "and somewhere Tara waits for you as Neith—I mean Glodda—waited for me."

"I intend to do a lot of looking," he said, and suddenly grinned, hope in his honest eyes.

Through the night we rode and on across the Anatolian plains, always headed west. And then, one morning, two things happened.

We had crossed snow-clad passes in what is now the Balkans, Bulgaria, Jugoslavia and Cisalpine Gaul. We had forged ever on, bluffing bandits and wandering hordes when we could, running when we could not. I was knowing a happiness that gave my heart content.

On this morning Glodda looked across the bleak wintry land at a blue sheen on the horizon.

"The Seine!" she cried. "This is Gaul—and beyond is Britain."

She sniffed the air. She flung her arms around me.

"A few more days," she said, "and we have reached the end of the long journey."

I bent to kiss her. My body froze with her lips inches from mine.

Tex yelled, "My God, Joel, it's come—it's—"

"Glodda! Neith!" I yelled, and my voice died in my own ears. I felt my body disintegrating, being destroyed from within.

"Joel!" Glodda's face was in my bulging eyes.

Then I dissolved and ceased to be.

## VIII

THE door to the oxydyl-durolo box opened and the brightness of sunlight flooded in. Framed in it was the huge round head of Professor Modesta. He stared anxiously, and then burst into a delighted laugh.

"They're alive and well," he yelled. "St. John! Stephanie! They're all right."

He helped me step from the box into the laboratory. Tex came after me, rubbing his eyes. Modesta was shaking my shoulders, "Answer me! Where have you been? What—"

"Byzantium!" I said wearily. "Constantinoplis!" I felt through my pockets and came upon the notebook of goldbeaters skin, the pencil made of tanned leather.

"I took notes," I said, "of the Nika revolt. They're all here."

I gave them to him.

He cried out in delight and immediately ignored us to delve into the facts I had brought back. St. John stood staring at us sullenly.

"You should be dead," he muttered. "Professor Modesta has worked night and day to repair the Helkes equation dial—to save you from being stranded in time."

So! That was why I had been snatched from Glodda's arms.

"I'm not laughing for joy that he fixed it," I said.

I caught Stephanie Claire's glance through the eye-pieces of her mask.

"Is there reincarnation?" I suddenly said. "I found Neith—her and no other—" and I rapidly told what had taken place, with Tex nodding as I spoke. Unknown to me, Modesta also listened eagerly.

"Good God!" he exclaimed when I had finished. "You're certain it was not racial

resemblance? Not similar hair, bone structure?"

"I'm positive," I snapped. "A man knows the truth—in here." I touched my chest.

Stephanie had been watching the expression on my face. Now she nodded excitedly.

"He speaks the truth," she cried. "Professor, this fact might account for the mutations—the freaks—such as Joel and myself and Tex. The persistence of a soul."

"If this be true," muttered Modesta, "you have discovered a metaphysical fact that will startle the world." He paused. Then: "Yet this is not enough proof. If on your next trip into time you meet her again, then I could make a statement to the world—"

"I'll meet her," I said confidently. "She lives eternally in time—as do we all."

When he stood silently thoughtful I added eagerly, "And we're ready to go—now—into time—anywhere."

"Later," he said kindly. "After you have rested. Then you shall explore the very womb of history," his voice rose excitedly. "Every day we see wheels revolve—but who invented the principle of the wheel? The American Indian never learned it and drew branches loaded with material behind his horses. Who invented the wheel?"

He seized my arm.

"Who discovered the use of fire? Who was the man who tied a sharp stone on the end of a stick and propelled it through space to strike down an enemy which he could not reach with his hands?"

He sighed. "I have examined the caves of the world. Those where the Java man was found; the Neanderthal man, the Piltdown man—those very half-human creatures of a half-million years ago who became man himself. They left drawings on the wall. But no history. No way of telling how the spear, the javelin, the wheel, the fire came into being."

"Neith will be there," I said. "We'll go tomorrow—eh, Tex?"

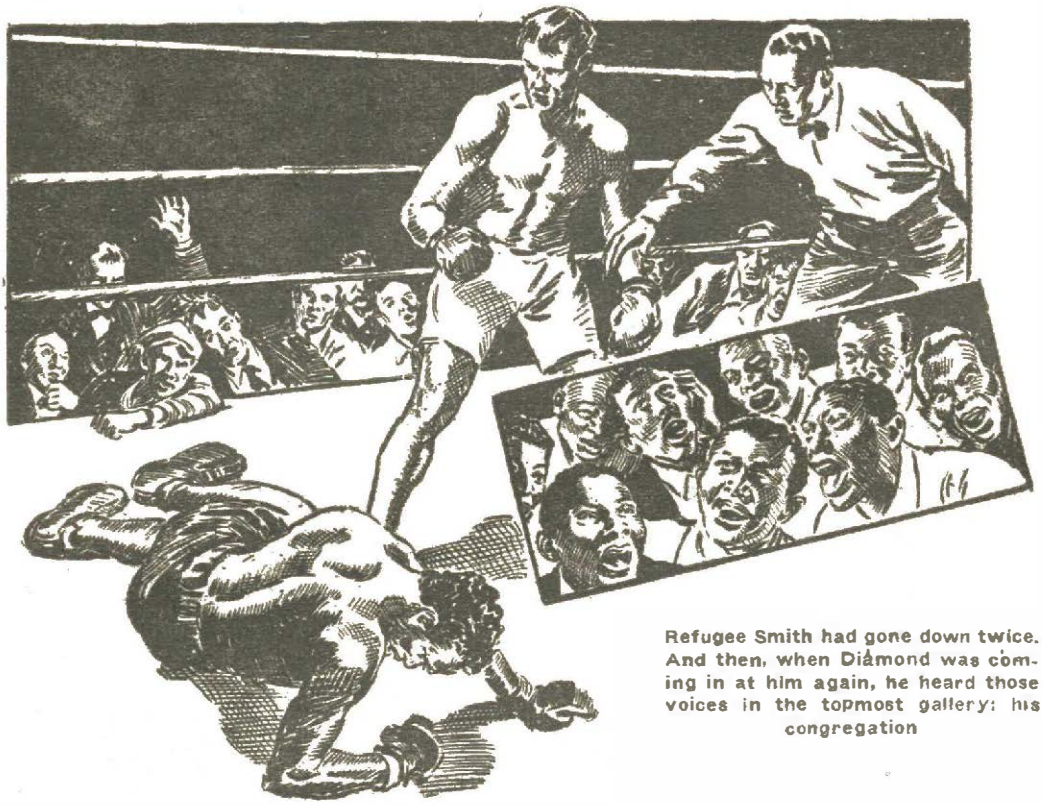
"Why not?" grinned Tex but I knew what he was hoping—for Tara.

"You'll go back," continued Modesta, "before the earth grew cold and the glaciers came. Before the earth was too intolerable for dinosaurs and the great lizards who crept out of the steaming shallow seas. You shall see the world in the pain of being born."

He clapped me on the back. "And if you find this Neith—this Glodda—I shall proclaim, on my reputation as a scientist, that the soul of man is indestructible and immortal."

I smiled at Stephanie Claire. "We will leave tomorrow."

And together, filled now with hope, Tex and I walked to the yellow helicopter and flew back to my father's house.



Refugee Smith had gone down twice. And then, when Diamond was coming in at him again, he heard those voices in the topmost gallery: his congregation

# Marching as to War

By EUSTACE COCKRELL

Author of "Reservation on Queer Street," "An Eye for an Eye," etc.

**Up an' at 'em, dark-skinned boy. This here's a good fight you're fightin', an' the congregation of righteousness is sure-nuff behind yo'. And remember: the cat did not get up until he heard the man say nine**

WILLIE WURTZEL jiggled the sliding weight on the bar and held his breath. The bar stayed up. Willie let his breath go in a long sigh and with a finger that trembled with reluctance moved the weight one notch to the right. Still the bar stayed up.

Willie looked up at the big black man on the platform of the scale, moved the weight still another notch to the right and watched it bring the bar down to balance.

Refugee Smith, standing nearly naked on the platform of the scale, looked down at Willie Wurtzel with a little frown creasing his forehead. "I feels right ga'nted, Mister Willie. Can I have a drink of water?"

Willie Wurtzel looked at the ground. "Go up to the house," he said, "and get you a half a glass of water outta the tap and drink it real slow and while you're drinkin' it suck you a lemon."

Refugee Smith grinned wanly. "It's a good thing I don't crave to spit," he said stepping down from the scales, " 'cause I couldn't get it done."

When Refugee had gone Willie Wurtzel

turned and looked at the round little man across the scale from him. "Well, Sudsy," Willie said, "that's that."

Sudsy McGuire pushed his derby back and mopped the sweat from his brow with the back of a pudgy hand. "Hunnert sixty-two," Sudsy said. "Today's Satdee. Monday mornin', eleven o'clock the black boy makes hunnert sixty or it costs you a gee what you've posted. He's drawed too fine now. If we steam it offen him he won't be able to hoist his hands."

"What the blazes you tellin' me that for?" Willie snarled. "I got you up here as a trainer not to tell me a bunch of stuff I already know too well."

"There ain't but one thing we can do," Sudsy went on. "We got to get him in a rubber suit and put him over the road tomorrow and then we got to keep him dryin' out 'til Monday mornin'. That won't weaken him so bad as the steam."

WILLIE WURTZEL shut his eyes, shaking his head from side to side. "I can't put that boy through that," he said.

He paused. "Sudsy," he went on passionately, "I picked that boy up out of the river and I kept him from bein' a preacher like he wants to be by tellin' him that if he gets to be a champion he'll have more of a swing with his congregations. I can't hardly bring myself to make him take such a beatin' as he'll have to take if he makes sixty."

Sudsy McGuire, who in Willie Wurtzel's opinion was the best trainer and second in the business, took off his derby hat and fanned himself with it. "He's a natchal light-heavy," Sudsy said logically. "What did you get him on with Daisy for?"

"Daisy's a big name," Willie said. "And this boy of mine is hot in River City. I've fought him sixteen times, the last four here. He's murdered their local hopes and ain't drawed a deep breath. If he beats Daisy he'll be the contender."

Sudsy's mouth fell slightly more ajar than it usually was. "You don't mean you're shootin' with the eight ball, Willie?"

Willie Wurtzel's face took on a slightly pained look. "Listen, Sudsy," he said ominously. "Me an' Refugee Smith, we're strictly on the level, see. That gee I got posted, that's strictly the mahoskey. We're tryin' to win 'em all. I've changed, Sudsy."

Sudsy McGuire let this penetrate for a moment. "Well," he said finally, "that's different. I natchally thought that the Daisy's crew had it set. Why, Daisy's tryin' to get a record. Didn't they say nothin', didn't they? . . ."

Willie Wurtzel walked over to the door of the barn where the indoor ring was and looked down the hill at the house. He could see Refugee Smith sitting on the steps of the porch.

Refugee held an empty glass in one big black hand, a limp lemon in the other. He looked dusty black. He wasn't sweating even in the heat.

"Yeah," Willie said, not turning around. "They come to me, Sudsy, but we didn't deal."

"Jeepers," Sudsy said, "I'd a thought they'd of tried to set it before they signed."

"Refugee hadn't beat nobody," Willie Wurtzel said. "He ain't fought but sixteen times. They didn't think it worth while 'til he kicked over Frankie Kline." He walked on out the door and toward the house. Sudsy followed.

IT WAS hot up in the country, and nobody was there but Willie and Sudsy and Refugee Smith. The sparring partners had gone down the day before.

*The* sparring partner, rather. Willie had been able to afford one spavined welterweight for Refugee to work with the one week he took him to the country to train for his first big fight.

Willie was doing the cooking. The farm he was getting rent free from a friend who had alternately run a training camp and gambling store on the property; but that had been back in the days when River City and its surrounding country was run by another political faction.

Willie Wurtzel walked up the steps, reached down and ran his hand through

his fighter's thick black hair. "Only two more days, boy," he said, "and then we'll drink a gallon of beer and eat steaks two inches thick."

Refugee Smith looked up and licked dry lips. He summoned a grin. "Mister Willie," he said, "I woulda thought it a most kindly thing iffen you hadn't said about them things you said about."

Willie walked on into the house and picked up his typewritten sheets. The carbon he kept, the other, again out on the porch, he gave to Refugee.

"Okay," be said. "Let's get at our home work."

Refugee reached out and took his sheet and an eagerness came into his face. Willie settled himself beside him on the step.

"The rat was a hooker," Refugee read haltingly, "but the cat held his left paw out in front of him and kept his left—left shooder . . ."

"Shoulder," Willie said.

"But c-o-u-l-d," Refugee protested, spelling out the word, "spells cood."

"It's screwy," Willie said sympathetically, "but it ain't my fault."

". . . shoulder up hiding his chin and hooked his right paw to the body when the rat put a left jab to his heed."

"Head," Willie said.

Sudsy McGuire appeared from the door. He had a toothpick in his hand and was wielding it in conjunction with loud sucking noises when it proved unequal to its task. "Sunnay school?" he inquired goodnaturedly.

"Mister Willie," Refugee said reverently, "is ateachin' me to read writin'."

"What's this about the cat hookin' his right?" Sudsy went on.

"I'm teachin' him to read," Willie said, "and I got a lotta books and they was all about the cat and the rat so I just figured I'd write my own and learn him a little about fightin' as he went along. Might as well," he added apologetically.

"Readin's a great thing," Sudsy opined, drifting casually toward the door and the kitchen. He chuckled reminiscently. "Didja see L'il Abner this mornin'?"

But Refugee Smith wasn't listening. He was crouched over his paper. "The cat was c'nocked down—"

"Knocked."

". . . knocked down but he did not get up until he heard the man say nine. . . ."

WILLIE came out of the house the next morning and he had the rubber suit and the sweatshirts in his hand. He looked at Refugee lying in the porch hammock.

"Boy," he began haltingly, "I hate to tell you this but you gotta hit the road today."

Refugee Smith looked up and he didn't smile. "But it's Sunday, Mister Willie."

"I know," Willie said, "but you got to. You got to take off a coupla pounds."

Refugee Smith set his face bleakly. "I can't work on Sunday, Mister Willie. It's wrote down in The Book."

"But, but—" Willie Wurtzel looked down at his fighter's face and stopped. He walked up and down the porch. "But preachers work on Sunday!" he shouted. "That's their hardest day."

"Preachin's different," Refugee said inexorably. "That's the Lord's work."

Willie Wurtzel took a couple of more turns up the porch. Finally his expression of deep gloom lifted a little. "Would you preach?" he said. "Would you give a little sermon if I got you a congregation up here?"

Refugee Smith jumped out of the hammock. "You reckon I could do it?"

Willie Wurtzel said slowly: "You won your first fight not knowin' nothin' about fightin'. You gotta start with prelims in any racket. You could kinda take a trial flight up here in the country and if you didn't do so good you could train some more just like for a fight."

"Oh, boy!" Refugee exclaimed. "Lemme get to thinkin'."

Willie Wurtzel disappeared into the door in search of Sudsy. He found Sudsy at the refrigerator. He gave Sudsy the last money in his wallet. "This'll be enough to

get 'em all gallery tickets and hire the truck," he said. "Now this is what I want you to do."

Willie talked fervently and explicitly for five minutes. Sudsy nodded dazedly.

"And don't forget the coat," Willie finished as Sudsy set off down the back steps for his car and River City.

IT WAS several hours later when Johnny Tirandelli ran into Sudsy. Johnny Tirandelli found Sudsy in a bar where Sudsy was having a couple of beers after the somewhat arduous task of rounding up a Prince Albert coat, nineteen indigent colored men, and a truck owner who would haul them all up to the farm.

Sudsy was pleased. He had gotten the coat from a friendly undertaker for nothing; and since he had thus saved the two dollars Willie had given him, he felt entitled to spent it on beer.

But Johnny Tirandelli found him; and thus it was that Johnny Tirandelli—who managed Daisy Diamond, middleweight contender, and who spoke in terms of a *hundred* dollars—made a deal with Sudsy McGuire and assigned Sudsy McGuire a task in event of emergency.

The deal between Sudsy McGuire and Johnny Tirandelli was closed, ironically, at the exact moment that Refugee Smith climbed into the ring of the sweltering training shed and gazed happily down at the faces of nineteen apathetic gentlemen of his race, who had come up to listen to him on promise of a gallery ticket to his fight.

Beaming, clad in wool pants, high collar, and Prince Albert coat, Refugee allowed that he was going to preach on "true frenship and prayer." His voice was husky with emotion.

As the fighter swung into his work, Willie Wurtzel watched anxiously for any sign of moisture on that black and shining brow. But among Refugee's other listeners there was a quickening of interest from another source.

Refugee Smith was giving them everything he had. He recounted in graphic pungent phrases his own experience of jumping from a river boat thinking he'd killed a man in a dice game, and swimming until he could swim no more, and praying until he could pray no more, and finally of vowing to give his life to the ministry if he was saved.

". . . and the Lord sent Mister Willie and Mister Willie pulled me out. And the Lord was in my corner the first time I fit and I smote the man down. And ever after the Lord and Mister Willie has been in my corner and whilst I has learnt to box some better . . ."

The truck driver standing beside Willie Wurtzel leaned over. "Pal," he said, "is that there the real McCoy?"

Willie Wurtzel looked up. "Yeah," he said. "I'd got in a little argument and they was fixin' to go over me so I run down and jumped in a boat and I rowed out in the river and found that boy and I've had him ever since."

And Refugee Smith just then, for the first time, struck audible spiritual paydirt. A small brown man, at the rear of Refugee's sparse audience gave in. "Amen!" he chanted.

Refugee walked to the edge of the ring and took the top rope in his hands, bunched his shoulders in his black coat and gave. And Willie Wurtzel, watching tensely, grinned.

A single drop of sweat rolled down Refugee Smith's blunt nose, teetered there a moment, then dropped. And as if by signal, prearranged, the fattest sleepiest member of Refugee's audience shook the rafters with a fervent "Hallelujah!"

Willie Wurtzel walked out of the barn and to the house. Sitting there on the porch, two hours later, he heard the booming, heart-tightening strains of *Onward Christian Soldiers* sung by men of voice who were at that moment, anyway, willing to man the front line trenches in that army.

The next morning at eleven o'clock a gaunt, thirsty and happy Refugee Smith weighed in for his fight that night. He weighed one fifty-nine and three-quarters.

WILLIE WURTZEL leaned over, felt Refugee's gloves, patted him once on the shoulder and said: "What about it?"

Refugee Smith grinned. "I feels frisky," Refugee said. "That eatin' and drinkin' you lemme do done cured me up. I feels hostile."

"All right," Willie said. "This Daisy is very good. He'll box you daffy; but crowd, bull him around, lean on him, rassle him, and hit him in the belly. I'll tell you when to go to work on his head."

Sudsy McGuire busied himself with his bottles and towels, not looking up. Sudsy felt a little poorly. He hoped fervently that Daisy would box this colored boy silly and he wouldn't have to do what he knew now, looking across at Johnny Tirandelli in Daisy's corner, that he might have to do.

Johnny Tirandelli looked very grim; and sitting at the ringside under Daisy's corner were two other characters who looked as if they kind of hoped Sudsy would try to cross Johnny Tirandelli because he was such a round little man and so easy to hit with something, like say a bullet.

The bell broke his thoughts.

Daisy Diamond was a good fighter. A good boxer; fast, smart, strong. He bewildered Refugee for a couple of rounds, stabbing him, marking his right eye; but Refugee Smith bulled in and he got a couple of shots at Daisy under the heart and Daisy moved a little slower thereafter.

Willie Wurtzel was pleased. In the minute between the fourth and fifth round, he asked Refugee again: "What about it, boy?"

"I'm gettin' my second wind," Refugee said. "I feels right coltish."

"Has he hurt you?"

"Nawsir. But I'm fixin' to hurt him."

"Go on like you been goin'," Willie said. "There's six more rounds."

Sudsy scrambled down with Willie at the bell. "That smoke is bull-strong," he said a little nervously, "but Daisy's stabbin' him silly."

Willie Wurtzel grinned.

Sudsy McGuire reached back and fingered the small clean towel in his hip pocket, and he looked up to see the black man crowd Daisy to the ropes, take a jarring hook on the chin but still ram home both hands solidly to the white man's body.

Daisy Diamond's mouth flew open and he boxed his way out to the center of the ring through sheer instinct. The black man followed him stolidly. Sudsy McGuire stole a glance at Daisy's corner and Johnny Tirandelli nodded emphatically. The bell found Daisy walking to the wrong corner.

Willie Wurtzel leaned down. "Okay, boy," he said. "Come up."

Refugee Smith leaned back, and let Sudsy wipe his face and expertly close a little cut. He straightened up a little with the ten-second buzzer; and Sudsy McGuire reached into his hip pocket with trembling hands, bent over and unfolded the towel, then drew it quickly across Refugee Smith's eyes.

The bell rang. Sudsy McGuire was halfway up the aisle.

REFUGEE SMITH stood up and whimpered like a puppy. Both his hands were at his eyes and he was standing there, not moving.

Willie Wurtzel half jumped, half climbed to the ring apron, stood up and screamed something; but his scream was drowned by the bellow of the crowd as Daisy hurrying across swung his left, and pivoting, his right. Refugee was down.

Refugee Smith got his hands away from his eyes and the tears were streaming out of them and the muscles of his face and cheeks were twitching with the pain.

And then Willie Wurtzel—watching him, cursing the referee, Sudsy, and the man who discovered pepper—saw Refugee start moving his lips; and Willie Wurtzel knew what he was saying.

". . . the rat knocked the cat down but the cat did not get up until he heard the man say nine . . ."

Refugee Smith climbed to his feet. He

was trying now to keep his eyes open, and part of the time he was successful. He still moved his lips. ". . . the rat was a hooker but the cat held his left paw out and kept his left shoulder up hiding his chin . . ."

Daisy Diamond set himself, feinted needlessly and slammed his right glove deep into Refugee's body. As Refugee's hands came down involuntarily Daisy dropped him with a whistling lefthook.

Refugee Smith took "nine."

Willie Wurtzel was screaming. "Grab him, grab him!"

Refugee moved down along the ring holding to the top rope with one glove, and Daisy Diamond came in. Then—above the screams of Willie Wurtzel, above the feminine screams to stop the fight—from the highest gallery came nineteen male voices in one concerted reverberating, full-throated expression of militant hope.

The members of Refugee Smith's first congregation were pulling all the stops. *"Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war . . ."*

Refugee Smith turned, and with both arms wide out lunged. He caught Daisy Diamond around the waist, and his rush carried them both to the opposite ropes.

Then Refugee started moving. Holding, pushing, taking blows, fighting against the referee's efforts to make him break, he worked Daisy Diamond into a corner.

Refugee Smith got his legs wide apart, pulled back his hands and started swinging.

*. . . going on before . . .*

Daisy went into his shell, ducked, and tried to butt his way out. Refugee brought him up, blood spurting from his nose, held him a moment, pushed him back into the corner and let go with both hands for where he thought Daisy Diamond's jaw ought to be; and this time it was there.

REFUGEE SMITH'S congregation was still singing when Willie Wurtzel led him up the aisle behind the men who were carrying Daisy Diamond.

"I'll kill Sudsy, boy. I'll cut his heart out. We'll get that pepper out of your eyes soon as we get to the dressing room. And I promise you I'll kill Sudsy for you. He'll never do—"

Refugee Smith gripped Willie Wurtzel's arm. "No," he said, "don't do that. We'll find him some time. I allow he's a real hard case."

He gripped Willie's arm a little harder. "I craves," Refugee Smith said, "to prove myself, and the way I aims to prove myself is to lead him up to Grace."

And suddenly it seemed that every one in the big hall was singing and the singing could be heard a long way off. Three blocks, anyway; because Sudsy McGuire, waddling as swiftly as he could up a side street, heard it; and his flabby face twitched.

Then there were footsteps. Sudsy darted up the steps, tugged at the door and was inside. Only the candles were there for light and he was alone. And still he heard the singing.

Carefully he bent over and took off his shoe. Then he took the new hundred-dollar bill and went over to the mite box. When he came out of the church he felt good. It was fine not to be afraid of footsteps in the dark.

It was good.

He turned and headed back toward the Coliseum.

**The Master Quack of the Cosmos appears in Jack Williamson's**

**RACKETEERS IN THE SKY**

***Coming in next week's Argosy***

# Señor Devil-May-Care

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

WHEN one of the ragged peon girls brought to dance at DON ESTEBAN DE LA ZAMORA'S fiesta turns out to be the proud SENORITA MARIA GODINES in disguise, Don Esteban has unwittingly committed an outrage. The girl's two devoted admirers, JUAN FELIZ and MARCOS CHAVEZ, swear to avenge her; and in order to protect the young hotbloods from a matchless swordsman, the governor of Alta California sends Don Esteban to San Diego de Alcala.

But that is not the governor's only reason for the temporary banishment. Don Esteban —called SENOR DEVIL-MAY-CARE—has served him before on secret missions, and now it will be his duty to outwit a plot to overthrow the governor. The principal in this treasonable scheme is DON JOSE DEL RIO, a nobleman who feels that he has been politically slighted. His allies are his son MANUEL, his beautiful daughter ANITA, and the pig-like MIGUEL BROCAMONTE, a wealthy merchant.

SHORTLY after his arrival in San Diego de Alcala, Don Esteban is summoned to the mission by FRAY FRANCISCO, and there he swears an oath that he will not use his sword for sixty days except in self-defense. Don Esteban does not know that Juan Feliz

**This story began in the Argosy for September 21**

and Marcos Chavez are already on their way to San Diego. He is greeted with fitting ceremony by Don José del Rio, who has already decided that Señor Devil-May-Care will make an excellent ally in the plot to overthrow the governor. After all, Don Esteban has been banished, a victim of the governor's harsh hand.

But Esteban de la Zamora brings only grief to the plotters. He insults Brocamonte; and when the infuriated merchant tries to stir up the peons against him, Don Esteban quickly wins their allegiance. He manages, too, to convince Brocamonte that the del Rios are planning to throw him over; and so that fat trader goes to Don José with an outrageous proposal. Unless he is given Anita for a wife, he will no longer support the del Rios in their plan for revolution. Having broached this, he is ordered out of the del Rio hacienda.

SO TREASON is not faring any too well. But Don Esteban knows that agents of Brocamonte's have already begun to incite an uprising among the natives in the hills. Don Esteban has sent one GONZALES, a trusted servant of the governor, into the back country to counteract the work of Brocamonte's men.

Then Manuel del Rio, incensed at Señor Devil-May-Care challenges him to a duel. But Don Esteban remembers his oath; he cannot defend his honor for sixty days. Returning to his inn, smoldering with anger, Señor Devil-May-Care is suddenly confronted by Juan Feliz and Marcos Chavez. Chavez flatly calls him a coward, and that is too much. His oath momentarily forgotten, Don Esteban rushes at the young caballero. . . .

## CHAPTER XVI

### PAYMENT POSTPONED

MARCOS CHAVEZ retreated a step in the face of Don Esteban's furious and determined advance. Juan Feliz gave a cry of nervous alarm. This rough and tumble was not at all to his duellist's taste. The expression on Don Esteban's face was murderous.

But he did not whip his blade from its scabbard. Instead, he seized Marcos Chavez by the arms and hurled him back against the wall and pinned him there.

"Give me attention, *señor!*" he said. "I am under oath not to give or accept challenge for a certain period of time, and that oath was not of my asking. I promise you this . . . I shall make an attempt to be released from the oath. If I can be, it will give me the greatest pleasure, *señor,* to meet you and your companion, at once or singly, and to teach you the last lesson you will learn on earth."

He released Marcos Chavez violently and stepped back, breathing heavily, his eyes snapping and face hotly colored. Marcos Chavez gasped in anger. When he could speak, he said:

"You have dared lay hands on me—"

"Do not torment me further, or I may forget myself to the extent of forgetting my oath also. Keep out of my sight!" Don Esteban stormed.

Boots suddenly ground the gravel outside the door, and Capitán Angelus strode in.

"What have we here?" the *capitán* asked. "More trouble? Is this to be a day of brawls?"

"This is an affair between gentlemen, *señor,* and does not concern the soldiery," Juan Feliz said.

"I am the *commandante* of this district, *señor,* and *all* affairs here concern me," Angelus replied. "Your arrival has just been reported. You are travelers off El Camino Real, but you have not complied with the regulations by stopping at the *presidio* to leave your names, rank and business."

"We were eager to confront Don Esteban de la Zamora as soon as possible, *señor,*" Marcos Chavez said. "He evaded our challenge in Monterey—"

*"Señor!"* Don Esteban roared in warning.

Capitán Angelus lifted his hand in a demand for attention. "Let us step into the patio, *señores,* where I will have something to say to you in private," he ordered. "Kindly lead the way, Don Esteban."

Don Esteban tossed up his head and strode through the doorway, and the others followed. The landlord closed the door at the *capitán's* gesture. Angelus took the others a short distance aside, where they would not be overheard.

"For you, *señores,*" he said, bowing to the two young *caballeros,* "things should be put right. For certain official reason which is none of your concern, His Excellency the Governor sent Don Esteban away from Monterey—"

"Thereby doing him a great favor," Juan Feliz interrupted.

ANGELUS glared at him. "And, at the order of His Excellency, Don Esteban was required to take oath at the chapel of mission here not to engage in combat during a stated period. Do not be deceived into thinking that Don Esteban is avoiding a challenge from you. You should know better than that. He has never refused before, has he? Now he is not his own to dispose of."

"If that is the way of it, Esteban," Juan Feliz said, bowing, "I ask your pardon for accusing you of evasion. But I promise to challenge you the instant you are free of your oath."

"And I, also," Marcos Chavez added.

"If he lives that long," Angelus said. "Don Esteban has incurred the enmity of a wealthy trader who may be inclined to hire assassins to get at him. He has aroused a mob against him already. If it is your passion to fight Don Esteban some day in the future, *señores,* make it your business to guard his life until the appointed time."

"I need no guards!" Don Esteban roared.

"No cowardly assassin will get at him," Chavez declared. "Our wish is to save him for ourselves."

"Do not let me find you tagging around at my heels," Don Esteban warned them.

"If you do, *señor* what can you do to resent it?" Juan Feliz asked. "You cannot attack us, because of your oath."

Capitán Angelus laughed. "I wish I could explain everything to you, *señores,* but government secrets cannot be revealed," he said. "Why not simply enjoy your visit to San Diego de Alcala for the time being, and await developments? You do not have to forget your enmity entirely. If you like, glare at Don Esteban whenever you see him."

"Are you presuming to laugh at us, *señor?*" Marcos Chavez demanded, hotly.

"And are you presuming to raise your voice to me, *señor?* I am under no oath to prevent my fighting you; and I could split you from top to bottom at a stroke. Then you would never have your chance to fight Don Esteban."

"We will arrange for living quarters here at the *posada* and decide what is to be done," Juan Feliz said, with as much of his dignity as he could salvage.

He bowed low, Marcos Chavez did likewise, and they went back to the common room to locate the landlord and make their arrangements.

Capitán Angelus turned to Don Esteban and smiled slightly.

"If they watch over you, Don Esteban, they may prevent worse rogues from getting at you," Angelus said.

"And chain me at every step."

"Oh, if you desire to evade them at any time, I know you are clever enough to manage. Which reminds me, Don Esteban, that I believe I have had an example of your cleverness. As a result of it, I found myself in difficulties this morning."

"How was that, *señor?*"

"WE WERE holding two prisoners accused by Miguel Brocamonte of theft. During the disturbance last evening, they were rescued from the *presidio,* after the guards had been manhandled. One of the guards told me that a score of men were in the affair, all masked and heavily armed, and that they rode away on swift horses. Later, he confessed there had been but one masked man. Two horses have been reported missing."

Don Esteban smiled in return. "The prisoners must have been persons of importance."

"I have been wondering considerably about that, Don Esteban. They seemed to be only a ragged peon and a halfbreed girl. But I believe I understand the situation. The rescue is a black blot on the

record of the *presidio* . . . but at least I was perhaps spared releasing them officially without trial, and thus causing comment."

"Black blots on records may be removed by official action, *Señor el Capitán* . . . when the full truth is known."

"I thank you, Don Esteban. Hereafter, if you will only take me into your confidence, possibly things can be made easier for you."

"At this time, *capitán,* I merely suggest that if the escaped prisoners are seen again they will not be seen . . . officially."

"I gather your meaning, *señor.* When Brocamonte roared this morning because the prisoners were gone, I pointed out to him that their release would not have been accomplished had not his own mob drawn all the soldiers away from the *presidio.* That silenced him."

" 'Twas a fine rebuke," Don Esteban said.

"I am existing in the dark," the *capitán* deplored. "I know only that you are doing some service for His Excellency, and are to have protection and any help you may ask."

"When it is possible, *capitán,* I'll tell you more."

"I have been informed also of your little tilt a short time ago with Manuel del Rio. I accosted him and assured him that I knew of your oath, letting him believe it was punishment for some trouble you had in Monterey. So his enmity, too, will be held in abeyance."

"When the oath is removed," Don Esteban said with a laugh, "I shall have half the country to fight."

" 'Twould be a pity if you were obliged to carve those two young hotbloods. They are only foolish, romantic adolescents. Don Manuel del Rio is another matter."

"Quite!" Don Esteban assented.

"I do not know the cause of the trouble between you—"

" 'Tis personal."

Capitán Angelus bowed. "Your personal affairs are your own, Don Esteban. But, if you ever need help, command me!"

## CHAPTER XVII

### A ROSE AND A BLADE

DON JOSÉ DEL RIO seldom came into the town of San Diego de Alcala. He considered it nothing but a cluster of mud huts and a community of persons of little account, and was content to remain for the greater part of the time at his *hacienda,* where he was lord of all his eyes could see. Occasionally, he visited some other *hacienda* owned by one of sufficiently high birth to address almost as an equal.

But today, soon after the siesta hour, the Del Rio carriage came rolling into town and traveled toward the *posada,* and those along the way beheld Don José himself sitting on the cushions, his head erect and face inscrutable. The *señorita* and her *dueña* rode in the carriage with him, and the flashing eyed Don Manuel was in saddle at the carriage's side.

It was an event for Don Manuel and Señorita Anita to appear in town twice in one day, too; and the populace wondered what was afoot. For news of the quarrel between Manuel del Rio and Don Esteban was public property.

The fat landlord almost had an apoplexy when he saw the carriage stop in front of his establishment again. He clapped his hands wildly for his servants and rushed them about, tore off his soiled apron and hurried through the door, to stop and bow until his head almost touched the ground.

"Welcome to my pigsty, Don José," he greeted.

"You have named it correctly, *señor,* but why boast of it?" Don José asked.

An outrider spread a carpet on the dirt, and Don José got out of his carriage and helped the *señorita* and her *dueña* alight. Don Manuel dismounted stiffly and handed the reins to a *posada* servant.

"We have come to pay our respects to Don Esteban de la Zamora and return the courtesy of his visit to us," Don José told the landlord. "Notify him that we are here, then conduct us to your patio and say nothing."

A servant went quickly to notify Felipe, who in turn notified Don Esteban. Another was sent to clear the patio of any guests who might be there. The landlord himself conducted the party across the common room to the patio door, bowing at every backward step.

Sitting at a table in a corner of the common room, Juan Feliz and Marcos Chavez heard and saw all, and their eyes bulged when they beheld the beauty of this proud *señorita* who bore the name of Del Rio. They regretted for the moment that they were in disagreement with Don Esteban and so could not properly ask him for an introduction to her.

DON ESTEBAN was halfway across the patio when the party entered, and he stopped and bowed, hiding his surprise to find Manuel with the others. Servants had placed chairs around a table beneath the arches, and were hurrying with the landlord's best goblets, a skin of the best wine, honey and little cakes.

"I am deeply honered," Don Esteban said, with the ring of sincerity.

They seated themselves and took the drink of ceremony, even the *señorita* sipping a bit of the golden wine. The servants retired out of hearing. Don Esteban made some small talk, including Don Manuel in an offhand way, meanwhile wondering whether this was a visit of courtesy or something more.

At a gesture from her father, Señorita Anita arose and beckoned her *dueña.*

"I am going to inspect the rosebush at the end of the patio, *señores,* and you need not accompany me," she said. "I know you wish to talk about men's affairs."

After the men had reseated themselves, Don José unbent slightly and leaned across the table.

"Don Esteban, I am here as the head of my house to make abject apology to you regarding my son," he said. "Manuel must have had a moment of madness this morning. There must be no quarrel between you, especially now."

"*Now,* Don José?"

"I am going to speak to you in confidence, Don Esteban, asking only that, if we do not come to an agreement, you will not repeat our conversation. But it is not necessary for me to ask that. You are a *caballero.*"

Don Esteban inclined his head slightly.

"You are aware of my ambition and intention. You know that I associated myself with Brocamonte, the trader. That association is at an end, Esteban. I kicked the rogue out of my house last night. He had the effrontery to propose an alliance of marriage with my daughter."

"He dared?" Don Esteban cried.

"I would have ripped open his greasy carcass, but I did not wish to soil my sword," Manuel put in.

"A whip would have been more fit," Don Esteban said.

"So I find myself now without an associate in my enterprise," Don José continued. "Do you feel that you can join me, Esteban?"

"Don Esteban does not wish natives and peons to die in the gratification of a man's ambition," Manuel said, his lips twisting slightly.

Don Esteban glared at him. Don José flashed him a look of warning.

"Accusing me of a remark like that brought on our quarrel this morning," Don Esteban said. "At that time, Don Manuel, you did not know of my oath. Now you know. Is it the part of a man of gentility, *señor,* to taunt another when he is powerless to strike back?"

Manuel started to get off his stool, but his father thrust him back upon it.

"DON ESTEBAN is right," he said. "You forget yourself, Manuel. I feel sure nothing has passed between you so grievous that it may not be forgotten."

"Let us consider Don José's question and exclude all other matters," Don Esteban suggested. "From the talk I had with Miguel Brocamonte, I am sure he means to go ahead with the enterprise alone."

"The scoundrel even thinks he can be governor," Don José said.

"If he attempts it, he will fail and he will pay the penalty of failure. An uprising cannot succeed," Don Esteban said. "This is but a small corner of Alta California. There are strong forces of soldiers at Santa Barbara and posts north of there. I understand and appreciate your ambition, Don José, but I would in friendship advise you to forget your project."

"A man afraid of failing wins nothing," Manuel said impetuously.

"I was hoping you would join me, Esteban," Don José confessed. "I was hoping . . . several things. Brocamonte's absurd proposal last night caused my thoughts to take a certain other line. My daughter meets so few eligible men—"

"Your daughter is a delight to the eye, Don José. Upon we can agree."

Don José had signaled his watchful daughter covertly, and now she called:

"Don Esteban! If you are through with your affair, will you speak with me about this rose?"

Don Esteban rose immediately, bowed, and hastened to her side. Her *dueña* moved away as if to look at a bank of flowers near the fountain.

Señorita Anita smiled up at him as he stopped at her side.

"The handsomest roses here are in your cheeks," he said, softly.

The girl laughed. "So they teach flattery in Monterey?"

"I believe so, though I never took lessons. That was not flattery, but the truth."

With deft fingers she plucked a full-blown rose of ivory white. "Have you and my brother made up your quarrel?" she asked. "Do not hold it against him. He has been nervous and distraught recently, and is not himself."

"I hope no ill will come of it, *señorita.*"

"Had my father spoken to you about . . . a certain project he has in mind?" She bent her head to the flower's fragrance, raising her gaze to his through lustrous lashes.

"*Sí, señorita.* We do not see alike in the matter, I fear. I wish every happiness for you, and a high place in the world—but one that is secure. The attempt Don José contemplates will fail and may result in disgrace. I beg you—use your influence against it, if you love your father. We all dream dreams, *señorita.* When we have one which cannot come true, it is wisdom to cast it aside and search for another."

"You almost convince me," she said. "But, if one cannot find another dream so good—?"

"That is always possible," he told her. "Perhaps I am searching for one now."

She flushed beneath the depth of his gaze, then looked away quickly. "I'll tell my father that we will search for another dream," she replied. "And I hope to find one that will come true."

They walked back to the table.

"THE door of my casa is always open to you, Don Esteban," Don José said. "My house is yours. Do not keep us waiting too long to make you welcome."

Don Esteban bowed. "I thank you, Don José."

"Manuel, if you would only extend your hand—" his father hinted.

"Not at this moment, please," Don Manuel said.

Don Esteban smiled and bowed again. "As you will, *señor.*"

They walked on toward the door of the common room. "Two young *caballeros* have arrived from Monterey," Don Esteban said. "They came to challenge me to combat. Perhaps you have heard the story."

"And your convenient oath made it impossible for you to accept any challenge," Manuel suggested.

Don Esteban's face burned angrily. He ignored the thrust and spoke to Don José again:

"They are Juan Feliz and Marcos Chavez, of good lineage, with parents prominent in Monterey. I vouch for them. They will be lonesome here for their own kind—"

"You may present them to me, Esteban," Don José said, immediately. "I'll

invite them to ride out to the *hacienda* with us."

"I would suggest that there be no talk of politics," Don Esteban said. "They are only raw boys, wine makes them talk . . . and their fathers know the governor."

Don Esteban performed the introductions in the common room. Juan Feliz and Marcos Chavez forgave him much for that. They accepted Don José's invitation to ride to the *hacienda,* and hurried to get their mounts.

Don Esteban had a moment aside with Don José as they went on to the carriage.

"I regret that we do not see alike politically, Don José," he said. "What has passed between us on the subject is buried in my bosom. Perhaps in the future honors will come to you, not through an act of treason. If your former associate attempts what he has in mind, he will come to an ignoble end, I am sure."

"It is a matter which requires thought," Don José replied. "I hate to cast good plans aside."

Don Esteban went with them to the carriage, held the *señorita's* hand an instant as he helped her into it, and exchanged smiles with her. Don Manuel did not speak again, and his face was like a thundercloud as he mounted. The carriage started away, with Don Manuel and the two young *caballeros* riding behind it.

Don Esteban smiled slightly as he watched them disappear. Juan Feliz and Marcos Chavez would not be there to dodge his steps and watch him now.

At his feet, crushed and soiled, lay a crumpled white rose. Bending, Don Esteban picked it up and carried it away.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ATTACK BY NIGHT

WHEN the Del Rios reached the *hacienda,* their guests were shown about the *casa,* and then conducted to a chamber where they could rest until the evening meal. Don José summoned his son and daughter to his own chamber in another wing of the house.

Don José's face was grave as he sat in the huge chair beside the fireplace and confronted his children. "I have decided not to go on with my plans," he announced.

"Father!" Manuel cried.

"That is my decision, my son. It was madness to think of it. Don Esteban is right."

"Don Esteban!" Manuel raged. "There was no halt in our arrangements before he came among us. He has ruined everything. We could have gone ahead with Brocamonte—"

"That beast!" the *señorita* exclaimed.

"We could have made use of him at least, and rewarded him with trade concessions. He would not have got ideas in his head except for this Don Esteban."

"I have decided, my children," Don José told them. "My ambition was wrong. I would have waded to power through the blood of men."

"Peons and natives—scum of the earth!" Manuel exploded. "Who cares for them? A Del Rio should sit in the governor's chair—"

"Not unless the viceroy puts him there," Don José interupted. "And do not forget —Brocamonte is not with us now with his gold, and Don Esteban will not join us and take his place."

"Anita, tell him he is wrong!" Manuel cried.

"He is right, Manuel. It was a crazy dream. If we go ahead, it will end in disgrace for all of us. Don Esteban made me see clearly—"

"Don Esteban again!" Manuel raged. "He and his oath! When he is free to fight, I'll split him with my blade! Are you really going to let him turn us from our project? The uprising is at the point of starting. The men in the hills are being inflamed. Brocamonte may try to carry it on. But they will want a man of station to fight for. They always do."

"I have decided, my son, and let that be an end," Don José said.

"The end of the del Rios! We never shall amount to anything. The viceroy

honors everybody but us. Perhaps you are done, but I am not!"

"What do you mean, my son?"

"I do not know yet. But I am not going to let Don Esteban de la Zamora turn me aside."

Manuel rushed madly out of the room, and they heard him clattering down the stairs. . . .

DON ESTEBAN ordered Felipe to get his black horse and have him in front of the *posada*, for he intended riding to the mission in the cool of the evening for a conference with Fray Francisco.

When he emerged, the horse had been waiting for some time, and the crowd of beggars also. Don Esteban tossed them coins and galloped away.

As he rode, he thought. He had carried out the instructions of the governor well so far. He had separated the associates in this treason, and got them at each other's throats so it was impossible for them to continue as associates.

Now, he had to stop Don José carrying himself, his family and name to ruin, thus putting a black blot on all men of lineage. And, above all, he had to prevent the uprising.

Jorge Gonzales was in the hills, and Don Esteban waited a report from him eagerly. Until it came, and he was sure what was transpiring, he would remain in San Diego de Alcala, where he could watch both Don José and Miguel Brocamonte.

He dismounted at the mission, tethered his horse, and was welcomed by Fray Francisco, who was smiling.

"I anticipated a visit from you, my son," the *fray* said. "I have heard of the day's events in town."

"Three men have challenged me, and I have been unable to meet them," said Don Esteban mutinously.

"I know, my son. But they are aware now that you are under oath, so cannot call you craven."

"Release me from the oath, *fray!*"

"So you can engage in violence? I do not understand about your quarrel with Don Manuel, but the other two . . . My son, the intelligence from Monterey was that they were on their way here to fight you. That is why an oath was asked of you, so you would not slay them."

"You knew they were coming? It was a trick?"

"Would I participate in a trick, my boy?"

"Did you not, *fray?*"

"I followed the orders of my superiors, and one of those orders was to require the oath from you without letting you know the two were on their way here. Is it not better? Do you wish to slay them?"

"They are but foolish boys, but Don Manuel del Rio—"

"What was your quarrel with him?" the *fray* asked.

"He flared up over some remark I made. It grew out of nothing."

"As many quarrels do."

"Will you release me to the extent that I can defend myself against Manuel del Rio?"

"You may defend yourself if he attacks you and puts your life in danger, but you may not accept a challenge merely to salve your pride."

"It is in your hands, *fray*."

"Partake of the evening meal with me, my son. The calm atmosphere of the mission may soothe you now."

Don Esteban remained for the frugal evening meal, and listened to Fray Francisco's story of a *fiesta* to be held there in six days time. The moon was up when he mounted his black horse and began the ride to town.

He had not gone more than a mile when his foe struck.

DON ESTEBAN was riding with loose reins. Three men rushed from the brush beside the road. One sprang to seize the reins, another dashed in with a knife, and the third discharged a pistol.

Don Esteban felt a slight shock as the ball from the pistol bruised his upper left arm. He swerved his horse suddenly and

struggled to get out his blade. The horse knocked one man sprawling.

But the other two were at him again. He felt a hot streak as the knife struck his left arm. Another pistol was discharged, and the ball missed the target. Then Don Esteban had his blade out.

"Assassins! Scum!"

He jumped his horse to one side as the man with the knife charged again. He sent the big black forward with a squeeze of the knees, his blade flashed in the moonlight, and the man gave a scream and went down.

Don Esteban wheeled his horse, to see the third man running. He raced after him. The knife was thrown, and flashed past his head.

"Carrion!" Don Esteban howled, and sent the blade home.

One foe was left, the one who had been knocked down by the horse. He was on his feet and trying to stagger away. "Halt *señor,* or you die!" Don Esteban cried.

The man turned, stopped, held his hands high above his head. Don Esteban sprang from his saddle and pressed the point of his blade against the man's breast.

"Spare me—!"

Don Esteban looked him over. He was a strong man of middle age, a field-worker from his appearance.

"Have you anything to say, *señor?*"

"'Twas the promise of gold made us do it, Don Esteban."

"You meant to rob me?"

"*Si.* It was to look like we had slain you for robbery."

"To *look* like it?"

"But the real gold was to come from the one who sent us. He ordered us to slay you and turn out your pockets. You had upset his plans, he said."

"So! You let a man like Miguel Brocamonte lure you into this mischief."

"Not Brocamonte, *señor.* We would not have done it for a man like him. But when Don Manuel ordered—"

"Don Manuel?" Don Esteban cried. "You dare intimate he would engage assassins to attack me?"

"We work on the Del Rio rancho, *señor.* He saw us and promised us gold. We hurried to San Diego de Alcala, and learned you had gone to the mission, so followed to waylay you. Do not slay me, *señor.* I have a wife, children—"

"This is almost beyond belief!" Don Esteban said. "Stand as you are!"

Don Esteban got a rope from his saddle and put a noose around the man's neck. He mounted and tightened the rope.

"We go back to the mission," he ordered. "March ahead!"

The whimpering man plodded through the dust, keeping up his entreaties. Don Esteban kept him ahead, for he was growing weak, and did not want the other to notice it. He was losing blood rapidly.

He almost fell from the saddle when he reached the mission and Fray Francisco and some neophytes came running.

"Seize this man and hold him," Don Esteban ordered. "He and two others waylaid and tried to slay me. The others are dead. I did not break my oath, *fray*—I had to defend my life. Send for the sergeant at the *presidio*. I . . . have been cut and shot—"

The assassin was thrust into the strong room of the warehouse. Fray Francisco sent a man on a mule to the *presidio*. Then he prepared to dress Don Esteban's wounds.

"You have lost blood, my son, but the wounds are not serious," the *fray* reported.

"I realize that, *fray*. But I do not want others to know. You helped play a subterfuge on me in the matter of the oath—now help me play one. Give out that I am sorely wounded and must be confined to my couch. Give me a corner in the guest house."

"To what end, my son?"

"That I may play a little game of my own, *fray*. And you will perhaps keep me from breaking my oath and taking a life. I know the name of the man who hired the assassins to kill me."

"My son!"

"Do not ask me to say more now. Get me on a couch and tuck me in. Send a man

to my servant, Felipe, and say that I am wounded and will not return to the inn for several days. Tell him to have transported here my leather chest—he will know which one I mean."

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE LASH BITES DEEP

DON ESTEBAN was assigned a small room in the guest house. His arm was dressed, and he was unclothed and in bed before anybody arrived from the town. The ball from the pistol had only broken the skin and bruised the arm. The knife cut was on the upper arm, fairly deep. Fray Francisco, who knew something of medicine and surgery, had sealed the cut and put a soothing and healing salve on the wound.

Sergeant Salazar came pounding out to the mission, but he was not alone. The neophyte the *fray* had sent to the *presidio* had dramatized the affair and made Don Esteban seem at the point of death. So Capitán Angelus had come with the sergeant, and had brought a couple of troopers along.

Don Esteban asked to see the *capitán* alone.

"The man I caught and brought here—he tells a story I hate to believe, *capitán*. He says Manuel del Rio sent the three men to assassinate me."

"Manuel del Rio! I shall question this man, then take Don Manuel into custody."

"You have told me to command you if necessary."

"Such are my orders."

"Then you will say nothing to Don Manuel about this affair at present. Incarcerate this fellow in the *presidio* and guard him well. Let it be known that he has admitted he and his companions were hired to slay me, but not that he has said who did the hiring. We will see what occurs."

"It shall be as you wish, Don Esteban."

"You have the right to hold the fellow against release until I am able to be up and around again?"

"Certainly, Don Esteban. We will keep everybody away from him. Do you care to tell me more?"

"Not at present, *capitán*. The two I killed—you can readily ascertain whether they worked on the del Rio rancho, and this one, also."

"That will be done immediately. Now you had better rest and sleep, *señor*. Fray Francisco says you lost a quantity of blood. The good *fray* will have your wounds healed in a few days. Felipe, your body servant, is here to attend you."

"Send him to me as you go out," Don Esteban said. . . .

FELIPE guarded the door of the little room the following day, and Fray Francisco turned aside all visitors.

"He has been hurt, but he will get well," the *fray* told all who asked, which was truthful enough.

Juan Feliz and Marcos Chavez called and offered their services, which were politely declined. Don José sent his *superintendante* with a message that he hoped for Don Esteban's speedy recovery.

Capitán Angelus appeared in the evening.

"I scarcely can believe it, Don Esteban, but the man you caught undoubtedly told the truth," Angelus reported. "We have found that the three who attacked you worked on the del Rio rancho, and were often engaged by Don Manuel for outside labors. Manuel del Rio must hate you well, to forget his blood and breeding and descend to hired assassination."

"No doubt," Don Esteban replied.

"I am holding the fellow you caught. I think he will die of fright before we have time to try him. Sergeant Salazar talks to him continually about how they hang a man."

"There has been no attempt to have him released?" Don Esteban asked.

"None, *señor*. Miguel Brocamonte called at the *presidio*, and desired me to understand that he had nothing to do with the attack on you. I said little and looked knowing. Let him fret!"

"I will be on my feet in a few days, *capitán*, then perhaps moves can be made," Don Esteban said.

Night came, and those of the mission retired. Then, Don Esteban de la Zamora became Señor Devil-may-care. Under careful instructions, Felipe slipped out of the guest house like a fleeting shadow and got the black horse ready. Don Esteban opened the leather chest which had been brought from town and removed from it the clothing and weapons he had used when he had rescued the prisoners from the *presidio*.

His arm was a little stiff, but not enough to bother him greatly. He dressed; and when Felipe returned with the information that the horse was tethered in a certain spot, Don Esteban got through the window and into the darkness against the wall, and Felipe barred the door and remained on guard, to say that Don Esteban was sleeping and could not be disturbed, if anybody approached to question.

Don Esteban rode slowly and as silently as possible until he was some distance from the mission, then went at a swifter pace cautiously along the highway toward the town, ready to leave the road quickly if he heard anyone coming. He did leave the road just before he reached the town, kept away from all buildings, and finally stopped his horse in a dark depression not far from Miguel Brocamonte's house.

SAN DIEGO DE ALCALA slept. A torch burned in front of the inn and another at the *presidio*, and there was light in Brocamonte's house also, but the remainder of the town was in darkness.

Don Esteban dismounted and tied his horse to a stunted tree. He put on his mask and got his pistol ready. He was wearing the blade also, and into his belt he had hooked a whip such as was used by horse tamers, a weapon with a long lash.

He crept slowly along the wall of Brocamonte's house until he came to an open window, and got through it. He could hear the voices of men coming from the living room. Step by step, he neared the open door, and finally was able to peer through.

Two burly, roughly-dressed men were talking to Brocamonte, as they ate and swigged down wine. The dust of the trail was on their clothing.

"Get back into the hills as quickly as you can, *señores*," Brocamonte was telling them. "Keep up your work. Inflame them! Be sure to explain repeatedly that I, one of their own class, am working to liberate them. We will drive the grandees out of the land and seize their acreage and houses. I will be the governor—I, a man who knows the needs of common folk."

"We understand," one of the men said.

"If it is possible to do so safely, send me news each night. Take this pouch of coins with you, and pass them out with my compliments. When the time is ripe to strike, we will strike first at the del Rio *hacienda*. In that house are certain persons I desire to humble."

"We shall do as you say, *señor*."

"Be loyal to me, do your work well, and you will be richly rewarded. Now, I will let you out. Do not be seen."

Don Esteban stepped back into the darkness behind some draperies as Brocamonte waddled to the front door with his two visitors. The trader unbarred the door and opened it, and the men darted out into the night. Brocamonte put up the bar again, belched, turned—and almost choked with surprise and fear.

A MASKED man stood there before him like a grim specter, his body bent forward, eyes glittering through the slits in his mask. He held a pistol in one hand and a whip in the other.

"Come here to me, *señor!*" Don Esteban ordered in a voice not his own.

"Wh—what—?"

"Keep your voice low, if you wish to live! Come to me!"

Trembling with fright, Miguel Brocamonte waddled forward, his eyes bulging and his fat body shaking. Alone and without his hirelings to fight his battles, Brocamonte was no lion of courage.

"Who are you?" he muttered. "What do you want here? If you are a robber—"

"Here to me!" Don Esteban ordered. "You forget your place, it seems, Señor Brocamonte. You dabble in treason and insult your betters."

The whip shot out, and the lash bit into Brocamonte's fat body. Don Esteban cut once because of the mob, once in the name of Señorita Anita, and several times in behalf of the government. The singing lash bit and stung. Brocamonte's howls of anguish filled the house.

"A lesson for you, *señor!*" Don Esteban said.

He whirled and darted back through the dark room and got through the window. He heard the shrill cries of frightened servants as Brocamonte's bellowings reached them. More lights came on in the house.

But Don Esteban was far back in the shadows, and had reached his horse. He swung into saddle and touched with the spurs. For a short distance he rode madly, then slowed his big black to a walk and turned aside, to curve back toward the mission road.

Once during the journey he was compelled to pull off the highway and hold his horse's nostrils to prevent a whinny as two riders passed going toward the town. But he reached the mission, safely, tied the horse and got through the window and into the little room.

"Go put up the horse," he ordered Felipe. "I'll undress and get into bed. Go and come by the window, and make sure you are not observed. Did anything happen here?"

"Nothing of importance, Don Esteban. Nobody knows you have been absent."

"If anybody asks, I have not been," Don Esteban replied.

## CHAPTER XX

### THOSE WHO RIDE AT NIGHT

MIGUEL BROCAMONTE did not suspect Don Esteban, for he believed him to be seriously wounded and in bed at the mission. But he did suspect Don Manuel del Rio or one of his hirelings He went straightway to the *presidio* with some of his servants, aroused the *capitán*, exhibited his hurts and made a loud outcry. His house had been invaded by a masked man who had beaten him. He was entitled to the protection of the soldiery, being a man of substance . . . and what was Capitán Angelus intending to do about it?

Angelus questioned Brocamonte at length regarding the masked man's clothing and general appearance, and an expression of bewilderment came into his face for a moment. He suggested that the trader go slow in charging Manuel del Rio with such an offense, lest he be punished for slander.

"Why did he say he whipped you?"

"He made some remark about me insulting my betters. I had a slight business understanding with Don José and his son, and may have said some harsh things. Do you not see, *Capitán*, that it was either Don Manuel or a man he sent to whip me?"

"Surely you would have identified him had he been Don Manuel."

"There were few candles burning in the room. He was about the size of the del Rio, and his voice was similar."

"Proving it would be difficult," Angelus told him. "If I were you, *señor*, I would not make the charge until I had better proof. Guard yourself better. You appear to have many enemies."

" 'Tis the penalty for being prosperous," Brocamonte said.

He went away fuming and swearing to have revenge, and Capitán Angelus spent some time thinking about the incident. The description Brocamonte had given of the man who had whipped him tallied with the one that the *presidio* guard bad given of the apparition who bad released the prisoners; and Angelus knew that man's identity. Don Esteban was playing some wild game, he decided.

In the middle of the morning, Angelus rode out to the mission and had speech with Don Esteban alone.

"How goes it with you?" he asked.

"I am mending slowly, *Capitán.*"

"There was an amusing incident during the night. A masked man entered Brocamonte's house and whipped him. The description given me fits the man who raided my *presidio.*"

"Remarkable!" Don Esteban said.

"Brocamonte is of the opinion that the del Rios sent the man. He says the intruder accused him of insulting his betters."

Don Esteban smiled. "Is it not possible, *Capitán,* that the intruder was there gathering information and the whipping was his secondary object?"

Angelus sighed. "Anything is possible. It is difficult to live in the dark. Do you have any special requests of me, Don Esteban?"

"None, *Capitán.* Fray Francisco is caring for me well by day, and Felipe sees that nobody disturbs me at night."

"An admirable arrangement, Don Esteban. I hope you do not develop a wound fever, wander in your head and . . . walk in your sleep."

"I must be well in time for the *fiesta* which is to be held here in a few days," Don Esteban said. "I like merriment."

The *capitán* departed, and Don Esteban slept a part of the time during the day. Again, when night had come and all was quiet around the mission, Felipe got out and made the horse ready, and Don Esteban dressed in his somber clothing once more, got pistol and blade and mask.

THIS time, he went a short distance along the highway and then cut across country to the del Rio *hacienda.* This was more perilous, he knew, than what he had done the night before. And he disliked the spy on the del Rios.

But he had a task to perform. He had to save Don José from committing folly, tarnishing his name, and bringing odium on all his class. He wondered if Don José had reached an absolute decision regarding the uprising.

Señor Devil-May-Care expected to use extra precautions in this escapade. It would not look well for Don Esteban de la Zamora to be found playing the eavesdropper . . . especially when he could not bring the governor's name into it and explain that he was carrying out a duty.

He wondered, as he rode cautiously, about the *señorita.* A vision of her beautiful face was before him. He had seen an abundance of proud and beautiful girls, and had had not a few tossed at his head by ambitious fathers and mothers. But Anita del Rio had attracted him beyond any of these.

As he neared the *hacienda,* he redoubled caution. He was obliged to tie the black horse a distance from the house and approach afoot. Though it was late, lights were burning in the big living room of the *casa.*

Don Esteban reached the side of the house safely and began following a wall toward a window. It was possible that Don José had peon night-guards around the place to watch for thieving natives, and he had to be on watch for them.

As he neared the arched entrance to the patio, he heard Don José's voice, and that of the *señorita* answering. Crouching in the darkness behind a clum of shrubbery, Don Esteban listened.

"Manuel must be mad," Don José was saying. "What a low thing to do—and send assassins after Don Esteban."

"He is mad with ambition," the *señorita* said. "When you told us that you had given up the project of the uprising, he was beside himself."

"And for him to rush away as he has done now, rush into peril—!" Don José continued. "I have sent men after him, ordering him to return. He will disgrace us all. I wish I had never contemplated this accursed enterprise."

"Don Esteban was right, Father. It could not succeed."

"Don Esteban! I cannot understand Manuel's enmity toward him. And you, my daughter—what are your feelings?"

"Regarding Don Esteban?" she asked. "He is a very attractive man, Father, and

is very wealthy. His wife would be received everywhere, even at the court of the viceroy in Mexico."

"So you are falling in love with him, my child?"

The *señorita* laughed. "Love?" she asked. "He would make a good husband, no doubt. He could give a wife everything. Marriage with him would be a convenient arrangement. But, if by love you mean an insane hammering of the heart, a feeling of childlike fondness . . . no, my father."

"Marriage should be only for love, my daughter."

"That may be true with some, but not with me. Royalty does not marry for love. If I marry Don Esteban, be assured it will be because of the position he can give me, that he can take me away from San Diego de Alcala and let me see something of the world. And a married woman, my father, has better chances than a girl under her *dueña's* eye, if she has a fancy for a mild flirtation."

"My child!"

"Do I shock you, father? Perhaps Manuel going away at this time is a good thing. If he were here, I would see but little of Don Esteban because of Manuel's silly quarrel. And I desire to see much of the *señor* and let him see much of me."

"Manuel must return!" Don José said. "He will involve me in the business to my ruin. And we must patch up the quarrel between him and the Zamora. I have given up the conspiracy, but Don Esteban is in a position to give me aid in high places."

"Especially if he is married to me," the *señorita* added.

"If you marry him for ambition, my child, perhaps love will come to you afterward," Don José said. "Pour me a little wine, and then I must retire."

CROUCHING in the darkness, Don Esteban considered what he had overheard. Here was confirmation that Manuel del Rio had tried to have his assassinated. And it appeared that Don Manuel had also left home on a perilous enterprise.

Not the least of Don Esteban's thoughts dwelt with the statements of the *señorita* concerning him. His lips twisted in a wry smile.

"What a mistake I might have made," he muttered. "Ambition gnaws at all these del Rios."

He heard a step behind him, and turned quickly. A dark shape lunged at him from behind the shrubbery.

"Who are you? What do you here?" a voice challenged.

Don Esteban sidestepped and struck wildly. A pistol exploded almost in his face, and he felt the hot breath of the ball which missed him by scant inches. His assailant yelled for help and charged again.

Don Esteban turned to run, but tripped on a root and sprawled. The other was atop him instantly, striking at him with the heavy pistol. Don Esteban twisted and hurled the other aside, struggled to his feet as other servants came running, as Don José bellowed to know what was amiss.

Getting out his own pistol, Don Esteban struck as the other rushed. The blow made his assailant reel. Taking to his heels, Don Esteban crashed through the shrubs and ran beneath the trees.

"A thief! . . . a thief!" somebody was howling.

Then, Don Esteban realized that he had lost his mask. He wondered whether it had been lost in time for the man who had attacked him to see his face. He rushed on as another pistol exploded behind him, and heard the ball cut leaves off a tree above his head.

Panting and half exhausted, he reached his horse. The pursuit was gaining on him. He got into the saddle and raked with his spurs, bent low, and dashed along the highway.

"After the rogue!" he heard Don José shouting.

But with the big black beneath him, Don Esteban did not fear pursuit. He feared only an inability to get back to the mission without being discovered. He

touched with the spurs again, and the black carried him swiftly toward the town. At the proper spot, Don Esteban left the highway and cut across country toward the mission.

The mission buildings were dark when he approached them. He was cautious as he neared them, muttering imprecations when a hound barked. But he got the lathered horse tied where Felipe could find him and care for him, and went on quickly toward the guest house.

Beneath the open window, he stopped an instant to gather strength. Felipe heard him, and helped him into the room.

"I had a close escape." Don Esteban said. "Help me undress. Let us stow the things in the chest. Get me to bed, then attend to the horse. Wipe his coat well, for he is hot."

"Your arm is bleeding badly, Don Esteban."

"The wound is opened, I suppose. I ran into a little violence I did not expect. Attend to the horse, and I'll attend to the wound."

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE INSULTED LADY

FELIPE got through the window after helping Don Esteban undress and get into his bed, stowing what he had worn away in the leather chest with the weapons, and helping Don Esteban bandage his arm anew.

Don Esteban sat on a stool at the window, letting the night breeze refresh him. He had learned all he could. Now he had only to watch them while he waited to hear from Jorge Gonzales.

"*Señor!* . . . Don Esteban!" somebody whispered at the window.

Don Esteban got up from the stool and stood at the side of the casement. He could see nothing except a dark splotch against the wall outside, and saw the splotch move slightly.

"*Si?*" he asked, whispering also.

"It is Rosa."

"Rosa!" Don Esteban bent out of the window, and she stepped close to him.

"I had difficulty finding you, Don Esteban. I learned you had been hurt and were here. But I was compelled to hide until night. I saw you ride away, and could not reach you in time to speak. And I saw you come riding back."

"Give me news!" he said.

"If you have food or wine . . . I am famished."

"Come through the window."

She scrambled through and stood panting beside him. He led her to the stool and whispered for her to seat herself. Cold meat and wine were on a table in a corner, and he brought them to her.

"Eat and drink first," he whispered.

She gulped some of the food, washed it down with the wine. In a fever of impatience, Don Esteban waited.

"Now I can talk," she whispered.

He crouched beside her. "Talk in whispers."

"MIGUEL BROCAMONTE'S men are preaching rebellion. He is sending money to them, and furnishing meat and wine. They are being told that he will lead them, that he is their own kind and knows their needs, and will be their governor."

"The fool!" Don Esteban said.

"The idea caught some of them, *señor*. Others thought a man like Brocamonte would not do for governor, and wanted a grandee who would promise to make their lot easier. That divided them."

"*Bueno!*"

"But there is a new development, *señor*, and Jorge Gonzales got me a horse and made me ride here with all haste. Don Manuel del Rio is in the hills."

"What?" Esteban gasped.

"He tells them he is there to lead them. And he is winning many of them over, *señor*. They are thrilled to think a man like Manuel del Rio would some out to aid them instead of waiting in his fine house for the blow to be struck."

"So!" Don Esteban said.

The meaning of what he had overhead at

the del Rio *hacienda* was plain to him now. Incensed because his father had given up the conspiracy, Manuel del Rio had decided to lead the uprising himself.

"The thing is dangerous," he told the girl. "But, if the two factions cannot get together on a leader—"

"Jorge Gonzales desires instructions, *señor*. We have been talking against the uprising, and have won some others to our way of thinking. But the great many, *señor*, are still hot of blood and eager to raid the *haciendas*."

Don Esteban paced the room a moment, then returned to her.

"When I learned Don José had given up his project, I believed my troubles over," he said. "I was not much concerned about Brocamonte. It appears I was wrong in both cases. A del Rio is involved again—"

"What must I tell Jorge?" she asked.

"Keep on talking against the rebellion. Keep on saying they will be fighting other men's battles, will suffer and die for naught. I'll remain here and watch for three or four days more, then contrive to ride to the hills and meet you. I am supposed to be suffering from a wound, and cannot leave too soon, lest it cause talk."

"If you could only be there, *señor*, to show my people into what sad trouble they are heading! They do not like Manuel del Rio much, for he is too arrogant. He scorns the men he would lead, and makes it apparent."

"Either you or Jorge return to me in three days with a full report of the situation. Do you understand, Rosa, what I am doing? I would save an illustrious name from being stained. I would keep the peons and natives from going to slaughter. If the uprising really starts and *haciendas* are raided, the soldiery will have to strike—"

"I understand everything, *señor*," she said.

A SHADOW appeared at the window, and Felipe crawled into the room. He gave an exclamation of surprise when he saw that Don Esteban was not alone.

"This girl, Rosa, is working for me," Don Esteban explained. "She has brought me information."

*"Sí, señor."*

"And now she must get away. Give her some money, Felipe, from my pouch. She can use it to advantage. And do not forget, Rosa—let me have news in three days' time."

A moment later, the girl was gone.

In the morning, Fray Francisco looked at him suspiciously after he had examined the wounded arm.

"It is not doing well," the *fray* said. "It looks is if there had been undue exertion. And your general condition, Don Esteban . . . you appear tired, exhausted."

"I will contrive not to get exhausted again, *fray*. My subterfuge is over for the time being. You may announce that I am able to arise and dress today, and wander around the mission a bit."

Capitán Angelus appeared in the middle of the morning.

"More excitement last night, Don Esteban, and this time at the del Rio *hacienda*," he said. "They had a prowler last night, and one of the guards almost caught him. He says the man was masked. The mask was found at daybreak, so perhaps the rogue dropped it while escaping. It seems he had a fast horse."

"A remarkable amount of excitement in this locality recently," Don Esteban commented.

"What is your condition, *señor?*"

"I am much better, on the mend. In a few days, I may even ride up El Camino Real and see some of the country."

"If you desire an escort—"

"Not necessary, thank you, *Capitán*."

"I am still holding in the *presidio* detention room the man who attacked you. Do you wish to prefer charges and bring Manuel del Rio into the matter?"

"I prefer to deal with Manuel del Rio myself," Don Esteban replied.

"May I express the hope that I am there when you deal with him?" Angelus asked, smiling. "I have heard of your supreme art with a blade." . . .

AFTER the siesta hour, Don Esteban dressed. From the leather chest, Felipe took new garments which had been made in Monterey just before Don Esteban's departure and never worn.

"I shall take a stroll," Don Esteban said.

He left the room and the building, walked slowly beneath the arches, watching the *frailes* and neophytes as they went about their work. He visited the stables and patted the big black on his glossy neck as if he had not seen him for several days.

When he returned to the guest house, he found Juan Feliz and Marcos Chavez waiting for him.

"We are glad to find you recovering, Don Esteban," Juan Feliz said. "We regret that we were not near you when the attempt was made on your life."

"We beg of your to take proper care of yourself hereafter," Marcos Chavez added. "We have an engagement in the future, *señor.*"

Don Esteban bowed. "I shall not forget it, *señores.*"

"It is imperative that you do not. We promised the Señorita Maria Godines that we would kill you, and no doubt she expects us to keep that promise. She has even come to see its fulfillment."

"What is this?" Don Esteban cried.

"She arrived at an early hour this morning with her father in a carriage. It appears they left Monterey shortly after we rode from there."

"Don Luis Godines and the *señorita* are in San Diego de Alcala?"

"They are, Don Esteban," Juan Feliz said. "They are coming on to the mission to reside in the guest house here until Don Luis can arrange for a property. He desires to make his home in this section, since the disgrace you put upon his fair daughter has made Monterey impossible for him."

"I shall be glad to see Don Luis and the *señorita,* for I owe them an apology," Don Esteban said.

"An apology will avail you nothing, señor," Marcos Chavez said. "We will remain in your vicinity until the time limit of your convenient oath expires."

## CHAPTER XXII

### SERENADE BEFORE BATTLE

THE guest house of the mission was commodious, with several chambers and a large common room. Neophytes worked under the direction of a *fray* preparing two of the chambers for the expected guests.

The Godines carriage arrived, Don Luis and the *señorita* were welcomed by Fray Francisco and retired to remove the stains of travel.

Don Esteban went to his own room and stretched on the couch to rest. Nor did he leave the room until Juan Feliz and Marcos Chavez had taken leave and ridden back to town. He wanted the two young hotheads out of the way when he met Don Luis and the *señorita.*

"Felipe," Don Esteban called.

"*Si,* Don Esteban."

"We return to the *posada* this evening. See to the arrangements."

Felipe began his packing. Don Esteban opened the door and went into the common room, where Don Luis Godines and his daughter were resting in easy chairs near the fire place.

Don Esteban bowed before them.

"I have never had the pleasure of meeting you before, Don Luis Godines," he said. "I am Esteban de la Zamora."

"Well, *señor?*" Don Luis asked.

"I desire to make my abject apologies to you and your daughter for an incident which happened in Monterey—"

"An incident!" Maria exclaimed. "You made me the mock of the town, *señor!*"

"I desired to present my apologies the following day, but was prevented by the governor."

"We understand you ran away to escape a challenge," the *señorita* told him.

"Surely you do not believe that, *señorita.* I was sent away so the challenge could be avoided. I have no wish to slay Juan Feliz or Marcos Chavez."

"Are you so sure of the outcome, *señor?*"

"I am a master of fence," Don Esteban said, his voice that of a man speaking of fact, and with no boasting in it.

"Oh, how I hate you!" she cried. "To have me treated like a peon girl . . . dragged into a cantina . . . made to dance!"

"I am willing to spend my life trying to atone, *señorita.*"

"I can exist quite well without sight of you, *señor.* I had hoped the two young *señores* had accounted for you before this, but I understand that now there is a convenient oath which keeps your sword in scabbard."

Don Esteban's face burned. He bowed to the señorita and turned to her father.

"Don Luis, I regret what happened in Monterey. I do not think it resulted in any harm except to the *senorita's* pride—"

"How dare you, *señor!*" she cried at him.

Don Esteban ignored her. "I am told that you felt shamed and so removed to this place," he added to Don Luis.

Don Luis smiled slightly. "It was my intention to come to San Diego de Alcala anyway, *señor,*" he said.

"Father!" the *señorita* raged.

Don Esteban glanced at her. She was beautiful in her rage. Don Esteban felt his heart beating quicker.

"I am returning to the *posada* in town, so you will not be embarrassed by my presence here," Don Esteban said.

"That is not necessary, *señor,* if you desire to remain at the mission," Don Luis assured him.

"My personal property is there, *señor,* and I am now well enough to go. I hope to meet you again here at the *fiesta* which will be held in a few days. This *fiesta,*" he added, giving the señorita a glance, "does not call for masquerade."

"*Señor!*" she flared at him.

Don Esteban laughed a little and bowed low, and went to the door, but there he stopped and turned.

"If you are interested in finery, *señorita,* I may say that one of the traders in town received a shipment of fine goods on the ship *Magdalena.* If I can give you any further instruction about this locality—"

"*Señor!* Can you not understand that I hate you?" she cried. "Have I not said you will die for what you did? You, who made me dance—"

"You were beautiful as you danced beneath the torches," he told her. "You are beautiful now, *señorita.*"

He bowed to her again, to her father, and strode on out.

FELIPE had engaged a cart to carry the leather chest to town, and would ride with it. Don Esteban gave thanks to Fray Francisco and mounted his horse. He rode leisurely, humming an air.

The bowing landlord welcomed him back to the *posada.*

When time for the evening meal came, he invited the two young *caballeros* to eat with him, and the three made a merry meal.

"This business of waiting for the time limit of an oath to expire no doubt is irksome," Don Esteban said, "but we may as well enjoy ourselves meanwhile."

"We rejoiced that you escaped death at the hands of the assassins, señor," Juan Feliz said. "From this moment, we shall guard you."

"It may prove a busy task, *señores.*"

"When do they hang the fellow you caught?" Marcos Chavez asked.

"He told a tale of being engaged by another to slay you, Esteban," Juan Feliz reported. "Name the man who hired him, and we will deal with the rogue."

"I shall deal with him myself."

"But you may be killed in the attempt, and we would save you for our own swords."

"Your kind interest overwhelms me," Don Esteban replied.

He bowed and left them. They saw Felipe hurry out. And after a time Don Esteban came from his room again, with a guitar.

"You will play for us?" Juan Feliz asked.

"For more delicate ears," Don Esteban replied.

Wondering, they followed him through the common room and outside, into the bright moonlight. Then they saw his horse ready, and shouted for their own.

He did not urge the black to high speed, and the other two soon overtook him. At the mission gate, he dismounted, and they followed his example.

Don Esteban walked around the buildings until he came to the guest house. He knew the window of Señorita Maria's room. Standing just outside it, he strummed the guitar and began a love song of Old Spain.

"The effrontery!" Juan Feliz said.

Don Esteban sang on. In the distance, some of the native neophytes took up the song softly. Watching the window, Don Esteban had a moment's glimpse of the *señorita's* face as she peered out, and knew she recognized him in the bright moonlight.

"Father!"

"*Si*, my child?"

"There must be an abundance of coyotes in this part of the land. One is howling now beneath my window."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### CLAWS OUT

THE next afternoon, Señorita Maria Godines decided she must inspect the trader's goods Don Esteban had mentioned, and drove into town with her father.

The arrival was noticed by Juan Feliz and Marcos Chavez, who immediately forgot they were guarding Don Esteban from assassins and hurried to the warehouse.

Don Esteban decided he would don new garments before he went to the warehouse also, and when he was dressed and ready met with a delay.

For the del Rio carriage had come to town again also, and Señorita Anita and her *dueña* had been left at the warehouse to inspect the goods while Don José rode on to the *posada*. He asked for a conference with Don Esteban, and the patio was cleared for them.

"In the name of your lineage, Don Esteban, I ask you to aid me if you can," the elder man said.

"In what way, Don José?"

"I can go to nobody else. You know how things have been with me. I decided to forget my ambitions, but my son would not."

"I fail to see what I can do about it, *señor*," Don Esteban said. "Your son has seen fit to make himself my enemy. The attack on me on the mission road was his doing."

"The boy is beside himself. Ambition has maddened him, and I am to be blamed, for I entertained that ambition first. I am an old man, and cannot go to him. Forget your quarrel, Don Esteban, for a time. Go to Manuel and beg him to return home before he does that which may cause him to be hanged for a traitor. Fight him afterward if you must . . . I would rather have him die on the point of a blade than on the end of a rope."

"Don Manuel would not listen to me."

"Make him listen, Esteban! Make him spare me this shame and disgrace. The men in the hills will not revolt unless a *caballero* leads them. Get Manuel home, and the trouble will be over. They will have no leader. Brocamonte . . . they are merely taking his gold and laughing at him. They would not fight for him. But they may for Manuel. They will burn, steal, kill. Then the soldiers will come and finish them . . . and their leader."

Don José's fear, his near approach to grief, touched Don Esteban. And the governor would be pleased, he knew, if this thing could be stopped without bloodshed.

"Don José," he said, "I will do my best. In two or three days, I will be prepared to go. My wound is not properly healed—"

"The shame of that! Manuel must have been mad! I will do anything to make amends, Esteban. Get him home, then do as you will. My daughter will thank you, also. She is now at the warehouse," Don José hinted.

JUAN FELIZ and Marcos Chavez thought they were doing a service when they introduced Señorita Anita del Rio and Señorita Maria Godines. But they only started fresh trouble.

"I have heard of you," Señorita Anita said. "About the affair with Don Esteban de la Zamora, I mean."

"I have my champions, *señorita,*" Maria Godines agreed, smiling at Juan and Marcos. "Have you none?"

"I have no need of them, *señorita.* I have not been seized in the street while dressed in rags, and carried to a cheap cantina and made to dance."

" 'Twas the best cantina in Monterey," Marie protested. "They say I danced very well, though frightened. Some can not."

Don Esteban saved the situation, striding in from outdoors, head up, a smile on his face, the eyes of Señor Devil-May-Care twinkling in his head. Señorita Anita flashed a smile at him.

"Ah, Don Esteban!" she said. "I am truly glad to see you again. I rejoice your hurt was not more serious. You are acquainted with Señorita Maria Godines, I believe?" There was malice in the remark.

"Indeed, yes!" Don Esteban agreed. "I had the honor of serenading her last evening at the mission, but she did not like my voice."

"Perhaps I will like it better another time, Don Esteban."

"How interesting," Anita del Rio purred. "Will a serenade wash away an insult?"

"It soothes one," Maria replied.

"I did not know. I have never been insulted. I have never dressed in rags to attend a peon's *fiesta.*"

"It does take courage," Maria observed.

Anita del Rio turned from her abruptly. "Don Esteban, will you favor me by helping me decide between two pieces of satin?"

"After he has helped me decide between two pieces of silk," Maria Godines said. "It is his duty, for I would not have known of this finery had he not told me yesterday at the mission, on his visit there."

"It is of small consequence," Señorita Anita assured her. "On second thought, none of the goods here are desirable."

"Oh, but this silk is what they consider to be quite the thing in Mexico at the viceroy's court," Señorita Maria replied. "But you would not know that, of course, being a provincial."

Anita del Rio's face flamed, and she almost choked in her wrath. She did manage to choke back a retort which would have been very unladylike.

"*Señores,* will one of you escort me to our carriage?" she asked. "I see my father is waiting." Both Juan Feliz and Marcos Chavez bowed to her.

"I was very rude," Señorita Maria said in a low voice, as Don Esteban bent toward her.

"Charmingly rude," he assured her, smiling. "May I have a dance at the *fiesta?*"

"Can you not understand, *señor,* that I hate you for what you did in Monterey, and hope to see you slain?"

"Hate is akin to love, *señorita.* And I would not let myself be slain, if it would bring tears to your pretty eyes."

"Tears in my eyes? I should laugh!"

"Look straight at me and say it."

But she would not. She turned to the trader and began asking prices, and Don Esteban smiled and walked through the door and into the sunshine. Señorita Anita was in the Del Rio carriage, and the two young *caballeros* were bowing to her. She beckoned Don Esteban.

"Let me say again, Don Esteban, that I rejoice at your recovery, and my father joins me in the sentiment," Señorita Anita said.

"Visit us soon, señor," Don José urged.

He gestured to the coachman, the señorita smiled, and the Del Rio carriage rolled away. Don Esteban turned to find Juan Feliz and Marcos Chavez glaring at him.

TELLING a tale of wishing to ride up El Camino Real and see some of the country, Don Esteban quietly made prepa-

rations to go to the hills the day following the *fiesta* at the mission. He was hoping to receive a report from Jorge Gonzales before then, so he would know how to reach Don Manuel quickly.

The *fiesta* started with a meal at noon, which attracted peons and natives from country miles around. Later, people would attend from the *haciendas* and from town. Don Esteban decided to remain at the *posada* until dusk, hoping he might hear from Jorge Gonzales.

Juan Feliz and Marcos Chavez deserted him and went to the mission early. Don Esteban saw the del Rio carriage pass through town and turn out the mission road, with Don José, the *señorita* and her *dueña* in it.

He dressed with care, and had his horse got ready. Dusk had come as he rode out the highway. He passed others bound to the mission, tossed coins to those who cried for alms, sang as he rode. Don Esteban was light of heart.

Musicians were playing when he reached the mission. A throng sat around the tables and another throng danced. In front of the guest house, persons of lineage sat on benches and watched the merrymaking.

Don Esteban swaggered around the edge of the dancing crowd, going toward the guest house. The moon gave a bright light, but the *frailes* had put torches and tallow pots everywhere also. Streaks of amber light wavered and flickered as the dancers wove through them.

The music stopped, the dancers went back beneath the arches. Now, peons and natives would watch the fine folk dance by themselves. As the music began, Don Esteban reached the benches.

SEÑORITA ANITA looked perturbed when she saw him approaching, for she had just risen to dance with Marcos Chavez. Don Esteban bowed to her and passed on. Maria Godines was claimed by Juan Feliz, and they danced away. Don Esteban walked aside, to where Sergeant Salazar was standing with a couple of troopers from the *presidio*.

"Ho, sergeant!" he said. "So you like music and laughter?"

"I am here on duty, Don Esteban, I shall eat and drink my fill, but not dance."

"Your *capitán—?*"

"In the guest house, Don Esteban. He said he desired to see you as soon as you arrived."

Don Esteban found Angelus pacing around in a corner of the common room, with nobody near enough to overhear.

"I have had disquieting reports, Don Esteban," the *capitán* said. "A horde of men up in the hills are preparing for another confounded uprising. Miguel Brocamonte is behind this one."

"He is not alone, *capitán*. That is the matter which brought me here," Don Esteban confessed.

"So?"

"His Excellency desires to save a man of noble lineage from the consequences of folly."

"Del Rio! So that was why Don Manuel tried to have you killed. He must have known you are a Governor's man."

" 'Twas not that. I was invited to participate, and refused to do so," Don Esteban replied, smiling.

"What shall be done?"

"They must be stopped before they make a move."

"And how—?"

"I start for the hills in the morning . . . possibly late tonight. They do not like Don Manuel, for he does not know how to handle them. I do."

"How, *señor?*"

"I'll stand their friend, scatter money among them, show them they are but dupes if they play another man's game."

"I hope you succeed, Don Esteban. What shall be do with Brocamonte?"

"That has me puzzled," Don Esteban confessed. "He may drag the del Rios into it. They were associated at the start of the affair. I am awaiting a report now. I'll let you know what I hear."

There was a burst of laughter outside, and the music began again. Don Esteban left the *capitán* and hurried out. He

brushed Marcos Chavez aside and bowed to Señorita Maria Godines.

"Will you dance once, *señorita,* with the man you wish to see slain?" he asked, in a low voice.

She smiled at him and arose to take his arm.

THROUGH the shadows they danced, now at arms' length and now close together. After a little laughter and banter at first, they did not speak. The *señorita's* eyes were starry as she looked up at him. They became lost in the crowd. Don Esteban danced her to where the shadows were deeper, and bent his head.

"That I should love the woman who hates me!" he said.

"Is this a jest, *señor?*"

"You know it is not. From the time I left Monterey, I have had before me a vision of you in rags, tears of rage streaming down your cheeks. Let me spend a lifetime in atoning."

"All is forgiven, *señor,*" she whispered.

"You do not hate me, then?"

"This I feel cannot be hate."

He whirled her in the dance, swept her into his arms and held her tightly. In a shadowy spot, he bent his head swiftly and touched her lips with his own. Fire burned against fire.

"Señor—" she breathed.

"I may speak to your father?"

"*Si.* Take me back now, and leave me alone a little while. 'Twas at a dance I learned to hate you, and at a dance that the hate turned to—" She faltered.

"Say it, señorita!"

"Later . . . after I have heard you say it first."

Don Esteban left her with her father, and walked back along the wall, for he wanted to be alone and examine this thing that had happened to him. Señor Devil-may-care was caught at last! He would be tamed now—at least in a measure. No more dangerous wild pranks for him.

Yet the most dangerous of all, the most terrible, was at hand. He glanced through one of the arches—and saw Rosa, the peon girl, beckoning him.

**TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK**

## Looking Ahead!

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***COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—OCTOBER 12***

# Argonotes

## The Readers' Viewpoint

WE ARE pretty much at ease in our corner this week; in fact, we're feeling complacent. Look at what our correspondents have to say. One of them was tremendously impressed by Borden Chase's "The Sun Sets at Five" and wants another Smooth Kyle story quick. Well, we're giving him one, and this seven-parter should satisfy Mr. Chase's most devoted admirers.

Then there's Mr. Llewellyn. In general he's pleased with the way things have been going, but he would like to have a Carse and a Bedford-Jones. While he was writing his letter we were rushing Mr. Bedford-Jones' "Emerald of Isis" to him; and the new Carse serial, "Rebel Take Arms" confronted him not very long after he returned from the mail-box. Rather neat work, we think; and we trust that you will be as satisfied as Messrs. Llewellyn, Ostermann and we are.

### ROBERT OSTERMANN

Although I'm a comparatively new reader, I'm completely sold on ARGOSY. As a fiction magazine it has no peer, so I thought I'd send you belated congratulations on Borden Chase's latest novel, "The Sun Sets at Five."

Never have I read a story that has thrilled me so with its patriotic spirit. Smooth Kyle's hard-boiled attitude only makes him that more real to the readers. Do not fail to have Chase write another Kyle story in the near future.

And now a query of mine. I enjoyed "The Sun Sets at Five" so much that I determined to get a hold of the other Smooth Kyle stories. My deduction is that the first Smooth Kyle novel was back in 1935—"Midnight Taxi." Have there been any novels featuring Smooth between '35 and '40?

Now that that's off my chest I'd like to pass on to other readers my system for preserving serials. I wait until the serial is concluded and then take the staples out of the magazines. Using the cover of the first installment—which usually illustrates the serial—I take the loose parts and staple them together. When I'm finished I have a perfect copy of a novel that can be read at one sitting like a book and preserved.
LA GRANGE, ILL.

BETWEEN 1935 and 1940 there were two Smooth Kyle serials—"Once for a Thousand" in 1936, and "Blue, White and Perfect" in 1937. Mr. Ostermann will enjoy them, we're quite sure. . . . Now here is a faithful correspondent who is kind enough to send us bouquets.

### W. WALLACE LLEWELLYN

I've been throwing brickbats at you for the last few months, but this time I want to hand you a few bouquets. Thanks for the good work of bringing back some of ARGOSY's old favorites such as W. C. Tuttle, R. V. Gery, D. L. Ames, C. F. Kearns, Elston, etcetera. Now if you will give us those short stories by H. Bedford-Jones and the serial by Robert Carse you promised me, I will be "In Seventh Heaven".

I've been enjoying the short stories by Garnett Radcliffe very, very much and wonder if you couldn't get him to write us another novel. Another ARGOSY author I would like to see make a return appearance is James B. Hendryx. Also would like to see a long serial by Walter C. Brown.

Thanks again.
SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

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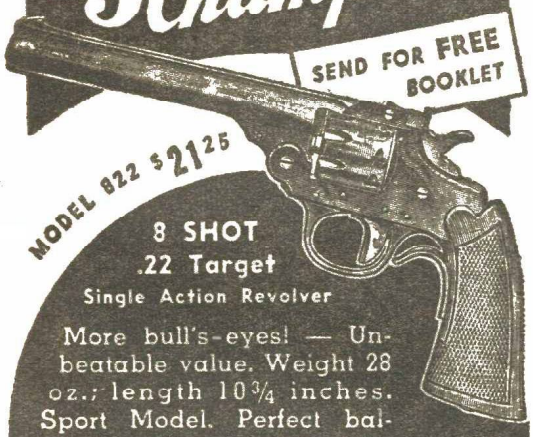

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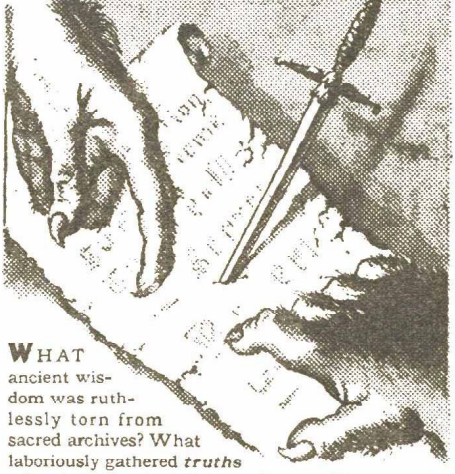

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