

ARGOSY



10¢

WEEKLY

SEPT. 28

Canada
12¢



Robert Carse
REBEL TAKE ARMS

*Stirring Novel of a Scotch
Warrior's Voyage to Freedom*

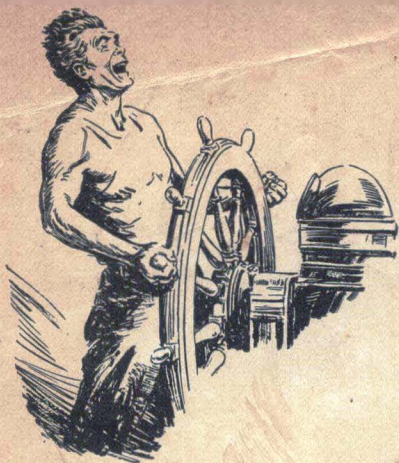
C. K. Shaw
RIFLE RIDE

Dramatic Short Novel of the West

Richard Sale
OLD UNCLE GHOST

Unusual Civil War Story

PRICE • McCULLY • BEYER



SAIL HO!

**Coming to the
News Stands**

SEPTEMBER 25TH

A brand-new magazine, crammed from cover to cover with stirring action fiction . . . entertaining, informative fact articles . . . pictures and photos, all about "that old devil sea." There's a ship-model department that gives you full-size plans for putting a model schooner in a bottle . . . navy notes . . . and the "I wonder what became of" department that may help you find old shipmates.

Bucko mates and hell-ships . . . tropic isles and rolling swells . . . howling hurricanes and doldrums . . . they're all in the exciting, thrilling sailor-man yarns that you'll find in this new magazine.

The \$2.00 book-length novel featured in the November issue is entitled "Northwest to Mutiny" by J. Allan Dunn.

Don't miss the first issue. Watch for it on the stands.

SEA NOVELS

NOVEMBER ISSUE . . . 10c

Remember the on sale date — September 25th

If your dealer can't supply you, send 10c to 280 Broadway, New York City, and a copy will be mailed to you.



Plan Your Future

Choose Your Field NOW For Success

Will you master fate or will fate master you? That's a question deserving your honest answer...right now! Actually it is largely up to you. You can do with Life almost what you will. LaSalle will help you establish yourself for real success by providing you with the comprehensive, specialized training for which it is so famous. Choose your field . . . now! Check the coupon below for the free booklet you want us to send you. It can be your first step toward assured success.

Opportunities in Traffic Management

The field of Traffic Management offers real opportunity only to the man who knows. Spare time study and the will to succeed have pushed scores of Traffic employees up the ladder to financial success. Many LaSalle-trained traffic managers—in the railroad, truck and industrial field—now command salaries of \$3,000.00 to \$5,000.00 a year—and better. Investigate. Find out how you can qualify for these higher positions through LaSalle home-study and guidance.

Law for Business Success

And it isn't necessary to practice law to get this Success. In fact probably most of the men who study law today have no idea of taking the bar examination or becoming lawyers—they want law training to help them master men and situations in business. You know that—

- (1) the man with legal training is a leader—not a follower.
- (2) legal training keeps your mind—clears away the problems that stump the ordinary fellow and makes you master instead of man.
- (3) knowledge of law simplifies the complications of executive work.
- (4) Many top executive places are filled by men who have studied law.

No matter whether you are in a big corporation or a small business—in a city or a little town—a practical knowledge of law can hardly fail to be of real and vital help to you in making a more successful career.

In every state in the union you'll find law-trained men who came up through LaSalle. What others have done, you can do.

And LaSalle offers either a full law course leading to LL. B. or a shorter business law training—whichever you prefer. All text material, including valuable 14-volume Law Library. Training comprises the most effective features of modern law instruction.

Executive Training

Executives who are efficient managers command responsible positions and good incomes. And the need for

trained executives is growing rapidly. We train you thoroughly at home in your sparetime for every type of executive work—teach you the principles and practices used by our most successful business leaders and help you develop your management capacity—by a training built with the aid of outstanding executives.

Become an Expert Accountant The Profession That Pays

The demand for skilled accountants—men who really know the business—is increasing rapidly. New state and federal legislation requires much more, and more efficient accounting from business—big and small. Corporations are in constant need of expert counsel in matters relating to Auditing, Cost Accounting, Business Law, Organization, Management, Finance. Men who prove the qualifications in this important branch of business are rapidly promoted to responsible executive positions—given an opportunity to earn real salaries. The range is from \$2,000.00 to \$10,000.00 a year—even to higher income figures.

Under the LaSalle Problem Method you can at home acquire a thorough understanding of Higher Accountancy, master its fundamental principles, become expert in the practical application of these principles—this without losing an hour of work or a dollar of pay.

Your training will be under the direct supervision of a staff of legal, organization and management specialists, business efficiency engineers and Certified Public Accountants.

Preliminary knowledge of bookkeeping is unnecessary. We train you from the ground up, or from where you now are, according to your individual needs.

Mr. Salesman: What's Wrong?

Why aren't you making more sales more money? Is it you—or your proposition? Check yourself first on yourself. Other men—no better than you—have found their earnings jump and stay up when they trained with LaSalle. Literally thousands of men—many of them years at the game—have increased their sales volume and earnings through home study with LaSalle guidance. Sound—practical—usable—right from field experience. Train for top-notch production with LaSalle.

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION Dept. 958-R Chicago

I would like to have your special booklet—without any cost or obligation to me—about my opportunities and your success training in the business field I have checked.

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Higher Accountancy | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Law | <input type="checkbox"/> Business English |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Law: Degree of LL. B. | <input type="checkbox"/> Expert Bookkeeping | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management | <input type="checkbox"/> C. P. A. Coaching | <input type="checkbox"/> Effective Speaking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Salesmanship | <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenotypy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Foremanship | |

Name.....Age.....

Position.....Address.....



ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

Volume 302 CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 28, 1940 Number 3

- Rebel Take Arms—*First of four parts*.....Robert Carse 6
Out from Scotland after the tragic wars goes the young Kenzie, to grapple with a world where others fight for liberty
- Legends of the Legionaries—*Picture Feature*.....W. A. Windas 23
Lexicon of the Fighting-men
- Old Uncle Ghost—*Short Story*.....Richard Sale 24
Two youngsters watched fearfully as the Bluecoats came; and then the Old Man of the Mountain went to work
- Men of Daring—*True Story in Pictures*.....Stookie Allen 34
Healy and Kenlon—Irish Smoke-eaters
- Rifle Ride—*Complete Short Novel*.....C. K. Shaw 36
Squaw Mountain folk don't take kindly to any stranger—and when he's a trigger-fast Texan, they're apt to lynch first and parley after
- Señor Devil-may-care—*Second of four parts*.....Johnston McCulley 59
Shaky indeed, a caballero's honor, when it cannot be defended by the sword
- Another Road to Destiny—*Short Story*.....E. Hoffmann Price 79
It's a hot and perilous trek across the desert—even when you travel with a saint
- Minions of Mercury—*Conclusion*.....William Gray Beyer 91
Whom the gods would destroy—they first make quintuplets
-
- Glawackus to You, Too.....Dr. Charles Ticknor Tolson 90
- Argonotes 110
- Looking Ahead! 109

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

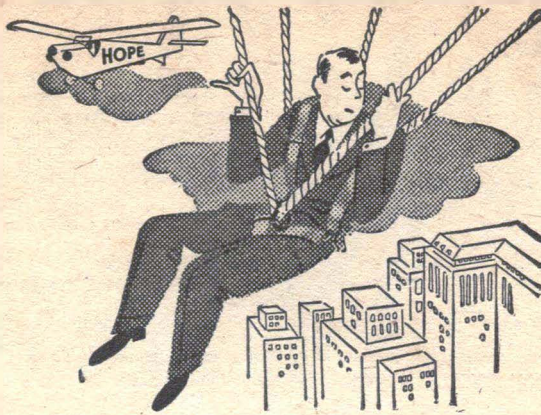
WILLIAM T. DEWART, JR., Secretary

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE, 111 Rue Réaumur

LONDON: THE CONTINENTAL PUBLISHERS & DISTRIBUTORS, LTD., 3 La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C. 4
Copyright, 1940, by Frank A. Munsey Company. Published weekly. Single copies 10c; Canada 12c. By the year \$4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; Canada, \$6.00. Other countries, \$7.00. Currency should not be sent unless registered. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Entered as second class matter November 28, 1896 at the post office, New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright and must not be reprinted without the publisher's permission. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office. Copyright in Great Britain. Printed in U. S. A. Manuscripts submitted to this magazine should be accompanied by sufficient postage for their return if found unavailable. The publisher can accept no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.

Other RED STAR Magazines

FANTASTIC NOVELS • RED STAR MYSTERY • FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES • RED STAR ADVENTURES
• CRACK-SHOT WESTERN • DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY • RED STAR DETECTIVE • CONFESSION NOVEL
OF THE MONTH • RED STAR WESTERN • RED STAR LOVE REVELATIONS • FOREIGN LEGION ADVENTURES •
RED STAR SECRET CONFESSIONS. • DOUBLE DETECTIVE. • ALL STORY-LOVE • BIG CHIEF WESTERN
• LOVE NOVEL OF THE MONTH • CAVALIER CLASSICS • RAILROAD MAGAZINE • FIFTH COLUMN STORIES
• SEA NOVEL MAGAZINE



ARE YOU JUST HOPING TO LAND IN A GOOD JOB?

HOPE without foundation doesn't go far in this competitive age. But hope PLUS TRAINING is a winning combination!

Today, in all kinds of professions and trades, men are getting ahead — earning more money — getting promotions — because of serious, systematic study of International Correspondence Schools Courses.

I. C. S. Courses are prepared by authorities chosen for practical as well as theoretical knowledge. Instruction is a personal — not a “rubber stamp” — relationship between student and instructor. The coupon will bring you detailed information on the subject in which you need training.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX 2222-F, SCRANTON, PENNA.

★ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, “Who Wins and Why,” and full particulars about the course before which I have marked X: ★

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Air Brake | <input type="checkbox"/> Cotton Manufacturing | <input type="checkbox"/> Marine Engines | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Signalmen's | <input type="checkbox"/> Refrigeration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Air Conditioning | <input type="checkbox"/> Air Conditioning | <input type="checkbox"/> Diesel Engines | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Drafting | <input type="checkbox"/> Sanitary Engineering | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Drafting | <input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Drafting | <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheet Metal Work | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Lighting | <input type="checkbox"/> Mine Foreman | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Electric | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Engine Tune-up | <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Engine Tune-up | <input type="checkbox"/> Fire Booses | <input type="checkbox"/> Navigation | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Engines | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Technician | <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Technician | <input type="checkbox"/> Fruit Growing | <input type="checkbox"/> Patternmaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Fitting | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aviation | <input type="checkbox"/> Boilermaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Heating | <input type="checkbox"/> Pharmacy | <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Drafting | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Boilermaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Heat Treatment of Metals | <input type="checkbox"/> Plumbing | <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineering | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building Estimating | <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Highway Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Poultry Farming | <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry | <input type="checkbox"/> Building Estimating | <input type="checkbox"/> House Planning | <input type="checkbox"/> Practical Telephony | <input type="checkbox"/> Telegraph Engineering | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry | <input type="checkbox"/> Locomotive Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Works Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Textile Designing | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coal Mining | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Machinist | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio, General | <input type="checkbox"/> Toolmaking | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Concrete Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Coal Mining | <input type="checkbox"/> Management of Inventions | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio Operating | <input type="checkbox"/> Welding, Electric and Gas | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contracting and Building | <input type="checkbox"/> Concrete Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Managing Men at Work | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio Servicing | <input type="checkbox"/> Woolen Manufacturing | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Contracting and Building | <input type="checkbox"/> Manufacture of Pulp Paper | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Section Foreman | | |

BUSINESS COURSES

- | | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertising | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Service | <input type="checkbox"/> First Year College | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Postal Clerk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeeping | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertising | <input type="checkbox"/> College Preparatory | <input type="checkbox"/> Foremanship | <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence | <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeeping | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial | <input type="checkbox"/> French | <input type="checkbox"/> Service Station Salemanship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence | <input type="checkbox"/> Cost Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> Grade School | <input type="checkbox"/> Sign Lettering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cartooning | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management | <input type="checkbox"/> C. P. Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> High School | <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Cartooning | | <input type="checkbox"/> Illustrating | <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management |
| | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Lettering Show Cards | |

DOMESTIC SCIENCE COURSES

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Dressmaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Home Dressmaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foods and Cookery | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Dressmaking and Designing | |

Name.....Age.....Address.....
City.....State.....Present Position.....

Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada
British residents send coupon to I. C. S., 71 Kingway, London, W. C. 2, England

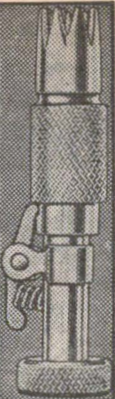
**UGLY, LONG HAIRS in NOSE
ANNOY YOU—OFFEND OTHERS
NOW SANI-CLIP THEM OUT SAFELY!**

You NEED SANI-CLIP because well-groomed men don't offend with ugly, nostril or ear-lobe hair. You feel better—look neater after using SANI-CLIP. Doctors know pulling or cutting hair is dangerous—may cause infection. To use SANI-CLIP: Place inside nostril—turn bottom knob. Hair is clipped closely safely—can't pull or cut. Sanitary! Shipped Postpaid—Money Back Guarantee!



ACTUAL SIZE 2"

MALCOLM PRODUCTS,
54 Clinton St., Dept. G, Newark, N. J.
Enclosed is \$1.00 for SANI-CLIP. If it does not meet with my complete satisfaction, I shall return it and my \$1.00 will be refunded.
NAME
ADDRESS



RUPTURED?

Get Relief This Proven Way

Why try to worry along with trusses that squeeze your flesh—press heavily on hips and spine—enlarge opening—fall to hold rupture? You need the Cluthe. No leg-straps or cutting belts. Automatic adjustable pad holds at real opening—follows every body movement with instant increased support in case of strain. Cannot slip whether at work or play. Light. Waterproof. Can be worn in bath. Send for amazing FREE book, "Advice To Ruptured" and details of liberal truthful 60-day trial offer. Also endorsements from grateful users in your neighborhood. Write: CLUTHE SONS, Dept. 28, Bloomfield, New Jersey.

BECOME AN EXPERT ACCOUNTANT

Executive Accountants and C. P. A.'s earn \$2,000 to \$10,000 a year. Thousands of firms need them. About 20,000 Certified Public Accountants in the U. S. We train you thoroughly at home in spare time for C. P. A. examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous experience unnecessary. Personal training under supervision of staff of C. P. A.'s, including members of the American Institute of Accountants. Write for free book, "Accountancy, the Profession That Pays." LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 458-H Chicago
A Correspondence Institution



HI-STANDARD AUTOMATIC
.22 caliber Model "B" for long rifle cartridges. Model "C" for .22 short cartridges. 4 1/2" or 6 3/4" barrel.
Choice\$17.95
N. & R. "922" .22 caliber 6" barrel 9 shot target revolver.....\$9.45
Gov't Cartridges, 30/06 Boattail, \$3.50 per 100. Send stamp for each list.—Ammunition surplus, etc.—Used Rifles—Used Shotguns (\$2 Deposit on C. O. D's)
HUDSON SPORTING GOODS CO.
W-52 WARREN ST. (New—FREE Catalog) NEW YORK

SELL TIES—OVER 100% PROFIT

\$1 STARTS YOU IN BUSINESS

5 TIES UP

Slide-On Ties, Sample Tie 20c. Doz. \$2.00
Silk Lined Ties, Sample Tie 35c. Doz. \$1.50
Hand Made Ties, Sample Tie 35c..... Doz. \$3.60
Custom Made Ties, Sample Tie 20c..... Doz. \$1.80
Muffler, Tie & Kerchief, Sample boxed set..... \$.80
Tie & Kerchief Set, Sample 35c..... Doz. \$3.60
3 Ties in box with Jewelry Set, Sample 60c..... Doz. \$6.00
25% deposit, balance C. O. D. Write for FREE Wholesale Catalog.
PHILIP'S NECKWEAR, 20 West 22nd St., Dept. M-20, New York

LAW STUDY AT HOME

Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before. Big corporations are headed by men with legal training.
More Ability: More Prestige: More Money
We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL. B. Successful graduate in every section of the U. S. We furnish all text material, including 14-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 68-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send for them NOW.
LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 958-L Chicago
A Correspondence Institution

WANTED for CASH UNUSED U. S. POSTAGE

ALL VALUES. 90% OF FACE VALUE.
IMMEDIATE PAYMENT. EST. 1933
STAMP ACCOMMODATION SERVICE
DEPT. M. 90 JOHN ST. NEW YORK

One-Spot Flea Killer Kills Lice, Ants, Flies, Aphids, Bedbugs, Crab Lice, Potato Bugs, Cabbage Worms.

Send for **FREE DOG BOOKLET**

• DUST ON ONESpot • Mex. Bean Beetle
25c Everywhere.
"One-Spot" Co., ElkrIDGE, Md.

FROM A Hundred Fathoms Deep

The SECRET KNOWLEDGE of a LOST RACE

Majestic structures once stood where now is naught but the ocean's roar. Legends relate a mysterious people survived to reach Egypt's shore. Did they impart a magnificent wisdom to secret brotherhoods? Is the Great Pyramid a silent testimony to their greatness? From the land of the Nile there has descended—through the ages—a strange knowledge, truths that have guided men to the mastery of life. For centuries the Rosicrucians (not a religious organization) have aided in perpetuating these teachings and extended them to all who sought to vanquish fear and dominate environment.

THIS FREE BOOK

If you wish to receive these time-honored—yet simple and rational—truths of nature, write for a free copy of the "Sealed Book." It tells how you may participate in the finer benefits of life. Address: Scribe B.M.Z.

The
ROSICRUCIANS
(AMORC)
SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA



FACTORY-TO-YOU
Save up to 50% **EASY TERMS**

30 DAYS TRIAL

PUT THIS 1941 CHASSIS IN YOUR OWN CABINET

14-TUBES AMAZING FOREIGN RECEPTION

\$19.95 COMPLETE WITH TUBES AND SPEAKER

FREQUENCY MODULATION AND TELEVISION PROVISION

Now, you can enjoy the mighty power of a 14-tube 1941 radio at the amazingly low factory-to-you price of \$19.95. Brilliant performance—beautiful tone. Now, tune in broadcasts direct from distant overseas stations.

SEE MIDWEST'S ANSWER TO TRADE-INS!

Big 1941 catalog shows how to buy at wholesale price . . . direct from factory. Read about sensational new 14-tube cabinet model at \$29.95. Also other chassis and cabinet models from 5 to 17-tubes . . . up to 5 wave bands . . . including Radio-phonograph-combinations and Home Recorder.

FREE RADIO CATALOG

SEND POST CARD FOR FREE 1941 CATALOG NOW!

USER-AGENTS Make Extra Money!

MIDWEST RADIO CORPORATION
 DEPT. 63-AA CINCINNATI, OHIO

I'll Send My FIRST LESSON FREE



It Shows How I Train You at Home in Spare Time for a GOOD



J. E. SMITH, Pres. National Radio Institute

RADIO JOB

Get my sample lesson Free. Examine it—see how clear it is, how easy to understand. Find out how I train you at home in spare time to be a Radio Technician. Do it now.

MANY RADIO TECHNICIANS MAKE NOW \$30, \$40, \$50 A WEEK

Radio Broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen, in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and service men. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make \$30, \$40, \$50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make \$5 to \$10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, Police, Aviation, Commercial Radio; Loudspeaker Systems, Electronic Devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N. R. I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open good jobs soon.

MANY MAKE \$5 TO \$10 A WEEK EXTRA IN SPARE TIME WHILE LEARNING

The day you enroll, I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets; start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your Course, I send plans and directions that have helped many make \$5 to \$10 a week in spare time while learning. I send you special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits.

FIND OUT WHAT RADIO AND TELEVISION OFFER YOU

Act Today. Mail coupon for Sample Lesson and 64-page book. They point out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tell about my course in Radio and Television; show more than 100 letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Find out what Radio offers YOU! MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a postcard—NOW!

Dept. OJK, National Radio Institute Washington, D. C.



\$3,500 a Year in Own Business

"After completing the N. R. I. Course I became Radio Editor of the Buffalo Courier. Later I started a Radio service business of my own, and have averaged over \$3,500 a year."—T. J. TELAAK, 657 Broadway, New York City.



\$10 to \$25 a Week in Spare Time

"I am now making from \$10 to \$25 a week in spare time while still holding my regular job as a machinist. I owe my success to N. R. I."—Wm. F. RUFF, 611 Green St., Bridgeport, Pa.

write for magazines

New writers are always welcomed by editors. In spare time, in your own home, you can learn magazine writing from experts. The Magazine Institute, a home study school operated by successful writers and editors, offers modern, practical training in short story and article writing. Simple, fascinating assignments. Individual attention. Write at once for the free booklet, "The Best Job in the World." No obligation. Address:

THE MAGAZINE INSTITUTE dept. K. 9-13—
 50 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.

HAVE YOU READ

FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

the magazine of stories you couldn't imagine?

U. S. GOVERNMENT JOBS!

START \$1260 to \$2100 a Year

Get Ready Immediately.
 Men—Women
 Thousands appointments every year.
 Mail Coupon today sure.

COUPON

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. H-251
 Rochester, N. Y.

Sirs: Rush to me without charge (1) 32-page book with list of U. S. Government jobs, salaries, duties, ages, etc. (2) Tell me how to qualify for one of these jobs.

Name.....
 Address.....

MAIL NOW for FREE PROOF

Mr. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. OJK
 National Radio Institute
 Washington, D. C.

Without obligating me, mail me a Sample Lesson and your 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No salesman will call. Write plainly.)

Age.....

Name.....

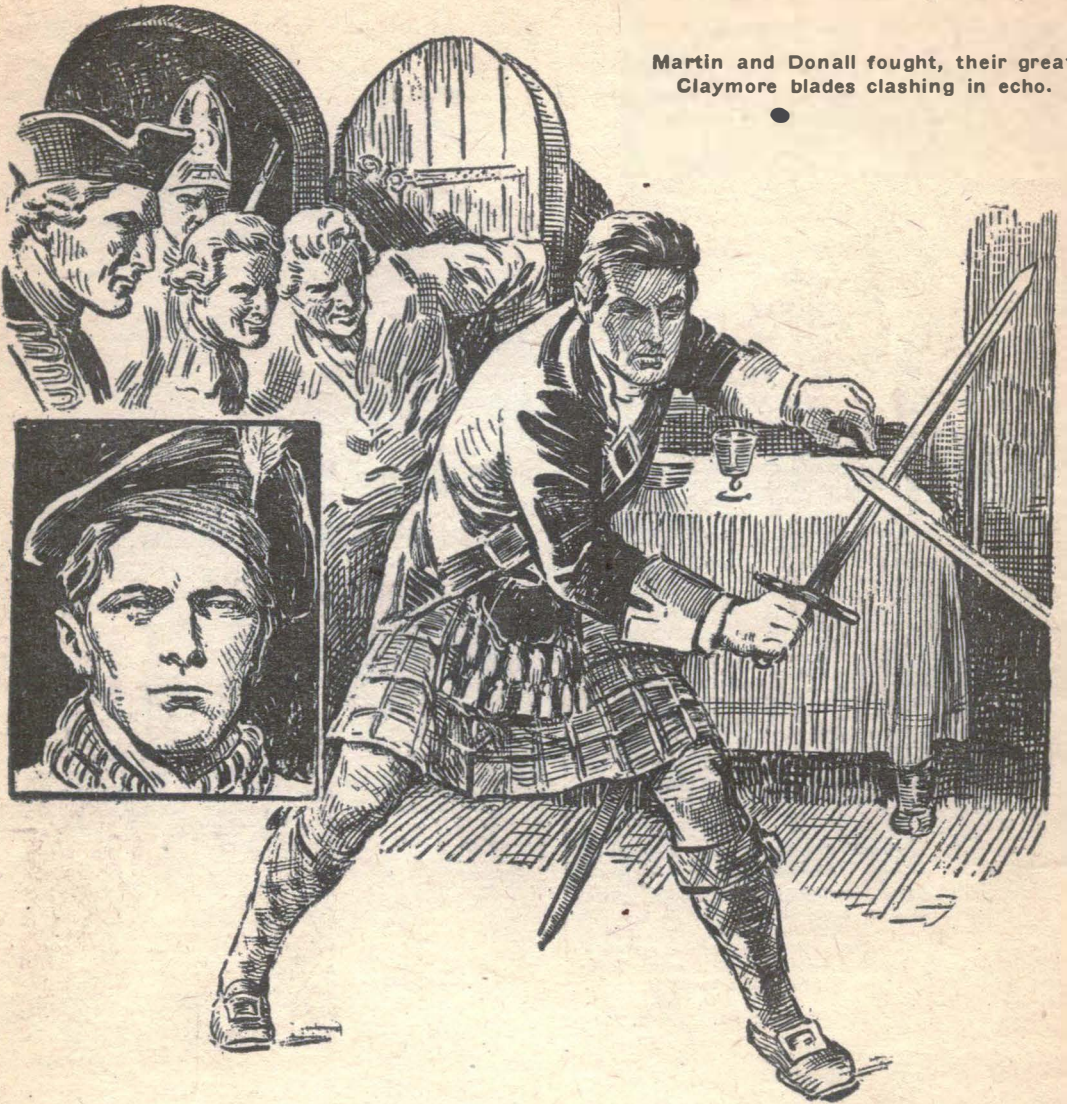
Address.....

City..... State.....

2FR



Martin and Donall fought, their great
Claymore blades clashing in echo.



Rebel Take Arms

By ROBERT CARSE

Author of "Blockade," "Dark Thunder," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE BROADSWORD IS KEEN

THIS was the end of it; the bitter fighting and the terrible marching. Scotland must win today, Donall Kenzie knew, or she was lost forever to the English.

Here on Culloden Field above the gray and bleak town of Inverness, the Bonnie Prince Charlie was bringing the clans to meet the army of Lord Cumberland. It had taken almost a year, this war of 1745, and it was almost done.

Donall Kenzie marched staggering, so weary that he could not stand straight.

Loyalty wears a strange guise in Glen Cluagh, where brother cuts down brother, calls him traitor. And now, after the bloody battle of Culloden, the bravest of the Kenzies turns his back forever on Scotland—to take over the world for his territory in an endless quest of freedom



His bare feet stamped heavily through the mud, the snow and moss of the moor. He saw them as if they belonged to some other man, were not his own.

He tried to count the paces, remembering all the miles he'd gone, into England and then out again, and then last night to Nairn. To Nairn, where they'd been lost in the snow, failed to get close to the English camp before dawn.

Up ahead, out in front of the Scottish column, the pipers began to play. Each pipe-band gave forth its own clan call, but they were all fierce, spirited.

Donall Kenzie brought his lean body

erect. You see no other man's feet, he thought, because you lead your clan. He looked back at his men of Clan Kenzie, smiled at them.

Their bonnets were pulled low across their brows. They carried the heavy muskets as if they hated them. Yet as they heard the clan call their heads raised. The bony faces sharply set. Men touched the hilts of their Claymores, hefted up their spike-centered leather targes.

"'Tis not far now, lads," he said. "Look yon. There's the Sassenach. Aye, the same lot we whipped at Prestonpans and Falkirk and all the rest. But this day we'll

take Cumberland's fat belly and wi' it make a drum."

Young Jamie, the standard-bearer, nodded and spat into the snow. "A drum they'll hear in London," he said. "Do ye ken, though, sir, that the Kenzie himself will be wi' us this day?"

"No," Donall Kenzie said. "I doubt it much. Your chieftain, my brother Martin, is a man who likes his law books better than his liberty. He's now perhaps wi' Cumberland's army, or in his chambers in Edinburgh, his head between his knees for shame. . . .

"Close them up yon, Jamie! We're come to fight, not haver."

Hail beat down over them as they deployed out across Dummrossie Muir. Behind them was Culloden House, dun-colored among its rows of sparse trees. Before them was a deep bog, and then the English army, machine-like, smoothly moving even in the hail.

The pipes had stopped. The Highland men stood still.

Clan Chattan had led the van, now held the center of the deployed Scottish. It was ancient tradition that Clan Chattan be given the right of any Highland fighting line, but they had been ordered to the left wing.

Clan Ranald, their chieftain, was wild with fury. He cursed Lord George Murray in a straining voice. "'Tis the Atholl men he's sent to the right," he said. "And the Camerons beside them. What d' ye think o' that fair pure insult, Kenzie?"

Donall Kenzie had never struck a blow in battle before the days of the '45. But at Prestonpans he had learned what Highland valor meant, had seen the Ranald chieftain cut down the English as another man would cut wheat.

"I'm of your belief," he said. "But Lord George is wi' the Prince. 'Tis the Prince's orders we take, none else's."

Ranald drew his great broadsword, balanced it in both hands. "Ye do well fair a lad o' twenty-two," he said. "Ye've got some brains in yeer hot head. More, say, than yeer brother."

A blush of anger and of hurt went through Kenzie's fair-skinned face. He made a kind of half bow to the older man. "Would you be pleased, chief," he said, "to name no names. Our clan has held its honor since the Prince first landed."

"Aye," Ranald said. He put his hand on Kenzie's shoulder. "But feel no shame about the loyalty o' yeer brother. Ye've given the Prince enough fair the two of ye."

SUN was coming out through the low, snow-dark sky. It brought sparkle and color from the armies. The Scots stood in ragged alignment, the greens and yellows and russets and blues on their tartans like some strange, huge mass of flowers.

But in the center of their rear line Prince Charlie's Life Guards kept stiff formation. They wore blue uniforms with red waistcoats, and among them the Prince seemed to gleam. He was dressed in a long silk coat and the blue-patterned royal red kilt of the Stuarts. His sword hilt caught the sun, and his silver-chased stirrup hoods.

The high, narrow Stuart head was brought back as he studied his army. A man to fight for, Donall Kenzie thought, one who had led charges shouting, "Make haste! Make haste!"

The English advanced steadily, rank on rank. They marched at the goose-step, their white gaiters flickering in the widening sun. Now the company columns were deployed as squads. The sergeants with their halberds at the right shoulder inspected the line.

For every half a dozen companies of those black-hatted lads, Donall Kenzie saw, there was a company of the Grenadiers. The Grenadiers were bigger men, wore their gold, miter caps as if they were really priests.

Off on the right flank, past the low stone wall leading down to the river, were a lot of dragoons. Better watch them, he told himself—and then he noticed the Campbells.

They moved at much quicker pace than

the English troops. They came to the double to take position behind the wall on the slope. But most of the Scottish had marked the Campbell dark green, the orange ribbons on the bonnets.

"Traitors!" they yelled at the Campbells. "Traitors an' spawn o' the same!"

A thudding crack broke that high yelling. The Bonnie Prince's six little brass cannon were firing at the English advance line. "Och," Ranald said. "Now's no time fair lawn bowls. The shot all fall short. 'Tis the steel that'll win fair us, and the Sassenach who have the cannon that carry."

Back of the English reserve line the horse-drawn artillery had swung into place. Lord Cumberland sat near them on a boulder, his gross body poised as he looked at the Scottish through his spy-glass. Then he slid down, remounted, and the artillery officer gave the command to fire.

IT WAS Donall Kenzie's thought that the cannon shot made a whimpering through the air like the Winter wind at home at night at Glen Cluagh. For a moment he wished he were there, beside the still loch, or high among the firs of the glenside.

The English shot was tearing the Scottish line apart. Men were beheaded, truncated. Arms and legs were lopped. Blood was on the pale moss now, stained it dark brown.

He cursed, knowing that if he didn't curse he would scream. "Damn Murray!" he said. "We're ready. We should gang at them an' attack."

All along the line the clansmen were saying the same thing. Ranald's face had gone pale with fury; his eyes were not entirely sane. "A runner," he called to his clan. "A runner to go to Lord George Murray."

But a mounted officer had turned at the gallop from the center. He rode low to his horse, his powdered wig a target for the English sharpshooters. He sprang down beside Clan Ranald, saluted him, spoke fast in French.

Clan Ranald almost hit him in the face. "Ye ken what he says?" he asked Kenzie.

"Aye," Kenzie said. "Our dominie taught me some French at home. This lad would say that the right must attack first, while the center waits. The Prince and Lord George wants the Campbells cleared from off our flank."

Clan Ranald smiled. He lifted and kissed the blade of his Claymore. "They've started to attack yon," he said. "Our time's come." He faced his clansmen, the sword above his head as he gave the clan cry, "*Dh'aindeoin co theiradhe!*"

His clansmen ran after him with the speed of deer. Donall Kenzie started forward, calling to his own men. It was the young French officer who caught his arm. "You must wait," he said.

Battle hysteria held Donall Kenzie. All his volatile, highly strung Highland nature was aroused to strike and kill. "Who says that?" he asked. "You, Frenchman?"

"The name," the Frenchman said, "is Georges Renec. I'm here to fight with your people because I love justice, too."

"Then you're one of Fitzjames' lot," Donall Kenzie said, "come out with the *piquets* from the French Royal Scots Regiment. Talk to Fitzjames, not to me!"

Renec still grasped his arm. "Watch," he said.

Over on the right, the charging Scottish were at the wall. They had discharged their muskets, flung them away after the first volley. They fought with their broadswords, hacking straight through the Campbells and then the English infantry behind.

But suddenly they were gone, swept from sight.

The sound of the massed English musket volley had a deep, rolling peal. "Cumberland's reserve regiments," Renec said. "Men with swords are no good against such fire."

Donall Kenzie stared forward. Clan after clan had followed Ranald. The Mackintoshes and many more were out there, charging the English center. Cannon shot and musket fire hit them. The blazoned

clan standards went down, and the wild pipes were stilled.

Clan Ranald himself was on his knees, his long, fair hair loose about his face. But as he stood up, Donall Kenzie saw that Ranald's face was a pulped wreck from a musket ball. Then Ranald pitched sidewise, did not move.

"Gainsay who darè," Donall Kenzie muttered. "That was the Ranald's cry. You'll follow that, Renec, or will you follow mine?"

"Either," Georges Renec said. "Now every man must fight."

Donall Kenzie thought that he made no progress at all as he ran. His long legs thrust forward and his feet pressed hard against the turf with each stride, but the English were still beyond the reach of his sword. They stood in closed ranks, deliberately firing into the clans.

His overtired brain played him a trick, and he imagined himself as he must look to the English. He was tall, dirty, ragged, with burs in his kilt and plaid. The kilt was torn, flapped high as he ran, and his stockings shook caked mud onto the ground.

But the white cockade in his bonnet was clean; the blade of the Claymore glinted, and even an Englishman could read the hate in his eyes.

"Come at us, ye sons!" he yelled at them. "Come take our Hielan' steel!"

"*Doucement*," Renec said beside him. "*Soyez calme*. They'll be at us very soon."

The Frenchman's voice snapped the mood of hysteria. You're acting like a fool, Donall Kenzie thought. You wouldn't have so stalking a deer down Glen Cluagh. Easy does it now, and look about you. It's a grave day for Scotland. You lead the clan, ye young gowk. Good men follow you for want of a better, be it Martin or any other.

Over to the right, the Atholl Brigade had broken. The Campbells and the Grenadiers were in among them, driving sheer through the flank. It was here ahead, with the Macdonald Brigade, that the Scottish had their one chance to win.

CHAPTER II

AN END TO VICTORY

BUT the clans had taken awful losses. Where Donall Kenzie placed his strides now was between heaps of bodies. He saw men he knew, friends and relatives, those who were Scotland's finest, and death had swiftly stopped them.

They lay on their backs or sides, still clinging to their swords. Their eyes were wide-staring, their mouths rigid in agony. He wanted to weep, to reach down and touch them, cover those eyes from the glare of the sun.

He did not; he kept on running, for here the English were very close.

He drew a deep breath, called to the clan. "Go for them straight," he said. "Do no' turn your side to them. Cumberland's trained them to drive the bayonet beyondst our targes and under the sword arm. Up now! Up, for James and Scotland!"

The first man he engaged was a Grenadier sergeant. He took him with one blow, sent the Claymore screeching down the halberd stock and at the juncture of the neck and shoulder. The sergeant died on his knees, coughing blood.

Donall Kenzie kicked the body away, swung the Claymore in a flat side stroke. It crashed the ribs of a big Grenadier, came stiffly from the wound. The Grenadier screamed, and let his musket fall. Kenzie killed him as he took a backward pace.

All around him the clansmen were in and through the English line. They were faster, more mobile than the English, and the bayonets were of little use against the broadswords.

Georges Renec had cleared a space for himself; killed with a precise, careful skill. His sword was long and narrow, and he used it almost like a rapier. A cornet of Grenadiers tried to pistol him, but Renec's blade was through his throat before the trigger pulled.

"A bonnie, bonnie day!" Donall Kenzie said. He was laughing. "A day for Cum-

berland to pick up his fat belly and run."

"*Pas encore,*" Georges Renec said. "We've done well, but not well enough. Cumberland still has his dragoons. He's been saving them."

The dragoons were like men out of some other existence. They appeared enormous in their great black boots and bronze cuirasses. The pistols they carried held a charge as heavy as a musket's, and their saber blows were given with shocking power.

They charged in squadron front, silent, their horses making the only sound. After them came the Prince of Hesse's men, the German lancers, but they yelled as they rode.

It was too much, Donall Kenzie recognized. The Scottish could not stand against this, not against the horses and the saber blows that clipped the targes through like bits of paper.

He went rolling down under a dragoon's horse, saw the quivering veins in the beast's belly as the rear hooves grazed his head. Then he was up, clinging to the dragoon's stirrup leather, dragging the man out of the saddle.

His mouth filled with blood from a blow the dragoon struck him with his saber guard. But he got his dirk out from his stocking, drove the point hard over the cuirass top. He leaned against the horse after the dragoon toppled. All of his strength was gone. He was weak with pain, could not see except in a swirling blur.

GEORGES RENEC found him so, lifted him up onto the dragoon's horse. "Out of here," Renec said. "The cavalry's got behind us and we're almost trapped."

"Then mount, man," Donall Kenzie mumbled. "We'll fight this lot a new day."

Renec did not answer. He stood with his feet spread, his body tensed. A pair of Hessian lancers had wheeled, set their lances. "Och," Donall Kenzie said. "Ye canno' handle the two of them alone."

He knew nothing of horses, but he kicked the dragoon mount, hauled on the bridle.

His horse met sidewise against those of the lancers. He was knocked from the saddle, sprawl on his back. But he heard the whinny of pain from one lancer's horse, saw the beast stumble down with a broken leg.

"So now," he said, and crawled forward to where the lancer crouched trying to get a pistol from the saddle holster.

He killed the lancer with a dirk blow. Then he went staggering to Renec's side. Renec had a lance wound through the shoulder. He protected himself against the other Hessian with his sword in his left hand.

The Hessian fought well, leaping in to deliver quick blows at the head. He spoke in French to Renec.

"Cumberland doesn't care for prisoners," he said. "Not even turn-coat French. But he's promised us the Scottish women—all of them we can take. You're fighting on the wrong side, *m'sieur*. The Royal Scots Regiment belongs in France."

"Wait a moment, you snatch-penny pedlar," Donald Kenzie said. "I'm fighting on me own heather, and I'm a Scot. Taste this; it's the best kiss you'll get in Scotland."

He let go a circling overhead blow with the Claymore, both hands on the hilt. It smashed the Hessian's saber blade in half. The Hessian blinked, and sweat ran down from under the brim of his round fur cap. He opened his mouth, then closed it, started to run.

Donall Kenzie tripped him from behind, gave him time to get up, lift the saber. Then he slammed the Claymore blade down through the middle of the cap.

He was suddenly revolted as he saw the Hessian die. This man didn't count, had come here to fight for Cumberland's shillings. But all the men back there did, the ones who had been the glory of the clans and of Scotland.

Scotland wouldn't be the same after today. Too many men had died. The Bonnie Prince had asked for loyalty, and the price of that was death.

"Come." Georges Renec said. He

touched Kenzie on the arm. "You've saved me, but there are more you must help."

FEWER than a score of the clan were left. They fought in primitive mountain style, back-to-back in a small ring, their targes above their heads, the Claymore blades sheering aside the blows of the lances and the sabers.

"Back, lads," Donall Kenzie called to them. "Fall back behind me to where the Prince stands. 'Tis not for us to die here."

They heard him, and slowly obeyed him. But their eyes were blank, terrible, and they would not look at him as they retreated. He walked supporting Georges Renec. He had picked up a pistol from some dead dragoon's holster, shot with it the first Hessian who tried to ride upon him and Renec.

It was almost impossible for him to stand. Each pace he took made him gasp. But you can't stop, he thought. You just cannot, Donall. You must get this lad back to safety, take your clan away home.

Martin maybe will be there in the Glen. Maybe he's come home from Edinburgh, hearing how it's turned out with us. Take another pace now, and another. Don't think of Martin. He's your brother, but he's no fighting man. It's you who'll take care of the clan, good or bad.

Through his exhaustion the skirling of the pipes came like the part of some disordered dream. He believed that it was a memory of Glen Cluagh come back, from the days of peace. But then he saw the pipers.

They were of several clans, and not of his own. Troops were with them on either side: Prince Charlie's Life Guards, some of the Camerons, the Keppochs and the Glengarries. His brother, Martin Kenzie, led them.

Martin wore city clothes, but there was a white cockade in the buckle of his sword belt, and he carried his father's Claymore. The sight of him made Donall fiercely proud and then angry.

He had been doing well until Martin came here. This was the end, not the be-

ginning. The carrying of the white cockade now would do no good. Martin should have stayed in Edinburgh, simpering to the English, checking his temper as they mocked his broad Scots' accent.

Damn Martin. The Bonnie Prince's cause and Scotland didn't need his help.

Groups of Hessians, of dragoons and English infantry attacked that Scottish force at once. They rode in at them, made repeated bayonet charges. But Martin Kenzie was determined to save the Scottish who were left, only to fight a rear-guard action.

His men had muskets, plenty of ammunition. They went to their knees and stopped the attacks with massed volley fire.

A bugle sounded somewhere. That was the English recall, Donall Kenzie realized. Cumberland was calling back his troops. Here was victory enough for many days. . . .

Donall Kenzie tried to control the shaking of his body as he faced his brother. "Ye've come a long way for a little," he said. "'Tis strange you're not wi' the Campbells."

"I'm no traitor," Martin Kenzie slowly said. He was shorter than his brother, heavier through the shoulders, and his years of study had taken the Highland tan from his strong-boned face.

He reached and held Donall up, looked intently into his eyes. "I love Scotland as much as any man. I came here today hearing swords were sore needed.

"But freedom for us is finished. The Stuarts will never have back their throne. Prince Charlie's gone, fled to the mountains. It's there we must go before the Southrons get ahead of us."

"Then why do you stay?" Donall said. He was weeping in nervous relaxation. "To count the dead?"

"No," Martin said. "No, Donall." He was staring at Georges Renec, slumped prone on the ground. "I want to see you safe home."

"Arragh!" Donall said it like a curse. "Take us, then, and take this man, Renec, too. He's of the Royal Scots, came out with

Fitzjames. He fair fought well this day."

"Aye, I will," Martin said. His manner, his tone were very quiet. He turned and lifted his sword above his head. "To me, all you men of Kenzie. Young Jamie, you have the standard?"

"That I have," young Jamie said. He showed the balled silk shoved into his sporran pouch. "But ye need be callin' me ainly Jamie noo. Auld Jamie lies out yon close by Clan Ranald an' the rest who'll no' be goin' home."

Martin Kenzie nodded. "You're the lad who knows the way home best, Jamie. But tonight it must be by the back trails and not the highroads. The red-coats will have their patrols out all the way from here to the Glen."

"And burning and looting as they go," Donall said. He had bent, helped lift Georges Renec. "It's us who'll be at the Glen, though, to meet them when they come."

CHAPTER III

WHICH WAY HONOR?

THAT was a night of unbroken agony. Three of the wounded clansmen died as they marched. Their way was north, then north and west, through the most precipitous country of the Highlands.

Jamie took trails known only to smugglers and hunters. Time and again they were forced to ford streams that nearly hurled them from their feet, climb ledges where the winter's snow was still thick.

They left the dead where they died, covered them with their plaids, softly saying their names in farewell.

Georges Renec had become unconscious, had to be carried. Martin carried him, and then Jamie and Donall. Strength had returned in part to Donall. It was thought of home that brought it to him.

No Englishman was going to loot or burn the house of Kenzie, he repeated to himself. A fat German might rule in London, and in Edinburgh, too; but Glen Cluagh had belonged to the KENZIES since the beginning of time.

Dawn was up as they came along the vale into Glen Cluagh. The curlews were awake on the loch. Dogs barked at the crofters' cabins, and a torch showed crimson.

"'Tis the women, and they're all right," Martin said. "Leave us here, lads, and get you home. We'll take the boat across the loch. But muster at the house after noon. I'll want talk with all of you."

The boat put a thin design of silver upon the black water of the loch, and the oar-tips flashed. Trout rose, leaped at flies, were gone in pale, swift descent. There was a big one right here, Donall remembered, that he'd promised to catch before the spring was out. He'd made Auld Jamie a pound bet on it.

Then recollection came to him of where Auld Jamie was—Auld Jamie and the others. Over in the crofters' cabins now women would be weeping, their shawls over their heads, their teeth tight to keep the men from hearing.

His own teeth locked and he hit the gunwales with both hands. "What has you, laddie?" Martin said.

"Thought of Culloden. Thought of how they died there."

Martin kept his oar strokes regular and wide. "A sad day for the Stuart and Scotland," he said. "But we're the lucky ones. We've no family to face at home, and only ourselves to mind. Should the Southrons take the house from us, we can still stand as men."

"They'll never take it," Donall said. His face was gray-shaded, convulsed. "Never, and you hear me?"

"I do," Martin said. He had beached the boat, shipped the oars. "Still, we of the Kenzie will now be under attainder. The way Cumberland reads the law, Glen Cluagh will surely be forfeit to the Crown if we fight here."

Donall got stumbling from the boat and took Georges Renec in his arms. Then he looked up at the house. In the days when his parents had been alive the lawns had been well kept, and his mother had grown flowers right down to the edge of the loch.

But Martin had been long away at his studies in Edinburgh, and he'd spent most of his own time hunting and fishing, keenly aware of his loneliness in the great, dark house.

He looked at it now a bit afraid, as if somehow the months he had spent fighting had changed him and his love for it.

The house was a solid mass in the white spirals of the mist. The square central tower, the tower that had been built here before the Romans built their Great Wall, raised like an immense, clenched fist.

Leaves were green and small on the vast yew tree on the lawn, and the cedars behind made a blue, thick wall.

Then the door opened and light was copper-colored through the mist.

ELLEN stood in the doorway, her plaid up about her shoulders. Ellen was more than a servant to the Kenzies, Donall thought. It was she who had taught him all the folk songs, all the legends, made him see how beautiful his mother was when she was young.

He walked forward to Ellen, unable to speak. He lowered Georges Renec down inside the door, then took her hands. "Ye're back," she said.

"Aye," he said. "We're back."

"And the Bonnie Prince?" she said.

Donall took his glance from her and to the Kenzie coat-of-arms over the door. It had always been his ambition as a boy to reach up and touch them. He reached up and touched them, then smiled at Ellen.

"The Bonnie Prince suffered bad defeat at Culloden yesterday. But he'll be back with another army to chase Cumberland to London and beyond. Scotland's strong yet, Ellen, as strong as the house of Kenzie and this door."

Ellen looked past him and at Martin. Martin walked slowly into the house. He put his sword and belt upon the table, then went to stand by the fire. The deer hounds came to leap about him, but he did not seem to see them. He kept on staring into the fire.

"Master Martin," Ellen said, "ye've the

look of one who's unco' sad. Is it that many of them will no' come home?"

"Many," Martin said. "Eighteen of our own. Three we left on the mountainside. Scotland has been taken by the Southrons, Ellen. For good and all. But would you bring me and Donall food and wine. The young French gentleman yon will be needing bandages. He fought at Culloden for the Prince, and at Donall's side."

Ellen did not weep. But she brought her plaid down over her face, and as she walked out into the kitchen she butted staggering against the wall.

"Need you have told her so?" Donall said. "Her heart will stop in her body with grief for the dead."

"Sit down," Martin said. "Rest while you can. This is the last day you'll spend in this house. The Southrons are sure to be here by night."

"Then we'll send them tumbling into the loch," Donall said.

"We will not," Martin said. "We canno' whip them, Donall. They're too strong for us. It's the English King's men who rule Scotland now, and English law."

"We've always made our own law!"

"That," Martin said, "has been our trouble."

"You mean we must surrender to the Southrons?"

"Aye. Surrender, or be slaughtered by them."

"Slaughter is the best o' that, and we can do our share."

"But," Martin said, "there'll still be the law."

Donall sat silent. He watched Ellen bring food and wine, then tend to Georges Renec's wound. Renec aroused to consciousness as the woman worked. He hitched himself up and tried to smile. "You've brought me to your home," he said. "Let me thank you."

Donall filled a tankard with wine, brought it to him. "You can thank me," he said, "after we've drunk a toast."

"Name it," Renac said.

"To freedom," Donall said, "and to Hell with English law! My brother says the

English will be here tonight to take this place. But if they come, I fight. And if I lose, I'll become outlaw—renegade—rather than take their law."

"Excellent," Renec said. He touched his tankard against Donall's. "Here's to defeat of the English and to all renegades."

IT WAS clan council, Martin told them, and each man had his say. "I'm no border laird," he said, "with false Southron ways upon him. If fight is what you will, you'll fight. All of you must decide that, then the clan take the majority's decision.

"But let me tell you first that it'd be an unequal fight and one we'd lose. Scotland's in a bad way, not all from the Bonnie Prince's doing, either. The Sassenach money-lenders have got mortgages on all the great estates. Our Hieland long-horn cattle don't any longer bring a decent price in the market. The Sassenach looms turn out cloth quicker and cheaper than our crofter folk, and we must needs buy from them.

"The Bonnie Prince could not take England back. So now, hate it as we will, the Sassenach have got Scotland."

There were fourteen men of the clan grouped there about the yew tree on the lawn. They carried their broadswords and their targes in the ceremonial fashion; and slender, black-haired Kip, the one remaining piper, had his pipes.

The men stared at one another after Martin was done. They looked down the loch in the falling sunlight and at their rude cabins, the violet and black immensity of the mountainside above the Glen.

"Ye mean, Kenzie," Jamie said, "that under the peace we'd stay here. Glen Cluagh would still belong to the clan."

"I hope that," Martin said. "Cumberland's spies must know full well that we fought with the Prince. Most like, we'll be given a great fine in punishment for it. Yet should be we keep the peace when the Sassenach come, we'll have good chance to hang onto the Glen. Speak now, all of you—war, or peace?"

Ten of them, the older men, were for

peace. The others were a bit shame-faced and angry as they saw how the count went. They turned their glances to Donall. He was up on his feet.

"Peace," he said. "So peace it will be. . . . Have you no memory in your heads? No courage in your hearts? Piper, play in honor of the dead. Play for these here *The Flowers of the Forest*."

Kip brought the wind gradually into his pipes. He stood and strutted the lawn. His head went back, his plaid and his kilt swayed. Then the call sounded out across the loch. It was the saddest and loveliest of all Scottish laments.

The clansmen held themselves motionless. At first they had watched the piper. Now they gazed down at the weapons at their feet. Jamie was crying, sobbing, saying Auld Jamie's name. But Kip kept on playing, gave them call after call.

It was the soul of Scotland that he gave them, and they knew it, let themselves be lost in its beauty. The sun set behind the huge western scarp of the glenside. Cascades that had dropped in sheening silver became scarlet-shaded, then pale shadow.

Light was gone from the loch; the water was satiny black. A wind touched the firs, shook the small, tender leaves of the yew tree.

"Look up, you men of Kenzie," Donall said suddenly, his voice harsh through the pipe's calling. "Look south. There's the Sassenach. And they burn as they come!"

THROUGH the gap at the valley's end they could see the flame. It flared the southern sky, a violent, intense illumination.

That was Davey Royd's house at Glen Slagair, Martin recognized, and Davey had been killed fighting for the Prince yesterday, left a wife and children. But the English had not spared a widow's grief.

Rage filled him, and a feeling of deep hopelessness. He had done his best for these men; yet his words would have no effect. They were not the sort to accept cold logic. All of them, even Donall, were braw, savage children.

He rose, held out his hands to them. "Listen to me, men of my clan," he said. "Don't fight. There's naught you can win but death."

They laughed at him, and some of them cursed him. They were drawing close to Donall. "Tell us how we sha' meet them, Donall," they said. "Ye're the mon tae lead us. Ye're the one who kens the fightin'."

Martin walked without haste along the path down the Glen. He was leaving his home, he understood, did not know when he would see it again. Every moment was precious now, every second while there was still peace. . . .

He met the English patrol at the far end of the Glen, past the crofters' cabins. A trooper with a bayoneted musket challenged him, then took him to the lieutenant commanding.

"I'm the Kenzie," he said to the lieutenant, "chief of the clan who live here. Tell your men to put out their torches. Take them back out of here or there'll be trouble. My brother's at the house with some of the clan, and they're ready to fight."

"You speak for yourself," the lieutenant said, "or for them?"

"For them," Martin said. "Enough Scottish died at Culloden. Peace can't be brought here by soldiery. Those men back there consider you their enemies."

"Rather," the lieutenant said. "Sergeant, put out the torches. Patrol, halt!"

His voice echoed with the musket report. The musket was fired from the lawn of the house. One of the English advance-guard let his piece fall clattering. He took a groping side step, his hands to his chest, tumbled headmost into the loch.

"I could shoot you with pleasure, Mister Kenzie," the lieutenant said. "M' Lord Cumberland sits at Culloden, though, and dispatches justice to the rebels in his own fashion. I'll hold you for him. Tie up this man, sergeant. Keep an eye on him. Then get your flankers out. We're going to take this house. Indeed, we're going to burn it to the ground."

Honor wore a strange guise sometimes,

Martin thought as the sergeant tied his hands with a pack-strap. Now not only the English but his brother and his clan would be calling him a traitor.

CHAPTER IV

FIGHT, MY BROTHER!

GEORGES RENEC was quite gay as he fought beside Donall. "Maybe we lose here," he said. "It's possible, that. But we will not be really defeated. No.

"Because there is a French ship off the coast, a ship that waits for men like us who have been fighting with the Prince. I know where it is, how to signal it from the beach past Inverness.

"Then we go back to France, you and I. You come to my home. What's one house, against the right to enjoy liberty? After all, the Prince started from France last year, can start from there again."

"True," Donall said. He knelt at one of the loop-holes in the old central tower, firing a musket as fast as he could load. He had seen Jamie get killed below, and four or five more of the clansmen. He and Renec and Kip, the Piper, were those left who were still free. The rest were trapped downstairs, defended themselves against the English troopers with their Lochaber axes and Claymores.

It was an unequal fight; and that, he remembered, was what Martin had prophesied. "Come on," he snapped at Renec. "Let's get out of here. Our chances are done."

Down below, the English had succeeded in smashing the front door. They were in the front room, joined in hand-to-hand combat with the clansmen. Donall clambered over the parapet of the tower, out onto the low roof of the house proper. "Follow me and we'll be all right," he said. "Kip, give the man a hand."

Kip still carried his pipes slung across his shoulder, but he and Donall had climbed all over these eaves when they were children. He took Georges Renec easily down the gable to where Donall crouched above the kitchen door.

An English trooper was there, working at the door with his musket butt. He must have heard Donall's breathing, for he looked up, and Donall caught him full in the throat as he lunged down at him.

They rolled to the flagging, bit and kneed each other until Kip got there. Kip put his dirk between the Englishman's ribs. "Where's awa' noo, Donall?" he said.

"South to Inverness Loch," Donall said. "Renec knows a French ship that'll pick us up. But we must take to the mountain-side before the Sassenach are on us."

They went through the broom and gorse behind the house on the run. English voices yelled, shots blared, but then there was silence for a time. It was ended a shrill and terrible yelling that came from the other side of the Glen.

"The lads frae the hoose ha' broken oot," Kip said. "They've got free an' up the glenside. Och, an' that's good! Should we join them, Donall?"

"No," Donall said. "They'll join with Royd's folk, or the folk north of the Glen. They'll hide safe enough. Our task is to reach the French ship."

He did not talk after that; climbed on up the glenside. But Georges Renec was made slow by his wound, had to stop often to rest. They were only a bit more than halfway to the crest when the house broke into flame.

The English had set their torches in the main room. Donall had a vision of the tall wall hangings as they burned, and then his father's portrait, and that of his grandfather, then the curving staircase.

That was where the clan shields were hung, the ones the family had carried out to the Crusades. The stag heads were there, too, right above the little minstrels' gallery. It was an old house, and the people who had lived in it had always been proud. . . .

He groaned aloud as the roof-tree gave. It slipped and crashed in a golden gout of sparks. The stone tower stood for several minutes more, then collapsed inward wall by wall.

That killed the fire. Nothing was left except a few charred beams, a blazing chair

that some trooper had yanked out onto the lawn.

The English marched down the valley in column formation, headed south, their flankers and point moving with caution.

GEORGES RENEC was in a fever of exhaustion, his face stark and white, wet with sweat. "*Je ne peux plus*," he said. "I must stop, Donall. You and the piper go on, and leave me. You can reach the ship, send men back for me."

"That's foolishness," Donall said. They were in a patch of broom beside the Inverness highroad, and in this hour past dawn the sea showed glinting. He pointed to the sails of the French ship where she tacked back and forth. "We can't board her now. We must wait until dark. Then you'll be in shape to get to her."

Renec shook his head. "I'm a cavalryman," he said. "You Highland men have walked the legs off me. It's another good ten miles to the beach where we'll have to wait for the ship's boat. I'll never make that without a horse."

Kip sat on his hunkers in the broom, straining to understand the strange French talk. Donall looked at him and nodded. "Lad," he said, "we've need of horses. Renec is played out for good and all. We canno' carry him more. There's patrols on this road every hour."

"That there are," Kip said. "But they wouldn't keep me from getting into Inverness town. I ken the place like the back o' me vurra own hand. Many's the night I've played the pipes at the Thrush and Garnet until I could no more lift a tankard. Horses I can get frae the stable there, bring here."

"And be picked up by the first patrol riding back?"

"No," Kip said. He grinned. "Me tairtain's so dirty even me ain mother would no' recognize it. And what's a Sassenach to tell one poor gilly frae another? I'll tell them I'm a loyal mon's gilly—one o' their traitor lot. And I'll bring back the horses, Donall. Trust me well tae do it."

Donall shook Kip's hand. "Go ahead, mon," he said.

He lost count of how many hours he and Georges Renec waited there. But it was late in the afternoon when the patrol halted right opposite them on the road.

It was a patrol of Grenadiers, and the sergeant-major in charge of them had good ears. He came walking to the edge of the ditch, his pistol in his hand. "Up out of there, skulker!" he said. "I've 'eard you."

Donall had rested, trying to keep Georges Renec still. His body was stiff from the cold and wet, and his own exhaustion made him stupid. Yet enough sense remained to him to get up out of the ditch at once, stagger forth onto the road.

"I surrender," he said. "You have me, Sassenach."

"And who might you be?" the sergeant-major said, his thumb on the pistol hammer.

"Donall of Kenzie."

"So," the sergeant-major said. "So, me boy? It's you then, who give such a time to our lot last night at Glen Cluagh. Come along. Cumberland will want to be 'aving his look at you. But give me that there big, brute sword."

Donall was in motion, tottering down the road. "I'll keep the sword," he said. "If I give it to any man, it's to Cumberland himself. My brother's a traitor; he must have gone straight to Cumberland. But try and take this from me and you'll have to shoot me first."

"Foosh!" the sergeant-major said, and kicked him. "Keep it! Cumberland will 'ave it broke to bits before yer eyes."

DONALL KENZIE was to remember that scene at Culloden House all the rest of his life. It was never to leave his memory; it would return in hours of sunlit quiet, send a trembling, aching anger through him that was close to insanity.

The lawns of Culloden House were filled with men, women, wounded from the battle, captured Scottish warriors, frightened civilians from Inverness, and the victorious English.

Some drunken Englishman had flung a dead chieftain's body up over one of the

pillared gate-posts. Men passing had swung at the dangling hands with their swords, cut away the fingers. Over the other gate pillar was a woman's dress of rich silk, pulled down along the stone as if upon a body; and on top of it was a velvet Highland bonnet that still carried the sprig of white heather that was Prince Charlie's emblem.

They've started to shame our women, Donall Kenzie thought, his hands twisting under the cords the sergeant-major had secured. It's not enough for them to burn our homes, give us to the sword when we can no longer fight back.

He tried to look away, for most of the Scottish women were ahead.

English troops formed a sort of swaying double rank along the graveled driveway leading from the house. At the doorstep, drunken English and Hessian officers stripped the women. They struck at them laughing with the flats of their swords, their riding crops. They forced the women to mount horses that glaze-eyed grooms held. Then the horses were loosed, sent down the driveway between the troops.

Most of the women were unbroken yet, rode heap up, the keen wind whipping their hair about their bare bodies. They stared at the English as if they were not there.

But when they saw some of the Scottish prisoners, some of their own, courage left them. Their heads lowered, they bent low to the horses, attempted to cover their nakedness.

Grooms beat the horses forward. Troops leaped out into the driveway, slapped at the women's legs and bodies. The cries of the gravely wounded lying in delirium on the frozen lawns were no different from the sounds the women uttered.

Donall Kenzie lost realization of where he was. He became for a few minutes wildly mad. He turned kicking, hammering with his elbows against the English. He bit one trooper's ear clear off, and the sergeant-major knocked him out with his pistol butt.

"A wild un," the sergeant-major said. "A bit of the brawny fer a proper good go with the real sports. Stay there, you!"

He had pushed into the house past the officers, slung Donall down in a corner of a little sitting room off the main hall. But he took trouble before he left to loosen the heavy Claymore belt, pitch the sword into the opposite corner.

IT WAS dark when Donall emerged to consciousness. A small coal fire had burned in the grate, but it was almost out; and the room was cruelly chill.

He crawled across the room to the grate, stretched close to the fire. Then he began with painful, steadfast care to loosen his wrist bonds.

To work at that kept him sane. Outside in the hall there were all sorts of sounds, clink of spurs, crack of bottles, yells.

Men were singing in English and German. They were forcing the women with them to sing. Hands struck hard against flesh. There were muffled cries, sobs, the rip of tearing silk, the crack of smashing furniture.

Donall had one hand, his left, free as Martin entered the room. The door was open long enough for Donall to see that his brother had taken off his city clothing, was dressed in a kilt and military jacket. "You're all right, Donall?" Martin said.

"Aye, I'm all right," Donall said. "I'll soon have my other hand free from this that holds me. And the dunder-head who brought me here left my sword behind. A mistake. I'll be going out with the sword to them in the hall. They'll have—"

"Quiet!" Martin said. "I had to give

that sergeant-major the last few guineas I had to get in here and see you. He's right outside now, drunk but not yet stupid. There's more of them, too, who're sober. So keep shut while I get you out of here."

"How came you to this place?" Donall said. He was up on his feet, and back from his brother.

"Brought here by the patrol that burned our home. The lieutenant in command would have me talk to Cumberland."

"And you have?"

"I have, Donall."

"So now you wear a kilt. It must be a traitor's kilt. You've joined the Campbells. Martin, you've turned traitor to our cause!"

Martin had stirred the coals and they blazed, gave uneven lights in the room. "Yes," he said. "I've joined the Campbells, taken the side of the Sassenach. But for only one reason, brother. To keep our lands in the family, save the lives of those of our clan who have yet escaped."

Donall Kenzie spoke in Gaelic. He cursed his brother with slow and awful words. His voice rose, rang:

"You'd sell yourself, your man's honor, when such is happening as that out there now. You're no longer a Kenzie. You no more have right to the name. Listen to them—listen to our bonnie women. Can you look at them later, and call yourself a man?"

Martin's face was without color. His hands were on his sword. Donall had stumbled to the corner where his own

Happy Relief From Painful Backache Caused by Tired Kidneys

Many of those gnawing, nagging, painful backaches people blame on colds or strains are often caused by tired kidneys—and may be relieved when treated in the right way.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking excess acids and poisonous waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging

backaches, rheumatic 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.

Don't wait! 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 the blood. Get Doan's Pills. (ADV.)

Claymore lay. He raised it up, brought it from the scabbard, cut the other wrist cord. "Leave me, traitor," Donall said, "before I kill you here."

"Ah, you fool, be still," Martin said. "Scotland must live even if you and I die in our hearts a thousand times. The Sassenach have become stronger than we, and so for now we must serve them. Think of the folk at Glen Cluagh. Think of the folk all through the Hielan's who must go on living."

Donall did not answer. He was moving forward, striking with the sword. His blow lashed past Martin's head, pierced the panel of the door. He cleared the blade, stepped back to strike again.

But Martin made no gesture to protect himself; he was listening to the men who came running to the door.

"You must live, Donall," he said. "And I must live. Get out of here, through that window behind you. But first make a mock fight of it with me. Make those men who're coming think that we're enemies, hate each other well."

"An easy thing," Donall said. "For that I do; I hate you for a bloody traitor."

The door had sprung open behind Martin. Men were in the room, Grenadier officers in their shirtsleeves and small clothes. They bawled drunkenly at Martin, but Martin was meeting his brother's blows.

He and Donall fought whirling, rushing up and down the room. The great Claymore blades clashed in reverberant echo. A couple of the Englishmen began to applaud the thrusts and parries.

"Ten guineas to you, do you take him, man!" one told Martin. "Get in close—strike the dirty shanks out from under him!"

Martin vaguely heard him. Donall was serious, he knew, planned to kill him. It was all he could do to stand up to Donall's blows.

Donall was forcing his guard down, weakening him with a flurry of repeated strokes at the head. His wrist was shocked, numb. He was too slow in making his parries. . . .

CHAPTER V

FAREWELL TO SCOTLAND

THE blow that got him was delivered double-handed. It glanced his blade aside and he went reeling to the floor, Donall's steel in his shoulder.

He lay still, looking up at Donall through the darkening of the pain.

Donall had taken his attention from Martin. He was chasing the Englishmen from the room. He cut the last one through the skull right in the doorway. Then he went leaping back, kicked out the bottle-glass of the window with his sword hilt.

Martin lifted up a bit, called thickly, "Good luck, brother."

"Bad luck, traitor!" Donall called back, and then he was gone, out onto the lawn.

A confused mass of men pursued him. They pounded after him among the trees and walls, lost him at the gate. He sprang the ditch at the side of the road, went swinging on through the gorse. He laughed a bit as he ran. There wasn't a Sassenach born, he thought, who could run as fast as a Highland man.

It took him hours to cross the moor, circle around Inverness and back onto the highroad toward the sea. Snow swirled in again from the sea, and he stumbled nearly blinded.

Kip heard him, came out onto the moor and found him. "A long wait," Kip said. "But the Frenchy told me ye'd be back, an' he was right. I've the horses, Donall, hidden out yon, acrosst the road. We'll be headin' fair the French ship noo?"

"Aye," Donall said. Georges Renec was getting up, came forward to him. "You must be a very lucky man," Renec said. "You'll bring us luck tonight. I'm sure we'll get aboard."

"I'm not," Donall said. "I think my luck's about played out. At Culloden House, I met my brother. He's turned traitor. I did my best to kill him before I left, and I missed. But let's mount and try for the ship."

The horses Kip had found in Inverness were really stocky Highland ponies. Their

best pace was a loping sort of trot, and they could only maintain that on the high-road. If we meet the patrol, Donall told himself, we'll be in for a bad time. The Sassenach mount better than these overgrown goats.

They were past the headland, turning into the marshy reaches off the road when they met the patrol. It was made up of dragoons—burly, dark figures in their long capes. Donall hitched free the Claymore, made a sign to Kip.

"You," he whispered, "get down from your beast. You're faster on foot, anyhow. Bring the wind into your pipes. As I ride into the Sassenach, pipe every battle call you know. We've need to confuse the lot so's to get clear of them."

Then he swung, talked in rapid French to Georges Renec. "Here's flint and steel," he said. "Keep going up the beach until you're facing where the ship lies. You'll find plenty of dry broom to make you a signal torch. But you must move fast. Our gamble is to have the boat from the ship fetch us off before we're caught up by the patrol."

"But who'll hold back the patrol until the boat makes shore?" Renec asked.

"Kip and I will," Donall said. "Kip will sound loud on his pipes to give the English to think there's a great lot of Scottish here. Then he will cut across the marsh to you, and I'll come along the beach."

Georges Renec grimaced. "You're seeking," he said, "to fight that patrol alone. They're at least ten men. Why not take me with you?"

"Because one now will be as good against them as two, or three. On your way, and don't hold the boat for me."

DONALL took Kip's mount by the bridle rein after the Frenchman had headed off into the low-misted reaches of the marsh. "You wait until you hear me in among the Sassenach," he told Kip. "Then sound the *pibroch* wi' every bit of wind you own. Keep moving as you pipe, though, and follow the way Renec has gone. I'll be seeing you at the boat."

Kip nodded, his cheeks round as he breathed into the pipes. They gave a squealing now that he could not restrain, and down the beach the man in command of the patrol had called an order to halt.

They were still about a hundred yards away, Donall estimated; then pounded his heels against his pony's ribs, jerked on the bridle of Kip's mount.

The unshod hooves of the Highland beasts made a lot of noise on the frosty ground of the marsh. Donall laughed as he rode. He sounded like a whole troop, must look like more in the thick mist.

The English were reining close together. Their pistols stung scarlet flame, and the balls drove about him with a hissing crack. He pulled Kip's pony up, ahead of his own mount, gave it a sharp slap on the flank, then let it go.

It rushed in instinctive haste to join the other horses. The dragoon mounts reared back, lost place.

Then Donall was there, surging through the center of the patrol, striking out to right and left with the Claymore. He heard one man go down, and another, felt a saber blow nick his knee, and was out from them.

He wheeled to go back, but the patrol was moving at the gallop down the beach. They charged toward the wailed challenge of the pipes.

Donall lifted his hands, shouted in Gaelic to Kip. The pipes fluttered out in a minor squawk. Yells came from the dragoons; they were trying to chase Kip out into the marsh. But their big horses went flank-deep through the scum ice into mud, clumsily floundered.

That took care of the dragoons.

Donall looked out to sea. The French corvette had beaten in, braced back her yards. A boat was away, and near to the beach. He jumped from the pony down beside Georges Renec. He and the Frenchman stood laughing at the dragoons when Kip came out of the marsh.

"Takes sheep-stealers tae catch a sheep-stealer," Kip said. "That's our boat, Donall?"

"The same," Donall said. "Now give help to put our friend aboard."

Surf flurried cold and harsh over them going forth to the boat. They were shivering, unable to answer the questions of the young French ensign at the tiller. But the dragoons had returned up the beach, were firing repeated shots. The ensign put the tiller down, gave a command and the boat came about, headed fast for the ship.

Donall's gayety, his feeling of victory, left him the moment he climbed to the deck of the corvette. He was safe, he realized, had come through great danger, would live to be a free man.

Yet that was Scotland back there. He was leaving it, perhaps might never see it again.

Down in the cabin were a number of men who had survived the defeat at Culloden. Most of them were Irish and French, court hangers-on who had sought glory with Prince Charlie. Now they sat stupid drunk, their eyes like agates, their mouths slack.

"All over," they mumbled to themselves. "No use trying again. Prince is in hiding in the Far Isles. Always he'll be a Pretender, but not a King."

THE hot, whisky-sweet smell of the cabin nearly overcame Donall. It was his impression that the vacant faces of those men were the masks of people already dead. He wanted to shout out at them, make them know there was still

courage left and still fighting to be done. But he went up on deck to watch Scotland, see it lower beneath the curving of the sea.

Sun had risen in clear dawn. The headlands held stark beside the river mouth. Snow was iridescent on the mountain peaks. They shone like shields, he thought, like the shields of the ancient warriors who had given Scotland her strength and pride.

He put his hands upon the rail, and his head on his hands. He wept without sound, his eyes tight shut so that he could not see the last of Scotland.

Georges Renec found him there. Renec touched him softly, said, "It's time we ate, soldier. Food is ready."

"I want no food," Donall said.

"Listen," Renec said. He tightened his grip on Donall's shoulder. "One battle is never all a war, or one war all a man's life. We're young. We've got a future.

"I spent my inheritance from my mother to buy and outfit this ship, the *Aventurier*, for the Prince. If the Prince is done with it, we can take it for ourselves, go anywhere in the world we choose.

"But first you're going home to Bezaude with me. We'll lie in the sun and get fat and drunk and lazy, until we weary of that. Then we'll take the *Aventurier*, set out to seize the world. Good, eh?"

"Good enough," Donall said. He made himself smile. Scotland was gone behind the horizon rim. Scotland was no more his world.

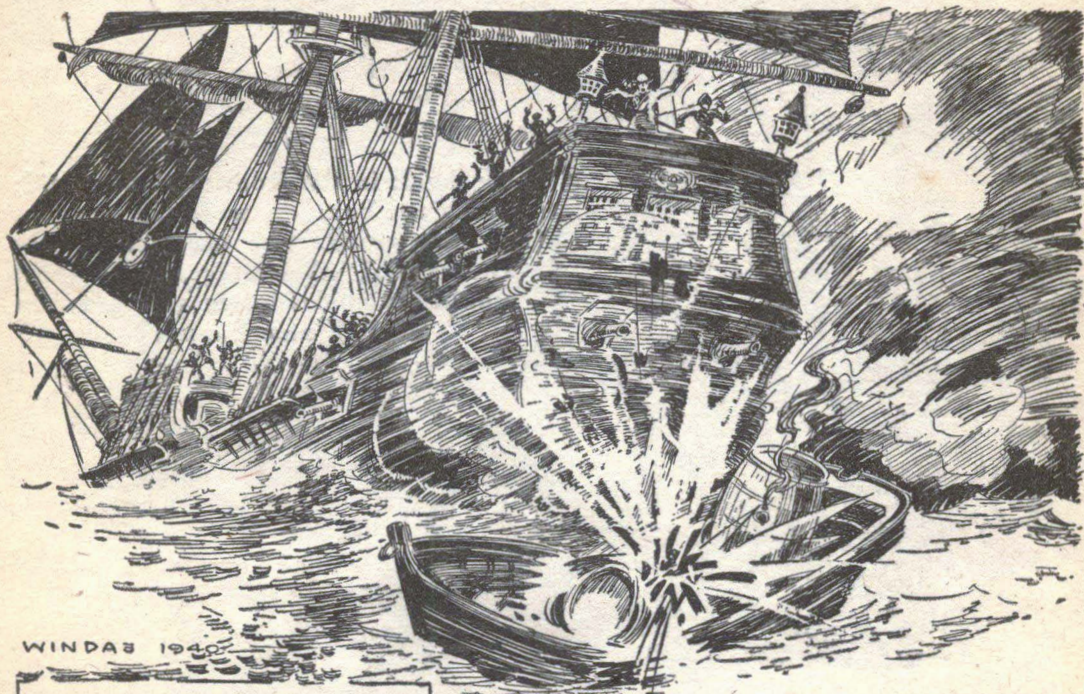
TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

USE SPEEDWAY BLADES DE LUXE
FOR FAST, SMOOTH, ECONOMICAL SHAVES



LEGENDS OF THE LEGIONARIES

ORIGINS OF THE CUSTOMS AND SAYINGS OF THE FIGHTING-MEN : BY W.A. WINDAS



WINDAS 194



• PRISONERS of WAR •

Before the 17th Century, the usual method of liberating prisoners of war was to ransom them. Since that time, however, the "exchange" method has been customary. It is usually conducted on a "man for man, officer for officer" basis.

• FLOATING MINES •

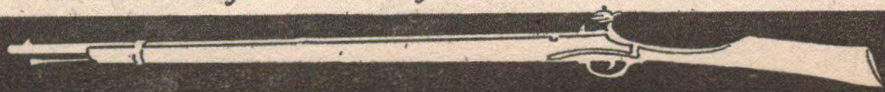
These weapons are by no means new. "Infernals" as they were called, were boats filled with high explosives, and were floated against enemy ships, and were used as early as 1585 A.D. at the siege of Antwerp. They were also used by the English during the sieges of St. Malo and Dunkirk.

• YEOMEN of the GUARD •

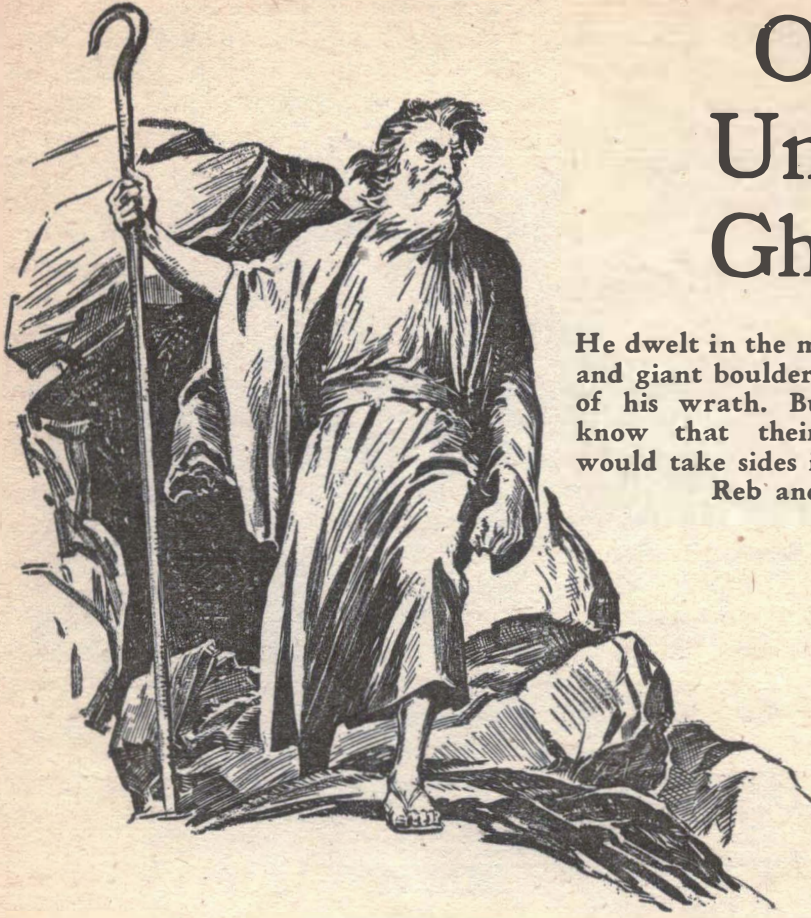
This historic corps was created during the reign of Henry VIII, and exists to this day. The men still wear costumes of same design as those worn by Henry's guard.



• BROWN BESS • The famous smooth bore was called "Brown Bess" because the barrel had been browned (or blued, as is usually done today) to eliminate the sun's glare on the sights which made them difficult to see.



Old Uncle Ghost



He dwelt in the mountain, they said; and giant boulders were the weapons of his wrath. But they could not know that their legendary ghost would take sides in the war between Reb and Yankee

By RICHARD SALE

Author of "Old Chalmouth," "Nice Dogs Don't Sing Dixie," etc.

IN THOSE days, when terror stalked the land, when the echo of cannonfire in the north shook the glass panes in the houses on Mulberry Street and cracked the brittle putty, when the armies moved across Virginia like the locusts, sweeping every living thing before them, leaving the land scarred, burned and empty—Pikesboro's ghost walked again.

The war had not disturbed him, in his lair on Hawk's Nest, the mountain to the west. And the war had not erased him from the recollection of every townsman who walked the Wake Mill road. To walk that road, you had to pass in the very shadow of Hawk's Nest, beneath its towering crags, where, high above, the

gigantic boulders of limestone poised on the rock rim, waiting to be started, waiting for the touch of the Old Man's hand to send them into space.

Or perhaps the clattering footstep of the Old Man might start that loose and terrible scree sliding across the shelves of clay-cracked limestone, to descend upon the highway below in a thunderous roar of destruction, like shrapnel and shot.

No one had ever seen the Old Man and lived to tell the tale. But he was there. You didn't have to be superstitious to believe that. He lived in that dark rock somewhere, embittered with the world, lying in wait for the hapless who came by on the Wake Hill road when he was angry. Amos Badger, counsellor at law, who was too old to be at the front, said as how he figured the Old Man would look like Moses, with a flowing white

beard, and an upraised crook, calling down the wrath of Virginian rock upon the sinners below.

No one had ever seen that specter of the Hawk's Nest. There was young Tommy Lade who tried to find the ghost. He was going to climb the Hawk's Nest and go through every cave and cranny in the mountain until he could grab the Old Man's beard. They found him at the mountain's midriff with only his hand sticking up out of the blanket of scree atop him. That had been in '60 before the war even started.

There was the battalion of Captain Margot's men who went out to Hawk's Nest with cannon to try and outflank Hunter and his raiders when they stormed the town. At the first burst from their gun, they were enveloped in a minor mountain of their own, and every man died in the scree.

There was Mr. Elbert Kincade. No one was sorry to see him go. He had made an excellent war profiteer; he'd bled Pikesboro as neatly as any surgeon with a lancet. And he died below Hawk's Nest, along with his elegant carriage and his lovely pair of horses. When Hunter raided, Mr. Kincade and his properties had been touched. So no one regretted his passing except for the fact that it had taken twenty plow mules to haul a boulder the size of a barn off Mr. Kincade's back, and also off the road.

That was the nasty thing about the whims of the Old Man of the mountain. When he threw stones, he blocked that Wake Hill highway, and there just wasn't any other way of getting to Wake Hill at all.

The ways of the ghost were strange, beyond the understanding of mortal Pikesboro people. But he was there. Grant could push Lee, Farragut could take New Orleans, and the *Monitor* could stop the *Merrimac*. But the Old man of the mountain kept a constant vigil up in those dark hills, a stone in his colossal hand, waiting to hurl it down upon the mortal who might challenge his power and domain.

IT WAS late afternoon in January, when Tindy Haynes and Jester paused at the foot of Hawk's Nest. Hawk's Nest was some five miles northwest of Pikesboro, a towering peak which rose gently enough until it reached its own midriff where it instantly became precipitous and dangerous, rising to its unclimbed summit.

The slopes of the mountain above the midriff were not only steep, they were studded with scree, loose shale and rocks. Here a sliding foot might start an avalanche of rock. And at the midriff there were dark holes in the limestones where caves honeycombed the place.

"Think he's up there?" Tindy said, his eyes round as he stared up at the summit.

Jester rolled his own eyes against his dark skin. He was a younger boy than Tindy, and a Haynes slave. Not that the Haynes owned a slave-worked plantation, but Dulcie and John, their house slaves, were Jester's parents and the boys were together most of the time.

"Marse Tindy, Ah think we'd butter git home," Jester said. "Ah's awful cold and it'll git dahk 'fore an hour."

"I know," Tindy Haynes said, staring up at the fading crags of Hawk's Nest. "But do you think he's up there?"

"Yass," Jester said, shuddering. "Ah reckon dat Ole Man is up chonder, Marse Tindy. I reckon he done jes' waitin' fo' yo' to come 'long so's he can brile yo' on a spit an' eat you' alive! Let's git home. Ah'm talkin', let's make tracks!"

"Hold your horses," Tindy Haynes said, setting his young jaw, his eyes steady on the mountain. He shifted the rifle under his arm and took a long breath. "A man don't like to go home empty-handed, Jes. What are you afraid of? The Old Man of the mountain ain't a cannibal. He's just an old ghost. And there's good game up there. There's rabbits and deer. And I'm going to get some. I ain't going back to Pikesboro without something. I been doing that for a week.

"I guess you don't understand, Jes, but folks think I'm just a kid that can't help his own house to eat when his pop's at

war. Doggone, those Yanks appear to have swept the country clean of game. There usta be rabbits thick as dandelions down this way in the winter. I ain't even seen a chipmunk or a squirrel . . . We're going up the mountain a ways."

"Ah, Lawd," Jester sighed, resigned. "If'n yo' say so, Tindy, but Ah's makin' wid a pow'ful pray'r fo' yo' foolishment."

WITHIN half an hour, they left the sweep of treeless plain and began to find the wooded country on the prickly rise of the Hawk's Nest slope. The boys were panting hard for the climb became arduous and the going was very slippery.

They rested on a ledge in a clearing on the eastern side, and from there they could look straight across the valley below and see the spires of Pikesboro in the distance. But it was growing dark. The sun sat on the western perimeter of the sky, and the day was filled with cold glowing lavender. Above them, the reddish cliffs, touched here and there with blue and gray, began to lose definition as the light faded.

"Gettin' dahk," Jester said, his knees rattling. "Tindy, it sho' nuff gittin' dahk and we got a long ways t'home."

"I want game!" Tindy said savagely. "I haven't seen a thing! There must be game here somewheres, and I ain't going home without a thing again!"

"We stays heah," Jester moaned, "and we ain' gwine home atall. De day is done and I'm a gone goose. Mah feet is frized, mah belly is'n done bangin' itself on mah ribs, and Ah crave de sight o' home."

Tindy stared at Jes and then sighed. The little darky's lips were blue with cold and his skin was faintly ashen. Tindy knew he was licked. He didn't want to stay and explore the mountain for game any more than Jes did, but they had to have meat—fresh meat.

In the east, a star glittered, and Tindy gave in. "All right," he said wearily. "I hate to do it, but I reckon we've got to. It's sure enough getting dark, I guess. And not even a starving rabbit to take back. I guess I ain't much of a hunter, Jes."

"Yo' good hunter," Jes said, "but dey ain' nothin' t'hunt. Ah do declar', Tindy, since dat Jin'l Huntuh an' his'n Yankees come through heah, ain' even a blade o' grass left."

They started down the long slope, and Tindy consoled himself with the thought that there was nothing else above them but the strata of limestone which formed the mountain's waist, and atop that the flat-topped summit with its cave holes and sheer rock walls which had never been scaled by any climber of Pikesboro.

They had taken not more than ten steps when Tindy halted abruptly, so abruptly that he nearly skidded on his backside. Jester stopped too, and was amazed at the sudden terror which he found in Tindy's eyes.

"Bear!" Tindy whispered.

"B-b-b'ar?" Jester whispered hollowly.

Tindy held his rifle at ready with one hand and pointed with the other. Down the slope, about twenty yards away, the bear stood on a flat rock, staring at them. He was a lean shaggy beast, quite large, and he was not moving a muscle, his head turned toward them.

"He sees us?"

"Course he sees us," Tindy Haynes snapped. "We made enough noise coming down here to wake up Lincoln in Washington. We're up the wind, it's carried the scent down. Thing is, what's that bear got on his mind?"

"Hunger," said Jes, shaking openly. "Dat b'ar is hungry. Yo' can see it in his'n eye. Never seed such a thin b'ar. Oh Lawd!"

"Stand still," Tindy said quietly. "I'll keep my eye on him. You take a look back the way we just come. Trees are no good, I think he can climb. Now look sharp and see if there's any foothold in that cliff behind us, any place we can climb up in case he runs for us."

"Ah'm lookin'," said Jester, his voice high and unsteady.

"Well hurry up. What do you see?"

"Ah'm lookin'," Jes repeated. "Ah don see nothin' 'cept a big hole in de rock

'bout twenty feet high up. Reckon dis yere b'ar couldn' git to dat hole. Reckon we can't too."

Below them, the bear stirred. He walked slowly off the flat rock and held his head in the air toward them. He growled. They heard him distinctly.

"You'd better find a way into that cave," Tindy said, wetting his mouth. "I think this bear is going to look us over pretty quick."

"Shoot 'im," said Jes. "Why'n yo' shoot 'im?"

"This gun ain't big enough for a bear. It woudn't stop him."

But it had to stop him. There was no longer any other choice than to try. The bear lowered his head and started to amble toward them, moving faster than they anticipated from his easy-going gait.

Tindy Haynes pushed Jes and cried, "The rocks! Run!" He threw the rifle to his shoulder and sighted it with trembling hands, drawing a bead on the left side of the bear's broad chest, and he fired.

THE sound of the shot was sharp, swift, and petty in the vastness which surrounded them. The brown bear staggered and tripped, seemed to snap at his own front, and then struggled to his feet, his tongue hanging out, a small patch of blood on his chest.

Tindy Haynes lowered the rifle instantly and took to his heels. There was no time to reload, climbing up that rock. Behind him he heard a roar of rage from the wounded beast, but he didn't dare look back. Above him and ahead of him, he saw Jester, climbing madly, finding footholds and handholds in the pattern of the limestone layers to which he clung. But there was excellent footing, really. Tindy saw that the minute he began to climb. The footing was too good; he had an idea the bear could climb as well as they could.

He reached a slope of some fifty degrees which was covered with scree. It started under his feet, but he managed to save himself from sliding off with the stuff by grasping the base of a small fir tree which

grew in a fissure close by. The scree avalanched down and crashed on the snow noisily, missing the bear, who had also started up.

Jes made the mouth of the cave safely and waited with horrified eyes as Tindy scrambled up. "Dat b'ar!" Jes screamed. "Dat b'ar is accomin'!"

Tindy made the mouth of the cave and stood there for a breathless moment. The bear, enraged, was still climbing, and doing a more dexterous job of it than they had. Tindy tried a sharp rock beside his foot, pelting it down at the beast with all his strength. It hit the bear's rump and only seemed to spur him on.

There was no further retreat upward possible, for above the mouth of the cave a shelf overhung, and at each side of the cave the rockside was too slick.

The only retreat was into the cave itself, and Tindy was afraid of that. He was afraid of it because he had been in the caves of Virginia before. The state was honeycombed with them, endless caverns cut from the soft limestone rock. They were exciting when you knew where to go in and where to come out. But caves were black, cold, and damp, studded with chasms, winding their way in impenetrable and constant night. You could lose yourself for eternity.

Again, no choice. Tindy took Jes's cold shaky hand and led him into the darkness. They felt their way along the wet rock inside, the daylight dying quickly as they left the mouth behind them.

"Keep feeling with your feet," Tindy gasped. "You never can tell when the floor drops away."

"Wait heah!" Jester cried at once. "Dey's lots of nothin' on dis yere side o' me!"

"Which side?"

"Left side."

"Try your right."

"Ain't nothin' dere either," Jes said. "We jes' gotta go ahead."

"I'm afraid to go ahead," Tindy said. "We're on a sort of shelf here and I guess we could get off it all right, if we had a

light, but we don't have a light. I'm afraid to keep going. We might fall into a hole and get killed."

They huddled together, gripping hands, feeling the cold breath of wind which swept through the cave soundlessly. Somewhere above Tindy was a wet rock ceiling, for drops fell upon his head with a strange cadence. From where they stood, they could still see that white hole where there was still day.

"Don't see him," Tindy whispered. "Maybe—"

"Uh-uh," Jes said, almost crying. "Uh-uh!"

THE bear was at the mouth of the cave. His bulk shut out the distant snow beyond. They could only see his outline as he filled the aperture. Tindy wet his finger and felt the cavern wind. It swept toward the aperture, not from it. They were up-wind again, and the bear had their scent.

The bear made a magnificent target as he filled the entrance. Tindy was thinking what a fine shot it was, with the proper gun. And then the silence of the dank dark place was shattered by a roaring explosion which echoed thousands of times before it faded.

It sounded like a cannon. Jes moaned and threw his hands over his ears until the sound of it faded, but Tindy was hastily priming his rifle for another shot which he was certain he would need.

As it turned out, he did not need it. He had aimed at the bear's head this time, but he never expected to make a lucky hit in the left eye. That he had made such a hit, he saw in a few moments. The bear roared in savage pain and cuffed at its head with its paws, the sound of its voice filling the ghostly caverns.

But the shot increased the danger. The bear did not retreat, nor did he die, for the ball apparently had been deflected by the skull bone and had crossed the eye, blinding it. Having done so, it galvanized the bear into sudden ferocity, and he rushed forward.

Gone now was Tindy's caution. He clung to his rifle, but he yelled at Jester and they began a wild scramble along the rock shelves into the deeper and gloomier fastnesses of the caverns, going with foolhardy speed.

Their luck held, for presently they found themselves high above their previous stand. They knew this because the roaring of the blinded bear was a good distance beneath them. They could no longer see him, or be seen. Tindy realized that they could see nothing at all, not even the mouth of the cavern. He wondered if night had come down to darken the mouth, or whether their scrambling had taken them out of its range.

No matter. There they were. Below them, the bear stopped his noise with a gruff grunt, and then there were seconds of intense and heart-wracking silence, followed finally by a remote and horrible thud which could have taken place as far away as Pikesboro.

"Wh'at dat ba'r?" Jester cried shrilly. "Wh'ar he at?"

Tindy replied quietly, "He's gone, Jes. He fell into a chasm. It was a long way to the bottom. I guess we musta missed it climbing up here, but he didn't. He wasn't in the mood to be careful. We're safe from that bear."

There was a long silence while they stood there. Somewhere near them was the drip, slow and adamant, of water. Jester gripped Tindy's arm. "Marse Tindy, kin yo' see somethin'?"

"I can't see a rang-tanged thing," Tindy said. "It's blacker than tar in here. I don't dare move."

"Lawd, ah's sceered," Jes whimpered. "Ah is really scared."

"Be quiet, Jes. That don't do no good. I got five matches with me, but I hate to use them up. Don't know where to strike 'em with these walls so wet. It'd only ruin them."

"Mah coat 's drah," said Jester. "Strike 'im on mah coat. Fo' de Lawd, strike one an' we see whatfo'."

TINDY struck a match, and then he wished he hadn't. They were on a shelf twenty feet above where they had huddled previously, and the only way down was a foot-wide path up which they had come. It was one thing to come up it, not seeing what would happen if you fell. It was another to go down, with that yawning mouth of abyss opened ready to swallow you if you slipped. Down there, in the mountain's gullet, lay the blinded bear.

The match went out.

"We're stuck," Tindy said. "I know this place. This is the cave where Lieutenant Coombs started his climb of Hawk's Nest last year. Remember when they tried to make a signal station outa this mountain, Jes? Lieutenant Coombs said it couldn't be climbed on the outside, that you had to go up on the inside. But he didn't make it, and he came down so quick after a rock missed him that he burned the skin offa his arms."

"De Old Man didn' want no signal station heah," said Jes. "De Old Man chuck a rock at de lootenant, Ah reckon. Marse Tindy, Ah sw'ar Ah seen a lantern on dis rock. Is Ah vizunin' things, yo' reckon?"

"What?" Tindy said. "A lantern? Where?"

"Back o' yo'," Jes said. "'Peared lak one, but de light makes funny shadows—"

Tindy hastily struck another match on the rough hemp of Jes' coat and as the phosphorus sputtered and glared up, he saw it too: a rusty, dirty kerosene lantern, beside it some rope, a small ax and a half-burnt candle. There was an army pack there, too, but it was empty.

"Good Lord!" said Tindy. "This is some of the stuff Lieutenant Coombs left behind. He's got this rope tied around a rock here and it goes up through that hole. I reckon—"

"Light de lamp! Light de lamp!" Jester chattered. "Gib me some light fust and den do yo' guessin', Marse Tindy! Light 'is whut Ah craves!"

"It probably won't work," Tindy said. "It's been here nearly a year—" But when he applied the dying match to the wick,

it did work, and he was amazed. The lantern filled their haven brightly, took away the terror.

Tindy pointed. "You see, Jes? Lieutenant Coombs left this stuff here in reserve. He started up from here, but he never came back this way, he got out somewhere else."

"He done got out when de Ole Man chase him out," Jester said.

"That may be," Tindy replied soberly. "And yet we either got to go down this way or else up, following Coomb's rope. And I say we're going up. I ain't got the nerve to go down again, and maybe this rope'll lead us out of another cave mouth up above some place."

Jester did not object. His was not to reason why, only to follow. He wanted to go home, and he didn't like that drop below either. Tindy gave him the rifle to carry and made him hold it with the barrel pointing behind, in case it should be accidentally discharged. Then Tindy led the way up, following the rope of Lieutenant Coombs, Virginia Volunteers, (who unknown to both the boys, now lay dead and buried near the Potomac.)

Time ceased to exist, and when they reached the end of Coomb's rope, they had reached the end of their strength, too; they were exhausted.

They had seen no other outlet, and yet there might have been one which they had missed in the darkness, for the lamp did not show all the crannies and alleys. The end of Coombs' rope left them in a room of rock with a solid enough floor and walls with only two apertures, the one through which they had arrived, and another one at the other end, through which perhaps they could leaye. But not then. Tindy decided against it. The rock-hewn room, like a tomb, was a safe resting place.

"We've gotta wait until dawn," Tindy said. "We can't tell when we do find a cave mouth with it being dark outside. We can warm our hands on this lamp, but I dop't think we'd better go any further."

They sat for a long time, staring at the

lantern, and then they fell asleep. The lamp burned out long before dawn, but they never knew it.

THE sun was colored like the meat of a ripe plum when it shot up in the east. Tindy awoke to find the rock haven bathed with the gaudy reflection of that sun, and he was instantly elated. He banged Jester on the back and kept shouting, "It's the sun! It's the sun!"

"Yass, yass," Jes said sleepily, "but we still heah wid de hand of de Ole Man all but reachin' out'n fo' us!"

"But don't you see?" Tindy exclaimed. "The sun is in here! That opening over there lets us out! We've found a way out, we're not down in the caves, we're almost at the outside!"

He ran over to the opening and climbed up the rock carefully until he could poke his head out. The wind touched his hair and ruffled it. He stared out in silence, his eyes wide with awe. Jester watched him with a falling heart.

"Jes!" Tindy Haynes whispered. "Come have a look."

The little darky went over, his steps leaden. He poked his head out and looked down on a vast white world of Virginia under snow. From their opening they could see all the way to Wake Hill. From Wake Hill the highway forked, one road coming to Pikesboro, in the shadow of Hawk's Nest, so close under them that they could have spit on a wagon top. The other fork led around the hills through the Pass to Whitehead, ten miles north of Pikesboro.

"We're close to the top o' the mountain," Tindy whispered. "Good lord, Jes, we musta climbed all night to get up here. But this is as far as a man could go. Look, there ain't a toehold outside this opening that goes up or down. We're looking right out over the highway down there and we must be a thousand feet in the air."

"Ah wunta go home," Jester said dismally, his voice breaking. "If'n de Ole Man o' de mountain catches us heah, he'll jest toss us over bo'rd and we'z gwine to squish lak grapes down dere on de pike.

We got'n get out'n heah, Tindy, 'fo' dat Ole Man sees us!"

Tindy looked out across the hills where Rockbridge Knob raised itself from the valley, with Huston Mountain behind it. He was looking down on them, for they did rise as high as Hawk's Nest. Huston was too far away to make out clearly, but he saw the big flag atop the Knob where the Confederate signal station was located.

These signal stations were located on almost every accessible peak of the Blue Ridge Mountains, since they commanded such superb views of Shenendoah Valley. Any enemy troop movements in the valley could instantly be spotted by one of the lookouts and the information passed on to another signal station by means of a flag; the flag would be dipped to one side for a dot and the other for a dash in Morse code. The rebels had used the technique expertly at Second Bull Run to relay information from Evans to Beauregard during the battle. And it was one of these stations that Tindy saw on the Knob.

The Knob commanded a fine view of the valley, but its sentries could not see the Wake Hill pike at all, or any terrain toward the northwest Allegenies.

STARING down into the flat land beneath him, Tindy Haynes' eyes grew amazed and frightened. He watched the Wake Hill road sharply. On it, like thousands of squirming worms, an army of blue ants moved, coming down toward Hawk's Nest and Pikesboro.

For a moment, he couldn't speak, and then he shouted, "Jes!"

"Lawd!" Jester gulped, startled out of his wits. "Whut yo' sceerin' me fo' lak dat, Tindy?" His knees shook. "De Ole Man—"

"Damn the Old Man!" Tindy shouted. "Look down there! Troops and artillery, moving at Pikesboro! Bluecoats! You can see them from here! They're Federal soldiers, advancing into the valley from its flank! And there ain't a soul knows they're coming, nor a soul who can stop them!"

Jes looked and groaned. "Dey take our

food agin? Dey gwine t'eat us out agin'?"

The same picture crossed Tindy's mind. It had been an autumn of privation after Hunter's Yankees raided Pikesboro and ate or burned or destroyed every bit of livestock and food in the town. Times had been hard. Tindy remembered his own mother's pale drawn face; more than once she had fainted from over-work and hunger. Rage shook him. Not again, God, not again! Pikesboro was barely on its feet, it was managing to live again. And there came the locusts!

The Union locusts, a thousand strong at least, for they clogged the pike from Wake Hill to Hawk's Nest. First came the advance guard, the scouts, then infantry, and behind that artillery and then more infantry. He couldn't be certain, that was the way it looked. But he could see the ugly black shape of cannon, big cannon, wheeling along.

What to do? The frustration drew the blood from his lips, left him shaking with fright and rage. Before that moving horde there would be no resistance. By sundown, Pikesboro would be sending its last smoke into the crisp blue sky as it burned to the ground. His mother was down there, alone with Dulcie and John. He couldn't get back. He and Jes would have to go down those dark dank caverns again and find their way with only the rope, for the lantern was no good now.

"Why couldn't they have gone by Whitehead?" Tindy Haynes cried in desperation. "There ain't no one left in Whitehead—the place is deserted! They never tried to rebuild after Hunter burned it! They'd find poor foraging there! Why didn't they take the Whitehead pike at the fork back there!"

"Dey'll kill mah mom and pop!" Jes wailed, with tears in his eyes.

"They'll kill plenty others, too—or starve 'em to death."

Tindy looked out, searched the valley for Confederate cavalry, saw none. That was natural enough. Confederate cavalry moved without being seen. There might be good Rebs anywhere around. Surely they

expected these Yanks. They weren't going to let the Yanks just walk in. No attack could be that much of a surprise.

His attention was drawn to the Knob where the signal flag stood on its summit. He saw no sign of the lookout, but even if the lookout had been visible, he could not have seen the disaster which was creeping up behind him.

Still, there was the only chance. That lookout on the Knob had to know. Once he knew, he would relay the information on to another peak and the news would ultimately reach a Confederate command.

But the Knob was half a mile north of Tindy as he stood in the mouth of the cavern. Half a mile north and two hundred feet below him. He could not shout the distance.

Tindy grabbed his rifle. "Jes," he snapped, "take off your coat!"

"Whut fo'?"

"Take it off! Don't ask questions! Take it off!"

Tindy looked down. The advance guard had already passed the foothills of the Hawk's Nest in which he stood. Leaning way over, he could see them, gone past him now, on the way to Pikesboro. Here was infantry and there was heavy artillery following. Tindy raised his rifle, drew a rough bead on the Knob and fired a shot.

It cracked out sharp and clear in the clear air. Jes had his hemp coat off. Tindy wrapped it on the end of the gun barrel and then lighted it with a match. He watched the Knob as it flared, then smoldered. The hemp coat made a cloud of thick smoke which choked him. But he continued to wave the burning coat to and fro.

Off on the Knob, the lookout came to life. He saw the smoke, then saw Tindy—as Tindy saw him. The lookout grabbed his own flag and hastily signaled a message in Morse code. But Tindy had never heard of the Morse alphabet, and all he could do was wave and shout and point down.

The Knob lookout didn't get it.

"Listen," Jester gulped.

TINDY HAYNES listened. Somewhere, some one was muttering. This was no mortal muttering. It was a superhuman growl, deep in the throat of Hawk's Nest. Some scree cascaded past the cavern opening, small pieces of rock. Then the mutter ceased. There was no more scree.

"De Ole Man" shouted Jes. "Dat wuz de voice o' de Ole Man hiself! Spoutin' wid his'n displeasure!"

"Oh, shut up!" Tindy said. "If there's an Old Man in this mountain, why don't he do something about it! Why don't he go to work and throw rocks! What kind of a Rebel spook is he, letting Yankees march on him? Oh golly, Jes"—his voice sagged tiredly—"the coat is all burnt and that lookout just don't get the idea. He can't see them and he must think we've gone crazy up here."

"Marse Tindy! Lookit deah! Dat look-out, he ain' de on'y one whut seed dat smoke! Look down deah! Lawd dey gwine t'peppuh us wid hot shot an' cannon!"

It was true. Tindy Haynes looked down upon the Wake Hill road. Beneath him, the Yankee artillery had wheeled into position. The infantry took cover and instantly opened fire. It was amazing to see the speed and dexterity with which the marching columns suddenly became defensive positions.

Tindy gasped. "They think this is a Rebel ambush! They think this summit is fortified! They think they've been taken by surprise!"

"Yass," Jes moaned, "but de fack is we's de ones done took by s'prise!"

Jes was right. Rifle balls began to spatter around the cavern mouth, driving Tindy back into the safety of the rock-walled room. Here, he and Jes were all right except possibly for a ricochet off the ceiling. They stood out of line of fire and tried to peer out. Tindy managed to catch a glimpse of the Yankees priming a cannon. That was the last straw. "They're going to cannonade!" he yelled.

"Le's go down, le's go back de way we come!" Jester pleaded.

But it was too late for a wild scramble

down the rope through the half-miles of black caverns in the limestone of the Hawk's Nest; too late for a retreat into the heart of the mountain.

Through the morning air came a whine which grew into a shriek, then a scream. It finally touched a crescendo when its voice broke. The cavern shook. Outside somewhere, the world became a roaring burst of flame and steel. Splinters and fragments stung the earth outside. The dust and smoke drifted in. The whole mountain seemed gripped by the tremor. Then there was a moment of overwhelming silence, to be followed by another sound, the voice of the cannon, far below in the valley, arriving later than the cannonball it had delivered on their very doorstep.

"Old Man!" Tindy Haynes shouted, panicked in his terror. "Old Man of the mountain! If there's really an Old Man of Hawk's Nest, help us out of here, help, help, *help!*"

"Ole-ghost!" Jester cried. "Ole uncle ghost, heah us prayin'!"

There was a miracle.

DEEP in the great mountain, the Old Man heard them. He shook himself awake slowly, and the sound was the sound of cracking wood, and the mountain trembled at the movement.

And then the Old Man looked down from some place and saw that cannon and those soldiers and growled his displeasure. Just a growl first, as the soldiers primed again. But the growl rumbled through the rock, through the red Virginia clay, through the roots of every fir and sassafras and oak and maple.

And both the boys could hear it, hear it through their ears and their feet. In the valley, the Yankee soldiers heard the Old Man clear his throat. Every face turned up. They were white against the dark uniforms, as white as the snow around them. The men at the cannon paused in their priming, as they all listened.

Then the Old Man whistled, grunted, shoved. The mountain shook in fear. He beat his chest like the boom of thunder,

and the earth cried out in a voice that put the voice of the cannon to shame.

From the summit, the Old Man plucked a stone. It was a big stone, weighing three tons. He pushed it off the mountain and laughed raucously as he watched it roll. It hit other boulders and started them on the march. It scraped up tons of scree and sent it sliding off the shelves, off the walls, off the ledges, into the valley.

The world was filled with the overwhelming tympani of stone in charge. The avalanche crashed and shrieked its way into space, but there was never silence, for other rock was moving, until at last, the thunder of the impact upon the valley floor could be heard at last, which meant that the rocks had ceased moving above.

The Old Man made no further sound, no laughter, not even a grunt. There was only the vast silence of the blue Virginia sky.

And in the valley below, where there had been soldiers and a highway, there was only a mountain—a small one, to be sure, and made entirely of stone, but a mountain none the less. And no cannon.

. . . All morning, Tindy Haynes and Jester watched the Yankees—what was left of the command that had been away from the action—retreat toward Wake Hill. When they reached Wake Hill, they took the fork that would pull them away from Pikesboro and run them through deserted Whitehead. But even so, Tindy wondered if they could reach Whitehead, for the Rebel signaler on the Knob had finally reached a position on his crest from where he could see the disordered remnants of the Federals who had been trapped on the Pikesboro side of the avalanche. And he was signaling instantly to

another lookout, and there would be gray uniforms in that valley soon enough.

After that, Tindy and Jes did not waste time. They followed the rope back, found the cave mouth through which Lieutenant Coombs had left the inner caves, and they managed to descend a precarious slope safely. Then they sped to Pikesboro to tell the tale again and again, just as it is told today.

After the university was established in Pikesboro in 1870, and classes in geology found Hawk's Nest to be a perfect example of what water will do to limestone through the centuries, a professor named Hurdkin publicly denied the existence of the Old Man and explained the Union disaster as a matter of sound and shock.

It was simple, he said.

He pointed out that the years had worn away the firm base of the scree and boulders on the mountain; the rocks had been perched precariously there, and it had required the merest shock to start them into an avalanche. He hazarded that the Union cannonball explosion started the slide, just as a Rebel cannon shooting had started a smaller slide a year before. He showed how sound and shock, in the vicinity of the mountain had accounted for the deaths of all those others who had made the myth.

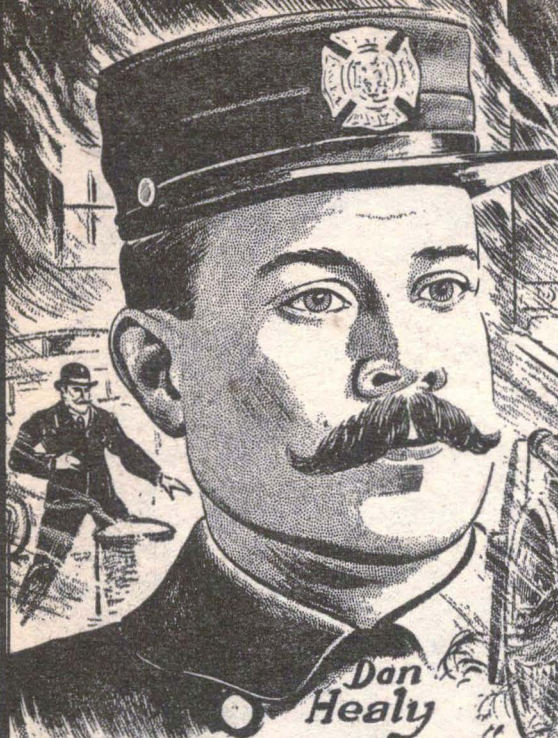
And it was with great difficulty that Sheriff Waterman prevented the townfolk from riding Professor Hurdkin out on a rail, tarred and feathered. For in Pikesboro, the Old Man of the mountain is regarded today with as much reverence as General Lee himself.

BEGINNING NEXT WEEK

CROOKED CARIBBEAN CROSS

By BORDEN CHASE

MEN of

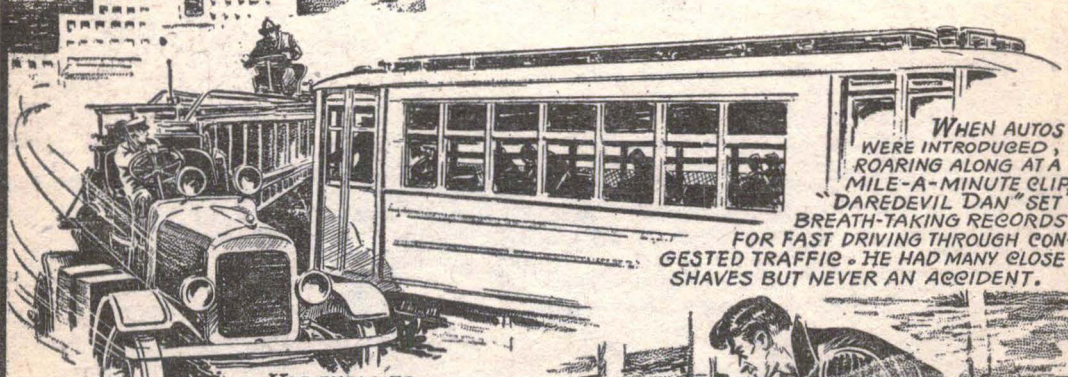
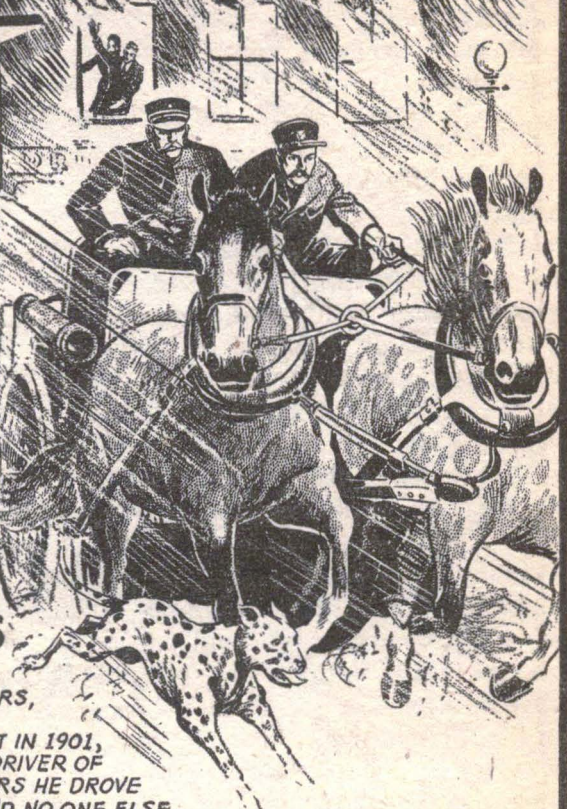


Dan Healy

IRISH SMOKE-EATERS

DAN HEALY AND JOHN KENLON, TWO OF NEW YORK'S MOST FAMOUS FIRE-FIGHTERS, WERE BOTH BORN IN IRELAND.

SHORTLY AFTER JOINING THE DEPARTMENT IN 1901, DAN BECAME THE ENVY OF EVERY BOY AS DRIVER OF CHIEF MARTIN'S RED BUGGY. FOR 21 YEARS HE DROVE FOR "SMOKY JOE," WHO WOULD RIDE BEHIND NO ONE ELSE.



WHEN AUTOS WERE INTRODUCED, ROARING ALONG AT A MILE-A-MINUTE CLIP "DAREDEVIL DAN" SET BREATH-TAKING RECORDS FOR FAST DRIVING THROUGH CONGESTED TRAFFIC. HE HAD MANY CLOSE SHAVES BUT NEVER AN ACCIDENT.

HIS EXPLOITS FOR COOL DARING BECAME LEGENDARY; HE RECEIVED THREE CITATIONS AND 7 MEDALS FOR BRAVERY IN SPECTACULAR RESCUES.

ONCE A SQUAD OF FIREMAN FELL INTO A DEEPLY FLOODED SUB-BELLAR. SOME WERE INJURED, OTHERS COULD NOT SWIM. DAN PLUNGED IN AND SWAM WITH THEM ONE BY ONE TO SAFETY.



DARING

by STOOKIE ALLEN



CHIEF
KENLON

JOHN KENLON'S FIRST EXPERIENCE WITH FLAMES CAME WHEN, PLAYING WITH MATCHES AT 3, HE SET FIRE TO A HAYSTACK AND ALMOST BURNED TO DEATH. LEAVING HIS PLOW STANDING HE RAN AWAY TO SEA AT 13 AND IN 9 YEARS ROSE FROM SHIP'S BOY TO MASTER.

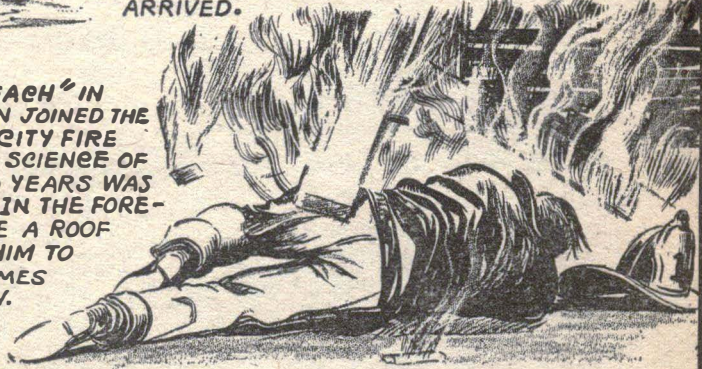


(KENLON IN UNIFORM)

FOR 3 DAYS, OFF CAPE RACE, HE HELPED FIGHT A FIRE IN THE HOLD OF A STEAMER, AND WHEN A GREAT LAKES FREIGHTER BURNED TO THE WATER LINE, SPENT HOURS CLINGING TO A RAFT BEFORE A TUG ARRIVED.



"ON THE BEACH" IN NEW YORK IN 1887, KENLON JOINED THE DEPARTMENT AND BECAME CITY FIRE CHIEF IN 1911. HE MADE A SCIENCE OF FIRE-FIGHTING AND FOR 20 YEARS WAS A REAL "WORKING CHIEF" IN THE FOREFRONT OF EVERY ALARM. ONCE A ROOF COLLAPSED ON HIM, PINNING HIM TO THE FLOOR. CHEMICAL FUMES LAID HIM LOW.



ONCE HIS LEG WAS BROKEN WHILE RACING TO A BLAZE. HE ESTIMATED HE HAD BEEN AT 40,000 FIRES DURING HIS 44 YEARS IN THE DEPARTMENT.



DAN RETIRED IN '25...CHIEF KENLON 6 YEARS LATER. BOTH GRAND OLD MEN DIED EARLY IN 1940.

Rifle Ride

By C. K. SHAW

Author of "To Ride a Crooked Trail," "Uneasy Gun," etc.

Yes, there's nice land for settling on Big Squaw Mountain. Might be peaceable up there—if the two fast guns from Texas could stop their fancy shooting long enough to talk things over with a dead man. . . . A complete short novel

CHAPTER I

WAGONS TO SQUAW MOUNTAIN

THE wooded mountain, forebodingly dark against the evening sky, was Big Squaw. Rising from black timber, it dominated the section of eastern Oregon toward which Flint Oliver was riding. The trees thinned a few miles from its base, and the land dropped into canyons, now inky cuts. Somewhere in those canyons cattle grazed, and horses scratched themselves on corral fences. Flint leaned forward as though so tiny a distance helped him cover the miles to those small ranches.

Flint Oliver didn't seem a man to settle down and grow up with a locality. His friends told him this when he spoke of building up a little spread. They might have gone on to disparagement had not his gray eyes stopped them. The gun that rubbed his thigh as his horse trotted was smooth from handling, oiled and dangerous.

Flint's father had been a gunman, willing to join any man's war where he could give his heart, and his heart lent itself to any wild cause. He had fought with the South, and joined with roving bands for a couple of years after the war had closed. Then his son had come from school where he had been all the years with his mother; and the father turned to the more legitimate business of conducting herds up the newly opened trails.

There was action enough here to satisfy him, and for six years he and his son worked up the Abilene Trail and down the Texas. Then they started on the Long Drive. Returning from Montana, Sam Oliver hired out to conduct a train of ten

wagons over a shortcut to eastern Oregon. He took the job to please his son, and it was the first favor Flint had asked.

The families of the train had money with them for ranches in the great new country ahead. Rathbone Tarbell talked of better cows and carefully bred horses. Flint sat at his fire many evenings, something inside him unfolding to the man's dreams. Young Red Tarbell and Flint became friends. Of the same age, they took to riding together, and Flint taught Red to use a rifle expertly. Red had no desire to handle the short gun that always hung at Flint's side.

Janey Tarbell, Red's sister, became aware of the lean young man who moved with such ease that his body was never in his way, who was often at her father's fire. Their eyes met again and again across the blaze. They came to taking walks together in the evenings. Flint's father spoke sharply to him. He saw nothing in the big awkward Red Tarbell nor in the gentle-eyed Janey.

"Marriage," he told his son, "is not for us, boy. I married your mother and traveling about was too hard for her. I never had my son with me until after her death."

"All men don't keep moving, dad."

"The Olivers do—they move like the wind. Don't get any notion of following this wagon train after we get it to the Blue Mountains. We'll hit for a spot where there's excitement. I've promised to show you a gold rush. There's The Last Chance in Montana. We'll go!"

Flint made no answer. Sam Oliver's anger showed beneath his light skin. "Don't say you're making a fool of yourself over that Tarbell wench!"

The boy turned away.

Big Red swung again, and the smaller man went down for good



FLINT had sensed the gulf that separated him and his father but he had never faced it before. Now he understood. He had the appearance of a true Oliver. He had the body men associated with speed, and his gray eyes looked dangerous.

It was his heart that was different. Sam Oliver's heart leaped only at tales of excitement, of fighting and wild rides. Flint's heart warmed when men talked of carving a solid life from a great country; it burned with a steady, quiet fire when he thought of himself as the carver and Janey Tarbell as his helpmate.

The next day he filled his hours with visions of a small ranch, and that evening he spoke to the girl. The stars were close to them and the moon a ball of gold. Janey listened and gave him her promise.

Sam Oliver became more bleak as the days passed. The Red Butts rose up to the south of the train as it headed across Wyoming toward the great mountain divide. Oliver gave his son scout duty that

kept him away from the Tarbell wagons during the days. Then he forbade him to walk with Janey in the evenings.

Flint looked at him across the low blaze of their supper fire, and Sam Oliver saw then that the boy should not be commanded. But Sam Oliver's white anger was checked by his son's words.

"You followed your own heart, Dad. You left mother alone, and left me without a dad until I was twelve years old."

"You are criticising me?"

"No, not even blaming you, but I'm pointing out that a man must follow his own heart. I'm going to marry Janey Tarbell."

Sam Oliver grew gray-faced. But he couldn't ask more of his son than he had been willing to give. He walked away in the darkness and was not seen until the morning call to fall in.

He had held his anger against his son, but he did not hold it against Bill Prindle. Prindle cursed him for leaving him to the

dust another day, claiming unfairness. Prindle was not liked; his ceaseless complaining sickened all the men. He had a weak chin, but a foxy light dwelt in his eyes. He could be mean, and this morning he chose to curse more vilely than ever.

Sam Oliver had spent a night of torture, and was in no mood to soothe the fellow. He dropped a hand toward the gun that had not left its holster during the trip. Prindle swept a knife from his boot-top and let it fly even as Sam Oliver tried to hold the move with words. Then Oliver tipped the gun upward and dropped Prindle across the tongue of his wagon—dead. The bullet had passed between his eyes.

Prindle's twenty-year-old son had witnessed the quarrel and its ending. He came from his crouch behind a wheel as members of the train crowded about. He claimed Sam Oliver had attacked his dad. A killing laid a terrible hush on the little train quartered between the high hills. Men looked at Sam Oliver's granite face, at his sharp gray eyes, and at his gunman's hands. They condemned him with hard glances. Mrs. Prindle wailed and Alby Prindle, the son, built up his story with each telling.

The men forgot Alby was a liar as his father had been. They took a swift vote to see if hanging were in every mind. Rathbone Tarbell lifted his voice against the death sentence.

"Oliver says he killed to protect himself. We can't say he didn't." Tarbell looked at Alby Prindle, weak-chinned and full of shambling pride over the part he was playing. "We can't say he didn't, for we can't place credit on Alby's word."

The wife wailed that they had seen her husband killed in cold blood and were now turning on her son. But the words of Rathbone Tarbell turned the tide. Sam Oliver was ordered to leave the train. Three rifles were bored into his back as they removed his guns. They took even his skinning knife and faced him toward the backward trail.

"If you beat these mountains with only your hands, Oliver," one of the men said, "you'll have paid for the death of Bill Prindle."

Sam Oliver had said no word after his

first statements regarding the shooting. He said none as he turned away. His arm was hugged close to his side so that these hard eyes might not see the blood that soaked his shirt from the knife wound. That blade had slide between his ribs, and another small distance would have left the train with two dead men.

FLINT stirred. Red Tarbell was close to his side and felt the tremor of his slightly-built companion. He looked into Flint's eyes, his own brown ones filled with pain. Big Red, they called him because of his wide shoulders and powerful hands. He whispered to his friend.

"I'll come back to this spot tonight with a horse—if you're goin' with your dad."

"Leave some medicine by the creek if you can," Flint returned. "For Dad's wound. I'll come back tonight for the horse—and guns."

Flint stepped from the shelter to the circle of men. Solemnly he unbuckled his waist gun and laid it across the wagon tongue. A girl came from the edge to the inner circle, her eyes very brown against her pale face.

"Flint, you're not going!"

"He's my Dad, Janey, and he's wounded."

She looked to the tall figure walking away, asking no odds of any man, even a son. "Yes," she whispered, "you must go."

Flint felt the greatest pride of his father he had even known, as he hurried to overtake him. And there was fierce joy in Sam Oliver's eyes when he saw his son beside him. He would not accept a helping hand, for hard eyes were watching from behind, but his gray face came to life.

"You've come with me, boy—thanks."

"We'll head for the trees to the left, Dad. When we're hid I'll dress that wound for you."

When the trees received them, Sam Oliver was glad to accept the aid of his son. The wagons were under way now, and when they had wound behind the hills, Flint ran to the camping ground to see if Red Tarbell had been able to leave bandages. Everything was there beside the creek, and some-

thing in the neatness of the package made Flint know Janey's hands had been at work.

All day Sam Oliver lay in the hot shade, babbling some when awake. The wound was a bad one, but Flint did not fear for his father's life. In the night, Red Tarbell came with two horses, one Flint's own and the other a saddler belonging to Rathbone Tarbell. Red had been afraid to take both the Oliver horses for fear the men would not believe that Indians or skulking whites had slipped down and cut them free. Flint's rifle was in its scabbard and his gun and belt over his horn.

"They gave me your guns, because we'd been friends," Big Red explained, "and because I kinda insisted on having them. They put your dad's in the lead wagon and I couldn't get them."

They didn't do a lot of talking. Red said Janey had told him about the plans she and Flint had made for a home in the Blue Mountains. He gave over a letter the girl had written, and then he was anxious to be on his way back to the sleeping train.

Red kicked at the dirt. "She said she was going to wait for you."

"I'll be there," Flint Oliver said quickly.

They shook hands and Flint tensed his muscles against the crushing strength in Big Red's fingers. "I'll be looking for you," young Tarbell said and rode away.

Flint took his father back to Laramie, where he lay with fever. When he was able to walk, his glance turned always to his native Texas. One day he took a ride and each day afterwards he rode farther. Then he said he was ready to ride south. Flint had not told him of his promise to follow Janey Tarbell. He was waiting until the wiry strength had returned to the thin body.

They made it to Texas and Sam Oliver was through with roving. He was glad to fall into his long sleep, knowing his body would rest beneath Texas sod.

It was fall then, and Flint knew a winter ride north was unwise. He had no address where he might write to Janey Tarbell, but Janey's was a gentle, waiting disposition and he believed her heart would

tell her the delay was necessary. He started up the trail with the first spring herd. He needed the money that drive would bring him, for starting up a spread was going to take more cash than he had.

CHAPTER II

DIAMOND ON THE BAR

THE Blue Mountain town of Opal lay in a twist of the John Day River a short ride ahead. Flint Oliver fell in with a puncher going his way and asked him if an emigrant train had come in the fall before. He had asked this question of all he met after crossing the Snake, and had learned enough to satisfy him that the Tarbell train had arrived safely.

"Yeah, eight families settled on Big Squaw. I'll swear if it ain't wonderful what some of 'em have done with them wilds. Grubbed 'em in spots along Dog Crick fer medders, built roads to their homes."

"Cattle ranches around object much to small fellows horning in?"

"Not a heap. Them breaks of Dog Crick at the foot of ol' Big Squaw are wilder'n seven steers. Them fellers mostly have cattle of their own, and they're good about throwin' the big ranches' stuff out when they ride. Not a bad lot." Then his lips tightened in remembrance. "That is so we thought till lately. Ain't you heard about the murder of David Slocum?"

Flint listened to the story of the Easterner who had come from Kansas City with five thousand dollars to pay down on a ranch. He had been dealing by letter with Alex Cox of the BW, and things were settled if the five sections turned out as Cox represented them to be. David Slocum arrived in Opal and started, supposedly, for the BW. He never got there, but he was seen by two punchers in the wilds of Big Squaw Mountain. That was the last ever heard of David Slocum and his five thousand dollars.

"If them two Circle 8 fellers hadn't chanced to a seen him, nobody would ever a known he rode toward Big Squaw, and them fellers up there would've got away with it slick as frog's hair. But he was seen,

and so was one of the ranchers from Dog Crick. Big Red Tarbell was kitin' down outa there, but the punchers didn't get close enough to speak to him."

Flint slid sideways in his saddle, facing the puncher. "Didn't Tarbell have any cattle back in there? Couldn't Red have been riding for calves?"

"Yeah, yeah, sure. But David Slocum was never seen after that day. 'Course Sheriff Dodson ain't arrestin' the big red-head, not till he gets more on him than he has. But that eastern company is sendin' a trailer here that always fetches in his man, and mostly dead. Red is a big slow-thinkin' moose. This manhunter will find him easy meat."

"Special deputy due, huh?"

The puncher spat.

"Yeah, a Texas gunslinger, so they say. First off the law has got to find the body."

"Yes, finding the body will come ahead of a murder charge. David Slocum probably made off with the money."

The puncher looked across. Flint's eyes had sharpened to a cutting gray, but his face was quiet. The man's glance moved from the low-worn holster to the hip brand of Flint's sorrel.

"Ain't seen that brand for two years," he said. "Feller up here from around San Antonio."

"Yes, Colorado River spread. Who's your sheriff?"

The puncher sat back in his saddle as a man who had done a good day's work. He anticipated the pleasure ahead for him when he sprung his news in Opal.

"Brin Dodson is sheriffin' these parts with the help of Deputy Cole Thomas. You'll find one or the other in that log buildin' to the left of town as we enter. You ain't got much of that Texas talk about you, but you got the gitup."

Flint roused from inspecting his horse's ears. He smiled faintly in answer to the puncher's knowing grin. "I'm not a Texan born, but my dad was."

"The strain has held over strong, feller. That's the jail yonder, the buildin' of pealed logs."

BUT Flint disappointed the puncher by riding on to the stable and putting up his horse. To deny to the fellow that he was the Texas gunman would only make him more certain. The mixup would be amusing if the name of Red Tarbell were not involved.

"Any of the Tarbells in from Squaw Mountain?" Flint asked the stableman.

"Big Red and Alby Prindle. You'll catch 'em at the Seven-up Saloon 'fore too long. Alby Prindle alus hits for there."

The mention of Alby Prindle jarred Flint. His dad had told him how Alby had lied about the fight at the wagon train, and Flint hated the fellow for what he had done to Sam Oliver. Now Big Red seemed to be traveling with him.

Things were dead in the Seven-up, although several punchers leaned on the bar. Flint took a chair in the corner and sized up the place. The lack of life might be due to the presence of a pointed-chinned deputy who was taking the measure of a man at the end of the bar.

The man was tall and meatless with eyes sunken into bony wells. He was evidently a stranger. The way his palm caressed his gun told a story. He wore two guns, but in his left hand he held a drink. The deputy had just snapped at the punchers that he wanted no heavy drinking, or brawls, that there was already enough trouble in town. The stranger didn't apply the words to himself. He set his glass down empty and ordered it filled.

The deputy's lips tightened, but he let the matter pass, having noted the hand hovering over the gun. The back door opened and two men entered. The one in the lead walked with shambling steps, a slouch hat cutting a line across his weak-jawed face. It was Alby Prindle—Flint knew him at first glance.

The second man was tall, broad-shouldered and thick of waist. His hat was shoved back to show a broad face and flaming red hair. His muscle-padded chest showed through a rent in his shirt. It was Red Tarbell.

"He's big as a bull!" Flint thought. A

year had thickened the muscle pads on the large bones. No wonder the name Big Red followed him.

When Big Red saw the deputy, his jaw corded. He was not asking for trouble but neither did he let his glance fall. Flint stayed in the shadowy corner, his palms moist. He didn't want to walk out and meet Red Tarbell with this sharp-eyed deputy watching. The fellow must be Cole Thomas, law assistant to Sheriff Brin Dodson, and it seemed there was tension between the deputy and Red Tarbell.

The gaunt stranger at the end of the bar began to feel his drinks, and with the warmth building up in him, he began to talk. He took another whisky and his words flowed freely, but still his palm remembered the loaded holster. Cole Thomas swung on him; but the stranger wouldn't row-tow. The deputy again passed him up. He might be drunk, but he'd still give an account of himself in a gun fight.

Flint knew his stripe, he'd seen many such on the Texas Trail. Despite the hint of northern flatness in the lean man's voice, he was a Texan. He would handle his two guns by pure instinct and shoot circles around the blustering deputy. The only good sense Cole Thomas was showing was in recognizing that.

ONE of the punchers had dropped back to the shadows beside Flint. Under the deputy's snarls, he had lost pleasure in his evening. His lined face was forlorn, and he spoke his grief in a low voice.

"Cole Thomas swoops down on a few of us horse wranglers like a eagle, but he's slow against anybody that looks like a triggerman."

The triggerman was close to Big Red now, and began to tell him of some diamonds he owned. Red glanced away, telling Alby Prindle to down a couple of drinks and get ready to strike for home. The gunman resented being ignored.

"Don't believe me, huh? Don't think I got any diamonds! Look at them!" He jerked a sack from his vest pocket and rolled two glistening stones onto the bar.

"They're gen-u-ine, too, don't make no mistake about that. I could turn either one of them for two hundred dollars just like that!" He snapped his fingers.

He turned away from the bar, drawing the room into his confidence. "They're the real thing, folks." His arm brushed the bar and one of the stones fell to the floor.

Flint had been watching closely. The fellow seemed drunk except for one thing. He had brought the sack from his pocket with his left hand. He weaved slightly, looking down at the diamond on the floor. He turned back to the bar. Both stones were gone.

His long body tensed. "Where's my other diamond?"

Deputy Cole Thomas snapped an answer. "You drug them off the bar with your arm. There's one by your toe."

The triggerman didn't look down. "I asked about the other one!" The drunkenness was gone.

The deputy's resentment against the gunman sharpened his next words. "This floor is full of knotholes. Don't go starting trouble till you're sure of something."

Flint Oliver had seen Alby Prindle's long fingers sweep across the bar toward the diamond. It had been a practiced move, too much of a blur for the eye to follow in detail. But only one diamond had been dragged to the floor and now the other was not on the bar. The triggerman was sober, swinging his head like a rattler.

Flint worked closer to the bar. Alby Prindle had stolen the diamond and hell was due to burst. Prindle realized the stranger had sobered and was dangerous. He took a sideling step toward the back door. The gunman's wrist flipped downward and his palm came up loaded. He covered both Big Red and Alby Prindle.

"You two hayseeds anxious to take the air?" he asked.

The question laid down a battle line. The stranger knew either Red Tarbell or Alby Prindle had his diamond. Flint was close now and saw Red's hands clinch.

The voice of Cole Thomas came sharply. "If there's any gunwork to be done here,

I'll do it. Put up that there iron, stranger!"

The triggerman laughed, keeping his eyes on Big Red. "I do my own shootin,' he said. "Search this pair, the redhead first."

The command fanned Thomas's anger. He jerked out his gun and stepped up behind the stranger. "I'll do the shooting—and I'll give the orders. Put up your gun."

THE stranger's attention switched an instant to Deputy Thomas. In that split second Alby Prindle's hand darted toward Red Tarbell's pocket. Flint understood the move. Prindle was planting the diamond on Red.

Flint leaped, sweeping Alby's hand into the air, shaking the diamond from his fingers. It hit the floor and lay in a path of light from the lamp.

Big Red Tarbell swung about, realizing only one thing—that Alby Prindle had been proved a thief. Red had not seen the attempt to plant the diamond on him. Prindle made for the door, but the triggerman stopped him with his gun. Flint felt Red's breath and saw his hands clenching. Complete loyalty was all the big fellow knew. He might hate Prindle for a thief, but he would not quit him now.

There was no time for words; those fists of Red's had to be stayed. Flint whipped out his gun and jabbed it in Tarbell's stomach.

"Get back, Red!"

The whisper was just between the two of them. So close did they stand that nothing was clear to the others in the room. Red looked into the eyes so close to him and his hands dropped. Flint jammed his gun to leather; it had been in his hand only an instant.

"Let me handle this, Red," he whispered.

Red stared, his face without expression. No promise was there. His eyes went over Flint's features, recognizing them, but there was no welcome in his gaze.

"You laid Alby on the block," he breathed.

Flint had no time to answer. He stepped from behind the wall of Red's body and faced the lean stranger. The gunman was

looking at Deputy Thomas with hard eyes.

"So the floor is full of knotholes, huh?"

Cole Thomas was white. The gunman swung his truculent glance to Flint. "You done a good job of makin' that thief spill the diamond, but I'd a got him myself. Nice the way you stopped the big red-head from hornin' in."

Flint stepped closer to him. "You got things twisted. The big fellow didn't try anything."

The triggerman's head came forward on his scrawny neck. He blinked. "I saw what happened," he said. "This pair work together. The slim one lifts the stuff and the big one raises a lot of dust so's his pard can get away. Arrest them both, Deputy."

"Mean to say I'm lying?" Flint Oliver asked.

The triggerman's thin frame tightened. He was no longer locking horns with a couple of hill men; here was an antagonist of his own caliber. He already had his gun free of leather, but if he switched the muzzle from Prindle to this new danger, the mountain man would dart through the back door to freedom. If he went with his left hand for a second gun—well, he wasn't going to work left-handed against this quiet-eyed man.

"If you say you didn't tangle with the beef-wagon, then you didn't," he said slowly. "There's one thing certain, I'll need both my hands to call your bluff. What you say goes—for now."

FLINT knew that fellow hadn't backed down. He had simply refused to be shaken loose from Alby Prindle. The attempted theft of the diamonds was rankling deeply. Deputy Cole Thomas was making an attempt to take charge of affairs when the front door opened and the sheriff walked in.

The lawman noted Alby Prindle shrinking down in his ill-fitting clothes, and he saw the stranger with a gun in his hand. He caught sight of Red Tarbell, and his face stiffened. Seeing Red in trouble brought him to point.

"What's the rip here, Thomas?" he

asked, and Flint caught the undernote of eagerness. Sheriff Brin Dodson was hoping for a juicy bite.

Cole Thomas stuttered. There was no way he could add any color to his own actions. He glared at the strange gunman who had grabbed the limelight. The triggerman launched into an account of what had taken place.

"I knew that long-hanky had my diamond, him or the beef-wagon, but this limb of the law here hankered to have me pry up the floor to see if it hadn't rolled through a knothole."

"Got anything on Red Tarbell?"

The triggerman looked toward Flint Oliver. He cleared his throat. "I 'low not," he answered.

The sheriff motioned for Thomas to take charge of Prindle. He was disappointed at not getting Tarbell, but glad to have at least one man from Big Squaw Mountain. He looked straight at Flint.

"A puncher told me you was looking for me. Come over to the office."

The puncher had evidently done a good job of identifying his man, for the sheriff was certain. Flint hesitated. If he went with Sheriff Dodson and kept his mouth shut, he might learn something of the David Slocum case.

"I reckon I might as well go along," he said.

The softness of his tones caught the attention of the room. The punchers at the bar reared up in quickened interest. The whisper "special deputy" traveled about.

At the door Flint managed a glance back at Red Tarbell. The big fellow was standing in the center of the room, his fists clenched, a light breaking on his face. His eyes were ugly.

He had heard the whisper and accepted it. Flint had come to Opal, a special deputy to run down a murder on Squaw Mountain. He would have revenge on the wagon train that had cast his father out. That was the way Red was reasoning; Flint saw it in his eyes. Alby Prindle was too shaken by his own troubles to give any attention to strangers.

Flint followed the sheriff. The triggerman fell in beside them, saying he needed the air.

CHAPTER III

SMART GUY

WHEN they entered the office at the front of the jail, Flint kept to the shadows until Alby Prindle was led to his cell. Cole Thomas returned from locking him up, and he said harshly:

"It's foolish this stranger insisting on holding Prindle. He's just a tool for Big Red. He made a big show over in the saloon, but he wound up with the wrong man."

The triggerman looked at Flint. "If you hadn't a horned in, I'd a had the right man."

"How do you figure?" Flint asked.

"That beef-wagon woulda tried to save Prindle if you hadn't a drawed cards."

"I told you I didn't tangle with the red-head."

"But you lied when you said it."

"I expect a man to get his gun behind words like that."

Sheriff Brin Dodson whipped in. "Keep your guns to leather! I never saw a gunman yet that wasn't itchin' to yank his hardware." He spoke to the stranger. "Who are you and what's your business?"

The fellow nodded toward Flint. "Why not start his tongue to waggin'?"

"I know who he is."

The triggerman's eyes grew cold. "You do, huh?" he asked softly.

It was the softness of the tones that told Flint the story. A Texan, and a gunman. The special deputy! That whole scene in the saloon had been a frame-up. He had shown those diamonds, or white rocks, hoping to drag in Red Tarbell, the man seen in the mountains the day David Slocum had disappeared. Small wonder he was irritated by having a stranger get in his way. Flint turned to the sheriff.

"Did you ask me over here for anything particular, Sheriff?"

Sheriff Dodson squinted his eyes to thin

lines. "Didn't you ride into town huntin' me?"

"No. A puncher spotted the brand on my horse and decided I was the man-trailer due from Texas—I'm not." Flint knew he'd had a narrow squeak. That triggerman would have been an ugly customer in another moment. He was nasty now.

"Decided sudden you wasn't a man-trailer, didn't you?" he asked. "Ever been in Opal before? Know anybody hereabouts—say that big redhead?"

Flint disregarded the sheriff and gave his attention to the triggerman. "You might be Jesse James," he said slowly, "or you might be the special deputy that's expected in these parts. Whoever you are, I've had a crawfull of you for one night. I'm leaving—unless you think you can stop me."

Sheriff Dodson dropped into a chair. "Go ahead you two gunfanners, shoot yourselves to rags. I'll be pleased to bury the remains."

The triggerman's hand fell away from his gun. "Get gone," he ordered Flint. "You and he has clashed twice in an hour, and both times I've took water, Next time, dang my feathers if I don't give you some action."

Flint walked from the jail, closing the door behind him. The stranger had backed off from gunplay a second time, but it wasn't because he was afraid. He hadn't been ready to tip his hand.

THE town was quiet. Flint stepped into the shadows of some trees for a moment's thought before he went to find Red Tarbell. It was now dark, and clouds banked away the light of the stars. He saw the door to the jail open and a tall man walk into the yard. After a few moments he returned to the lighted room, closing the door. It had been the gunman, and he had been making certain no listeners were about. That meant he was going to talk.

The keyhole was the only spot Flint could place his ear to hear what went on inside the jail office. The stranger was talking.

"Diamonds like I rolled on the bar ain't worth a dollar a dozen, but I knew they was

good enough to ketch a thief. The way the play fizzled out ain't no fault of mine.

"How would drawin' Big Red into that trap help solve the Slocum murder?" asked the sheriff tartly.

Flint had missed the first of the conversation, but the sheriff's question proved the gunman as the special deputy.

"I'd a known he was a thief!" snapped the triggerman. "David Slocum was robbed; the man that done the job was both a thief and a killer. How come Slocum to be ridin' in the wilds of Squaw Mountain? That ain't the direction of the land he come here to buy."

"That's what makes this thing so hard to get at. The punchers that saw Slocum said he was ridin' along smokin' a cigar. They wasn't wrong about it bein' him' cause he was a tenderfoot lookin' feller and they even knew the color of his coat."

"Think he got turned in directions?"

Deputy Cole Thomas answered that question. "I met him about a mile out of town the morning he was heading for the BW. I went along with him a few miles to where I was to turn to Alder Mountain. He didn't seem very sure of his memory so I drew him a map of the country. He couldn't a got lost with that map to follow."

"Then what was he doin' there?"

"Somebody tolled him there with a fake story," the sheriff answered. "Couldn't be otherwise. That is if Slocum was murdered. That eastern company is payin' the air like a wild mustang and hollerin' for somebody's blood, but don't forget there ain't been no body found!"

"David Slocum was murdered," the triggerman said quietly. "He was a wealthy man, had fifty thousand dollars in the Chicago bank. He never hit out with no chicken feed like five thousand dollars. It's lucky for us them two punchers was ridin' on Squaw Mountain the day he disappeared or we wouldn't have a tree to bark up. Cuss that stranger fer jimmin' my play tonight! Knowin' that redhead was a thief would help a lot."

Cole Thomas had been pacing about the room, but now he paused beside the special

deputy's chair. "Watch that man! Big Red Tarbell is dangerous, but he's a slow thinker. This other hombre turns on a dime."

"You ain't tellin' me any news," the triggerman said dryly. "Fetch this Prindle here and don't neither of you throw any monkey-wrenches in the machinery when I start talkin' to him. Ford is *ray* name. They call me Slim Ed. I'll get the murderer of David Slocum, and I don't want nobody crampin' my style."

FLINT heard them bring Alby Prindle out. "I was after bigger fish than you tonight," Slim Ed Ford said. "I'm the special deputy sent here to fetch in the murderer of David Slocum. I'll fetch him, though maybe he won't be on the hoof." He laughed. "Set down, Prindle."

A chair squeaked. "Nobody's got any right hangin' that murder on Squaw Mountain," Prindle blustered. "Slocum like as not skipped with the five thousand."

"That's what the killer figured the country would think — but I've found the body!"

The chair squeaked as Alby Prindle leaped to his feet. "I never had nothin' to do with the killin'. Maybe I was liftin' that diamond tonight, but I ain't a murderer!"

"Sure, I know, you ain't got the nerve. I'll turn you loose in the mornin' but not till me and the sheriff is ready to start fer that body. The killer left some evidence there and I can't let you loose to warn your friends—maybe that big redhead—that the noose is tightenin' on their necks. They'd ride up there and destroy the evidence. You're in a sweat, Prindle, and kinda white. Want some water?"

Alby Prindle's words were too mumbled for Flint to catch, but it was clear he was putty in the hands of Slim Ed Ford. In a short time Cole Thomas returned Prindle to his cell. He came back to the office, closing the door that led back to the four cells.

"When did you find the body?" he asked in a smaller voice than he had yet used toward Ford. Until now he had been har-

boring resentment. "What proof did you locate?"

Ed Ford laughed. "Shucks, you fellers is as easy fooled as Prindle. No wonder you ain't got no place in this. I didn't find no body. In the mornin', after Prindle has had a night of cold sweatin', we'll turn him loose and foller him. If he done the killin', he'll make a bee line for the spot to see what evidence he left about. If he ain't connected with the job, he'll hop to warn them of his friends that is. Then we'll foller whoever needs follerin'."

"By Judas!" cried the sheriff. "You're smart, Ford."

"Sure I am. Anybody that's seen me work will tell you."

"I'll stand guard at the jail tonight," Cole Thomas said. "Some of the Squaw Mountain crowd might try to get at Prindle."

"That's why I'm going' to stay," Ford snapped. "If that redhead makes a visit to the jail tonight, I want to greet him personal."

"This stranger that horned into things," the sheriff said. "He'll bear watchin'. I noticed he didn't answer when you asked him if he knew Red Tarbell."

"Don't worry about that stranger, Sheriff. I've put a noose around smarter necks than his."

CHAPTER IV

RIDE TO DISASTER

FLINT headed for the Seven-up. It was still early and little life was stirring. The bartender was alone in the saloon. He leaned both elbows on the bar as Flint advanced.

"So you're Flint Oliver!" he said. "I've heard Big Red mention you lots. He kept your star gleamin' like a lighthouse in the fog. I guess after tonight he won't waste no more elbow grease shinin' it."

"Where is Big Red?"

"That's a sweet question for you to ask. Turnin' Alby Prindle to the law the way you did tonight, just because you had a grudge at him, was bad enough, but turnin'

deputy to get even with a wagon train that cast your dad off is worse!"

Flint reached across and grabbed the front of the man's shirt. "Get this," he said. "I'm not against those folks. Where's Big Red?"

There came the sound of ripping material. The bartender dived under cover for his shotgun, but he never leveled it. Flint already had a weapon resting on the bar.

"Where did Big Red go?" he repeated.

"Hell and back, and that ain't idle tongue waggin'. When he went out that door he was like somebody that'd had a knife run in their back. He didn't talk, nary a word."

Flint left the Seven-up and searched the town. Big Red had not been seen. There was nothing but to return to the jail. The building was dark, but Flint knew the special deputy was waiting there in hopes Red Tarbell would try and talk with Alby Prindle.

The town warmed to a little life, then it died again. Lights began to blink out along Main Street. The night wore away. Flint turned his collar higher against the mountain coolness. He walked now and then to keep his blood circulating, but he walked close to the jail. He kept his right hand in his pocket that his fingers would stay warm and supple.

A chill daybreak turned back the night. Slim Ed Ford came into the yard and walked about, humped down in his coat against the raw air. Sheriff Brin Dodson came, gunned for a ride. Ford asked about Deputy Cole Thomas.

"Come by in the night to tell me he'd been called to Spring Holler—sheepherders fightin' over range. Said he'd be back early."

"Was countin' on leavin' him owlin' around town, but reckon there ain't nothin' of importance goin' to happen here. If we follow Prindle, he'll lead us to some excitement."

Flint waited to hear no more. He knew the sceme would work. After the night in jail, Alby Prindle would be broken. If he didn't know the location of the body, he

knew something of the murder. His attitude under questioning had proven that.

Flint thought back over the other members of that wagon train for a man that would work with Prindle. It wasn't Red Tarbell, but because Red had been seen in the wilds the day of Slocum's disappearance, he was under suspicion. It was not because Flint Oliver doubted Big Red that he was worried; it was because of what might come of circumstantial evidence.

FLINT called at the stable for his horse and asked the road to Squaw Mountain, although he had already gotten the information from the puncher with whom he had ridden into town. The stableman hung around as he saddled, taking a chew of tobacco and spitting nervously.

"'Tain't none of my business where a gent rides," he said at last, "but I can tell you Squaw Mountain ain't goin' to weep on your neck. They figure you're back for revenge and they'll be all cocked for your play."

Flint swung to the saddle, troubled that his connection with the colony that had settled on Squaw Mountain should be so well known. Red had evidently informed the bartender of his identity, and now this man knew. Flint trotted his horse down Main Street, wanting his leaving to appear natural. The stableman would tell the sheriff that he had asked the way to Squaw Mountain.

Clear of town, he rode rapidly. The important thing was to reach Red Tarbell and warn him to defend himself against the lying tongue of Alby Prindle. When Prindle found himself in danger he would cast about for an out. He wouldn't dare betray his companion in the crime. He would realize that Big Red, already under suspicion, could be made the goat.

At the mouth of Dog Creek Canyon, a deep valley branching south from Squaw Mountain to the ranches of the members of the wagon train, Flint met a youth who informed him Red Tarbell was supposed to have spent the night across the hogback at the Butch Rafer place.

Flint circled to the Rafers' farm, finding the buildings makeshift affairs much as he would have expected. Butch Rafer and Alby Prindle had been friends, and were birds of a feather. Red was selecting the weakest men in the colony as his companions.

Butch Rafer gave guarded replies to every question, but when Flint slid swiftly from his horse and stepped close to him, his tongue loosened. He said Red had not spent the night there, but had ridden by that morning. He was now at home.

Flint was uneasy over the two hours he had lost as he headed back for Dog Creek. He rode slowly the last bit of the road, the frantic desire to push forward dying within him. Big Red was doing a lot of riding. And Butch Rafer was a strange man to visit for advice.

Another thought helped to cool Flint's desire to reach the Tarbell place. In a few moments he would hear word of Janey. His palms were moist, he was a coward. Would Janey be waiting for him with the same warmth? Would she be doubting him because he had not come before? Would she too believe he had had himself made a deputy that he might bring vengeance on the men who had cast his dad off?

The Tarbell place had a look, even in so short a time, of having put down roots. Flowers were in the yard, tangible proof that Janey lived there. She had planned flowers for the home Flint was going to build her. He wanted to talk with Red before he saw Janey. The law was following Alby Prindle and might soon be here on this quiet creek.

FLINT rode into the willows at the crossing and as he came out on the opposite bank of the stream, a girl appeared from a brush-sheltered bend. She sat stiff and straight in her saddle at sight of him. He spurred his horse forward.

"Janey!"

His voice brought color to her cheeks. At first she had been afraid to believe her eyes, but his glad cry swept her toward him.

"Janey," he repeated, reaching across to draw her close. He kissed her and for a second the world belonged entirely to them. The long months of waiting seemed a dream, now that he was again seeing the warm trust in her eyes. His fears vanished. Janey Tarbell had not let anything happen to her love for him; it was written clearly upon her face.

Her lips trembled when she told him there was trouble on Squaw Mountain, and how the law was watching her brother.

Flint nodded. "I must see Red," he said.

Janey was startled at the tenseness in his voice. He held her hands tightly and assured her that all was going to be well "The law might come here today, Janey," he whispered. "But things will work themselves out. I must go find Red."

She did not try to keep him. She had waited for him a year, and now was surrendering their first moments together. "I'll ride down the creek to the old pine tree," she said. "I'll be waiting there."

He kissed her again and suddenly he feared to let her from him, even so far as the tall pine. A doubt of how things might turn out with Red Tarbell tightened his lips. He spurred his horse away lest she see his weakness.

By the barn were four men, Red and his father and two others Flint remembered as members of the wagon train. Hostility met Flint Oliver as he rode up and slid to the ground. Big Red stepped forward.

"Why aren't you smelling out sign somewhere?" he asked. "Or maybe you've come to arrest somebody for the murder of David Slocum."

"Red, don't damn me before you give me a chance to talk."

Rathbone Tarbell growled, "Don't let him soft-soap you, Red."

Red's face was white and damp, his eyes set. He seemed to look straight through the man before him. "I don't want to hear anything you got to say, Oliver," he said.

A rattle of hoofs came from the creek and Butch Rafer appeared, his horse lathered. He saw Flint and threw a curse at him as he dismounted.

"Oliver was by my place tryin' to get me to answer questions all about where you was, Red. Reckon he thought I hadn't heard he was the special deputy sent to run down the Slocum case. He's got Alby in jail already and if you don't watch out he'll land you there."

"Red," Flint said sharply "the law is on its way here. We'll hear Butch Rafer later. I wan't to talk with you."

"I guess the law is already here," Big Red said darkly.

"I'm not a special deputy. I wouldn't sneak around gathering facts to hang men. I must talk with you alone."

Mutters arose at this. "I don't want to talk with you. If you hadn't a been the deputy, you'd have told the sheriff," Big Red said stubbornly. "You're changing fronts now to get me to talk."

"Give him the blacksnake!" one of the men cried. "He's like his dad."

"Tar 'n' feather him!" cried Butch Rafer.

They surged up. Flint Oliver met them with his gun. "You'll not lay a hand on me," he warned. "I'll fix any man for the grave that touches me."

"Just like his dad—a killer!"

Red Tarbell roared them back and his fist whipped for the side of Flint's head. He caught him back of the ear and followed with a second blow. As Flint went to his knees, Red pounced on the gun. He tossed it on a pile of sacked grain beside the barn.

"We don't need a gun," he said. He stood back for Flint to come to his balance. "There won't be any tar and feathers or blacksnakes—just bare fists."

Flint shook his head to clear it from the impact of the two blows. "You were the only man I wasn't watching," he said. "That's how you got my gun."

"Don't stall. Put up your fists!"

"You're naming the play, Red. The law is on its way here and I've come ahead to help you. If you won't listen to reason, you won't."

"There's no reason to you coming here like you have."

"But . . ."

RED TARBELL was finished with talk. He moved at his man. Flint darted aside. Red was fast in a fist fight, but Flint Oliver was like a streak. It was a wildcat against a moose.

Flint might have stayed away from the iron fists, but he scorned to fight in that manner. Both men went in with everything they had, wanting to finish it rapidly. Flint was lifted into the air with a blow, but was back into the fight before the Squaw Mountain men could open their lips to cheer. His face was streaming with blood, but he had lost none of his speed.

Big Red was not coming off unscratched. Blood smeared his cheek and he fell back a step when Flint buried a fist in his middle. Red gathered for a rush that would end things. Flint stood toe to toe with him, hammering back, but he was taking more punishment than was possible for a man to take for long. Rathbone Tarbell forgot to cheer his son as Flint wavered on his feet.

Then Flint Oliver went down. Red stood over him, wiping blood from his eyes with the back of his hand. His anger had died, and he cursed to see how the fallen man had been beaten.

"He wouldn't quit till I half-killed him," he said.

"He fought like a wildcat," Rathbone Tarbell replied, and went to the horse-trough for water. He returned and began to bathe Flint's face. Flint opened his eyes. When the daze cleared, he climbed to his feet.

"Get clean out of this country," Big Red ordered dully. "Don't ever show in these parts again."

"I'm staying right here," Flint answered him. "But you've given me the last beating. From now on I'll be watching you the same as the rest."

Rathbone Tarbell pointed toward Dog Creek. "Here comes the sheriff."

Flint took the bucket of water and washed more of the blood away. Sheriff Dodson and Slim Ed Ford were approaching on weary horses. Where could Alby Prindle be? Had he given them the slip?

"It's the fellow that had the diamonds stolen, with Dodson," Big Red said gruffly. "He's a mean one; everybody watch their tongues!"

Flint continued to bathe his face. Let Big Red find out in his own way that Slim Ed Ford was the special deputy. The sheriff and Ford rode up to the barn and dismounted. Ford didn't waste a move; his gun covered Flint's heart.

"I'll watch this gent for you, Sheriff, while you talk with the rest. Dear me, he's shed his hardware he's naked as the day he was born. And he's been battered up since we saw him last."

Sheriff Dodson produced handcuffs and walked toward Flint. He paused a few steps from him, clinking the cuffs noisily. "How long have you been here?" he asked. Then he saw Big Red's cut cheek and puffed lips. "Been fightin' among yourselves, huh? Tarbell, how long has Oliver been here?"

"About twenty minutes."

"Dear me suz!" Slim Ed Ford exclaimed. "Telling the truth. Ain't that a bad sign, Sheriff?"

"Twenty minutes," Sheriff Dodson said with narrowing eyes, "and you left Opal in time to have been here two hours ago. Where was you all that time?"

Flint said "I rode by Rafer's place."

"How about that, Butch?" Sheriff Dodson snapped.

Butch Rafer shifted his tobacco. "I ain't got nothin' to say."

Red Tarbell swung on him. "You said Oliver rode by your place, Butch."

"Maybe he did," Butch growled. "I ain't furnishin' no alibi for the gent that put Alby in jail."

"For the gent that *killed* Prindle," the sheriff amended. "Alby Prindle was shot dead this mornin' on his way to Squaw Mountain."

CHAPTER V

A BULLET A MAN

ALBY PRINDLE had been ambushed as he rode toward the wilds of Big Squaw Mountain. Deputy Ed Ford was in

an ugly mood over having another of his schemes spoiled. Prindle had been shot from long range before he had progressed far enough for his movements to be valuable to the law.

Sheriff Brin Dodson advanced a step toward Flint Oliver, clanking the iron cuffs. "You left Opal early this mornin' and you coulda easy laid off in the brush and dropped Prindle, and you had a grudge against him. Barkeep John told me how Prindle and you was enemies on account of your dad killin' his."

"Who owns that black out yonder?" Slim Ed Ford snapped the question. He jerked his head toward a sweaty horse standing with dragging reins.

"That's Red's horse," Rathbone Tarbell answered.

Ed Ford's deep eyes came to life. "Then he ain't been here long! And he left the last place where he was in a hurry. Hold on a shake with them handcuffs, Sheriff. Red Tarbell mighta had a lot more than an old grudge drivin' him." He kept his gun trained on Oliver, but he directed his next words at Red Tarbell. "Where you been so early in the mornin'?"

"I stayed in town last night. Rode by Butch Rafer's on the way home."

"Rafer's had a lot of company this mornin'. Stayed in town, huh? The sheriff looked around for you last night, but didn't see you."

Red looked at the slim man. "You got any business to be pitching for Sheriff Dodson? If he wants to know anything, let him ask."

Slim Ed Ford puckered his lips. "So your friend here ain't told you I'm the special deputy, sent in here to bring in the murderer of David Sloucum. Ford is the name, they call me Slim Ed. I hadn't expected to advertise myself, but Oliver figured it out.

"You stayed in town last night so's you could talk with Alby Prindle, didn't you? Then you found me guardin' the jail. You was terrible anxious to let everybody know Oliver hadn't been here long, wasn't you? Maybe figured it would cover your own tracks.

"And some news Oliver fetched brought on a fight. Beat him up real smart, didn't you? That ain't showin' much gratitude after him a steppin' in last night to keep Alby Prindle from plantin' them stolen diamonds on you."

Sheriff Dodson whipped around. "What do you mean, Ford?"

"I forgot to mention, Sheriff, that I caught on to Oliver's play. Prindle knew I was goin' to call for a search, so he tried to slip the diamond to Tarbell. Oliver grabbed his hand, and now he's been beat up for his pains. There's a lot of bad blood here."

The blank look that had come to Big Red's face when Ed Ford had introduced himself was gone now. He stood bareheaded, strange lights flickering in his eyes. Slowly he turned toward Flint.

"I guess we been wrong about you," he said.

Ford studied every glance, caught every inflection of voice. "Red beat him up 'cause he turned Prindle in," he said. "I guess Big Red didn't want Prindle in jail—even if he was a thief." He drew a second gun and covered Big Red. "We'll take the pair of them in, Sheriff."

Red's anger flared. "You got nothing on me!"

"More than you think," Ford replied. "We're after somebody that wanted Prindle stopped from that ride he was taking. You stayed hid in town last night and followed Prindle this mornin'."

Rathbone Tarbell rumbled in anger. "Are these fools accusing you of killing Alby Prindle, Red?"

Red was watching the sheriff. "Stand back from me with those cuffs."

Sheriff Dodson kept advancing, but he took care he did not obstruct the vision of Ed Ford. "Stick our your hands."

"Get back, I say!"

"Make a move and I'll blow you apart," Slim Ed threatened.

The Mountain men stood with eyes on Ford; they were motionless, frightened. Big Red's face was very white. He looked toward his horse, and back to Ford.

Ford laughed. "Ain't got a ghost of a chanst, Tarbell."

RED TARBELL extended his hands. The click of the irons settling on the thick wrists was sharp in the silence. Flint Oliver stirred at the sound. He lifted his glance, seemed aware for the first time that Big Red was in the hands of the law. There was a swift, curious change in Flint's face. Red Tarbell had given him a beating, but that was between the two of them. This thing Red now faced was of a different nature.

The rain-washed gray eyes of Slim Ed Ford were traveling over Big Red. "Search him for a gun," Ford suggested to Sheriff Dodson.

No gun was found, but a roll of bills was pulled from his hip pocket. After a quick look, Sheriff Dodson waved them toward Ford. "There's three fifties! Wasn't the Slocum money in fifties?"

"Yep, part of it! Tarbell, where'd you get them bills?"

Red looked at the money, his lips straightening to silence.

"Better talk, if you got anything to say," Ford advised.

"Tell 'em where you got that money, Red!" Rathbone Tarbell cried. It was clear he had not known of the bills. His face was black, but his anger was against Ford and Sheriff Dodson. "Talk Red, these bloodhounds are connecting you with the murder of David Slocum!"

Big Red stood with head hanging forward between his powerful shoulders. "I've got nothing to say to the law," he said, and his lips again clamped shut.

Flint Oliver weaved toward the sacks of grain beside the barn. The sheriff was turning to his horse for a second pair of handcuffs. Ford watched Flint as he ran fingers over his cut eye and swollen lips.

"You sure got a beaut of a beatin'," Ford said.

Flint nodded. "Mind if I sit down," and he let himself down on the grain sacks. "Why you taking me? I wasn't in the country when Slocum was killed, can prove it."

"But you can't prove where you was

out when Alby Prindle was bumped off."

Flint shook his head. "This talk about my having a grudge against Prindle is wrong. I hated his lying tongue; he lied about my dad and that was why the men of the wagon train set him afoot with a death wound. But I didn't come here to gun him for that. I shook that diamond out of Prindle's fingers to keep him from planting it on Red."

Red looked at Flint, lax there as though no strength remained in his body. "I've been a fool," Red said thickly.

Flint flashed him a glance. "You're late finding that out!"

Ford glanced at Red to see how he would take that. In that instant, Flint's hand came up from between the sacks holding a gun. He had seen it pitched there when Red had taken it from him.

Ford caught the move too late. He was dropping to the ground from a bullet before he could fire. But he pressed trigger. Then both guns slid from his fingers and he folded up. The sheriff whirled from his horse, but Red Tarbell was on top of him, his big hands lifted. The sheriff sank down with blood pouring from his head.

Flint kicked aside the guns of the deputy, glancing at the path the bullet had taken across Ford's scalp. Ford's shoulder was bleeding from a second wound, but he wouldn't be out long. Then Flint took the keys to the cuffs from the sheriff's pocket and set Big Red free.

"Let's get out of here fast," he said turning for his horse.

Red Tarbell ran for his black. "You shouldn't of give a damn about what they did with me, Flint," he cried. "Not after the way I've treated you."

They rode straight for the wilds of Squaw Mountain. At a fork in the trail, Red drew rein and faced Flint. "You keep riding south here, Flint. The law hasn't enough against you to follow very hot. I'll stick around Big Squaw."

Flint looked at him. "Red," he asked, "where did you get that money?"

"Alby Prindle slipped it to me last night in the Seven-up saloon when he saw they

were going to take him to jail. He whispered something about winning it at poker. But Alby's dead now. That story won't draw much water. But Flint, I had nothing to do with the murder of Slocum."

Flint Oliver's breath came harshly. "I believe you, Red. I'm not quitting you. Let's get moving."

"You've already done enough. If they'd taken me to town, I'd a hanged in three days." His broad face clouded. "With Alby dead, I can't prove where I got that money."

"We've got to find Slocum's body! A murderer always leaves a trail. Somebody worked with Prindle, somebody that killed him before he could lead the law to the body. I wish Slim Ed Ford didn't have his nose to the wrong scent. He's a smart trailer."

Big Red wiped the sweat from his forehead and glanced back over the trail they had come, nodding his understanding. "We better hit for the wildest part of Big Squaw," he said. "There's a dust cloud a ways back."

CHAPTER VI

HANGING'S TOMORROW

IN SPITE of the posse scouting the wild section, Red Tarbell and Flint continued to search for the body of David Slocum. They moved steadily southward into the country where the Easterner had last been seen. Every mile put them in greater danger of capture, for the undergrowth was sparse.

The fourth day Flint suggested Opal Creek. Red held back.

"That posse will nab us sure. You've already done enough, Flint. I'd hate to see you in any more trouble."

"We weren't going to mention that again."

Red turned wearily to his horse. They had taken supplies from a sheepherder's camp on the way up, but now the food was almost gone. They could not shoot game or build a fire.

The Opal Creek country yielded noth-

ing. Early on the second morning Flint spoke across to Red. "Slim Ed Ford has got to be put on the right trail. He's riding the seat out of his pants hunting the wrong man. Red, I'm going to see Ford and set him after the real killer of both Prindle and David Slocum. Prindle didn't have nerve or brains to plan a job that would have as few leaks as this one."

Red blinked. "What do you mean, see Ford?"

"Have a talk with him. He's a dangerous man, and he'd make it hot for that killer if he wasn't blinded by a few bad leads."

"Talk with Ford! He'll be after your neck for shooting him up!"

Flint continued to press his argument and Red's jaw squared. "No," he said stubbornly, "if anyone rides to Opal, I'll be the one."

"And be hanged for murdering David Slocum. Red I'm a better talker than you, and they're not after me in connection with the death of Slocum, which means Ford isn't after me at all. I'll give myself up, and that'll go a long way to show I'm in earnest. Ford's smart enough to grab at all those points. If I'm not back in three days, you can come down and bust me out of jail."

It took him another hour to wear Red Tarbell down to agreeing.

FLINT stood flattened behind a pine trunk and waited for Slim Ed Ford to ride closer. He spoke without showing himself. "I'm giving up, Ford."

The special deputy drew his gun with his left hand; his right was in a sling. "Come out with your dukes high, or come a-shootin'," he said.

Flint stepped out with his hands high. "You're careless riding along half-asleep like that, Ford."

"A man's got to sleep some time. Where's the beef-wagon?" His gray eyes slid from tree to boulder figuring a possible ambush.

"Red's back in the timber. This is on the level. I've come out to tell you a few things."

Ford dismounted, walked behind his man

and disarmed him. Then he gave a long call. In answer the cracking of brush came from a draw; then the sheriff and his deputy, Cole Thomas, were in view.

"I could have thrown a gun on you and talked without giving myself up," Flint pointed out. "But that way, my words wouldn't have carried any weight."

"Your words ain't ever goin' to weigh heavy, Oliver. You killed Prindle to save Red Tarbell, then you shot the devil outa everybody to get the beef-wagon away. He done you a favor once, so I've learnt. Butch Rafer said everybody in that wagon train was dead certain he slipped you and your dad horses. You returned that favor when you dropped me the other day."

"I was sorry I had to crease you."

"It was neat shootin'."

Sheriff Dodson and Cole Thomas came crashing up. The younger man's eyes were sunken as though he had ridden constantly these last few days. They were glittering as they fell on Flint.

"So you caught the fox in his own backyard!" he cried.

"Got him dead to rights," Ford replied. "Since we had him hemmed in, he claims he give himself up."

The men spent an hour making certain Big Red was not in the vicinity, then started on a return to Opal with their prisoner. Flint was turned over to Cole Thomas, and Thomas let him know he would drop him from his saddle if he made a single false move. Ford and the sheriff rode in the rear, weary from long hours of riding, and both still weak from their wounds.

Flint rode along, looking straight between his horse's ears and wondering if Red had been right in claiming Ford would be too prejudiced to listen. Ford had a rapid-fire brain, but would he use it? Was talking to him going to do any good? Could he ever be swayed enough so he would start looking for the real killer?

Thomas chuckled. "Seeing anything interesting in that spot of atmosphere ahead of you, Oliver?"

Flint continued to stare, making no

reply. His gun was gone, iron cuffs were on his wrists. If Red were right, it was a late hour to realize it.

IT WAS afternoon when they came to Dog Creek and the farm of Cy Mills, one of the families that had come with the wagon train. The sheriff said they could get a good dinner here.

"I could stand some hot food," Ford replied.

Mills and his wife both came to the door. The sheriff spoke.

"Better not object to gettin' some hot food on the table, folks. You won't help Squaw Mountain none by showin' friendly toward this prisoner."

Mrs. Mills looked at Flint without a word of greeting. "I'll mix you up a batch of hot biscuits, Sheriff," she said.

Ford and the sheriff went to the barn with Cy Mills, and Cole Thomas ordered the prisoner into the house. They sat down in the little dining room to wait and Mrs. Mills could be heard talking to someone in the kitchen.

"The law just brought in that Flint Oliver. Land sakes, his pa didn't come to no good either."

Flint felt a sudden lift of excitement within him. He knew the low voice that was answering, although the words were not plain. Janey Tarbell was in the kitchen. Mrs. Mills kept up a running talk, sometimes in a soothing tone, sometimes sharp.

"The law has got to be kept," she affirmed grimly. "It ain't no respecter of person."

Janey came into the dining room once to set the table, but she did not glance toward Flint. She spoke to Cole Thomas. Her face was pale and shadows were painted beneath her eyes.

Ford and Sheriff Dodson were some time getting to the house and Cole Thomas began to pace. Suddenly he spun on Flint.

"Take your damn eyes off me!"

Flint hadn't been aware that his gaze was fixed on the deputy. He half smiled. "Nervous, eh Thomas?"

"You're the one to be nervous! You'll

swing for the killing of Alby Prindle the same time Tarbell swings for the death of David Slocum."

"That's a lot of hanging. Strikes me you're over-anxious to get started."

Thomas stiffened. "What do you mean?"

Flint had been thinking of the deputy's hate for Squaw Mountain, and how he'd be glad to pin a killing on anyone from there. That was all he had had in mind, but the clenching of the deputy's hands as he voiced his sharp query snapped Flint into a new line of thought. He couldn't have explained what prompted his next words.

"I meant several things. Don't forget I gave myself up. I might have some important news for Slim Ed Ford."

"You never gave yourself up! We had you hemmed in and you were smart enough to know it. You haven't any news for Ford." He said the last louder.

Flint felt his way carefully, testing his words, playing upon the deputy's emotions. The twitching muscles in Thomas' face told him when he struck deep. Thomas dropped to a chair as Ford and the sheriff entered.

"Oliver still hangs to that lie about giving himself up," he said to Ed Ford.

Ford had ignored Flint, but now he asked him his first question. "Did you get Tarbell to show you where the body of Slocum is?"

Flint felt his chances of enlisting Ford's aid in finding the murderer growing slimmer. Failure lay in that direction. He had decided on a plan that had come to him as he talked to Cole Thomas. It might fail also, but everything was lost as it was. Slim Ed Ford was set on hanging Red Tarbell and collecting the reward for getting the killer of David Slocum.

"Well?" Ford snapped. "I asked you if Tarbell had found Slocum for you?"

"Yes," Flint answered.

HIS quiet voice had a swift effect. The sheriff and Cole Thomas both sprang from their chairs. Ford crossed his legs and nodded sagely.

"I thought likely Tarbell could find that body. Where is it?"

"Back on the Mountain a ways."

"Ain't that enlightenin'."

While Flint talked to Ford, he watched Cole Thomas' face in the small looking glass that hung on the wall. It was gray.

"Alby Prindle slipped Big Red those bills you found on him," Flint went on. "Alby killed David Slocum, we both figure, and was on his way to the body the day he was ambushed."

Ford leaned forward. "How come you and Tarbell guessed Prindle was on his way to the body?"

"I was outside the jail and heard you plan the whole thing. I could have followed and killed him, but I had no reason for wanting Prindle dead. Neither did Red Tarbell."

Cole Thomas burst into the conversation. "He admits he knew Prindle was heading for the body. Then Tarbell knew it too, for he was in town that night. They worked together!"

Flint turned to Thomas. "I admit I knew that Prindle was heading for the body of David Slocum—you also knew it. Where were you when Prindle was killed?"

Thomas was choked with anger. His words came huskily. "He's accusing me, Ford! Next he'll be saying it was the sheriff!"

Ford nodded. "I see his game. He figures to divide my attention so's that beef-wagon can get out of the country."

The special deputy was stubbornly sticking to his point. Cole Thomas had braced himself and was calmer, but he might yet crack.

"Red and I hunted till we found the body," Flint said slowly. "And we found something that will lead us to the man who worked with Prindle. We knew a smarter brain than Alby's did the planning. Ford, you were striking close to home when you ran your bluff there in the jail. The murderers *had* left something. I gave myself up so as to lead you to the body."

Mrs. Mills said the meal was ready.

Sheriff Dodson shook himself from the

spell of Flint's words. Ford said they would eat before they decided on anything.

"Hot food will do us all good," the sheriff said, and unlocked Flint's wrists. The fact he didn't warn him against an attempted escape was proof that Flint's startling announcement had had plenty of effect.

JANEY TARBELL came in with a bowl of gravy and stood beside Flint's chair. She met his glance without indication of knowing him. "There is a drawer that pulls out under your plate," she said. "Will you hand me a spoon?"

Flint was seated at the end of the table and he found the knob to the knife-and-fork drawer. His fingers touched the rounded steel of a gun barrel as he reached into it. He handed out the spoon and Janey put it in the gravy.

Sheriff Dodson was brooding over the things Flint had said, but Slim Ed Ford seemed to have forgotten. Rapidly he put away biscuits, ham and fried potatoes. Cole Thomas was finished ahead of the rest and slid back his chair.

"No use my trailing back to Squaw Mountain with you two fellows," he said rising. "I'll see Lem Hopkins about those sheep he claimed were poisoned, and go on to town. I don't have any faith in Oliver's story."

"You better get a night's sleep 'fore you start on that sheep war," Sheriff Dodson advised, but Thomas was already at the door. It closed behind him with a bang.

Flint's muscles tightened. Thomas was leaving the party. It wasn't natural for a man as weary as the deputy to start on a mission that was not pressing. He had taken the same bait as Prindle.

Flint looked toward Ed Ford. He was reaching for another biscuit and he thanked Mrs. Mills for another piece of ham. He was allowing Cole Thomas to ride from under his nose.

Flint had not completely closed the knife-and-fork drawer. When the time came his hand could slide quietly to that gun. But the time was not ripe for another few moments. Cole Thomas must have sufficient

start so he could be followed without detection. He must be allowed to reach the body of David Slocum but he must be caught before he could destroy the evidence both he and Prindle had suspected was there.

CHAPTER VII

ASK THE DEAD MAN

FLINT OLIVER slid his chair back and came to his feet, a gun in his hand. The sheriff was caught unawares. Slim Ed Ford was just lifting a cup of coffee with his left hand.

"You should have gone into my boot when you searched me for hardware," Flint said. "I keep a hide-out there. I'm leaving you fellows, but I'll be back."

"Yep," Ford said, his eyes calm, "I'll see to that. Decided you don't want to lead us to the body of Slocum, huh?"

"Ford, you're not as smart a man as I thought you were."

"I'm a darn sight smarter than most figure. I'm smart enough right now to stand hitched till you get out the door. I only got one arm left and I need it. Don't go for your gun, Sheriff we'll wait for a reshuffle."

Flint backed out the door, jerked it shut and ran for a fringe of trees that led in a round-about way to the barn. It would be a close shave if he made it to a horse ahead of the law. Two bullets clipped twigs over his head as he slid over the bank of Dog Creek. He ran half-stooped, but soon the banks deepened enough for him to straighten. Around a bend he came upon a horse standing with reins tied loosely to a chunk of driftwood. Cy Mills had figured which way he'd likely go and been busy while the biscuits cooked.

Flint kept to soft footing and did not break his horse to a run until certain he was out of hearing of Ford and Dodson. They would probably waste time waiting to trap him in an approach to the barn. When Ford realized his prisoner was gone, he would head for Squaw Mountain. This would be a delay, not a defeat to him.

Flint cut the trail of a shod horse and followed it. When he saw the tracks keeping a direct line for Big Squaw, he believed he was trailing Cole Thomas. He urged his own horse to more speed. If Thomas should catch a glimpse of him, he could not be certain it was not a Mountain man riding the breaks.

Flint's hope dimmed some when the trail swung away from a direct course to the wild section. He spurred his horse into what had once been an old lumber road, following easily the tracks in the unused way. Ruttled, and overgrown in spots with brush, it angled down from the timberline to creek bottom. This was leading toward Opal Creek and Opal Mill. This was the section where he had left Big Red.

The tracks were now very fresh, and once he caught the trot of hoofs on a rock-ribbed portion of the trail ahead. Just before he reached the bend around which he knew he would find the mill, he dismounted and left his horse standing. He and Red had looked down on this widened valley from a ridge the day before, but had not considered it a likely spot for a murder, not when so much wilder country lay near.

Taking the rifle Cy Mills had provided for him, he went afoot to a spot that overlooked the valley. A building, roofless and half caved in, stood beside a rotted platform. Close by, a gray horse stood with trailing reins. Cole Thomas had ridden a gray.

Flint slid down the slope toward the thick brush of Opal Creek. His plan had worked. Thomas had planned the murder for Prindle, and when he saw Alby trapped, he shot him before he could give away the location of the body. Once Ford had trailed Alby to that body he would have had small difficulty in getting the entire story. And there was some proof at the scene that Thomas feared, something that was going to implicate him.

FLINT became reckless in his haste to reach the spot before Thomas could do away with the evidence. When he was a hundred yards from the creek brush, a

bullet out of the brush fanned his cheek.

He saw what had aroused Thomas' suspicions. Cy Mills' horse had wandered in view, seemingly not understanding what reins over the head meant. Flint flattened to shelter, angry at his own carelessness.

Thomas had no intention of letting Flint reach the security of Opal Creek—singing bullets proved that. Flint recalled that Ford had said Alby had been dropped by a good marksman. Thomas selected a pile of old lumber and began whipping the vicinity where Flint lay. The thin brush was poor protection. Thomas fought with the fierceness of desperation and frayed nerves. He had to win in a hurry. He knew that Ford and the sheriff would be trailing their escaped prisoner.

His lead began to drop closer. He had only the movement of twigs to guide him, but he was soon due to score a hit. The lumber made the deputy fairly safe from Flint's return fire. It was a case of hammering away until one or the other won. Flint hugged a small boulder and watched for smoke puffs against the brown lumber. Part of his body was exposed and he felt a bullet rip the skin of his leg. He zoomed a shot into a white puff.

Then from the thick brush of Opal Creek a new gun boomed. It spoke once and Cole Thomas lifted from his protection, spread his arms and toppled to the earth. Flint opened his lips to call, feeling sure that gun had been in the hands of Big Red Tarbell, but a voice behind him checked the hail.

"Get your paws high as a kite!" ordered Ed Ford. "Leave that rifle lay and get on your feet."

Flint obeyed. Two guns were trained on him.

"We've got you for a double murder," Sheriff Dodson growled. "You killed Prindle and now you've added Thomas to your list."

"I followed Cole Thomas here," Flint said, looking straight at Ed Ford. "He was on his way to the body of David Slocum."

"You're one man I'll enjoy seein' hang, Oliver," Sheriff Dodson said. "Get goin'

toward that pile of lumber. Thomas might not be dead."

Flint walked before them, his hands in the air. They found Cole Thomas still stretched on the earth, but his fingers were beginning to twitch. Ed Ford holstered the gun he held in his one good hand, and started to kneel beside Thomas.

Big Red walked from the brush of the creek, and he held a rifle leveled at the sheriff's back.

"Drop that gun, Sheriff. *Drop it!*"

SLIM ED FORD lifted his one good hand. "I never saw a country that made the lives of lawmen any tougher. Every time I've turned around somebody's dropped a bead on me. Better obey orders, Sheriff; bein' a dead hero won't spell nothin'."

Sheriff Dodson stood tense another instant, then he relaxed his hold on the gun in his hand. Flint scooped it up as it fell, for they had taken his away. He stepped back so he might have both lawmen under his weapon.

"Tie this pair up good and tight, Red. I followed Cole Thomas here after he bit on the same bait that Prindle did. David Slocum's body is close and we're going to find it."

Big Red brought a rope from his saddle and tied the sheriff first. "Every move you make tightens the noose on your neck," the lawman growled. "We'll get you!"

"So far they've got us," Ford reminded him dismally.

Flint explained more fully to Red as the big fellow worked. Slim Ed Ford backed away when it was his turn to be tied. "Let me go along and help hunt for this body you're so sure is hereabouts. Smart fellers like me sees things other men overlook."

Cole Thomas had been slowly pulling himself to a sitting position. He braced his back against the pile of lumber and spoke. "I was riding toward Willow Creek when I saw Oliver high-tailing it for the wilds. I knew he'd shot his way out again. He was slick enough to get in an ambush shot on me."

"It was the beef-wagon that cooked your goose. That shot fooled me too," Ford admitted. "Now we're all holdin' the sack."

Thomas's eyes were wild; he cursed as his hands were loosely tied. His greatest anger was against Flint Oliver. "Your dad was a cold killer and so are you! Looking for the body of Slocum is just a gag; you'll murder all three of us. Ford, you better stay here, we can die together anyway."

"Ford is going with us," Flint said. "I'm going to show him a few things about running down a criminal."

Slim Ed Ford puckered his lips. "I ain't never got no objection to learnin'."

An hour of searching revealed nothing. Evening was close, already a dampness was in the bottom of the canyon. Dank odors thickened about the old mill.

"I ain't learnt no new tricks yet," Ford complained.

"You will!" Flint snapped. "That body is buried in this valley."

"So long as I ain't got so much as a pocketknife on me, and only one good arm, do you object to me doin' some investigatin' on my own?"

Flint looked into the deepset eyes. There was no way of knowing what lay beneath their surface. "I don't object, but if you try to get to a horse, it'll be a mistake."

Ford walked directly to the ruins of the old mill and began poking about. They had already gone over the mill hurriedly, but most of their time had been spent searching in the thick brush.

Flint kept the special deputy always in sight, relieved that Ford was convinced enough to search. The body of David Slocum *must* be found. The shooting of Cole Thomas had piled up another charge, unless the whole thing was cleared up. Big Red's face was gray as he kicked aside some brush to see if the ground beneath had been disturbed.

ED FORD signaled, and Flint and Red responded promptly. "I calculate I've found the body of David Slocum," the special deputy said. "That pile of lumber there has been moved within the last three

weeks. I 'lowed if Alby Prindle killed Slocum, he wouldn't dig no grave in this hard ground."

Red and Flint set to work on the small pile.

"Yep," Ford said, "there it is. I don't never fail."

"Stand back!" Flint whipped the command at Ford as the deputy was moving in close to the body rolled into a shallow trough that had been scooped out beneath the lumber.

Ford moved back. "I ain't never seen a tougher feller than you, Oliver."

David Slocum had been killed with two shots from the back. His clothing did not seem to have been disturbed. A gold watch and chain were in place.

"Like as not the feller that sent Prindle to do the killin' told him not to fetch anything away that would trap them." Slim Ed Ford walked around the body, studying it. "Well, Oliver, where's that proof you said was here?"

Flint Oliver too had been studying the ground. He moved back and circled the pile of lumber. He saw nothing here that would implicate Cole Thomas.

"I'm gettin' cold," Ford complained. "This damp air puts pains in my bum arm. At the rate you fellers are goin' we'll be here all night. You better let somebody that knows how search that body."

"Go ahead," Flint said dryly. He had no hope of the body revealing any secrets. The thing Cole Thomas had feared, he had arrived in time to destroy. Big Red was thinking the same thing; it showed in his set face.

Ed Ford knelt to begin the search. The inner vest pockets attracted him first. "I'm lookin'," he said, "for the map Cole Thomas drew directin' Slocum to that cattle ranch. Yep, here it is!" He unfolded a piece of paper and studied it in the dim light. He nodded his head wisely. "Just like I figured. I'm a hard man to fool."

He handed the paper to Flint and Red. Big Red's forehead knotted, he bent closer. Flint's eyes held new life. Here was proof that would clear them. Here was what

Cole Thomas feared. It was a map leading David Slocum to the Opal Creek Mill.

"I thought Tarbell was mixed into the murder at first," Ed Ford said. "Then when you give yourself up, Oliver, I right away started castin' around for somethin' I'd overlooked. When I saw Cole Thomas a swallerin' your bait, I knew he'd had a finger in the pie.

"I got to recollectin' back, and recollect-ed he'd took a ride the mornin' Prindle was killed. Then I recollected he'd drew a map for David Slocum." The special deputy was reviewing his past reasoning with pride. "I was goin' to foller Thomas, soon as he got a head start, but you, Oliver, nearly spoilt things."

Slim Ed Ford looked hard at Flint. "That was a smart trick you used on Thomas, but don't forget you learnt it from me."

Flint smiled. "And when you think them up, they're good."

Red Tarbell was wiping the moisture from his forehead, although the valley was chill with coming night. "If you'd a been much later getting here, Flint," he said, "I'd have been hanged by the neck."

Ford puckered his lips. "Don't know but what you're right. You havin' that money on you made things look bad. Guess I better amble over and cut the sheriff loose and break the news to Thomas." He paused with a new thought and spoke to Flint. "Seein' we worked together on this case, I guess a fifty-fifty split would be right. I don't generally split reward money, but if it hadn't been for you I might a hanged the wrong man. Course I don't put out no claim to bein' perfect, but I do like to hand over the right man."

"Fifty-fifty suits me," Flint said and his eyes traveled to the dark skyline. "This is a nice country. A man could build up a spread here tolerably easy. Let's get moving, Red. Janey will be worried."

THE END

"NOBODY HEARD THE SHOT"

Murder—baffling and unsolved . . . **PLUS** . . . four big-shot crime experts . . . **PLUS** . . . *Fletcher Steele*, a plain, little, unsociable detective, who mixes horse-sense with science . . . **EQUALS** . . . one of the year's most exciting mystery stories by none other than

DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

Complete in the October issue of

**RED ★ STAR
DETECTIVE**

MAGAZINE

NOW ON THE STANDS 10¢

In event of a sellout send 10¢ to 230 Broadway, N. Y. C. and receive a copy by mail.



Masked, Don Esteban crept up on the one trooper who guarded the presidio

Señor Devil-May-Care

Start now this vivid and stirring novel
of Old California

By JOHNSTON McCULLY

IT IS fiesta time in Monterey, and DON ESTEBAN DE LA ZAMORA, called Señor Devil-may-care, is entertaining his friends with wine and dancing. Generally the peon girls come willingly to dance for a piece of gold, but there is one among the entertainers who protests with tearful violence. Then Don Esteban is shocked to discover that she

is SEÑORITA MARIA GODINES, a highborn girl who has dressed like a peasant the better to enjoy the fiesta.

So, unwittingly, Señor Devil-may-care has caused an outrage, and two young hot-bloods, JUAN FELIZ and MARCOS CHAVEZ, swear they will avenge the *señorita* with their blades. When the governor of Alta California condemns Don Esteban to temporary banishment it is partly to prevent the two young *caballeros* from presenting their challenge and so meeting certain death from Señor Devil-may-care's sword. But the governor has another reason; he has a task for Don Esteban who has served him on several

This story began in last week's Argosy

secret and adventurous missions. So Esteban de la Zamora takes the next ship for San Diego de Alcala.

HIS duty there will be to outwit a plot to overthrow the governor. The leader in this is DON JOSÉ DEL RIO, a nobleman of ancient lineage who is embittered by the fact that his family has never received political honors. He is aided by his son, MANUEL and his beautiful daughter ANITA; and the pig-like MIGUEL BROCAMONTE, a wealthy merchant, is providing money to further the treason.

When Señor Devil-may-care arrives in San Diego de Alcala, ostensibly the victim of the governor's hard hand, the del Rios and Brocamonte agree that here is an excellent opportunity for them. Don Esteban must resent the governor's harshness, so they will draw him into their plot, even permitting him to be its leader temporarily. They plan to communicate with him as soon as possible.

MEANWHILE Señor Devil-may-care has impressed all San Diego de Alcala with his glittering extravagance. He is eventually summoned to the mission by FRAY FRANCISCO, and he goes there, not knowing that the good *fray* has just received a message from the governor, containing among other things the news that the two hotbloods, Juan Feliz and Marcos Chavez, are on their way to San Diego. Therefore, Don Esteban does not understand the *fray's* real reason in asking him to take an oath that for sixty days he will not use his sword except in self-defense. But he agrees to it, believing that the oath is a penance.

The governor has an agent in San Diego, a man named GONZALES, disguised as a ragged peon. When Señor Devil-may-care rides out to meet him one night, he is intercepted by a native girl, ROSA. She takes Don Esteban to a hut where Gonzales lies wounded; he has been badly beaten by hirelings of Brocamonte. Apparently, then, Gonzales is known to be a spy, and Don Esteban will have to proceed more or less alone against the plot of treason. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

TRADER IN TREASON

WHEN Don Esteban arrived, Felipe was waiting in front of the *posada* to take the horse and turn it over to a stable servant.

"I ate at the mission, but it was a most

frugal meal," Don Esteban said. "I need more food. Tell the landlord to do his best, Felipe. Have him set the table in the patio."

As Felipe led the horse away, Don Esteban strode through the open front door of the *posada*. The common room was crowded. Dishes were rattling, wine mugs thumped the tables. Smoke swirled through the room and ascended to the rafters. Torches in niches in the walls, candles and tallow pots gave an abundance of light.

The din died when Don Esteban entered, and everyone turned to look at him. During the day, legends about him had been invented, and Don Esteban would have been startled had he heard them.

Within a short time, a table had been carried into the patio and set with the landlord's best service. Don Esteban, having cleansed himself in his room, sat at the end of the table, which had been heaped with foods both hot and cold, and Felipe stood behind his stool to serve him. At Felipe's gesture, the regular *posada* servants retired out of earshot.

"Have you anything to tell me, Felipe?" Don Esteban asked.

"Sí, señor. A man named Miguel Brocamonte called to pay his respects, and said he would return later this evening. He is a fat trader and a very common person."

"He may be amusing. I'll have a chat with him when he calls again."

Felipe blinked his surprise. "Don Manuel del Rio also called, señor. He said he hoped to have the honor of seeing you tomorrow."

"The Del Rios are well known. I'll be glad to see him. . . . Give me some of that overripe fruit. Tell the landlord to use more salt in my roast hereafter. The fowl was underdone. Not enough peppers in the stew. Give the fellow an abundance of criticism, for no doubt he expects it."

Concluding his meal, Don Esteban waved Felipe aside and arose to wander across the patio to the common room. The landlord bowed when he entered, and motioned for a servant to conduct Don Esteban to a reserved table near the fireplace.

Voices dropped again because of Don Esteban's presence. He waved his hand languidly at the men watching him.

"Continue your merriment, *señores*," he said. "I like noise, life and laughter. They are the best medicines for human ills, especially of the mind. Those of you who have heard somewhat of me should know I am no longface."

There was a roar of merriment, and Don Esteban smiled. He beckoned the landlord.

"Serve wine to all, an abundance of it, and put it to my account," he directed.

THE servants scurried about serving the wine. The landlord himself brought Don Esteban a golden goblet and filled it with his best wine. Both Don Esteban and the landlord looked up quickly as somebody stopped beside the table. Don Esteban saw a short, excessively fat man whose triple chins quivered as he breathed.

"Welcome to San Diego de Alcalá, Don Esteban!" he said. "I am Miguel Brocamonte."

"Indeed?" Don Esteban's brows lifted a trifle.

"The landlord will tell you, if you do not know—I am a man of standing and substance."

"Of substance, surely," Don Esteban agreed.

"I like good food, and have an extensive larder. It is at your service, Don Esteban, should the landlord be unable to provide what you desire."

"That," Don Esteban observed, "would be a business deal between you and the landlord. I have no time for business."

"It would please me, Don Esteban, if I could have a few minutes of conversation with you alone."

"Could we possibly be interested in the same things, *señor*?"

"It is possible," Brocamonte said, boldly. "We want your stay among us to cause pleasant memories. If we are too dull for you, we will try to make it livelier. If you wish amusement—"

"So far, I am finding plenty of it," Don Esteban interrupted. "Landlord, serve

Señor Brocamonte wine, and allow him to sit on the bench at the end of the table."

Brocamonte gulped some of the wine served him, and at the last instant remembered not to belch. "It is a mystery to me," he said, grandly, "why men do not understand and consider the feelings of other men."

"There, *señor*, you have one of the mysteries of the ages," Don Esteban replied.

"Your own affair, for example. Pardon me for mentioning it, but word has spread generally. What happened to Monterey, I mean. You have a little amusement. And a pompous governor, a dull person who cannot appreciate amusement himself, resents it. He exiles you. What has this governor of blood, station and rank that he can order around a Zamora?"

"He is the governor, *señor*."

"Nobody can blame you if your blood is hot. Ah, things are not as they should be in this land."

"They are not," Don Esteban agreed, instantly.

"There is dissatisfaction. Some think things are not run correctly. Not only are men of standing grumbling, Don Esteban, but the feeling is spreading. Peons and natives—their backs are commencing to squirm beneath the lash, in a manner of speaking. The time is ripe for trouble."

Don Esteban put down his goblet. "I am thinking, *señor*—"

"Yes?" Brocamonte encouraged.

"—what a strong rope it would take to hang you, since you are so heavy with fat."

"Hang me, *señor*?"

"The rope is the penalty for treason, is it not? And your talk is leading to it?"

Brocamonte bent forward and lowered his voice to the confidential pitch. "I do not blame you, Don Esteban, for being on guard. But you have nothing to fear from me. If the governor has irked you by expelling you from Monterey, you are near other men who have been irked by him. Perhaps we may understand each other better in the near future."

"I understand you fully now, *señor*," Don Esteban replied. "Who sent you to approach me? If you are acting for a principal, have that principal come to me himself."

Brocamonte bowed. "I understand, Don Esteban. No doubt another will approach you soon, a man of your own rank and standing. I am but a humble servant."

Brocamonte gulped the remainder of his wine, and forgot himself. He belched. His face was purple instantly because of what he had done. Don Esteban brushed his scented handkerchief quickly across his nostrils and glared at him.

"Señor Brocamonte," he said, "you appear to be filled with gas. Perhaps if you were pierced in the entrails with the point of a blade, that would cure your unfortunate condition. If you ever dare conduct yourself in such manner in my presence again, I shall make the experiment. You have my permission, *señor*, to depart."

Brocamonte apologized hurriedly.

"I ask a thousand pardons, Don Esteban. It—it is a disease with me. Let me do something to atone. Make my house your own during your visit with us. I have a splendid *casa*. Use my food, my wines as your own. When you desire entertainment, allow me to furnish it to you. Music, dancing . . . and I know where some bronze native beauties may be found."

"Your relatives, *señor*?" Don Esteban asked.

"Señor!" Eyes blazing, Brocamonte lurched to his feet.

"You may leave me instantly," Don Esteban told him. "And back away from me, bowing, as is proper! . . . Landlord! Burn a scented candle in this corner."

CHAPTER IX

COCKROACH RACE

THE following midmorning, the del Rio carriage approached the *posada*. Four splendid horses drew the vehicle. A native postilion in livery of scarlet and gold was guiding them. Two outriders brushed other travelers out of the way.

Don Manuel del Rio sat in the deep seat of the carriage amid silken cushions stuffed with feathers. He was dressed in gorgeous attire. Rings sparkled on his fingers and jewels gleamed in the scarf at his throat.

From boyhood, Don Manuel had been taught that the del Rios were the kings of the earth. He had not married, for he had found no *señorita* he considered worthy. He sulked because the family did not hold a more prominent position. Now his brain was aflame with the idea that his father might become governor, and the son shine in a reflected glory.

The carriage stopped before the *posada*, and the landlord hurried out, bowing deeply as he wiped his hands on his apron. Don Manuel waited until one of the outriders had spread a crimson rug on the ground, then stepped out of the carriage.

"Don Esteban de la Zamora—?" he questioned.

"He is in the patio, Don Manuel. Will you honor my place by entering?"

Don Manuel bent and passed through the doorway. In the common room, he paused, confronted by a delicate question. Should he go to Don Esteban, or have Don Esteban come to him?

"You may tell Don Esteban de la Zamora that I am here," he instructed the landlord, finally.

The landlord hurried into the patio and Don Manuel sat on a bench to wait. Almost immediately, the landlord came hurrying back.

"Well, *señor*?" Don Manuel asked.

"I told Don Esteban that you are here, as you requested. He asked me why I should take him such intelligence, since he was not the clerk of the *posada*."

Don Manuel's face turned crimson. "Did you state my name to him clearly?"

"Sí, Don Manuel. He said that, if you desire to see him, you may join him in the patio, where he is busy."

"Busy? Perhaps I have come at an inopportune moment. Is he in private conference with others, *señor*?"

"Felipe, his body servant, caught two

large cockroaches, Don Manuel, and Don Esteban is racing them on the floor to decide a bet."

"How is this?"

"If a certain cockroach gets to the wall first two times in three, Don Esteban will put an amount of money into the poor box at the mission. If the other cockroach wins, he will scatter the money among the peons around the *posada*. I hope the latter is the case. I get very little money from the poor box."

"He keeps a del Rio waiting while he plays with cockroaches?" Don Manuel thundered. "There must be some mistake. You did not announce me correctly. Take me to him."

DON MANUEL was escorted to the patio, where the man from Monterey was sitting on a bench, bending forward agog with excitement.

"The winner!" Don Esteban exclaimed. "Catch him, Felipe, and let the other go. Feed the champion luxuries. He has decided the bet for me. The money goes to the poor box."

The landlord stifled a groan. "Don Esteban," he said, advancing and bowing, "here is Don Manuel del Rio—"

"Ah!" Don Esteban sprang up and bowed to just the proper degree. "Kindly be seated, *señor*. The del Rio name is well known to me."

"So well known, *señor*, that you keep me waiting while you play with cockroaches?"

"Have you come here to quarrel with me, *señor*?" Don Esteban asked.

Manuel del Rio curbed his anger. He remembered that his father needed this man.

"I have no quarrel with you unless because you gave me no opportunity to bet on the race with you," Don Manuel replied. He seated himself, and the watchful landlord filled a wine goblet. "Your health, *señor*!"

"And yours, Don Manuel!"

They drank and put down their goblets. The landlord hurried away.

"We were agreeably surprised to learn

of your arrival," Don Manuel said. "There are few people of good station in this locality. Don José, my father, suggested that this *posada* is not a comfortable residence for you. He invites you to come to our *hacienda* and make it your home."

"A generous offer!" Don Esteban said. "But I am only just settled here, my boxes unpacked, and would remain for a time. Nevertheless, Don Manuel, at your convenience I will be delighted to pay my respects to your father."

"Why not now, Don Esteban? My carriage is waiting."

"Felipe, have my horse prepared," Don Esteban ordered. "I'll ride to the *hacienda*, but take my horse along to ride back, for he needs exercise. Can one of your outriders handle him for me, Don Manuel?"

"Sí. I'll have him led by a good man."

Thus it occurred that, a little later, two *caballeros* in resplendent attire left the *posada* and got into the del Rio carriage. Don Esteban's horse was led by an outrider, and they started along the highway.

"A splendid country here!" Don Esteban said.

"A pity its affairs are not administered better," Don Manuel remarked. "But the governor we have now . . . however, you have had a taste of his arrogance."

"I, *señor*?"

"I refer to your expulsion from Monterey. What manner of man does the governor think himself, that he can order around a Zamora in such fashion?"

"He is a very headstrong man," Don Esteban said.

"There is much displeasure with him here, among all factions. 'Tis being said the natives are at the point of revolt."

"Which would gain them only wounds and death," Don Esteban suggested.

"We of Alta California should name our own executive. The Viceroy down in Mexico does not understand our problems."

The carriage rolled smartly around a bend in the road, and the outrider ahead gave a shout of warning. The postilion

swerved and stopped the horses in time to avoid a collision.

SERGEANT SALAZAR and three troopers were riding with two prisoners walking behind them, fastened to saddles with ropes. Don Esteban's eyes narrowed slightly. One of the prisoners was Jorge Gonzales, and the other the girl Rosa.

"Ho, Sergeant Salazar!" Don Esteban cried. "What is this?"

"A nuisance, Don Esteban. This nameless fellow and the halfbreed girl are accused of theft. There was a complaint, so we were obliged to ride out and get them."

"Who caused you this hard toil?"

"Miguel Brocamonte, the trader. He accuses them of stealing from his warehouse. Foodstuff, I believe. It appears this peon has been in trouble, for he has been badly beaten. Perhaps he will be beaten more, at the whipping post, when the *magistrado* is finished with him."

The sergeant saluted, barked at his men and moved on with his prisoners. The latter lifted their heads as they passed the carriage, and for an instant the eyes of Don Esteban met those of Jorge Gonzales.

Evidently, Brocamonte's men had caught Gonzales and the girl as they were trying to get into the hills. So the charge of theft had been made. Brocamonte probably expected the *magistrado* to order them whipped and sent out of the district.

"A sorry business," Don Manuel commented, as the carriage rolled on.

"Human misery is always a sorry business, *señor*. Such people seldom have persons of influence to fight their battles for them."

"Oh, no doubt they are guilty!" Don Manuel said. "The country is overrun with light-fingered rogues."

"This fellow Brocamonte . . . he had the audacity to call on me," Don Esteban related. "I do not see how a person of blood and breeding can endure a moment's conversation with such a man."

Don Esteban brushed his handkerchief

across his face as if to drive away a gnat, but in reality to hide his smile at the expression which came into Don Manuel's countenance.

CHAPTER X

LADY, BEWARE THE HANGMAN

WHEN the carriage stopped at the del Rio *hacienda*, the huge front doors of the house were thrown open, native servants quickly spread rich carpetings on the steps and bowed low, and Don Esteban entered at Don Manuel's side.

Don José waited to receive them, eyes alight and head held proudly. He unbent slightly when Don Esteban was presented.

"The name of your family is well known to me *señor*," he said. "It is an illustrious name."

"As is your own, Don José."

"I am glad to welcome you in my house. In these times, it is not always a man can have proper persons around him."

They took the drink of ceremony; then Don Esteban walked with father and son through the rooms on the lower floor, admiring the furnishings. They stopped for a moment at the family shrine, then entered the patio. On a bench near the fountain, sat Señorita Anita del Rio with her *dueña* at her side.

The *señorita* had staged the meeting beautifully. Her lustrous beauty was enhanced by a background of crimson bloom. Her costume had been selected for the moment. She smiled charmingly when Don Esteban was presented to her.

The talk soon turned to politics, and Don Esteban knew they were feeling him out. He listened for a time, then deliberately turned the conversation to other topics. Don José motioned to his son, who excused himself and retired into the house.

"Anita, child, why not show Don Esteban the garden of which you are so proud?" Don José asked. "He will excuse me, I know, if I remain here."

Don Esteban went with the *señorita* through an arch and into the spacious gar-

den. The smiles Señorita Anita had promised to bestow were given generously. Her heart had beaten wildly at first sight of Don Esteban.

"You should be in Monterey, *señorita*, where we have the gaiety of the capital, and where they would be more to admire your beauty," Don Esteban said.

"Would it not be better to move the capital here, *señor*?"

"The governor might not like the change."

"Then why not change the governor?"

"Only the Viceroy may do that."

The *dueña* dropped behind to inspect a rose bush, and the *señorita* stepped closer to Don Esteban.

"Why not seize opportunity, *señor*?" she asked. "You are a far better man than the governor. So is my father. The people are ready for revolt. What a leader you would make!"

"A leader?"

"The peons and natives would flock to you. They would fight to the death with a man like you to lead them."

"Your neck is beautiful, *señorita*," Don Esteban said, smiling. "It is so shapely, so small. It would snap easily—at the end of a rope."

"*Señor*, how dreadful!"

"'Tis the punishment for treason, *señorita*."

"No man dare cry treason when a cause succeeds. The governor who shamed you—he should be deposed. If the movement started now, it would sweep like wildfire along the coast. If you lead a move against him—"

"The Governor has soldiers, *señorita*."

"More than half of them would follow a new leader, knowing they have little to expect of the old."

"The Viceroy would send more troops."

"By the time that could be done, you would be secure in your position. Alta California should be an empire in itself, independent of Mexico. Why should we not have . . . not a governor, but a viceroy?"

"You will soon have me a king, *señorita*," Don Esteban said, laughing.

"Where could one be found more regal?" she asked, her face glowing as she spoke.

THEY turned back toward the patio, the *dueña* walking ahead. The *señorita* paused to bend over a new blossom, knowing well the pretty picture she made. They were near the entrance to the patio, and as Don Esteban walked on slowly, he heard voices. Don José and Miguel Brocamonte were talking.

"I have told you often, *señor*, not to come here without permission," Don José was saying, angrily. "You may arouse suspicion."

"But I thought it necessary, Don José. I talked with Don Esteban at the *posada* last evening, and did not like his manner."

"Perhaps he did not like yours," said Don José.

"And I have news for you. The natives in the hills are commencing to boil. The sailors I engaged are doing their work well. We must prepare to act swiftly. Either Don Esteban must join us instantly, else we must move without him."

"Don Esteban is here. I have had a few words with him, but have not sounded him out fully. It takes time."

At that instant, Don Esteban strolled through the arch ahead of the *señorita* and her *dueña*.

"Ah, Don José, entertaining another guest?" he asked.

Don José's face flamed. "This man, Señor Brocamonte, a trader, often purchases the products of my *rancho*."

"You should have a *superintendente* to attend to business affairs," Don Esteban suggested, "then you would not be annoyed by unpleasant contacts."

Don Esteban brushed his handkerchief across his nostrils as he looked at the trader, the gesture one of significance. Brocamonte's face turned red.

"The *señor* has a habit of intruding," Don Esteban continued. "He had the effrontery to call on me last evening."

Brocamonte said quickly, "But, Don Esteban, I do not understand. You said

something last evening about my principal—”

“You intimated, *señor*, that you were approaching me on a delicate matter, and I said for you to send our principal to me. I do not deal with subordinates.”

The *señorita* and her *dueña* were crossing the patio, and Brocamonte bowed low. The *señorita* overlooked him and went on into the house at her father’s nod, the *dueña* following.

“It occurs to me, Don José,” Brocamonte said, “that we are getting nowhere.”

“This is not the moment for a discussion, *señor*,” Don José broke in, quickly. “Never before have I met a man with so little brains. Begone!”

Brocamonte flushed again. “Don José, two things are necessary in a certain enterprise—a man and money. The latter is sometimes difficult to obtain, but one can always find another man.”

There was a threat in the statement, and Don José stiffened with anger.

“Brocamonte, I am asking you to leave now,” he said. “I desire to talk to Don Esteban. You upset everything. You have no discretion. I shall take the subject up with you later.”

“Very well, Don José,” Brocamonte said, stiffly. “I hope the delay will not be great.”

The trader made what he thought was a dignified exit, and they heard his boots grinding the gravel outside the patio as he retreated.

“I regret that I intruded in a business quarrel, Don José. I appreciate that in this country a man must come into contact with tiresome persons at times,” Don Esteban said.

Don José looked straight at him.

“You are a man of blood, a *caballero*,” he said. “You would not take advantage of another in your caste. Tell me—how much do you know?”

“Concerning political disquiet hereabouts?” Don Esteban asked. “We always have that with us. I have even heard it rumored that there may be an uprising here.”

“It is commencing already. It will be a

rare chance for those who dislike the governor. You, a Zamora, ordered out of Monterey by him—”

“It gave me a chance to visit this delightful spot and meet your charming daughter, so perhaps I should thank the governor.”

“We must talk more, *señor*. Will you honor me by remaining for the evening meal?”

“I thank you, Don José, and regret I must return to town immediately. I have letters to write, to send by the ship *Magdalena*, and she may sail with any tide. Give my respects to your daughter and son, and say it will give me pleasure to see them again soon.”

CHAPTER XI

FETCH ME WINE, AND A RIOT

DON JOSÉ escorted him to the front door. The servants bent almost double as Don Esteban mounted and took his leave. The black horse spurned the flinty ground with his hooves and galloped down the dusty road.

Within a short time, Don Esteban overtook Miguel Brocamonte’s carriage, which was his intention, and drew alongside.

“Have your coachman drive off the road to the shade beneath those trees, *señor*,” Don Esteban directed. “Tell him to stroll aside, so he cannot overhear. I wish a private word with you.”

“I was hoping you would overtake me, and that we could talk,” Brocamonte said.

He gave the coachman the required orders. Don Esteban kept his saddle, and when the driver had walked away bent over for conversation.

“Señor Brocamonte, for a man who has prospered in business, you show a small amount of common sense.”

“What mean you, Don Esteban?”

“You toy with death and take no precautions. You play at treason and leave yourself wide open for trouble. I understand what you and Don José have been hinting at me. You are eager for me to join a certain project. Would I engage in a dan-

gerous enterprise with men of scant wisdom?"

"If we could come to an understanding—" Brocamonte said, weakly. "With Don José, I never know where I stand."

"Ah! Does he want you to know?"

"Señor?"

"My understanding is that Don José would cause a revolt so he can become governor. You, I presume, are furnishing gold for expenses. What do you hope to receive in return?"

"Trade concessions."

"Consider, *señor*. Is Don José the strong man necessary for the task? Can you depend on him? Can he lead men, make them follow him? Or will he sit in his patio and expect other to do the work, and reap the benefits when the work is done? Are you satisfied with everything?"

"I am not satisfied!" Brocamonte burst out. "I want action. I demand a profit when I invest money. But Don José will not break word. He will grant me the concessions."

"If he is ever in a position to do so," Don Esteban said. "And what if disaster comes, *señor*? Are you sure it will not appear that you alone are guilty? Are you eager to stretch rope while other escape? Have you any safeguards?"

Brocamonte frowned. "Don Esteban," he said, "I do not like my present arrangement with Don José. He is inactive. He treats me like dirt. So far, I have done all the work and endured all the expense."

"And you a business man!" Don Esteban scoffed. There was a moment's silence before Brocamonte spoke.

"DON ESTEBAN, let me replace him in this project with you. You would be a gallant leader. You have a right to strike at the governor because he shamed you by exile. Lead the revolt, take the governor's place yourself—and give me my concessions."

"So you would betray your fellow conspirator and cast him aside?" Don Esteban asked. "How do I know you would not cast me aside also?"

"You would be active . . ."

"My advice to you, *señor*, is to drop the whole business."

"But the revolt has started, Don Esteban. The natives and peons are being aroused. The work has begun, and now is the time to drive it to a conclusion. Will you join with me?"

"Do I look like a fool, Señor Brocamonte? See how you have been talking openly to me. You have no caution."

"No third person heard me, *señor*," Brocamonte said. "I am perhaps not such a dolt as you think. Will you consider the matter, Don Esteban? A man of your birth, wealth and spirit could go far."

"As far as the gallows, perhaps," Don Esteban replied.

Brocamonte's face darkened. "Don Esteban, you know considerable about this enterprise. So much, *señor*, that unless you are with us hereafter you will be a danger to us."

"Are you presuming to threaten me, *señor*?"

"Run to the soldiers with the story! You will find that Don José del Rio, with his standing, and I with my money, have some influence. And you, already sent to exile by the governor—"

"That is enough, *señor*!" Don Esteban interrupted. "You are even more uncouth than I had thought. You have suggested that you cast Don José aside and join forces with me. Did you ever consider that Don José might cast you aside and join with me? I can bring to the cause as much money as you, and leadership besides. And I would want no trade concessions afterward."

"So, *señor*—" Suspicion flashed into Brocamonte's face.

"And if *you* run to the soldiery with the yarn, as you suggested I might do, how long do you think your word would stand against mine and that of Don José? We both outweigh you in importance, *señor*, and I alone outweigh you in wealth."

"So you would take my place in this business, Don Esteban?" Brocamonte raged.

"I could, *señor*, if I so desired. Don José and I could be firmly welded together. He has a marriageable daughter, and I am unmarried and considered eligible."

"Things were going nicely before you came to San Diego de Alcala," Brocamonte said, with a sigh. "Two days here, and you upset everything. I am growing bewildered."

"Keep to your tallow and hides, honey and olive oil, *señor*," Don Esteban advised. "Those commodities you understand. Do not try to deal in politics and conspiracy. Now, I must ride on. Somebody may pass us, and I would not be seen talking to a man like you. Be kind enough not to belch until I am out of earshot."

Don Esteban laughed, tugged at his reins and touched with his spurs. The big black spurned the hard ground with his hooves again. A cloud of fine dust drifted back on the wind and engulfed Miguel Brocamonte.

BROCAMONTE shouted for his coachman, and the man came running back to the carriage. "Get me home!" he howled. "Lash the horses!"

The carriage traveled the remainder of the distance to the town at a perilous rate of speed, rocking from side to side wildly. Miguel Brocamonte tossed about on the cushions while the driver whipped up the horses.

In front of his house, Brocamonte got out of the carriage with more celerity than usual. His face was suffused with rage, his eyes were glittering, and his triple chins shook with determination.

In his living room, he collapsed in a huge chair at the end of a table, and howled for one of his trusted men. The man came running, brushing past the frightened house servants.

"This Don Esteban de la Zamore— he must be caused an abundance of trouble," the trader ordered. "Get the proper men and put them to work. Have them spread the report that Don Esteban is in reality

a man of the governor's, that his exile is but a trick, that he is here to levy new heavy taxes and, above all, to select men to be seized and impressed into the army to fight the natives in Mexico. You understand?"

"*Sí, señor!*"

"Start a riot. Work the peons and natives into a frenzy. Have him attacked, if possible. See to it instantly!"

"At once, *señor*. I'll do the work well."

"That will finish this pretty Don Esteban and also inflame the peons and natives against the governor. Get at the work! And you," he shouted at a trembling servant who entered the room, "fetch me a flagon of heavy wine and some cold meat. A man may belch in his own house."

CHAPTER XII

A SWORD AND A MASK

DON ESTEBAN announced that he would retire early that evening, and told Felipe he could go out and amuse himself. When Felipe had departed, Don Esteban extinguished the candles and stretched on his couch to rest for a time. At length he arose and dressed in the dark.

He put on dark clothing, boots and sombrero he had not worn since coming here, and from a locked chest took a serviceable blade with a plain hilt, a pistol which he thrust into his sash, and a black mask which he stuffed into a pocket.

He crawled through the window into the night. He could hear a din in the distance, with men shouting at one another, but gave it scant attention. He went cautiously through the darkness to the side of the *posada* where several saddle horses were tied, selected two and led them away.

Don Esteban tethered the horses in a dark spot not far from the *presidio*, and went on carefully. It came to his attention that something unusual was happening in the town. A crowd had gathered around a huge bonfire in the distance, and somebody was shouting.

At the *presidio*, the troopers had their

horses ready in front of the building, and Sergeant Salazar was bellowing orders. Don Esteban kept close to the wall of the building in the darkness and got near enough to overhear.

"'Tis a mob of peons and natives, *capitán*," Salazar was reporting to Angelus. "Somebody is stirring them up against Don Esteban."

"We'll take all the men except for two guards," Capitán Angelus ordered. "I'll go with you. There is to be no attack on the crowd if it can be avoided, for the governor wishes the natives treated as kindly as possible. We'll keep them from mischief and scatter them."

In the darkness, Don Esteban grinned. He guessed who had been instrumental in stirring up a mob against him. He had counted on it. Mentally, he thanked Miguel Brocamonte for doing it, since it drew all except two soldiers away from the *presidio* and made easier the task he must do now.

Don Esteban watched the troopers mount and ride away, then went like a shadow around to the front door of the building. A yawning guard was leaning against the casement. Don Esteban put on his mask and got the pistol out of his sash.

The guard jumped when he suddenly felt the muzzle of a pistol prodding him in the ribs and heard a low voice:

"Not a sound, *señor*, or you die! Step back inside!"

The trooper obeyed, watching the eyes which glittered at him through the slits in the mask. He was compelled to face the wall and turn his back, and his wrists were deftly lashed behind him. Don Esteban suddenly tripped him to the floor, prodded him with the pistol to keep him quiet, tied his legs together and gagged him with a piece of cloth.

"You may tell your *capitán* that half a dozen men set upon you," Don Esteban said. "They looked like pirates and flourished all manner of weapons. Make the story as strong as you like, for I will not appear to denounce you for the lie."

DARTING along the dimly lighted corridor, Don Esteban approached the detention room. He encountered no trouble there. The second guard was asleep on a bench in front of the door, heavy with wine and snoring. Don Esteban took away his pistol and cast it aside, and got possession of the guard's keys. He unlocked and opened the door of the detention room.

"Jorge . . . Rosa!" he called, guardedly.

"*Señor!*" Gonzales cried.

"I knew you would come, *señor*," the girl said, rushing to the door.

Jorge Gonzales was but a pace behind her, moving slowly because of his bruised body.

"Come quickly!" Don Esteban ordered. "I have horses for you both. Ride for the hills. Some sailors of the *Magdalena* have been induced to desert and foment trouble. You and Rosa must work against their influence. You know what to do. Are you able to ride, Jorge?"

"*Sí*. Get me into a saddle, and I can ride."

"You must be swift. You must make strong talk against an uprising. Considerable damage probably has been done already. We'll communicate later. Come."

They hurried down the corridor to the front door, and Don Esteban peered out. Nobody was in sight. The mob was still making a din a distance away. The three left the *presidio* and went rapidly through the darkness away from the building, and Don Esteban took off his mask.

"Here are the horses," he said, presently. "Release them when you are safe in the hills. Ride slowly and carefully until you are a distance from the town, then make speed. *Dios!*"

Through the shadows, Don Esteban hurried back toward the *posada* after the others had ridden away. The din in the distance was increasing, men were surging around the fire, and Don Esteban guessed that Capitán Angelus and his troopers were having difficulty making the mob disperse.

He crawled through the window and

got into his room, and worked swiftly to get out of his clothes. He heard voices in the patio, and somebody pounded on his door.

"Don Esteban! Don Esteban!" Felipe called in frightened voice.

Don Esteban did not reply for a moment, feigning sleep. He opened a chest and thrust into it the clothing he had been wearing, the mask, pistol and blade, and closed the chest and locked it.

"*Si?* What is it?" he called then, like a man aroused from deep slumber. "What is all this tumult?"

"Don Esteban! A mob has been inflamed against you," Felipe called. "Arouse and dress yourself! There may be serious trouble."

"A mob? You have been taking too much wine, Felipe. I'll have your ears for this!"

HE PUT on a robe, unbarred the door and opened it. He had disarranged his hair, and he squinted in the light from the torches. "What is this about a mob?" he asked, yawning.

Felipe looked badly frightened. The landlord at his elbow, fearful of sudden tragedy to Don Esteban and a consequent loss of profit, was in terror. A couple of servants and a trooper were with them.

"Dress and arm yourself, Don Esteban," Felipe begged. "They may try to do you a mischief. The soldiers may not be able to hold them in check. They have sent to the mission for old Fray Francisco, who can handle the rogues."

"But what is the cause of the excitement?" Don Esteban asked.

"Somebody has been circulating the report that you are the governor's man, here to levy more taxes and also seize men for the army."

"Ridiculous!" Don Esteban roared. "Am I so poor that I must earn a living by working for the governor? Give me but a moment to dress, and I'll attend to the affair."

"Arm yourself, Don Esteban. I have a pistol—"

"Keep it in your sash, Felipe."

Don Esteban closed the door and began dressing in splendid attire, taking his time about it. The howls and shouting outside told him the mob was approaching the *posada*. Through the general din, he could hear the hoarse bellowing of Sergeant Salazar as he threatened the rioters.

"They will tear the place to pieces," he heard the landlord moaning, as he opened the door again. "Why don't the soldiers stop them?"

"Felipe, carry this!" Don Esteban barked. He gave the body servant a small leather pouch which seemed heavy. "And stop shivering!"

"What do you intend to do, Don Esteban?" the landlord asked. "Please do not show yourself. They may attack and injure you. If you can get away on your horse—"

"Get away, *señor?* Run from a mob?" Don Esteban roared, his eyes flaming. "Do you realize, *señor*, what you are saying and to whom you are speaking? If you are so afraid, keep well behind me."

"You do not have your pistol, Don Esteban. Take mine," Felipe implored.

"I need no pistol," Don Esteban replied.

He straightened his sash, brushed a scented handkerchief across his nostrils, touched the jewel-studded hilt of his blade, and strode across the patio toward the door of the common room, the others close behind him.

CHAPTER XIII

RABBLE IN ARMS

AT LEAST a hundred men were in the mob, and Miguel Brocamonte's hirelings had worked them into a frenzy. Capitán Angelus had only fifteen troopers in addition to Sergeant Salazar, for the *presidio* at San Diego de Alcalá was at the moment but weakly manned. And the *capitán* was under strict order from his superiors to treat the natives with kindness as much as possible. Angelus was a worried man.

His mounted troopers spread out in

front of the *posada* and stationed themselves at the corners of the building. Howling, the mob approached slowly. Don Esteban heard them as he entered the common room of the inn and started across it toward the open front door. The big room was deserted, for both guests and servants had fled, fearing they would be caught in the midst of trouble.

"Back, *señores!*" Angelus was thundering. "Do you wish to be shot down? Are you eager to die? We will have no violence from you!"

"Misbegotten sons of ground owls!" Sergeant Salazar added, less elegantly. "You are mad—mad!"

The mob pressed forward, howling for Don Esteban, shouting insults, daring him to show himself. They were armed with bludgeons, stones, implements they had picked up. Brocamonte's men kept urging them on.

From his house a short distance away, Miguel Brocamonte was watching through a window. He saw that his men had done their work well. He had a hunk of cold meat in one hand and a flagon of wine in the other, and was eating and drinking as he watched.

"Back!" Capitán Angelus warned the rioters again, as the mob surged toward the door of the *posada*. "You cannot intrude on private property, *señores*. I am warning you for the last time. Disperse!"

At that instant, Don Esteban de la Zamora, in his resplendent attire, appeared in the doorway. Light from the torches fastened to the walls at either side of the entrance fell upon him.

A roar came from the mob. They surged forward again, and suddenly stopped. For Don Esteban, his head held high, was stepping away from the door, walking straight toward them.

A group of men hurried toward him from one side, but they were sailors from the *Magdalena* headed by Carlos, the burly mate.

"Give us the word, Don Esteban, and we'll handle these rogues!" Carlos shouted. "We know you for a proper man."

"Easy, *amigo*," Don Esteban called. "There seems to be a misunderstanding here."

He walked on until he was beside the *capitán's* horse.

"Back, Don Esteban," Angelus begged, from the corner of his mouth. "The sight of you will enrage them more."

Don Esteban did not reply. With his hands at his sides, he walked straight ahead again, his eyes searching the faces of the men nearest him as if trying to read their thoughts. Some gave ground slightly. Don Esteban stopped and looked them over coldly.

"What is all this excitement, *señores?*" he asked. "Who has played you for fools and got you to do this thing?"

"Governor's spy! . . . Tax man! . . . Oppressor!" They shouted at him.

DON ESTEBAN threw back his head and laughed. That astounded them and brought silence. He braced his fists against his hips, and the merriment roared from his throat.

"What a jest is that!" he cried, his fit of laughter at an end. "The governor exiled me from Monterey for a bit of fun—"

"'Twas a trick!" somebody shouted.

"I have nothing to do with taxes or the army, *señores*. I am a wealthy man, and need not work in any government position. Use your brains, *señores*. Stop and think who impelled you to this violence. A certain man here dislikes me, and would egg you on to causing me trouble. You will suffer, not he."

"Spy!" another shouted.

"You are being used as fools, *señores*," Don Esteban continued. "The government is your friend. I have heard whispers that an uprising is being fomented among you. Would you fight the battles of an ambitious man and receive hurts and death for him? To what end? That politicians may win and you lose? Your state would be no better afterward."

The members of the mob began muttering, but there were no more wild shouts.

"I do not blame you for this show of

hostility toward me, *señores*, for I know you have been duped into it," Don Esteban went on. "Men have been well paid to stir you up against me, by a man who has not courage enough to fight his own battles, but must have you do it for him.

"If you desire to forget this, we will be friends. If you do not, I wear a sword, and a few of you will taste steel before I am undone. Which of you desires to be the first to lose blood?" Don Esteban dropped hand to hilt of blade.

"Rush him!" one howled.

Don Esteban whirled quickly, sprang forward, grasped the man who had shouted and jerked him back into the light.

"Attention, *señores!*" he shouted. "Let us get at the truth." He shook the man he had seized, forced him to his knees. "Tell the truth! Who pays you to make these friends of mine turn against me?"

"Spy of the governor—"

Don Esteban hurled the man flat to earth and whipped out his blade. It seemed like a live thing as it flashed in the light.

"The truth—quickly!" he ordered.

"What is the meaning of this?"

"If I talk, they—"

"I'll see you protected."

"'Twas the order of Miguel Brocamonte, *señor*, that we arouse men against you."

"Why?"

"I do not know that for certain, Don Esteban. I was told that Señor Brocamonte wished to cause you trouble because you had insulted him."

"Can one insult a rat?" Don Esteban cried. "You see, *señores*, how you have been made dupes? Miguel Brocamonte would have you fight his battles. Is he an honorable man? If I had not stopped you, even now the soldiers would be at you, and some of you would be hurt and others dead—"

Cries of rage came from the mob. They surged backward, and many turned to look toward Brocamonte's house.

"Wait, *señores!*" Don Esteban shouted.

But their minds had turned to Brocamonte. They were ready to do violence to him and his property, glad for an excuse.

Brocamonte had always treated them as dirt, had cheated them all, had grown rich and fat on them.

A TROOPER came clattering up, and behind him was old Fray Francisco on a mule. The *fray* slid to the ground and staggered forward, his tattered robe whipping around his thin ankles.

"What is this, my children?" he cried, in a squeaky voice. "You would do harm to Don Esteban; a kind and gentle man who never wronged any of you? Shame!"

But the mob had forgotten their feelings against Don Esteban now.

"Brocamonte! He tricked us!" they were shouting.

They turned as one man and surged toward Brocamonte's house.

"A new peril," Capitán Angelus growled. "Sergeant, cut them off and turn them back. It is our duty, though personally I would rather have them strip the rogue."

Salazar howled at his troopers, hooves pounded the hard earth, and the soldiers rode madly to get around the mob and turn it. But it was Don Esteban who stopped them.

"*Señores!*" he shouted. "Attention!"

They stopped, turned toward him.

"I am the injured party in this. Let me fight my own battles," he cried. "I'll deal with the rogue in my own way. Would you deny me that pleasure and satisfaction? Here!"

He motioned for Felipe, and the trembling body servant shuffled forward. Don Esteban took the heavy leather pouch from him.

"This occasion gives me an opportunity to have you all drink my health, *señores*," Don Esteban called. "Form in line and pass me, and there will be a coin for each of you. It is but a few steps to the common room of the *posada*, and the landlord has servants to aid him."

They could not resist that. They fought one another to get into line. They began passing Don Esteban, looking ashamed, bowing and knuckling their foreheads, and he gave each a coin from the pouch. Then

they hurried into the *posada* and began calling for wine.

"Don Esteban, you have handled them," Capitán Angelus said, when the last man in the line had passed. "So Brocamonte stirred them up against you?"

"Undoubtedly. I had some words with the rogue," Don Esteban confessed.

"Ha! I shall speak sternly to the *señor* about it immediately. He goes too far."

"Do not take the trouble, *capitán*. I can handle Miguel Brocamonte."

"Do not forget, Don Esteban, that he can hire assassins," Angelus warned.

"I'll be on guard against them."

"I was worried, for a fact," Angelus said, lowering his voice so nobody else could hear, "when they shouted that you were the governor's spy."

"What do you mean, *Señor el Capitán*?"

Angelus smiled. "I have had private advices from Monterey, Don Esteban. I am yours to command."

CHAPTER XIV

THE COURTLY LOUT

WATCHING from the window of his house, listening to the howls of the mob and understanding their import, Miguel Brocamonte shook with fear.

When the mob finally was turned aside and its members hurried into the *posada* to spend the coins Don Esteban had given them, Brocamonte gave a sigh of relief and collapsed into a chair, called for a trembling servant to fetch him more wine, and awaited a report of the occurrence.

One of his trusted men finally brought him the entire story, and Brocamonte's heavy body shook again, this time with rage.

"This is ruinous!" he cried. "It will turn them against me. The man who confessed I instigated it—I'll have his ears! Everything is going wrong!"

"I have received some reports from the hills, *señor*," his man said.

"What reports?"

"The sailors you engaged to stir up the natives are doing their work well. They

have invented lies which have terrified both natives and peons. The latter have been told that the government is about to enslave them all, and are growing into a frenzy."

"*Bueno!*" Brocamonte exclaimed. "The affair can be continued. But there must be some adjustments. Don José del Rio . . . ha! I must come to a complete understanding with him. His dignified bearing has intimidated me long enough. He has lineage—*sí*. But I have the money he needs. A closer association—ah!"

"*Señor?*" his man questioned.

"I can trust you, *amigo?*"

"To the last extremity!"

"Very good. Of all the men around me, you are the one in whom I confide most. Tell me, is Don José del Rio a better man than I am?"

"Accident of birth made him what he is, *señor*, and what property he owns was inherited. You, Señor Brocamonte, started from nothing, if you will pardon me for saying so, and have made of yourself a power in the world through your own efforts. Your common sense, *señor*, will tell you which is the better man, even if your modesty makes you doubt."

"You are right, *amigo*," Brocamonte decided, gulping wine and belching. "It is time for me to assert myself. I have acquired some wealth, it is true, but other things have been neglected. There should be a mistress in this house."

"Every house should have its mistress, *señor*."

"I need somebody to preside over my establishment. I could load a wife with silks and jewels. Despite my accomplishments, I am but a common man—"

"Oh, not that, Señor Brocamonte!"

"I have it in mind to be married," the trader replied. "I shall retire and think of it until I fall asleep."

BUT Miguel Brocamonte did not have time to think of it much. An hour before midnight, there came an imperative summons at the front door of the house. One of his servants hurried to arouse him.

"What is the tumult?" Brocamonte demanded.

"There is a visitor, *señor*. The *superintendente* of the del Rio rancho."

"'Tis a strange hour to sell tallow and hides," Brocamonte commented. "I'll see him immediately. Something must be afoot—or amiss."

He slipped his fat feet into sandals and waddled across the room in his heavy, full-length nightshirt, the long tassel of his nightcap nodding over his left ear. Gulping and yawning, he appeared in the living room, a picture which almost made the sedate *superintendente* laugh.

"Well, *señor*?" Brocamonte asked. "What brings you here in the middle of the night? Are you in wine and not aware of what you are doing?"

"Don José sent me, *señor*. He desires you to come to the *hacienda* at once."

"At such an hour?"

"Immediately, *señor*, if you would not displease him. And be cautious in your journey. Slip quietly from the town in your carriage without letting everybody know where you are going. I will ride beside you."

"'Tis almost the middle of the night," Brocamonte protested. "What has happened, that Don José would see me now?"

"I am not entirely in his confidence, *señor*," the *superintendente* replied, stiffly.

"Oh, I'll come, I'll come!" Brocamonte decided.

He clapped hands to summon a servant, ordered his carriage made ready immediately, and went to his chamber to dress, directing that the *superintendente* be given refreshment. Señor Brocamonte would not set forth until his cook had rushed preparation of a dish of eggs and rabbits' kidneys by way of a midnight snack.

Though the *superintendente* rode close beside the carriage, Brocamonte could not talk openly to him because of the driver. So he sat and did considerable thinking. He wondered if Don José had received important information from the men in the hills, or perhaps had new plans for rushing the revolt.

THE carriage was driven around to the rear again, and the *superintendente* dismounted and accompanied Brocamonte to the house, entering through the patio.

Don José and his son were in the big living room, Don José sitting stiffly in a chair, his face dark with anger, and Manuel pacing nervously around the room.

"So here you are, *señor!*" Don José exclaimed, after the *superintendente* had been waved out. "What have you to say for yourself?"

"Regarding what, Don José?"

"He asks me regarding what!" Don José exploded. "Know, *señor*, that I have had full reports from town. I am told you instigated a riot against Don Esteban. Have you no common sense? Is that a way to get Don Esteban to join us?"

Brocamonte's eyes narrowed. "Join us, Don José. He overtook me on the road as I was driving to town. He berated me and laughed at my association with you. He asked whether I trusted you. He even intimated"—and here Brocamonte watched Don José closely—"that you might cast me aside in this business and carry on with him as your associate, having him furnish the funds instead of me!"

Don Manuel whirled toward him. "He intimated that?" he cried, with hope in his face.

"Would you welcome the change, *señor*?" Brocamonte asked.

"And because he taunted you," Don José put in, sternly, "you had a mob stirred up against him? And he turned that mob cleverly on you. The very people we are depending on to help us by commencing an uprising against the government—you alienate them yourself. Fool!"

"*Señor!*" Brocamonte protested.

"Do you dare raise your voice to me?" Don José demanded, hotly.

"It occurs to me," Brocamonte said, "that for some reason this Don Esteban is playing a game. He seems to me, *señor*, to be trying to separate us, to break up our association."

"Why would he do such a thing?" Don Manuel asked.

"I do not know, unless he hopes to take my place with you. He seems aware of our plan, and that makes him a dangerous man to us, unless he is our associate. I thought the mob would frighten him—"

"Frighten Don Esteban?" Manuel roared, laughing. "He is not of a breed that frightens easily."

BROCAMONTE spread his fat hands in a gesture of hopelessness. "Everything I do displeases you," he mourned. "I am running around in circles. I must know where I stand. The people back in the hills are growing inflamed. They will be ready to strike. Where do I stand?"

"Where you have always stood, *señor*," Don José replied. "We started this business together, and we will carry it on together. If Don Esteban cares to join us, we will welcome him. But our association stands."

"I thank you, Don José. That makes me feel better. You understand, Don José, you have kept me feeling uncomfortable. You call me an associate, yet you treat me like dirt under your feet. I was not born to rank, yet I have made something of myself—"

"You are a good, successful man, Brocamonte," Don José said kindly.

"Thank you, Don José. I have much money, and will have much more. I have an establishment, but I feel that I should have somebody to set it off, a jewel in the setting—"

"What are you talking about, *señor*?" Don José interrupted.

"I am trying to say that it has occurred to me that I should be married, have a mistress in my house—"

"You get married? What has that to do with our contemplated plans to upset the governor?"

"I would feel more secure if we were closer associated," Brocamonte said. "When victory comes, Don José del Rio will have the highest place in Alta California. In addition to that, I'll see that he has a great fortune; I'll make it for him. But I must have a keen personal interest.

It occurred to me, Don José, that if your charming daughter would be my wife—"

"What?" Manuel cried.

"*Señor!* Do you jest?" Don José thundered.

"I . . . certainly I am not jesting, Don José. Perhaps the thought did startle you. You did not expect such a rich suitor, eh? I could give her everything. She would be like a queen. And we would be closer associated—" Brocamonte rushed on to his destruction.

"*Dios!*" Manuel roared. "This is too much! You marry a del Rio—a thing like you? You marry my sister? I'll carve your fat carcass—"

Don José finally found voice. "How dare you, *señor*? This is the insult supreme! You . . . you swindler of natives! You halfbreed!"

BROCAMONTE recoiled a step as Don José roared and Manuel advanced toward him. "So!" he said. "I am not good enough for you. But my money is good, eh? You would play at treason with me, make use of me—"

"Get out of this house!" Don José roared. "Never enter it again! Never dare address me or my son, or even my servant. We are done, Brocamonte!"

"Our plans?"

"There are no plans, as far as you are concerned!"

"Do not be too sure of that, Don José. It is my men who are stirring up the people in the hills. My money is paying the bills. Do I need you in this business? Perhaps I may be the governor myself."

"The man is mad!" Don José decided.

"I am not mad. Such a thing is possible. However, I am willing to stand by our bargain if your daughter—"

"Do not dare mention her again!" Manuel cried. "Even for you to think of her is an insult. My father says we are done, so we are. We can do without you."

"You, to be governor!" Don José scoffed. "Do not forget your origin, *señor*."

"I understand, Don José. It is quite plain to me," Brocamonte said. "You expect to

replace me in this business with Don Esteban, regardless of what you said a moment ago. Now that he is here with his wealth, you need me no longer, and cast me aside. Your rage because I suggested marriage with your daughter, 'twas but your excuse, your subterfuge—"

"You dare charge me with such cheap trickery?" Don José cried.

"But Don Esteban will not join you," Brocamonte went on, raising his voice. "He told that mob that they were being tricked into an uprising. He said an ambitious man was getting them to fight his battles."

"He said that?" Manuel cried.

"He did, Don Manuel. Perhaps some of your men will report it to you. He will not join you. And now you are casting me aside. How do you expect to win anything? Can we not be sensible about this, *señores*? I am not such a bad man. The union of wealth and lineage—"

"Manuel!" Don José cried. "Get this unmentionable rogue out of the house before I have a stroke."

"Go quickly, *señor*, before I forget myself and soil my sword with your foul blood!" Don Manuel ordered.

"I go," Brocamonte replied, breathing heavily, and with his eyes aflame. "But you will learn that I am not without power."

CHAPTER XV

TOO MANY CAVALIERS

THE following morning, Señorita Anita del Rio, accompanied by her *dueña*, drove into town to look at a display of goods received by one of the traders on the ship *Magdalena*.

The *señorita* was a picture of haughty beauty as she sat erect in the carriage amid silk cushions. Don Manuel, her brother, rode a splendid horse beside the carriage and glared at lesser folk as they scurried out of the way.

The trader was displaying his finery in a warehouse, and the del Rio carriage stopped in front of the door. Don Manuel dismounted and helped his sister and the

dueña to the ground and escorted them inside, where the bowing trader awaited them, eager for sales and profits.

They found Don Esteban standing at the counter and inspecting bolts of satin.

"Now I know what lured me here this morning," Don Esteban said, bowing over the *señorita's* hand.

As she smiled and arched her brows at him, Don Esteban turned and bowed to Don Manuel, who returned the bow stiffly.

"They tell me you were the object of a riot last evening, *señor*," Manuel del Rio said.

Don Esteban laughed a little. "'Twas not much of anything. That rogue of a Brocamonte tried to set the natives and peons on me."

"I have heard, *señor*, that you made one strange remark at the time—something about the people being the dupes of an ambitious man."

"Possibly."

"Were you by any chance referring to my father, *señor*?" Manuel asked.

Don Esteban looked at him swiftly. "Does it not occur to you that I may have been referring to Miguel Brocamonte?" he asked in return. "He was the one instigating the riot."

"Your position in this matter appears to be something of an enigma, *señor*."

"Am I vitally concerned in it?" Don Esteban asked.

"You could be, *señor*. It is your opportunity for advancement, great personal glory—"

"I can see no personal glory in leading human beings to slaughter in an unworthy cause."

"An unworthy cause, *señor*?" Don Manuel flamed.

"Let us speak plainly, *señor*. Your father would have men do battle, suffer and bleed and die, that he might sit in a high place. He does not even have the legitimate excuse that he will strike the shackles from the oppressed. The present government is kind and just, and if your father was to set up another tomorrow it could be no more. It would not be improving conditions. So

why cause turmoil, misery and suffering, *señor?*"

"This from a man of blood who has been insulted by the governor, ordered into exile for a prank! Are you a worm, Don Esteban? Have you no courage?"

"*Señor!*" Don Esteban thundered. "You forget yourself, I think."

"I forget nothing."

"I am willing to overlook your remark and accept your apology."

"I have no apology to offer, Don Esteban."

"Then—" But Don Esteban suddenly stopped speaking. He looked into the other man's blazing eyes. Ordinarily, there would be a swift outcome to a situation like this—a blow, a challenge, a settlement with blades. But Don Esteban was remembering the semidark, cool little chapel at the mission, old Fray Francisco's soothing voice, and the oath he had taken.

"Don Manuel del Rio, we will go into this matter some day in the future," he said.

Don Manuel looked amazed. "Are you in the habit of delaying such matters, *señor?*"

"Are you so eager to die?" Don Esteban cried, thrusting his face forward.

"It appears that I'll never die on the point of your blade, *señor*. 'Tis a pretty weapon, with a hilt flaming with precious jewels. But it seems to be a weapon for ornament only."

"Beware! You'll go too far!"

THEY had raised their voices and attracted attention. Loiterers outside the door of the warehouse were watching and listening. Those inside looked at the two men in amazement, and Anita del Rio, seeing the expression in her brother's face, gestured to her *dueña* to follow and moved forward swiftly.

"Manuel, let us leave," she said. "There are no goods here I wish to buy."

"Go to the carriage with your *dueña*," her brother ordered. "I have some business—"

"Understand me, *señor*," Don Esteban

interrupted. "This business must wait. At a certain time in the future, I shall be happy to oblige you."

"In the future? Can I be assured, *señor*, that you will not take ship and run away?"

"What is this?" Don Esteban roared.

"You avoided a challenge by hurrying away from Monterey, I have heard."

Don Esteban almost choked with rage. Suddenly he lurched forward, seized Don Manuel's arms and forced him back against the wall, and held him helpless there.

"If I was not under an oath—" he began.

"So you are under an oath, *señor?* To save your hide?" Don Manuel sneered.

"I am under oath not to give or accept challenge for the space of sixty days."

"And how do we know that, Don Esteban?"

"*Dios!* Are you now accusing me of falsehood? I shall kill you for that at the proper time, Manuel del Rio."

"The proper time for a man to resent an insult is when that insult is given him, *señor*. Perhaps you do not consider that you have been insulted. Must I strike you?"

The *señorita* ran at them. "Manuel! Don Esteban!" she cried. "Control yourselves! Are you mad? There must be no trouble between you."

Don Esteban suddenly released the man he held, whirled around and strode past the *señorita* and through the door. The gaping natives and peons who had been watching the quarrel scattered quickly at sight of the rage in his face.

THIS could not be endured, Don Esteban told himself. He would ask Fray Francisco to release him from his oath. He could not take such insults and live.

He stalked toward the *posada*, which was only a short distance away. News of the quarrel was being spread rapidly, he knew. He would have to make certain that intelligence regarding his oath got about, or these people would be thinking he was a craven.

As he neared the door of the *posada*, he

saw two horses standing with their heads hanging and lathered sides heaving, as if they had just come off the highway after being hard ridden. But he gave them scant attention.

He swung through the door and straightened, blinking to adjust his eyes to the semi-gloom of the interior. A number of men were in the common room, and they were unusually quiet. As Don Esteban started toward the patio door, he suddenly found himself confronted by two travel-stained young *caballeros*.

Juan Feliz and Marcos Chavez had arrived.

"You?" Don Esteban cried.

"*Sí, señor!*" Juan Feliz said. "You did not expect us? Since you ran away from Monterey to avoid our challenge, we have followed you here at some inconvenience to ourselves."

"We have come to convince you, *señor*, that one cannot with impunity insult a lady

of gentility when we have the honor of her acquaintance," Marcos Chavez added.

"Young asses!" Don Esteban growled.

"You add personal insult to your other offense, *señor?*" Juan Feliz demanded.

"I could split you both with a blade, one after the other," Don Esteban warned them. "Do not taunt me, else I may do it."

"Do we understand, *señor*, that you refuse combat?" Marcos Chavez asked.

"I'd be delighted to accommodate you, *señores*, but I am under an oath to refrain from violence."

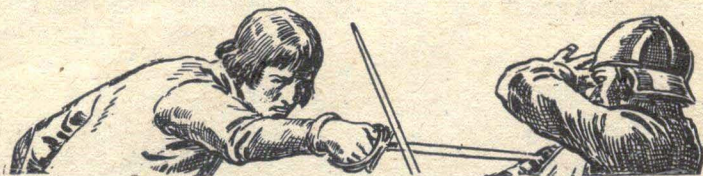
"'Tis a trick!" Juan Feliz cried. "You take refuge behind an oath, knowing we would call you to account."

"Have a care, *señor!*" Don Esteban warned.

Marcos Chavez faced him squarely. "Don Esteban de la Zamora, coward, poltroon—"

Don Esteban gave a roar of rage and rushed toward him.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



The Crusaders march again!

To battle the Saracens go the flower of Europe's knight-hood. Long swords clash with scimitars in a flaming tale of the Crusades by Theodore Roscoe, entitled

Crescent and Cross

Also other superb stories of chivalry by Lawrence, . . . Stillson . . . and Challis, all complete in the November issue of

CAVALIER CLASSICS

NOW ON THE STANDS . . . 10¢

In event of a sellout, send 10¢ to 280 Broadway, N. Y. C. and a copy will be mailed to you.

A blow doubled him; he lurched to the hot earth; and Brennan booted him with a foot that was almost bare



Another Road to Destiny

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

Author of "Yaqui Gold," "King of Knaves," etc.

When you've finished your trek across a blistering desert in search of somebody who isn't there, stop and think twice about this Jewel in the Lotus. It may save you a return trip

WHEN CARTER found that tin-roofed shack near the causeway which leads from the mainland to Massowa, he knew that he was licked. He knew that he could not get Brennan off the Somali Coast and back into the world of mines and men.

Carter's broad shoulders sagged as he stood there, beaten before he had started.

Brennan's chin was square, and everything else as made to suggest hardness: a nose somewhat set off center; prominent cheekbones; and then his stature. He was tall and broad as Carter, and somewhat darker, with wiry hair on his big paws and muscular forearms.

None of Brennan fitted into the portrait of any saint, yet all that he lacked now was a nimbus. Something had happened inside Brennan, and its force showed in his eyes. Once merely blue and deep-set, they now had more than color.

Carter had come to salvage one of the damned. Now he saw that the rumors were too true to be laughed off. Brennan was

beyond saving, but their friendship had been too long and too deep for Carter to admit the truth. If he retreated without, an effort, he would always regret it.

Carter had only one weapon and it probably was dull. He gestured broadly to include the thatched huts along the beach, and the masts and raking yards of the pearling fleet, which were black against the sky. The hot wind was heavy with the stench of *sadaf* oysters.

"Stinking place," Carter said. "Sorry you're down and out; never thought you'd land on the beach. But I got a job for you. I'll help you come back."

Trying not to show it, he braced himself, ready for those big fists. If Brennan flared up, there was hope. But the man smiled at the friendly contempt in Carter's sharp face and hazel eyes. He noted the sprinkling of gray in Carter's sandy hair, the weariness and the lines that made the broad mouth straight and hard.

He said, "Come in, Dan. You're tired, and probably you've been working too hard and worrying too much."

The porter who had brought Carter's luggage from the boat was no longer there. He preferred not to wait at the door of a white man who was too low to have servants. When Brennan picked up the bags, Carter said, "If you're too poor to hire natives, I'd better eat at the hotel."

But you can't insult a saint. Anyone but Carter would have walked out. He stayed because he remembered how they had worked their way through school; how he had almost flunked integral calculus and method of least squares, and how Brennan had pulled him through, saying, "Don't try to understand calculus—you have to feel it. It's almost mystic; and like poetry, only more beautiful."

That had left him gaping, even after he did pass.

Then the flu epidemic: Carter had somehow worked Brennan's shift at the filling station, and then done his own stint of janitor work. These things could not be wasted, so Carter stayed; for his own sake, since having seen, he could not quit.

All this as he watched Brennan bake yams and dourra cakes. There was goat milk and cheese. Finally, a can of peaches from the States; the imported touch, for an honored guest.

But there was no meat. Carter knew why when a scrawny little Hindu came in and said by way of greeting, "Peace to all living things!"

If this had been less like a benediction, and even a little stagey, Carter would have been glad. Instead, he was afraid of defeat, and worried.

THIS dark man who wore a turban and loin cloth and a white cape that was surprisingly clean for having been a blanket by night was called Ramakrishna. Carter understood everything. Now the odds were two saints against one practical man.

Carter eyed the Hindu, spat on the clean dirt floor by way of comment, and said to Brennan, "So you've got a Mahatma Gandhi Junior to show you the path? You'll start wearing diapers when you get the final lesson in wasting your life, huh?"

Ramakrishna's eyes remained dark and friendly, and his thin face became amiable. "Not a *mahatma*, Mr. Brennan. That means, exalted soul. I am merely a teacher, who is perhaps more advanced along the path of liberation."

Carter groaned, "That stuff! Do you mean you've buried yourself in this dump because your pal here says, 'We are bound to the Wheel'? I thought it was about Lane following your bum advice and then shooting himself."

"It is both." Brennan answered. "Lane asked me about that girl, and I did not have guts enough to tell the truth."

"So he married her." Carter carried on with the story he had heard first in Egypt, and then in Djibouti. "And didn't leave Ethiopia in time, and he heard too much about her, and he couldn't take it."

Ramakrishna's turban slowly inclined in the firelight. In mechanical English he said, "Mr. Lane tried to run from destiny.

His *karma* was one of humiliation, and the debt could be paid only in humiliation. So since he tried to evade it, he remains bound to the wheel, and he must come back in another life to make good. Your friend tries to pay in full now. In this life, you understand—to win release from his debt.”

Carter rose and shook his fist under the Hindu's nose. “Look here, you! You're making a fool of Brennan with this jargon, this pious resignation, this passive endurance tripe! Okay for you gutless Hindus, but Brennan's a white man, with a man's work to do, do you understand?”

Ramakrishna looked up and quietly said, “I did not persuade. He was troubled, drinking heavily by way of penance. He asked, and I explained. He has a debt of cowardice. He was afraid to speak the truth in full. He was also afraid to remain silent and let the man learn the truth himself.”

“That's right,” Brennan said. “Next to you, Lane was my best friend. He thought she was an officer's widow. I told him to marry her and leave Ethiopia. He asked, why leave. I hedged and smoothed it over. He signed a new contract. I hadn't foreseen that—

“Well, this is my way of paying a debt. A free choice. Having seen what pride did for Lane, I have none, and you can not offend me. Particularly not by staging an act, Dan.”

This rang too true. He had lived with his resolution so long that it became commonplace. Brennan would stay until malaria ended him and his penance. Carter knew better than to waste any mention of that mineralogical survey in western Ethiopia, a two years' job in which Brennan could help him, and help himself also.

Carter needed time to prepare another approach. There was one, but it needed saint-appeal.

Carter turned to scowl at Ramakrishna. The Hindu answered the silent accusation: “I did not name the penance. He asked. I explained.”

Carter's big hand almost swallowed the

mystic's shoulder as he lifted him to his feet and hustled him to the door. “Get out! Stay out!”

He heaved and booted at once. The Hindu landed all asprawl, three yards from the house. He lay there, quivering, until he could groan a little and claw at the hard earth with his fingers. Carter was too full of wrath to compare his stature with Ramakrishna's.

“SIT down, Brennan. Now that that faker is out for a few minutes, I'll tell you about a job. You know the Danakil country?”

“I marched the length of it and I don't blame people for doubting that any white man can live through it. No work there—going through was just a stunt, blowhard vanity, I guess.”

Carter, however, had invented a task. He had caught the glint of something almost the cousin of anger in Brennan's eyes, when the Hindu smashed against the hard earth. And as long as there is any wrath in a man, he can be saved from becoming a saint.

What he was about to propose would be kill or cure, but it was worth the risk.

“There is a job, if you have guts enough. Remember Warren and Hardy?”

Brennan closed his eyes for a moment, then nodded. “Class of '31.”

Carter continued improvising. He was betting that Brennan had been out of touch with the world too long to know that his classmates had desk jobs in New York; so it was safe to say, “Exploring inland, from Djibouti, and their plane crashed. In the Aussa Oasis.”

“Poor devils! I never thought I'd get out of there.”

“They're alive,” Carter went on. “But they can't even try to leave. The Sultan of Aussa is afraid they're spies and that the Italians would bomb him for helping them. But he knows you. You were in there before this Ethiopian conquest, and you could convince him they're okay.”

Carter hunched forward, eyes narrowed to hazel fire under shaggy brows; his face

had tightened, making it seem thinner, sharper.

"You"— He pointed— "You are the only white man alive who knows the Sultan. That is our job."

"How did you hear about Warren and Hardy?" This was a simple question, with no doubt implied. "Well—I guess it is our job. Or mine, anyway."

"Rumors," Carter answered. "In Djibouti. My business over here can wait a bit. If you come out of the Danakil country a second time, you've paid off *karma*, or whatever you call the Hindu idea of debts to fate."

Brennan did not ask what business had brought Carter to Djibouti, though an answer was easy enough: that geological survey. He said, "We can get camels and men south of here, at the potash mines. Now I want to see about Ramakrishna. He seemed to be hurt."

But the Hindu was not there. Carter was no more surprised than Brennan; for he had heard of the way of mystics. Neither was he amazed that Brennan had taken his teacher's mauling so calmly: that was part of the doctrine of non-action as a way to avoid moral debts. All he had now to do was to build up a background for the disastrous aerial survey.

A WEEK later, an Arab *dhow* landed Carter and Brennan at the port of the potash mining concession. Kulluli, the mining town, was a few miles inland, a sprawl of native huts among the arid hills. The temperature was over one hundred and forty in the shade. It would be higher, further south.

The Italians who operated the concession lived in tin-roofed houses near the potash beds. The alkali deposit gleamed like an inland sea, and the wind that blew across its face was bitter with chemical grit. The particles stung Carter's eyes; they mixed with sweat and made lye that burned his tough skin.

The superintendent of the station had heard of Brennan; so while he was friendly enough, he did not invite the travelers to

his quarters. He sent them beer and his compliments. That a man is not violent does not prove he is sane.

So Carter and Brennan stayed in the native village while they hired men and camels, and bought rations and leather water jars.

Nothing ever came from the south, out of the Danakil country. Already, Carter knew why they said that whoever returned from it alive is as if he had been born again.

The Aussa Oasis was a fabled land surrounded by spearmen who lived by stealing the goats of fellow nomads—after murdering and mutilating the owners. A dozen planes could have crashed in the oasis and no one to the north would have gotten even a rumor, unless perhaps many months later.

The Aussa sultan's men killed every prowling Danakil they found within a day's march of that fertile spot; so news traveled only east and west, along the old slave route, from the Ethiopian Plateau to the Red Sea.

Along this easy route it took eight weeks or more to cover three hundred miles. Carter and Brennan were taking the hard way, because it was quicker, and not impossible. Going from south to north, Brennan had survived. All other white explorers had died of hardship or wounds.

When they set out ten days later, Carter was afraid that he was about to kill twelve men and fifteen camels and four mules to save Brennan from self-imposed penance. But it was too late to retreat; particularly when he saw Ramakrishna coming toward the caravan, from one side, as if he had waited all night to intercept it.

Carter was not surprised. He had been fearing this. He faced the little man who walked, leading a cream-colored jackass. Then he saw that the animal was loaded with supplies. Either Ramakrishna did not suspect the hoax, or else he intended to choose the hour for its exposure.

Carter said to Brennan, "He ought to have a lily in his hand. He will, too, if he butts in around here."

"He can take care of himself. And don't worry; he doesn't nurse grudges."

"Did you tell him to trail us?"

"No. I'd really not have to."

Ramakrishna bade them good morning. Carter demanded, "Where are you going?" Though these words were wasted, for already he knew the answer.

"With you," the Hindu said. "I have my own supplies, but I would rather not travel alone." He took Carter's silence for permission, and turned to join the tail of the caravan.

During the midday halt, when the men huddled under tarpaulins stretched from heap-up packs, Ramakrishna did not approach his disciple. Under the shelter, the thermometer read one fifty one.

Seeing the Hindu sitting out there in the open began to shake Carter. *Peace to all living things!* He wondered what the fellow's game could be.

That evening, they camped at a water hole just south of the Eritrean frontier. Iron-black peaks swung away to the west, toward the Ethiopian plateau. On the other side of Carter was a chain of extinct volcanoes which kept the Red Sea from filling the Danakil Depression. Straight ahead, the salt bottom dropped down, finally reaching four hundred feet below sea level, and heat beyond imagining.

Shimmering panels of air danced up from the glistening pit.

The brown men at the water hole were Indertas who had come to hew salt to take inland. Carter was glad that they were friendly; for the breech of his rifle was too hot to be touched without flinching.

Yasu, the chief of the camel men, was armed, and so were four of the drivers. Brennan of course would not carry any weapon. He said that he did not believe in arms to resist what a man's past had earned.

Carter's cracking lips hurt too much for argument or prediction. But he was certain enough that prowling Danakil spearmen and the Danakil Depression would be a cure for saintliness and contemplating the Jewel in the Lotus.

THE following sunrise made him realize how cool the first day had been. Sulphur deposits made yellow splashes to the east, and on the left was a volcanic cone so perfect that it could not have been formed by nature: it must have been built by a wizard, and for no good purpose. Far off, ostriches raced across the rocky flats, and here and there lizards darted about.

At first Carter had wondered at the number of goatskin water jars Brennan had brought. Now he thought that there should have been twice as many. In desert Arabia a man can march all day without a drink; but this was the Danakil country. Soon the skins were flat.

Refilling them that evening, at the first water hole, was slow and trying. The water had to be dipped up in a gallon tin, for the lava blowhole in which it had collected was little over a foot in diameter.

"Don't drink more than you have to," Brennan warned.

Carter grimaced and gulped some more of the clear water. It was bitter, puckering, dirty-tasting. "I didn't expect champagne," he said, and took more. "Not out here."

A moment later, he was doubled up. He gritted his teeth, but could not keep from groaning. One of the camel men yelled and rolled from the cramps the volcanically tainted water had caused.

Brennan's face tightened. He shuddered, then said, "We'll only have to drink this for a day, and we'll get to sweet water for a while."

Ramakrishna seemed unaffected by the mineral water. Now that camp was made, the Hindu sat somewhat apart, cross-legged. Carter recognized the posture prescribed for meditation. He watched the man's breathing and heard it. There was no perspiration on his face, though the thermometer was still over a hundred and forty.

"Yoga exercises," was Carter's thought.

Ramakrishna began to make a sound that seemed to come first from his throat, then from his chest, and finally from his stomach. His lips did not move, as far as

Carter could see in the brief twilight, but the sound was articulate: "*Om! mani padme Hum!*"

Hail! The Jewel in the Lotus Flower. Carter knew that much; many people do, though few suspect the real meaning. Most difficult of all is *Om!* which if properly pronounced enables the speaker to create an entire world.

A chill ran down his spine, and there was a catch in his throat when Ramakrishna repeated the mystic invocation. *Om!* was not loudly uttered, yet it rolled resonant as if the frail Hindu had become a sounding board.

The men seemed unaware of this recital. Carter forced himself to turn away. He was dizzy, and not entirely from heat and thirst. Brennan was not doing any *yoga* exercises. Either he had never gone far enough in his studies, or else the desert was too much for him.

Carter wondered whether there was not a chance of becoming as mad as his two companions. Worst of all was waiting for Ramakrishna to expose the hoax. The Hindu must know; anyone who could recite *Jewel in the Lotus* one hundred and eight times, and with a bellyful of poisonous water, could certainly read a man's mind.

Halfway to the next water hole, the caravan camped not far from an active volcano. Sulphur fumes tainted the air, and the low-hanging vapor reflected the red of the crater. The sluggish lava flow could hardly have added to the temperature, though the glare made the night seem hotter.

Then, two days later, they came to Matahala, where tall tribesmen herded goats in an oasis which anywhere else would have been called desert.

There were fewer than five hundred in the tribe. The men carried long spears. Their lean bodies were criss-crossed with corded scars. Two boys led the chief, who was blind. Battle had cost him his eyes.

When he thanked Carter for the tobacco and coffee and knives, he said, "Do not go on. The wild Danakil will kill you. They

want our rich country, and one by one, they kill us. There were twice as many of us in my father's time."

After leaving the oasis, Carter's party marched in the hours before dawn, and camped through the heat of the day; and at night they resumed the march.

Two of the caravan men were delirious and had to be tied to camels. No one else rode, for each beast had its burden of water. There was no room for fodder; and in the waste ahead even tamarisk was scarce.

Lizards and snakes and flights of partridges: nothing else lived on the way to Labedin Wells. Or so Carter thought, until he saw the thin, narrow-hipped man, far off on the shoulder of a lava flow.

YASU went to warn the camel men, for it would presently be time to camp. No one must go beyond reach and sight of his fellows. But with all the strict watch, a camel was missing at sunrise, and one of the drivers was gone. Just that much less water could be carried.

Several hundred yards from the camp site, the caravan passed the missing driver. He had been speared and mutilated. A Danakil prowler was on his way home with a trophy to convince some desert girl that he was a good provider. Luckily, no guns had been stolen.

That day, two nomads watched the caravan from a distant ledge. Carter squinted through his glasses. There was no mistaking the broad shoulders, the narrow hips, the kinky hair; the goatskin canteen and the long-bladed Danakil spear. Carter was all too full of the night just past. He leveled his rifle. Reprisal was all that these wild men understood.

"Do not shoot!" That calm voice was so unexpected and close to his ear that Carter obeyed; he lowered the weapon and turned. Then he saw Ramakrishna, and the Hindu went on, "Peace to all living things! Let us not have any blood guilt on our heads."

Carter cursed and faced once more toward the ledge. The nomads had ducked

for cover, and would not again expose themselves to rifle fire; not after that unmistakable move he had made, showing a handiness that no native of that gun-hungry desert could have.

From now on they would creep up by night, an inch at a time, spearing whoever was a few yards too far from his fellows. They would imitate the sound of a camel fighting his hobbles, and when a man came to investigate, he would be speared.

This might have been anyway; but now the nomads were warned to added stealth. All that knowledge was upon Carter in an instant; and he spun back, rifle at his hip, pointing at the Hindu's stomach.

The scrawny little fellow was not alarmed. Carter controlled his wrath, and for a moment the desert became dark. But when he recovered, he knew that he had saved his own life. If he had fired, he himself would have gone amuck. With heat and hardship, no man's sanity could be trusted.

At the night halt, Carter could see no chance of victory. Two saints and the desert were getting him under control. He wanted to quit, and yet he could not: so he did not sleep.

The sentries were fatalistic enough to nod. Brennan and Ramakrishna trusted to Cosmic Justice, a term that Carter used in trying to explain *karma* to himself.

To fight Brennan's self-annihilation, he had to understand this paying of debts, this being "liberated from desire." The doctrines he had heard in the lands of Hinduism and Buddhism and then laughed off as nonsense now had to be understood; he had to understand, or he would fail when he denounced them.

Trying to understand, however, was in itself a form of surrender, an admission of validity. His wrath kept him awake, and his senses were abnormally keen from restlessness. He perceived a sound too small for any other ear in camp.

Perhaps he smelled rancid grease. Maybe he caught the half-gleam of steel in the opalescence just before moonrise. At once, he knew that a stranger had come

to camp; that Ramakrishna was about to die.

Carter drew his pistol and prayed. The Hindu had to be saved and made ridiculous. You can't fight a dead man!

Then Carter had the prowler sky-lined. He fired twice, and heard the spearhead ring against rock.

Caravan men yelled and scurried about. Brennan, now aroused, played a flashlight into the middle of the tangle.

A dead Danakil lay across his long spear. Carter said to Ramakrishna, "I didn't have time to tell this fellow about the Jewel in the Lotus."

"He will learn in the lives to come."

Carter turned to Brennan. "You better start wearing a gun."

Brennan said, "I do not care to add to my present debt."

That was more than Carter could stand. He turned on the two, and pointed at the Hindu. "So I carry the killer's *karma*, while you two frauds go your saintly way, huh? Quit fooling yourselves, quit posing!"

Brennan's face tightened, and indignation showed in his eyes. But the Hindu spoiled Carter's victory by saying, "You acted for us all, and so each has taken a share of your blood guilt. You did this for us as a soldier or a headsman, who strikes for his group."

AT LABEDIN WELLS, the hungry animals grazed. Oasis dwellers sold goatskin jars to replace those slashed to pieces when camels fell in the lava beds. Rations were gathered, and tattered sandals repaired.

The next well lay across a waterless stretch six marches wide. This was the worst hazard of the trip, except perhaps the nomads who lived just beyond the barrier. Before facing the final test, Carter wanted one thing made sure.

He cornered Ramakrishna. "You know I hate your guts and you know why. But before it's too late, I want to know why you're here."

"I want to see," the Hindu deliberately

answered, "what my disciple does when he learns that there are no aviators."

"Look here—say, what do you mean?"

"You have not had enough practice at falsehood, Mr. Carter. I knew the truth, and without asking at Massowa, or cabling Djibouti."

"Then why didn't you tell him then and there? Suppose he dies on this march? Where does that put you? You won't lie or kill, but you let me do both. I can't understand your cockeyed logic!"

"Is it not written how Krishna said to Arjuna, the Pandu Prince, just before the battle, 'Think not, O Prince, that ever there was a time when all these men did not live; think not that ever there will be a time when all these men shall not live; therefore strike, Pandu Prince!'"

"Do you see, you and I and he, we all have our work to do, not because we desire the result of that work, but because each must do according to his nature.

"So, it makes no difference if one or all of us die on this march. There was never a time when we three were not alive, nor ever a time when we shall not live."

This, given in the face of peril, stunned Carter. His wrath did not rise until he realized that he had begun to accept the Hindu's appraisal of men and their fate. A man dared not accept such a thing, for if he did, he would sit down and perish before he did his work.

And Carter's work was to get Brennan out of the world of fantasy, and into the world of action, of doing, of making things.

"Put your cards on the table!" His voice trembled, then cracked. "What is your game? You're holding out. You didn't tell him at the start because then he'd have forgiven me, and perhaps listened until I told him your way of living is not for our kind of people.

"No—you want me to march him further into Hell; and then when he learns the truth, he'll call me a prime louse and he'll laugh off my influence.

"All right—go to it! I'll win then."

Ramakrishna's smile was a queer blend

of pity and amusement as he considered Carter's challenge. "You think I planned to make one friend hate another? With this blindness in your mind, can I answer the question about the soldiers who were dead, yet not dead? And why kindly Krishna told the humane prince to lead his men to death and the vultures?"

"But if we reach the next oasis, you will be wiser, and I will be wiser, and perhaps I can teach and you can learn."

Ramakrishna would have turned, but Carter caught his arm.

"Sit down! I think I've got it. You seem to mean that there always are plenty of chumps to fight wars, that there always will be, and it makes no difference—no!"

The elusiveness of the answer angered Carter, for he had almost gotten it, and then falsity mocked him. "No, you with your turn-the-other-cheek stuff, you'd not preach that.

"Maybe you mean reincarnation. Those soldiers were always alive, in one form or another, a million years before Arjuna got up his army. When they finished hacking each other, they were not dead in the way we learned, dead till a final and single judgment and resurrection. You mean, they are only dead until their next incarnation.

"So it really made no difference, and Arjuna had no reason to regret being a prince whose job it was to say forward march. . . . Quit grinning, you! What's funny?"

RAMAKRISHNA raised his hand. "Please believe me, I am not mocking you. I am happy to see that while you condemn me, you still think a little before you condemn. You are not quite right, no, but you are close enough.

"Listen, Mr. Carter—we are all so close to our end that I must tell you what I can.

"When Time began, there was just a certain amount of life in the universe. It never varies, it changes only its form. The grain is alive, it nourishes the ox instead of sprouting. Is the grain then less alive for giving strength to the beast? Is there

less life now than when Brahma exhaled his vitalizing breath into this cycle—”

He paused, deliberately put his finger tips together. Now he risked a little mockery; self-mockery, Carter suspected, for the little man went on in a school-teacher tone, “At the beginning of a cycle that will end exactly three hundred and eleven thousand billion years, at which time Brahma will inhale and draw all life from the universe, until he exhales again. Please do not ask me how we estimate this, but it is so written.”

“Huh? Three hundred thousand billion years—Aw—”

“Yes, a period we call a *maha-kalpa*, a life cycle. So, Mr. Carter, if you die, if I die, if Brennan dies on this march, or a thousand years hence, what difference does it make? The life that leaves us prolongs the life of the vultures, and are they less than we in the sight of the infinite?”

“Three — hundred — thousand — billion—”

But Ramakrishna was walking from the encampment, to meditate. Carter leaped to his feet; he wanted to go and shake the little mocker, but something about the Hindu's manner made him remember the first time he had pushed him around, and he did not like that memory.

Meditation, which Brennan also practiced, must have some nourishing quality, Carter decided; for he, Carter, had lost more weight, was more haggard, was shakier on his legs than either saint. Something was strengthening them.

Yet Carter felt, deep in his heart, that they had only hypnotized themselves, that living on illusion is not a way to live.

Once the caravan left Labedin Wells, there were long detours to get around ravines that could not be crossed; hours of crouching in caverns for shelter from the sun. It was so hot that the men huddled against each other for mutual coolness. Water was rationed out, and there was not enough. They chewed the reeking goatskin jars, lest a drop be wasted.

Finally Brennan wavered. Every man's life depended on his memory, since for

some days he had not been able to get any guides. No native would risk leaving the security of an oasis to venture into a desert where Danakil nomads lurked.

“The one big slip,” he said to Carter. “When I headed from the Awash River, it was easy going north into the Aussa country, and it wasn't hard getting guides for a northbound march. It never occurred to me that I couldn't get guides going south.”

His eyes were bloodshot. For days there had been no water for shaving, and black bristles reached through the grime on his squarish face. He was worried; and when a saint wavers, he becomes a man.

Carter said, “Quit staring at your hands. It's not your fault if we all croak, and our lives aren't in your hands. Ask Ramakrishna.”

THEY finally found a well, and it was not dry. But there was little forage for the animals. All that night, Carter was kept awake by their gnawing at tamarisk and acacia branches.

There were no nomads to block the water supply, since their herds had eaten nearly every bit of herbage, and they had marched on. Carter gave the animals some of the slender stock of meal, but it was far from certain that they could carry enough water.

At the next oasis there was grazing, but half the animals had died of hunger and exhaustion. At the approach of the caravan, the natives fled with their herds. There was no chance of buying fresh camels or jackasses.

That night Carter said, “Knocking off that prowler in the dark scared everyone, good and bad alike. They're afraid of our guns.”

Brennan answered, “I guess you see now what Ramakrishna meant when he said we all shared in that killing?”

Carter nodded. “Uhuh.” He rubbed his thin beak of a nose. “Yes, it's simple. I could have startled the fellow and slugged him. The truth of it is, I shot mainly to make a chump of Ramakrishna.”

The week that followed was a blind stumbling over rock and through thorns; but finally, more crawling than walking, Carter saw a faroff gray-green smudge. This was a loop of the Awash River. They had reached their goal, and were on the edge of the Sultanate of Aussa.

Presently the mirage thinned enough to reveal thatched huts and fields of millet. With fresh animals, it would now be easy to follow the Awash to within a day's march of Dessie, the market-town on the edge of the Ethiopian plateau. Here, by the river, they would wait for the Sultan's permission to enter the oasis.

Yasu was hurrying to the nearby clump of beehive-shaped huts to reassure the suspicious natives. The others, still unable to believe that they were alive, knelt in the shade and praised Allah.

Brennan drank, but he did not eat any of the dry meal that he gave the men, now that fresh supplies were in sight. His first thought was of the stranded aviators. "I'll write to the Sultan. We've got to get a runner going, right away."

Carter had waited for this moment. For weeks he had worked toward it. He would have hated it had not so much hung on it. It was hard to speak. Then he became calm, and knew that his grin would be convincing.

He said, "Go ahead with your greetings, but don't mention Warren and Hardy, or the Sultan'll think you're crazy."

Brennan rose. "What do you mean?"

"Might as well tell you the truth," Carter cheerfully went on. "You have been out of touch with things, so you don't realize how much question there has been about your marching the length of the Danakil Depression. So I rigged this whole business. This time you have a witness—a white witness, I mean.

"And it'll help me, too. The ballyhoo, I mean. Make me the contacts I need to get in on a mineralogical and geological survey of all western Ethiopia—and I'll cut you in on the job. Simple, huh?"

Finally Brennan began to understand.

He ceased looking like a saint. He stuttered, and his voice was hoarse and shaking.

"You risked—all these lives—for damn cheap vanity. Press-agent stuff. Why you lousy—!"

He lashed out with those big fists and Carter met him, toe to toe. At first he pulled his punches, simply because this was one fight he had to throw.

But Brennan's fury made that needless. Carter was beaten down by rage that frightened him. A blow doubled him, and he lurched to the hot earth. Brennan yelled, "Here's one for the men you murdered on the way!" and booted him with a foot that was almost bare.

Carter's head spun, his ears roared, and blood blinded him. What followed was not entirely clear, but it seemed that the Hindu seized Brennan's arm before he could kick again.

And after that an amazing thing happened; amazing, and disconcerting.

Brennan looked down, and then, though Carter could not believe this, the man knelt before the saint. Words came in sharply; others blurred out, and none made too much sense: ". . . *Guru*, I forgot . . . wrath comes back to strike the wrathful . . . I couldn't help it . . . wasted all your teaching . . . *Guru*—"

WHEN Carter regained his breath and his senses, he was ashamed at seeing a white man kneeling. He turned his head and got to his feet, for he had work to do. But after seeing Brennan's face and hearing his penitent outburst, Carter would rather have repeated the march that had just ended.

So this was the end of everything he'd done to re-awaken Brennan. One hundred percent washout!

Thick-lipped, he said, "Get up, you're a heck of a saint. Can't take a joke. When you were a plain man, you never kicked a fellow after you'd laid him out. Be a man again. Even if you did believe in Rama-krishna, you can't live up to it."

Reaction had taken Brennan's remain-

ing strength, and he could not get up. Carter crouched in the sand beside him, and heard the beaten victor mumble, "I guess you're right, Dan. I thought I could live up to it, but I guess I can't. They say we live by action, and I guess they're right."

Carter began to hate his victory. Until this moment, it had never occurred to him that he would destroy Brennan's hard-won achievement, would befoul that source of inner strength which had kept the man serene and placid through danger and thirst and hunger; though if he had known, he would still have acted, for he knew that the final test of strength is doing.

While he no longer ridiculed, he still believed that a choice had to be made, and that there was only one choice for Brennan. So he went on to clinch his victory:

"Don't be so unhappy about it. Nothing's lost. You can—

"Look, buddy! You've more than made up for the cowardice, as you called it, that made poor Lane kill himself. Sure, I staged this phoney to make you blow up—to show yourself that even with what good the mahatma's ideas probably have, they aren't for our kind of people!"

Breathless, he pressed his advantage. "Meditation for Hindus, action for us. *Karma*—I think I understand what you fellows mean. If you do someone some dirt, you make a debt, and you have to pay up, voluntarily or else when it finally catches up.

"All right, you've worked off your debt of chicken-heartedness that spared a man's feelings for a while and then killed him finally. On this march, you've squared your account. I'm using your own arguments, and I'm right."

Brennan looked up into his friend's face, and there was a gleam of the same spirit that showed in Carter's eyes and made his voice ring with command; yet something held him back.

"It's this, Dan. In one second of anger, I betrayed what I had spent a couple years worshipping. Self-control, beating

down fear, greed, vanity. When you said our march was good ballyhoo, risking our own and other lives to win an appeal to the cheapest human instinct, I blew up."

He sighed. "Well, at that, I am square, I guess, as far as my intentions were concerned. But it doesn't make sense, a backslider calling his account paid in full."

Carter gave him a hand, pulled him to his feet; he laid a hand on Brennan's shoulder. "Never mind thinking, that's for mahatmas. We're not wired up that way, us Occidentals."

Then Ramakrishna cut in, saying, to Carter's great amazement: "Your feeling of guilt finally sent you into the desert to save lives, as you believed. You challenged Destiny to destroy you. Whoever lives long enough to cross this land is as if he had been born again. So your friend is right; and since Destiny did not destroy you, you are justified. Yes, twice-born, in a way of speaking."

BEFORE Brennan could find words, the Hindu's glance shifted to Carter, and he said, "If malice had made me expose your lie, it would have made my wrong worse than yours, for your action had neither greed nor pride behind it. You acted according to your place in life—just as Arjuna incurred no debt to Fate for leading his men to battle. Being born a prince, it was his work to lead, to act, rather than to meditate!"

"I'll be damned!" Carter grinned until his broken lips hurt. "You do make sense. We both do. Your line is that an honest doer is as good as an honest thinker, and if Brennan decides for action, it's okay by you?"

Ramakrishna smiled whimsically. "In your language, I would say, it is okay by me. I encouraged this test, so that the real truth could come out. Would I wish a disciple to accept my belief if something deep in his nature made my truth a false way for him?"

"Indeed, I would have told you that at the start, if you had not been in such a hurry to throw me out of Brennan's house.

So, for a strong man, a strong lesson. That you both win the truth through action proves—”

The Hindu turned away, still smiling. The words he had not uttered were clear in Carter's mind: that the challenging of destiny through action had demonstrated that both Carter and Brennan had a place in the world, rather than in solitude and meditation.

Carter said, “There really is a job, now that you're groomed up to take it. I had to save that till last; I knew I couldn't bribe you.”

Brennan chuckled; he looked at his bleeding knuckles and at Carter's face, then he thrust out his hand.

“Put 'er there, son! After a couple years of thinking, I'm damn well ready for work!”

Glawackus to You, Too!

PAPA, that Glawackus is here again. Only this time he's got three tails and speaks Chinese. You should see him snapping up the chow mein I left for him this morning. It's very strange, because he eats with his eyes.

This is what might be called a minority report. Others will assure you that the Buckingham (Conn.) Beast has polka-dot ears and runs like a snake with legs; or that he whimpers in his sleep, but sleeps only in tree-tops from four to five a.m.; or that he is especially fond of children (take that either way you want).

IN ANY event, the dispatches are coming in again that the Glastonbury Glawackus is once more on the loose in the Buckingham section of that otherwise moderate Connecticut city. To be more exact, he (she, it) recently had a very narrow escape from being shot by one of the astonished citizens.

It seems that Mr. Citizen's wife and son had observed—and remarked on—a large animal at the edge of the family's garden. Mr. Citizen ran to the house to get his gun; but before he could get in any serious shootin', the animal had disappeared suddenly into the brush.

The description given in this case was of a creature “much larger than a cat, and of a dark color.” That was approximately the description *some* people gave of the Glastonbury Glawackus when it infested the local woods a couple of years ago.

THERE are, of course, various ways of looking at it; and when the first Glawackus hunt was on, the description may have varied a bit with the different circumstances under which it was seen. But as to the existence of the beast itself, there can of course be not doubt whatever.

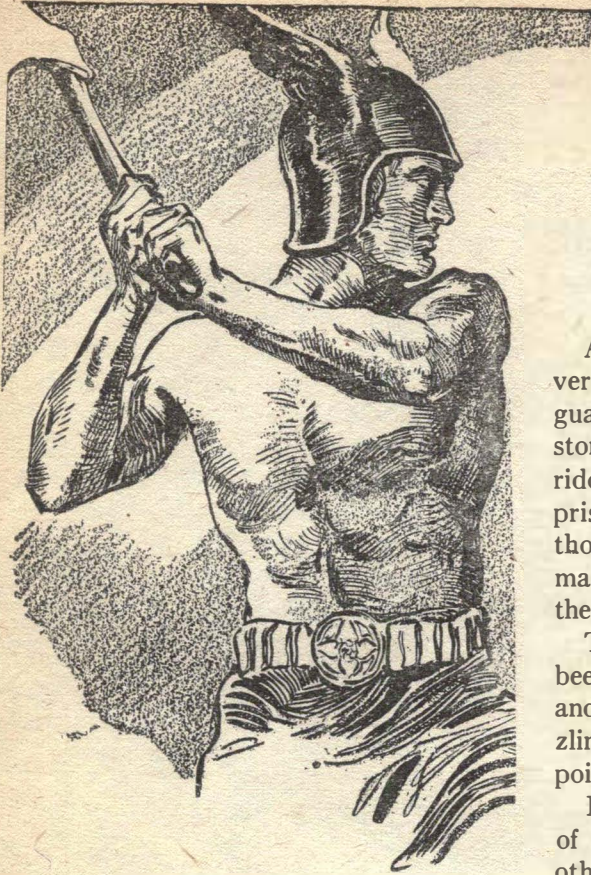
It is unfortunately necessary to add that there is a dissenting opinion about the present reappearance. Another resident of Glastonbury is now quoted as saying that he shot the Glawackus and buried it. It was like a big tawny dog, he said; and it had been running wild.

Maybe so; but people around Glastonbury are still keeping a wary weather eye on the woods.

There is some uncertainty concerning the etymology of the animal's name. Some contend that it is a combination of “Gla-,” for Glastonbury, and “wackus,” meaning how you feel when you see the thing. ARGOSY will try to keep its readers informed of developments.

—Dr. Charles Ticknor Tolson

Minions of Mercury



By WILLIAM GRAY BEYER

CHAPTER XX

POOSH 'EM UP, MARK

MARK eased himself cautiously through the window in the upper story of the prison. He had approached just as warily, half expected to find a trap. But neither the outside nor the inside of the place showed any sign of one.

The bars he had ripped from the window were still lying where he had left them, and the only footprints in the dust on the corridor floor were his own and those of the guard.

Could it be that Vargo didn't know that he had once gained admittance to the prison?

Abruptly he realized that such could very well be the case. He had killed the guard, and if he remembered correctly the stone door which opened on the lower corridor had been closed when they left the prison. Vargo and his nobles probably thought that either Tolon or Forney had managed to get out of his cell and liberated the others.

There was no evidence that Mark had been there at all. The guard's broken neck and the mangled cell door might be puzzling them considerably, but that still didn't point in Mark's direction.

For Vargo and his henchmen didn't know of his extraordinary strength. The only other time he had used it since coming to the city, had been when he had bent the cell doors in releasing himself and Dodd. And that time he had hypnotized the guards and made them forget they had ever seen him.

Those conclusions, while reassuring, didn't prevent him from exercising the utmost caution in reaching the lower cell corridor. He didn't walk; he floated. Even the light patter of his sandals might be heard.

He smiled inwardly, realizing that he had forgotten his ability to soar, on the other occasion when he had come down these stairs. Even if he had remembered, the screech of the rusty-hinged doors at each landing would have nullified his own silence.

This time the doors were all open, and his descent was utterly without sound.

As a testimonial to his memory, the stone door at the bottom of the last flight was shut. As before, a thin crack of light lined

The first installment of this five-part serial, herein concluded, appeared in the Argosy for August 31

its lower edge. Mark paused, trying to visualize the corridor behind that door. As he did so, he heard a voice. "Raise you two," it said.

"Check," said another.

"I'll see 'em," said still another. "Damn this hat!"

"My pot," claimed the first voice. "Say. Do you really think Vargo ordered these helmets?"

"That's what the captain said," was the answer.

"Yeah. But he'd rather lie than tell the truth. Remember the time he said it was Vargo's orders for us to take a bath once a day?"

"Do I remember? Say, I took seven baths before I found out it was just his idea of a joke. It's a good thing I found out when I did. That perfumed soap he issued was getting me in a lot of fights."

THERE was silence for a space, except for the slapping of cards being dealt. Mark felt a swift elation as the import of the men's words struck home.

His theory was confirmed. Vargo's hypnotic control of his subjects was powerful, so powerful that his words received obedience even when relayed through a second person. These men were wearing their helmets because their captain had said that Vargo had commanded it. Their minds were so conditioned that any order coming from him would be obeyed, as long as it was relayed by someone in authority.

The trouble here seemed to be that the captain was given to practical joking, and his word was therefore doubted. But they wouldn't hesitate an instant if Vargo's voice had issued the order. That was the important thing. Vargo, speaking over a radio, would be instantly and unquestionably obeyed. His voice alone would sway the thoughts, even the emotions of his people.

Mark stayed behind the door, hoping that the subject of the helmets would be reopened. It was.

"Suppose," postulated the first man, "that the captain is pulling another one of his jokes? There don't seem to be any

good reason for wearing these things. I'd rather have my old one. This thing wouldn't stop a sword, let alone a bullet."

Another short silence. Then: "I'd hate to do anything against Vargo's orders. Maybe he has some reason for wanting us to wear them. I've noticed 'em on several of the nobles."

"Sure," said the first man. "Everybody in the palace has them. But I figure that's only to identify those who belong in the palace. Makes it easy to spot an outsider. And I figure that the order to keep them on at all times is one of the captain's inventions. They're terrible hot in this weather, and he gets a kick out of seeing us suffer. Gimme two cards."

"Make mine three," said the other man. "What are you going to do about it?"

"I'll take the thing off—that is, if you guys will. Nobody'll see us in here."

Mark held his breath—which he didn't need anyway—during the tense silence which followed. If the man's suggestion was taken up, his immediate problem would be solved. If it wasn't, he'd never be able to free the members of the fraternity who were imprisoned within.

The guards were at the far end of the corridor, too far away to risk rushing them. He'd collect too many slugs in the attempt.

"Suppose—"

"Rats with supposing! I'm taking mine off! If the captain hears about it, I'll know who told."

Mark heard the plunk of the helmet striking the floor. A second later it was followed by two more.

"Aaah. That's better."

Mark pulled the door open and stepped into the corridor. "Much better," he agreed, freezing the surprised three in their seats. "Go on with your game, boys. Don't think of anything else, least of all your prisoners."

Obediently, the three guards lost themselves in the game of cards, paying not the slightest attention when he removed the ring of keys from the wall. Nor did they turn their heads when he opened cell after cell, calling softly to the sleeping prisoners to get out and report back to Ira.

THE thieves came out of their cells, one by one, looked wonderingly at the guards, and quietly filed out the front door. Mark released the last one and shut the door after him.

Noticing that the card game seemed about to come to an abrupt end because one of the guards had garnered almost all of the visible cash, he reached over and redistributed it. Then he went on exploring.

Ira had said that a passage existed between this place and the palace. The appearance of Dene Baron, the last time he was here, indicated the same thing. He certainly hadn't come in the door, for Mark had heard him come, even though he was barely conscious and trying to regain his senses at the time.

A few minute's search showed him the entrance to the tunnel. It was at the other end of the corridor, and protected by a locked door of thick iron bars. One of the keys on the ring opened it.

Once more resorting to his gift of levitation, Mark floated along the tunnel. It was dark and he proceeded slowly. Even so he failed to stop himself when it abruptly branched off to the right. He fetched up with a thud against the wall.

The new course became lighter, the further he progressed. Dimly he could see another turn, around which there was a light burning. Its rays were reflected from the wall and gave him light enough to prevent another bump.

The tunnel ended in a flight of stairs. Silently Mark floated up. There was a door at the top—an ordinary door, not a barred, iron one. Carefully he opened it, and found, surprisingly, an elevator shaft.

There wasn't any car, and the shaft was so dark that he couldn't see where it might be. One thing was certain: the car was at an upper floor. It couldn't be lower, for the bottom of the shaft was at the stair landing.

But how far up, he could only guess. There was nothing to do but go up and find out. Slowly, hoping that nobody would decide to come down, he ascended the shaft.

GRUDGINGLY he gave Vargo credit for the forethought which had planned this avenue from the palace to the prison. Except when the cage was at the bottom of the shaft, there was no possibility that anyone would use it as a means of escaping from the prison itself.

Nor did it provide a means of ingress into the palace for any body of invaders who might be able to capture the prison. The height he traveled before his outstretched hands came in contact with the bottom of the car would have made it impossible for an ordinary man to climb. The cables were thick with grease and wouldn't provide a hand-hold.

Nor was there an opening at any of the lower floors. Mark estimated that the car was resting at the very top floor of the palace.

Gropingly he explored the bottom of the car. There was no opening in it, nor were there any cracks which might indicate the presence of a trapdoor. Similarly, there was nothing but smooth concrete on all sides of the shaft. How was he to get out?

There was a door, he knew, at the level of the car; though he couldn't guess which side of the shaft it was on. He'd turned around so many times that his sense of direction was all out of gear. But knowing wouldn't have helped any, for he couldn't reach it.

Several minutes passed while he thought the problem out. Then he placed a hand on the side of the shaft, to make certain that he held himself in one position, and brought all the power of his mind into the effort of moving the elevator cage.

Telekinesis would solve the problem, if his control proved itself versatile enough for the job. There would almost certainly be a space in the shaft above the car. He must manipulate the energy waves which surged about him, and make them do two things at the same time.

One of these things they were already doing: the task of holding him without other support at a spot over a hundred feet above the bottom of the shaft. But the second manipulation was of proportions

far greater than anything he had tried up to the present.

The car was heavy, and a terrific concentration of the waves would be required to lift it. Yet the energy waves were abundant, and it shouldn't be any harder to make them perform this task than it was to make them carry a quantity of air with him when he flew. The mental gymnastic involved differed only in degree.

Mark applied himself with confidence. The feel of the flowing but resistless waves of energy became intense, almost tangible.

The tips of the fingers of his left hand rested against the bottom of the cage. As he increased the pressure of the waves, he felt it move, slowly and ponderously, upward. He moved his right hand to a higher position on the wall, and let his body follow upward.

In the total darkness there was no other way of gauging his progress. He avoided exerting too much pressure on the moving car, for fear the energy at his command might slam it through the roof of the palace. He was juggling with cosmic forces, and must treat them with respect.

With light, the task would have been easier, but as it was he must check himself with the sense of touch.

But even that little maneuver of hitching himself upward required a delicate balance of the waves. Entirely by mental control he held the car motionless, bunching the energy against it while he advanced his body to a new position.

The energy which held the car mustn't be confused with that which lifted his body, either. If that should happen, even for the slightest instant, he would be dashed to a smear against its bottom. The two flows of energy must be carefully kept separate, each doing its appointed task.

Slowly the car moved upward. Then he stopped it and took another hitch. But this time, as he delicately fed more power to the waves of energy pressing against the car, it remained at rest. Carefully he increased the pressure. The car still didn't move!

Puzzled for an instant, he held the power

as it was. Then he decided that his perception of the energy waves was slightly imperfect, and that he really wasn't exerting as much as he thought. Accordingly he exerted still more.

Abruptly there was a rending, tearing roar of twisted girders and shattered masonry. The car had pushed itself through the top of the shaft!

INSTANTLY realizing what had happened, Mark relaxed the pressure, holding the car stationary. A moment of panic now would be fatal. If he forgot for a second the mass of weight which hovered over his head, it would fall and crush him.

But his control was perfect; not even a scrap of the shattered concrete fell into the shaft.

He was no longer in darkness now. A thin crack of light outlined a door on the other side of the shaft, opposite to and slightly higher than his present position. Cautiously he moved toward it, keeping one half of his mind on the energy which supported the elevator cage.

Fumblingly, fearful of losing his control, he groped for the door's fastenings.

There was no room in his mind for the possible commotion which the sound of the crash might be causing in the palace beyond that door. He didn't think of the inmates who might be searching for the source of the sound; of the armed guards which would be swarming the corridors of the palace. His mind was completely occupied with the task at hand.

If there had been the slightest amount of reasoning power left for him to command he would have retreated, leaving the elevator cage to dangle at the end of its cables.

But there wasn't. He was irrevocably committed to a course of action; the course he had planned before his mind had become too occupied with the manipulation of cosmic energies to leave room for other things. That plan of action had included the opening of the door as soon as he raised the car enough to permit it. And open the door he did.

The inner latch operated by a lever, and

his groping hand discovered it. The door slid back. People were moving along the corridor—soldiers, nobles, and palace menials. All wore the helmets which protected them from hypnotism.

But Mark saw none of them. They passed before his eyes as fleeting shadows, not even impressing the brain behind those eyes. That brain was filled with the necessity of moving himself through the doorway and at the same time keeping the elevator cage from dashing down upon his unprotected skull.

The instant his feet came to rest upon the corridor floor, he released the pressure which was supporting the car. It fell, pausing only slightly when the cables stretched and parted; then crashed with a deafening din at the bottom of the shaft.

As if the sound released his mind from the fetters which had held it, he became aware of the scene before him. A dozen pop-eyed soldiers had him covered with pistols. They were infinitely more astounded than he, for as soon as he saw them he realized that the sound of the car going through the roof must have awakened everybody in the palace.

But that fact didn't help him in the least. Their guns were centered on his body and there were too many to ignore.

A noble appeared on the scene and took charge. He was as mystified as any of the soldiers concerning the real nature of the things which had happened; but he had a better grip on his nerves. He ordered them to conduct Mark down the corridor.

The party stopped before a massive oaken door. The noble rapped on it with his knuckles. A tiny slip opened at a level with his head, and a pair of suspicious eyes looked out.

"What do you want?" came the muffled growl.

"Tell Vargo we've captured a prisoner at the top of the elevator shaft," said the noble. "The noise was apparently caused when the cage crashed at the bottom of the shaft. If there were any others, they went down with it. We caught only one."

"Let me see him," said the guard.

The noble stepped back. The eyes roved over Mark and then suddenly disappeared from the slit. In a minute the massive door swung wide.

"Just him," said the guard, training his pistol on Mark's stomach. "The rest of you stay out."

CHAPTER XXI

MEET MR. MOUSE

VARGO, in silk nightclothes, sat on a heavily upholstered chair beside an ornate bed. The covers on the bed were rumpled as if he had recently jumped out of it.

A dozen other chairs were in the room; hard ones and not designed for comfort. Mark supposed that these were for the twelve brawny guards who were watching him alertly. Vargo probably slept with them in the room.

Vargo regarded him through slitted eyes. His face, evilly repulsive, was wrinkled and parched-dry. The gayly colored silk failed to conceal the scrawny body of the aged ruler. Mark received an impression of the man which amplified the one he got on the occasion of their last meeting. An old man, incredibly evil and self-centered.

Then abruptly Vargo smiled. His face took on a benevolence which Mark would have said was impossible only a moment before. It was clothed with an expression of friendly welcome, both cordial and reassuring—to anybody who hadn't seen the other expression.

"I'm certainly glad to see you," he said, his cracked voice filled with relief. "It's a pleasure, a rare pleasure."

"Nice of you to say so," Mark replied. "I'd figured this meeting out a little differently."

Vargo beamed. "With my hat off, eh? Sorry I can't oblige. But I've cultivated an affection for this hat. I'll keep it on."

"I was afraid of that," Mark confessed. "Well, what's next on the program? You ordered me shot, once before."

Vargo nodded amiably. "Silly, wasn't it?" he said. "But I countermanded that

order. I knew you'd come here sooner or later, since you said you wanted my form of government changed. So I put my Ancestors to work devising this helmet. Everybody in the palace must wear one. Ingenious things, aren't they?"

"Why did you change the orders?" Mark asked, though he could already guess the answer.

Vargo shook a finger chidingly. "Don't be coy," he said. "You've got something I don't have. You can teach me. I'd like to fly like you do."

Mark grinned sardonically. "After which, of course, you'll set me free."

Vargo's expression remained affable. "No," he drawled. "But there are several ways of dying. Your reward for proper cooperation will be a quick one. Need I elaborate?"

"No," Mark said. "Your droolings aren't very entertaining. And it will be impossible to teach you to fly, so you might as well think up an appropriate way to kill me."

Vargo's face clouded. "Impossible? How?"

"There is only one way you could be made to sense the waves of energy which make flying possible. That way is to submit to my hypnosis. And of course you're afraid to do that."

VARGO bit his lips nervously. He looked aimlessly about the room, his eyes resting momentarily on each of the guards, as if he half expected some comment from them. Then his eyes returned suddenly to Mark.

Instantly Mark felt the impact of Vargo's hypnosis wave. For a second it beat back his will, and waves of blackness hammered at his brain. Then his own powers rescued him, and the waves receded.

"You didn't suspect this was a one-way affair, this helmet," Vargo said, wearily. "An electrical unit in the collar provides the field which shields my brain; but my own wave cuts it off, allowing me to hypnotize at will. It turns itself on automatically as soon as my wave ceases."

"It didn't do you much good, did it?"

"Harrumph!" said Vargo. "Of course it did, young man. You went down—well, a *little* anyhow. And I learned that you were bluffing. You can teach me your ability without hypnotism."

For a second Mark believed him. The waves of blackness *had* engulfed him for a brief instant.

But then the inconsistency of Vargo's statement struck him. True, he couldn't give Vargo the power of telekinesis by hypnotism. But neither could he give it to him any other way. Omega had operated on that part of his brain which controlled the faculty before he had been able to use it.

And he hadn't the slightest notion how to duplicate the operation.

Mark smiled indulgently. "You flatter yourself," he told Vargo. "You aren't strong enough to put me down."

The king's face twisted in rage. Mark smiled at the contortion, and that only served to make it worse. Vargo went white and began to tremble.

Then suddenly he seemed to regain control of himself. In the space of a few seconds he changed from a man on the verge of an apoplectic stroke to the kindly, benevolent old fellow he had been a few minutes ago.

"I'll submit to your hypnosis," he finally said. "And you'll teach me to fly; nothing else!" Vargo broke off and fell to chuckling evilly. It was some minutes before he said anything coherent. "The great Vargo can see to that. Do you want to know how?"

"How?"

Vargo fell into another fit of chuckling. "Simple. Oh, so terribly simple. I should have thought of it sooner. First you shall be hypnotized!

"Don't smile. You can be hypnotized. There are twenty trained hypnotists on my Vocation Board. Once I placed two of them *en rapport* in the course of an experiment. They were able to put down the resistance of a third man by combining their power. And that man was very strong, too.

"Tomorrow I will place all twenty of them *en rapport*. Together, they will break

your resistance. Then, while under their power, you will teach me to fly. In fact, you'll teach me all you know. Take him away!"

MARK was a very worried man when he was placed in a dungeon in the lower-most basément of the palace.

There were several good reasons for this. The most important was the fact that for once he found himself in a cell which seemed to be escape-proof—even for him. It was a large affair, dimly lighted through a small, square hole in the heavy, stone door.

Entirely composed of granite, damp and cold, the cell would have held twenty people, and have held them until Doomsday. The heavy door would have withstood the battering of a pile-driver.

Mark had a notion that he could force the thing by utilizing the means which had pushed the elevator through the roof; but that was impractical. Guards placed at the ends of the passageway outside his cell would be attracted by the noise and fill him with lead before he could get out.

Another reason for his mental turmoil was the fact that he didn't dare stay here and face the very real possibility that the twenty hypnotists of Vargo might overcome him. If they did, and learned that he had been bluffing, Vargo would cook his goose thoroughly.

Not only that, but they would learn all the plans of the fraternity as well. That would be the end of everything.

Angrily he paced back and forth in the cell, trying to think a way out of his difficulties.

But angry pacing, it seemed, wasn't conducive to clear thinking. He stopped, after a few moments, and made an intelligent survey of the cell. But that brought nothing, either. It was just as solid as before.

It was damnable.

The only thing he noticed that he hadn't seen before was a narrow crack which extended for a foot or so at the bottom of one wall. That didn't help a bit. It merely indicated that the monstrous slab of rock

which formed that wall didn't fit quite as snugly as it might.

If this were above ground he might try to use the vast energy at his command to force the wall outward; but that would be senseless if solid earth was back of the stone. Even if he did force it silently, there would be no way out.

Absently he examined the door. It was solid and fitted like the case of a watch. He had seen the heavy iron bar which secured it on the outside and knew that there was no way of reaching it. The small hole was large enough to pass his arm through but was located too high to be of any use. His arm wouldn't be long enough to reach the bar.

Mark swore.

To think better he tried sitting down on the floor; gave that up because it was uncomfortably damp. His eyes happened on the crack in the opposite wall and he noticed that several roaches had decided to investigate his presence. At least there were quite a few of them on the floor near the crack, though of course they might only be searching for crumbs.

Quietly he crossed the cell and put an end to their existence. Mark didn't like roaches, even in dungeons. He stamped the life out of a dozen or two before the rest escaped into the crack. That, he hoped, would discourage any further exploration.

It didn't, as he noticed in a few minutes.

The next explorer wasn't a roach, however. It was a mouse, small and clumsily fat. Mark scuffed a foot, expecting to see it dart back into the crack. The mouse only looked up, as if slightly startled, and regarded him insolently.

Then it approached one of the defunct roaches and hit it once with a paw. It repeated this operation haphazardly with several more; then apparently decided that they weren't very good sport, and left them alone.

Next act of the mouse was to waddle closer to Mark and inspect him carefully. Finally he sniffed, as if contemptuous of a mere man, and went back to the roaches, smacking them around some more.

MARK watched with interest, glad to give his mind a brief rest from its many problems. Suddenly he noticed that the dead roaches were apparently falling into a pattern as the mouse pushed them around.

He took a step closer to make sure that the dim light wasn't playing tricks on his eyes. The mouse paid no attention, other than to sniff irritatingly.

Sure enough, a dozen or so of the roaches were arranged so as to form two letters of the alphabet—D and O. Roughly, to be sure, and probably accidentally; but Mark nevertheless watched closely to see if the mouse did anything else significant.

But apparently he didn't intend to do so. He looked up at Mark as if to say that he didn't think much of the human race in general, for he raised his head in a disdainful manner and sniffed again, this time pointedly. Then he resumed his game, wrecking the two letters he had formed.

Mark was about to give him a swift kick in the place where his pants would be if he wore any, when he suddenly noticed that the mouse had formed more patterns. Letters again—this time a P and an E. Once more interested, Mark watched closely. But the mouse quit his game and sat up on his hind legs as if waiting for applause.

Suddenly Mark swore. It had occurred to him that the four letters spelled a word, and a darned appropriate one at that.

"All right, toots," he growled. "I know you're not a man, but you don't have to be a mouse, either."

"Omega," Mark said.

At this recognition of his peculiar talents, the mouse swelled pridefully. In fact, he continued to swell. In the twinkling of an eye he reached the size of a man. Then he melted a bit around the edges and actually became a man—the aged one which Omega delighted in being.

"But you're a dope," he said, amiably. "Any way you look at it. You let Vargo beat you again. The trouble is that you refuse to utilize your powers. You have a brain and you don't use it. You have telekinesis, and you don't use that, either. You

could have licked him easily. You could have dropped the roof on him."

Mark shook his head. "As a last resort maybe," he admitted. "But I want him alive. I want to hypnotize him and make him spend the rest of his life correcting the wrongs he's committed. Once I get a chance to hypnotize him, I'll make him a model citizen, interested in the peoples' welfare and anxious to do what's right by them. I'll put his genius to good use.

"Then I'll release The Ancestors. They'll be glad to undo some of the work they've done in the past thirty years. For one thing, they should be able to do something about the growth ray. They'll have to find some way of making it harmless to the men who operate it.

"There's a hundred things to be done, and they hinge, for the most part on keeping Vargo alive."

Omega nodded. "Good idea. You do use your brain, after all. But not as much as you might. Telekinesis, for instance. It could get you out of this cell."

"How?"

"Lots of ways. Think it out for yourself. I just dropped in to bawl you out, not to help you. Don't you think I have other things to do?"

Mark frowned, quite exasperated, for Omega's "other things" didn't seem nearly as important as getting out of this dungeon.

THE old man faded slightly and turned into a beautiful flower girl, complete with a basket of flowers, which she proceeded to toss gayly about as she danced lightly over the damp floor. The light-hearted tune which she sang to accompany her dance had a lyric which would have blistered the ears of a caravan driver. It furnished, in fact, such a sour note to an otherwise perfect performance that Mark had difficulty concentrating on a way to use telekinesis to get out of the cell.

And he knew very well that Omega intended to stick around until he solved the problem.

He did, however, hit upon an idea. Omega had told him that he would have

to teach himself the many things which could be done with the power, aside from the most simple one of moving matter by means of the waves.

Creation of matter was one of the biggest uses of the energy. Destruction of matter was another. If he could use that one, he could dissolve the iron bar which held the door. But could he do it?

He decided to try. It seemed to be the only solution.

The bar was iron; of that he was sure. He had seen the rust on it. Thinking back to his early, and skimpy, study of physics he tried to visualize the atomic structure of the element. The atomic weight, he remembered, was about fifty-five.

He also remembered having seen a diagram of the probable molecular arrangement of iron. The problem was to use the energy waves at his disposal to cause the bar to dissolve or change into something else. He couldn't release the stored-up energy of the atoms or the explosion would bring down the entire palace.

Vainly he wished he knew the process which he'd seen Omega use so many times. The things he caused to vanish, did just that, probably dissipating their energy into the fourth dimension or something.

Omega didn't aid his mental processes in the least. Tiring of his flower girl act, he had decided to do something more sinister in nature. A gory fight between a pair of spiders and a cobra was the result of his effort. Mark shut his eyes and tried to concentrate.

Finally he hit upon the solution of his problem. Since he couldn't attempt to turn the iron into pure energy, for obvious reasons, and since he didn't know enough to transmute it into something else, he'd try to melt it!

He had the means, if he could direct the energy waves in the proper manner. Energy makes heat when applied in many ways. Friction is one way, but that wouldn't do here. He had to create intense heat if he wanted to melt iron.

Why not use the energy directly, causing the atoms to speed up their motion?

MARK became so engrossed in the problem that he didn't notice at all when the carcasses of the cobra and the two spiders vanished—the fight had ended in a draw—and were replaced by two colonies of ants, one black and one red, which immediately formed in battle array. Nor did he see the conflict which followed, led by miniature fife and drum corps on both sides.

He was too busy concentrating and directing energy waves to do things which were new to him. A dozen times he tried before he finally hit upon the proper method of directing the waves. When he did, the bar on the outside of the door glowed, became incandescent and slowly dripped on the floor.

He continued until he could no longer hear the drips; then he sighed and turned to Omega. That individual, he saw, had turned himself into a python, tied himself in a knot, and was vainly trying to untie himself. He gave up and returned to the guise of the aged man.

"Very clever," he applauded. "You've mastered something new. But why didn't you do the obvious thing, and lift the bar from its sockets?"

"I couldn't," Mark defended. "My arm isn't long enough."

"Oh," said Omega, scratching his chin judiciously. "It was your arm then, which lifted that elevator?"

Mark flushed.

"I forgot," he confessed. "I couldn't see it, and it didn't occur to me that the waves would act through the door. But anyway, I did something new. Now suppose you tell me some of the other ways I could use telekinesis to get out of here. You said there were several."

"Come over here," said Omega, and placed one hand down near the crack under the wall.

Mark did likewise and felt a draft. That meant that there was air beyond the wall, and not earth. Abruptly he slammed all the energy he could muster against it. The slab of granite was pushed outward, breaking in half as it fell with a crash. There

was another dungeon on the other side. He jumped through and headed for the open door.

AT HIGH speed he traversed the corridor outside, and ascended a flight of stairs. Omega, chuckling loudly, floated beside him. Two startled guards took potshots at them when they reached the top, but neither slowed in the slightest.

Mark was traveling at express-train speed toward a window, which he crashed through without bothering to open. Outside, he soared high above the grove of trees on the palace grounds. The rush of the wind felt good after the dankness of the underground cell. Omega kept pace, once more humming the song of the flower girl.

"Thanks, old smelt," Mark said, when they were well out of shooting distance.

"Don't mention it," said Omega, graciously. "Have you made up your mind yet?"

"What about? Oh, you mean the matter of descendants?"

"What else, dope?"

"I wish you'd quit calling me a dope. First thing you know I'll be believing it."

"The sooner the better. But that's not answering my question."

"No. To tell you the truth, I've been so busy I haven't thought about it at all."

Mark quaked inwardly as Omega appeared to be thinking it over. He was afraid his mentor would ask for an immediate decision, and thus force the issue. And he didn't want to reveal his own plans until they were well under way.

"Well"—Omega finally broke the silence—"don't wait too long. The next time I drop in, I'd like to know what you're going to do about it. So long."

Mark thought he heard a disembodied chuckle float eerily back to him after Omega vanished, but the sound was so faint that he couldn't be sure.

He sped toward headquarters. There were a thousand things to be done and he had only a week in which to do them. Vargo would have to be licked. Well, the

radio idea was still good. There would have to be a few refinements . . .

CHAPTER XXII

AMATEUR NIGHT

ACTIVITY during the next few days was furious. Mark visited the factories where the electrical experts were employed. He had them introduce him to the chiefs of the various plants. Without warning he hypnotized each of these, and left them with certain post-hypnotic suggestions.

Ira he trained for a part in his plan. Tolon also he coached. Gladys and Nona were given parts to perform. Everyone worked like a beaver to make himself letter-perfect in the parts to be played.

Announcements were sent out, as a result of Mark's hypnotism, by the various officials of the electrical companies. The wonders of radio transmission were explained. The announcement stated that every citizen of Detroit who applied to one of the companies would be given a ticket for a seat in one of the receiving auditoriums on the day of the initial broadcast.

Glowing descriptions of the type of entertainment to be offered was included in the announcements. The many uses of radio were explained, not even skipping its military value. Mark included this last because he wanted every citizen to attend, and war was of paramount interest at the present. It also was meant to be a lure for Vargo.

Vargo himself was sent a special invitation to broadcast personally. The presidents of the companies involved delivered the invitations themselves. They did so in accordance to Mark's suggestion, and dwelt upon the advantage to a ruler of being able to speak to all of his subjects whenever he wished. They told him that the receivers were inexpensive and could be installed in every home. The military value of radio was also impressed upon him, though it appeared that Vargo was more interested in the first virtue of this new wonder.

He accepted, promising to prepare a speech for the occasion.

When the fraternity was notified of his acceptance there was a certain amount of subdued rejoicing at headquarters. That was the first stumbling block in Mark's plan, and it had been hurdled. He hoped that the rest of the plan would work out as smoothly.

In the days of feverish preparation for the event, Mark became well acquainted with the people who were working with him. Jan Thomas, of course, could have no part in the proceedings. Nor could anyone who might be recognized by a member of Vargo's retinue. Tolon was one of these.

But both Tolon and Jan Thomas had work to do. For Mark had been watching both men, and had made up his mind about them. They were fine characters, however dissimilar.

Jan Thomas was a true scientist, one of the kind that had made the twentieth century one of the most progressive eras in the history of man. He worked assiduously for the pleasure of working, and with no thought of personal gain. An accomplishment was payment in itself for the grueling hours which had made it possible.

A fact learned or a fact proven, was worth all the gold in the world to Jan Thomas. In the days that followed the perfection of the serum, he hadn't once intimated that he himself was a worthy recipient of its miraculous virtues. Mark was convinced that the thought had never entered his head.

Tolon, an exact opposite of Thomas— young, virile, and filled with the joy of living—claimed Mark's attention also. For that young man had virtues all his own. An adventurous, rollicking spirit, he nevertheless had an ingrained sense of fairness and consideration for the rights of others.

Considering the nature of his recent employment, he was an exemplary citizen. In spite of his grand contempt for the authority of Vargo, and the fact that he made his living as a thief, that was still true. For he believed in the equality of man and was willing to chance anything to bring about the freeing of the minds of the people of Detroit. Even in his thefts he

had invariably picked victims who appeared prosperous enough to stand a slight loss.

MARK put Jan Thomas to work making a small supply of the serum. Enough to inject a half-dozen persons. He memorized the ingredients himself, for he wanted to know that formula for future use. Later he intended to subject Thomas to hypnotic suggestion and make him forget the formula.

Mark realized that in order to keep his trust he alone must judge those who were worthy of the injection. Omega's dream of a better world must come true. His own meddling mustn't shatter it, which would surely happen if the blessing were spread indiscriminately.

To make sure that the formula remained a secret, he hypnotized the two old scientists who had helped Thomas develop the serum. He erased all memory of the occurrence from their brains and substituted a fabricated memory to account for the days they had spent working on it.

To assist Thomas in the making of the serum, he pressed Tolon into service. His duties as an assistant didn't require technical knowledge, and the two worked well together. The supply of serum which Mark required was finished on the day before the great broadcast was to be made.

It was late in the afternoon when Mark sent for Tolon, Thomas, Ira and Gladys. He and Nona received them in the meeting room of the fraternity. Nona served drinks and Mark talked.

He told them of Omega and of the reason for Mark and Nona's difference in blood chemistry. To the best of his ability he outlined the idealism of Omega's experiment in human lives. He told them of the things which Omega didn't like about humans: their wars, their petty jealousies, and their selfishness.

As he talked, he scanned their faces and tried to penetrate their reactions. They satisfied him. He saw the wonder in their faces as he told them of Omega's existence and his nature. He saw their approval of his idealism.

"Now," he finished, "what do you think his reaction would be if I made several others like myself and Nona? Remembering, of course, that it is his wish that only our descendants form the new race which will some day be the only survivors of humanity."

They thought that over for a minute and then gave a diversity of answers. They ranged from the opinion that Omega would approve the action, to the guess that the disembodied intelligence would annihilate all such recipients of the blood, including Mark and Nona.

Mark grinned, admitting that their guess was as good as his. "Do you think that there are any humans living who would risk his anger, for the blessings which would be theirs after the injection, and for the honor of participating in the experiment?"

A clamor greeted that question. Everyone present, it seemed, would be glad to risk Omega's displeasure. And not only for the near immortality to themselves, but that their children would number among those favored of humans.

Mark looked at Nona. She nodded, her face aglow.

THE decision made, and by the ones who were most concerned, Mark wasted no time. Looking into Gladys' eyes, he separated her mind from all bodily sensation. A hypodermic needle injected its fluid into the veins of an arm.

He held her brain in the grip of his hypnosis wave for a full minute, giving the serum a chance to diffuse itself completely in the blood stream. The hypnosis was necessary to prevent the nerve shock which had placed him in suspended animation for six millenia. Omega had used the same nerve block when he had injected Nona.

In rapid succession he treated the others, leaving Tolon for last. When Tolon was snapped awake, he immediately gathered Gladys into his arms and tried to kiss her. She laughingly averted her face.

"After the annulment," she promised.

"That'll be automatic when I dehypnotize your husband," Mark told her.

Tolon finished his kiss while she was thinking that one over.

"I don't feel any different," claimed Ira.

"You are," Mark assured him. "And don't get married unless you see me first. That goes for you too, Jan. Choose wisely, for I can't guarantee that I'll use these other doses unless you do."

Mark dismissed the four, suddenly feeling that he had crossed a fearful Rubicon. He was relieved that he had acted as he had, and that there was no turning back or changing his mind; but an obscure brain cell or two persisted in reminding him that there was almost certain to be a reckoning.

Nona, frankly jubilant that the problem was solved, had no such worries. Although Mark hadn't known it, Nona had been worried and mentally ill at ease for quite some time. The problem of the future of her children had bothered her even more than it had him. That is why there was no room in her mind for apprehension about the possible consequences of Mark's act.

The day of the broadcast found everybody concerned eager to get it over. They were letter-perfect in their roles and rehearsals had been thorough; but none of them were trained entertainers and they suffered the usual stage-fright at the thought of their first performance.

Mark assured them that even the most practical entertainers would be similarly stricken at their first broadcast. Radio was something to disconcert the best of them at the first try.

Ira was to be master of ceremonies. The performers gathered in the anteroom of the improvised studio, a large sound-proofed room in one of the electrical laboratories. Vargo was to have the feature spot on the program, and would witness the performances of all the others.

And though he didn't know it, Mark had prepared his speech for him. It would be a totally different thing from the speech he was planning to make. For Mark intended that the broadcast would end all the more vicious of the suggestions which Vargo had placed in the minds of his subjects, over so many years of his reign.

The speech, as Mark prepared it, would stop all desire for war. The voice of Vargo, which the people of Detroit were conditioned to obey, would preach a new set of ideals.

By messenger came the word that all the public auditoriums rented for the occasion were jammed to capacity. Several outdoor meeting places had been equipped with receivers and amplifiers to take care of the overflow. The attendance exceeded all expectations.

Mark would have been satisfied to broadcast to a majority of the population. That would have served his purpose.

But Vargo had been sold completely by the idea of again exerting his influence upon people he hadn't seen since their appearance before the Vocation Board, and had ordered every citizen who was physically able to attend the broadcast. As a result about ninety-seven per cent of the population were anxiously awaiting the broadcast.

VARGO hadn't as yet made his appearance. The performers began to fidget, Ira himself leading the fidgeting. He was probably the most nervous of all. For upon him rested the responsibility of getting Vargo to remove his shielding helmet.

Mark had concealed himself in a cabinet not far from the microphone. It was marked conspicuously, *DANGER—10,000 VOLTS*.

He didn't dare let himself be seen by Vargo before the helmet was removed. And he was certain that the king would be adequately surrounded by a bodyguard, so that he would get no chance to snatch it off. He had thought of doing that, but realized that even if he did manage to remove the shield he would be punctured by a dozen bullets before he could break down Vargo's not inconsiderable resistance. Ira would have to do the job.

There was a narrow slot in the cabinet, at a level with Mark's eyes and facing the microphone. A piece of smoked glass prevented anyone from penetrating the darkness within. Mark could remove it when the

proper time came. Heavily insulated wires led from the top of the cabinet to give credence to the danger sign.

He was sure nobody would investigate its contents. People were very cautious about running the risk of grabbing a handful of volts.

Vargo arrived finally, with heavy dramatic accompaniment. A platoon of soldiers, all wearing the new helmets, came first. They went through the broadcasting rooms with a fine-toothed comb.

Those of the men who carried pistols were relieved of them. Closets and lockers were investigated for hidden assassins, though all of the soldiers shied away from Mark's cabinet.

Then the platoon arranged itself along the wall of the studio, and a man blew a whistle. Vargo, surrounded by a bodyguard of ten men, answered the blast. He marched in, smiling benignly, and accepted an upholstered chair from Ira, who placed it several feet from the microphone and directly opposite Mark's cabinet.

Nona was the first performer. She came in at Ira's signal, and curtsied to Vargo. Then she approached the microphone, and as she did so a thin squeal was heard, gaining in volume as she came closer. Ira halted her apologetically.

"There must be some metal among your garments," he said. "The microphone is very sensitive to metals."

Nona removed a brooch from the neck-piece of her dress, and handed it to him. He carried it away from the microphone and the squealing ceased. Vargo and his soldiers watched the byplay, though they had no way of knowing that Mark was causing the squeal by turning a rheostat inside his cabinet.

IRA made an announcement, and Nona sang. Her throaty voice, singing a Viking folk song, enchanted all who listened. She finished, curtsied again, retrieved her brooch, and left the studio.

A comedy team was next, and a loud squeal greeted their approach. Ira explained again the peculiar effect of metals in close

proximity to the microphone. They were obliged to remove coins and belt buckles and leave them on the other side of the studio.

The two were nervous at first, but soon forgot it, and drew a big hand from the king's soldiers. Vargo himself applauded heartily. He seemed very much pleased with the performance.

Act after act went through without a hitch. Gladys sang a popular song, and the male quartet sang a slightly bawdy marching song of the caravan guards. This drew the greatest applause from the king's soldiers, though none of the acts failed to get some appreciation.

The last performance, a duet starring Nona and Gladys, concluded the fraternity's part of the program. Next was to be the speech by Vargo. His bodyguard approached the microphone with him. The squeal which greeted them was deafening.

Ira was extremely apologetic as he pointed out that their guns and swords were metallic. Vargo frowned and then issued terse orders. The pianist was hustled from the room. Ira, the only remaining person who wasn't among Vargo's retinue, found himself covered by a dozen guns.

Vargo approached the microphone again. A thin squeal, rising in pitch and volume was the result. Vargo stepped back. He examined his clothing and removed a belt buckle. The squeal came again when he neared the microphone. He stepped back again and faced Ira.

"Make an announcement," he directed. "Say that Vargo, Giver of Life, will speak to his people after a short pause. All listeners are to remain and wait."

Ira did as he was ordered, suppressing his nervousness, and masking all emotion behind his unscrutable poker face.

"Now," said Vargo. "You were about to suggest that my helmet might contain some metal, weren't you?"

Ira paled, though his face wore an apologetic smile. "There must be some metal about the person of your majesty. The microphone only acts like that in the presence of metal."

Vargo's eyes gleamed. "Have you ever looked in a mirror, my traitorous friend?" he asked. "Try it some time, and notice particularly the gleaming gold inlays in your teeth."

Mark groaned inaudibly, cursing himself for a fool. He hadn't even thought of Ira's teeth, which should have caused quite a squeal. Nona's gold brooch should have been left on to explain that gold was the one metal which didn't affect the microphone. Vargo, an intelligence of the first order, had seen the inconsistency.

But there was still a chance to win. Mark quickly removed the smoked glass from his peep-hole. No one was looking toward the cabinet, he had a few moments in which to work. Before, Vargo would order a more complete search of the studio and the surrounding rooms.

He had probably already reasoned the motive behind the attempted removal of the helmet. There was only one man who could possibly want that helmet removed.

CHAPTER XXIII

MAY I CUT IN?

GATHERING all his mental perception of the energy waves about him, Mark concentrated on the helmet. Lead was the metal: 207.10 to 207.22 in atomic weight. Exerting every ounce of energy, he concentrated on the helmet.

Silver might also be present, in minute quantity; for lead extracted from galena—the usual source—always contains it. To be certain of success, he must provide for it.

Silver had an atomic weight of 107.880 though he had never tried such a combination, Mark attempted it now. To fail would mean the failure of his entire plan. There might never be another chance. If he failed, another minute would probably find him so full of bullets they'd have to bury him with a crane.

Ira's face took on an ashy hue, as he realized that he was trapped. There was no explanation to account for the gold's failure to cause a squeal. He also remembered

Nona's brooch. And having nothing to say, Ira wisely said nothing.

Vargo looked leisurely about the room. His eyes roved over the faces of those beyond the glass which separated the studio from the anteroom. He motioned to two of his men. They placed themselves, guns drawn, at the door which led into the factory proper.

All the performers were now trapped in the two rooms. Not even a window offered any means of escape.

Vargo frowned momentarily as he raised a hand to his helmet. The thing was becoming uncomfortably warm. But he lowered the hand without touching it. He studied intently the faces of those in the other room.

He raised the hand again, and scratched his scalp through the helmet, apparently musing and turning over a course of action in his mind.

"Of course," he said slowly, "I can just shoot all of you. That would be easier than penetrating a disguise, and it would be certain to get the right one."

He paused and frowned again. "But I'd much rather get my hands on this Mark, self-styled Protector of the Planet. I've a few tortures in mind for him. Suppose one of you tell me which is he. I'll let that one go free."

A number of emotions showed on the faces of the performers, but none offered to speak. Vargo frowned and moved the helmet about on his head, without loosening the collar. The thing was getting infernally hot.

Abruptly Vargo's face showed fear. He strode to the nearest of the soldiers.

"Loosen your helmet," he ordered. "When I take mine off, place yours instantly on my head. Ready now—don't leave my head uncovered an instant!"

The man did as ordered. He loosened the collar to his helmet and paused, both hands grasping his helmet, waiting for Vargo to remove his. Vargo did, with a lightning move which was made even speedier by reason of the fact that his fingers were being scorched.

The man instantly slammed his own helmet on Vargo's head. A tendril of smoke rose from the cloth of the one Vargo was forced to drop on the floor.

BUT the great Vargo had let panic dim the processes of his brilliant brain. He forgot something. And forgetting it was fatal. For the instant the soldier removed his helmet, he fell under the spell of Mark's hypnotic wave.

With almost the same move that he had slammed the helmet on Vargo's head, he snatched it off again, casting it to the floor besides the other.

Five shots rang out. Vargo's other soldiers had been trained to instantaneous action when anything threatened their ruler. The soldier dropped to the floor, bleeding profusely.

Vargo made no attempt to retrieve the helmet. Instead he turned slowly to face the cabinet, his eyes becoming glassy as he did so. For a minute he stood silently, while his soldiers wondered but feared to open their mouths.

Then he turned away from the cabinet and told them all to remove their helmets. They did, and immediately became motionless, rigidly staring at nothing.

The door of the cabinet opened and Mark stepped forth, his face haggard with the effort of his concentration. In his hand was a sheaf of paper, which he gave to Vargo.

"You may announce Vargo, King of Detroit," he said wearily.

Ira, weak with the reaction of being snatched from a sentence of death, smiled sickishly and approached the microphone. But his voice was strong and assured as he announced the benevolent ruler, Vargo.

BACK at headquarters was a scene of jubilant triumph. Plans for the future were being made, and for the first time carrying a degree of certainty with them. Fear of the Vocation Board was gone: Each man could go back to his work without being forced to face that body and account for his time while he had been gone.

Many of them didn't intend to return to their original jobs. There were other forms of endeavor more attractive.

The two men who had appeared as a comedy team had decided that they possessed talent as radio broadcasters. And Ira, temporarily, intended to head a company engaged in the manufacture of receivers.

Tolon and Gladys refused to make any plans. They had placed themselves at Mark's disposal, to help in the solving of the many problems incident to the reorganization of Detroit's industrial life. Beyond that they wouldn't go. There were too many years to plan for.

"But I can't understand," said Ira, "why you intend to leave Vargo as King of Detroit. Why not elect a new king?"

Mark shook his head. "As long as Vargo lives, he will rule Detroit," he said. "It lies within his power to direct the thoughts of those he has hypnotized. And he'll now devote himself to undoing the wrongs he has committed. The task would be impossible for a new ruler. I'd have to do it myself, and that would be too confining.

"By the time he dies, the younger generation will be grown up and there will be no need of him. As time goes on there will be fewer and fewer people who have been under his influence. They will all die eventually.

"But before they die, and before Vargo dies, their thoughts and ideals must be governed so that they will be happy without spending all their time and energy working in factories. Even though still slightly under the influence of hypnosis, they can be directed in such a way that their lives will be normal."

"How about the Vocation Board?" asked Ira.

"It's a good idea, leaving hypnosis out of it," Mark contended. "As a body of experts, concerned solely with finding the special aptitudes of young people just out of school, it will be a valuable aid to society. Its decisions don't have to be final—merely directive. Any one applicant will probably find that he has aptitudes

along several lines. The final choice of his subsequent training will lie with him."

The large meeting room of the thieves' fraternity had been turned into a banquet hall for the celebration. Rugs had been removed for a space for dancing. A small orchestra, composed entirely of members, furnished the music.

It was while Mark was leading Nona in a waltz that Omega appeared. He did it quite suddenly, at Mark's elbow. His wrinkled countenance was the familiar one of the superannuated, but agile old man. He leered pleasantly.

"May I cut in?" he inquired.

Mark relinquished Nona, and went back to the table where Ira, Tolon and Gladys waited, eyes wide at the appearance of the old man. They had been watching Mark and Nona dance, and had all seen Omega suddenly take form.

"That's—" began Ira.

"That's him," finished Mark, as grim as he was ungrammatical. "Get Jan Thomas. We'll have to face this sooner or later."

IRA, face as unscrutable as ever, left to find Jan Thomas. Tolon and Gladys seemed to catch the tension in Mark's mind and were silent until Ira returned, bringing the bio-chemist with him.

"He seems like a nice old man," ventured Gladys.

"Doesn't mean a thing," said Mark. "He might just as well look like a spider, or a saint. He puts bodies on and takes them off like changes of clothes.

"Not that he isn't a fine character. Don't misunderstand me. He's finer than any human could possibly be. But he just doesn't see things the way we do. His viewpoint is something we can't begin to understand.

"There's no telling what to expect. He might be cosmically offended at what I've done. Then again he might pat me on the back for having spunk enough to defy him, and give you all his blessings. I wish I knew."

The dance ended, Nona brought Omega over to the table. Mark gravely introduced

him to the others. He seemed very cordial. His eyes twinkled merrily, albeit they were a bit crossed at times. He perked up at the introduction of Jan Thomas.

"One of the Ancestors, eh?" he observed, to Mark. "Then you've licked Vargo?"

"Thoroughly," said Mark, and explained the present situation. ". . . But there's something else I'd like to tell you about. Er . . . Suppose we adjourn to another room. Too much noise here."

It was getting a bit noisy, what with the free flow of wines and other beverages, but that wasn't Mark's reason for wanting to seek the privacy of another room. He preferred not to have too many witnesses when he sprang the news to Omega. And that turned out to be admirable foresight.

"You like it here now?" inquired Omega, as they left the room.

Mark nodded. "And so does Nona," he said. "We're going to bring both the children here."

"Both!" Omega exploded, as the door closed behind them, shutting off the noise of the revelry.

"Yes. Both," said Mark. "I've decided on another plan. Neither Nona nor I liked the first one."

Omega's face darkened angrily. He overdid it, though. It continued to darken, until he resembled a Senegalese even to the thick lips and broad nose. Gladys let out a stifled shriek, and he abruptly changed back. He smiled disarmingly at her.

"What an actor I'd have made," he said. "What's your new plan, son? It had better be good!"

For answer Mark took Tolon's arm and laid it beside Gladys'. Then he drew a knife across both. A streak of blue blood followed the knife, but the wounds immediately closed and healed.

CHAPTER XXIV

NO HAREM FOR NONA

"SO!" said Omega explosively. "You've usurped my prerogative! You think you can judge as well as Omega, eh? How

do you know these people won't beget idiots, criminals, or the like?"

"No offense, Toots," he added to Gladys. "I could get idiotical about you myself." But he scowled ferociously at Mark as he said it.

"It wasn't really your prerogative," Mark reminded gently. "My blood was an accident. And I haven't done anything to—"

"There won't be any idiots or criminals!" interrupted Nona. "These two have proven themselves to be intelligent and good. As much so as Mark or I."

Omega regarded her thoughtfully. "You too, eh?" he said. "Didn't you know that I investigated your ancestors for several generations back before I made up my mind? What do you know about these two? There might be a vicious strain that'll crop up in the next generation. Meddlers! I ought never to have noticed you!"

He pushed his chair back and stood up. The chair vanished in a puff of dust as he kicked it aside to pace angrily back and forth across the floor.

He stopped suddenly, looking at Ira and Jan Thomas, who were keeping a discreet silence. "Those too?" he asked.

Mark nodded and started to speak, but Omega silenced him with a gesture and resumed his pacing. There was a carpet on the floor and he almost wore a groove in it before he finally stopped. Mark and the others were nearing an advanced state of nervous prostration by that time.

"There's no sense in punishing them," Omega said, looking at the four who had received the injection. "It wasn't their fault. And it's too late to do anything about it. But you two—"

He fixed a baleful eye on Mark and Nona, who calmly gazed back at him. "You two shall suffer! . . . All of you face the other wall!"

They did. In fact they were afraid not to— although Mark was heeding a rebellious section of his mind, which insisted upon telling him that there was nothing to fear. He fought down his imagination, refusing to picture Omega's possible revenge.

Nona, however, was frankly apprehensive. She shivered a little as she faced the wall.

"Now," said Omega. "Mark. You back up about three steps."

Mark did so, and realized that there were more people in the room than there had been a moment before. To the right of him were two men, and to the left two more. His eyes widened in surprise.

"All right," said Omega. "You can all turn around."

They obliged, then gasped in unison. Five Marks met their startled eyes: all identically similar, down to the last detail. Omega had apparently vanished.

"They're spurious," said the middle Mark, stepping forward a pace and facing the others.

"Who's spurious?" said Mark of the left end. "Nona! You know me don't you?"

A clamor came from the others at this turn of affairs. They all turned to Nona and held their arms appealingly to her, beseeching her recognition. Then they fell to glaring at each other and muttering dire threats. Nona, pale and worried, looked from one to the other in indecision.

"Take it easy, boys," came a voice from out of the air over their heads. "We'll leave it to Nona to decide. That'll be a fine punishment for both of you. When she decides which is the real one, I'll destroy the others. Tough if she makes a mistake, eh Mark?"

ALL five Marks nodded thoughtfully, then glared at each other once more. Nona weakly sat down, looking appealingly at the others. But none of them had a suggestion to offer. Each of the five looked like the Mark they had known since his arrival on their horizon.

"Ask them questions," Jan Thomas finally said. Things which only Mark can answer. We'll leave the room if you'd rather."

"Won't work," said Omega. "Each of them is complete with all Mark's memories. They're identical in all respects but one."

Nona came alert. "What is that?"

Omega chuckled eerily. His disembodied voice gave them all the shivers, it seemed to be enjoying itself so thoroughly.

"The phonies know they're phoney," Omega said. "But that won't help you. They want to keep on living, so they won't give themselves away."

Nona buried her head in her hands. A muffled sob escaped her. Five solicitous Marks stepped forward to console her. That almost resulted in a fist fight, but inasmuch as each knew that the others couldn't be easily harmed, the thing fizzled among a host of angry looks and gargantuan cuss words.

The air turned an azure hue for a few seconds—though that was probably one of Omega's little jokes.

Nona finally stifled her sobs and came erect. She held her head defiantly. "I won't choose!" she said. "After all, I've had a lot of fun with one Mark. I should have five times as much with five Marks. That's final!"

Astonishment covered the faces of the five. Then four of them smiled and one looked angry. Nona triumphantly stepped forward and kissed the expression off his face. The others disappeared with an impressive clap of thunder.

"Smart girl," applauded Omega, resuming the shape of the old man. "I had you going for a few minutes though. And was Mark scared!"

"I wasn't you old fraud," Mark claimed. "You gave yourself away when you said that nothing could be done about the blue blood of my friends here. You could change it back if you wished. I knew you were only fooling from that minute on."

OMEGA laughed, the parchment-like skin of his sides crackling as he heaved. Omega was thorough when it came to sound effects.

"All right, all right," said Mark. "I was a little scared for a minute."

"I kind of thought you were," Omega chuckled. "But in regard to these four friends of yours. They're all right. In fact it might interest you to know that I

had something to do with the quick development of that serum. Thomas will tell you that never before did his mind work so clearly as when he threw together that last batch of serum—the one that didn't kill the guinea pig."

Jan Thomas' eyes widened. "I thought—" he started. Then he nodded vigorously, not trusting his voice.

Omega beamed. "You know, Mark," he continued, "I believe in letting people solve their own problems, though I don't mind helping them a bit when they're on the right track. I was getting impatient there a few months ago when you kept putting off a decision on this matter."

"Naturally you didn't want this family mating. Neither did I. But you didn't seem to be doing anything in the way of following the only other course open to you. I had to get you started. Don't mind, do you?"

Later, when the celebration broke up and everybody went to his own room, Mark looked at Nona quizzically as she prepared for bed.

"What's on your mind, if any?" she asked.

"I'm just wondering how good an actress you are," he answered. "You were certainly convincing when you intimated that five husbands would be better than one."

THE END



Looking Ahead!

CROOKED CARIBBEAN CROSS

Filtering up out of South America now into the States: the seepage of that malignant poison with which the Nazis would make a cesspool of the New World. It's working; and Smooth Kyle is working against it, with Gilda Garland once more at his side. Once more the knowing ones along Manhattan's Main Stem are rising up to deliver a roundhouse blow for their country. Beginning a colorful and exciting new novel by

BORDEN CHASE

THE GOLDEN EMPRESS

Ancient Byzantium and the darkly beautiful Empress Theodora give up their secrets to a brave new world in this newest amazing journey backward by Joel Quaité, time detective. In a novelet by

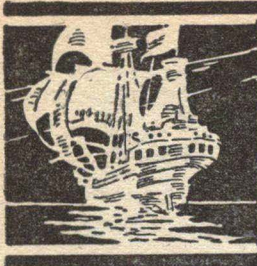
FREDERICK C. PAINTON

APPOINTMENT IN OCTOBER

They've always been fiercely loyal to each other, these two brothers. Now one of them—profiting by what the other taught him about baseball, years ago—is on his way to the top in the big leagues; the other is just over the crest. Today they face each other across the diamond; and the man who loses is through for good. The most dramatic, most sympathetically written baseball story we've read in years; a fine novelet by

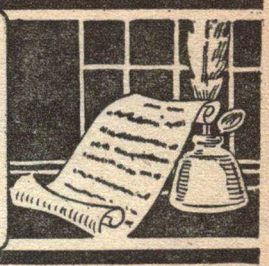
CHARLES MARQUIS WARREN

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—OCTOBER '5



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



LABOR DAY, being a holiday, is a fine institution; and if we didn't mention it in passing at the proper time, it was because we try not to think of anything that indicates the end of another summer.

At this late date, however, we haven't much choice but to bow our heads to the inevitable. And yet it seems only last week that we sat, looking dreamily across our desk at the spring flowers we had brought in from a lunch-hour excursion. *Sic transit shirt-sleeves.*

Very well, then. Not to be bullied by a mere change in seasons, we take this opportunity to bring you good tidings. For those long winter nights that lie ahead, ARGOSY is whipping up no end of goodies; and it'll be a major tragedy to miss even one issue in the coming months.

(Look: *we* wouldn't miss an issue. Why should anybody else?)

ITEM: A swell new Borden Chase serial—beginning next week. We'll come back to that later. Meanwhile:

Item: More Charles Marquis Warren. The readers have been yelling for him (quite rightly, too); and he's coming up pronto. A fine baseball novelet next week; a new serial later (he's working on it now).

Item: A new fantastic novelet by Jack Williamson, coming just in time for the fall and winter season of our fantastic fans; and after that a serial of planetary adventure by Otis Kline and E. Hoffman Price.

Furthermore: a Walt Coburn Western serial; and a three-parter about those two rakehellies, Cleve and d'Entreville, by Murray R. Montgomery. And a war novelet by Theodore Roscoe. And a mystery

of Trojan-horse work in the deep South by William Du Bois. And . . . and . . .

Shucks, we're out of breath; but you get the idea.

AT THIS point we'd like to say a few words about the Fifth Column. Naturally there's no point in getting hysterical about it (which Adolph would just love to have us do); but on the other hand, there's certainly no wisdom in overlooking the facts.

And the facts are there, in sickening abundance, every time you pick up a daily paper. When we publish a story about the enemies of America who are working around under the Nation's skin, we're not going in for fantastics. We think our authors can back up everything in their fiction with things that keep going on here in fact—and go themselves a few better at that.

It is in this spirit that we present Borden Chase's novel, "Crooked Caribbean Cross," beginning in next week's ARGOSY. The subject matter is serious enough (Chase isn't fooling); but the story of Smooth Kyle's new adventures with Gilda Garland makes just as absorbing and exciting reading as ever.

Besides this, we want to suggest a look at a new magazine that's hitting the stands this week—"Fifth Column Stories." In pictures, in arresting fact articles, and in first-rate fiction it tells the story of what America is up against. We've seen an advance copy, and we recommend it.

Incidentally, it's only fair to mention that the lead novel in "Fifth Column Stories" for November was written by C. Dawes Appleton and Edward C. Goodwin,

who wrote that fine two-parter published in *ARGOSY* last January, "Fate Wove a Rug." Their new story—"Floodtide of Treason"—has its most exciting scenes in the Mississippi bayou country; and we think it's a honey.

WITH all this off our chest, we proceed to a letter from one reader who doesn't like fantastics. Not the only one, we're sure; but as he says, the fantastic fans always seem to be more vocal than the others. Naturally we're doing our best not to let either group down; and this is, in fact, acknowledged by

JOHN FREDERICK

I started reading *ARGOSY* about 1926 and read it steadily until last winter when I gave it up because of so many fantastic stories. Unable to find any other magazine as good as *ARGOSY* I have started reading it again.

I may be wrong, but I don't believe that your average reader likes so many of these fantastic things. However, Mr. Average Reader seldom writes to let anyone know his likes and dislikes. But once you find a rabid fantastic story fan he wants the whole world to know about his likes and dislikes.

Personally, I prefer the historical, African, Northern and Western stories. But I liked such fantastics as "The Return of George Washington", "The Hothouse World" and "Seven Footprints to Satan". But I can never get to first base on these stories that have space ships, death rays and prehistoric types of animals. I gave up reading fairy stories about the fourth grade.

Congratulations on your new cover design. In my opinion it is most satisfactory. It is conservative and I have always hated most newsprint magazines because of their bloodthirsty covers.

Would like to see you print some stories on the order of those you used to run by Fred Mc-Isaac. I've never saved back copies, but I can still remember "Those Lima Eyes", "He's a Prince", "Red Hot", "The Golden Burden", and several more.

The two best stories in recent years, in my opinion, were Max Brand's "War for Sale" and George Challis' "The American". Outside of the science-fiction I have absolutely no kick to make against *ARGOSY*. I know that other people really like them and I guess that I get my money's worth even if only half of each issue suits my reading tastes.

CLARKSBURG, W. VA.

WE'RE mighty happy about all these favorable comments on our new cover design; and the congratulations are still coming in. We just don't know *how* we'd feel tucked in, as Mr. Frederick says, between bloodthirsty covers. Not good, anyway.

We've just had a longish letter from Butte, Montana, which we can print only in part—since it refers to an old controversy on which we wrote *fnis* some months ago. We may say, however, that the writer moves up a bristling array of details about etymology and astronomy, until we're all but floored by erudition.

But what really gets us about this letter is the stationery itself. Superimposed on an airplane, riding through the clouds, is the legend, "The Novelty Shop, Novelties, Stamps, Supplies, Ship & Aeroplane Models, Electrical Appliances, Radios, Jewelry & c. 23 West Porphyry Street, Butte, Montana."

Now this is in the spirit of *ARGOSY*. A host of things, all of them fascinating, all of them worth having. The romantic spirit of the Old (and the new) West. And finally, that beautiful and exotic phrase, so evocative of priceless treasures, so sweet when spoken that we've been repeating it again and again—Porphyry Street!

If this is a free ad for The Novelty Shop, we don't care. It's a place worth knowing about.

Well, about this letter:

ELMER GILMIR

I have read the *ARGOSY* since along in 1884. It was a boy's paper then with such writers as Albert Pason Terhune, and other writers—many of them not heard from now. I had most of my reading exercises from *ARGOSY* instead of other books; this makes me a reader of forty-six years.

BUTTE, MONTANA

Thanks, Mr. Gilmir. It gives a very nice idea: why not have *ARGOSY* as a supplementary textbook in the schools? Meanwhile has anyone else cut his literary teeth on *ARGOSY*? We'd be interested in hearing about it.

"THE SNAKE MOTHER"

One of the most unusual science-fiction stories ever to come from the pen of that master author of fantastic tales—

A. MERRITT

Thousands have been amazed by the startling plot and the astounding action of this world famous classic of imagination.

Enjoy a story that is different . . . Read "The Snake Mother" . . . complete in the November issue of

FANTASTIC NOVELS

Now 10c on the newsstands

If your dealer is sold out, send 10¢ to 280 Broadway, N. Y. C., and a copy will be mailed to you

High School Raises Your Standards of LIVING TRAINING INCOME



Many Finish in 2 Years

Finish High School at home, as FAST as time and ability permit. Equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college, pre-professional examinations, business, industry. Standard texts, Diploma. Credit for High School subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. American School, Chicago, est. 1897. FREE Bulletin. Write TODAY!

American School, Dept. H-630, Drexel Ave. at 58th St., Chicago

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| — HIGH SCHOOL COURSE | — Air Conditioning |
| — Accounting and Auditing | — Diesel Engineering |
| — Architecture and Building | — Drafting and Design |
| — Automotive Engineering | — Liberal Arts |
| — Business Management | — Private Secretary |
| — Aviation | — Mechanical Engineering |
| — Electrical Engineering | — Radio and Television |
| — Electric and Gas Refrigeration | — Home Economics Courses |

Name _____
Address _____

Promotion Begins at Home

FREE TRIAL OFFER

NEW REMINGTON NOISELESS PORTABLE

AS LOW AS

10¢
A DAY



10-Day Free Trial Offer

AT LAST! The famous Remington NOISELESS Portable Plus Carrying Case is yours for only a small deposit and terms as little as ten cents a day. Brand new. Not rebuilt. Standard keyboard and every modern feature. Free typing instruction book. 10-Day free trial. You don't risk a penny. WE PAY ALL SHIPPING CHARGES. Act now! Write Remington Rand Inc., Dept. 145-9 465 Washington St., Buffalo, N.Y.

WRITE STORIES that SELL

Mrs. Grace Blanchard had an idea for a story. We criticized her story and gave it a new name and told her where to send it. She got a substantial check the first time out. And E.K.N. of Clayton, Ind., got \$500.00 for the first story. What a thrill! Each month many of our men and women graduates get the thrill of successful authorship. Let our 22 years of experience guide you. Write now.



JACK LONDON

wrote us:—"Your course in short story writing is excellently comprehensive and practical."

FREE BOOKLET Write for Free Booklet, "The Art of Story Writing," with explanation of our personal criticism and manuscript sales service. No cost or obligation. Tells how others succeeded and what opportunities await you. Money back agreement. Easy payments. Because you are interested send for free booklet at once. Write

HOOSIER INSTITUTE, Room 139, Hoosier Bldg., Chicago.

Every American should read

FIFTH COLUMN STORIES

In thrilling, realistic fiction . . . in revealing fact articles
. . . this vital new magazine opens your eyes to the
menace that threatens the nation.

Could your neighbor be a Fifth Columnist? There
are thousands in the U. S. A. ***You might live next
to one—work next to one—play next to one!***

Make a date to stop at a newsstand on **September 25th** for
your copy of the **November** issue of this exciting, timely, new
magazine. Ask your dealer to reserve a copy for you.

FIFTH COLUMN STORIES

ON SALE SEPT. 25TH

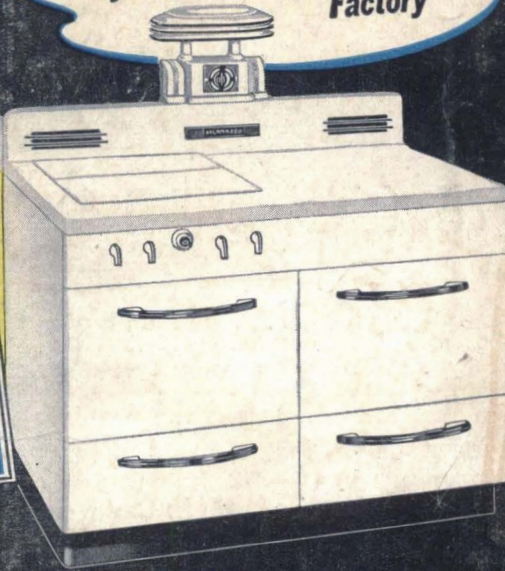
10c

Don't supply you, send 10c to 280 Broadway, New York City, and a copy will be mailed to you.

"A Kalamazoo Direct to You"



I Saved \$50
by buying *Direct from the Factory*



NEW MODERN GAS RANGE



COMBINATION GAS
COAL AND WOOD
RANGES

Style



COAL AND WOOD
RANGES

Quality



COAL
AND
WOOD
HEATERS

30 Days Trial



OIL
HEATERS

Factory Prices



Factory Guarantee FURNACES

**NEW
Free
CATALOG**

\$5 down
up to
18 Months
to Pay

**136 Styles
and Sizes**

**Mail Coupon for
NEW FREE
CATALOG**

Just out—sensational new stove and furnace catalog. Rock bottom **FACTORY PRICES**. Easy terms: \$5 down on stoves, up to 18 months to pay. 3 years to pay for furnaces. New models—new streamline designs—thrilling new features—latest equipment.

Stretch your dollars! Deal direct with the factory. Dazzling new Gas Ranges. Outstanding values in new Combination Gas, Coal or Oil Ranges, famous Coal and Wood Ranges with the "oven that floats in flame," Coal and Wood Heaters, beautiful new Oil Heaters, great new Super-power Furnaces. **Factory Guarantee**. **Factory Service**. 24 hr. shipments. **30 Days Trial**. 40 yrs. in business. 1,600,000 Satisfied Users.

**287 Factory Owned Stores in 14
States. Ask for address**

Kalamazoo Stove & Furnace Co., Manufacturers
99 Rochester Ave., Kalamazoo, Michigan

Dear Sirs: Send **FREE FACTORY CATALOG**.
Check articles in which you are interested:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Combination Gas, Coal or Oil Ranges | <input type="checkbox"/> Coal and Wood Ranges. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gas Ranges | <input type="checkbox"/> Coal and Wood Heat. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Oil Heaters | <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Ranges |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Oil Ranges |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Furn. |

Name.....
(Print name plainly)

Address.....

City.....