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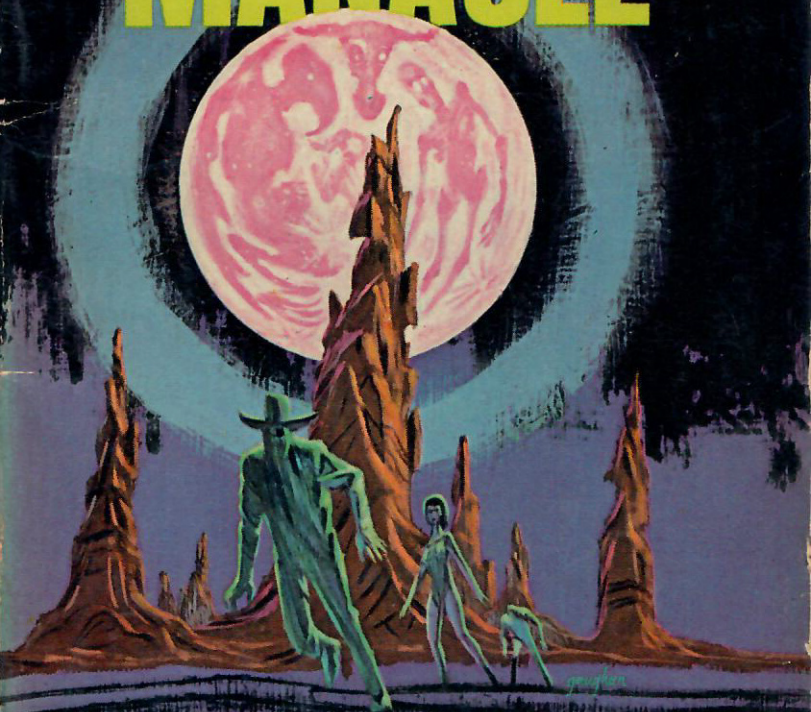
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The damnedest book you ever read

CHARLES G. FINNEY

THE

**GHOSTS of
MANACLE**



Seven uncanny stories and a short novel by
the author of **THE CIRCUS OF DR. LAO**

THE GHOSTS OF MANACLE

- ▶ One left a VERY effective curse on the town
- ▶ One buried a fortune that started the craziest treasure hunt ever
- ▶ One called out an avenging posse —of rattlesnakes!
- ▶ One invented an aphrodisiac that was just TOO strong

**AND ALL OF THEM
WILL HUANT YOU**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charles G. Finney was born in Sedalia, Mo., in 1905, and traces his ancestors back to John of Plymouth. "Here," he states, "the tree gets lost in the Scotch-Irish forests." After a year at the University of Arizona, Mr. Finney spent three years in the 15th U.S. Infantry, stationed in Tientsin, China.

After his army service, he returned to the United States where, in 1930, he began working for the *Arizona Daily Star*. He has been with that paper ever since. Mr. Finney's first book, *THE CIRCUS OF DR. LAO*, was published in 1935 (it will soon be an important MGM movie under the title of *Seven Faces of Dr. Lao*, followed by *THE UNHOLY CITY* (1937), *PAST THE END OF THE PAVEMENT* (1939), and *THE GHOSTS OF MANACLE* (1964). His short stories have appeared in such magazines as the *New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *Paris Review*, *Fantasy and Science Fiction* and *Point West*.

Married, with two daughters, Mr. Finney does his writing at his Tucson home where he "composes on the typewriter and gains inspiration by sitting in the back yard, worrying about its unkempt condition."

THE GHOSTS OF
MANACLE

CHARLES G. FINNEY



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THE GHOSTS OF MANACLE

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FOREWORD

Every writer, I suppose, sooner or later faces the day when he feels compelled to gather together the oddments he has come up with over the years and present them as one book. It isn't only writers. Painters and sculptors enjoy displaying representative collections of their work, and I believe even composers are not averse to having whole concerts devoted to nothing but their own melodies. I even heard of a man who had eight or nine children . . . *he* would have group photographs taken every autumn (in color, bless him) and mail the results out as Christmas cards. With all this precedent behind me, what else could I do? Ah, me, I fondly dream.

Every book needs a title. I came to Tucson more than a generation ago, and everything that I have published has been written here. Tucson has not been exactly what I sought as a background city, so I invented first Abalone and, later, Manacle. The stories contained herein all revolve in or around Manacle; and all are about nonexistent people and beings in a nonexistent town. Hence, in a way, all are ghosts; and, hence, the title.

CGF
Tucson, Arizona

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THE IOWAN'S CURSE

After the defense plant shut down, people left Manacle, Arizona in droves. They had to. It was a one-industry town; with that one industry gone, you couldn't even make a living taking in your neighbor's washing because, chances were, you didn't even have a neighbor any longer.

That was why my wife Jane and I settled there. We had our own money and wanted to live in a place where it was quiet. Manacle was very quiet. The climate there was just what the doctor had ordered for both of us.

We bought a nice little place several miles from the town proper. It consisted of a small and very comfortable house and ten fenced acres of unimproved desert land. Slightly off center in the ten-acre plot was an outcropping of rock that reared about thirty feet in the air and could be easily climbed. This was known locally as the Cathedral. It made a good landmark.

We bought mostly new things for our little house, and it was a jewel of coziness when we finally had everything arranged to our satisfaction. Jane got out her brushes and paints and easel. I decided to bird-watch. I had some books on Arizona birds.

We had a visitor about five days after we moved in. He was a grumpy old man, older than I at any rate, and much grumpier. He was from Iowa, had made his money in the haberdashery business, and had come to southern Arizona to get away from the severe Iowa winters and to see if the climate would help his wife's asthma.

"She never had a comfortable day in Iowa," he said. "Here she can sleep nights again."

"How long have you been here?" I asked.

"Going on four years now."

"How do you like it?"

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"Why, the weather's right enough, but there's something wrong with the place."

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, I don't rightly know. But it seems like when you do a favor or something for anybody out here, they turn against you."

"That's odd," I said.

"It ain't odd," said the grumpy old Iowan. "It's the work of the Devil. It ain't only people does it to you; it's everything."

"I don't understand," I said.

"Well, it's like this," he explained. "My missus is a friendly-type woman. She likes people; that is, she did. Well, we had a neighbor when we first came here. Young woman married to a young fella who worked in the defense plant. Lived right next door to us. Well, my missus went over there calling one day, and the young woman she was there with her baby, and the baby was sick, and the house looked awful; and my missus hates a messed-up house. So she says to the young woman, 'You tend your baby, honey, and I'll kinda straighten up a little for you.' And she did it. She made the beds and swept the floor and did the dishes, stacks of dishes. And the young woman was real grateful, and the baby got better, and my missus felt like she had done a good deed. She told me so when she came home.

"Next day she went over there again. The house was still kinda clean, but there was that sink again piled high with dirty dishes, and the young woman said the baby had been so picky and fretful that she just hadn't had the time to get to her dishes. So my missus said, 'Honey, you just sit there and tend your baby, and I'll do your dishes.' So she did them, stacks of them. And then she sat and visited with the young woman for a spell, and then she came on home.

"Well, after a couple of more days, she went over to see the young woman again, and there the house was looking like the city dump, and the sink piled high with dirty dishes. And this time the baby wasn't even sick. It was laughing in its crib. My missus she just sat this time and never offered to do anything; and when she left the young woman didn't ask her to come back again. And the young woman also told some of her friends that my missus was a nosy old fool that liked to stick her beak into other folk's business.

"Well," I said, "Mother, those things happen. You did that young woman a good turn, but she didn't appreciate it. Thank goodness, everybody isn't like that."

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"That's what I thought. Till it got to be my turn.

"I was driving back from town, see, and there's a fella and his wife that we knew slightly standing by their car in the middle of the road. Their car had gone dead on them, and I offered to give them a shove. They were real grateful and said thanks and hopped into their car, and I drove up slow till the bumpers touched and started to shove them. Well, I shoved them maybe a mile, and there was a chug hole or something in the road, and his bumper went down and my bumper went up; and the things latched. He was a real excitable fella, and he jumped out of his car and started cussing me for not driving more careful, specially when I was pushing him. I told him to settle down and take it easy. I got a tire iron and prized the bumpers apart. Then I told him to get back in his car, and I'd push him the rest of the way. Which I did.

"Well, it seems when I prized the bumpers apart with the tire iron I must of bunged his up some way, because when we got to his place and stopped and I backed away, why, his rear bumper came away with me. His wife bawled and he cussed. He came at me till he saw I still had that tire iron in my hand.

"I drove off. He sued me for damaging his car, and I had to pay. I said to Mother: 'Next time you see me doing anything in the way of a favor for anybody, kick me quick so's I'll stop.'

"'You do the same for me,' said Mother. And we've never done any favors since. It's not safe to do favors in Manacle. Something about the place."

I asked him why he and his wife kept staying on at Manacle if they disliked the people so.

"Revenge," he said. "I put my curse on this place, and me and Mother are staying here to watch it work."

"Is it working?" I asked.

"Something's working," he said with a mixture of a snort and a laugh. "The defense plant's shut down. There ain't any work for the dear neighbors. The young woman who was so snotty with my missus had to go back to her folks in Oklahoma with her baby when her husband ran off with another woman. That sweet-tempered fella I gave the push for when his car was stalled got fired when the plant closed and lost his house and his car, too. It's that way with everybody. Except me and Mother. We ain't dependent on any defense plant. If it ain't my curse that's working on Manacle, it's somebody's curse. And that's good enough for me and Mother.

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"Mind you," he concluded, "I never had the idea of doing you a favor when I stopped by here to say hello. And don't get the idea that I have done you a favor. I ain't. I have given you a warning and that's all. I don't do favors any more."

With that he left, and Jane came out of the house to see who it was I had been talking to.

"It was just an old nut with a grudge against the world," I said. "Because of a few coincidental irks, he thinks everybody's against him. He just stopped to warn me about Manacle."

"But why should he warn you?" asked Jane. "And against what?"

"He says he put a curse on Manacle," I explained, "and he seemed to imply that the curse might affect us, too."

"Where's the old buzzard from?" asked Jane.

"Iowa."

"Is there anything particularly lethal about an Iowan's curse?"

"He seemed to think there was."

"Well, I feel sorry for him," said Jane. "It's such beautiful country here. His attitude seems so silly. Is there any way of avoiding his curse?"

"I'm not sure," I said, "but from what I gathered the best way is not to do favors for anyone. That way you escape it."

"Well," said Jane, "that should be easy enough for us, for we are very selfish people, and doing favors is absolutely foreign to our natures. When is the last time you did a favor for anyone?"

I tried to think back but couldn't remember a single one.

"Well, curse or no curse," Jane said, "we'll have to chance it and drive into Manacle to get some groceries. Let's take the Cadillac instead of the pickup, and not look so rancherish for a change."

So we got into the Cadillac, and we sped along over the beautifully tended gravel desert road. We had driven perhaps two miles when up ahead we saw a girl standing beside a body in the road, and the girl was trying to wave us down. I slowed down and stopped.

"Something's happened to Jim," the girl wailed. "We were just taking a hike, and he grabbed his side and fell over and groaned. Can you get him to a doctor quick?"

"We can try," I said, and I leaned over to help Jim up. But Jim sprang up of his own accord and thrust a revolver—which he had concealed under his prone body—in my face.

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"Hands up, Grandpa," he snarled. "Hands up. Back up. Turn around. Kneel down. Put your hands behind you. Put the cuffs on him, Nellie Rose. Get out of the car, Grandma. Hurry up. Kneel down. Put the cuffs on her, too, Nellie Rose. Now both of you stay put till you count five hundred and twenty-seven."

Then he and the girl leaped into the Cadillac and drove off.

Jane and I helped each other to our feet. "Don't swear," said Jane. "It doesn't do any good. Somebody will catch them. Can you walk with your hands that way?"

"I think so," I said. "Can you get the cigarettes out of my pocket?"

She could and did, and we knelt down behind each other by turns to get lights from her cigarette lighter. But we couldn't flick ashes or manage the cigarettes after they were lighted, so we spat them out.

"This is a well-traveled road," said Jane. "Let's just start ambling toward town, and somebody will be along and pick us up in a jiffy."

"The Iowan's curse doesn't waste any time," I said. "You noticed, didn't you, how it took hold the moment we started to do what we thought was a favor for those delightful young people?"

"Yes, I noticed," said Jane. "And if an Iowan can make his curse stick, why can't I? I hereby put my curse upon both the young man and the young lady."

"So do I," I said. And I also said: "Look there's a car coming. Wave your head at it or something so that the driver will stop and pick us up. I want to see the sheriff, the high sheriff, of this benighted county."

Jane waved her head; the car cut out to the side of the road to avoid us and barreled on past at fifty miles an hour.

"My, but people are accommodating in this country," said Jane.

"Maybe they, too, have heard of the Iowan's curse," I said. "Chin up. Stride along. There will be more cars."

There were. There must have been seven more. And each one swerved and passed us as if we were exposed booby traps with warning flares on every side.

"Really," said Jane after a while, "that curse thing isn't as funny as I naively supposed it to be. How much farther is it to the vile little hamlet known as Manacle?"

"I can see its spires and towers now through the gentle desert haze," I said. "We will be there in a matter of minutes."

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This is the most horrible way to walk I have ever experienced. I ache from my shoulder blades to my heels. I have a headache. I need a drink. I shall not burden you now with how I feel about that adolescent bushwhacker and his scabrous camp follower."

"Tell me about the way the Chinese Communists torture people, dear," said Jane. So I told her about that until we entered the fringes of Manacle and found a house with a telephone. We kicked against the door because we could not knock, and the startled inmates summoned the authorities.

Tucson police caught the young couple who had robbed us of our Cadillac, but not before the young couple had run the Cadillac off the road and set it afire. The fellow and his girl were wanted on a homicide charge in California and were extradited there to stand trial, California's case having precedence over mine and Jane's. So we never had the pleasure of appearing as witnesses against them in court and watching them wince as the judge pronounced sentence. However, California was an able proxy for us. The young man was sentenced to death on the homicide charge, and the young lady was sent to a hospital for the criminally insane. In a way we felt recompensed. The Cadillac's insurance provided us with a new Cadillac.

"See," I said to Jane, when the new Cadillac was delivered, "the Iowan's curse was only a transitory thing. In a way everything has turned out for the better."

"Uh-huh," said Jane. "That reminds me. I didn't tell you about the men from the air base who were out here quail hunting, did I?"

"No," I said, still admiring the new Cadillac. "What about the quail hunters from the air base?"

"Well," said Jane, "when you were in town getting gasoline put in the new Cadillac there was some shooting in the direction of the Cathedral rock where you feed the quail. I went over there, and there were three air-base men, sergeants or something. They had killed a lot of quail; they had them in the jeep thing they were driving. I told them they were hunting on private property, which was against the law because the property was posted, but if they would just leave and not kill any more of our quail I would do them a favor and not take down the jeep thing's number and report them to the air base and also to the game warden."

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"Hold it," I said. "You told them you would do them a favor?"

"Uh-huh," said Jane. "And I nearly bit my tongue off after I did it."

"Well . . . go on," I said.

"They left," said Jane briefly. "They had been drinking. They called me Grandma and said a lot of insulting things about how I looked in my shorts. But they left."

"How did they get out?" I asked.

"Just like they got in," said Jane. "They drove their jeep thing right through our fence. There's two big crash-throughs in the fence now."

"Did you get their car number?" I demanded.

"No," said Jane. "That was just a bluff."

I put in a long-distance call to the air base, demanded to speak to the commanding officer, and was shunted over to some underling chicken colonel who was sincere but rather feeble. "We have over three thousand men here," he said. "It'll be hard to identify the ones you have accused from what you have told me. A lot of them go hunting, you know. But I'll try. I'll call you back if I can find out anything."

He called back the next day. He'd checked with the provost marshal, he said, and found that three enlisted men who had been quail hunting up in our neighborhood had met with an accident on their return to the base and were now in the base hospital suffering varying degrees of injuries. It seemed that the men had gotten drunk on the trip and had smacked their jeep into a bridge abutment. Two had spinal injuries and broken legs, and the third had a broken back. The colonel asked if I wanted to prefer charges against them after the base medics got them patched up.

"No," I said. "Let it drop."

I told Jane what the colonel had reported, and I said: "Isn't there some theory or other about passive revenge? The idea that when somebody does you dirt, you don't actively do anything in return but just sit back and wait, and, sooner or later, Old Nobo-daddy or the Sea Hag or the Norns catch up with them and deal it out good?"

"I don't remember reading anything like that," said Jane, "but it sounds reasonable. If the author wants any new case histories to use when he brings out a new edition of his theory we can give him some which will do for footnotes at the least."

"I'm disturbed," I said. "Nothing like this has ever happened to us before. The whole pattern seems so vicious. People

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go out of their way to injure us in some manner; we sit back in dismay and anger because we can do nothing about it, and then, bam! The sky caves in on them without our moving a finger. But why?"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake," said Jane. "There have been some coincidences, and that's all. Our experience is probably universal. Don't make so much over it. Stop acting as if there's a big eye up there somewhere brooding over our next moves and tentatively pulling the strings of its evil puppets."

"I cannot share the reasonableness of your conclusions," I sighed. "But, nevertheless, I do not care to mix again with the human species—yourself excepted—for a spate of days. Gather up your paints and your easle, and I will gather up some suet, crusts, and bird seed. Let us go out amidst our ten acres, you to paint its beauties, and I to feed its avians. There, let the eye brood down upon us; let the Iowan brew his curses as he wills."

"You pompous old fool!" said Jane. "But it is a good idea. Come on, let's go."

In the sunlight among the mesquite and paloverde trees, the world was at her loveliest that gentle autumn afternoon. I spread out some viands for the desert birds and sprawled beside Jane as she daubed with her colors. We had brought along a lunch basket and some cans of beer.

"I had a letter yesterday," said Jane chattily, "from Mrs. So-and-so in Tucson. They are trying to start up a new art gallery there, and she said the hanging committee would consider it a great favor if I would submit some of my paintings for their first exhibit. She mentioned *Caverns* particularly. You know, the one which won the prize in Chicago."

"A hanging committee asked you to do it a favor?" I shuddered. "No, Jane, no! A thousand times no. The potentialities are just too horrible."

She hit me lightly with a paintbrush, and we laughed.

But presently she stopped laughing. "Darn you," she said; "now I am afraid to send them my paintings. But how silly. They are nice people."

"Oh, I was only joking," I said. "We are not misanthropic hermits in hiding from every manifestation of our kind. You *will* be doing them a favor. The Tucson artists are not fleeing felons or drunken airmen."

I arose to get us each a can of beer, and, as I did so, I dislodged a flat rock. The dislodgement disclosed a little

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straw colored scorpion which had been nesting there. He waved his crablike pincers in dismay at being disturbed.

"Tiny fiend," I said, "on an afternoon such as this, even against you I bear no animosity. Return to your haven and slumber again in peace." And I carefully put the rock down upon him.

"Stand beside that big mesquite," Jane directed. "I want to paint a faun among the brambles. I have the brambles; now I need the faun."

So, with a beer can in one hand and a cigarette in the other, I posed faunlike beside the big mesquite tree; and I could hear the birds quarrel as they pecked at the food I had placed for them.

Then Jane, who worked rapidly, sketched in her faun among the brambles, and told me I might stop the posing; and I returned to her side and lay down upon the warm desert soil.

I felt a stab between my shoulder blades and then pain such as if a thousand bees had stung me. It was radiating pain, and made me vomit. In my agony I tramped upon the little scorpion which had bitten me; then Jane helped me back to our house.

My arms were paralyzed, and my legs went dead just as Jane was able to get me in the car. With one hand she held a handkerchief full of ice cubes against the spot where I had been stung; with the other hand she drove the Cadillac.

At the clinic in Manacle they injected me with that blessed anti-scorpion serum which Dr. Stahnke, the genius at Arizona State College in Tempe, had developed. I was in the hospital overnight; and Jane took me home the next day. Three days later I was my old self again.

"I had a siege of hysterics when you were in the hospital," Jane said. "And I'm not a hysterical woman. I'm not superstitious, either. And I'm not crazy. But I'm not going to send any paintings to that Tucson show."

"Are you afraid?" I asked.

"Yes. I am afraid."

And we let it go at that. But our days became rather snarled affairs. It was almost as if we were getting on each other's nerves, we who had been married so long that we were as one person, never saying anything without saying it to the other, never making a decision without making it with the other, never doing anything without doing it with the other. Never sleeping, eating, rising, traveling, dreaming, or praying as one

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alone but always with the other. This was our harmony and our strength.

Finally Jane said: "This is awful. Are you afraid of doing me a favor?"

"I was afraid," I said slowly, "that you were afraid that I *might* do you a favor."

Then we both laughed, and the tension of days was eased.

"We have been making mountains out of molehills," she said. "We are selfish people. We have always considered our own lives and our own felicity as paramount to everything. We have always repelled the encroachment of others."

"I think it is being brought home to us," I replied, "that our tower of selfishness is not inviolable. Perhaps it is a lesson we have needed for a long time."

"Perhaps," agreed Jane. "Or, on the other hand, perhaps the whole concatenation has been nothing but nonsense. Let's start going out again just as if nothing had happened. I will call Mrs. So-and-so in Tucson and tell her I'll be delighted to enter my pictures in their show. And you can drive us to Tucson, and we will enter them. That is something neither of us wants to do, because I am sensitive about my paintings and resent any criticism of them, and you hate affairs of the sort—cocktail parties, mingling, chitchat. So let's go. Let's do something we don't like and see what happens."

I started to protest, then found myself in agreement with her. For it was necessary that we did do something, and not sit there any longer in our ten acres trying not to get on each other's nerves.

Jane called Mrs. So-and-so in Tucson who was delighted with the news. Next day we put the pictures in the Cadillac, and I drove us down to Tucson.

There is only the one road, and it goes through Manacle. The streets were dilapidated but pretty enough in their soft decaying way, lined as they were with crumbly adobe houses and shoddy little businesses. Then we drove through Manacle's subdivision—Sunrise Heights—built by the government to house the defense plant workers which Manacle itself could not accommodate.

Tumbleweeds and old papers blew through Sunrise Heights. The windows in the once neat little houses had been smashed by rocks, thrown no doubt by roving bands of Manacle's young manhood. The roofs were cracking, the paint fading and peeling in the remorseless sun. Manacle itself was nearly one hundred years old, and bore its age—and its disgrace—

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with a sort of sullen dignity. Its subdivision of Sunrise Heights was only ten years old; now dead, it resembled a toy some delinquent child had abused.

Neither of us wanted to mention the Iowan. What would have been the point? The defense plant was closed because the weapon it had manufactured had become obsolete. Sunrise Heights was empty because the people who had lived there had been forced to go elsewhere to find employment. The young marauders from Manacle had wrecked the Sunrise Heights windows because Manacle was a dull place, and there was nothing else to do.

The fact that a grumpy old Iowan had cursed the place had nothing to do with it . . . nothing.

Or to do with us.

So we drove on to Tucson and found the house where our hostess lived, Mrs. So-and-so who had asked Jane to do the artist group a favor by lending her paintings for the exhibit.

We were to stay two nights, attending the show the first night and being entertained the second day and night. There was a trip to Nogales, Mexico, planned for us, and a reception and cocktail party.

The art show, the reception, and the cocktail party were much as I had expected they would be—rather strained and artificial. Jane's paintings, as far as I could see, were the only ones of merit in the show, except some by Mark Voris, who was then as always Arizona's finest painter.

But I had been looking forward to the trip to Nogales. It would be our first visit to Mexico; and old travelers always enjoy seeing new countries.

Our hosts and Jane and I decided to go in our Cadillac, because the car was roomy and I liked to drive. We set out in the afternoon, an afternoon of gold and silver and green, and our hearts were light.

We paused not at all in Nogales, Arizona, but crossed over the border immediately to the Mexican Nogales. Jane and our hostess began a round of the curio shops, those curiously alike little cubicles with their curiously alike wares and their curiously alike methods of bargaining. Are they all owned by the same person, and is the competition nothing but sham? One wonders.

Our host and I found without difficulty a little drinking place, and sipped tequila sours while the ladies bought their jimcrack curios. The tequila was good, but there was a shoddy

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cheapness about the town which depressed me. I had a vague, uncomfortable feeling of being cheated whenever I paid out money for anything there.

A little boy came in the bar where we sat, stood by diffidently for a moment, and then in rather good English offered to guard the Cadillac for us. I laughed and asked our host: (1) Was it necessary to have one's car guarded in this country? and (2) Was it customary?

Our host laughed in return and said that while he couldn't speak for the necessity it was, nevertheless, more or less customary; people were wretchedly poor here as a rule, the little boys made a sort of living "guarding" tourists' cars, and I would probably be doing the lad's family a favor in paying him to guard mine.

I winced at that remark. Had I a little more tequila, I probably would have become angry and cursed both our host and the cringing little boy. But I had had only enough tequila to make me feel genial, so I said: "Well, child, guard the car, but don't get your dirty fingerprints on it," and I gave him a dime. He left with an odd look on his face.

Jane and our hostess, after an interminable time, finished their shopping, looked us up, and announced it was time for dinner. We put their purchases in the Cadillac and went off to a restaurant for some genuine Mexican food.

We had enchiladas and tamales and dishes of that sort, and more to drink. I enjoyed the meal; Jane chattered like a magpie; we were having a very good time.

Then horrid things began to happen.

After dinner as I drove back toward Tucson, I was halted by highway patrolmen on the way, and cited for speeding, drunken driving, and endangering human lives. The officers ordered me out of the driver's seat and ordered our host to drive the remainder of the way. They admonished me to appear in court the next morning.

I appeared in traffic court—our host driving me there in his car—and was fined one hundred dollars, but was allowed to keep my driver's license and to escape a jail term because of extenuating circumstances.

When we returned, our hostess asked in trembling fashion if I had looked at the Cadillac. I replied with an irritable no and asked what was wrong with it. Mutely, she led me out.

All the knickknacks she and Jane had bought had been stolen. So had the hubcaps. The rear tires had been slashed, but had held up. The paint along the sides had been scored

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as if with a beer can opener. Obscene words in both Spanish and English had been daubed on the back.

All this had happened in Mexico, but such had been our travail that it had gone unnoticed till our hostess had gone out this next morning to get her purchases.

"But I thought," protested Jane, "that you paid a little boy to watch the car."

"I did," I said. "I did it as a favor. We did everybody a favor, now that I think back."

We went back to our ten acres at Manacle as soon as feasible, driving past the dead defense plant, past the withering Sunrise Heights, and through the malignant heart of Manacle. It was a very gray day; our ten acres looked wistful and unhappy; the outcropped rock Cathedral resembled a decayed and aching tooth.

"Let's move," said Jane. "I can't stand it any longer. Let's get away from here. I have begun to hate, and I don't like to hate."

"I'll put the place up for sale," I said. "I'll order a truck. We can start packing today. We can be gone in two days. Where do you want to go?"

"New York, I guess," said Jane gloomily. "For a while at least. To a hotel. Where I can think."

I called our realty broker in Tucson and told him to put our place on the market. I called a van line and told them to send a van around the next day to pick up our stuff and put it in storage.

"It won't take two days," I told Jane. "We can leave tomorrow. We will be doing ourselves and this place, too, a favor."

Jane brightened up.

The air outside became gusty; rain began to fall. I built a fire in our fireplace, and I brought out a bottle of German wine. We toasted the imminence of our departure, and, as the rain poured down with new intensity, dared the elements to do their worst.

The elements accepted the dare.

Rains in that part of Arizona are always sparse affairs, and a half-inch precipitation is accounted almost a cloudburst.

This time it rained that half inch in less than half an hour, and still the inundation kept pouring from the skies.

I looked out the door, and the water was gathered in ponds

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all over our front yard; the patio was full of water; the Cadillac stood in water up to its whitewalls in the ramada. There was no wind, and there was no break in the sky. There was only blackness and furious, unceasing rain.

The land was flat; there was no place for the rain to go after it fell; it piled up and made ponds and lakes in every little declivity and every hollow.

I returned to Jane and the fireplace and the wine. But I was uneasy and after fifteen minutes I went again to the front door and again looked out.

The water was over our porch step. Everywhere I looked was water. The Cadillac was hubcap-deep in water under the ramada.

Then I became afraid, and I told Jane we were on the verge of being flooded out.

"Nothing would surprise me less," she snapped. "But what can we do about it?"

That was the point. What could we do? We couldn't get anywhere in the Cadillac; it was already bogged. The nearest habitation to ours was more than a mile away and was unquestionably in similar plight. And then I remembered what I had read about flash floods: the water piles up in some hitherto dry mountain gulch or gully, then suddenly bursts out and swamps the lowlands with a roar. All this rain was piling up in the mountains north of us; the drainage flowed our way; it was only a matter of time until a whole wild sea would be upon us.

"Come," I said to Jane. "We've got to go up." And I explained the situation to her.

"But where can we go?" she protested.

There was only one place. That was the rock outcropping on our acres, the ugly Cathedral. It was thirty feet high. It would be a place of refuge. We put on our raincoats and hats, as if we were going to the store, and waded—sometimes knee-deep—to the Cathedral. We climbed its rocky side and sat upon its top; and the rain poured down.

We sat there all that night. When dawn came we watched the flash flood come with it—nothing really flashy, just a swell and a billow that surged across the lake which already covered our ten acres and all the surrounding land. The Cadillac rolled over on its side and wobbled helplessly. Our house disintegrated a wall at a time; our things floated, a chair here, a paper there.

Around eight o'clock the rain stopped. About noon a heli-

The Iowan's Curse

copter fluttered by and rescued Jane and me. Nearly ten inches of rain had fallen. It was the worst flood ever recorded in that part of Arizona.

After our rescue everything became rather academic. We refugeed for two days in Manacle which was on high ground and escaped most of the flood. When the water went down we hired a man to drive us to Tucson where we could catch plane, train, or even bus to get us out and to keep us going.

As he drove us along the road to Tucson, our man companionably pointed out the high points of the flood's devastation. "Over there," he said, indicating the remnants of a house, "was where an old grouch from Iowa lived. But he'd already left before the rain started."

"What caused him to do that?" I asked.

"Termites," said our driver. "They had eat out the wood of his whole house, even the pitcher frames. Man, did that old grouch cuss this country when he left!"

"I can imagine," I said.

THE HORSENAPING OF HOTSPUR

In the arroyo country an hour's drive from Manacle, in times past, were two habitations just three miles apart, airline distance. One was as manorial and well kept as any rural abode in these entire United States. The other was of such sullen squalor that it could only be likened to the unpleasant den of an unsocial animal which reveled in obnoxiousness.

In the one lived Henry Percy, rich rancher, kind father, expert husbandman, philanthropist, and king of the countryside. With him lived his adoring family and his no less adoring retinue.

In the other lived Poverty Booger, a scowling scoundrel, sin-besotted, slothful, saturnine, and snarling. As his companion lived Injun Joe, a quarter-breed as unwholesome as his host.

Henry Percy raised horses, the finest nags in all that vast expanse of southern Arizona.

Under Poverty Booger's care were a buzzard named Battlescar, a coatimundi named Cisco, and a mongrel dog named Pedro. The buzzard looked like a Phorkyad, the mongrel like a Tasmanian devil, and the coati like a nightmare.

On the afternoon of this story all was calm at Henry Percy's, and all was also calm at Poverty Booger's.

At Percy's, the hour of siesta held sway.

At Booger's, cookery was being done.

The previous evening, Cisco and Pedro had caught a jack-rabbit and brought it home to their master. The animals made their forays in concert with Battlescar the buzzard. That canny bird, soaring on remorseless wings, would sight the prey and signal so to Cisco and Pedro. If the prey chose to flee, Pedro would run it down, for Pedro was half coyote and as speedy as a greyhound. If the prey chose to burrow, Cisco would dig it out, for Cisco could excavate with the

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facility of a giant mole. If the prey chose to climb a tree, Cisco would climb after it, and Battlescar would dive at it until the prey became so bedeviled that it would fling itself from the branches into Pedro's waiting jaws. No rabbit, no squirrel, no gopher ever escaped that deadly trio.

Now, singing to himself in his shack, Poverty Booger was busy with his rabbit-cooking. Outside, Cisco and Pedro were gnawing on the rabbit's feet and hide and head; and Battlescar was waiting for the entrails to ripen.

Booger cut up the meat and seared it in his encrusted skillet. Then he dumped it in a pot and covered it with water. Into that he crushed a dried chile pepper, and he added chunks of dried squash. He put the pot on the fire to simmer, then patted wet cornmeal into tortillas and set the tortillas to cook on a sheet of corrugated iron beaten flat.

"Thet there looks good an' smells good," commented Injun Joe, at ease upon a pallet of gunny sacks. "Leave us hev a drink fer an appertizer."

He arose and reached into his tattered coat, extracting therefrom a bottle of 45-cent sherry wine. "Whur'd you git thet wine?" demanded Booger, one-third in suspicion, two-thirds in delight.

"Ah found a dollar in Manacle," explained Injun Joe. "So ah bought two bottles of sherry, and also acquired a fifth of whiskey on mah charge account. Ah still got a dime in change."

Booger took the bottle from him and poured a cupful into the jackrabbit stew. "Tuh give it a tang," he explained. He then took a good soldierly slug of it himself.

He considered a moment. "Ah think ah'll make a wassail bowl," he said.

"Whot's thet?" asked Injun Joe.

"Hit's another of mah coolinary specialities," said Booger. "Gimme the rest of thet likker you stole."

"Bought," corrected Injun Joe.

"Gimme it," said Booger.

He took the three-gallon tin can he used as a water jug and emptied a third of it on the floor. Into the remaining two gallons he poured the whiskey and the bottles of wine. He added some crumpled chile and stirred the concoction with a stick. "Thar," he said. "Thar's the wassail bowl." He tasted it. "Wow!"

"Leave me try it," said Injun Joe eagerly.

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"Help yerself," said Booger. "They's two whole gallon an' more of the stuff, an' it's pahrful enough to run an airypplane."

At Henry Percy's, the siesta over, the family was having afternoon tea. In Percy's well-kept stalls, corrals, and pastures, Percy's well-groomed horses munched their hay and oats.

Matron of Percy's herd was Julie, a big black mare of placid mien and gentle eyes. Whenever the other horses had troubles they always took them to Julie, for Julie was wonderous wise. Julie's stable companion was a medium-size bull-snake named Toro. Toro's mother had once laid a clutch of eggs in Julie's stall, and Toro was the only one to hatch. Toro's mother abandoned him, and Julie raised him. They were now inseparable friends.

Pride of Percy's herd was a young stallion called Hotspur. He was the swiftest and most beautiful horse in that part of southern Arizona, and Percy often said he would not take a million dollars for him. Percy meant this, too, for he already had a million dollars.

Down again at Booger's, Poverty and Injun Joe, full to bursting with jackrabbit stew, took the can of firewater Booger had mixed and went out under the trees to enjoy the cool of the early evening. Battlescar, the buzzard, slept on Booger's well top. Pedro and Cisco slept in Booger's fly-infested wickiup.

Booger and Joe reclined beneath a mesquite tree. In the branches above them perched a slim gray figure: Molina the mockingbird, who wished that they would go away so that he might sing. He knew if he sang now one of them would throw a rock at him.

"What we need, Booger," said Injun Joe, "is some working capital."

"How we gonna git it?" demanded Booger.

"Thet's what ah'm studyin' at," said Joe. "Ah bin thinkin' about thet hoss of Hennery Percy's. The one they call Hotspur."

"So," said Booger.

"Ah betcha," said Joe, "Hennery Percy'd pay handsome to git Hotspur back if he was missin'. Percy's mighty fond of thet plug."

"So," said Booger.

"So," said Joe, "if Hotspur was missin' an' if we was to

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tell Hennery Percy whur to find him, mebbe Hennery Percy'd give us a reward, mebbe as much as fifty dollars."

"Air you suggestion' we steal thet hoss?" cried Booger. For the Code of the West, which is the law in that part of southern Arizona, deals severely with horsethieves. A man who shoots his wife may, and often does, get off free. But a man who steals a horse is always punished.

"Not stealin'," said Joe. "Jest hidin' him out somewhur. An' then accidently findin' him when Hennery Percy starts lookin'."

"Thet's horsenapin'," said Booger.

"What if it is?" asked Joe.

"Pass the punch," said Booger. "Leave me think on it. Fifty dollars. Hmmm."

The upshot of his cogitations was a plan to go to Percy's after dark, lure Hotspur out of his corral with a piece of squash, and then hide Hotspur in the deep brush. "We'll leave Cisco an' Pedro an' Battlescar home till we git Hotspur hid, an' then they kin stand guard fer us."

"An' we jest set back an' wait fer Percy to go lookin', an' then we find Hotspur and collect the reward," said Joe.

"Right," said Booger. "Pass the punch."

"When do we start?" asked Joe.

Booger estimated the contents of the wassail bowl. "Two hours afore the dawn," he said.

Above them in the mesquite tree, the horrified Molina took down everything they said with the accuracy of a tape recorder. His horror became transmuted into action, for he knew he could wait no longer. Molina took off like a feathered dart and flew through the gathering gloom toward the Henry Percy ranch.

"What was thet noise?" asked Injun Joe.

"Jest a little bird," said Poverty Booger.

"Little birds mean nuthin' to me," said Joe. "Pass the punch."

Molina winged his way over the tops of the giant cactus and the mesquite trees to Henry Percy's place in six minutes flat, thereby setting a new speed record for mockingbirds in that part of southern Arizona.

He found Julie in her stall, gently scolding Toro for something the bullsnake had done or failed to do that day. Molina naturally had gone to Julie, just as all the other gentle creatures did when they had troubles.

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"Julie! Julie!" chattered Molina, alighting on a rafter well out of Toro's reach. "Julie! Julie! Terrible things are afoot."

"Whatever is the matter?" asked Julie. "Tell me quickly."

"Two terrible men are planning to horsenap Hotspur, Julie! It's the most dreadful thing. They are sitting under a mesquite tree laying their plans now. They are drinking too, Julie! They have their drink in a huge tin can, the most vile concoction you have ever dreamed of. They plan to horsenap Hotspur two hours before the dawn and hide him out in the brush, and then wait for Mr. Percy to ransom him. Oh, it's terrible, Julie! Terrible! I came to you as fast as my wings would carry me. I set a new record for mocking-birds in southern Arizona. And I was just getting ready to sing at sunset like I always do. You know how I sing, Julie: first like a thrush, then like a sparrow, then like a parakeet I heard in Manacle, and then that song Papa Mocker taught me when I was a fledgling. Oh, how beautiful that song is when I sing it! And I was just getting ready to sing, Julie, when those awful men came along with their liquor and started to talk about horsenaping Hotspur. Oh, Julie, Julie, whatever will I do?"

Molina's alarm transferred itself to Julie, for horsenaping was a horrible thing, almost as bad as horse-stealing.

"Who are the men, Molina?" Julie asked in a strained voice.

"One is Poverty Booger and the other is Injun Joe," said Molina.

"And you say they are drinking?"

"Just as fast as they can pour it down, Julie."

"Drinking men fear snakes," said Julie after a long moment of consideration. "I know a way to stop that horsenaping in its tracks. We have many hours left to us. Toro, summon the clans."

"What?" gasped Toro. "Why, that is only done in times of direst emergency."

"That time has arrived," said Julie. "Summon the clans."

"But what will I tell them?"

"Tell them that two bad men will attempt to steal Hotspur two hours before the dawn, and that their help is needed to thwart the bad men."

"I don't think the clans will like it," said Toro. "I don't think the Grand Master will like it."

"You tell them," said Julie, "that these bad men plan to do harm to Mr. Henry Percy, and you point out to them that the only place the clans are safe any more is on Mr.

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Henry Percy's ranch, and that they owe this help to Mr. Percy."

For the clans which Toro were to summon were the snake clans and, indeed, ever since Henry Percy had acquired his property he had forbidden anyone to kill a snake or harm it in any way on his land; and that was a very unusual thing for a person to do, because, in a way, even the Code of the West hints that snakes ought to be killed on sight, which is one of the few flaws in that great document.

"Very well," said Toro. "For Mr. Henry Percy's sake, I will summon the clans."

And he dropped from Julie's manger down onto the ground and slid out of the stall and across the corral and into the greasewood thicket. And, once deep in the thicket, he sent out the call to the clans.

"What's up?" asked a Leconte's snake which was very near and was the first to arrive.

"Treachery to Henry Percy," said Toro.

Then seven red racers came whipping through the greasewood like coppery streaks. Two Sonoran racers followed them, proud gray beauties with pink throats and big luminous eyes. Then came some black racers, and then a whole family of bullsnakes, cousins, aunts, and uncles to Toro. And garter snakes came, and night snakes, and lyre snakes, and hog-nosed snakes, and king snakes. And then a monster black snake, ten feet long, came winding in. He was an indigo snake from Texas that had escaped from a traveling sideshow; he obeyed the summons as readily as any of the Arizona reptiles.

When he heard horsenaping was afoot, he was agog with enthusiasm to join his Arizona brethren in its prevention.

"Us Texicans," he proclaimed, "hates hossnapin' wuss than ary other thing on this hull earth. An' when a Texican hates, he really despises. You sidewinders here in Airyzoney cain't even begin to vizoolize what fiery hate a Texican kin generate when he gits riled up properly. Whar is them thar miscreants at, Toro? Ah aims to take 'em on singlehanded fer the glory of dear ole Taxis." The indigo snake's name was Alamo; a Lone Star was tattooed in red on his head plates.

"Calm yourself, Alamo," said Toro. "We can't do anything until the Grand Master gets here."

More snakes kept coming in from all points of the compass, and in only a few minutes the greasewood thicket was

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alive with them, some on the ground, some in the bushes, some coiled, some at full length.

Then, afar off, the whirr of tiny, brittle drums could be heard: the rattlers were approaching. The little ones came first, the gray rattlers, the horned rattlers, the green rattlers, the Price's rattlers, and the tiger rattlers. Following them came the blacktail rattlers, from the foothills and the black diamondbacks from the mountains. Then came the shock troops of Arizona viperhood, the desert diamondbacks, dusty, venomous, killers all. And in their midst was the Grand Master, a desert rattler seven feet long, five inches thick, with twenty rattles on his tail, and inch-long fangs in his head.

He slid rapidly into the center of the throng of serpents, coiled, reared his massive head, and shook his castanets for a full thirty seconds.

"Who summoned the clans?" he demanded.

"I did," said Toro, secretly wishing *he* was seven feet long and had twenty rattles on his tail and inch-long poison fangs in his jaws.

"For what purpose?" demanded the Grand Master.

And Toro related to him the reason for the summons.

When Toro had finished the Grand Master said: "There is only one man in the whole world whom I would wrinkle a scale to help, and that man is Henry Percy. Any other man in the world can always expect my fangs but never my help. Henry Percy, however, has provided sanctuary for snakes, and snakes now have an opportunity to repay Henry Percy. You did well, Toro, to summon the clans."

Then the Grand Master laid out his strategy. There was only one trail from Poverty Booger's place to Henry Percy's. The snakes would station themselves in groups of ten along that trail and harry the horsenapers with hisses, rattles, and scurryings in the underbrush as the thieves made their way toward Percy's. After the two men had been subjected to that treatment for perhaps a mile and a half, they would be confronted in the clearing below Percy's stables by seventeen of the biggest desert diamondbacks, commanded in person by the Grand Master. This platoon of seventeen would rattle in unison and move toward the thieves as the spokes of a wheel converge on the hub. If the thieves broke and ran for it, well and good: Let them go.

If the thieves chose to put up a fight, the desert rattlers

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would bite and bite hard, and the Grand Master himself would deliver the coup de grâce.

"Is everything understood?" demanded the Grand Master.

"Aye," said the assembled serpents.

"To your posts, then," said the Master. "Little snakes first and farthest down the trail. Medium snakes next. You red racers will act as scouts and keep everybody informed. We have several hours. Snakes away!"

And the greasewood thicket writhed as the clans headed for their stations.

"I reckon," said Injun Joe, "it's time to git about our bizness." Before arriving at that reckoning he had shaken the three-gallon can and found it empty. "I propose we jest walk down the trail, and seize thet hoss Hotspur, and take him off in the bresh and hide him. Thet's about as simple as I figger it kin be done."

"Right, right," said Booger, lurching to his feet. "Let's keep her simple. My haid is spinning."

"The walk'll clear it," said Injun Joe. "Gimme yer hand. I'm jest a mite onsteady."

They staggered down the trail, the moon illuminating the pathway for them. Behind them in the mesquite tree, a bird began to sing of joy and eggs and fat berries and safe nests. It was Molina catching up with his music after his return to his perch.

After walking about twenty minutes, Poverty Booger said to Injun Joe: "I keep hearing somethin'. Somethin' in the underbresh."

"Lizards," said Injun Joe. "They all time pester around at night."

A long thin shiny black streak swept across the trail in front. Then two more black streaks crossed the trail from the opposite direction. From either side of the trail loud hisses seared the air.

"Thet ain't lizards," said Poverty Booger, stopping. "Thet's snakes!"

"It's the matin' season fer snakes and other reptyles," said Injun Joe. "They always act like thet. Come on."

The hissings and the flashings across the path grew almost incessant. Injun Joe finally became more nervous than Poverty Booger. "Seems like," he said, "every durn snake in

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the hull Southwest is corngregated along thisyere trail. Gitcha a club, Booger, and start beatin' 'em away."

"You git the club," said Booger. "Ah ain't aiming to pick no fight with a herd of snakes. Not tonight I ain't."

"If yer afraid," said Injun Joe, "jest say so, and thet's thet. Now take me: I hain't afraid." And he stepped off the trail and picked up what he thought was a long black pole.

But instead of being a pole it was Alamo. As Injun Joe stooped, Alamo looped and struck, his jaws jabbing harmlessly in Injun Joe's long beard. Injun Joe let out a scream and leaped back to the trail.

"Har, har, har!" roared Poverty Booger. "Ain't scared, huh? Jest an ole stick layin' in the bresh, and it scares yuh."

"Thet warn't no stick," said the trembling Joe. "Thet was a snake fifteen foot long if it was an inch. It struck at me. I think I been snake-bit, Booger."

"Are you in pain?" asked Booger.

"I feel sort of numb," said Joe.

"Snake poison stings; it don't numb," said Booger. "You ain't been snake-bit. Come on. Let's go."

And they pursued their way again. And the rustlings and the hissings and the swishings grew louder and louder.

"Ah cain't make it no further," said Injun Joe at last. "Thar is jest too many reptyles along this daggone trail to suit me. The sign ain't right tonight fer hossnapin'. Leave us go back to yer diggin's, Booger, and figger out some other project."

Poverty Booger was as nervous as Injun Joe, but his moral fiber was a little more fibrous. "Right ahead is the clearin'," he said. "We're in sight of our goal, Joe. Let's not quit now." Teeth chattering, he took Injun Joe by the arm and steered him toward the clearing.

The noises which had plagued them along the trail ceased. A profound silence, which seemed to flow down from the moon herself, blanketed the air as they stepped into the open ground.

They took ten steps apiece, and then the silence ended. A buzzing crackle arose like the shaking of a million dried peas in a gigantic dried pod. Gray shapes, like huge dusty worms, slid into the clearing. These were the shock troops, the big desert diamondbacks the Grand Master had mustered for the last stand.

They moved in straight lines, heads upraised, rattles fairly

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burning in the air. The clearing was covered with them. They converged on the horsenapers.

"Look, Joel!" gibbered Booger. "Jest look! Rattly snakes. Everywhere is rattly snakes! They is attactin' us, Joe. Listen to 'em buzz."

"You listen," said Joe. "Ah'm gittin'. This night ah hev seen forty-'leven too many snakes."

And he turned and fled down the trail, and Poverty Booger fled after him.

The Grand Master halted the march of the desert diamond-backs. He sent out the red racers to congratulate the clans and dismiss them. It had been a successful night. Toro wriggled back to the stables and told Julie all was well.

"I knew it would be," said Julie. "I was never the tiniest bit disturbed. For the Code of the West, Toro, states firmly that the forces of good will always triumph over the forces of evil." And Julie closed her big, gentle eyes and went to sleep.

As for Poverty Booger and Injun Joe, they returned to Booger's diggings, barricaded the door and chinked up the cracks. A day later hunger overcame their fear, and they removed the barricades.

Pedro, Cisco, and Battlescar teamed up to provide another jackrabbit. With a sigh and a curse at the monotony of the fare they were having, Booger cooked up another jackrabbit-and-squash stew.

Some Papago Indians, passing the place in their government truck, smelled the rabbit cooking and stopped off to get a bite to eat. Seeing the straits in which Booger and Joe were living, the Papagos, after eating up all the stew, took up a collection among themselves and gave Booger and Joe two dollars and eighteen cents and six cans of beer.

Other Papagos, passing Booger's place after that, always stopped for a dish of Booger's rabbit stew. So many Papagos stopped so often that Booger had to erect a ramada for them to eat in. Injun Joe was constantly washing dishes. Battlescar, Pedro, and Cisco were constantly on the trail for more rabbits.

The Papagos spread word about the unique dish Booger cooked at his diggings. It became fashionable for the rich people of Manacle to come there at night and dine in the exotic surroundings.

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The overhead was low. The money poured in. Booger bought a fire-engine-red Jaguar.

Some years later, he ran for the school board and was elected, defeating Henry Percy. For the Code of the West says a man's past shall never be held against him, particularly when he starts making money.

*THE LIFE AND DEATH OF
A WESTERN GLADIATOR*

He was born on a summer morning in the shady mouth of a cave. Three others were born with him, another male and two females. Each was about five inches long and slimmer than a lead pencil.

Their mother left them a few hours after they were born. A day after that his brother and sisters left him also. He was all alone. Nobody cared whether he lived or died. His tiny brain was very dull. He had no arms or legs. His skin was delicate. Nearly everything that walked on the ground or burrowed in it, that flew in the air or swam in the water or climbed trees was his enemy. But he didn't know that. He knew nothing at all. He was aware of his own existence, and that was the sum of his knowledge.

The direct rays of the sun could, in a short time, kill him. If the temperature dropped too low he would freeze. Without food he would starve. Without moisture he would die of dehydration. If a man or a horse stepped on him he would be crushed. If anything chased him he could run neither very far nor very fast.

Thus it was at the hour of his birth. Thus it would be, with modifications, all his life.

But against these drawbacks he had certain qualifications that fitted him to be a competitive creature of this world and and equipped him for its warfare. He could exist a long time without food or water. His very smallness at birth protected him when he most needed protection. Instinct provided him with what he lacked in experience. In order to eat he first had to kill; and he was eminently adapted for killing. In sacs in his jaws he secreted a virulent poison. To inject that poison he had two fangs, hollow and pointed. Without that poison and those fangs he would have been among the most helpless creatures on earth. With them he was among the deadliest.

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He was, of course, a baby rattlesnake, a desert diamond-back, named *Crotalus atrox* by the herpetologists Baird and Girard, and so listed in the *Catalogue of North American Reptiles* in its issue of 1853. He was grayish-brown in color with a series of large dark diamond-shaped blotches on his back. His tail was white with five black cross-bands. It had a button on the end of it.

Little *Crotalus* lay in the dust in the mouth of his cave. Some of his kinfolk lay there too. It was their home. That particular tribe of rattlers had lived there for scores of years.

The cave had never been seen by a white man.

Sometimes as many as two hundred rattlers occupied the den. Sometimes the numbers shrunk to as few as forty or fifty.

The tribe members did nothing at all for each other except breed. They hunted singly; they never shared their food. They derived some automatic degree of safety from their numbers, but their actions were never concerted toward using their numbers to any end. If an enemy attacked one of them, the others did nothing about it.

Young *Crotalus*'s brother was the first of the litter to go out into the world and the first to die. He achieved a distance of fifty feet from the den when a Sonoran racer, four feet long and hungry, came upon him. The little rattler, despite his poison fangs, was a tidbit. The racer, long skilled in such arts, snatched him up by the head and swallowed him down. Powerful digestive juices in the racer's stomach did the rest. Then the racer, appetite whetted, prowled around until it found one of *Crotalus*'s little sisters. She went the way of the brother.

Nemesis of the second sister was a chaparral cock. This cuckoo, or road runner as it is called, found the baby amid some rocks, uttered a cry of delight, scissored it by the neck, shook it until it was almost lifeless, banged and pounded it upon a rock until life had indeed left it, and then gulped it down.

Crotalus, somnolent in a cranny of the cave's mouth, neither knew nor cared. Even if he had, there was nothing he could have done about it.

On the fourth day of his life he decided to go out into the world himself. He rippled forth uncertainly, the transverse plates on his belly serving him as legs.

He could see things well enough within his limited range, but a five-inch-long snake can command no great field of

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vision. He had an excellent sense of smell. But, having no ears, he was stone deaf. On the other hand, he had a pit, a deep pock mark between eye and nostril. Unique, this organ was sensitive to animal heat. In pitch blackness, *Crotalus*, by means of the heat messages recorded in his pit, could tell whether another animal was near and could judge its size. That was better than an ear.

The single button on his tail could not, of course, yet rattle. *Crotalus* wouldn't be able to rattle until that button had grown into three segments. Then he would be able to buzz.

He had a wonderful tongue. It looked like an exposed nerve and was probably exactly that. It was forked, and *Crotalus* thrust it in and out as he traveled. It told him things that neither his eyes nor his nose nor his pit told him.

Snake fashion, *Crotalus* went forth, not knowing where he was going, for he had never been anywhere before. Hunger was probably his prime mover. In order to satisfy that hunger he had to find something smaller than himself and kill it.

He came upon a baby lizard sitting in the sand. Eyes, nose, pit, and tongue told *Crotalus* it was there. Instinct told him what it was and what to do. *Crotalus* gave a tiny one-inch strike and bit the lizard. His poison killed it. He took it by the head and swallowed it. Thus was his first meal.

During his first two years *Crotalus* grew rapidly. He attained a length of two feet; his tail had five rattles on it and its button. He rarely bothered with lizards any more, preferring baby rabbits, chipmunks, and round-tailed ground squirrels. Because of his slow locomotion he could not run down these agile little things. He had to contrive instead to be where they were when they would pass. Then he struck swiftly, injected his poison, and ate them after they died.

At two he was formidable. He had grown past the stage where a racer or a road runner could safely tackle him. He had grown to the size where other desert dwellers—coyotes, foxes, coatis, wildcats—knew it was better to leave him alone.

And, at two, *Crotalus* became a father, his life being regulated by cycles. His cycles were plant-like. The peach tree does not "know" when it is time to flower, but flower it does because its cycle orders it to do so.

In the same way, *Crotalus* did not "know" when it was time for young desert diamondback rattlers to pair off and breed. But his cycle knew.

He found "her" on a rainy morning. *Crotalus*'s courtship at first was sinuous and subtle, slow and stealthy. Then sud-

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denly it became dynamic. A period of exhaustion followed. Two metabolic machines had united to produce new metabolic machines.

Of that physical union six new rattlesnakes were born. Thus *Crotalus*, at two, had carried out his major primary function: he had reproduced his kind. In two years he had experienced everything that was reasonably possible for desert diamondback rattlesnakes to experience except death.

He had not experienced death for the simple reason that there had never been an opportunity for anything bigger and stronger than himself to kill him. Now, at two, because he was so formidable, that opportunity became more and more unlikely.

He grew more slowly in the years following his initial spurt. At the age of twelve he was five feet long. Few of the other rattlers in his den were older or larger than he.

He had a castanet of fourteen segments. It had been broken off occasionally in the past, but with each new moulting a new segment appeared.

His first skin-shedding back in his babyhood had been a bewildering experience. He did not know what was happening. His eyes clouded over until he could not see. His skin thickened and dried until it cracked in places. His pit and his nostril ceased to function. There was only one thing to do and that was to get out of that skin.

Crotalus managed it by nosing against the bark of a shrub until he forced the old skin down over his head, bunching it like a rolled stocking around his neck. Then he pushed around rocks and sticks and branches, literally crawling out of the skin by slow degrees. Wriggling free at last, he looked like a brand-new snake. His skin was bright and satiny, his eyes and nostrils were clear, his pit sang with sensation.

For the rest of his life he was to molt three or four times a year. Each time he did it he felt as if he had been born again.

At twelve he was a magnificent reptile. Not a single scar defaced his rippling symmetry. He was diabolically beautiful and deadly poisonous.

His venom was his only weapon, for he had no power of constriction. Yellowish in color, his poison was odorless and tasteless. It was a highly complex mixture of proteids, each in itself direly toxic. His venom worked on the blood. The more poison he injected with a bite, the more dangerous the wound. The pain rendered by his bite was instantaneous, and

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the shock accompanying it was profound. Swelling began immediately, to be followed by a ghastly oozing. Injected directly into a large vein, his poison brought death quickly, for the victim died when it reached his heart.

At the age of twenty *Crotalus* was the oldest and largest rattler in his den. He was six feet long and weighed thirteen pounds. His whole world was only about a mile in radius. He had fixed places where he avoided the sun when it was hot and when he was away from his cave. He knew his hunting grounds thoroughly, every game trail, every animal burrow.

He was a fine old machine, perfectly adapted to his surroundings, accustomed to a life of leisure and comfort. He dominated his little world.

The mighty seasonal rhythms of the desert were as vast pulsations, and the lives of the rattlesnakes were attuned to them. Spring sun beat down, spring rains fell, and, as the plants of the desert ended their winter hibernations, so did the vipers in their lair. The plants opened forth and budded; the den "opened" too, and the snakes crawled forth. The plants fertilized each other, and new plants were born. The snakes bred, and new snakes were produced. The desert was repopulated.

In the autumn the plants began to close; in the same fashion the snake den began to close, the reptiles returned to it, lay like lingering blossoms about its entrance for a while, then disappeared within it when winter came. There they slept until summoned forth by a new spring.

Crotalus was twenty years old. He was in the golden age of his viperhood.

But men were approaching. Spilling out of their cities, men were settling in that part of the desert where *Crotalus* lived. They built roads and houses, set up fences, dug for water, planted crops.

They homesteaded the land. They brought alien animals with them—cows, horses, dogs, cats, barnyard fowl.

The roads they built were deathtraps for the desert dwellers. Every morning new dead bodies lay on the roads, the bodies of the things the men had run over and crushed in their vehicles.

That summer *Crotalus* met his first dog. It was a German shepherd which had been reared on a farm in the Midwest and there had gained the reputation of being a snake-killer. Black snakes, garter snakes, pilots, water snakes; it delighted in killing them all. It would seize them by the middle, heed-

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less of their tiny teeth, and shake them violently until they died.

This dog met *Crotalus* face to face in the desert at dusk. *Crotalus* had seen coyotes aplenty and feared them not. Neither did the dog fear *Crotalus*, although *Crotalus* then was six feet long, as thick in the middle as a motorcycle tire, and had a head the size of a man's clenched fist. Also this snake buzzed and buzzed and buzzed.

The dog was brave, and a snake was a snake. The German shepherd snarled and attacked. *Crotalus* struck him in the underjaw; his fangs sank in almost half an inch and squirted big blobs of hematoxic poison into the tissues of the dog's flesh.

The shepherd bellowed with pain, backed off, groveled with his jaws in the desert sand, and attacked again. He seized *Crotalus* somewhere by the middle of his body and tried to flip him in the air and shake him as, in the past, he had shaken slender black snakes to their death. In return, he received another poison-blurting stab in his flank and a third in the belly and a fourth in the eye as the terrible, writhing snake bit wherever it could sink its fangs.

The German shepherd had enough. He dropped the big snake and in sick, agonizing bewilderment crawled somehow back to his master's homestead and died.

The homesteader looked at his dead dog and became alarmed. If there was a snake around big enough to kill a dog that size, it could also kill a child and probably a man. It was something that had to be eliminated.

The homesteader told his fellow farmers, and they agreed to initiate a war of extermination against the snakes.

The campaign during the summer was sporadic. The snakes were scattered over the desert, and it was only by chance that the men came upon them. Even so, at summer's end, twenty-six of the vipers had been killed.

When autumn came the men decided to look for the rattlers' den and execute mass slaughter. The homesteaders had become desert-wise and knew what to look for.

They found *Crotalus*'s lair without too much trouble—a rock outcropping on a slope that faced the south. Cast-off skins were in evidence in the bushes. Bees flew idly in and out of the den's mouth. Convenient benches and shelves of rock were at hand where the snakes might lie for a final sunning in the autumn air.

They killed the three rattlers they found at the den when

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they first discovered it. They made plans to return in a few more days when more of the snakes had congregated. They decided to bring along dynamite with them and blow up the mouth of the den so that the snakes within would be sealed there forever and the snakes without would have no place to find refuge.

On the day the men chose to return, nearly fifty desert diamondbacks were gathered at the portals of the cave. The men shot them, clubbed them, smashed them with rocks. Some of the rattlers escaped the attack and crawled into the den.

Crotalus had not yet arrived for the autumn rendezvous. He came that night. The den's mouth was a shattered mass of rock, for the men had done their dynamiting well. Dead members of his tribe lay everywhere. Crotalus nosed among them, tongue flicking as he slid slowly along.

There was no access to the cave any more. He spent the night outside among the dead. The morning sun warmed him and awakened him. He lay there at full length. He had no place to go.

The sun grew hotter upon him and instinctively he began to slide toward some protective shade. Then his senses warned him of some animal presence near by; he stopped, half-coiled, raised his head and began to rattle. He saw two upright figures. He did not know what they were because he had never seen men before.

"That's the granddaddy of them all," said one of the homesteaders. "It's a good thing we came back." He raised his shotgun.

THE GILASHRIKES

Knox Copje of Manacle, herbalist and healer of sorts, mused in his patio as he prepared to feed his pets. One pet was a gila monster, to which he fed hen's eggs. The other was a shrike; to it he fed liver. Disparate as pets go, they were nevertheless fond of each other, for the butcher bird was wont to peck affectionately now and again at the lizard, and Copje had observed the lizard, as affectionately, caress the bird's feathers with its thick purple tongue.

Their friendliness, thought Copje, was not too strange. Both were outcasts, the monster because of its poisonous fangs, the shrike because of its habit of impaling young birds on thorn tree spines. Mankind loved them not, and animal-kind distrusted them. Hence, they sympathized with each other. Could, wondered Copje, that sympathy be turned into an even more meaningful thing? Bird and lizard, biologically, were not too far apart. A feather was only a modified scale. A wing was only a modified leg. The shrike's hooked beak was startlingly reptilian. Shrike and Gila alike laid eggs. If these affinities of theirs were abetted—scientifically—what were the potentialities?

Herbalist Knox Copje went into his laboratory and examined his stocks of aphrodisiacs. From a selected bath of them he distilled a subtle drop or two.

One drop he injected into the monster's daily egg. Another drop he introduced into the shrike's dollop of liver. He fed his pets, then prudishly vacated himself from the patio for the rest of the day.

Two weeks later he observed the Gila monster painfully trying to climb the Balm of Gilead tree. She had a twig in her mouth. Copje made a long, not too slanting ladder from the ground up to the branches. Gratefully, she wagged her thick tail at him, seized her twig again, mounted the ladder,

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chose a secure place among the lower branches and began to build a nest. In a matter of minutes the butcher bird was there to help her; in addition to other twigs he brought pieces of bright yarn. Together they constructed a stout and remarkably handsome nest. The two-foot-long lizard curled her plump orange-and-black body into it and sighed with contentment. There the shrike fed her, bringing her baby mice, baby pack rats, baby birds. She thanked him with her gentle little eyes and nibbled daintily. What she did not eat he hung on the branches around her.

She laid three eggs. When she needed exercise or a drink of water, the shrike sat upon the eggs while she made her way down the ladder and attended to her wants in the patio. Copje said afterward he had never seen a more loving couple in all his days.

It was a hot summer in Manacle that year, and the eggs hatched in two weeks. The butcher bird celebrated by singing for three hours in his fierce, triumphant voice.

The chicks, like their lizard mother, had four legs, but the legs were longer and more slender than hers. They had their father's short, powerful wings. Each wing had a hook on its joint, as does the wing of a hoatzin or bat. Their heads, featherless and with reptilian scales, resembled Gila monster heads with butcher bird beaks. The beaks, in turn, were equipped with Gila monster fangs. The chicks' tails were like their mother's, thick and heavy—but covered with downy gray feathers. The general color of the young things was black and orange, suitably interspersed with an almost rosy gray.

As active as newborn reptiles but as diffident as newborn birds, they left the nest quickly but remained for a week in the protective branches of the Balm of Gilead tree. With their four legs and wing hooks, they could climb with wonderful facility and, besides, their father was always there to watch over them. The mother lizard, who had left the nest, stood guard beneath the tree.

One day their father decided it was time they learned to fly. As their mother watched fearfully from the ground, he took the little things one by one in his hawklike beak and tossed them into the air. They flapped their thick little wings and, feet and tails hanging down like the underpinning of ancient airplanes, winged their way around and around the patio. They landed in a tumbling cluster beside their mother. She hissed at them in delight.

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Copje noted that they could crawl up the concrete block side of his patio wall as easily as a Sonoran skink, that they could dig with skill and rapidity, and that they were not averse to taking dips in his swimming pool where they held their wings high to keep from wetting them while they paddled around speedily with their four feet. As do chuckawallas, they had the ability to inflate their bodies and thus were able to float like pontoons.

Copje also noted that their parents after a relatively few days took little interest in them, and after three weeks none at all. The chicks were then six inches long, and they were growing with astonishing rapidity.

Though they spent their days together, they chose to sleep apart at night. One dug itself a snug burrow and slept there. The second roosted upside down in the Balm of Gilead tree. The third slept on a doll bed in the play house.

Despite their fierce looks and poison teeth, they preferred canned dog food to any other kind of fodder. Copje fed them from a wide, shallow pan. They perched upon its rim with their hind legs and fed themselves carefully with their front talons.

For want of anything better he named them Eaque, Minos, and Rhadamante, which all sapient people know are the names of the sooty judges of Hell.

Copje could never decide whether they were shrikegilas, Gilashrikes, or butchmonsters, but settled on the second term as being the most euphonious.

In that neighborhood lived many cats and, concomitantly, few birds. The cats, mostly alley with a sprinkling of Persian and Siamese, were adepts at waylaying and pouncing upon their feathered friends; and the feathered friends, after many such decisive incidents, took heed and avoided the felines' hunting grounds.

Eaque, Minos, and Rhadamante, having attained full stature, one day appointed themselves guardians of the birds. Copje, who liked birds and despised cats, saw them undertake their first police job.

A purple grackle, unaware of the cat menace, had chosen to land first on Copje's bird bath and next to alight on the ground and peck at things. Under a nearby Texas Ranger bush, tense and ready to spring, crouched a feral Siamese tabby. Copje was about to shout a warning at the grackle, when, dive-bombing down upon the Siamese, came Eaque, Minos, and Rhadamante. Each at that time was about two

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feet long and as fearsome as a cockatrice. They attacked the cat from all angles, two seizing its ears and digging in, the third seizing its tail and digging out. As was that of their Gila monster mother's their poison apparatus consisted of fangs which were channeled rather than hollow. But, unlike their mother's, their venom was not deadly. Instead, it acted as a powerful narcotic. The Siamese tabby put up a brief, bewildered struggle, then, as its chastisers drew off to watch the effect of their handiwork, slunk away like a cat in a dream, found a sheltered place in which to lie down, and promptly went to sleep. The grackle, which had taken interested refuge on a telephone wire, returned to the pickings in Copje's patio.

The Gilashrikes thereafter made it their daily business to dive on cats that were out after birds. They extended their operations from Copje's immediate patio to cover the whole neighborhood. Word got around among the birds that they were safe in the area again. Word got around among the cats that *they* were not. The feathered friends returned in swarms. The sullen grimalkins left them alone. To see that order was maintained, Eaque, Minos, and Rhadamante maintained vigil awing and from tops of telephone poles.

One day the stern trio perceived a large bully dog about to attack a small, cringing Chihuahua. Just as the bully dog bared his teeth, the Gilashrikes struck him and buried him in a mass of orange and black fury. Chewing on his ears, they gave him a particularly strong dose of their weird sedation. He managed to get only to the corner before he lay down and went to sleep.

Next, the Gilashrikes turned their attention to dogs that barked at mailmen, meting them the same treatment they had meted the bully dog which had bared its teeth at the Chihuahua. Finally, they began to punish dogs which yelled and howled at night when people were trying to sleep.

They imposed their discipline so rigorously that soon no cat or dog in the neighborhood dared to take one step beyond the bounds of strict propriety lest Eaque, Minos, and Rhadamante catch him at it and descend upon him like the plague.

The catholicity of their policing policy knew no bounds. When Halloween neared and little trick-or-treaters took to the streets at night to ring people's doorbells and solicit sweets, fruits, and cookies, the Gilashrikes put up with it for ten minutes only and then began systematically to herd the tots back to their respective households.

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Furthermore, Eaque, Minos and Rhadamante did not approve of young couples parking in the school lot and smooching. Many a maiden, in the sweet arms of temptation, heard a rustle of wings, saw a flash of orange and black, heard her escort yell, and watched fearfully as he fell fast asleep after a sharp munch on the ear.

Window-peeping, though never an openly acknowledged nighttime sport in Manacle, did exist. The modest bather, immersed in her ablutions, sometimes heard footsteps outside her window—particularly when the Venetian blinds were partly open. The disrobing housewife sometimes saw eyes peering at her from the blackness outside the window pane. Eaque, Minos, and Rhadamante quickly put a stop to all that nonsense. For a while it seemed as if an epidemic had struck certain young men—and some middle-aged ones, too—an epidemic which unaccountably made them fall asleep in their neighbors' yards around midnight.

People who overlooked arising in time to go to church on Sunday—it made no difference what denomination—very shortly found that when they were on the verge of oversleeping, there came a most outlandish and insistent clatter from their rooftops. It was either Eaque, Minos, or Rhadamante telling them it was time to get up and go to worship. The Gilashrikes by that time had developed a command of language which rivaled that of the smarter parakeets.

Knox Copje, though no alcoholic, did enjoy a drop now and then, particularly in his patio in the late afternoon. It was then that he relaxed his nerves. It was then that he dreamed his dreams. It had been such a time that he had thought up the idea of mating butcher bird with Gila monster.

Having cleaned up the cat situation, having scourged and tamed the bully dogs and the postman-baiting dogs, having disciplined the trick-or-treaters and the neckers, the oversleepers and the window-peepers, the three moralists which Copje had, in a sense, created, turned their attention to him. Did he attempt that first cool, lovely drink in his patio, one of them came buzzing along like a giant, infuriated hornet and knocked it out of his hand. Did he slink into the confines of his house and attempt a secret sip, one of them was sure to be hiding near the bottle only too eager to nip him on the hand and put him to sleep.

Copje philosophized: These beings act the way they do because their parents were such bad citizens. Everybody hates Gila monsters, and everybody hates shrikes. Hence, these

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chicks of theirs, knowing the odium in which their parents were held, resolved to erase that fulsome censure by the rigid probity of their own lives and actions. They chose the role of neither bird nor lizard. Instead, they chose to be admonitory and avenging angels, hoping in that way to wipe out the opprobrium attached to their birth. Their zeal, I presume, must be called commendable.

Thus philosophizing, Copje reached for his bourbon. Three orange and black fantasies attacked him from three sides. But Copje, no fool, was ready for them this time.

He wore stout screen netting over his head and thick leather gloves upon his hands. He wrung their necks.

THE BLACK RETRIEVER

Mr. Charles was first made aware of the beast one Sunday morning in May. He was, at the moment, shaving. His youngest daughter came running in, breathlessly as was her wont, and announced there was a big black dog in the patio.

Mr. Charles said nonsense and continued shaving. He knew the patio gates were closed; he had closed them himself. He said so to his daughter.

"But this dog doesn't use gates," she cried. "He just jumps over the wall."

Again Mr. Charles said nonsense, for the wall was five feet high, and it had been there five years, and in all that time he had never known a dog to jump it.

"But it did," his little girl insisted. "And it's killing things out there." And she ran off for another look.

In a moment she let out one of her shrill yells. "It's on the patio wall! It's caught a bird! Come and see!"

Mr. Charles switched off his electric shaver, said things not appropriate to be said before a little girl, and went outside and looked.

Mr. Charles saw—or thought he saw, because he wore trifocals and sometimes looked through the wrong lens tier—a black blur on the patio wall. It moved along and disappeared. "See!" said his daughter. "It's jumped down and now it's gone. Look, it dropped the bird."

"Well," said Mr. Charles, "we will investigate later. Right now it's time to go to church."

And, their preparations completed, the Charles family packed itself into its Hillman Minx and drove off. Mr. Charles thought no more of the black blur or the black dog that he had seen.

That afternoon he and his wife decided to sit in the patio while their daughters watched television. Their two little

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dogs elected to accompany them. The cairn terrier slept. The dachshund dug a hole beside the flowering pomegranate. Mr. Charles and his wife talked of sundry things: television shows, shopping, the necessity of having the Minx greased.

The dachshund stopped digging and began to snoop around the patio, sniffing at shrubs and bushes. He disappeared behind some greasewood and then appeared again, this time with something in his mouth. He brought it up to Mrs. Charles.

"Oh!" she cried. "Snorkel! How could you!"

"He's innocent," said Mr. Charles. "He merely found it. That other dog killed it. Roberta told me."

"Other dog?" she asked. "What other dog? You surely don't mean this lazy thing." And she indicated Mac, the sleeping cairn.

"No," said Mr. Charles. "This was a strange dog. A big black one. It leaped over the wall into the patio and killed this bird. Then it jumped on top of the patio wall and swaggered around."

"I never heard of such a thing," said his wife. "Did you actually see it, or did Roberta just tell you about it?"

"I saw a blur," said Mr. Charles. "But Roberta saw it plainly. She even saw it kill the bird. I didn't believe her at the time, but here the bird is, so the story must be true."

A few days later Mr. Charles was in the patio again, this time neighboring across the fence with his friend Mr. George, who lived next door.

Mr. George was angry. At his feet lay the body of his Siamese cat. It was chewed and torn.

"A big black retriever did it," said Mr. George. "It jumped the wall, cornered the cat and killed it. Then it jumped up on top of the wall, walked around a little, leaped down and disappeared. It happened so quickly there was nothing I could do about it."

"I know," said Mr. Charles. "It happened here, too. Only in our yard the thing killed a bird. Did it look like a blur to you?"

"Blur? Of course not! I saw it plainly—a big black retriever. They're usually rather gentle looking. But not this one. It was a brute. I think I'll put some poisoned meat on top of the wall. If it's so fond of parading around on patio walls, maybe it'll return and find the meat. That ought to fix it."

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A grotesque pattern evolved. Every time Mr. Charles met an acquaintance in the neighborhood, up came the subject of the black retriever. If the one Mr. Charles was talking to had not seen it himself he was sure to have a neighbor who had, a neighbor whose patio had been visited by the beast and in whose patio the beast had killed something—a pet rabbit, a cat, a puppy, a bird, once even a badger. A family down the street had a pet badger in their patio. The black retriever had jumped over their patio wall, caught the badger sleeping near the mouth of its burrow and killed it.

But despite what his neighbor Mr. George had said, Mr. Charles soon ascertained that neither he nor any of the others actually had seen the black dog clearly. In the main, the ones Mr. Charles talked to agreed it was a retriever of some sort, but one man insisted it was a poodle and another said just as insistently it was a black Airedale. Some of them used the word Mr. Charles had first used to describe it: a blur. But everyone agreed that it was black and that they saw it walking on their patio walls. As for its reality, blur or no blur, there were all those dead things to prove that its visitations had been made.

These people of Manacle lived in a suburban development. The houses were pretty much alike; the inhabitants very much alike—middle-class people with middle-class jobs. Their children attended the district's middle-class school. It was a tolerant neighborhood of friendly people.

Everything there was a little humdrum and, if you will, rather mediocre. But it was a pleasant, comfortable place to live, and the standard of living was probably as high as has ever been attained by a group of *Homo sapiens* since that biped began to walk upon the face of the earth.

No hordes of beggars swarmed the streets. No warring armies prowled about its borders. No necessities, no luxuries of life were wanting, or had to be struggled for. If the people of that suburban development wanted water they turned a tap. If they wanted heat they jiggled a thermostat. If they wanted coolness they switched on the air conditioner. If they wanted light they pressed a button. If they wanted to talk to a friend or a relative in Europe or nearby, they picked up a telephone. If they wanted to go somewhere they got into an automobile and drove there at speeds ranging from twenty-five to eighty-five miles an hour, or they boarded an

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airplane and flew there at speeds up to a thousand. All this they could do, and did, without asking anyone's permission. They didn't even need servants; electricity did for them what no staff of servants could ever do.

And now it seemed odd, incredibly odd, that a black dog, a black retriever (or a black blur), was leaping their patio walls and killing things that they loved.

At first various individuals tried various expedients to apprehend the retriever and put it away where it could do no more harm. Mr. Charles's immediate neighbor, Mr. George, allowed Mr. Charles to talk him out of his poisoned meat project, Mr. Charles's argument being that some innocent creature—even a child—might suffer. Instead, for Mr. George was a mechanically minded man, he contrived a long noose-and-spring arrangement and set it on his patio wall. His idea was to snare the retriever.

Another equally ingenious neighbor constructed a large doghouse with a hair-trigger door; he baited it with choice dog foods. His idea was to trap the retriever.

A third, an archery enthusiast, took down his long bow and stationed himself at odd times in his alley. His idea was to impale the retriever.

None of these expedients worked.

The black beast visited the patio wall on which the noose was positioned, ate the bait, sprung the spring, but was not ensnared.

It visited the doghouse arrangement, ate the bait, sprung the door, but was not entrapped.

It showed itself to the archery enthusiast, presenting a good target to his arrow, but was not transfixed.

Meanwhile, it continued its depredations. Did anyone set out new tender plants, those plants were sure to be dug up or torn out in a day or two; and everybody said it was the retriever that did it.

Sometimes days would pass without any fresh reports of trouble, but sooner or later, inevitably, someone would see the black blur on his patio wall, and, lying nearby, the dead thing which the retriever had killed.

Mr. Charles and Mr. George summoned an informal meeting, a council of the elders they called it, of the ones in the area who had felt the bite of the black blur. They thought that by uniting their efforts they could conceptualize an aim, syncretize a program, finalize an operational method,

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and concretize the black retriever's doom. After all, other settlements, other civilized communities had been plagued by intrusive horrors, and had been able, through drastic communal action, to abate them. Surely, Mr. George and Mr. Charles argued, they should be able to do as much.

They held the meeting in Mr. George's patio, and a dozen of the elders came. Their discussion was diffuse and not the least bit parliamentary, but it finally boiled down to one thing: the only thing to do was to shoot the retriever.

It was against the law to discharge firearms in the area, but the elders thought they would be able to get the police commissioner, or the mayor and council, or something or somebody to relax the ban long enough for them to carry out their purpose. So Mr. George and Mr. Charles were deputized to confer with the mayor and police commissioner and seek authorization to stage a dog hunt in their alleys.

Such authorization was promptly refused. There was in existence, the commissioner pointed out, an organization which offered a perfectly obvious solution to the elders' problem. That was the City Animal Shelter, a euphemism for dog pound. Why, he demanded, hadn't Mr. George and Mr. Charles gone to the shelter in the first place?

The answer to that was that they hadn't thought of it. However, now that it had come to their attention, they certainly would.

And they did. The poundmaster listened to them, smiled, and said he would send a man out. He wanted to know on what days and at what hours of those days the retriever was most likely to show up.

The two elders protested that the beast did not operate on a fixed timetable. Sometimes it came at dawn, sometimes at high noon, sometimes around dinner. It could be on a Thursday as well as on a Monday.

"I was just trying to narrow it down," said the poundmaster.

The dogcatcher came out in his wire-cage truck, equipped with a lariat, heavy gloves, and a single-barreled .410 shotgun. He was a businesslike young man in cowboy boots and cowboy hat.

Mr. Charles was at work at the time of his appearance, but his wife told him what had happened.

"He snooped around the alleys a while," she said. "All the dogs in the neighborhood barked their heads off—just as if they were trying to warn the retriever. He got hot and tired,

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and Mrs. Betty took pity on him and asked him to come in and have a can of beer and cool off. He had the can of beer and then made a pass at Mrs. Betty. She ordered him out of her house and called the City Animal Shelter to report him. Before she got the number of the shelter she heard a gun go off and looked out to see what it was. He had just shot Mrs. Stella's Wiemaraner. Mrs. Stella ran out screaming. So did I. That is, I ran out. I wasn't screaming. The dogcatcher said he guessed he'd made some kind of mistake. The Weimaraner, he insisted, looked black, real black, and was growling when he shot it, but now that it was dead it didn't look so black any more."

Mr. Charles started to say something, but his wife interrupted him. "Wait, I'm not through yet. While all that was going on, the black retriever, the real thing, you know, jumped into Mrs. Wilhelmina's patio and killed her toy Chihuahua. Then it paraded around on Mrs. Wilhelmina's patio wall for a while and then disappeared. Mrs. Wilhelmina is just sick. The doctor came and gave her a sedative. Of course, the dogcatcher was still at Mrs. Stella's, explaining about the Weimaraner business when this happened, so he didn't know about it."

And there it was. The black retriever was still on the prowl. Everything the suburbanite elders had done or tried to do had been turned against them sardonically.

Two days later little Margarita, a child down the street, was bitten twice by a dog while she was playing in her yard. The bites weren't very serious—just skin punctures—but nobody had seen the dog except Margarita. She said it was big and dark, and everybody said it must have been the retriever. Everybody agreed the retriever was rabid, too; that was the only way to account for its actions.

But this didn't add up, for rabid dogs die very quickly, and the retriever had been around for quite a while. However, there was no arguing the fact that the retriever might have become rabid just lately, and that was what had caused it to bite Margarita.

Margarita, incidentally, was given prompt medical care and was as good as new the next day. But everybody insisted the retriever was the dog which had bitten her; efforts to apprehend the brute were, as a consequence, doubled.

Another council of the elders gathered. The elders decided not to go the police or to the dogcatcher. They would do the job this time themselves.

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Mr. James, who had hunted a great deal in his boyhood, devised the *modus operandi*. They would secret themselves in blinds, as duck hunters do, await the arrival of the retriever, and shoot it down.

A successful blind, said Mr. James, must be something that blends into the landscape; hence, duck blinds are made of rushes and bushes, things the ducks see all the time and are not afraid of.

But for the retriever such things would not do. What would do were automobiles. The retriever had seen plenty of automobiles and was used to them.

The elders, said Mr. James, would simply sit in their automobiles in the alleys or under the ramadas, wherever their automobiles customarily were parked, and would await the retriever. When it came along whoever saw it first would shoot it. That would be that; the police could howl their heads off.

Mr. James assigned certain men to hold watch and ward in their cars at certain times of the day so that the whole day was covered. The plan seemed foolproof.

Mr. Charles's first shift came at five-thirty in the afternoon. He checked with and relieved Mr. Paul, who had been sitting in his car in the alley since four. Mr. Charles decided to take up his station in his own car rather than in Mr. Paul's. He was parked only a few feet behind him.

Mr. Paul chided Mr. Charles for being late, handed him his gun—a beautiful little Remington .22 automatic—told him he hadn't seen anything except dozens of kids and scores of harmless dogs, remarked that Mrs. Betty—the one the dogcatcher had made a pass at—was wearing shorts and a Bikini bra, asseverated that this whole dogwatch was a lot of nonsense, warned Mr. Charles not to shoot without first making certain of what it was that he was shooting at, announced that he was going to have a drink, called down perdition on the black retriever, and concluded by saying that this was his one and only trick at the dogwatch wheel—he wasn't going to waste any more time at it. The hour and a half he had been sitting in his car was an hour and a half wasted and lost, and he was finished, through, ended, done.

Mr. Charles got into his car, laid the little Remington across his knees and began to read the collected poems of Dylan Thomas. It was a beautiful late afternoon. The children played, the birds sang, etc. The Welsh bard sang also, but he wasn't getting through to Mr. Charles. He put the book

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down and, for want of something better to do, looked into his rear-view mirror.

Through some unusual property of the atmosphere, the mirror achieved a magnifying effect. Things seen in it were as large and clear, almost, as those on a Vistavision screen in a drive-in movie. Mr. Charles swiveled the mirror around, picking up different views.

The chief attraction proved to be Mrs. Betty in her shorts and Bikini bra. She was hanging up clothes on her clothesline; and, looking at her, Mr. Charles could not help but recall the dogcatcher and his flaming moment of temptation. She was a brunette.

It occurred simultaneously to Mr. Charles that there had been no proof adduced so far that the black retriever was a male. No one had seen the thing very clearly or very closely. How strange it would be, thought Mr. Charles, if the retriever were actually Mrs. Betty. That she, at certain unholy hours, transformed herself into the animal and did the things it did. Mr. Charles looked at her closely in his rear-view mirror and watched as she adjusted her bra. There was something distinctly animal-like in her motions. Far afield, said Mr. Charles; my thoughts are straying far afield. Nevertheless, he kept his mirror focused upon her.

She was behind the clothesline now, hanging up towels; and one of the towels hung down and all he could see of Mrs. Betty was her legs, the towel hiding the rest of her. Thus viewed, she gave the impression of wearing nothing at all. Then she hung up a sheet, and her bare feet were all Mr. Charles could see. Then she moved out of the mirror's field, and he could not see her at all.

He jiggled the mirror to get Mrs. Betty back on the screen; instead of her he picked up a black blur. It was far down the alley; it moved. Mr. Charles was torn, as it were, between trying to watch the blur and trying to pick up Mrs. Betty again. He jiggled the mirror more vigorously and lost everything. All he could see was his own face. He was wearing a very queer expression.

There was a scratching above, and Mr. Charles became aware that something had leaped on top of his car and was clawing to retain its footing. The alley was vacant. Mrs. Betty had disappeared. Mr. Charles was all alone, sitting there in his car with a Remington .22 automatic and a book of Dylan Thomas' collected poems. And something was on top of his car, scratching and sprawling around.

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A drop of foam or froth fell on the windshield. The thing on top of the car was slavering, and this blob of foam had dropped from its mouth.

Then a black shape fell lumplike on the hood of the car, scrambling and clawing around. It regained its feet and stared through the windshield at Mr. Charles. It had horrible yellow eyes. Mr. Charles could not shoot through the windshield. He was too terrified to get out of the car and attempt to shoot from on foot. The windows of the car were open. It would be only a matter of seconds until the black thing would discover they were open and leap in upon him.

Other men, he knew, were off elsewhere in the neighborhood sitting as he was sitting.

He knew he must give them the alarm.

He pressed his hand on the horn button and honked loud and long.

The horn's bellowing woke him up. Apparently he had gone to sleep over Dylan Thomas' *Hold Hard These Ancient Minutes in a Cuckoo's Mouth*. There was no black beast on the hood of his car. There was no black blur in the alley. When Mrs. Betty came up to see what the honking was about she was dressed in modest housewifely garb and looked just as she always did—distinctly homely.

Obviously Mr. Charles had simply drowsed over a cryptic poem and fallen asleep. The rest he had dreamed. They say daytime nightmares are the worst of all.

The elders called off the stakeout the next day. Nobody had seen anything. Everybody felt rather foolish. Several of the others had also fallen asleep. One of these diffidently asked the other drowsy ones if they had had bad dreams. One and all, they ridiculed the idea, but their ridicule seemed rather artificial. Mr. Charles even had such bad taste as to inquire of the diffident one if he had dreamed about Mrs. Betty. He looked at Mr. Charles a long time before denying it. The other ones who had fallen asleep looked at Mr. Charles a long time also.

They ran the retriever to earth—or at least they ran a retriever to earth. She was a big black bitch and had a litter of pups in a culvert pipe in the arroyo which bordered the subdivision. Some of the children of the neighborhood, playing in the arroyo, saw her run into the culvert with a pigeon in her mouth. They told the elders, and the elders

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called the dog pound. A different dogcatcher came out this time. He shot the black bitch when she attacked him, and took away her puppies.

The elders concluded the dog had been raiding their yards to feed her pups, and had dropped the dead things they had found in their patios when they flushed her at her depredations. It was a satisfactory conclusion.

But a very unsatisfactory thing happened on the heels of that conclusion. Mr. Charles went out to wash his car, and, there on the top of it, he found dog's footprints and nail scratches.

THE CAPTIVITY

Elderly oddballs who dote on showing you their color slides or their collections of rocks or bottles or coins or stamps—or whatever—infest every community, and Manacle was no exception. It had its stamp collectors and its rock-hounds, each almost in archetypal form; they would corner the unwary or the unlucky and bore them to death with the exhibition of their hobbies, exhibitions replete with long, tiresome anecdotes. But the prize oddball was old Rops, the retired soldier of fortune who could reminisce hours on end, and whose only pleasure any more was, indeed, in this reminiscing, this chewing over for the thousandth time the tag ends of his tiresome military career. It was computed by one of his critics that if Rops had really done all that he claimed to have done in all the places in which he had claimed to have done them, he would now be one hundred and thirty years old and at most times of his life had been equipped with seven-league boots, the elixir of life, and infallibly potent rejuvenation pills.

Anything would set him off. In one instance, it was at a corral where prize Hereford bulls were on exhibit that he recalled a happening of his younger days, and having got a comparative stranger in a corner where that poor stranger could not escape, launched again full winded into a recount of the time when he had been a prisoner of war.

I know it sounds like the Abyssinia of Rasselas, Rops began, eyeing the placid Herefords munching their fodder, but there it was, and it was real. One hundred of us were there; it dawned on us later that we had been selected—much as these Herefords here were selected. *They* held about six thousand of us captives, you know. So *they* sorted out one hundred of us, and all the rest were allowed to escape.

This Hundred I was in was captured in the Far North

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Region; *they* flew us out, after we had been culled over, to the place which was to be our prison camp for the next three years. You have seen the green-covered hills rising in Hawaii and the green-covered chasms of Mindanao. It was a place like that. There was a canyon all covered with green about ten miles long, flat at the bottom, traversed by a river. The canyon was about a mile wide at the bottom, and probably fifteen miles across the top from rim to rim. The sides of the canyon were benched and terraced. The whole thing was fenced in, as is a wildlife section in a zoo; the animals seem to be living in their natural habitat, but everybody—even the animals—knows there's a fence around it and that there's no escape.

There were trails and pathways along the benches and terraces, and there were big roomy caves carved in the canyon walls. The Hundred was broken up into Tens, and each of the Tens was given a cave to use as barracks. Toilet facilities were provided in the caves, and each man had sleeping privacy, for his hammock was screened off. *They* took away our Far North Region uniforms and gave us flower-printed loincloths to wear. *They* immunized us against all possibility of sickness. I never knew any of the Hundred to become ill during the three years we were there. There was never a death, either. The Hundred that marched in all marched out again three years later.

Never once did we see our actual captors. *Their* word was passed down to us through an intermediate race, military men—mercenaries—who acted as our jailers. Perhaps attendants would be a better word than jailers. In no sense were we in a jail. We were in a little ten-mile-long world of our own, but it wasn't like a jail at all. We were nurtured, cared for, looked after as if we were the rarest of rare animals. And it was a beautiful world of river and hills and flowers and fruits and sunny greenery.

We played at sports much of the time, a game of balls on a sanded court being the most favored contest. Twenty men could play at a time, one Ten against a rival Ten. We drew up a schedule and held a tournament; the Ten I was in became the world champions one year, but lost the next. We used to seine in the river, ten men manning the big nets *they* had given us. This was as much a sport as anything else. The prize for the seiners who netted the most fish was an extra little pipe of wine. We hunted, with knives made of flint, the deer and the pigs that lived high up on the green

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benches, and this was the best sport of all. The meat thus secured, the white meat of fish, the pale meat of pig, and the red meat of deer, we turned over to the intermediaries who attended us, and the meat was cooked for us and served to us.

The arts were encouraged. I myself took up painting, for I had always wanted to paint. *They* provided me with pigments, brushes, and lovely thin boards of hard white wood to paint on. When I asked for it, through the intermediaries, *they* provided me with a book of instructions on how the proper shading was done to delineate the eyes and muscles and breasts of the nude figure.

Many of the men wished to pursue sculpturing and modeling and ceramy. *They* provided these men with the tools needed. Seven men from one of the Tens down the canyon erected a scaffolding against a bare rock wall and chiseled into the wall heroic-size statues of themselves standing there in different postures. They won the prize that year for art. One of my paintings was singled out for honorable mention. It was a nude I had done of Leaf. She had just caught a salamander, and in my painting she stands holding it with a look of fright on her face and drops of water glistening on her skin. Oh, yes, *they* provided us with women. *They* considered women as necessary to our well-being as food and exercise and wine and shelter. We named the girls after the pretty things around us. Thus I called mine Leaf and another man in our Ten named his Twig and another named his Petal. They were girls from another race, captive, too, of course, with skins lighter than ours. I remember how delighted the Hundred was when it learned, on the third day of the captivity, that there would be girls. We had a long frolic the night the girls arrived. We built a great fire on the sand that bordered the river, and *they* provided us with extra wine. The girls were given their own caves. We could visit them whenever we chose, visit whichever one we chose, provided she gave us entry.

We mated, in fact, as birds mate—for the week, for the month, for the season. One of the men in a Ten near ours sired eleven children during his three years of captivity.

Like hippos in a zoo, you know: the keepers give them the best care possible, and are happy when they breed. Or like pigs, perhaps. You have seen the feeding arrangements on pork farms. There will be so many troughs for so many pigs, and the pigs quickly learn to gather at the troughs at stated

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feeding times. Of course, we were not fed at troughs; we were given our food in black and brown stoneware bowls. Each Ten had its own feeding place, garitas we called them after their similarity to sentry boxes. They were gate-like places, ten of them, in the fence at the mouth of the canyon. It was just a wire mesh fence, but it was very high; the lianas had crawled all over it, concealing its steel meshes and making it look like an impenetrable barrier of green. Five stated times a day we of the Tens would gather at our own garitas and be served. Here is a typical menu, though the menu changed daily, and remember that servings were quite small:

Breakfast: Fruit, cereal, egg, coffee.

First Lunch: One little sausage, roll, pickle.

Second Lunch: Soup (lentil or bean or pea), roll, tart, wine (red, one cup).

Dinner: Meat or fish or fowl, raw vegetable salad, wine (white, one cup).

Third Lunch (in the evening); Broth, three large olives, roll, beer (one large flagon).

Our daily schedule, though it varied every day, was something like this:

Breakfast, then hunting in the hills or seining in the river.

First Lunch, then group games where the Tens would vie against each other.

Second Lunch, then a rest period which was usually devoted to art (sculpturing, painting, wood carving, etc.).

Dinner, eaten together with the girls.

Third Lunch, very late in the evening. We would be tired by then and the girls would drift away up the canyon to their own caves.

Now, none of this was hard and fast. We could follow the daily schedule or disregard it. We could eat at the stated times, or we could miss the meals. We could spend the whole day sleeping, or playing with the girls, just as we chose. We could hunt the whole day or work the whole day on our art projects. There was no discipline, and there were no roll calls or inspections. But mostly we followed the routine. We referred to it as "the rut."

I found it necessary, after I had been there about seven

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months, to take long, solitary walks, which I usually did after Second Lunch. The canyon terraces and benches were laced with paths, little trailways under a constant canopy of green, moist little trailways full of bird sounds and fern odors and shadows. Even in all the three years I was there, I was never able to explore all the paths.

Once I followed one which led upward rather sharply, almost like stair steps, and then leveled off into a glade where there was an opening in the roof of greenery. In the glade was a mountain hillside pool fed by a waterfall which plunged over a cliff formed by the bench above, the water frothing down through waving, spumid ferns. In the pool three of the girls, Twig, Nest, and Vine, were playing, and they had three men with them. None wore anything, for they were playing in the water; the young men had long beards, for they had not shaved for nearly two years. A radiant fruit grew on hanging branches near the pool; they were eating of it and throwing the seeds at each other. Lotos Land. On the hills like gods reclined. I hurried back to my cave and gathered up my painting things, and I coaxed Twig and Nest and Vine and the three youths to arrange themselves in a frieze there by the waterfall. And thus it was that I painted them, and I think I am the only man ever to have painted nymphs and fauns in the flesh.

Another time I took another path. As always, it was a green path, moist and full of bird sounds and the odor of ferns. It led to a place which, because of the enormity of the trees which grew there and the spacing of their boles, seemed like the interior of a cathedral. And there was a youth there from one of the other Tens. He had made a kind of table of green branches, and when I came upon him he was standing before it, and I heard him say, "I shall go up to the altar of God, to God the joy of my youth." Then he saw me and he giggled. He giggled only a little, then began to weep. "I have take the name of the Lord in vain. I have sinned," he said. He fled from there.

We had no Sundays. Every day was like another day. We never knew which day it was, but used to spend much time in aimless arguments over whether it was Monday or Thursday.

It was during one of those solitary walks toward the end of the second year that I came upon a man from one of the upper Tens. He had his girl with him. She was very beautiful. Neither wore anything, for by then all of us, men and girls

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alike, had given up clothing as a nuisance. He seemed to want to talk, so I stopped beside him. He was an older man, probably twenty-two or twenty-three.

"See these little roots," he said, indicating a cluster of them which thrust out from a crack in the cliff wall. "They look like tiny electric wires, don't they? I used to have a job with a telephone company, working with such wires. Each wire was of a different color; the job was to match color to color and so complete the splicing accurately. It was a very tedious job and did not pay very much. But, you know, when it was done, and done properly, there was a satisfaction in it. A feeling that something had been accomplished."

"Well," I said, "I suppose you could do something of the sort here. You have only to let *them* know, and *they'll* provide you with wires and things."

"Here?" he cried. "Let *them* know? I'd cut my throat first." He took the cigarette from my fingers and burned his girl savagely with it on her shoulder. "There's no satisfaction in anything here," he snarled. "You know that."

During the third year, another man and myself decided to escape. We had examined the fence at the garita where we were fed, and had discovered that its meshes were no more formidable than chicken wire. So our plan was simple enough. We would merely climb to the rim of the canyon where we knew the fence stood and, with clubs made from dead tree limbs, batter our way through it. The reason we had never attempted to escape before was because up to that point we had rather enjoyed our captivity.

We started out after Second Lunch and after about an hour's climbing had gotten up about five thousand feet, for the path we took was terribly steep. As we ascended the higher benches, other paths crossed ours again and again, and on those paths there was a deer hunt in full cry, a hunt which had started at the usual time after Breakfast but which because of the superb stamina of the particular deer being hunted had gone on far longer than the ordinary chase.

There in our canyon we hunted deer as the Tarahumara Indians of the barrancas of the Sierra Madre Occidental hunted them: We ran them down and cut their throats. On a hunting party we stationed ourselves at intervals along the terraces where the deer fed and whoever first started a deer would give a cry and take up the chase, and he would bound after the deer until he became winded. Then another of us, or two or three of us, would take up the chase in his stead,

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ever bounding, ever on the deer's trail. The animal was never allowed to stop and rest, never allowed to stop and graze, never allowed to pause and drink, for once the chase was taken up it never halted until the deer was dead. And the deer itself would never halt until its lungs were full of blood and its hoofs were torn and splintered from endless clawing and pounding over the rocks of the trails. The deer only halted and fell when it could run no longer, and when the deer fell the deadly relay was done.

So, as my companion and I climbed up the side of the canyon, we could hear the noise of the chase, the pounding of the deer's hoofs, the cries of its pursuers. And from far down in the canyon and the ball courts along the river we could hear the shouts of the players as one Ten vied against another Ten in another of their interminable games. Then at times the noise of the chase would fade away as quarry and hunters swept far up the canyon on some curving path, and the shouts from the playing courts would die out after a score was made, and then all we could hear would be the bird sounds in the canyon's greenery and the sounds of the great ferns as the wind stirred them.

By afternoon we thought we should have reached the canyon's finite rim where we knew the fence was, but the benches and the terraces still reared above us. The chase continued on the paths and trails around us; we wondered how one deer could hold out so long against that pack of human wolves.

And then we did reach the rim of the canyon, and we looked down, and the canyon was a long winding slash of green with a thin white streak through its center—the river and its sanded sides. We also found the fence. It was not formidable at all; it was neither very high nor very strong. There was no point in making clubs and battering a hole in it, for the fence had a gate in it and the gate was unlocked.

As we examined the gate the sound of the chase arose again; it was coming toward us along a path that bordered the inner side of the fence. We were so high now that we could no longer hear the sounds of the players down on the sands. My companion and I looked at each other, and we nodded in agreement. We opened the gate of the fence and when the deer came bounding along the trail we leaped in front of him and startled him, and with a greater bound he went through the gate to freedom. He was a huge gray

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stag, the biggest we had ever seen; his sides were heaving, and his horns were streaming with fronds of ferns.

We closed the gate and went down the trail and halted the three young men who, with flint knives in their hands, had been pursuing him. We told them what we had done. "So there's a gate up there?" one of them said. "Could we all go through it—like the big buck did?" "Certainly," we said. "But what's on the other side?" he asked. "Nothing," we said. "Just more greenery, more mountains. It's better on this side." So they threw away their knives and joined my companion and me as we began our descent into the canyon.

During the third year animosities arose; fighting between the Tens and the individuals of the Tens was monotonously frequent. But, although there was no ordinance against it, none of us killed another. "Thou shalt not murder" was the only law we obeyed, but none of us could explain why we did so. Certainly *they* had never so ordered us; *they* never gave us any orders in any form at all. But as a troop of monkeys in trees operates without formal rules or laws to guide it, yet, nevertheless, observes certain taboos, so did we. There were many flareups over many things—coming on the playing field, minor pilferings, suspected insults—and there were many, many fights over the girls, some of whom were prettier than the others. But none of the fights ever ended in murder. There seemed to be some agreement among us that One Hundred had marched into imprisonment and One Hundred would some day march out. So we beat and clawed and cursed at one another, and sometimes we would cut each other with flint knives, but never did we kill each other. I think that was our only pride.

For we could take no pride in anything else. When we had marched in we were civilized; at least we had the veneer of civilization. There were certain things we would do and certain things we would not do. We obediently wore the loincloths *they* had given us. We obediently said our prayers at night as we had been taught to say them in our former homes. But with no discipline over us, with no restrictions upon us, with no necessity for doing anything, with no animal desire left unfulfilled, we became as animals. We threw away our loincloths and stopped saying our prayers.

You might say there was a price attached to all this. And there was. Our captivity ended exactly on the hour when the three years were up. One Hundred men had marched into

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it; One Hundred men marched out. We had marched in as one group, but we marched out as two. The first fifty of us to march out were those who had somehow survived. The second fifty were those who had gone mad.

THE DOOR

In that period of waste years I always fell sick in the spring. The ailment, virus X, flu, "something that's going around" (it was always the same but always had a different name), was sometimes very severe, sometimes less so; but it never failed to keep its stated appointment. I had gone through all the sulphas, the penicillins, the mycins, and the other wonder drugs, taken each of them as the one supplanted the other, taken them year after year. Never in any year had I noted any curative effect from any of them. The "thing that was going around" invariably took its nine-to-eleven-day course to run, and then I was "better"—but about as ambitious as a damp rag, about as strong as a dried leaf.

One year, after a short but nasty attack, my internist decided what I needed most was a plenary checkup—the kind they give presidents and plutocrats and plenipotentiaries—from inside to outside, from top to bottom, from blood to bone marrow. So, after Easter, the necessary arrangements were made and I entered the hospital for a spate of tests where all my fluids would be analyzed and all my heart beats counted and all my intakes and outputs measured. I say in passing that even these compilations of clinical data were not enough to exorcise the demon which plagued me every springtime, nor did my internist claim that they would. I had to realize, he said when the checkup was completed, that "a man of my age could not expect to feel as sharp as a man twenty years younger; that a man of my age had to learn to cut down on certain things and be content to know that if certain restrictions were observed there was no reason why many years of good, productive life might not be left to him."

It was good advice, expensively arrived at, but I took

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no comfort in it. For one thing, I had heard it all before. But there is never any comfort in knowing that one will never swim across another lake, never climb another mountain, never smoke another hundred cigarettes a day, never close out another party at five in the morning with a final glass and a final song. This new mode of existence, impressed upon me diplomatically by my internist during my hospital stay, meant, as I saw it, that severely and abruptly, one stopped doing all the things he liked to do and began to do many things which he hated, until at last all he did do was keep himself alive. The process would reach its triumph when one had returned almost to a complete state of vegetablism.

There was a gentle but graphic example of this in the ward which I entered. This example was eighty-seven years old and was named Eustacio San Pedro. Except for his face and right hand and arm, he was paralyzed, a series of strokes having done their work on him over a period of eight months, reducing him to a state of nearly absolute helplessness. The hospital folk spooned food between his thin gums and drained the waste from him with a system of tubes. It took four nurses to turn him over. His bed sores were prodigious. He spoke only Spanish, could manage only a few mumbles at a time, and nothing that he said was ever heeded. Why should it have been? His days of making decisions, or raising protests, of laying down orders, or rewarding or punishing, even literally of thinking, were long over. His bills were paid by wealthy relatives down in Sonora who had shipped him to Arizona to escape the onus of having to care for him. His requirements had simplified themselves into gruel and pills. He was kept alive in his hospital bed as if he were a precious old ailing plant in a flower pot. Every day the priest came in the ward and blessed him. That was the only time during the day that Eustacio ever smiled.

Two other men were in the ward when I entered it. One had a complicated liver ailment, the other something beastly wrong with his prostate. Both of them had tubes in them, also. Neither, of course, was as helpless as Eustacio San Pedro, but neither could leave his bed. They could sit up to eat and could wash their own faces, and that was all. At fifty-five, I was the youngest man in the ward and the only one who spoke English natively.

My regimen was simple enough. I needed no bed care. I had bathroom privileges and, between tests, I was allowed to

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wander around as I chose. Be-slippered, in pajamas and dressing gown, arms sore from being punctured incessantly for blood, chest bone aching from a marrow extraction, I wandered. It was either that or lie on my bed and contemplate my companions and their tubes. I had with me a copy of Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*. I read at it fitfully.

In a single room down the hall, separated from our ward by a bathroom and utility room, was a giant of a man who, after I had passed his door several times, beckoned me in. He held up his water tumbler and pointed to a filmy incrustation of white inside. "If you take a glassful of Missouri river water and let it stand all night, you'll have an inch of sediment in the bottom of it in the morning. But look at this: just rinse the glass with water—look what collects."

"It's chlorine," I said. "It's harmless; it won't hurt you."

"It's the worst-tasting water I ever drank," he said. "And I'm a man in my eighty-seventh year."

"You don't look it," I said honestly. "What's the matter with you?"

"They think it's an allergy. They're giving me tests. I don't mind. It gives me a chance to think. A man ought to think. If I had done more thinking during certain stages of my life, I believe I would have been better off."

Well, I thought, you're eighty-seven and not in too bad a shape: What else do you want? And then I thought of Eustacio San Pedro who was also eighty-seven, and I thought of the shape he was in. "There's a man in my ward the same age as yourself," I said. "Why don't you come and have a look at him?"

"I'll do that," said the old giant. "I've been lying around too damn much. That's bad for a fellow." He levered himself off his bed, snuggled his feet into slippers, and pulled a robe around his shoulders. I noticed that his wristband said his name was Simon Bowles. Gowned and on his feet, he was even more enormous than I had judged him to be. He looked like a barrel with a hawk-billed head and surprisingly thin shanks. I led him to our ward and showed him Eustacio San Pedro. There wasn't any point in introducing them to each other. Simon Bowles stared at Eustacio for a long time, and then said, "So he's in his eighty-seventh year, too, is he? What do they do for this old chap?"

"They keep him alive," I said.

"What for?" asked Simon Bowles.

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"It is his right as a human being to be kept alive until such time as some higher law . . ."

"That's right," said Simon Bowles. "There is such a law. Fifty years ago I didn't recognize its existence, but now I do. You know, I find that I can think more clearly now than I used to. I am in my eighty-seventh year, and I have accumulated a tremendous store of things to think over. One thing I am sure of: everything is written out for a fellow. That's that law you were talking about."

"Yes," I said, following him with some difficulty. He had a denture plate in his upper jaw, but none in his lower, and it was sometimes hard to understand him.

"Let's take a walk," he said. "Lying around on a damned bed all the time is bad for a fellow. I've been thinking, you know. And I've been telling myself, 'You've got to keep punching, Simon Bowles. Every morning you've got to get up and punch yourself and say, Get going, Simon Bowles. Even if it's just something trivial you're to do, you've got to do it, Simon Bowles. For when you stop punching, you stop everything; and when everything stops, it stops. Even Simon Bowles.' Let's go down this hallway."

He carried a cane, a long black stick with a rubber knob on the end so that it wouldn't slip on the floor. He gesticulated with the stick to emphasize his remarks. The doors of the patients' rooms were mostly open, and Simon Bowles stared in with undisguised interest at each bed patient we passed. We also passed registered nurses and student nurses and nurses' aides and licensed practical nurses and candy strippers. I heard a student nurse giggle to her companion, "Who in the world are those two?" and the answer came giggling back, "They're the teen-agers from down the hall who complain about everything . . . like the taste of the water."

A door labeled *FIRE ESCAPE* attracted Simon Bowles' attention and sent him into a fit of chuckling. "I've been thinking about doors a lot lately," he said, jabbing at this one with his cane. "Only God knows how many doors I've passed through in my eighty-seven years, but the main door still awaits me. It's the door between *here*"—he pounded the floor with his cane—"and *there*." (He pointed vaguely.) "Now, I want to know what's on the other side." (He jabbed the *FIRE ESCAPE* door savagely.) "The idea is that when fire breaks out, you go through this door to escape it. But the door I'm talking about, rather than provide you with an escape, may lead directly to the eternal fire. That's what

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bothers me sometimes. Does it or doesn't it? Do I escape or do I burn? That's what I want to know." And once again he jabbed the *FIRE ESCAPE* door. "Mr. Bowles," said a passing nun sternly, "I will have to ask you to stop that!" "Yes, of course, Sister," said Bowles. "Thank you, Sister."

"Think of all the silver and gold that's been mined since the world began," he continued after she had passed on down the corridor. "Thousands and thousands of tons. And it's all still here. You can melt it and change it around and mix it with other stuff, but it's still here. It was here when the world began, and it will be here when the world ends. The poor stuff has to remain; it's got nowhere to go. But with a man it's different. Gold is only gold; that is to say, matter. But a man is made up of three things, matter and energy and spirit. Matter is meat and blood and bone. Energy is what makes it move around and reproduce itself. Spirit is what gives it will power. The matter is earthbound, and so is the energy.

"Energy is strange stuff; like silver and gold, only so much energy was passed out in the beginning. Man, beast, and plant have only so much energy to share. If man hogs more than his share, something suffers. Where are the buffalo and the passenger pigeon? They're gone. But is their energy gone? No more so than their matter, which has returned to Mother Earth. Man has got their energy, has taken it over along with their domain. There was only so much energy to go around, and man has hogged the pigeon's and the buffalo's.

"But there's that third thing, spirit. It ain't energy and it ain't matter. I've thought it all out. It's spirit. You have your own spirit. That old paralyzed fellow in your ward has his. Simon Bowles has his. Spirit plus energy plus matter equals a man. When a man goes through that door, he leaves his matter and his energy behind for something else to use. But not his spirit. That's what actually goes through the door. The matter and the energy are left behind. Now, I wonder frequently: When my spirit does go through the door, will it encounter other spirits out there? And, if so, is it going to find those spirits congenial, or ain't it? You know, I'm in my eighty-seventh year, and I've known a lot of people I didn't care for; and I'm not giving away secrets when I say some of them were close relatives."

He paused and waved his cane. "I am in my eighty-seventh year. I have outlived them all, loved ones, friends, foes. What the hell difference does it make to me now that sixty years ago a woman I trusted cheated me and lied about me and

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spread scandal about me? But I hope my spirit does not encounter hers when it goes through that door. Can she harm me in death as she did in life? Good God, man, does this nonsense continue?"

Old dogs doze, get up, drink water, snoop around, and go back to dozing. So did we. We slept all night on our sleeping pills, were aroused in the morning and fed. We were given more tests, more X-rays, or submitted to more blood extractions. Then we napped. Then one or the other would wake up and rouse the other, and again we would wander up and down the halls. Simon Bowles was not at all sure he liked the routine. "It's no way for a fellow to live, this lying around most of the time. Now, I'm a man that values his thoughts. All my life I've had problems to face, you know. And I've always found that if I faced them squarely, worked them over thoroughly in my mind, I could usually solve them.

"And I tell you this: even early in life I found a very wonderful thing: that if a problem became insurmountable, that if nothing I could come up with seemed in any way to meet it, why, as a last resort, I could always lie down and sleep with it, and come up with the answer. I have always been a great one for dreaming. My body would be on the bed, my mouth would be open and I would be snoring. But I, the real I, would be off somewhere, thousands of miles—if you can measure such conditions in miles. That's a thing I can't account for: the gross body ridiculous on the bed, but the spirit, the real thing, off somewhere having fun. That's what I think about that door; the ridiculous body remains behind it, but the spirit passes through and soars away. It has been that ability of mine thus to dream that has carried me on into my eighty-seventh year. But now this damned hospital: they give me a pill at night to make me sleep, and the pill jumbles my mind, and then just when I do succeed in gaining a nice dream, they come and wake me up for some medical reason—in the middle of the night—and it's hard, it's impossible, to pick up where I left off. I care nothing for this world any more. I have had eighty-seven years of it, and it's a bad place, I tell you. But that world I enter in my dreaming mind, that world where my spirit is free, I care for greatly. But every night here in this hospital they take it away from me. That's not right."

He cared nothing for this world any more, he said. It was a tiresome theme of his, and I grew tired of hearing it. But

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one night a new nurse came on duty, one that we had not seen before. She was dark almost as a Negress and, as old, world-hating Simon put it, as shapely as sin. She had a smile that illuminated, a laugh that caressed. When we first saw her we thought she was a Mexican girl. But she spoke no Spanish and she had to call in a white nurse's aide to interpret for her when she tended the three Spanish-speakers in my ward. As she passed the chair where I was sitting that first night (Simon Bowles sat on my bed) I looked at the name pinned to her uniform: MARIBETH YAZZI. She was a Navajo.

Simon Bowles said he cared nothing for this world. I sat talking with him two nights later in his room, and he was deep in his care-nothing-for-world mood. It was approaching lights-out time. Maribeth Yazzi came in, looked at us and laughed, and said to old Simon, "Would you like your back rubbed, Mr. Bowles?"

"Child," he said, "if the great Jehovah asked me at this minute what I wanted most of all things, I would say a back-rub by Maribeth Yazzi. Lay on those sweet hands."

So, with slim, dark, twenty-two-year-old hands, she rubbed his eighty-seven-year-old back, laughing, kneading in the lotion of aloes which the hospital provided. And then she dried his back, laughing, and, laughing still, powdered it. While she was at it, another nurse came in with his sleeping pill. He had been rather seedy that day, and the nurse told Maribeth Yazzi to stay with him awhile. I asked if I might remain also, and she nodded. So Maribeth Yazzi and I stayed and watched—watched eighty-seven years go off to dream-land. And I prayed that his sleep be not interrupted that night, because dreams, when disturbed, are so hard—so impossible—to pick up again.

The door of sleep opened gently for the old man, and gently he passed through it. I know not what dreams he found, but they must have been peaceful for he did not stir. I returned to my own bed in the ward down the hall, and the nurse brought me my sleeping pill, and Maribeth Yazzi came and rubbed my back. She was the daughter of a medicine woman, born on a remote mesa. Massage is practiced there; in their pagan way Navajos believe the evil of disease can be pressed out of the body. They begin at the feet and massage upwards. On the back they trace healing symbols, reversing them for greater effect. In nursing school, Maribeth Yazzi had been taught the white medicine man's approved way of rubbing backs, but in a hogan on a barren and beautiful

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mesa her mother had already taught her the art of the Navajo healers. Well, a back-rub, as they say, is a back-rub. Maribeth Yazzi, using the aloe lotion, laughed and traced reversed, esoteric symbols on my back. I think you can hypnotize a person that way; I think that is how the Navajos effect their cures. I know that later, out of the hospital and feeling a bit irritable, I found myself remembering Simon Bowles' words: "If the great Jehovah asked me at this moment what I wanted most of all things, I would say a back-rub by Maribeth Yazzi." That night I slept in a great sea of peace. I have always recognized, as did Marius the Epicurean, that "to sleep, to lose oneself in sleep—was a good thing." I needed no schooling on that score from Simon Bowles.

In the morning when I awoke, I reached as usual for a cigarette, but something told me not to. I looked about and noticed that Eustacio San Pedro had an oxygen mask over his face, that an oxygen tank stood by his bed, and that a big, repulsive *NO SMOKING* sign was attached to it. Well, I didn't have to smoke the first thing when I woke up, although it was a habit formed over some thirty-eight years. But the more I didn't have to smoke, the more I decided that I must, and I went down the hall to Simon Bowles' room. He was awake, and I stayed there and smoked and had my breakfast in his room with him.

"This is the springtime," he said. "Now, what happens in the spring? Why, things are born. Babies, buds, tadpoles, lambs. All those things require energy. Where do they get it? Why, they get it out of the store of energy the world has been provided with. Like silver and gold, there's only so much of it. So when these new things are born, they have to get their energy from the things that are already living. Like me. Something's been sapping my energy so that it may live. It ain't taking too much of it yet—I still feel peppy—but it's taking it. That's an idea I've had for fifty years: in the spring new things are born and old things die, and the new things take over the energy the old things no longer need. It's a hell of a note. But there's nothing you can do about it."

After breakfast we found that neither of us had any test scheduled for the morning, so we decided to wander around a little. Simon got his stick and took a rap at the *FIRE ESCAPE* door as we passed it. "I reckon it's still pretty well locked." We strayed farther than had been our wont in the past and came to a long, glass-windowed corridor with a chain across it barring our way. The chain had a sign hung

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from it saying; "Do not pass beyond this point. Babies are being taken to their mothers."

Simon Bowles said, "I'm in my eighty-seventh year, and I don't need a lot of damned signs hanging around telling me where to go and where not to go. Come on." And he raised the chain with his stick and ushered me under it.

Almost like chickens or roasts on display in a supermarket were the babies in their cubicles. Two lay side by side in tiny incubators, a white one and a Mexican one. "Life begins," said Simon Bowles. "Life begins in the spring, bud and babe, and pup and piglet." He leaned on his stick, breathing heavily. "I shall never know. I am in my eighty-seventh year, but I shall never know. These human whelps have just entered the world through some door, and that old man back there in your ward is about to quit the world through some other door. But why these things must be, I shall never know.

"Now, these two here—" and he indicated the tiny premature ones in their incubators—"are fighting for their lives. They don't know it, but they are. And that old man back there is fighting for his, but he probably doesn't know it either. Different devices are used—the incubators and the oxygen mask—to support them in their battles. But there is only so much energy in the world to go around, and one of these little creatures is seeking to rob that old man of his last remaining drop. Don't tell me I speak foolishly. I have pondered these things. When that old man dies, one of these babies will perk up. For there is only so much energy, and what he forfeits this baby will inherit."

The little things in their incubators lay still as death, and a nun came down upon us, tall, garbed in the beautiful hospital white of her order, full of wrath. She ignored me completely. "Mr. Bowles, when *will* you learn that you must obey the rules of this institution? You saw that sign on the chain. The nurse told me you did, and that you deliberately flaunted it aside. Now you go back at once to the quarters where you are allowed, Mr. Bowles; and if you ever do anything like this again I shall be compelled to ask your doctor to move you to another hospital."

"Yes, Sister. Thank you, Sister," said Simon Bowles, and we retreated from the babies' ward.

That afternoon, during my nap, I became aware of some disturbance in my ward. They had placed screens around the bed of Eustacio San Pedro, and the hospital chaplain was administering extreme unction. I could not see very well, be-

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cause of the screens, exactly what took place; but I suppose it was much the same as that described by Pater in penning the death of his Epicurean: "In the moments of his extreme helplessness their mystic bread had been placed, had descended like a snowflake from the sky, between his lips. Soothing fingers had applied to hands and feet, to all those old passage-ways of the senses, through which the world had come and gone for him, now so dim and obstructed, a medicinal oil."

That night, late that night, when Maribeth Yazzi was going off duty, she found Simon Bowles to be in some sort of distress. Then it was his turn to have an oxygen mask placed on his face. I was never to speak to him again, for he was allowed no visitors. The next night he died. Maribeth Yazzi told me about it. "He ripped the oxygen mask off his face and grabbed that big stick of his. He waved the stick and punched with it, and then he yelled, 'Open the door!' I didn't know what he meant, because the door was open all the time. Then he died, and that was all." Maribeth Yazzi laughed. "He was a funny old man. I liked him."

When I left the hospital a day later, I asked the nun about the two little babies Simon and I had seen in their incubators. "Oh, they're just fine," she said. "They'll be going home to their mothers very shortly now."

I went to my own home, feeling neither better nor worse than I had on the day I had entered the hospital, but vowing to punch myself every morning and to tell myself to get going, even though the matter at hand was only very trivial.

THE END OF THE RAINBOW

Why, man, you are writing a romance.

—Cardinal Newman

CHAPTER 1

We bought the map in Nogales, Sonora, from a man who was the seventh son of a seventh son. He had a hyphenated Spanish name, but he was a guileless-looking chap. The map was notated in Greek and oriented in a fashion so obscure that even an expert cartographer couldn't tell which was north and which was west.

A fortuneteller had advised us to buy the map. My associate in the enterprise was Alberecht Pimiento, an Argentinean by birth who had been educated in Germany and spoke English with a German accent. He had become an American citizen after his World War II service in General Patton's Third Army.

Along with me, he had gone to the fortuneteller for a palm reading. She had seen great things in the lines of his skin, the greatest of which pointed to the finding of the Frémont Treasure. She was very practical. She told Alberecht that he and I must go to Nogales and buy a map from the first man who offered to sell us one. It made no difference which map or what man. All the treasure maps sold in Nogales were fakes, but so many of them had been made that, through accident, one of them might actually show where treasure was buried.

Treasure, indeed, she continued, was hidden all over southern Arizona. Fate, as indicated in Alberecht's palm lines, would

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lead us to buy the right map from the right man. After that it would be up to us to find the place the map was representing and then simply to follow its directions.

The man who had faked the map could not possibly know that the fanciful lines he had traced did indeed correspond to real lines on the earth and that the fanciful X he had imprinted did indeed show the exact spot where the Frémont Treasure was buried. She gave Alberecht a long lecture on the science of probability, not a word of which he understood, and charged him fifteen dollars.

Alberecht paid her grumblingly, and grumbled still more when we went to Nogales and found the man and bought the map for another fifteen dollars.

"Diss iss terrible," he said. "Always der money dey iss after."

"Your investment has been very minor so far," I reminded him. "Think of the dividends you will reap when we find the Frémont Treasure."

"Bot," said Alberecht, "diss map. Even der Greek iss silly und says noddings. It does not say vere to start. It only says vere to end."

"It is the end we are after," I replied. "The beginning means nothing, but the end is the Frémont Treasure; and that is what we are after."

Frémont's last days had been spent in Manacle, Arizona, in the years immediately preceding the building of the Southern Pacific Railroad across the territory, which would date it about 1880. To Manacle, then, having the map, Alberecht Pimiento and I went, to pick up what tenuous threads we could of Frémont and his doings in those far off days.

His pals of the '80s, of course, would have all died off, but we thought there would still be in Manacle some greybeards who as children might have seen him and who might remember something of his legend. What we wanted to know principally was which way Frémont had headed when he bundled up his treasure and left Manacle forever.

We tried a bartender, Happy Ezekiel by name. "Why, sure," he said. "People still talk about Frémont. He was quite a fella with the ladies, if you know what I mean." And Happy Ezekiel gave a leer.

"Der ladies," said Alberecht, "are not too motch yet on our agenda. Ve are vanting to know vich vay did he go, diss Frémont, ven from Manacle he chose to depart."

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"He didn't choose," snickered Happy. "He got ordered. The Manacle folks of them days told him to git and not never to come back. There was only one way to git in them days and that was on a hoss. They say Frémont got on a hoss and gitted, and that was the last anybody ever seen of him again. You fellas looking fer his treasure?"

"Ve are not at liberty to expose our intentions," said Alberecht. "Vich vay did Frémont go ven he was giffen der orders to depart? Answer straightly, please, und don't make der evasions."

Happy Ezekiel rested his elbows on the bar and rested his chin in his hands and stared at us a long time. "Have you fellas got a map?" he at last demanded.

"Vot ve happen to possess," said Alberecht, "cannot possibly be of your concern, mein goot fellow. Actual, ve are two journalists seeking der scoop to write on diss Frémont for a great metropolitan daily newspaper in Europe. For der treasure—pah!—we are caring noddings." And Alberecht took a notebook from his pocket, poised a pencil journalist-wise at Happy Ezekiel's head, and demanded again: "Vich vay did Frémont go ven he left Manacle?"

Alberecht was a big, stout man in those days, and his beard was tinged with gray. Behind his thick glasses, his eyes had a steely glint; and there was forceableness in the way he gripped his glass of beer.

"Take me with yuh," begged Happy Ezekiel in a low voice. "I know this country. I've prospected here. I've been a hard rock miner. I built roads on the charity gang during the Depression. I know how to pitch a dry camp. I kin follow sign. I kin cut fer sign. Take me with yuh, fellas. I hate this here job. Fer the boss of this here booze joint and fer all of Manacle I do not keer one drop of sour owl crud. Take me with yuh, fellas. I kin help yuh."

"Vich vay," said Alberecht, "did Frémont go ven diss place he left?"

"In them days," said Happy in a whisper, "they was only one way. That was toward the Paranaqui Mountains. The Paranaquis is where I done my prospecting. People has been lost in the Paranaquis and has died in 'em. But not Happy Ezekiel. Now will yuh take me, fellas? I know them mountains. They got a bad name."

"Sir Edmund Hillary," I remarked apropos of nothing, "needed a guide when he climbed Mount Everest."

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"So?" said Alberecht. "Of this I vas knowing noddings. Dere iss a relationship between der Paranaquis und der Hima-layas? Of diss I am not knowing."

"A mountain is a mountain whurever you find it," said Happy. "Many a man has been lost and found dead in the Paranaquis." And, whispering again, he said: "They was looking fer the Frémont Treasure."

This contest of will could not go on forever, and yet I was suprised when Alberecht was the first to yield. "Vot," he asked, "iss diss treasure vich diss Frémont made so cunning der disposal of? Vot iss dist treaure trove for vich mens seeks und for vich mens dies? Who," he added as a clincher, "are der Paranaqui Mountains?"

"They," said Happy Ezekiel, pointing vaguely, "is over thataway. A big pile of mountains whur a whole division of troops kin git lost in and not never be found. It," he continued, answering the first part of the question second, "is what Frémont tuk from the priests. Them fellas had tuk it previous from the Indians. Gold! Heaps and stacks of gold. The Indians had dug her up over the centuries. Then the priests come and tuk her from the Indians and buried it. Then Frémont come and tuk her from the priests and buried it all over again. Frémont had him a hoss in them days named Old Blue. They claim Old Blue got swaybacked toting all thet gold from whur the priests had buried her to whur Frémont buried her all over again. They has always been lots of gold in Arizoney, and most of it is whur Frémont hid it. Thet's in the Paranaqui Mountains. Hev you fellas got a map?"

"Of maps ve are not shpeaking," said Alberecht sharply. "Of maps ve are not knowing noddings at all. How motch vould you say diss Frémont gold iss vorth under der system of der free coinage?"

"They claim," said Happy, "thet there was stacks of it. They claim Old Blue got swaybacked from lugging it from one place to another."

"Let us," said Alberecht suddenly, "buy der automobile. Der small trucklike vehicle. Diss ve vill christen Old Plue."

"There is a Land-Rover agency down the street," I said, for I was now getting the gold fever as severely as either Happy or Alberecht. "A man with the telephone company tells me the telephone company always uses Land-Rovers in its mountain states enterprises. It is a rugged thing, they say, capable of enormous exertion with its four-wheel drive arrangement, and not too uncomfortable to ride in."

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"A Land-Rover would be jest the ticket," said Happy. "They claim they kin go anywhur. You fellas do hev a map, dontcha?"

"Of maps ve are knowing noddings," said Alberecht. "For maps ve are not caring a single pinch of sour owl crud. These Land-Rovers are expensive, yes?"

"They'll cost you a smidgin more'n a jeep," said Happy.

"Jeeps I know. Jeeps I like," said Alberecht. "Jeeps I drive in Italy, in France, in Shermamy."

And then a reflective look came into Alberecht's eyes. "Old Plue," he said. "A svayback dot poor horse got. A svayback."

"The drinks," said Happy, "are on the house."

CHAPTER 2

While Alberecht and Happy went down to the auto agency to buy the Land-Rover, I went to the Manacle newspaper office to do a little boning up on Frémont.

The editor was a pleasant chap, younger than I had expected him to be. "Frémont?" he said. "Oh, sure, that story's been kicking around for years. I took out the old files once and did a piece on Frémont and tried to sell it to *The New Yorker*. They bounced it back by return mail.

"His name wasn't Frémont at all. It was Freemantle, but he got a letter once with some money in it and whoever sent it spelled his name Frémont instead of Freemantle, so he changed it to Frémont. He wasn't any kin to that other Arizona Frémont, the general that was territorial governor and all. This here Freemantle Frémont was a great lady's man. That's why they ran him out of Manacle. They claimed he knew how to rig up a love potion and that he'd slip it to the señoritas till they got bug-eyed and then he'd take 'em out in the brush. He did it once too often, then the manhood of Manacle rose up and deported him. You fellas got a map?"

"A map?" I laughed. "What would we be wanting or doing with a map? What would the map show us? Where Frémont distilled his love potion, I suppose."

"Okay, wise guy," said the editor. "But let me tell you one

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thing: Every time greenhorns go into the Paranaqui Mountains looking for Frémont's treasure they get into bad trouble, and sometimes they lose their lives. I got a separate file over there—" he waved his hand at an untidy heap on the shelf—"of nothing but stories about people who went into the Paranaquis and were never seen again until rescue parties brought out their withered corpses. And every cock-eyed one of them had a map, generally one he'd bought in Nogales. There is a fortune-teller in Tucson who'll steer you to those maps in Nogales; she gets a cut from the guy that sells them. She makes a good living at it."

"So there was a treasure," I said to change the subject.

"Well, Frémont was never hurting for money," said the editor. "And when he did hurt, he'd disappear into the Paranaquis, and when he'd show up again he'd be loaded with gold. Dust and nuggets. But nobody ever yet succeeded in panning any gold in the Paranaquis."

"Looks like the men of Manacle would have followed him," I observed.

"They did," said the editor. "Lots of them did. Those he couldn't shake off his trail he'd bushwhack. It was legal in those days to bushwhack anybody you thought was trying to jump your claim; and Frémont collected many a scalp for himself. That's another reason why they ran him out of Manacle."

"Yes," I said. "But then didn't he go to the Paranaquis again and get all his gold and vamoose for keeps?"

"He did not," said the editor. "He tried to, sure. But his body was found in an arroyo where somebody had dry-gulched him and searched his clothes for his map. That's where this map business started. The story is that the guy who plugged Frémont—and nearly everybody in Manacle would have liked to do it—had actually found Frémont's map on his body. But then the guy got scared and lit out for Mexico. There he got roaring drunk and also got rolled. Whoever rolled him got the map, not knowing what it was, of course."

"Well, the map changed hands several times over the years, and still nobody knew what it was. Then somebody—this was about forty years ago—comes to Manacle, claiming he's got Frémont's map, and he goes off into the Paranaquis; and they find the buzzards eating him ten days later. He was the first of a long string. I got the whole works in my file over there."

"The map, of course, wasn't in Greek," I said idly.

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The editor looked at me sharply. "How do you mean?" he demanded.

"Why," I said, "Frémont being an American wouldn't do his map in Greek, would he?"

"He would," said the editor, "if he wanted it to be unintelligible to any maverick from Manacle who might steal it from him. Frémont wasn't any Yankee; he was an Englishman and learned his Greek at Eton."

"I didn't know," I said.

"Where'd you get that Greek idea?" demanded the editor.

"I just picked it out of the air," I said.

He sneered at that. "Frémont's map—his original map—just happened to be in Greek. For the reason I told you: So if it got stolen nobody could make it out. The maps these people get in Nogales are always in English; the seller of same claiming they're translations of Frémont's original. If anybody came up with a Greek map, I'd say he had something. Something mighty, mighty big. You fellows have a map, don't you?"

"For maps," I said, "Frémont's or otherwise, we fellows do not care a single pinch of sour owl crud."

As I left the newspaper office, a woman of thirty stopped me on the corner. She was neatly shod in expensive shoes. Her face was sensitively beautiful. Her dimensions were 32-24-34. She beckoned me imperiously to follow her a short way up a blind alley.

"You fool!" she cried when we were out of earshot of passers-by. "Don't you know you may be killed?"

"In a way—yes," I replied; "for they say all men are under the sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite reprieve."

"That's not what I mean," she snarled. "You know that's not what I mean. Give me the map. Quickly! Now! At once! then you will be safe."

"I don't have a map to give you," I said. "Wouldn't a kiss do just as well? Just a sensuous peck upon those oh so ruby lips?"

She softened a little, but then that hard look came back into her eyes.

"I," she whispered, "am Isolde Fremantle from London, England. Now, do you understand?"

"I get a glimmer," I said. "You are related in some way to the Freemantle" (Note that extra e!) "who called himself Frémont and who lived here in the eighties, accruing, they

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say, a fortune in gold which he hid in the Paranaquis and to which hoard he would repair ever and anon in order to refill his purse, the contents of which he had expended recklessly after the manner of his high living. A man of loose morals, he corrupted the young womenfolk of Manacle to such an extent that the male inhabitants of this town enacted upon him a forced deportation, during which he was drygulched by a bushwhacker.

"He carried upon his person a map, done up in schoolboy Greek. Since Frémont's demise that map has had a checkered career.

"Age being a hindering factor, I cannot consider you as being of sibling status with that Frémont of the eighties, but I do conceive that you may be a descendant in some degree of relationship. I apprehend that you, having heard of the existence of the map and, concomitantly, of the treasure, have left London, England, and journeyed here to Manacle, Arizona, in order to get what you feel is properly yours.

"Somehow it has come to your notice that I, a most unworthy man, and my associate, Alberecht Pimiento, are also on the trail of that treasure. You believe that we possess *the* map showing its location, and you are threatening me with death if I do not hand it over to you. This, I concede, is a laudable and understandable enterprise on your part. The only flaw in it is that I have no map to give.

"On the other hand, I do have ardent passions, and I offer you the opportunity of cuddling with me in some sequestered spot and letting nature take its course. In short, you are a very attractive woman, Miss Fremantle, and you arouse my baser instincts, map or no map."

"You are a cad," she said. "And another thing: The prices they charge for lodgings and meals in this miserable town are outrageous. I have very little money because I squandered most of my inheritance in Las Vegas, and what little I have left these leeches of Manacle seemed determined to mulct out of me. If I don't find the Frémont Treasure soon, I shall be forced to cash a war bond."

"Will you be my guest for dinner tonight?" I asked. "By my paying for your meal, you will be able to save some of your fast-dwindling liquid wealth. On the other hand, I will be able to sit close to you and perhaps steal a little pinch when the lights are low. I will call for you at your lodgings at ten after six. Wear red and be prepared for the worst."

So saying, I gathered her into my arms for a hasty but

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nonetheless ardent kiss, and I felt her little heart pound against mine. Then I thrust her from me and hurried out of the blind alley in which we were standing, for I had much to do and miles to go.

CHAPTER 3

I found Alberecht Pimiento and Happy Ezekiel at the used-car lot, chaffering with the used car man over the purchase of a brand new Land-Rover.

"They ain't but one price for these here vehicles," the used-car man was saying, "and that's the price what's posted on her and it ain't no use trying to Jew me down. Take her or leave her, fellas."

"Look" said Happy Ezekiel, "we never come here to buy no Rolls-Royce nor nothing like that. We come here to buy something on the order of a jeep, and we don't aim to pay more'n jeep prices for it. Why, if we'd of wanted a custom-made Cadillac—which you seem to think we do on account of the price you're asking—we'd of gone to Deetroit and had done with it. Wouldn't we of, Alberecht?"

"Jah," said Alberecht. "Money is all they think of in America. Honesty among dealers, fair profit, satisfied customers: Dese are meaning noddings. Der cheat, der svindle, der snide, der crooked, der slick deal, der legal robbery: Dese are vot dey contemplate in America."

"Don't be calling me no cheat, you big fat slob!" said the used-car man. "I'll get me a jack handle and cut yuh down to size."

"Now der threats he issues, der scare tactics he employs," said Alberecht. "Next he vill be der insult making. Direct in our teeth, too, I bredict. Ve offer you ten dollars less den your posted price. Below dot, ve cannot go."

"Sold," said the used-car dealer. He made out the papers, advised Alberecht to take out liability insurance, gave him an Arizona road map, advised him against looking for Frémont Treasure, and waved us a cheery farewell as we drove off, Alberecht at the wheel.

"That was a good, sharp deal, Alberecht," said Happy.

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"You really ground him down. Leave us go back to that old bar of mine what I have done quit and celebrate."

"Der bargaining," beamed Alberecht, "I learned among der masters of Europe und mein own country. Der honest Argentinean can always outvit der Yankee crook." He stepped on the gas, and the Land-Rover leaped along lustily on its fat rubber feet.

Alberecht drove through the streets of Manacle until we came to a sporting goods store. Here we stopped, Alberecht expertly parking in a bus zone. "Dey seek to pre-empt der streets from ve taxpayers," he said defiantly, "bot from me dey shall not do it. In Argentina vun parks vere vun pleases. In Manacle, I, Alberecht Pimiento, do likewise." He shut off the motor and jerked home the emergency brake.

"You're liable to git a ticket," warned Happy Ezekiel.

"I shust tear it op," said Alberecht. "Many are der tickets I shust tear up. Come, in here ve go."

"But what are you going to get, Alberecht?" I asked.

"Veppons," said Alberecht. "Veppons und goons. In dis country a man should be armed."

From the clerk, a young lady in sweater and slacks and with a blond pony tail, he ordered the heaviest caliber sporting rifle which the store might have in stock.

"Are you going to hunt dinosaurs?" asked the clerk saucily.

Alberecht eyed the clerk in contempt, then looked her over more carefully—a thing which Happy and myself had already done—and, contempt abating, became as playful as a jovial pachyderm. "Jah!" he chortled, "dinosaurs iss goot. Many times in Argentina der dinosaur I hunt." He leaned toward the clerk confidentially. "You know how ve catch der dinosaur in der Gran Chaco, Fräulein?"

"How?" said the clerk, backing away from him.

"Der tails ve pinch mit salt!" roared Alberecht. "Many iss der dinosaur tail vot I, Alberecht Pimiento, haff pinched mit salt. Here, I show you."

But the clerk, as agile as she was saucy, leaped away from Alberecht with the skill of a small-mouthed bass eluding a landing net; and she reached into a gun rack and presented Alberecht with a beautiful and incredibly powerful-looking sporting arm.

It was a Winchester African, caliber .458. It would have made a wonderful weapon for dinosaur hunting.

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"Vill it shoot?" asked Alberecht, trying it for heft and size, snapping its bolt back and forth, and squinting through its telescopic sight.

The clerk handed him a cartridge. "Try it," she said. "Pre-tend you're back in Argentina."

Though people often attempted to, never did I see one successfully pull a joke on Alberecht, nor did the pert pony-tailed clerk in her slacks and sweater succeed this time.

Alberecht took the atrociously big cartridge from her slender fingers, inserted it into the chamber of the African, drew a bead on a mounted elk's head, fired, and blasted the taxidermist's masterpiece from the wall.

"Goot!" said Alberecht, recovering from the recoil. "It iss a goot goon. I take it. How motch, please?"

The girl looked dubiously at the debris on the floor. "What about that?" she asked. "The boss is gonna be sore."

"Bah!" said Alberecht. "He makes der sale, don't it? Der big profit is dere, ain't it? More elks he can shoot, can't it? Write me oudt der sales ticket, please, und to me giff der guarantee. Also five boxes of bullets on der bill place. Der games laws also giff me so dot ven next I shoot der dinosaur I vill know vich season I am disregarding."

Then Alberecht turned on me suddenly. "Vere," he asked, "do ve dine tonight?"

"I have a date," I said diffidently. And I in turn turned to Happy and asked: "Where's the best place to eat in Manacle, Happy?"

"You mean right now or in the tourist season?"

"Now. Right now, Happy."

"Well, I guess it'd be La Gilconda. It costs yuh more than the other joints."

"Goot!" said Alberecht. "You, Fräulein, vill be mein guest. To eat alone I am not liking. Ve vill haff boiled dinosaur und elk cutlets. Be at der La Gilconda at ten after six."

He gave her a courtly bow, kissed her hand, beckoned to us, and shepherded us out of the sporting goods store.

"Tonight," he said zestfully, "iss der time to play. For tomorrow ve must der serious things do. Bot, tonight"—and here he blew a kiss into the air—"iss der time for romance. Hah, vot romance ve had in Argentina: der dancing, der singing, der love making. For I come from Resistencia on der Paraná River. Dere der birds zing, der fish yump, der macaws yammer, und der young ladies svoons mit passion. Life iss

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very dull mostly in Resistencia on der Paraná, bot in der time for romance it iss like any udder place."

With which typical Alberechtian involution, he seated us in the Land-Rover and drove to our motel on the outskirts of Manacle.

Here, because the afternoon was drawing late, we had only time to freshen ourselves up a little at the washbasin and then down four bottles of beer apiece. We must not, as Alberecht said, keep the ladies waiting.

Toward the end of his fourth beer, Happy Ezekiel became nervous and began to fidget about. "Look, fellas," he finally said, "I ain't got no date fer tonight. Maybe I'd be jest a fifth wheel er something at this here dinner party of yours. I ain't got a whole lot of dough neither, and it's pretty expensive to eat at the La Gilconda. Jest the big-shots mainly kin afford a place like thet."

"And," said Alberecht, "ve are not der big-shots, no? Diss is vot you are saying?" Happy nodded mournfully.

"So," said Alberecht. "Diss clinches mein suspicions. Dere iss in diss America der class system. Vun class der rich. Der udder class der poor. Der La Gilconda class. Der hovel class. Goot! Diss iss as it should be. Diss iss how it vas in Resistencia on der Paraná. Dere, I, Alberecht Pimiento, vas in der La Gilconda class. Homesick I am for dot dear old place. Vunce again I vud like to hear der birds zing und see der macaws yammer. Shust vunce again. Bot no! I, Alberecht Pimiento, am condemned to be der vanderer, to roam dese awful desert vastes, peering under rocks for der treasure vich a dead mans has buried. Alas, poor Alberecht Pimiento." And, with a sigh, he opened our last bottle of beer.

"But you got the map ain'tcha?" demanded Happy. "I know you got the map, Alberecht. It'll show yuh which rocks to look under."

"Jah!" thundered Alberecht. "Der map! Of course der map I got." And he unfolded the Arizona road map which the used-car dealer had given him. "See," he said. "Here iss Glendale und here iss Tempe und here iss Litchfield Park und here iss Eloy und here iss Emery Park. Look at it, und see if I lie."

Happy scrutinized the map carefully. "They ain't nothing to show on it whur the treasure's buried," he said at last.

"Certainly dere iss!" snorted Alberecht. "Arizona iss shown, no? Und parts of California und New Mexico und Utah.

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Hah, even a part of Colorado iss dere! Somevere in all dot land dere iss treasure. Of course it shows."

"It'd be quite a trick to pinpoint her, though," said Happy.

"Bah," said Alberecht. "Diss vay I pinpoint it." And he took his beer bottle opener and stabbed at the map. I noticed that the hole he made was squarely in the Paranaqui Mountains. Alberecht noticed it, too, for he picked up the map in amazement, examined it carefully, then folded it and shoved it into his pocket.

"Come," he said brusquely. "Let us go. Vich vay iss it to der La Gilconda?"

I paused at Isolde Fremantle's lodgings to pick her up. She wore a Dior evening gown in flaming red, and her dimensions had changed subtly from the daytime, being now 38-23-34. Her black hair hung in a long bob to her shoulders; there was a streak of white in it just above her forehead. I had to confess that she was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. However, I refrained from telling her so.

For there was a man across the street, and he was watching us most narrowly behind the three-day-old copy of the *Phoenix Gazette* which he pretended to be reading. I could not make out the headlines on the paper.

"Who is that man?" I hissed to Isolde.

"Masterman Freemantell," she replied. "He is the worst of the whole tribe."

"Is he any kin to you?" I demanded. "Any relation in any degree of consanguinity? I do not like the way he looks."

"Nor does anyone else," said Isolde. "He bears the name of being the most hated man in all the Lesser Antilles, and he was only there for three hours and that was seven years ago."

"But is he a relation of yours?" I demanded again. "This is important, you know."

"He's a kind of relation," admitted Isolde. "You see, Grandfather Fremantle—the one whom Manacle called Frémont and after whom the treasure is labeled—had many wives in his day, and one of them was an Oglala Sioux medicine woman, the Tigress they used to call her. Masterman Freemantell comes from that branch. The wife from whom I descend was Lady Jane Lear. We have never spoken to the Oglala Sioux descendants, and I do not intend to do

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so now. Leave us go to La Gilconda and eat. I'm starved. The pizza I had for lunch was impalpable."

"But what is Masterman Freemantell doing in Manacle?" I persisted.

"Looking for work," answered Isolde, adjusting something inside her Dior gown. "You see, he hasn't worked a day since they chased him out of the Lesser Antilles. That was seven years ago."

"But how has he lived, Isolde?"

"By his wits," she replied. "And, knowing his wits as I do, I judge his living to have been very poor."

"Do you suppose," I asked in an undertone, "that his presence in Manacle has anything to do with our search for the Frémont Treasure?"

"Very likely," said Isolde. "But, for heaven's sake, let's eat. When I touch my stomach I can feel my backbone. Here, you try it."

Loath, I tried it; and, sure enough, felt her vertebrae, the disc of one of which seemed slightly out of line. I mentioned this to her, and she said: "Of course. It always feels like that when I have gone too long without food. I am through with this ladylike hinting, and I put it to you plainly: Are you going to buy me a meal, or aren't you?"

Food, I confess, was far from my thoughts at that moment, standing as I was on a twilight-dripping street corner in downtown Manacle talking to a deliriously beautiful woman and being stared at from behind a three-day-old copy of the *Phoenix Gazette* by a brutal-looking character across the street. But I summoned my courage, took Isolde by her downy forearm and escorted her into La Gilconda where the bongo drums were throbbing and the onions were dropping into the martinis.

Here the squalor of the streets was blotted out. Here all was gaiety and beauty. Here Alberecht Pimiento and Happy Ezekiel and the girl clerk from the sporting goods store sat at a corner table and beckoned violently to us to come and join them.

I started to introduce Isolde, but Alberecht boomed out: "No time now for dot nonsense! Listen! Der Kid has up from Globe-Miami come, und he has svore to get dot treasure map from me before der moon sets. Trouble ve iss in. Bad trouble."

"How did he get here?" I demanded.

"He hid his gang in expensive house trailers and pulled

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them up with a Cadillac and a Lincoln Continental," explained Happy. "The Kid allus travels in style. His spies are combing the town now, looking for us. They's one spy only three blocks down the street."

Alberecht meanwhile was gazing with rapture at Isolde. "Sotch a pretty girl," he crooned. "Sotch a pretty gown. Dior? Jah, Dior I tink. In Argentina dey veer dem too. Bot not mit sotch . . ." And here he waved his hands to show what he meant.

Isolde blushed prettily, but the sporting goods store clerk looked daggers, Spanish daggers. Her name, we later discovered, was Larith. She lived with her widowed mother and Old Jake, a pensioner who tended their neat little house while Larith and her mother were out working. Old Jake had the green thumb, and the grounds of Larith's house were noted for the beauty and variety of plantlife which surrounded it.

Old Jake's special pet was a night-blooming cereus. It bloomed only once a year, but it was always the first cereus to bloom in that part of southern Arizona and was, according to Old Jake, by far the most prolific. One year it displayed eighteen blossoms. A newspaperman took a picture of it, and the picture was published, with an explanatory story, in a Sunday edition of the *Chicago Tribune* eighteen months later. Jake kept the clipping pinned to his wall.

I settled Isolde comfortably in her chair, gave her a reassuring pat or two, whispered a soft endearment in her ear, then turned to Alberecht and said:

"Who is this Kid and why does he comb the town for us?"

"Ach," said Alberecht. "Diss iss terrible, diss Kid. Der real name iss Christopher Wyecroft Freedman; a descendant he claims he iss from dot Frémont who dot treasure did bury in der Paranaquis. Only dot Frémont's real name vas Free-mantle. Diss Kid der outlaw iss; he robs der poor und giffs der moneys to der rich like dot hood called Robin in dot place of Shervood's. Der rich people hide diss Kid ven der politzei after him seeks. Ach! a noble character he iss, giffing to der rich dotavay. Dot iss vy dey hide him from der politzei. All der time dey try der same thing in Argentina, bot dere it does not vork so goot."

"But why should he be combing the town for us?" I persisted, for Alberecht's reply had been far from satisfactory.

"Becoss," explained Alberecht patiently, "he, too, wants to

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find dot treasure und giff it to der rich. Only I dond't giff it to nobody ven I find it. I keep it for meinself, I betcha."

"Atta boy, Alberecht," said Happy. "Finders keepers, I allus say."

I let an arm drop carelessly but intentionally around Isolde's ivory shoulders, and out of the corner of my eye I watched Larith, the clerk from the sporting goods store. She was fumbling in her reticule. I pretended to nuzzle Isolde's nape, but I kept one eye on Larith. Out of the reticule I saw her take a tiny white folded paper which contained a white powder. This powder she insinuated into Alberecht's beer.

"So," said Alberecht, who had also been watching her, "You salt mein beer, hein? Dot iss goot. Der beer ve always salt in Resistencia." He gave her forearm a grateful pat, raised the glass in salute, and prepared to down the beer in one gurgle.

"Stop!" I roared. "She didn't salt that beer. She mickey-finned it. One sip of that Alberecht, and you'll go into hibernation. Throw it into that olla."

"Diss I do not understand," said Alberecht.

Larith sprang to her feet. "Fool!" she snarled. "You'll understand well enough before this night is over. I," she proclaimed, "am Larith Freedman. The Kid is my step-uncle. That slut"—here she indicated the shuddering Isolde—"is my third cousin once removed. This creature"—and she indicated the cowering Happy—"who goes under the alias of Ezekiel was actually born Freedman. He, too, is related in some shoddy, illegitimate way to the rest of us, including the Kid."

"Diss I dond't get," said Alberecht.

"Well, perhaps you can get this!" screamed Larith. "You think to find the Frémont Treasure. We think you will find it because you have the map. But I am in league with the Kid, and the Kid is in league with the Devil. Together we shall not fail. The Frémont Treasure shall be ours. Why do you think I worked all those wretched years in that sporting goods store?"

"Diss," said Alberecht, "I would not know. Bot young ladies sometimes vork, even in Resistencia on der banks of der Paraná in der Gran Chaco vere I vas born. Iss noddings wrong to vork. You got der goot chob. You get der social security ven you iss der old lady. Der pension it iss called. Jah, der pension. In Shermanny efferybody has der pension. Dey like it. Der kids like it too. Ven der kids iss out of

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work, dey go to der old folks, und der old folks supports dem mit der pension. Diss is goot."

"Alberecht!" I cried in despair. "Can't you realize what is happening? This whole town is infested with Frémonts, Fremantles, Freedmans, Freemantells, Manfreeds, Mantelreeds, and what have you. They are descendants of that old pirate who lived here in the eighties. And they are all after the treasure, Alberecht. They'll kill you, Alberecht, before they let you lay a finger on it."

Alberecht reached under the table and brought up his Winchester African. "So," he said. "Dey kill Alberecht Pimiento, do dey? Hah, I tink more likely Alberecht Pimiento kill dem." And he snicked the African's bolt.

Even as he snicked, Happy Ezekiel hissed warningly and pointed, and we all turned around and looked. We saw a small, furtive man wending his way toward us among the tables. A dark-complected man, he wore dark clothes and dark glasses. Hatless, he looked hot among all the gaily and lightly dressed merry-makers in the expensive and exclusive La Gilconda.

Happy quickly sketched the furtive man's history for us. His name was Phillip Frymong, and espionage and window-peeping were his vocations. He had worked in turn for the Ogpu, Gestapo, NKVD, OSS, Mafia, Scotland Yard, and FBI. He was known and feared on three continents. Currently, he was the Kid's chief scout. His presence here, Happy said, could mean only one thing: trouble.

Isolde's breath quickened, and an unhappy look came into Larith's eyes, for this was more than either of them had bargained for. But Alberecht Pimiento merely lit a long cheroot and blew careless smoke rings, triangles, and rhomboids.

Phillip Frymong, eyes smoking with fury behind his smoked glasses, fingers trembling with rage, breath coming in pants and hisses, strode up to our table and confronted Alberecht. A silence fell in La Gilconda. The orchestra played muted music. It was so quiet you could hear the ice cubes tinkle in the highball glasses. Bardon Montfre, proprietor of La Gilconda, laid aside the chits he was tallying and came out of his niche to see what all the quietude was about.

Phillip Frymong confronted Alberecht. "Pimiento," he snarled, "make your peace with your maker, for you are about to die. I convey to you a challenge from my master, the Kid, to meet him and fight with him the duello."

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Alberecht blew a big smoke ring around the little scout's head. "Duello schmooello," he said.

Phillip Frymong's eyes blazed afresh. From out of his cummerbund he drew a glove, the kind electricians wear when they are repairing live wires, and with it he attempted to slap Alberecht across the face.

But Alberecht doused his cheroot in Isolde's martini, rose to his full height, picked up Phillip Frymong by neck and heels and hurled him through La Gilconda's gilded portals with this admonition:

"Tell dot Kid I meet him vun hour's time at dot football field at der etch of town. Tell him to haf der floodlights turned on. Tell him veppons iss optional und dot I bring Old Betsy." And Alberecht calmly patted the African.

Then, calm still, he sat down. But one could tell he was tense and taut, for he picked up Isolde's martini and drank it down cheroot and all.

Bardon Montfre, proprietor of La Gilconda, and master of mob psychology, ordered the orchestra to play bop, a bop fugue in G-minor. Gaiety returned to La Gilconda's floors. First one couple. then another rose and began to dance. Isolde's toes began to tap. In another ten minutes, I leaped to my feet, seized her into my arms, and we cake-walked briskly over the polished floor. Her perfume was heady and my head was light. Alberecht, too, began to dance, swinging the lovely Larith lightly around over the polished floor. She had taken dancing lessons when only a mere child and was much the better performer of the two. But what Alberecht lacked in skill he made up for in vigor, and finally Isolde and I withdrew to a dark, cozy corner and left the polished floor to Larith and Alberecht.

Tiring of conventional writhings, they began the car-magnole, then slipped gently into a kasatska. It was marvelous to watch, and I nuzzled Isolde's ear as I kept my eyes fixed on their gyrations.

But, alas, hours are such short affairs. This particular one took only sixty minutes, and then it was over and time for Alberecht to keep mortal rendezvous with the Kid. He kissed Larith's hand gently, waved down the thunderous applause, took up his Winchester African from under the table where we had been sitting, shouldered it and started off for the floodlighted playing field where destiny awaited him. The crowd in La Gilconda gave him seven *olés*.

I returned to Isolde the ring I had nuzzled out of her

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ear, and we followed along behind Alberecht, for, as Isolde said, we wouldn't miss it for anything in the world.

Neither did Manacle intend to miss it. The lights went out all over town as the inhabitants turned off their television sets to save electricity. Then the inhabitants formed into groups and platoons and made their way to the football field where many a pigskin had been tossed and many a touchdown scored.

The press was on hand, too. Reporters were there with their notebooks, cameramen with their photography equipment, young girl journalists ready to jot down everything of local color and man-on-the-street comments. A radio sound truck soon pulled up, but something was wrong with the apparatus and, at best, it could only emit feeble squeaks. We heard later that a television crew had been flown down from Phoenix but had arrived too late.

Young boys were selling hot dogs and soda pop to the throngs in the stands when we arrived, and one of the more enterprising of the lads thrust a hot dog wrapper in Alberecht's face and asked him to autograph it. Alberecht did so graciously, resting the wrapper upon the butt of the African and printing out his name carefully in large Cyrillic characters. A band, hastily formed, struck up the *March of a Caucasian Chief* which has always been one of my favorite military tunes.

We went straightway to midfield and there, whilst Alberecht stood back modestly, I met and consulted with the Kid's second. This was a slender ruffian in Bermuda shorts and T-shirt. It made one feel supercilious just to look at him.

The Kid, he said, had chosen a British Sten gun for his weapon. He intended to keep on firing it until Alberecht fell over dead. However, the Kid was willing to call the whole thing off right now if Alberecht would turn the treasure map over to him. This offer I indignantly rejected, saying that Alberecht would rather die than part with the map. Then, said the Kid's second, Alberecht would certainly die, for there was nothing more to discuss.

Nothing, I agreed; and I spat at him and he spat at me, and he returned to the Kid and I returned to Alberecht.

Alberecht and the Kid were to station themselves under their respective goal posts and, when a neutral party standing in the middle of the fifty-yard stripe dropped a handkerchief, were to start firing. This arrangement called for the selection of a neutral party with unusual spryness, and Bardon Montfre,

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proprietor of La Gilconda, was prevailed upon to accept the role. He did so ungraciously, pointing out that dueling was illegal in that part of southern Arizona. To this the crowd only hooted, so Bardon Montfre shrugged his shoulders, wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, and plodded gloomily to the fifty-yard stripe.

Alberecht Pimiento took his stand under his goal post. The Kid took his stand under his.

Bardon Montfre called out sharply: "Ready on the right! Ready on the left! Commence . . . firing!" And he dropped his handkerchief and leaped for cover.

Alberecht fired one shot from the hip. The bullet, striking the sod, flung a great divot into the Kid's face and spun him halfway around. Then, working the bolt of his African like a Marine at Camp Perry works the bolt of his Springfield, Alberecht ejected the spent shell, chambered a fresh one, took lightning aim and fired again. The Kid fell over. He had not been able to discharge a single shot from his British Sten gun.

Doctors and ambulances raced to the Kid's side. They took a hasty look and then announced the news to the crowd over the loudspeaker:

Alberecht had creased the Kid!

A mighty roar went up from the assembled throng. The *olé*s echoed and pyramided. Never had such a thing been accomplished before in any dueling incident in the history of southern Arizona.

For creasing is the specialty of great marksmen only. Even Annie Oakley never accomplished it. To crease a man, you must knick him with your bullet at just the right spot in the back of his neck. If you hold too coarsely, you miss him. If you hold too fine, you kill him. Famous sharpshooters of the West employed the creasing technique in catching wild horses. And now Alberecht had used it on the Kid to such success that the Kid lay unconscious, but unharmed, on the playing field, his fully loaded Sten gun lying uselessly beside him.

The crowd in the football stadium slowly dispersed, most of them going back home to their television, but a goodly portion heading for La Gilconda. There, seeing how many had gathered, and how he was their hero of the moment, Alberecht felt he could do no less than recognize their presence, so he stood to his feet and announced in a loud, clear voice that the drinks were on the house.

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This announcement brought Bardon Montfre to *his* feet. "What do you mean, the drinks are on the house, you big slob? You think you own this joint, huh?"

Alberecht patted the butt of his African. "Der drinks," he repeated softly, "iss on der house."

Bardon Montfre shuddered, then went obediently to the beer pull.

CHAPTER 4

I slept uneasily that night despite all the good food and the good drink that was in me. It is written somewhere that to make for happiness you take the male body, fill it full of alcohol and put it in bed with a beautiful woman. This is false. It may make for excitement, but happiness never. Unless the soul be at ease, blandishments are as naught. Besides, I slept alone.

And my soul was not at ease. For I, too, was a part of that unholy alliance surrounding Alberecht Pimiento. Though I went by another name, I was actually born Tristan Frumanthal, my ancestry going back in a direct line to that first Freemantle who had secreted a vast treasure in the Paranaqui Mountains.

As I struggled with La Belle Dame Sleep, almost seizing upon her but never quite firmly enough, the figure of Alberecht Pimiento rose in my mind to giant stature: He was the archetype of all the heroes, massive, imperturbable, rock-like, unconquerable. And we—the wretched remnants of a scoundrel's lust—were the ravenous horde, the archetypal pack, that dogs a hero's feet, baying him one moment, fawning before him the next. "Villainy of villainies; and all is villainy," I moaned. "All is villainy and reverse of merit."

A vision of Isolde swarmed into my mind, a vision nude and lewd. But it was not this I wanted; I wanted peace of soul, some solution to my moral dilemma, and, most of all, a big piece of the Frémont Treasure. I was glad when morning came and I could take a shower, put on clean clothes, eat a big breakfast, square my shoulders and go out and face the world.

I met Happy and Alberecht at our appointed rendezvous;

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we boarded the Land-Rover and drove off to buy camping equipment. As we passed a trailer court we saw the Kid's trailers parked under neat trees, the inmates sleeping off their drunken orgy of the night before. A small boy with a cloth was polishing the Kid's Continental. The trailer court looked quiet and peaceful in the morning shade, even a little bit humdrum.

The Kid himself, except for the rough red mark on the back of his neck where Alberecht's bullet had creased him, was physically undamaged. But spiritually he became a new man. For, as the application of a prefrontal lobotomy will change a hardened criminal's attitude and convert him into an honest, law-abiding, albeit plodding, citizen, so did Alberecht's creasing change the Kid. He joined the Ember Day Bryanites and expounded the law of the Old Testament first to the poor of Manacle and then to the poor of the cotton camps. Many a cotton-picking soul, they used to say, hah, hah, was saved because of the Kid's evangelical talents.

Alberecht, Happy and I went through the marts and shops of Manacle, buying the equipment we would need for our incursion into the Paranaquis. Stout outdoor boots. Water bags. Mess kits. Medicinal ointments. Alberecht relied chiefly on Anthony Fiala's list of necessities for a trip into the Arctic, but modified the list suitably to accommodate a trip into the Paranaquis. He had also consulted the works of the Duke of the Abruzzi and Amundsen and Hornaday to see what the complete camper would take along.

Our purchases made a wondrous big pile out in the street when we finally got them assembled, and it was obvious even to the optimistic Alberecht that they wouldn't fit in the Land-Rover. But Alberecht surmounted that difficulty by buying two small two-wheel trailers which he linked tandem behind the Land-Rover like boxcars behind the engine of a freight train, and thus we had sufficient room for our impedimenta.

Whilst Alberecht and Happy stopped at an inn for lunch, I went to pick up my shirts at the Chinese laundry. They were neatly wrapped in an old newspaper. Curious, for old newspapers fascinate me, I unwrapped the bundle to see of what vintage the newspaper was and what news it might contain. The paper was the *Manacle Monument*, and the date was June 8, 1882. I let the shirts drop in the street.

There, on page one, was the picture of a man I thought I recognized. The name under the picture was Adam Frémont.

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The story beside the picture told of his being deported from Manacle that day by a mob of maddened Manaclites. I read the story only cursorily, for I already knew the unhappy details; then I looked at the picture again. There was no mistake this time: The face of Adam Frémont was the face of Alberecht Pimiento. The same beard was tinged with the same gray. The same eyes peered out from behind the same thick spectacles. The necktie was the same. The tiepin was the same. I shuddered at my discovery, but carefully folded the damning evidence and put it in my billfold, empty otherwise.

Then I remembered something funny about Alberecht's autograph when he had given it to the little hot dog seller at the football field the night before—that most significant of all nights when he had fought the duel with the Kid.

So when I got to the inn where Alberecht and Happy were dining, I sat down beside Alberecht rather than beside Happy. ordered neck bone stew, and said to Alberecht in a wheedling voice: "Alberecht, please give me your autograph."

"Bah," said Alberecht, "vot does a grown mans like you vant mit mein autograph? Autographs iss for kits und pretty girls. Not for ugly old mens."

"Please, Alberecht," I begged.

"Don'tcha do it, Alberecht," said Happy. "Like you say, autographs is for kids."

"Aw, come on, Alberecht," I pleaded.

He relented. "Vell, bot shust diss vunce." He took a pencil and a menu slip from a passing waitress, a dark-skinned lass weighing about one hundred and seven pounds, and on the slip he wrote with a flourish: *Alberecht Pimiento F.*

I nearly wept. It was the same autograph he had given the young hot dog seller at the football field. It completely gave him away.

For Spanish-speaking people always hang their mother's family name onto their own, although for the sake of economy they cut the name down to its first initial.

Thus Alberecht's name spelled out was obviously Alberecht Pimiento Freemantle. And Alberecht was the direct descendant of that terrible man who had amassed and buried that terrible fortune in treasure. The one among us all who I had thought was free of that awful taint was actually the most tainted.

This was terrible. On the other hand, it did establish

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Alberecht's claim to the treasure in some sort of quasi-legal fashion. I decided to keep my mouth shut and play everything thereafter very close to my chest. I decided in effect that at the moment secrecy was the best policy, for I knew that Alberecht could be a terrible adversary if he so chose, and such a choice directed toward me I dared not contemplate.

Isolde Fremantle dropped in shortly and so did Larith Freedman. Both were hungry, for neither had eaten since late the night before and it was now high noon. They both looked sleek and charming, and their appetites were enormous. A huge dish of French fries disappeared between them as if by magic, and so did a second and a third. Alberecht was a kindly host and bought them each a pitcher of beer to help wash down the fries.

We dallied long at the inn, beguiling the time with sparkling conversation. Then Alberecht looked at his watch, announced that the hour was growing late, and that it was time to set off for the Paranaquis.

Both girls cried simultaneously: "Can I go too, Alberecht? Can I go too?"

Alberecht chuckled them under their chins, smiled benignly, and said: "No, mein shickadees. Diss is men's vork, not girls'. I buy you each a nice present ven ve get back."

This was most unsatisfactory news to both Isolde and Larith, the expressions on their faces showing it distinctly, Isolde's expression being red and flaring, Larith's dark and defiant. But Alberecht was adamant, and he and Happy and I left the inn without the girls. Indeed, Happy laughed sneeringly at them as we left; this served to heighten their ire still more.

We looked to the couplings on the trailers, then boarded the Land-Rover, Alberecht announcing that he intended to make the foot of the mountain by sunset. "They ain't no water there," said Happy.

"Den," said Alberecht, "ve make der dry camp." And he unfolded the Arizona road map which the used-car dealer had given him, and began to chart our course. "They ain't but one road," said Happy.

"I haf der zest for details," said Alberecht, using dividers to measure the map-scale distance between Manacle and the Paranaquis. "It's a hunnerd sixteen mile," said Happy. "I been there many a time."

"So?" Alberecht. He adjusted the compass on the Land-

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Rover's dashboard. "They ain't but the one direction," said Happy.

"So?" said Alberecht. He jotted down the mileage on the Land-Rover's speedometer and, consulting his map again, began to compute his probable gasoline needs for the trip. "They's filling stations all along the way," said Happy.

Alberecht folded his road map around a heavy screw driver and beat Happy over the head with it.

"So," he said. "So . . . so . . . so. Now maybe you shot op for der while." And Happy shut up and Alberecht went on with his calculations.

Finally everything was in shape to suit him, and we drove off, waving good-by to the crowd which had gathered on the street to see our departure.

"Good luck, Alberecht!" the people in the crowd shouted. "Good luck and good hunting."

Alberecht steered expertly with one hand and with the other waved placidly to his well-wishers. We cleared Manacle in eight minutes and, with an open road ahead and smooth sailing expectable, sped for the Paranaquis.

CHAPTER 5

Other writers, some of greater, some of lesser stature than myself, have described the ride out of Manacle as you leave the sordid little city and descend gradually into the bosom of the desert.

The road is well signed, and the signs tell you the distances to Phoenix, Tucson, Douglas, Flagstaff, Las Vegas, and Casa Grande. Other signs tell you the best gasoline to buy, the best motels to patronize, the best night clubs to attend, and the best places to go for pizza. Drive-in stands are plentiful along the road and so are resort places. You are in the desert assuredly, but a friendly civilization is still there at your fingertips to assist you in any way it can.

The road is well patrolled by uniformed officers, and a constant watch is kept on your speed by means of radar. The silence of the desert never becomes oppressive because it is broken at frequent intervals by the wailing of sirens both

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from highway patrol cars pursuing speeders and ambulances hastening to pick up the victims of the latest road crash.

Nor does the loneliness of the desert become oppressive either, for buses constantly whizz by you and so do huge cargo trucks and even other passenger vehicles more speedy or more daring than your own.

It's just like being in the city, except that it's a little more crowded, a little more noisy, and a good deal more dangerous. It's probably more expensive, too; at least Alberecht said it was after balancing his books when the long trek was finally ended. Said Alberecht then: "Ve could haf eat twice as motch stoff cooked twice as goot und costing twice less if ve had shust stayed home." But I anticipate by a spate of pages.

After we had traveled perhaps twelve miles I became aware of something persistent in the Land-Rover's rear-view mirror, and I turned my head to look back and see what it was. It was a gray Chevy two-door sedan, model 1950, with a black right front fender. Driving it was Isolde and beside her sat Larith. In the back seat sat Masterman Freemantell. They had closed to within half a mile of us and were steadily holding to that interval. Isolde wore a white scarf about her head; Larith wore a green. Masterman smoked a cheap cigar.

I called this to Alberecht's attention.

"Ve trow dem off der trail," he said laconically.

He slewed the Land-Rover's front wheels and cut to his left straight across the superhighway in the face of the oncoming traffic. Brakes screeched, horns honked, drivers swore; but Alberecht completed his daring maneuver. We bumped over the bar pit beside the road and, Alberecht shifting into four-wheel drive, were soon zooming across the open desert, knocking down cacti and small trees but, withal, maintaining a cruising speed of about fourteen miles an hour.

Finally we reached a dry wash, and here Alberecht drove under an overhanging bank which concealed our caravan from inquisitive eyes. Here, too, Alberecht stopped, for he knew we were safe for the time being from Isolde and her gray Chevy two-door sedan model 1950.

We broke beer out of a case in one of our two trailers and took a break there in the desert. This reminded Alberecht of the way the Aussies of the Eighth Army had done during World War II when they were pursuing Rommel across Africa, or, as equally likely, were being pursued by that same master of desert warfare.

"To dem Aussies," said Alberecht, "der beer vas a solace

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und a comfort. It vas canned beer like diss; maybe it from der same brewery came; who can say? Der Aussies said it took der drinking of a hundred cans of beer to kill vun Sherman, shust like it took der firing of fifteen tousand rounds of bullets to kill vun. So var iss expensive. Money it costs. Motch money. Diss money comes from der taxpayer. Der taxpayers iss not liking it. But der taxpayers vas neffer liking it. I, Alberecht Pimiento, haf been a taxpayer all mein life, und neffer haf I liked it. To me, Alberecht Pimiento, heffen iss a place vere der iss no taxes. Shust anchels und cherubim . . . bot dey sing for noddings."

And he computed rapidly the taxes he had paid on the Land-Rover and the two trailers and the things we had loaded into the trailers, and a great gloom came upon him.

"In France," he cried, "dey protest der taxes. Here ve pay like sheeps und lamps. Ve neffer protest. Bot I, Alberecht Pimiento, protest now. Der taxes I hate. I do not care who knows diss: Der taxes I hate."

"Yeah," said Happy placatingly, "you surely got something there, Alberecht. Taxes is horrible. You got a right to protest. But, man, you should see the taxes a guy what runs a bar has got to pay. Boy, it makes yer head swim."

"Diss," said Alberecht, "I am not caring to do. Swimming in der head. Bah! Der foolish talk you make, Happy."

A man—a homesteader to judge by his garb and mien—came along about then and ordered us off his property. He also demanded that we pick up the empty beer cans we had thrown into the dry arroyo and threatened to cite us under the anti-litterbug law if we didn't.

Alberecht designated Happy to pick up the cans, and then he engaged the homesteader in a long discussion about taxes. The homesteader didn't like taxes any more than Alberecht, and they found such common ground in their hatred that he and Alberecht were on very good terms when Alberecht finally started up the Land-Rover and we continued on our journey.

We pulled out of the arroyo and headed south.

Soon it became obvious what Alberecht's intent was. We would abandon the highways for good and strike straight for the Paranaquis across the virgin desert. We would cut our way through the last heart of the Old West to reach our goal. We would cut loose from all ties with civilization. We would go back, back, back in time as well as terrain. As had the covered wagons of old, we would pursue our journey on

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our own, unaided, unabettèd by the artificial fripperies of modern times. The stars of heaven would guide us. The breath of heaven would speed us.

I was breathless with apprehension, for we still had many miles to go, and this part of the West appeared most unfriendly. But Happy Ezekiel was transformed with delight. It seems that in his youth he had always dreamed of living a life of high adventure but that the nearest he had gotten to it was being expelled from school when he was in the seventh grade. Then the dull ordinary drudgery of making a living had enmeshed him and from then on Lady Adventure danced tantalizingly far out of his reach.

But now it seemed as if she were in his embrace at last. When he had been picking up the empty beer cans in the arroyo, he had found the radiator cap of some primitive automobile—an Apperson Jackrabbit, I think he said. At any rate it was a museum piece; and now he gave it to Alberecht in gratefulness for what Alberecht was doing for him. I was touched, and I think Alberecht was touched also.

CHAPTER 6

Once out of the dry wash where we had taken the beer break, Alberecht corrected his course until we were steering dead south, and we cruised across an irrigated land covered with alfalfa and cotton plantings. The soil was moist but the plant stems and shoots provided us with traction. Alberecht held the Land-Rover to a steady five miles an hour, its engine roaring complacently as its mighty torque manifested itself in all four of the vehicle's wheels.

This was indeed a beautiful land. It showed dramatically what you could do with the desert when you poured water on it and thrust seeds into it. I pointed this out to Alberecht. He agreed, saying:

"Jah, diss iss terrible. All diss lant growing der cottons und der alfalfa hays. Motch work, I tink, it needs. In Argentina in Resistencia, vere I vas born, der people are not caring so motch for der vork. Mein oncle der fiddle had. Vork? He neffer vorked. He shust loafed und played der fiddle. Vun time for veeks dere vas no food, und der

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babies cried, und der vimmens vept. Bot mein oncle he shust sit in der shade und play der fiddle. Oh, vat beautiful music he make. It make der tears come to der eyes of all dose hungry babies und hungry vimmens."

Happy espied about this time a solitary rider on the near horizon. He was mounted on a quarterhorse steeldust pony and, from the cut of his jib, was obviously a Western man. He spurred his pony toward us, shouting meanwhile in a grotesquely vituperative and agitated jargon.

But Alberecht coaxed the Land-Rover onto some firmer soil where its tires could get a firmer grip, and he shifted into a higher gear ratio. Then, knowing he could easily leave the horseman behind whenever he chose merely by stepping more heavily on the gas pedal, he let his speed lapse a little and allowed the horseman to catch up with us and gallop alongside.

The horseman was the most choleric man I have ever had shout at me from a distance of only a few feet. In deference to my readers' sensitive ears I will not record here the exact words he used in addressing us; suffice it to say that they were compounds of many obscene and profane syllabications, arrived at apparently after a lifetime of experimentation.

The gist of his philippic was that by driving over the cotton and alfalfa fields we were destroying divers tender shoots and roots and had bugged up the irrigation laterals from which the crops were watered. At the end of his tirade he demanded to know whether we were crazy or not.

That was all Alberecht needed for a cue. "Jah!" he bellowed back at the horseman. "Ve iss crazy. Ve iss all homicidal maniacs, und today ve haf escaped from der crazy house in Phoenix. Many mens haf ve killed und many more ve plan to kill. Killing is our avocation. Ve luff to kill. To see der blut run iss our delight. To hear der victim schream iss music to our ears. Ten mens ve kill yesterday. Today ve kill fourteen. Tomorrow ve go back und kill der vimmens. Always ve kill. Und now ve kill you."

So saying, Alberecht stood up, steered the Land-Rover with his knees, brandished his Winchester African ferociously and aimed it at the man's head.

The rider reared his horse around, flung himself under the beast's belly and, so sheltered, rode away at a gallop upside down over the cotton patch.

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Alberecht stopped the Rover so that we could watch the man ride.

"He is goot," said Alberecht. "Dot stoff he could do in der sideshow. Vy does he vaste hiss time on diss silly farm, I vunder? He could, I betcha, ride in der Olympics. Better he iss den der Svedes und der Czechs und der Russians. Almost as goot iss he as dot Mexican Mariles. Jah, his time he vastes in diss hayfield. It iss terrible to vaste time. Motch time mein oncle vasted in Resistencia. Bot motch music he make. Music is nice. It iss better to play der fiddle in Resistencia den to vork."

And Alberecht started up the Land-Rover, consulted his map, changed his course a little, and started off in low gear.

We logged the next fourteen miles without incident, averaging over fair ground a speed of twelve miles an hour. Off in a hollow square stood a humble cottage. Alberecht steered for it, for he deemed it was time to give the Land-Rover a much-needed drink.

A beautiful but poorly dressed girl stood in the doorway of the cottage. She had been weeping. Beside her in an old rocker sat her grandfather. He had been weeping. His long white beard was still wet with tears.

In her hands the girl held a legal writ. It was the notice that the mortgage on their property had been foreclosed and that she and her grandfather had to get off the place at once, taking with them only the clothes on their backs; for such was the law.

Down the road, disappearing over the horizon, was the black, dour figure of the sheriff who had just served the notice. He bore the look of one who, having been elected to office, was without a peer in his field; he had no one to boss him around and was responsible only to the electorate, and this was not an election year. His long black cloak, his slouchy ride typified the Western sheriff, truly a rugged race of men.

"Poor old mans," said Alberecht gently, addressing himself to the grandfather, "vy does you weep so? Diss crying iss not goot. Diss cryings iss terrible. You iss too old for tears, old mans."

The grandfather blew his nose and pointed an awful, accusing finger at his granddaughter. "It's her," he said. "She done it all. She's responsible fer this here plight us'ns is in."

"Diss I do not onderstand," said Alberecht, while Happy

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and I examined the girl more closely. She was about twenty-seven and had a defiant look in her eyes. Tobacco stains on her fingers indicated that she smoked cigarettes, but one looked in vain for those telltale calluses on her palms which might indicate that she chopped wood, milked cows, fed chickens, slopped pigs, laid bricks, and otherwise helped her grandsire in the conduct of their miserable homestead.

To her credit, however, it must be said that she was full in the bosom and round in the thigh and had the shaggy, unshaven appearance of a young range filly which has never felt the bite of the curry comb or the curb of the bit or the cinch of the saddle.

"Sex," said her grandfather. "That's all thet there girl thinks about, seems to me like. She won't work; she won't do nothing but jest lay around an' think about sex. Some day, I'm afeerd, she's gonna do more then jest think."

"Diss iss terrible," said Alberecht, while Happy and I clucked disapprovingly.

Here the girl ended her long, sullen, uncommunicative silence and said: "Grandfather, these men are obviously weary from their journeyings and would, no doubt, appreciate a dipper of water from our well and a frying of eggs from our hen boxes. Let not your rancour, Grandfather, dam up the hospitality in your heart. Bid the gentlemen be seated, Grandfather, and I will prepare them a humble repast. The sheriff gave us until sundown to quit this place; meanwhile, leave us not forget our manners when guests arrive."

"Okay, boss gal," said the old man forlornly. "Set down, fellas, and take the loads offen your feet. You-all 'pear to be strangers in these here parts. I take it you air lookin' fer the Frémont Treasure. Cain't say as how I hopes you finds it, howsomever."

"All over der world," said Alberecht, "mens iss seeking for der treasure. Generally, dey finds dot dose treasures vere in dere own backyards all der time. Diss ve hope not to do. Backyard treasures generally iss not vorth too motch."

I left them wrangling gently in the shade of the porch and went back to the kitchen to help the granddaughter fry the eggs.

"What," she asked me, looking at me with great green eyes, "is the world outside like? Do the women wear fine gowns? Do the men kiss their hands? Does Atalanta still thirst for Itylus?"

"Yes," I replied. "All those things."

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"Is it wonderful out there?" she asked.

"Very wonderful," I replied.

"Then I shall have it!" she announced. "I shall have all that and more."

"You must be prepared to pay the price," I said.

"What is the price?" she whispered softly. "Is it so very great?"

"The price," I said, "is something like this." And I gathered her to me roughly and kissed her.

"Is that all?" she cried gaily. And then she turned serious. "How does Alberecht like his eggs?"

"Half over easy," I said.

She laid the kitchen table with the whitest of napery and shining silver. In addition to the eggs she prepared sausage, sliced tomatoes, beaten biscuits, and honey butter. When all was in readiness, she thrust her head out the kitchen door and bellowed: "Come and get it!"

The grandfather was the first one in.

He was followed by Happy who had been engaged in tethering and watering the Land-Rover, checking its tires, its oil, its gasoline, and its steering apparatus. Happy helped himself to five eggs with the remark that a brisk drive over the desert always did things to his appetite.

I went out on the porch to see what was holding up Alberecht.

He appeared to be in a brown study but was obviously glad to see me.

"Der plight of dese peoples iss terrible," he said. "Dey iss being foreclosed upon but dey got no place to go. Dese tings all der time happen in Resistencia, too, vere I vas born. Sometimes I am glad I left dot place. Sotch unhappiness vas dere. All dot der peoples vanted vas to be rich. Bot few of dem vere. Dot makes for motch unhappiness."

"But what about this grandfather and this granddaughter?" I asked. "They have a terrible problem."

"Diss grandfather und diss granddaughter haf der terrible problem," said Alberecht. "Dot old mans iss so old und so foolish dot dere iss noddings for him to do. He vants to go out on der highway und lie down und let somevuns run over him. Motch insurance he hass got, und dot insurance he leafs to der granddaughter. Also she can sue der mans vot runs over der grandfather. Dot vay she gets still more moneys. All diss der grandfather tinks op. He iss a sharp old mans und got goot brains. As soon as ve get trough mit

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der meal I take him out to der highway vere he can lie down und get run over mit. Der girl she understands diss und iss very sympatic mit dot old mans. It iss goot to see sotch understanding in a family. Neffer did I see it in Resistencia. Dose people vas always very selfish. Even mein oncle vas a very selfish mans. Nobody else would he let play upon hiss fiddle."

So we went into the kitchen and sat down to what was to be the grandfather's last meal. He served dandelion wine in honor of the occasion.

Then he arose, dressed himself carefully in his best suit, and indicated to Alberecht that he was ready to go. Happy unhitched the Land-Rover from its trailers and helped the grandfather into the front seat beside Alberecht. They drove toward the highway in a cloud of dust. The granddaughter got out the insurance policy.

In less than an hour a beaming Alberecht returned alone. Everything had gone according to schedule. Alberecht had delivered the old man to the highway, and the old man had laid down in the exact middle of it. A man then came along in a Bentley and ran squarely over the old fellow. Alberecht took down the Bentley's license number for lawsuit purposes and also jotted down the time of the accident.

But the Bentley stopped, and a handsome, well-dressed young fellow got out. He was a man whom the old grandfather had once befriended in a time of dire need and who later had gone off to Europe to make his fortune. This fortune made, the young fellow had just returned to repay his benefactor. It was discovered that the old grandfather was not too badly hurt in being run over by the Bentley, and the young man had taken him to the hospital to get him patched up. When that was done, the young man would return and take the granddaughter out on a date.

The girl's eyes shone as she heard all this wonderful news. She went straightway to bathe and primp and preen.

Alberecht, Happy, and I waited until the young man came back to pick her up, and then, the house being vacant and the night coming on apace, we bedded down comfortably in capacious sleeping quarters and slept soundly until the dawn.

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CHAPTER 7

It was evident next day from the terrain and from the manner in which the Land-Rover was laboring that we were climbing. We had left behind the farming lands, the vegetable gardens, and the irrigated fields. We were doggedly forcing our way up a miles-long slope that rose steadily and remorselessly from the desert floor and would not stop rising until it consummated itself among the peaks and crags of the Paranaquis themselves, still leagues and leagues to the south.

As I looked over that vast expanse of open range—for open range it was, neither more nor less, and it was all leasable from the state and/or federal government—I felt a surge of that quiet desperation which dwells malignantly in every man's breast.

Everything seemed so futile, so useless, so abominable. Why couldn't Alberecht have stuck to the beaten path—the superhighway—as did everyone else? Why had he to cut across lots where the going was really tough? Why did he refuse to conform? And I looked at his black-coated back, his ridiculous Mennonite hat, the great paws that served him as hands, and, under my breath, I said: "You big slob, I hate you."

Then I thought: Is this the way a friend thinks of his friend? Is this the way I repay Alberecht's many kindnesses to me? Is this the way a long companionship ends?

Alas, so it seemed to be. Indeed, it seemed inevitable. But then, with dramatic suddenness, something happened to deflect the unhappy trend of my tautological thoughts.

For we were now high in the rangeland, and on one side of the range stood an embattled band of shepherders, and on the other side stood an infuriated crew of cattlemen. That great, that awful, that mysteriously recurring feud of the Southwest had broken out again. This time, apparently it was to be fought to the last man.

Gunsmoke was in the air, an acrid mist that smelled of hate and fury and irreconciliation. Blasphemous barbs of excoriating wit flashed back and forth between the contending camps. Never say, dear reader, that your cringing cowboy

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or your stupid shepherd is an unlettered dolt unable to hold his own in verbal thrust and parry. Never say it! Just listen, as it was my privilege to listen that desolate morning, to them at their best (or worst!) and you, reader, will willingly acknowledge, as I acknowledge, that their invective is at times Shakespearean. Demonstrably, they have not the great bard's mastery of grammar, but what they lack in commas and semicolons, verily they make up for in punch.

"Diss iss terrible," said Alberecht. "Dey fight over whether der cow or der sheeps eat at diss place or at dot place. Der cownmens hates der sheepmens und vice versa. In der Gran Chaco, dot country vich I come from, der iss also motch hatred. Mein oncle he hate pretty near efferybody."

A beautiful young girl, perhaps twenty-six, ran out from the ranks of the cattlemen and flung herself into the waiting arms of a stalwart young shepherd. Guns roared, and the shepherd fell over with a mortal wound.

The young girl wore shorts and a halter and stood about five feet seven. She had brown hair and nice white teeth.

"Seel!" cried Alberecht. "It iss history vot repeats itself. Dot girl, whose fadder iss der cattlemans, iss in love mit dot sheep fellow. Diss, her fadder is motch opposed to. Bot does dot your girl listen to her fadder? Does she pay attention to vot he says? Nein, she does not. Der passion, der love, der sex iss all she tink about. She vants only to be mit her sheep fellow. Diss iss not right. Diss iss terrible. Always der young girl must listen to her fadder. I betcha dot young girl dere cost her fadder plenty moneys to raise. Now look vot she do. She make der fool of herself. Her sheep fellow iss dead. Her fadder iss unhappy. Vot iss it dot Kink Lear says about sotch tings?"

"It is better to nurture an adder in yer bosom than an unfaithful child," said Happy Ezekiel.

"Yes!" said Alberecht. "Some sotch nonsense as dot he says. Der sheep mens iss bad, bot der cattle mens is vorse. Dere iss noddings wrong mit sheeps. Der vool dey giff und der lamp shops. Sure, dey eat der grass, bot so does der grasshopper. Diss iss terrible."

At this point a huge, lusty shepherd broke away from his fellows, scooped up the girl and ran toward us, carrying her in his arms. An unofficial truce settled upon the range as he galloped in our direction on his clumsy, pounding feet.

Thrice we thought he would fall with his precious burden, but each time he regained his footing and increased his speed.

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The girl apparently was as light as a feather, for he carried her with only one arm, using the other to wipe the sweat out of his eyes as ever and again it accumulated there.

The girl's long hair streamed in the wind, and it was evident from the look on her face that she was pleased at being the cynosure of all our glances.

The man's hair was curly, and in the queer light that danced over the range it seemed as if that hair had spiraled into short, thick horns; it seemed as if the fellow were of the brood of Pan and was running toward us with a nymph in his arms. He was a Basque, impressed in the Pyrenees for sheepherding duties in Arizona and, though he was a large man, there was a goatlike quality to his movements.

He deposited the nymph gently at our feet, told us briefly that the last great battle was about to begin; and he begged us to guard the nymph. In a modest voice he explained to us that the cattle and sheep men were determined to exterminate each other; but that this fair daughter of the cattle clans bore within her the seed of the sheep people; that though all the others died, she would and could repopulate the range, and that both sides agreed she must be saved. Then, looking enviously at Alberecht's big Winchester African, he saluted us and barreled back to his waiting henchmen.

The cattlemen, arms at ready, moved out in a line of skirmishers toward the sheep drovers. The shepherds in turn dug themselves into little foxholes and began to pour a withering fire upon their attackers. So tough were the cattlemen from long days in the saddle and hours in the rodeo arena that many of the shepherds' bullets merely bounced off their backs and rumps; but ever and again a bullet would strike a soft spot and a gallant cattle grower would fall over, never to rise again.

Commanded by their roundup boss, a man named Pickett, they re-formed their ranks after every devastating volley. They fought their way into the very heart of the shepherds' stronghold, then cast aside their firearms and fought with tooth and claw. Time and again the shepherds beat them off, only to find that they were not beaten at all but were only taking time out for a quick cigarette before renewing their assault.

I looked at the nymph and saw that she was a mass of mixed emotions, for though her blood was that of the cow people her heart was with the sheep fellows. And how that heart beat beneath its concealing halter! It quivered and

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throbbed, systole and diastole, shaking the halter so that its clingingness was disturbed and it drooped where it should have concealed.

"Look der udder vay," said Alberecht sternly; and I embarrassedly averted my eyes.

Such a battle could not in the nature of things last long. Both sides fought bravely; both gave their all. Pickett had asked too much of his men. The shepherd leader had asked too much of his. We watched the great drama unfold to the end. At length only two men were left standing: Pickett himself and the boss shepherd. They locked in mortal combat and, at the same instant, throttled each other.

Thus ended the last great cattle-sheep feud of the West. Thus faded from history another of those old, bloody episodes which have been glorified in story, painting, song, stage, movie, and television. It was our privilege to witness it from its first faint treacherous beginnings to its final Wagnerian climax. For truly those mighty contenders were as gods, and as gods they fought and as gods they died. True, now when they have troubles they take them to court; but in those days they did not. *Requiescat in pace!*

Masterless now, the flocks and the herds they had tended wandered gently over the lea, ram grazing beside bull, ewe beside cow, lamb beside calf. Everything became very gentle and pastoral. A prodigious peace blanketed the open range.

Alberecht turned on the Land-Rover's engine, and we drove off to a sheltered spot to have tea. We had failed again to reach the foot of the mountain, which had been our goal for that morning's run, but we had seen history in the ending.

CHAPTER 8

An amusing incident occurred shortly after we pitched camp under some sheltering cottonwood trees. Happy Ezekiel, off looking for water with which to brew the tea and in which the nymph could bathe, spied three disreputable-looking fellows making coffee in a dry wash. He crept up behind them to hear what it was they were saying.

Imagine Happy's surprise when he discovered that they

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were sitting there, calm as coconuts, planning the robbery of the 2:15 bus!

This bus, it seems, was a double-decked scenic job, and was carrying the payroll from Phoenix to the Meyerhof Mines.

The desperadoes' plan was simplicity itself. They would fell a log across the road which the bus was to take and, when the bus driver halted his vehicle on account of the obstruction in its way, would leap out, hold the man up, bind him and gag him, and make off with the payroll.

Happy gasped at the ingenuity of the scheme. "Them fellas ain't amateurs," he told Alberecht and the nymph and me, when he returned breathless from the drywash where the men were making their coffee. "They knows whot they're doing. They got ever' step planned. They is perfessionals, Alberecht."

"Diss iss terrible," said Alberecht. "To rob der bus iss terrible."

The nymph said to Happy: "Is one of the men a lean six-footer with hair parted in the middle? Does he have a heart tattooed on his left shoulder with the inscription: In Remembrance of My Mother? Does he chew on something constantly, as though he had a cud in his mouth?"

"Thet's the man, boss gal," said Happy.

"Then," said the nymph, "it's even worse than I feared. For that man is Red Cowpens and his two henchmen are Hurley and Moriarity. They will stop at nothing. The reason Red Cowpens chews all the time is that he has given up cigarettes and chews some sort of stick to keep his mind off his craving for nicotine. His mob is known as the Dancehall Drabs. They have a very bad name in these parts. The FBI has a file on Red Cowpens and is beginning to compile one on Hurley and Moriarity. I think we better get out of here before we become involved in something. Hijacking buses carrying mine payrolls is no joke."

"Vot?" bellowed Alberecht. "Go away vwhile der bus is being robbed? Diss iss nonsense. You iss a silly, shtupid girl. Der goot schmack I should giff you. Vere iss der road vere der bus comes, Happy?"

"Over yonder about half a quarter," said Happy, pointing vaguely.

"Goot," said Alberecht. "Den ve got time first for der tea. I vant boilt eggs und toast, too, Happy. Four eggs. Hungry I iss."

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We had a lovely tea under the cottonwood trees, Happy cooking, the nymph serving. She had once been a waitress in a small Manacle restaurant and laying out tea things was a second nature to her. But the call of the range had been too strong for her, and she had quit her waitress job when they tried to make her join a union.

Alberecht questioned Happy closely and found out that the Dancehall Drabs were driving an M.G., Red Cowpens and Moriarity sitting in the seat and Hurley riding the back fender. "That's probably why they are planning this job," said the nymph. "They need a second car bad."

"Bah," said Alberecht. "More better dey shust get some trailers like I got. A second car dey iss needing like der second holes in dere heads. Giff me some more eggs und dond't interropt so much." For Alberecht was becoming testy at losing so much time over diversions while his main goal was the Frémont Treasure.

Testy or no, the plan he devised to circumvent the Dancehall Drabs was as daring as it was involved. It contemplated no less a thing than our hiding ourselves beside the road *below* where Cowpens, Hurley, and Moriarity would fell the tree, halt the bus, and rob the driver of the Meyerhof Mines payroll. Being below them, we would then bushwhack them when they came rattling past in their crowded M.G., their fell deed accomplished.

The nymph was skeptical. "Those fellows are desperate, Alberecht," she said. "They won't stop at anything. I druther you wouldn't get mixed up in it, Alberecht."

"Dey shtop at diss!" roared Alberecht. And, inserting three 500-grain "solids" in the magazine of his Winchester African, he waved it threateningly in the air. Those bullets would travel at about 2100 feet a second and would deliver a blow calculated in the neighborhood of 5000 foot-pounds, so there was thus some ground for Alberecht's bravado.

After tea was finished and Happy and the nymph had washed and put away the tea things, Alberecht rose to his feet and announced it was time to go. We went single file, like Indians, Happy acting as guide, Alberecht following Happy, and the nymph and I bringing up the rear.

She was a sweet little thing, and it was fun helping her over rocks and detaching the hem of her shorts when it hooked on brambles or branches or burrs. Once, indeed . . . but that is another story.

Hem.

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The spot where Alberecht chose to conduct his bushwhacking was a spot you could find anywhere on any desert road in any part of southern Arizona. A tree, rocks, and cacti sum it up. We sat under the tree, but it gave no shade. There was no use looking for cover, because there wasn't any. But, as Alberecht pointed out, the Dancehall Drabs were bound to come by there because there was nowhere else they could come after robbing the bus.

Happy consulted his watch and announced it was fast approaching the time when the bus was due at the spot where Red Cowpens and his crew had elected to fell the tree. And sure enough, off in the distance we could hear the rumble of the bus's engine as the driver gunned it to get his vehicle over a hill. There was silence, and then there was a crash-bang. This was followed by loud curses as Red Cowpens directed Hurley and Moriarity to tie up the bus driver, gag him, place him face down in the bar pit, and grab the boodle.

Another sort of silence followed, and then more loud cursings and swearings and recriminations. These came from Hurley and Moriarity, who wanted to split up the swag there on the spot, and from Red Cowpens, who did not want to. Red settled the matter by slugging Hurley and Moriarity with the handle of his shiv. Then all three boarded their M.G. and headed down the road in our direction with the payroll.

"Three times," said Alberecht, "iss it always necessary for der sentinel to cry halt. So I do it now." And he threw back his head and yelled: "Halt! Halt! Halt!"

Then he sat down and rested his African across his knees.

The speedy little sports car with its crew of desperadoes soon hove in sight.

Alberecht aimed at the M.G.'s bonnet and fired his three rounds as rapidly as he could work the bolt. The recoil of the African shoved him back four feet, even though he was in sitting position. This firearm is designed for slaying the elephant, the rhino, the hippo, the cape buffalo, the giant Kodiak bear and such with a single shot; one can imagine what its bullets did to the M.G.'s hot little engine. They put a stop to its revolutions.

Red Cowpens skillfully steered the wounded thing to a stop alongside the road, set the hand brake, and got out, followed by Hurley and Moriarity. All three were in a state of profound shock and, after taking only a step or two, fell

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over in dead faints in the bar pit. The payroll loomed large on the M.G.'s seat.

"Shust leave dem dere," said Alberecht. "Ve go now for to help dot bus driver. De vun dey tied op."

Happy led off down the road, Alberecht following. The nymph and I brought up the rear. Alberecht carried the purloined payroll under his arm.

"How much," I whispered to the nymph, "do you think that mine payroll amounts to?"

"About one hundred seventy-five thousand dollars," she whispered back. "In cash."

"Why don't we," I whispered again after a moment's reflection, "overcome Alberecht and Happy, tie them up beside the bus driver, take the payroll, and hightail it off to Mexico? Two can live as cheaply as one in Acapulco, they tell me. If we get caught we can always blame it on Red Cowpens, Hurley, and Moriarity."

"I have never been so affronted in all my born days," replied the nymph. "Alberecht is a good man and a kind man, and I have no doubt that Happy is much the same. To suggest that I enter into this foul plot with you is to imply that my morals are no better than yours. This is, indeed, a crowning insult. You are a cad, sir. A sly, cunning cad. Besides, I cannot live in Mexico for I am allergic to the food—Montezuma's curse, they call the ailment—I will have none of it, nor of you."

"Nymph," I said sadly, "in your orisons be all my sins remembered."

The bus driver was an unhappy sight to contemplate when we came upon him. Red Cowpens and his gang had done a number one job of tying him up and gagging him. It was only with great difficulty that Happy was able to free him of his bonds. Hurley, it is now supposed, had done the tying. In his youth Hurley had won an Eagle Scout merit badge for his dexterity with knots, and he had put this ability to good use in securing the bus driver.

Whilst Happy was loosening the driver, a rural mailman came along the road on his bicycle. Alberecht waved him down, gave him the payroll and instructed him to deliver it to the Meyerhof Mine.

"Ain't no postage on it," objected the carrier.

Alberecht stripped a dollar bill from the payroll and bought a dollar's worth of stamps from the mailman. These,

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he licked and stuck to the bundle. "Now deliffer it!" he thundered.

"Okay," said the mailman, and pedaled off.

The freed bus driver sat up and chafed his limbs where the Dancehall Drabs' fetters had bitten into him.

"Man," he said, "I could sure use a beer."

At this juncture the nymph gave a little cry and leaped into his arms. He took a close, startled look at her, then kissed her and hugged her tightly. It seems that in their 'teens bus driver and nymph had been sweethearts in the village school they attended, but fate had soon separated them, and they had never seen each other since.

Now that they were together again they vowed that nothing would ever part them in the future.

So Alberecht secured a promise from the bus driver to give the nymph a good home; and then he beckoned to Happy and myself and led us back to the site where we had taken tea and where the Land-Rover was parked.

The mine payroll incident, as I said at the beginning of this chapter, was amusing but it forwarded us not at all in our search for the Frémont Treasure, and now, as Alberecht put it, "it vas time ve got on mit our vork."

Nevertheless, even the dour Alberecht smiled when, as we left the place where the bus had been bushwhacked, the nymph ran toward us and implanted a kiss upon his bearded cheek.

CHAPTER 9

It was three quiet men who clambered into the Land-Rover when we reached the spot where it was parked beneath the cottonwood trees. A little squirrel sat on the Rover's bonnet, but Alberecht shooed it away. Then Alberecht looked at the sun and calculated that it was well past noon. He decided we had better have some lunch before pursuing our journey.

We clambered out of the Land-Rover to have our lunch on the shady sand.

Alberecht took two long loaves of French bread, split them down the middle, scooped out some of the pulp, and filled up the canoe-like husks with canned tomatoes. This he

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salted and peppered. It made a good meal. Happy and I shared a loaf, and Alberecht ate a whole one. We had a beer apiece, then Happy buried all the tin cans and bread wrapping so that we would not be indicted under the anti-litterbug law. Alberecht was careful to crunch out his match after lighting a fresh cheroot.

Alberecht consulted his map and decided there was nothing for it but more cross-country trekking. "Der roads," he said, "all goes in der wronk directions. Diss iss terrible."

And he was right. Our trip up the side of the first hill which confronted us was indeed terrible. At one time Happy had to get out and push. But we finally made it, and when we reached the top of the hill we looked down into a small but most beautiful valley.

"That there," said Happy, "is Vivid Valley. It's whur the Potenuse Injuns lives. They ain't never become civilized, so the government lets 'em live in Vivid Valley fer free. Over there," he said, pointing to a cliff dwelling on the side of the towering bluff which formed one boundary of Vivid Valley, "is whur the Glorybookers live. They is a white sect and very quarrelsome. Thet's why they live in thet there cliff dwelling. Womenfolk is top dog in the Glorybooker sect, and they don't think nothing at all about having three er four husbands. The Glorybookers don't git along none too well with the Potenuse Injuns. Matter of fact, seems like they was having some sort of stramash right now."

And, sure enough, we saw a Glorybooker running at full speed across a ledge leading to the cliff dwelling with a Potenuse Indian on his heels, the Indian waving a war club and shouting maledictions.

"Diss iss terrible," said Alberecht. "Efferyvere ve go ve run into more troubles. Now, I suppose ve got to shtop here for a while. Ve be old mens before ve find dot dam' treasure."

"Diss iss terrible. Trouble, trouble, trouble. It reminds me of Resistencia vere dere vas noddings bot trouble. How-effer, it iss not goot to shase each udders across dot ledge like dot. I put a shtop to it, I betcha."

And Alberecht raised the African and fired a shot into the cliff wall, bringing down a shower of rock and rubble upon the heads of the galloping Glorybooker and the pursuing Potenuse.

As he predicted, it broke up the chase. The Glorybooker went on to refuge in the cliff dwelling, and the Potenuse

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sulkily sheathed his war club and returned to his hogan. Peace descended on Vivid Valley.

The hour growing late in the afternoon, Alberecht decreed that we should pitch camp where we were and stay the night, the terrain being too hazardous for journeyings in the dark. Accordingly, Happy broke out the tent from one of the trailers and in a trice had us as snug as bugs in a rug. Alberecht examined our food stocks and came upon a goose which had been frozen solid when we first purchased it but which was well defrosted by now.

"Diss I tink ve better cook," he said, sniffing at it suspiciously, "Anudder day like today und it vill haf cooked itself. Der self-cooked goose. Dot iss a choke. Hah, hah, hah! I make der dressings meinself."

I sat back against a comfortable igneous boulder, a glass of gin and bitters in my hand; and a great feeling of contentment stole over me, for Alberecht and Happy were both skilled cooks and I loved roast goose above all other things.

But my moment of placidity was all too brief, for I was hardly on my ninth sip when a man came into our camp—an Indian, a Potenuse buck—and he strode up to Alberecht, raised his hand in salute and said: "How."

Alberecht's hands were deep in a bowl of goose dressing; he acknowledged the redskin's presence with a courteous inclination of his head and said: "*Guten Abend.*"

The Indian sat down cross-legged on the ground and produced a long-stemmed pipe. "This," he said, "is a pipe of peace. It has been the property of my tribe for six hundred years, ever since the day we stole it from the Ixitlecotls." He lighted it and took a puff. "The tobacco," he said, "is aged in a cask and is plug cut. Just good, solid Potenuse Indian tobacco. No perique. I am a good, solid Potenuse myself. No Yaqui. I am an emissary from our tribal headquarters. My name is Sneak-About-Quietly-in-the-Dark. My mission is to find out what you are doing here. We imagine you are looking for the Frémont Treasure as your main object, but we suspect you may have other aims and motives. Meanwhile, until it is ascertained that you definitely intend harm of some sort to our people, I am authorized to offer you this pipe of peace."

And he thrust the pipe toward Alberecht.

Alberecht wiped the goose dressing clinging to his fingers off on his long black coat, took the pipe, and tried a deep

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puff. He tried a second one and blew an appreciative smoke ring.

"Goot," he said. "Dot iss goot tobacco. No perique. Ven der sheroots I gif up I get me vun of dese peace pipes und some of diss tobacco. It shmokes goot like a peace pipe should."

"How?" asked the Indian.

"Noddings," said Alberecht.

"You doubtless know," said the Indian, watching as Alberecht meticulously stuffed the goose, "that our tribe has had, is having, and in all probability will continue to have uneasy relations with those palefaces known as the Glorybookers who live in yon cliff dwelling.

"Indeed, the relations were most uneasy today when one of our men caught a Glorybooker pilfering a cucumber from our vegetable patch. Our man seized his war club and was driving the Glorybooker back to his home grounds when you, sir, interfered and fired a highpowered bullet into the canyon wall above his head, bringing down upon him and the Glorybooker, too, a shower of small but irritating stones. We Potenuses do not look lightly upon such interference."

"Bot . . ." said Alberecht, attempting to explain.

The Indian waved an imperious peace pipe and cut him short. "I have the floor," he said sternly. "I shall probably continue to hold it until the goose is cooked. Then you may take over."

He laid aside the peace pipe and lighted a filter cigarette. "The Glorybookers," he said, "are a sect of millennarians who have lived in that cliff dwelling since the day they built it, and that day is a hundred years and more agone now. You can trace the history of the Glorybookers by digging in their midden heaps. Their artifacts today are exactly the same as they were one hundred years ago. Same black-on-buff pottery. Same crude knives. Same rude cradle boards. They apparently reached the peak of their culture a century ago and have not been able to progress since. Our tribal soothsayers explain this by pointing out that, as millennarians, the Glorybookers consider that the world is due to end at any moment and that, hence, there is no point in any further effort on their part other than to stay alive until that great day comes at last. When it does come, they conceive they have only to sit snugly in their cliff dwelling and watch the world drown.

"We Potenuses, naturally, reject such beliefs, and, to our

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credit be it said, have never relaxed our attempts to convert the Glorybookers to a more rational outlook. Alas, like other missionaries, our efforts have been frustrated by the very pigheadedness of the folk toward which they have been directed. Sullen and uncommunicative. That sums up your Glorybooker. You cannot teach a Glorybooker a single, solitary thing. They cover their ears with their hands against our preachments; they beat their children when they catch their children listening to our proselyters. In short, they sealed themselves off from all ideas except their own one hundred years ago when they built their cliff dwelling, and sealed they intend to stay."

"Diss iss terrible," said Alberecht, putting the goose into the reflector oven and adjusting the flame. "How do dose peoples liff like dot?"

"They steal," said the copper-colored emissary. "They steal from us Potenuses. This has been a bone of contention for four score years and twenty. It also accounts for the relative per capita poverty of the average Potenuse. Whenever one of our families accumulates a little wealth, a Glorybooker is sure to steal it from them. The incident this afternoon which brought you to fire your big game rifle in laudable but mistaken zeal is a perfect example. The Glorybooker stole. The Potenuse took up the chase. Mistaken justice sided with the Glorybooker and allowed him to escape punishment."

"Vell," said Alberecht, "all mens got to liff. Dey shust can't lie down und die like der dog. In Argentina ver I liffed und in Africa und Europe vere I fight for der democrats, dere vas motch shtealing. Sometimes der tief got caught; sometimes he didn't. Der point iss dot he liffed by dot shtealing; und dot iss better den dying."

"Sophist!" sneered the Potenuse. "Your morality is lower than that of the Glorybookers. You defend the criminal."

"I dond't defend him," said Alberecht. "I shust point oudt dot he liffs by his criminality. Diss, I tink, iss a truism."

The Indian started to say something in reply, but, just as his mouth opened, a second Indian appeared, a young squaw as lithe as a paloverde limb and wearing only an abbreviated loincloth. Her plaited black hair hung down between her shoulder blades, blades as beautifully formed as if Rodin himself had sculpted them. She had even white teeth. Her feet were beautiful things to behold.

She whispered something in Sneak-About-Quietly-in-the-Dark's ear, and he leaped to his feet in wrath and dismay.

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"This is too much," he said. "The Glorybookers have gone too far this time. There is only one thing for me to do. That is to return to my chief and recommend he sound the war drums and go on the warpath."

"Diss I do not understand," said Alberecht. "Vot iss it vot dey do?"

"Delinquent teenagers," said the redskin savagely, "from the Glorybooker cliff dwelling have stolen four of our tribal cars, Plymouths and Dodges, from the reservation ramada, have altered the engine numbers, and have sold those cars for ten cents on the dollar in Manacle. When a man steals a car in this country, it is a capital offense, for autos are our only transportation and without transportation a man must die. When a delinquent teenager does it, it is equally serious. We shall insist that those teenagers be tried as adults and hanged as were horse thieves of old. The warpath is the only solution."

"Vell," said Alberecht, "dot iss your business. Ve shtay here und vatch und enforce der fair play. Ven does diss var-path stoff commence?"

"Heavens," said Sneak-About-Quietly-in-the-Dark, "you don't just blow the whistle and go on the warpath. There are many preliminaries. The war dance and the making of war medicine are two of them. I hereby invite the three of you to be my guests tonight at the war dance. I advise you to accept, too, for no paleface has ever seen the Potenuse war dance; and it is really something to watch. Milly Appleblossom here"—and he indicated the lithe young squaw who had brought him the grim tidings about the car thefts—"is only one of the feature attractions." And, as he said that, his stoicism vanished for a moment and he indulged in a vulgar snicker.

"I wanna go, Alberecht," said Happy.

"Vell," said Alberecht, looking at Milly Appleblossom, "ve go. Bot first dere iss diss goose. Ve cannot vaste der goot goose even dough der var dance iss varming op." And Alberecht turned the goose on its spit and basted it tenderly.

Sneak-About-Quietly-in-the-Dark was none too pleased with this arrangement and showed it in his restiveness, for it was plain the goose must cook for quite a while yet and equally plain that he did not want to wait that long.

But Milly Appleblossom was all for staying, no matter how long it took, and partaking of the white men's viands; and she soothed the great, savage warrior by taking him in her

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rounded, downy arms and chewing on his ear, exactly as one chews on the ear of a recalcitrant range nag. His restive, unhappy mood left him; a serene look came upon his face; and, when Happy handed him a glass of gin and bitters, he was able to hold it in a steady grip and drain the contents of the glass in one long, loving gulp.

"Heap good firewater," he said appreciatively.

"How," agreed Happy Ezekiel, fixing one for himself.

"The vintners of my tribe," said the warrior reflectively, running his hands absent-mindedly over Milly Appleblossom who was still chewing on his ear, "make a corn beer they call tseguino. I do not think it is as good as these gin and bitters. It is a primitive concoction, but it is as powerful as it is unrefined.

"For the war dance, great quantities of tseguino must be brewed, and the squaws are kept busy brewing it many nights on end, for it cannot be brewed except between sundown and sunrise. I do not think there is enough tseguino on hand now in our wine cellars for this war dance which I contemplate advocating.

"But our chief is a wise man. Months back he foresaw the possibility of having to order up a war dance on the spur of the moment, as it were, and at the same time be faced with the fact that there was not enough tseguino on hand to . . . uh . . . lubricate that festivity. So, wise chief that he is, using tribal funds he purchased and stashed away twenty cases of Sctoch. That should do nicely in the contingency we are confronted with.

"Alberecht, shouldn't you turn and baste that goose again? Happy, another of these delightful mixed drinks of yours. Milly Appleblossom, do the other ear, please. By the deities which long have watched over the Potenus tribe, never did a brave have it so good as I am now having it.

"We have a charming folk poem in our lore, handed down from father to son over the endless centuries. It says something to the effect about a young buck and a young squaw beneath a paloverde tree with an olla of corn beer and a cake of corn pone. She is singing to him. In summation, this lovely lyric contends that such a situation rivals that of Paradise. A little slower, Milly, please, and a little higher. Yes, even though the Potenuses are a rude, crude, unlettered clan, they appreciate the higher things of life. Alberecht, baste that goose again! Happy, a refill!"

"Don't put so motch gin in hiss trink diss time," said

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Alberecht in an aside to Happy. Happy nodded and jiggered accordingly, as the buck turned all his attention to Milly.

As for me, I was overcome with the beauty of the moment: The raw grandeur of this love scene, this love play between Stone Age man and Stone Age woman. Never before, do I believe, has it been observed at such close quarters. Remy de Gourmont in his magnificent *Physiologie de l'Amour* tells about such amatory antics between mantis and mantis and crab and crab and worm and worm—leaving man completely out of it—but as for me, if I want to watch intimacy, I want to watch it between lad and lass and not boar and sow.

All too soon, it seemed, the goose was done and the napery laid; and we had to take up our knives and forks and fall to upon the goose. Alberecht carved the bird with great dexterity, and our Indian guests, surprisingly well versed in the use of knife and fork, wolfed it down with an appetite born of their gentle, prolonged exercise in the mild evening air.

And, just as the meal was done and Alberecht was lighting his cheroot, Milly Appleblossom gave a maidenly gasp and pointed down into Vivid Valley.

There a great fiery sparking pillar of smoke was rising. Potenus at its base were doing something to it with a wet blanket so that instead of being a solid pillar it wiggled and wavered in spots.

It was a message directed to Sneak-About-Quietly-in-the-Dark; it was from his chieftain, and it was stern in tone.

It wanted to know what he meant by frittering away his time up there with the palefaces, drinking their gin and biters, wolfing down their roast goose, acting disgracefully and, indeed, scandalously with Milly Appleblossom, and all the while this miserable business with the Glorybookers had been pending with no decision made or even approximated. End smoke signal message.

"You gotta flashlight?" demanded Sneak-About-Quietly-in-the-Dark of Alberecht.

"Sure ve got der fleshlight," said Alberecht. "You tink ve iss tenderfeets or somedings?"

"Gimme it," said the big buck. And he took the electric torch, pushed Milly Appleblossom aside, leaped to his feet and started blinking away in Morse at the Indians assembled around the signal fire far down in the heart of Vivid Valley.

"Some of them during World War Two were in the Coast Guard," he explained, "and they can read Morse better than

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they can read sand paintings. Brother, am I telling that chieftain a thing or two." And he worked the switch on the flashlight like a madman.

An angry billow of smoke and flame came up in prompt, outraged answer. Wearily, he turned off the flashlight. "It's no use," he said. "We have to go. The chief himself has thought up having a war dance, and it starts in ten minutes. Leave your gun behind, Alberecht. The chief won't allow firearms at a war dance. Too dangerous."

"Vell," said Alberecht, "I go down dere in der interest of science. Bot I am not convinced dot you fellas got justice on your side. I tink mebbe dose Glorybookers got dere side of diss troubles, too. Dere vas always two sides to efferyting in der Gran Chaco vere I vas born. Howeffer, I like to dance. Motch dancing ve did in Resistencia ven I vas der boy. To der fiddle ve danced und to der concertina. Mein oncle der fiddle always played. Some udder fella played der concertina. Dot vas nice. I vish I vas dere now. But come, let us go."

In silent Indian file, Milly Appleblossom leading the way, we wended from the high fastness of our camp down to the floor of Vivid Valley where the aborigines were making war medicine and tapping out the first steps of the war dance.

The moon peeped languorously through the cirrus clouds. Whippoorwills whooshed over our heads. Snakes buzzed monotonously. But we plodded on, for the Potenuse chieftain had spoken and it was for us to obey.

Alberecht, I could tell, was at a low ebb. He had left behind his African, his great weapon, and, hence, no longer felt secure. He felt he was meddling in other people's affairs, and this had always been an intolerable thing to him. Always before he had been master of the situations which arose; now the situation mastered him. He sighed audibly and stumbled visibly as he made his way among the rocks and boulders. His thoughts, I could tell from his mutterings, were back in Resistencia, that city of the Chaco where, as a boy, he played on the banks of the Paraná River and listened to his uncle play the violin.

And I could not help but sympathize with him, for everything, truly, seemed to be messed up beyond any hope of unmessing. If we had only stuck to the main road, the well-traveled path, the natural course, the main stream flow, we would have been in the Paranaquis now, happily digging for the Frémont Treasure. But no. Here we were, groping our way down the side of a bleak canyon, with a wild Indian

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buck as our companion and a half-nude Indian squaw as our guide.

Thinking thus, I looked again at Milly Appleblossom and was made aware again of how cute she was with her bare feet and all; and I thought nuts! If we had stuck to the main road we would never have seen anything like Milly. And, in gratitude, I grasped Alberecht's hand and wrung it heartily. He smiled wanly. "Diss iss terrible."

For lack of anything better in which to hold their war dance, the Potenuse Indians had erected a huge tepee capable of accommodating several hundred savages at one time. The floor was well-packed hard pan and made for excellent dancing. The music came from gourds and drums and single-stringed instruments. Flares illuminated the tepee. For the thirsty there was cold spring water and Scotch. It was barbaric.

Even Alberecht brightened up at the scene, replete as it was with wildly gyrating bucks and prettily pirouetting squaws. The bucks had on their war paint. The squaws, like Milly Appleblossom, had dispensed with everything except loin-cloths. These were of exotic color—green and buff—and of a texture which bespoke great skill on the part of the weavers.

Sneak-About-Quietly-in-the-Dark hastily introduced us to a group of his friends, gave us each a small gourd of Scotch and a large gourd of spring water for a chaser, and hurried off to report to his chief.

Milly brought up two of her girl friends, and presented one to Alberecht and the other to Happy. Then she turned to me, smiled, held out her arms, and said: "Shall we dance?"

I caught her up and we went whirling into the very heart of that maddened, milling throng. Soon I was howling and stomping with the best of them, tossing Milly about as if she were a thistle, and vowing at the top of my lungs, as were the rest of them, destruction to the Glorybookers.

Hey, I sunk back down then through the ages to the very prehistoric slime out of which the savage had crawled, and it was with an ecstatic savagery that I bawled and stamped my feet. Yes, I proclaim it now: It is good to cast aside the fripperies of civilization and culture and sink back into the primordial slime when the drums are beating and the fiddles bleating and the feet shuffling and the breasts shaking and the mad wind blowing and the seeds of war are being sown.

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Yes! It is good to strip oneself of hypocrisy and have a dance and a howl.

Man, I felt young then, as young as the first man who stood upon his two feet for the first time and looked about for something to kill. The millions of years which it had taken to make me what I was melted away as mud melts under a warm rain, and I felt as one suddenly reborn into the youth of the world when the swamps still covered the globe and the miasma veiled the mountain crags. I was a beast, a great blond beast of prey, and forgotten were my ulcers, my glasses, my truss and my dentures. I called for madder music and for stronger wine; and the great war dance of the Potenuses roared and thundered on.

CHAPTER 10

Man, I had a hangover the next day, beside which the agony of medieval torture chambers of the Renaissance would have seemed like the solace of a hospital bed. Eheu! He who dances must pay the piper. We arose from the Potenuse couches upon which we had passed out, thanked our hosts, and painfully climbed the bluff back to our camp.

"I tink," said Alberecht, holding his head in both hands, "today ve shust rest. Unroll der shleeping bags, Happy. Shust der liddle nap I take. Dot var dancing iss fun, bot dey should haf a curfew or somedings. In Resistencia der politzei always broke up der dancing at four in der morning. Udderwise, how vould anyvun effer get to vork? Make some black coffee, too, Happy. Dey say dot iss goot for der morning after der night of var dancing." Happy moaned but bent to his task.

We slept like three dead men until four that afternoon. Then Alberecht decided we must break camp and try to gain a few miles more in the remaining daylight. Happy painfully loaded the trailers. We climbed into the Land-Rover, and Alberecht consulted his maps.

He had just touched the starter when a soft voice from the shaggy growth surrounding our campsite bade him to refrain.

"Vot iss it?" demanded Alberecht irritably. "Did you say

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somedings, Happy? Vy do you vaste time now? Der engine I am all ready to shtart. Vot do you vant, Happy?"

"I ain't said nothing," said Happy. "It's her . . . over yonder."

We looked where he pointed and saw a young girl of perhaps twenty-seven standing at the edge of the clearing. She wore a gray shirtwaist, black skirt and laced boots. Her hair was done up in a bun. Her sleeves were full length and her shirtwaist collar was high. She weighed about 119 pounds and was about 35 inches in the bust and possibly an inch less around the hips. Her waist apparently would measure about 23. She had a pretty pallor as does one who lives long indoors.

This pallor was explained when she conveyed to us the fact that she was a Glorybooker and had spent most of her life in the Glorybooker cliff dwelling. Her name was Angel Longworthy, and under the Glorybooker system of matriarchy she had four husbands, three old ones and a young one.

Her mission, she said simply, was to enlist our aid against the Potenuses who, after their war dance, had gone on the warpath and were now surrounding the Glorybooker cliff dwelling. She pointed a white, slender finger and we looked and saw indeed that the aborigines had formed a great half circle around the foot of the bluff in which nested the cliff dwelling and, spears and bows in hand, were slowly making their way up the side of the mountain.

Angel Longworthy explained to us that the Glorybooker elders had learned that we were camped where we were and that, while our primary concern was the unearthing of the Frémont Treasure, we had, nevertheless, taken time out to discipline the Kid, aid a mortgage-bedeviled grandfather and granddaughter, rescue the nymph from the horrors of the cattle-sheep feud, and foil a payroll robbery. Hence, the elders argued, we were probably just the men the Glorybookers were looking for to help them in their present travail.

And the elders, convinced that succor was at hand if only that succor could be prevailed upon to exert itself, had looked among their flock and had chosen Angel Longworthy to pierce the Potenuse lines and bring to us the urgent appeal of the Glorybookers.

She, Angel Longworthy, had managed to get through the Indian blockade by stripping off her clothes, dying herself the color of a Potenuse squaw, redoing her hair into two long braids, donning a skimpy loincloth, and walking boldly down the mountainside, shouting simulated insults at her fellow

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Glorybookers. Once through the redskin ranks, she had washed the odious dye from her fair skin in a handy brook, had donned her customary modest garb and stout boots, done her hair back up into its usual bun, and was now here, bringing us the message of the elders.

She had indulged in deceit, she conceded, in disguising herself as a nude Indian girl, for disguise is only another form of lying; but she had done it for a good cause and, where good causes are at stake, the end justifies the means.

"Diss iss terrible," said Alberecht. "Bot I dond't onderstand. Ve iss only three mens, und dere iss tousands of dem Potenuses. Vot does your elders expect me to do? Shust holter und vave dem away? Diss iss nonsense, I tink."

Angel Longworthy put a pale hand on Alberecht's arm and looked at him with her blue, blue eyes. "Our elders," she said, "know that you have some incredible weapon, a weapon that makes you invincible. Our elders want you to employ that weapon in our cause."

"Veppon?" said Alberecht. "Veppon? I got dot rifle, dot African. It iss a goot goon, sure. Bot it iss for der elephant und der vater buffalo und der lion und der tiger. Not for no Indian. Der Vinchester peoples didn't mean I vas to shoot Indians mit it. Diss iss terrible."

Angel Longworthy put both her slender, pallid hands on Alberecht's arms. "Alberecht," she said, "if you do this thing for my people, I am prepared to do for you anything you may see fit to ask. That is why I was chosen for this mission. Glorybooker women are world-famed for their beauty and their amorousness, and I am the loveliest and most amorous of them all. It is written in the Glorybookers' book that a young woman's charms are often more sought after than gold. I will dress for you, Alberecht, as I dressed to get through the Potenus lines. I will sing and dance for you, Alberecht. I will perfume my limbs and depilate my skin. I will disport myself with you, Alberecht, and never cry nay to anything you might suggest that I do or that you choose to do yourself. Look at me, Alberecht, and say that you will help my people."

"Vell, I dunno," said Alberecht. "Dot singing und dancing stoff I had enough of last night to keep me for der long times. Diss zither-playing iss goot, bot not ven you got der headache like I still got. Diss I dunno."

"Leave her git in thet Indian costume, Alberecht," said

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Happy. "Maybe thet'll help you make up yer mind."

And I said: "Yes, Alberecht. Let her dress like an Indian. She said she would, Alberecht. Besides, she'll have to do it anyway to get back to her cliff dwelling."

"I will gladly do it, Alberecht," said Angel Longworthy, "and I shall not even require that these nice friends of yours go off some place and hide. I have only to step behind that tree for a moment."

"No!" said Alberecht. "Diss ain't no shtrip tease show. I don't allow it. Get me dot African, Happy. Ve see vot ve can do."

Angel Longworthy kissed him on both cheeks, and Happy and I shook him by both hands. This was the kind of decision we were hoping Alberecht would make. He became a bigger man for it in our eyes. He had been tempted; he had been shaken by temptation to the very roots of his being, but he had withstood it. Happy and I both accorded him a silent *olé!* secretly wishing at the same time he was not so straightlaced; for, surely, Angel Longworthy in a dress diminished to mere loincloth would have been a calendar cover, what with her dimensions, her pallid skin and all. This thing, in essence like every other thing, had two sides to it; and we wished that Alberecht had given it a little more thought before coming up with that resounding nay.

Anyhow, Happy fetched the Winchester African, and Alberecht examined it, wiped it with an oily rag, adjusted the telescopic sight, filled the magazine with three enormous cartridges, and announced it was time to get down to business.

The Potenuses' copper horde was now one-third of the way up to the Glorybookers' cliff dwelling, and it appeared that nothing could stop them. With mud, wattles, and stones, they built a sort of ladder terrace as they ascended the bluff, just as termites build mud-covered staircases as they ascend a tree. It is a terrible thing to watch.

I looked at Angel Longworthy, and she looked at me and Happy. What, we asked each other silently, could Alberecht do to stop that attack that pressed so mechanically up the bluff? True, Alberecht had his African, but what were three bullets against those thousands?

Alberecht, however, was the picture of serenity. He laid aside the African and took out his road map of Arizona and studied it carefully, holding it first one way, then another. Finally he cried "Hah!" and asked Angel to come to his side and see what he saw.

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She did so and he pointed out to her a spot on the map. "Vot iss dot?" he asked.

"Why," she replied, "it's just that silly reservoir the U.S. Reclamation Bureau built for the Potenuses during the Great Depression. It cost the taxpayers millions, and the Potenuses won't even swim in it."

"How many acre feet of vater iss in it?" demanded Alberecht. "How motch concrete vent into its construction?"

Rapidly she recited for him the statistics he had asked.

"Goot," said Alberecht. "Now den. Vere iss diss dam?"

"Why, it's right over there," said Angel, pointing to a concrete abutment with a gate in it sunk into the top of the bluff to the left and high above the Glorybooker Cliff dwelling. This gate, on its eminence, commanded all of Vivid Valley.

"How iss dot gate hooked?" asked Alberecht.

"Just with an old barn latch," said Angel. "The Bureau's appropriation ran out when they got that far with the construction and they had to make do with what they had. The idea of the gate, of course, is that if the lake impounded by the dam gets too full of water, you can open the gate a little and let the excess water dribble out."

"Hah!" cried Alberecht. "Den if I shoot der latch off dot gate, dot gate vill open all to onct und der vater vill come svooshing down und vash away dose Indians dot climb der bluff. Iss diss right?"

"It might very well be right," cried Angel Longworthy. "Try it, Alberecht! Please try it! Do!"

So Alberecht took a seat cushion from the Land-Rover and, using it as a sandbag upon which to rest his firearm, took up a prone position on the ground. He sighted in the African on the dam gate latch and began to fire methodically. At the third shot the latch flew apart and the gate burst open.

Have you ever seen, dear reader, an avalanche of water like that of a dozen Niagaras unloosed suddenly and for the first time? It is an awe-inspiring sight.

The waters which Alberecht loosed surged down the face of that tremendous bluff in one terrific swoosh, avoiding the Glorybooker cliff dwelling by inches only, but sweeping away the toiling Potenuses as a garden hose will sweep spiders off the wall of your house.

In a matter of minutes all of Vivid Valley was flooded, and the Potenuse hogans were floating helplessly in the flood.

The Glorybookers were in their glory. This was exactly

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what their prophecies had predicted: There would be a vast flood, and all their enemies would be swept away in it, and they could stand on the roof of their cliff dwelling and sing and dance as the world came to an end.

This, they did. The Glorybooker women came boiling out of the crevasses in the dwelling, mounted to the roof top, took off their clothing in ecstasy and flung shirtwaists, pantaloons, corselets, lingerie, and everything else into the millennial waters. Their husbands did not try to restrain them. Indeed, some of the husbands did the same thing.

Angel Longworthy was caught up in the general frenzy, even though she was with us and not with them. Happy and I watched appreciatively as she divested herself of her wearing apparel, and she was a sight to behold.

"Religion," said Happy, "kin really do things fer a gal. Them Glorybookers been sorta suppressed all these here years, but, man, when they gits a chanct they really goes to town."

The waters crept higher and higher until they were lapping at the parking ground on which we had halted the Land-Rover. Angel Longworthy, radiant as Eve, kissed us all good-bye, flung herself into the flood and set out with a magnificent Australian crawl to join her people in their greatest hour.

"She iss a goot swimmer," said Alberecht. "She got plenty vater to swim in, too."

There was a reproachful murmur behind us, and we turned and saw Milly Appleblossom standing there. She wore a white Bikini.

"Why did you do it, Alberecht?" she asked sadly. "Why did you do it?"

"Blut," said Alberecht simply, "iss ticker dan vater."

"I suppose so," admitted Milly. "At any rate, it was a drastic step. Now my people will have to do what our ancestral prophecies always said we would have to do."

"Und vot iss dot?" asked Alberecht.

"Pack up and leave," said Milly. "And go back to Acadia. See, even now they are about it. When a Potenuse hurries, he hurries."

And we looked into the flooded valley and, sure enough, the Potenuse bucks were hauling huge war canoes from their caches high up in the side of the bluff, and the squaws were loading them with kitchen ware and bedding and papooses and food and tins of petrol. They worked with amazing haste and soon the whole tribe was packed and ready to leave.

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The chieftain gave the command to cast off, and the flotilla circled grandly and then surged past us, making a grand sight as the bucks turned on the outboard motors, and the squaws sang of happy fishing.

Sneak-About-Quietly-in-the-Dark came by in a smaller liaison canoe, accompanied by four young redskins. Milly Appleblossom leaped in beside him.

"Good-bye, Alberecht," Sneak-About-Quietly-in-the-Dark shouted, "we're going to ride the crest of the flood and make Tiburon Island by sunrise. We never liked this place, anyhow."

"Bon voyage," said Alberecht.

CHAPTER 11

Next morning Alberecht woke us early and spoke to us sternly: "Ve vaste too motch time," he said. "Ve horse around too motch. Ve neffer get novheres. Always der interruptions, der nonsense, und der foolishments. Diss ve got to qvit doing dese silly tings.

"Always iss der girl come mit der troubles. Always ve got to shtop und fix dem troubles. Bot ve iss not here for der girls und dere troubles. Troubles of our own ve got. So! Now ve go, und ve dond't shtop all der dam time for girls. Mit girls it iss ended for der rest of der treasure hunt. I, Alberecht, haf said it. Get op, Happy, und fix der breakfast. I vant grilled kidneys und eggs. I am very distressed. Diss iss terrible."

Well, there was justice in what he said. Our primary mission, the goal that beckoned us on and kept us in complete thrall was the Frémont Treasure, that blood-soaked trove of gold buried in some black spot in the forbidding Paranaqui Mountains. George Moore says that no man can go very long without thinking about the girls, but Happy and Alberecht and I decided to try it. We would think about the treasure and nothing else. Avaunt the turn of calf and trim of thigh, the burst of breast and tendril of tress, the kiss and the sidelong glance. We had more serious things to command our attention.

"Now den," said Alberecht after he finished his grilled kidneys and eggs and had drunk his third cup of coffee, "ve go

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dissavay, shust as der crow flies. No more horsing around. No more girls."

And he laid down a course on the map that took our breath away. For it was a straight line between where we were and where the Paranaqui Mountains lay, a line that never deviated, but went up over crag and pinnacle and down into gulch and rill, regardless of terrain.

"We ain't never going to make it thataway," said Happy.

"Ve make it," said Alberecht. He folded the map and put it away. "Get in, shentlemens," he said, "und holt your hats."

Then began what was, I suppose, the most fantastic ride ever undertaken in that part of southern Arizona. Alberecht spared the Land-Rover nothing and its passengers even less.

He drove like a man possessed. Did a mountain appear, Alberecht drove over it. Did an arroyo gape, Alberecht drove through it. Did a flat stretch of desert open up, Alberecht gunned his engine until it boiled and surged over that desert at floorboard speed.

Happy became ill with car sickness; I became queasy, but Alberecht pressed on. Branches of trees, as we flew past, would snag on the tarpaulins covering the goods in our two trailers and immediately would be snapped off for their impertinence. A jack rabbit tried to keep pace with us; Alberecht left it behind in a cloud of dust and cactus spines.

We had forgotten to check the mileage reading on the speedometer before we started out, so it is impossible to say how far we actually went; but it was doubtless in the neighborhood of ninety miles up and down. During the course of our journey we drove straight through five dustdevils, and such was our speed that the wind generated by our passage served to act as a counterforce on the devils and dissipate their whirling motion. Each died in a relapse of rotation. As Alberecht had said earlier, he was tired of horsing around and determined to get somewhere in a hurry. He did.

We made the foot of the Paranaqui mountains by nightfall, and, while Alberecht and I had a beer, Happy pitched camp in a delightful dell beside a purling stream. Birds sang in the trees; moths flew in the twilit air.

The reader will naturally wonder why we didn't press on instead of camping for the night beside that purling stream in that delightful dell. Well, the thing was that we were worn out with the fatigue of the journey and, besides that, the Paranaqui Mountains were formidable-looking heights. Who knew what inimical forces dwelt in their fastnesses? Who knew

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whether or not tragedy awaited us in some dry gulch? So many were the legends about the Paranaquis, and so fearsome their nature, that we thought it best to pause overnight. Even stout hearts are known to quail at the unknown, particularly at the end of a long, harassing day of travel. That was, in essence, why we chose to camp. In short, we were afraid.

Happy Ezekiel, I suppose, was the handiest man around a camp who ever existed. In a trice he had our tents pitched, water boiling for Alberecht's tea, the ground swept, the bed-rolls neatly laid out, a toilet erected in a modest grove, the Land-Rover and the trailers parked in a neat side-by-side line, the blankets aired, and reserve cans of beer cooling in the purling stream. Alberecht and I had not to give him a single direction; he anticipated everything long before we thought of it.

Alberecht decided to make a stew for supper, and he went about it at the folding kitchen table which Happy had set up. He took two rolls of flank steak and cut them up in little pieces. He seared these cubes in a huge frying pan and added chopped onions. He was just beginning to cut up his carrots and celery when a laughing voice from the gloom which surrounded our well-lit camp called out to us, saying:

"How would you boys like some company when you eat that stew?"

I suppose all our hearts fell a degree or two.

There was no question who was speaking.

It was Isolde and with her was Larith. After all we had done to throw them off our trail, after all we had gone through to keep them off it, here they were, arms about each other's shoulders, giggling at our discomfiture, tempting us with their femininity.

"Gott in Himmel," said Alberecht. "Diss iss horrible."

And it truly was. There could be no denying it. And yet Isolde and Larith did look pretty standing there laughing at us. They both wore shorts and tight sweaters and had bright scarves bound about their heads. They looked a little smudgy, and unquestionably a bath would have done them both much good, but for companions of an evening they had it all over the birds that were singing in the trees and the moths that were fluttering in the darkened air.

"Vell, coom on und sit down," said Alberecht defeatedly. "Giff dem some beer, Happy. Diss shtew got a long time to cook. Shid."

I sat beside Larith, helping her drink her beer, and asked

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her what she and Isolde had been doing since last we saw them.

Between gulps she told me of their adventures.

"My dear," she said, "it was incredible. After you threw us off your trail, we stopped at a roadside tavern—Masterman Freemantell was with us, you know, and he wanted to buy us girls a drink. Well, in the tavern he got fresh with Isolde and the bartender had to throw him out. But he kept circling around the tavern and peering in the windows and muttering threats and it was awful. Finally the bartender got fed up with it and called the highway patrol. The nicest patrolman came—real handsome in his uniform—and he looked all around but he couldn't see Masterman anywhere. So he came and sat down with us girls and bought us a drink although he was on duty and couldn't drink anything himself. But he said he would be off duty at six o'clock and how about him picking us up with his buddy and they taking us girls to the dance at Moxley's? So we said sure, okay, and we sat in the tavern until six, and the boys came along—out of uniform this time—and we got in their old car and drove down to Moxley's. They got a dance hall there and a swimming pool and some nice private little cabins. Isolde pushed her date into the pool and my date pushed me in and then we had to go to one of the cabins to dry off. And Moxley came along and said he wasn't going to have anything like that going on at his place and that we would have to get out. Well, my date said: Okay, Moxley, but the next time you want a favor don't look to me and my buddy here to help you any. And we bought some steaks and a couple of cases of beer and went out on the desert and had a picnic. It was real nice there and the panorama was wonderful. But finally Isolde's date got a little too fresh and she had to tell him off so then both of the dates started acting up and said if we wanted to play that way they could play that way too and they loaded up the picnic stuff in the car and drove us back to Moxley's and told us to get out, they were sick and tired of the whole thing. And then Isolde got control of herself—she had been crying—and, boy, did she tell those two bozos where to get off. An acquaintance of hers had dated my date once so Isolde knew all about the big punk and his funny habits and, man, she let him have it at the top of her lungs. People came out of Moxley's dance hall just to hear her. And Moxley came out himself and he said if those guys didn't get away from his place and stay away he was going to call the sheriff's office.

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They left and there was bad feelings all around. But I had a feeling Moxley was sorta eyeing me and Isolde up and sure enough pretty soon he came up and said: Looka here, Larith, there's a couple of guys in there having dinner with me who are kinda figuring on buying this place and I figure if I could show them just a little better time tonight I might swing the deal. How about you and Isolde coming along and helping me? They're both real nice fellas from the coast and both are carrying big wads. So we went along because anybody would help poor old Moxley if she had a chance and, darn it, if one of the fellas from the coast wasn't B.J. Furd! Why, I'd known B.J. back in Kansas City when he was just getting started."

This went on for two hours longer, and then Alberecht abruptly announced that the stew was done. He had made hot biscuits to go with it, and it was a feast fit for a king. Each of the girls had three helpings. Happy snickered at that because when Alberecht had started to make the stew he said he was going to make enough to last us for three days and that way he wouldn't have to be cooking all the time. But Alberecht didn't snicker. He just stared at the girls and, if looks could kill, we would have had two dead damsels on our hands in short notice.

After supper was over we fixed a sort of couchlike arrangement of logs and cushions and blankets, and we sat with our backs against it and sipped beer and stared dreamily at the campfire. Its flames were unusually pretty, and its coals glowed spiritedly.

Never get the idea, dear reader, that the Paranaqui Mountains are quiet places after dark. They are almost as noisy as Moxley's dance hall. Cows moo. Owls hoot. Tree frogs shrill. Coyotes howl. Crickets crick. Bugs buzz. Birds complain. And then when things do calm down a little, a jet bomber comes over from the Tucson air base and jars the filling out of your teeth and sets the denizens of the Paranaquis to yelling and whickering again.

"My," said Larith, "I'm glad we've got some big, strong men to protect us tonight."

None of us said anything.

The moon came up shortly and cast its glow upon us. This woke up the whippoorwills, and they made the best of it, calling back and forth to each other incessantly across the canyons.

Finally the whippoorwills stopped and it was actually quiet

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for almost three minutes. I was sitting beside Isolde and it was so still that I could hear her breathe.

Then a singing arose, a far-off chant. It carried softly through the mountains. It sounded vaguely like a high school cheering song.

"Vot," yelled the exasperated Alberecht, "iss dot now? Diss iss terrible."

"Why, it's only the Girl Scouts, Alberecht," said Larith.

"Girl Scouts? Vot you mean, Girl Scouts?"

"Why, just what I said, Alberecht. They are in their summer camp up there, and now they're sitting around their camp fire singing. They always do it before they go to bed. Isolde and I saw them today. They're real cute little kids in their green uniforms. Don't you think they sing pretty, Alberecht?"

"Dey sing terrible," said Alberecht. "Motch better der kids sing in Resistencia. Diss iss no place for kids. Diss iss bad mountains vere peoples gets lost und dies of thirst und sunstroke und shnake bite und dose tings. Vot iss all dose kids doing here mit der foolish singings? Kids should be home, not in dese mountains. In Resistencia der parents would not shtand for diss."

"But Alberecht," said Isolde, "they have their leaders with them. They camp here every summer. They know all about first aid and everything, Alberecht."

"I don't care vot dey know," said Alberecht. "Diss iss no place for kids."

I confess that I had to agree with Alberecht. What was in the back of his mind, of course, was the fact that we were here to search for the Frémont Treasure and that that hunt, complicated as it was with uncertainties and fraught with peril at every step, would be now even more complicated with a bunch of little green-clad girls in the way.

A feeling of frustration settled upon me. I was on the verge of jumping to my feet and suggesting that we pack up and go to Moxley's for the night and leave the Paranaquis to stew in their own noisy juice when Isolde put a downy arm about my neck and snuggled my head against her shoulder. This was a very comfortable position and I soon drowsed off. The singing of the Scouts also acted as a soporific.

Dawn comes late in that part of the Paranaquis, for the canyons open to the west and the crags to the east veil the sun till long after the plains are flooded with the blessed light of early morning.

I awoke to the twittering of small birds and the cawing of

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crows, black vagabonds making their way out of the canyons to the grain and vegetable fields of man.

The camp was deserted as I struggled to my feet; my companions, I assumed, were off making their toilets. Indeed, I heard giggles and splashings coming from around the bend of the purling stream beside which we had pitched our camp. I made my way gingerly thereto to see what was to be seen.

There was a sizable pool, thigh deep, in the stream. A willow limb lay athwart it. On the limb were soap, towels, and lingerie. In the pool were Isolde and Larith taking an early morning bath. Like oreads they looked as they scrubbed each other's back; their laughter was a joy to hear, their antics rapture to behold. They were as playful as polar bear cubs and much more attractive.

A stick snapped beside me, and I saw it was snapped by Happy Ezekiel as he lumbered to my side to see what it was I was so engrossed in looking at. He took one look and said: "Wow!" I shushed him.

We watched for perhaps seven minutes when another stick snapped behind us. This time it was Alberecht. "Vindow peepers!" he hissed. "Can't dose girls take der bath mitout being vatched by two shnakes in der grass? Diss iss terrible. Go away, both of you. My, dot Larith iss a pretty ting. Look at dot . . . dot . . . I dond's know vot you call it in English, bot she got it. My, my, diss iss terrible, und so early in der mornings, too. Dey iss so blayful. Like dose girls in der *Folies Bergère*. Yes, diss iss terrible. I tink ve better shtop looking. Coom away, fellas; diss iss terrible."

So, with reluctance, we took ourselves away and went back to camp. Happy cooked up a big breakfast of little link sausages, scrambled eggs, hot biscuits, honey, butter, and coffee. Presently the girls appeared. They were dressed in white cotton frocks with Peter Pan collars, and very proper young ladies they looked, too. They intended to take Alberecht to the Girl Scout camp and introduce him to the camp mistress, and that was why they wore their summer frocks.

"Bot vy do I got to meet diss vomans?" demanded Alberecht, spearing three sausages on the tines of his fork. "I am not caring anytings about Girl Scouts. Dey iss a nuisance, dot's all. Evfferyting iss a nuisance on diss trip. Always I got to shtop vot I'm doing und do somedings else. Dot iss vy efferyting takes so long. It iss der interruptions. It iss shust

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like it iss in Argentina. Dere efferytime you try to do some-dings you get interrupted. It iss terrible."

"But, Alberecht," said Isolde, helping him to more scrambled eggs and biscuits and coffee, "don't you see? The camp mistress is in charge of the Girl Scout camp, and the camp covers many acres. It could very well be, Alberecht, that in her demesne lies the very . . . hem . . . spot you are looking for. That is why you must meet her, Alberecht, and get on her good side."

"She sounds like der vitch to me," said Alberecht. "Vot doss she look like, diss qveen of der mountains? Has she der broom got to ride on?"

"She's a college graduate," said Isolde; "and, while she does wear glasses, she's only about thirty-eight and she has a nice figure and a beautiful tan complexion. We will time our visit to her so that it will be the hour of the day when she is wearing her short shorts and her halter. She has nice legs, Alberecht."

"So has der frog nice legs," snorted Alberecht. "Bot it iss not der frog dot I am vishing to see. Vot iss der name of diss vomans vot der short shorts vears und bosses around der liddle girls?"

"Her name," said Isolde, "is Frezia Freemound."

Alberecht blanched a little at that. But he recovered quickly and said: "Bah! Der name means noddings to me. Bot I suppose I must go und say hello to her. Vait till I put on mein necktie."

After Alberecht spruced himself up a bit, we all marched up the winding mountain trail to the Girl Scout camp. The juniper, the Douglas fir, the ponderosa pine, the balsam, and the aspen grew in profusion upon the slopes; and squirrels with tufted ears played among them. Once, a hydrophobia skunk ambled across our path, but we did nothing to him and he did nothing to us.

A flock of jays accompanied us on our journey. They are beautiful birds, the color of Prussian blue, and they speak to each other in a language almost intelligible to human ears. After I had an opportunity to examine them at close range, I decided that if I were a bird I would be a mountain jay, and I would be top jay among the jays, for it is better to be the number one jay in a steep mountain canyon than to be a number two bird elsewhere.

The Girl Scouts had their camp in a lovely mountain meadow carpeted with Bermuda grass and surrounded by

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stately trees. They lived in neat, green barracks. There was a mess hall in which seventy children could eat, cafeteria style, at the same time. There was a towering flagpole with Old Glory proudly flying from it. The camp was equipped with a swimming pool and a chapel and a darling little library. Everything was spic and span and in apple pie order; and it did your heart good to observe what the donations of generous citizens (wrung out of them, it is true, in a series of relentless drives) had provided in the way of accommodations for these small female fry.

Nevertheless, there was something institutionalized about the setup; and I thought it possible that the carefree jays in their Prussian blue feathers had a better time of it in their mad, chattering flights than did these little girls in their forest-green uniforms with the hours of the day marked out for them in a precise schedule and posted upon an impeccable bulletin board.

The camp mistress, we ascertained from a freckled little thing about nine years old, was in her study making out her day report. Therewith we marched, we three rugged men and two summer-befrocked ladies, and many a curious glance was cast our way, from the groups of Scouts busy at their morning tasks of tying knots, studying nature, collecting rare minerals, doing leather work, learning camp lore, or engaged in organized play.

Miss Frezia Freemound was obviously not pleased to see us, though she made an effort to be polite. She had her short shorts on all right, but she sat behind a desk and it was only by edging around that one could see them. And she didn't wear a halter either, as Isolde had said she would. She wore a blouse.

She stared at Alberecht as if he were the leader of a band of pirates and at Isolde and Larith as if they were our camp followers. There was no place for Alberecht to dunk the ashes of his cheroot nor for Happy and myself to crush out our cigarettes; and, though it was as hot as blazes in Miss Freemound's office, the atmosphere was as chilly as that of the polar regions.

After Alberecht had falteringly explained to her that we were uranium prospectors and were camped down the trail a-ways and that we had come to pay a social call on the camp and its directress, she said:

"Of course, it's a free country and you can camp there if you wish. But there are five hundred acres of these mountains

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deeded over to the Girl Scouts for camping and recreational purposes, and the Forest Service has said that we are not to be bothered by prospectors or treasure hunters while camp is in session.

"As a matter of fact, we can by radiophone, call on the sheriff's department at any time for protection, and they can get a posse here in a matter of minutes by helicopter. I see that all of you men are smoking. That is strictly against Forest Service regulations, and I must caution you that if I ever hear a report of you doing it again I will be forced to hold you under arrest for the authorities. I hold magisterial powers in these mountains, and am an honorary deputy sheriff and a licensed notary public."

Then she turned her attention to Larith and Isolde. "As for you young ladies, I can only say that I have the deepest pity for you. How you became enmeshed in this association is unknown to me, and I assure you I have no desire to pry into your private lives.

"However, as directress of this camp, I have certain obligations toward my young charges, and the greatest of these obligations is the moral one. I cannot allow that there shall be any immoral examples perpetrated in these mountains. Bathing is a good thing and a necessary thing, provided it is done at the proper time and under the proper circumstances. But bathing, as it is practiced by you young ladies, under the eyes of what I doubt not was a very appreciative audience, is an abomination.

"Take that look of injured innocence off your faces! Your actions this morning were reported to me. Nothing can occur in these mountains without it being reported to me. I even know how many little link sausages you ate for breakfast. We shall remember you in our evening prayers, but if you do not mend your ways we shall be forced to report you to the authorities. As I said before, this is a free country, but its freedom is within strict bounds, particularly in these Paranaqui Mountains. You may go in peace, but I advise you to watch your steps. Good morning."

We filed out of her office. What else was there to do? "Diss iss . . ." said Alberecht. "Diss iss really terrible." And I saw him look at his map in perplexity. It was not the Arizona road map this time. It was that Greek map we had purchased in Nogales from the seventh son of a seventh son.

I peered around Alberecht's shoulder, and then I saw why he had pronounced the situation to be really terrible. The X

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on the Greek map indicating the treasure was exactly the spot on which Miss Frezia Freemound's office was located. Yes, it was really terrible. I lighted a cigarette, and a gangly Girl Scout darted out of the bushes at me. "I won't tell Miss Freemound on yuh if yuh save the butt," she hissed.

CHAPTER 12

It seemed that we were beaten at last. It seemed that we had been defeated at every turn. It seemed that everything had been in vain. "Futility of futilities," I said, "and all is futility. All is futility and waste of effort."

Alberecht was in a black and terrible mood. None of us dared say a word to him. We went slowly back down the winding mountain trail to our camp. A jay flew close to me and jeered in my face. I could not blame him. Indeed, we were a sorry crew.

We sat down on the logs beside our camp. Dispiritedly, Happy began to prepare lunch, for the time was high noon. Alberecht set out five small glasses and, from the second trailer, secured an unopened bottle of rye. "Ve all," he said, "are needing der drink." He uncorked the bottle and started to pour.

"I seen yuh! I seen yuh!" shrilled a voice from the undergrowth. "I seen yuh uncork thet likker an' I'm a-gonna tell Miss Freemound. She don't stand fer no drinkin' an' she'll run yuh outa these mountains. I'm a-gonna tell."

Alberecht recorked the rye, put it back in the trailer and sat down. "Ve iss, it seems," he said calmly, "under der constant surveillance. Diss iss not nice."

"Them little snots ain't telling me what to do," said Happy Ezekiel. Defiantly, he took out and lighted a cigarette. Three piping voices immediately arose in the underbrush. "We seen yuh! We seen yuh light thet there cigarette. We're gonna go an' tell Miss Freemound right now. You're a-tryin' to burn the forest down; thet's what you're a-tryin' to do, an' we're a-gonna run an' tell."

"Heavens," moaned Isolde, "we are surrounded by the little horrors. We can't even smoke. What shall we do, Alberecht? What shall we do?"

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"Ve shust vait," said Alberecht decisively. "Ve vait till dey are gone. Ve vait it oudt along diss line if it takes all der summer."

"It ain't gonna be much fun," said Happy, "jest a-setting here. I'm afeerd to blow my nose."

"Ve vait," said Alberecht.

Somehow we struggled through that awful day, sitting there on the logs, staring at the trees and bugs. Supper, which was usually a gala affair with wine and lilting conversation and good food, this time was so soggy that we could hardly go through with it. We were relieved when it was bedtime and we could crawl into our bedrolls and forget our troubles in profound and dreamless sleep. But even this was spoiled by the triumphant chanting of the Girl Scouts, sitting around their camp fire in the mountain meadow high above us, singing their bedtime songs.

Two hours after dawn we were awakened by a disheveled Girl Scout in a tattered uniform. She was terrified over something and for a long time spoke only in gibberish. Isolde finally slapped her and made her snap out of it. "It's bad enough having them spy on us all the time," said Isolde, "but when they come here to have their hysterics it's just too much. As Alberecht says, it's terrible."

She shook the little girl. "Now tell us what the matter is, and be quick about it, or I'll give you a paddling, Frezia Freemound or no Frezia Freemound."

"It's the Brahman bull," sobbed the little Girl Scout. "The speckled Brahman. He's loose in our camp."

I think we all shuddered when we heard this intelligence. For the speckled Brahman was the most feared animal in all that part of southern Arizona.

He was a rogue bull, imbued with all the unpleasant characteristics of a rogue elephant. Rumor had it that he lived entirely off loco weed. He weighed two thousand pounds and had broken away from a rodeo six years previously, having, in his escape, gored or stamped to death four rodeo performers, one rodeo announcer, two clowns, a winter visitor and a cameraman. There was a price on his head. He appeared only once or twice a season, usually at picnics or social gatherings, and the depredations he wreaked during those appearances were fabulous.

He could over-end an automobile with one charge. He could stampede a group of riders with one snort. With a heave of his mighty hump he could crash down the wall of a

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house. People trembled at the mere thought of the speckled Brahman.

And now he was in the Girl Scout camp, and from what the little Scout told us, his carryings-on were really terrific. The Scouts and Scoutmistress Freemound had taken to the trees, and the speckled Brahman was systematically destroying the camp. Thousands of dollars in donors' money, as represented in camp property, now lay in scattered wreckage. Yes, it was terrible. It was as if the Minotaur had left his labyrinth, had declared war on the Minoans, and was now methodically razing their cities. Our little informer had escaped the beast by crawling on hands and knees past him in the guise of a giant green tomato worm and then racing down the mountain path to us to spread the alarm and beg us to come to the camp's assistance.

Albrecht Pimiento took out a cheroot and lighted it. Then, very ostentatiously, he poured himself a shot of rye.

I immediately sensed that the situation had changed and that Albrecht now knew he held the upper hand. I whispered as much to Isolde and kissed her in my newly awakened joy.

Albrecht stared at the Girl Scout. "Vy," he demanded in a kind and gentle voice, "does not your Fraulein Freemound summon der sheriffs und get der posse dere in dot helicopter in der matter of minutes? Vy does she send you, brafe liddle girl vot you are, to ask der help from us bums?"

"'Cause," sobbed the messenger, "the speckled Brahman knocked over the radio tower the first thing an' stomped the transmitter into teensy little bits. You fellas is the onliest ones left what she kin turn to. That's what she said."

"Hmmm," said Albrecht, "diss iss terrible. Out of der whole world, to us she got to beg—to der tramps vot she bawled out, scolded, und insulted. I betcha she iss not liking to do diss."

"She jest wants tuh git outa thet tree," sobbed the Scout. "You will help her, won't you, Albrecht?"

"Jah," said Albrecht. "I help her." And he patted the little girl on the head and gave her a cookie and a piece of candy. The poor little thing hadn't had her breakfast, and Happy fixed her some toast and a soft-boiled egg and a glass of chocolate milk.

Albrecht, meanwhile, decided that the situation called for the utmost speed on our part, and he ruled out walking up the winding mountain trail to the girl Scout camp. Instead, he ordered Happy to hook only one trailer to the

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Land-Rover, and into this trailer he loaded our medicine chest, tins of easily prepared food, blankets, bandages, brandy, and candy bars. Then he took up his Winchester African, wiped it with an oily rag, squinted a time or two through its telescopic sight, tried its trigger pull, blew through its barrel, and loaded it with three "solids." Alberecht, obviously, was going out for big game.

Preparations carried out with that thoroughness which Alberecht always demanded, we boarded the vehicles, Happy, Alberecht, Larith, and the Girl Scout in the Rover, Isolde and myself tucked comfortably among the blankets of the trailer. We crashed through the underbrush until we came to the well-paved road which led to the Scout camp, and began to climb.

True, our speed was something less than that attained by Jaguars, Mercedes-Benzes, Borgwards, and Ferraris at Le Mans, but there is something indomitable about a stout four-cylinder internal combustion engine revving spiritedly in super-low gear, and we barged our way up that steep mountain road like a homesick angel laboring toward the seventh heaven. The same hydrophobia skunk we had seen the day before ambled across our path, but Alberecht avoided hitting it by a dexterous twist of the Rover's steering wheel. The same jays jeered at us, and the stands of timber were much the same as those we had encountered on the footpath.

As a matter of fact, everything was so similar that it caused Happy to remark: "When you've seen one mountain road, you've seen 'em all." And to this we could only nod silent agreement.

When we reached the camp a heavy stillness hung in the air, the stillness of fear and suspense. The trees which bordered the camp were festooned with pathetic little green bundles; each bundle was a Girl Scout who had taken refuge in that particular tree. In one of the larger trees was a larger green bundle. This was Frezia Freemound.

The main mess hall was in ruins, and so was the shower stall. The flagpole had been knocked over, but this had taken place before the flag had been hoisted so Old Glory was not desecrated. The parade ground was scarred and rutted where the great bull had scraped and pawed the ground.

But where was the beast? Where was the speckled Brahman which had wreaked such devastation? A shuddering crash told us where he was. He was down along the avenue of barracks, tearing up the Scouts' sleeping quarters, one after the other. We drove there cautiously to have a better look.

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It was interesting to watch the way he did it. The barracks were forty-foot-long buildings capable of housing twenty Girl Scouts at one sleeping. They contained bunk beds, footlockers, washstands, toilets, and that was about all. The speckled Brahman would sniff around one of these barracks, tapping at the clapboard side with his horns until he found what he thought was a soft spot. Then he'd back up perhaps forty paces, snort furiously, paw the dirt, let out a bellow which echoed through the entire mountain range, lower his head and charge.

His momentum was terrific by the time he hit the barracks and, with a loud bang, he would smash right on through the whole thing, bursting out the far side with horns draped with chairs, blankets, night clothes, and washrags. These, he would scrape off on the nearest tree, and then go back to sniff and tap at the next barracks.

"He's better than any bulldozer," said Happy Ezekiel in open admiration.

"He must be suppressed," said Alberecht.

He laid his plans tersely. He absolutely refused to shoot the bull when it was standing still, pointing out that this would not be sporting. "Like der sidding ducks," he said scornfully. No, he would only shoot the bull when it was charging straight toward him; this way, the bull would have a chance. He proposed to park the Land-Rover in an unobtrusive spot, get out on foot, and confront the Brahman. This was excellent as far as the rest of us were concerned, and we applauded his plan.

The only trouble was that after he parked the Rover and got out of it, African in hand, the Brahman was busy elsewhere, wrecking barracks far down the line and bellowing in bovine ecstasy.

"Diss iss terrible," said Alberecht. "You-alls get oudt of dot automobile und go shase him op diss vay. Ve vaste too motch time."

We weren't a bit anxious to do anything of the sort. But Alberecht was determined that we should, and he showed his determination by waving the African in our faces and threatening to shoot us instead of the bull. Between the two, the speckled Brahman seemed less dangerous. Like shikaris, we slunk from the Rover and scurried through the underbrush to drive the bull toward Alberecht.

Isolde accompanied me on that desperate march through the gloom of the forest, and her heart beat with such excite-

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ment that I thought it would burst through the thin T-shirt she was wearing. But she was a true daughter of Diana, or Artemis, and, beating heart or no, we pursued our way.

It was Happy Ezekiel, long schooled in the ways of the cattle drover, who finally accomplished our mission. He snatched a dead limb from a handy tree, broke it off into club length, beat the speckled Brahman over the rump with it, and cried: "Git! Git! Git, you oversized freckled beefsteak, or I'll beat the hawns offen yer ugly face. Git!"

This was language and treatment the Brahman understood. The bull left off demolishing barracks and trotted out on the parade ground. At the far end of that grassy expanse it saw Alberecht Pimiento waiting. Alberecht waved a taunting hat. The speckled Brahman accepted the challenge.

Here, dear reader, for the sake of immediacy and accurately to describe Alberecht's moment of truth, I must employ short sentences and short words, with perhaps a gasp thrown in now and then. Alas, that there was no cheering, perspiring throng on hand to howl *olé*s at Alberecht and toss him the ear, the hoof, and the tail when that minute of blood on the greensward in the forenoon was over and done with. I call down upon you, reader, the spirit of silence whilst I weave my words.

The Man stands, a little carelessly, weapon in one hand, the other hand on his hip. He is a big fellow. He wears a Mennonite-like hat, a long black coat, stout outdoor boots. He is bearded like a prophet of old.

The Animal looks at the Man and paws the dirt. He is a large animal. He weighs a ton. His ancestors came from India where they developed tickproof hides and foolproof digestions. He is angry.

The Man makes a contemptuous gesture. The Animal coughs. The Animal, it seems, is more polite than the Man. The Man waves a red rag. The Animal, for it is a bull, is not liking the red rag. It is the worst thing the Man could have done. The Animal whets first one horn and then another in the gravelly soil. These horns are needle-sharp when the Animal is done. The Man nervously checks the sights on his rifle while the Animal whets.

Then the Animal stops honing and the Man stops checking. The moment of truth is at hand.

The Animal collects his feet under him, freezes for a long second, then lets drive at the Man with all that he has got.

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The Man raises his rifle. The Animal's weapons are his horns, his bulk, his splay feet, his locomotive-like charge. The Man's weapon is a superb American sporting rifle, designed for just one thing and that is for the killing of huge beasts like this Bull.

So . . . one shot is fired, and one beef is downed. Withal, it is more sporting than the abattoir, for at least the Animal has had a chance. Not much of one, but the best which can be arranged.

The little Girl Scouts, seeing that the danger was over, climbed down out of their trees and, strictly disciplined as they were, began methodically to tidy up their shattered camp. They had it back in apple-pie order in a surprisingly quick time.

The camp directress, Miss Frezia Freemound, on the other hand, could not climb down. In the excitement she had fainted, and was now sprawled among the branches of the tree in which she had taken refuge.

I climbed the tree and detached her slender, tanned arms and legs from the twigs which held her captive. I let her drop. Alberecht caught her in his big, gentle arms. She was as light as a feather and as warm to the touch as a frightened bird.

We revived her with a drop of brandy, and she was prettily grateful for what we had done for her and her Scouts. On the spot, she relaxed the ban she had placed upon our smoking; and she asked for another sip of brandy. She could be quite charming when she wanted to be, and in half an hour was exchanging intimacies with Isolde and Larith.

Remained the speckled Brahman lying on the parade ground. Happy Ezekiel solved that problem. He suggested a barbecue, and everyone enthusiastically agreed. Happy attached a tow rope to the carcass and, with the Land-Rover in low gear, towed it beneath a mighty tree. To a branch of the tree, Happy hooked a block and tackle borrowed from the Girl Scout tool shed. With block and tackle he raised the carcass and then he butchered it. Gleeful little Girl Scouts helped him dig a huge trench into which he piled branches and made a roaring fire. When the fire was in coals he wrapped the meat, now all in pieces, in burlap, having first daubed the pieces with his secret creosote bush barbecue sauce, and placed the pieces on the coals. All this he covered with fresh clay and then let it cook. It was done the next morning, and there were two helpings for everybody.

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CHAPTER 13

And now began a period of idyllic, pastoral joy. We were in the good graces of the Girl Scouts and their mistress and, in return for being allowed to smoke and drink in the forest and bathe in its pools, we cooperated all we could with the camp itself.

Isolde taught sewing to the little girls. Larith taught them folk dancing. Happy repaired the bull-battered barracks. Alberecht took the little green-clad chicks on his knee and told them droll stories about life in the Gran Chaco. I, myself, flask on hip, hunted and fished in that paradise of wild life.

Once indeed, Frezia Freemound herself consented to come along with me on a fishing expedition and, for the occasion, wore her short white shorts. She told me all about her unhappy childhood, how her father drank and played poker and how her mother had to become a real estate broker in order to make ends meet. But finally the mother was making such a good thing out of her real estate brokerage that she was able to chase the father away and make him stay away through the imposition of peace bonds and the threat of contempt of court actions. Frezia herself went to Wellesley and won scholastic honors. Too well-to-do by that time to bother with ordinary work, she took up Girl Scouting; and everybody said she had accomplished great things with the young ladies under her care who might otherwise easily have become child delinquents and, later on, wayward girls.

Idylls, summer idylls, are great things in the Paranaqui Mountains, but after three weeks the strain of this particular idyll began to tell on Alberecht's face. The strain was visible even under his beard. "Diss iss terrible," he confided to me once. "Vond't dose peoples effer leave? Ve didn't coom here shust to amuse der liddle girls. Ve got vork to do."

I regretted to tell him what I had to tell him: That when this group of campers had stayed their allotted time, another group would move in and, as sure as the sun sets and the moon rises, its directress would take over Frezia Freemound's office which, as has already been related, was built directly on top of where the Frémont Treasure was buried.

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But tell him I did, for he had to know. His gloom thickened still more. For one thing, he had a financial worry. Due to the length of our stay, we had been forced to send Happy back to Manacle in the Land-Rover three times to purchase more groceries. Happy was an indifferent shopper at best. He would usually lose the grocery list which Alberecht had given him, and would buy all sorts of stupid things instead. Once he fell in with some evil cronies and didn't return for two days. As a result, we were forced to eat nothing but the trout I could catch and the rabbits I could poach, both fine dishes in their way but monotonous after being served up three times a day at regular meals and as snacks at midnight.

Nor could Happy be called a careful shopper. He ran Alberecht's grocery bill up into amazing figures. When Alberecht finally saw the size of it he wept. Then he gave Happy a savage bawling out.

"But I never meant tuh spend so much, Alberecht; honest, I didn't," whimpered Happy by way of extenuation. Alberecht would have none of it. "Der beggar you make me!" he cried. "To der poorhouse you send me. Vot a fool you iss, Happy! Aind't you got no sense at all? Vy did you buy all dem ham hocks? You know der girls von't eat dem. Vy did you buy dot tripe? You tink all der time I shust make menudo? Crazy you iss, Happy. Crazy like der lunatics."

"I never meant tuh do it, Alberecht," said Happy pathetically and went off to hide his head.

Indeed, all our tempers were wearing thin. The girls had been without cosmetics for a fortnight due to Alberecht's refusal to let Happy buy them any, and their looks were as hag-gish as their tongues. In sheer boredom, Larith accompanied me on a rabbit hunt, but we fell into a pettish quarrel over nothing, and she threatened to rip the shirt off my back if I ever said such things to her again. I took my troubles to Is-olde and sought to gain solace from her. Instead I reaped a tongue-lashing and a slap in the face.

Yes, our tempers wore thin; and they reached the bursting point when trucks came for Frezia Freemound and her Scouts, loaded them up, and hauled them, singing, down out of the mountains. We rushed back to our camp after seeing them off, had a long, wild beer party, then seized picks and shovels and rushed back to the Girl Scouts' camp to have at that treasure trove.

Alas, we were too late. In our absence and during our beer party, a fresh truck convoy of Girl Scouts had driven up

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and unloaded; the camp directress was solidly installed in Frezia's old office; the Scouts were going about their scouting business, and all was serene and idyllic.

Alberecht and I held a council of war and then called on Frezia's successor. She was a merry miss of thirty-five, and a very good-looker, too, and was delighted to see us.

"Alberecht!" she cried as we entered her office. "Frezia told me all about you and what a wonderful fellow you are. Oh, what good times I expect to have at your camp when my little charges are put away safely for the night. Frezia told me about those sky-high martinis you mix. Oh, Alberecht, I can hardly wait!"

"How long," asked Alberecht, "will you be camped here?"

"Seven weeks," said the Scoutmistress.

"Diss iss terrible," said Alberecht.

About the only thing we could think of was to set the forest on fire and burn them out. Alberecht considered the plan for a long while, slept on it, but then vetoed it because he was against violence.

"Ve vait," he sighed defeatedly. "Ve vait for seffen more weeks. Ve vait it oudt along diss line if it takes all der dam summer."

We waited.

Isolde and Larith became sick and tired of living, as they expressed it, in sleeping bags and demanded something better in the way of accommodations. Glad of anything which would help break the awful monotony of our existence in those mountains, Alberecht and I ordered Happy to build them a sort of bower of logs and limbs and twigs and leaves. It slept two quite comfortably. Alberecht referred to it contemptuously as "der vitches' den," but you could tell he was pleased that the girls had a little retreat of all their very own that kept most of the rain out.

And, indeed, what with a frill here, a gaud there, a bright bow elsewhere, they managed to pretty the thing up until it was, in fact, quite charming. Many the happy afternoon I spent there, lying in a sort of hammock which Happy had constructed, sipping cool beer and listening to the girls chatter as they darned their tattered clothing or combed each other's hair. They were sweet things, both of them, and it was remarkable how well they stood up under the rigors of the primitive existence we were forced to lead.

Happy, who had no deep inner resources such as I had and became nervous unless he kept busy, cleared off a largish

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area of flat ground near where our camp proper was erected, and roofed it over with green branches. This, he announced, was a dance hall; he proposed that we invite the Scoutmistress down some evening. She could be the third partner, and we could have a dance. For music we would drive the Land-Rover close to the dance hall and tune its radio to some hep band.

The girls were very pleased with this plan, and the Scoutmistress was even more pleased. She got her charges to bed on the night of the dance with unusual dispatch and arrived at our camp so well ahead of time that she was able to pitch in and help Isolde and Larith with the canapés and hors d'oeuvres. Happy set up a bar at one end of the dance hall, and Alberecht pushed up the Land-Rover and set its radio to blaring.

I asked the Scoutmistress—her name was Pearl Manfretle—for the honor of the first dance; and Happy chose Larith and Alberecht selected Isolde. Pearl was as light as a feather in my arms and we outdanced the other couples by several lengths. After a spate of such go-rounds, I got her a mixed drink at the bar and led her out in the moonlight away from the crowded dance floor.

The music from the Land-Rover's radio seeped to us softly through the growth of the forest. Above our head a whip-poorwill sang. I sat Pearl down on a mossy log and told her I wished that I was Michelangelo that I might carve her statue then and there.

"Indeed," she laughed whimsically, "it would be a fitting thing for me to be carved in cold marble, for I am actually as cold emotionally as is that majestic stone. I have never been able to fall in love. Like Hamlet, according to Joyce, man delights me not nor woman either. I'm quite satisfied with myself, of course, but there are drawbacks to narcissism. That's what I have always despised about Frezia Freemound; she gets along with everybody. That's why she ranks me in the Girl Scout movement. She's a joiner, but I'm just a lone wolf. When I don't like people I tell them so to their faces. But not that sneaky Frezia. She fawns around hypocritically and just when you think she's acting her nicest, she cuts your throat. I suppose that's the way to get along in the world, but I could never do it. I wish I were a man. I'd join the Coast Guard. But I'm just an old maid, a silly old maid. And everybody knows it." Then she branched off in a long, dull tirade about what an unhappy time she had had as a child, being particularly angry about the attitude of her cousins toward

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her when she was in her formative years. "They could of been a little bit nicer to me," she concluded. "It wouldn't of cost them a penny, just a little effort."

Happy came looking for us then and announced that Alberecht had proposed that we do the Potenuse Indian war dance; the girls wouldn't know the steps, but we could teach them easily. This sounded like an excellent idea. I pulled Pearl to her feet and we hastened back after Happy.

Alberecht tuned the radio to some music which sounded vaguely like that which the Potenuses had made for their dance, and then we hopped to it.

How we stomped and how we howled! The ground shook; the trees trembled. At the height of our frenzy, Pearl said to me: "Gee, this is fun. I wish we didn't have to break camp tomorrow and leave."

"What?" I cried. "Are you leaving tomorrow?"

"Yes," she said. "We had a radiophone call this morning ordering us back so that the next troop can come up for its camp. It seems the schedule got fouled up, and we have to cut our camp-out short so that they can squeeze in another one. It sounds like Frezia Freemound's doing."

"Change your partners!" I yelled. And I flung Pearl into the arms of Isolde and danced away with Alberecht.

"Vot iss diss?" demanded Alberecht. "Vot iss diss crazy stoff you do now? Mit der mans I am not liking to dance. Let go of me. Get away."

"Listen, Alberecht, listen!" I beseeched him. "The Girl Scouts are breaking camp tomorrow. It's our chance at last, Alberecht. It's the chance we have been waiting for all summer. But we have to work fast, Alberecht. There'll be a new bunch of Scouts arriving just as soon as the present gang leaves."

"Diss iss terrible," agreed Alberecht. "Ve got to vork fast. Diss iss der chance ve haf been vaiting for all summer. Vun bunch of Scouts leafs und der udder bunch arrifes. Diss iss our chance."

I saw that he had caught on, so I released him and went off dancing with Isolde. Into her ear I whispered the gist of what I had told Alberecht, and she became fired with enthusiasm. "This is our chance," she said. "This is our big chance. We have to work fast."

"Yes, yes," I said. And, dancing close to Happy and Larith, I traded Isolde for Larith and into Larith's ears I poured the gist of what I had just told Isolde.

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"This is our chance," she cried excitedly. "This is what we have been waiting for all summer. We have to work fast."

"Yes, yes," I said. "Fast. We have to work fast. It is our big chance."

We stopped dancing about dawn, and Happy cooked bacon and eggs and coffee for that long-awaited, much-desired breakfast. Bacon and eggs, I have observed, taste good whenever served, but never so good as in the heart of a primeval forest at dawn after a night of war-dancing. We all looked a little weary, but we fell upon the bacon and eggs with a heartiness that belied our looks.

The coffee was good, too. Reader, have you ever smelled the aroma of scalding hot, black coffee wafting through the pine needles on a frosty mountain morning? If you have, you know what I mean. If you haven't, there has been a big gap in your life. The first time I smelled that smell—the very first time . . . but that is another story.

Pearl Manfretle left us as soon as breakfast was over, for she had to oversee the packing of her chicks, as she called her group of little girls. The trucks would come for them about eleven, she calculated.

"Ven does der udder bunch get here?" asked Alberecht.

"Oh, they can't possibly make it before three in the afternoon," said Pearl.

"Goot," said Alberecht. "Diss iss peautiful."

And then Pearl left us. I never saw her again. She was a nice girl, strong, slim, self-willed. But she had character. I wish her well.

"Now," said Happy briskly, rubbing his hands. "I guess we better start planning, hey, Alberecht?"

"No," said Alberecht. "Ve got lots uff time. First ve take der nap. Den ve plan. Put heads down, efferybody."

This was such a good idea that none of us could resist. Have you ever napped, dear reader, in the heart of a mountain forest after a long night of war-dancing? If you have, you know what I mean. If not, then no feeble words of mine can convey the repose of it to you. I pillowed my head on Isolde's soft shoulder and went sound asleep in a jiffy.

We awoke refreshed and invigorated and sat down to a good bowl of soup Happy speedily prepared. He made croustons, too, and tea. Alberecht, between spoons of soup, unfolded to us his plan.

The Girl Scouts, he said, found their way to their camp by following signs posted along the road. What he proposed to

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do was to take down those signs and post them upon a different road—one that led away from the camp. Thus, while the Girl Scout trucks were lumbering vainly around on the wrong road, we would have ample time for our—here he coughed—excavating. "I," he said, "I, Alberecht Pimiento, vill turn der first shpadeful of dirt."

We said nothing. What could we say? The plan was so masterful, so simple, so foolproof, that only the veriest zany would have had the temerity to attempt to pick flaws in it. I leaped to my feet and grasped Alberecht's hand and shook it warmly. Happy did likewise. The girls were even more demonstrative. They kissed Alberecht and snuggled against him and stroked his beard. It was a beautiful sight.

But we wasted not too much time with these social amenities. We betook ourselves to the Land-Rover and its tandem trailers and threw everything they contained out on the ground. Then we loaded the trailers back up again with picks and shovels and several bottles of grog, and, singing in unison, we drove off to the spot where the first GIRL SCOUT SUMMER CAMP directional sign was posted.

It was at the cross of two roads. We changed it so that it pointed down the wrong one. Then, to make doubly sure that the truckers bringing in the new load of Girl Scouts would follow the erroneous direction, we felled a large tree across the right road and, on the fallen trunk, posted a large sign saying: ROAD CLOSED. THIS IS *NOT* THE ROAD TO THE GIRL SCOUT SUMMER CAMP. TAKE THE *OTHER* ROAD AS DIRECTED.

We did this with every sign we encountered. There were four of them. When we had done with our devious work, the world's greatest pathfinder could not have discovered that Girl Scout camp.

We had a hard time finding it ourselves, for there are lots of roads in that part of the Paranaquis; but we finally made it when Alberecht pointed didactically in one direction and said: "Dot camp has got to be dere," and then driving off in the opposite direction.

Still as death lay that abandoned collection of playing grounds and barracks and mess hall and flagpole. A crow cawed unhappily from a tree. A lizard sprinted across the badminton court. A spider spun its web in the office which first had housed Frezia Freemound and then had housed Pearl Manfretle. I never saw so desolate a spot in all my life.

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It reminded me of a deserted theatre, its stage mute, its hangings forlorn.

Over the four of us there crept a feeling of something which I cannot describe. The long search was ended. Here we were and there *IT* was. It had been a long road we had taken, a road beset by pitfalls and cul-de-sacs, and bypaths and mantraps. But we had fought through them all. And now the denouement seemed almost anticlimactic. We were a little tired and a little depressed when Happy tossed a lasso over the camp office and dragged it away with a lunge of the Land-Rover.

Bare, mildewed ground was exposed by this operation. We took pickaxes and shovels and began to dig.

We didn't have to dig very far.

POSTSCRIPT

The Frémont Treasure consisted of gold coins, gold dust, and gold nuggets. The Land-Rover and its two trailers became swaybacked in ferrying all that gold from its cache in the Paranaquis to the vaults of Manacle.

As we transferred his treasure the descendants of old Adam Frémont descended on the town. Like vultures they sought to dispute possession of the hoard. Tax collectors gathered, too, and Treasury officials, and queer, furtive men who had strange identification cards in their billfolds. Alberecht held them all off with his Winchester African.

But finally somebody served a court order on us, and we felt that we were trapped.

It was then that Alberecht played his trump card. He produced the map we had purchased in Nogales. On the one side of it were the markings to show where the treasure had been buried. But on the other side was Adam Frémont's will, written in Greek. The will said the oldest surviving direct descendant of Adam's was to divide the treasure equally among the other lineal descendants. The collateral descendants were to get nothing.

Alberecht offered the will for probate and asked the court to declare him the oldest lineal descendant. The collateral

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crowd—and there were hundreds of them—put up a howl and hired lawyers right and left.

The lawsuits which followed took seven years to settle, but in the end Alberecht won . . . just as Alberecht always won.

After taxes and court fees and legal fees, the Frémont Treasure amounted to \$28,000,000. In a somber courtroom on a hot day in September, seven years and eight months after we had bought the map, we twenty-eight lineal descendants gathered; and each in his own hands received one million dollars in gold.

Now, as I write this—years later, sitting at ease in the expensive patio of my expensive home in Manacle—I know not exactly what has happened to the others who have appeared in this chronicle. But as for Alberecht Pimiento and Happy Ezekiel and myself, we married worthy wives and have lived happily ever since.