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*Battle's Basin sees the
playing of a lone
hand game*

MYSTERY RANGE

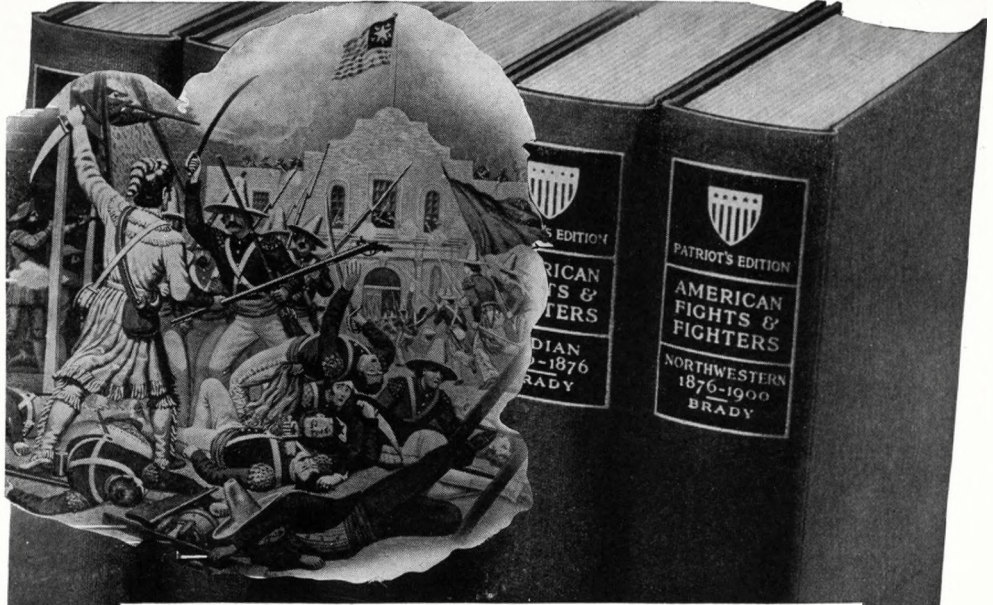
by

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Short Stories

Vol. CXXII, No. 5

Whole No. 533

HARRY E. MAULE
EDITOR

D. McILWRAITH
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

JEST FIGHTIN' HIS HEAD



"**W**HOA, thar, you sway-backed, flea-bitten fuzztail, quit fightin' yore head or I'll jest natcherly have to work you over. Whoa, I say, or you'll get a real taste o' this here Spanish bit." But as a matter of fact Hank Hardrock put very little pressure on the reins. As he dismounted, one of the cowboys asked him why he stood for so many monkey shines from the rangy *caballo*. "Well, I'll tell you, Shorty, it's thisaway. That 'ere bronc ain't what you'd call mean. He just hasn't got good sense, and I can't forget that it ain't noways his own fault. So I sorta hate to pull his mouth to pieces unless it's necessary.

"You see he's jest fightin' his head thataway all the time, an' runnin' in circles. Maybe it's because he wasn't gentled right when he was a colt, or maybe it's because he's just got a plumb nervous disposition, but anyway it's like that all day long, standin' or ridin', while the bit's in his

mouth and the saddle's on his back. But put him on the run cuttin' out beef critters and he ain't a bad cowpony.

"He's like a lot of fellers I know. They jest don't seem able to accommodate themselves to the conditions of the range.

They fret, and paw and chomp on the bit, and jerk their heads around something terrible. They are the fellers who find fault with everything from the gov'ment to the grub, and with everyone they come in contact with. They are suspicious and ringey. Then they wonder why they don't have any friends and why they don't get along faster. Don't ask me why some fellers are like that; I only know that like this ugly bronc some of them will come through if they get it put up to them hard enough.

They'll have got to forget their little own troubles and put their backs into a real fight. Why can't they do it first off?"

THE EDITOR.



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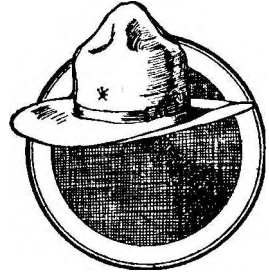
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Our Next Issue
March 25th



Harmoniky Dick
rides in the night
on a perilous trail

in

THE TROUBLE MAKER

by

George C. Henderson



**THE
 REVENGE OF
 FLORIDA JACK**

A short story with
 a surprising twist

by

Ernest Haycox

FOOL'S FOLLY

The Major takes a
 hand in a desper-
 ate game

by

L. Patrick Greene

**BURNING
 THE SNOW**

Corporal Downey
 of the Mounted
 hears a weird tale
 on a trail of the
 Barren Lands.

by

James B. Hendryx

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MYSTERY RANGE

A Cowhand Plays a Lone Hand in Battle's Basin

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "West!" etc.

PART I

GOLD, CATTLE, A MAN ON THE DODGE, A SECRET VALLEY KNOWN TO CONTAIN A VAST FORTUNE, AN ASSUMED PERSONALITY—WHAT MORE COULD ONE WANT FOR A DOUBLE-ACTION MYSTERY STORY OF THE WEST? ONLY THAT IT BE TOLD BY SUCH A WELL-KNOWN WRITER OF WESTERN ACTION STORIES AS CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

CHAPTER I

THE PAYMASTER IS DUE

FOR some hours Brazo had been lying motionless in a little niche of rock in the wall of a low butte at a curve in the Gila. Brazo's honey-colored pony which he called Blinky because of a pronounced cast in the animal's left eye, was hobbled some distance down the river in a swale which could not be seen from Brazo's rock bedchamber. Blinky could take care of himself for he was a range pony duly taught and intelligent.

Brazo had slept long and had slowly awakened when he had become conscious that the diapason of the night insects had ceased. The great white light of Arizona

disclosed a pleasant land which was already warm and slumberous. There was no sound, no movement. There was an enormous expanse of sky and an equally enormous stretch of land. The sky was featureless, but there were certain corrugations and excrescences in the land by which one might lay a course if one meditated traveling through it. And because Brazo meditated traveling through the land he was interested in it.

The land was not much different than a great deal of that which he had already ridden over. There were some mountain ranges, an interminable number of low hills, some bald knobs of rock, systems of valleys, flats, gorges, sand. On the crests of some of the hills was some stunted spruce. Here and there grew cactus, oc-

atilla, yucca. Because the month was April there were grass tufts of a brilliant green. In distant flats were splotches of wild flowers.

There was an awesome monotony of sand and sky. From Tombstone to Benson, from Benson to Cochise, from Cochise past Fort Grant to Solomonsville there had been sky and sand. Northward was more sand and sky. Narrow trails ran into distance and vanished. Other trails came out of nowhere and crossed the one you were riding. Perhaps in a day's travel one might observe in the distance a dust cloud which contained a rider, and it might happen that one would observe a stage coach lumbering along the horizon. But more often there would be nothing in the world of space.

And yet there was the blessing of a glorious solemnity in the atmosphere, an all-pervading cleanness and virginity which must have reigned when the Earth was finished.

Brazo's niche in the butte faced north and the strong white light of the sun did not shine upon him. He was aware that the butte was part of a ridge that ran from east to west and that a stage trail ran along the crest of the ridge. Last night crossing the trail to seek a bed ground for his pony he had observed the trail and had decided that it ran from Globe to Bowie.

HE ROLLED out of his blankets and sat on the edge of the ledge, dangling his feet while he ran a hand through his hair and rubbed his eyes to banish the last traces of sleep. He yawned, buckled on the cartridge belt and pistol which had been with him in his blanket all night, glanced at the Winchester rifle which had been within reach, yawned again and prepared to descend the sloping ground to the river.

He remained motionless however, for before he could begin his descent he heard sound. Listening intently he heard the steady, slow beating of horses' hoofs on the trail above him. They came on, growing louder as they neared him, until at last he decided that there were two horses.

Brazo was curious, but not curious enough to disclose himself to the riders of the horses. He sat on his ledge, silent and motionless.

One thing he had decided. The riders were not Apaches. He had heard the creaking of saddle leather. The horses had been approaching in the steady chop-trot affected by the experienced plains pony. While Brazo listened the chop-trot became a walk, then died away completely. The horses had halted.

Then a voice floated over the edge of the butte and reached Brazo's ears.

"There's Solomonsville," it said. "There's Fort Grant."

"I always thought they were the other way 'round," came a second voice. "Curious how a thing gets set in a man's mind."

There was a silence which lasted long. A thin smoke, trailing over the edge of the butte assailed Brazo's nostrils. The aroma of herb-scented tobacco.

"Eat at Solomonsville?" asked the first voice.

"Suits me."

Another silence. Then the first voice.

"He'll be headin' north tomorrow mornin'. It's near sixty miles. He can't make it by night. He'll probably stay overnight at Bain's Camp—him an' his escort. Niggers! Why hell! Bain will make the niggers sleep in the stable!"

"He'd ought to," said the second voice.

There was another silence. Apparently the men were finishing their cigarettes. Then the voice of the first man came again.

"We'll water down here a piece. There's a shallow. About a hundred yards. Just beyond that bend."

The horses went on at a walk.

WHEN Brazo could no longer hear the beating of their hoofs he slid down from the niche in the wall of the butte and made his way along the base of the butte toward the bend in the stream. He moved cautiously and slowly and when he reached a point from which he could observe the men, they had finished watering their horses and were already riding away. He could not see the faces of the riders, but he observed that one was tall

and heavily built while the other was short and slender. Both rode bay horses. The tall man wore a gray shirt and a black Stetson, while the smaller man was arrayed in a blue shirt and a Stetson of a light cream color. Both wore leather chaps, cartridge belt and pistol, and each carried a rifle in a saddle sheath.

They rode away into the dun distance and again Brazo was engulfed by the silence.

Solomonville was eastward several miles. From the crest of the butte both Solomonville and Fort Grant were visible across the featureless distance. The riders had become mere moving dots in the land. They were no longer close to Brazo and they were therefore unimportant in his thoughts.

Brazo washed in the shallow waters of the Gila. He built a small fire with some dry branches of chaparral, boiled some coffee in a small pot which he took from the slicker which had been wrapped around his bedroll, and ate some dry biscuit and

beef. Later, seated on a huge boulder with a broken section of mirror propped up in front of him, Brazo shaved. Finishing, he rolled all his possessions in the slicker



and went down into the swale after his pony, carrying his saddle and rifle. When a little later he rode back along the banks of the river he pulled up at the bend where the two riders had watered their horses and sat motionless in the saddle looking down at the hoof prints in the sand.

Brazo was twenty-five and many things had happened to him. For fifteen of his twenty-five years there had been no parents to advise him, for in the Brazos Valley a roving band of Arapahoes had struck without warning while Brazo was bringing in some stray cattle from a distant part of the range.

Brazo's parents had been well educated, and they had bequeathed the young man

a brain which functioned with more than ordinary keenness and facility. There must have also descended to Brazo a love of the Western country, for after the killing of his parents he had delved deeper into it. Deeper, but to little advantage, for though he knew cattle as well as any man, and had ability to do various things well, he now found himself at twenty-five severing old associations and heading northward, jobless.

Brazo's eyes were agleam with speculation as he lifted his gaze from the hoof-prints at the water's edge and centered it upon the two moving dots which had now dwindled to minute proportions.

He recalled the words of the first voice, which he had already decided belonged to the big man: "He'll be headin' north tomorrow mornin'. It's near sixty miles. He can't make it by night. He'll probably stay overnight at Bain's Camp—him an' his escort. Niggers! Why hell! Bain will make the niggers sleep in the stable!"

Obviously, someone in whom the two riders were interested was traveling north on the morning of the following day. The riders expected he would sleep at a place which they had called "Bain's Camp." But who, in this wilderness, would travel with an escort of "niggers"? Where would he be likely to get "niggers" to comprise an escort?

Brazo stared thoughtfully into the white light that flooded the dun land. He was not interested in the two riders, though he mentally admitted a slight irritation because what he had overheard was so meager as to give him no basis upon which to build a theory of the intentions of the riders. His interest was merely speculative. Did the riders mean harm to the one who was "headin' north tomorrow"?

Wrinkles appeared upon Brazo's forehead as he sent his pony clattering up the north slope of the Gila and headed him across a level toward a dim trail that ran with many undulations into the northern distance. He reached the trail and rode it thoughtfully. When he gained an eminence several miles distant he glanced backward to find that he could no longer see the two riders.

HE HIMSELF was riding northward, aimlessly. But he was thinking of various places where, report had told him, he would find cattle. Blue Creek, perhaps. Salt River. The Little Colorado. The latter section would bring him rather far northward, and he decided he would not go that far. He'd try the Salt River section, and then he'd cross into New Mexico and head for Roswell, in Lincoln County, where he'd be almost sure to strike a job.

As a matter of fact he was in no hurry to acquire a job. In a belt at his waist was six hundred dollars in gold which would last him a long time, and he felt he could afford to exercise some deliberation in choosing a new employer.

Noon found him in the Gila Mountains. There were Indian signs two or three days old which interested him only enough to cause him to examine them. Just now the Indians were peaceful, and if they became otherwise tomorrow, why that would be tomorrow's problem.

During the afternoon he threaded one valley after another, though he traveled leisurely and twice watered his pony at water holes which he found close to the trail as he rode. He saw no ranch-houses, no cattle. Late in the afternoon while descending a slope that led into a dry arroyo, he came upon a squad of negro cavalry. There were four men in the squad. They were headed south and as they passed they grinned widely at him. After they had ridden out of sight he turned and looked back at them.

"Why sure!" he said aloud, slapping a knee. "Anybody with any sense would have thought of that before! The paymaster's due. Now what do you suppose they meant, anticipating his movements that way?"

The two men who had spoken of the paymaster might be friends. Gamblers, perhaps, who made it their business to hang around Army posts near pay-day. It would be rather ridiculous to assume that the men meant robbery. There were only two, and there was the squad of negro soldiers to act as an escort.

The United States Army could take care of itself. Anyway, he remembered no occa-

sion when outside assistance had been called.

He ceased to speculate upon the incident of the morning, and the furrows went out of his brows.



And when toward dusk he came in sight of a cluster of box-like buildings on a level at the edge of a small stream which he surmised was

Salt River, he felt that he had reached Bain's Camp.

Later he discovered that his surmise was correct.

Bain's Camp was a stage station. Relays of horses were kept there. There were several buildings and some sprawling corrals. The stable was between Bain's Saloon and a store, and there was a strange mingling of odors which myriads of flies found interesting.

Brazo had made many camps in the open. Here might be found a bed, good feeds for Blinky and refreshing beverages for himself. He unsaddled in the stable, sought the bar and listened with quiet satisfaction to the clinking of glasses.

CHAPTER II

"Let Me See Your Gun"

BAIN'S CAMP was a novelty to Brazo after months spent on the ranges around Tombstone, and one day longer he luxuriated in absolute idleness, giving his pony an opportunity to rest and himself frequent potions of the beverages he found at Bain's bar.

Bain's was little more than a name. Brazo had the bar to himself except for the infrequent visits of the storekeeper and the man who ran the stage stable and corrals. Therefore, although the country in the vicinity of the camp was pleasant enough, Brazo decided that a man could be as lonesome there as riding alone through the country. He told the stableman that he would pull his freight before dawn of the following day.

But late in the evening preceding his departure he saw the negro soldiers again. They rode into Bain's flanking a stage coach out of which, directly in front of the saloon, stepped the paymaster. The latter, Brazo soon discovered, was addressed as "Major Pitrick."

Pitrick was a big man and wore his blue uniform rather slouchily. Five minutes after his arrival he was standing at the bar talking loudly to Bain. Not caring to listen to the major, Brazo went outside and watched the stage move away. He overheard the stableman say that the major would stay overnight at Bain's and go on to Fort Apache the following morning with his escort. The negro cavalymen had brought along a led horse for the major.

The cavalymen were unsaddling in the stable when Brazo reached the doorway, and he gravely watched and listened. They were not permitted to enter the saloon in the presence of the major, but the stableman was friendly. He disappeared and presently returned with a bottle which the cavalymen took. They vanished in the direction of a hay shed in the rear of the stable. From that direction, later, Brazo heard much laughter.

The stableman joined Brazo at the door. He jerked a thumb toward the saloon.

"Twelve thousand dollars," he said. "Or somethin' near that." Brazo divined that the stableman was referring to the amount carried by the paymaster. "Of course there ain't much chance of it gettin' away from him," the stableman went on. "But the way he handles that money fair makes me nervous. Had it in the boot of the stage. Got it out himself an' I saw the boot wasn't locked. While he was givin' his niggers his orders the valise was standin' there in the dust with nobody lookin' at it. If I'd have been a thief I could have hid it while he was gassin' to the niggers. An' now he's lickin' up drinks in the saloon. Likely he'll get drunk. He'd ought to keep his niggers right around him to look after the money. But usually they get as drunk as he does."

"There ain't much for an army man to do out here," said Brazo.

"That's right. Well, a thirst ain't hard to develop when you're loafin'."

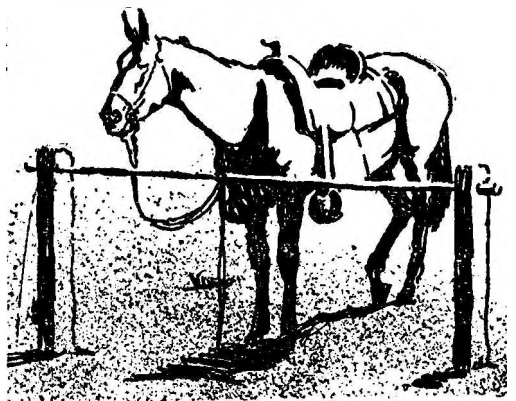
"I'm wondering why he didn't stay on the stage."

"Stage is drier then Bain's," grinned the stableman. "Well," he added, "likely I'll be up when you pull out. If I ain't you know where your hoss is."

BRAZO paid his bill, so that the item might not be overlooked. He went back to the saloon. Major Pitrick was still standing at the bar and a little black valise was on the floor at his feet. Brazo had a final drink and then went to his bunk in a rear room.

He did not hear the major when the latter retired. It seemed to Brazo that he had not been in his bunk five minutes when he was awakened by the gray dawn peeping in his window.

He dressed and went noiselessly outside, for he had left word with Bain that he was leaving early. There was still a trace of



night in the gray sky when he reached the door of the stable and went in to saddle his horse.

There was no one about. The negro cavalymen were still evidently sleeping, and the stableman was not on hand. Brazo was leading Blinky out toward the door when he heard rapid movement. Then the paymaster appeared in the open doorway. He had been running. His blue coat was open, his huge form was heaving. In one hand was the black valise.

He halted in the doorway and shouted, "Turn out, you black devils! Help!"

He turned, drew a revolver from a holster. Outside came a clatter of hoofs. Major Pitrick did not use the revolver he

had drawn. Its muzzle had hardly left the holster when from outside the stable came a crashing report. The major staggered. There came another crash from outside and the major pitched forward on his face.

The major's body was not yet still when two men appeared just outside the door. As they loomed against the dark interior of the stable Brazo recognized them as the two men he had overheard talking at the Gila. Both men had guns drawn and it was evident to Brazo that their bullets had killed the paymaster. They were after the black valise and Brazo knew they would kill anyone who might interfere with them. The army should be able to take care of itself, but this was one instance where it hadn't. Almost cold-blooded, the killing had been, and a sudden rage flamed in Brazo's brain.

He drew his gun and shot twice so rapidly that neither of the two men had time to move a finger in retaliation. The big man went down with a swinish grunt, flat on his big stomach. The little man dropped sideways, landing upon a shoulder. Both were motionless and Brazo was certain he would not need to shoot again. He led his horse out of the stable door and stood for a little time watching the fallen men. It had been fast work. An instant before there had been nothing but the empty stable door and the gray and silent dawn. Now there were three dead men lying in grotesque positions close to the stable door and the atmosphere was throbbing with various sounds.

Shouts reached Brazo's ears. From the dark interior of the stable there was a swishing as of men running over the straw-covered floor. There was a clatter of metal, as of muskets rasping together. The stableman, his face white, his lean body arrayed in shirt and overalls, his hair disheveled and his eyes wildly staring, peered out of the doorway at the forms of the men lying in front of the stable door.

He looked at Brazo.

"What—what?" he began, and seemed unable to finish.

From the front door of the saloon came Bain. The ruler of the camp was attired only in an undershirt and drawers. He

was barefoot and the heavy dust of the trail erupted as he hopped forward through it. A Colt .45 dangled from his right hand.

"What's happened?" he questioned as he came near. Then he saw the bodies on the ground. His gaze went to Brazo. "Talk, damn you!" he said.

"There ain't a lot to say," returned Brazo. "I came in to get my horse. I'd saddled and bridled him and was leading him out when the paymaster came running up, carrying his little valise. Seems these two jaspers must have been chasing him, for he turned right in the door and called his niggers. Then he tried to pull his gun and the big man and the little man downed him. Then I plugged the big man and the little man. That's all there is to it."

"He's a liar!"

The little man had spoken. He had been lying on his right side; now he was sitting half erect, bracing his body with one hand. His face was gray with what was undoubtedly the death pallor, but his eyes were bright and venomous.

"He's a liar!" he repeated, pointing to Brazo with his free hand. "He's a liar, an' he knows it! Me an' my pard was just ridin' up. We're honest men. This here man was holdin' a gun on a soldier. Evidently the soldier wouldn't do somethin' this man wanted him to do, for he backed off a little an' plugged the soldier twice. Then he turned an' plugged me an' my friend. Sorta thought we'd interfere with him, I reckon!"

THE little man was weak; he again stretched out on his side and turned his face away.

There was a silence which was broken by more sounds as of men running through straw. The negro cavalymen were coming.

"Let me see your gun?" said Bain. He moved toward Brazo, but halted and dropped his own weapon when Brazo's six-shooter was shoved forward almost to his face.

"You're looking at it right now, Bain!" answered Brazo. "And if you do any moving you won't ever see anything again! That goes for you!" He waved the muzzle of the gun toward the stableman.

Brazo's position was precarious. Riding

from the Gila to Bain's Camp he had shot several times at a rattlesnake, and until this minute he had forgotten that he had neglected to reload his gun. The stableman would remember that he had talked with Brazo about the paymaster and the money the latter carried. They would convict him upon the word of the little man.

Holding Bain and the stableman with his waving weapon, he backed to his horse and swung into the saddle. The stableman had no gun, and so the instant he mounted Brazo sent Blinky plunging at Bain. The latter dived into the stable to escape being run down and Brazo wheeled Blinky sharply and sent him racing past the sa-



loon. He reached the far corner of the building, skittered around it and sent Blinky at a wild gallop into a range of low hills at the rear of the camp. He had just reached the first hill and was swinging wide around its base, with Blinky traveling as he had never traveled before, when he heard bullets whining dolefully around him.

CHAPTER III

FUGITIVE

THE White Mountains were to the north of Brazo, and he knew that somewhere west of the mountains was Fort Apache, so he rode a little distance up the river until he was screened from sight of Bain's by a long, low ridge. Then he crossed the river in a section of broken country and fled eastward.

He rode about five miles before he reached a wooded eminence where he halted to rest his pony. There, sheltered from view he shielded his eyes with his hands and gazed back toward Bain's. He interpreted several puffs of dust as pursuing horsemen and calmly estimated their distance from him. They had been slow enough getting under way, but he knew they were riding hard. They had not picked up his trail yet, for they were darting in

all directions from Bain's, spreading out so that one or another of them was sure to stumble upon his tracks. However, most of the riders would be the negro cavalrymen, and he had little fear of them.

He drew his gun and reloaded it. The chambers were empty, showing that he had shot four times at the rattlesnake. If Bain had had a little more courage there would have been no need of pursuit.

Brazo interestedly watched the puffs of dust in the distance. Shortly there would be more of them. As the days passed there would be still others. Word would go to the Fort, if such word had not already gone; and from there his description would be telegraphed all over the Territory. He would not dare to visit any more settlements. He would have to avoid any riders he might see. Moreover, if he wanted to get out of the country he would be compelled to do most of his riding at night.

He dropped down the opposite side of the eminence and rode fast across a two mile level. There, in some spruce at the head of a shallow gorge that ran between two black hills, he halted and gazed backward again. He saw no puffs of dust this time. He rode on again through the gorge and out of it to a sand plain. The plain was several miles wide with a long line of timber on its farther edge. If he could reach the timber without being seen there was a chance that he might escape the posse behind him, so he urged Blinky to his best. When he reached the timber he was certain he had not yet been seen, for there were still no puffs of dust anywhere within range of his vision.

HE RODE far into the timber and dismounted. Blinky had been running hard and was almost winded. He must conserve the pony's strength as much as he could, because there would probably come a time when strength would be needed. That time would not come however until other posses got on his trail. Such horses as were used in the cavalry could not match the stamina and speed of Blinky. The stableman at Bain's might have a good horse in the string he maintained there, but he doubted that, for they

were nearly all stage horses. Bain himself wouldn't ride out for Bain would have to stay at the camp to attend to business.

After resting Blinky, Brazo mounted and headed eastward again. Some hours later he was deep in some hills of the Gila Range. Blue Creek was visible to him at times, though here the stream was a mere trickle of shallow water with an indolent movement that matched the atmosphere. At a point where some rocks led directly into the stream, Brazo entered it and rode for a mile or two through the water. Encountering another rock bank he emerged and crossed a lava bed to a rocky slope that led down into a narrow gorge which was filled with a wild tangle of undergrowth. Penetrating the gorge for perhaps a mile he halted Blinky and dismounted. Trailing the reins over the pony's head he stretched himself out on a slab of stone under a juniper, pulled his hat over his eyes and rested.

What had happened, had happened, and there was no way of changing it. He was somewhat inclined to admire the little man for his adroitness in shifting the blame for the killing of the paymaster. "Who would have thought he would think of it that quick?" was Brazo's mental interrogation as he minutely reviewed the episode. "He didn't lose any time in turning things to his own advantage!" But what good would the advantage do him? If Brazo knew anything about the devastating effect of a forty-five bullet entering a man's chest near the heart the little man wouldn't live long to enjoy the malicious satisfaction of knowing some other person would be blamed for the killing of Major Pitrick.

Brazo reflected upon the venomous gleam in the little man's eyes. They had been positively poisonous. Some men were like that.

BRAZO keenly appreciated the dangers that now menaced him. Of course there were many places in the country in which a man might hide for weeks without fear of discovery. But there would come a time when he would need food, and then he would have to risk appearing in a town or at a ranch-house. But if he could succeed in keeping himself invisible

for some days he would have a chance to finally escape.

Brazo's chief emotion over his predicament was annoyance. He felt that if he had been a lazy man or a more ambitious one he would not have arrived at the stable at the time the two men and the paymaster had clashed. Being lazy, he would have remained in his bunk longer, being more ambitious he would have been at the stable earlier. Yet such thoughts were futile, and he ceased entertaining them. He had to face the fact that although he was innocent of any crime he was a fugitive. He could not permit himself to be taken, for he could not prove his innocence.

He slept on the slab of rock in the gorge until a flood of pearl and amethyst swept over the world, telling him that the short Arizona twilight had come. He got up, went to Blinky, removed and unrolled the slicker and dined on some dried beef and soda biscuit. Just before the dusk came he climbed cautiously to the crest of one of the walls flanking the gorge and peered out of some brush at the surrounding country.

The gray, limitless expanse of land was quiet and seemed strangely solemn. Brazo felt that the solemnity was in himself, though, it having been born of his realization that this was the first time in his life that he had ever been hunted.

HE COULD not go where he wanted to go. Worse, beyond the various ridges and hills, there might be riders who would be searching for him, to kill him should he offer resistance to capture.

He frowned and descended the wall of the gorge. He was aware of a strange and new emotion. Many times in other days he had ridden alone into far, wild sections of the country, but always in his thoughts had been the assurance that he was linked to other men by the tie of friendship, and that no matter where he went he could resume association with his fellows at will. Now he was cut off from all such association or from any communication with his friends or acquaintances. All ties that had bound him with other men had been broken. He could no longer ride at will; he could not appear in a town or at a

ranch-house. He would have to avoid meeting other riders for fear such riders might prove to be seeking him. He was a pariah, to be shunned by those who had been friendly to him.

When darkness fell he mounted Blinky and rode out of the gorge to the creek. He watered the pony and filled his canteen, mounted again and rode out of the river valley to higher ground.

They would do little searching for him at night. They would watch for signs, however, for a fire which he might be foolish enough to make; or they would lie in some place of concealment in the hope that he might ride near and expose himself. They would light no fires. They would have watchers posted upon all the trails; riders would carry news of him to all the ranchers in the section. They would guard the water holes, the accessible places in the rivers.

BRAZO knew little about the country in this direction, but he was aware that there were several small towns between him and the Rio Grande. He would have to avoid these towns as he would have to avoid all trails leading to and from them. Therefore although he kept on level land during the greater part of the night the first streak of dawn found him again in the hills.

When the sun rose he was in some timber on the shoulder of a mountain, and his pony was tethered in a deep recess which was also screened by a growth of brush. Brazo made his way upward, keeping himself behind bushes and small spruces until he gained the summit. There, lying flat on his stomach, he scanned the dun land that encompassed him.

Northward he observed half a dozen riders on the sky line. Southward in a flat he saw various little dust clouds erupting. The dust clouds were far away, but he knew they contained riders. Eastward and westward were other dust clouds. There were a great many of them.

Brazo spent the entire day watching the clouds and speculating about them. So far he had fooled them. Not a rider in any of the posses had picked up his trail. They were merely combing the country, searching. After a while, conceding they did not find him, they would search elsewhere. Brazo stayed on the mountain top all night, thinking the riders would be gone in the morning. But when the light again came he saw them, as before, searching.

Brazo and Blinky had been for more than twenty-four hours without water, for Brazo had emptied his canteen the preceding morning, thinking he would be able to refill it from some stream during the night. But he had not left the mountain top during the night, and now thirst was torturing him.

HE WENT down the mountain when night came. The riders seemed to have drawn off a little. He rode around the bases of the foothills in search of water, and found none. But during the day he had observed, far southward, a line of green which he knew must be timber, and which he was certain was a fringe of trees following a stream. As a result of his observations from the mountain top he was convinced that he was close to one of the small streams that were tributary to the Gila, and that he had spent two days and a night in the Datil Range.

Before daybreak he reached the timber; and from the crest of a butte which was almost hidden by a wild growth of rank weeds and bushes, he watched riders of a posse searching the limits of a big basin. Brazo's pony was in a small box canyon below him.

The day passed. Brazo was now hungry as well as thirsty. That night he found water again, for the pony and himself, and by daylight the following morning he was concealed in some wild brush on a high ridge fifty miles east of the Butte which had been his latest camp. He had ridden recklessly during the night, hoping to lose his pursuers among the mountain ranges, and now both he and Blinky were exhausted.

Blinky he had hidden in a gulch in the valley behind him. The pony was in better



shape than Brazo. For three days Brazo had been without food. He had not shaved since leaving Bain's Camp; he had not taken time to wash for fear of someone surprising him; he was gray with alkali dust which had settled upon him; his eyes were rimmed with red from loss of sleep and constant watching; and in his heart was beginning to burn a flame of contempt and rage.

YET he knew he must not yield to either. He was aware that the members of the posse were hardy, grim men whose wits were as keen as his own, and that one thoughtless move on his part would bring them upon him. Below him in the broad basin which he had first seen only a few minutes before when he had reached the crest of the ridge, was a river in which the water gleamed alluringly. The basin was not more than three or four miles wide and perhaps seven or eight miles long, and it was rimmed on all sides by hills and ridges and buttes as high and ragged as that upon which he was concealed. Brazo had no doubt that even while he was looking down into the basin certain members of the posse were also gazing down into it, seeking signs that would tell them of his presence there. Or perhaps members of the posse had been lying concealed among the ridges and hills for several days, waiting for him to ride down for water.

The basin was beautiful. There was a great deal of timber near the river, and there was green-brown grass spreading over the levels. A few cattle were feeding in the farther reaches of the basin. For a time Brazo felt they were part of a herd belonging to some rancher in the neighborhood, strays which would not be



discovered until the next roundup. Then, scanning the timber near the river for the second time, Brazo saw a small log cabin on a level near the stream. There was a small corral near the house, a few small outbuildings, some horses, a buckboard.

ALTHOUGH Brazo spent several hours watching the cabin, he observed no signs of life around it. No smoke came out of the adobe chimney, no man or woman emerged.

It appeared to Brazo, gazing at the cabin from a distance of perhaps three miles, that the building was close to a grim, red butte that towered above it. It seemed to him that the butte stuck far out into the basin, like a narrow neck of land projecting into a sea, and that the cabin was close to it. But around the cabin and at the base of the butte were many trees and a tangle of wild undergrowth, which created a dark background which Brazo's vision could not penetrate.

All along the northern rim of the basin ran great, rugged walls of granite with seemingly no break in them. Beyond the buttes and towering above them, were the peaks of mountains. Far westward, in a gigantic cave formed by the overhang of the granite wall of the buttes, was a deserted cliff dwelling fashioned of adobe blocks. In the face of the butte were other dwellings which were carved out of the granite walls of the butte itself. Brazo knew that some of the walls were covered with crude decorations, pictures of serpents, mythical beasts and personages. There were symbols chipped out of rock with the stone hatchets of aboriginal sculptors; steps, ledges, terraces.

The white sunlight, pouring down into the basin, had bleached the huge boulders of the moraine at the edge of the basin until they seemed like skulls of prehistoric monsters. The sand along the river bed was also whitened, and the water gleamed in the sun like a broad, silver ribbon.

Something more than silence reigned in the basin as Brazo crouched in the deep brush and gazed down upon it. A strangely solemn hush, an all-pervading somberness was in the atmosphere. Nowhere in the basin or above it was there sound or movement. There was no chattering of birds, no humming of insects, no rustling of leaves in the windless void that seemingly floated over the section. Brazo had the impression that he was the only living human in this great amphitheater which had once

been teeming with the people of a forgotten race.

And yet in the solemn hush was menace for Brazo. In the wild growth along the base of the buttes men of the posse might be lying in wait for him. There was water in the basin, and they knew he and his pony would have to have water.

Brazo's tongue was parched; he knew Blinky needed water, yet he dared not travel the few miles that stretched between himself and the stream. He would have to wait for the darkness.

HE DID not move until noon. Then he squirmed on his stomach to the edge of a ledge behind him from where he could look down upon his pony in the gulch. When he observed that Blinky was grazing in apparent content he squirmed back to the position in the brush just in time to see four horsemen riding down the western slope of the basin.

The riders halted about half way down the slope and appeared to confer as they scanned the basin. Then they went on again, spreading out and examining the sand in various places as though in search of hoof tracks. One of the riders crossed the river and loped his horse across an upland section which led to the base of the long butte. This rider sat for some time motionless on his horse in front of the deserted cliff dwellings, peering at them. He rode around in ever-widening circles away from the dwelling, peering into the sand. Another rider was working his way slowly up the sandy bed of the river. He, Brazo knew, was searching for signs which would tell him that the fugitive had ridden down to water.

The other two riders were circling the basin. They were an hour riding around it, and the first two vanished into the timber.

After a while the two circling the basin and the two who had gone into the timber met at the base of the butte near the log cabin. They again appeared to confer and then all of them rode to the house. Three of them dismounted and entered the cabin, and the third remained outside, evidently to watch the horses or to guard against surprise of any kind.

The men were in the cabin a long time,

and when they emerged they talked with the fourth man. They nodded their heads toward the cabin and pointed in various directions, and from their manner Brazo divined that they were talking about him and wondering about the direction they should take in order to come upon his trail. The men finally mounted and rode around the corral, looking at the horses confined there; and after a time they seemed satisfied and rode away. They all went eastward, and Brazo watched them until they vanished over a ridge.

Brazo resisted an impulse to ride to the river for water. There was a possibility that the men might ride only a short distance and return. Brazo's tongue was so swollen that he felt he could not have talked if he had tried, but he decided that he was more comfortable where he was than if he were dangling at the end of a rope somewhere in the distance toward Fort Apache.

The afternoon was long and the sun hot, but Brazo, stretched out on his stomach on the ridge, watched the sun sink low over the mountains. When twilight came he rose and went down the gulch to his pony. Blinky, violating the stern rules of his early training, was pulling upon his rope, trying to break away.

BLINKY had stood it as long as he could, Brazo decided. He scented water and was eager to get to it.

Darkness had come by the time Brazo climbed into the saddle. He was amazed at the weakness of his legs. Blinky was still strong, however, and took him down the slope of the ridge without difficulty. He needed no urging and when he reached the level floor of the basin he loped steadily into the darkness toward the river.

Horse and rider spent an hour at the stream. Brazo had to fight the pony to keep him from over-drinking. For three or four hours after that Brazo slept while Blinky grazed upon the grass of the level. Awakening about midnight, Brazo drank again from the stream, filled his canteen, watered Blinky, mounted him and rode into the timber on the north side of the basin.

Deep in the timber he halted Blinky and considered entering the cabin to search

for food. He was convinced that the cabin had no occupant or he would have made himself visible during the day. It was possible though, that the owner was away, and in that case, according to the unwritten



law of the country, any visitor could help himself to what food he needed.

Brazo was deep in the timber when the moon rose, and when he at last saw the cabin in the center of a little clearing he sat in the saddle for some time before venturing to approach it. He decided the posse had not returned. They would, perhaps, return later, when they failed to find him.

HE DISMOUNTED, tied Blinky to a small tree and strode across the clearing toward the door of the cabin. At the door he drew his gun. He entered, stood just inside the door, and peered about him. A shaft of moonlight entering a small window provided a subdued light. When Brazo's eyes grew accustomed to the shadowy gloom of the interior of the cabin he saw that there was a bunk built against the northern wall, and that in the bunk was a man lying stretched out on his side, his eyes wide open.

Brazo's gun was in his right hand, and its muzzle was gaping straight into the reclining man's eyes. Brazo waited. The shaft of moonlight from the window was shining straight upon the man in the bunk, and Brazo observed that his face was white and emaciated, as though a wasting disease had stricken him. His eyes were bright and he appeared to be trying to narrow his gaze so that he could see Brazo's face in the shadows that surrounded him.

He seemed at last to cease trying, for he smiled wanly and lowered his head to the pillow.

Brazo did not move. Silence followed.

At last the man spoke, slowly and distinctly, with a hint of derision in his voice.

"I've been hearing you for quite a while. You wasn't sure about what you'd find

in here. I reckon you're the killer the posse is after!"

CHAPTER IV

EVEN A KILLER MUST EAT

THE man's hands were visible to Brazo, and they held no weapon. He did not appear to be interested in his visitor, for in the silence which followed his words he closed his eyes and seemed to rest.

"You are right; they are after me," answered Brazo. "You're sick, eh? I'm sorry I had to come in here."

The man opened his eyes and smiled.

"Glad to have somebody. Even a killer. Gettin' lonesome. These fellows must have hustled you some. I suppose you saw them come in here. Sheriff Neil and two others. Neil said they had more than a hundred men out after you, beside some soldiers. They think you must have headed south. They're layin' for you all over the country. You'll never get out."

Brazo did not answer, and after a time the man spoke again.

"You're hungry, eh? Well, help yourself. There's lots of grub stacked around. The last time I was in to Cooney I brought back grub enough to last a year."

Brazo accepted the invitation. He holstered his gun, found food in the cupboard, placed it on a crude table which stood near the window through which the moonlight came, and ate silently.

He did not look at the man in the bunk, but felt he was being watched. The moonlight shone fairly upon him, so that if the man was interested in his visitor he had time and opportunity to study him.

The man took advantage of the opportunity. He saw a lean, strong face in which there was no suggestion of evil. It was the face of a man who had learned the lessons of life in a grim school. There was no furtiveness in the eyes or the mouth. His movements were unhurried, deliberate even, although he must know that the members of the posse might return any minute.

When he finished he straightened in his chair and smiled at the man in the bunk.

"Thanks. I feel better. I was beginning to think I'd have to take a chance on riding into a town for grub. You're in bad shape, eh? Anything I can do for you?"



"I'm sort of thirsty. Ain't had a drink all day. I spoke to Neil about it, an' he promised to get me some water. Likely he forgot about it."

"Some folks can only think of one thing at a time," said Brazo. He found a pail, went to the river and filled it with water; returned, set the pail on the table, found a dipper, and gave the man a drink. The latter smiled.

"Tasted as good as your grub," he said.

BRAZO set the dipper on the table and went to the side of the bunk, where he stood, looking down at the man.

"You're not able to get out of bed, eh?"

The man shook his head.

"Not lately," he said. "Not for more than a minute or so at a time."

"Do you know what's ailing you?"

"It's my back, I reckon. Seems paralyzed. Gettin' worse every day."

"Had a doctor?"

"Can't do me any good. He's given me up. Last time I saw him he gave me a month. I reckon he was too generous."

"You got anybody around here to wait on you?"

"No."

"Hell!"

Brazo pulled a chair close to the bunk and sat in it.

"Got any folks?"

"None that I'd want to bother with me when I'm in this shape."

"It's likely you'll want them to know when you're through."

"Well—yes. But somehow, in spite of the doc, I sometimes feel as though I'm goin' to pull through this. No use botherin' folks."

"Hungry?" asked Brazo.

"Well—yes. I ain't been eatin' much. But I've been thinkin' all day that maybe a little toast an' milk would taste good."

"You tell Neil that?"

"Well—no. You see, I didn't want to bother him. He was in a terrible hurry."

Brazo got up. He found some wood in a corner and started a fire in a small cast iron stove near the wall opposite the bunk. He had already seen a kerosene lamp on the table. He touched a match to the wick and a yellow light flooded the room.

THE man in the bunk watched him wonderingly. Lighting the lamp might bring the posse back. However, if Brazo had any such fear there were no visible signs of it, for he worked deliberately with the stove, the bread and the canned milk he found in the cupboard, not even glancing at the door or the window as he moved about the room.

"Ain't you scared the light will bring Neil an' his men back?" asked the man in the bunk.

"I'm hoping it won't," Brazo replied, grinning. "Anyway, I've got to take that chance. Burnt toast ain't so good when a man hasn't done any eating all day."

While the sick man was eating Brazo went out to Blinky, removed saddle and bridle and slipped a hackamore on the animal, leading him to a grass patch and hitching him to a tree. When he returned to the room the sick man had finished his toast and was lying back in the bunk. His face was grave as he looked at his guest.

"I ain't curious," he said, "but I'd like to know your name."

"I used to be known as Bob Adams. Later folks got to calling me Brazo."

"Texas man, eh?"

Brazo nodded.

Brazo had paused just inside the door and the light from the lamp shone strongly upon him.

"Hell!" declared the sick man suddenly. "You never killed the paymaster!"

BRAZO was silent. He met the sick man's gaze steadily.

"Did you?" insisted the other.

"No."

"I knew it!" declared the occupant of the bunk. "It was them other jaspers! An' they blamed it on you! Why didn't you stay there an' have it out?"

Brazo told him why and the sick man nodded.

"Yes," he said, "it sure did look bad for you. Beats the devil what scrapes a man can get into!"

"You're talking too much!" declared Brazo. "You're getting all flushed up." Brazo walked to the table and put out the light. "I'm quitting you," he said from the doorway. "If Neil and his men haven't got sense enough to send some one here to take care of you until you get on your feet again, I'll do it."

"How will you do it?"

"Tack a note to a post, maybe," answered Brazo. "Anyway, I'll get somebody to come here."

"Couldn't hang around yourself, I reckon?" asked the man.

"No."

"Well, so-long," said the sick man. "If you're dead set on gettin' somebody to come here to wait on me you'll have to tell them my name. It's Jim Henley. An' this is Battle's Basin."

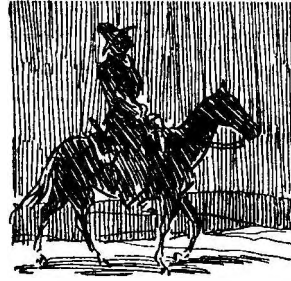
Brazo stepped out of the door into the moonlight. He had decided to stay in the basin, but he hadn't told Henley of his decision because he wasn't sure that Henley could be trusted. The sick have their vagaries.

Henley was helpless, almost. His cabin was stocked with food enough to last for a long time. According to what Henley had said there would be little chance of escaping the various posses which were out searching, and Brazo had little desire to repeat his experiences in hiding and starving. If he was to be taken he would rather be taken here than out among the hills, enduring heat and thirst and hunger.

HOWEVER, he did not mean to be taken. He had some ideas which he had not mentioned to Henley. One was that if he could find a place of concealment in the vicinity he would stay around and take care of the sick man until the search cooled a little.

He felt that he might elude his pursuers if he made the effort, but he was reluctant to desert Henley. The man needed care. It was curious that Henley had been convinced of his innocence.

Brazo got Blinky again, mounted him and rode deep into the timber. Again he tethered the pony in a grass plot, and once more, wearied by his long vigil, he dropped into the grass, rolled up his blankets and went to sleep.



He was awake with the dawn, exploring the timber, seeking a hiding place.

He had been right about the projecting butte, although it was farther from the cabin than it had appeared to be when viewed from the distant ridge which he had occupied during the day. All along the base of the butte was a wild, dense tangle of brush which extended some distance out into the level. The river, flowing westward out of the mountains, was broad and shallow along the base of the butte, its waters lapping the walls, penetrating the brush and seeping into various deep recesses. There was a certain spot where spires and battlements of rock reared upward independently of the granite walls that rose above them, and it seemed to Brazo as he studied them that some cataclysm had separated them from the mother wall, cracking them, splitting them, shoving them out so that the elements might have their way with them.

The points of rock had yielded to the elements; exposure to wind and rain and the action of sand whirling against them had worn them into grotesque shapes, had created space between them until from a distance it appeared they were many feet apart and that the water of the river flowed behind and around them.

BRAZO urged Blinky to the water's edge and looked closer. The rocks were screened by the heavy brush that grew in front of them, and perhaps few

men would have inspected them as Brazo was now doing. However, few men in Brazo's extremity had been in the vicinity, and Brazo's interest was acute, his need desperate.

He sat in the saddle, watching the lazy current flow around the base of the rocks. There was a steady westward movement, but presently Brazo observed that more water flowed out of the rocks than appeared to flow into them. In fact, it appeared there was a steady current flowing ceaselessly southward, at right angles across the river toward where he was stationed.

Convinced that the phenomenon would bear investigation, Brazo slid out of the saddle, trailed the reins over Blinky's head and stepped out into the stream.

The river at this point was about one hundred feet wide, but the water was shallow and there were great slabs of rock projecting upward. Brazo leaped from one rock to another until he stood on the opposite side on a rather wide ledge at the base of the butte. For a time he moved here and there, peering into the recesses between the walls and spires; then he entered a broad cavern which was roofed over with rock. A ledge ran along its base, and he followed the ledge until complete darkness engulfed him.

A strong wind blew against his face. A wind laden with the aroma of sage!

Brazo continued along the ledge. He was tingling with eagerness. He knew that the scent of sage did not come from the cavern itself, but from the outside country beyond it. That meant, of course, that the cavern must open upon the outside world.

He must have traveled several hundred feet when he came to an abrupt turn in the wall and in the ledge, and he was not surprised when a faint light burst upon him and he saw directly ahead of him at a little distance an opening in the cavern through which was revealed a broad, vast valley, emerald green and basking in the sunlight.

The ledge over which he had passed was wide enough for a horse to pass, and the water that ran beside the ledge was shallow and flowing slowly over a rocky bottom.

Brazo reached the outlet and stood on a rock high above the water to gaze at the valley. He had found his hiding place!

The valley was about a mile long and perhaps half a mile wide. Its floor was thickly covered with lush grass and trees, and the stream beside which he was standing ran through the center of it to a gorge that was cut in a mountain wall on the northern edge. Mountain peaks rose all around, dead, somber piles of volcanic origin, completely shutting the valley in from the rest of the world. It was evident that no one had ever penetrated here, for there were no signs of human occupancy.

BRAZO smiled. He walked back over the ledge, crossed the stream, mounted Blinky and rode him slowly through the cavern, emerging into the valley. He observed Blinky's ears lifted as the new grazing burst upon his vision. A paradise for Blinky!

Brazo rode around the valley for an hour or more. Then he returned to a spot near the entrance to the cavern, staked the pony out with rope of sufficient length to permit him to reach the water, and again went through the cavern, to emerge at last upon the bank of the stream from which he had first viewed the entrance to the hidden valley.

The sun was high as Brazo went through the timber toward Henley's cabin. Twice as he walked Brazo paused and carefully scrutinized the surrounding ridges. He saw no riders. Perhaps Neil and his men had ridden south, as Henley had suggested. It made little difference to Brazo now which way the riders went. He, himself, was not going anywhere.

CHAPTER V

A SECRET DIES

BRAZO felt that Henley was studying him, appraising him, valuing him. For every time Brazo entered the cabin Henley watched him. His gaze followed Brazo around the room. If Brazo stood by the stove, cooking, Henley would lie motionless in his bunk and regard him with half-

closed eyes. Brazo could feel Henley's gaze. Henley was interested in everything Brazo did. No movement that Brazo made while in the cabin escaped Henley's eyes.

Henley's watchfulness was not critical. It was anything but that. It was admiring, grateful, appreciative, pleased watchfulness. And yet there was something more in it, an emotion more subtle and profound, an evanescent slyness which gleamed in the depths of his eyes and would not be expressed.

Brazo had caught that gleam many times and was baffled by it. It wasn't derision, it wasn't mockery or amusement. After a while Brazo gave up thinking about it, ascribing it to a mental malady which Henley's disease had brought upon him.

He didn't care, after all, how Henley looked at him. He had been with Henley for over three months, now, and he meant to stay until Henley died or got better. And he was certain that Henley would not get better. Slowly he got worse. He was thinner, weaker, more helpless.

Henley was a tall man, almost as tall as Brazo, and Brazo estimated that in good health Henley had been lithe, rugged.

However, Henley was ten years older than Brazo, but the beard he wore was black, as it had always been since he had permitted it to grow. His hair, too, was black, and it had been so long when Brazo came to stay with him that Brazo had cut it off with some shears that he had found on a shelf.

Brazo, too, had grown a beard. Not quite so long as Henley's, it strongly resembled the latter's. On the day that Brazo had cut Henley's hair the latter produced from the corner of his bunk a bundle of papers tied with a string, from which he drew a daguerrotype and showed it to his guest.

"I had it taken over in Cooney, by a man who was takin' pictures there one day when I drove in for supplies. I was feelin' pretty good then. That was about nine years ago, a year after I came here." He looked keenly at the picture and then at Brazo. "You looked like I looked then," he added; "enough to be my twin brother!"

For a moment Brazo decided that he had discovered the mystery of Henley's constant watchfulness. It was in his resemblance to the man Henley had once been. Later he changed his mind and became convinced that Henley was merely trying to determine what sort of a man he was. Henley was probing him, perhaps a trifle cynically, in an attempt to interpret his character.



For what reason?

BRAZO could not decide. Later, however, meditating upon the situation, he conceded that in Henley's position he, too, would be doing some wondering about the character of a man who had suddenly appeared out of nowhere, branded as a killer. He would wonder why the killer persisted in staying month after month when he must know that the search for him must have practically ceased. Yet perhaps if he liked the killer as well as Henley appeared to like him he would not wonder so much after all. He would want the man to stay and he would very probably reveal that desire in much the same way that Henley had revealed it.

Well, Brazo meditated, he was staying, anyway. And he meant to stay until Henley died.

There was little to do except to fill the sick man's wants. And those wants were few. Henley spent most of his time sleeping. When he wasn't sleeping he would draw the bundle of papers out of its corner in the bunk and write. What he was writing Brazo did not know, or care. Brazo would sit for hours upon end on a fallen log in the timber, from where he could scan the ridges around the basin. At such times he felt the completeness of his isolation, and a yearning for the companionship of his fellowmen would grip him. Yet he had no impulse to desert Henley. He liked Henley; had liked him from the beginning. He knew Henley would die soon, and he wouldn't desert him.

There were times when he wondered much about Henley and about the cabin and the basin. Henley had few cattle, not more than fifty. He was living alone, with no neighbors within a hundred miles. He apparently sold no cattle; he owned only a few horses; he had no visible means of getting money. And yet the interior of the cabin was stacked with food supplies of every description; and there were other supplies in one of the outbuildings. Henley had told him that on the occasion of his last trip to "town" he had laid in supplies for a year. Obviously, Henley had means which were not visible.

However, Henley's affairs did not provoke Brazo's curiosity, and the long, lazy days dragged by without any questioning on the latter's part.

NO MEMBERS of the posse revisited the basin, although Brazo was careful to keep to the shelter of the timber during the day, and only ventured into the cabin when he was assured that he would not be seen from the ridge that surrounded Henley's dwelling place.

Brazo kept Blinky in the hidden valley. Sometimes upon days when his presence was not required by the sick man, Brazo would saddle and bridle Blinky and run him for several hours across the green floor of the basin, to keep him in condition against the day when he might need him. Brazo also rode on many trips of exploration. He sought out various small canyons which appeared in the granite walls that rimmed the place, he climbed the sloping walls of dry gorges that ran deep into the mountains he scaled tall, ragged walls and twice almost lost himself among some towering, distant peaks.

Henley grew weaker and seemed to watch Brazo more than ever. Of late there had come a certain wistfulness into his gaze. It appeared to Brazo that Henley wanted to talk with him about something of importance, but that he was holding off, apparently doubting the wisdom of confiding in his guest.

Brazo could not fail to understand that something was disturbing Henley, but whatever was on the man's mind would

have to come off without Brazo's assistance. The months passed without Brazo asking any questions that would indicate he had any interest in Henley's personal affairs.

Brazo wasn't interested in Henley's secrets, in his past or in his problems. He had found the man in need of care and he was giving him care until he would have no further want of it. That was all.

Henley's eyes were exceptionally bright when one morning in late summer Brazo entered the cabin. He raised himself in his bunk and stared long and intently at his guest.

"There ain't no use of me tryin' to fool myself, Brazo," he finally said. "I'm goin' to cash in."

"We all got to do that, Henley."

"Sure. I know that. What I mean is that there ain't no hope of me ever gettin' well. I ain't goin' to die sudden, but I'm sure goin'. Every day I get a little weaker. What you goin' to do when I cash in?"

"You'll hang on quite a while yet, Henley."

"You know better, Brazo. You can't fool me. I'm just curious to know where you're goin' when you leave here."

"When I left Bain's camp I was thinking of New Mexico. Lincoln County. It's likely I'll get there some day."

"You got any folks?"

"Not any."

For some minutes Henley silently watched Brazo.

"You're an odd cuss, Brazo," he finally said. "Most young fellows would be sort of impatient, stayin' on here with a sick man. They'd be wantin' to hit town once in a while to raise hell." He again studied Brazo. "You don't like that sort of thing, eh?"

"I've raised hell," returned Brazo. "More than I should have, I suppose. But while I was doing it I couldn't see any sense in it. Lately I've been avoiding town and saving my money."

"You like money?"

"I'm not getting gray hairs worrying about it," smiled Brazo. "I feel a lot better when I haven't got too much of it."

HOW much is too much?" "Well, I've got about six hundred in my belt," answered Brazo. "I get sort of tired dragging it around. If I had more I wouldn't know what to do with it. I'd be like some people, I reckon; I'd put it in a bank and then camp alongside the bank and watch it. It would sure be annoying to have so much money that you'd have to feel that way about it."

"You drink, Brazo?"



"Some. Whisky and me never formed any sort of friendship. Two drinks and I don't want any more until next time. And 'next time' ain't the next day, either."

"What do you think about women?" asked Henley.

"I've never done much thinking about them. Sure, I've seen some. A man does." Brazo blushed. "I've maybe got some fool ideas about women, Henley," he added, "but I've got them and I can't change them. I like to look at a good woman. I ain't got any use for the other kind." He met Henley's gaze challengingly. "Maybe that was the way I was raised," he went on. His face paled.

"You're thinkin' of them damned Indians that killed your folks," said Henley. "Well, if a man likes his mother he thinks of her. Sort of judges other women by her, eh?"

Henley watched Brazo.

"You've been stayin' in the hidden valley for quite a while, Brazo," he said. "Likely you've poked around in there some. Did you find anything interestin'?"

"Nothing unusual."

Henley smiled. He was watching Brazo's face.

Brazo was sitting on a bench beside the table. He saw Henley half turn from him, and thinking the man was through talking and intended to lie down again, Brazo got up and walked to the door. He stood in the doorway a few minutes, gazing out into the shimmering sunlight; and then he heard Henley's voice and turned to look at him.

Henley was again sitting up in the bunk. His eyes were narrowed and they were gleaming and alert. A small object which at first appeared to Brazo to be a sphere of dark cloth, was lying in his lap. Brazo's vision had been slightly blurred from gazing into the sunshine of the basin, and when his eyes finally became accustomed to the light of the room he saw that the object in Henley's lap was a small buckskin bag, round, about six inches in diameter, its top tied tightly with rawhide thongs.

Brazo's gaze was questioning, but he said nothing.

"Look here, Brazo!" Henley had said.

Now he said nothing, but was studying Brazo's face with his alert eyes.

Brazo did not move. His face had not changed expression.

Henley continued to hold the buckskin bag and continued to regard Brazo intently.

"Well?" said Brazo, finally.

"Do you know what's in this bag?" asked Henley. He seemed amazed that Brazo had not betrayed excitement or interest.

"Yes," answered Brazo. "That is, I think so. I can guess. It's gold."

"You're right," said Henley. "It's gold. Nuggests!" He opened the bag and scattered the precious metal upon the coverlet. Meanwhile he watched Brazo with a peculiar intent slyness which brought a derisive smile to Brazo's lips. Henley's fingers played with the gleaming pebbles, but he did not remove his gaze from Brazo's face. Nor, after the first glance, did Brazo look at the gold. He was more interested in wondering why Henley had chosen to be dramatic.

AND now Henley appeared to be somewhat confused, although there was a strange gleam of elation in his eyes.

"You don't appear to be much interested, Brazo," he said. "I show you a bag of gold worth thousands of dollars, and you stand there as unconcerned as if I had dumped out a handful of gravel!"

"I'm glad you've got it, Henley. But what did you expect me to do? I never could get exactly excited over looking at

money that belonged to some one else. I expect it ain't natural."

Henley tapped some of the nuggets, but kept his gaze on Brazo.

"This is your gold, Brazo," he said. "I'm payin' you for stayin' here an' takin' care of me."

Brazo smiled. "If you wasn't sick I'd knock hell out of you, Henley. I haven't been taking care of you, I've been taking care of myself. I've been here several months, loafing and living like a king while waiting for the sheriff and his men to kind of ease off and give me a chance to get out. I'm not taking any pay from you. That's settled."

Henley said nothing in reply. He gathered the nuggets and replaced them in the bag, drawing the rawhide thongs tight and tossing the bag into a corner of the bunk when he had finished with it. Then he sank back in the bunk, placed his hands back of his head and watched Brazo. Henley's cheeks had a little color in them now; his eyes glowed; he appeared to be pleased.

"You're an odd cuss for sure, Brazo," he said at last. "Seems you ain't got no greed or curiosity. You see that bag of gold. You won't take it. You don't ask where I got it, an' you don't seem to be interested in knowin' if there's more where that came from. If I cashed in right now you'd have to take that gold, wouldn't you?"

"Not if I knew where I could find your folks."

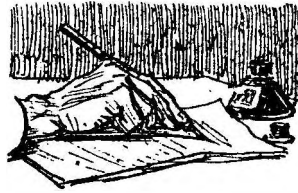
"Well, you'll know that. But not right now. I ain't certain. Somehow I feel better, an' mebbe I won't die right soon, after all. You've seen me writin', I reckon. You've never asked me what I've been writin' about. You ain't interested, eh?"

"What you are writing is your business, Henley."

HENLEY seemed to meditate. For a time he watched Brazo intently, and then he smiled.

"There's some things I've got to tell you, Brazo," he said. "I've lived here about ten years an' I ain't had anybody to talk to. An' I've wanted somebody. When you first come here I knowed right away that

you was an odd cuss, an' I was hopin' you'd stay. It's the odd cusses that amount to somethin'; a n' a man has got to be pretty odd if he don't get



fused up when he sees a bag of gold nuggets. Most folks think that money is everything. There's men that would cut my throat for that bag of nuggets. Well, what do you do when you see it? You don't even look at it the second time. There was nothin' to prevent you grabbin' that bag from me an' ridin' away from here. Why don't you do it? You don't do it because you've already found out that there's bigger things than money. It takes some men the biggest part of their lives to find that out, but you ain't very old an' you've found it out already. You've thought things out. You're onto life. No matter what would happen to you, you wouldn't be stampeded. You think before you do things. You're slow an' soft-spoken an' cool, an' I reckon you're a bad man in a fight. I've been sizin' you up some"

"Shut up, Henley; you'll talk yourself to death."

Henley observed that Brazo was embarrassed. He laughed softly. Brazo's embarrassment proved exactly what Henley was thinking—what he had thought all along—that Brazo was modest, that life hadn't hardened him. He had a man's body, a man's presence, he knew how to take care of himself, and other men would respect him for the quiet manliness that would be visible to them. And yet beneath the intense masculinity of him were the impulses, the warm generosity, the quick sympathies of a boy. Yes; Brazos could take care of himself, even in this country where a man's existence depended upon wisdom and rapid, ruthless action.

"I've been sizin' you up some," repeated Henley. "When I saw you standin' in the light the first night you came into my shack, I knowed you hadn't done that killin'. The reason I knowed was that you looked about the way I felt when in my home town I found folks was accusin' me of a murder that I hadn't done!"

"That's why you're here, eh?" said Brazo. "You're hiding."

HENLEY nodded. "Nobody knows where I am—that is, nobody I don't want to know. I've changed my name. What you've seen me writin' is a sort of sketch of what happened to me. It's the truth, but I reckon the circumstances of that killin' point so plain to me as the killer that I'd never be able to prove my innocence. I ain't goin' back to try. I'm stayin' free as long as I can.

"Well, that's part of what I've been writin'. The rest is about you; about how you stayed here and took care of me, an' how I know you didn't kill the paymaster. I'm writing this to someone you don't know. When I find I'm goin' to cash in I'm goin' to name names. Then you'll know. But not before. I'm not takin' any chances on gettin' caught. Time enough to name names when I'm sure. Then it'll be too late for them to jail me.

"An' listen, Brazo! You'll find more than that in what I'm writin'. I've showed you some gold. What I showed you ain't a hundredth part of what I've got cached!"

HENLEY lifted himself on his elbows and stared at Brazo. He now seemed to have complete confidence in Brazo, and it was evident that he was on the verge of revealing his secret. His eyes were brighter than Brazo had seen them; his color was high and his voice hoarse with excitement.

"I figure I've got a million, Brazo!" he declared. "I got it out of the hidden valley. I came upon it one day by accident! Man, I kicked it out of a rotted vein, where it had been layin' for centuries. Free gold! For days after I uncovered the vein I was plumb crazy.

"But I'll never handle it. It's goin' to you, an' to some one else that I like. You will find it all in what I've written an' in what I'm goin' to write. I know you're square, Brazo, an' I'm trustin' you!"

"You're goin' to go to sleep right now!" declared Brazo. "We'll say you got plenty of gold. But what of it? If you keep on at the rate you're goin' you'll bust some-thin' and cash in mighty quick. Sure, I'll do

whatever you say. But take your time, Henley. I'm leaving you for a little while. When I come back you'll be asleep."

Abruptly, with a smile at Henley, he strode from the cabin.

Henley was queer. He'd had trouble, and the end of things for him was not far away, now. A million, eh? A pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. Henley had found it and was not to enjoy it. He felt a deep sympathy for Henley. Innocent, and living like a hermit. Rich, and no way of enjoying his riches. Sick, facing death, and striving to keep his identity a secret so that the hand of the law might not grasp him in life. Concerned for someone, as yet unnamed, whom he liked and to whom he wished the gold to go when he died.

Why didn't that some one come out here with Henley?

A member of Henley's family, probably, not caring a great deal for him—obviously—but possibly writing to him occasionally; giving him some written words now and then to lean upon. Slender support for a man in exile.

But Brazo felt he should not judge. He knew very little about Henley and less about the mysterious person who was to receive Henley's gold following his death. Brazo hoped the person would prove worthy.



BRAZO'S interest in Henley's gold was almost negative. He wanted none of it. It was as safe with him as if it had been in the bank vault.

Brazo spent the day in the hidden valley. He had left things handy for Henley, and there was little need of staying at the man's side, for Henley's wants were few. And so Brazo did not go near the cabin again until dusk. He entered the door and heard no sound from Henley. He walked close to the bunk and looked down into Henley's upturned face. Henley was dead. He had evidently died peacefully, without knowledge of what was happening, for his eyes were closed and calm serenity was in the lines of his lips.

CHAPTER VI

HIS SECRET DIED WITH HIM

FOR many hours Brazo sat in the darkness of the cabin. A consciousness of loss assailed him. He had grown to like Henley. He did not light the lamp or build a fire in the stove. He kept thinking of Henley, and of the life the man had lived in this lonely spot, away from the one person he "liked," because some one had misjudged him.

He sat in the cabin until daylight. Then he again walked to the bunk, pulled back the bed clothing, laid his head on Henley's breast and listened. There was no doubt about Henley being dead. He was rigid, cold as marble.

Brazo covered him, went out to one of the small outbuildings, found a pick and shovel and went a little distance into the timber. There he labored for several hours.

Returning to the cabin he gently lifted Henley and carried him into the timber. When he again returned to the cabin he bore only the pick and shovel. These he threw into the outbuilding.

He stood for a long time at the edge of the timber, scanning the ridge around the basin. He was alone.

He did not reënter the cabin until noon. Then he built a fire, made coffee and opened some canned food. He had baked biscuits several days before, and there were a few left.

His meal over, he looked at Henley's bunk. In a corner he saw the buckskin bag and a bundle of papers with a string around them. Henley's gold and his writing. The bag and the papers Brazo placed on a shelf behind various cans and boxes. He would examine them later. Just now he was interested in cleaning up the interior of the cabin, responding to a vague impulse which was provoked by a subconscious desire to rid the cabin of the atmosphere of death.

It was late afternoon when he finished. He had scrubbed the floor, cleaned all the shelves, polished the stove. The bed clothes were on a line outside, to be aired.

Just why Brazo had prepared the cabin for future occupancy he could not have

told. He stood in the open doorway, wondering.

He had done what he could for Henley, and now there appeared to be no further reason for his remaining in the vicinity. But still he had no inclination to leave.

He took Henley's bundle of papers from the shelf, laid it on the table, opened it, and spread the papers out so that he could read them.

THERE was a deed to Henley's land. One hundred and sixty acres. Henley had bought the land from a man named Mason, who had proved on a government grant. The deed had been recorded.

There was a bundle of letters. The envelopes were addressed to "Mr. James Henley" in a woman's handwriting. Brazo studied the writing but did not open the bundle.

"The person he liked, I reckon," was Brazo's thought. The writing was clear and bold. "If she's anything like that she's a straight-shooter," was his conclusion. He pushed the letters aside and picked up a pad of several closely written sheets which he knew was Henley's literary effort. For an hour he poured over the manuscript. It was addressed to "Ella."

Henley had related the story of the experience which had resulted in his being sought on a charge of murder. The details were similar to what had happened to Brazo. Brazo was not interested in the details. They were sordid, and Henley had escaped the law. But there was a certain hopelessness and wistfulness in the recital. A longing, a yearning.

"I'd sure like to be with you," had been written in one place. "It gets pretty lonesome here. If I could see you once, for only a minute, I'd feel better."

Brazo frowned at the page. "Seems she's sort of cold-blooded or she'd have hustled here to give him that look—whoever she is!"

he declared mentally. He drew the bundle of letters to him again and scrutinized the writing.

"How can a man tell about writing?" he



asked himself. "If she was as bold as her writing she'd have come here to see him. But if she was close to him maybe they was watching her, and she couldn't come without running the risk of being followed. In that case she did right in staying away."

"I have found a lot of gold. About a million. Before long I'm going to make arrangements to get it into a safe place, where you can get hold of it. Right now it's in a pit which I have dug under the floor of my cabin, right under my bunk. If anything happens to me you'll know where to find it. I haven't been feeling any too well lately, and so one of these days I'm going to send this letter to you. Then you can come here and get the gold."

There was a great deal more about Henley's lonesomeness, and various references to intimate details of life between Henley and "Ella" which Brazo did not understand. And then appeared this:

"You'll be twenty-two tomorrow. You ought to be quite a big girl. You was growing fast when I left you; looked a great deal like ma looked just before she died. I'm glad ma wasn't alive to know what happened to me. She had enough trouble with dad, didn't she? Or maybe you don't remember?"

"Well, I'm glad to hear you are going to try to come here. If you could let me know when you are coming I'd try to meet you. I won't send directions until you are sure."

FARTHER down the page and apparently written some days later, was this:

"I ain't feeling so good today. Weak. Can't get out of my bunk. Ain't had a drink of water all day. Funny thing happened a little while ago. Sheriff Neil and some of his men came here looking for a man they said had killed the paymaster, a fellow named Major Pitrick, of the United States Army. They was more interested in catching the killer than they was in me, for I asked Neil for a drink and he plumb forgot to get it for me. Well; after

dark I kept hearing someone around the cabin. I knowed it was the killer, and I wasn't surprised when he came in. I thought maybe he'd kill me too. But he didn't. He got me some water and some grub for himself and me. While he was sitting in the light I studied his face. I knowed he wasn't a killer, and I asked him. He said he hadn't killed Pitrick. Anybody would know he didn't. He got in a deal something like mine. He's a regular guy, good-looking and clean-looking."

There was more about Henley's physical condition. This had been written much later:

"This Brazo man is a sticker, and he's square. Today I showed him a bag of the gold and he didn't move an eyelash. He wasn't much interested. I told him I had more gold. Even that didn't phase him. I'm trusting Brazo. I've got to trust somebody, and I'd rather trust him than anybody I know. It's got so I can't get to town to ship the gold, and so I've got to leave it here. If I die sudden, Brazo will see that you get it. But Brazo's been so good to me that I want him to have half of it."

"Brazo don't know my real name, and he won't know where to find you if I die without telling him. But when I find I'm going to die I'm going to write down my name and yours so that Brazo can find you. I'm going to have Brazo mail this letter for me one of these days, for Brazo has changed so much that if the guys that's hunting him was to see him now they wouldn't know him from Adam. He looks a lot like me when I left home. There's another thing——"

That was all. Evidently Henley had grown wearied just at this point and had put his writing away. He had not been able to continue it, for death must have come upon him in his weariness.

Well, there was little for Brazo to do now. Ella's letters were here and it should not be a hard task to find her and communicate with her.

HE DREW the bundle of letters to him and examined the envelopes, seeking a postmark. However, evidently

feeling that the postmarks would provide a clue to the Ella's whereabouts, Henley had obliterated them. The letters themselves bore no word to indicate the post office from which they had been sent. They mentioned no city, town or village. They began with the greeting: "Dear Jim."

Not even Henley's real name was disclosed. "Ella" must have been warned against using it. And Henley himself had not had time to record his real name in his writings. Henley had waited too long!

Brazo looked the letters over thoroughly, reading every one of them in the hope of discovering Ella's identity. When he finally tied them together again his brows were wrinkled in disappointment.

Carefully he examined all of Henley's possessions. The last article he examined was the daguerreotype. He hardly expected to find anything illuminating upon that either, because it had been taken in Cooney. He found nothing. And then he sat for a long time with the picture in front of him on the table, studying it.

He smiled oddly at Henley's picture. He remembered how Henley had watched him and questioned him. He particularly recalled how Henley had tested him by exhibiting the bag of gold.



Well, there it was, now. Under the floor of the cabin was a million dollars

in gold. Henley was gone; there wasn't a chance in the world of finding "Ella." The gold was his, if he wanted to take it. He smiled at Henley's picture.

"You old son of a gun!" he said. "You knew what I would do, didn't you?"

CHAPTER VII

THE OWNER OF THE LODGE ARRIVES

BRAZO of course would stay at the cabin, for there was nothing he could do away from it. He would have to wait until the mysterious "Ella" came. According to what Henley had written he expected her, so she must have apprised him

of her intention of visiting him. Brazo did not know where he could find Ella, and he had no intention of running aimlessly around the country seeking her. Also, he was not yet ready to leave the basin. He had heard nothing of the activities of the minions of the law who must be seeking him, and although he might possibly escape from the country, he was not inclined to take the chance. Finally, he felt it was his duty to stay. Henley had expected him to stay.

Studying Henley's picture he was reminded of Henley's words: "You look like I looked then. Enough to be my twin brother!"

Brazo got up, went to a small mirror which was hanging on a wall of the cabin and stood there for some time comparing his face with the face in the daguerreotype. He was forced to confess that there was a remarkable resemblance.

Brazo's hair had grown long. It covered his ears and swept the collar of his shirt. His beard, too, had grown long, and was a faithful replica of Henley's.

Brazo turned from the mirror and gazed meditatively at a corner of the cabin where upon the wall hung some clothing that had belonged to Henley. Brazo examined the clothing. He found a fairly good suit, two shirts and a Stetson. These garments were almost new and it was quite evident that they had been worn only a few times. Henley had probably bought them shortly before his illness had sent him to bed. The coat, vest and trousers were a dark gray, the shirt the same color, though of a slightly lighter shade; the hat was cream colored. These, Brazo decided, were the clothes Henley wore on his visits to town.

If Brazo was to stay in the cabin he would have to impersonate Henley. There had been no visitors since Brazo had come but that fact was no assurance that some of Henley's neighbors might not appear at any time. Henley had told him that he knew few people in the section, but there were certainly some who had seen Henley and observed the peculiarities of his personal appearance. These people Brazo must deceive.

Brazo disrobed and arrayed himself in Henley's clothing. He replaced his own

boots, cartridge belt and pistol, and later got his leather chaps from a rock ledge in a cavern-like overhang in the hidden valley, and hung them on the wall of the cabin. His own clothing, which might be recognized by Bain or the stableman, and the saddle he had used while riding Blinky, he carried into the valley and concealed.

HE WENT back into the timber and scattered some boulders indiscriminately over the ground where he had buried Henley. The bag of gold, Henley's writing and the bundle of letters from Ella he concealed behind a broken board in the east wall of the cabin, shoving them back into a corner where no prying eyes would discover them.

That night Brazo spent in the cabin. It was the first time in months that he had passed a night indoors, sleeping, and he awakened in the morning entirely satisfied with his experience.

Days went by and nobody appeared in the basin. Autumn came, and Brazo, growing bolder, began to range farther from the cabin. He rode one of Henley's horses and used Henley's saddle. His hair and beard had grown so long that he felt, gazing sometimes into the mirror, he had grown to look more like Henley than Henley himself.

Then he rode into Cooney. The seventy mile trip occupied two days, and he reached the town late in the afternoon of the second day, dust covered and eager for sight of a human face.

Cooney was a mere collection of shanties at the foot of one of the Mogollons. A stage station was there, and a store and a saloon. Brazo drank twice in the saloon,



and he observed that the proprietor looked keenly at him and nodded rather uncertainly. Then while Brazo drank the proprietor walked to the front of the barroom and stared at the horse Brazo had hitched to the rail in front

of the building. The horse, a roan, bore an "H" branded upon a hip. The proprietor sauntered back and grinned at Brazo.

"Feelin' better, eh?" he said. "Last I heard of you you was sick. Forgot who was tellin' me. Well; you ain't a lot sick now, eh?"

"Not any," replied Brazo. "But I reckon I had a pretty narrow squeeze."

BRAZO left the saloon in some elation. He had been identified as Henley without having to declare his identity. He went into the store and bought some tobacco, and the owner, a man named Thomas, squinted his eyes at him and smiled.

"Same brand, Henley?" he asked.

Brazo had used several packages of tobacco left by Henley and he nodded, adding, "An' you can put in half a dozen packs of that Virginia leaf."

"Grub holdin' out?" asked Thomas.

"Got enough to last me six months yet," returned Brazo. "You'll recollect I was sort of sick when I was here before. Thought I wouldn't be able to make it back here soon. An' I wasn't. So I packed enough home to last me."

"You sure looked peeked," agreed Thomas. "But you've got all over it. You're healthy enough now." He walked to a box behind the counter and drew out a letter which he passed over to Brazo.

"This here has been waitin' for three or four months," he said. "I'd have sent it over to you, but there ain't been nobody travelin' that way. An' I thought you'd be in for it."

Brazo pocketed the letter, after first glancing at the address and observing that it was in Ella's handwriting. All the rest of the day and the night Brazo spent in Cooney. He played cards with some men in the saloon until after midnight, then sought a bed in a room above the barroom. Shortly after daylight he was again in the saddle, heading for his cabin.

HE NOW felt that there was little danger of his true identity being discovered. He had not inquired about the killing at Bain's Camp for fear of bring-

ing attention too sharply to himself. Therefore he heard nothing for no one had volunteered any news.

Once again before winter set in Brazo went to Cooney. This time he went in for supplies and drove the buckboard. Again he stayed a day and a night.

He shot plenty of game during the winter, and enjoyed himself as well as a man could who was forced to live alone. He had cut enough wood for the winter and had it piled against the rear wall of the cabin, and he was snug and contented when the north winds and the snows swooped down upon him.

Fate had been very perverse for the post mark on Ella's letter was too blurred to read and there had been nothing in the letter itself to tell him where it came from. It began: "Dear Jim," and ended: "Ella."

Its contents caused him mild astonishment. "I am glad to hear you have discovered gold," he read in one place. "That will certainly make things much easier for you." And in another place: "I am coming to see you just as soon as I can. There is nobody to stop me now and it is terribly lonesome here. I suppose you have changed a great deal, but of course you would in ten years. I have changed, too. My hair is getting brown; that is, it is slowly turning. It has been almost yellow. Do you think I could live there? I don't see why I couldn't. I don't like dances or crowds of any kind; and I think I should like to ride a horse—if I could get one that wouldn't run away with me. I have not heard from you in a long time. If I do not hear soon I am coming there to see you, anyway. I suppose if I get to Cooney there will be someone there who can tell me how to get to your place. I got the tin type picture you sent. Imagine you with a beard. You will seem like a stranger, I am afraid. When I come I will make you shave it off. Answer as soon as you can,

Ella."

"P. S. Do you think the wind and sun there would spoil my complexion? I do not tan easily."

Brazo pored long over the postscript.

"I reckon she's out doors a lot," was his

thought. "She don't care for dances of for crowds, and she thinks she would like to ride a horse. Well, if that's the way of it I reckon she won't have to worry much about her complexion.

"She's twenty-two, eh?" he reflected; which indicated that he remembered what Henley had said about her. "Twenty-two. She sounds little. And she's had yellow hair, only now it's turning brown. That would make it changeable, according to which way the light struck it." His face lengthened. "She'll take it mighty hard, finding out that Jim has died."

BRAZO had no means of knowing when Ella would arrive. That she would come some day he was certain, and so when the first mild days of spring appeared he busied himself with his ax in the timber. With a team of horses and a drag he hauled straight young logs to the house and began to erect an addition. The addition was not large, yet was big enough for a bed-room, for which purpose he intended it. April had come before it was completed, but Brazo was proud of it. He



laid a floor in it; he plastered it inside with adobe, and spent two days carrying water from the river to scrub it to a condition of cleanliness which he thought would appeal to a woman.

He had made one trip to Cooney during the winter, and had ordered various articles from the storekeeper. Late in April he made another trip and returned with the wagon heavily loaded with furnishings for the addition. And then, after the addition had been made ready for occupancy, he stood in the doorway and regarded it doubtfully.

He had been assuming that Ella would live in the cabin. But would she?

She would expect Henley. Henley was her brother, of course. That must be the relationship. She would be glad to live in the cabin with her brother, but what would

she do when she discovered that the cabin was occupied by a stranger?

"She's got to live somewhere," Brazo decided. "She can't live in town and she can't camp out. She can't stay here alone, with me sleeping outside and no one around to look out for her. I reckon there ain't no other way."

Brazo now began to watch the Cooney trail. Twice each day he rode to the crest of the southern ridge and gazed into the vacant southern distance. Often he rode several miles southward, toward Cooney. She would come by way of Cooney. She would have to come that way because all the letters she had received from Henley had been postmarked "Cooney" and she would know that there could be no other town nearer.

But May passed and she did not appear. The mild, warm winds came and touched the valleys and levels with their magic. The days were slumberous, the nights breathed romance.

BRAZO began to believe she would not come. The wind and the sun would ruin her "complexion." Maybe she had got as far as Cooney and observing the desolation and squalor of the place had turned back in disgust? Brazo would not have blamed her very much. Cooney was not much to look at.

But Brazo had not really given her up in spite of his knowledge of the unattractiveness of the country. There were things here that were more interesting than anything she had been accustomed to, no matter where she lived. Could there be a better atmosphere? Could there be nights more beautiful?

Brazo was oppressed with a terrible loneliness, which had been growing upon him as night after night he sat on a log at the edge of the timber near the cabin and gazed at the stars and at the faintly luminous line which marked the crest of the ridge, southward, over which Ella would have to come on her way from Cooney.

In two weeks he had not gone to his bunk before two o'clock in the morning. Anticipation had provoked him to a strange restlessness. His thoughts had been

so continuously upon the girl that he had given her a character, built upon her letters to her brother, which he now idealized and loved. There were times, upon just such nights as the present one, when his mental picture of her grew so vivid that he could almost see her, standing near him, smiling at him.

She was little. Not too little, though. As a matter of fact, her head just about reached his chin. And her hair was like strands of finely spun gold, gleaming in the starlight.

BRAZO smiled in self-derision. "That's what thinking about one thing does to a man," he reflected as he sat on the log at the edge of the timber and gazed at the shallow waters of the river glittering in the luminous haze of the brilliant stars. The river was not more than a hundred feet distant from Brazo. It came from a point along the dark, shadowy walls of the butte, doubled sharply and ran under the corral fence, and then swept outward into a giant horse-shoe curve, and back again, close to the timber. Then it flowed outward again, following the center of the basin until it vanished far down near the deserted pueblo village.

"A man thinks, and thinks. And he gets to believing the things he thinks. That's what makes some folks believe their own lies, I reckon. Its likely she ain't at all what I think she is. I've been convincing myself that she's beautiful. Maybe she is. But it's more likely she ain't. Anyway, I'll be giving her a square deal."

He had been resting his rifle on his knees. Now he placed it on the log beside him and drew out his pipe and tobacco. He filled the pipe, tamped the tobacco down until it was level with the top of the



bowl and reached into the breast pocket of his shirt for a match. He had been looking down at his pipe

as he filled it, and now with his fingers exploring the pocket he looked up.

The pipe dropped from his hand; his

fingers released the matches they had seized. He stiffened, drew a great breath of astonishment, and sat rigid, staring.

The girl was coming. She was arrayed in white, as he had many times seen her in his mental pictures, and she was not very tall. Plainly against the dark background of the long grass of the basin and the velvet blue of the sky at the crest of the southern ridge, he could see her. She was coming rapidly toward him, for she had evidently seen the light in his cabin. She was on foot, and running!

BRAZO got up. He stood, leaning forward, amazed, incredulous. His first thought was that his imagination had summoned a vision of the girl, but when he saw that her hair was streaming wildly about her shoulders, and that she was running heavily, as if she had come far and was near exhaustion, he knew that he was staring at no picture of the imagination but at a real, living girl.

Yet he was still amazed. He still stood rigid, watching her, wondering how the girl had got this far into the wilderness without a horse and why she should be running so frenziedly when almost at the end of her journey.

And then, when the girl was still perhaps a hundred yards from the river, he saw the silhouette of a horse and rider become detached from the dark background of the ridge and leap against the blue arch of sky.

Brazo's muscles tightened and swiftly relaxed. His lips went into straight lines and he leaned over and grasped the rifle he had previously laid upon the log. A strange girl running wildly toward him

out of the night might be a spectacle to bewilder Brazo momentarily, but his brain worked keenly enough now, realizing as he did that the man's pursuit could mean nothing but evil to her.

YET Brazo did not intend to shoot until he was certain of the man's intentions. The latter was coming fast, shortening the distance between himself and the girl with amazing rapidity, so that he was only a few yards behind when the girl, staggering in apparent weakness, approached the edge of the stream.

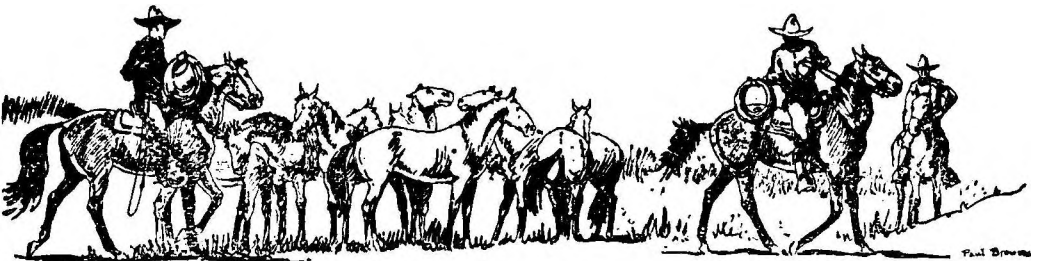
It was evident that the girl was aware that the rider was near her, for she did not turn as she reached the water, but started to run through it, sending a silver spray high into the air.

But the man was now at her side. He had slid off his horse with the animal still in motion, and had leaped forward, cursing. His arms went around her. She was lifted bodily and carried back from the water, kicking, scratching at the man's face, fighting silently.

Her fingers must have lacerated him, for he cursed violently, suddenly released her, pushed her slightly away from him and then struck heavily. The girl fell, soundlessly, into a pitiful heap in the long grass near the water.

The man stood erect. For a space of several seconds he was motionless, seeming to lean a little forward as though peering down at the girl. Then Brazo's rifle, rigid as the log beside him, spat a crimson lance straight at the man's chest. The man straightened, groaned, and pitched forward, flinging his arms wide as he fell face down, in the grass.

(Part II in our next issue)





THE SHOEMAKER OF SALVADOR

By HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

Author of "Lone Butte," etc.

A MEXICAN TOWN DROWSING IN THE SUNLIGHT MAY HOLD MUCH OF TENSE DRAMA AND BITTER ACTION—ESPECIALLY WHEN IT HOUSES A TALL AMERICAN OF WHOM IT WAS SAID HE FEARED NOTHING IN HEAVEN OR UPON EARTH

AS I see it, señor, the little shoemaker was a greater man than our alcalde, whom it is proper enough to name as the greatest man in our community, although opinions differ. This shoemaker was greater than José Avila, the *bandido*, called the Black Panther; greater than the suddenly courageous little Miguel Rios, a boy of twelve, señor, who flung a pair of mended boots in the bandit's face; and even greater than your compatriot, the tall Americano, who dwelt here a while, and who feared nothing in heaven or upon the earth. You find this a peaceful town, señor; a town where folk tread softly, speak pleasantly to each other, and journey no farther from home than the shadow from the tree. And so it is. And that is why the little shoemaker came, and dwelt a while. And that is why your compatriot, the tall, cool eyed Americano came, and dwelt a while. And, *por Dios!* that is why he left.

Señor, I have told you the story. If you tell the story, do not mention my name. It is said that Zapata still dwells in the hills of Durango. I do not know. Only, I wish to die in peace, as I have lived."

WHEN Yardlaw rode into the Mexican town of Salvador, some two hundred odd miles south of the border—where later he was to be described as the tall Americano who feared nothing in heaven or upon the earth—he decided he had traveled far enough. He surmised that Sheriff Applegate's deputies had ceased trailing him. Once or twice they had tracked him close. It had been nip and tuck from Tecolote to La Osa, Harmon and Sears dusting the trail with an occasional shot. But they had wasted their ammunition. At Rancho La Osa, Yardlaw had traded a jaded horse for a fresh horse, giving a gold eagle to boot. When Harmon and Sears arrived and saw the fugitive's horse in La Osa corral, and Yardlaw a good half-mile into Mexico on a fresh mount, they wisely turned back toward Tucson. "If Applegate wants him bad enough to cross the line, it's his job," said Harmon. Sears was of the same opinion.

Lounging in the cantina, the day following his arrival, Yardlaw took stock of himself and his surroundings. Salvador was a quiet, isolated community, unchanging and unvisited by Americans. Obviously there was no shooting, no gambling,

no wild life. True, the cantina sold good wine and high-proof tequila. If a man wanted to get drunk and sing, Salvador, as a community was willing to allow him that liberty. If he wanted to fight, let him fight, if he could find anyone foolish enough or courageous enough to fight with. This much Yardlaw gathered from Angel Sepulveda, the proprietor of the cantina. Yardlaw had the knack of getting along well with Mexicans. He spoke their language. He was no stranger in Sonora. And Salvador, near the hills, appealed to him. He had something like six hundred dollars in gold in his money belt—one reason for his having crossed the border in haste.

IN LESS than a month, Salvador had won him to its indolent manner of living. He decided to stay there. There were too many counts against him, up north. And here, a stranger, and alien, he had been made welcome. He lived in the alcalde's house, the best house in town, where he rented a room for which he paid well, chiefly because the alcalde's wife was an excellent cook. The townsfolk looked upon him as the alcalde's guest. They knew nothing about the shrewd bargaining that had preceded the arrangement. Yardlaw hired a mozo, a bright, active boy of twelve, who looked after his horse, ran errands, and retailed the village gossip for his patron's benefit. He paid the boy well, and the boy, in turn, literally worshipped the big Americano, whom he followed about like a faithful dog. Often Yardlaw and Pedro Olivares, the shoemaker, spent an hour or two in the cantina, playing dominoes, and taking an occasional drink of the good native wine. And as often when Yardlaw came out to the street he would find his mozo waiting for him. When he told the boy to run along home, little Miguel would declare his father had told him to be as a shadow to his patron, the big Americano. And Miguel always delighted to add, "Until the sun goes down, I am your shadow, señor. Thus it is that I earn my wages."

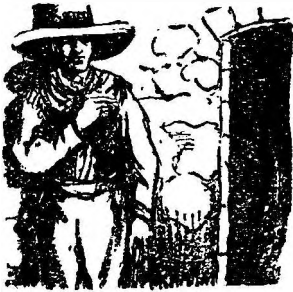
And it was the same when Yardlaw visited with the alcalde in the latter's garden, where there was the acequia, and shade,

and always a jug of wine on the bench. Always Miguel would be waiting, in his timorous brown eyes the light of a loyalty and admiration rare and beautiful.

Naturally, the folk of Salvador wondered why the Americano was there and who he was. But their curiosity soon evaporated. Pedro Olivares, the shoemaker, was his closest friend. Questioned about the Americano, Pedro replied, "He is, like myself, a man who has seen much and has little to say about it." Pedro Olivares was somewhat of a mystery, himself. He had not always lived in Salvador. And it was whispered that he had worn out more shoes running away from the rurales and the law, than he had ever mended.

IT WAS nobody's secret that once a year, José Avila, sometime known as the Black Panther, rode into Salvador and exacted tribute. He called himself the friend of the oppressed, the enemy of the oppressor. No one openly disputed this, though one or two of the more thoughtful citizens finally came to the conclusion that their only oppressor was José Avila himself. Avila's manner of collecting tribute was peculiar.

Once, each year, he came alone, heavily armed and riding a splendid horse. He first paid his respects to the alcalde, which was quite proper. Next, he visited the cantina, that the pueblo at large might know of his presence. But his real curtain-raiser was the Ceremony of the Hat. Taking always the same stool from which he had cut the cowhide seat, he placed it in the middle of the plaza. In this framework he set his inverted sombrero, high-crowned and stiff with silver braid. The empty sombrero was a silent invitation to each of his friends to contribute to the Cause. No one seemed to know just what the Cause embraced. Avila made no open threats, nor did he importune the tardiest contributor. He simply placed his sombrero in the plaza and left it there for a day. His tithes collected, he rode back into the hills. He may have used other methods in other communities. Salvador neither knew nor cared. It paid, groaned inwardly, and drowsed along for another twelve months.



It may be possible that Yardlaw and Pedro Olivares discussed these yearly visitations. It is fair to assume that they did. My historian, chary about quoting Pedro Olivares, does not say. But it is known that the *alcalde*, shrewdly surmising that the *Americano* was a man of courage and not too scrupulous in regard to matters of life and death mentioned José Avila's name to Yardlaw, and the fact that it was the month in which the *bandido* was accustomed to levy tribute. Yardlaw asked the *alcalde* to explain. The *alcalde* made it plain that he did not wish to be quoted, and proceeded to explain. The *Americano's* gray eyes, so steady, so steely cold, seemed to read all that lay behind the *alcalde's* flowery hedge of words.

"You mean you want me to blot out this José Avila." Yardlaw made it a statement, not a question.

"By the Breath of God I said no such thing!"

"Did he ever kill anybody down this way, or mistreat your women?"

"Of a truth, no, señor! He but collects yearly funds for the Cause."

"What cause?"

"I know not. And it would not be safe to ask him."

"You are entitled to know where your money goes."

"Sí, señor! But would it not be better if the money did not go at all?"

"I'll take a look at this Black Panther, some day." And Yardlaw would say nothing more.

YARDLAW'S opportunity to look at the Black Panther came within the month—came with a clatter of hoofs, a swirl of dust, the slithering halt of a horse set up cruelly with a heavy spade bit.

José Avila dismounted in front of the cantina. "I am here!" he declared pompously. A high-crowned and magnificent sombrero shaded his broad, dark face from the noon sun. In spite of his expen-

sive raiment, it was obvious he was of the people, a common fellow with the high cheek bones, heavy lips and small glittering black eyes of the Indian. Broad across the shoulders, bull-necked, rather short and vigorous, Avila appeared quite as impressive, out of the saddle as in it. Yardlaw, leaning against the lintel of the cantina doorway, seemed not at all impressed. He was puzzled. He had seen José Avila, the Black Panther, in Juarez, often enough. This pompous fellow was not the Black Panther; rather, a blustering imitation of the great bandit.

All about the plaza, small shop-keepers thrust startled heads and shoulders out of small doorways, and stared, muttering a mechanical prayer to some especial saint. Avila had come! Again he had come! *Sangre de Cristo*, but the *bandido* would keep coming forever. Next, the inverted sombrero and the free-well offering. Would that some saviour might appear, someone courageous enough to dispute Avila's right to levy tribute in Salvador. Someone like the tall *Americano*, who had not moved an inch since Avila had arrived, but lounged in the doorway gazing past him as though he were some peon with a street broom.

Avila took a step toward him. A score of curious citizens wondered if the *Americano* would show fear.

Yardlaw noticed that Avila's eyes and mouth were primitive, cruel. Without doubt he was a killer. But was he a coward, or a man of true courage? Yardlaw had known cowardly Mexicans who, through sheer brutality and indifference to human suffering, appeared to be courageous.

AVILA was surprised to see an American in Salvador, but he was not at all perturbed. Mockingly he doffed his sombrero and bowed. "May I have the pleasure of the señor's presence while I refresh myself?" He was rather startled when Yardlaw replied in Spanish, with an apt, colloquial phrase, "You could have said something worse."

"You speak my language. Good! This day Salvador entertains me. Consider yourself my guest."

"I wouldn't spoil your party for the

world," declared Yardlaw as he stepped aside. Avila swung into the cantina with a jingle of spurs and a flirt of his hand toward the bar. "It has been, my custom, when here, to drink alone. But now I have discovered one worthy of my hospitality. As for those whom I protect," Avila gestured toward Salvador in general, "they are but sheep!"

"You sure hate yourself!" Yardlaw spoke in the American tongue, but Avila did not seem to understand the language.

However, he understood strategy. He took up his position at the bar, his left elbow on the counter, his right arm free. Facing him, Yardlaw seemed at a disadvantage, as his right hand was nearest the bar. Avila had been so deliberate in choosing his own position that Yardlaw laughed. "I can shoot just as fast with either hand," he stated.

Avila was momentarily embarrassed. But then, Gringos had no subtlety. They were always blunt, even though, like this one, they spoke good Spanish. Yet, blunt or not, the Americano's statement was a sort of challenge. Avila felt that he dare

not let it pass unnoticed.

"But there will be no necessity for any shooting, señor."

"I am glad you feel that way about it. This is good tequila, twice refined. Here's to your widow!"



José Avila failed to appreciate the toast. But then, all Gringos were mad.

"How is your trade?" asked Yardlaw.

"My trade suffers. The country is poor. And yours, señor?"

"Not bad. When do you do your hat trick?"

"My hat trick? You refer to my manner of collecting funds for the Cause? Very soon I shall place my sombrero in the plaza. Do you wish to contribute?"

"No. But I will buy a drink—and pay for it."

THE Panther's broad, black eyebrows drew down. He had never considered it necessary to pay for food or drink while

gracing Salvador with his presence. What did the Gringo mean?

Yardlaw tossed a gold piece onto the bar. Avila's little eyes glittered. Angel Sepulveda protested that he could not change such a big piece of money.

"You won't need to," said Yardlaw. "Señor José and I will drink it up."

"But first," and Avila set his empty tumbler on the bar, "I have a small matter to attend to. Angel, the stool!"

From the back of the cantina Angel fetched the framework of an old cow-hide stool which Avila placed in the middle of the plaza. He returned binding a handkerchief about his head. The noon sun blazed down on the hard-packed earth of the ancient plaza, and glittered on the silver braid that decorated Avila's sombrero, inverted and set in the framework of the stool. The Ceremony of the Hat was about to begin.

The gold piece still lay on the bar, a bright, yellow disc which teased the Panther's gaze. Why had Angel Sepulveda neglected to put it in his pouch? And again Avila felt, that in some vague way, the Gringo's piece of gold was a subtle challenge. He wondered what the Gringo was doing in Salvador. Probably hiding from the law of his own country. Avila's interest became divided between watching his sombrero, out in the middle of the plaza, and studying the tall, cool eyed Gringo, who, in turn, seemed to be interested only in watching an occasional citizen walk out and drop a coin in the big hat.

JOSE AVILA began to make a cigarette, meanwhile watching the Gringo out of the corner of his crafty eye. He had not yet made up his mind to kill this stranger, but he was willing to do so, if offered the least excuse. The cigarette made, Avila pretended to search for a match. He would have pulled his gun, laughed in the Gringo's face and either shot him, or ran him out of town, when, *Madre de Dios!* a match crackled, and the Gringo was offering him a light. The Gringo was playing with him! Avila accepted the light. Again he had been challenged. The game was getting on his nerves.

Yardlaw felt that Salvador was not roomy enough for the two of them. He

liked the town, and its folk. An outlaw himself, a fugitive, Salvador had become his home. He knew everyone, from the old alcalde to the most insignificant *muchacha* that toddled across the plaza. Juan Rios, the metal worker. Angel Sepulveda, Felipe Rios, his mozo's father, Yorba the butcher, Pedro Olivares the shoemaker—tradesmen, ranchers, sheepmen who occasionally came in from the hills, all had a friendly greeting for him. And why not? He spoke their language and understood their manner of thought. And there was Lolita Rios, daughter of Felipe. Lolita of the Pretty Mouth, she was called. Lolita, whose dusky face grew rosy when he happened to glance at her. Already Yardlaw had contemplated going into partnership with her father, Felipe, and running cattle on the land west of town. Felipe had been a vaquero, and knew the country. Yardlaw had even gone so far as to contemplate marrying Felipe's daughter. Lolita was pretty, and modest and industrious. He knew that she liked him. Shyly her eyes had told him so, often enough. His friends. Yet of these, there was but one person he felt he could trust absolutely, and that was Olivares, the shoemaker, a fiery, speculative little man, not afraid to say what he thought.

"You seem to be staring at nothing, señor."

YARDLAW'S gaze came back from its journey into a possible future.

"Was I looking at you?" he queried. "Well, I did not know it."

"You would insult me. You would call me nothing, yes!"

"No, *amigo*. It is not necessary."

"You make yourself very much at home for a stranger, señor."

"Yes. At home. But not a stranger. I live here."

José Avila helped himself to tequila. He set his tumbler down. He was more than annoyed by the Gringo's peculiar utterances. If he could but catch the Gringo off his guard—"Let us be friends. Why should the wolf eat the wolf?"

Yardlaw ignored the insinuation. "Four years you have been taking money from these poor people. I am told."

"You are well informed, señor."

"Yes? Well, this is the last time."

"My last time? You mean——?"

"No. I'm not going to kill you. I gave you several chances to get killed and you wouldn't take them. I mean I'm going to give you a chance to collect your tax and get out of town alive. I don't want any trouble. At four o'clock you will take your sombrero and what is in it and leave, and don't come back."

"You say this to José Avila!"

"Yes. And only once."

AS HE spoke, Yardlaw stepped back a pace, giving the Panther all the opportunity in the world to try conclusions with him. Avila was on the verge of doing so, but changed his mind. Yardlaw stepped back another pace, and another. He passed through the rear doorway of the cantina, and disappeared swiftly between the buildings. Avila stared at the empty doorway. He cursed, and swept the still-untouched gold piece into his pocket.

"But Salvador shall sweat for this!" he blustered, shaking both fists at the strictly neutral Angel Sepulveda. He drank more tequila. The American pig had defied him!



Not he, but the American pig would get out of town. Another tumbler of tequila, and the Black Panther felt a wave of hot courage surge through his swollen veins. But yes! The Gringo had vanished, fled, afraid to stay and make good his threat. Let the Gringo but show his face in the plaza!

Meanwhile, although it was the hour of siesta, the folk of Salvador, men and women, singly and in little groups, walked out to Avila's sombrero and grudgingly made their annual donation to the Cause. Outside the doorway of the cantina, Avila, sitting on a bench, his arms folded and his dark brows drawn down, watched the people come and go. None came to greet him, came near him, but shunned him as though he were the plague itself. Heretofore the citizens had never failed to say a word or

two in greeting. Was it because of the Gringo they now dared ignore him? Did they borrow courage from his presence? But let the Gringo show his face!

ALONG the western side of the plaza the shadow of four o'clock lay black on the hot earth. Lolita Rios and her young brother Miguel, who was Yardlaw's mozo, came from the shop of the shoemaker and started to cross the plaza on their way toward home. The boy had a pair of mended shoes tucked beneath his arm. They were his father's shoes, heavy soled and tied together by their laces. Lolita, slender and pretty and vivacious, laughed as her brother hesitated when they came near the *bandido's* sombrero.

"But you are afraid?" she said, laughing. "I am not afraid of the big hat of the ugly one."

"But see, my sister!" whispered the boy. "He sits there! He has heard you!"

Lolita tossed her head. "And so. Did not our friend the Americano, sitting in the shop of Señor Pedro Olivares, tell us to take the shoes and go home That no one would molest us? You are always imagining something, Miguel. Take my hand, if you are afraid."

"But I am not afraid," said little Miguel, his voice trembling.

Avila was drunk, but not so drunk that he could not hear and see, and understand the timidity of the boy and the mocking courage of his sister. He rose as they were about to pass him. "Come here, Pretty Mouth!"

Lolita ignored him, would have gone on but he lunged up and caught her by the arm. "So you are not afraid of the ugly one? That is good. I would kiss such a brave señorita!" Lolita struggled and fought. She screamed, and bit his hand as he crushed it against her mouth. Little Miguel, timorous, frenzied by terror, swung up the heavy shoes, tied together by their laces, and flung them at Avila. They struck the *bandido* in the face. Blood spurted from his thick lips.

Little Miguel was too frightened to run. Avila flung the girl aside and whipping out his gun, shot the boy down. Lolita stared at her brother, a crumpled, twitching thing

that made no sound that ceased to twitch and lay very still. She knelt down, staring at the hole between the white buttons on his new, clean shirt. A blotch of red stained the cloth, spreading and spreading—

JOSÉ AVILA quickly became aware of himself and his surroundings. The plaza stood out, clean-cut in the clear afternoon light—flat, black shadows along its southern edge, and the glitter and shimmer of sunlight across the windows of the northern side. And there was his sombrero framed in the stool. Moving toward the sombrero from the corner where stood the shoemaker's shop, was a tall figure—the Gringo. Avila fired. Yardlaw's hat twitched up and spun off his head. Still he came on, his gun held muzzle up near his right shoulder. His stride was even and deliberate. Again Avila fired, hastily. The bullet grazed Yardlaw's ribs, high up and to the right. Avila did not know that his enemy had replied to the shot until he felt something strike his chest and stop him in his stride. They were coming closer. This time Avila determined to make certain. He brought his gun down, centered on the Gringo's chest—and there came a terrific crash, the flashing of a thousand bolts of thunder, and blackness succeeded the turmoil and the flame. Avila felt his life hurtling through bottomless space.

Not more than twelve feet had separated them, when Yardlaw, whose first shot had gone clear through the bandit's chest, followed with a second which struck him between the eyes and literally blew the top of his head off. Yardlaw glanced round. The plaza was empty, save for Lolita Rios, kneeling and holding her dead brother in her arms. Yardlaw took Avila's belt and gun. He walked swiftly to where the girl knelt and taking the boy's limp form in his arms, strode straight to the home of Felipe Rios. Lolita followed him, her lips dumb, her eyes blind with tears.

WHEN the alcalde heard what had happened he hastened to the plaza, where he arranged for the prompt burial of the dead *bandido*. The alcalde declared that he would take charge of the sombrero and the money until a more convenient

time in which to return it. But the sombrero and its contents had disappeared. Salvador was in a turmoil. No one knew what had become of the precious sombrero. Fear rode the community, fear that when the Black Panther's men heard of his death they would raid and ravage the town. True, the Americano could hardly be blamed for killing him. But after all, had it not been a mistake to kill the *bandido*? Thus argued some. Others ventured the opinion that the Americano should have killed Avila in the cantina, instead of threatening him, and telling him to leave town. Had the Americano done so, little Miguel Rios would not have been murdered. And there were still others who asked their neighbors why the Americano had meddled at all. Left alone, the Black Panther would have taken his sombrero of money and ridden away, as aforetime.

Fear, superstition, tribal jealousy and ignorance stalked through the evening streets of Salvador, poisoning the minds of an erstwhile contented community.

In a brief three hours, Yardlaw, who had risked his life to rid the town of oppression and fear, had become unpopular. Even Felipe Rios and his wife had begun to hate the Americano, who had brought this tragedy to their door. Something of this Yardlaw learned from the attitude and manner of those he met on his way from



the shoemaker's shop to the alcalde's house, that evening. And the alcalde's wife seemed less friendly. Shortly after supper Yard-

law came to a decision. He returned to the shoemaker's shop and talked with Olivares.

OLIVARES paid some boys to gather firewood and fetch it to the plaza. At eight o'clock that evening there was a big bonfire going in the plaza. News had gone about that there would be a bonfire. That the alcalde would have something to say to the citizens. By half-past eight the

plaza was filled with groups of people curious, and somewhat bewildered. Presently Yardlaw rode into the plaza, mounted on the dead *bandido's* horse, whose silver trapping glittered in the firelight. With him came Pedro Olivares, on foot and bearing a huge sombrero in his arms. A murmur ran through the crowd, a sigh of anticipation. They thought the big Americano would say something to them. They hoped that he would. But it was Pedro Olivares, the shoemaker who placed a board across the stool in the middle of the square, and standing on it, addressed them.

"I have heard that you blame my friend for killing José Avila. I have heard that you are afraid the *bandidos* of Avila will raid Salvador. Let me tell you this. José Avila, the Black Panther, was killed in a gambling house in Juarez, four years ago. He is dead. His *bandidos* are scattered. His lieutenant, whom my friend most obligingly killed today, took Avila's name and his war name, and used it to make you pay a tax. Had you known the real Black Panther you would not have let this other fool you as he has done for four years. There is no José Avila. I know it, for I, Zapata, killed him in a gambling house in Juarez. Now you have something to laugh about! The money that you were foolish enough to give this blusterer, I have taken, so that it would not be stolen from you. I have it here." Pedro Olivares, or Zapata, as he called himself, raised the sombrero that all might see it. "A mass for the soul of little Miguel Rios!" he cried.

A SHUFFLING, a murmuring, but not a voice answered the shoemaker's plea.

"Then take it!" he cried, and digging his hand into the sombrero, he flung handful after handful of silver and copper coins into the faces of the crowd. Literally stung by his bombardment, the people scrambled, fought, kicked and trampled one another as they realized that it was their money the shoemaker was flinging at them.

Yardlaw wheeled his horse and rode slowly away. Zapata ran after him and held his horse while he stopped to say a word of farewell to the stricken parents of

little Miguel. Yardlaw left money with them and came out into the still and starry night.

Zapata, holding his horse, seemed impatient to be gone. "I am through mending shoes!" he declared. "There is neither money nor glory in such a trade. And indeed, once I had a better trade and a bigger name. I retired, señor, that I might live peacefully in Salvador, and in Salvador die peacefully. But, señor, today you stirred my blood. I see what a poor thing I was becoming. To die here and be buried by these ingrates, these cowards, these

swine! May I die a leper and accursed if I stay another hour in this town! Your horse is in my pasture. Permit me to saddle him, and ride with you. Let the devil mend their shoes!"

"Who did you ride with, when you were Zapata, little man?"

"Ask, señor, who rode with me. I am Zapata. I call no man my chief."

"I knew you were holding out something on me," said Yardlaw. "Well, I tried the easy life and it didn't work. Get the horse and we'll drift, and see what's doing up along the border."



OLD COWBOY'S MEMORIES

By Edgar Daniel Kramer

R IDIN' into Chisholm
 From the dusty trail,
 Gullet dry as paper,
 Pockets full of kale;
 Comin' from the cattle
 An' the singin' stars
 To the lights an' laughter
 An' the crowded bars;
 Lappin' up red liquor,
 Dancin' with the dames,
 Buckin' faro layouts
 An' the other games;
 Minglin' in the ructions
 Where the six-gun's bark
 Indicates some hombre's
 Fared into the dark,
 With a gasp an' curses,
 With a locoed yell,—
 Ridin' into Chisholm
 For a fling in hell.



Ridin' out of Chisholm
 With a poundin' head,
 An' my nerves all jumpin'
 To my pony's tread;
 Turnin' from the clamor
 In the wakin' dawn
 With my tongue a carpet
 An' my wages gone;
 Goin' to my toilin'
 With the silly steers,
 Where the coyote's howlin'
 Tingles in my ears;
 Circlin' through the shadows
 'Round the munchin' herd,
 While I hear the singin'
 Of a mockin'-bird;
 Roundin' up the stragglers
 From the beaten track—
 Ridin' out of Chisholm
 Plannin' to come back.





THEY COME HARD BOILED IN THE LEGION

By J. D. NEWSOM

Author of "The Gun Runners," "Three Days Leave," etc.

MUCH OF ROMANCE ATTACHES TO THE NAME OF THE FOREIGN LEGION, BUT WHEN YOUNG AMERICAN GEORGE BRADLEY JOINED UP, HE FOUND MUCH ELSE BESIDE. THE LEGION WAS TO FACE DANGER, UNBELIEVABLE TOIL, TREACHERY IN HIGH PLACES, PURPOSES AND CROSS PURPOSES ON DREARY MARCHES ACROSS THE DESERT SANDS, RACIAL HATREDS WITHIN ITS OWN RANKS, AND TASTE THE BITTERNESS OF BEING A CONDEMNED PAWN IN SHADY POLITICS. BUT ABOVE IT ALL, WAS TO STAND OUT COURAGE AND THE LOYAL COMPANIONSHIP THAT CAN ONLY BE BORN WHEN MEN SHARE TOGETHER THE HORRORS OF A LAST DESPERATE STAND. OH YES, IT'S A MAN'S GAME—THE LEGION

CHAPTER I

TWO OF THE LEGIONNAIRES

DUSK filled the barrack room with blue shadows. A stale breeze drifting in through the open window was heavy with the smell of sweat and dust and rancid oil. From the parade ground came a murmur of voices and the scuffle of hobnailed boots in the gritty dust.

It was concert night, and all the men not on duty at the depot were on their way downtown to listen to their band—the band of the First Regiment of the French Foreign Legion—the finest band in the world!

Soldier of Second Class George Bradley sat on the edge of his cot, admiring the mirrorlike polish of a large black boot, which he held at arm's length on the end of his left fist.

He was a lean, big-boned man, without an ounce of fat on his body. Because of the

stifling heat, he was stripped to the waist. In sharp contrast with his forearms and his face, which were tanned almost black, his torso was astonishingly white. It glistened in the semi-darkness, streaked with rivulets of perspiration.

"Pretty slick piece of work," he remarked, speaking around the cigarette stub. "By golly, it almost dazzles me."

"Huh! You're getting to be a real sojer, ain't you?" retorted his neighbor, a short, bandy-legged Cockney by the name of Charley Coats, who sprawled at full length on a near-by cot. "Strike me pink, Gawge, you ain't got what sense you was properly born with."

"Boy, how you do talk!" commented Bradley. "What's all the trouble about, anyhow?"

"Yer know as well as anybody else what the trouble is, and hit ain't my plice to be tellin' you—only you're a young squirt of a Legionnaire what ain't been in the army

four months, and what I says is, 'Lay orf an' be done wiv it.'"

"Much obliged—but lay off what?"

COATES cleared his throat and glared at Bradley.

"Lormier's girl—that's wot," he snapped in a voice which was shrill with emotion. "D'yer think I'm blind? Gor! Last couple of weeks all you can think of is your uniform—next thing you know you'll be usin' perfume! And dashin' off every evenin' like as if the flamin' 'ouse was on fire."

Bradley had pulled on a shirt and was slowly fitting himself into a snow-white uniform. The numerals on the collar were of green silk instead of worsted, and the buttons had been burnished till they shone like old gold.

"You what 'ad a broken 'eart when you joined this 'ere Legion," sneered Coates. "Garn! Yer mikes me laugh!"

"Say, how come you take so much interest in me and my gal?" Bradley inquired placidly.

"A hinterest! Lor' lumme! A hinterest! Don't try and lord it over me, Mr. Pershin' Bradley. Only, didn't we join up together, huh? Ain't we been through the mill together? Ain't we been blotto together—and' Gor' struth, just when we're settlin' down nicely, you 'as to go orf chasin' Lormier's gal."

He struck a match with great viciousness and applied it to the bowl of a short clay pipe. Clouds of acrid smoke enveloped him.

"She's a right smart gal," Bradley admitted. "And what's more to the point, old horse, she ain't Lormier's—nohow."

"Well, 'e thinks she is, and don't nuke any mistike about it. 'E's niking threats, 'e is—'e said 'e'd put 'arf a foot of steel dahn yer gullet if 'e caught you messin' around 'is bit of fluff."

"Maybe," agreed Bradley, cocking his *kepi* over his right eye and judging the effect in a cracked mirror propped against his bedding.

"You're a blarsted skirt 'ound, that's wot you are," Coates went on wrathfully. "But I'm awsking you as man to man—lay orf that jane. In the first plice, we'll be pulling out of 'ere in a matter of three

weeks, and Gord knows will we ever see Bel-Abbes again!"

"Maybe not," agreed Bradley. "Catch hold of this sash, Charley, while I wind myself into it."

"Yus, you ought to wear corsets," sneered Coates, dragging on one end of the long black cummerbund while Bradley wrapped it tightly about his waist. "Proper toff, you are! And, look 'ere—yer ain't actin' square and 'onest—that's me last word, so 'elp me."

"What's on your mind?"

"You know. Yer doin' the dirty to Lormier, that's wot. 'E ain't a bad lad, Lormier. 'E's been friendly and obligin'—and, Lor' lumme, you goes and pinches 'is girl! Strike me pink! Use yer brain, Gawge. Look 'ere—when we pulls out of Sidi-bel-Abbes and goes on active service, Lormier'll be wiv us, but the girl, she'll be walking out with somebody else— And 'ere I got to sit and watch you turnin' sour against each other! It makes me sick, that's wot it does."

"Who told you Teresita was Lormier's girl?" inquired Bradley.

"'E said so."

"All right. Well, I'm telling you something—the less she sees of him the better she likes it. I'm looking after her until we pull out. Time's getting short—I've got to go."

ANY retort Coates might have made was cut short by a blanket which Bradley hurled in his face. By the time he had untangled himself, Bradley was clattering down the stairs. Panic seized him; he dashed out of the room and shouted down the shaft the warning he had been hoping he would not have to utter.

"Don't go, George, for Gord's sake! He's laying for you wiv Stopfel. 'E'll get you if you ain't careful."

Bradley's voice drifted up through the darkness.

"That's fine, Charley. Thanks for the information. See you later, old horse."

Coates retraced his steps and let himself flop down on his cot.

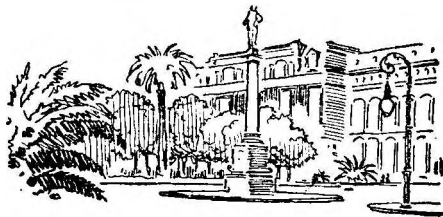
"Women!" he grunted. "Women——"

Then, after a long, contemplative pause, he smacked savagely at the mosquitoes on his ankles and added half aloud:

"There ain't one of 'em worth all the trouble 'e's 'eadin' for."

BRADLEY walked briskly across the parade ground and once he had passed the sentry he paused to fish a cigarette from the sweat band of his *kepi*. Having inhaled a deep draught of smoke, he walked on in a less soldierly but more comfortable manner.

Dislodged by the evening breeze, a powdery film of dust sifted down from the leaves of the trees lining the Boulevard de la Republique, so that the light of the



street lamps was dimmed as if by a light fog. The air was sultry; and before he had gone a hundred yards Bradley's face streamed with sweat.

He walked quickly down the Boulevard and threaded his way through the crowd loitering outside the officers' club, where the string band of the Legion was playing Offenbach's "Brigands."

The whole town was there. Inside the grounds, the socially elect sat at small tables and gossiped in subdued voices. Outside, a restless, heat-weary mob filled the streets. Whole families of small shopkeepers paraded slowly up and down beneath the trees, dragging chaplets of children behind them: French families, garrulous and superior, very much at home; Spanish families, poorer, more prolific and dirtier; and Jews, and Maltese, and enormously fat, ungirt women, and thin women equally ungirt, and giggling girls arm in arm, zigzagging from side to side in search of adventure; and the young-men-about-town in amazing store clothes and high starched collars; and workmen from the railroad shops collarless, greasy, and Arabs in rags and Arabs in pale lavender bur-nouses.

And in the crowd, but not of it, there were Legionnaires, moving like gray ghosts through the shadows, clustering in twos and threes—silent, aloof, and rather sullen.

THERE was little or no fraternization between the civilians and the soldiers. On both sides there was a sense of watchful waiting—of contempt, which made the girls look disdainfully down their noses at the troopers and caused the high-collared young men to sneer—discreetly. Dangerous men who would steal the buttons off a dead man's shirt.

Past the officers' club, Bradley turned into a quiet street, ill lighted and narrow, lined with shuttered shops. A smell of rotting cabbage and garlic hung heavily in the air. Through a half-opened doorway came the asthmatic wheeze of an accordion and a whiff of cheap scent. Somebody guffawed and there was a clatter of breaking crockery. The door slammed shut.

"Pair of fools fighting over a girl," thought Bradley, with a shrug. The incident amused and interested him—he was heading for exactly the same sort of trouble: deliberately going out of his way to start a nasty fight—over a woman. The very thing that had thrown his whole life out of gear and driven him into the Legion.

The ghost of dead things came and hunted him down the empty street—

He had fallen in love with Katherine Powell—in love with her green eyes and her lithe, slender body. And he had made a magnificent fool of himself. She wouldn't say yes and she wouldn't say no, and then he found her one day in the arms of another man—too completely in his arms. He had broken three of the other man's front teeth before he realized that his own heart was smashed. He was bewildered and disgusted, and though he realized the absurdity of his conduct, he didn't care what happened. He slipped—and went on slipping faster and faster, until he brought up in Paris, penniless and hungry.

It was in Paris that he met Charley Coates—at Mitchell's English Bar by the Gare St. Lazare, a hangout for jockeys, fifth-rate pugilists, touts, and tourists. Charley had been a groom at the Chantilly racing stables, but, as he expressed it, "What wiv one thing and anover, and me breaking the mare's orf 'ind," he had ceased to be a groom and become a bum—which called for peculiar qualities he did not possess.

Bradley shared his last twenty francs

with the stable lad. Fired by the whisky, Coates suggested that they "chuck this 'ere blinkin' starvation and join the Legion," which was an improvement on suicide, for Africa was a hot place where a man wouldn't freeze to death, and a soldier was sure of eating at least once a day.

The suggestion appealed to Bradley.

AT THE recruiting office in the Rue St. Dominicain, a recruiting sergeant asked Bradley three questions: his name, age, and nationality. Nobody seemed to care whether he told the truth or whether he lied. He signed a document which was much too long for him to read—and the thing was done. He was a soldier of the second class of the French Foreign Legion.

A week later, he reached the depot at Sidi-bel-Abbes. It seemed like years instead of months ago. He recalled the confusion of the first few days—learning how to sort out his kit, how to make his bed, to salute, whom to salute; how to peel potatoes, to wash his clothes, to clean a rifle, to keep his temper.

But he had learned—and learned fast, for the Legion knows how to train its men. He learned how to march forty kilometres a day with a hundredweight of kit on his back and no socks on his feet. He learned barrack-room French, and acquired a hard-boiled manner.

Regular hours, coarse, plentiful food, hard work made him lean and tough as a whiplash. If, on pay day, he drank more red wine than was



good for him, the after effects were short-lived, and his platoon sergeant helped him to overcome the listless apathy of the morning after. He learned, too, to leap at the word of command and to obey blindly, mechanically.

The system of discipline was hard and merciless. In the beginning, it struck Bradley as almost inhumanly brutal, but by degrees he began to sense the reasons underlying this ruthless enforcement of the letter of the law.

The problems of the Legion are peculiarly its own. The human material which fills its ranks comes from all the slums and gutters of Europe. There are Germans, Czechs, Poles, Belgians, Russians, Italians and Albanians and Greeks—all the riff-raff, the misfits, the soreheads, the waste products of the civilized world. Among them there are men from every walk of life—men who have starved, men who have failed, men who have suffered—worn, broken, reckless men, soiled and degraded in a thousand ways.

The Legion takes in this unpromising stuff and moulds it with an iron hand. Those it cannot shape, it breaks. They end their days in the prison camps, or, swiftly, against a blank wall faced by a dozen rifles. But out of the others the Legion fashions one of the finest fighting machines in the world. It gives them a new pride and a new faith. They become smart and clean, proud of themselves and their splendid regiment, which is a dangerous regiment. The French, who are born soldiers, have handled it with masterly skill. Ruthless discipline has gone hand in hand with words of praise; and if upon occasion a few companies have been thrown away for the greater glory of the mother country, the survivors, if any, have been fittingly rewarded with decorations, kisses, and superlative adjectives.

AND into this outfit Bradley had dropped without attracting any more attention than any other recruit. He was a cog in the machine—a cog that the machine was busily grinding down and tempering to suit its own purposes.

He had had so little time to think about his private troubles, his broken heart, his shattered life, that he almost forgot them. He had even succeeded in getting himself snarled up in a new affair, which promised most unpleasant complications.

There was Lormier to be considered. He was large and beefy—a good-humored bully, inclined to be brutal. A loud-mouthed truculent man who liked to hint, when he had a few drinks inside of him, of the lawlessness of his past life.

One evening he had stumbled into Teresa's *fonda*. Forthwith he took a fancy for the olive-skinned *patronne*, and, in his

impulsive way, he had declared his readiness to marry and help her run the business as soon as his time expired.

At first the girl was amused. *Madre de Dios!* She knew enough about men, and she thought she could handle them all. But she didn't know Lormier. He was a revelation. He pursued her with all the grim, frolicsome good-nature of an amorous gorilla. When she slapped his face, when she bit his hand, he crowed with laughter. Most of the customers were Spaniards—laborers, mechanics, and truck farmers. A few of them objected to the soldier's presence. And Lormier, when he came back to barracks on the stroke of twelve, woke up the whole section so that he might tell his mates exactly how he had thrown his competitors off the premises.

Teresita made no complaint. She was managing the café for her brother, who had been forced to leave Sidi-bel-Abbes in a hurry. He had tried to increase his profits by helping Legionnaires to desert—and the military authorities had got wind of the business. So Teresita allowed Lormier to terrify her, and, day by day, he established himself a little more completely, if not in her heart, at least in the café.

He was so pleased with the turn of events that he invited Bradley and Coates to visit *his* establishment. Bradley went out of curiosity. Afterward, he went back out of sheer pity. He saw only too clearly what was happening—and the girl asked him, begged him to help her.

For two weeks, the storm had been gathering.

He swung across the silent market-place which stank beneath the starry sky, and pushed open the door of the *fonda*.

FOR a second or so, he was blinded by the glare of the acetylene reflectors hanging from the blackened ceiling. An acrid smell of wine fumes and tobacco smoke caught at his throat.

At one of the long tables against the wall, some Spaniards were playing cards. On the opposite side of the room, two Arabs, looking strangely clean in their white burnouses, were drinking mint tea and playing checkers. And at the back of the room, Lormier leaned against the bar, grinning from ear to ear as he made

playful grabs at Teresita's bare arms. Near by sat Stopfel, a heavy, stupid man, who guffawed and smacked his thighs each time Lormier opened his mouth.

It was Teresita who first noticed Bradley's presence. Her eyes opened very wide, and her hands leaped up to her throat. Her face was dead white. The glass she had been wiping fell at her feet and crashed to pieces. There was a second's silence—an abrupt pause while Lormier swung around to face the newcomer, and Stopfel grinned foolishly, his mouth hanging open.

It occurred to Bradley that the situation was unnecessarily dramatic. He wasn't in love with the girl, and he didn't want to quarrel with Lormier, who, in many ways, was a quite decent fellow.

"What the devil am I butting in for?" he asked himself, and he was irritated by his own inability to mind his own business.

All at once the girl cried out:

"Monsieur Bradley, for the love of God go away—go! They say they will kill you—go!"

This merely made him more stubborn than ever. Who was Lormier that he should place the café out of bounds? Lormier might be a tough baby, but he, Bradley, was even tougher.

The aisle seemed interminably long, but he walked on toward the bar with an outward calm which had no relation to his true feelings.

"*Bonsoir, tout le monde!*" he greeted them cheerfully. "And so I am not wanted—that is most sad, is it not?"

"It's going to be sad for you, my American friend," retorted Lormier, whose face was apoplectic. "You were told to keep out of here—you were warned. Before I

left barracks this evening, I said to Coates, 'You tell Bradley the best thing he can do is to go to the concert and listen to the pretty music. He's a good fellow, and it would be a shame if he got hurt.' That's what I said to Coates."



And he brought down his fist on the counter.

"Har-har!" exploded Stopfel, doubling up with mirth.

The customers had forgotten their cards and their checkers. They scowled at the Legionnaires and muttered dark threats beneath their breath.

"Now, look here," said Bradley, when Stopfel subsided and speech became possible, "suppose we sit down quietly and talk things over."

"There is nothing to talk over," Lormier retorted, drawing himself up to his full height, with his thumbs in his belt, and glaring down at the unwelcome guest. "Maybe Coates didn't give you my message. That's possible. I won't hold it against you. But now it is I who am telling you—you understand." He emphasized the last word with a sidewise shake of the head. "You can get out and stay out. Go on, disguise yourself as a current of air and go cool your heels elsewhere."

"Have you bought the place?" inquired Bradley, seating himself at the end of a table.

"Ah! *Pobrecito!*" cried Teresita. "You have done your best for me—but I fear for you. I know, I asked for your help—but there is nothing you can do—nothing. Go—before they kill you!"

AS A matter of fact, she was thinking of her *commerce*. If they started fighting in the café, they would be sure to break a lot of cups and glasses and bottles, and her brother would be very cross when he came back.

"So you asked him to help you!" remarked Lormier, wheeling upon the girl. "You did that, did you!"

He turned to Stopfel.

"That is how I am thanked—you see how I am thanked, eh! I come here night after night to protect this little girl against a bunch of lousy, greasy, dirty Spaniards who would surely rob her and, *sacre bon Dieu*, she goes behind my back and asks this recruit, this badly licked, pigeon-toed species of a bean pole to come to her assistance! What! Have my intentions been anything but the most honorable?"

Then, in the middle of his discourse, he remembered Bradley, who had taken off

his *kepi* and was fumbling about under the sweat band for a cigarette.

"And you asked me if I have bought the place—Insolent swine, I have! It is agreed between Teresita and me—when I leave the army we shall be married and I shall be the *patron* of this café!"

But Teresita cried:

"That is a lie. I promised nothing—nothing at all. You came here, you made threats——"

Her temper blazed up and Bradley noted with considerable alarm that she was coarse, common, and anything but attractive. The affair was a confounded nuisance.

Teresita's face was screwed up sideways; she spat harsh words out of the corner of her adorable red mouth.

"*Salopards!* Yes, all of you—*tas de salopards!* Because I cannot go to the police, that's why you come here and make a hell of my life! Yes, I asked that one"—she jerked her chin at Bradley—"to help me against you, thou great scoundrel. I thought he would have the courage to drive you out, that's what I thought. But look at him—look at the beast—so cold, so hard, but——"

"So you've been kissing my girl behind my back?" thundered Lormier, shaking his fist in Bradley's face.

The atmosphere was becoming superheated. Everybody was yelling at the same time. Even the customers were beginning to shout, demanding, at the eleventh hour, that the dirty soldiers remove their stinking presences into the street. The two Arabs, who knew by bitter experience that, if the police found them on the premises, they would be arrested, gathered up their burnouses and departed with the stately tread of large white birds. They got as far as the door when Teresita spied them. With a shriek, she was out from behind the counter.

"My money!" she shrilled, venting upon them the overflow of her emotion. "Swine! Thieves! So you would run away without paying! Give me my money——"

Staring with grave unconcern at her flaming face, they paid, dropping the coins one by one into her outstretched palm. Gentlemen of an older civilization, they in-

sulted her and her breed with a subtlety that passed wholly unnoticed.

Gripping the coins in her hand, she marched down the room again, swinging her hips, stamping her heels on the red-tiled floor.

She halted two feet from Lormier and stormed at him:

"And you, *mon gros*, do you think I would marry you? Never! Never! Never! Not I! Marry a penniless foreigner——"

"Bradley has turned you against me," thundered Lormier, thrusting her aside and dropping his hand to the hilt of his bayonet. "I'll put a foot of steel down his gullet."

"Don't be a crazy fool," snapped Bradley, sliding off the table. "It's not worth it. So far as I'm concerned, you can——"

"Not worth it!" Teresita leaped at him and struck him across the mouth with so much violence that the coins flew out of her hand. "Do you think you can insult me with impunity?"

His lack of enthusiasm outraged her. For two weeks she had been beseeching him to rid her of Lormier—but she had not expected him to do so publicly—in front of her customers! She wanted nothing so much as to be rid of all these loutish soldiers who had no money to spend.

Stopfel was braying with laughter.

"Bradley's face has been smacked!" he gurgled, doubling up with his arms wrapped about his stomach.

Lormier, however, was not amused. He was boiling with rage, for he would have been pleased to marry the girl—though he had one wife in Amiens and another in Brussels. He caught her by the shoulders and ground his thick fingers into her flesh. Thrusting his face within an inch of hers, he growled:

"You asked him to help you—you've been kissing him, you vicious little brat?" He shook her in quick little jerks which made her head

rock. "But you can't fool me—you're mine!"

Teresita writhed beneath his grasp, but there was no shaking him off. He, at least,

was not afraid of using his great muscles. He was a man, a real man——

"Mine," he repeated. "Is that right or isn't it?"

"Yes," she gasped, "only—let me go."

He loosened his hold, and she staggered back against the counter.

"And now," Lormier went on, wheeling upon Bradley, "I'm going to fix you. You tried to steal my girl—you——"

HE LUNGED at Bradley, but when the blow arrived, Bradley was not there. He stepped out of the way and sent his fist crashing against Lormier's ear. He cursed his own clumsiness, for he had aimed at the jaw, hoping to bring the inevitable fight to a quick close. He didn't want to fight, but nobody would listen to reason, and there was nothing else for it.

Teresita was shrieking:

"Outside—go outside! Oh, my furniture! They will break everything in the place. Help! *Au secours!*"

Pandemonium broke loose.

Roaring like a bull, flaying the air with his arm, Lormier rushed in, trying to crush Bradley—to smother him beneath his greater weight. He was brought up by a trip-hammer blow in the mouth. He bored in, and Bradley caught him neatly in the pit of the stomach. The blow hurt. For a fraction of a second, he hesitated, and Bradley, who had gone fighting mad, rained blows in his face. He lurched back against the counter so heavily that several bottles fell over and dropped to the floor.

Teresita emitted piercing shrieks and called heaven to witness the damage these good-for-nothing Legionnaires were doing to her property.

Unaware of the clamor, Bradley closed in. All his misgivings had vanished into thin air. He could whip this mountain of a man with one hand. He struck him again and again, putting every ounce of his strength behind the blow. Lormier sagged; his knees bent beneath him—but one blind swipe of his great paw caught Bradley on the side of the jaw. And Bradley sat down.

Stars glittered before his eyes; his head rang with melodious carillons.

Before he could struggle to his feet, Lormier fell upon him. They rolled about



the floor, tearing and clawing at each other's throats. Stopfel, remembering at last that he was supposed to take some part in the conflict, aimed heavy kicks at Bradley's arms and legs. Unfortunately, Bradley squirmed in a most aggravating fashion, and the toe of Stopfel's boot, more often than not, connected with exposed portions of Lormier's anatomy, for the latter offered a bulkier and a broader target.

Teresita screamed shrilly and shook her fists at the ceiling, calling down fresh curses upon the heads of the combatants. All the customers were on their feet. They raved, they screeched, they cursed most foully. They shook their grinning fists, but they did not interfere. They were quite willing to let these Legionnaires massacre one another.

One Spaniard became hysterical when he saw Stopfel pick up a bench and wield it as if it were a club. The end of this improvised weapon struck one of the kerosene lamps, which tipped out of its holder. Fortunately, the light went out before the lamp hit Lormier between the shoulder blades. But the Spaniard rushed to the door, burst it open, and yelled "Fire!" in a voice which echoed and reechoed against the walls of the empty market-place.

The lamp was made of metal and weighed several pounds. The force of the blow knocked the breath out of Lormier's body and flattened him out, even while he was fumbling for a grip on Bradley's ears with the intention of "ringing" him; in other words, pounding the back of his head against the floor. The momentary respite gave Bradley a chance to squirm out from under.

BOTH of them struggled to their feet at the same second—and Bradley slugged first. Lormier went down and stayed down, curled up with his face pressed against the back of the counter. Stopfel stood stock still, his arms hanging down in front of him, gaping at the victor.

Teresita, however, with that inconsistency which is the crowning inebecity of some women, flung herself down beside Lormier and cradled his battered head in her arms. Like a tigress defending her

young, she looked up at Bradley and snarled:

"Cowards! Pigs! It took two of you to murder him! Yes, you, thou dirty beast Stopfel—you are a traitor. He will kill you for this—my man will tear out your heart!"

Stopfel seemed to shrivel up. He went from red to white and then red again. He stammered excuses. But before he could apologize in full, he was interrupted by Bradley, who inquired in a harsh voice:

"And how about you—do you want a dose of the same medicine?"

His uniform was soiled, bloodstained, and ripped to pieces. Blood, streaming from his nose, covered the lower part of his face with a dark red mask; his right eye was closing, and his lips were cut and swollen. He looked so terrible that Stopfel backed away from him, protesting:

"But, *mein Gott*, do you not hear the woman? It was me that beat him for you!"

"Traitor!" repeated Teresita, between her pearly-white teeth.

"You beat nothing," grunted Bradley.

"The best thing you can do is shut your face and keep it shut. Where's my *kepi*?"

Despite his truculent manner, he was too exhausted to retrieve his cap, which lay on the opposite side of the room. His brain was spinning dizzily, the room rocked in a sickening fashion. He needed fresh air, lots of fresh air. But he had licked Lormier and he was very glad, even though he knew he was sure to be sick if he did not reach the street in a very few seconds. The atmosphere was poisonous.

Then the armed picket attracted by the loud cries of "Fire," burst into the café, and subsequent proceedings were conducted in strict accordance with the *code militaire*, although the sergeant in charge of the picket favored each of the prisoners with an unsanctioned kick because the night was very hot and he had had to run all the way from the other side of the Officers' Club.



Bradley and Stopfel walked back to barracks; Lormier was carried by four cursing troopers, face downward, his belt buckle brushing the ground. And Teresita stood in the doorway of the café, waiting for all the world to hear that her man had been murdered.

Escorted by squealing Arab urchins, the party marched back to barracks. The barred door of the *salle de police* swung open. Into the dark and musty depths the three prisoners were shoved.

CHAPTER II

HARD DISCIPLINE

A MONTH later, Bradley returned to duty. He was older, thinner, and pleasantly self-satisfied. Yet he had no valid reason for this self-satisfaction, for he had just spent thirty days in hell.

The morning after his arrest, he was marched before the colonel. The sergeant who had affected the arrest read off the charges: damage to government property—to wit, one tunic, summer weight; one pair trousers, ditto—torn and blood-stained; three buttons missing off the tunic; damage to the property of a civilian, to wit, two bottles of anis, one bottle Amer Picon, one bottle cognac; one siphon; seven glasses; one bench; one lamp; one lamp chimney—broken or otherwise destroyed; furthermore, causing a disturbance in a public place, to wit: the Café des Deux Mondes, in the Rue de Mogador; blows and injuries to the person of No. 42517 Soldier Lormier, Julien; and No. 57222 Soldier of Second Class Stopfel, Herman. Drunkenness was thrown in for good measure by the sergeant, who automatically assumed all delinquents were drunk because a drunk was a delinquent.

Retribution was swift and merciless. There were no unnecessary explanations. The colonel looked at Bradley's scarred and unlovely face for a second or so, then pursing his lips, he said:

"Ten days cells—twenty days ordinary arrest. If you appear before me again in such a state, *mon ami*, you'll grace the disciplinary battalion with your presence—Next case, sergeant."

And it was even so.

Bradley spent the next ten days in sol-

itary confinement in a dark, narrow, ill-ventilated, and unclean cell. His food was cut down to a third of the normal ration, and every other day he received nothing but a half ration of dry bread. Swarms of vermin favored him with their attention, and several large brown rats shared his food. His time was equally divided between scratching and cursing, but he was not at all downcast. Indeed, he was disgustingly pleased with himself.

He gloated over his fight with Lormier, recalling each phase of that Homeric struggle as fondly as a mother dreaming of the antics of her first-born. To him, the weak ray of light seeping through the grating was positively rosy. He was even known to whistle in the stilly watches of the night, much to the astonishment of the men on guard duty, who marvelled at his imbecilic good-humor and rewarded him with an occasional cigarette when the non-commissioned officer on duty had his back turned.

Word spread about the barracks that the American was a wild and terrible person, much to be feared. A *numero*, a species of a sacred camel; who could not be subdued even in a cell. And the rank and file, while they admired his courage, unanimously agreed that he would come to grief. It wasn't rational for a man to act that way. He should have been sullen and depressed and revengeful.

BUT he whistled a different tune when his period of solitary came to an end and he began his "twenty days ordinary arrest." Instead of being kept in a cell, he was transferred to the *salle de police*, the guardroom, which he shared with all the other defaulters of the depot.

Lormier and Stopfel joined him there, for the colonel had inflicted the same sentence upon them to keep peace in the family. Bradley was ready to forgive and forget. Stopfel was only too willing to minimize the affair and laugh it off, but Lormier was suffering from a badly damaged reputation. He had been the pride of No. 7 Depot Company, the good-humored bully of No. 12 Platoon—and, thunder of God! his position had been wrested from him by a recruit, a dirty American. He was the laughing stock of the regiment. Even the

sergeants grinned when they caught sight of him. It was maddening, it was unendurable; he had spent ten days pacing his narrow cell, deciding exactly what he would do to Bradley—and the worst of it was, when at last they did come face to face, he was utterly incapable of saying or doing anything. He wasn't scared—he was merely cautious. The heat and the starvation diet had undermined his oxlike constitution; he was suffering from a dose of fever, but as soon as his health was restored—well, Bradley would know all about it!

Ignoring Bradley's outstretched hand, he drew himself up to his full six foot four, squared his shoulders, scowled ominously, clenched his fists—and turned on his heel. He stalked to the far end of the room and sat down on the edge of the raised platform which did duty as a bed for the occupants of the *salle de police*.

One incautious Legionnaire, slowly recovering from the effects of too many libations on the previous evening, leaned affectionately against his arm and inquired:

"What's trouble? Big fellow like you—hic—give him one little tap—stretch him out. Big fellow like you—hic—nothing to be afraid of."

Grunting savagely, Lormier struck the man down and sent him rolling across the floor.

"I'm a sick man," he announced, looking anywhere but at Bradley. "Yes—very sick. I'm rotten with fever—but if there's a man here who thinks he can make a donkey out of me, I'll break his neck."

Then he sat down again and tried to look very sick and very desperate. Thereafter, he was left alone.

There is nothing very ordinary about ordinary arrest as the term is understood in the Legion. For six hours each day, dressed in full marching order, the prisoners were exercised in the barrack yard. Six hours of back-breaking drill in the heat and dust. Six hours of torment in the steamy, ovenlike heat of the cells, Bradley had grown soft. Then, without transition, he was worked until every muscle and fiber in his body ached intolerably, until the rays of the sun bit through his skull and made his brain boil. March—run—march again. Load, aim, fire—march,

run, march. For six hours. Drill! Until his lungs were ready to crack open and his feet dragged like lead in the sand.

Day after day for twenty days. A nightmare and a torment.



Bradley suffered, but he gritted his teeth and hung on. He saw Lormier collapse and saw him kicked to his feet again,

but he was too dazed to care. Thought and feeling were washed out of his mind. The rasp of the sergeant's voice made him wince as if he had been struck with a whip lash. Nothing else mattered.

By the end of the twentieth day, Bradley was a chastened Legionnaire. He swore solemnly all to himself that never again, under any circumstances, would he run the risk of being condemned to ordinary arrest.

AND yet, an hour after his release, he was anything but chastened. His spirits rose with a leap. Back in the barrack room (the good old, orderly, clean, neat, tidy barrack room), the entire platoon shook him by the hand. They were a hard, bitter crew, but they were not ashamed to admit that Bradley was the master of them all. He had beaten Lormier—he had beaten Lormier and Stopfel! They dug down into their pockets and offered him a "wine of honor." He was no longer a recruit—he had made his mark, he had arrived.

In his exuberance, Bradley was overcome with twinges of remorse toward Lormier. He tried to explain that he was sorry he had ever come between Lormier and his girl: he assured Lormier that nothing on earth would induce him to go near Teresita again (and he meant it), and he expressed the hope that she would some day be sorry she had given Lormier the gate—this because Teresita, with unladylike gusto, now declared she was through with a weakling.

Lormier smiled and shrugged his shoulders. It was of no consequence, he declared. Nothing mattered—And at the same time he was thinking:

"No, nothing matters, you pig-face, but if ever I can get you without running the risk of going to prison—I'll stiffen you out!"

He was careful, however, to keep such explosive thoughts to himself, for his mind was full of misgivings. He would have murdered Bradley but for one vital consideration: he was afraid. All his self-confidence was gone. He could not realize that he had been whipped by another man. Never before had such a thing happened to him. He doubted his own strength, and groping about in his mind for an excuse, he decided that he must be suffering from a weak heart. As the days went by, the belief was to become a certainty. There was no other possible explanation. It was his heart that had let him down.

Soon the whole section knew that he had a weak heart. To a man, they sympathized with him. It was hard on a Legionnaire a complaint of that nature! At night, while his roommates snored, he lay awake, tormented by a desire to kill Bradley—to drive a bayonet into his throat—but he dared not do it, for he realized all too clearly what the consequences would be.

MOREOVER, all private feuds were forgotten during the next few weeks. Ceaselessly, the Legion was shaping its human material, hardening it for the tasks that lay ahead. The practice hikes grew longer, musketry drill more thorough. Discipline tightened up. The tolerance with which the recruits had been treated at first gave way to an inflexible code.

On parade, Bradley ceased to have a mind of his own. He was an automaton, a "bayonet unit," working smoothly, instantly, at the word of command. He no longer questioned the authority of bibulous sergeants. And the change was so gradual that he did not notice it. He was a full-fledged Legionnaire, even while still wearing out his first pair of boots.

Everything became a matter of routine: even the mild spree on pay day and walks downtown on concert night. Sidi-bel-Abbes lost its glamor. Of an evening there were long debates as to when and where they might be sent. Rumors began to drift about the echoing corridors of the barracks.

Tonkin, Madagascar, Toughort—the world opened up before him.

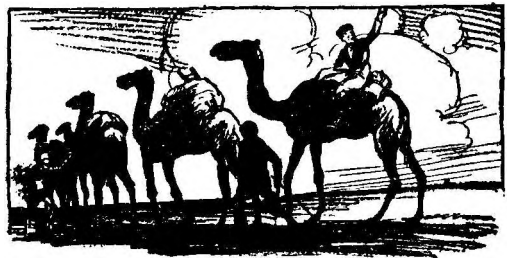
And at last the rumors became a fact: he found his name on the bulletin board, included in a detachment a hundred strong which was being sent down south to Ain Seffra.

There was no time to celebrate the event. Medical inspection, kit inspection, rifle inspection, followed in quick succession. At ten o'clock that night the party was packed into third-class railroad coaches, and the journey began. When dawn arrived, the vineyards and wheat-fields had been left far behind. The train rolled across an immense plain studded with clumps of gray-green grass. In the distance, a row of blue hills closed the horizon.

"So this is the desert!" exclaimed Bradley, leaning out the carriage window.

"Desert!" laughed an old-timer. "We aren't within a thousand kilometers of it yet."

EMPTY, shadowless, desolate, the plains swung by, hour after hour. The stations were forts guarded by loopholed turrets and barbed-wire entanglements. A new type of Arab drifted by, and groups of them, standing behind the barbed-wire barriers, watched the Legionnaires with appraising eyes, which flickered a little as they exchanged low-voiced comments. They were lean men with hawklike faces, dressed in the plain white burnous of the plainsman or the gray *djellaba* of the hill folk; and as the train rolled southward, the first rifles began to appear, for the law becomes highly debatable once the Tel plateau lies behind, and each man is free to protect himself as best he may.



Here and there, along the way, nomads' tents appeared; and just before dark Bradley saw his first camel caravan straggling

toward the fiery red eye of the setting sun.

Then the lights of Ain Seffra appeared, twinkling far away across the plain, and that last lap of the journey was over.

CHAPTER III

INTO THE UNKNOWN

IT WAS the emptiness of that sun-scorched land that most impressed Bradley. Ain Seffra consisted of a group of barrack buildings in the best Moorish new-art style; a few stores, a few unlovely places where troopers might spend their money—a ragged collection of huts inhabited by Arabs and Black Jews—and that was all. The rest was sand and rock, hill and desert. And yet things happened. In the hills to the east, there were tribes that had never acknowledged the overlordship of the white man. They were migrants, moving here and yon, with their herds of goats and camels—a fluid people always in motion, always restless. Sometimes they pillaged and plundered right under the white man's nose—and they were gone before a shot could be fired after them. They melted away before the punitive columns, lured them on into their barren hills—and butchered the transport train ten miles in rear of the troops.

It was the Legion's task to keep down that country for the greater glory—and prosperity—of France. It was hard work—killing work—with very little to show for it in the end. Forced marches that led nowhere—weeks of waiting at some water hole for an enemy who never came, days of blistering, blinding heat and dust and thirst, and always, at the end of the hike, the monotony of life in barracks.

In all the rooms, photographs were posted up, "by order," so that Legionnaires grown weary of the steady grind might think twice before they attempted to desert. The photographs were of men who had gone astray and had been caught by hostile bands. What was left of them was ghastly, but after the first shock of disgust those pictures became commonplace.

Bradley stood the strain. Everything was new and strange; there was always a chance that at any moment he might have a chance to make use of the cartridges that weighed him down on the line of march. He was, in his way, a good soldier, and it

never occurred to him that he was a degraded human being who had thrown away a promising career and was expiating his sins in a hot wilderness. As a matter of fact, he was rather proud of his uniform and of the man inside of it.

He was mildly amused when Coates informed him one day that he was "fair sick and tired of this 'ere dawg's life." They had just returned to Ain Seffra after a ten days' aimless hunt for a marauding band, and were sitting on the ground propped up against the wall of the canteen, holding a *gamelle* full of wine on their knees.

"What's eating you now?" grinned Bradley.

"This 'ere blarsted business—I ain't a bleedin' camel, I ain't! I got some self-respec' left even if I am a Legionnaire. Lickin' the blinkin' sergeant's boots." He leaned over and whispered: "Tell you what, Gawge—let's desert. I 'ear there's all sorts of chawnces for trained men up in the Tafilet. If you can 'ook up with one of them *kaid*s, you can make a fortune."

"Dream on!" snorted Bradley. "Charley, you're crazy. That stuff's all bunk. Rich *kaid*s! Look about you—a bunch of goat herders living in tents. Sheiks full of fleas! A bunch of lousy desert Arabs. Money—maybe they have some, but it's not for the likes of you. Who's been telling you fairy tales?"

"Lormier said——"

"Lormier's a sorehead, and he's a good liar, too. Is he going to desert?"

"'E didn't say when exactly."

"Well, wait till he does. He's a blow-hard. That bird gives me a pain. Crab, crab, crab all the time! Nothing suits him. Him and his heart!"

"What's that got to do with desertin'?"

"Oh, use your bean! You don't speak Arabic, you don't know the country. It's full of wild men who're aching to carve you up and fill your tummy with stones—and you think you could hook up with a *kaid* who'd give you a soft job? Better forget it, Charley, if you aim to live a while longer. Come on, let's have one more shot of *vin rouge* and turn in."

Coates let the matter drop. He was very gloomy until he had absorbed the contents of four bottles of wine; then he went fight-

ing mad and threatened to dirk Bradley with his bayonet. Indeed, his rage was so great that he staggered off to fetch the weapon, but by the time he reached the barrack room he had forgotten all about his homicidal intentions. So he curled up on his cot and went sound asleep. Morning found him refreshed and cheerful.

"I didn't mean you no 'arm," he explained later, "but I was feeling sort of low. Must 'ave been a touch of that *cafard* they talk about so much. It come over me all of a sudden, and, s'elp me, I didn't know what was 'appenin'!"

HIS diagnosis was correct: he had been suffering from a mild attack of the *cafard*, a mental disease which in civilian life is called neurasthenia and treated with benevolent contempt. But it plays havoc with Legionnaires. If time hangs heavy on their hands, and they have too much leisure to brood over their misfortunes, many of them crack up and go to pieces.

The official remedy for the *cafard* is work; the unofficial remedy is drink.



Shortly after Coates's recovery, Stopfel deserted. He was missing for a week, then a patrol found what was left of him, splayed out on the ground and so

shockingly mutilated that they buried him where he lay.

Undeterred by his fate, two other men set out. They were caught by a squad of native police and brought back in handcuffs, chained to the saddles of the *goumiers*. Then a boy of twenty went mad and brained a sergeant with the butt-end of his rifle. He had to be shot down before he could be subdued.

Before the epidemic spent itself, half the garrison had filed through the *salle de police*.

THE end came suddenly at five o'clock one afternoon. Bradley was leaning out of the barrack-room window finishing

a cigarette. He had nothing to do and all evening to do it in. Pay day was far away. He couldn't even afford a drink. Behind him, men sprawled half naked on their cots, dozing, smoking, quarrelling in rasping voices. An orderly ran across the parade ground toward the guardhouse. Bradley looked after him lazily, wondering why anybody should choose to run in that oven heat. Out of the guardhouse came a bugler. A call rang out—clear, compelling, urgent—the alarm.

There was a rush of feet. Shouts—A volley of cheers—The *cafard* was forgotten. The section sergeant appeared in the doorway of the barrack room, braying:

"Full marching order! Assembly in fifteen minutes. Get a move on in there!"

Knapsacks and kit and accoutrement came off the shelves—Rumors sped down the corridors—The Beni Hanaf were out—There was a full-dress rebellion down south—Hell had broken loose, and the Legionnaires yelled. They were moving south to Béchar—they were being brigaded with the Bat d' Af and some Senegalese—

Down below, the bugles sounded "Five Minutes to Assembly." The room was full of shouting men, sweating and cursing as they struggled into their harness. The sergeant was in the doorway again, speeding them on.

With a heave and a jerk, Bradley swung his pack into place and elbowed his way to the rifle rack by the door. As he took out his weapon, he heard Lormier saying to the sergeant:

"It is my heart, *mon sergent*. I am not fit for the march."

He was gray-faced and shaken. All too clearly the prospect of going into action had not cheered him up.

"You and your heart," stormed the non-com. "It is afraid that you are! Species of a camel, must I kick you all the way from here to Béchar? Put on that pack and move!"

"If you had a heart like mine—" began Lormier. But the whole section shouted him down.

They spilled out on to the parade ground—Order came out of apparent chaos—Company by company, they assembled—When the bugle sounded again,

the lines stood steady— Roll call— A volley of orders— Thunder of trampling feet— A thousand strong, they swung out of the barracks and headed south into the unknown.

CHAPTER IV

INTRODUCING THE BUTCHER

THE Beni Hanaf had been quiet for a score of years, and the chances are that they would never have thought of running amuck if a religious fanatic had not drifted into Souk el Maroud from the general direction of Marakesh.

Muhammad el Yafz had a persuasive tongue and a plentiful supply of loose cash, which he spent judiciously. He preached nothing less ambitious than a general uprising of all Muhammadan peoples from Fez to Calcutta, and, once he was sure of his audience, he went so far as to whisper the exact date and hour when the holy war was due to burst upon the unsuspecting world.

He spoke so much and so well that, before long, the Beni Hanaf were spoiling for a fight. Instead of waiting for the great explosion, they started a little war of their own. Whereupon the holy man departed to sow the seeds of unrest among other tribes.

He belonged—but he did not boast about it—to a society with headquarters in Cairo, which was engaged in the tortuous business of stirring up as much trouble as possible among the so-called subject races. The fate of the downtrodden people who answered their call and rebelled interested them but little.

Here were the French, for instance, who owned a huge slice of the earth's surface—owned it and ruled it without any pretence of allowing their oppressed inferiors the least sniff of self-government. There was a cynical cocksureness about their attitude that was rather disarming. They ruled, with a bland sense of their own superiority, over Arabs and Annamites, Moors and Malagas, Senegalese and Kanakas. And they had a preposterous habit of asserting that their subject races loved them, cried out for them, nestled fondly on the ample and cultured bosom of Mother France! Which made the head of the society's propaganda bureau see red. He let

loose the pick of his missionaries in North Africa and, in due course, the Beni Hanaf uprose in the name of Allah.

They butchered the delegate administrator while he was at breakfast; they caught the resident surgeon while he was swabbing a small girl's infected eyes, and chopped off his head; they surrounded the police barracks and shot the policemen who came staggering out of the burning building; and they ended up by looting the one and only European store at Souk el



Maroud after having dispatched the storekeeper and his shrieking wife. Then, having accounted for all the available white men, they sent out emissaries of their own among the neighboring tribes and exhorted them to throw off the despised yoke of servitude.

They lived in a range of barren hills south of Kerouane, and a full week went by before word of the uprising reached the French headquarters at Colomb-Béchar. During the interval, several dissatisfied tribes went over to the Beni Hanaf, and Colonel Armand de Gonesse, when he reached the scene of operations, found himself confronted by something like two thousand rifles in the hands of two thousand fanaticized Arabs who labored under the delusion that they were more than a match for ten times as many Frenchmen.

But their fanaticism went hand in hand with a canny sense of military values. They were quite well aware of the disastrous effects of massed rifle fire upon charging horsemen, and they wisely tethered their horses out of sight and waited for the French to attack.

Souk el Maroud was easy to defend. The oasis lay within a loop formed by the dry bed of the river, which protected it on three sides. Within this loop, there was a maze of date-palm groves and mud-walled gardens, criss-crossed by irrigation gulleys, which formed an additional barrier between the town and its assailants. Outside the loop began the naked, stony plain

which stretched back to the foot of the hills.

The only direct access into the town was through the neck of the loop, where the plain reached to the gates, and the hot winds piled lemon-colored sand drifts at the base of the wall. But even this approach was commanded by a knoll—an outcrop of rock jutting up about thirty feet.

MILES long, the column crawled over the hills and camped at the far end of the plain. It had marched something more than thirty-five kilometers a day for eight days, and it had been sniped at along the line of march ever since it had reached the foothills. The men needed a rest before they went in and put an end to the Beni Hanaf's dreams of independence.

But there was no rest for Colonel de Gonesse. Accompanied by his chief of staff, his galloper, and an escort of spahis, he rode out to inspect the lay of the land. The knoll which commanded the approach to the insurgents' town was especially marked down by him as he circled the oasis.

One of the youngest senior officers in the French Army, Colonel Armando de Gonesse had achieved this enviable distinction by dint of hard work, tact, charming manners, a pleasing literary style, and an almost uncanny gift of being able to talk in a weighty manner without ever expressing any kind of an opinion. Moreover, he never knew when he was beaten, which, in an officer, is a great asset.

HE HAD gone from success to success. He conquered the enemies of France and the wives of his fellow officers with the same masterful ease. Yet he never lost either his head or his heart. At all times he was cool, circumspect, and quite fearless. Also because of the prestige he derived from his long line of ancestors, he was treated with respect, respected for his calm insolence, and admired for his brilliant record. This regard was further enhanced by the fact that his brother, Casimir had accumulated a brilliant though unstable fortune directing colonial development companies. He had a controlling interest in the Mines du Niger, the Société pour l'Exploitation des Forêts du Dah-

omey, the Tonkin Export, and a dozen other concerns. Incidentally, he also owned an influential Parisian newspaper, which could be used for other purposes than the mere dissemination of news.

So the two brothers worked hand in hand for the development of their country's colonial empire; Casimir exploited what Armand conquered. But there was a slight difference in that, while the man of business piled up money, the man of war piled up debts. He simply could not help it. Money slid through his fingers; it went and was no more. It was this unfortunate trait that compelled him to bury himself in the wilderness on the fringes of the empire when, with a very little wire-pulling, he could have secured a comfortable staff appointment at headquarters.

But there were compensations. His self-abnegation and devotion to duty were lauded by his chiefs; he was called a hero and an idealist who was sacrificing himself to spread among uncultured peoples the fruits of Gallic civilization. Wherefore he was much decorated, and was made a Knight of the Legion of Honor.

The men who served under his command, however, referred to him by other, less savory names, the only printable one being "The Butcher."

He had discovered an almost infallible method of winding up colonial campaigns in the quickest, most spectacular fashion. With a little preliminary diplomacy, he could always be sure of having at his disposal twice as many troops as he knew he would actually need. Then, having cornered his enemy, he threw in his men—and went on throwing them in until success crowned his efforts. It was simple and effective.

If his losses were high, the result was decisive; the one counterbalanced the other



in the eyes of his chiefs who read his carefully worded reports. What the rank and file thought of it is another matter. But they were cheap troops, most of them — Senegalese Tirailleurs, Foreign Legionnaires, African Light Infantry,

Spahis; men whose deaths had no echo in France—and their loss was as nothing compared to the peace and safety and prosperity which they helped to establish.

Nevertheless, they did not seem to appreciate either the cause for which they died or their leader's splendid record. In fact, they had the bad taste to hate him. From Hanol to Dakar, he was known as the Butcher—and he survived for one reason only; because he was absolutely fearless, and even while his men hated him, they were compelled to respect him.

THE colonel sat in the doorway of his tent, finishing his cigar before turning in. The night was hot and dark. Against the stars loomed the black mass of the hill at the foot of which the camp was pitched. The voices of the sentries traveling from post to post around the bivouac intensified the immense stillness that brooded over the desert.

De Gonesse had spent the evening in conference with his unit commanders and had had a somewhat tiresome discussion with Captain Proton of the Foreign Legion, who had appeared with a copy of the orders for the next day's operations in his hand.

"There's something wrong here," Proton had grunted. "Look! it says: 'The Foreign Legion is to assault the knoll after ten minutes' artillery preparation'—and as soon as we start our advance, the guns switch targets."



The knoll in question was the very one especially noted by Colonel de Gonesse on his first survey of the scene of the attack.

"And so?" asked the colonel.

"It is self-evident, *I* should say. Those two little mountain guns are going to put about ten shells somewhere around the knoll before we go forward."

"The moral effect of artillery fire."

"Permit me, *mon colonel*," Proton had growled. "Just permit *me* to finish. I know Souk el Maroud. I was here when we took the place the first time. That's nearly fifteen years ago. I was a corporal then."

"*Tiens, tiens!* How interesting!"

"And my company tried to take that same knoll. Well, we were three days tak-

ing it, and it cost the best part of three companies. That rock's full of holes and crevices. And believe me, these Bicots know how to defend it! When I read the orders, why, I had to laugh. But, yes! And I said to Lieutenant Valon, who was with me, 'The colonel doesn't know this place as I do,' and I came right over to tell you."

"That's very kind of you." De Gonesse had agreed gently. "Oh, extremely kind!" and it had taken him some moments to convince Captain Proton that on the morrow the sacrifices of the Legion would not be in vain. A fresh page would be written in their glorious history.

"It is unfortunate that our supply of shells is so limited," he was saying to the Captain when some Beni Hanaf snipers, who had worked their way up the flank of the hill above the camp, chose that particular moment to open fire on the light glowing in the colonel's tent. Three bullets arrived simultaneously.

"Shall I put out the light?" the aide-de-camp inquired politely.

"Do," agreed the colonel.

Two more slugs arrived in quick succession, and the light went out of its own accord, for the lantern crashed to the ground.

"They are urging us to retire!" exclaimed De Gonesse. "What thoughtful people! Now, my dear Proton, tomorrow I leave to your discretion"—another bullet tore through the wall of the tent—"and on your way back you might detail a small party to deal with those snipers, will you? Four men and a corporal ought to do quite nicely."

Proton saluted and limped away through the darkness.

CHAPTER V

GETTING THE SNIPER

THE snipers' fire did not disturb Bradley. A mine explosion would not have disturbed him. He lay on his back and snored. There was a beatific smile on his sweat-streaked, dusty, bearded face. He was dreaming: a gorgeous and beautifully cool dream.

He was walking into a ballroom—an enormous room which dripped with mellow light from a million crystal chandeliers.

It was crowded with beautiful women and handsome men. Instantly, he realized that they were the very *creme* of New York society, but he was not at all embarrassed, even though he wore a sky-blue tunic with black facings and skin-tight scarlet breeches and was leading a camel by a hal-



ter tied to a ring passed through its nose. A Legionnaire's *kepi* was perched on the camel's head, and it had a habit of rising up every so often on its hind legs to salute in a highly dignified and military fashion. Thun-

ders of applause greeted his entrance; the crystal chandeliers clinked; and Katherine Powell floated toward him with outstretched arms, imploring him to forgive her.

But he drew himself up haughtily and said:

"Behold, there is your George," for he was no longer George, but somebody else, and the camel stood up on its hind legs and saluted.

Then Katherine suddenly faded out and Teresita stood before him, a fiercer and more shrewish Teresita, who leaped at him and bit his shoulder——

He woke up fighting. There *was* a pain in his right shoulder. Corporal Martinelli was hammering it with the toe of his boot. With a groan, he crawled out of the shelter tent and joined the corporal, who was arousing the rest of the squad, Lormier, Coates, and a man by the name of Kussling.

Dazed for want of sleep they fell over each other's feet and grumbled unimaginative curses beneath their breath. But they straightened up when they recognized Captain Proton's voice rasping in the darkness.

"There's a sniper up there. He's disturbing the colonel's beauty sleep. Go and get him, and work fast, my infants, because, if you think you're going to lie between

blankets tomorrow morning, you can think again. Off you go."

"'Unting for a needle in a bloomin' 'aystack," growled Coates as they trudged out of camp. "Might as well arsk us to find a blinkin' penny in the bottom of the per-ishin' ocean."

A spit of red flame flickered on the hillside. The crisp report of a rifle drifted down to them.

They worked their way up the slope, dislodging an avalanche of small stones and loose earth, floundering about clumsily in the thick shadows. A herd of young elephants could not have given away its exact location more effectively. Bullets began to smack against the near-by boulders.

The corporal paused, sponging his streaming face on his coat sleeve.

"We'll try something," he whispered. "You, Kussling, stay where you are and roll stones down hill—make a noise. You comprehend? You will keep the snipers amused while we can work in close to them. Stop in about five minutes. They will crawl down to see what has been happening, and we shall get them."

Kussling, who was a conscientious Hanoverian, did as he was told. Tons of rock began to hurtle downward until it seemed to Bradley that half the hillside must be in motion. Then Martinelli strung out his squad at twenty yards' interval, with orders to lay low and shoot at the flashes.

Kussling had stopped his bombardment; the night was hushed and still. Propped against a boulder, Bradley waited. The declivity was so steep that he felt like a fly hanging to the side of a wall. Minutes dragged by. He was beginning to nod when he thought he saw something move—something not quite as dark as the surrounding shadows. A pebble rattled across a ledge of rock.

Almost at his elbow a red flash boomed, and the crash of the shot rang in his ears. For one split second he caught sight of a brown bearded face.

Before the clatter died away, Bradley was aware of a scuffle of feet above him where Lormier should have been. . . . A bayonet glistened in the starlight. It came straight at him.

He flung himself sideways just in time

to avoid the thin steel blade which, nevertheless, ripped through his shoulder strap and struck the boulder against which he had been propped. It snapped off at the hilt where it was attached to the gun barrel—Lormier's gun barrel.

Lormier himself followed close behind. He tripped against Bradley's legs and came down with a grunt. They slithered sideways against the ledge of rock, and as they came to rest Bradley jammed the muzzle of his gun up beneath Lormier's chin. For a second they lay side by side, breathing heavily, then Bradley whispered:

"You'll try that once too often. One of these days, Lormier, I'm going to lose my temper."

"I thought you were the Arab," panted Lormier. "I heard—I thought I saw——"

"You thought you could stick two feet of steel into my back," Bradley retorted. "Lie still, my little cabbage, or I'll blow off the top of your head." Lormier lay still. "Now listen here, this vendetta has lasted long enough. I'm tired of it. The next time you bother me, it is your skin that will be punctured."

"I swear——"

"Don't; it's a waste of time. Ever since we left Sidi-bel-Abbes you've been trying to get me. You can't take a whipping like a man. You've tried every filthy trick you could think of."

"It is not so. Not at all," Lormier gurgled. "I've done nothing."

"You're a sweet liar. Now, listen: who put the scorpion in my shoe at Ain Seffra? Who slipped a bullet into my rifle so that I might shoot out the captain's eye at rifle inspection? Who—— But what's the use?—You know and I know—and the very next time anything of that sort happens, I'll fix you once and for all. That clear?"

Lormier was whispering, "You are not fair to me. I have done nothing. I am a sick man, asking only to be let alone——" Then Corporal Martinelli arrived feet foremost, sliding down the hill, and the tête-à-tête broke up with remarkable suddenness.

MMARTINELLI, it appeared, was displeased. He explained in a voice that quivered with indignation that he had

heard them arguing while he was two hundred meters away. Their caterwauling had driven all the snipers under cover, and there was nothing for the patrol to do but go back empty-handed.

When he heard that Lormier had broken his bayonet, he exploded with all the fury of which a Neapolitan is capable, but he calmed down a little when Bradley assured him that at least one sniper had been accounted for.



Then he became suspicious.

"Why had you a bayonet on your rifle?" he demanded. "There was no order to that effect, thou lumbering camel."

"I saw an Arab," explained Lormier. "I started down after him and, desiring to avoid a noise, I decided to make use of the bayonet. That is reasonable, is it not? But my foot slipped, alas, and I rolled against Bradley."

"Is that right, Bradley?" snapped Martinelli. "If he's lying, I'll have him court-martialled."

"That's right," Bradley agreed, "he rolled down."

The corporal shrugged his shoulders. After all, it was not his business if these two men chose to nurse a grudge against each other. So far as he was concerned, they could kill each other, for all he cared.

Twenty minutes later, bearing the dead sniper's body with them, they trailed into camp. Another five minutes found them asleep and snoring.

IT SEEMED to Bradley that the bugles sounded reveille almost before his head had touched the knapsack. But this time, at once, he was wide awake. There was a queer, pinched feeling in the pit of his stomach, and his throat was as dry as punk. His hands shook a little as he buckled on his belt.

It was not quite light. Behind the hills, the sky was turning gray, the dawn wind

was cool. It swept across the plain, making the dust swirl in quick spurts. Souk el Maroud came out of the shadows—a dark mass of walls and trees.

The section orderly came by, lugging a tin canful of coffee. Bradley gulped down a mugful, scalding hot and black. He tried to munch a hunk of stale bread, but it turned to plaster in his mouth and he could not swallow. His own nervousness irritated him.

Nearby stood Coates, looking glum and cold. Nobody, for that matter, looked particularly happy. Men moved about stiffly, yawning, quarrelling in undertones.

Then bugles began to call in the sunlit dawn familiar, matter-of-fact summonses, which put an end to Bradley's restlessness.

"This way No. 4 Company!"

They trotted clear of the tents and formed up. There was no letting down of the routine discipline. Sergeants began to bark.

"By your right—dress—— Up a little in the center—eyes front—*Repos!* Stand at ease!"

They might have been on the parade ground at Sidi-bel-Abbes. The machine worked smoothly without a hitch. Drawn up in line of platoons, the two companies waited, leaning on the rifles. Four hundred and fifty men, waiting stolidly for the signal to go forward to their many deaths.

A minute went by. The hilltops were aglow with color. Long shafts of golden light shot down between the peaks, driving away the shadows. Over yonder, Souk el Maroud slept within its girdle of greenery. In the stillness, Bradley heard the deep-toned buzz of a myriad flies crawling upon the litter scattered about the camp.

He found it almost impossible to realize that, in a very little while, he would be marching out across the plain and that, at the end of the march, there would be a fight. It seemed absurd. The oasis reminded him of the pictures at Sunday school—only it was more vivid. The date-palm trees were a cruder green than he had imagined; the background of hills looked stagey, as if it had been cut out of cardboard and painted with pale shades of

lavender and heliotrope, tipped with gold and crimson. He could not make himself believe that he was going to see men killed—that he himself might be killed—— And all at once he recalled the events of the previous night, he had shot a man in cold blood. But that was different. The man had been a shadow, a gray target in the darkness.

He wondered what it would feel like to dig his bayonet into a man's chest—

Then he remembered Lormier's treacherous attack, and a quick flash of anger swept through him. That damn' fool with his one idea! Going sour simply because he couldn't always depend upon his bulging muscles and act as the unofficial censor of the platoon. Lying awake at night devising idiotic plots to rid himself of his "enemy." A fatuous giant with the mind of a nasty twelve-year-old boy.

Lormier was staring off toward Souk el Maroud out of wide-open, glassy eyes. His mouth was drawn down at the corners by a spasmodic twitch.

"Company—*Garde a vous! Fixe! Attention!*"

The ranks stiffened. Captain Proton came out in front.

"My children," he announced, "give me your undivided attention. You see that red lump of rock over there? That's our objective. A great many of you are going to be in hell before we capture it, but don't let that bother you. What I want you to remember is this, I'm a bit lame this morning. In a little while we're going to charge. If a single one of you scoundrels thinks he can run faster than I can and tries to get ahead of me, I'll pop him in prison before he can say 'oof.'"

"Proper card, ain't 'e?" chuckled Coates, his lips barely moving.

But the sergeant spotted him.

"You, there, Coates, talking on parade! I'll deal with you in a little while, never fear. Stand steady!"

Crack! Out ahead the battery of mountain guns had come into action. The first shell sped on its way and burst in a woolly white cloud against the clear blue sky.

"Company—fix bayonets!"

Four hundred and fifty bayonets leaped

from their scabbards—a flash of steel——



Bradley found himself performing the movement automatically. The whole outfit worked as one man, with a snap and a swing—Legion style.

“Steady!”

The two guns were firing at thirty seconds intervals, raking the knoll with shrapnel. A haze of yellow dust was gathering about the target——

Over on the right the massed ranks of the Senegalese Tirailleurs were gathered. Rows of black faces beneath blood-red fezzes. Farther away Bradley caught sight of the Bat d’Af, already under way, pouring out to stage a sham flank attack.

Up went Proton’s right arm.

“Company will advance— Forward by your left——”

And the sergeants took up the cadence.

“Left—left—left, right, left—Steady the center——”

It was altogether unreal to Bradley. He passed the sweating gunners and heard the clank of the breech bolts, ringing as they were swung to.

The knoll was a long way ahead.

“It’s going ter be another scorcher,” Coates remarked. “Gor’ blimey, I’ll be glad when this ’ere business is over. Too ’ot to be cavorting in the middle of the dye, that’s what it is.”

“Take open order! By your right—extend——”

THE lines opened out, three paces between files. A breath of hot wind flung stinging handfuls of dust into the Legionnaires’ faces. For a moment, Bradley closed his eyes; when he opened them again, he was faintly surprised to see that they had covered more than two thirds of the distance to the knoll. Beyond were the square watch towers and the gray walls of Souk el Maroud. Shells screamed by overhead at regular intervals, lashing the rocks with a hail of shrapnel.

Captain Proton jerked a watch from his

breast pocket; one more minute to go. Only two more shells; then two guns would switch targets. He was still almost four hundred yards from his objective. The ground was as flat and bare as a billiard table. Not an inch of cover anywhere——

He lengthened his pace, digging his stick into the loose sand as he limped along.

“Step out!” brayed the sergeants. “Keep your distances.”

Bradley saw the first high explosive charge burst in front of the gates. The sullen crunch of the explosion rumbled across the plains.

Tac—tac—tack. Rifles were beginning to pop. The air hissed. Bradley’s front-rank man doubled up like a jackknife and fell forward, hitting the earth with the top of his head.

The knoll loomed dead ahead, sheer-walled like bastion. A pale flicker came from its flanks, which were wreathed in a gaseous blue haze.

All at once, Proton half turned toward his men, raising his arm as he shouted:

“Come along, you rascals. We’re nearly there now! Charge!”

The knoll awoke with a roar. Right and left, men were dropping. A gust of lead swept the ranks—fifty yards—forty yards—twenty yards to go. A trooper, running elbow to elbow with Bradley, was hit in the head. A warm rain struck Bradley in the face. He fell over the dead man, and jerked himself to his feet, spitting great oaths out of his twisted mouth. He ran on into the teeth of the wind of death.

Whole rows of men were being swept away. At the foot of the wall of rock, among the loose boulders, the dead lay in grotesque attitudes, like corpses rolled up on a beach by a stormy sea.

Clangor and heat and dust. Both lieutenants were down; sergeants were growing scarce—and as yet no foothold had been gained on the knoll.

Then, out of a gully in the flank of the knoll, poured a stream of Beni Hanaf. There was no pause; on went the Legionnaires, straight at the swirling mob. They butted into it with their bayonets. Parry—thrust—thrust again. Close on Captain Proton’s heels, Bradley cleared a red lane

for himself through the swirl of gray burnouses. The smell of hot spilled blood was in his nostrils, and a goatlike stench of sweat. He fought in silence, husbanding his strength, doing automatically all those things that had been drilled into him day after day for months on end. Near by Coates sobbed for breath as he hacked his way forward.

"Gor' blimey, gimme elbow room, yer big blighter."

The rolling thunder of the conflict blew his voice away.

Held in front, hammered in flank, the Legion fought its way on, a step at a time. At last, the Beni Hanaf broke.

Helter-skelter they poured back up the gully, with the Legionnaires' bayonets against their spines. But the gully was narrow and steep. The Beni Hanaf turned and fought with the wild courage of trapped beasts. Soon the narrow funnel was choked with dead—and at the foot of the wall of rock the Legion was being wiped out. Rush after rush failed to reach the crest. Platoon were burned up in the gully.

Proton dragged himself out of the fight and collapsed. Bradley hauled him beneath a projecting ledge and tried to prop him



up. He was dying, but there was no trace of fear in his eyes.

He spoke through the harsh rattle in his throat, glaring at Bradley:

"Listen, get an automatic up

that gully—sweep the crest so the others can climb up the face—automatic rifle. You understand, *mon petit?*"

"Oui, mon capitaine."

"Pass the order along. *Par Dieu*, I won't die until you're up there! Move, you rascal—move!"

His head fell forward on his chest.

ONE sergeant was still on his feet. He formed up the remnants of the two companies, holding them under cover as close to the foot of the knoll as possible. The automatic rifle was found beneath a

heap of dead. Bradley hoisted it on his shoulder. Six men were detailed to go with him. A score more covered their advance, firing up the gully, but half of them were down before Bradley had gone five yards. There began a slow and bitter struggle for every inch of ground. Lying behind the mounds of dead, he sprayed the sky line with quick bursts of fire—gaining sometimes a yard, sometimes a foot before the Beni Hanaf could mark him down. Coates lay beside him with a fresh drum of cartridges clutched against his chest; behind, Lormier and Kussling hauled a box of ammunition between them.

For fully five minutes they lay huddled close together behind a rampart of corpses while Bradley reloaded.

It was more than Lormier could stand. He stammered:

"Let's get out of this. It's no good. We can't get up there. We're being thrown away. I'm going to slide back."

"You'll slide into your grave in another second," snapped Bradley. "We're going up."

And as Lormier was about to protest again, he shut his mouth with a powder-blackened fist.

"Keep an eye on him, Charley," he told Coates. "Blow holes in him if he tries to break."

Coates nodded his head, and Lormier shrank away from the cockney's leveled bayonet.

The move forward began again. At last they were flush with the crest of the knoll. The top was flat and bare. It swarmed with tribesmen, closing in to dispose of this handful of *roumis*. Bradley squatted out in the open, resting his elbows on his knees to steady the heavy gun.

"Fire, *nom d'un vache!*" cried Lormier. "*Nous sommes foutus!* We're lost!"

"Watch out behind me," snarled Bradley. "If they come too close, give me a shout. Ready with the next drum, Charley?"

Then he let drive into the thick of his assailants at almost point-blank range. He hosed them down with a stream of lead, and the Beni Hanaf withered away—shriveled up in the face of that hot blast.

Bullets hissed about him. A slug tore off

his *kepi* and sent it spinning through the air, another grazed his cheek. In front of him, the rebels were beginning to break. He slewed himself around and ripped off the full contents of a drum at a group closing in from behind.

The desert sun beat down upon his unprotected head; the nape of his neck was on fire. Half blinded by the glare, he forced himself to go on firing at the hazy figures that danced before his eyes. All at once, the shimmering horizon gyrated crazily, the hills slid over sideways. He knew he was going to faint—faint like a schoolgirl.

"Here, Charley—" he shouted, and his voice was a thin whisper. "Charley—catch a-hold. Keep the doggone thing going—"

"Orlright. I'm wiv you."

Coates snatched the gun out of his hands.

"Bit of a touch of the sun, eh?"

Bradley keeled over, flopping heavily on his face. Quick as a flash, Coates jammed his own *kepi* on the back of Bradley's head before he opened fire.

He raked the top of the knoll, hunting out the last of the rebels, but their spirit was broken. They had no stomach to fight against such devils. They sifted away, scrambling down one flank of the ledge of rock as the Legionnaires clambered up the opposite side.

And while Coates was busy speeding the Beni Hanaf on their way, Lormier, with his elbow, knocked the *kepi* off Bradley's head on the off chance that the desert sun might accomplish what he had failed to do.

The Senegalese Tirailleurs were streaming by toward the breach that the guns had blown in the wall. Half the houses of Souk el Maroud were on fire, roaring up in a towering pillar of flame and smoke.

And out of that inferno, a little later, came the *Kaid* of Beni Hanaf, penitent and submissive, to kiss Colonel de Gonesse's stirrup iron and to beg for mercy. The fight was over, as the colonel said, almost before it began. It had cost the lives of some two hundred Legionnaires, and as many more were wounded, but the colonel was in the best of good spirits—which did not keep him from having the

Kaia shot, as a lesson to the other dissidents.

HAVING made sure that the rebellion had been thoroughly crushed, he trotted over to review the Legionnaires. The remnants of the two companies were drawn up in two perfectly straight lines. A finer gang of cutthroats it had never been De Gonesse's privilege to inspect. Nor did he particularly like the bloodshot look in their eyes. But they came up to "the present" with a snap and a swing worthy of a presidential guard of honor.

Captain Proton was not quite dead, although the rattle in his throat was unpleasantly pronounced.

De Gonesse dismounted and ran to his side.

"My dear captain," he began, "you have done splendidly—wonderfully well. I am proud—"

"Ah, goose grease," bubbled Proton. "Forget it. Listen here. The men who deserve the credit—men who deserve the credit—took machine gun up on top—remember them— Good work. My rascals, they—they—"



His jaw dropped. Colonel de Gonesse had other things to attend to, but he knew all the moral value attached to spontaneous gestures.

He demanded to see the men who had handled the automatic rifle. One man stepped forward, and only one: No. 42517, Soldier of Second Class Julien Lormier. Of the others, three had been shot dead, Bradley had not yet recovered consciousness, and Coates—well, Coates had tried to interfere with Lormier and had to be stamped on before he could be subdued.

So the colonel shook the Legionnaire by the hand and called him "my hero," although he was not quite sure what the hero had done, and he said:

"France will not soon forget your gallant conduct! Such courage and devotion to duty are the very essence of the fine

spirit that animates the Legion and sets so glorious an example for other regiments to follow. As a reward for your signal bravery, *mon ami*, you are hereby promoted to the rank of sergeant!"

Then he remounted and galloped back to camp to prepare his official report.

CHAPTER V

THE ARMY AND FINANCE

THE Legionnaires, who had set such a glorious example for other regiments to follow, were not allowed much leisure to gloat over their own courage and devotion to duty.

First there were the wounded to bring in; next the dead had to be buried, and afterward something had to be done for the Arabs. The Legionnaires did it. They put aside their rifles and went to work with pick and shovel and entrenching tool. Before the embers of Souk el Maroud were cold, they were hard at work clearing away the débris, rebuilding mud walls, mucking out cesspools, whitewashing, sawing, chopping, quarrying stone, and shaping mud bricks. They did not sing for joy—such a statement would be a slight exaggeration—still, they did what they were told to do, while the Beni Hanaf loafed in the shade, marveling at the strange ways of the French, who forced their own soldiers to rebuild what their guns had destroyed.

While the Legionnaires sweated among the ruins, the colonel, who was a born administrator, dispensed justice, levied fines, and made appointments with so much energy that, in six weeks, the work of reconstruction was almost completed. A force of native police was draughted in to occupy the new barracks erected by the Legionnaires, and with their advent the colonel's task came to an end.

His report on the origins and causes of the uprising, together with a detailed account of the punitive campaign, had attracted much favorable comment. The colonel's star was in the ascendant. He was summoned to Paris, where the minister, himself, thanked him with tears in his eyes and a catch in his throat. For De Gonesse had managed the campaign with such celerity and discretion that it had not become

"news." The losses had been trivial (Foreign Legion losses are always trivial), the expenses had been light, and the opposition newspapers were unable to assail the proverbial incompetence of all ministers in office. Whereby the minister's political life had been saved, and he was very, very grateful.

Tempting offers were made to De Gonesse, but he turned them down politely, sadly, and with a finality that was much admired. He spoke of his "mission," of his love for the desert, of everything and anything but the true reason that forced him to live in exile. He had a financier's tastes and a colonel's income—and he was far too cautious to run any unnecessary risks. He knew himself too well.

DURING the month's leave of absence granted him so that he might recover from the hardships of the campaign, he gave an excellent example of what he could really do if he tried. Starting out with a capital of 150,000 francs, he ended up with a debit balance of almost 100,000, which, all things considered, was a good deal of money to spend in thirty days. And yet he had done nothing—or next to nothing. He had had a very quiet holiday.

When the colonel started back for Algiers, and his mission, he was, in the language of the gutter, cleaned out, flat broke, squeezed dry. But he had had a very pleasant time, and he did not regret any of the things he had done.

One thing alone worried him: the 100,000 francs debt, which he had contracted at a most awkward moment. He had given his note of hand for this sum, payable at ninety days; and in the cold, clear light that streamed through the windows of the first-class carriage bearing him toward Marseilles, he was forced to admit that he had not the faintest notion where that 100,000 francs was to come from. It was, he admitted, a lot of money. He stood about as much chance of collecting such a sum in three months' time as he did of being promoted *generalissimo* of the French Army. And yet, if he could not meet the note, there was bound to be a very nasty row. He was not a "good risk," and he had been compelled to borrow from one

Sharas Gougoltz, an amiable Levantine who might or might not condescend to wait for his money. It was a debatable point; it was even a highly improbable point. The more thought De Gonesse gave to the situation, the more he was forced to admit that it was anything but roseate.



He had had ample time to recall some of Sharas' financial deals, and he realized that Sharas was thoroughly unscrupulous and thoroughly honest—in the eyes of the law. Sharas didn't fear publicity; he liked it. Scandal was his middle name.

By the time he reached Algiers, De Gonesse was beginning to wonder why he had fallen in with such a cosmopolitan crowd. They were too fast for him. In fact, he looked upon himself as the victim of a dark plot to discredit and ruin him.

THERE was only one thing to be done. He would have to ask his brother for the 100,000 francs—and Casimir, of course, would pay, as he had paid before, after making a speech on the importance of thrift and the futility of army officers. These little speeches so galled De Gonesse that, as a rule, he never went near his brother. He didn't even know where his brother was at the time; he might be in Paris or Baku or Hanoi; there was no way of telling. He dashed about the earth, squeezing dollars here, pounds there, francs and drachmas and zloti elsewhere.

De Gonesse was still wondering whether he should or should not get in touch with his brother, when the latter got in touch with him. The colonel found a note waiting for him at headquarters—three lines in Casimir's abrupt business style:

I am at the Hotel Splendide until the 18th. If you have time, come and see me. I need some information. This place is terrible, rotten, can't compare with Cairo!

Yours,

Casimir.

The colonel resented the peremptory tone

of the note and left it unanswered once he had assured himself that the date was the 17th. He spent the day paying duty calls on his chiefs, and dined with a general's wife—this being also in the nature of a duty. Only afterward, toward ten o'clock at night, he made his appearance at the Hotel Splendide.

He found his brother sprawling in a wicker chair on the moonlit terrace, overlooking the sea. A romantic spot. The breeze was cool and fragrant. Through the open doors of the ballroom drifted the mellifluous accents of a love-sick saxophone played by a Madagascar musician for the benefit of American and British tourists.

MONSIEUR Casimir de Gonesse greeted the colonel with a wave of the hand, as if they had parted less than five minutes before.

He was a large, thickset man in the prime of life. He had the De Gonesse nose—like a beak—a full spade beard, and a prematurely bald head. His eyes were shrewd and hard.

He said brusquely:

"If you think it's intelligent to have kept me waiting all day—" and left the sentence hanging in midair while he puffed at a cigar.

The colonel's nose wrinkled with disgust.

"Can't you afford anything better than that?" he inquired, drawing up a chair and depositing himself in it very cautiously, as if afraid it might bite him. "Your taste in cigars is abominable!"

"So you've said before," Casimir grunted, settling himself deeper in his chair. "I'm not asking you to smoke 'em, am I? Well, then! Couldn't you get here earlier? You came in on *Bugeaud*—seven o'clock this morning! Kept me cooling my heels all day."

It was just like him, thought the colonel, to know more about other people's affairs than they did themselves. He was efficient after the fashion of a cash register—as hard, as metallic. He was too powerful to be criticized.

The colonel murmured something about the exigencies of the service, and Casimir grunted again, derisively.

"Nonsense," he said. "Nonsense, rubbish! You were making me realize the importance of the conqueror of Souk el Maroud— Oh, yes, I know all about it."

"*Tiens!*" De Gonesse smiled. He smiled because, unfortunately, circumstances obliged him to be pleasant at all costs. "*Tiens, tiens!* You have heard about that little affair! Ah, well—a matter of no importance. A mere flicker of unrest. By the way, you said in your note that you wanted some information?"

"Coming to that presently. Had a nice time at home?" He polluted the air with a cloud of acrid smoke.

"Not bad—no, not bad at all, all things considered. Quite a change."

"Um—so I gather." Casimir turned a fishy eye upon his younger brother. "Been up to tricks again, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Tricks?"

"I'm not going into details, but you haven't managed to keep yourself out of the dirty paws of our friend Sharas."

This time the colonel was genuinely surprised. His first impulse was to lose his temper, but, on second thought, he realized that he was being saved an unpleasant explanation, and he shrugged his shoulders as if to say, "Well, you know the worst. What shall we do about it?"

"Sharas is a blackguard," Casimir went on, "and what's more, I'm tired of paying your amusement bills. I'm not made of gold. Hundred thousand francs! It is formidable how little you value money."

"I was just going to ask you for the loan of a hundred thousand!" De Gonesse said brightly. "What a coincidence!"

"It is." Casimir threw the stump of his cigar over the stone railing and lighted a fresh one.

"Of course, I don't like having to ask you for this money," De Gonesse went on, gently waving his hand in front of his face to drive away the smoke, "but I'm afraid I have no choice. I'll repay you."

"Will you?" Casimir's tone was sardonic. "I'm not pressing you, remember, but if my memory serves me right, you now owe me something like eight hundred thousand francs. I swear you act like a child of ten! However, the army doesn't call for brains."

"Maybe not—but without us, where would you be? You and your splendid



schemes?" Despite his good resolutions, the colonel was becoming snappish. "Sneers are cheap, I admit, but without this brainless army there would be no Tonkin Export, no Oubangui forests, no Mbrazzi copper. In a sense, I'm merely asking you for my commission. It's a business deal. I conquer and you exploit. You pay me little enough as it is."

"Not bad," Casimir admitted. "There's an argument there. However, we're simply marking time and getting nowhere. There's something I want to ask you." Again he stared at his brother, squinting through a haze of blue smoke. "You're going to Bechar when you leave here, aren't you?"

"So I believe—I heard today. Where the devil do you get your information?"

"Here, there, and everywhere. Doesn't matter. Point is—I do know. All right, then, d'you know the district?"

"Pretty well— By the way, how about that loan?"

"Just a minute— So you know the lay of the land?"

"Yes."

"Know anything about a place called Foum es Akba?"

"Yes—four days from Bechar, in the Taflet."

"And you know what's his name— Ahmed ben Harazan?"

"The *Kaid*? Surely."

"Well—he's a nuisance. I'll tell you what I want, then you can decide to suit yourself. I want him kicked out—he's in my way."

"I can't have him kicked out!" protested De Gonesse. "My dear man, he's one of the most dependable native chiefs in the Southern Territory. Positively. The thing's preposterous."

Casimir's face grew hard.

"Suit yourself," he said curtly. "Have

him turned out—in ninety days—or Sharas can whistle for his hundred thousand, and he'll get you. *He won't mind.*"

"Even if I wanted to have Harazan turned out, I couldn't do it. There is absolutely nothing against him. He's always been loyal."

"That's no concern of mine. He's in my way, that damned Arab! If you can get rid of him, the hundred thousand is yours. Otherwise—you'll have to look after yourself. Nine hundred thousand francs is too much for me to throw away on your mistresses."

THE two brothers exchanged a long look. For a time they sat in silence staring at the sea. The colonel beat a tattoo on the arm of his chair. He was thinking:

"This man is my brother, and yet he is utterly unlike me. He is heartless, cruel, and self-seeking. He worships money because it gives him power; he is the product of the twentieth century while I am a throwback to the eighteenth. I am better read, better educated, more cultured than he is, but I am no match for him. He means what he says; he will let me sink if I do not agree to this filthy scheme of his, whatever it may be. He is not afraid of the possible scandal, whereas I cannot hope to survive a scandal." He added to himself after a long, blank pause, "Never again—never—never!" And at the time he meant it.

Aloud he said, "You'll have to be more explicit."

Casimir smiled through his black beard and leaned over closer to the colonel. He knew that he had won, and his manner became friendly, almost confidential.

"It's quite simple," he explained. "You'll understand at once. Harazan holds all his lands as a free gift from the government because of the loyalty of his grandfather during the 1870 rebellion. That old fellow was wise. And for some uncanny reason the grant includes subsoil as well as surface! It's never been revised—can't get it revised. The stubbornness of some people! The cowardice!

"Now the point is this, the district is stinking with copper, and there's a good

deal of coal at the northern end of the range. Good steam coal—not like the thin stuff they mine at Kanadza. If it can be exploited—well, you can see for yourself, even though you are a soldier."

The colonel nodded. He knew all about the mineral wealth of the Djebel-Agreb hills. The only drawback to its exploitation was that Ahmed ben Harazan was opposed to it. He was a loyal supporter of the French cause, but he would have nothing to do with industrial development. It was rumored that his objection was due to the influence of a group of native councilors, who, if he antagonized them, would have disposed of him speedily. At all events, according to his expressed opinion, an industrial civilization might be all very well for the inhabitants of the temperate zones, but it was not adapted to the temperament of his people, the Beni Harazan. And there the matter always ended, for nobody wished to antagonize Ahmed ben Harazan, master of ten thousand men.

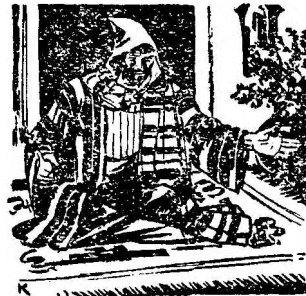
"Of course *you* understand what will happen if we kick Harazan out?" snapped De Gonesse.

Casimir shrugged one plump shoulder. He winked at the colonel—a solemn, conspiratorial wink.

"Does it make much difference what happens?" he inquired. "The world is going on whether Harazan likes it or not. Reactionaries of his caliber have to be swept away. We can't afford to stand still,

we can't afford to worship moth-eaten contracts and land grants. It's absurd! Ridiculous! Criminal!" He sputtered indignantly.

"I sent my agents down to make a deal with Harazan, and he—oh, he was damn' polite, but they came away empty-handed. That's our reward for having modernized North Africa. And the Governor's afraid, that dirty politician—hides behind his own froth of words. I'll have him hamstrung."



DE GONESSE was breathing fast, as if he had just been plunged into a bath of ice-cold water.

"Wait!" he snapped. "You've said enough. You're offering me a hundred thousand francs to bring about Harazan's disgrace. As you probably know, the situation's none too good at the present moment. Hazaran's all right, but his people are restless. They're spoiling for a fight—ever since the Beni Hanaf affair. There's something wrong—a wave of discontent—but Harazan can hold it down. So long as he is in the saddle, we have nothing to fear—nothing much. If he goes, the thing will flare up, it will cost hundreds of lives." He laid his hand on his brother's arm. "I can't do it, Casimir. I cannot. It is out of the question."

"Why?"

"Because I am not quite as venal as you think I am," the colonel said in a harsh voice. "You and your dirty schemes! You and your filthy money! You'd sell your country if you could make 20 per cent. profit off the sale!"

"Um—maybe I would—if it were for sale. Calm down, *mon petit*, you are over-righteous, it seems to me. Look here, I'll talk sense to you, for once in your life. No sentiment. We're here to make money—to create wealth—to produce. Stripped of slushy verbiage, that's the truth about all colonial development, isn't it? All right, let's have a clear situation with this Harazan and his dubious people. Shoot 'em over a bit, make 'em docile, then we can get to work.

"Now, observe; I am an honest brother. If you can help me, I shall help you. I'll pay off Sharas, naturally—and you'll get your fair share of the profits out of the exploiting company. You'll never have to pinch and scrape again. There are forty or fifty fortunes locked up in those hills. It's almost unbelievably rich. What'll it cost? A few men's lives—they're nothing to you. You're the Butcher—you'll win both ways, prestige and money. You can accept any post they offer you, and I'll see you aren't overlooked."

"And if I refuse?"

Casimir blew a thin stream of smoke

through his pursed lips. He stroked his moustache with his fingertips to hide the smile which he could not suppress, for those four words told him that he had won.

"If you refuse," he said pleasantly, "you'll have to retire on half pay, and I'll raise such a howl in the paper about the Beni Hanaf episode that the government will blow up and you'll lose your shining reputation. Three hundred men killed to take a fly-blown oasis—incompetence—criminal incompetence—and so forth."

"Well," sighed De Gonesse, "I must think it over."

"Take your time, my old one," agreed Casimir. "Meanwhile—it is rather cool out here. Shall we stretch our legs a little? And I want to introduce you to some rather nice American girls—dying to meet the great soldier."

So they strolled along the terrace toward the ballroom doors, the soldier and the financier, respected members of a respectable society.

A little later the colonel was being taught the preliminary intricacies of a new dance called "ze Charlestonne" by a delicious young thing who rejoiced in the name of Katherine Powell. She had the most disquieting eyes the colonel had ever gazed into. They were jade-green with little yellow glints in their depths. She was lithe, and cool, and fresh as springtime. Strangely enough—the colonel had never expected it in an American—she could talk quite intelligently.

Moreover, she had money, American style. Casimir swore she was worth millions. The colonel was dazzled by her green eyes and her millions. He showed her just how charming a gentleman of ancient lineage could be; she had been beginning to be bored with Algiers—where she was supposed to have come to study "light and color"—until his arrival.

The next day they played golf together—Algiers is a very modern city—and he had ample opportunity to admire her stance and swing.

"There," said the cynical Casimir, "is just the wife for you—rich, pretty, young. Just the wife for a corps commander."

AND there was a dreamy look in the colonel's eyes. He was feeling very happy—life was no longer terribly complex and irksome. It had a purpose, it was gay and full of promises.

"But don't forget our friend Harazan," went on Casimir. "When he's out of the way, I'll give you a wedding present worthy of an oil king."

But matters dragged on, for the colonel, for the first time on record, was diffident and circumspect. He resolved not to say anything to the girl until after the campaign was over and his financial troubles settled once and for all. She was staying in Algiers indefinitely—for some months at least—there was lots of time. But on the last night of his stay in Algiers, before he headed south, panic seized him. He threw all his good resolutions overboard and proposed while they were sitting on that white terrace haunted by the pallid ghost of a waning moon.

She said, "Oh!" and later, much to his disappointment, after he had kissed her unartistically on the right cheek bone, she added, "I must think it over."

"My name is Armand," he urged, speaking in quite good English. "Call me Armand, my adored one."

"You're just as sweet——" She checked herself. "No, I musn't say that—yet. Why, my dear, I haven't known you a week!"

Finally it was agreed that he would come back to Algiers in three months' time. If she hadn't changed her mind, they would announce their engagement.

"Ah, but you will not change your mind, will you?" he implored, kneeling beside her chair, pressing her hand against his medals. "Oh, no! You could not be so cruel."

"Hush!" she whispered. "Somebody's coming."

It was Monsieur Casimir, smoking a one-franc-fifty cigar. One glance at his brother's tense expression was enough to convince even him that he was *de trop*, but he took his time. After having greeted Katherine, he turned abruptly to his brother.

"Leaving tomorrow?"

"Yes!"

"Going straight to Foug es Akba?"

"By way of Bechar, yes."

"Um—well—long train ride from here to Bechar. I'll be back in Paris day after tomorrow. Just drop me a line sometime. I'll see Sharas at the proper moment."

He bowed toward Katherine and sauntered on down the terrace, leaving a trail of smoke eddying behind him.

Then, instead of making love all over again, the colonel had to sit down like a lamb and tell his semi-fiancée all about Foug es Akba and its *Kaid* and what he was going to do down there.

"It must be simply heavenly," she sighed. "I'd love to see it."

"Some day," he promised, "I'll take you there. At sunset the sand dunes are like golden waves with purple shadows in the troughs—but it's not quite safe yet."

"Suppose I ran down to see you?" she inquired. "Could I?"

The suggestion disturbed him.

"Impossible, *mon trésor!*" he protested. "Impossible. Oh, but no! It is not very safe now. There is no railroad."

"But suppose I simply had to see you? What if I couldn't wait another minute?"

FACED by an impossible dilemma, the colonel closed her lips in the usual manner, nor did she appear to resent his way of evading her question. But as they went indoors after a last farewell, the maddening girl said lightly:

"You won't be cross if I *do* run down to see you at Foug what's its name, will you?"

He could not afford to seal her lips again, for they were in a public hall, surrounded by appraising eyes. He smiled gravely.

"Foug es Akba is in a military zone," he explained. "Civilians are not allowed access to such territories without a written permit. Alas! What will you! There are dangers to be faced down there, and I should tremble for your safety if I thought,



for one instant, that you were contemplating such a rash venture."

She tried to look very impressed.

"When will you be there?" she inquired.

"Oh, in about ten days' time."

"I feel I must do something rash," she declared. "I'll meet you there, and you can pretend to be very angry."

"No, no!" protested the colonel. "You must be patient, I beg of you! And I shall return very soon."

So they said goodby in the lobby of the Hotel Splendide, and Katherine gave the colonel's hand a friendly little squeeze before she let it go, holding on to it lingeringly to the last fingertip.

She was used to doing that sort of thing, and, it must be admitted, she did it very well.

CHAPTER VII

THE POWER OF A SERGEANT

SILENCE had fallen upon the city of Foum es Akba, shimmering in the glare of the noontide sun. The last strip of bluish shadow had faded away, and the houses seemed to have melted together into a single blinding white sheet caught on the lower slopes of a yellow hill. Here and there, the oblong of a window, the maw of an open door, made a purplish stain on the snowy surface; and the gardens at the southern end of the city were green and dark against the background of ash-colored sand dunes.

Life had come to a standstill, as if crushed by the heat and the glare. Outside the redoubt, on the outskirts of the oasis, a sentry, sheltering in a coffin-shaped box, sat motionless with his rifle across his knees, while beads of perspiration gathered on his temples and dribbled down his face. Before the rivulets of sweat could reach his chin, they evaporated.

Time after time, his head drooped forward until his chin rested on his breast, and his eyelids closed. But each time he was brought up with a jerk by a raucous, rasping voice that ripped the silence asunder with a foghorn blast.

The voice belonged to Sergeant Lormier. Despite the heat, he was engaged in the highly enjoyable task of teaching default-

ers that *they* could not take any liberties with *him*. He stood in the center of a narrow courtyard flanked on three sides by blank walls, drilling a squad of eight exhausted, gasping, blear-eyed Legionnaires. They were dressed in full marching order, but Lormier, judging this load insufficient, had placed a sack of sand on top of each man's knapsack—to smarten them up, so he gleefully declared.

He stood with his legs wide apart, shoulders back, a fine figure of a man. He felt like an animal trainer in a cageful of tigers, only, instead of a whip, he carried a revolver strapped on his hip. They knew he'd blow out their addled brains if they tried to snap back—and they hadn't a round of ammunition between them. Oh, he was safe enough!

He had been "safe" for almost four months—ever since he had been promoted "for distinguished conduct" at Souk el Maroud. There was no more talk now about the weakness of his heart. It was as sound as a bell, solid as a rock. He had almost forgotten what it felt like to wince and crawl and lie because he was afraid of another man. Now he was sure of himself, he had power, the kind of power he could understand: the power to insult, degrade, to hurt had been miraculously conferred upon him. And his victims could not hit back!

BUT this new-found power was not enough for him—his mean and narrow mind was scarred by memories of the days when he had been humbled by two Legionnaires—by that pair of swine, Bradley and Coates. He had never forgiven them; nor could he forgive them, for the grudge that he nursed had taken root in the very fibres of his being.

Very slowly, methodically, he was breaking them down, tormenting them with great cunning and sudden flashes of maniac rage, waiting patiently for the day to come when



they would reach the end of their tether and give him a chance to wipe off his grudge in full.

It had all been done strictly according to the reglement—nobody could complain—but he had not missed them once. Not once! In the dust and the feathery clouds of ashes at Souk el Maroud, he had sweated them to the bone—always behind them, urging them on with a grim good-humor, detailing them for the filthiest, vilest jobs, cracking jokes while they cracked stones, standing over them while they labored like galley slaves.

But he had failed in his purpose. To his loutish jibes, they had opposed the blankness of automatons, obeying his orders, never opening their lips to retort, never giving him a chance to strike back at them. Bradley especially irritated him. The Yankee seemed to be made of wood and flint, but his whole bearing conveyed a sense of ironic contempt all the more maddening because it was indefinite, impalpable. He did nothing, he said nothing, and yet he exuded insolence at every pore. When he said, "Yes, Sergeant," Lormier felt as if he had been kicked in the stomach.

His own impotence exasperated Lormier, but by degrees he learned his trade. He discovered that, with the aid of a little imagination, he could always find something to complain about, and he fired his imagination with lashings of white wine made possible by his sergeant's pay.

Thereafter, Bradley's life became a veritable hell on earth. He was punished because of an alleged dust speck on his belt, because of a non-existent spot of rust on his bayonet, because his blankets were not properly folded—because he had the misfortune to be alive. He became known as the worst soldier in No. 9 Company, with Coates running him a close second. Their records were one long list of condemnations: cells, ordinary arrest, guard-room detention.

From Souk el Maroud to Bechar, where the company was reorganized, and then out into the desert again, to the redoubt at Foum es Akba, the uneven contest went on—a grizzly game of cat-and-mouse with the troopers' lives as the stakes.

Lormier had been warned by the ser-

geant-major, who could not help seeing something of what was going on.

"If you take my advice, Lormier," he said, "you'll forget your private grudges and start acting like a sergeant of the Legion. No fear—no favors. Can you get that into your head? And while I'm on the subject—one more thing: the lieutenant is young, but he knows his business, don't make any mistake about him."

He was a wise sergeant major, but Lormier was not wise enough to heed the warning. He had already decided that young Lieutenant Fachamin, the garrison commander was a drooling jackass, and had said so quite openly.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SECRET AGENT

IMMEDIATELY after evening *soupe*, Bradley and Coates changed into their No. 1 hot-weather uniforms, wrapped their black cummerbunds around their waists, and headed for the gate of the redoubt. The orderly sergeant grunted and jerked his thumb toward the exit.

They stepped across the threshold, took half a dozen brisk steps, and halted. A gusty sigh came from Coates; Bradley smiled like a seraph. For, for the first time in weeks, they were free men. They had served the last day of the last sentence for the last imaginary offence—and they had survived the ordeal. The night was theirs, all the way up to twelve o'clock.

They sniffed at the hot wind and found it cool; they gazed at the flaming sunset and thought it beautiful; they looked at the palm trees of Foum es Akba and at the piled up houses of Foum es Akba, stained a rosy hue by the dying sun, and they were filled with joy unspeakable. Such is liberty.

A grave problem confronted them, however; what to do with their spare time. Between them they had accumulated the sum of twenty-seven francs and fifteen centimes, which, all things considered, was a fortune. The obvious thing to do was to spend it on drink. They had every intention of so doing, but the question was—where to go, for, although the native city

was not out of bounds, it was not much frequented by the men of the garrison. The people were desert Arabs, and unlike the more sophisticated, more mongrel inhabitants of the seaboard, they lived austere lives. They obeyed the letter of Koranic laws: they neither smoked tobacco nor drank alcohol. Moreover, while they were quiet, they showed no desire to fraternize with the troops. And the Legionnaires, when their curiosity had been satisfied, were quite content to patronize the canteen and let the inhospitable people of Foun es Akba go hang themselves to the nearest apricot tree.

But Bradley and Coates had had an overdose of barracks and barrack life. They wanted to get away from the sight of a uniform and the sound of a bugle.



The next morning would find them back in harness again, face to face with their tormentor, but to-night they were free.

For a while, they strolled aimlessly through the narrow, crooked streets. The last shops and stalls were closing down. There was a rush and scurry of feet, a volley of high-pitched shouts, a clatter of boards being thrown into dark interiors. Flies swarmed off the butchers' stalls, where they had fed all day unmolested. Ultimate bargains were being made; wails and lamentations came from the fringes of the ghetto. Coates stood transfixed at the sight of a black Jew with unshorn locks shaking two very much alive chickens in the face of an Arab. A fight seemed inevitable, but at the last second a deal was made and the squawking chickens changed hands. Sheeted women scuttled by with a clink of silver anklets.

THEN the sun went down, and it was night. Doors slammed, the streets emptied—silence. From some hidden courtyard came the thin wail of a flute.

"A proper town this is, I down't think!" exclaimed Coates. "Gor' struth, what do we do now, I'd like to know?"

"What d'you expect?" asked Bradley. "Movies and theatres and a couple of saloons on every corner?"

Coates made a dive at a gray figure hurrying along close to the wall.

"You there," he summoned in the Franco-Arabic dialect of the Legion, "where's a café—*Kaoua*—place to drink?"

The Arab stepped aside, said something uncomplimentary between his teeth, and went his way.

"Down't seem to like us, do they, the blighters!" Coates went on. "Sort of stand-offish, seems to me."

"We should worry," chuckled Bradley. "We'll find a dump or else bust."

THE party was not turning out as successfully as they had expected, but after about half an hour's tramping through covered streets and latticed streets and streets ankle deep in garbage, they came to a very small native café with a pale blue light above the doorway. A half-dozen Arabs squatted outside, backed up against the wall, drinking mint-scented tea out of cracked clay mugs. The place was dark, stuffy, and dirty. The Legionnaires were unwelcome beyond a shadow of a doubt, but it was better than nothing. They went in and sat down on a hard bench of sun-baked brick.

"The joke's on us," grunted Bradley. "We're back where we started! We could have come here when we first started out, instead of wandering all over the shop."

"Don't I know it!" rejoined Coates. "It's the only café in this 'ere perishin' town—and it's the worst, too."

The *patron* of the establishment was an enterprising Arab who had once spent two years as a stevedore at Oran, and one year in prison for robbery. He knew all about Legionnaires! He hated them—as he hated all white men—but he also loved money. Legionnaires had money, therefore he catered to their foul tastes.

He brought out a bottle clearly labelled "Best Gin" and rapped it down on the table.

"Two?" he inquired. "Two drinks?"

"The whole bottle!" said Bradley. "How much?"

Surprise overcame the *patron*. Never before had any soldiers offered to buy a bottleful of the rot-gut. It cost him one franc seventy a bottle at Marakesh, and there was the cost of transport to be considered.

"Twenty francs," he said at random. "Cheap. Very good."

Bradley handed over the twenty francs without a murmur, thus convincing the ex-stevadore that all Legionnaires were fools.

He backed away from the table, bowing repeatedly and assuring the soldiers that they would find the liquor in the bottle exquisite. He assured them that he had another bottle of the same make in the store-room, and he hoped to Allah they would drink themselves unconscious so that he could rifle their pockets before throwing their bodies on to the nearest pile of refuse.

The first drink reassured the Legionnaires. It was a hot, peppery, raw distillation of the essence of dynamite. In its cloudy depths there lurked what is sometimes called a mighty wallop.

Long practice, however, had rendered both men's throats immune against the attacks of such products. They drank; they smacked their lips; their eyelids fluttered slightly, and of a common accord they leaned back and said, "Ah!" Nothing had changed; they still sat in the grimy café, the same sullen Arabs squatted in the doorway; the same two bits of charcoal glowed like a fiery eye beneath the simmering kettle in a dark corner of the room. But the place seemed lighter, more spacious, almost cozy.

"As I was saying," remarked Bradley after a moment of stunned silence, "this is more than I bargained for."

Coates sucked in his lips and tried to look fierce.

"I'm a-going back to barracks," he announced truculently.

"What for?"

"To find Lormier, that' what for."

"Want to kiss him?"

"I'm a-gowin' to 'it 'im, and 'it 'im that 'ard 'e won't never get up."

"No!"

"Yes, I'm a-goin' to do what you ought to 'ave done a million years agow—'it 'im wiv my bayonet." His voice was full of scorn. "It's you what ought to be doin' it—but there! I'm tikin' pity on you seein' as 'ow you've suffered so much."

"One more before you go?" urged Bradley. "The bottle's almost half full. Maybe I'll stick Lormier myself before I'm through."

THEY were not drunk—merely exhilarated—speeded up, as it were. So they had another. For a time, their spirits soared; and then, after just one more, their spirits crashed. They saw in a lucid flash the awful train of events which would inevitably follow the inquiry on the demise of Sergeant Lormier. Cells, the



mines at Kanadza, degradation, and death. Firing parties in the dawn—Coates wept as the vision unfolded before his eyes.

"I can't do it!" he wailed.

"Not even for you, ol' chum. I can't."

"Aw, g'wan, nobody ain't asked you to," grunted Bradley, holding his head between his fists. "This is a hell of a party, I'll say. We came out to have a good time—and look at us now!"

"I'm looking," admitted Coates, "and what I sees ain't none too rosy. We got four more years to go, and what I sez is: if we don't get out sooner'n that, Lormier's going to get us. 'E ain't got no 'umanity, that there bloke. Proper 'ell 'e's mide of our lives. Me what wanted ter be a good sojer an' be promoted."

He gazed sadly at the nearly empty bottle, rolling lugubrious thoughts inside his boiling brain.

"Nobody can't say I ain't stood by you," he went on. "You admits I been a friend. No doubt about it. Many's the time I've sived your life. Orl right, then—what I says is this: Hit's about time you did somethink for me."

"Anything," agreed Bradley. "Million dollars, house 'n' lot, shine your shoes, anything. Good ol' Coates. Le's shake hands."

"Go to 'ades, you an' your 'andshakin'. Listen ter me, will yer?" and he leaned over and hissed in Bradley's ear. "We're a-gowin' to desert, if there's a spark of man'ood left in us!"

"Well, what d'you know about that!" cried Bradley. "When're we going?"

"We makes a bee-line for the coast—ow, I thought it all out careful. We gets dressed up in a couple of burnouses, and when we reaches the sea——"

"Boy, I may be oiled to the gills," Bradley broke in, "but I'm not *that* bad. Use your bean, Charley. First off, I'm not so doggone sure I want to desert—I've a sort of hunch our sergeant's not sitting so pretty around this neck of the woods. And, in the second place, even if we did want to desert, there ain't nowhere for us to go. I can't see myself crawling about in the middle of the desert five hundred kilometres from God knows where. It doesn't make sense, Charley. Hang on a while longer."

"After all I've done for you!" sneered Coates. "Me what's stood between you and death many's the time, and you ain't even got the bloomin' guts to desert like a man! I'm s'prised—hic—pardon me. S'prised as I can be. Yus!"

They wrangled for several minutes, their voices growing louder and louder, arguing without any discretion the merits and demerits of desertion.

While the debate was at its height, they became aware of the presence of an Arab with a sallow, goatlike face of the color and texture of an old brown shoe, and a thin beard that helped to heighten the goatish effect. He wore a *gandourah* of pale pink muslin, which fell to his ankles, and a small skullcap of the same material. He leaned against the door jamb, with his hands lightly clasped in front of him, listening to the Legionnaires with a faint smile on his thick purplish lips.

Now Legionnaires do not take kindly to the smiles of Arab dandies in pink muslin. At the same second, they forgot their quar-

rel and turned upon the newcomer with the same words:

"What the hell do you want?"

In the heat of the moment, they had spoken in English. The Arab, however, was equal to the situation. He walked slowly into the room, smiling more broadly than ever and remarked:

"Gentlemen, I find you——"

"Gor' blimey!" cried Coates, "e speaks English! Come 'ere, you 'eathen, and shike 'ands! Gor', it does me good to 'ear it spoke again! You old josser, you been standin' there like a perishin' idol a-listenin' to us——"

The Arab made a deprecating gesture.

"Waiting for an opening," he apologized.

"What kind of an opening?" shot out Bradley. "And what d'you want?"

His tone was peremptory. Instinctively, he disliked the man.

"E's all right," protested Coates. "Ain't you, old cock? Whatcher doin' in the middle of the desert instead of 'iring out as a guide to them tourists what visit the pyramids?"

A look of intense distrust swept across the Arab's face. He stepped back as if expecting to be struck, but the next second he was smiling again.

"Quite a compliment," he said gently. "It is indeed pleasant to hear English spoken again. May I offer you gentlemen a drink?"

TACTFULLY, he refrained from saying "another drink." They condescended to share a little light refreshment. Bradley, however, was still suspicious. He started to cross-examine the Arab and found out exactly nothing; indeed, after the first few questions, he and Coates were being discreetly pumped. The Arab sympathized with them, led them on to tell him about their misfortunes, and, very gradually, led them back to the subject of desertion. He agreed heartily that two lone men stood no chance whatsoever of getting out of the desert.

Then, in his soft little voice, he began to hint at the unrest prevalent among the people; he sighed over their misfortunes,

and inveighed guardedly against the French. The Legionnaires emptied the



second bottle of "Best Gin" and listened open-mouthed to his stories of French duplicity and bad faith. Their interest spurred him on to fresh efforts.

Waxing eloquent, he swore that a mass uprising would soon occur, and he wound up by declaring that the embattled hosts of Islam would need instructors to teach them how to handle modern weapons.

To sum up, he was ready to assist Bradley and Coates to desert and could promise them much gold, positions of great power, and all sorts of minor comforts.

He laid all his cards on the table, that simple-minded fellow, for he was convinced that two such dissatisfied troopers could not possibly resist the allurements he was offering them. He was in need of a few expert machine gunners for purposes best known to himself, and he felt sure he had them.

But he found out to his sorrow that Americans and Englishmen are the most illogical, irrational people on earth. He was saying:

"So you see—you have everything to gain and nothing to lose! Once France can no longer depend upon the blood of misguided foreigners——"

"How's that?" inquired Bradley.

"I said, misguided foreigners—men like yourselves—led astray by foul promises——"

"You leave the Legion alone," ordered Bradley. "Misguided foreigners, are we? Where do you get that stuff?"

"They kill you with work, they pay you abominably, they exploit your sufferings. The Legion (is it not?) is a disgrace to any civilized country?" And the Arab

smiled a goatish, yellow-toothed smile.

It gave way to a look of incredulous anger, however, when Bradley retorted:

"The Legion's a disgrace, is it, you poor, flea-bitten blatherskite? I'll give you disgrace with the business end of my boot."

"E's a ruddy hagitator!" cried Coates, pounding the table with his fist. "E's the kind of perishin' swine what make trouble for us poor Legionnaires!"

There was no sense in them. The Arab tried to show them that they themselves had condemned their regiment, but they would not listen to anything so reasonable.

They were on their feet, coming at him around the corner of the long table.

"Arrest the blighter and tike 'im back to barracks!" shouted Coates.

And Bradley added, "Poke some steel into his gizzard if he squeals!"

They had drawn their bayonets and were closing in on him. He gave one loud squawk, caught up the bottle of "Best Gin" and hurled it at Bradley, but it missed its mark and burst against the whitewashed wall.

Then the storm broke. The loungers who had been sitting outside the café came rushing in to support the Arab. The *patron* tried to dash out Coates' brains with a stick. He retreated, dripping blood from a long gash in his forearm. Other sticks, and bludgeons appeared out of nowhere. The Legionnaires were driven back against the wall. They caught up the heavy table top and hurled it at their antagonists. Shrieks and howls broke the stillness of the night. The Arabs swayed away from the bayonet points.

Bradley caught sight of the pink muslin *gandourah* sliding through the doorway.

HE DRAGGED Coates after him. They butted their way out of the café, stabbing, hacking, punching, until they reached the roadway and galloped off in pursuit of the Arab. Step by step, they overhauled him, panting as they clambered up the steep streets. When they reached the market-place, they saw him cut diagonally across the square and turn into a narrow lane. They were almost on top of him when out of a roadway to their right burst the night patrol: twelve men in charge of a

sergeant. A whistle sounded shrilly—but Bradley and Coates, instead of stopping as they should have done, plunged on in pursuit of their quarry.

A revolver shot rang out. The bullet whistled past Coates' ear. It reminded them of duty and discipline and the value of prompt obedience. They stopped dead in their tracks.

Sergeant Lormier marched down upon them, followed by the picket whose bayonets glinted in the starlight.

"Chasing a rebel!" he grunted after listening to their explanations. "More likely you were trying to hold up and rob some defenceless Arab—I know your breed."

"E wanted us to desert," panted Coates. "E——"

"Shut your ugly face," snapped Lormier. "You're under arrest."

He made a lunge forward and wrenched the naked bayonet out of Bradley's hand.

"I knew I was right!" he went on. "You'll get ten years for this."

"I don't think so," retorted Bradley, forgetting that silence is golden. "We might have a chance to say something in our own defence at a court-martial."

"Oh, is that so?" Lormier sneered. "You're an insolent swine of a Yankee!" He struck Bradley in the mouth. "Chew on that for a while and keep still!"

Several Arabs had drifted into the market square. Lormier rounded them up and shot questions at them. They agreed instantly that Bradley and Coates had invaded the café and demanded money. Lormier put the



words into their mouths. He triumphed when they had the good sense to repeat what he told them. In five minutes time, the investigation

was complete. No reference whatsoever was made to the man in the pink muslin *gandourah*; and as he marched his prisoners back to the redoubt, the sergeant kept repeating:

"Yes—you'll go to the penitentiary for

this. Oh, yes, they teach you to leave the Arabs alone! You're a disgrace to your regiment. You wanted a court-martial—you'll get it!"

And, as Bradley admitted later that night in the hot darkness of the *salle de police*, nothing seemed more certain. Before dawn, when the effects of the "Rest Gin" had completely worn off and their heads were on fire, they began to wish most devoutly that they had listened to the Arab and deserted. The future looked black.

But neither they nor Sergeant Lormier had taken into account the strangely unorthodox character of Lieutenant Fachamin. That young man had a mind of his own.

A few days later, he sat behind his desk, drawing curlycues on a pad of blotting paper, while Lormier's witnesses filed by.

The case had been prepared with a singleness of purpose that a lawyer might have envied, for the sergeant was determined to rid himself once and for all of his two pests. He did not fear this investigation; try as he might, the lieutenant could not find a flaw in it. Lormier had spent three days schooling his witnesses and as one followed another and the weight of evidence piled up, a great weight seemed to be lifted off his shoulders. He breathed more freely than he had done for months. In his mind, he was quite convinced that Bradley and Coates were a pair of blackguards who had envied him his stripes and deserved to be put out of the way.

HE FELT so good that he risked a wink in the direction of the adjutant, who stood, stiff as a ramrod, beside the lieutenant. The adjutant, however, looked as blank as a stone wall. His stolidity annoyed the sergeant, who wished everybody to share his sunny good-humor. He stared down at the top of the lieutenant's *kepi*, wondering what was going on inside that young man's head.

To men of Lormier's stamp, Lieutenant Fachamin was as perplexing and unfathomable as the infinitesimal calculus. He was hard, cold, and matter of fact, and yet his men loved him. He never had

much personal contact with the rank and file, but he knew each man by name, his record, and something of his past. How he achieved so much knowledge with so little effort amazed Lormier. And he was always busy. Instead of relaxing and taking life easy when everything was running smoothly, he was forever snooping around the kitchens, tasting the *soupe*, poking his nose into odd corners—simply to devil overworked sergeants. He had them on the jump every minute of the day. It was common knowledge that he had to live on his pay—he was a poor man—but he gave himself airs. He wouldn't tolerate any familiarity, and he never seemed to realize what a fine fellow Sergeant Lormier was. Because he could not understand his officer, Lormier distrusted him, and his distrust turned to furious anger when Fachamin, instead of simply dismissing the case pending court-martial, looked up and said to Bradley:

"What have you to say for yourself?"

What could the man have to say for himself in the face of all that evidence, Lormier wondered. He had to stand there like a ramrod while Bradley told lie upon lie. He was on the point of breaking in upon this tissue of falsehoods, but the adjutant's fishy eye was upon him, and he decided to say nothing. No matter what Bradley might invent, he couldn't escape. The evidence was conclusive—and his own report was absolutely final—damning. Nobody could doubt his word—the word of Sergeant Lormier!

But he was due for another shock.

Fachamin had listened to Bradley's version of the night's event without interrupting him once.

"What did the Arab look like?" he inquired sharply when Bradley paused.

"A long face, with a straggling beard; thick lips; light yellow skin; not very tall—about like Coates, *mon lieutenant*."

"Ah, but no!" protested Coates, "'e did not look like me—'e was like a species of a goat, *mon lieutenant*."

Fachamin said, "Mm, I see," and leaned back in his chair staring at the ceiling, where a bright green lizard was catching flies.

Lormier snorted with impatience.

"May I remind you, *mon lieutenant*," he burst out, "that the witness, Abdul ibn Achara, has testified that he was the one the prisoners chased across the market square?"

"And may I remind you to speak only when you're spoken to?" snapped Fachamin.

He turned to Bradley:

"Have you any idea what part of the country your man came from?"

"Tunis, I should say, *mon lieutenant*—either that or Egypt. He wasn't a Beni Harazan, I'll vouch for that."

"Wait!" exclaimed Coates. "I remember I said somethin' about 'im bein' a guide for the pyramids, and 'e gave me a dirty look, *mon lieutenant*, a species of a dirty look as if 'e—"

FACHAMIN brought his hand down on the table.

"That settles it," he announced. "Case dismissed. March those men out. Wait here, Sergeant Lormier. I have two words to say to you.

Silence filled the room. Fachamin sat at his desk, squinting his eyes as he looked at the sergeant.



Lormier stood very erect and stiff, trying to register amazement, sorrow and contempt, without, however, changing

his expression. He succeeded in looking like a man who has been seized by violent cramps. The adjutant stood with his hands behind his back, his lips pursed in a soundless whistle—the embodiment of unconcern.

Suddenly Fachamin spoke:

"Why were those men kept under arrest for three days before the case reached me?"

It was painfully evident that he was addressing Lormier.

"I was collecting the necessary evidence, *mon lieutenant*," the latter said with gentle reproof.

"Mm—have much trouble?"

"No, *mon lieutenant*."

"I mean—did you find it difficult to school those natives, to make them lie with such perfect coördination?"

The adjutant looked from Fachamin to Lormier and raised one eyebrow. He was no longer whistling.

"I—why, *mon lieutenant*," stammered Lormier, "I swear—I assure you—I——"

"You prevented the arrest, you fool, of one of the most notorious secret agents in North Africa—that is what you have done. I'm not going into details—they don't concern you—but I'll tell you this: those two soldiers were not lying, whereas your witnesses did not speak a word of truth. Is that clear to you?"

Lormier wheezed:

"It is possible, *mon lieutenant*, that those Arabs deceived me. I acted in good faith. I——"

"This time we'll assume you did. But don't let anybody deceive you again, do you hear? For your own sake, don't! And here's a word of advice—and a warning: you have been doing your best to break two of my men for motives of your own. Stop it! Give them a chance, as I'm giving you a chance today. If I catch you at it again—I'll have those stripes off your arm at five minutes' notice. Forget your dirty little grudges—give your men a chance to breathe, because"—he looked straight into Lormier's eyes and shot the words at him—"because very shortly, unless I am much mistaken, the loyalty of every one of us here is going to be tested to the utmost limit. That's all. Dismissed!"

Lormier, having saluted, turned on his heel and stumbled out of the office. His self-confidence had oozed out of him; he was shaken and afraid. The case he had built up with so much fervor that he had come to believe in it himself had come crashing down about his ears. He wasn't all-powerful and indispensable. The lieutenant had threatened to rip the stripes off his sleeve—he might be reduced to the ranks and the mercy of Bradley and Coates. He was sick with fear as he walked slowly down the corridor of the barrack building toward his room.

CHAPTER IX

LIGHTING THE FUSE

THE first flush of dawn was in the sky when Lieutenant Fachamin reached the redoubt after an all-night march, which had taken him in a wide circle around Foun es Akba. Neither he nor his men wasted any time admiring the splendor of the desert sunrise. At the end of a fifty-kilometre hike, any kind of a sunrise is singularly uninteresting. They craved food and sleep. They had been jerked out of their beds at eleven o'clock, and ever since that hour they had been slogging through the night, up hill and down hill, "like a bunch of perishin' cats chasin' their own blinkin' tails," as Coates disgustedly expressed it.

Fachamin had issued strict orders against singing, whistling, and smoking.

There had been one half hour's halt in the bottom of a pitch-black gully, when they sat and listened to the sound of their own heart-beats until, miles away, a donkey brayed. Then they were off again, hurrying along, always hurrying, hammering out the miles, hunting for something which they did not find.

At six o'clock in the morning, they were back on the parade ground again, hot and thirsty and tired, waiting for the order to break ranks.

"No parade until five o'clock this afternoon," announced Fachamin. "The wine ration for the day is doubled: you marched well, my children—I'm proud of you—*Rompéz!*"

The ranks broke up into straggling knots of men, clumping away towards the hutments.

"E's a real orficer, 'e is," Coates declared. "Double ration of wine, eh, what? But what the 'ell does 'e think 'e's gowin' to find out there in the dark? 'E's getting sort of funny, seems to me, wiv 'is night patrols. Fair gives me the creeps, chasin' donkey brays all over the map. A crazy business, if you awsk me."

Having dismissed his men, Fachamin headed slowly for his private quarters, where a bath and a cup of steaming black



coffee awaited him. He was dog-tired, too tired to think.

But the adjutant, who had been hovering near at hand ever since his return, jarred him back to complete wakefulness.

"At four o'clock this morning *mon lieutenant*—" he began.

"At four o'clock this afternoon, *Monsieur l'Adjutant*," broke in Fachamin, waving him away, "I should love to listen to you. You are a magnificent second in command; I admire your zeal; but nothing short of Divine intervention can make me listen to you now. Come around at four. You will find me refreshed and intelligently interested in anything you have to say."

"The fact is," persisted the non-com, falling into step beside him, "Colonel de Gonesse arrived at four o'clock. He's in your bed now. Left orders that he should be called as soon as you returned. He *has* been called."

"Zut!" remarked Fachamin. "That means no sleep. He becomes most energetic, our colonel! It is not like him to arrive without giving warning."

"He had an escort of twenty *Chasseurs d'Afrique*," explained the adjutant. "They say he pushed the horses as if the devil were behind him all the way from Béchar. Came in three days."

Fachamin whistled softly.

"They're beginning to wake up at headquarters," he commented. "It's none too soon."

He found the colonel, dressed in a white bath robe with pale blue trimming, sitting in the only comfortable chair in the room, with a cup of coffee in one hand and a cigarette in the other.

Fachamin saluted; the colonel waved his cigarette and exclaimed:

"Ah, my boy! Been waiting for you impatiently. Charming place you have here—charming! So sorry to burst in upon you like this without warning."

The object of the colonel's visit was not mentioned until Fachamin had changed his clothes, washed, and finished his breakfast, for De Gonesse did not approve of talking shop during meals. It spoiled his appetite.

He inquired after the health of the troops, commented upon the cleanliness

of the barracks; talked books, music, and theatres, until the last mouthful of bread and butter had vanished and the coffee pot was irremediably empty.

Then he lighted another cigarette, sighed, and remarked:

"I read your report, you know, as soon as I came back from leave. You don't appear to be very optimistic. What's the matter with the place?"

"If you've read my reports—"

"Well, I skinned through them. Unpleasant reading, I must admit. I came on down at once to see for myself. Everything seems quiet enough."

"It's too quiet. We're sitting on top of the proverbial powder barrel. One of these days, it's going to explode. It's almost inevitable."

"If you'll begin at the beginning," murmured De Gonesse.

SO FACHAMIN began at the beginning. He spoke without heat or passion of the impending crisis which, to him, appeared unavoidable. It had to come; nothing could be done to stop it. The Beni Harazan were growing more restless from day to day: the signs were unmistakable. Ever since the Beni Hanaf had rebelled, the neighboring tribes had been restless. The people of Fom es Akba were being brought to a white heat by a notorious religious fanatic, Muhammad el Yafiz.

"Ah, yes!" put in De Gonesse, "one has heard of him. You are sure he is here?"

"Positive, *mon colonel*."

"Seen him with your own eyes?"

"No such luck! I had one agent working for us in there," he jerked his chin in the direction of the city. "He warned me, but the next day, *mon Dieu*, he was dead. I was not quite convinced until two of my troopers came in contact with him. He tried to induce them to desert to handle machine guns for him!"

The colonel said, "*Tiens!* They are modernizing their equipment!"

He did not seem at all perturbed. In fact, he was not perturbed. So far as he was concerned, everything was for the very best.

"Those two men of mine tried to arrest El Yafiz," Fachamin went on, "but they

were held up—and the bird escaped. But he is still in the city. There can be no doubt about it. Crazy rumors are drifting about. They say we're going to convert them forcibly to Christianity."

"*Mon Dieu*, what next!"

"All sorts of things, but the root of the matter is that they've been led to believe we are weak, and I haven't enough troops



here to impress them. They know I have only one hundred and fifty men—their number at least five thousand, and they've been supplied with

modern equipment, as you said, *mon colonel*."

"How very interesting!" The colonel almost beamed with pleasure.

"Night after night, we have tried to cut off the convoys, but it can't be done. Not enough men! If I could scatter a few posts in the hills to the east, we might be able to put an end to it, but I can't. Too dangerous. If I may make a suggestion, *mon colonel*, the best thing to do would be to send down a couple of battalions to make a demonstration—just to show these fire-eaters that we still have some troops to spare. Otherwise——"

"Impossible, my dear Fachamin. Utterly out of the question. There are two columns operating at this very minute in the Tafilet, and the general wouldn't think of sending men down here for a—ah—demonstration."

"That's where the guns are coming from—the Tafilet."

"Well, the source of supply will soon be cut off. That will settle the question. Now, tell me this: where do you think the money comes from to buy rifles?"

He opened his eyes very wide and looked wise as an owl.

"They've been selling off large herds of goats," began Fachamin, "and El Yafiz has——"

"In other words, you don't know," the colonel said paternally. "*Eh bien*, it is I who will tell you where the money is com-

ing from: from the coffers of our friend the *Kaid*—Ahmed Harazan!"

Fachamin shook his head and laughed.

"He is the only man in the whole place who——"

"Now, don't!" protested De Gonesse. "I've always had my doubts about that oily fellow: too soft, too smooth, too loyal. The whole thing is quite clear to me: we have given him too much liberty. It has gone to his head; he thinks he can kick us out if he really wants to. Isn't that so? Just think it over, and you'll have to admit that it's absolutely correct. Not a flaw. The money's one big point. And then—this toleration of agitators like El Yafiz. If he were really as loyal as he professes to be, why, he would rid himself of such wasps overnight!"

"There's nothing he would like better," grinned Fachamin. "Unfortunately, he's lost the support of his people, and he's positively cross-eyed with fear."

"That's what he would like to have you believe. I have had much experience with these old foxes."

"Then he's the best actor I've ever met. He comes here at least once a day begging for protection. If I listened to him, I'd massacre half his people and put the other half in chains. He wants to be allowed to go to Algiers or Paris or Marseilles. He'd go to the North Pole to get out of the way of his people, if we'd send him and guarantee his safety."

"I remain unconvinced," declared the colonel.

"You will have an opportunity to judge for yourself," Fachamin assured him. "He's the best informant we have. He weeps on my bosom, drinks my cognac, and spends his time denouncing his entire household—thinks they're trying to poison him. He's afraid to eat—wasting away."

"Mm," said the colonel, tugging at his moustache. "We'll see—we'll see. Have you searched the houses for weapons, by any chance?"

"No, *mon colonel*—you see——"

"But why not?"

"Not enough men. One false move, and we'll be wiped out. I pointed out in my last report——"

O H, REPORTS, reports——” De Gonesse said testily. “Let me tell you, my boy, the thing to do is to impress these people. You must show them you’re not afraid. Go in boldly. Search every house. If they don’t like it, so much the worse for them. That’s the way to handle natives. Force! And lots of it! It’s the one thing they understand. You’ve been sitting here for six months, flirting with them; there’s no other word for it—flirting.” He brought down the palm of his hand on his knee. “So far, you have been depending upon hearsay, and that’s why headquarters has not seen fit to grant your request for reinforcements. Hearsay is no good. We need facts. Now that I am here, we are going to get at the facts. First of all, we’ll go through the houses. If any guns are found, we’ll put old Ben Harazan under arrest—and the whole matter will be settled in no time. Without leaders or rifles, the natives will be as helpless as infants in arms.”

“If we start a house-to-house search,” began Fachamin, “and a fight flares up, we’ll be cut to pieces. Now, if we had five hundred men here, we could hold them, but——”

“My dear Fachamin,” snapped De Gonesse, “I do not want to argue. You are entitled to your private opinion and I to mine. And I am afraid that you will have to obey *my* orders. We’ll discuss the details a little later. If you will excuse me, I think I shall slip on a few clothes.”

He was very sorry he had to speak so sharply to his subordinate, but at the same time he could not allow upstart lieutenants to tell him what he could or could not do. Preposterous!

But his bad temper was short-lived. Fachamin was playing into his hands, and the future was full of hope. Overnight, while he slept, his difficulties had been solved for him without trouble, effort, or worry. Because he wanted to be so, he was firmly convinced of Ben Harazan’s guilt, and his conscience was at rest. Now

he could do his duty, and nothing but his duty—to his own and his brother’s entire satisfaction. He arose like a giant refreshed, ready for a full day’s work. The first thing to do, he decided, was to lay hands on that ruffian, Ben Harazan.

HE DID not have long to wait. Half an hour later, Ben Harazan himself came galloping up to the redoubt. For the occasion he had donned the raspberry-colored burnous of state, conferred upon him by the government as the outward and visible sign of his authority. On his left breast twinkled half a dozen medals.

He was a man of fifty, tall, stout, and soft, with a heavily jowled face, a broad nose, purplish lips, and a crinkly gray beard that hinted at a streak of Negro blood in his veins.

As soon as he caught sight of the colonel, sitting beside Fachamin in the office, he rushed forward, caught his hands in his own, pressed them against his forehead, and concluded the ceremony by kissing them.

“What a relief!” he wheezed in a thin voice. “Ah, *mon colonel!* At last I begin to breathe! For days—for months, I have lived in torment. But you are here, therefore all is well!”

There could be no doubt as to the genuineness of his sentiments. He exuded loyalty at every pore. But the colonel remained unimpressed. He really couldn’t afford to be friendly with a man he intended to put under arrest!

“Ben Harazan,” he said gravely, “is it with your lips or your heart that you speak? Think well—think twice before you answer me! You have said that you love my country, that you admire her civilization—and yet I find you rejecting the offers that have been made you! Ah, but yes, my friend, I have heard of your stubborn refusal to place at the disposal of my country the vast wealth that lies within your hills.”

He could not put in another word. Ahmed ben Harazan again assaulted him with a torrent of words. Was the colonel referring to the magnificent offer made by the representative of Monsieur the Colonel’s brother? (Here Lieutenant Fachamin



placed his hand over his mouth and kept it there throughout the rest of the interview.)

"I refer to no specific instance," the colonel put in sharply. "I speak——"

But he was mistaken: Ben Harazan was doing all the speaking. There had been a misunderstanding, he swore by the beard of his father. He had been weak. He had been a coward. He had rejected the offer only to avoid bloodshed. A thousand men brought in would do that even now. The accursed Eî Yafiz had inflamed the people's minds. He had lied to them and told them that the white men would rob and enslave them.

"So you're ready to grant a conces-



sion," mused De Gonesse, whose heart was full of unutterable joy.

"Tomorrow—now!" Ben Harazan assured him. "I wish to join the onward march of this civilization. Oh, yes, *mon-sieur le colonel*, nothing would please me better. I desire to place my wealth at France's disposal—but the danger is great!"

The colonel arose and laid a benevolent hand on the *Kaid's* shoulder, whose good faith he could no longer doubt.

"Ben Harazan," he said, "I came here fearing the worst! I see that I was mistaken. In your hour of need, you shall not be deserted. You will see that your trust has not been misplaced. *We* stand behind you."

After these enheartening words, he got down to business and outlined the plan of action that he had decided upon. During the next few days, the *Kaid* was to simulate a change of heart and get in touch with El Yafiz. He was also to find out if there were any large caches of rifles and ammunition. Then, as soon as the information had been collected, a lightning raid would be made, the ringleaders shot, and order restored before the people knew what was happening.

Reinforcements, the colonel declared, were quite unnecessary. One hundred and fifty determined, disciplined soldiers could easily master a disorganized mob. Moreover, the arrival of additional troops might precipitate an outbreak and spoil everything.

"Tomorrow," De Gonesse concluded, "we shall place a detachment on guard over your residence. This will convince El Yafiz that you are under suspicion, and you will have a bodyguard ready to protect you if there is any rioting. Do you agree?"

Nothing could have suited Ben Harazan better. He had been clamoring for protection for months, but Lieutenant Fachamin had refused to split up his small force. The *Kaid* was almost tearfully grateful. The colonel was his blood brother—his friend—his father!

The meeting broke up amid protestations of good will.

"*Eh bien!*" exclaimed the colonel, when Ben Harazan had gone away. "You see, my good Fachamin, everything arranges itself for the best."

"I hope so, *mon colonel*," Fachamin agreed, without any enthusiasm.

DURING the next few days he showed the lieutenant how to master an incipient rebellion. He worked fast because he was in a hurry to leave that hot, dreary place and bask in the sunshine of Katherine's smile and to shake his brother's hand. He was middle-aged and he was in love—and he threw caution to the winds.

Foum es Akba was raided. Only five rifles were found, but the moral effect of the house-to-house search was very great. A riot that started in the market square was snuffed out by the immediate use of a well-placed machine gun, and the native population was cowed. Eleven of the ringleaders, denounced by the *Kaid*, were lined up and shot. De Gonesse weighed down upon the city with a heavy hand, but his most persistent efforts failed to bring to light any more weapons, nor could any trace be found of Mohammad el Yafiz. These were minor considerations, however, for the Arabs had been made to understand that five thousand of them were no match for one hundred and fifty white

men, and that the best thing they could do was to settle down quietly to water their gardens and tend their flocks. So said De Gonesse—the man of action, the empire builder, the staff colonel!

His infectious optimism spread to the *Kaid*, who allowed himself to be convinced that peace had really been restored.

Of his own accord, he gave De Gonesse a letter addressed to the latter's brother, begging him to "bring to the hills of Founes Akba the blessings of your Western civilization, which will spell prosperity for my people and an enlightenment not otherwise obtainable."

In other words, it was a perfectly good concession granted for a period of ninety-nine years to M. Casimir de Gonesse.

The colonel's triumph was complete, although the attitude of Lieutenant Fachamin was really very vexing. That young man, instead of sharing his chief's enthusiasm, went about with a long face, making disagreeable suggestions.

The climax came one evening at supper when De Gonesse said:

"*Eh bien*, everything is now in order, my dear boy. Tomorrow I shall leave you. Will you see that my escort is ready at four tomorrow morning?"

"Very good, *mon colonel*," agreed Fachamin, with his nose in his plate.

"You see," De Gonesse went on glibly, "the situation was not as black as you depicted it. Oh, far, far from it. Let it be a lesson to you, my boy. You must be self-reliant—bold! I assure you, reports such as you sent in will do you no good. If we had listened to you, we should have drafted in a couple of thousand men."

"Well," Fachamin pointed out, "so far as that goes, they're still needed."

The colonel laid down his knife and fork and glared at him, unable to restrain his exasperation another minute.

"I fear," he snapped, "I greatly fear, Lieutenant Fachamin, that you are not fit for an independent command. It hurts me to say so—but you appear to be lacking in moral courage, and it is moral courage that wins victories. No wonder the situation got out of hand! I warn you I shall have to explain matters to the general. We cannot afford to have our frontier guarded

by men who allow themselves to be overawed by—rumors."

"I didn't know that I was overawed," retorted Fachamin.

"If you're going to quibble over words, my boy, I warn you to be careful. I am tempted to believe that you are not well. I wish for your own sake that it was so! Yes, you must be relieved, no doubt about it!"

"My health is excellent," the lieutenant said placidly, "but it won't be for long."

"What does that mean?"



"This: you ordered us to raid the city. We found five rifles. You ordered the *Kaid* to trap El Yafiz; he didn't. The situation hasn't changed. The day El Yafiz gives the word, those other rifles—the ones we didn't find—are going to come out of their hiding places. If I'm any judge of native character, they're waiting to see just how far you're going to go."

"Trash!" snorted De Gonesse. "Utter trash! Your imagination——"

White-faced, his eyes suddenly blazing, Fachamin confronted his colonel and spoke not as a subaltern should speak but as man to man.

"For once you are going to listen to the truth about yourself. It may do you some good. You know as well as I do this business has been a farce, but you'll be hailed as the peaceful conqueror! And when the smash comes and my men are wiped out—who will be blamed? You? No! Of course not. I'll be blamed! And you'll bring in the reinforcements I've clamored for and acquire a little more merit! You can't lose. *Par Dieu*, you're well named—the Butcher. We're the bait. It doesn't matter if we are killed—that's what we're here for—to be killed for your private benefit."

"Lieutenant Fachamin," thundered De Gonesse, "I order you to stop."

"I'm through," agreed the lieutenant, with a slight shrug of the shoulders. "Now have me cashiered."

"I shall! I've never heard such monstrous—such foul slander." De Gonesse choked back his anger and said quickly, "As soon as I reach headquarters, I shall see that an officer is sent here to take over your command. Until he arrives, you will perform your duties as usual."

Not another word was spoken until, at dawn the following morning, the colonel left Fom es Akba. Then, by way of farewell, he said between pursed lips:

"Your successor will be here in about ten days' time. You'll report to the provost marshal as soon as you reach Bechar. You're under open arrest, you understand."

Without waiting for an answer, he put spurs to his horse, and the flying hoofs kicked the fine sand into the lieutenant's face as he stood at the salute.

CHAPTER X

THE PALACE GUARD

SOLDIER of Second Class Charley Coates leaned against the parapet on the roof of the *Kaid* Ahmed ben Harazan's palace and surveyed the dawn with a jaundiced eye. Near by, Soldier of Second Class George Bradley squatted with his back propped against the wall. Between them, thrusting its blunt muzzle through a breach in the parapet, a machine gun looked out upon the market place.

The palace was a jumble of dwellings ranged in a rough quadrangle about a garden where, under striped awnings, a fountain played and roses scented the air. It was a rabbit warren, a maze of passages, rooms, staircases, and terraces heaped up on the steep flank of the hill in the heart of the city. Beneath it, the roof tops went down the slope in gigantic steps; above, wall was piled upon wall. Only the market square and the upper portion of the palace stood on level ground; the rest of the city seemed to be hung in midair, between the green tree-tops and the cobalt-blue sky.

On the far side of the oasis stood the redoubt, white-walled and four-square, looking like a child's toy with its rows of little huts and its match-stick flagstaff on top of the watchtower. In the clear morning light, details, dwarfed by the distance, stood out with astonishing vividness. Coates could see the antlike figures of men crossing and recrossing on the yellowish pocket handkerchief which was the main parade ground. And beyond this toy with its little tower and its miniature watertank and the minute slits that were loopholes, there was nothing—nothing but an empty, flat plain thickly littered with gray stones and gray-blue wisps of alfa grass, going back and back toward the horizon where it blended with the wavelike folds of the sand dunes.

This immense sterility offended Coates' street-bred soul.

"It ain't so bad ter be down in it," he grumbled, "but to sit up 'ere and watch it. Gor' blimey, it fair gives me the creeps! Empty! It's like bein' on a bloomin' ship in the middle of the perishin' ocean!"

"It's going to be a hot day," yawned Bradley, stretching his long arms above his head. "The doggone wind smells scorched."

After a pause, while they listened to the small sounds of the awakening city, Coates suddenly exclaimed:

"'Ello, what's up! Why, strike me pink, the Butcher's a-leavin' us!"

A group of red-cloaked horsemen had trotted out of the redoubt. A row of Legionnaires were presenting arms. Steel flashed in the dawn. The horsemen trotted away toward the east. A cloud of dust gathered above them and rolled across the plain until it vanished behind a shoulder of the hill.

"That's 'im, all right! I saw 'im! 'E didn't stay long, did 'e?"

"He's a wise guy," commented Bradley, who hadn't bothered to watch this hurried departure.

"'E's stirred things up to a queen's taste!" Coates snorted indignantly. "Proper larfin' stock 'e's mide of us, what wiv 'is 'ouse-to-'ouse search and mountin' guard over this 'ere dump!"

"I'll say he's stirred things up! God!

He must be blind! These Arabs hated us before he came along, but now— When the show starts we'll be caught up here like rats in a trap."

"Maybe it won't start."

"No? And maybe it's going to snow! Look at the way the place is filling with a bunch of doggone cutthroats! They've been sifting in for days. Didn't you hear 'em last night—whispering, whispering, whispering? The damn' city was alive with whispers! Boy, we aren't sitting so pretty up here on this roost, and I don't mind telling you I hope the Butcher's going to send along a couple of battalions just for luck."

"'E will," agreed Coates, "when we've all been killed. But nothin' ain't appened yet, and I ain't goin' to worry."



He turned away from the parapet and loafed across the rooftop with his hands in his

pockets.

Bradley fished a cigarette out of the lining of his cap and struck a match on his thumb nail. All about them the city was coming to life. Traders were stacking their wares beneath the arcades surrounding the market square. A grizzled Arab was unloading wicker baskets strapped on a donkey's back. There were little mounds of bright-red carrots and yellow-skinned melons and platters of amber-colored dates laid out on green leaves. Farther on, a boy shouted loudly as he whacked three goats with a stick, driving them toward the butcher stalls. Sheeted women, with one eye showing through the triangular opening in their *haiks*, haggled with the merchants. Groups formed, dissolved, came together again. There was a medley of voices.

THE rising sun splashed down into the haze of dust, picking out bright garments, glistening on the ebony skin of Negroes, flashing off copper ware—and on the rifle muzzles, tucked up beneath a hundred burnouses.

For some time Bradley sprawled on his

stomach, watching the scene through the breech in the parapet, until Coates called softly to him:

"'Ere, Gawge, look 'ere what I've found!"

"What's eating you now?"

"Come 'ere, yer blasted long-legged lump of laziness! Yer don't want ter miss this!"

He was peering over the brink of the wall on the far side of the roof, looking down upon an inner court, which, during the night watch, had escaped his notice. And the chief peculiarity about the court was that it was peopled with women, for it happened to be the private garden of Ahmed ben Harazan's harem. There was nothing particularly wonderful about the ladies. They were middle-aged, fat, shapeless, and very busy. A gray monkey, hanging by its tail from the branch of a lime tree, was picking fleas off its stomach. Several other women were about, all of them doing very commonplace things. The palms of their hands and the soles of their feet were dyed with henna, their wrists and ankles were heavy with bangles, but these artifices could not conceal the fact that they were neither pretty, attractive, nor desirable. Coates, however, beamed with delight.

"Their fyces ain't worth the trouble they take to 'ide them," he said, "but it's a proper treat just to look at 'em. They do say——"

Then they both stood spellbound, for out of the house came a girl who was quite young and almost pretty. Beneath her white veil, which was thrown back off her bare arm, she wore a flaming yellow garment. Armlets clinked on her brown arms. The fact that she was carrying a bucket did not detract from her charm.

"Ain't she wonnerful," stammered Coates. "Ain't she prime! Ain't she a dream! Gor! I ain't seed nothin' like that since I went to the old Empire in Lunnon!"

Goggle-eyed, they watched her cross the yard to a well and let down her pail at the end of a rope, which appeared to be never-ending.

"Lumme," Coates went on. "I'd give—I'd give anythink if she'd just look at me. That ain't awskin' for much, just one look! These 'ere Arabs, they know 'ow to live,

I don't mind telling you. Gor' blimey, ain't she going ter look up?"

Before Bradley could interfere he had loosened a little piece of dry mud from the top of the parapet and thrown it at the girl.

"Duck!" warned Bradley.

"Duck nothin'! I want 'er to see me."

The missile struck the girl's shoulder. She looked up. Her eyes were large and liquid. They shone like stars.

"'Ello there, girlie!" cried Coates, carried away by his enthusiasm. "Cheerio, ladies! Meet the bold Legionnaires."

His advances met with no success whatsoever. There were shrieks—shrill screams. The girl dragged her veil over her face and fled, upsetting her pail of water over a stack of gray wool. The older women gave tongue and rolled away with the grace of pachyderms. The monkey sat up and chattered.

Doubled up and helpless with laughter, Bradley and Coates sank down at the back of the parapet. They were still laughing when a Negro came prancing out on the roof top closely followed by Ahmed ben Harazan, whose facial expression was anything but jolly.

In fact, he was almost crazy with rage. His home had been desecrated and his honor besmirched by these common soldiers who had gazed upon the faces of his women and thrown stones at them. But he misjudged his position. Because the soldiers were there to guard him, he thought that they were his own servants, his own slaves, and he came out on the roof top with the intention of punishing them for their filthy ways. He was armed with a rawhide thong, and before the Legionnaires had time to move, he slashed Coates across the face. The blow ripped the flesh off Coates' cheek bone and sent him staggering back against the wall. Then the *Kaid* turned to strike at the other culprit, but he was just the fraction of a second late, and he found himself confronted by the butt end of a rifle in the hands of a very determined-looking man.

Nevertheless, his rage was so great that he lashed out, shouting that he would tear out their black hearts and feed them to his dogs.

Bradley ducked beneath the whistling lash and drove the steel-shod butt of his gun into the *Kaid's* stomach.

The *Kaid* said, "Harr-umph," and sat down, followed by the Negro, who, in coming to his master's rescue, was unfortunate enough to stop the rifle stock with his mouth.

He bounced off the ground as if he had been made of rubber and retreated at top speed, spitting blood and teeth on the sun-baked mud. His howls mingled with the screams of the ladies of the harem and the loud lamentations of Coates, who, hopping on one foot, swore that his eye had been torn out, and begged Bradley to "'ammer the guts out of the blighter." Curled up on the ground with his knees drawn up as close to his chin as his fat stomach would allow, Ahmed ben Harazan wallowed in the dust and uttered agonized groans. Bradley was vainly endeavoring to ascertain whether or not Coates had really lost his eye when Sergeant Lornier lumbered out upon the roof top, followed by six Legionnaires and a swarm of servants, relatives and hangers on of the *Kaid's* household.

ONE glance was enough for the sergeant. The Negro who had brought him warning of the outrage had prepared him for the worst. His blood was up and he craved action.



There lay the *Kaid*, obviously much the worse for wear; there stood those two scoundrels, Bradley and Coates, gone crazy and shouting at each other in English. The sergeant wasted no time in futile inquiries. His duty was plain. Before the two madmen were aware of his presence, he leaped at them with heroic courage, pole-axed Coates with one blow on the top of the head, and rammed his knee into Bradley's groin. He followed up his advantage by throwing his arms around Bradley and squeezing him until his ribs cracked. He'd teach him how to fight! He went on squeezing until Bradley's face

turned black; then he let him drop, and, for good measure, he kicked him on the jaw.

Meanwhile, Ben Harazan, who had been helped to his feet, was beginning to take a fresh interest in life. He gave the sergeant a full and none too truthful account of the "crime," and wound up with an urgent plea that the two criminals be shot at once.

"They are dogs!" he wheezed. "If you had not interfered, they would have killed me! I demand that they be punished instantly! I, who am an officer of the Legion of Honor, I order you to shoot!"

But Lormier was not running any unnecessary risks. A miracle had happened. Bradley and Coates were headed straight for the penal battalion. No longer would they sneer at him behind his back, nor would their presence constantly remind him of incidents he wanted to forget. He could afford to obey the letter of the law.

He temporized, explaining that Lieutenant Fachamin would have to be consulted. Since the culprits were still alive, they would have to go on living until the officer gave orders to the contrary.

"He'll be along in about an hour," Lormier told the *Kaid*, "but I'll show you how we deal with such criminals in the Legion. They won't stir a finger until the lieutenant arrives."

WHEN Bradley recovered consciousness he found himself lying on his side, with the glare of the sun full in his eyes. His body seemed to be cramped and twisted. Gradually, as the fog in his brain cleared, he became aware of an intolerable prickling, stinging sensation on his cheeks, in his ears, and the corners of his mouth. He tried to raise his arms to wipe his face, but his hands were fastened behind him, and as he squirmed to free himself, an almost intolerable wave of pain shot through his whole body as if he were being stretched on a rack.

Then, at last, he realized what had happened: his wrists and ankles had been tied and drawn up together, so that he was bent back upon himself like a drawn bow. A swarm of flies had settled on his face and were biting him, boring into his flesh.

When he moved his head, they arose, buzzing angrily, and settled again as soon as the motion ceased. The sun was roasting him, but he could not stir an inch.

Each second increased the agony. His arms were being drawn out of their sockets by the drag of his bent legs, and his knees felt as if they were bursting through the skin. But the greatest torment of all was the unclean swarm of flies, crawling over his lips and his nostrils and the corners of his eyes.

Near by, he could hear Coates moaning, but the glare of the sun blinded him. Minutes dragged by. At first, he tried to fight against the plague of flies, rocking his head from side to side, wriggling his body along the ground, but exhaustion conquered him. He lay still, face turned to the sun, which drove a myriad flaming darts into his skull. His whole being, nerve by nerve, muscle by muscle, dissolved in a torrent of pain. Thirst was added to his torment.

Then his mind snapped, and he sank into a fiery pit where for an eternity he dwelt in monstrous agony.

IT WAS past ten o'clock when Lieutenant Fachamin reached the palace. Since early dawn, the colonel's farewell had been echoing in his brain, and he realized all too clearly that he could expect no mercy from that gallant gentleman. He, Fachamin, had no social connections, no family relations in high places, no influence, and no money. He would either be asked to resign or else retrograded to the foot of the seniority list. Whatever happened, it was bound to be unpleasant, for the colonel's grudges died hard.

"Still," thought the disgraced lieutenant as he rode up the crooked staircase which was the main thoroughfare of Foun es Akba, treading his way among the meat stalls and the camels and the hard-faced Arabs, "Still, it cannot be denied that I have told the Butcher what nobody else has dared to tell him. It was bad manners—no doubt about it—but bad manners is the one thing which would get under his conceited hide. As there were no witnesses, I shall probably be let off with a reprimand. And what is a reprimand?"

Thus enheartened, he reached the palace, where, as soon as he sat foot on the ground, Sergeant Lormier and the *Kaid* proceeded to inform him of the crime that had been committed that morning. Lormier's account was brief, matter of fact; the *Kaid's* version of the affair was more colorful.

He renewed his request that the two men who had tried to murder him be shot at once, and he concluded his speech with an emphatic statement that Sergeant Lormier was the bravest man he had ever met. Had he not saved the life of an officer of the Legion of Honor?

Lormier's chest expanded several inches, and he looked down at the lieutenant with a kindly expression on his face, as if to say, "All these months you have misjudged me—now you know what a fine fellow I am!"

But Fachamin did not appear at all impressed. What he said was, "Where are the prisoners?"



"You will have them shot, I trust," insisted the *Kaid*. "Such a dastardly attack upon my person calls for immediate punishment. I trust an example will be made——"

"An example will be made after the case has been investigated," snapped Fachamin. "We don't shoot men without giving them a hearing. If they deserve it, they'll be court-martialed. Where are they now?"

"They were violent, *mon lieutenant*," explained Lormier. "Very violent."

"Violent beyond belief!" echoed the *Kaid*.

"So I tied them up, *mon lieutenant*, and left them together on the roof so that they might not disturb the other men with their shouts."

"What do you mean—shouts? They've gone crazy, have they?"

"Homicidal mania, *mon lieutenant*," asserted Lormier, standing very erect and doing his best to look stern and just.

But Fachamin refused to accept this diagnosis.

"You've left two men lying out in the sun since eight o'clock this morning!" he exclaimed angrily. "All right, I'll see them myself. By the way, I'm still waiting to know their names."

"Oh! Coates and Bradley," answered Lormier as he led the way through the maze of dark corridors. He tried to make this statement in a normal tone, but he had an uncomfortable feeling that the lieutenant was looking at him queerly, sizing him up in a most suspicious manner. His mind was at rest, however, and no qualms assailed him. He had done his duty; the lieutenant would have to do his; he would be compelled to have those two criminals court-martialed whether he liked it or not. They would get ten years apiece, on the strength of his testimony. They would sweat blood, and die, and be damned in the mines at Kanadza!

When the lieutenant caught sight of the two prisoners, he stood still and cursed with a cold fury which filled the sergeant with apprehension. Even he had to admit that the prisoners did not appear at their best; and he regretted he had not loosened their bonds a little sooner. They looked like men who had died in awful agony, but they were not dead. Their blood-smearred faces were clotted with swarms of glistening flies, and out of their twisted mouths came a rasping moan, which Lormier judged to be entirely superfluous.

"Cut those men loose and have them carried downstairs," ordered Fachamin, in a voice which had an extremely nasty ring to it.

HIS subsequent actions not only galled Lormier but disgusted him. Fachamin was a soft fool, as weak as a woman! In the sergeant's estimation, he made himself utterly ridiculous, for he refused to calm down until Bradley and Coates had been washed, sterilized, and bandaged. Then, to cap the climax, he ordered one of the men on duty to place cold compresses on their heads! And to renew the compresses every five minutes! The idea of pampering Legionnaires in this fashion amused and reassured the sergeant. But

he was due for a shock. As soon as Fachamin had satisfied himself that every possible thing had been done to make the two sufferers comfortable, he summoned Lormier and the *Kaid* and led them into a cool little room giving on to the garden where the fountain tinkled in the shade of a striped awning. It was quiet and restful in there, and the sergeant was thinking how nice it would be to own a home of his own built along the same lines, with a well-stocked harem, when the lieutenant said sharply:

"Now, then, I want a few facts. First of all"—he jerked his chin in Ben Harazan's direction—"why did my men assault you?"

The *Kaid*, who had subsided on a pile of cushions, stroked his gray beard and smiled.

"It is as I told you. I came toward them on the roof top, and the tall man struck me down——"

"Why?"

"Why?—ah, yes! It was that they had befouled my honor! I found them peering down at my women folk—terrorizing them. I need say no more! Your country is the staunch friend of my faith."

"Exactly. So you went out on the roof and threatened them."

"I went out to chastise them!" cried Ben Harazan, who still believed that he had a divine right to punish common soldiers.

"And they refused to be chastised," Fachamin said dryly. "I see—you hit first, didn't you?"

"Of course! With a strap—I struck the little one with the bow legs."

"So they're not insane." Fachamin suddenly turned to Lormier and rapped out, "Who stationed those men up there?"

"I did, *mon lieutenant*."

"I thought I had selected the sentry positions?"

"Yes, *mon lieutenant*, of course, but last night *monsieur le Kaid* and myself—we decided, or, rather, *monsieur le Kaid* requested me, to mount a guard which would command the market-place. So——"

"So, you sacred, stupid, murderous imbecile, you disobeyed my orders. You placed two troopers where they were bound to get into trouble, and you jammed a ma-

chine gun into the faces of the Arabs as a direct provocation!"

"A provocation!" laughed Ben Harazan. "Oh, but, no! *Voyons, monsieur le lieutenant*, I pray you to be calm. Let us look at the facts: For several days past my city has been crowded with hillmen whose presence constitutes a grave menace to that security which is so essential to the full development of our natural resources." He cleared his throat, well pleased with this neatly turned phrase, and added importantly, "Furthermore, it was Colonel de Gonesse who gave me permission to make such arrangements as I might see fit for the adequate protection of my palace."

"Colonel de Gonesse has gone back to Bechar," Fachamin said quietly, "and I happen to be in command here. While I am in command I am responsible for the defence of the city. The best thing you can do is to keep quiet. I'm speaking bluntly because it's the only language you appear to understand. Is this your city? No, certainly not! It's in the hands of El Yafiz this minute. And you think you're safe be-



cause you have twenty soldiers in your house! *Nom de Dieu!*" He swung across the room and came to a halt in front of the *Kaid*, looking down at him with bitter scorn. "Why don't you try to lay hands on El Yafiz, if you want

peace, instead of shoving my machine guns into the faces of your own people? Do you think my Legionnaires are made of stone? You put them where they could see your women, and you expect them to look the other way! If anybody is to blame, you are! Do you understand that?"

"I will write to the colonel," stuttered Ben Harazan. "Such an outrage—such insults heaped upon me! This is the reward of a lifetime's allegiance—the reward for the noble devotion of my grandfather!"

"And you've been living on his reputation ever since. You're too good for your people—that's your trouble. You've despised them—and they despise you. You're

a dead weight." He shook his forefinger in the *Kaid's* face. "Listen to me—I'm giving you your orders now: Don't interfere with my men ever again. Hands off, understand? If you want to assert your authority, go out and make peace with your people instead of hiding behind our backs. Drive out El Yafiz, if you want something to do."

HE FACED Lormier and snapped. "Now, you—you told me those men had gone mad—why did you lie to me?"

The sergeant was uncomfortably aware that he was dealing with a new and unsuspected Fachamin—a man of iron who might be hated but could not be despised—and he felt that in some obscure fashion he had been tricked into a false position.

"*Mon lieutenant,*" he mumbled, "I assure you—I was summoned by one of the servants—found the *Kaid* lying on the ground, and the two soldiers appeared to be fighting. I acted for the best."

"*Bon!* I'll accept that as a possible excuse. But there's no excuse for your subsequent conduct. None! You know as well as I do that no man may be subjected to the *crapouillaude* for more than forty-five minutes. And you left them out there to roast in agony for two hours!"

"There were no garrison orders to that effect," Lormier said stubbornly.

"Yes, you're safe; there was no definite order issued. You're covered. But this is your second warning, Sergeant. The next time, those stripes will leap off your arm. If it were not for the fact that you won that medal you're wearing at Souk el Maroud, I'd break you here and now. But I believe you're a brave man—and we're going to need brave men: one hundred and fifty of them. And I want them led, not driven. That clear to you?"

"Yes, *mon lieutenant,*" agreed Lormier.

"Right. Have those two men carried down to the infirmary at once. We'll wash out the whole affair and start with a clean slate."

"You are g-going to let those murderers go?" gasped Ben Harazan. "Those criminals who struck me down and tried——"

"When they are well enough to be ques-

tioned, we'll hold a court of inquiry," promised Fachamin. "We'll find out who is to blame and why."

"Are you not going to have them shot?" went on Ben Harazan, into whose cloudy mind no glimmer of understanding had penetrated. "I, who am an officer of the Legion of Honor—a loyal friend of——"

"Prove it by arresting El Yafiz!"

A crafty light gleamed in the *Kaid's* eyes.

"If I hand you El Yafiz—will you punish those men? Will you—will you?" he insisted.

"If they're guilty, they will be punished," agreed Fachamin.

"Give me two days," said Ben Harazan, "and El Yafiz will be in your hands."

"If they are guilty," repeated Fachamin, "they will be punished."

And the *Kaid* smiled, for, in his mind, they were guilty beyond a shadow of a doubt.

CHAPTER XI

PRYING LOOSE A SERGEANT

LORMIER put down the empty bottle with a crash. For a second, he stood mumbling to himself, then, angrily, he snatched up the bottle again and hurled it against the wall, where it burst like a bomb. He kicked the broken fragments out of his way and went on tramping up and down the room, prowling from side to side like a caged beast, while, in his wine-sodden mind, he moided over the day's events.

He had been drinking steadily ever since the lieutenant had gone away, leaving him in charge of the picket for another twenty-four hours—to punish him for his brutality. Brutality! He clenched his fists, wishing to God that he had killed Bradley and Coates when he had had them at his mercy, up there on the roof top. Then their lying mouths would have been closed forever and he would have had peace.

He was drunk—savagely, coldly drunk. It had begun with a nip to steady his nerves at ten o'clock in the morning. Before dusk he had cleaned out the lockers; emptied nine bottles of warm white wine while he brooded over his misfortunes.

Now his brain was on fire; he was obsessed by an impulse to go down to the redoubt and put a bullet through the lieutenant's skull and then to strangle that damned Bradley. Red thoughts galloped through his mind; he found himself wishing the Arabs would rise up and massacre the garrison—wipe it out of existence, blow it to pieces, crush and torture it.

It was almost ten o'clock. And what of it. He was sick of the Legion and the burning sun and the immense silences of the desert. He was overcome by an access of drunken self pity. What was it to him what time it was? All day he had neglected his duty—and if the lieutenant had anything to say about it, he was going to kill him—kill him—kill him. The words danced in his brain: kill him—drive a bayonet into him—kill him, kill him. The whole gang was in league against him. Bradley and Coates and Fachamin. He pressed his knuckles against his eyes to drive away the memory of their grinning faces.

At half-past ten— Why, of course! Now he had it. Late in the afternoon, the *Kaid* had whispered something in his ear—something important—about a rebel, El Yafiz, who had promised to attend a secret meeting. He was to be caught and handed over to the lieutenant.

"But what is it to me?" grumbled Lormier. "I will get no credit if he is caught—let him slit the *Kaid's* throat wide open! He talks too much about his loyalty. If I had a chance——" He left the half-formed thought hang in midair.

Why should he help Ben Harazan? Twenty times he told himself that it was none of his business. He didn't have to take orders from Ben Harazan.



Minutes went by. The stillness of the night remained unbroken. No warning had come from any of the sentries, and he began to wonder whether El Yafiz had walked into the trap. Curiosity conquered him. He snatched up the lantern and hurried down

the long corridor toward the *Kaid's* apartments. As he went deeper into the recesses of that strange dwelling, silence enveloped him like a shroud. There was a baffling sequence of steps and passages and empty rooms where even the sound of his footfalls was smothered, and he seemed to be wading through a dark and musty fog which smelled of decay and sweat and dry mud. Out of the unexpected corners came whiffs of cheap scent, and once, as he skirted a walled garden, he heard the nerve-racking thump of a guitar—three melancholy notes which died away when he came to a halt, and were never repeated.

AT LAST he caught sight of a thin thread of light glimmering through the cracked panel of a door. There should have been a Negro attendant on guard; but the place was empty.

Lormier stood stock still, pressing his ear against the crevice, trying to detect some small sound in that tomblike silence. He thought he heard the faint lisp of a whisper. Maybe they were laughing at him, in there behind that door. With a grunt, he hitched his revolver close to his hand and pushed open the door. Two candles, stuck on the mud floor, lighted the room with a pale yellow glow. Between them, stretched out flat on his back, lay Ahmed ben Harazan, stone dead, with the bone hilt of a knife sticking between his ribs. Against the far wall lounged five Arabs with the hoods of their burnouses drawn down over their eyes. Their faces were lost in shadow. They stood as motionless as carven images—and in the hands of each of them was a rifle—not the old-fashioned elaborate Arab weapon, but a blunt, short, high-powered carbine. The candlelight put streaks of gold on the blue-black barrels as they slewed around to point at Lormier's chest. Behind him the door closed softly.

"*Bonsoir*, Sergeant," murmured a voice at his elbow. "If you will be good enough not to draw your revolver, you will live; otherwise it will be necessary to kill you."

He jumped aside and found himself staring into the face of Muhammad el Yafiz.

"Steady," urged the Arab. "It is not my wish that you, too, should die."

"But you—you have murdered him—the *Kaid*!" Lormier burst out.

"Oh, that fool!" El Yafiz shrugged his shoulders. "Yes—he tried to trap me. I walked into the trap, and his own servants held him while I drove the knife into his heart. Now, drop your revolver onto the floor and sit down over yonder, for I want to speak to you."

"How do I know——?"

"If I raise my finger you will have five bullets driven into your heart. Sit down."

Lormier obeyed. He sat down all of a lump, for his knees were amazingly shaky.

"You are wise," smiled El Yafiz, squatting down beside him. "Very wise. Death is nothing in itself—but dying can be made difficult. Now, these men"—he flicked his fingers in the direction of the motionless figures—"they would not have killed you outright. They would have cut off your eyelids and put you out in the sun tomorrow morning. And that is an improvement on your method—as you practised it today."

"I don't know what you mean," growled Lormier.

"I mean this: I saw how you dealt this morning with those soldiers, and I have heard enough about you to know that you are the man I want. I need your help. Will you give it willingly—or shall I have you laid out beside that dog?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"What has the Legion to offer you?" El Yafiz went on placidly. "Nothing! Less than nothing. What has it done for you? Put those stripes on your sleeve; called you a sergeant—at the mercy of every officer who chooses to abuse you."

"Go on," said Lormier. "I'm listening."

"I have no time to waste. Here is what I propose: Leave the Legion—desert—come over to me. You will have money and honor and women. They are yours for the taking. These people are going to rebel when I give the word."

"They're going to rebel—they're going to rebel," repeated Lormier. "All that sounds very pretty, but the odds are a million to one against them."

"Even more hopeless than that," laughed El Yafiz, "but they do not know it. They are little pawns in a great game—Oh, that's all right," he added as Lormier

glanced at the silent Arabs on the far side of the room, "they speak no French; there is nothing to fear—not, that is, if you are with us, and I believe you are."

HE LAID the tips of his fingers for a second on the back of Lormier's hand.

"You are an intelligent man," he went on, "and to you I can explain these things—because either you will agree with me, or—you will join the *Kaid*, that unclean beast! Listen: it is true, these brave people are foredoomed. For a little while, they will fight like demons, but in the end, they will be crushed back into servitude. But it does not matter. It is written. They serve their purpose. A score of tribes will hear of the little war—the news will spread—and some day they will learn their lesson; they will understand that, if they rise up all together, if they sink their little differences and fight like brothers to free their land—then they will sweep their oppressors into the sea and be the masters of their own destiny. *We* are never defeated—though whole nations may perish, we live

because we have faith."

"That's all right, but where do I come in?" grumbled Lormier. "God knows, I don't give a curse whether



the Arabs kill all the French. Good luck to 'em! I'm sick of their rotten army! And I don't mind telling you I wouldn't mind seeing that gang down there at the redoubt blown to hell—I'd like to help send some of them myself—I hate them—the swine! Give me a chance to get out, and I'll go like a shot—but there's no sense in fighting."

"That's where you are wrong," smiled El Yafiz, "and that is also why we need your help. Each little success rings like a gong from end to end of this land, and is remembered long after the big defeats have been forgotten. With your help, we can score a lightning victory—and after-

ward, with money in your pockets, you will be free."

"Yes—but free to go where?"

"Wherever you choose—we can slip you out of the country at any of a dozen points—in safety—provided, of course, you do not attempt to deceive us, in which case——"

"How much do I get?"

"Your price?"

"Ten thousand francs—gold."

"You shall have them," promised El Yafiz.

Out of a pouch strapped to his waist he drew two handfuls of gold which he slid, clinking, into Lormier's *kepi*. "On account," he said. "The rest—later."

"I'm with you," agreed Lormier. "The sacred pig of a Legion! Yes, I'll help you all right."

"Of course you will," pursued El Yafiz so gently that Lormier failed to notice that biting sarcasm behind the words. "And now, to celebrate the occasion, we shall have a little drink, eh? A little drink of cognac!"

"Take me to it!" laughed Lormier.

AN HOUR later, the bottle was empty. Red-eyed and fighting drunk, Lormier shouted at his new-found friend:

"Well, *mon vieux*, and when does the fun start?"

"Now," said El Yafiz, who had not touched the cognac. "It starts now, the fun—if you are ready."

He glared sharply at Lormier, half expecting the white man to shake off the effects of the liquor and to balk at the last moment. But Lormier was too far gone to have any scruples. In his wine-poisoned brain, all the bestial passions which for months on end he had repressed had boiled over and swamped him. In his insane desire for revenge, he was fawning upon El Yafiz, to whom he was selling the lives of a hundred and fifty men for a hatful of gold.

"I'm ready," he boasted. "Damn them! They won't snicker at me any more!" He leaned over and breathed in El Yafiz's face: "They've been laughing at me—all of them—because they think I'm afraid of Bradley—but I'm going to get Bradley,

you see, and I'll wring his neck. I'll tear off his head, and I'll make that squirt of a lieutenant eat his rotten tongue."

"True!" agreed El Yafiz, backing away from the maniac, "but we must make a beginning. You will go ahead."

"I haven't forgotten," Lormier chuckled. "Oh, no!" Then, with an access of drunken caution, he whispered, "Ssh! Softly, softly!"

On tiptoe, he led the way out of the room, and the flies crawled undisturbed on the blood-soaked robe of Ahmed ben Harazan, lying stiffly between the glimmering candle stumps.

Minutes later, the Legionnaire on sentry duty at the northern end of the block of buildings came up to attention and informed Sergeant Lormier that there was nothing to report.

"Species of a pig," retorted Lormier, "nothing to report, eh? Have you been asleep?"

"Non, *mon sergeant*," grinned the Legionnaire. "I heard a few voices some time ago——"

Then Lormier held his lantern up on a level with the sentry's eyes, so that he was blinded by the light. And while the sergeant was saying: "Your eyes are red with sleep," El Yafiz, who had crawled up behind the Legionnaire, thrust a knife between his ribs.

"One!" snarled Lormier.

The massacre went on swiftly, in whispered silence. Over the unprotected walls came a swarm of men, filtering in from a dozen points, until secrecy became impossible. From the black streets of Fomes Akba a murmur had arisen—the city throbbled with life waiting for the spark which would release the swollen torrent of hate.

There was only the handful of men down in the *corps de garde* to be disposed of. Cold and businesslike in the midst of the growing hysteria, El Yafiz said to Lormier:

"That uniform is dangerous for you. Here, put this on." It was a white burnous, which fell to Lormier's heels. "Keep close to these men: they know you. Otherwise, a mistake might be made—And now it is time to let them go!"

THE last sentry by the main gate saw them coming. He emptied his rifle into the seething mass. The shots brought the Legionnaires to their feet. A dozen men against a thousand— The gates fell in beneath the pressure of the mob in the market-place, and a roar of triumph rolled up toward the dark sky.

Twelve men and a corporal of the Legion were penned in a narrow room. The doorway was piled high with dead before a single Arab crossed the threshold. It was hopeless from the very first—but they held on, jeering as they fired into the twisted faces that swirled before them. Then the corporal dragged himself out of the fight



with a bullet in his belly, and before he died he drew the straw mattresses of his men together and set them alight. The last of the Legionnaires went down fighting, and the fire saved their bodies from the rage of their foes.

High leaped the flames of the gigantic funeral pyre. A red glare spread over the walls of Fom es Akba, and through the streets rolled a triumphant mob holding aloft on spear points the grimy heads of the Legionnaires who had been dragged out of the furnace. Down below in the redoubt, little points of light had appeared. The shrill, clear voice of the bugle cut like a knife through the deep-throated clamour of the mob. And Lormier shrieked, "Hear them squeal! They're afraid!"

But the bugle answered him, as if, through the night, it had heard his taunt, and it flung in his teeth the notes of the Legion singing—high pitched, cocksure, laughing at death.

The whistling crackle of the flames smothered the yelp, and Lormier, tearing himself out from the spell that seemed to have nailed his tongue to the roof of his dry mouth, yelled again:

"They're done for!"

The smoke eddying about him caught at his throat and made him choke.

CHAPTER XII

AN UNUSUAL ARRIVAL

BRADLEY awoke to the call of the bugle. Beyond the trees of the oasis, Fom es Akba burned like a torch. The whitewashed walls of the infirmary were stained with a crimson glow.

Again the bugle call rang out, followed by the shrill blast of whistles. Bradley crawled out of bed and leaned out over the window sill. A mutiny seemed to have broken out. From the hutment across the way came a gust of noise: shouts, cat calls, cheers, snatches of song—a vast hullabaloo accompanied by a banging of tables and benches and gun butts. Even the duty bugler had gone mad: he stood in the middle of the parade ground in his shirt sleeves with his suspenders hanging down around his knees, blowing the Legion's March as if his life depended upon it.

Out of the hutments tumbled the Legionnaires, tugging at their belts, fastening the last button as they trotted out to form up.

"Markers!—Markers!" braved the sergeant major. "Form up there, species of lumbering jackasses. This isn't a circus, you're on parade now! Form up!"

Squad by squad, section by section, the troopers found their places.

"By your right—dress," shouted the sergeant. "Up there in the middle—You there, Grutman, I'm speaking to you; you can sleep later on!"

Order came out of apparent chaos, smoothly, swiftly, until the ranks were drawn up as straight and stiff as if they had been traced with a chalk line.

Roll call—a volley of names.

"What the hell!" quoth Bradley, speaking to himself. "What the hell am I doing here?"

He turned away from the window and almost fell over the hospital orderly, who protested angrily:

"Back to bed with you! Haven't you got two sous' worth of intelligence to be——"

"If you try to put me back to bed," explained Bradley, "I'll heave you out the window! Out of my way, thou horse doctor, while I put on my clothes."

"But——"

"There are no buts! There's a fight on, and I crave to partake of it, my lovely cabbage. Never have I felt better in my life. Perceive!" He caught the orderly by the shoulders and danced him down the room. "Am I an invalid?"

And the orderly, whose feet were tangled up by the violent motions to which he had been subjected, sat down on the end of a bed.

"I'll report you——" he began, but he thought better of it and said nothing, for fully nine tenths of his patients were crawling into their clothes, and the entire ward was in open mutiny. Dysentery cases, fever cases, were cackling with delight as they tumbled out of their cots. One Legionnaire suffering from a broken ankle sat up and reviled himself, Fate, and the orderly with a flow of abuse that was nothing less than masterly.

Coates, with tears in his voice, was appealing to Bradley:

"Give us a 'and, mitey! Cawn't yer give us a bit of 'elp! Lor' lumme, I'd do as much for you any dye, if you took the trouble to arsk me."

"What's trouble, Charley?" inquired Bradley, who was battling with his puttees.

"Trouble! I'm that stiff I cawn't do up my own blinkin' shoe laces, that's what."

They hobbled out of the infirmary and snatched their rifles out of the rack in the barrack room.

"Good old barrack room!" sighed Coates, overcome by a wave of sentiment.

"Ah, kiss the damn bedbugs good-by," snarled Bradley, dragging him along by the collar.

They joined the tail end of the procession filing past the ammunition depot, where a sergeant was baling out two hundred cartridges to each man. Much to his surprise, Bradley found that the aches and pains that had been racking his body had completely disappeared. He wasn't even stiff. Only the neckband of his collar scratched a little when it rubbed against his sun-scorched skin.

He filled his leather pouches with cartridges and stuffed the overflow into his haversack.

"Two 'undred times one 'undred and twenty is what?" panted Coates.

"Search me! Millions, I guess."

"Gor! there ain't going to be no Arabs left," decided Coates, "and what wiv a few machine guns to——"



"Where's your section?" shouted the sergeant major, appearing out of nowhere. He

peered at them through the red twilight. "You two, eh? What are you doing out of hospital? Tell me that?"

"Our health improved most rapidly," explained Bradley, "and we thought——"

"You swivel-eyed, loose-mouthed gabbler, you've disobeyed orders, that's what you've done! I can't stand here all night listening to your nonsense. Impossible! J No. 5 Section, my infants, on the instant—Double-march, gallop!"

Before they had time to move off, however, Lieutenant Fachamin's sharp voice brought them to a halt.

"Fine!" he exclaimed. "Glad to see you on your feet again!"

"The ward's empty," grinned Bradley.

"Thank God for that—but I expected as much—Coates, you know something about horses, don't you?"

"Well, I ought to," Coates admitted.

"Good. Are you willing to take my horse and make a dash for Béchar? If you don't think you're strong enough to attempt it, I'll find somebody else. It'll take you four days—and you may be shot down before you're a hundred yards from the redoubt. But it's our one chance, and I'm asking you because I believe——"

"Can I saddle up now, *mon lieutenant*?" Coates inquired in a squeaky voice.

"I don't doubt your courage," Fachamin said, laying his hand on Coates' shoulder, "but it's a hard ride. You may find water at Bou Mekenoub—if not, you'll have to go dry for four days—and you may have to walk a good part of the way."

"Suits me," agreed Coates.

"That's settled! Bradley can help you saddle up. As soon as you're ready, we'll

make a sortie to give you a chance to ride clear of the redoubt.—Off you go!”

“Yer don’t think I’m a rotter, do yer, mytey?” inquired Coates as they hurried toward the stable. “A-leavin’ you like this—Gor! I’ll be blowed it I ain’t got arf a mind to tell ’im to send somebody else.”

“G’wan with you,” jeered Bradley. “They got cold beer at Bechar—that ought to make you sprout wings to get there quicker.”

“Sure you don’t mind?” pleaded the cockney.

“Of course not! Have one for me while you’re about it.”

And the thought that was uppermost in the minds of both was left unspoken; for a friendship that has to be talked about and laid bare and slobbered over is no friendship at all.

Coates, who was a sentimentalist at heart, snuffled dismally as he jammed the bit into the stallion’s mouth.

“It’s only two hundred and ninety kilometres,” he grumbled. “I’ll be there in three days.”

“And you’ll croak your horse before you’re halfway, and the jackals’ll get *you*. Take your time and act sensible, Charley. Don’t let a bunch of Arabs throw a scare into *you*.”

“Throw a scare into me? Huh! Gor’ blimey, am I actin’ scared? Am I? I’d like ter see *you*, yer smart aleck, this time tomorrow night, and that’s a fact.”

So they shook hands, and Coates swung himself into the saddle.

NO. 5 SECTION was massed by the main gates when Bradley joined it; the other Legionnaires had moved off to their battle posts; the parade ground was empty and quiet. Out of the distance came a sullen mutter, beating like surf against the walls of the redoubt, which glowed dull red, faded, and glowed again in the light of the blaze in the rebel city.

Facing his men, Fachamin spoke in a quiet voice:

“The Beni Harazan have trapped twenty of your comrades—and butchered them. We’re going to hit back at once. They’re singing just now; we’ll give them something to wail about before they come at

us in the morning. And while we’re keeping them busy, Coates will show them a clean pair of heels. All set, my children? *En route!*”

There were no heroics, no appeals to their honor or their courage: these things Fachamin took for granted, for he knew in some queer, indefinable way that these roughnecks, these graceless scoundrels, needed no such empty encouragement.

The wicket gate opened. Out filed the men of No. 5 Section. Bradley caught a last glimpse of Coates: a diminutive figure hunched up on top of the rearing stallion; then it was his turn to slip out into the open.

The section swung into line and moved slowly forward, skirting the fringe of the oasis. The semi-darkness was deceptive. Every bush and tree trunk seemed to be alive and crawling, writhing in the dancing glare of the blaze. Bayonet scabbards clinked; men stumbled clumsily over the lumpy ground; a stone rolled noisily into a gully, but the little noises were swallowed up and hushed by the silence that weighed down upon the desert. Someone tripped on a stone and went down with a clatter. And still nothing happened, although Bradley could feel a growing menace pressing in upon him.

At last the section reached the steep bank of the channel carved by the rains, and a halt was called. Across the way lay the Arab cemetery, its small headstones glimmering faintly in the wavering light, and beyond stood the first houses of Fomes Akba.

A hinge screeched; there was a quick thud of hoofs which changed abruptly to a gallop: Coates was on his way, thundering through the night. Almost simultaneously, Bradley became aware of a stir over on the right. He heard Fachamin cry out, “*Garde a vous! Close up the ranks. Feel in to your right.*”



There was a confused sound of scuffling—metal clanked against metal, and a shriek of intolerable agony split the air. A rifle banged. Out of the gully at the Legionnaire’s feet, dark figures leaped up, dimly silhouetted

against the stars. A dozen shots rang out, followed by an angry shout. Shoulder to shoulder, the Legionnaires met the sudden onslaught. They stopped the Beni Harazan on their bayonet points and threw them back.

LIEUTENANT FACHAMIN gave them no time to reform and attempt another rush. He had come out with the deliberate intention of hunting for a fight, well knowing that the discipline of his Legionnaires would give them an overwhelming advantage over the unorganized rebels. His men would be all the better for a chance to meet the Beni Harazan at close quarters before being cooped up inside the redoubt until relief or death put an end to the struggle.

So he swept them forward on the heels of the Arabs; down into the gully, up the far bank, through the graveyard, in a headlong rush which ended at the mouth of a street full of astonished Arabs, who had thought themselves in safety behind the screen of watchmen they had thrown around the redoubt. Muhammad el Yafiz had assured them that they were unconquerable, and, behold! here were the French dogs and cowards invading their city—shooting them down.

From the roof tops came a crackle of rifle fire; bullets began to sing past the heads of the Legionnaires. The volume of fire increased as the seconds flew by,

"That'll give them something to think about," panted Fachamin. "And now, *mes enfants*, back to the nursery. One more volley and we're off."

The bullets did little damage, beyond knocking chunks of mud off the walls, but the noise was terrific. For a moment, it silenced the Beni Harazan, and the Legionnaires were tripping among the low headstones, halfway across the burial ground, before the rebels realized they had turned about.

Then out of every house and every street poured a frantic mob, which lashed itself into a fury with the sound of its own bellowing voice, and rolled out across the plain in pursuit of the Legionnaires.

Night fighting, however, calls for a peculiar quality which the Arab, for all his

splendid courage does not possess. If he must die, he wants to do so in the light of his desert sun, in the glare and the dust, with the cries of his stricken foes ringing in his ears. And the Beni Harazan, though they shouted themselves hoarse and wasted expensive ammunition in an orgy of noise, steered clear of No. 5 Section, which fell back slowly and in good order. Every fifty paces Fachamin halted his men, about turned, and favored his pursuers with a volley, which further increased the Arabs' inborn distaste for that sort of blind pursuit of a dangerous enemy. Moreover, as soon as the Legionnaires were under the walls of the redoubt, waiting for the gate to open, their retreat was covered by the machine guns, and the attack collapsed.

Hot, panting, sweating, and very pleased with themselves, the Legionnaires filed in through the wicket gate. Fachamin counted them in: only one man was missing, and two others lightly wounded. A good night's work. He stepped across the threshold and the door shut behind him. The bars went home with a rasp.

ALREADY the platoon sergeant had formed up the raiders and was waiting for orders. He reported to the sergeant major, who informed the lieutenant that the section was waiting for orders. Raids, rebellions, and cataclysms might sweep the earth, but inside the redoubt the army regulations still ruled supreme.

"Good work!" said Fachamin, and his wolves grinned happily. "Hot work, too. There will be a quarter of a litre extra wine ration issued to each man. Afterward, you can turn in fully dressed and snatch a little sleep. You'll need it. Sergeant major, take charge!"

Then came the adjutant, with a worried look on his face.

"*Monsieur l'adjutant*," declared Fachamin, "you are an incomparable second in command, but I feel I am going to hate you if you make any suggestions until I have washed out my throat. I am, to be concise, dry. The men, by the way, are splendid. If the God of the Third French Republic is with us we can hold on for at least a week, and that, all things considered, is pretty good."

As he talked, he turned toward his private quarters, but the adjutant refused to be shaken off.

"Yes, of course," he agreed, "but I have something to tell you, *mon lieutenant*; something most important. If you will attend to me for one small minute——"

"Naturally, headquarters will move heaven and earth and rush reinforcements here in about ten days," Fachamin went on. "We'll all be dead, but that is a minor detail. However, you can't have anything more important than that to tell me, so you can hang on to it until——"

"But it is! It is!" cried the adjutant. "*Monsieur le lieutenant*, I beg you to listen to me—there is a lady in your room!"

Fachamin stopped dead in his tracks and passed a dirty hand across his eyes.

"There is a what in my room?" he inquired.

"A lady—a female, *mon lieutenant*. She arrived most brusquely, accompanied by two native guides from Béchar, while you were out there. Yes! The lookout on the east wall shot the camel from under her, and it was but a miracle that she escaped death."

"But, good God! What does she want?"

"She says she came to visit Colonel de Gonesse," declared the adjutant, waving his hands in a most ill-disciplined manner.

"One of the colonel's little friends!" grunted Fachamin. "How the devil can I tell her she hasn't one chance in a hundred of being alive in a week's time? Is she having hysterics?"

"Well, no—not exactly," but the noise of rifle fire made conversation difficult.

"Confound it!" growled Fachamin. "All right, I'll have to see her, I suppose. Call me at the first signs of trouble."

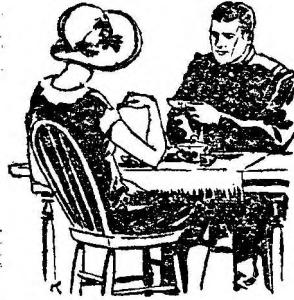
And he walked into the room with the air of a man who does not intend to be trifled with.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LAST STAND

A QUARTER of an hour later, Katherine Powell and Lieutenant Fachamin were sitting *tete-a-tete* over a pot of tea, the remains of a box of stale chocolate biscuits and cigarettes. The room was blue with smoke.

The interview had opened inauspiciously, but, as the minutes slipped by, it had become quite friendly and pleasant. Far from having hysterics when she understood how precarious the situation was, Katherine had accepted it without a murmur of protest. And Fachamin, observing



her determination not to break down, had allowed himself first to admire and then to pity her.

She was, he conceded, the prettiest thing he had ever seen—not a doll-like prettiness, by any means. She had irregular features, laughing green eyes, a small hard chin, and a wide, full-lipped mouth. Even her heavy, dusty walking boots were, so he thought, exquisite and dainty. And she spoke the most delightful French with just enough of an accent to make it delectable.

While she was explaining how she had disregarded the injunction of the military authorities at Bechar and hired two ruffianly Arabs to guide her to Foun es Akba, he was assailed by conflicting emotions which waged an epic battle within him. He was angry that a withered old man like the colonel should be able to fascinate a girl such as this one and cause her to risk her life to be near him; and he despised the girl for loving such a decrepit old man. And he was fearful for her safety, because he wanted her to live and be happy. And he hated himself because he wanted her to be happy, even without him. And he was impatient because, instead of sitting there drinking tea, he ought to be snatching a few hours' sleep. And he cursed the colonel because he had gone away without waiting for the girl—And he was sincerely glad the colonel had not waited.

"I know I'm in the way," she was saying, "but I'll try to give as little trouble as possible."

"What I do not understand, mademoiselle, is why Colonel de Gonesse should have gone away twenty-four hours before

your arrival. If he expected you——”

“I told him to expect me. It’s not quite the same thing, is it? And now that I am here and since you can’t very well get rid of me, won’t you try to find something for me to do? I can’t sit here twiddling my thumbs all day long.”

The idea shocked him. “*Ma chere demoiselle*,” he protested, “this place will be a shambles before we are relieved. I am not trying to frighten you, but certain things are bound to happen which—which are not meant for your eyes. If you’ll stay in here under cover——”

“But I really don’t want to! Please——” she laid her hand on his coat sleeve, and looked up at him with pleading eyes—“won’t you let me help? I’m not afraid. Oh, I know! I understand what’s going to happen, but somebody will have to look after the wounded. Couldn’t I do so? It’s a woman’s job, nursing.”

“Any experience?”

She shook her head. “I’m afraid not, but I can learn. I want to learn. Won’t you let me try?”

“Wounds are sometimes terrible,” Fachamin tried again, but he was beginning to weaken. “And men who are in pain say and do things which might offend——”

“Don’t worry about that, please. You’re awfully stubborn, you know. Honestly, you act as if I were a spy! I’m a foreigner, of course, but you’re not going to hold that against me, are you?”

“As a foreigner, you’re among friends,” laughed Fachamin. “All my men are foreigners—Legionnaires. And there are no better troops in all creation. They’ll fight till they drop. While they’re alive you needn’t worry over your safety. And if you condescend to look after the wounded—well, they’ll worship you. I’m afraid they may get themselves wounded purposely so as to fall into your hands.”

“So it is agreed!” she said quickly. “You’re an angel. And I’m glad to hear somebody say a good word for the Legionnaires. I was beginning to believe they were caged wild animals.”

“You’ll find them as gentle as lambs,” he assured her. “They are a mixed lot, of course, but I wouldn’t change regiments if I were tempted with a colonelcy.” As

soon as the word colonel was out of his mouth, he could have bitten off his tongue. There was really no need to rub in the fact that De Gonesse had left her in the lurch. He rushed on, trying to cover up his *faux pas*: “It would astonish you if you knew what queer fellows they are. One of them’s a doctor—a German trained at Vienna. You’ll see him at work tomorrow. I mean,” he floundered, “if any of the men are scratched. And then there’s a compatriot of yours—an American. A fine fellow.”

“Really!” she smiled comfortingly. “And they all speak French, your Legionnaires?”

So they talked about the queer ways of Legionnaires and a hundred other things while the time flew by and the cigarette stubs piled up in the brass ash trays.

Then a loud knock came at the door and, after a discreet interval, the adjutant thrust his weather-beaten face around the corner.

“Day’s almost dawning, *mon lieutenant*,” he announced stolidly, trying to keep his eyes from straying toward Katherine. “I’ve roused the men—there’s a good deal of stir among the trees.”

FACHAMIN sprang up.

“I’ll follow you at once!” he said quickly, and the adjutant withdrew his solemn countenance. He turned to the girl. “I offer you all sorts of apologies. I should have given you a chance to rest and sleep. Won’t you do so now? The bed’s quite comfortable. Only, please, for your own sake, don’t take off any more clothes than you have to—and keep under cover.”

A single rifle shot clacked in the stillness.

“I couldn’t sleep now if I tried,” she told him. “Don’t bother about me—they’re waiting for you out there—and”—there was an unexpected note of anxiety in her voice—“you’ll be careful, won’t you?”

His heart rose up in his throat so that he could not speak. He snatched up his *kepi* and hurried to the door. On the threshold, he spun around and inquired in a hard, parade-ground voice:

“Tell me, *mademoiselle*—are you going to marry Colonel de Gonesse?”

His own insolence astounded him. It was an unmannerly, disgusting question. It was none of his business—but he couldn't help it—he *had* to know.

For a second, she stared at him through drooping lashes; then, slowly, she shook her head.



"No, *monsieur le lieutenant*, I am not going to marry anybody. I thought I was, but——"

In quick succession, four more shots rang out, followed by a ragged volley that went off like a string of Chinese crackers. Something thudded heavily against the wall of the hut bringing down a shower of loose earth.

Fachamin cried: "I'm so glad! I beg you—I pray you—keep over there in that corner. Now I must go. Be brave, *mademoiselle*! Courage!"

"The wounded? Where shall I find them?"

"There aren't any yet. *Mademoiselle*, for pity's sake, keep away from the window. Promise me!"

He rushed across the room, caught her in his arms, and kissed her on the side of the nose, and a bullet, glancing off the window sill, buried itself in the red-bound back of Volume Two of the Code Militaire.

THE next thing he knew, he was running across the parade ground toward the gate. He wasn't quite sure whether she had smacked his face and called him a lout or returned his kiss. He was ashamed and happy and bewildered.

Dawn was close at hand. The redoubt looked bare and sinister in the cold gray light, like a warship cleaned for action. The Legionnaires were at their battle posts, squatting by the wall beneath the loopholes. An orderly with his shirt sleeves rolled up to the elbows, bareheaded, amble down the line, toting an urnful of coffee into which the troopers dipped their tin cups. In the bastion, flanking the gate, the crew of a machine gun crouched down behind the parapet, out of the way of the flying bullets.

Each second, the weight of fire was

growing heavier. The air was alive with the thin whistle of slugs.

"It comes from the oasis," the adjutant shouted in Fachamin's ear. "In among the trees. They're massing thick as ants."

There was nothing to do but wait for the rush which was bound to come. Fachamin went his rounds, peering through the loopholes, hunting for some sign of an impending attack on the other flanks of the redoubt. All at once, a new sound brought him hurrying back toward the gate—over across the way a machine gun had come into action, adding its steady chatter to the roll and roar of the musketry fire.

"I knew they had 'em!" he commented. "If they waste their ammunition on thin air, they won't be very dangerous."

The adjutant jerked his thumb at the righthand panel of the gate.

"That's what they're firing at," he pointed out. "Listen, *mon lieutenant*! Hear 'em? Hammering at that one spot by the hinges. Whoever thought of that is a clever devil and no doubt about it!"

The heavy beams were shuddering beneath the impact, and the mortar around the hinges was beginning to crack and disintegrate, bit by bit. Two at a time, Fachamin went up the steps leading to the top of the bastion. There were no telltale flashes to be seen, for the sun had climbed above the rim of the horizon, flooding the earth with a bright white light.

AT HIS orders, the machine-gun crew brought their weapon to bear on the trees. It jarred into action, sweeping the oasis with a hail of lead, but there was no silencing the rebel gun. A swarm of bullets smacked into the parapet of the bastion, and, almost at once, one of the crew was hit. The slug went in between his eyes and tore out the back of his head.

"Those treetops are full of snipers," Fachamin told him. "Give them one belt—that ought to put an end to their acrobatics."

"*Bien, mon lieutenant!*" agreed the corporal. "We'll give them——" and he fell forward into Fachamin's arms with a bullet in the back of his neck. His spine was broken and his head rolled drunkenly on his shoulders.

Then, before Fachamin could rid himself of his burden, the Beni Harazan closed in to the attack.

In dense masses, they spilled out from behind the screen of trees, from the gulleys and the channels that criss-crossed the land, and they rolled like a gray flood tide toward the white walls of the redoubt. Around the fringe of the oasis swept a thundering troop of horsemen. The sunlight played on the flashing steel and the foam of tossing manes.

Section by section, the Legion came into action.

"Sights at two hundred meters—Prepare for salvo—fire!"

The loopholes belched lead. Again and again; and the machine guns, having picked up the centre of their target, let drive with a staccato clatter that roared like a mighty song. The front ranks of the Beni Harazan caved in, refilled, came on, and caved in again. Out of the dust and the smoke burst the battering ram—the cavalry heading straight for the gate. Reckless and magnificent, they drove their horses at the weakened panels, and were scythed at point-blank range. The gate sagged beneath the pressure. An Arab leaped out of his saddle astride the wall—and came down on the bayonet points beneath him. Another followed him, and another— The bastion was lost, regained, lost again. One of the machine guns was silenced. A Beni Harazan, gone berserk, caught up the red-hot weapon, held it high above him, and hurled it down on the heads of the men of No. 5 Section, who had been rushed up to strengthen the defence.

The adjutant, revolver in hand, led the way up the flight of steps. Behind him crowded the Legionnaires. They butted the Arabs over the parapet, drove them off with bayonet and bullet and steel-shod gun butts. Without bothering to take cover, they lined the parapet and emptied their magazines into the sea of upturned faces swirling beneath them.

They, too, were swept by a tornado of steel, but they held on until a fresh crew hauled the machine gun into place and opened fire on the rebels—cutting long red gaps in their close-packed ranks.

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the Arab attack spent itself. The Beni Harazan withdrew, seeping away, vanishing in among the trees, dropping out of sight into



a hundred shallow gullies. And an aching silence settled over the plain where the dead lay thick in the white light of the sun. Men and horses were heaped against the gate of the redoubt—twisted, crushed, bent, and mangled as if defiled by brutal hands.

The redoubt was a charnel house. The living sprawled among the dead, too exhausted to move. The parade ground was littered with corpses, but the greatest havoc of all was over the south wall, where the Beni Harazan had gained a momentary foothold. There the dead lay in windrows, and the wounded cried out in the sunlit stillness that had settled upon the redoubt.

After the first dazed moment, as soon as he was sure that the Beni Harazan were falling back, Fachamin mustered his weary men and put them to work. The rebels might slacken their effort; there could be no rest for the Legionnaires. The wounded had to be cared for; fresh supplies of ammunition had to be brought out, and the weakened gate had to be reinforced. A swig of the lukewarm water in their water bottles, a curse—and the Legionnaires went to work. Thirty of them had been killed outright and as many more wounded, but the survivors showed no sign of despair.

Stripped to the waist, they toiled in the burning heat of the day; and, after a little while, the rebel machine gun hidden among the trees opened fire again against the gate, chattering angrily as it hammered at the sagging panels.

EH, DIS donc, l'Americain," croaked the corporal in charge of No. 5 Section, "what's the matter with you—squirt-ing blood all over the place? Can't you tell when you're wounded?"

Bradley wiped the sweat out of his eyes

and looked down at his right trouser leg. Unmistakably, he was wounded. When it had occurred or how, he did not know, but there was a long gash running from his hip almost to his knee. He felt no pain. Indeed, he had been aware of no physical effort since he went up behind the adjutant to recapture the bastion. The rest was noise, dust, and confusion.

Now he was slowly coming out of the trance. He was weak and dizzy, and the back of his throat was as dry as punk. He stared at his injured leg—even the puttee was dyed red, and his foot squelched inside his boot. A puzzled look appeared on his grimy face, and he said, "Hell! I wonder how that happened."

"Never mind how it happened," rejoined the corporal. "Go over to the infirmary and have it bandaged. Lascher's in there trying to make believe he's a surgeon major, and that pretty girl is helping him, they say."

"I'd forgotten all about her," admitted Bradley and hopped on one foot. His right leg, he discovered, much to his disgust, had grown clumsy and numb, and his head was spinning in a most alarming fashion.

"It's the sun," he told himself. "I'll be all right as soon as I get in the shade for a bit."

But each step required more effort, and the ground seemed to sway beneath his feet, so that, when he reached the infirmary, he had to claw his way up the steps. He stood against the door jamb listening to the blurred sound of voices that came to him through a wall of mist to the accompaniment of the quick thud of the bullets dinning against the gate.

Gradually, his eyes became accustomed to the shadow. Lascher, the Legionnaire who had once been a surgeon, was bandaging a trooper stretched out on a table in the middle of the room. Other men, a score or more, sprawled on the floor. Most of them were silent and motionless, absorbed by the pain that was burning them up. By the window, with the sun on his dirty boots, a soldier was dying noisily, his breath rattling in his throat. And in a far corner of the room, Bradley saw the slim white form of a woman. She was

bending over a Legionnaire, propping him up while he drank out of a tin mug that she held to his mouth.

There was something startlingly familiar about her: the line of her neck, the poise of the head, the slim, nervous shoulder.

"Of course not!" he muttered. "It's impossible! I'll be seeing purple snakes in a minute. I'm going potty!"

He leaned against the wall with his eyes tight closed to shut out the vision, until Lascher came and helped him on to the improvised operating table. The German's surgery was rough but efficient. He ripped open Bradley's trouser leg and swabbed iodine into the wound.

"It's nothing much," he declared heartily while he was applying a gauze bandage. "You've lost some blood, my poy, but dot's nothing—it will pring down the blood pressure. Lie quiet for half an hour, and you'll be ready for duty. There: dot's the best I can do for you. Wait—I'll carry you off the table—and you lie still, remember, till you're needed."

"I don't want to do nothing else but,"

agreed Bradley, "Lying still's the best thing I know how to do. But, for the love of Mike, can you get me a drink? I'm as dry as a bone."

"She's coming right now," said Lascher.

Bradley heard someone walk down the room with a quick, light tread.

"Water?" said a woman's voice. "But, yes! The poor man——"

There was no mistaking that voice, even though it was speaking French. Bradley's eyes flew open, and he found himself staring into the face of Katherine Powell. Forgetting Lascher's injunction, he exclaimed angrily:

"Look here, this has gone on long enough. Either I'm crazy or else——"

Her eyes opened immensely wide; a look of incredulous surprise spread over her face; she screamed and spilled the



pannikin of water down the front of Bradley's tunic.

"George Bradley!" she cried. "Why—George! I thought—everybody thought you were dead."

"Well, I'm on my way," he assured her.

FROM the oasis came the cries of the Beni Harazan, massing for another rush; the rifle fire was growing in intensity from moment to moment, but nobody cared. The rebellion was forgotten. Time stood still while a distraught woman wept over a worried trooper.

"But, look here," he pleaded. "You're getting things balled up. On the level, Kitten—I mean Katherine, it's all right, don't fret yourself. All things considered I've had a bully time."

"I can't help it," she sobbed. "I can't. I've been a beast."

"If I don't get a drink soon, I'm going to croak," Bradley pointed out. "My chest is all sloppy and cool, but I don't mind telling you, my throat——"

She jumped to her feet with a cry of dismay and hurried down the room to refill the pannikin. She was on her way back when Fachamin dashed in. In front of his men, he tried to act in a dignified manner, but he could not conceal his admiration for the girl. She was a true heroine—tending wounded men under fire.

Another attack was imminent, but he took time to congratulate her.

"Mademoiselle," he whispered, "I have no words with which to express my emotion. You are splendid—magnificent—an inspiration. With you to fight for, we shall conquer!"

And he meant it. Defeat had become impossible.

"In a little while, help will arrive and you will be free—free to be happy."

"I'll never be happy," she assured him.

"Never! But you must let me go, I am taking the water——"

"Oh, Mademoiselle! You have been weeping. I see the tears! Be brave," he begged. "Have courage! We shall beat off these savages, and when it is over, Mademoiselle, I shall kneel at your feet."

"Please! Not now, please!" Her agitation was so great that her hands shook

violently, and the water slopped out of the *gamelle*.

Bradley swore quietly but profanely to himself, "Don't I ever get that drink? Ten to one she's fallen for the bold looie—she could do worse."

BUT she came toward him at last, and he drank greedily, a trickle of water running down the side of his mouth. He felt better at once.

"Just what I needed," he sighed. "Great stuff, water. You've no idea. Now, listen, Kay, quit acting—just for once in a way. You aren't in love with me any more and don't want to marry me worth a cent. And I'm not kidding you when I say it's mutual."

She felt quite sure he was deliberately lying, and she smiled sweetly, resigning herself to her fate. Which was, in its way, very sad, because, for the first time in her life she was really deeply in love—and with Lieutenant Fachamin. But her determination was unshakable: she would sacrifice herself, and marry George. He was harder, leaner than when she had been engaged to him—almost tough—but she would redeem him—if, of course, they survived. Death, she realized in a lurid flash, would put an end to all her troubles, yet she didn't want to die. As for the colonel, he was out of the picture.

Her devotional attitude made Bradley gnash his teeth. He was cured! Some other woman some day might enthrall him, but Katherine—not in a million years. Time had healed that scar.

"But, look here," he protested, propping himself up with his back against the wall, "ain't you engaged to the Butcher—the colonel?"

"I was," she admitted, "but——"

"Well, go right on and don't mind me. Don't break his heart, or he'll have me court-martialed."

Before Katherine could answer, Lieutenant Fachamin called out, "My children, the enemy is coming again! Every man who can shoulder a rifle is needed."

He was not given time to finish. They cheered him, and those who could crawl or hobble or drag themselves along, gathered up their weapons and went out again

into the inferno of heat and noise. Bradley struggled to his feet and grinned into Katherine's upturned face.

"Don't you worry," he told her. "You'll be all right," and he turned away, dragging his leg after him.

What was left of No. 5 Section had been assigned to the defence of the gate.

"*Eh bien*, did you see the colonel's girl?" inquired the corporal. "A pretty little one, I'm told." He blew a kiss with the tips of his powder-blackened fingers. "It is I who would like a nice leg wound to have it bandaged by such hands! No wonder you come galloping back full of life and vigor."

Bradley grunted something beneath his breath. There was a time and a place for everything—and the present was certainly not the right time to be talking about girls. He was far more interested in the enemy machine gun, which was still pelting bullets at the

gate.



He peered through a loop-hole at the wall of shrubs and date palms that concealed the movement of the rebels. It was late afternoon; the sun was swinging down behind the hills and the plain was on fire. A hot wind blowing out of the south was sweeping up dun-colored clouds of dust.

And out of this haze of dust came the Beni Harazan—a sea of them spreading out across the plain strewn with the dead, a gray tide rolling toward the scarred walls of the redoubt. Again the thunder of hoofs shook the ground as the mounted men hurled themselves at the gates.

They were mowed down in tossing, squirming heaps; at point-blank range, they were slaughtered; the machine guns hosed them down and blew wide gaps in their ranks, but they came on, reckless and terrible.

One mounted man, charging alone through the storm of bullets, reached the gate, hurled his horse against it, and brought it crashing to the ground. He died gladly, when Bradley shot him through the heart, for he had opened a breach in the

defences and he knew that Allah would reward him.

But the breach was filled by the Legionnaires. They kneeled in the open, face to the bellowing horde, and sprayed it with steel. Volley followed volley, until rifles grew too hot to hold, until every other man had been killed. They were on the point of being swamped when a machine gun was brought into action close behind them. It broke up the tidal wave, scattered it, blotted it out.

No. 5 Section had been reduced to seven men. While the machine gun held the breach they built up a rampart with whatever material came close to hand, dead horse and dead men and stones and broken timbers. And when the rampart was half completed, they had to snatch up their rifles and repel a furious onslaught which threatened to engulf the west side of the redoubt.

SERGEANT and corporals were gone. Bradley found himself in charge of a dozen men who followed him blindly when he led the way toward the threatened flank. In the red light of the setting sun, he saw the Beni Harazan come tumbling over the wall like great birds of prey, leaping down upon the bayonet points, smothering them.

He halted his squad in the middle of the parade ground. "Pick them off as they come over," he shouted.

Other Legionnaires joined in the rush, and once more the Beni Harazan were held in check by that small band of weary, bleary-eyed men. The rush failed. Behind crumbling walls, in among the rotting dead, sixty-odd Legionnaires stood at bay, unconquered. When the last gun sputtered into silence, the last shout drifted away, they dropped in their tracks and slept.

The days that followed were a nightmare of heat and hunger, thirst and pain. The wounded died for want of care, for Lascher had been killed. The infirmary became a shambles. During a lull, Fachamin installed Katherine in a cell-like room in the watchtower, where she was mercifully spared the sight of the heaped-up horrors. But, hour by hour, she understood more clearly that there could be but

one end to the struggle. She sat there in semi-darkness, too exhausted to sleep, too numb to cry, while the bullets thudded against the walls and the voice of the unending battle beat like a mighty dirge against her ears.

There were no companies or platoons or squads—nothing but a handful of half-crazed, emaciated, ragged men, hanging on to a heap of ruins and a flag shot full of holes.

Late in the afternoon of the fourth day, after hours of stagnant heat, a dust storm swept the oasis on the wings of a howling wind. The sun was obscured by the flying sand; the burning air was well-nigh unbreathable. At the height of the storm, the Beni Harazan launched a surprise attack. They burst through the barricades guarding the gateway and overran the flanking bastion before the Legionnaires could wake up. Then it was too late.

Sand-clogged machine guns jammed, and the gunners were cut down. Blind and choking, the survivors gave way before the onslaught. Through the stinging mist they groped their way back to the shelter of the watchtower—and slammed the heavy door behind them. The last man in was Bradley, bearing the lieutenant in his arms. He laid his burden on the cot in Katherine's room.

"He's been killed!" she exclaimed, but Bradley shook his head, pointing to a red stain on the lieutenant's left sleeve.

"Nope, only wounded. Stunned as he fell—be all right in a minute—Leave him here, if you don't mind."

Sobbing, she fell on her knees beside Fachamin and flung her arms about him.

Bradley was quite forgotten. His one comment was, "Well, this is one hell of a funny world!" Then he lurched on up to the top floor where twenty-seven other Legionnaires were commending their souls to their Maker in terms which must have made their Maker blush.

CHAPTER XIV

A MESSENGER ARRIVES

AS SOON as he had put on a clean uniform, Colonel de Gonesse went to pay his respects to General Chaumont,

commanding the Southern Territory.

Chaumont was a short, peppery gentleman, with a round, red face and a waxed moustache. He had the reputation of being one of the most stubborn commanding officers on the active list; some people went so far as to call him the French equivalent of pigheaded. He had reached the top of



the ladder by dint of hard work, luck, and a bluntness of speech that was sometimes disconcerting.

He received De Gonesse in his private dining room, where he was having his early morning bowl of coffee.

"Ah!" he said. "De Gonesse! Been waiting for you. Sit down and have some coffee. No? Suit yourself. Did you round up that scoundrel El Yafiz? No? Thunder of God, why not?"

He sponged off his mustache with a red-and-white check napkin while De Gonesse sketched a rough outline of the situation at Foug es Akba.

"The *Kaid* is really a progressive man," the colonel concluded. "Why, *mon général*, it will surprise you to know that he has agreed to open up his territory—"

"He'll be meat for the vultures before that happens, if you want my opinion," declared Chaumont. "A preposterous old man! Still, I'll wait for your detailed report. I like documents. Something concrete. Look here, did you catch that sacred woman?"

"Woman? What woman?"

"That little American, of course. I'll have her deported! She was here three days—pestering everybody. Wanted a permit to go to Foug es Akba! Fantastic woman! Of course, I refused to let her leave Béchar, except to go home to her mother; and—" he sucked coffee with a loud gurgle—"and she scampered off *without* permission! The little devil. Flouting the military authorities, flouting ME! The district's been scoured for her. Nothing's been found. She picked up two guides

here. I've found out that much. They probably took her out a couple of miles and slit her throat open."

"Do you happen to remember her name, *mon général*?" asked De Gonesse in a voice that was unexpectedly squeaky.

"Shall I ever forget it! A Miss—now let me see—a Miss something or other—these confounded English names always slip my mind. When some of these women get an idea into their heads, nothing can stop them. I suppose she's up to monkey tricks with that Legionnaire lieutenant, what's his name? Oh, yes, Fachamin. *Zut!* my coffee's getting cold."

"Was her name Katherine Powell, do you happen to remember?"

The general smacked his hand on the table and exclaimed, "That's it! So you *have* seen her!"

"Not recently, but she was on her way to visit me. She—ah—well, that is, we—ah—"

Chaumont laughed heartily.

"Thunder of God, De Gonesse, can't you keep your women where they belong?"

"I didn't know she would dream of coming down here. I warned her—in fact, I distinctly remember telling her not to attempt the journey. *Mon Dieu!*"—the colonel for once in a way betrayed his anxiety—"but it is dangerous for her to be at Fom es Akba."

"If she gets there, she's safe enough," commented Chaumont, shrugging his shoulders. "You say yourself the district is quiet. You've just finished telling me that Fachamin's report lays too much stress on El Yafiz's influence. You say there aren't twenty rifles in the whole place—so where's the danger?"

"With a *Kaid* like Ahmed ben Harazan, one can never be quite sure of anything. If he should lose his grip on his people it—"

"I'm beginning to believe an extra half battalion could be usefully employed at Fom es Akba, helping your progressive *Kaid* to keep his grip on his people. But I may be prejudiced. Personally, I don't like these modern Arabs, and I don't like to see civilians coming into the territory. The country's not ready for them yet." He

folded his napkin and stood up. "Anyway, I'd like to have your full report as soon as possible. Could you let me have it this evening?"

"Certainly, *mon général*," agreed De Gonesse. "This evening, without fail. And as to the lady—"

"If you want my advice, you'll give that child a first-class dressing down and send her home. You're too old, De Gonesse, too old. Marry a widow, if you must have a woman. But that's none of my business. At all events, get her out of the Territory just as quick as you can. If anything should happen to her, there's bound to be an outcry. It'll look bad, especially coming on top of the— Well, never mind that now." He looked sharply at De Gonesse. "By the way, you haven't seen the papers yet, have you? No? Well, just run through them when you have a minute to spare—you'll understand more clearly what I mean." He took the colonel's arm and walked him as far as the door. "So far as the service is concerned, nothing's changed—you have my—my—ah—dammit, my full support, but you want to be careful where you tread."

"I confess I am unable to understand," began De Gonesse.

"You will when you've been through your mail," Chaumont assured him, "and the papers will enlighten you still further. Damn the Press! Don't forget that report, will you?"

DE GONESSE was almost inclined to agree with his general. They were wild and ungovernable, those American girls. They led their husbands a merry dance—divorced them in an off-hand manner. Still, there was the money to be considered—but what good would the money be to him if she turned around and divorced him just when he was beginning to settle down?

When he reached his private office, De Gonesse drew a small mirror from the drawer of his desk and looked gloomily at his reflection. There were brown pouches beneath his eyes, his cheeks were beginning to sag, and he could not smooth out the deep wrinkles on his forehead. There was no disguising the fact that he was not

quite so young as he had been once upon a time.



He flung the mirror into the drawer and slammed it shut. His one consolation was that he had secured the contract for his brother without having to stretch his honor to the breaking point. It ought to bring him in a quite sizable

income—enough to live on comfortably, to say the least of it. Stiffing a yawn, he turned to the letters and newspapers neatly stacked on his desk. The general had said something cryptic about the newspapers.

De Gonesse picked up a copy at random and shook it open—and, as he read the headlines, a gasp of astonishment burst from his lips. For a moment, his face became white and drawn. He slumped down in his chair, round-shouldered, holding the paper at arm's length, staring at it stupidly. But the next second he straightened up, smiled all to himself, and lighted a cigarette with particular care. His hand was *not* shaking.

"Now," he said half aloud, "let us begin at the beginning and find out just how bad this business is. Casimir, my reputed brother, I greatly fear you have made an ass of yourself."

HALF an hour's scrutiny of his correspondence and of the newspapers confirmed this opinion; Casimir had made an ass of himself.

The "affair" had been set in motion by a deputy who had attacked the administrative methods of a colonial governor whose political views did not coincide with his own. And he had named names. He had accused M. Casimir de Gonesse of bribery, corruption and malpractice. He had mentioned specific instances and produced damaging evidence.

M. Casimir de Gonesse fought hard,

but he could not withstand the weight of evidence stacked up against him. All his financial transactions were picked to pieces. He was found to be working hand in glove with a suspicious financier by the name of Sharas Gougoltz, a foreigner. Casimir tried to deny the charge—Sharas retaliated by making a public statement that he had acted as Casimir's backer—without, of course, knowing anything about the charges brought against his partner. People began to talk of "treachery," and Casimir was lost. He had to face his former friends, his enemies, and an indignant nation. It was too much even for him.

The colonel betrayed no surprise when, slitting open a telegram which had been lying among the letters, he found that his brother had added a final touch to his guilt by committing suicide.

"There go my hundred thousand francs, my reputation, and my own good name," he summed up, and he fell to thinking about his own unenviable fate in the midst of so many crashing fortunes. He was still holding the telegram in his hand when his aide de camp stepped into the room and informed him that the general wished to see him again—at once.

"My dear fellow," De Gonesse smiled, "there's no reason why you should look so glum. When you are my age, you will realize how needless it is to worry about anything except important service matters, such as promotion, depot orders, and the impeccable fit of your riding pants."

Thereupon, he crushed the butt end of his cigarette in the ash tray and swung off toward the general's office.

HE FOUND an unwonted air of excitement pervading the place. There were several officers in the room, including a brigade major, the chief of staff, the chief of staff's assistants, and the major commanding the Foreign Legion battalion. As soon as the general caught sight of De Gonesse he snapped:

"Here's a message from Fom es Akba. Just been brought in by a Legionnaire. That putrescent *Kaid*—I knew! Just read this."

De Gonesse read the scrawled note, written three days before by Lieutenant Fachamin—and he was almost tempted to shrug his shoulders. It had to be! It was the climax of a whole series of calamities that had fallen upon him out of a clear blue sky. And Katherine was at Foum es Akba—

"I've sent for the trooper who brought this in," Chaumont went on. "He may be able to tell us something more."

And, after a while, Soldier of Second Class Charles Coates was ushered into the room. He looked small and thin, and he was visibly ill at ease in the presence of so much gold braid. Also, he was extremely dirty, badly in need of a shave, and his left sleeve was stiff with blood. Among those immaculate gentlemen, he looked like a miserable guttersnipe. But he cheered up somewhat when the general called him a gallant soldier and said very kindly:

"Tell me, *mon brave*, what was happening when you left Foum es Akba?"

"Well," said Coates, after a moment of abashed silence, "a lot was happening, *mon général*. A grand mess! The nigger town was on fire, we were completely surrounded."

"Foum es Akba was on fire?" repeated Chaumont. "How did that happen?"

"There was a detail up there guarding the *Kaid*, *mon général*. They were chopped first. We could hear the firing and then the whole place blazed up. Afterward, *mon général*—my God, you should have seen it!" He warmed to his subject, waving his arms in a most reprehensible manner. "Sparks flying all over the place—ten thousand wild Arabs howling—guns going off—"

"Yes, yes," the general interrupted him, "and how did you get away?"

"Oh, that—" Coates hesitated, trying to remember exactly what had occurred. "Oh, it wasn't anything much, *mon général*. The lieutenant went out scouting, and I broke through. I had a good horse—lasted two



days, it did, poor brute. All the wells were choked with dead goats—no water. I finished the last bit on foot. That's about all."

"How did that happen?" pointing to the bloodstained sleeve.

"Bit of a scrap—an Arab came at me out of the dark and I dropped him. Cut at me with a sword, so I tumbled him out of his saddle. That's all, *mon général*."

"*Mon petit*, you are a true Legionnaire!" Chaumont declared. "I'm proud of you. It takes a man to travel that distance in three days! And wounded? You've earned a holiday, and you look as if you needed it. The hospital's the place for you. Off you go! No— Wait a second. Before you left—did a—hm—a lady reach the redoubt?"

"A lady!" cried Coates. "No!" He was so taken aback by the question that his mouth hung wide open and his eyes seemed about to leap out of his head. Impossible! The general had gone crazy.

Chaumont was knawing at his mustache and slowly nodding his head as he looked at De Gonesse, who seemed to have swallowed a packet of pins. Coates was tempted to snicker, but the temptation was annihilated when the general said:

"All right. That's all I wanted to know. Dismissed!"

But Coates, with an audacity that astonished him, did not dismiss.

"*Mon général*," he stammered, "I have a request to make."

"*Eh bien*—quick, be quick!" snapped Chaumont, who, having said all that could possibly be expected of him under the circumstances, wanted to get to work.

Coates gulped several times before speech became possible. Then he burst out:

"Are you going to send a column down to Foum es Akba?"

The general, controlling himself with great difficulty, glared at the overinquisitive private. "Yes, certainly, I'm sending a column. What of it?"

"Then I'd like to join it, if I may."

"Haven't I told you to report sick?" thundered Chaumont and all the officers present stared at the offender as if expecting him to sink into the ground.

"Yes, *mon général*," agreed Coates. "I know, thank you kindly, but my mate's

down there, and I'd like—I'd like to find out what's become of him. I heard Lieutenant Fachamin say they could hold out for ten days."

"Bon! If that's your idea of a rest and the doctor'll let you go—you can go. Now, dismiss!"

SMILING all his grimy face, Coates saluted and marched, painfully erect, out of the presence into the arms of an apologetic sergeant.

In the Legion, they make no allowances for heroic conduct. It is taken for granted, except in those particular cases which are sanctioned by the *reglement*.

As soon as Coates was out of the room, the general and his staff went to work. Before noon, orders were drawn up; two squadrons of spahis and five companies of the Legion—every available man—were to start out at once for Fom es Akba. Two other columns, drawn from garrisons farther up the line, were to work in through the hills and clean up the territory.

"I've had enough of this unrest and agitation," the general summed up. "We'll put an end to it once and for all; it's time those hillsmen learned just how hard we can hit. We've been relying on half measures too long." He paused, glanced inquiringly at De Gonesse. "By the way, Colonel, I was thinking you might like to command the first column—am I right?"

"Nothing," agreed De Gonesse with a pleasant smile, "could suit me better, *mon général*. I shall be highly honored."

And that evening, before the column got under way, Chaumont said quietly:

"You've seen the news, I suppose, by this time?"

To which De Gonesse answered, "As a matter of fact, I have seen too much news. If, by chance, Mademoiselle Powell should be found, will you make sure that she is treated——"

The general laid a hand on his shoulder and said briskly:

"Certainly, my dear fellow, certainly! We stand by one another in the service—always. You need worry about nothing. And—er—good luck to you."

Then De Gonesse swung himself into

the saddle and cantered away to the head of the long line of men streaming out of Bechar into the thick darkness of the desert which began at the end of the street.

CHAPTER XV

A MAN'S JOB—THE LEGION

TOWARD dusk, the desultory fire that the Beni Harazan had kept up all day against the watchtower ceased abruptly, and a silence settled over the plain.

The Legionnaires, fourteen of them, peered through the embrasures in the parapet, waiting for the long-drawn roar that would herald the rush—the last inward sweep of the tide that would engulf them at last.

They were magnificent and terrible, those fourteen men. Weary beyond all belief, gagging with thirst, fever-riddled, rotten with dysentery, they had held a nation at bay for nine days. The end was in sight, however, for their ammunition was almost exhausted, and their water supply had given out twenty-four hours earlier.

If the Beni Harazan chose to drive home their next attack, they were sure to stamp out this last flicker of resistance. But ever since they had recaptured the redoubt, only to find themselves faced by a fresh obstacle, their rushes had fizzled out. From day to day, Muhammed el Yafiz's hold upon them was decreasing, for he had promised too much and accomplished too little.

He had called the French soldiers dogs who would break and run at the first onslaught. He had boasted of the terrible weapons he had procured—

weapons that were to have wiped out the garrison at one stroke; he had sworn that the Faithful would rise up from end to end of the desert and join in the Beni Harazan—and none of these things had come to pass.

They refused to believe him now, when he swore that one more assault was sure to succeed. He could neither goad nor coax them into action.

Mutterings arose against the false



prophet, and in his dilemma he remembered Lormier—the deserter; drink-sodden, brutish Lormier.

And El Yafiz, pocketing his loathing, said:

“Up there they are starving and dying of thirst—go and speak to them—tell them to surrender. They will see that you are alive and they will believe.”

Lormier rolled the idea in his warped mind for some time.

“If they did believe me,” he growled, “would their lives be spared?”

“Once we hold them—what does it matter what they have been told?”

“They would be killed, eh?”

Muhammad el Yafiz shrugged his shoulders.

“I don’t care what happens to those *salopards*, but what do I get out of it?” leered Lormier.

“When the time comes,” said El Yafiz, “you can name your own price,” and he turned his head away to hide his disgust.

“All right,” agreed Lormier.

AND a little later, the Legionnaires, tensely waiting in the twilight stillness, saw a white wisp of cloth fluttering among the ruins. Then a man arose waist high above a heap of wreckage—a man who cupped his hands about his mouth and shouted:

“Legionnaires—comrades, come on out and surrender. There’s nothing to fight for, *les copains!* You have no quarrel with these people! The French won’t thank you—come on down and join us.”

Bradley smothered an oath. “It’s Lormier!” he whispered. “He was spared—I wonder why now?”

“I can guess,” came Fachamin’s voice. “I thought a trained hand was working that machine gun of theirs.”

“You can’t hold out any longer,” went on the voice, “but you’ve fought well. The Beni Harazan want you with them. Come on out and surrender. You can have what you like for the asking—a well full of water—there’s a barrel of wine waiting for you—and money. You’ve played the French game long enough! They traded on your misery—they’ve made use of you—and thrown you away!

“*Allons, les braves!* Open your eyes—wake up!”

Out of the corner of his eye, Bradley saw the lieutenant’s tense white face, and he caught sight of Katherine standing motionless beside him.

After the first few days of panic-stricken horror, the girl had been transfigured into a woman with nerves of steel and abounding courage. She had refused to cower down below, out of the way of bullets. She had blistered her hands and broken her nails loading rifles while the Legionnaires manned the parapet. She had bandaged their wounds, and looked on without flinching when the dead were dropped down below. When the water gave out, she refused to keep the last canteenful for herself, sharing it out sip by sip with her companions—

“Are you coming?” Lormier called again.

The spell was lifted. Bradley leaped to his feet shouting, “Have they paid you to shoot us down, you traitor? Come in and get us if you want us—you and your water and your money! Do you hear me, Lormier?”

He raised his rifle to his shoulder and fired. But his hand was unsteady and the shot went wide.

Lormier guffawed. “Missed! You never could shoot straight, Bradley—you long American! Legionnaires,” he went on, “don’t listen to that *salopard!* Kill him, if he won’t join you—cut him down!”

Smack! Bradley’s second shot chipped the stones less than a yard from Lormier’s shoulder, and he ducked out of sight. A moment later, his voice came again.

“Your last chance, comrades. Think it over! Think hard! Is it worth it? Chop down that fool who’s standing between you and peace—and if there’s still a squirt up there calling himself an officer, ram a bayonet into his liver and have done with him. I can hold off these Arabs until dawn, but not an hour longer. Come on out.”

“Come in and get us,” jeered Bradley.

HE FIRED one more shot at random at the thickening shadows where the voice came from.

Then Fachamin said quietly:

"Give them one volley, *mes enfants*, just to show them we're still here."

Out of the blackness drifted Lormier's voice.

"Wait a while, you fools, we'll be there!"

THE night dragged by, hot, breathless, and still. Bradley fell into an uneasy doze. He dreamed he was wading waist deep in a mountain stream, which gurgled as it swirled past his thighs— Once he awoke and caught sight of Katherine and Fachamin leaning their elbows over the parapet, looking out into the starlit darkness.

Then, when he awoke again, the sky to the east was ashen gray and the first stir of dawn was in the air. His craving for water had become an obsession. He watched the first silver streak creep up above the horizon, dreading the coming heat of the day more than he dreaded death. And as

he watched something stirred among the shadows—the darkness seemed to be alive and crawling, drawing in about the base of the tower.



"*Garde a vous!* Stand by!" The shout was a whisper on his lips. Fachamin caught it up, "*Garde a vous!*"

Up came the weary men, scrambling to their feet. The machine gun swung into position, and the gunner grunted, "Last belt, *mon lieutenant.*"

"Save it for a clear target," Fachamin ordered.

There came a crisp rattle of breech bolts. The trooper next to Bradley was humming the song of those who know they must die.

Crash! The sound of the report was drowned by the immense clamor that leaped from the plain where the Beni Harazan had massed for the final rush. And the fourteen rifles could not stop them—nor could the machine gun stem the tide.

Shot answered shot; bullets beat against

the parapet and whined through the embrasures. Three of the fourteen were down before the Arabs reached the tower. Two more, leaning out to shoot down at the mob, were hit in the head.

Something gave way with a rending crash. The deep-toned roar of the Beni Harazan changed to a howl of delight, for the door was down at last, and the way lay open into the stronghold.

Fachamin forced a revolver into Katherine's hand.

"*Ma pauvre petite,*" he whispered, "this is the end. Here, this is for you. When the time comes——"

She looked him full in the eyes and said steadily, "Very well, when you give the order."

Then, because they were young and greatly wanted to live, tears sprang into their eyes.

THE streak of light on the horizon was growing, spreading, pulsating with color. The hilltops were aglow, swimming above the level floor of the desert, which was still blanketed with opaque shadows. An angry swarm of bullets burst from the mouth of the shaft coming from the floor below. Hit in the stomach, a trooper pitched forward and dropped out of sight. Bradley caught hold of the top of the ladder projecting above the edge of the platform and tried to throw it aside. Others came to help him. A slug tore off his *kepi* and sent it spinning through the air. Another Legionnaire was hit, and another.

Bradley drew back and, catching up his rifle, emptied it into the heads of the Beni Harazan, who filled the room below. Bullets fanned his face with their hot breath. He groped about in his cartridge pouches and cursed, for the pouches were empty. He was still cursing when up the ladder sprang a man: Lormier.

He whipped his bayonet from its scabbard. They met head on, with a shock that threw them against each other, face pressed against face. But the bayonet had done its work; it was buried to the hilt in Lormier's side. For an eternity, he stood like a rock, trying to crush Bradley in his thick arms, but they had grown suddenly

numb and useless. A cry—a bellow of terror burst from his lips, and he fell, blocking the opening of the shaft with his twitching body.

Exhausted by the effort, Bradley lurched back and braced himself against the broken stump of the flagstaff. A film was gathering before his eyes, and his ears rang with strange sounds, like the clash of cymbals. Somebody caught him by the arm, and he heard the echo of Katherine's voice crying:

"George, George! They're here—listen!"

Revolver shots, a medley of angry shouts from the Arabs, the long-drawn whine of stray bullets—he could hear nothing else. He wondered how long it would be before the Beni Harazan tore away the body that was blocking the shaft and climbed up.

"Lormier," he muttered. "I got him—"

"George! Can't you hear? Listen—they've come!"

As he was about to shake his head in negation, it came to him—the blunt, hard roll of the drums. They seemed to be beating inside his chest, hammering in his brain.

A muffled, measured tread rising out of the gray desert. And then, unmistakable, leaping up to the dawn sky, the voice of the bugles, a yell torn out of brassy throats, a shout of ribald defiance.

And the drums took up the cadence as they came up over sand dunes all shot with gold in the rays of the rising sun.

Dust along the sky line. The call of cavalry trumpets. Steel flashing clear in the morning light. Two squadrons of spahis, khaki burnouses streaming in the wind, riding in hell bent for leather, and, clinging to each stirrup strap, a figure in white—two Legionnaires to a horse.

Six paces front, sword in hand, Colonel Armand de Gonesse rode to his death. Bullets dummed into him, but he stayed upright in his saddle until the charge struck home; then, as if his work was done, he slid sideways and dropped beneath the flying hoofs.

Beneath the impact, the Beni Harazan broke. They fled toward the shelter of the city streets, and two companies of the Legion cut them off very neatly as they

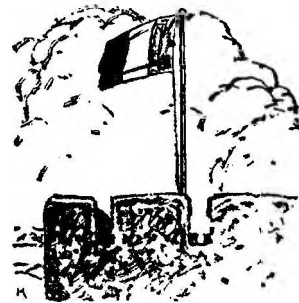
reached the cemetery. Caught between the spahis's sabres and the machine guns, they milled like a stampeding herd. Those who escaped fled toward the hills, but Muhammad el Yafiz was not among them. The false prophet lay with his throat cut wide open in a ditch by the side of the road.

The fight ebbed away, and a little later a captain of the Legion scrambled up on to the top platform of the watchtower, where four men and a girl confronted him.

He saluted them and said, "You have conducted yourselves like heroes, and I wish——"

"Never mind that now," croaked a scarecrow by the name of Fachamin. "What we want is water."

Which was brought to them in large quantities. When their thirst had been quenched, they were taken before the major commanding the column, vice Colonel de Gonesse, deceased, who congratulated them while a company of honor,



drawn up outside the wrecked walls of the redoubt, presented arms. Then they were handed over to the doctor, and so far as they were concerned, the defence of Fomes Akba was over and done with and buried.

THEY slept, and while they did so, such things as rank, seniority, and discipline came into their own. Fachamin became an officer again, separated by a wide gulf from the men who had stood by him; Katherine became a woman instead of an amazon; and the three other survivors remained what they had always been—hard-boiled soldiers of the second class. Impassable barriers sprang up.

While, in the mess tent, the lieutenant and his fiancée were being toasted by his brother officer, Bradley sat behind a crumbling wall in the company of a bow-legged private who had lured him away from the field hospital. For having allowed himself to be lured away, Bradley was li-

able to "ten days cells," but he appeared quite calm and untroubled. He blew a thin stream of smoke at a green lizard sunning itself on the stones. "Well, Charley," he sighed, after a long pause, "it sure feels pretty good, old horse—sitting out here in the shade, all nice and quiet."

"But that ain't all," quoth Coates, unbuttoning his tunic with much ceremony. "Not by a long shot it ain't. I says to myself, I says, 'If that big galoot is still alive arfter that there battle, it ain't water 'e'll be wantin', but a real snorter,' so I pinches this 'ere bottle." He produced the bottle after the fashion of a conjurer drawing a rabbit from his waistcoat. "I pinches it out of the orficer's mess, an' you tell me if it ain't prime! Cognac, that's what it is!"

"By the looks of the bottle," chuckled Bradley, "you've been sampling it some yourself."

"And why not, yer ungrateful blighter! Arfter me carryin' it all the way from Béchar inside my pants!"

So they finished the cognac.

"But I crave to keep out of cells," Bradley announced, "and it's time to pack the bats."

"Well, you've 'ad your snorter," agreed Coates, "there ain't no 'arm in goin' back now. They sye we're to be sent back to the depot and put into the Corporals Training Squad—some clawss, eh what? Cawn't yer see us paradin' the Boulevard de la Republique in good old Sidi-bel-Abbes—wiv stripes on our arms and all the gals fair tumblin' over themselves to talk to us?"

Which brought another chuckle from Bradley's throat.

IT WAS almost dark when he crept by stealth toward the hospital tent. He crept with so much stealth, that, on rounding a corner, he almost fell over Lieutenant Fachamin and Katherine, who, hand in hand in the dusk, were looking up at the watchtower. He tried to back away, but Fachamin laughed at him.

"It's all right, Bradley. We've been looking for you everywhere. Come here a minute."

"You didn't, by great misfortune, look for me in the hospital tent, *mon lieutenant*?" he inquired sorrowfully.

"We did—but that's all right, too. There's a certain amount of elasticity about the *reglement*—sometimes. Mademoiselle Powell wants to speak to you," he added.

He stepped out of earshot and tried to interest himself in the scenery, while his fiancée talked to the soldier of second class.

"Oh, George," she said quickly, "I'm so sorry for you—I know you must have been in love with me or you wouldn't have enlisted. I was a beast, I know. It was my fault, but—well, I've spoken to him," she motioned with the head toward the lieutenant,



really would like to—to get out and go back home, it might be fixed up. It's a horrible life for you."

"Thank you," Bradley grinned, "but I'll stay put. This life may be horrible, but it suits me. The Legion's all right. I'm going back to Sidi-bel-Abbes to join the Corporals Training Squad. How's that for speed! When my time's up, maybe I'll get out—and again, maybe not. Now, you go back to the looie and don't worry about me. Not at all. Be happy and make him happy. That's all the harm I wish you."

"And you're not hurt because——"

"Hurt!" he said. "No! I'm grateful. I won't try to tell you why, because the looie's growing impatient. Good luck to you both."

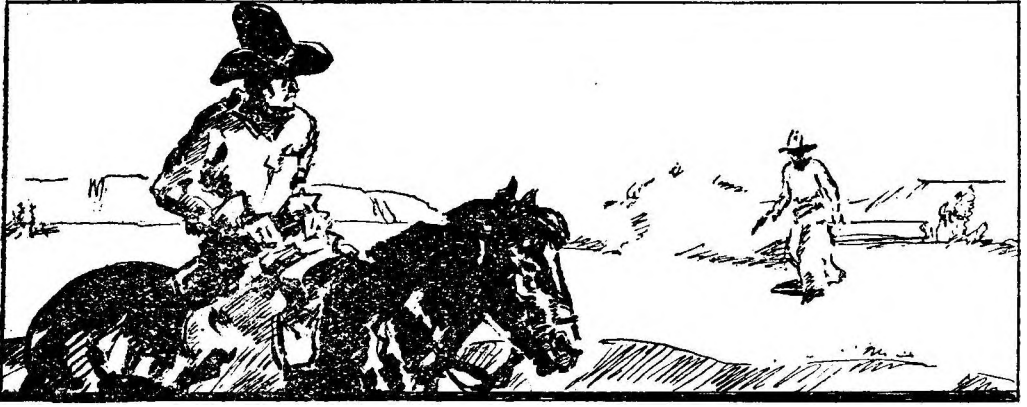
He limped away toward the hospital tent, whistling softly to himself, until he was interrupted by Coates, who, having watched the amazing spectacle from a safe distance, desired explanation—immediate and full explanation.

"She's the gal I used to be engaged to," Bradley explained. "A peach! Wanted to help me desert—can you tie that?"

"And?"

"And I said no. I guess I can stand a bit more goat's meat before I desert. It's a good life when you come to think of it. Clean and hard as steel. Clean—it's a man's job."

"A man's job—" echoed Coates.



BOUND SOUTH

By ERNEST HAYCOX

Author of "The Octopus of Pilgrim Valley," "The Man from Montana," etc.

DRIFTING SOUTH, LONELY COWBOY JOE BUMPED INTO CANYON—AND CANYON, ALL AGREED, WAS ONE BAD TOWN TO BUMP. BUT IN AN HOUR JOE RUSTLED TWO MEALS, SAVED A RANCH, FOUND A FRIEND—AND DRIFTED SOUTH AGAIN

THE day promised to be fine as Joe Breedlove mounted and swung out of Prairieville. He had breakfasted well, there was money in his belt, and a sound animal carried him. It was late October; rose flame spread all along the eastern rim and the air was clear, thin and sparkling. Down in the brakes the trees glowed yellow and crimson. The ridges, wet by a recent rain, showed a verdant tinge. It was a morning to make a man heady with the surge of his blood and the expansion of his spirits.

Even so, Joe Breedlove rode off in a pensive state of mind. He had seen an old and chosen friend married the day before. Married and settled on a ranch. And, while rejoicing at his comrade's luck, he saw the finger of destiny point him out henceforth as a lone rider, a solitary wanderer. Hereafter he would sit beside the night fire alone, watch the distant stars alone. Once he would not have minded, for early youth has a way of being self-sufficient. Joe, going along his thirties, felt the need of friends. It was the way he was built.

He rode with a smile on his lean face, the smile of a man who looked at the world with shrewd and tolerant eyes, of one who

loved life but was never for a moment fooled by it. That, as a matter of fact, was the substance of Joe Breedlove; his was the nature to make allowances for all frail and mortal things, asking in return very little for himself. He was quite tall and ridden down to hard, slender muscle. His features were broad, generous; and his hair, where it showed beneath the Stetson, had a silver color that made him seem older than he was.

Thus he rode onward, busied with his thoughts and with the signs about him. It was a rugged, barren land as it reached southward, and to the casual observer nothing much met the eye. But to Joe Breedlove, versed in the country, it was an unfolding story. Here a lobo crossed the trail, his pads broad and plain in the dust. Alongside were the flanking print of accompanying pilot coyotes. Twenty yards to the left he caught a flash of coiled orange and black under a sage bush. High overhead and farther along a buzzard wheeled in a steady circle, the sign it had sighted carrion on the ground. Joe watched the bird as he traveled, a kind of impersonal curiosity in his mind. But he would presently have forgotten it had he not quite of a sudden arrived at a wide flurry of hoof-

prints cutting athwart the trail. A cavalcade of men, traveling fast, had come out of the left ridge not long before and aimed straight for the rugged land farther west.

Breedlove studied these prints at some length, a kind of soft chuckle in his throat. "Six-eight men in a hell-bent hurry. Now what you suppose? Minions o' the law or gents escapin' the wrath o' justice? Not that it makes any difference, but it might be profitable to know."

He didn't know this country, but stray report indicated it was somewhat tough. Down at the southern end of the valley there was a town called Canyon and the name of it was a byword as much as five hundred miles northward where men in jest often said, "I'm goin' to kill me a sheriff some day an' go to Canyon." The theory rightly or wrongly being that this act was a necessary qualification to citizenship in the place.

JOE BREEDLOVE lifted his eyes again to the buzzard which by now had dropped lower and traversed a narrower circle. He wasn't certain, but he thought dust still hung over the cavalcade's trail in the west. Again the chuckle welled up. He swung his horse to the left, aiming at the buzzard's mark. "They say trouble comes to a fella that's got trouble in his heart. Well, pony, we're as pure of conscience as the driftin' snow. Nev'less we ain't goin' no place so lessee what's over there. It might be interestin'."

To the left he traveled, threading gulches, climbing the ridge's side. Stony pockets lined the ridge, ringed here and there by stunted pines. As he came beneath the buzzard's arc he took great care not to appear stealthy, slowing the pony and whistling the mournful bars of some old song. Likewise he kept well up on the ridge where he might be seen, and although his glance absorbed everything he appeared to be half asleep in the saddle.

"Buzzards," he opined casually, "ain't nowise healthy animals, but they tell a lot." Then he straightened a little. He had arrived at another of the depressions. In its bottom was a dead paint horse, saddle and gear stripped from it. But it hadn't been dead long and Joe Breedlove, looking

across the rim to where the pines bunched together nodded his silvered head ever so slightly. He dropped into the depression and from the saddle read a plain, commonplace tale. The animal had broken its leg in a gopher hole and had been put away with a bullet. Breedlove raised his head to the pines and spoke aloud.

"If you got me covered up there, jes' forget it. I ain't after yore skelp. Plenty to do watchin' my own."

And he rolled himself a cigarette, waiting. Several moments passed. Then the brush rustled and a man came from concealment, sliding down the slope, gun in his fist. He was a thin, undersized bundle of nerves with a fiery, impatient face. It was far from a handsome face, yet it bore no apparent depravity or wickedness. Breedlove, placidly smoking, set the man down as just another of those bantams who were forever bridling at injustice. Apparently the fellow had a gambler's spirit, for after a cursory glance toward Breedlove he dropped his gun into the holster, shoved his hat back over a jet black cowlick and began to swear in melodious, flowing syllables. Even a bullwhacker would have acknowledged the artistry, the complete adequacy of that cursing. Breedlove smiled in benevolent, approving interest.

"Some men," he remarked, "are shore born with the gift. Nothin' lubricates the soul like a little well chosen profanity."

"Was yuh ever in Canyon?" asked the stranger in a high pitched voice.

"No," admitted Breedlove, "I'm from the north. But I was rapidly vergin' tords that point."

The small one made expressive gesture with his hands. "Stay away, stay away, brother. Ninevah an' Tyre—they don't compete. Nossir, they don't nowise compete with Canyon. A sink o' iniquity, a stinkin' hog waller, a condemned blotch o' scurvy on nature's benign countenance." He looked at Breedlove almost meekly. "*Amigo*, I ain't tongue-tied, but I'd shore have to improvise on the English langwidge to name an' classify that Siwash smellin', snake-belly crawlin', festerin' heap o' boards what—"

"Ample," interposed Breedlove. "Plumb

ample. I would gather Canyon had done you some great wrong."

THE small man's voice had a way of breaking and rising to falsetto in anger or excitement. It squeaked now like a pair of rusty hinges. "Wrong? Did yuh say wrong, *amigo*? Huh, what it done to me was a-plenty!" He kicked at the loose stones with his feet, adding somberly, "But I guess I did a few things m'self. Did yuh see a passel o' beetle-faced gents sashayin' across the landscape down yonder?"

"I saw tracks cuttin' westward about two miles."

The wiry one looked gloomily at his horse. "Uhuh. They're a-follerin' a dead trail I laid down. Me, I'd been out of this stagnatin' country, by now, if the paint loss hadn't struck a hole an' sent me to hell and gone on my coco." He squatted down and laid a brown hand on the animal's neck. "He shore was a good hoss, too."

Something inside Breedlove grew warm and friendly. He announced, through a ring of smoke, "Name's Joe Breedlove. Bound south. Nothin' in p'ticular. Jes' a-travelin'."

"I dunno what they took me for," muttered the small one, rising on his haunches. "I was a-mindin' my own fool business, which ain't usual for me, but nev'less I was



readin' my own hole cards. Thunder, but trouble jus' popped up like a gusher comin' in! Out goes the lights an' bang goes the furniture. Well, when a man ain't wanted he'd orter have sense enough to depart. Which was what I proceeded to do even if the dang' fools tried to impede my progress."

"Some towns is mos' unusually clannish thataway. It takes a can opener to get in an' a crowbar to get out."

"Uhuh," said the wiry one. He flashed a sidewise glance at Breedlove. There was

something about this tall, serene man that inspired trust. It may have been the directness of his glance or it may have been the shrewd yet unsoured humor hovering in the corners of his broad mouth. At any rate, he invited confidence. The small one announced solemnly that it had been his aim and intent to hit for the Box U and find work with the beef roundup. Men, he added, called him "Indigo" Bowers.

Silence for a moment. Then Breedlove stretched forward his right hand and they shook. "All right, Indigo."

"All right, Joe."

The formalities were completed, a rough and ready partnership formed. Indigo studied the sweep of the valley through the trees. "What would you do," he inquired casually, "if a tin horn sport insinuated yuh was holdin' more aces than the law required? Yuh a-knowin' all the time this gent had a sleeve full o' said aces an' was jus' tryin' to initiate a argument for private purposes?"

Breedlove studied the matter at full length, likewise watching the valley below. "I believe I'd enter some sorta protest to the management. Nobody's got a call to be ill-mannered."

Indigo seized upon this with a show of eagerness, as if it had justified his acts. "That's jus' *exactly* what I did. But I didn't kill the guy. Nossir, I aimed high an' to one side. If he died it was because of his own weak constitution an' none o' my fault. Why should they blame me because some gent went into an argument with impaired health?" Then his manner and tone changed. "You skin out of here, Joe. Them bloodhounds are back-trackin'. They'll reach here in no time."

Breedlove also had seen the dust cloud growing out of the west. He slipped from the saddle and motioned to Indigo. "Hop aboard. Skin out. When the storm's blown over come back."

"Hell, no," objected Indigo. "Those guys ain't civil."

"They don't know me from Adam," said Breedlove. "I'll say you ambushed me and took my horse. Hit over toward that broken top and I'll steer 'em north."

Indigo gave Breedlove one quick glance and swung up. "All right. But I'll have an

eye on 'em. If I see you bein' led off in chains I'll turn this country to cinders."

"A soft answer," smiled Breedlove, "punctures many a bloated temper."

"Mebbe so," was Indigo's dubious reply. "I ain't never tried it." Then he was up the hollow and out of sight. Breedlove moved half along the slope, buried his gun beneath a flat rock and settled back to smoke in peace.

THE posse came upon him somewhat sooner than he had expected. In fact it was just three cigarettes later that he heard a rustling noise to his rear and an abrupt command to elevate his elbows. He complied, though not in silence.

"Pull in yore neck," he advised the unseen gentleman. "Can't a man study nature without interruption?"

Men dropped into the depression from various angles. Indigo Bowers had called them beetle-faced and it would have been difficult for Joe Breedlove to have improved on the term. Foremost among these pursuers was one who had a pair of excessively bowed props and a bull voice. He aimed a question at Breedlove in a conversational tone, yet the echo of it fled among the trees and filtered down toward the valley.

"Where's the leetle sawed-uff runt with the trouble-huntin' face?"

"I wish I knew," murmured Breedlove, rolling still another smoke. He jerked a hand to the north. "Last I saw he was foggin' up thataway. If you find him jes' kindly return my horse which he appropriated."

They were not to be easily convinced, these fellows. Breedlove saw it in the manner they studied him. "What brought you this way anyhow?" demanded the full voiced one.

"I come from Prairieville," explained Breedlove in a mild tone. "Saw a buzzard circlin' over here an' thought I'd investigate. I walks myself into a trap."

"Well," ruminated another, "that ain't no lie. I saw that buzzard. Didn't I tell you, Ike? We should a' left that damn trail an' hit here first."

"Was the gent badly wanted?" asked Breedlove.

"He shot an' killed the best stud dealer in the county, brother. It ain't a thing to whistle off. No, it ain't. North, yuh say?"

"Uhuh."

They collected in a group and filed toward the top of the bowl. "Say," demanded Breedlove, "where's the nearest rancho? I got to get another horse."

"Cloverleaf—three miles south." Then something seemed to strike the leader and he turned, bringing the whole crowd to a halt. "You don't seem very doggone put out about it. Looks like a trick to me."

"Shucks," grinned Breedlove, "all the snortin' an' pawin' in the world won't do no good. I ain't worryin' none. You boys'll get that horse for me, and the gun likewise which he took. I'll collect 'em in Canyon tonight. Treat the horse gentle."

IT WAS not so much the words he said, but the manner in which he issued them, soothingly, authoritatively. They disappeared over the bowl and in a moment he heard them riding away. Nor did he bother to rise and watch them immediately. Not until the sinking sun found him out and made that particular haven uncomfortably hot did he move. Casually, he strode upward and swept the little stand of pines. Satisfied, he sought another spot and waited until he heard hoofs drumming. Indigo swept to view riding the borrowed animal and leading another. Quite in silence as if this were only a minor detail of the day's chores, the two of them went about their business. Indigo saddled his new horse, tarried a moment to look at the dead animal and pressed his lips tightly together, avoiding Breedlove's eyes.

"Shore a good pony," he grumbled. "If this brute's half as saddlewise, I'm lucky."

Away they traveled, and it was a little curious the way the leadership seemed to fall quietly upon the tall, serene man's shoulders. Indigo merely said, "Now where, Joe?" and fell to meditation.

"When in doubt," reflected Breedlove, "lead for the stummick. We'll aim straight tords Canyon, I reckon. What's on yore mind?"

"Me? Oh, Im headin' for the Box U like I said an' get me a job. Where you goin'?"

"Bound south," and there was a trailing note of lonesomeness in it. Indigo looked sharply at his new partner.



"Mebbe there'd be two jobs at the Box U," said he gruffly.

"I misdoubt I could put a mind to work right now. I'm an old horse, needin' some open range for a spell."

An interval of silence. The sun sank and the world for a time was ablaze on the western summits. Then a swirling blue dusk enveloped them and the autumn chill nipped their bones. Indigo seemed to be feeding on his injuries. He swore in lilted, honey syllables. "I'd shore like to level that town right down to the grass roots. Thunder, they's a lot of hog fat hombres there which I'd like to send squealin' for shelter."

Breedlove chuckled. "Spunky cuss, ain't you?"

"Me? Say, Joe, it's shore funny how I ram my smeller into trouble. Allus been thataway. But I shore can't stand to have rannies pulled on me."

"Providence," mused Breedlove, "has a way o' takin' care o' all that."

"Providence has shorely been squattin' on me the las' two days," grunted Indigo.

"Well, Providence has got to sit an' rest sometimes," agreed Breedlove. "But she rises again. She rises an' the world shines bright."

"Now ain't that restful," murmured Indigo. There was irony in it but it was the kind of irony covering admiration. Thereafter no more was said until the glimmering lights of a town met them. They had traversed a ridge, climbing higher and higher. The valley on their right puckered together and dived into the narrow recesses of a hill and in a little while they discovered themselves looking directly down

on the house tops of Canyon. Canyon the wayward and the headstrong. Joe Breedlove studied it, his chin resting on shirt front. Indigo stirred, saying with no great enthusiasm, "Well, *amigo*, I guess I'll strike east from here. Box U thataway, jus' acrost the State line."

"Ain't had nothin' to eat, have you?" interposed Breedlove. "No, shore not. You make a cold camp here while I go down an' rustle a little grub."

"Say, yuh can't walk them premises peaceable," objected Indigo. "They'd spot yuh. The posse is mebbe back by now. And I don't misdoubt but what the rancher I got this hoss offen has come in with his yarn. Yore gummed up with the same sheep dip I am now."

"Well, I don't believe the posse has got back. They seemed out for blood an' bent on ridin' till they found you. Anyhow, I don't owe this town money and I eat my supper regardless of ary barrel-bellied star totter. Should worst come to worst, I can talk 'em peaceable."

"Yuh got a lot to learn about Canyon," prophesied Indigo. "I'm waitin' here, then. Should I hear trouble, I'll fog after yuh."

"Trouble," philosophized Joe Breedlove, "is a delusion which only the wicked fear. Hang to your vest buttons, Indigo. I'll tote back some chuck."

He started down the trail but returned to dismount. "I'll leave the horse here. Safer if the sheriff, or whatever he is, should pop in." And he vanished in the shadows.

IT WAS a steep pitch and let him down quite abruptly to one end of the solitary street through the town and the canyon. It was like all other cowtowns in its essential features yet, since it had its back to the hills it drew many queer characters, many fugitive characters into its confines. Breedlove noted them here and there as he marched straight upon the restaurant; noted, too, that although the evening was young, considerable noise drifted from the half dozen saloons on either side of the street.

At the same moment he was inspecting his surroundings, others were inspecting him from odd corners. He was a cow-

puncher in every muscle and gesture, yet a cowpuncher without a horse, a circumstance bound to attract curiosity. He felt this scrutiny and as he slid to a stool and ordered a double order of steak he understood the justness of Indigo's comment. Lawless Canyon might be; nevertheless the town seemed to scan its guests with something more than casual attention.

"Takes a can opener to get in an' a crowbar to get out," he murmured much later when the weary and slightly acid lady of the establishment slid sundry platters toward him.

"What was that?" asked the lady, sharply.

"Merely remarkin' that this shore was a han'some piece of cow," he hastened to assure her. Such a thing as a napkin failed to exist but a month-old paper lay within reach and he took this, making a huge sandwich of the extra steak and several pieces of bread. He wrapped it well, noting the lady's furrowed brow upon him. "I'll be a long ways from here by breakfast," he explained.

She lifted one scornful shoulder. "Another gent hidin' out. Say, there's more men up in those hills than down here. What's your shyness?"

He winked expressively, laid a dollar on the counter and gathered his sandwich. Still she seemed unsatisfied. And when he had finished his meal and was about to go, he dropped his voice low. "Lady, breathe it to no livin' soul. I'm the man that struck Billy Patterson!"

"Kill him?" she asked, matter of fact.

He was out of the place, chuckling softly. It had been no more than a matter of five minutes, yet traffic on the street had increased. More horses were tethered on the racks, more noise floated from the



saloons. He shook his head and headed out toward the top of the hill, not at all sorry to be quit of Canyon. Yet it was not to be so easy a retreat. Hard by the restaurant, in a par-

ticularly deep patch of darkness, a hand fell lightly on his arm and a woman's voice, moved by distress, spoke.

"I—I saw your face by the restaurant light. I *know* you are honest! I've *got* to have help!"

That stopped him as if a lariat had tightened around his shoulders. He could not see her, not even that lightly detaining hand. It didn't matter. Her voice decided him on the spot. So he stuffed the sandwich in his coat pocket and answered promptly. "Ma'am, it is done."

"My father is in the Blazing Star! They've got him at a poker table and they'll never let him go until they've broke him! I've waited and waited with the buckboard! Not a man will help! He's got all our cattle money! You'll get him for me? A heavy man with a white goatee and a white Stetson. The name is Henry Allen. If you'll *only* get him out of there——"

"It'll be the matter of a minute, ma'am."

Her answer was vehement. "You've got something to learn about Canyon."

"Education," he remarked gravely, "can never start too late. Wait here." He walked leisurely toward the mentioned saloon, reflecting that twice that evening he had been told there was still something to learn of this town. And for all his apparent unconcern with the girl, he stood by the swinging doors and pondered a moment. "I'm a man of peace. Shore, shore. But where kind words fail——" His fingers brushed the butt of his gun. "Where kind words fail, Providence and a little main strength must finish the job. Henry Allen, you old dodo duck, ain't there no sense in yore head?" With which he pushed through and stood in the brightly lighted barroom.

FOR all the noise, the place was not crowded. A few were at the bar, a scattering number lounged around restlessly, and no more than a dozen played at the tables. Breedlove saw Henry Allen's white Stetson and goatee at once, pondering over cards. But he did not make the mistake of going directly to the man. First he filled his glass and drank, meanwhile eyeing the place with a mild interest. The

table at which Allen sat held but three players and to Breedlove's shrewd mind it was evident one of those players stood as nothing much more than a dummy. Allen was the sheep they were fleecing and the third member, a professional gambler in every feature, seemed to be doing the job cautiously, painlessly. Breedlove deserted his glass, slid casually to the table and took an empty chair.

Sharper than a serpent's tooth is the bite of a man unwilling to be rescued. Allen raised his flushed, half-angry face to the newcomer. "Three-handed game, friend. I pick another table."

"Well, if I can't play I can look in," said Breedlove amiably. The gambler's impassive face swept the newcomer and there seemed to be a wisp of dry humor in the opaque eyes. Here was a man who knew the ins and outs of the world, one who returned that glance with shrewd, tolerant eyes. They understood each other without saying so much as a syllable.

As for Henry Allen, he was just another heavy-handed fool goaded to recklessness by his losses. What little he knew of this game of games—the element of timing, deception, false gestures, the ability to drift through bad hands and plunge with good ones—all this knowledge had deserted him. In the hands of the skillful professional he was a bull plunging at the red cloth. Perhaps he knew he was playing great odds against short ones, certainly he had torn more than one hand to pieces and called for a fresh deck. The litter of such was on the floor by him. Still he stumbled on, obsessed by that fever which forever leads to ruin.

Breedlove, sitting idle, grave as the sphinx, knew it would never do for him to attempt to persuade the man to give up and go back to his daughter. As well try to dam Shoshone Falls with his hands. The gambler's long, slim fingers dealt around the board swiftly and Breedlove's eyes watched them jealously between lowered lids. Crooked cards, naturally. But the professional hardly had need to be crooked to trim this blundering, stubborn Allen hombre. Now wasn't it a problem? Wryly, he remembered saying to the girl it would only be a moment.

Looking up and around he saw two or three stray characters leaning against the bar, paying particular attention to him. Their faces seemed vaguely familiar. Were they part of the posse or not? It seemed likely. A second glance sometime later revealed that one of these had left toward the saloon. The gambler's eyes had lifted toward them, fluttered, and dropped again.

"Devious," stated Joe Breedlove to himself. "Devious but plain. Should I make a move, where would I be? Yeah, where would I be?"

"Little ones, full up," droned the gambler and spread deuces on trays across the green cloth. Allen glowered at the hand, dropping a broken straight. Breedlove could hardly repress clucking his tongue. The fool had tried to bluff it out with the game running against him and the weight of the chips on the other side. What he didn't know about human nature was ample.

ALLEN'S own pile was down to a half dozen blues. His purple face sagged and he threw the weight of his shoulders forward, resting on the table as if seeing bankruptcy in those fanwise pasteboards. He ran a shaking hand across his disheveled hair; the game faltered and the gambler's fingers were shoving a fresh pile across. "Luck changes around midnight, mister. A hundred more?"

Breedlove swept the room with a flashing gaze. Two big lamps behind the bar, one in the middle of the room. And that bull-voiced leader of the posse just shouldering through the doors. It looked for a moment as if Allen was going to back out and call it an evening. Breedlove's muscles hardened. But the gambler's voice was per-



suasive and Allen reached into his pocket, dragging out a pouch that clinked with the unmistakable sound of gold pieces as it struck the table. It was still a well-filled poke. "Why, I reckon——" began Allen, plucking at the draw strings.

Breedlove's hand swept across the table,

closing like a vise around that pouch. His mild voice entered the proceedings.

"Henry, if it was yore own money, I wouldn't say a word. Not a word, Henry. But seein's as I grubstaked you and got a sorter half interest, why I think I'd ought to be paid afore you go gamblin' any more."

Allen was half out of his chair, crimson and outraged. He had no gun or it would have been drawn, Breedlove was sure of that. "Why, you damn' meddlin' outlander, leggo my pouch or I'll——"

Breedlove showed a pained and steadfast face. "That's right! Treat me as a stranger to save yore own pride. I don't care about that, Henry. You been actin' queer to me ever since I got to town. Nev'less, I'm demandin' my share afore you lay another bet."

"Your share!" yelled Allen.

"Come outside, Henry," entreated Breedlove. "We'll talk it over alone."

The gambler had scarcely moved a muscle, yet a point of light flickered in those drab eyes. "Smooth, quite smooth," he said, very quietly to Breedlove. "But what's your game?"

"Keep out of it," warned Breedlove, slashing at him with the words. For the first time during the scene a deep and slumbering temper flared in him. It shuttered across the serene face and left it harsh, like so much granite. "Keep out of my play." Once more he turned to Allen. "Let's go outside Henry and talk this peaceable. I ain't goin' to make a fool of you or myself afore strangers. Come on."

The situation had drawn dangerously tight. The gambler seemed frozen in his chair. Every other man in the house was silent and by the bar the same three whom Breedlove had seen before, were standing with a tell-tale negligence. He heard the bull-voiced gentleman cruising slowly toward the table. There was dynamite in the Blazing Star; well he knew it. He had moved under poor conditions, yet it was the only way open to him. By usurping Allen's poke he had made it a quarrel solely between the elderly man and himself, a quarrel in which others could not legitimately come. At the same time he hoped Allen might catch on and might use it as

an excuse to retreat. Once again he urged his point. "Le's go outside, Henry, I'll give it back then. Come on."

But Allen was not of the kind to make a good bargain of a bad one. He shook his fist at Breedlove. "Drop that pouch, you mangy cur! Somebody gimme a gun! Have I got to be held up in sight of the hull town? Gimme a gun!"

So the man was inviting others to share his quarrel. Breedlove, moving with deceptive slowness, rose and turned about, confronting the bull-voiced one. The man was a sheriff well enough the star hung conspicuously from his vest. His oval face was aflame with suspicion.

"Seems every time I see yuh, friend, yore mixed up in difficulties. What you doin' now?"

"Find my horse, Sheriff?" countered Breedlove.

HE TOOK a step backward. Nobody stood behind him now. He commanded a view of every soul within the place. Three lamps, two behind the bar and one to his left hand. Well, he could get the pair over the bar before anybody drew. Still, it wasn't just his fight. He had to get that cussed pigheaded loon safely from the scene.

"Yore horse?" boomed the sheriff. "Hell, I misdoubt yuh ever had a horse! Don't tell me yuh ain't in with that bantam rooster! Where's he holin' up now?" And then he saw Breedlove's gun. "Thought he'd took yore wee-pon? Oh, no, yuh don't git away with that yarn! Say, was yuh tryin' to stage a holdup under our smellers? Drop it, fella or I'm bearin' down on yuh!"

"Listen," began Breedlove, smiling his famous smile. All the benevolence and the charity of the universe beamed on his bronzed face, "Henry says he don't know me. Well, natcherlly he don't want to appear like a fella gamblin' off his friend's money——"

"You lie!" shouted Allen. "You lie! Pin him, Sheriff! It's a bold-faced holdup!"

"Drop it!" was the sheriff's brittle order. "Or——"

Well, now was the time if ever. The philosopher must become the man of action. Breedlove, still smiling gently, swept

the whole group. His right arm for the instant remained immovable, but the fingers splayed out slightly and his head dropped a trifle. Allen was speaking rapidly and with increasing rage. The swinging doors burst wide open and a man popped through, hatless, excited.

"Say—say, you hombres! Git to hell outen here an' fog down to Minnick's deserted stable! It's afire! Wind suckin' the flame right tords town, too! Come on or we wunt have no roostin' spot!"

"Providence," murmured Breedlove lazily, and his smile grew less rigid. The sheriff swayed uneasily on his toes, but the rest of the onlookers hurled themselves toward the street, bowling over tables on their way out. A shooting scrape was not uncommon to Canyon, but a fire coming to a town of scant water and tinder dry houses, touched them vitally either as a matter of entertainment or as a sterner enemy to be fought. So they fled and presently as the blood glow of the flames seeped through the foggy windows of the saloon there was left but the gambler, Henry Allen, the sheriff and Joe Breedlove. The sheriff, off guard, dropped back on his heels and turned his head ever so slightly. "Damn!" he grunted. Joe Breedlove was chuckling. Light glimmered along the barrel of his drawn gun. "Turn about, Sher'ff. Providence rises an' the world is filled with light." He captured the official's revolver and nodded at the gambler.

"This ain't yore quarrel, remember."

The gambler shrugged his shoulders. "Your pot, friend. Smooth, very smooth. I take off my hat to you."

"Tell this man—" pointing to Allen—"somethin' he ought to know."

"Why should I? Just another fool after easy money. Why should I?"

BUT Breedlove looked quite steadily at him, as one worldly wise man to another. "No, you ain't that kind. His daughter's been wa'in' out there three hours for him to bring home the year's earnin's."

The gambler's face lost a little of calm. The stack of gold he had won from Allen was piled neatly behind his chips. He swept it up and thrust it at the older man, adding a few sharp, curt words. "You infernal

idiot! Don't you know better than to play another man's game? If you ever come here again, I'll pluck every hair off your billygoat face!"

"Out the back door," said Breedlove. Allen, holding the returned money in one fist walked across the room with sagging steps. The sheriff never moved, but the gambler threw up an arm as Breedlove stood framed in the rear entrance. "Some day, come back," he called. "I could learn a trick from you."

Breedlove smiled and closed the door. Never saying a word he pushed Allen down an alley and to the front street. Toward the east end of Canyon the stable roared in flames, lighting the street plainly. But the men running by had no time for him and he reached the girl and silently passed over the money pouch to her. "Keep this in yore own hands, ma'am. Even so, I think yore daddy won't fondle the pasteboards for a while."

She was quite fair and when he saw how her eyes glistened unaccountably he was forced to turn his head a little, hearing her words as from a great distance.

"Slim—I knew you were an honest man. I'm thanking you."

"I remember a girl that looked like you once," he murmured. "She was shore some lady." And then he had ducked back in the alley, traveling swiftly. He climbed well around Canyon and it was perhaps a half hour before he reached the top of the bluff again. He found Indigo lying flat on his stomach, head overhanging the town; and Indigo was grinning from ear to ear.



"Ain't it purty?" cooed the little man. "Oh, ain't that a fine sight? Nineveh an'

Tyre—they don't compete. I wisht a spark would carry over an' make a real bonfire. Did yuh get a snack, Joe?"

Breedlove passed across the beefsteak sandwich and sat Indian-fashion while his partner ate. "All I'm needin' is a napkin now," sighed Indigo, "to make it a Roman feast. *Amigo*, we'd better pull freight afore they git time to think."

"It's my belief, likewise," said Joe. And they mounted and rode out of the aura of light, traveling upward and eastward until darkness cloaked them.

"Providence shore disposes of a lot o' things," murmured Breedlove.

"Providence—hell!" snorted Indigo. "I set that shebang afire. Knowed yuh was in trouble on account of the time yuh took. So I though I'd give 'em somethin' to diversify their minds." He snorted. "Providence! Huh!"

"Well, Providence an' a little personal aid, then," amended Breedlove, smiling in the shadows. But when they came to a forking of the trails the smile had disappeared. He drew up and sat silent. Both of them understood well enough that here was the parting, yet both of them seemed at loss for words.

"Bound south," muttered Breedlove, that trailing lonesomeness touching the words.

"Mebbe there'd be two jobs on the Box U," suggested Indigo gruffly.

"No, I'm an' old horse needin' pasture."

"Well, so long Joe."

"Good huntin', Indigo."

Another moment they tarried. Then darkness dropped between them like a curtain and they had only the sound of each other's horse striking the rocks along the way. In time that died and they were traveling their lone trails.

Breedlove rode leisurely, eyes fastened to the blue ceiling above. "Spunky cuss," he muttered. "I guess I must be gettin'

old. Seems like the taste of things is a little flat nowadays."

PRESENTLY he left the pines to the rear and dropped sharply downward. Ahead rustled the waters of a river shallowing up at a ford. Across the way was another State. And southward there would be still more wide prairies and still more miles to travel alone. He pushed ahead, somber and meditative. "Indigo will be shakin' out his bed-roll tomorra' this time. Oh, well——"

There was a small echo directly ahead and as he pushed to the brink of the ford a shadow barred his path. A voice floated up. "Now who would that be, anyhow?"

"Breedlove straightened. "Indigo? Thought you was a-goin' to the Box U?"

"Well——" a trifle angrily—"ain't I on the right trail, I want to know?"

"No, I guess you circled around the hill on the wrong trail."

Silence. A half sheepish rejoinder. "Shucks, so I musta. Well——"

Breedlove heard Indigo's horse breathing as if it had been put to a hard run. He smiled sweetly in the darkness, feeling immeasurably better. Still, he held his peace, knowing it to be a ticklish moment. Indigo spoke again, very fretful. "Well, wouldn't that singe the hairs on an asbestos cat? How could I have got off like that? Shore foolish."

"I've done it lots of times in unfamiliar country," reassured Breedlove gravely.

"Shore, that must be it. Well——"

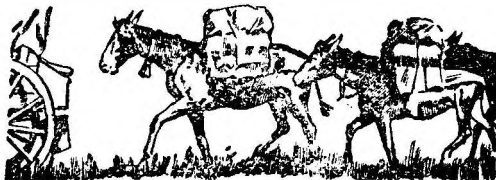
"I imagine they ought to be a right good campin' spot acrost this stream."

"Now, I believe there would be," said Indigo with alacrity. "Oh, hell, I ain't goin' to back track. Box U can wait."

"Mebbe some grazin' might help you, too," said Breedlove, the smile broadening.

"Lead on, Joe."

"Bound south," murmured Joe and pushed into the stream.





SOLDIER JACK

By BUD LA MAR

Author of "Mail Order Outlaws," etc.

WELL, IT MAY ALL HAVE BEEN A PRACTICAL JOKE—SOME HOMBRES IN THE COW COUNTRY HAVE A KEEN SENSE OF HUMOR—BUT, AND A CERTAIN HAND OF THE TWO BAR OUTFIT WOULD LIKE TO KNOW, IN THAT CASE HOW COME THOSE FIVE MOUNDS UNDER THE COTTONWOOD TREE NEAR SOLDIER JACK'S PLACE?

JUST like you say, stranger, most communities hereabouts point out with pride to their leadin' gun expert, bad man ex-killer, and otherwise blood-thirsty individual. It may be that said bad hombre is just some little old dried up wart that don't look like he would harm a flea, intentional. Howsomever, they will describe his bloody dealin's and tell you in whispers of his lightnin' speed with a six-gun and you will go away from that peculiar town, never to fergit "Bad Land Bill" or "One Shot Charley" or whatever fittin' handle has been hung on the galoot.

That's business, mister. A Western tradin' center without its retired gun faner is like an empty bottle—unsightly and not at all worthy of attention. Along in the summer, when tourists and grasshoppers is the thickest, the sage brush seaport that does the most business is the one that can boast and display the most notches on one single gun-handle.

This may be the reason why this here village appears so dang deserted like it can't produce a real shore enough bad man and is too honest to manufacture one. But should you care to ride outa yore way forty, fifty miles, I could show you the

queerest little old human that ever blistered his hips a-carryin' a couple of three pounds hand guns. He would maybe disappoint you though, as he is unlike any shootin' feller you ever read about in story books. And come to think of it, I wouldn't willingly get any nearer than a mile from the old hellion. If I got that close I would be nervous and homesick for other parts. But if you ain't in no hurry, I will tell you of the time I first met him and of one night in my life when I really learned what fear was.

I WAS new to this country then, havin' just come up from Arizona. Said long and sudden jump resultin' from difficulties encountered there. Sech as hot climate, no rain to speak of and inquiren' hombres wearin' tin stars on their vests. It was no trouble obtainin' ridin' work, them days, and I hired out to the old Two Bar spread in the Goshen Hole. It's the custom on most outfits to play anyway one joke on a new hand, and the way he takes it has quite a bit to do on whether he stays on or not, and how he will be treated if he does. I was familiar with that part of a cowboy's life and figured I would maybe be bucked off their pet buckin' pony. But

I didn't mind lookin' forward to eatin' a little dust.

Howsomever, Len Sherman, the boss, had something more fittin' in his mind for me. You see, me havin' come sech a hell of a long ways and not sayin' much about myself, I was just ripe for this joke as it was one trick that couldn't be played on nobody but an innercent and unsuspectin' stranger like I was.

The fact that my first mount was a peaceful animal with no desires to git shet of me and stomp on my carcass should have aroused my suspicions. But it didn't, and I thought maybe them northern outfits had different ways of doin' things. I never give it a thought during the morning's work, and after we had chuck, Len comes to me.

"I got a job for you," he says. "Old man Crocky, our neighbor on the west, was tellin' me yesterday in town that he seen some Two Bar stuff on the Rim. You ride up there and drive 'em back. Do you see that cut over yonder? Well, you head for that. You'll get there about sundown and you can spend the night with Soldier Jack. Follow the crick in and you can't miss his buildings. Them cattle is prob'ly there, anyway, and if they ain't, they'll be on the Rim. You can make it back by tomorow night easy, more likely sooner."

A FEW minutes later I was on my way. The country was strange to me, but there was no chance of gettin' lost. The Goshen Hole is, like its name describes it, a hole in the ground with sharp high walls all around it. Water runnin' down them walls has cut in canyons which are the only ways out of the basin. The one I was headin' for appeared to be just a small break and seemed a lot nearer than it really was. Not bein' hampered by fences, which was scarce and far between, them days, I cut straight across the prairie toward my objective.

Toward evening, the high winds that blow in there most of the time calmed down to a soft warm breeze. I was shore relieved at the change and so was my bronc. I was now able to look around without gettin' my eyes full of sand. The range

was becomin' rougher as I neared the sides of the basin, and once in a while I would pass a small runty pine tree and was forced to ride around coulees and ravines that showed up in front of me unexpected. I couldn't help thinkin' this would be a dirty stretch to ride over on a dark night and I spurred my horse to git to Soldier Jack's before sundown.

The sun was just sinkin' behind the Rim when I rode up to the mouth of the canyon. I was due for a surprise. The inside of that canyon was a downright pretty place and quite a shock after travelin' through the desolate stretches I had covered that afternoon.

It was, I reckon, a half of a mile long and rose up in a gentle slope to the top of the Rim. It widened out in the center, in an oval shape, and on each side of it several smaller draws led to the flats above. A tiny stream ran zigzag across the bottom of it and big old cottonwood trees grew thick on its banks. Choke cherry trees and brush covered the ground all but in one place where the land had been cleared for a small fenced in pasture. No house could be seen, but I sighted smoke driftin' slow like over some trees and I headed for that.

RIDIN' into that canyon gave me a strange feelin', like approachin' some deserted settlement away in the hills, after sundown. A sensation that tells you you ain't welcome. Ghosts of departed settlers seem to rise in yore way, showin' their displeasure by bangin' shutters and doors for no apparent reason whatever. The wind whistlin' softly through the trees seemed to whisper a warnin' to keep out and the small stream, a-headin' toward open country, instead of rushin' cheerfully like most mountain streams do, slunk swiftly away without a sound.

I circled the pasture and noticed seven horses in it. They was just common inbred knot-headed broncs not fit for the saddle and shorely not for the harness. I thought first they was wild horses, but the gate



was shut and they grazed peaceful, barely lookin' up as I rode past and returnin' to their feedin'. What kind of a outfit was this where the likes of such horses were fenced in, eatin' good grass?

I traveled on wonderin' about it and rode smack into ranch buildings. There was two log structures, a house and a barn. The barn was old and fallen apart, great holes showed through the roof where logs had dropped to the floor and grass and weeds grew thick in front of the open door. The house was not in much better repair. It had once been a large one for its kind, but now the back end of it was gutted and daylight showed through the logs. Only one room had been fixed up to keep out the weather.

The creek ran between these buildings and irrigated a small patch of garden that had been painfully hoed and weeded out. Back of the barn was a round pole corral with the gate saggin' open and not a horse track goin' in or out of it. Only for that garden and the whiff of smoke comin' out of the chimney of the house, the whole place looked like it had been deserted for years. Then I set my eyes on the strangest little man I ever saw in my life.

HE CAME out from behind the barn without makin' a sound. It was dang near impossible to see his features, for the hair and whiskers on his head. He was hatless, and shocks of white hair dropped down over his eyes and seemed to mix in his beard which hung half way to his waist. He wore an old patched white shirt, plumb devoid of buttons, and a pair of faded blue overalls covered the tops of a pair of cow hide boots.

He looked to be a hundred years old.

But the most hypnotizin' details about his make up was the guns. He wore two of them and they was the biggest Mister Colt ever manufactured. They hung on each side of him, the handles pointin' outward, in old shiny holsters hooked to a wide belt strapped low on his old thin waist.

Them two pistols made him look like a dwarf. They was so big and he was so small. It wasn't probable that he could lift one out of its holster, let alone shoot it. I

reined my horse to a stop and after gazin' at this strange galoot for a full minute, I managed to say one word: "Howdy!"

Rip Van Winkle don't answer and don't move a muscle. The whole thing is more like a dream than plain facts. His thumbs is hooked in his belt, comfortable close to them cannons. His little eyes glare at me through the brush that perfects his face. I've made a speech and I figure it's his move but you can be shore I ain't happy; in fact I am plumb lonesome and homesick for other parts.

"I take it yo're Soldier Jack?" I ask.

Old Rip answers; yes, sir, he actually speaks! It ain't no powerful voice, by any means. It sounds whiney like and it's full of squeaks and whistles.

"Yo're right," he croaks. "Do you come here peaceful?"

"Who, me?" I answers surprised. "Hell yes! Who are you expectin'? Villa and his gang?"

Then this little old galoot begins circlin' me. He don't come straight for me, but walks around my horse gittin' closer all the time and watchin' me all the while this here stalkin' process is takin' place. I follows him with my eyes, feelin' like a hoot owl on a fence post. After he had viewed me from all angles, he stops in his tracks. I am plumb oneasy.

"Git off yore horse," he squeals.

"Yes, sir!" I says. "You betcha!" I dismounts on the off side so as to put the horse between us. That tickles him and his little old carcass shakes and quivers and he lets out funny chucklin' noises, like an old hen anxious about her chicks.

"Gittin' late, stranger," he says. "Better stay hyar this night. Put yore horse in the corral and peel off yore leather. Then we'll have one meal together, just you and me. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

I DON'T like this "one meal" and the way he says it. And that dang chucklin' of his sounds dirty and kinda like a threat. I ain't hungry nohow and would rather camp somewhere else but I don't dare say so and does as he tells me. As I am gettin' ready to unsaddle, he comes into the corral with a big armful of hay and drops it on the ground. Then he walks to

my horse and inspects him careful.

"Two Bar horse, huh? Len Sherman's brand. Buy him?"

"No," I answers. "I works for Len. He sent me huntin' strays. They was supposed to've come this way."

"They ain't come this way!" pipes up the old feller. "Who says they did is a liar. Len is a crook, he stole a dehornin' knife from me, thirty-five years ago!"

"Yeah?" I states. "Well, I ain't seen it.



I just hired out to him yesterday. I aim to watch him since yore kind enough to warn me and maybe he won't swipe my tobacco!"

Then I follows him to the house. Old Jack is watchin' me like a hawk and I don't wiggle an ear or otherwise show signs of bein' curious. That old boy is spry for his years and I cease doubtin' that he can handle his artillery. Leastways, I don't aim to make shore. I am willin' to take it for granted without proofs which might turn out disastrous.

I had an idea the inside of his shack would be all tore up and dirt all over, but I was wrong. Everything is spic and span. The furniture is hand made, out of logs and packin' cases, but it looks solid and substantial enough. There's a table, three chairs and a double deck bunk in a corner. The cookin' stove is clean and a few sticks of wood is piled neat, close to it. On that stove is a big iron kettle with something a-bilin' in it and givin' out soothin' smells.

OLD Jack lights a kerosene lamp and sits it on the table. He don't take off his guns; I bet he sleeps with 'em.

"Yo're in luck," he says. "Poor Oscar met with an accident this mornin'."

"You don't say!" I exclaims. "Who's Oscar?"

"My old rooster," answers the old man. "And my only friend. Oscar's been here many years, but he was havin' spells of rheumatism lately and didn't git around

right pert. A coyote killed him, just before daylight. I heard him a-squawkin' and run out, but he was dead. That's him a-bilin' on the stove. He ought to be tender, I cooked him all day. But I'll feel like a dang cannibal, eatin' of pore old Oscar."

Oscar bein' no perticular friend of mine, I didn't mind chawin' on one of his hind legs, only he was so tough and stringy, you'd a-thought you was eatin' gopher. After supper, I rolls a cigarette and lights it. Soldier Jack shoves his plate aside and begins starin' at me, never takin' his eyes off'n me for a second. I feels nervous. I know the old feller is cracked and I don't enjoy bein' alone with him, away out here, and him a-watchin' me that a-way. Who knows what's runnin' in his old leather head? I am shore I don't, and all I can do is hope for the best.

Suddenly, the old man jerks out one of his pistols and lays it on the table. Then he leans toward me from across the table.

"I'm on to you, young feller!" he whispers. "Len sent you to spy on me. Listen hyar! I been in this country sixty years; I'm eighty now. I was an old timer in these parts when Len took up a homestead in the basin, forty years ago. Him and Jess and Frank Dillard come together. Runnin' away, they was, with a Texas sheriff after 'em. They thought they was safe, down yonder on the flats. They bought a few cattle, rustled a heap more, and got a good start.

"Then that Texas sheriff showed up. He rides to my place one evenin' and inquires for them boys. It was comin' night and he was hungry and saddle sore. Been on the trail two years he claimed, and he looked it. But his eyes was glassy and unfeelin'. He belonged to that breed of man hunters that never stop till they kill or git killed."

OLD Jack stopped talkin' for a minute and run his hand lovin' like over his big six-shooter. The move was a caress. The kerosene lamp spluttered and threatened to go out. Everything was quiet and peaceful. My horse snorted in the corral, then silence again. I felt my hair risin' slowly on my head and I know I musta been white as a ghost. Sweat oozed out on

my forehead and temples. My smoke went out unnoticed.

Then Jack continued. "This Texas killer told me his story. Jess and Frank Dillard had shot his brother over a horse deal, back in the Panhandle; then they lit out. So this man, Jake Ferguson was his name, took the trail. All through the Panhandle he followed 'em and all over Oklahoma, then in Nebraska. He lost 'em there. But he kept movin', askin' questions wherever he went and not stayin' in one place any longer than it took to learn that



the Dillards wasn't there. All who spoke to him knew what his game was and no one dared to lie to the hombre. Danger with a capital D was wrote all over him and he didn't mind pickin' up a scalp or two durin' his journey. Blood thirstiest man I ever see! He found out they was here and he come hell bent. He didn't know which one of the boys had killed his brother but he was gonna git 'em both so as to leave no doubts.

"He decided he would stay all night with me and bring his search to an end the followin' mornin'. He laid down on the bottom bunk to rest and after a bit, he went to sleep with his gun in his hand. I watched him for an hour. Jess and Frank was friends of mine but I was afraid to go warn 'em, afraid he'd wake up and git me before I got out of the door. Sech critters don't sleep heavy. But after a while, the lamp went out and I sneaked to the corral. I saddled a horse and rode to the Dillard ranch and told the brothers about the man at my place. Frank was for leavin' the country, but Jess refused. They had a nice little spread by that time and they hated to lose it. But you can be shore the fear of that sheriff was in their hearts. They mounted some horses and rode up here with me. They left 'em tied at the mouth of the canyon and crawled a half a mile on their bellies, like a couple of damn Injuns to git to the house without wakin' Jake.

HE WAS plumb tired out and slept like a baby, with never a suspicion of the approachin' danger. The fact that his journey was nearin' its finish acted like a soothin' tonic to his keyed up nerves. The results of his meetin' with the two brothers held no doubts in his mind; he had figured out every move over and over. He could not fail.

"The boys never gave him a chance for his life, they feared him too much. They pulled their boots off and entered my house, threatenin' to kill me if I made a sound of protest. It was dark in there and they waited for the moon to rise high enough so that it shone through the window and lighted up Jake's features. Jess took a long aim at the sleepin' man and shot him between the eyes. At the same time, Frank gave a wild yell and leaped for the bunk, a bowie knife glitterin' in his hand. There followed dull sounds of powerful blows drivin' the knife to the hilt into the unresistin' body of Jake Ferguson. To make shore, he said afterward, just like a man with a hole in his head would ever git up! Ha! Ha! Ha! —And the damn murderin' whelps up and run, never lookin' back, leavin' the mess for me to clean up. I was mad but I had it to do. So I buried Jake Ferguson, scrubbed the floor and the bunk and washed the blankets. But by gad, there's spots left to this day!"

THE old man was pointin' a shakin' finger toward the bunk and I gazed at it fascinated. All around it, the floor was scrubbed spotless. It looked spotless to me; I don't know, maybe there was faint marks there. I couldn't tell in the pore light.

"I thought that was all there would be to it," Jack went on. "But it wasn't, not by a damn sight! Frank and Jess got scared I would talk and one night, as I was ridin' into my own corral, I was shot at. But it was dark and I got away. I fell to the ground like I was kilt, then I crawled out of the corral and into the barn and from there clumb on to the roof and watched. Pretty soon, an hombre come sneakin' out of the hills a-holdin' of a rifle. He was comin' to finish his job if

necessary. I just had time to see how surprised he looked when he didn't find me layin' where he thought he dropped me, then I let him have it! Drilled him plumb center!

"He was a stranger and I reckon he was hired to git me. I buried him alongside of Jake Ferguson and from then on I was careful. But they tried again. I was lucky though. I used to be a scout in the Injun wars and when they thought they was trailin' me, I was trailin' them! There's five graves under the old cottonwood now, stranger! Then they quit tryin' to git me and started stealin' my horses, I had some fine stock them days and lots of 'em. Didn't run many cows, specialized in horses.

"Now, I got seven head left. Don't that beat hell? And to think I could put them thievin', murderin' buzzards in jail if I'd talk. Jess and Frank Dillard, owners of the biggest layout in this country! Money in the bank, friends of the Governor! And me a pore old man with nothin' left after workin' hard all my life. I figured I'd do for you when you rode up here—I don't trust strangers. But, instead, I'll let you go to tell this story. Do you hear?"

I NODDED, bein' way past the speakin' stage. I'd heard about the Dillards. Just like Jack said, they was big folks in this country and I wondered what would happen if I told what I'd learned tonight. I couldn't though. They'd git me shore. They was powerful and I was just a punch and, besides, I wasn't cravin' no publicity at that time myself. But I couldn't help wonderin' how they felt. Rich as they was, they musta led an awful life, thinkin' about this terrible little feller who knew their secret. I didn't doubt but what they had tried to kill him. But rustlin' his stock! What good was there in that?

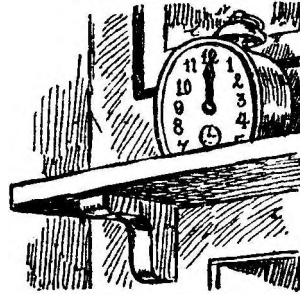
Jack had holstered his gun and was watchin' me again. "You can go to bed now," he said. "Take the top bunk."

I pulled my boots off and clumb up and lay down, but I wasn't figurin' on sleepin' none, not with this locoed little killer in the same room with me! Soldier

Jack pattered around for a while, then he took off his clothes and blowed out the lamp. I heard the bunk squeak and I knew he was in bed.

An old tin clock rattled away on a shelf. The distant yip of a coyote drifted in the canyon from the flats above. Tired muscles won over fear and I slept.

I woke up with a dry taste in my mouth and a strange feelin' that somethin' was wrong. Was it mornin'? There was a light



somewhere but it wasn't daylight. Too dim and blinkin' like. The lamp! Then it was still night. I couldn't tell how long I had slept. Jack had got up and made a light. I lay with my face toward the wall not darin' to move. Only fer the clock, there wasn't a noise in the room. Had the old boy lit the lamp and went back to bed? It didn't look like the old scout to do that. I twisted myself around, careful not to make a sound and thrust my head over the edge of the bunk. A strange sight greeted my eyes.

JACK was sittin' on his bunk, his bare feet touchin' the floor, starin' fixedly at the lamp which was on the table in front of him. I craned my neck farther out to see better. He had a gun in his right hand and was holdin' it in a way plumb uncommon. The thing was pointed over his right shoulder, at the window between the two bunks and his thumb was around the trigger. The hammer was cocked. My heart stopped beatin' and I quit breathin', I was that scared! What he meant to do was a mystery to me. His eyes never left the lamp fer a second.

Then I grasped his motive. He was watchin' the window with his back turned to it and keepin' it covered. He had the reflection of it on the globe of the lamp. Was there somebody outside? The outside board of the bunk was bruisin' my chest and my muscles cramped under the strain of keepin' my position, but I was unconscious of it. I could have reached down

and grabbed that gun but I never thought of doin' so. The clock kept tickin' away. Minutes passed, neither one of us as much as wigglin' an ear. A faint light appeared under the door and things began to git more distinct. The sun was comin' up; still the man under me kept his silent watch.

This was shorely a hell of a place for to be in and I was right anxious to git away.

After a while, Jack cursed under his breath and laid down his gun. He got up and dressed, strapped his belt around his waist, put out the lamp and went out. I took this opportunity to jump out of bed. When he came back a few minutes later, I was dressed and ready. The old boy looked me over grinnin'.

"How there, young feller!" he squeaked. "Up and goin', I see. How'd you sleep last night?"

"Fine!" says I. "How about yoreself?"

"Not so good," answers the old man, shakin' his shaggy head. "Fact is, there was horse thieves around, toward mornin', but I was ready for 'em! They didn't take nothin' though; still seven broncs in the pasture. I wish they'd take 'em and leave me alone. They ain't worth a damn nohow!"

He walked to the stove, took a knife out of his pocket and sliced a few shavings from a chunk of wood; in a few minutes a fire was cracklin'.

"No need for you to go out," spoke up the old man. "I fed yore horse. We'll have breakfast in two jumps and you can go locate yore strays."

THAT program suited me fine, 'specially that part of it where I would ride away from the place. The old man seemed to be in better humor. He set a dish of steamin' beans on the table, poured hot coffee in a couple of tin cups and took a pie tin full of biscuits out of the oven.

"Sit to, stranger. This is cow country grub and will stick to yore ribs. Come and git it!"

I pulled a chair to the table and rushed through the meal like I was in a gosh awful hurry, which was the truth of it

and no mistake! We washed the dishes, then put on my hat and followed Jack outside.

He had saddled and bridled my horse which stood, reins trailin' on the ground, ready to be mounted. I effected a pony express mount, pickin' up my off stirrup about a quarter of a mile down the trail. Soldier Jack's croakin' laugh rung in my ears and I spurred my horse to attain more speed. As I rode out of the canyon, I thanked my lucky stars for pullin' me out of such a tight place.

Any thoughts of stray cattle was plumb out of my mind. Straight as the crow flies I rode back for the ranch, hell bent and leapin' my horse over draws to keep from circlin' and losin' a lot of valuable time. It wasn't likely the old man had took after me but I wasn't takin' no chances, not so you could notice it.

Had the gates leadin' through Len's yard bein' left open, I reckon I would have sailed right through his place and headed for town. But they was shut and so I slid off my horse, took a seat on the ground, pulled my hat off and wiped the sweat off my face.

The boys must have been watchin' me for I had no more than got settled when they came streamin' out of the bunkhouse in my direction.

"What's wrong?" asked Len, lookin' innocent and surprised. "Did you forgit something?"

I must have been a strange sight, sittin' there, pale and goggle-eyed and some of the boys chuckled.

"There ain't nothin' to laugh about!" I declared, and I proceeded to tell my story, puttin' all the stress I could muster on the bloodiest details. My recital of the killin' of Jake Ferguson in that faintly moonlit cabin by them two fear crazed ranchers must have been a blood curdlin' description. You see, it was still fresh in my mind and you can be shore I had been impressed by it.



Howsomever, my hair raisin' story didn't appear to have the expected effect on my audience. Instead of hangin' onto every word, like you might think they would, grins began to show up on every face. When I came to the lamp gazin' incident, a roar went up from every one, hats was throwed in the air and a general good time was had by all present—except me!

MY FIRST reaction to these strange doin's was to git mad and offer to fight the whole outfit, singly or in groups, but realizin' I had been made the goat in some kind of a joke, I thought better of it, havin' took a hand myself in many similar pastimes. And so I managed to grin and demand an explanation for which I had to wait until all them boys had laughed themselves weak. Finally, Len wiped the tears out of his eyes and took over the job of puttin' me wise.

"You see," he said, "Old Jack is crazy, but plumb harmless. He has shot a couple of sheep herders and maybe a few Injuns, away back in the early days and stayin' alone so much it got to workin' on him till he thinks he is always surrounded by murderers and horse thieves. Nobody as knows him will go near his diggin's but when he

can git some stranger to stay with him he proceeds to tell 'em the doggonest stories of blood and thunder that he can think of. We never thought you would stay with him all night; we figured a few minutes of his company would be sufficient to send you back hell bent. Fact is, we stayed up most of the night waitin' for you. Stranger, I want to congratulate you, yore a hog for punishment! I've known feliers to run barefooted across the flats till they dropped of exhaustion after listenin' to one of Soldier Jack's yarns."

SO YOU see, mister, this community ain't the least bit proud of Old Jack as a fire eatin,' hell roarin' bad man. He don't come to town often and when he does he don't wear his guns; folks call him Loco Jack.

But, as I was ridin' away from his place that morning, shootin' through the trees like Haley's comet, I passed a big old cottonwood tree, just off the trail a ways. I got a fleetin' glance of five long mounds of earth under it. They was barely noticeable, just faint wrinkles covered over with rotten leaves and growin' grass, but there was five of them. And so I've been wonderin' at times, is old Jack as locoed as folks think?"



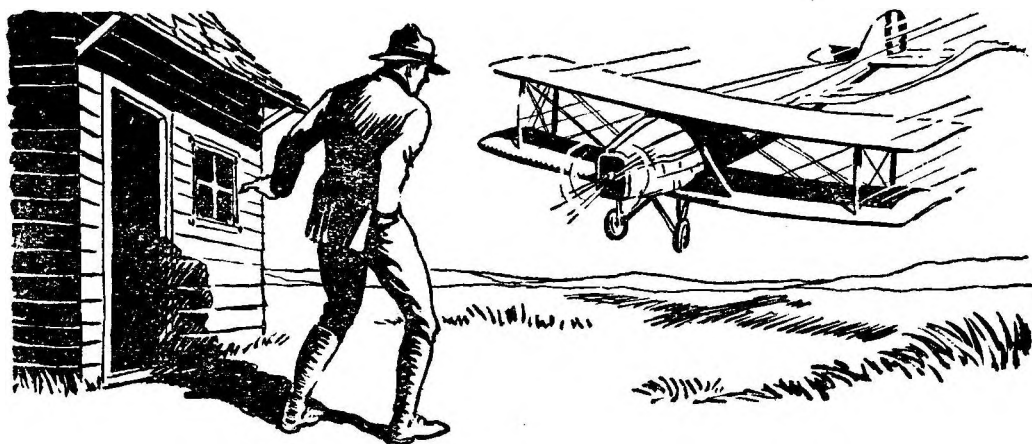
**A long Novelette in
the Next Number—**

THE TROUBLE MAKER

**A story of a swift riding cowpunch who
found himself up against a bad border gang**

By

GEORGE C. HENDERSON



PATH OF GLORY

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

Author of "Spoilers of the Range," "The Left Arm of the Law," etc.

WHEN BROMLEY'S PLANE CRASHED IN THAT DISTANT DESERT IN CHILE AND KIRBY CAME INTO THE PICTURE, THE EAGLE MET THE FOX—AND FROM THE FOX-LIKE KIRBY'S DASTARDLY BID FOR SUDDEN WEALTH AROSE ONE OF THE STRANGEST, GRIMMEST SITUATIONS EVER FACED BY MEN OF THE FAR-FLUNG PLACES

YOU'RE on," accepted Beggs Benson, fishing from his pocket two soiled fifty-peso Chilean bills. Jimmie Belden, who had offered the wager, did likewise. The money was placed in the hands of Harry Archibalds, who, being an Englishman, knew nothing whatever about baseball and was thus adjudged to be entirely unprejudiced.

"And to think," groaned Jimmie Belden, "that the World's Series is going on right now and we won't know how it comes out for weeks!"

"You may not know," retorted Benson, "but anybody with common sense knows right now. Babe Ruth'll knock those Pirates for a row of busted centerfield fences."

A hot argument ensued, in which every American engineer on the staff joined. It was the 8th day of October, 1927, the discussion taking place in the club room of the engineering staff at the Cobreillo mine. Cobreillo, as everyone knows, is the big American-owned copper plant high on the sterile Chilean pampa. In spite of their isolation, the Cobreillo boys have always been warm baseball fans. On this October

8th, 1927, Jimmie Belden was backing the National League contender to win the series, which his last New York paper, that of September 21st, had informed him would start on October 5th. This same paper informed Jimmie that Pittsburgh had a good lead in its league, although two other teams might nose the Pirates out. Now, on October 8th, the fourth Series game was probably going on, and it would be two weeks before the score of even the first game reached Cobreillo.

As for the club's radio, it was a battered affair whose record of range so far had been Antofagasta. Which did no good because the sporting editors of the Anto papers themselves—assuming that those papers had sporting editors—would have told you that Pirates were Spanish buccaners.

KIRBY'S refuge was an old deserted copper working about one hundred and fifty kilometers north and a little east of Cobreillo, on the rim of Atacama Desert. There was a small hot ojo, or spring, at the place, emerging from the foothills of San Pedro Volcano. Most of the shacks of the old copper working had fallen

down, but the one Kirby used still maintained a fair roof.

He had been there five months, alone. He had to get out; the supplies he had packed up from Iquique were nearly gone; one of his burros had strayed and the other was dead.

South, west and north of Kirby lay the most infinitely desolate desert in the world. To the east reared Andean peaks. These peaks were tipped with snow, but the rest of Kirby's world was yellow. Kirby was mightily fed up with it.

He was, of course, a skulker, a fox hiding from men. With a razor he carried in his kit he kept himself clean shaven, not from sanitary motive, but merely because at the time of the Seattle job he had been bearded. He had never been able to find out whether that Seattle policeman had died or not.

But even if he had, Kirby reasoned now, the Seattle affair was pretty old and he ought to be safe. It was time he was pulling out. He decided to do so at the first opportunity, going south to Calamidad on the Antofagasta and Bolivia narrow gauge. That would enable him to leave the pampa via Anto, which suited him because he had entered it by way of Iquique.

Kirby's opportunity to forsake his refuge and travel south came that very afternoon; to be exact, at five o'clock in the afternoon of October 8th, at just about the same instant when two young engineers of the Cobrillo mine were placing a certain wager. He, Kirby, was squatting in the doorway of his desolate shack, facing north, when he saw a distant black speck appear in the northern sky. He thought it was a condor.

In fact for a full minute he was dead sure it was a condor. What else could it be?

Kirby went into the shack and poked at the fire he had made of split yaretta chunks. Then he placed his greasy coffee pot on his still greasier stove. He was so engaged when it seemed to him that he could hear a distant roar, a sound which came from the north and high in the air. He rushed to the door. He saw the thing he had mistaken for a condor. It was big-

ger, nearer, louder and lower now, winging straight toward Kirby's shack.

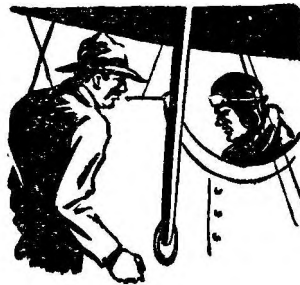
KIRBY felt a sickness at the stomach. He had seen plenty of aeroplanes, but never one on Atacama Desert. This one swooping down on him made him realize how close he was, after all, to the world of men. He saw that the plane was going to land. It did, without even a circle of inspection, for the desert floor was as level and smooth in one spot as in another.

Astonishment and no small portion of terror gripped Kirby, as the thing hit the ground and came bowling toward him across the yellow dust. He could only conceive it as a menace. Flying machines were connected in his mind with armies, navies or police. There was an automatic gun in Kirby's hip pocket; instinctively his hand shot around to grasp its butt, under the tail of his coat.

The plane came to a stop not over fifty yards from him. A degree of assurance returned to Kirby when he saw that it had but one occupant, a youngish man wearing a leather helmet and who, even before the machine stopped rolling, had slumped into a posture of utter physical collapse.

Thus somewhat reassured, though mystified and nervously alert for a trick, Kirby began a cautious approach to the plane whose engine was still humming. The man in the pilot's seat remained motionless, chin slumped on chest. Kirby approached closer. Still the man did not move.

Kirby, more assured all the while, arrived at the plane and peered into the pilot seat. He looked his strange visitor over from head to foot. The fellow's coat, like his helmet, was of leather, his trousers were corduroy and his legs were encased in knee-high laced boots. One lock



of unruly black hair escaped the edge of his helmet. The face was well-featured and generally prepossessing, although just now it was

creased in lines of extreme weariness. The

eyes were shut; amazedly Kirby realized that this fellow who had just dropped from the sky was asleep.

Kirby let him sleep, while he walked around the plane itself. On the underside of one wing he saw a large brass nameplate reading: "PATHFINDER." On the under side of the opposite wing he observed a second piece of metal, smaller and crescent-shaped, cleated to the wood. Looking closer, Kirby saw that the latter was a silver horseshoe, bearing an inscription:

"From the Mayor and Citizens of
Tarpon Beach

GOOD LUCK, BROMLEY, AND
GOD BLESS YOU."

Kirby had never heard of Tarpon Beach.

He returned to the pilot seat and shook the man. The flyer opened his eyes—Kirby now saw that the eyes were black, matching the man's hair—and stared stupidly about. Then Kirby saw his hand shoot out to some contraption on his controls; the humming noise slackened; in a moment the engine was still.

"Gee!" the flyer exclaimed. "Wasting gas! And I'll bet there's not three gallons left." Then chin slumped on chest once more, the black eyes closed. Like a tired child the man was asleep again.

"Who are yuh and where the hell did yuh come from?" snapped Kirby, shaking the man once more.

The eyes opened heavily and stared into Kirby's. Kirby's eyes were squinty, fox-like, habitually furtive and cunning; those which he faced were, though drowsy now, entirely frank and without guile.

"Where the hell yuh come from?" barked Kirby again.

The other smiled wearily, then sat up with an effort and looked westward toward the sun, now about to drop beyond the horizon. Then he turned eastward and looked quizzically toward the snowbound peaks, league-high peaks, which bounded the desert like a ghostly wall.

"It's not where I come from," answered the pilot, "but where I got to, that counts. Have I crossed Capricorn?"

Kirby had never heard of Capricorn. Though half decided that the man was nutty, he asked again, "Where yuh come from, bo? I quique?"

The pilot shook his head.

"Arica?"

"No."

"Lima?"

"No."

"Where the hell *did* you come from then?" barked Kirby.

"I flew," answered the young man, his hand moving to his mouth to stifle a yawn, "from Tarpon Beach, Florida. But it's where I got to that counts. If I've crossed Capricorn, then I've made fifty thousand dollars in thirty-four hours."

Then Kirby knew he was crazy. "Don't come that on me," he sneered; "you can't—"

But he saw that the black eyes were again shut and the man was sleeping peacefully.

LATER Kirby got him to the shack and fed him a shot of hot coffee. There was no Good Samaritan trait in Kirby, he was merely curious. He didn't know but what there might be a windfall in this thing somewhere, for himself. The fool had said something about fifty thousand dollars.

Outside the tropic night closed swiftly over the pampa. Bromley, as the flyer introduced himself to Kirby, drank his coffee and then looked from the shack to see that starshine had replaced sunshine. Refreshed by the stimulant, he immediately asked Kirby again about the latitude of the spot. Kirby didn't know.

Bromley left the shack and walked over to the plane. Kirby watched him furtively from the door. He wasn't afraid Bromley would fly away because something had been said about gas being exhausted.

When Bromley came back it was with a wry face, and to report that he had measured his fuel and appeared to have about fifteen gallons left.

"I could have gone another hundred miles and cinched it," he announced; "but my gauge was so near zero I was afraid to take a chance. That and I couldn't keep my eyes open, either. These buildings were

the first I'd seen in four hours, so I landed. Now we'll soon find out whether I'm rich, or whether I'm just plain busted and a long ways from home."

He had brought from the plane an assortment of instruments and maps, together with a book of geographical data. Kirby watched him curiously, while Bromley, his manner betraying an excited eagerness now, set about taking some simple observations.

"What's it all about, bo?" asked Kirby.

BROMLEY squatted and arranged on the ground about him a compass, a sextant, an aneroid barometer, a stellar ephemeris, his maps and his book of data.

"It's all about the Vandemore fifty-thousand-dollar prize for the first non-stop flight from Cancer to Capricorn," he told Kirby. "My air instruments went on the bum, but these'll do the trick. Don't give a darn about longitude; latitude's all that counts. By the way, you mentioned the port of Iquique. Asked if I'd come from there, so I must have passed it. Have I?"

Kirby pointed northwest. "Iquique's that way," he informed.

"Fine," cried Bromley. "I see Iquique's a little better than twenty south. And I've passed it. Hot dog! I figured I must be inland from Antofagasta. Huh?" He looked from his map to Kirby with an expression of considerable anxiety.

"Anto's that way," informed Kirby, pointing southwest.

Bromley's face fell. "Humph!" he exclaimed, "I see Antofagasta is twenty-three degrees and ten minutes south. You say it's southwest from here. So I'm between twenty and twenty-three, and lose fifty thousand if I didn't make twenty-two and a half."

Bromley set to work with his instruments and now Kirby, watching him from between narrowed lids, began to take a real interest, his guileful brain immediately began to scheme, for he saw a chance to make himself useful to this prize-seeker. No one had witnessed the landing but himself, Kirby. Suppose Bromley had fallen short of his goal! Suppose he took a second hop and crossed it, with Kirby as a

passenger! Kirby could claim that he had been at the second stop all the while, could be Bromley's witness—for a split of the prize!

He mulled this scheme in his mind while



Bromley sought wisdom in the star-flecked sky. Already Bromley had picked

his main guide, a great red glowing star of the first magnitude, spotted brilliantly south over the desert. He checked it with his compass, and by its juxtaposition to three other stars with which it formed a diamond balanced on edge, he knew that it was Alpha of the Southern Cross. Alpha, Polaris of the South, the quick sure guide to latitude in the hemisphere whose pole it crowns. Bromley knew, of course, that its altitude is always the latitude of the spot where the observation is taken. So with anxious hands he raised his sextant to measure the angle between the level desert ahead and the base star of the Southern Cross.

The angle read: twenty-one degrees and ten minutes.

Capricorn is twenty-two thirty. Bromley had landed about a hundred miles short of his goal.

HE TOOK it rather hard, and had little to say to Kirby except a bare announcement of the fact. A scheme of deception quickened in Kirby's mind, and he began feeling out Bromley. Bromley paid little attention; with a keen disappointment shadowing his face he began to take other and more accurate observations.

"Yuh got gas enough left for another hop?" asked Kirby.

"I could make another hundred miles, I think," replied Bromley. "But it's no good, Vandemore's wire said all the way to Capricorn, and nothing doing except for a non-stop flight." The flyer was looking southeast toward the profile of a peculiarly shaped volcano. He consulted his map.

"I'm the only one knows yuh stopped here," suggested Kirby, licking his lips.

"That's Teconce, isn't it?" asked Bromley, ignoring the suggestion.

Kirby nodded. Any layman could have picked Teconce from its neighbors, with the crudest of descriptions. It was eighteen thousand feet high and stood away from the main range. Bromley's description of it told him that it was shaped exactly like that picture of the Rock of Gibraltar so well advertised on the blotters of a certain life insurance company. With his sextant he took an azimuth to Teconce, its clockwise angle from due south.

He took other azimuths. To Leon; to Paniri; to Sans Pedro and Pablo, the giant twin cones almost directly at his left. These azimuths he jotted on a piece of paper, making a sort of log of his landing.

Kirby ventured: "I was going south to Calamidad first chance I got. It's about a hundred miles. Take me as a passenger, will you? We can land a few miles from town. I'll swear you came down alone, that I seen you land, and——"

"No."

Bromley's negative was sharp. He did not amplify it, just uttered the one word and went on writing. Even Kirby's thick skin winced. The rebuke was so unpromising that he shut up for a while.

BROMLEY added to his azimuths his vertical angle to Alpha of the Southern Cross. He completed his log with less vital data, and when he was done any trained engineer or land surveyor, to say nothing of a navigator, could have taken it and readily fixed the spot of Bromley's landing.

"That's that," said the flyer, shrugging his well knit young shoulders. He placed the paper in the inner pocket of his leather coat.

They went into the shack and Kirby produced food. As he was going to leave the place anyway Kirby was not niggardly with this. Bromley sat down, facing Kirby across a greasy table.

Kirby talked, drawing Bromley out. Bromley, inherently frank and affable, told something of his venture.

It was a strange conclave, this, between two men who had arrived on Atacama

Desert by such different trails; Kirby, who had skulked along the dark and devious byways of dereliction; and Bromley, who had shot here like an eagle through the sky, blazing his own uncharted path, a sunlit path of glory. Yet here they met, Kirby and Bromley. In certain respects they were alike, being of an age and of a height, and, as to hair and eyes, of a complexion. In other markings they were immensely unlike. The skin of Bromley was clear and that of Kirby sallow. Bromley's jaw was firm and square; Kirby's was weak, pinched and deeply cleft. Each looked what he was. Now they broke bread together across a greasy table, and Kirby drew Bromley out.

He learned that Bromley, though an American, had spent very little of his life at home. He was a man without family or kin; early in 1915 he had enlisted in the French Air Service, remaining in it for the duration. Even after that he had remained, identified with an air unit of the French Foreign Legion in Africa. So Bromley had been something of a stranger among his own countrymen upon returning to America about a month ago.

Kirby did not remention his scheme about bearing false witness to support Bromley in collecting a fifty-thousand-dollar prize. He had found by now that Bromley wasn't that kind. The fox knows the eagle, and this one already knew Bromley. And Kirby immediately abandoned a second scheme which popped into his crooked mind — that of riding on a hundred miles with Bromley, of doing away with him and then assuming his rôle. He knew he could never in the world get away with it. He, Kirby, didn't look like an eagle. The stamp of the fox was writ upon his face, and no one in God's world would ever believe he could fly.



So he gave up that scheme on its pure lack of merit. Yet, while Bromley, ahunger from his fast and busily eating everything

in sight, continued to face him across the table, Kirby smoked cigarette after cigarette and plied him with further questions. He learned certain details about the Vandemore prize, its manner of payment, and about Vandemore himself. He learned that Bromley had never seen Vandemore, but had registered for the flight by an exchange of telegrams. Bromley showed him one of them, in which Vandemore said that there would be no prize except for a non-stop flight which cleared Capricorn, but that in case of success speedy payment would be made, if desired, through the Consul-General of the country in which landing was made.

IT WAS while fishing this telegram from his pocket that Bromley also fished out a small piece of green cardboard. While Kirby read the message, Bromley glanced at the green scrap and smiled reminiscently. It was the part of the stub of a grandstand seat check for a baseball game, dated October 5th, and it amused Bromley to realize that it was only October 8th, right now. He restored the stub to his pocket and then, full fed, he stretched his arms and yawned.

"Guess I'll flop," he told Kirby.

"All right," said Kirby, looking up from the telegram. "Flop over there." He indicated his own messy bunk. "But first, how about me riding down to Calamidad with you in the morning? I've got to go, and it's either that or walk. If there's room for me—"

"Sure thing," agreed Bromley.

He was already sprawled on the bunk. In a minute more he was asleep, while the fox sat watching him through half-closed eyes.

AS HE slept, millions read his name. The name of Richard Bromley was emblazoned in a thousand headlines, captioning the story of the hour. News sheets from New York to Frisco were telling the world of his flight. Many of the evening editions, on this Saturday night when Bromley was resting at the refuge of Kirby on the Atacama Desert, carried the story as follows:

BROMLEY BELIEVED SAFE
CABLE FROM ANCON, PANAMA, REPORTS
PATHFINDER SIGHTED OVER CANAL ZONE
SIX P M FRIDAY, ELEVEN HOURS AFTER
TAKE-OFF FROM TARPON BEACH
FLYER HAS HOPPED CARIBBEAN, AND NOW
WINGING THROUGH TROPIC NIGHT, TOWARD
GOAL AT CAPRICORN

Richard Bromley, soldier of fortune and ex-legionnaire of France, is well on his way toward winning the Vandemore \$50,000 prize for the first non-stop jump of the torrid zone. His plane flying low and on a course of South five degrees East, was sighted over the Canal Zone at 6 PM Friday evening. There can be no question of identity as he dropped a message enclosed in a pasteboard box, reading: "*Have encountered perfect flying conditions and everything fine—Bromley.*"

Aviators are hoping that Bromley has broken the jinx which for months has beset every attempt at inter-continent flight. It is said that when he took off from Tarpon Beach the mayor or that village cleated a silver horseshoe to his plane, bearing the words: "Good Luck, Bromley, and God bless you." With this benediction the intrepid young American—for it seems that Bromley is an American though he has been a resident of far-away lands for the last ten years—has triumphed over the Caribbean and is now winging his way down the west coast of South America.

WHILE millions read this account, Bromley himself was sleeping peacefully in Kirby's desert refuge.

One hundred and fifty kilometers south of Kirby's refuge, in the staff club room of the Cibrillo mine, a group of American engineers were reading a New York paper whose editors, at the time of issuing it, had never heard of Bromley. It was some three weeks old, dated September 22nd; yet it was the latest American news sheet available at the mine.

"I see where the Yanks'll repeat, even if they lose every game from now on," exulted Beggs Benson.

"Yeh," agreed Jimmie Belden. "And I notice it says the World's Series is scheduled to start on October 5th, at the home town of the National League contender. This is the 8th, so the fourth game was likely played this afternoon. Remember, Beggs, my bet stands on the National League team, whether it's the Pirates, Cardinals or Giants who cop the pennant."

"Wanta double it?" challenged Benson, looking up slyly from an account of Babe Ruth's fifty-third home run.

"You're on," answered Belden, reaching for his purse.

The Englishman, Archibalds, was called into service and a few minutes later found himself in custody of stakes which now totalled four hundred pesos.

Discussion of baseball was interrupted by the entrance of the General Manager,



a keen-eyed official known far and wide in frontier mining circles as "Six A. M." Sanders. Benson deferentially offered the September 22nd New

York paper to his chief.

Having seated himself, Sanders skipped the sporting news and turned to other columns.

In a moment he remarked: "Here's something interesting, boys. I see where a man named Vandemore has posted a fifty-thousand-dollar prize for the first non-stop flight from Cancer to Capricorn."

None of the staff could see why this should be any more interesting than dozens of other competitive flights of which the papers were full, until Sanders added musingly: "Capricorn! Humph! Did you ever know that that imaginary parallel, one fourth the way from the Equator to the South Pole, happens to pass right through this mine camp?"

"The devil it does!" exclaimed Jimmie Belden.

Six A. M. lit a bulldog pipe whose short stem just cleared his beard, and began puffing with the extreme energy which characterized his every movement. "Yes," he went on, "and here's another point that strikes me about this Vandemore prize. The nearest land to Cancer in the United States is the cape of Florida. So that's where the competitors, if any, will take off. All right. Now attention, class in geography! What is the nearest land on Capricorn to the cape of Florida?"

It happened that Beggs Benson knew his meridians and thus answered without

hesitation. "Why, the coast of Chile at twenty-two thirty south."

"Go to the head of the class," applauded the G. M. "But the shore of Chile is rock-bound, the coast range rises right out of the sea, practically a mile-high cliff from Peru to away south of here. So the flyer's best chance would be to follow the pampa, the high level bench between the coast range and the Andes. In other words, our pampa. And Capricorn intersects the pampa at our mine."

"The devil you say!" cried Belden again.

"Which means," went on Sanders, "that if anyone competes in the Vandemore prize flight, our camp is the nearest and most logical goal post—the finish line of the race."

"The devil you say!" bleated Belden. "Gee! Wouldn't it be great if some fellow'd light in camp and give us the low-down on the World's Series!"

Little did he dream that the race had already been run, and lost. Lost by a hundred miles. That Bromley, incidentally with the remains of a seat check for a certain ball game in his pocket, lay sleeping a hundred miles to the north, under the fox-like surveillance of a man named Kirby.

KIRBY didn't know anything about aeroplanes, or about flying. However he was not greatly frightened when he took off with Bromley at daybreak, Sunday, October 9th, on a hundred-mile hop down the pampa toward Calamidad. For certainly, reasoned Kirby, if Bromley had spanned sea and jungle and desert from Florida, this comparatively short hop would amount to nothing at all.

And besides, there was not a mile of that hundred which was not exactly like the other ninety-nine, level, bare, offering no obstacle to perfect landing.

Kirby's mind, as he occupied the rear seat of the Pathfinder that early Andean morning and whizzed along at a pace he had never known before, at last reluctantly abandoned the schemings which had engrossed it the night before. He admitted that there was no possible scheme to turn the adventure to gain.

They whizzed along, flying low. It was daybreak but lacked of sun-up, for the sun had not topped the league-high wall to the east. It beat walking, admitted Kirby.

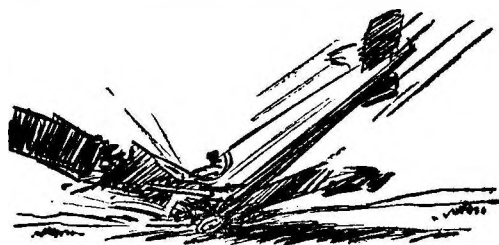
After a while he looked out. Far ahead, perhaps forty kilos yet, he could see a tiny green oasis in the desert; that, of course, would be Calamidad. Then to his right he observed a group of low, bulbous, gray-green hills spotted with sheet-iron buildings and drill towers. That, of course, would be the big Yankee-owned copper mine he had heard was located not far northwest of Calamidad.

A copper country—this portion of Atacama—because the yellow dust beneath was beginning to get spotted with tiny green lumps. They were the dumps of old *pozos*, or test shafts, sprinkled here and there on the desert.

ONCE again Kirby looked ahead and saw that Calamidad could not be over twenty kilos away. They were nearly past the big American mine development, lying perhaps five miles to the right. Kirby frisked his pockets for a cigarette. But he failed to light it—the speed was too great. He leaned low under the shelter of the front seat and tried again.

Suddenly he was aware that Bromley, from in front, was yelling words at him. The next sensation of which Kirby was aware was a sickening upward pressure of his vitals, as though he were falling swiftly in an elevator. He straightened up. Something was wrong. He caught something of what Bromley was yelling now: "She's quit; hold tight; I can land her maybe."

Kirby saw the desert swooping up toward him and screamed. He screamed and grabbed Bromley around the neck. The



plane dived. They crashed on Atacama, just clear of Capricorn.

KIRBY was pinned to the ground. He wrenched mightily to get out from under, for the plane was afire. He couldn't. He couldn't move his arms. He couldn't move his left leg. He kicked frantically with his right. Something licked his face; he shut his eyes and began to moan hysterically. A brand fell across his face and lay there, burning. It burned the eyebrows from Kirby's face, singed his flesh, stabbed inward to blister, it seemed, his very soul. And Kirby couldn't move.

Yet he was conscious. Bromley, ten feet away on his back, was not. Kirby winked his eyes open for a second and saw Bromley. Bromley was dead, he was sure. Kirby moaned and screamed and kicked his right leg. Then he cursed the plane and he cursed Bromley. Then he wrenched more frantically than ever to free himself. His coat was afire; his very heart was afire; he was burning to a cinder on hell's hearthstone, and couldn't even squirm.

The thing crushing against his ribs was heavy hot metal. Something collapsed upon it and it tipped, slightly. Kirby kicked again frantically with his right leg and found his left free. He wrenched and twisted more and his arms came free. He rolled to his belly, clawing at the dust like a madman. He crawled a foot; two; three; in a moment more he was free of all fire except that of his own coat and shirt.

Screaming piteously, he ripped them to shreds, tore them off. He ripped off his belt. He moaned and clawed at his face with hands which felt as though rived with a hundred hot spikes. His eyes were tight shut, and he thought he was still afire. With his eyes shut and screaming like a madman he disrobed, piece by piece, all but his socks and shoes. Naked but for his socks and shoes he lay and rolled and wallowed and screamed and cursed, in the amber dust.

The Sunday morning sun peeped over the Andes. There lay Kirby; there lay Bromley; there lay the embers of the plane. There, red in those embers, lay one which was inscribed with the name of Bromley's plane. And yonder lay another, crescent-shaped and of silver, which bore a benediction to Bromley himself. This Sunday morning sun, and none other, saw

them sprawled on Atacama, athwart of Capricorn.

SUFFERING unmeasurable agony Kirby arose to his feet. He opened his eyes; then shut them quickly as hot daggers seemed to pierce through the sockets and stab inward to cleave his brain. His seared hands clapped to his worse seared face. His face was a hairless blister. Again he fell to the dust in raving hysteria.

After a while he winked his eyes open again and saw Bromley. Bromley hadn't moved. He was ten feet from the nearest embers and was unburned. But he was dead, thought Kirby, and for this luck Kirby cursed him.

Blood streamed from a gash on Bromley's head. So Kirby cursed him for the luck which, as he believed, had killed him dead.

Another while and Kirby came to his hands and knees. Naked except for his socks and shoes he crawled a pace. Something crackled under his weight. It was hot under his hands, but these hands were beyond the assumption of further pain.

He looked down and saw that he had crawled upon a hot segment of a windshield. Under the glass was a charred fragment of wing. The thing furnished Kirby with a mirror and he saw the reflection of his own face.

Yet was it? It was a face Kirby had never seen before. Could it be his own? Could that black-red blister of flesh be his? Eyebrows gone, puffed, hideously scarred and charred, the thing which had been Kirby's face looked upward at him, mocking the agony of his soul.

Eastward, the sun cleared the peaks and crept higher. It dripped golden beams on Kirby, upon Bromley and upon the embers of Bromley's plane. This springtime sun—springtime in a land where birds have never sung—brought no cheer to Kirby, but after a while the warmth of it began to revive the machinations of his mind. He must do something.

He began to think. Finally, still naked but for his socks and shoes, he crawled over to Bromley.

He looked upon Bromley; his thoughts

became schemings. Seared and blistered, Kirby was still a fox.

THERE filtered back into his brain a little of fox-like guile. The fact that he blamed Bromley as the instrument of disaster fanned this guile of Kirby's and burst his schemings to bloom. Certain facts became clear. Suddenly, born of these facts and of his own bitterness, an amazingly bold idea stood out in sharp relief before his mind.



He crawled

back to the segment of windshield. Again he looked upon the reflection of his puffed and hairless face. For months it

would be nothing but a blister. And Kirby was sure that no one would ever look upon it, whether before the blisters were healed or after, who had ever seen Bromley.

And then he realized that he wouldn't even have to claim to be Bromley. He would claim nothing.

Yonder in the ashes of the fire he saw a silver horseshoe. Nearby was a brass nameplate marked: "Pathfinder." These he considered. No, he wouldn't even take these with him. He would leave them as they lay; he would take nothing, claim nothing.

Except Bromley's clothing, of course. Yes, he would merely stagger into the Cobrillo mine, face and hands burned to blisters, dressed in Bromley's clothes, stagger in, faint, be carried to the camp hospital, get swathed in bandages and keep his mouth shut.

And if he ever talked, what would he say? Only that he would never ride in an accursed aeroplane again. Which was true. And who would blame him?

Let the damned fools at this Yankee mine do all the claiming; let them acclaim him as Bromley. Kirby could always beat it in a pinch, and he was sure there would be no pinch. All he need do would be to

wearily admit he was Bromley, as he lay swathed in bandages on a hospital cot. The fact of his wounds should smooth his path. It would draw pity, protect him from crowds and questions. No law in the world could make him fly again, and no human in the world but what would see the justice of his sudden aversion to it. No law in the world could make him return to the United States to be awarded the Vandemore prize. Vandemore himself had guaranteed payment through the Consul-General of the country where landing was made.

YES; he would keep his mouth damned well shut, except to say that as soon as he was well he meant to go to the Argentine, now that he was down here anyway, and buy a ranch. He would use the fifty thousand dollars, or profess to, to buy the Argentine ranch. Bromley's character as a soldier of fortune and globe trotter would lend convincing color to this program. And suppose even that Vandemore, the boob, took ship and came to Chile in order to make the presentation himself! Well, Vandemore had never seen Bromley.

But first, Kirby realized, he must dispose of Bromley's body.

Looking northwest over the desert he saw the group of bulbous, gray-green hills, flecked with concrete walls and *calamina* buildings, which was beyond doubt the Cobrillo mine. He could walk that far, he was sure, but first he must efface all sign of Bromley.

Scarcely a hundred yards away he saw a small green mound which gave him an idea how this might be done. Kirby arose to his feet and staggered over to it. Yes, this thing was an old *pozo*, just as he had assumed.

The Atacama Desert, and especially that strip of it between Cobrillo and Calamidad, has been mined, off and on, for a half a thousand years, by Inca, by Spaniards, by Chilenos and in the case of Cobrillo by Yankees. Gold, silver, saltpetre and copper have sprung from its rootless crust. Kirby had seen other *pozos*, such as the one before him. He knew that by Chilean law the *pozo*, or test pit, which holds a claim of one hectare, is a shaft one meter square

and not less than five meters deep.

Here, a hundred yards from the wreck, Kirby found such a shaft. Obviously it was an old one, long deserted. He chose it as a convenient grave for Bromley.

Returning to Bromley he stripped the man of his clothes. In spite of his pains he worked efficiently. His schemings in fact acted as a stimulant. So his hands worked swiftly over Bromley, inspired by the boldness of his brain.

Having stripped Bromley, Kirby tossed the clothing upon the hottest embers of the wreck.

With his own body blistered it wouldn't do for him to appear in unburnt garments. So while he waited for his new riggings to scorch, he busied himself with changing his own out-of-toe shoes for the knee-high laced boots of Bromley. After that he raked the clothing from the fire, allowed it to cool and then dressed. He fitted Bromley's leather helmet over his head.

IT TOOK him some time to drag Bromley by the shoulders to the *pozo*, a hundred yards away. But it was finally done, and Kirby was glad to see that the wind, a wind which sweeps Atacama relentlessly about one day out of three, was coming on higher and higher as the day aged. It was making dust. In three hours, Kirby figured, it would efface the track he had made between the wreck and the *pozo*.

It was when Kirby had Bromley fairly on the brink of this *pozo* that he discovered that Bromley was not, after all, quite dead. He was unconscious; but Kirby, feeling the man's heart, found that it still beat.

But if not dead now, then soon, thought Kirby. He peered into the pit. The morning sun was not yet old enough to incline into its depths, and Kirby could see nothing but black shadows. The pit was deep. There was no rope, nor ladder, nor windlass. No way for a man to get out, even if he survived the fall. And there was only the tiniest flicker of life in Bromley, anyway.

Feeling assured of this, the fox, having dragged the fallen eagle to this desolate hole, toppled him therein.

Then Kirby bethought himself of other

details. Returning to the wreck he looked over all clues. Yes, it would be far better finesse not to take the silver horseshoe and brass name-plate in with him. That might look as though he were fearful of doubts and was therefore bringing proof. Best plan to let the evidence lie as it lay.

But his own charred clothing! He gathered up the remains of it and walked over to the old *pozo*. He peered in. Again he saw nothing but blackness. No sound came from Bromley. He was quite sure that the fall had snuffed out Bromley's final spark of life.

Piece by piece he tossed his old clothing into the shaft. Down into the blackness of the pit he pitched them, to fall like an unsanctified shroud upon the despoiled body below.

The last garment Kirby handled was his trousers. These, the least burned of all, were weighty, and Kirby remembered that the hip pocket contained an automatic pistol. He took this out. Better not carry it himself, he reasoned, because Bromley had flown from Tarpon Beach unarmed.

HE TOSSED the trousers into the hole. He was about to toss the gun in after them when he bethought to remove its loads. For there was a bare chance, of course, that Bromley wasn't dead. In which case he might discharge the pistol later, while someone was here to examine the evidence of the burned plane, and attract attention.



Kirby made shift to remove the loads. Then a thought struck him. It were better not to even have cartridges in his pocket when he showed at Cobrillo. If he tossed the cartridges after the gun into the shaft, Bromley, if alive, might reload the gun. The thing to do was for Kirby to explode the cartridges himself. And by so doing, was his murderous thought, he could make sure that Bromley was dead.

So Kirby pointed the automatic down

into the blackness of the pit and fired eight times. Then he dropped the gun into the hole.

Next he felt in the pockets of his new rigging, the clothing which had been Bromley's. He found sundry personal effects, a gold watch engraved with Bromley's name, various envelopes addressed to him, several telegrams signed by Vandemore, an honorable discharge from the French Foreign Legion, and other papers.

Most of the evidence seemed to be colorful proof that the bearer was Bromley, so Kirby retained it. He noticed a small green slip which appeared to be what was left of the stub of a theatre ticket, dated October 5th. That, Kirby realized, was only four days ago. No carrier of sea or land could have brought that stub to Chile. So Kirby retained it as the most colorful evidence of all.

One other paper, however, worried him. He read it, failed to understand it because it was all cluttered up with technical phrases, such as "azimuth," "altitude," "declination," "correction for refraction," "Alpha of Cruz," and with many figures which were Greek to Kirby. So Kirby tossed this paper down into the *pozo*, retaining all the rest. Then, leaving Bromley at the end of his path of glory, off went Kirby, staggering toward the Cobrillo mine on his own chosen trail of dereliction and deceit.

The ace he held right now was that his misery happened to be real, and did not have to be faked. He did not even have to fake the faint in which, two hours later, he fell across the threshold of the Llampera Club, at the big American mine.

THIS being Sunday, a considerable number of the staff were lounging about the clubroom. Jimmie Belden, Beggs Benson and Harry Archibalds were playing a game of cut-throat pitch near the door when the apparition of Kirby stumbled in upon them.

Naturally there was a rush to pick the fellow up. When he was laid upon a couch they found that he was hideously scarred, and unconscious. Archibalds was sent for the camp doctor while Benson and Belden searched the man for identification.

His clothing, especially his head gear, incited considerable comment. As for the man himself, one glance was sufficient to show that he had been nearly burned to death. But how could he have been in a fire? There had been no fire in camp, and the desert about was bare of things combustible.

It was not difficult to discover that his name was Bromley, Richard Bromley. His watch, together with various papers found upon him, established that fact at once. But who was Bromley?

Pending the arrival of the doctor, Benson and Belden, hemmed in by a score of their fellows, carefully examined the man's papers. What amazed them most were the dates which certain of these papers bore. Here, for instance, were two telegrams signed by a man named Vandemore and addressed to Richard Bromley. One was dated October 5th, 1927, and addressed to Bromley at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The Pittsburgh telegraph office had received it at one P. M. of that date. The other wire was addressed to Bromley at Tarpon Beach, Florida, and had been received there at six A. M. of October 7th.

"Criminy!" cried Beggs Benson. "Am I batty? Why, to-day's only October 9th."

Then he read the text of the telegrams; after which he completely blew up. Belden snatched them and read them aloud, a reading which threw the entire group of engineers into a frenzy of excitement. The telegrams referred to a non-stop flight from Cancer to Capricorn.

"Vandemore?" yelled Jimmie Belden. "Why, that's the fellow old Six A. M. was talking about last night."

"Can you beat that?" cried Benson. "This bird's done it. What yuh know about that?"

Every man in the room, except he who lay unconscious on the couch, began talking at once. This continued until the camp doctor arrived and ordered quiet.

Beggs Benson had presence of mind enough to realize the importance of the identifying evidence which had come from the flyer's pockets, so he stuffed this back where he had found it. All except a tiny

green stub which fluttered unnoticed to the floor.

A few minutes later Kirby, followed by a long queue of cheering admirers, was on his way to the camp hospital.

Belden and Benson, however, broke into a run for the office of the G. M., Six A. M. Sanders. They burst with small ceremony into that sanctorum, and found Six A. M. engaged on the long-distance telephone. They listened to Sanders' end of the phone conversation.



"Hello, Garth," Sanders was saying. "Yeh, Garth, I was reading about that last night— Well, well; you say he was sighted over Panama, huh? And later over Lima, huh?— All right, Garth; we'll keep an eye out for him up around our neck of the desert. Say, wouldn't that be a—but wait a minute, till I find out what Beggs Benson means by pulling my arm and kicking me in the shins."

Sanders whirled fiercely upon his shovel bench foreman. In a rush of words Benson forestalled rebuke by telling about Bromley.

Sanders became no whit less excited than Benson. Turning back to the instrument, he repeated the news to Garth. Garth was the American Vice-Consul at the port of Antofagasta. A half hour later the cables were hot. To all the world the news was flashed. The Consul-General at Santiago received it there, and Herman Vandemore received it in his Chicago home. Bromley had reached Capricorn.

THERE was not a shadow of doubt in any human mind but that Kirby was Bromley. Who else could he be? The Cobrillo crowd accepted him, hook, sinker and all. None more enthusiastically than the big chief, Sanders. Sanders was joyously elated. He prepared to receive a thousand guests, and did. It was an amazing and signal distinction for the Cobrillo mine.

Perhaps no one in camp appreciated the affair more than Jimmie Belden. What pleased Jimmie most was the finding, when he returned to the Llampera Club from the big ovation given the flyer at the hospital, of a small green piece of cardboard, a part of a ticket stub. It was lying on the floor near the couch. Jimmie pounced on it, reading its text with eager interest.

"Hot ziggetty!" he exulted. "This is the daydreams come true. And we thought we'd have to wait three weeks to find out about the World's Series! Why, this fellow Bromley was *there*."

Indeed there was enough of the mutilated stub left to bear evidence that Bromley had attended the first game of the great baseball classic. Not even in Pittsburgh was there a hotter fan than Jimmie Belden. He rushed back to the hospital to ask Bromley how the game had come out.

BUT he had no luck. The distinguished patient was all swathed in bandages and asleep. The doctor forbade anyone to disturb him.

Sanders, Benson and others of the staff were already off in an automobile, scouring the desert in the direction from which the flyer had appeared for trace of the wrecked plane. In no time at all they were back with abundant trophies. The silver horseshoe, the brass name-plate and various charred segments of the wreck were brought back in triumph to camp.

Kirby, lying between cool sheets and with his puffed and blistered face bandaged, kept his eyes closed and his mouth shut. He heard about the bringing in of the horseshoe and the name-plate, and applauded his own sagacity. This was a thousand times more effective than if he had brought in the proof himself. Why, so far he hadn't even claimed to be Bromley. But since these fools insisted with loud huzzahs that he was Bromley—that was a different matter.

Kirby merely lay in his bed and slept all he could; when he was awake he did much licking of his lips and wincing with pain, real pain, made signs to indicate that it hurt his throat to talk and—kept his mouth shut.

He lay there for two days; two days in

which there was a great deal of comings and goings, and in which Cobrillo became a focus for large hordes of cablegrams and visitors. Many of these cablegrams were directed at Bromley himself. Kirby only answered one. He dictated a reply to the message from Herman Vandemore, a message in which the millionaire sportsman had invited him to Chicago as his guest, there to be presented amid the great eclat with fifty thousand dollars. The reply Kirby dictated was:

No. Am going to Argentina to buy ranch with prize money. Please send it care Consul-General, Chile.

Jimmie Belden, up at the Llampera Club, began to complain that there was an awful lot of cablegrams going back and forth without his being able to find out about the World's Series. It was just before noon on Tuesday, October 11th, that Jimmie finally broke into the sun parlor of the hospital, where Kirby was convalescent, to engage in a little heart-to-heart baseball gossip with the hero.

He had a hard time pressing through Kirby's admirers. Kirby was sitting up, his face still swathed in bandages, listening to good news borne by Garth, the Anto Vice-Consul. This good news was that fifty thousand dollars had been cabled to the Anglo-Chilean bank to the credit of the Consul General. The latter was on his way up from Santiago by fast boat to make the presentation, scheduled for tomorrow. Right now there was a special train awaiting Bromley's pleasure at Calamidad, and on which he was to be that afternoon escorted in triumph down to port. A big parade and ovation awaited him there. Later he was expected to go to the capital as honored guest of the President and Chilean cabinet.

SNUGLY behind his veil of cloth and blistered skin Kirby listened with gloating avarice. It hurt him to talk, he said, and he did so sparingly. Everyone was tremendously sorry for his physical dilemma, a circumstance which helped Kirby immeasurably. When Jimmie Belden edged up, there was a man named

Hodge taking pictures of Kirby. Hodge, it seemed, was cameraman for *Around the World News Weekly*. He had happened to be on the West Coast at the time and of course had hustled to Cobrillo.

Jimmie Belden finally edged up close to the hero.

"Mr. Bromley," he began grinningly, "you're a man after my own heart. I see you were at the first Series game, between the Buccs and the Yanks. I'm a baseball fan myself. How'd this game come out?"



Still grinning, Jimmie held out the stub of a grandstand seat ticket.

Kirby's shrewd wit did not entirely desert him. He recalled the green

stub; he had assumed that it was part of a theatre ticket but now it appeared to refer to a baseball game. He was an American, and even an underworld American knows that "Yanks" means New York American league team; also that baseball is a thing of innings. The term "Buccs," however, missed him entirely. It was a mite too subtle, being slang for slang, and hadn't been in vogue in Seattle when Kirby left the town.

Kirby wriggled out of the hole by answering:

"I don't know. I had to leave at the end of the sixth inning."

Jimmie's face fell. "But what was the score when you left?" he insisted.

Right there was where Kirby should have quit, and faked a sore throat. Instead he scoured his mind for a reply which would get rid of this pestful inquisitor, and yet at the same time further his own, Kirby's, deception. He didn't dare guess at the score, of course, for any day this score might be cabled to Chile. He glanced at the date on the stub: October 5th.

"Fact is," he told Belden, "I don't remember. I was kinda up in the air, you know, with this flight only two days off. I'd stopped over in New York on the chance of seeing Vandemore, but learned

he was in Chicago. Just had two hours before my train left for Florida, so I whiled away that by taking in the first part of the game."

To shut off further questions, Kirby gave a grimace of pain and began stroking his bandaged throat.

"It hurts him to talk, Belden," the camp doctor explained.

"And besides," cut in Garth, looking at his watch, "it's not long now till we all have to leave for Calamidad. Bromley should have all the rest he can get."

Garth and the doctor dispersed everybody, and Jimmie left the hospital much disappointed in the interview.

YET no suspicion that there was anything phoney about it entered Jimmie's head until, fifteen minutes later, he ran on to Beggs Benson up on the shovel bench. He repeated to Beggs his conversation with the flyer.

The big bench foreman began scratching his jaw.

"That's doggone funny," he said.

"Darned if it isn't," agreed Belden. "The idea of anyone being enough interested in a World's Series game to buy a ticket and see the first six innings, and then not read the evening paper and find out how the game came out. He could have done that on the train. But it proves one thing, Beggs. The Giants won the National League pennant after all. You recall the last paper we got showed the Buccs away in the lead."

"Giants won the pennant!" exclaimed Benson. "Did Bromley say that?"

"Just as good as said it," answered Belden. "He said he stopped over in New York to see Vandemore, who was in Chicago. He just had two hours before his train left for Florida, and he put the time in seeing the first part of the game. If the game was in New York, then it must have been between the Yanks and the Giants."

A queer expression overspread the bronzed face of the bench foreman. "The Pittsburgh Pirates won the pennant," he said slowly and deliberately, "and the game was played in Pittsburgh."

"What?" cried Belden. "How do you know?"

"If Bromley saw any part of the first series game," replied Benson, "he saw it in Pittsburgh. There was a telegram in his pocket, addressed to him at Pittsburgh, and received there at one P. M. October 5th."

Jimmie and Beggs looked at each other eye to eye for quite a long time. Then Jimmie exclaimed: "Well, I'll be eternally hornswaggled and doggoned!"

IN THE sun parlor of the Coblillo hospital Kirby was feeling pretty good. He wasn't admitting this, but he knew he was in a shape to run, and run fast, once he got his hands on fifty thousand dollars. Tomorrow it would be his. It was almost time right now to leave with Garth, Sanders and a considerable escort for Calamidad to catch the train for port.

He had heard no tiny inkling of doubt expressed but that he was Bromley. How could there be? he asked himself over and over again. He was here, wasn't he? Out there lay the wreck of the Pathfinder, didn't it? Exactly on a hundred mile an hour schedule notes from the plane had been picked up at both Panama and Lima, hadn't they? How could the most crabbed pessimist in the world doubt but that he was Bromley?

As Kirby was thinking of these things, Six A. M. Sanders drove up in front of the sun parlor in his speedy seven-passenger car. Sanders, Hodge and Garth were going to drive with the flyer in that car down to Calamidad, where Bromley's special train was waiting. Cars bearing other visitors and many of the mine staff, bound down to port for the celebration, had already left.

Garth, the Vice-Consul, came around the corner of the building and called out: "Time we're starting, Bromley, old chap."

Then Hodge, the cameraman, appeared. Kirby had not been in the least afraid of those pictures Hodge had taken. He was sure that his bandages and blisters could defy any camera. But now Hodge sprung another one on him.

"It's not far out of our way," he told

Kirby. "Let's drive by the wreck of the Pathfinder so I can get a shot of you, standing between Sanders and Garth, with the wreck and the desert as background."

Kirby demurred.

But Hodge was a regular "get the story at any cost" reporter. "It'd be worth real cash to *Around the World News Weekly*," he told Kirby; he followed this up by whispering a certain figure in Kirby's ear.

KIRBY was tempted. In case anything went wrong before he got his fingers on the prize money, this fee from Hodge would come in mighty handy. But he was afraid. In fact he was nervously atremble at the thought of it. Suppose they were all out there, and someone happened to walk over a hundred yards and look down a certain *poso*—and saw the corpse of Richard Bromley!

So he demurred again.

Hodge shrugged. "Well," he said, "I guess I'll have to get me a car and go out there by myself. I'd get fired if I didn't bring in a picture of the wreck." He turned away.

Kirby thought quickly. After all, what if someone did look down that *poso*? Kirby himself had done so, and been able to see nothing but blackness. And what a shame to pass up this hard cash! Not only that, if Hodge were going anyway, Kirby decided he would just a little bit prefer to be there himself. If anyone did find the body of Bromley, Kirby wanted to know it, and quick. He didn't want anyone slipping up on him from behind.

So he called Hodge back and agreed to the proposal.

Sanders and Garth were hardly modest enough to object. Each knew that this picture of the hero at the wreck would later be featured in every great news sheet of the world and be flashed upon a thousand silver screens.

Ten minutes later the four men were off in Sanders' car. To make up the time lost by the digression, Sanders hit it up. Kirby, sitting with him in the front seat, noticed that the speedometer went to fifty-five an hour. The bare desert presented an inviting speedway, for even though a car

skidded there was nothing it could possibly hit.

And Sanders didn't skid. In a very short while he pulled up at the wreck of Bromley's plane.

Hodge got out and rigged up his camera. Kirby kept his seat until they were all ready for the picture. All the while he kept telling himself that he was safe. Hadn't dozens of inspection parties already been out here, and found nothing? Nevertheless his nervousness increased. A chill began creeping up his spine as he alighted from the car, when all was ready, to pose between Sanders and Garth.

He licked his lips and said: "Make it snappy, Hodge."

THE trio grouped themselves, Six A. M. and Garth each with a hand on a shoulder of Kirby. It was a still. The camera had merely to click and the job was done.

It clicked, and with a sigh of relief Kirby returned to the car and climbed into the front seat.

"Let's get goin'," he demanded peevishly; "this place gives me the jim-jams."

Sanders smiled understandingly. Naturally Bromley would feel that way about a spot where he had been so nearly burned to death. He lingered a moment, watching Hodge refold the tripod.

It was Garth, the Vice-Consul, whose eyes happened to pick up the glint of a tiny object, alien to the desert, which lay some hundred yards away in the noonday sun.

"Another souvenir of the wreck," he remarked in high humor. "I'll just grab that for myself." And he started walking with long quick strides toward the shiny object, which lay near the brink of an old *pozo*.

From the car Kirby looked; he saw; he knew instantly what the damnable thing was. In a cold sweat he knew all about it, and how it must have come there. It was an automatic pistol, the one he himself had thrown down the hole.

"Let's get going," he fairly screamed.

But Garth was nearly to the *pozo*. All power of speech left Kirby. Why hadn't he thought of it before? It was true he

had emptied the gun, so that Bromley, if alive, could not shoot it and attract attention. But why couldn't he have thrown the gun upward and out of the hole?

And now Garth was about to pick the thing up! Finding it on the brink of a *pozo*, wouldn't he naturally look down? And what would he see? Kirby's thumping heart leaped to his throat as he realized something else he had not thought of before. It was not early morning now, as when Kirby had looked down the pit. It was high noon. If Garth looked there would be no shadows. The vertical rays of the noon sun would guide his vision to the bottom of the pit.

GARTH had reached the *pozo* and was picking up the shiny object. He held it aloft; both Sanders and Hodge, still standing by the wreck, discerned that it was a pistol.

Naturally the presence of such a thing at such a place was calculated to arrest attention. Sanders called out; "That's funny; but bring it along, Garth. Let's get going."

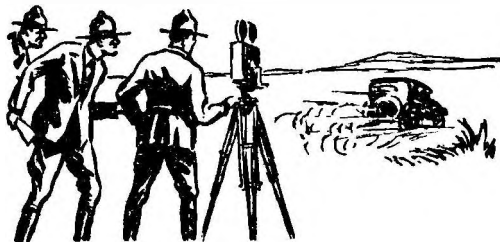
Kirby, alone in the car, watched Garth in icy suspense. Garth lingered by the *pozo*, examining curiously the thing in his hand. He took a step toward the car; then, as though impelled by some inconsequential afterthought, he stepped back to the *pozo* and peered down.

Kirby, in the car, squirmed and choked back the scream of terror which arose in his throat.

And then he saw Garth, at the *pozo*, kneel and look fixedly into its depths.

"See anything, Garth?" yelled Six A. M. Sanders. "If not, let's get going."

Garth didn't move immediately. Kirby had no doubt but that murder was out.



Hodge finished bundling up his gear and was starting for the car when suddenly there was a roar from its engine and it

began to move. Sanders whirled at the sound. The car was moving faster. He saw that Kirby had slid over under the driving wheel. He was off, going fast now, faster, still faster now, plunging across the desert, alone.

"Hey there!" bawled Sanders.

But Kirby was gone.

In amazement Sanders, Hodge and Garth—Garth had risen from his knees by now—watched the unexplained desertion of Kirby. Straight northward across the desert, in the opposite direction from Calamidad, the car retreated at tremendous speed.

"Well, I'll be damned!" cried Sanders.

"Wouldn't it frost your eyebrows?" exclaimed Hodge.

The two walked over to join Garth by the *pozo*. They also peered into its depths. The bottom was plainly in sight, some twenty feet below their eyes and flooded generously by the vertical sunbeams. It was bare and clean. There was absolutely nothing in the hole.

THE three men were completely mystified. Finding themselves alone on the desert and five miles from the nearest house, they had no choice except to start tramping through the dust toward Cobrillo. The spot of black which was the retreating automobile was now fading from sight on the northern horizon.

Garth's theory was: "Bromley got out of bed too quick; he's feverish likely, and don't know what he's doing."

Six A. M. Sanders, a better judge of men, than either Garth or Hodge, trudged along puzzledly. Garth's theory satisfied him not at all. It occurred to him now that he had been subconsciously aware all the while of something lacking in the flyer's make-up. It was a thing for which Six A. M. had a word he had coined himself—manstuff.

Each with his own thoughts, the three men trudged along. But they were less than halfway when relief appeared in the shape of a flivver bearing Beggs Benson. The bench foreman drew up, and yelled excitedly for them to get in.

They did so and Benson whirled the car around, heading toward Cobrillo.

Sanders, sitting beside Benson, told him what had happened at the wreck, and of Bromley's strange flight.

"Something big's popped, chief," informed Benson in turn; "but no use to follow that fellow in this lizzie. I'd never catch him."

"Follow who? Bromley?" cried Garth from the rear seat.

"No," Beggs yelled back, as he pushed the gas lever to the last notch; "not Bromley. We're heading for him now."

"Spill your stuff, Benson," shrieked Hodge, his reportorial acumen fanned to a hot pitch. "What do you know?"

"Jimmie Belden and I, on a hunch, were at the wreck an hour before you were," answered Benson. "We saw the same thing you did—an empty gun lying near the brink of a *pozo*. Naturally we looked down, and there was Bromley."

"Bromley!" cried Garth. "Are you crazy?"

"Anyway we found a man clothed in rags—burnt rags, mind you—lying on the bottom of the *pozo*. We got him out. He was almost dead, but not quite. He couldn't talk. Looked like he hadn't had anything to eat for three days. There was a gash in his head, his eyes were shut, his heart was just barely fluttering and he had two bullet holes in his leg."

"What?" bawled Six A. M. Sanders. "How did he get there? Who——"

"We got him out," repeated Benson, as the flivver swung into the east outskirts of Cobrillo where were located the shacks of the native laborers, "put him in the flivver and hustled him to the first house here in the native quarter. Looked like he was going to pass out any split second; we wanted to get him on a bed and, if possible, his story. Here's where we brought him." Benson brought the car to a jolting stop in front of one of the cabins. "He's in here," Beggs went on, "but probably dead by now."

"Did he say anything?" asked Sanders, scrambling out of the car.

"He came to for about ten seconds—that's all," informed Benson. "I asked him who he was, and he said, 'Bromley.'"

"Goshomighty!" cried Sanders, and rushed into the shack.

GARTH, Hodge and Benson followed. Inside they found Jimmie Belden, keeping watch over a pitifully pale and forlorn young man who, clothed in burnt rags, lay on the bed. The native *roto* who lived in the cabin had long since been dispatched for a doctor.

Garth, the Vice-Consul, took charge. His was the responsibility of unravelling this mix-up. He approached the bed and looked gravely down upon him who lay thereon.

"He's still alive," whispered Jimmie Belden.

Indeed as he spoke Bromley opened his eyes.

"Are you Bromley?" asked Garth.

The man on the bed stared dully around the room. Then his lips moved, forming a scarcely audible affirmative.

It cannot be held against Garth that he was cautious. He had been deceived once and naturally did not want to be deceived again.



"Can you prove it?" he asked.

Again the lips moved in a faint affirmative. The man's eyes closed

and Garth thought that his life had ebbed away.

But Six A. M. appeared on the other side of the bed with a flask of brandy. He forced it between Bromley's lips, and Bromley's eyes opened again.

"How can you prove it?" asked Garth.

The tiniest flicker of color came to Bromley's cheeks. One of his hands groped toward a pocket of his ragged and scorched trousers. Then he relapsed. Sanders administered a few more drops of the stimulant.

"How can you prove it?" repeated Garth.

Suddenly Bromley, as though by some divine miracle, seemed to be possessed with sufficient vitality to answer Garth. Or perhaps he realized the gravity of the issue and thus made the almost superhuman effort necessary to use his voice at length.

"I—tore—sheet of paper—in three

thirds," he answered, and the words were more distinct than any he had uttered.

"You tore a paper in three thirds," prompted Garth. "What paper?"

The room was hushed. One could hear the big gold watch tick in Sanders' pocket. Beggs Benson had gone to see why the doctor was so infernally slow coming. Garth and Sanders, one on either side of the bed, and Jimmie Belden, leaning over the foot-rail, were hanging with acute anxiety upon the man's answer. For a full minute there was silence. Then Bromley spoke again.

"A paper—ruled—into—squares," he said haltingly.

"The paper was ruled into squares," prompted Garth.

"Easily matched," whispered Bromley huskily, "when—torn—into three—parts."

"I see," said Garth quickly. "You tore a paper, one side of which was checker-boarded with squares, into three parts. What then?"

AGAIN Bromley seemed to make a superhuman effort to speak distinctly. "On the back of the top third," he whispered, "I wrote the note dropped over Panama. On the middle third, I wrote the note dropped over Lima."

"And the bottom third?" asked Garth.

"Is here," answered Bromley. All the while his hand had been delving in a pocket of his scorched trousers—trousers which once had been Kirby's and which Kirby had thrown down into the pit. And now Bromley drew from this pocket that certain scrap of paper which Kirby had likewise thrown into the pit for the reason that he had not understood the characters written upon it.

Bromley extended this paper to Garth, and Garth saw that it was a torn third of what had once been a sizable sheet.

"Is here," Bromley repeated.

Garth did not take the scrap immediately, but stood looking upon Bromley with an expression of infinite tenderness and complete conviction. Sanders, too, was convinced. He knew men. Whatever was that thing which he called "manstuff," here it lay, he was sure, clothed in rags and tatters on this bed.

And Jimmie Belden, leaning breathlessly over the foot-rail, was likewise convinced. Bromley was still holding the torn bottom third of a paper out toward Garth. Jimmie, from where he stood, could not read the forward side, on which was inscribed the azimuth to five volcanic peaks and an angular altitude to the South Polar Star. That data Jimmie couldn't see, but he could see the characters on his own side of the sheet.

Yes, discerned Jimmie, it was indeed checkerboarded into squares—in fact this paper was, or had been, nothing more nor less than an official score sheet of a ball game. And this being the bottom third, it naturally bore the summary of score which Jimmie Belden read as follows:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	R	H	E
New York	1	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	5	6	1
Pittsburgh	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	4	9	2

"And," cried Garth, "assuming that this

third of the sheet matches the two notes you dropped at Panama and Lima, it proves beyond a shadow of doubt that you flew from Cancer to Capricorn and have won the Vandemore prize."

It was then that Bromley raised himself a trifle from his pillow and made his last valiant effort to speak. In that effort he put every jot and tittle of—as Six A. M. would have named it—his "manstuff."

"No," he answered; "it proves quite the opposite. Read the log. I failed to reach the goal. Vandemore owes me nothing at all."

He fell back upon the bed, and his heart ceased to beat. With that prize called honor his spirit fled. It was his. It had been his all the while. Oceans, nor deserts, nor jungles could have snatched it away. Ungivable by donors and unstealable by thieves, to *that* thing Bromley held fast, even now, and with it his immortal soul flew on.

BLOWING OUT OIL FIRES WITH T.N.T.

FOR pure, spectacular adventure, the life of an oil fields firefighter presents episodes that can hardly be matched by those in any other walk of life.

Lightning, static electricity, friction, carelessly handled cigarettes or matches, a boiler too close, or any of innumerable other causes may ignite a monster gusher or gas well as it is being brought in—and then the firefighter has a job on his hands that would make the average man quit in complete despair.

The well may be flowing thousands of barrels of oil. It may be a gasser, making as much as one hundred million cubic feet or more of gas a day; or it may be flowing both gas and oil at the same time. The heat of such a fire is so intense that it is impossible to get within hundreds of yards of the well without special protection, while the brilliant light can often be seen sixty or seventy miles at night.

Sometimes the well will be flowing "by heads," which means the oil or gas is coming in spasmodic gushes, causing lightning-like flashes of flame that soar hundreds of feet into the air in one mighty pillar of fire. These mighty volcanoes of flame the oil firefighter must attack and subdue.

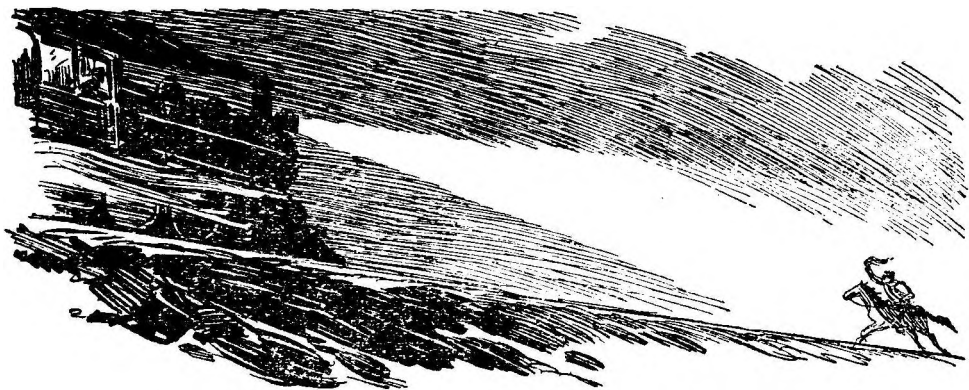
Occasionally he uses steam to quench the blaze, inching up to the volcano under protection of great, asbestos-covered shields, playing huge jets of live steam against the fire. But the spectacular and most effective method is a lone hand game in which the fighter walks into the heart of the flame, protected by a cumbrous suit of heavy asbestos, and carrying in his arms a big charge of T.N.T. or nitroglycerine, in a shell similarly protected.

In the very heart of the fire he places this shell, then runs frantically. It requires approximately three minutes for the heat to penetrate the asbestos and tin covering of the deadly explosive and detonate the charge—and by that time the fighter is three hundred yards away, flat on the ground, if his luck holds.

The concussion of the explosion literally blows out the flame and extinguishes the well, as one might extinguish a candle with a breath.

Naturally the oil fire fighter is a picked, paid and marked man.

F. H.



THE HAM AT EAGLE BUTTE

By CLIFFORD KNIGHT

Author of "The Buckfoot Sweepstakes," "The Lord Mayor of Nippentuck," etc.

THE A. & B.G.R.R. BARRED ALL STUDENT OPERATORS FROM THE WIRES OF ITS DESERT DIVISION. THEN, ONE NIGHT, WITH TWO TRAINS HURLING TOWARD AWFUL CATASTROPHE A DESPERATE DISPATCHER TRIED IN VAIN TO GET EAGLE BUTTE STATION—AND YOUNG JOE EARLY MADE HISTORY AND A NEW RAILROAD LAW

TO STOP the Pacific Limited was a high crime and misdemeanor. It wasn't done on the desert division of the A. & B. G. railway by anyone who valued his job. For 117 miles run at an average speed of 51.2 miles an hour was too great a strain on the division to permit more than the necessary operating stops.

The eastbound Limited met the westbound at Walton. The desert division being single tracked, that stop was obligatory for one or other of the trains, usually the westbound. Everything else got on side-track early and stayed there until the Limited ripped past, and woe betide the luckless wight who was so slow that he had to flag the Limited down until he got into the clear.

That's why Superintendent McGinnis was so wrought up one June morning. Somebody had blundered. The Limiteds, both east and westbound, two days before had been stabbed 45 minutes at Walton. It was dog eat dog. The general manager in a caustic telegram the afternoon it happened had figuratively eaten McGinnis alive, and now two train crews, a dispatcher, and an agent and his helper were on the carpet in the superintendent's office at Headerville, and McGinnis was gnaw-

ing on them as a savage hungry dog on a bone.

The superintendent's face was a purplish red, his hands trembled, he strode up and down the room pausing to shake his fist under the nose of some hapless employee who had come quakingly in at the official command to tell his story.

"Forty-five minutes! Ye gods of the mountain! And you two train crews sat there on side track all that time like dumbbells, instead of hopping out and running like hell as you're required to do! How, about it? What's your explanation, Curtis?" and he wheeled upon the conductor of the west bound Limited. "And yours, Henderson?" when Curtis was done.

McGinnis bored in and after a bitter cross-examination settled upon one Alex Jackson, the agent's helper and student operator at Sandy Crossing, as the guilty man. His face ashen, the youthful helper stammered he had taken the train order sent by Dispatcher Adams for the eastbound Limited, directing the two trains to meet at East Walton, that later he had spilled some ink on the order and decided it would look better if he rewrote it, and did so. Unfortunately he left out the word "East."

The two trains, therefore, approached

their meeting point, one with an order to meet the other at Walton, and that other expecting the meeting place to be at East Walton, 2½ miles from Walton and behind a sand hill that obscured the sidings one from the other. And there they had waited until a passing section gang solved the situation.

McGinnis whirled upon the helper as though he would tear him apart.

"The rule book says plainly," he fulminated, "that any train order that must be rewritten shall be repeated to the dispatcher and he must OK it. Why didn't you do it?"

"I forgot——"

"Forgot! My Lord Almighty! You can't run a railroad with a bunch of forgetters!" McGinnis shouted. Then another thought took possession of his superheated brain. "What business have you got handling train orders at Sandy Crossing, anyway? Bailey, what about it?" And he turned savagely upon the agent. "You're the only one authorized to do that job at your station."

WHEN the smoke of battle cleared Alex Jackson, the helper, had no job and Agent Bailey's fair white record was assessed forty demerit marks, which was a two-thirds dismissal, for sixty "brownies" on the A. & B. G. was the limit at which an employee was discharged.

McGinnis's report to the general manager elicited a grunt from that huge, grizzled individual as he reached for a telegraph pad. He wrote to Superintendent McGinnis:

"Effective this date, no student operators will be permitted on your division. See to it personally that every 'ham' on the line is kept off the wires in future. (Signed) J. T. Cantrell."

At Eagle Butte far out towards the middle of the desert division, where the Limiteds in their transcontinental flights were wont to hit her up at better than 70 miles an hour past the tiny box station, Joe Early's ambition received its death blow. Eccles, the agent, had shown him the official notice. "That's what it says, Joe," and Eccles patted the undersize youth on

the shoulder. "It means my job if they caught me learning you to telegraph."

Nobody had paid much attention to Joe until Eccles arrived at Eagle Butte to take the agency. But for that matter there never had been many at Eagle Butte to pay attention to anybody else anyway. For the entire personnel of the station comprised only the agent and a section foreman. The section foreman had a gang of four Mexicans, but they weren't counted as men in enumerating the population of Eagle Butte.

No one before Eccles had been interested apparently in an undersized youth on a pinto pony who occasionally ranged along the fence back of the dobe huts where the men spent their off hours in sleep, gazing wistfully at the yellow railway station building beside the gleaming rails and speculating on the tall semaphore standard that reared two red arms high into the Arizona sky in a commanding gesture to all trains that passed the station.

When Eccles came it was different. "Some kid from the ranch the other side of the butte, I reckon," said Eddie Hanson, the section boss, whose chief concern in life was whether his flivver would get him safely to Rackets and back nightly, Rackets being the nearest town, thirty miles away, where a blonde waitress in the Rackets Eatery had interested him now for the long period of six months. "I've seen him a few times. Never paid any attention to him though."

But with Eccles it was distinctly different.

"Hello," he said the first time the boy came within speaking distance, which was the next day after the station had been turned over to him by his predecessor.

The boy paused in his contemplation of the railroad line, looked gravely at Eccles, a tall, thin man with sandy hair and blue eyes, and ventured a "Howdy." He was a stockily built lad of 16, square of face and freckled.

That was the beginning of the thing. The end was something that is history in the annals of the A. & B. G. railway.

"I'm not a cowboy, really," Joe confided when relations between them were more firmly established. "I was a born railroad man."

"That's so?"



"Yes, you see, Dad was a bill clerk at the freight house in Los Angeles till he got sick and we had to come out here when I was just 6. And he died. Over at the ranch—" and he jerked his arm in a sudden gesture towards a point beyond

the butte—"there wasn't nothing else for me to do except cows when I got big enough, but I want to get back to railroadin' again. I want to learn to tap on the wires the way you do. Not that I got much against cows, you understand; a cow's all right, but the railroad is in my blood."

ECCLES thought it could be arranged. "It's not hard," he had said. "I picked it up one day back home on the Burlington. In half an hour they had me telegraphing. If you're quick, you ought to pick it up in a couple of hours easy." It was the old joke upon which Eccles himself had cut his teeth in his "ham" days, but Joe took it seriously and opined that come next Saturday evening he thought they would spare him a couple of hours from the ranch.

Eccles watched him ride away with some misgiving.

"And could I get a job as soon as I learned?" Joe had asked as he swung onto his pony.

"Sure, you can," Eccles had replied; "any good operator can get a job anywhere, any time." And now as he saw the figure growing smaller along the fence that ended somewhere near the sunset beyond the butte, he turned and went into the station, saying, "Hell, why did I want to kid him like that for?"

It may have been a feeling of remorse at having joked with the boy's earnest ambition that prompted Eccles on Saturday evening, when Joe appeared in the station

doorway, to redeem his promise to teach the boy the art of telegraphy.

"I've got a practice set fixed up here on this board," said Eccles, and he drew from under the table a thin pine board upon which were mounted a key and a sounder. "We'll take a little juice off the local battery, and we're all set to go. Take off your hat and set down in that chair. This is 'A'—a dot dash, see?" And Eccles tapped the letter on the key. He made it over again and a third and fourth time for the boy whose eyes were intent on Eccles's slim fingers "It's just like learning your letters all over again, only you do it with your ears."

The dispatcher at Headersville called, and Eccles moved into the crescent niche at the telegraph table, seized a pad of green tissue with carbon paper between its leaves and wrote hurriedly with an agate-tipped stylus in a flourishing hand the train order the dispatcher sent. He repeated it back when it came his turn and signed it and received the dispatcher's "complete."

"That's a '19' order, Joe," he said turning back to the boy, folding the green tissue sheets he had torn from the pad. "I've got to hand it up on the fly to the engineer on an extra freight train in about five minutes." He took a long-handled, wooden, train order hoop from its nail and clipped the order upon the handle. "Gosh, they're comin' already!" he exclaimed as the sharp bark of a locomotive whistle called suddenly for a clear track.

Eccles seized the semaphore lever and moved it back and forth so that the light outside on the high standard changed from red to green and back to red and then to green. It was the telegrapher's signal to the engineer to pick up a train order without stopping. There came two short sharp blasts on the whistle in acknowledgment and Eccles rushed outside into the darkness.

THE giant engine, like some monster of the night, its side rods pounding, steam and smoke trailing in a fiery plume over the cab, wheels screaming, exhaust roaring, lunged up out of the darkness. Joe Early standing in the doorway saw Eccles moving down the platform,

edging out closer towards the track, holding aloft his hoop, a diminutive David gone to meet a nightmare of a Goliath. With a rush the engine swept by, the fireman crouched in the gangway ran his arm through the upheld hoop, snatched the order from the clip and tossed the hoop from him.

Eccles came back limping after having retrieved his hoop.

"Damn!" he said, raising his right foot into the circle of lamplight on the table and examining his instep. "There's a low joint in the track out there, Joe, and a chunk of coal jarred off the tender and hit me. This business of handing up train orders on the fly ain't as safe as it might be. The man down at Jagers last week got his leg broke when a brake shoe worked loose and got thrown out when a freight was passing. Good thing it wasn't my head tonight that got hit. It don't amount to much, though," he concluded after pressing the injured instep a few times with his fingers. "Now, we'll get started again. 'B' is like this, dash three dots. Hear it?" and he tapped the letter on the practice set.

Joe rode home under the stars, his head stirring with a multitude of fancies. He had got as far as the letter "F," and Eccles had written out on a piece of paper all the letters of the alphabet and the numerals and punctuation marks.

"It's going to take longer than two hours to learn you, Joe," Eccles had said at parting. "Learning to telegraph is harder than I let on it was the other day. It takes lots of practice to become expert."

But Joe after his first evening with Eccles at the Eagle Butte station was resolved to learn no matter how hard it was.

And he had learned, and with remarkable quickness in the two months he had worked under Eccles's direction. He could send fairly well, although he still had the halting manner of the amateur, and he could receive at slow speed the messages Eccles sent him on the practice set. As yet he had been forbidden to touch the wires on the telegraph table, but he could listen and did listen and had picked up most of the call letters and occasionally could hear an "and" or a "the."

So it stood when Superintendent McGinnis's circular letter blasted his hopes.

"I know it ain't fair, Joe," said Eccles consolingly, who had heard the gossip back of the order. "But Bailey up at Sandy Crossing got forty 'brownies' out of it and his helper got canned. And they'd can me if I went ahead trying to learn you."

"I can come to see you, though, can't I?" asked Joe, slightly hopeful. "And I could listen to the wires if I promised not to touch them?"

ECCLES thought a while, then said, "Yes, you can come to see me. Always glad to have you, Joe. And, of course, if you listen to the wires, I don't see what harm there is in that, only don't listen out loud. Nobody will know you're listening



then." And so Joe listened almost nightly, becoming more proficient, although not so rapidly as he would have done had Eccles taught him as before. "It's too bad, boy, the company's making a mistake, but it's their railroad and they're running it to suit themselves. You'd been just about ready to hold down a job, by now, if they hadn't put out that order." Eccles was consoling.

"Do you think they'll ever let 'em have 'hams' again in the line?"

"Don't look like it, boy. Only last night some 'ham' came in on Number 7 wire there and they heard him at Headerville and started hunting him. And finally they run him down and found him at East Walton. Somebody will get called on the carpet again, and get some more 'brownies' for it. No, Joe, it takes a railroad a long time to forget a thing like that."

His words were lost in a sudden roaring sound that seemed to shake the tiny station until it threatened to fall in splinters; then with a shriek as from hell the Limited split the silence of the night wide open and fled towards the dark butte that stood across the stars in the eastern sky. The rails clicked to themselves for a time after the train had gone as if in murmured protest at the terrific pounding they had received, then fell si-

lent. All sound of the train disappeared completely and the calm desert night remained.

"Didn't have any extra car tonight," said Eccles, jotting down the time of the Limited's passing in his train register. "Sometimes the general manager's car is on there, or the president's. Nobody else can ride the Limited in his own car except somebody like them, and they have to ride right up next the engine so as not to interfere with the passengers in the club cars and the observation. Joe, if anything'd happen to that train running like that, they probably wouldn't be a single devil come out of it alive. I'd shore hate to be the man responsible for putting 'em into the ditch or into another train, say like Number 10 which the Limited meets down the line at Alston. If the Limited and Number 10 ever happened to get set for a collision down on that big curve around the butte, nothing in hell or heaven could stop 'em, because they can't see far enough ahead to shut off in time. I get to thinking about things like that, Joe, when I'm settin' here alone sometimes, and it gives me the willies. Boy, that would be one awful wreck. Because Number 10 ain't no slouch when it comes to steppin' out and runnin' a little herself."

THE evening passed with long moments of silence between them, which Joe occupied in listening to the wires. For the most part they were tantalizing clicks that he could almost but never quite interpret. The calls, because of their constant repetition, he knew by heart, but the speed of the messages, the abbreviated code of conversation, the train orders, queries and answers in symbols, all were so dishearteningly swift that a frown appeared on Joe's forehead with the concentration of his effort. Eccles had seen it evening after evening, and the earnestness of the boy at length inspired him to an unbelievable act. He told Joe of it after Number 10 had gone that night and the boy was mounting his pony back of the station. Eccles' voice spoke in the darkness:

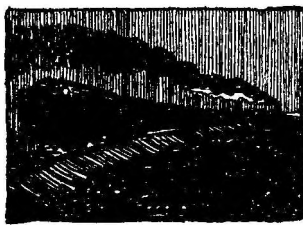
"I wrote a letter the other day, about a week ago, it was, Joe. I wrote to McGinniss, the superintendent, about you."

"About me?" echoed Joe in consternation than any affair of his own should be brought to the attention of so great a man as the superintendent of the desert division.

"Yes, I want to see if they won't make an exception with you because of yore father bein' an A. & B. G. man, and you bein' so nearly learned. Won't do no harm asking, I says to myself, and so I wrote the letter. Now don't go and expect that they'll let you start in again. Because probably they won't, but I figured that if there was a chanct at all of their doing it, you ought to have it."

The boy muttered an awkward thanks, lingered a while on his horse then rode away in a cloud of dreams. Eccles went back into the station, wishing he had said nothing to the boy about the letter, for the disappointment would be keen when he heard from Superintendent McGinnis, for, of course, the company would not make an exception. He should have thought of that before writing.

Superintendent McGinnis was not a believer in making exceptions to company rules. He didn't countenance it himself and he put Eccles' letter in a pile to be answered. But, upon a whim, when in his dictation he reached it, instead of addressing the agent at Eagle Butte he wrote the general manager, referring the request to that official. "It's his rule, anyhow," he thought. He remembered Joe Early's father, but he had forgotten, if he had ever known, that there was a boy.



"I'll let Cantrell say what he wants to do about it," he said to his stenographer.

And General Manager Cantrell didn't get around to saying what he would do about it until one evening after dinner in his private car. He had been called East that day to an important conference at the President's office and had ordered his car put in the eastbound Limited's train. He was not in the happiest of moods. He didn't like to ride the Limited, because its speed was greater than he

cared for, and it was uncomfortable and noisy so close to the locomotive. But there was nothing else to do but take it, if he was to reach the conference in time.

"Bring along all the unanswered correspondence, Sam," he directed his private secretary, "and we'll try to clean it up." The afternoon had passed with a steady grind of letters and the sun was dropping towards the dark crest of the mountains far behind them in the west when the Limited came short up at a flagman's signal to be informed of a derailment ahead. Two cars in a freight train had jumped the rails. Forty-eight minutes later the Limited got under way again to the utter disgust of the general manager who had sat most of the time in his car, watch in hand, and knowing that each minute lost was a minute the Limited could not make up.

He ate dinner in silence, shortly after the train started moving again, scarcely noticing his secretary across the table. And then the first letter he picked up from the pile when they settled back to work again was Agent Eccles' request for an exception in the case of Joe Early. "Hell, no!" he grunted, and dictated a brusque reply to Superintendent McGinnis.

That forty-eight minutes of lost time annoyed Dispatcher Adams, who controlled the movements of the desert division trains from the dispatcher's office at Headersville. It meant he must tear up his carefully arranged schedules and make new ones. All trains had to be informed that the Limited would run forty-eight minutes behind its regular schedule. The usual meeting point of the Limited and Number 10 at Alston must be changed to Eagle Butte. There was an eastbound fruit special on express train schedule running thirty minutes ahead of the Limited. It must not be sidetracked until the Limited was right upon its heels. It meant hard and constant work until things were running smoothly again. By 8 o'clock he began to ease up from the strain.

And then catastrophe.

THE thing happened which train dispatchers dream of in their nightmares. The night man at Sandy Crossing, an operating stop for the eastbound Lim-

ited called as from a clear sky and in snappy nervous Morse said that he had forgotten to give the Limited order Number 72. Dispatcher Adams needed no reference to his book in which were written all the orders he had issued to the many trains of the division to tell him that disaster awaited the Limited and Number 10. For order Number 72 had changed the meeting point of the two trains from Alston to Eagle Butte. Number 10 had received the order. The Limited had not.

Adams, a slight perspiration starting on his high, smooth forehead, without waiting for Sandy Crossing to finish his explanation, called Eagle Butte. If a collision were to be averted only Eccles at Eagle Butte could do it, for his station was the only one in the pathway of the two trains, the other intervening stations, of which there were three, being open only in the day time, now were closed. So Adams called Eagle Butte. The call letters "BU" snapped through the instruments sharp as a whiplash. He looked at the clock. It was 8:03. The fruit special should have passed Eagle Butte at 8 o'clock. Two minutes of steady calling went by without an answer. Eccles would answer in a moment. Usually he was very prompt, and he would be told to stop the Limited and hold it until Number 10 arrived.

Two minutes, three minutes, four minutes more of steady repetition of the call letters. Adams swore, refusing to think for a moment what would happen if Eagle Butte failed to answer. It would happen somewhere on the curve around the butte—the collision. Not a chance! And Cantrell, the general manager, riding the Limited, next the engine. "God!" Adams said under his breath, wiping his perspiring face with his handkerchief while the steady beat of the call drummed through the instrument.

At 8:15 Adams paused long enough to send a call boy to the roundhouse to order the wrecker to be got ready. That's as far as he would admit. Where in hell was Eccles? He was the only chance. "BU—BU—BU," he called. He paused a moment to start Greely, his operator in the next room, to calling Eagle Butte on the commercial wire. A glance at the clock told

time there was fifteen minutes left. His instinct for calculation set the moment for the collision at 8:31. If Eccles didn't answer by 8:29 or 30——!

"BU—BU—BU," Adams called.

JOE EARLY heard the call as he stepped into the doorway of the Eagle Butte station. He had just dropped the lines on his pinto back of the station and came in expecting to find Eccles and have an evening of talk and listening to the wires. He had noted, though, that something was wrong at the station as he came up. The light on the tall semaphore pole was out. Eccles usually filled and lighted the light at sundown and climbed the pole and put it in place. "Eccles," he shouted in the tiny room, but there was no answer. The agent might have been playing a trick on him, he thought. Then a sudden fear laid a light finger upon him and he went outside, kicking as he did so a lump of coal just beyond the doorstep.

That was funny. Must have fallen off some engine. Then his eyes growing accustomed to the gloom after the lighted office, he saw a battered signal light among some scattered pieces of coal. He picked it up. It was the semaphore light, smashed beyond use. A groan from the shadows near the bay window of the office suddenly brought Joe's heart up into his mouth. "Eccles," he shouted, but there was no answer. Steeling himself against the shock of unknown things, he walked slowly towards the sound, and almost stumbled over Eccles' form lying near the building where he had crawled.

Joe read the signs. That fruit train he had seen down beyond the butte a bit ago, running like a devil from hell, had spilled the coal on Eccles from its tender when he handed up an order on the fly. The signal light, for it must have happened at dusk, was on the platform and would soon have been put on its high perch by Eccles. It too had been smashed by the falling coal. No one on the train had seen the accident.

The youth had half carried half dragged the man into the office as he thought out the manner of the accident. He laid his burden on the floor and brought the lamp and held it over the prostrate figure. There

was a large scalp wound above the left ear and it was bleeding. The agent was alive, but Joe couldn't rouse him.

"BU—BU—BU," came the call from the instrument. Joe listened and heard the



dispatcher sign the call. Any call from the dispatcher was important, he knew. But he was frightened, his mouth was dry and he could scarcely swallow.

He didn't know what to do with Eccles. Maybe he would die right there on the floor. That scared him. Maybe he ought to ride for help, but the nearest doctor was at Rackets thirty miles away. All the while like a steel instrument boring relentlessly into his consciousness was the steady call, "BU—BU—BU." It ought to be answered, but he didn't dare. Eccles had told him not to touch the wires and besides he couldn't hope to understand what the dispatcher would say. He grew cold at the very thought of trying.

The injured man on the floor stirred and moaned and Joe dropped down at his side and shook him gently, calling his name. But there was no response. He ought to be got to a hospital. That was certain. Then Joe conceived an idea. He would send a message and have a train stopped to take Eccles to the company hospital at Headersville. He could send a message, he knew, although he couldn't receive one.

He went to the table and wrote it out carefully on paper even to the symbols that were customarily a part of a telegraphic message. He couldn't trust himself to send it out of his head as he went along. With set face and clenched teeth, when he had finished his composition, he grasped the key of the dispatcher's wire and halted the steadily flowing call of "BU." He made a trembling beginning and his fingers then slipped nervously from the key.

ADAMS was irritated at the interruption. Instead of the hoped for answer from Eccles, there came only a few im-

perfectly made symbols. It was the sending of a "ham." He knew it instantly and swore roundly.

Superintendent McGinnis came in. He frequently returned to his office evenings, but being warned of the impending disaster to the Limited and Number 10 he had hurried, and arrived in the dispatcher's office breathlessly and purple faced as Adams struggled with the unknown interrupter for possession of the circuit. But Joe Early was not to be put off. It was the dispatcher he wanted to send his message to and he doggedly interrupted when the call letters "BU" began to come through again.

"Sounds like a 'ham,'" said McGinnis, taking in the situation, realizing that it was a matter of minutes now with life and death in the balance.

"It is a 'ham,'" said Adams, swearing horribly while his fingers danced on the key in an effort to rout the intruder from the wire.

"Get him off the wire for God's sake!"

"I'm trying to," snapped the dispatcher. The superintendent seized the dispatcher's hand.

"Wait. Maybe that's the 'ham' that used to be at Eagle Butte. Let him say whatever it is he wants to say."

The wire fell silent. Joe Early at Eagle Butte started again. Tremblingly in halting shaky characters, characters that were often repeated and indifferently made, came the message: "Agent Eccles bad hurt. Stop train. Take hospital. Joe Early."

"My God! Can you beat that!" exclaimed McGinnis. He looked at his dispatcher whose face had a hopeless expression. The dispatcher's eyes were fixed on the clock as though he saw a ghost. It was 8:22. The superintendent noted the time also.

"He'll never understand," said Adams, "never get it."

"Try it!" snapped McGinnis. "You've got to make him stop that train. Here——" and he seized the telegraph key himself and started sending to Joe Early at Eagle Butte.

Joe Early, his message successfully sent, sat back with a great sense of relief and a

feeling of momentary exultation. He actually had sent it and had heard the OK. He turned around to look at Eccles on the floor. Eccles was breathing audibly and unnaturally. Joe was worried. What if he should die before a train stopped? Then into his thoughts came the clicking telegraph instrument. With a sinking heart he realized somebody was trying to say something to him.

He opened the key and made a question mark, the signal to repeat. The clicking sounds started again. Joe didn't understand them. Almost but not quite could he distinguish the letters, they came into his consciousness like a dream half perceived, seeming intelligible yet meaning nothing. "Send slow," he said, opening the key once more and speaking in symbols to the office at Headersville sixty miles away.

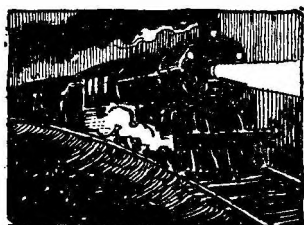
Adams groaned and mopped his forehead. McGinnis left the key and turned away. The wire was silent and in the silence the clock on the wall ticked away the lives on the two passenger trains drawing nearer to each other in the desert. "Send slow, please," said Joe, when nothing seemed to be coming through. McGinnis suddenly burst out cursing the general manager. "His own damn' fool order," he exploded. "Taking the students off the line. Now when we need somebody——! If he'd let them stay that boy would have been able to get us by now. Serve the old man right if he gets killed in this wreck! God! Adams, see if you can't make him understand. He's got to stop 'em! He's got to do it!"

ADAMS started slowly and deliberately, although the hurrying moments shrieked at him that he must make haste. Slowly and deliberately, first a letter and then a long space he spelled out "S-T-O-P."

He was interrupted by the perspiring youth at Eagle Butte who, laboring with pencil over a sheet of paper, and cruelly beset with emotions of fear and anxiety that parched his tongue and throat, had put down the letters "S-L-O-H," which spelled nothing.

Again Adams started. Twice he repeated the word, stealing a glance at the

clock. Two more precious minutes had gone. Then from Eagle Butte the word "stop" was correctly repeated. McGinnis brightened. "Good," he exclaimed, "he'll get it!" Adams continued, sending "No. 17" (the Limited's number in the time car. But the numerals were as Greek to the "ham" at Eagle Butte, even when slowly made. Joe with a tremendous concentration was trying to understand. Eccles on the floor moaned, and the boy started out of his chair in alarm. But the injured man continued to breathe and so Joe turned back to the wire. The word "stop" heartened him. His message had



been understood and he was being told to stop a train to take Eccles to the hospital. The quickness with

which his request was being answered was a mark of the loyalty which the company felt toward its employees.

Far out in the desert he saw through the office window a winking white electric eye. That would be the Limited. They were late tonight. "Gosh, they aren't going to stop the Limited for Eccles surely," he thought, striving to catch the meaning of the queerly sounding symbols. Then the symbols changed. McGinnis at Adams' elbow had said, "Try him on the word 'Limited.' He's not getting the figures."

Joe's pencil laboriously wrote "T-I-M-I-L-E-D." He had confused his "t's" and "l's." His ear not being skilled in timing the length of the dash in the two similar letters. The white eye in the desert had grown steadily. It was the Limited. Joe's eyes on his paper suddenly saw his error. "Gosh, it's the Limited they want me to stop!" he exclaimed, appalled. He repeated the word back.

"For God's sake," shouted McGinnis, "he's got it!"

But Adams was still working at the key, and Joe, after his intense struggle and concentration, suddenly, as it were, found he could read the instrument with greater ease. He heard the words, "Yes, stop Limited. Hold them," and then there came a

word he didn't make out, but whose symbols were etched in his mind as he leaped from the table to behold the white eye of the oncoming train grown much closer.

"Where was a red lantern?" thought Joe. He looked but found none. He knew the semaphore light lay broken on the platform and that he could not stop the Limited with the train order signal. Where was a lantern? There wasn't any that he could find. He jerked the red bandana from his neck and rushed outside.

HE MIGHT have stood on the platform waving the pitifully small square of cloth in the face of the oncoming Limited, but some instinct warned him not to. His signal might be misunderstood. "They'll think I'm some cowboy on a toot just waving at the train going by," he thought. "Maybe they wouldn't see me at all."

A sudden idea flashed in his mind, and he ran stumbling in the darkness to the rear of the station where his pinto stood. He flung himself on and with a shout and a clatter of hoofs he dashed down the platform, leaped his pony to the center of the track and spurred him on to meet the oncoming Limited whose roaring exhaust and flattened plume of smoke told of the flying miles that raced beneath the wheels.

The last word that clicked through the telegraph instrument forced itself into Joe Early's consciousness as he spurred onward. He remembered it clearly, each symbol. What was it? He thought it out, letter by letter, his heels digging at the heaving flanks of his surprised pinto, and when he had got them all suddenly the word "wreck" flashed from the remembered symbols.

"Stop Limited—Wreck!" He bent low over his pony's neck, waving the bandana. It wasn't Eccles, then, he was saving, but he was saving the Limited from a wreck. He remembered what Eccles had said if the Limited and Number 10 should ever meet on the curve. That's what was about to happen now. He saw it all clearly, and he was the only one that could stop it.

The Limited was coming up the track toward him as he raced, the glaring eye of the electric headlight growing more daz-

zling with each passing second. He could hear the roaring exhaust above the clatter of his pony's hoofs on the ties. But why didn't the engineer answer his signal? Two short whistle blasts should have been the answer if he saw it. Then almost as though the gigantic engine had leaped out of the background of the night, the train was upon him. Towering in the sky, roaring like a volcano, bathing him in the cruel white light, the prodigious monster literally burst upon him, and Joe jerked the pinto's bridle and felt his pony leap into darkness.

"What was that, Ed?" yelled Sam Ryan at the throttle to the fireman across the cab from him. Sam had been trying to pick up the semaphore light at Eagle Butte, but had not succeeded, when out of the darkness raced an apparition on horseback waving a bandana.

"Cowboy," said the fireman.

"Did we hit him?"

"Couldn't tell for sure, but think we did. He was waving us to stop."

Ryan drove the throttle in and the big locomotive began to lose speed, eventually rolling to a stop at the Eagle Butte station.

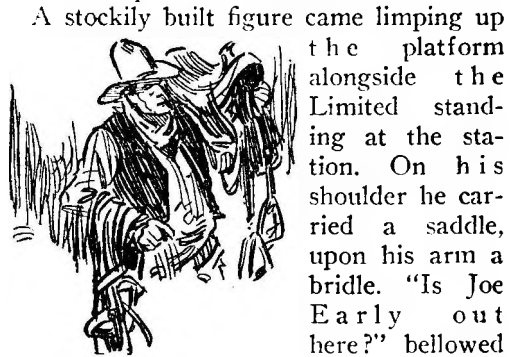
IT WAS General Manager Cantrell on the wire when Adams in the Headersville office answered, after what seemed to him and McGinnis an unending century. "What's going on?" he demanded of McGinnis who took the wire. "Agent here is seriously injured and we were flagged by a cowboy on a pony. Engineer thinks he must have killed him when he hit him. And here comes Number 10 we were to meet at Alston."

In rapid Morse McGinnis explained to the general manager what had happened. "I don't know about your cowboy. There ought to be a 'ham' there named Joe Early. He was the one who saved you all from the wreck." The general manager's fingers caressed the key as he thought. Joe Early was the boy for whom the Eagle Butte agent asked an exception be made, and he had just written that it would not be done.

"Wonder if he was the cowboy who flagged us?" asked Cantrell.

"Don't know."

The general manager turned from the key to face the room crowded with trainmen and the few passengers who had climbed out to investigate the stop. "Is there a boy named Joe Early around here?" There was no answer. A brakeman belloyed the question outside.



the brakeman again.

"I'm Joe Early," said the youth as he came up. "Who wants me?"

"The general manager inside is asking for you."

Joe went inside, his heart pounding. He saw that Eccles had been removed from the floor and to his question he was told he had been carried to a berth in the train and a doctor passenger was treating him. Then a large grizzled man who smoked a black cigar took hold of him by the shoulder.

"Joe," he said, "the A. & B. doesn't know exactly how to thank a young man like you who used his head as smartly and who risked his own life as you have done tonight. If you could have your wish what would it be?"

"To be a railroader."

"Sam," said General Manager Cantrell when the Limited got under way again, "let's tear up that letter to McGinnis about Joe Early. Wire McGinnis to buy the boy a new pony for the one that got killed. And write him a check on my account for \$500. And also wire McGinnis to let the boy go back at Eagle Butte as a student on salary. And while we're at it I guess we might as well rescind that order forbidding students on the desert division. Joe Early has demonstrated we ought to have them."



OUTCLASSED

By HARRISON G. STREETER

Author of "The Acid Test," "Cash and Carry," etc.

THERE WAS HIGH TENSION IN THE SIERRA ROCAS DISTRICT WHERE CATTLE WERE DISAPPEARING AND THE "MASKED RIDER OF THE ROCAS" HELD THE COUNTRYSIDE IN AWE. TRIGGER FINGERS ITCHED FOR ACTION, BUT EVEN THAT ACTION WAS TO BE OUTCLASSED BEFORE THE RANGERS GOT THEIR MAN

JOHNS CRAWFORD pulled his horse to a sliding stop and glanced again at the recent cattle trail leading up the rocky bottom of an arroyo into the foothills of the Sierra Rocas. A grim, mirthless smile creased his lips. That was the last of two hundred of his cattle rustled two nights before. More than a thousand had disappeared within a month. The old man's ire had blazed. The trail was lost in the rocky malpais of the foothills and now, baffled in his solitary search, he was returning empty handed. He turned into the down trail for beyond the next ridge lay the valley of the Ajo and his ranch.

A premonition of danger smote him and he scanned the rugged landscape about him. No sign of human presence was visible and he again touched spur to his horse's flank.

But he was not alone. Concealed behind the branching stem of a manzanita a pair of eyes gleamed with murderous purpose. White teeth flashed in a swarthy countenance. Fingers tensed on a rifle barrel and then relaxed. A thousand yards was a long shot but the windings of the trail

would halve that distance. A little time and patience were necessary, for the master of the Ajo was both too curious and too active for his age.

UNKNOWN to either, another pair of eyes scanned the rugged country from the shelter of a point of rocks a quarter mile distant. The trail from Mesquite topped the ridge at that place, then descended to join the rugged path Crawford was descending. From the ridge a young man watched the lurking figure behind the manzanita, glanced casually at the descending rider, then turned to his horse.

"Seems like there's a party comin' off down there, Yaki."

The buckskin jerked forward his ears inquiringly as the young man drew the rifle from its sheath, then sagged on three legs. Rest was more interesting to him than the affairs of humans.

Entirely unconscious of watching eyes, John Crawford approached the junction of the two trails. All about him were ragged rocks so large that he was at times concealed from view. His thoughts were grim.

Suddenly a shot rang out followed instantly by another. His hat tugged, loosened and fell off over his shoulder. In an instant he plunged from the saddle and crawled swiftly to the shelter of the rocks. His horse bolted down the trail. Again silence descended. For a quarter of an hour Crawford waited, nerves tense and six-gun half poised. No sound of hostile presence came to him. He crawled into a crevice between two rocks and settled down to wait for darkness.

Came a voice, clear and resonant.

"Yuh can come out now an' look at the hombre what cut down on yuh."

Crawford started then glanced cautiously around the edge of the rock. His gun was poised ready for action. A smiling young man leaned against a boulder only thirty feet away. Beside him was a rifle and a worn leather holster hung at his right side. He grinned at the staring eyes and the glinting muzzle.

"Yuh can put up yore hardware now, he's daid."

"Who's dead?"

"The hombre what perforated yore hat."

"How'd yuh know?"

"I shot 'im."

"Who're yuh?"

"Most people call me Jim. When they wanta be real formal they call me Peters. Yuh can take yore pick."

"What yuh doin' here?"

"Amblin'."

"How d' I know yuh ain't the one what shot at me?"

"Yore takin' me on faith till yuh see the real party."

"Huh, well I ain't no great truster, so keep yore hands in sight."

THE young man's grin broadened. "Yo're plum' trustful," he grunted, "now come on an' I'll show yuh the other feller." He turned his back squarely and led the way among the rocks.

Behind the manzanita lay an inert form—evidently a Mexican. At his side was a recently discharged rifle.

"Know 'im?" queried the man who had called himself Jim Peters.

The rancher nodded, shoved his gun into his holster and extended his hand.

"Reckon I was sorta suspicious," he apologized.

"'S all right," returned Peters. "Now what did he have ag'in' yuh?"

"Nothin'. He was paid to do it by the masked rustler of the Rocas. If yuh ain't got no better place to go I'd admire to have yuh stop with me at the Ajo. It's just over that ridge."

Peters nodded. They caught their horses and just as the sun sank behind the rugged summits of the Sierras they rode up to the home corral.

"Here's a new rider I've hired," Crawford informed Bill Poole, his foreman. "I picked 'im up in the Rocas."

Poole's eyes narrowed with suspicion. He surveyed the young man disapprovingly and turned away with a grunt. Ten minutes later he met one of his trusted riders and growled irritably.

"Boss just brought in a new rider. Keep yore eye on 'im an' plug 'im if he makes a mismove."

So it was that Jim Peters came to the Ajo.

Humbolt county was at that time harassed by the most ruthless band of rustlers in its history. Thousands of cattle had disappeared mysteriously, swallowed up in the fastnesses of the Sierra Rocas. From thence they had presumably been driven south across the Rio Grande. Any attempts to solve the mystery surrounding their disappearance had met with tragic results. Bleaching skeletons in the rocky arroyos of the foothills bore mute evidence of the thoroughness of the rustlers as well as to their ruthlessness. John Crawford had narrowly missed a like fate.

The leader of this daring band was not known. On the few occasions that he had been seen he always wore a black mask. His fame had gone forth over the range. Men spoke in bated breath of the masked raider of the Rocas. Those too curious disappeared.

THE local authorities were powerless. Sheriff Garrett largely contented himself by offering five thousand dollars reward and put forth the usual amount of bluster. But nothing effective had been done to stop the raids.

No movement of cattle, no attempts to penetrate the secret of the Rocas escaped the attention or evaded the vengeance of the masked bandit. He seemed to have sources of information everywhere. Hence every stranger was looked upon with suspicion and suspicion was easily followed by gun play.



This was the country into which Jim Peters suddenly appeared under the protection of John Crawford who in turn could furnish no satisfactory explanation for his presence.

Peters kept his own council which did not increase his popularity nor decrease the blanket of suspicion which descended upon him. The atmosphere of the Ajo was tense. Trigger fingers itched for action.

THREE weeks passed—weeks of hard work at the meanest jobs the Ajo had to offer him. Bill Poole openly derided him and the others were covertly hostile. But Jim Peters stayed on. He performed the menial tasks assigned to him cheerfully and kept his mouth shut. His very willingness centered the suspicions more closely about him.

In the fourth week another bunch of cattle disappeared mysteriously up the Rocas trail where all traces were lost as usual in the rocky slopes of the foothills. The next morning, even before the loss was known, Slim Williams gazed curiously at a horse in the corral. It sagged with weariness while its hairy coat showed unmistakable signs of hard riding. It had been rubbed down recently but the hairs were still stuck together in places by dried perspiration. As it had not been used the day before, Slim was not long in making his deductions. His next visit was to the harness shack where he quickly and carefully examined each saddle. Jim Peters' saddle blanket lay spread carelessly but was still wet. A short conference with Bill Poole sent Williams immediately to new duties at the line cabin in the foothills of the Rocas. He went well armed.

After this, even John Crawford's con-

fidence was shaken. He had hired Jim Peters on a hunch perhaps dictated by gratitude. The masked raider had tainted the very air with suspicion and it was hard to know whom to trust. He purposed to have a straight talk with the young stranger but an unexpected call to El Paso put it off for more than a week. In the meantime things happened at the Ajo.

Twilight was just deepening into night three days later when Jim Peters rode down the rough trail from the Rocas. Just below him was the spot where he had first seen John Crawford. He paused, sagged in his saddle and proceeded to build himself a smoke. A mirthless grin creased his features. In the scant patches of soil at his feet were abundant signs of the recent passage of cattle going upward. He already knew where they had gone. Although the task assigned him that day lay at no great distance from the ranch buildings his horse showed signs of long hard riding. He inhaled deeply and squinted quizzically at the afterglow.

"Spang."

A bullet neatly clipped a button from his shirt. He reeled in the saddle and slid limply to the ground. It was an excellent imitation. The riderless horse trotted down the trail to the home corral and for more than an hour a huddled form lay silent beside the rock. One hand concealed by the crook of an elbow held a gun ready for instant action. But dusk deepened into dark and no sound of hostile approach greeted his ears.

II

SLIM WILLIAMS was at the bunkhouse that night. A brief report to his chief accounted for his presence. There was some speculation about the riderless horse which had come in to the corral after dark but comment was strictly limited. Jim Peters' unexplained presence was at an end. They sensed the lay of matters and said little.

The jangle of the iron triangle before the cook-shack next morning brought the riders of the Ajo to an early breakfast. Bill Poole and Slim Williams crowded through the door at the same time. They stopped short. Eyes stared and jaws

sagged in amazement. In his accustomed place sat Jim Peters stowing away bacon and beans as though that were his sole purpose in life.

"Well, I'll be damned!" gasped Poole.

"Uh?" grunted Jim glancing up innocently. "Yeah, you'll be late for breakfast if yuh don't watch out." He shoveled another forkful of beans into a waiting mouth and followed it with a half cup of coffee. "An' say, Slim, you'd oughta take better care of yore gun. Yuh didn't clean it after yuh shot last an' it's started rustin'. I was just lookin' at it."

One hand rested lightly on the edge of the table just over his holster. His eyes, veiled with a humorous twinkle studied the man before him. A sardonic grin twisted his mouth.

For a minute the atmosphere was tense. Then it subsided. Silently punchers slid into accustomed seats and the work of stoking went forward so industriously that conversation sagged.

TWO nights later Bill Poole and Slim Williams stood in the deep shadow of an arroyo. Back of them were scattered clumps of sage and greasewood. The lighted points of cigarettes glowed and died and the air was tinged with the faint aroma of tobacco.

"Well!" Slim's voice was curious.

"He was out again last night. Claimed he went to San Ramon," growled Bill Poole's voice.

"He didn't come up the Rocas trail anyhow."

"They's other ways of gettin' there."

"Uh, huh, no doubt he knows 'em all."

"This has got to be stopped. Something's due to break soon an' he's just spyin' on us."

"Why don't yuh have Sheriff Garrett take 'im in on suspicion."

"Too o n c e r t a i n . He's gotta be dry-gulched."

"How?"

"I'll send 'im over to mend that fence around Sand sink in the mornin'. Yuh

have Pedro Chavez up in the rocks with a gun. The quicksands'll cover all traces."

"Yeah, sounds effective," nodded Slim.

"Yeah, an' expeditious," returned Poole. They moved off in the darkness.

A quarter hour later the sage stirred. A dark form crawled out, made its way noiselessly to the shadow of the bunkhouse, squatted on its heels and smoked meditatively. The door opened sending a beam of light over the silent figure.

"What yuh doin' here, Peters?" Poole's tone was sharp.

"Studyin' the stars," returned Peters dryly.

"Well yuh turn in. Tomorrow go over an' mend that fence around Sand sink."

Peters answered with a grunt, ground his cigarette stub under his heel and passed inside.

THE vertical rays of the desert sun the next day looked down into a niche of the rocks above Sand sink and discovered Pedro Chavez scanning the open range below. A rifle lay across his knees. His eyes gleamed with murder as he clinked gold pieces in his pocket. The price had been good and half the pay had been in advance.

A slight rustle back of him failed to draw his mind from the coming spree in San Ramon. Danger was remote from his mind. The loop of a lariat dropped over his shoulders and jerked taut around his elbows. A hundred sixty pounds of bone and muscle followed and in a minute he lay flat upon his back, hog tied. Above him was a smiling face.

"Mornin', Pedro. Yuh lookin' for strays?"

Came a clink of gold and a coin dropped from the Mexican's pocket. Peters picked it up and explored for more.

"Five twenties," he grinned wryly. "High pay for an easy job, eh, Pedro?"

The Mex quailed, turned a pasty yellow and squirmed in his bonds.

"That quicksand's plum' convenient," continued the cowboy relentlessly. "S'pose we change the plan. Yuh go in an' I'll watch you."

"You no keel," pleaded the Mex abjectly.



"No? What was yuh countin' on doin'?"
 "They make me."
 "So-o, an' what was the money for?"
 "I tell you something if you no keel."
 "Shoot, I'm listenin'."

AN HOUR later Peters rode back into the foothills of the Rocas. Behind him he led Pedro's horse with the Mexican tied securely thereon.

In a rocky pocket he hobbled the animal and left the greaser trussed.

"Thanks, Pedro," he smiled. "If all yuh told me's true, it's enough. I'll be slopin' along now. If I come through alive I'll be back to gather yuh in. Yuh can remember me in yore prayers for they ain't no-body else liable to find yuh."

It was midnight. Peters had been busy. He had carefully surveyed the concealed trail leading down into Ancha canyon which had eluded him before. The no less secluded notch leading out of the western side had also come under his observation. He estimated the stolen herd grazing in the bottom at three thousand head with six riders in charge.

"An' I'm supposed to be one of 'em," he cogitated. "Well here's where John Crawford comes in for a s'prise."

Clouds had lowered over the western peaks. It was the cloudburst season. The time for the drive to the Rio Grande was well chosen. The trail across the sandy bottoms beyond the Rocas would be wiped out completely.

Yaki picked up his ears. A low rumble came from the north. Jim felt of a bundle tied to his cante and shifted swiftly south. A half hour of hard riding along the rough trail was sufficient. He paused on a broad shelf. Above was the rugged slopes of the Rocas and below was a hundred foot precipice. He took the package from the cante and proceeded swiftly with his preparations.

For ten minutes he worked industriously finally adding three long fuses. Then he straightened. The low rumble of hoofs came again from the rear. He touched a match to the long fuses and shifted quickly to a high jumble of rocks a hundred yards below. Here he tied the horse in a narrow crevice and climbed to the top.

THE air was oppressive and a death-like stillness settled down over everything. Only the rumble of the approaching cattle broke the silence. A bank of black clouds had rolled to the summit of the peaks and obscured the moon leaving the landscape shrouded in deep gloom.

The nervous cattle tended to bunch on the flat open ground and the sharp yells of the riders blended with the hollow bellying of the cows and the rumble of countless hoofs. The clouds swept over the peaks and settled above them. The air was tense. The herd was now just above.

Suddenly a dazzling streak of lightning split the heavens. A stunning crash shook the hills. The flash and bang of a smaller explosion came like an echo. Then pandemonium broke loose. The ridge just quitted by Peters, became the center of a firework display. Shooting stars of variegated colors smote the air amid the staccato clatter of giant crackers. The rustlers stared aghast and the cattle after one brief moment of astonishment broke into a mad stampede. Another flash of lightning illuminated the awesome scene. A veritable wall of tossing horns swept down on the rocks behind which Jim was concealed.

"Huh," grunted the cowboy, "that's more coöperation than I counted on."

The riders caught before the stampede were now scurrying madly to either side.



Almost constant but more distant flashes of lightning kept the scene well illuminated.

The front rank of cattle struck the rocks below Peters with a crash. A dozen were crushed

and trampled while the main herd swept by on either side.

Came the agonized squeal of a horse. Shod hoofs and flaring nostrils shot up to within a few feet of the top of the rock. The rider reached out eagerly for the rugged rim. Jim's fingers twined with the clutching hand and yanked him upward out of the smashing confusion below. Another flash of lightning revealed a black mask and a stalwart form. With a quick

movement the newcomer was thrown upon his face and his wrists were circled with steel. Then the mask was ripped from his features.

"Howdy, Sheriff," greeted a sardonic voice "yore in such bad company that I'll have to truss yuh up." Saying which he bound his legs and lowered him to a safe place among the rocks. Then he returned quickly for further observation.

BOTH wings of the herd had now swept past and were headed wildly for the declivity below. Two riders unable to get past the wings of the herd were still out in front. Peters' face was grim. He had not counted on the coöperation of the elements and the result was stunning. The smother of tossing backs hid the tragedy. Riders and a score of cattle had gone over the brink before any check in the forward movement of the herd was noticeable. Then nature again came to their aid.

The heavens were again split. Three vivid streams of lightning shot down almost in the very faces of the terror-mad cattle. Came a splitting crash and silence. The stampede came to a sliding stop. A few milled off to the right but most of them stood trembling in their tracks.

Then the clouds opened. A wall of water descended smothering any further attempt at stampede by its very volume. Cattle collected in groups and drifted slowly before the storm.

In a half hour it was over. The moon peeped through a rift in the clouds and Peters gazed out on a wild scene of dashing water and of cattle marooned upon the rocky patches of higher ground.

The sound of voices and a smothered curse came from below. Two figures detached themselves from a cleft in the rock face and climbed upward. They paused at the top and stared fascinated at the scene of devastation about them.

"Slim, that's the worst bust I ever seed.

Them cattle's a total loss."

"Yeah, but we're mighty lucky at that. Poole. Guess the others went under."

"Most of 'em likely," returned Poole, "but I thought I heard voices when we came in here."

"Hands up there!"

Light glinted on a metal barrel and empty hands reached upward.

A LOOP of rope was thrown dextrously over the upraised wrists and in a few seconds their possibility for hostile action had passed.

"Welcome to our home," greeted Peters turning them about. "Got the sheriff down here all tangled up an' we'll be ready to slope along to San Ramon soon's this water lets up."

Light glinted on a nickel star pinned to the front of his coat.

"An' yuh was a ranger all the time," growled Bill Poole sullenly. "If I'd knowed that, we'd of skun yuh alive."

"Yuh wasn't so slow anyhow," grinned Peters. "I've got Pedro Chavez tied up in the Rocas. If he ain't drowned by this time I reckon he'll be a valuable witness to yore intentions."

Two days later Captain Reynolds of the Texas Rangers entered the adobe jail at San Ramon. He nodded to his subordinate and glanced at the sullen face of Sheriff Garrett now safely locked behind his own bars.

"Good haul, Peters," he approved. "How much valuable property did you wipe out gettin' these birds?"

"More'n I counted on," returned the ranger. "Reckon likely John Crawford has salvaged most of it by this time. Yuh see when I started that Fourth of July celebration I'd counted on sendin' up some rockets down from where I stood so's to head off the stampede an' turn it back but when the elements opened up they had me plumb outclassed."





THE SMOTHER HOLE

By FRANK C. ROBERTSON

Author of "The Fighting O'Farrells," "The Stampeding Ghost," etc.

CHARLEY DUVALL KNEW WHEN HE TOOK IT ON, THAT THE JOB OF LONE-HAND HERDER FOR JOE BENCH WAS NOT GOING TO BE ANY CINCH. BUT, AT THAT, HE DIDN'T KNOW QUITE WHAT HE WAS UP AGAINST TILL THE DAY OF THE SMOTHER HOLE STAMPEDE

SORRY I ain't got another man tuh put with you, Duvall, but times are mighty hard for us cattlemen an' I just can't afford it."

Charley Duvall looked at his employer and decided that Joe Bench was sincere. Times had been tough for the cattlemen. It was because his former employer had gone broke that Charley had come to the Strawberry Creek range looking for work. He had not been long in the country, but from what he had seen of it he saw no reason why he could not do the work he was asked to do.

"It'll take hard ridin' to keep the stuff from driftin' over the summit into Morgan County, but one man can do an' tend his own camp besides," Bench went on. "I'm not worried about that. What I am afraid of is that the Harpool brothers an' Heb Johnson may cause yuh trouble."

"Yeah? Seems tuh me I seen this Johnson on the roundup. Great big feller ain't he?"

"Big as a house. Heavy jowled, sullen sort of a chap."

"I remember. A little runt of a rancher wanted to fight him an' Johnson took water," Charley said.

"That's him. Awful coward, but probably dangerous. I'll tell yuh why I'm afraid of those fellows," Bench said. "There was three of as good homesteads as a man ever laid eyes on up here toward the head o' Strawberry—if they had water. Johnson an' the Harpools filed on 'em, an' also on some tributary creeks. If they'd have held 'em they'd have been right in the middle of my range, an' it would have ruined me.

"As you know my ranch is lower down, an' I'd filed on all the water long before. I sued 'em, an' won the case. They couldn't hold a drop o' water. Meanwhile, they'd been off their places, an' I had friends o' mine contest their homesteads. Kinda hated tuh do it, but I couldn't have 'em in there."

"I see," Charley drawled. "An' yuh moved 'em out."

"Had it tuh do," the cattleman said defensively. "They're bad medicine. The Harpools are jailbirds an' moonshiners. Watch out for 'em. They'll cause me all the trouble they can. All I'm lookin' for is a chance tuh send 'em over the road."

"I'll try to protect yore cattle," Charley said meaningly.

DUVALL rode away with a frown on his face. Obviously his job was going to be a lot harder than it had at first appeared. Neither was he thoroughly convinced of the justice of his employer's cause. Charley shared the instinctive prejudices against claim jumpers. Ordinarily he believed such characters to be the lowest product of the human race, unless it was the men who put them up to it. In Bench's case, however, there seemed to be extenuating circumstances, and Charley was willing to withhold judgment.

As he rode up Strawberry Creek toward his own camp Duvall passed by the three disputed claims. He had noticed them before, though without particular attention. The cabins were built beside clear little streams of water above green, parklike meadows. Johnson's cabin was the farthest down the creek, with those of the Harpool brothers separated from his claim by a low ridge, and a bend in the creek.

There was smoke issuing from the chimney of Johnson's cabin, and as it was not far out of the way Charley decided to ride over and investigate.

As he rode around the corner he was amazed to see a girl wielding an ax at the woodpile. As she heard his horse she looked up with a start. An uncertain marksman at best the ax fell, not upon the stick she was chopping, but upon a small, shapely foot.

"Oh-h!" An exclamation of pain and fright escaped the girl.

"Gee, I'm sorry I caused that!" Charley said remorsefully, as he leaped to the ground.

The girl sat down upon a log and nursed the injured foot. "I—I guess it ain't serious," she quavered.

Blood was oozing through an inch long hole in the shoe, and without ceremony Charley began to take it off.

"Got some turpentine—an' some bandages?" he asked.

THE girl told him where to find the needed articles, and when he returned with them, and a pan of warm water she had stripped off the stocking.

The cut was not deep, and Charley was fairly handy at dressing wounds of that

nature. Had it been a man it would have bothered him not at all, but as it was his hands fumbled badly on occasion. The flow of blood was checked, however, and the small, white foot adequately bandaged. Then Charley ventured to look up into the girl's face more appraisingly than he had yet done. To his surprise she was laughing at him.

"I believe it scared you worse than it did me," she said.

"Well, I feel tuh blame for it."

"It wasn't your fault," she disclaimed promptly. "Uncle Heb wanted to chop the wood before he left, but I knew he was in a hurry and sent him on."

"Yo're Heb Johnson's niece?"

"Yes. I live here with him. Know him?"

"Uh-huh." Charley was trying to find some similarity between this pretty, flaxen haired girl and the stolid, heavy jawed Johnson, but without success.

"He—he's up at his mining claim," the girl explained.

"I thought—that is—er—do yuh live here?" Charley stammered.

"Yes. A cattleman is trying to have uncle ousted from our home, though."

"You like it here?"

"Oh, I should say so! I'm crazy about the mountains. Don't you think it's a nice place?"

"Now that you remind me it certainly is," Charley agreed. "If yore uncle only had water he'd have a dandy ranch."

"And he's got a perfect right to it, but there's a hoggish cattleman trying to beat him out of it," the girl said hotly.

THIS was getting on dangerous ground, and Charley made an unsuccessful effort to change the topic.

"What are you doing here—are you a rider? Maybe you're one of Bench's men," she charged.



"Yep. I'm ridin' line along the summit," Charley admitted.

"I'm sorry, stranger," the girl said.

"Well, we don't need to fight," Charley smiled. "I don't

know a thing about the right or wrong of this business. All I want is to do my work—an' see you occasionally," he added boldly.

"That's what I hate about it. You can't just go on an' run your job." She hesitated, obviously wondering how far she dared go.

"They say Bench has bought off the courts, an' if he has there'll be trouble. Any rider up here will be in it first," she cautioned.

"Yore uncle wouldn't be violent, would he?" Charley asked, and had to suppress a smile at the thought of the burly Johnson causing serious trouble. He had seen the man called by a much smaller man, and Johnson had only hung his head.

"I've never known uncle to harm a thing, but there is Alf and Arch Harpool. Ugh! Watch out for them."

"I will," Charley promised. "Will yuh tell me what yore name is? I want to call again, an'—an' see how that foot is gittin' along."

"The cut will be all right, but my name is Diana if you want to know," she laughed.

"Mine's Charley, an' I'm sure goin' tuh keep an eye on that sore foot."

Diana tucked the injured member under her skirt. "You'll do better to keep both eyes open for danger," she warned.

CHARLEY rode away, and soon he was whistling gayly. This new job, which he had expected to be somewhat tedious, had developed remarkable interest. Diana Johnson had certainly made an impression upon him, and he knew that he was going to be restless until he saw her again.

He passed around the bend, and saw the two cabins of the Harpools in a grove of trees some little distance off the trail. He had a sudden desire to see what kind of men they really were. Being a man of quick decision he turned off and rode between their cabins, along what was obviously the boundary between their claims.

There had been many signs of industry at Johnson's place, but there were very few here. They were not at home, and presently Charley rode on, taking a dim

trail up a timbered canyon. He estimated that he could ride to the top of the canyon and still make it home by dark along the backbone between two counties, where it was henceforth to be his business to ride.

Properly speaking he had no business riding up this canyon. It was in the heart of the range and needed no attention. His knowledge of the range, however, being only cursory, he desired to enlarge it.

He had ridden scarcely more than a mile when he caught the sound of rattling wheels. Someone was coming down the canyon in a light vehicle. More from instinct than anything else he reined his horse out of sight behind some brush and waited for the people to pass by.

He did not need to be told that the two men slouched in the seat of the buckboard were the Harpool brothers. Powerful, despite their gawky, ungainly build they were as alike as a pair of peanuts. Their faces were covered with ragged, sandy beards, stained with tobacco juice. Long, muscular arms projected out from denim jumpers with sleeves too short. One of them handled the lines with an air of indifference while the other, much more alert, sat with a loaded rifle pointed upright from his knee—apparently on the lookout for game.

They were typical mountain men of the toughest kind—dangerous fellows to have as foes.

THERE was a long object in the back of the buckboard, covered by a dirty canvas. Charley did not need to note the few bloodstains to know what that object was. There was a queer tightening in his chest, and he was very glad that he had decided to pull to one side. He breathed easier when the buckboard had passed out of sight.

The Harpools had been killing a veal, and unless they had defied every tradition of the range by their actions the animal had worn somebody else's brand. Honest men did not proceed in just that way to kill their own beef. Had he ridden out and questioned the men about the carcass in their rig Charley was quite sure he would have been murdered. Might have been even though he had foreborne to question.

In a moment Charley was hot on the trail of the wheel tracks. They were not difficult to follow, though he almost lost them where they had turned into a side pocket. A short distance up this, however, he saw where the rig had been turned around. The slaughtered animal had been dragged down from a short distance above, and though an effort had been made to wipe out the tracks they were still discernible.

In half an hour Charley had unearthed the hide and head of a long yearling heifer where they had been shoved under a



drooping clump of half dead willows. There was high, dead grass around the clump, and this had been straightened up with meticulous care, almost totally concealing

the only tangible evidence of the theft.

Charley verified his guess that the animal had carried his employer's brand and ear-mark, then replaced the evidence as carefully as it had been in the first place.

"So that's what I'm up against," he murmured. The thing to do, he knew, was to report the matter to Bench at once. The evidence of the hide and head, together with his own testimony, would probably be enough to send the men to the penitentiary. It was what his employer would want.

IT WAS almost dark before he left the place, but as he rode along in the dusk he found various reasons for hesitating about making known his discovery. Had Bench been on good terms with the Harpools it would have been no more than right and custom for him to give them a beef occasionally. Perhaps his evidence would not convict the men, and then he would have a real fight on his hands. But the principal reason that occurred to him was that if accused the Harpools might incriminate Heb Johnson, and that would react upon the girl he had met that afternoon.

He finally decided that he would not act too hastily. He would watch the Harpools, and he would visit Johnson's often enough to find out if Diana's uncle was also given to such practices.

For the next two days he found that he had his work cut out for him getting the cattle back under control. Though the feed was better on their rightful range the perverse animals seemed determined to enter another county. At times Charley had suspicions that the movements of the cattle were not always of their own accord.

The third day he made a fast ride in the morning, throwing everything well back below the divide; then, without waiting to eat lunch he saddled a fresh horse and loped down to the Johnson place.

A GAIN Diana was alone. They greeted each other as old friends. The girl admitted that the hurt foot was still troubling her and Charley insisted upon dressing it again. He was busy with warm water and disinfectants when there was a heavy step upon the door sill. Charley was a bit chagrined when he recognized one of the Harpools instead of the girl's uncle.

"Here, le'me have a look at that foot," the fellow growled impatiently. He sank to his knees and clasped one grimy paw around the girl's ankle.

Charley saw her shudder of repulsion, and he suddenly lurched against Harpool hard enough to bowl him over.

"When yore assistancè is needed here we'll ask for it," he said icily.

"By Gawd, I'll larn ye tuh leave my gal alone," Harpool mouthed furiously.

"I'm not your girl, Alf Harpool, and don't you dare say that I am," Diana half sobbed with anger.

"We'll see about that," Harpool growled as he got to his feet. "Whether yuh ever marry me or not I won't have no truck-lin' cowpuncher a hangin' around ye."

The fellow whirled suddenly and rushed at Charley—the surprise attack of the wildcat type of fighter. Luckily for Duvall he was expecting something of the sort. He sprang out of reach of the long, flailing arms, thrust a chair in the way of Harpool's feet, and when the man stumbled over it Charley let drive a pivot

swing which caught the fellow under the butt of the ear and sent him crashing against the wall.

Charley followed up his initial advantage quickly. He sent his antagonist's head back with a succession of short jabs having just sufficient force to keep his man going backward. Then, when Harpool's back was to the door, Charley lunged into him and the fellow went sprawling out in the yard.

Harpool's rifle was leaning against the door. The fellow glanced at it longingly as he got to his feet, and then came charging back. Charley realized that he had been lucky thus far in having an opportunity to out-think his opponent. In a straight hand-to-hand fight in the open he doubted his ability to defeat the larger, stronger Harpool. Having the advantage he determined to maintain it.

"Back up, Harpool!" he called sharply, and jerked out his six-gun.

HARPOOL came to an abrupt halt, and a sneer overspread his bloody face. "'Fraid tuh fight like a man, huh?" he grunted.

"Not exactly afraid, but Miss Johnson has seen enough of this sort of thing." Charley removed the cartridges from the man's rifle and handed it out to him. Harpool took the weapon and his face set in a vicious grin.

"I'm tellin' you one thing, young feller," he remarked. "Any man who works fer Joe Bench is an enemy o' mine. Anybody who hangs around Di Johnson is a foe o' mine. If you stick around here another twenty-fo' hours I aim tuh git ye."

"All right, you cattle thief, I'll be ready for you," Charley accepted the challenge hotly.

"Cattle thief! If yuh didn't have the drop on me I'd cram them words back down yer throat," Harpool gritted.

"Would yuh? Suppose I produced the hide and head of that heifer you an' yore brother killed up in the head o' that canyon the other day, an' hid under a willer bush?" Charley retorted.

An incredulous look passed over Harpool's face. The fingers grasping the rifle stock were bloodless. If ever a man

wanted to kill Alf Harpool was that man.

"You see, I've got the goods on you an' yore brother, an' the quicker yuh git outa this country the better," hammered



Charley.

With an incoherent oath Harpool turned and strode rapidly away.

"Is—is that the truth?" Diana queried shyly

"It's a fact—I met him an' his brother comin' in with the beef," Charley answered.

THE girl gave a quick, guilty glance toward the pantry, and Charley knew that some of the stolen meat was in there. He preferred to believe that it had been given to the Johnsons rather than that Heb Johnson had been a party to the theft.

"Charley, please go away from here," Diana pleaded suddenly. "I know you'll be murdered."

"Would you care?" he demanded abruptly.

The color came into her face, but she met his eyes steadfastly. "Of course I would," she replied. "I like you."

"This—this Harpool—he ain't got any hold—I—I mean he can't bother yuh none?" Charley floundered.

"You mean is my uncle mixed up with them so that I have to stand their attentions whether I want to or not?" Diana stated evenly. "They have pooled their resources to fight Bench in court, and Alf Harpool has been ranting that I'll have to marry him. I don't believe my uncle would do anything really wrong, but I don't know."

"What about that mine of his yuh mentioned?" Charley asked. From the first he had been suspicious of that mine story.

"He has a claim. I don't know how good it is," she answered shortly.

"I don't care how good it is, nor how crooked yore uncle is," Charley said. "All I know is that I'm plumb crazy about you, Diana. I love you."

His mind knew only a delirium of hap-

piness when he found the girl in his arms. He was rudely awakened when a powerful hand clamped down upon his shoulder, and fairly lifted him to one side. The great bulk of Diana's uncle loomed over him.

"Git outa here, you," Johnson panted. "Don't make me git rough. This is my land yet, an' I won't have no man in the pay o' Joe Bench trespassin'."

"Look here, you big stiff—" Duvall began hotly, but Diana interrupted him.

"Please, Charley, go away," she begged. The pleading in her tone could not be denied. Baffled and half ashamed Charley mounted his horse and rode away.

THE thought came to Charley that he should perhaps communicate with Bench about recent developments, especially the calf butchery; but he rejected the idea immediately. It had become a personal issue between himself and the Harpools. If they got him Bench could get another man. He had to fight it out with them alone or ignominiously quit his job.

Alf Harpool meant business—Duvall had no doubt of that. Probably his brother was fully as dangerous. Johnson might, or might not, be dangerous. Charley Duvall loved life as much as anybody, and had an instinctive aversion to trouble. But to clear out and leave Diana to be pestered by Alf Harpool was unthinkable. He assigned this as his reason for staying, though in reality he would have stayed anyway rather than be bluffed out.

That night he ate his supper before dark, and when twilight came moved his blankets some distance from camp. He was determined to take every reasonable precaution, but in the daytime he knew he would have to take his chances. Much of the country he had to ride through was covered with timber, and he would have to be wary lest he be shot from ambush by one of the Harpool brothers.

Nothing happened for nearly a week. Indeed, Charley would have been better pleased had he had more to do. Only a few cattle tried to cross the divide, in contrast with the big bunches he had had to turn back before. There was just enough work to keep him on the job, for once the animals got into the other county they

could not be got back until snow fell, and then they would have to be gathered from various feed yards at considerable expense.

Bench, he knew, had gone east with a shipment of beef cattle, so he did not expect any visitors. His job was routine and easy, but constantly he was aware of an undercurrent of apprehension. He felt that he was being watched.

HE WOULD have liked to call on Diana again, for various reasons. But he could not neglect his work, and he had no desire for a run-in with her uncle. To fight him before the girl or show him up as the coward he believed him to be would be equally bad. In fact Johnson was a problem. He had little doubt of Diana's feelings toward him, but he could not tell how she would react if he was forced to fight her uncle as well as the Harpools.

He had been in the habit of riding the line west of his camp in the morning, then eat lunch, change horses, and ride the east line in the afternoon. Half a mile west of his camp rose a pinnacle which cut off his view to the east after he had passed around it. He saddled up one morning and set out to make his ride, as usual keeping wide of the patches of brush that might harbor an assassin, and at the same time keeping a lookout for straying cattle.

A mile past the pinnacle he encountered a thin cow with two calves—one of them obviously a bum. Thinking that perhaps the calf might be reunited with its mother if he gave them a good start back into the lower country he rounded them up and hazed them down the slope. The calf's mother might be dead, but there was the possibility that it had only strayed off after the cow and the other calf. He chased the animals through the brush until the cow turned on him with a bellow which meant that she would go no further without a fight. Since this was really no part of his job he turned her over with his rope, simply to demonstrate that he could, and started back.



From habit he scanned the horizon with eyes long trained to comprehend every detail that was at all unusual. A puzzled expression came into his gray eyes as he saw a faint, hazy blur hanging over the top of the pinnacle. At first he thought it must be close to his camp, then he realized that it must be several miles east of the camp, and something that rose high in the air.

Smoke? He thought not; it was not blue enough. But if not smoke it could be but one other thing—dust. The reason for a dust cloud, however, was still more puzzling. There was not a breeze to stir so much as a leaf. This cloud was far reaching; it must be that it was kicked up by something moving.

For several minutes Charley stood still and watched the dust cloud. It was moving very, very slowly. He glanced up at the tree tops and saw that they were bending slightly in a direction opposite to the one in which the dust was moving.

HE HAD diagnosed the situation. A large bunch of cattle was crossing the divide some two or three miles east of his camp. Had it been horses the dust cloud would have been smaller and moved faster. Furthermore, he believed those cattle were being driven. For one thing it was too early in the morning for a band of that size to get together of their own accord and start to trail. Neither would they have moved fast enough, or in such a compact body as to kick up such a dust.

Whatever it was it was his duty to find out what it all meant. He rode hurriedly back to the top of the divide, and found the dust cloud almost obscured by the knoll. His horse was somewhat winded, but he urged it to a trot until he had rounded the pinnacle and came in sight of his own camp.

A gasp of astonished apprehension broke from him as the summit of the divide lay exposed to his view for several miles. He could now see the cattle quite plainly, and there was a larger band than he had anticipated. There must be, he judged, close to a thousand head. Three horsemen were urging them along with flapping, colored blankets and, he supposed, wild yells.

The cattle had been ranged in the timber all summer, and were naturally wild. Having been pushed over the top of the divide and started downhill a wild stampede was well under way. Most of them were trotting, and a few of the more goosey ones were already on a run. They had been brought up through a swale where the cattle usually tried to cross the divide, but instead of being taken down another one on the other side where there was a well defined trail, the riders had turned the herd down a long, bare ridge. At the end of that ridge was an almost sheer jump-off, with a deep, narrow wash-out at the bottom!

The intentions of the men were plain. Once those cattle were stampeded over the end of that ridge the stampede would end with a mass of smothered and crippled cattle in the bottom of the wash!

WHILE he had been riding the line the Harpools and Heb Johnson had been gathering up the cattle below and holding them. Having observed that he rode the west line in the morning they had chosen that time for dealing the blow that would disgrace him, and perhaps break his employer.

Duvall instantly comprehended the full effects of the monstrous act. He had rolled the spurs to his mount immediately, but with a hopeless feeling that he would be too late. The stampede was gathering momentum every instant. He could now hear revolver shots, and knew that these were adding terror to the frightened beasts.

Two thirds of the way down the slope was a spur ridge which came half way to the top of it. That offered the only way to get on the main ridge, and already the leaders of the herd were abreast of it. For a moment Charley considered his chances of riding along it and trying to overtake and turn the leaders. He had to abandon it almost immediately. Not only would it be too late, but he would be an open target for the Harpools, and he did not question their marksmanship.

He had a momentary temptation to let the cattle go and lay for the culprits when they returned from their diabolical per-

formance. There was, however, one slim remaining chance to save the herd, and while that chance remained he had to take it. By making a mad ride down through the brush and over the rocks he stood a chance to reach the opposite side of the wash almost as soon as the cattle reached it. By firing shots into their faces he might be able to deflect the leaders and get them to running along the side of the ridge. With the irresistible pressure from behind pressing them on it was almost a hopeless possibility.

SUDDENLY he saw a lone horseman cutting across the top of the spur ridge and racing with the cattle. His heart gave a sudden, violent leap as he recognized the racing figure. It was Diana Johnson!

The girl was well below the cattle, and a considerable distance behind the leaders. A sob rose in Duvall's throat. There was not one chance in a thousand that she could turn the maddened cattle, and if she failed she would be caught between them and the wash. Nothing could save her then from a horrible death beneath a trampling, smothering mass of cattle.

Charley Duvall rode as he had never ridden before, leaning ahead and spurring his horse over brush and dead timber with reckless abandon. Once his horse passed between two small aspen trees so close together that his knee collided with one of them with a bang. The pain was intense, but he forgot it almost immediately.

Only occasionally could he catch a glimpse of Diana's race with the now thoroughly crazed cattle. He could see her waving at them frantically, but instead of turning they were crowding closer and closer against her, and she was getting dangerously close to the wash.

When next he saw her there was no possible chance for her to turn back. The wild-eyed cattle were close enough to blow

froth upon her. Even had the leaders tried to avoid her the weight of the ones above would have pushed them on. He caught a glimpse of the two Harpools on the crest of the ridge still yelling and waving like demons. The lust to kill rose within him.

A thicket of brush gulped him up. He would not see the girl's race with death again until he emerged from the brush on the very edge of the wash. And by that time—— For a moment he shut his eyes with an anticipation of horror.

"Diana!" The words were frozen on his lips.

With a final plunge his heroic horse cleared the brush, and the cowpuncher's sickened gaze swept the other side of the wash. A sea of glassy, fear maddened eyes confronted him as the horde of demented range cattle swept down to their deaths.

Not more than a hundred feet from him he saw Diana, with her white, horrified face turned toward the foolish beasts whose lives she had tried in vain to save. Even as he looked a long-legged, red three-year-old steer with a white stripe down its back pounded up beside her horse and in blind fear crowded the pony to the very edge of the wash. Just above them hundreds of tons of live beef were hurtling down.

AND then Duvall saw another horseman behind the girl—a man on a huge buckskin horse who rode like a centaur and fired shot after shot from his six-guns squarely into the faces of the stampeding Herefords. The man was Heb Johnson, and notwithstanding his reputation for cowardice he was surely risking his life in one desperate effort to save his niece's life. Before his spitting guns the stampeding host veered away, or at least those on the outside where the guns were discharged directly in their faces.

For one wild moment Charley dared entertain the hope that Johnson's effort to save the girl would be successful. Then he saw that the buckskin had been caught in the jamb, and was held in place as tightly as an orange in a crate, with no more freedom of movement than any member of the herd.

In another minute Diana's horse would

surely be pushed into the wash. There remained but one slim chance to save the girl's life and Charley took it.

"Jump, Diana! Jump!" he yelled.

The girl heard his voice, and her face turned toward him. Her response was instantaneous. She left the saddle and leaped toward the bottom of the wash. She would have fallen in the bottom, only that before she struck Charley Duvall's rope had dropped around her body, and she was jerked upward just as half a dozen animals were hurled bodily into the exact spot where she would have been. An instant later her pony was shoved off. It landed on its back, and before it could move the cattle were upon it.

Charley leaped from his horse and dragged the girl to safety. Sick at heart at what was being done to the cattle he averted his gaze from the smother pen at the bottom of the wash and crushed the girl to him with an inarticulate cry of relief.

Her eyes were closed but he stooped to shelter her from the hideous sight when she did open them. Her eyelids fluttered and she clung to him convulsively.

"I—I found out what they were doing, and I came to warn you this morning but you weren't there," she said. "Then I tried to stop the stampede myself, but—but they wouldn't turn." She was half crying now, and he soothed her with tender words and caresses.

HE VENTURED a glance toward the wash expecting to see it filled with struggling and dying cattle. Piteous moans and frightened bellows in plenty were coming from it, but to his amazement most of the herd were galloping horizontally around the end of the ridge. Something had turned the leaders parallel with the wash, and the mass behind had gradually made the turn, though some few had been thrown into the gully as though by centripetal force.

Heb Johnson had turned them Charley felt sure, but he looked in vain for the buckskin horse or its rider. He lifted Diana gently in his arms and carried her to a pine tree against which she could rest.

Then he went back to the edge of the wash. He estimated that there were twenty-five or thirty dead or crippled animals at the bottom of it. Diana's pony was beneath the smother, and a few yards farther along he saw Johnson's buckskin with its neck broken. Beside the horse lay Johnson—dead.

A moment later both the Harpoos came in sight. "That damn' yaller Johnson got cold feet or thar wouldn't be a tenth o' them cattle alive," Alf cursed loudly.

It was his brother who first saw Charley. "Hey, look!" he called sharply, and reached for his gun.

A cold, bleak smile was on Charley Duvall's face. Arch Harpool's gesture was sufficient cause for him to use his own weapon, but he waited for Alf to draw. That worthy swung his rifle toward his shoulder as Arch fired.



Duvall's gun was drawn, but he did not fire. At Arch Harpool's shot he fell forward—into the wash. As fast as they could come the Harpoos rushed to the edge of the declivity to peer over at their victim. Duvall lay on his side, with his arm thrust over the back of Heb Johnson's horse. As the men looked on he fired twice. First Alf, and then Arch struck the bottom of the wash, the men diving into a swimming pond. They lay still.

Slowly Charley climbed back to the top. Alf Harpool's bullet had grazed the top of his shoulder and it made his arm stiff. He found Diana on the bank to aid him in his last, floundering struggle to the top.

"You don't need to tell me," she said bravely. "I saw what happened. What do we do next?"

"Them cattle will swing around the end o' the ridge an' work back over the ridge themselves," he said mechanically. "I reckon we'll have tuh both git on my horse an' ride down to the ranch fer help. If—if it wasn't fer yore uncle I'd say we'd orta keep a-goin'."

"We can't do that, Charley," Diana said. "My uncle really did have a mine. He told me last night that he had struck it rich. It's placer and requires water to work. That's why he went in with the Harpools to try to drive Joe Bench out. If Bench had the water Uncle was afraid he would have to give him most of the gold."

"Then I reckon I'll have tuh be travelin' on—alone," Charley said a bit bitterly.

"And leave me to fight Joe Bench alone?" Diana protested.

"Well, if yuh put it that way," he grinned somewhat sheepishly.

ONE week later, with a grim look on his face, Charley Duvall faced his employer. "Me an' my wife have got them placer diggin's up there, an' we aim tuh have water tuh work 'em," he said. "I'm servin' notice that if yuh try tuh stop us there'll be trouble."

"I reckon I wouldn't be huntin' trouble with a man who could down both the Harpools in a gun fight even if I was inclined to be ornery," Bench smiled. "Son, yo're as welcome tuh that water as the flowers in May. All I ever did object to was havin' them thievin' Harpools there in the middle

o' my range. Mebbe yuh'd like tuh file on a homestead there yourself. If yuh would I'd be right glad tuh have yuh."

"Yuh mean if I filed on one o' them places the Harpools had, an' my wife holds the one her uncle had as his heir, that yuh won't try tuh fight us as yuh did them?" Charley asked.

"Just that, son," Bench answered. "I hate claim jumpers myself, an' I wouldn't have contested 'em at all, even though they hadn't lived up tuh the law, if I hadn't known that the Harpools only wanted tuh git in there where they could steal me blind. Instead of bein' afraid of you I figger you're the best insurance I could have. All contests are off. You can have all the water you need, and if yuh ever have a little bunch o' stock o' your own I reckon we can split the range."

It was fair enough, and knowing the Harpools as he did Duvall knew that Bench had been justified.

"Well," he said, "me an' Diana meant tuh fight yuh for that land if we had to, but I reckon we're plumb glad we kin have it peaceful."

Bench extended his hand, and Charley shook it warmly.

RINGBONE

IN MOST ways, horses have been able to adapt themselves to the localities into which they have been brought by man. Changes in climate and food seem to make little difference with them, and the various kinds of work they are taught to perform soon become habitual and natural.

There is one way, however, in which horses have not been able to adapt themselves to the needs of civilization. When they are ridden or packed in very steep country, their ankles and hoofs are subject to ringbone. It results from unnatural strains at the ankles, in going up and down very steep grades in the mountains. Horses are built for the plains. They were never intended to go up or down hill, but always on the level.

Of course, many horses are able to travel up and down hills for years, pulling vehicles and being ridden, without developing a trace of ringbone. But usually in such cases the hills are not really as steep or as long as they appear to be. The grades which horses are compelled to take in the mountains are frequently precipitous. And it is only in the mountains that ringbone is common.

A horse that is ringboned is usually still useful for most purposes, but he can no longer be considered perfectly sound. And as a cow pony he is disqualified. However good his record may have been, he must retire and give place to the younger generation as soon as the first trace of ringbone is discovered.

Ringbone is only one of many things which may disqualify an otherwise perfectly good cow pony. In this field, many are called but few chosen. Only the exceptional horse can learn perfectly, what he is supposed to do when the rider throws a rope. And in order to be reliable he must be sound in every respect. Good roping horses are valuable, their working life is rather short, and the turnover is rapid.—J. H. H.



The STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

GUNS AND GUNMEN

YOUNG BRAZO, the fighting hero of Charles Alden Seltzer's serial-thriller "Mystery Range" opening in this issue, lived in the days when guns meant law in the West—and every man was his own lawyer. A hombre had to learn to unlimber his irons and fan the hammer just a shade faster than a bronc slides out from under a pilgrim, as Brazo learned when he bumped into a shooting scrape and had to draw to try to save an army paymaster's life.

Gunmen good and bad had to select their weapons with a lot of care. Wilbert E. Eisele, of Edgewater, Colo., tells some interesting things about old-time guns in the West, and the men who used them.

"Even the earliest weapon of the real gun-fighter was not to be despised," he writes. "The first practical revolver to be adopted by the school of western gunmen was the Colt's cap-and-ball, made in two sizes—.38 'Navy Colt's,' and .44 'Dragoon Colt's.' Both types had barrels seven and one-half inches long, some even being equipped with 9-inch barrels. Once loaded, they were handy and accurate weapons—until it was time to load them again.

"Reloading was a laborious process. Each chamber in the cylinder had to be freshly crowned with a percussion cap, and partly filled with a measured charge of powder. Then the bullets—frequently molded painstakingly by the gunman himself—were shoved into the chambers so

far as possible by hand, after which, with the hammer at half-cock, they were 'seated' against the powder with the little lever ramrod attached under the barrel of the weapon. Then the pistol was ready. They called it a pistol in the early days—never a 'gun,' as more recently.

THE old-style Colt's was not double action; it had to be cocked with the thumb for every shot. And to this day your true gunman rather scorns the double action principle as making the trigger pull too hard for accurate shooting. At that, the old-time gunman could cock his revolver in the single, flashing motion with which he drew, delivering the first bullet in less than a half-second after starting the draw. He could deliver five more shots in the space of two seconds, cocking the weapon with his thumb. Some of the fastest gunmen used to file the trigger off the hammer, so that the hammer would fall without a trigger pull as soon as the thumb released it.

"And the accuracy of their shooting was something to marvel over. Wild Bill Hickok could drop an apple from a tree by cutting its stem with a bullet, and then put two more balls through the apple while it was falling to the ground. The real gunman shot his revolver as a boy throws a stone—without conscious aim. His gun was as much a part of his hand as his index finger, and he pointed it as unconsciously—and accurately.

"Wild Bill Hickok was unquestionably

the greatest two-gun artist and peace officer of all time. Unique in his ability to shoot equally well with either hand, depending altogether on his marvelous swiftness and unerring aim, Wild Bill was the only man on record who could give an opponent the draw, and then himself pull and kill his man before the latter could fire.

"Laid against the sleek, blue, flat 'automatic,' that is the last word in small arm construction, the long, dull-colored, rangy Colt of an earlier era doesn't look nearly as shabby as might be expected. There is something indescribably rakish about it, something powerfully suggestive, something grim and sinister and deadly in the long barrel and the beak-like hammer."

HE KNOWS HIS STUFF

WHEN a man who's wrangled steers, trekked in the Northland and sailed a windjammer says a yarn of the West, or the North, or the sea, is right, he knows what he's talking about. Meet Mr. Howe, folks—he's done all those things, and the interesting way he tells about them gets him this issue's \$25 prize.

Editor, *SHORT STORIES*,
Dear Sir:

In all the years I have taken *SHORT STORIES* I have not written you; but things are slack here now, so I am going to tell you what I think.

I was born and raised at Angleton, Brazoria County, Texas. Ran away at thirteen, and hit Galveston good and hungry a week later. Visited the wharves, and finally got into conversation with a man, who took me aboard the schooner *Estella* and gave me what I thought at the time was the best meal I ever ate. I was offered a job and sailed with her next day for the Campeche banks, after red snapper. After an unprofitable trip, we returned to Galveston, where I made one of a crowd hitting for Oklahoma for the opening of the Cherokee strip. Located O. K. and then, like a fool, I let a bunch of pro's, who watched me clean up a grown man who had used a wrong name to me, get me to travel with them as "Texas Curley the Scrapping Kid." Hit every town worth while in these United States, finally making New York, very little to the good with regard to cash, and good and ready to quit. Got a sight as ordinary seaman on the *John Willie Troop*, a blue nose ship of St. Johns, N. B., and followed the sea until, when I finally paid off from the full rig ship *Ketton of Liverpool*, in Portland, Oregon, I had seen pretty much of the world. Went north to British Columbia and in the next six years drifted down through Alberta, Saskatchewan, Assiniboia, into Winnipeg, Manitoba, where I worked as a

painter. Took in a tie camp at Rainy River. Came to Pittsburgh eighteen years ago; I still follow painting.

The reason for telling you all this is: Give me a story of the cattle country, sea, oil camp, tie camp, fight, or northwest territory, make one bad break and I nail you, and that finishes that. I am a great reader, and have tried and dropped several magazines that I found to be full of josh, written by men who didn't know whereof they were writing. I got my first copy of your magazine through a mistake made by my son, whom I had sent for the one I then was taking. I kept it, read it, and have continued the motion ever since.

We have the greatest bunch of mechanics writing for us that were ever gotten together, and between me and you, I don't know how you ever managed it. Tuttle, McLeod Raine, Von Ziekursch, Henderson, La Mar, Robertson, Gardner, Dunn and all the rest of them—good Lord, how come you to get them into camp?

ALFRED E. HOWE,
Pittsburgh, Pa.

Like a tomato can on a corral fence, another \$25 prize is waiting, friends—all set for somebody to draw and pop her off. The best letter we get in the next two weeks will perforate the target—any kind of letter, from a yarn of a personal experience to a criticism of *SHORT STORIES*, good or bad. Pull the shootin' iron out of the holster, you rannies, and have a shot at that check!

R'ARIN' AHEAD!

BROTHER, watch those mustangs! Mean? They're wild! Right off the range, that cavvy—never felt a rope before. Never seen a saddle, either. But there's waddies what can gentle 'em—an' if you want to see it done you'll find 'em, each and every one, next issue.

Looks familiar—that big roan that's pawin' wild-like? Sure—that's George C. Henderson's racing novelette, "The Trouble Maker." Heads the list, that story—and sets a gun-fighting, danger-brewing pace. Harmoniky Dick King's the leading puncher in it, and Harmoniky starts out to locate a coyote who's been rustling and murdering—and doing it plumb plenty. Harmoniky gets in wrong mighty fast, though, and the scene's all set for a lynching before fast action and a lot of burning lead get things to going straight again. "Trouble Maker" isn't half of it!

Then there's another friend—the Major back again. In L. Patrick Greene's "Fool's

Folly" the Major lopes right into danger; and it looks for a while like he's made his last ride. A fake Major plays a hand in this yarn of illicit diamonds and double-crossing in South Africa—one of the most surprising and exciting Major stories Mr. Green's dabbled his rope on.

Another bucking, plunging story will be Ernest Haycox's "Revenge of Florida Jack"—a yarn that begins with a two-man feud and ends in rattling gun-fire. Another old hand, James B. Hendryx, brings Corporal Downey of the Mounties back in a gripping tale of suspected murder in the icy North, "Burning the Snow."

And of course Charles Alden Seltzer is wrangling his man-killer, "Mystery Range," right along from this issue to next. Part II brings peril and despair to Brazo; it starts a hot-blooded, life-spilling gold rush; and it has a plot turn you wouldn't guess from now to Christmas.

A r'aring, tearing remuda, this lot corralled for next time. The show they'll stage for you will be the best you've ever paid your money for.

CAMELS IN TEXAS

YOU can savvy why young Bradley, in J. D. Newsom's speedy novel in this issue, "They Come Hardboiled in the Legion," dreams about a camel that r'ars up on its hind legs and salutes—that's down in the Algerian desert, where camels belong. But when a cowpuncher out in Arizona comes in from riding fence and reports he's seen a couple of the animals grazing on the range—can you blame the hands for thinking he's been out in the sun too much?

And yet the story comes into the Circle about every so often from punchers in the Southwest—and what's more, we know it has a background of fact. Back before the Civil War, some old-timer got the idea that a cavvy of camels would be handy to wrangle army supplies across the American plains. So they brought in more than seventy of them—double humps, long legs, and all—and the army made headquarters for its remuda near San Antonio, with

(Continued on page 176)

THE EXPERT SAYS—

Have you a puzzling question you want answered? a problem for which you can't just turn up the solution? Send it along to the Story Tellers' Circle, and we'll do our best to furnish the right answer—an answer by an expert who knows. This service is free to readers of SHORT STORIES. We hope you'll use it.

I notice that in the story of "The Painted Stallion" the author mentions "buckhooks." On page 30, Jughead Fry says, "Anchor them buckhooks in the cinch," etc.

I was raised on the range and have drifted from one cow state to another. Have seen lots of spurs, but I must confess that "buckhooks" are a mystery to me. Will you please tell me through your column what they are?

Yours truly,

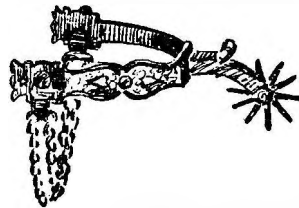
J. P. MANKINS, Drifter.

BUCKHOOKS are blunt, upturned pieces on the upper side of the shanks of some spurs, rising just behind the rider's heels. The shanks protrude beyond the buckhooks to carry the rowels. The purpose of this device, which is common though by no means universal, is to hook into the cinch as an aid to remaining on the horse. The picture shows the buckhook, the small curved bit of metal protruding upward from the shank behind the heel-band.

Some cowboys, of course, have scorned the use of buckhooks, much as they scorn pulling leather. But not many, when they

are gentling bad horses, are above locking their rowels into the cinch, and sometimes they wire or jam the wheels to help make them hold securely. The buckhook is a simple means of getting the same results.

Incidentally, buckhooks are barred in rodeo riding, and busters have sometimes been detected with wired rowels or specially made spurs on which the wheels locked when jammed into the cinch. This was before the "three rakes every five jumps" rule became general.



DON'T FORGET THE COUPON! CUT IT OUT TODAY AND LET US KNOW YOUR
OPINION OF THE STORIES IN THIS NUMBER

READERS' CHOICE COUPON

"Readers' Choice" Editor, SHORT STORIES:

Garden City, N. Y.

My choice of the stories in this number is as follows:

1 _____ 3 _____

2 _____ 4 _____

5 _____

I do not like:

_____ Why? _____

NAME _____ ADDRESS _____

(Continued from page 175)

three Arab camel-busters as tophands. They fed them greasewood and cactus, loaded them down with mail and chuck, and put them into service between Texas and the coast before cowboys ever thought of the pony express.

The camels did the job, too. But the Confederacy broke up the herd during the war, and most of them high-tailed—or whatever it is a camel does when he's in a hurry—for Sonora. Nowadays the scattered remnants of the herd (or anyhow the scattered remnants of the old story which was true in its day) show up just frequently enough, in Mexico, Texas, Arizona and other districts, to shiver the hide off a waddie when it happens.

THE MAIL BAG

HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS, author of "The Shoemaker of Salvador" in this issue, hit the bull's eye again and hit it hard—when he wrote "Lone Butte" for a recent SHORT STORIES. Here's one of the big passel of letters it brought through our hands:

Dear Mr. Knibbs,

I have just read your story "Lone Butte" in SHORT STORIES. How well you have succeeded in focussing the forces of your imagination upon unadorned courage in an unadorned setting, you, of course, know, but it is my pleasure to add

to you that at home in an interlude between college work, I found in your lone man and lonely butte a bright flash of something that is unforgettable. It stamped itself—the picture—upon me as I read it, and I am still remembering it as I write these lines.

Yours sincerely,

PAUL ELDRIDGE,
Dewey, Oklahoma.

BUD LA MAR'S BACK

BUD LA MAR, you might say, wrote "Soldier Jack," in this issue, right in between a sunfish and a rainbow. Here's the interesting letter we just got from this bronc-busting author:

Editor, SHORT STORIES,
Dear Sir:

I have just pulled in for the winter after a successful season of rodeo work. I joined up with one of the old outfits and held the jobs of arena director, publicity man and bronc rider—enough to keep me busy as we showed two and three days a week. In October, I took a trip to the Black Hills and the Pineridge reservation to buy a bunch of horses for another company. An Indian friend and I made up a pack outfit and we camped all over the reservation, trading and buying ponies from the Sioux.

Thanks for the number of SHORT STORIES with my first yarn in it. At the time it was published I was camped out by the trading post of Oglala and reading week-old newspapers. But the horse business was very brisk—I was buying horses at all the way from three to seven dollars a head. When news circulated that somebody was putting out good cash money for fuzztails, I had three hundred head to pick from every day.

Very truly yours,

BUD LA MAR.



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