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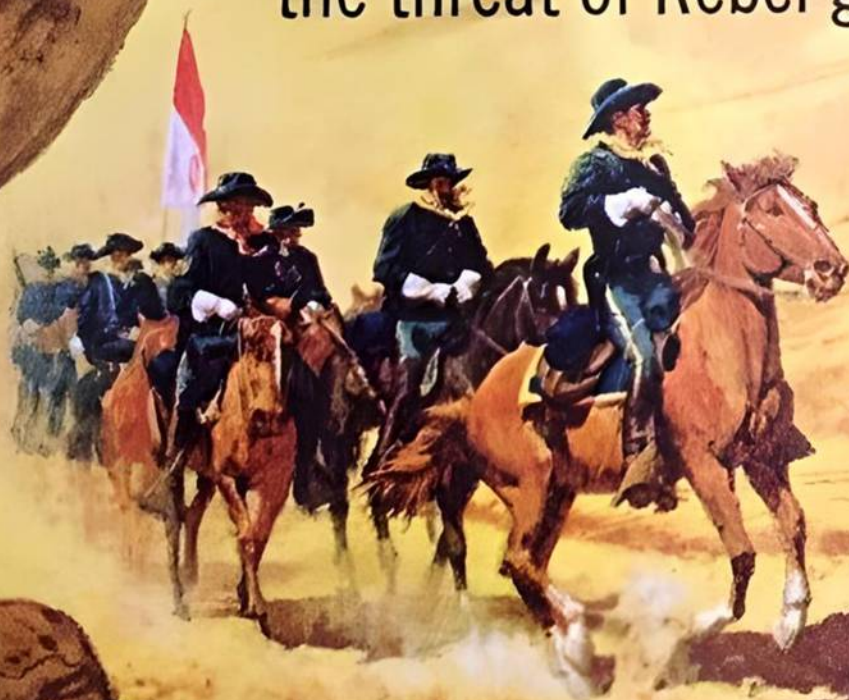


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VALLEY OF WRATH

A land turned to ruin by
the vengeance of Apaches
—a people torn asunder by
the threat of Rebel guns...



JOHN PRESCOTT

"God!" Mannion said in a gust as they drew their horses up. "Look at that! The sons of bitches!"

"I see it," Wales said, and he felt suddenly chilled in the airless, pressing heat. He never quite got used to the refinements of Apache torture.

He saw the whole thing as they came up to it—the twisted iron, the blackened timbers of the burned wagon, the smouldering mass of ruined flour. He looked a little at a time at the man who had been up-ended and espaliered on a wheel, but there was no avoiding him. Everything about the man was charred, smelling sick with death by fire. Wales could feel his stomach churn, but he looked deliberately at the black blood basted over the crusted nakedness, and the split skull emptied into the dying fire beneath.

Wales looked and said nothing, for there was nothing anyone could say that would be adequate.

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VALLEY OF WRATH

An Original Gold Medal Novel

by

John Prescott

GOLD MEDAL BOOKS

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WHEN LIEUTENANT WALES had gone to bed the night before, there had been a wind across the desert. All spring the wind had blown. For three months the days had been filled with the sound of rustling air and the grit of sifting sand. The sound of the tiresome wind was the last he heard at night and the first he was aware of in the morning. It had sawed away so long that he'd come to think of it as a permanent condition of the climate that blurred his memory of stillness.

It had caused him to so forget the sound of silence that on awakening that morning he could not immediately think why Reveille broke so clear across the drill ground. Surprised, he lay on his cot for a moment, trying to place it, hearing the silver notes bell away, not seeming to die at all, but simply thinning away beyond his hearing range.

Their enduring quality marked a difference in the morning, and he swung out of his cot. He walked across the earthen floor of the adobe room and looked out of the doorway. Through it from the mud and wattle buildings came the shouts of the rising men, the squeal and stamp of horses in the stables, and everything else you heard around Fort Breckinridge as day began. But the sounds were clear again, as he had heard them during the winter, before they had been blunted by the endless wind. In the night the wind had ceased, passing in the sudden way peculiar to the season's end, and he was now made aware of it.

Overhead, the sky was pale, and greying to an opaque softness toward the western mountains which were dull and dormant with the last of night. The day was still too young to give any sense of depth or contour to their naked flanks. In the early light, the only color lay above the Galiuros, where the dawn was swelling up hot and orange. The air was very still, but the stillness went beyond its freedom from the wind, and he recognized the latent threat of humid summer heat. As yet no clouds were

rising in the south, but he had experienced the sensing of their imminence many times before in his life and that feeling was unforgettable. The wind could drive you mad, but summer brought its own forms of madness.

He came back to his cot and took his trousers off the nail. They were old and worn, and the yellow stripe was nearly white against the threadbare blue. Leaning back to pull them on, he pushed each foot as it emerged against the cot across from him where Charlie Price, the lieutenant who bunked with him, lay, still sleeping soundly. His bland, untroubled face showed no awareness of the bugle, and in sleep it was as free of years and cares as that of a child.

After another push, Wales reached up to the shelf for his socks; Price blinked his eyes a couple of times and opened them.

"Let's go, Charlie," Wales said. "Come on, let's go."

Price rolled over slowly, got an elbow under him and sat up. He yawned, scratched his ribs, and stretched his arms up over his head.

"When're we pulling out, Fred?"

"The sooner the better," Wales said. "It's getting hot."

Wales was pulling on his boots which, like his trousers, were old and worn, and scarred by alkali and sand. The routine of the day began unrolling in his mind. He was thinking of the men who would be going with him down to Tucson.

"Did you check the names off the guard list, Charlie?" he said to Price.

Price yawned again, and made smacking noises in his mouth.

"The guard list? I don't think I did. Where's the roster?"

"Sergeant Mannion's got it," Wales said. "We'll take him, Corporal Fox, Haynes, Soames, Beyers and Gleason. Maybe Wilcox, too."

"All right, Fred. I'll check them. What about the tracker?"

"Lopez? No, I don't think so. They'll want him here, if something happens. We're not trailing anything today."

"I don't know, Fred. The Finals were on that trail last week. I like to know when they're around."

"So do I, but John might need him here. He'll have few enough as it is."

Wales stood up, crossed the room and held the pitcher of water over the bowl. Running the wet cloth over his face and neck, he felt the coolness, and was aware of thinking that the time for being grateful for such favors had about arrived again. More than once in deep winter, they had bitched about the skim of ice inside that pitcher, but soon they would be bitching in another tone.

When he had dried himself, he got the calico shirt from the nail behind the door. Nobody wore tunics when the heat was starting. He looked around at Price, who was lying down again, as if arising was not a thing to be done all at once. Price had a way of facing things with an air of grace and negligence which Wales sometimes admired, and which other times irritated him.

"Y'know, I just remembered something, Fred," Price said. "We'll be seeing Allis, won't we?"

"Bass wants us to," Wales answered.

"Well, he's got a girl. Did you know that?" Price moved his hands gracefully in the air. "Very nice."

"Come on, Charlie, fix that guard list, will you?" and he knew it was one of the times he was irritated, but he tried not to show it.

"All right, sure," and Price made an heroic effort and sat up again. He sat up all the way and put his feet squarely on the floor. "What about rations?"

"Swett's got four days' ready for us. But we'll be lugging them ourselves; I'm not taking any pack animals down there."

"Only four?" Price was getting on his trousers now. They were as old as Wales's, but you could tell their tailoring was elegant. "That's only down and back. We'll be there a day."

"I know; we'll live off the contractor while we're there."

"Tyson's going to like that," Price said drily.

"That's too bad," Wales said, but with only half his mind on it, for he was getting his gear down now, piling the clothing he would take upon his blanket to be wrapped; then his hardware onto the blanket when he had folded it. He would pick it all up after mess, but he liked to have things ready in advance.

"That's too bad," he said again when he was finished. "He gets paid for it."

He went out of the room while Price was blowing and puffing over his boots. He still felt irked at letting his back get up at Price, but it had less to do with Price than with the threat of heat which he could feel around him like a garment, though the sun was hardly up. He remarked to himself again about the change, marveling that the year before had slipped his mind.

But if they weren't withdrawn before it came in force, he knew he would remember summer soon enough.

Like all of the other buildings at Fort Breckinridge, the mess hall had been built of mud and wattle. Inside were two long tables with benches on either side of them. Sitting down, he drank a mug of coffee while he waited for the cook to fix him a plate. There was a smell and sizzle of frying grease, and over his head he could see the vermin crawling in the ceiling of saguaro ribs.

He had finished his bacon and biscuits, and was having more coffee when the captain came in, a compact, dark-haired man whose easy movements made you know he felt at home in his business. There was a deliberate sureness about him—an alert mobility to his glance—that a man who knew what he was about would have.

He walked through the room, nodding to some of the others who were eating, and smiling when he spotted Wales. He stopped for coffee, then came to the table, and sat down.

"Hello, Fred, about set?" he said, and then went on, as he sometimes did, without an answer. "I don't think you'll need beyond a day or two down there."

"Hello, John—no, that should be enough. I think we'll bivouac at Tyson's, and settle with him first. I'll see Allis later on."

"That sounds good enough. It's smart to camp at the mill. A lot of Secessionists in Tucson now. You don't want any incidents."

"That's what I was thinking of," Wales said.

"And Tyson's got to understand about this escort business. We can't keep on sending him vouchers for stores we never get."

"I'll tell him he's got to furnish it," Wales said. "Hell,

he can afford to loosen up a little. It was all his way until the Indians got bad."

"That's right; make him understand that, Fred." Bass drew on a small cigar which he was lighting. "With replacements ended, we simply haven't got the men to spare."

Wales did not speak when Bass paused again because he knew that Bass was going on. A line moved over his forehead, and by its depth Wales had learned to guess the measure of his concentration or his worry—if Bass could be said to worry. Whether he did or not, Wales was aware of feeling glad it was not he who had to wonder and decide, now that things were going as they were.

In a moment Bass said, "You've never met Allis, have you, Fred?"

"No—and what's he doing in Tucson? I thought the Territorial Commission was over at Mesilla Valley."

"It is. He just came over to wind things up on this end. The best of the lot, too, thank God. I met him last month, along with his family. Ask him about the Secessionists down there; he may know a thing or two."

"All right, I'll find out," Wales said—and as the Secessionist thought enlarged—"D'you think they'll try taking Tucson over?"

Bass shrugged and blew out a cloud of smoke. "When we evacuate, perhaps; not before. Unless a Rebel column comes out of Texas. That could happen."

"There's always a Rebel column coming out from Texas." Wales gave half a laugh. It was an old joke, or something they would like to be a joke, but wasn't quite any more.

"It's going to get here some day, I suppose," Bass said. He slowly stirred his coffee with the spoon, as his thoughts turned back, "This damned war. Hell, I can't get used to it. Indians—yes—but not this thing between the States."

"No, I can't either," Wales said, trying to visualize it, trying to grasp the sense of it, but failing—although the signs had been there long enough. "We're too far away from it."

"Yes, that's it," Bass said. "Distance means a hell of a lot." He gave his head a wag and smiled. "Did you know I used to be at Sumter? My first post out of the Point."

"Did you?" Wales said, surprised at how much he still didn't know about Bass.

"Yes, I was there, all right." Bass drained his cup. Finished now, they both stood up to leave. "Too damp for me, though, Sumter was. I think Sumter sold me on the Cavalry."

Wales went back to his quarters for his gear. Coming out again, he saw the troopers arriving from the stables with their mounts, gathering on the drill ground before the H. Q. hut. He saw that the mounts were held up close to the jaws against their early morning spryness, and thought it was a time of the day he always liked, before the heat and trail had worn the horses down. It was good to see them full of ginger, and he laughed aloud at Sergeant Mannion as he struggled with his own and Wales's horse, which he led along together.

Coming up to the flagpole, Wales met up with the Surgeon and the Quartermaster. The Surgeon was the taller, and thinner, and his eyes seemed older than his face. Simpson was less military, too, while Swett, the Quartermaster, was always serious and proper so that you felt he meant to show his worth before the riding men. He was dark and stocky, with an air of neatness that went with his accounts and ledgers.

"I think you'd better leave Wilcox here," the Surgeon said to Wales.

Wales dropped his gear on the ground. "I thought he was all right now," he said. Wilcox had been injured in a foray.

"A little higher, he'd have been unmanned," Simpson said, smiling, so that Wales remembered it was not so long ago that Simpson hardly smiled at all. "Cut him out of it, will you, Fred? It's a hell of a ride down there."

"All right, Phil." Wales nodded. "He can stay." Then he looked at Swett, who waited, ticking through his papers. "Have you got something for us, George?"

"Will you ask Tyson where our manta is? The Pimas are going to cut our wheat if we don't get that cloth over to them soon."

"I'll find out about it, George. Anything else?"

"No, I think that's it." Swett checked his papers to be sure. Swett was always making sure. "We're due for a

load of flour, it's late by a couple of days. Poke him up on it, if you want to."

Wales nodded, standing aside with the others as Mannion brought the horses up. The animals were lively, still, and their nostrils flared when they tossed their heads against the bits.

Wales reached for his reins and ran his other hand along the neck of the dark, red horse to steady it as he began to check the shoes.

"Mornin', Mannion; thanks. How're you?"

"Christ, I'm ready," Mannion said in a laugh that flared his red mustachio back from his yellow teeth. Mannion looked as eager as he always looked when they were heading for Tucson.

"Don't count on anything," Wales said. "We haven't been down that way for a while. Things are different now."

"I know," Mannion said, and laughed again. "I take her as she comes."

Content with the shoes, Wales threw up his gear behind the saddle and tied it down. He buckled his belt around him, snapped the saber into place, and hefted his revolver. Then he swung up into the saddle and slipped his boots into the stirrups. Everyone else was mounted now, and waiting, and he looked around at them and raised his arm over his head.

"Are we ready? Let's go," he said, and let it fall. He slapped the horse on the neck, and with the metal and leather sounding in clanks and creaks, he led them over the drill ground. Looking down to the side, he saw their shadows moving beneath them on the ground reaching far out. The sun now stood above the Galiuros, and lay bold and hard upon the Tortolitas to the west of the river.

They went over the dry San Pedro River into the pallid glare of the broken land rising to the stony hills beyond. The animals walked in the dust and sand of the faint road reaching on. Wales looked at the yellow flowers on the prickly-pear, the greyness of the sage waiting to flower lavender with rain, and at the fringe of fire rippling on the ocotillo branches. As he watched, a lizard ran erratically across the line of march, its tail upheld, its head

stretched long in front, too scared to look. From up in a saguaro somewhere, a woodpecker's boring could be heard. A shrike sat in a mesquite tree, and as they passed he saw the deer mouse it had impaled upon a twig beside it. Sometimes the shrike would tear off shreds of bloody fur, but it was watchful of the riders as they passed by.

There was no air moving in these hills, and Wales began to feel the sun burning his neck. He pulled his bandanna higher and squinted through the harsh light reflecting from the everlasting, pastel-colored rock and sand. They said that spring was the best of all the seasons in the desert, but after a year in which to judge he felt a more honest term would be the least offensive, for the best that could be said of spring was that the monotony of color was somewhat relieved.

Elsewise, his comparative and descending scale was governed by the seasonal extremes. He was thoroughly fed up with it, but he had settled on enduring patience and a hope in their eventual withdrawal. There was little sense in raging at it, as did some, since there was nothing you could do about it anyway.

Except to men like Lopez whose whole lives had been lived in this environment, the desert was withdrawn and alien, and as with anything that can't be altogether known, it kept you on your guard. To be sure, there was that brief, elusive time at dawn and dusk—particularly dusk—when it seemed less austere, and even attained a rather grand and mystic beauty; but that was fleeting and deceptive. And you were more impressed with the grim and changeless facts of heat and dust, of distances that made you feel of no account, and of scaly reptiles slithering in the shadows. It seemed to have seen everything, or known of everything, and there was something sad about it, too, something of the sea. He often felt that he could be absorbed by it, and disappear without a trace left.

Perhaps, he sometimes felt, if he had come here of his own volition, he might have reached some ground of understanding. But at least he understood his limitations. And knowing the potential of the desert, he simply hoped they would get out of it in time—before that Rebel column, say, came from Texas, or the Apache raids got too bad. K Troop was all that now remained here of the First

Dragoons, and they were simply marking time until recalled. They were simply hanging on; and, if good for anything at all, the desert encouraged self-discipline while you hung.

They were into the hills across the river when they saw the smoke rising faintly in the sky. Wales began to see it some distance to the south, far away beyond a ridge grown up in greasewood. It rose black, diffusing into grey as the thermals moved it off.

He stood up in his stirrups and raised his arm to bring the column down. As they halted, Price and Mannion kept on coming up the line and stopped beside him. Their pants were soaked with lather from their horses, and the overlaying dust had grown muddy.

"Do you see it?" Price said. "There it is. Over there."

"Yes, I see it, all right," Wales said. "About a mile, I'd say. Due south, almost."

"What d'you make of it?" Mannion said. "Indian smoke?"

"Too low for signals," Price said. "They'd have it on a rise. It's got no pattern, anyway."

Wales nodded slowly and kept on looking at the smoke. "Indians could have made it, though," he said; he wasn't thinking of signal fires.

All of them sat quietly in the heat and silence, looking south. The mounts were swishing their tails against the random flies which always followed them. Nobody said very much because the thoughts of each were shared by all. The sight of smoke gave rise to many possibilities, most of them bad.

After a moment Mannion said, "No ranches down there I know of." He was tugging at his mustachio while he spoke, as though to crank the words out.

"None that haven't been hit, at any rate," Price said.

Wales kept quiet while he watched the smoke lift softly up and away. In order to check his bearings, he was watching to see how it related to the mountains, and to the river in the early ground haze, further east. Then he studied the shadows underneath the animals, to make certain.

"It could be along the road," he said at last.

"Yes, that's right," Price said. "It's full of turns."

"Well, we'd better go down and see," Wales said, and he was conscious now of having done again what he had done so many times before that it was automatic: appraising, evaluating and reaching a decision, and he looked around at the waiting men.

"Be best above the road, though." He pointed at a ridge, nearby. "That looks all right up there. Make it single file. Charlie, you'd better cover the rear."

Price nodded and tugged at his hat. "All right, Fred."

"Keep on the end, but not too far," Wales said as they moved onto the outwash slope. Price did not like being reminded of such things, but he seldom thought of them himself.

"All right, Fred," he said. "All right."

All in a line, they went up the long ridge rising roughly south, and topping out, Wales could see the slopes fall into swales on either side, and approved of it as a vantage point; they could see the country at this height, and avoid surprise.

Going along the narrow crest, he was silent and watched the smoke. Sometimes he could see the road—here and there and gone again. In the quiet he could hear the falling hooves as clear sounds, one distinct from the other. He heard the wheeze of leather, too, the jingling harness, and he knew that he was listening for those sounds the way he always did when they were getting into something. It had come to be a habit at such times, that he would see the country, and be thinking of it, too, but his mind would be divided. A part of it was always on the men he had with him.

But he knew them well enough to have confidence in their behavior. And in these recent weeks, with hostilities in the East improving their prospects for withdrawal, moments such as this found him less concerned with them than with some miscalculation of his own, or with the possibility of some unforeseen disaster. In a certain way the removal of the garrisons from the west had seemed to make their lingering presence in it meaningless. It would be a futile and tragic thing should he involve them in some accidental blunder.

Still, he thought about their capabilities. In the long run they were all dependable. Take Fox, that rangy blond

boy from the Appalachian Mountains—always quiet and reserved, never saying much, but so sharp-eyed that very little got past him. He was more observant than the other men, particularly Soames, who seemed blind at times. Soames, however, had that sawed-off powerful physique that made him hell when they were going in with sabers. As if by opposite attraction, he was a friend of Wilcox, who had stayed behind. Wilcox was the youngest, and the shyest, too, and with his wide, blue eyes looked more like a schoolboy than a soldier. He was a fine marksman—though not so good as Haynes, who could be deadlier than any on the post with a carbine.

But they were all reliable men; they were the oldest from a point of service, and he liked to have them with him. Being steady under pressure, he rarely felt unsure of them—though there were times he wished that Price would be less careless and more like Mannion who was steadiest of all.

When the ridge sloped into the rising land, there was another ridge, and still another beyond that. They ran gently into each other, the next beginning where the one ended. When they descended from the third, only a low rise lay between them and the smoke, and coming out on this above the road, they saw the wagon below, crumbled in the smoke and stench and burned ruin of ambush.

"God!" Mannion said in a gust as they drew up. "Look at that! The sons of bitches!"

"I see it," Wales said, and he felt suddenly chilled in the airless, pressing heat. Along his cheeks and arms, the skin became clammy. He never quite got used to the refinements of Apache torture. "I see it, all right," he said.

Coming down the rise, the men moved on his signal from the file to a column front; he saw the whole thing as they came up to it—the twisted iron, the blackened timbers of the burned wagon, the smouldering mass of ruined flour. He looked a little at a time at the man who had been upended and espaliered on a wheel, but there was no avoiding him. Everything about the man was charred and smelling sick with death by fire. Wales could feel his stomach churn, but he looked deliberately at the black blood basted over the crusted nakedness, and at the split skull emptied into the dying fire beneath.

"Holy Mary! How they fix them!" Mannion's eyes were round, and his mouth was a hole within the long mustachio.

Wales could think of nothing to say that would be adequate. He felt a hot rage growing in him that displaced the initial chill of horror. He looked hard at the man, seeing the bones and tendons through the peeling flesh and syrupy ooze of matter. He looked squarely at the violated body, trying to view it without any passion, as he'd always tried to view his Indian fighting. But it did not work that way now. This was so brutal and barbaric, and unnecessary, that no purely professional attitude could cope with it. Whatever compassion he felt for the Apache in the face of Anglo invasion washed away before revulsion, and left him only fury. It was a time when all compunctions died and he would like to kill them down to the last unborn child.

Wales looked up when Price came from the end of the line; he was aware of his contrived expression of unconcern. Price rarely let himself become involved in anything and sometimes Wales found his studied dispassion thoroughly offensive.

"What a barbecue!" Price said while his horse shied and blew at the sickly odors. "And the smell—God!"

"Buzzards comin'," Mannion said. They all looked at the sky, now hard and blue, and saw the carrion birds sailing black against it on quiet wings, waiting.

"Yes—well, we'd better get on with it," Wales said. "Get a detail on it, will you, Mannion? And, Charlie, put some pickets out. They're likely gone, but you can never tell."

Then he straightened his back and shoulders in a deliberate effort to push this away from him. "I'm going to make a sweep around this place. I'll take Fox."

And, good Lord! what they had done, he thought when Fox had joined him in a widening circle around the wagon. Things like this were more than simple primitive vengeance. To sate their lust on the driver's shrieks, the odor of his roasting brains, went way beyond that. It came nearer some ritual of a dark religion that fed on blood sacrifice and human butchery. He felt brassy nausea rising again to think of it, and he remembered that the incidence

of such atrocities was increasing now, with the withdrawal of the troops. It was related to the growing boldness of marauders who believed themselves to be responsible for the departure of the garrisons, and thereby felt encouraged to enlarge their depredations. If their hatred made them hard to fight before, the steady dwindling of the troops would soon increase the difficulty to a point of real danger. He had the queer and sudden feeling that they were getting into a race with time. And it occurred to him that, even for themselves, it might become a matter of simple survival.

TUCSON WAS ANOTHER forty miles beyond the point where Wales sent Haynes and Mannion back to Breckinridge to report the ambush. The way lay over the desert and through the barren, crumpled hills, past the shimmering walls of the Canada del Oro, and around the northern flanks of the Catalinas where the reaching pine stood blue and airy on the massive peaks. There was open country after that, with the Rillito cutting through the rolling plain, and beyond it cholla thickets and saguaro forests in the foothills. Here the trail came into the valley where the city lay, with the country expanding toward the mountains in the south.

They were riding in the purple twilight of the second day when they began to see the earthen mass of flattened roofs and right angles sprawled along the mesa on the Santa Cruz. Wales could see the old presidio and the full green heads of cottonwood trees along the water, but there seemed no real height to any of it. The sameness of adobe made the individual buildings hard to separate from one another, and from the earth, from which they appeared to grow. From a distance you would think the town more compact, and smaller, than it really was.

When they were nearer, the road went into the twisting, unpaved streets, which billowed up high clouds of dust from the heavy traffic of frowzy burros, and of oxen pulling loaded carretas with high, squealing wheels. There were crowds of small brown Mexican men and women with shapeless bundles of possessions, in the midst of children and domestic animals. There seemed to be an atmosphere of something big and sad going on, for all the movement was depressed and listless, and there were only occasional greetings for the passing riders.

Wales rode directly to the heavy adobe building over the river from the gate of the old presidio. The mill, with timber vigas coming through the tops of the walls as roof supports, stood in an earthen compound into which a

canal came from the Santa Cruz to turn the wheel. Within the compound were a number of large blue wagons, a file of Army tents, and scattered stands of long rifles belonging to the Infantry. There were six or seven open fires where men were cooking the evening mess. He felt surprised to see these Fort Buchanan men, and associated them with the activity in town.

A tall lieutenant with blond hair and a small mustache came out of a tent as they began to dismount. He wore the black stripe of the Infantry on his trousers, and he smiled broadly as he came forward to greet them. "Well, Wales—hello. What're you doing down here?"

He held out his hand to Wales, who shook it heartily. "Hello, Anderson. Do you know Charlie Price?"

"Sure. Good to see you, Price."

"Thanks," Price said. "How've you been, anyway?"

Anderson shook hands with Price, and nodded to the men as they stood down. When a heavy-set lieutenant with dark features came up, Anderson introduced him as William Jarret. "What's going on?" Anderson asked when that was over.

"Not much," Wales said. "We're down to see Tyson and Allis."

"Tyson's buying Papago cattle out at San Xavier today," Lieutenant Jarret said. "Be back tomorrow, if you can wait."

"I guess we'll have to," Wales said. "But we'd counted on him for rations; can you spare us some?"

Anderson counted the men. "For six? Sure. D'you want to use the mill for quarters? Or, you can double in the tents with us, if you like."

"Thanks, we'll just roll up here on the ground," Wales said. "We're used to it."

"Suit yourselves on that," the blond lieutenant said. "We'll mess in a while; I'll bet you boys would like to wash."

"We sure would," Wales said, very much aware, now that he was standing, of the salty filth of sweat and dust. They'd gone for two days without shaves or baths, and they were covered with it.

"As soon as we dump this gear," he added.

A sergeant showed them where the horses could be

picketed. Wales stripped the tack, wiped his mount with straw and watered it; then carried the tack around to Anderson's tent. Anderson had stepped away, but Jarret gave him a tin bowl and showed him the way to the mill race. When he'd bathed, he filled the bowl and brought it back with him. After shaving, he gave the bowl to Price, and put on his clothes.

Anderson was back then, pouring whiskey from a bottle into a number of tin cups. "Cut the dust for you," he said when they were filled and passed. "Here you go."

"Regards," they all said, and raised their cups.

After drinking, Wales set down his cup to button his shirt. He could see the land becoming softly dark all around, save in the deep west where the desert peaks stood black against the dying crimson sky. In the town, he saw the pale light glow from windows and doorways, and as the massed shapes that moved against them were defined, he was disturbed again about the atmosphere when they had arrived.

"What're all the people doing here?" he asked Anderson. "Have you got something to do with them?"

"We brought them up here," Anderson said. "We're evacuating the Santa Cruz. The Chiricahuas are going crazy from here on south to the border."

"What will they do here?" Wales asked, remembering the listlessness again, and the air of not having anywhere to go.

"Not much," Jarret said. "This is just the beginning. A lot of them will stay. Some will try to get to Magdalena. The rest will go out to the Rio Grande with us."

"When are you leaving?" Wales said. He was surprised, not that they should go, but that the departure sounded imminent. Their own withdrawal was always in some nameless future time. "We never hear anything at Breckinridge."

"We don't either," Anderson said. "I don't know when we'll leave. We're just doing this for now, that's all. It'll take a while to get them all off the Santa Cruz. There must be fifty ranches down that way. And the mines. And Tubac."

"And timber camps in the mountains," Jarret said. "We came through one a couple of days ago. Good Lord, what

they did up there. There was nothing left. Nothing at all."

Jarret waved his arm like a scythe, and Wales wondered if any men had been espaliered in the mountains. "This sounds pretty big," he said.

"You're damned right it is," Anderson said as though Wales had sounded some deep feeling in him. "And we can't do anything about it, either. Tucson's going to be an island when we clear out."

"We couldn't do much anyway," Jarret said. "We're down to a company now. I don't know how many Chiricahuas there are. But they're everywhere."

"They're going to take this country one of these days," Anderson said.

"For all of me, they're welcome to it," Price said, and laughed. "What would a white man want with it?"

"Well, they're going to take it, all right," Jarret said. "They don't know about the war back east. It just makes them worse to think we're on the run because of them."

"It's a big mistake pulling everything out," Anderson said. "They don't know beans about it in Washington; nor at Mesilla Valley, either. They're not trying to hold this country. They're quitting on it."

"You ought to hear the people," Jarret said. "Even the Secessionists aren't so sure they want us out any more."

"They thought they were going to get their hands on something big," Anderson said. "They're just going to get them full of trouble."

"You boys make me even gladder we're leaving," Price was pulling on his shirt, and smiling as he sometimes did.

Anderson poured another drink and kept his eyes away from Price at first; he looked at the whiskey in his cup. "I suppose I should be, too," he said. "But we took it over, didn't we? We're bound to protect it, aren't we? And the people in it? We won't keep it otherwise, and we won't deserve to, either."

Wales was rather glad to see the corporal with the long meat fork who came to say that mess was ready. Sitting with his kit on a mesquite log, he was thinking it was still too early in this development down here to have much feeling for it, and he was reluctant to involve himself in arguments he did not entirely understand. Perhaps if he were around here more, like these Fort Buchanan men, it

would be different, but he had only felt he would be glad to leave. In a way he was surprised that Anderson should feel so strongly; but while he could not tell if Anderson was right, he had been exposed to it enough to give it some thought.

Everything was different at Breckinridge. There was just beginning to be this sense of crisis up there; the fact had not come really alive for him until today. It had taken the ambush of the flour wagon and the presence of all these people here to do it. The impending crisis was due primarily to the lack of opportunity for damage by the northern tribes with Breckinridge blocking them from entering southern settlements—and Coyoteros, Tontos and Pinals did not belong in Chiricahua country anyway. They were troublesome, but mostly because they raided stock around the thinly scattered ranches on the San Pedro, or the grazing herd at Breckinridge. The tension was all a part of the general restlessness invited by the withdrawal of the garrisons, but it was not so obvious at the fort because there were no settlements and few people. There was nothing at all above the Gila, and very little between the Gila and Tucson. It was all down here, where everything had broken loose at once.

When he finished eating he got up and washed his mess kit in the tub of hot water provided for that purpose. "I've got to have a talk with Allis," he told Anderson.

"Do you know where he lives?" the blond lieutenant asked.

"No—I've never met him. Bass said he's around somewhere."

"He's on the other side of the presidio," Anderson said. "There's a wall with gates—big place. Some old don owned it once."

"That's good enough, I guess. Thanks. I'll find it." He looked at Charlie Price, who was draining his coffee cup. "You coming with me, Charlie?"

"I'll drop in later, maybe. But I'll go along with these fellers for now, Fred. Jarret says there's a place we ought to see."

"Alfredo's," Jarret said. He smiled. "Come on along, Wales."

"Sure, come on," Anderson said. "It's on your way. It's a hell of a place."

So Wales said, all right, and they went into town through the dark and twisting streets, with only the pale lights through the windows to show the way. Wales saw those same crowds of homeless people in the streets and bedding down in vacant lots; but they were quiet now, and simply waiting, as they had learned to do. But there were others too—Anglos and Secessionists—who were standing with weapons in their belts, and who spoke sullenly among themselves when the troopers passed by. They were not so quiet they could not be heard, but nothing happened even though Jarret bumped into one of them deliberately.

Inside Alfredo's, the air seemed swollen with the noise and reeked of sweating bodies and Mexican cigarettes. Through the haze of smoke Wales made out the makeshift wooden bar and the handful of musicians, but their playing was so disorganized that he could not tell what the music was. The place was jammed with charros and peons in peaked hats and soiled pajamas of manta cloth sitting at tables or standing around the edges with bottles or glasses. In one corner he saw a table of enlisted Infantry and Cavalry, and in the center of the room a bare-legged girl with castanets was dancing wildly on a platform raised above the earthen floor. She was singing a gypsy flamenco song, and whenever she kicked her legs and arched her back you could clearly see the division of her breasts, and all the men yelled.

Up at the bar, a man who looked like a bandit brought tequila, which made Wales breathless when he drank because there was no lime to go with it. After the first, he bought another round, but he felt wary of drinking much because of calling on Allis.

"God, this is wonderful," Price was saying through the roaring sound. He looked right at home in this environment.

"It compensates," Jarret said. "About all there is."

"It's enough," said Anderson, smiling broadly as he watched the girl kick up her legs. "Another one would overdo it."

"Hell, it's wonderful," Price kept saying. "It's better than Delmonico's."

Wales was watching the door when it opened again and he saw the short man with the peaked hat and tight leather pants come into the room. His face was richly brown and very weathered, with thick, gray brows, and a beard like a pointed spade. It made him look oddly satyr-like, and pointed wherever he looked because he carried his head high. When he saw them he broke into a laugh, and coming over in quick strides, he clamped Anderson into his arms in a big abrazo. Then he slapped them all on their backs, and laughed again while he pointed his finger at the yellow stripe on Wales's and Price's trousers.

"Ha! Caballeria! You are here! Bueno! This is something. It will all be different now!"

"You look like Cavalry, yourself," Wales said, and laughed at this strange wire-muscle man who seemed to have vitality enough for everyone there. He was old or middle-aged—it was hard to tell—but his eyes were bright and young in his leathery face.

"Yes—but long ago!" He spoke in a shout, and gave his arms a flourish. "Against the Spanish. I am the San Juan!"

When the barman came again there was a long heated discussion in Spanish with so many violent gestures that the others could make nothing of it, and could only laugh.

"Who in hell is he, anyway?" Wales said to Anderson. It was hard to believe the man was real; he seemed like something out of a legend or myth.

"The San Juan. Just what he says. He's got that old place down south of here. His name is Salazar. He came out with us, but he says he's going back. He's about the last of the old dons."

The discussion at an end, the barman brought more glasses and poured something into them from a bottle. Salazar passed them around, then raised his own with an air. He stood very straight and stiff, and scowled and smiled at the same time.

"Felicidad! Look, it is mescal! The national drink!"

"My God!" Price said, his face no longer bland, but red and happy. "This keeps on getting better all the time."

As he drank it, Wales could feel the mescal flowing hotly behind his eyes. He remembered Allis, and knew he

ought to get going, but he was having too much fun to leave yet.

He clanked his glass against the one that Salazar held. "What nation is that?" he asked.

"This one! Listen—I am Spanish first, then we fight with them and I become a Mexican. When the Gringos change the border I am a Yanqui." He threw his arms wide and began to laugh. "Look at me! Now you see a pinto!" He finished in a loud shout, and still laughing, crashed his empty glass on the bar.

By now there seemed to be a heady conviviality in the air. It seemed to Wales that the discordance of the shouting and the singing and the clashing music had backed off and softened. It seemed, too, that the girl's voice had grown melodious, and that she had become a woman of passing beauty.

That, more than anything else, told him he was getting high and he knew it was time to leave. He put his glass back on the bar, touched Anderson on the arm and handed him some coins.

"I've got to go," he said. He felt a stiffness in the hinges of his jaw. "Hell, I'll never get there. Here, take these and buy a round."

Anderson smiled lopsidedly.

"All right. Be good, hear? D'you remember how to get there?"

"Sure; I'll find it all right. See you later."

He flipped his hand, and as he turned to leave, Salazar seized the hand and shook it with a ferocious vigor. "I've got to go," Wales said to him. "Many thanks. Muchas gracias."

"For what? For nothing!" He stuck his beard up and gave his fierce happy laugh again. "Look—we will fight them! We of the caballería will fight them! We will have good times together!"

"All right—fine," Wales said, and he, too, laughed, although he did not really feel it now. It had just occurred to him that Salazar believed that they had come down to fight the Chiricahuas, and it was better to slide it off than disappoint him with an explanation.

HE CAME OUT in the street and walked along the flank of the presidio toward the corner where he was to cross. On the other side he began to see the building he was looking for, and then the wall extending from the end of it. Soon he saw the gates which seemed to enter on an inner court where the branches of a tree crowned up against the stars behind them.

It took a moment to find the bell pull; then a longer one before a woman held a lamp behind an iron grille to look out at him. She was old and bent, and wore a dark rebozo draped over her head. Her face was wrinkled with many seams that appeared deeper by the light of the lamp.

"Quien es?" she said. "Quien es?"

He told her who he was and what he wanted. She looked at him closely, said, "Uno momento," and closed the grille. He heard the lock catch, and then her footsteps going away across the tiles. After another wait they came back; a bar moved through a set of brackets, and the gate swung slowly open.

She bowed, the oil lamp held above her head.

"Le tomo el sombrero?" she asked him.

He gave her his hat, and followed as she moved off. He had been right about the court. There was a tiled patio, with a tree, and beyond it a long portales raised on high timber pillars. At the end of this a pair of doors went into a lofty room with white gypsum walls and dark vigas running through the ceiling. It was very large and made him aware of the spacious Spanish gesture of the former occupants—the heavy furniture, the tile and leather, the grand dimensions—there was even a santo in a niche. The walls were lined with cases filled with books from floor to ceiling, and the table at which Allis sat was littered with papers.

Allis got out of a chair behind the table when they came in. Perhaps it was the presence of so many books that made him seem like a man who had seen enough to know

there were no surprises any more. He was a fleshy man in shirtsleeves. His face was open and friendly, and gave a sense of easy tolerance. He shook hands with Wales and smiled.

"How are you?" he said. "I'm glad you came by. How is John Bass?"

"I'm fine, thank you," Wales said. "John was all right when I left. He sends his best."

"Ah, thank him for me, if you will," Allis said. "And take him my regards when you return."

"Yes, I'll tell him that," Wales said.

When the old woman set down the lamp and hat she stood like a gnome while Allis spoke to her. She replied, bowing in the formal way, and left the room. Allis waved his hand at a heavy chair with gargoyles on the arms, beside the table.

"Our Tia Carlotta will find my family for us," he said. "I also thought a bottle of Madeira might go well."

"That's kind of you," Wales said, but then recalled Alfredo's, and felt doubtful of the Madeira.

When Allis smiled, the flesh about his eyelids wrinkled up at the corners. "The Madeira will do no harm, if you survived Alfredo's," he said when Wales mentioned it. And spreading his hands, he laughed and added, "After all, we have Saint Paul to vouch for wine."

"Well, yes, I guess that's true," Wales said, and smiled. He was beginning to like Allis, with the same spontaneous liking that he'd felt for Salazar at first meeting. The reasons were different, of course, but the feeling was much the same.

"An old man came in while we were there," he said as the thought of Salazar developed. "His name is Salazar, I think. And he lives at a place called the San Juan."

"Oh—yes," and Allis laughed. "That's old Don Diego. He was born at the San Juan. It's very old. They say De Anza stopped there on his way to colonizing California. So, he came out."

"That's what Anderson of the 8th. Infantry said. He came out with them. But he's going back again, apparently."

"Yes, that sounds like him," Allis said. "Perhaps it's not very wise, but it's not surprising either."

"I suppose he has a family down there," Wales said.

"As a matter of fact, I think they're dead," Allis said. "Still, he's got a number of people dependent on him." He smiled his amiable smile again. "Even without them, though, he'd probably try it. He has fire."

"Yes, I noticed that," Wales said, and he recalled the impression of flashing eyes and great vitality.

"He is larger than life, really," Allis said. "Very generous in dimension. Perhaps the country made him that way; or perhaps the country simply makes me look at him in that way. Anyhow, he compensates; anyone of interest does—for me, at least." He paused. "Of course, it's a shame that he's going back because the danger down that way is greater all the time." He threw up his hands in a laugh. "But, what would you do? He has the right to live as he wishes."

"Yes," Wales said. "You can't deny him that."

"True," Allis said, and his glance at Wales seemed estimating, so that Wales half wondered if he, himself, was being considered as a compensation. Then Allis smiled again, and settled into his chair. "You're down for long?"

"No. Just a day or two. Mainly to see Tyson. He's out at San Xavier now, they say."

"Ah," and Allis smiled. "Our friend from Maine. Yes, he is a far-trafficking man. An interesting personality, too."

Wales could not hold back his grin. "Does he have fire, too?"

"Well, hardly that," Allis said, and looked at Wales shrewdly. "But he intrigues me somewhat. In his way, he compensates, too."

"You must know him, then."

"Only briefly, to date. But I am beginning to find him a man of many parts. I may even come to enjoy him one day." He laughed and put up his hand. "Don't mistake me. I said enjoy, not like; the two are not necessarily compatible. But I've always enjoyed people, regardless of the condition of their souls; and out in these wide wastelands there is little else to divert and challenge the inquiring mind."

Again Wales had that vague feeling of being himself an object of Allis' disinterested inquiry or scrutiny, and he hesitated, wondering what and how much he should say.

But then, Allis was the Territorial Commissioner, too, as well as whatever else he fancied himself to be.

"We've been having trouble getting shipments," he said. "On grain, mostly." He hesitated. "Escorts seem hard to get."

"There are men," Allis said. "The town swarms with them now."

"Tyson's reluctant to provide them, then," Wales said. Allis, at this, pursed his lips, but his eyes glinted.

"Costly matter, of course, escorts."

"Well, his monopoly on supplies pays him enough," Wales said. "I think it's plain greed."

"Tut-tut, my boy, thrift," Allis said. "After all, a man of his background, trading in a Secessionist atmosphere, must have his own kind of compensations. As well as make the most of opportunity."

Then Allis leaned toward Wales in what Wales could only consider a confidential manner; but there hesitated, while his eyes upon Wales grew searching, as if Wales's choice of words had revealed something that now, upon reflection, caused Allis to still hold back his judgment of Wales, as a person in abeyance and doubt.

And into this moment of doubt, of pause, there came a sound at an inner door, and when a white-haired woman entered Wales stood up and put his heels together. She was introduced to him as Mrs. Allis, and he felt her to be very dignified and patrician in her dark silken gown. Yet there seemed an air of sadness underneath, too, as if she bore the weight of some inner grief.

"I am pleased to see you, Mr. Wales," she said.

"Thank you very much," he said, feeling puzzled by the melancholy as he bowed over her hand.

"You are kind to call," she said, warmly, sadly.

Before they sat again, a girl came in bearing a silver tray which held a number of goblets and a bottle of wine. Wales saw that she was fair, but the coloring of her face had been deepened by the desert sun. She wore a muslin blouse and colored Mexican skirt, but with so much ease and grace that he forgot to be surprised that Anglo women rarely wore native dress. Her eyes were clear and brown, and appraised him with an honest directness when he took her hand. He thought she might be twenty, and he remem-

bered Price's offhand remark. Price was right; she was very nice.

She put the tray on the table, poured the Madeira, and passed the goblets. She stood slim and straight as they drank to each other's health, and it was hard for Wales to take his eyes away from her when they all sat down around the table.

"Charlie Price spoke about you," he said.

"Oh?" and she laughed, her teeth even and white. "Did he come down, too?"

"Yes, he's here. He thought he might stop in later."

"That's nice of him," she said, and her smile made Wales wonder what, if anything, lay between them.

He made an effort to look at Allis, and asked about the news. "John thought you might have something for us," he said.

Allis raised his glass and watched the light stream through the wine.

"Well, I don't know there's anything just now. We hear little from the east; and it's the same old thing from Mesilla Valley—stand by, you know. As for this"—and he motioned with his hand—"it's just a matter of time."

"This evacuation of the Santa Cruz is new," Wales said. "It's new to us, at least."

"Well, yes, that's new; came on suddenly, too. The Indians are really bad down here now. The troops are too thinned out to fight them properly any more. The Indians seem to know that."

"They only have to watch to see them go," Wales said. "The troops seem needed pretty badly in the east. That's what we keep hearing, anyway."

"Yes, they don't have much of an Army back there yet," Allis said. "They really ought to have an Army before they think very seriously of fighting."

"We need them here, too," Marion said to Wales, and he saw her level gaze. She spoke with a quiet earnestness.

"The fighting's back there, though," he said. "Or will be. The real fighting."

"This doesn't seem very real to you?" she said.

"Oh, dear," said Allis as he smiled at Wales. "You'll have to watch her now."

Wales sat up straighter in the chair. Marion was smiling,

too, but he was aware of a sense of disagreement. "Yes, it's real enough," he said to her, "but they're going to settle it back there."

Marion turned her glass in her slender fingers. "Perhaps. But what of the people who will be left?"

"I suppose the Rebs will look out for them when they get here. Who knows?"

"How easy you make it sound," she said. "If the Government can't spare the troops, how can the Confederacy?"

"They seem to want the country," Wales said. "We keep on hearing about a column coming out."

It was no way to start things with her, and to avoid what seemed an issue now, he turned to Allis, who was sitting back, smiling broadly. It seemed a matter they had aired between themselves, and it was easy to imagine that Allis took an academic pleasure in such discussions.

Now he winked, and wagged his head. "We hear nothing definite; it's like yourselves. But whatever comes will have to take Mesilla Valley first. Craig and Fillmore could be hard to crack."

"Yes, they could," Wales said, but he was watching Marion, deciding that her difference went beyond native dress. All the girls in the east wore leg of mutton sleeves and perhaps played melodeons by way of social grace; they did not argue military matters from a moral slant. She smacked a little of Anderson—too levelheaded for a crank—and he had never known a girl like her.

There was an interruption when the old woman came into the room again. She spoke to Allis, who replied, and got up.

"I'm sorry," he said to Wales. "I get callers at all hours these days. This man's a miner who's got to return to the mountains by daylight to avoid the Indians. I'm afraid he's in a hurry."

Wales got out of his chair and took his hand.

"That's all right," he said. "I should be going anyway." He looked at Marion, who had risen, too, and at her mother, who had said almost nothing all the while. "Thank you very much. You miss such hospitality in the Army."

"Then you must come again before you leave," Allis said.

"I'll try to," Wales said. "Thank you very much."

"And, if you can't—good luck."

Allis waved his hand and went off. His wife smiled in her melancholy way again, said good-bye to Wales, and departed through an inner door with the older woman. Wales was feeling very aware of Marion as she brought the oil lamp back to life. She took his hat from a smaller table and gave it to him.

"That lamp looks pretty heavy; let me carry it," he said.

"No, it's not heavy. I don't mind. You have your hat."

They went through the door to the dark portales and walked in the fragrance of bougainvillea. She walked straight and slim beside him, the radiance of the lamp enough for him to see the motion of her hips; and the restraint in her expression, too, which bothered him because he wished to get along with her.

"My remarks about the fighting must have bothered you," he said.

She looked up at him with an awareness so alive that he knew he was right.

"Don't say that, Mr. Wales. We all have our opinions."

"Oh, come on," he said, because he wanted to make things light. "I simply meant it's going to be decided back there, that's all. I've got a name, too, you know; call me Fred, if you like."

But she ignored the part about his name. "Whether this shall be north or south?" she said.

"Yes, that's right. I can't see it'll make much difference whose troops are here—or if there's any troops at all."

"You mean the people here don't count?"

"Well, not in the final outcome, no. The territorials won't have much to say about it. They're largely a foreign population, and everything's new here."

"I mean, what will happen to them?" Marion asked while they walked on, the warm light lending to her features the grace of candlelight. It was hard to think of that and labor through these abstract values at the same time. "And, what about the Indians?" she asked. "What about our obligations?"

"I suppose those who stay just have to luck it out until the troops return. We've got other obligations, too."

Then, because that seemed oversimplified, and since he

knew by now she didn't want to have things light and easy, he tried to make it clearer.

"I'm not saying these people don't mean anything; I'm just saying the Army had to think ahead. I don't know how far—maybe a year, six months. They had to consider what might happen in between—out here and back east, too. They had to make a decision between the relative importance of the two. What other basis could they have? You've got to be careful of sentiment trying to work that way."

It was hard for him to think along those lines because he was conditioned to the unquestioned acceptance of decisions, and he could not tell if he was close to the answer or not. But he believed in the decision, for he had faith in his commanders.

Marion did not speak right away, but walked slowly on. The sky seemed very near. He saw the pepper tree, and the patio tiles shining with starlight.

"I see what you mean," she said in a while, "but it seems cold to me. I don't think these people coming in for help will understand it."

The truth of this demanded agreement; they had been too briefly in the Union to make any sense of what was going on; there was the language barrier too.

"But that's the part that can't be helped," he said, for he believed that to be true, too.

"According to the logic of your Army, no." She said it slowly, and looked at him and smiled. "But, then, women aren't so strong on logic, anyway."

He was glad to see her smile, and he moved into the opening it had made in her aloofness. "Then there's not much sense in arguing any more. It's hard to argue with the Army anyway. It's like shouting into a barrel."

"I know," Marion said, and she laughed this time. "Even I know that."

They came to the gate and Wales pulled back the bar. Marion held the lamp above her head and he could see her hair fall smoothly and light against her neck, and shadows under her breasts. All at once he felt shy, and at the same time he wished that he could string this out for a time.

"I don't know when we'll leave," he said, "but I'd like to see you again."

"I'm at the presidio all day," she said, neither inviting nor declining. "We're trying to help these people coming in."

"I'll come around and say good-bye anyway," he said. "Good night." He took her hand and smiled, and put on his hat. He stepped through the gate, but stopped and turned again before she closed it behind him. One of those inanities, which you utter before you think, popped into his mouth.

"Do you play the melodeon?" he asked.

"The melodeon?" She was surprised, and she laughed with such easy humor that he felt it was not an inanity after all. "Why, no," she said. "I've never learned. Why do you ask?"

"Simple curiosity, I suppose," he said, and he was laughing, too. It seemed that each had seen into the other's mind, and while he could not think what she might see in him, he knew what he saw in her and liked all of it.

Leaving, he felt the warmth of that liking in him for twenty yards down the dim street; until a figure, approaching, took shape in the dark, and became Charlie Price heading for the gates, which were open still, telling quite plainly that Marion had seen him, too, and waited there for him.

SAN XAVIER DEL BAC was seven miles out in the desert from the town, and periodically throughout the following day Wales went up to the roof of the mill to look for movement on the dusty road which led out to the mission.

From the roof of the mill, the mission was a strange and beautiful thing to see on the sandy plain. The patterns of the sunlight on the walls and domes were always changing, and seemed to invest them with an animation of their own, as though they had some secret inner life. Although he had never seen them, he knew the interior walls to be adorned with striking primitive murals painted by the early neophytes under supervision of the Spanish padres. It was hard to believe that the place could be as old as it was, but he remembered that the Jesuits had begun it long ago, before their banishment, and that Franciscans had finished it. In between there had been sackings and raids by Apaches, and there probably would be more of them; but it remained there, solid and graceful, still.

After mess was served at noon, he let the men go to town. There seemed little point in keeping them around the mill, for it began to look by then as if Tyson would arrive too late to finish their business with him and get started back to Breckinridge that afternoon. Leaving at that time of day would mean their making camp in the Canada, which could be dangerous with all the Indians raising so much hell. While it was true that they were superstitious of the night, they were fond of making raids at dawn, and it was no good bedding down where you could not shake loose if something happened.

After his men had gone he worked on his report for an hour or so, and then the Infantry was ready to leave for Fort Buchanan. The whole of the morning had been filled with their shouting and profanity, the dust and turmoil of their striking tents and loading their high, blue wagons. But now the mules were rigged, the men were climbing into the wagons, and they were leaving.

Wales put his report on the ground beside his blanket, where he had been writing, and stood up as Anderson came over to say good-bye.

"Well, s'long, Fred. The place is yours." Anderson stood tall and blond, and Wales believed his blues more faded than his own.

"Thanks," he said, "for the gift. When're you coming back?"

"I don't know. A couple of weeks, perhaps. We're going over through the Cienega and down the Sonoita. We'll have to get out on the Babocomari sometimes, too. A couple of weeks, at least."

"That's a lot of ground," Wales said. Though they had been over that way only a few times, and nearly a year ago, he remembered the tall grass in the plains and sweeping valleys, and the green oak mottes which the presence of Chiricahuas seemed to make so sinister.

"Don't let them skin you on the way," he added.

"They haven't yet," Anderson said, and laughed. "Did you find Allis all right? I forgot to ask."

"Yes, I found him. I don't know how much I learned, though. Nobody seems to know anything right now."

"No, and it's all rumor anyway. I don't think anyone knows what's going on for sure. It's getting to be a motto here. We ought to stitch it on our guidons. Well, s'long again."

After Jarret had come over to say good-bye, the order was given to move. The blacksnake whips exploded and the mules drove into their collars team by team. Wales saw the drivers, shouting and sawing on the reins as the slack came out of the line, and the wagons started their long file through the gate. The men sat in the boxes with the barrels of their rifles leaning against their shoulders, and the butts on the floor. A few had hung their muzzles with their forage caps. But most of them were waving the caps above them as they whooped and pulled away.

The afternoon was very quiet after the rumble of the wagons had died away, and when there was nothing more, he went back to the blanket and took up his report again. He could not finish it until he'd talked with Tyson, but he told himself it was something to do until Tyson returned.

But he knew there was really a different reason for working on it now instead of later, in the evening. He was really saving time that he could spend with Marion.

It was dusk when he went up into town. He had waited all afternoon, to no good end, and he would wait no longer. He would have to see him later on that night—if Tyson had come in by then—or in the morning before they left. Now, with Marion on his mind, he was in no mood to see him sooner anyway. He had talked with him before, and knew exactly what it would be like—a long and acrimonious discussion relating to the costs involved in providing escort for his wagons. He would plead and wheedle, and then he would get angry and demand to know if the Army was trying to ruin him. He might even threaten some sort of dark political reprisal, but Wales would have to listen to it all just the same. It would all be on a monetary level, since Mr. Tyson, as a Maine man, had a religious attitude toward thrift.

So he was just as glad he didn't have to face all that before calling on Marion. He had taken a bath and shaved. He was feeling good, and it was pleasant walking through the town in the falling twilight. All of the buildings had a softened, lavender look about them just now. The window lights had a mellow quality in the dusk. In the east, and overhead, a few of the brighter stars were beginning to appear, but there was still a luminous afterglow behind the Baboquivaris far in the west.

There were two flambeaux burning in iron brackets on either side of the gates in the presidio. He had no clear reason for coming here except that he was thinking it still might be too early for her to be at home, and he was curious to learn what she was doing in this place. But as soon as he walked in he felt himself intruding, and began to wish he had gone to her home to wait instead. It was jammed with evacuees, in much the same condition that he had seen on the streets, the day before, except that now their misery and resignation seemed intensified because they were crowded all together here among their animals and belongings. The odors were overpowering, and as he walked among them toward the fires where tortillas were

being made, he was aware of murmuring voices and reproachful glances turned his way. He could not remember when he had felt so acutely uncomfortable before; he felt pity for them in their miserable condition, but he felt some kind of guilt before them, too, because he wanted to get away to some place where he wouldn't see them and where they couldn't look at him.

He found Marion at the far wall working under a brush ramada raised to shield the cooking area from the elements. She stood among a number of native women making tortillas on hot comals—a kind of skillet—over open fires. As he came up, she was using a little paddle to lift the finished ones to a tray which one of the women held.

There was a moment before she saw him and he was aware again of that sense of steadiness. He liked the way the firelight made highlights in her hair and enlivened her warm skin tones. Then she saw him and smiled, and he liked the way she did that, too.

She seemed pleased that he had come. "Hello," she said. "I thought you'd be gone by now."

"No, we're still around," he said. "Tyson isn't back yet."

"And you're waiting for him." When he nodded, she showed her even teeth in a friendly smile. "I'm glad you came. Would you like a tortilla?"

"Thank you, but I've eaten," Wales said, although with the men in town there had been no evening mess and he had only nibbled on some biscuits. But he didn't like being here with this feeling of resentment in the air. Those people who were near were watching him, all right.

"Look—can you get away?" he asked her.

She finished loading the tray and the woman who held it went away. There seemed to be a general slowing of activity. Marion looked around before she answered, and then began to untie her apron.

"I think so," she said then. "We're about finished for tonight." She hung the apron on a nail in one of the posts of the ramada roof, and spoke to an older woman who looked at Wales and smiled, nodding her head as she listened.

"You do a lot of this, don't you?" Wales said when she came out to him.

"For now," she said, "yes. Somebody must. I don't

mind. It doesn't bother me." She took his arm and looked at him and smiled. "You shouldn't let it bother you," she added.

"What makes you think it does?" he said. He laughed, but he was startled, too. It was an uncomfortable thing to have her read his mind.

"I can tell," she said, still smiling as they started off. "Through the gate, there, and around."

He laughed again, for he was glad to have the topic shift.

"Is that the long way?" he said. "I don't want any shortcuts."

"As long as there is," she said.

"It's too bad there's no place to go for a while. There's Alfredo's, if you don't mind being shouted at."

"I don't think I'd like that," Marion said. "I'll have to be down early in the morning, anyway."

She was telling him she wished to go straight home, and indirectly, that he should not expect too much. It was a long time since he had been out walking with a girl, but there were things that you remembered.

"All right, I'll take you home, then," he said. "But let's not have any fights. We'll be pulling out tomorrow."

"That sounds fine to me," she said, and laughed. "I don't like them either."

They went out through the gate. They were soon beyond the flambeaux, and the darkness allowed him to take her arm more firmly to guide her. He was aware of feeling encouraged that she did not try to draw away from him, and he could feel her pulse beating against his finger tips. He felt she would resent familiarities, but it was hard to keep from thinking of it with her so alive beside him.

"What'll you do when this is over?" he asked her when they had gone a short way.

"Go east, I suppose," she said. "I don't like to think of it. It's all too involved with us."

He was mildly surprised. "Do you think it is? It's the simplest thing there is for our crowd. And your family's like us, isn't it? Your father simply goes wherever they tell him, doesn't he? It's easy."

"No, it isn't," Marion said. "My mother's from Virginia. That doesn't make it very easy."

"I don't see that makes much difference. It's mixed up everywhere. This is a family fight all around. Even the Army's that way."

He would rather not have things get serious again, but they seemed to have to straighten out some fundamentals before they could relax with one another.

She walked with her head tipped downward and her hands together at her waist.

"I know," she said to him. "I know all that. But I have a brother down there in the Army. He was going to school in Richmond, but after Sumter and Moultrie he joined up with some of his classmates."

"A brother?" Wales said. "Down there? I see." He said it slowly. That was different. It was easier to understand her mother's air of melancholy.

"So, that's how it is," she said, and then she looked up at him quickly as though she sought his thoughts in his expression. "It's not going to be so easy going back. There's a lot of feeling in the east."

They had come to the end of the wall. He was bothered by the way the war kept getting between them, and when she turned the corner he held her by the arm. He brought her close with his other hand behind her back, and when her face came up he kissed her, hard at first because he felt impatient, then warmly and more gently. She did not resist him, but while she kissed him back, she was far from aggressive.

When she drew away from him, they walked along in quiet for a while. He was mildly surprised by what he'd done, but he was bothered by her mild response, too. Now that they were getting near her home, he was aware that time was running out, and her reluctance annoyed him.

"That was foolish for us to do," she said when they had gone on further. "We shouldn't do such things."

"Why not?" he said. "What's the matter with it? Unless you tell him, Charlie won't find out." He felt irritated, and he knew that she could tell it, and it was stupid to mention Price, too; but he didn't care, because he felt rebuffed.

She laughed about Price. "Maybe I will tell him; after all, he doesn't own me. But neither do you; no one does." She looked away, and her voice had a far-off sound. "We

just shouldn't, that's all," she said. Then she smiled and patted his arm. "But I'm sorry about your vanity."

It was another time when he was startled by her insight, but then he hadn't concealed his irritation very well. Still, there was more involved than that.

"I'm not that bad," he said. "I just can't see why you call it foolish. I didn't feel very foolish kissing you."

He put pressure on her arm, and when her fingers answered, he knew she wasn't angry. But neither had he made much headway.

"I didn't feel foolish, either," she said. "But what will come of it? This will all end here, and we'll go away and never meet again. That's what I mean."

"My God, it isn't going to last forever, is it?" Wales said, and he wondered if it was Price, if Charlie Price meant something to her.

"No, but we'll simply make ourselves unhappy, that's all. There's enough of that as it is. Why ask for it?"

It was a woman's argument, he supposed—the instinct to defend herself against impermanence and relations of the moment. It was not the way a man would see it, and as they came to the gate he knew there would be no casual affair with her. In a way, it was assuring to know this, but it also made him feel impatient for he would soon be gone.

"I'll see you again," he said, aware now of the time. He had the feeling it was ending without any chance for something later—although he was not clear on what that something should be.

"Oh—I don't know," she said. "It's all so hard—all this, and what's happening back east. And my family, my brother."

"It's hard everywhere," Wales said. "Everybody's in it. But you can't stop living."

"No, I know that," she said. "I know all that."

The impatience and his immediate desires took hold of him again and he brought her into both his arms and kissed her hard. It was like the first time in that she was unresponsive at first, but then he felt her arms come close around his neck, and her mouth grew yielding and soft. His head began to pound with the surge of blood and heat as she pushed against him and her clean smell flooded over him. He felt amazed at her release of passion, and

was aware of a sweeping wave of tenderness for her.

Then, with equal passion, she pulled her arms away and said, "No," in a choking voice. "No—we can't. It's all wrong—ridiculous."

Her willingness seemed now an error, for abruptly she pushed against his chest. He felt the heat as a dull pressure in his head, and tried to take her into his arms again, but she evaded him. Before he was able to move, she was through the gate and it had closed behind her.

Wales stared at it until he heard her footsteps running over the tiles, and then he turned and started slowly down the dim, rutted street. He felt angry, and confused, and exalted all at the same time; but after a hundred yards he saw the lights that glimmered through the windows of the mill, and things began to settle back into focus. He knew that Tyson had returned, and that they would leave in the morning.

THOUGH TUCSON DID not amount to much, it was hard to leave, for in comparison Breckinridge seemed the end of the earth. Until March it had been the same with the Butterfield station at Maricopa Wells, where they had often gone to meet the stage from San Francisco or St. Louis. While the line had ceased its operations when Secessionists in Texas had seized the animals and rolling stock, Wales could still recall having made some contact with the outer world, just as he recalled it now. Going back to Breckinridge was grim either way. It was simpler not to go away at all, because the monotony was always at its worst when you returned. But whenever you had the chance, you still went.

It was boring business going back. For a while they made an effort to maintain a military bearing; they were all aware of having enjoyed themselves too much, and were conscientious for a time. But the effort soon collapsed; the heat grew too heavy, the air too choked with dust, and the mounts too rough-gaited. The aftereffects of the tequila made the men listless. Just to look at them made Wales feel glad that he had not had anything to drink the night before.

For a while he thought about Tyson. It was hard to understand that gross, portly man whose eye in conversation seemed ever roving, as if in search of further opportunity for aggrandizement. And Wales had not tried very hard to understand him. Coming into the man's office—more a cubbyhole made grudgingly, it seemed, among bales of hay and sacks of milled grain—and sitting on an upended crate beneath a carefully trimmed oil lamp, it was enough for him to maintain composure while the contractor chanted his litany of hardship.

"You ask a great deal," he said to Wales when the escort matter was broached.

"I'm not asking anything," Wales said. He would not

be drawn into argument; he'd had those before. "I only bring the message."

"Your commander, then," Tyson said. "He has no idea what it is to secure reliable escorts for my wagons."

"Men need work, wherever they are," Wales said. "Those who choose to live here accept the dangers, I imagine."

"Leeches," Tyson said. "And worse. An enterprising man is at their mercy. The pay demanded by their kind is larcenous."

"Well, it's hardly desk-work," Wales said, aware that he was close to argument, after all.

But Tyson laughed at this, gently. "So easy for you to say, Mr. Wales. Perhaps your calling insulates you against reality. The Government payroll is not related to a balance sheet. But mine is."

The point, familiar ground to Tyson, appealed to him, and he went on explaining to Wales the horrendous costs involved in his operations—sorrowing over the immense investment in his mill and in his hay and beef acquisitions, all of which was bound in time to be lost when the troops departed, as they surely would.

To Wales, who heard it all out with such patience as he could command, it was a mystery that Allis should call Tyson a man of many parts, implying thereby a person of interest and variety—or so he supposed. But then perhaps he had missed the point.

Yet Allis had also told him that men could be found for escort work, and perhaps it was best to hew to that line. He mentioned this fact when Tyson had finished his complaints.

"Oh, did he, now?" and Tyson laughed once more, gently still, but with venom, too. "Well, there's another that wouldn't know."

"He's the Territorial Commissioner," Wales said. "He ought to know something about this town and what's in it."

"A politician," Tyson said, with unction. "Feeding at the public trough. A Buchanan man, at that. And worse, perhaps. I'd be very careful of what he told me, if I were you, Mr. Wales."

"How do you mean that?" Wales said, though he suspected what would follow. But he was curious to know

how it would tally with what Marion had said. She was in his mind, he realized, more than her father, or even Tyson.

"Why, he's southern, of course," Tyson said. "Or, his wife is, which is all the same to my thinking. It's common knowledge."

"So what?" Wales said. "You find that everywhere."

"With a son in Confederate uniform?" and Tyson smiled. "And who can say what other affiliations in that direction?" Tyson moved a pudgy finger out to nudge at Wales's arm. "You and I may have our differences, but they are only details in the long run; at least, we share common loyalties."

Wales did not wonder very much where Tyson had acquired his information; perhaps it was a part of what the contractor labeled "common knowledge"; perhaps it came from Allis, himself, or some private source—Tyson would have those, very likely. More, just then, he was struck by the sense of animosity harbored in Tyson, and he wondered once more at Allis's bemused reflections upon the man. Perhaps, Wales thought, he *hadn't* understood altogether and he recalled that moment's hesitation when it seemed that Allis was on the brink of some revelation concerning Tyson, but then had changed his mind.

That he had did not bother Wales, even now. Allis could let his agile mind and imagination do with Tyson what it would. Wales knew all of Tyson that he cared to know; or cared to think of, either, on this hot dusty ride back to the post.

It was better to think of Marion, or of matters which seemed related to her. With everything in a state of flux, he had no way of knowing whether he might see her again or not. The chance was only a slender one which he couldn't count on, and would depend on the vagaries of Army orders. In a way it might be wiser not even to think about it, but that was hard for he could not keep her out of his mind for very long.

It was hardest to drive away that moment at the gate. He could feel the warmth and softness of her gentle acquiescence as vividly as though it were all a moment ago. He remembered how her voice had sounded, too, when she had pushed away from him. Perhaps she had been right in what she said. She was no ordinary girl who would get

carelessly involved with him. He knew it would be easier to forget her if she was.

Along with that, there kept cropping up her connection with the war. In a peculiar way, the enlistment of her brother gave it a substance which it had not really seemed to have earlier. Although he felt he had a fair understanding of the basic principles involved, they seemed only abstract ideas when the personal equation was absent. Their far removal from the scene had made it all very much as Bass had said, and he remembered everyone's disbelief when hostilities had begun. They had been even faintly amused when Sumter and Moultrie had been shelled. The distance and their lack of information were responsible for their being unconvinced, although they sensed there might be more to it than what came down through channels. All they really had to go on was what came west with the courier, and that was always three weeks old, and censored, by the time it reached them.

And it was easier to believe it was not really serious yet. Throughout the spring the troops maneuvered up and down the seaboard, but after engagements at Romney and Rich Mountain, Phillipi and Harper's Ferry, it grew quiet again. He remembered being vaguely alarmed over these encounters, at first, until he learned that they had been no more than skirmishes. Then everyone took the calm to mean that neither side was determined, and felt there might even be some chance for conciliation. In the desert, it was hard to know how the picture really looked in the east, but the inactivity encouraged them to wonder if the whole thing might not blow over by the end of summer.

Wales shied away from thinking of it in any other way. He didn't like to contemplate a full-blown fratricidal war. Aside from the chaos into which the nation would plunge, he knew that fighting southern boys would be an unpredictable undertaking. Except for the tragic implication, he could feel amused at the quaint notions people often seemed to have about them. He was well acquainted with these boys from the Army, however, and was familiar with their rural self-reliance, their steady courage and their dependability with animals. He remembered most, however, their tenacious love of home, a kind of blind

devotion to the soil of their birth. It seemed really to be a form of regional allegiance which had a strangely medieval character that might surprise you to find in modern times.

It was a custom on journeys to and from Tucson to bivouac on the open mesa beyond the Canada del Oro, and come on into the Post toward the end of the following day. Coming out of the hills and over the river, Wales could see the rickety buildings on the rise beyond. They seemed always to return at sundown, and the muddled saplings and flapping canvas always appeared the same. The soft golden sunlight at the approach of dusk endowed it with a patina of antiquity. It was a trick of the light and hour and circumstance of routine which worked together at that moment to produce a bewitching quality, and he would experience the illusion of having done this all his life. It was a time when his resentment for this place could achieve a kind of zenith—when he was tired and caked with filth and it would suddenly seem that he had been here since childhood. It was a time when he would almost hate the Army. Conversely, it could be a time of real affection, too, because their approach was often made when the flag was coming down, and Retreat was sounding. He never cared about the filth, or being tired, or even serving at this desert outpost, when he heard the bugle sounding Retreat.

After he dismissed the men, Wales walked his mount to the stables where he stripped it, rubbed it down and watered it. It was something he liked to do himself, and he must have done it a hundred times before. It was all so much the same as any time before that he could almost feel that he had never gone away at all, and that Tucson was simply a twist of his imagination. But it only lasted for a moment, because he knew he would never have met Marion Allis here.

"I'll take some of that," Bass said as Wales came up to him before H.Q. "How did it go?"

Wales gave him the saddle bags to carry, and they walked on. "Take these, if you want. Your report's there. It went all right. Hotter than hell. Tyson bitched about the escort, but I think we'll get one."

"Yes, I thought he would. He has some strange ideas about his status out here. Did you get to see Allis?"

"Yes, but he doesn't seem to know much more than we do."

"That's too bad. I hoped he could shed some light on things."

Wales thought before he spoke again. "Tyson said that Allis had been appointed by Buchanan."

"You mean that's why he doesn't seem to know what's going on? That they're just not telling him?"

"Maybe. Likely, I'd say. But listen to Tyson long enough, you'd think that Allis just wasn't telling."

"Well, his wife is southern, that's true enough; he told me that," Bass said, "last month. I'd trust him, I think, Buchanan man or not. Tyson doesn't, though, I gather."

"He was at pains to let me know that," Wales said.

"And Allis? Did he say about Tyson?"

"Only that Tyson intrigued him. Amused him, I gathered."

"Well, there you are," Bass said. "Tyson very likely knows of that by now; and a man as full of industry and rectitude as he is can't abide that. Throw in opposing politics, and you've got a good hate cooking. The ingredients are all there." Bass leaned back and smiled. "And I know I don't need to tell you that politics is not our dish."

Wales did not need to be reminded; the stricture fit his own views anyway. For him the subject had been exhausted, and his mind moved on.

"Do you remember Anderson from Fort Buchanan, John?"

"From the Eighth? Sure. Was he down there?"

"They're evacuating the Santa Cruz. They were camped at Tyson's when we got there."

"So, they've started that. That's pretty bad. Is the town filled up?"

"It's getting filled. The Eighth will be back with more. They say the Chiricahuas are going to make an island out of Tucson."

"They've been expecting something like that. It was bound to come. I don't suppose the people feel too kindly toward the Army."

"No, I guess they don't," Wales said, and then he

seemed to see the people in the presidio again, watching him reproachfully.

"It's only natural, and it can't be helped. We'd be the same way. We may go down there, by the way."

It was a simple statement, as matter-of-factly made as any Bass might make, yet it brought Marion more to life than anything Wales had thought since he last saw her.

It was difficult to sound so matter-of-fact, himself. "No orders, though." He looked at Bass.

"Not yet," Bass said. "Maybe never. We'll be getting out of here one day, though. We could go there."

When they came to the room, he dumped his gear on the end of the cot and sat to pull his boots off. Fatigue ran through him like hot water now, and his mind kept moving back and forth, as it always did when he was physically tired but still alert, and he remembered the flour wagon.

"Mannion and Haynes got back all right, I guess?"

Bass looked up from the report. "Yes, they got in, all right. Say, that was a hell of a thing. They're Pinals, though apparently some Coyoteritos joined them later. Lopez tailed them to the rancheria over the Pinal; he just got back a while ago."

"Did he? Good for him. When're you going up?"

"In the morning. Your crowd's out of it, though. You can run things here."

"No, I'm going with you," Wales said, and something of what he felt must have been apparent in his voice because Bass looked up and gave the smile of the even-tempered commander who feels obliged to buoy up the troops when they are tired, and soothe their feelings when they become discouraged. Wales could not remember when anything had really got Bass down.

"Don't take it personally," he was saying to him now and smiling too. "It's all in the business, Fred."

"I know, but there's getting to be too damned much of that," Wales said. He was tired, and would be in the morning, too, but there was not any question in his mind. The memory of the stench and ruin was still clear. "No; I'd rather go than sit around. Some of the others may want to, too."

"All right, suit yourself; you don't have to, though."

Bass smiled again. "And just don't take it personally. Things like that can get you down, you know."

"I know. Nothing's getting me down. I just want to go along."

There was a sound and Price came into the room and dumped his gear on the floor. Lying flat on his cot he straightened his legs and closed his eyes.

"One of Alfredo's casualties," Wales said.

"Yes, he has that pallor," Bass said. "They all look alike." Then he folded the report and stuck it under his arm. "It's all here, Fred. Thanks. I'll tell the mess you're on your way."

"All right, John. Thanks. Good night."

"Yes, good night," and Bass looked over at Price again, and smiled. "Are you coming to the Pinal with us tomorrow, Charlie?"

"My God," Price said, his eyes still closed.

Price was sleeping almost as soon as Bass was out of the room. Wales thought again, as he had thought so many times, of the adolescence of his face. It would be nice to have a mentality that never cared, he thought. It would be nice to have a mind that never wondered about the way things went. He would be asleep himself, like Price, and he would not be going to the Pinal tomorrow, either.

In some new and odd way he was aware of Charlie Price as he had never been before now; and as he had earlier, he wondered what Price might mean to Marion Allis.

A PLANNED PURSUIT in the mountains induced a frame of mind that was different from that of an exploratory reconnaissance. On the drill ground, while assembling, there was a certain preoccupation with detail. You noticed things—rigging, weapons, the way a horse blew out his nostrils; the hooing of the mourning doves and their swift, erratic flight as they rose with dawn and flew away to feed. You saw the sky change—grey, lavender, orange. The bony mountains gained perspective and filled out with color. Shadows blackened as the sun came over the peaks and cast the buildings into bold relief on the ground. While it was true that routine reconnaissance encountered trouble too, they lacked that implication of expected action with attendant casualties.

It was better once they left the post. Wales began to have the feeling of having crossed some bridge that carried him out of the awareness of himself, the beauty of being alive, and into the routine of patrol. They were heading north toward the Pinal, which lay across the Gila, and the transparency of the air seemed to bring it nearer than it really was. They would be the better part of a day and a half in getting over the peak to the northern face, where the rancheria had been found. In between there was the stretch of desert before the Gila, then the mountain desert, then the foothills where the grama grass and curly mesquite flowed on across hills marked otherwise only by yucca, mountain laurel and manzanita. The few trees, harbored in the washes and draws, were mainly sycamore, oak and ash until they climbed into juniper and pinyon, and finally pine and fir, high and slim and withdrawn into the blue world far above. There the pitch of the climb increased so that they rode more in canyons and draws than earlier, and the air was fresh and cool.

And at last there was the bald ridge where the dwarfed trees appeared as rheumatics in the weathered rock, and

you looked out on abyssal space so sudden it seized your breath. Rolling slopes ran into one another and away again; peaks and mesas sheared off in clean lines. You saw the black incisions of canyons where water had been abrading since rain began to fall on earth; and far away the lavender of distant ranges cast against each other, the last one smokey blue and infinite, and beyond that just the milky sky curving down to the remote horizon.

Looking out, you became aware of the smell of time, and you were highly conscious of your human impermanence and infirmity.

He did not know if the others thought this way or not. On these patrols, where conversation was limited, it was hard to tell what anyone thought about at all—beyond the demands of what was going on. He supposed they thought of home, of leaving here, or whatever was going to happen back east; or any one of a million other things. He thought of them himself. He thought a good deal of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where his mother lived, with a maiden aunt. Often he thought of Kearny, up there on the Platte, where the Troop had been posted before coming here. Bass would think of Kearny, too, since he had left his wife and children there when the Troop had got its orders to Leavenworth for supplies. He could have brought his family out here, but on learning that the men were not allowed to bring theirs, he left his own.

It was hard to tell, though you could guess with some. You could with Simpson since you knew his wife had died at Breckinridge, and that he'd stayed on when his unit had left. You could with Price, too, but only to the degree of knowing it would differ from what the rest of them might think. And even then it could just be imagined, because nobody else had Price's money, or had lived as he had back in civilian life.

It was that way with them all. There was a part of them you came to know quite well, but another that you probably never would. That was what the Army did to you, he thought. It was one of the reasons that Army life was so lonely.

During the afternoon of the second day they crossed the peak of the mountain and came into a park where grass and watercress grew thick and green around a seep flowing into a basin worn as concave as an old metate. Earlier in the day, Lopez, the tracker, had gone on to scout ahead, and it was agreed they were to meet here. As they stood down to stretch, to drink, and press their hands against their backs, he came out of the timber in his ragged white trousers.

He waved, laid his rifle on the forest floor, and knelt to drink. Wales saw the coppery sheen of his skin beneath the water and was unaccountably moved to connect him with those Mexican ranchers and farmers filling the presidio in Tucson. He was made aware of that curious sense of guilt he had experienced, and felt it now, again, though he could not explain it. The sunlight on the flesh had simply emphasized their racial difference. He had never thought of Lopez exactly in that light before, but Lopez was the same as all those others and he, too, would be left when the country was abandoned.

But it lasted only a moment. Then Lopez was settled on his heels, and they were gathered around him. They all felt that compressed excitement now, the way they always felt when they were ready to go in.

"How far out do we stand from them?" Bass said.

"Oh, two hours, perhaps. Yes, they are there; they are making mescal now."

"That's good. That mean's they're settled down. What about the Coyoters?"

"Well, they are all together there. They are maybe half the number of Pinals." Lopez lit a black cigaro. He smiled, and Wales was wondering if he would smile that way once they were gone. "But there is a hunting party out," Lopez added.

"Oh?" Bass raised his eyebrows at the tracker, who was smiling broadly. Lopez was fond of inducing little moments of suspense.

"Yes, an hour, perhaps—this side of the rancheria. There is a cow elk hanging in a canyon over there." He paused, wagging his head in the direction of the canyon. "Some walk, some ride, by the tracks. There are maybe twenty of them. Maybe more."

"An hour," Bass said. He took out his watch and looked at it. Then he looked at the sun which slanted through the trees in a long diagonal. His hat was under his arm, and the sunlight glistened in the grey along his temples.

He put the watch away and looked at Wales. "I think we'd better hit the hunters. The light will last for them. But not for the rancheria."

"It's the bucks that do the damage," Wales said. "Hitting them sets up a double-barreled reaction anyway. It raises hell with the band."

"We may scare them out of the rancheria, but it can't be helped. It had better be the hunters."

Bass put on his hat, swung onto his horse and looked around at everyone. It was all decided, and they were mounted when he raised his arm.

From there on, they rode very quietly through the forest. The quietness was due not so much to the danger of being heard as to the frame of mind which the imminence of action brought upon them. For a long while there were only the sounds the mounts and harness made as they went through the thick, high trees.

They approached the canyon from the side, at about the middle. It ran from south to north, beginning on a peak to their left, and at the edge, they stopped to separate.

"I'll take a bunch down below through the mouth," Bass said to Wales. "You give cover up here."

Wales unhitched the flap of his revolver holster. The image of that wagon driver had entered his mind again as he felt the nearness of those responsible.

"No, I'll go down," he said. "I don't mind."

Bass looked quizzically at Wales and Wales thought he was going to tell him not to take it seriously again. But he smiled instead, the skin wrinkling up around his eyes.

"All right, Fred. Go ahead. Have a good time."

Wales felt he was being humored through a phase. He wished he knew exactly why he felt the way he did. The ambush had outraged him, but at the moment he did not feel outraged. He felt a very cold and precise conviction that a definite punitive stroke must be delivered; but that did not really explain it either. It went beyond that

and he wondered if it was not related to Tucson and what he had learned there.

They were coming down the incline now, through the trees, over a rock slide, and down a steep short slope into the mouth of the canyon. The canyon floor was sand imbedded with rock and gravel, dry now though it could be a trap when the summer rains came down.

"Where is the elk?" Wales asked when they had halted.

"Oh—beyond," Lopez said. "We will see it first."

He smiled at Wales, but Wales did not want to play those little games with him. "How soon?" he asked.

"Oh—ten minutes," Lopez said. "Perhaps ten minutes."

It was near enough to leave the horses, and after they put them under guard, they continued afoot. Wales put everything out of his mind except what they were doing now. He was aware of being very alert and wary as they went ahead. It was wonderful ambush country, and they walked with their carbines or their revolvers at the ready. The walls were fairly close together, with bushy cedars growing out of the breaks. There were large rocks, too, which had broken from the walls, and others which had washed from the peak in time of flood.

They saw the Indians all at once. It was not what Wales had looked for, but it rarely was. Two of them came off the wall with a doe slung on a jackpine between them, held on their shoulders. He saw their clouts first, moving white against the rock. And then the rest of them developed and he saw the rags around their heads, the up-swept toes and boot-tops of their moccasins, and the run of blood from the throat of the doe.

Then it seemed that a second had skipped over in time, for they now came from the very sand and stone itself, and the air was alive with yells, the sound of gunfire and the shine and flutter of arrows in the sunlight. Wales shouted, but nobody had to be told to make for cover. They fell in behind the brush and rock-falls on the sides, or behind the up-jutting rounded boulders in the middle, kneeling to fire, loading and firing again.

As he got them working forward, they kept mostly to the sides where the brush and rock was thickest. Some of the Indians were high already, having been above the troopers at the outset, and the others were trying to get

there now. They were hidden on both sides and kept flushing out like quail as the men advanced. They were hurried and inaccurate, but worried Wales because the brush was dense and tangled. It was all that hardy alder and willow, so thick and obscure that he wished he had Infantry with bayonets.

He felt better when the Indians had got out of there and were higher in the rock and cedar along the walls. They could be dangerous with height to their advantage, but they were full of panic, and once out of the brush they were more exposed and made better targets. Some, when hit, came tumbling out pinwheeling in the air, their arms and legs spreadeagled and their clouts tailed out like guidons. Others fell like hawks diving, crashing solidly, and folded up in the alders. On top, the firing had begun, and those Indians still unhit from down below let loose when the smoke broke out overhead.

It became very wild with the Indians dropping back in the rock and brush again. The shooting had got to be at point-blank range. Some of it was saber work, too, and one of them ran suddenly onto Wales's blade as he came around a point of rock. He felt the driving jar and saw the blade go in beneath the breastbone. Everything went very slow, and he saw it all in great detail. The Indian had a knife in his hand and was working himself along the saber blade to get at Wales. He was as good as dead, but he kept coming on with that senseless drive which Apaches have when they are nearly finished, and Wales began to club him with his revolver. There was a solid, meaty feel as he battered him with the barrel, and blood came out of the Indian's face. Though his open mouth made no sound, Wales could see the agony in the lips, the flatness of his eyes. A sack of amulets hung from his dried umbilical cord around his neck. His mother had saved it from his birth. Wales saw it all in a cool second before the knife swung back and upward. Then he struck again with his revolver, so that the Indian finally faltered and dropped the knife and then slid backwards off the saber down to the ground.

Wales leaned over slowly and wiped the saber on the dirty clout. The Apache's face was quiet now, his body relaxed and bronzed, and there was something quiet in

Wales too. The brave seemed to have been symbolic of the ambush, and perhaps other things, as well, but not any more. Lying dead, he was only another Indian they had come west to pacify.

Now Wales was simply tired and out of breath, and he looked around. It was quiet all at once, with the fighting in the bottoms ended. There was only a scattering of fire from the rim where Bass's crowd was trying to down the ones who had got up on the far side. In the bottoms there was just the diminishing sound of horses running up the canyon, but they would all be checked for riders from above.

He gathered his men together, and examined their injuries when they came to their horses in the canyon mouth. He felt gratified that only two were wounded, and that neither was very serious. One had a glancing arrow cut on the arm, but hunting arrows were neither venomous nor bound in aloe, and it could be easily fixed by Simpson. The other had a ball run through the fleshy part of his leg, and that was not bad either, though it made riding painful.

Up on the rim, there was still a desultory and random fire at those Indians who had managed to reach the heights across the canyon; but it was dying out. They rode on slowly past the pickets in the trees and came to a halt in a clearing where the other mounts were grazing on their ropes. The men were resting on the ground, for it was all but over now, and they were waiting to return to the park where the seep ran.

Bass was waiting when they reached the clearing. It was one of his moments of happy vigor when things had gone well, and he laughed and patted their arms as they got down and stretched.

"Fine, Fred, fine," he said to Wales. "You looked just fine down there. Really great."

"I guess it went all right," Wales said. "A few got out of it, but we stopped most of them." He never felt as Bass did after an action.

"Yes, it went off fine. A handful on the other side." Bass laughed and shrugged his shoulders with a boyish jauntiness. "What's the difference? They'll remember it. What about injuries?"

Wales looked around at his men. They were sitting on

the ground beneath the trees, and Holloway and Beyers, who had been hurt, were lying down.

He explained them to Bass, and asked where Simpson was. He was looking around for Simpson, but did not see him anywhere.

"He went in to get Fox a moment ago, but I think they're coming now. Yes, that sounds like them, all right."

"Fox?" Wales said. "Fox hit?" Fox would not have come to the Pinal at all today except that he had come himself; Fox had volunteered.

Bass was smiling in a tight-lipped way, which was disconcerting until you came to know him. It was a deceptive quality related to a sense of balance. He was able to view his casualties with detachment, yet feel badly about them, too.

"In the lungs," he was saying. "In the lungs."

"Jesus—" and then Wales stopped because the men were coming in with Fox. He was on a blanket drawn taut between them, and Wales could see the arrow which traversed his body under the arms. A run of blood poured out of his nose and mouth, and his face was luminous with shock.

Wales walked slowly over, thinking that Fox might not be lying there like this had he himself stayed at Breckinridge. He saw Simpson kneel beside him on the blanket and take an instrument from his bag, and open Fox's clothing with it. Simpson worked with a quick, decisive sureness; but when the shirt was cut away, he paused, as though receiving a presentment, and laid his ear down to Fox's chest.

It was different when he raised his head. There seemed no longer to be any need for haste. His movements were very slow, almost measured, now. He put the instrument in the bag, closed the bag, rolled his sleeves in place and buttoned the cuffs. Some of Fox's blood was on his cheek; and when he stood, his knees cracked in the silence. He had not been aware of Wales before, but he saw him now and shook his head.

Wales did not believe it until he looked, but it was true. He looked at Fox and thought of his quietness, the way he always seemed to know when trouble was brewing. He remembered how Fox would squint when scanning the

country. Some folks would be sad in West Virginia when the message reached them.

He walked away, feeling that some vital part of him had been removed from his body. He seemed to see himself with Fox again, riding in the heat and sunlight in the circle around that wagon, and he remembered, almost to the word, what he had thought of survival.

A FEW DAYS after the canyon fight, there were orders from Mesilla Valley to send a detachment to help the Infantry evacuate the Santa Cruz. By now, they were so accustomed to rumor and indecision on the Rio Grande that they half expected Colonel Canby or Major Lynde to send a countermanding order.

But at the end of the week, when nothing had been changed, Bass went off with Price and Swett and ten or a dozen others to get things organized. They were gone for several days because they were establishing a second base which had to accommodate the twenty men who would be sent down. Ultimately, all of them would go, and the curious thing was that only a detachment should be going down at first. Wales couldn't believe that Mesilla Valley was unaware of the handicap such orders placed on operations from Breckinridge. So reduced, the remaining force would be unable to patrol without exposing the post to danger while gone. To split them up simply tied their hands, and the sensible thing would be to send them all down there, or none at all.

A year ago he would never have thought to question policy; and it was only lately that he had grown aware of the subtle shift in his attitude. Now it seemed natural to think of this as typical of Mesilla Valley's particular brand of logic.

Bass was gone for eight days. While he was away Wales ran short patrols into the foothills of the Galiuros, the Tortolitas, and up Arivaipa Creek behind Breckinridge. But no patrol was longer than a day, and all were quiet, for the Indians were always slow to pull themselves together when they were hurt badly.

There was not much going on since the raid in the Pinal; and Wales, riding through these dusty spring days, let his mind drift often toward Tucson. Since the possibility of going there was now quite real, he thought of Marion, too, and in terms more positive than earlier, won-

dering what might come of it—and also, in that connection, of Charlie Price, who might this very minute be pressing his attentions upon her. It was odd, Wales thought, with some misgivings, that those qualities which went into making Price a dubious soldier, very likely made him attractive to women.

When Bass returned, he wrote the movement order, giving Wales command of the detachment. They would patrol along the Santa Cruz where settlements, mines and ranches were being abandoned, and when needed, would help the Fort Buchanan Infantry.

They departed on a clear, hot morning at dawn. It was going to be a slow march because they trailed a wagon with the gear and personal property of the men. Wales did not think of this move with any finality until the file descended toward the river; and then he looked around and saw the flapping canvas and the heaps of mud under the flag. He looked a long while at the row of crosses on the rise of barren ground beyond the quadrangle. The nail heads which preserved the names against weather were rusty and dull in the sunlight. He had been at Breckinridge for a year, and since the post would be burned when Bass abandoned it, he would never see it again. It seemed very odd that he was pleased to leave, and at the same time felt a sense of loss.

As had been expected, the wagon held them back, and evening had long ago been drowned in deep night when they arrived. Since Bass had made arrangements in advance, there would be no midnight haggling with Tyson over terms, and Wales was wearily grateful. The last half-hour had worked on his defense against fatigue, and he could hardly stay awake for the final hundred yards. All day in the back of his mind he had the notion of seeing Marion on their arrival, but all he could think of now was sleep.

Swett and the six or seven Bass had left with him were waiting for them in the compound, which seemed very large now without the tents and wagons of the Infantry. Coming forward to take the bridles, they looked sleepy

and disheveled, as if they had turned out of bed especially for this.

"Well, you're here," Swett said as Wales threw down the reins to him. "Did you run into something? We were looking for you earlier."

"No—it went all right. Just this wagon threw a wheel, that's all; you should have stayed in bed."

"Oh, that's all right; we've been expecting you," Swett said, which was like him, since loose ends made him feel uneasy. Swett had probably worried about them, coming late.

The men dismounted slowly and disjointedly, then stretched up on the balls of their feet to ease their muscles. Yawning, and leaning against their animals, they undid their blankets behind the saddles and loosed the cinching.

"We've got a wing of this place to use," Swett told them when the horses had been stripped and picketed. "Rather warm for sleeping now, but we can use it when the rains begin. In the meantime, it'll make good storage space."

"Yes, we can use the room, all right," Wales said. "And by the time they all get here, we'll need it."

"And I've got a laundress for us, too," Swett continued as the men picked up their gear and followed him across the compound.

"Have you? That's something we can use."

"Indeed—" and Swett went on about the laundress; but Wales was just as happy because he was too tired to talk. Rather than see the wing, he would prefer to lie down on the ground and sleep, but Swett had waited up for them, and he felt obliged to return what seemed a courtesy. From somewhere came the unrelated thought that Swett missed out on much of the chaff and by-play common to the rest of them. He was probably deserving of more attention than he got, and would be a lonely man. In his tiredness, he felt suddenly kindly toward the Quartermaster, and he tried to remember what he knew about him; but there was little. Except for garrison matters, Swett was very reticent. He was shy, and rarely talked of himself. Had Wales not seen it on the muster rolls, he'd never have known that Swett was married.

In the morning, there were all those things which would

have been done the night before, had they got in earlier. All the unpacking, the sorting, the putting away, the setting up of mess facilities, the kitchen, and the cots. Then there was an hour or more that afternoon spent with Tyson over the matter of rations for the men and grain for the horses. This had all been arranged by Bass, but somewhere in the interim the contractor had reckoned his return as too low, and so it had to be figured over once more with Wales in a squalid conversation which began with Tyson's declaration of patriotic motives, descended quickly to the state of jeopardy in which his investments existed, and finally settled on the low level of personalities. Having no experience in commerce, Wales's main reaction to all this was annoyance. Yet it had its compensations. He had expected to run a patrol southward today, but the further delay with Tyson took too much time. He was now free to see Marion.

It was midafternoon when he left the mill, and in the presidio this time, things seemed more settled than during those first few days of the evacuees' arrival. While there was still that temporary atmosphere, the feeling of sudden influx and emergency which he remembered from before was gone. Except for random stragglers who had come up the trail alone, the crowd was about the same, and probably would not change until Anderson arrived again with others.

Before he could decide if he was going to feel peculiar among these people, he heard his name called, and as he looked around he saw the peaked hat coming through the mass of faces from the street. It was Salazar, with his satyr beard and leather pants. A quirt was hanging from one wrist, and he was laughing as he walked toward Wales.

"Ha, Caballeria! It is you again!"

"Yes, it's me, all right," Wales said, shaking hands with him and smiling with a sudden feeling of pleasure. "How are you?"

"Fine. Fine. So, you are here again. Will you return this time?"

"No. We're here for good now, until they pull us out. I'm sorry we didn't stay before," Wales added, because

he remembered their conversation in Alfredo's, and how Salazar had seemed to think they would remain.

Salazar laughed again with that great vitality of his, and swung the quirt against his leather pants.

"At my age," he said, "one expects little, and appreciates what he receives." He patted Wales on the arm. "But we will have fun together now."

"I thought you were going back to the San Juan," Wales said.

"Oh—I go and I come. Soon I will go back again. But now I am here. These days I am recruiting here."

"Recruiting?" Wales said. Salazar was smiling and scowling together, and Wales could never tell about him then.

"Ha! My lancers! Each day now I recruit them at Alfredo's."

He began to laugh again, so that Wales did not know whether or not to believe what he said, yet it was the sort of bizarre—almost Quixotic—thing that Salazar would do.

"It is God's truth," Salazar said when he had stopped. "Come with me now, and observe. Men become very brave when they are in Alfredo's for a while."

Wales believed him then, would have liked to see the spectacle, but he apologized. "I've got to meet someone now," he said. "Some other time, perhaps. But, thanks for the invitation."

"Ah, so. You would like it, though. But, as you say, another time." He smiled, he patted Wales again and tipped his hat in a short bow from his waist. "Well, then, adios, until we meet again."

Wales was aware of making some of those gestures himself. Salazar made him feel good, and he admired his defiance of adversity.

"Yes, adios," he said. "We're around here now; we'll be seeing you."

Then Salazar walked away, and Wales stood in the street watching him until he saw only the high peak of the hat among the many people. When he turned again, to enter the presidio, Marion had appeared, coming straight out of nowhere while his back was turned.

She looked up at him and smiled.

"What are you doing here?" she said.

Because of all the uncertainties, he had tried not to think too hard about her, and now he was surprised at the overwhelming feeling in him.

"I came to see you," he said. "How've you been?"

"Fine. And you? They told us you arrived last night."

"Yes, around midnight," he said. "We're here to stay now. I mean, until we all pull out."

"Yes, I heard that, too," she said.

Wales did not have to wonder where she had learned about their staying on, but he was too aware of her just now to think about Price. Her face was smooth and her brown, smiling eyes seemed filled with golden splinters in the sunlight. He was very glad to see her, and the fact that he had tried to suppress his thoughts about her while back at Breckinridge made him acutely conscious of it.

"Have you time to take a walk?" he asked. She held her hands together at her waist, and he took her elbow.

She looked doubtfully through the gate at the tortilla fires. "I don't know," she said. "I was just returning from the house; they'll be expecting me. Can't we talk over there?"

"Too crowded," Wales said, remembering how he had felt while waiting there before for her. "Can't you leave for a while?" He tugged a little on her arm. "Come on."

"Well—" she said looking across the grounds again, "all right; but only for a while. I can't stay away for long."

"You can never do anything for very long, can you?" he said, and then, since he disliked himself for this impatience, he laughed.

But she had caught the tone of his voice, and looked up. "Please. I can't help it. I don't plan things this way."

"I know you don't," he said quickly. "The remark was meant as flattery."

She brightened in the street. She became quite gay and talkative and told him all about a new rebozo which Tia Carlotta had been sewing on. She explained a refinement she was learning in tortilla making—there was a way of slapping it on your hip. She diverged along the newest rumor concerning a Confederate column out of Texas. She asked of his morning, and he told her, and she made a face over Tyson and said she thought him sly, though her father found him an interesting personality; but then her

father was so easy-going and tolerant of fault that he could even term as idle certain rumors concerning Tyson's activities in town, as well as gloss over the contractor's growing penchant for innuendoes regarding her family's Virginia affiliations.

"Why," she said indignantly, "he's even had the gall to question father's right to authorize voucher payments for Army supplies!"

Recalling Tyson's assessment of Allis, Wales was not much surprised; nor was he especially interested in the matter, but he tried to make it appear that he was.

"How does your father like that?" he asked.

"Oh, he laughs it off," she said. "He treats it like a joke."

Which was like him, Wales thought; and perhaps it was the best thing, anyhow. It never did any good to argue with Tyson.

"Maybe he's right," he said.

"Oh, you think so? Well, I don't. I think Tyson's dangerous."

"Don't you think your father'd know if he was?"

"Maybe," Marion said, while her shoulders moved in a shrug. "I don't know. It's hard to know what he thinks sometimes, even if he is my father. I suppose he's bored; he takes his fun in strange ways when he's bored."

"Everyone gets bored out here. That's natural enough. Maybe he's lucky to find his pleasure so easily."

"Well, I wish he wouldn't. It puts me on edge. He's not a practical man, and I'm always afraid he's going to get himself into something."

She prattled on, airing her indignation. Wales began to grow somewhat bored himself, thinking that her chatter almost seemed to be a willful effort to diminish the sense of intimacy which had risen with the infant controversy over whether or not she would walk with him. It was as if she sought some haven from emotion in unrelated conversation. But on the other hand, perhaps his intense awareness of her simply made it seem that way.

He watched the road and listened to her go on; then, when they were going upgrade past the earthen buildings she asked him when the remainder of the unit was coming from Breckinridge.

"Soon, it looks like. A week or so, I imagine. Bass will bring them down as soon as the orders come."

"Your commanding officer? I've only met him once, I think. My father knows him, though. What's he like? Is he like you?"

"Like me? Johnny Bass?" Wales laughed. "No, he's not like me. He's better than that. He knows the answers."

"And you don't?" She was smiling in a roguish way. It did not seem to be unnatural, rather a side of her that he had never seen before, and it puzzled him.

"Not the way he knows them," Wales said. And then, since he was bothered by his puzzlement, he added, "What's all this anyway?"

She laughed and touched him on the arm, in a way that seemed exactly like the girls he used to know in Pennsylvania. He could almost believe she was accomplished on the melodeon, after all, and perhaps made samplers in the evening. It was a curious transformation.

"Nothing in particular. I simply want to know your friends, the ones who ride with you—what they're like."

"What do you want to know all that for?" he asked. He would like to talk about themselves, but she would rather discuss the table of organization. It came to him again that she seemed to be directing this along an impersonal path.

She laughed again, and said, "I suppose I'm just curious, that's all. What are their names?"

"Names? Oh—" and then, since she would have it that way—"Simpson, Mannion, Haynes, Gleason. There're a lot of them. Swett's another. Price, too. Wilcox. Beyers." He stopped. He had nearly mentioned Fox, too; it was still too soon to automatically think of him as gone. "About thirty," he said, to finish it.

Marion shook her head the way you do when nothing registers.

"They're not familiar to me at all," she said slowly. "Except for Price. I know him, all right. He was just down here."

"Yes, I know," Wales said, and he was aware of mild jealousy. "I don't doubt he looked in on you."

"Yes, he did," she said, and she laughed quietly. "He's amusing, don't you think? Or is refreshing the word?"

He had never thought of Charlie Price as being particularly refreshing or amusing; but he could see how Marion might. Charlie had that gay, inconsequential humor and personal charm which the ladies always found so appealing.

"Yes, Charlie's quite a boy," he said, rather drily.

"Yes, I think he is," Marion said, and smiled. "I don't know—he made me feel a million miles away from here. I don't know how to explain it; I almost felt that none of this existed."

"It exists, all right," Wales said. "You pointed that out to me yourself."

"Oh, I know." She turned her palms up and looked at them. "I suppose it was just that he didn't seem touched by it, that's all. I just went along for the ride."

It was queer how each could see the same things in Charlie Price, yet see them differently. He looked at her again, not at all happy to think that Price might have held her in his arms as he had. She was hardly Price's style, but that would not make any difference to Price, since Charlie never thought in terms of permanence anyway. More than once he'd thought it would be nice to have some of Charlie's free-wheeling flamboyance, and now he thought of it again. He was such an odd old stick, sometimes, himself.

But Price annoyed him now, the way he kept cropping up, and when they had come to a high point on the road, he pulled her over to a lonely palo verde tree and tried to kiss her. She would not let him, though. She pressed her hands against his shoulders, and turned her head away. He tried to bring her close, but when he bent his head he could not reach her mouth.

"Oh, Fred, please; please, we can't." She spoke in quick little breaths, and kept on pushing at him.

"Why not?" he said. "What's wrong with it?" There was a flush of high color on her cheeks as he bent over her.

"Oh, everything. Can't you see?" She laughed. "What will people think?"

There was no one around to see, but he felt foolish in this awkward stance, and let her go. She stepped back and smoothed her hair and dress. The color lingered in her face, and her laughter had a kind of desperation in it.

"No," he said. "I can't see what you're afraid of either." Her laughter made him feel ridiculous and he stood stiffly before her trying to think. But all he could think of was Charlie Price.

"I can't help it," Marion said. "We talked about it all before. Nothing's changed." She looked up from smoothing her skirt and smiled. "Please."

"I know we did," he said. "But it didn't seem to make any difference in what we did."

"I know that," she said, laughing again, "but perhaps it should have."

"Do you believe that?" Wales said, smiling now, himself, although he did not really feel like smiling. And when he added, "It sounds more like Price to me," it slipped out, as if it had been lying in wait to be said.

"Maybe you're right," she said, in that capricious way that baffled him—but then she looked away. "Oh—I don't know. I'm afraid, I guess." Then she turned to him once again and touched his arm. "Please, Fred, I've got to get back."

Going back down the road, he felt confused and resentful. He could not reconcile her willing passion of before with her inclination toward irrelevancies now. He could not reconcile the caprice of her resistance either. Price could easily be in back of it, and however much he might like to think of Price as just a symptom of something else, he knew that Price was a real concern. Yet, perhaps she was resisting her own impulses, as well as his own. Then he realized quite suddenly that he had no way of knowing what it was. There was no way to judge the thing detachedly, and he seemed to see all sorts of elements that might not be present at all.

It would be nice to understand a woman's thinking processes, he thought ruefully as they went down the dusty road. Somewhere he had heard that men felt that way when they began to fall in love.

HE DID NOT see Marion again for a while because they were on reconnaissance for four days along the Camino Real, the old road which the Spanish had pioneered and had used for a hundred and sixty years. The patrol was principally exploratory because their lack of knowledge of the country placed them at a disadvantage. They had been through here a time or two, and over the Sonoita to Fort Buchanan, but it was all too long ago to be of any present value.

The Camino Real ran south along the river through a valley elevating slowly toward the border of Mexico. Along the water there was much aquatic growth, and many cottonwoods and willows; toward the higher country further down, the trees ran more to sycamore, oak and walnut. At the mouth the valley was wide, with the growth in the bordering hills of a desert character; but later on it narrowed, and the hills were brown with grass which shimmered golden when fall came. To the west the hills conformed to an even, undulating line cut with periodic washes which ran with water when the rains fell. As the country raised, these hills rose higher, but they still were lower than the hills across the river which rose more abruptly from the plain and became a tableland from which the Santa Ritas lifted. Except for the Catalinas, the Santa Ritas were the highest in the Santa Cruz drainage, their peaks ragged and forested in pine. In their higher elevations, they looked wild and precipitous, and were natural strongholds of the Chiricahuas. When you rode beneath them on the trail along the river, you always felt under observation.

Here in this southern valley, the Spanish had built their mining camps, their haciendas and missions, and they were riding by these places which now were dead and silent in their fields. After you had seen a few, you came to anticipate them before you were near enough to see the burned corbels, or vigas, or the smoke-stained adobe walls,

or the sunlight streaming through fallen roofs. There was always the odor of rotting stock, and sometimes there were turkey buzzards wheeling high over head. You came to know them simply by the absence of life, for you could see the fields becoming overgrown with noxious growth. They would never be that way if someone was living there. And you could feel it in the atmosphere, too; in some way, which you never fully understood, the fact of death communicated itself, and you knew it was near.

And the road, too, was showing the aftermath of devastation. After they got into the grassy vegas further south, they could not ride a quarter of a mile without encountering an animal carcass along the roadside or in the nearby grazing land. They lay stark and stiff and sometimes they'd been all but stripped by carrion-feeding animals and birds. Once in a while there would be a mule or horse, or an ox, perhaps, that lay dead in harness, or a wagon, or an old carreta that lay broken and half-burned. There were rudely erected crosses, too. Some were marked with names, but that seemed to depend upon the burial party's need of haste. One time they passed five all in a row on fresh mounds beside an old spring wagon with half-burned clothing strewn around it. Nearby were two dead oxen, still harnessed to a wooden carreta whose cottonwood wheels had split. This was all in a meadow of lavender sand verbena which had a fragrance that carried several miles.

All was quiet in this fruitful and abandoned land. There was a green freshness in the mountains where the summer rains were just beginning to fall, and the grassy hills were tawny in the sunlight. Along the Santa Cruz, the trees were full-crowned and lush. It seemed incongruous and bizarre that such beauty and tranquility should exist coincidentally with violence; but it did. The circumstance endowed Wales's notion of their being in a race with time with a sinister validity; for the ruination here portrayed the Chiricahuas as being the worst of them all.

They were back in Tucson on the afternoon that Bass arrived with the remainder of the Troop. It was getting on toward sunset when they brought their wagons into the

compound of the mill. Wales came up from the race, where he had bathed, and stood watching with a towel around his middle as they rode through the gates in a long, relaxing line, the mounted men first, then the wagons with the gear, and finally, Domingo with the led string and the pack animals.

Wales walked over and took the bridle of Bass's horse as he began to dismount.

"Hello, John, how are you?"

"All right," Bass said in a flat voice. "I want a bath."

Wales was looking around in the failing light. There was a kind of silent preoccupation among the men which was the first indication he had that something was wrong.

"Where's Charlie?" he said, and wondered if his concern for Price was from habit, or out of this odd, new feeling toward him.

"Up here, you blind bastard," Price said, and Wales looked up and saw him on a wagon seat. His arm was in a sling.

"What's your trouble?" Wales said. "Your horse get sick of you? Did you break that thing?"

"They shot him out from under me," Price said, and he laughed in the way he did when something big had happened. "A sprain."

Wales was looking around some more. In the queer light he began to see that there were other casualties. Most were minor and the men had arrived mounted, but a few were in the wagons. Simpson was working around with them now.

"What did you get into, anyway?" he said.

"Some of the Pinals, I guess," Bass said. "They hit us coming out of the Canada this morning."

"By God, they really did, didn't they?"

"Yes, a complete surprise; and the hell of it is, we thought we'd fixed them." Bass was pulling his gear off now and piling it on the ground beside his mount. There was a roundness in his shoulders which made the weight look heavier than it was.

"Hell, I thought we fixed them, too," Wales said.

"They just had more than we had thought, when we were finished with them. I think they had some Tontos with them this time, too. They had a crowd, all right."

"By God, they must have," Wales said; he was still surprised, and finding it hard to believe that this had happened.

"Yes, and they had to ride a hell of a ways to pull it off, too. But, they did it."

Price lowered himself from the wagon and walked over to them.

"They caught us with our pants down, Freddy boy," he said. "I was on the goddam ground on my back before I knew what happened. Lord—I didn't even hear the shot that got the horse."

"No, it all went too fast," Bass said. "We were just like ducks in a pond." He stripped the bridle off and threw it on the ground. "You've got to hand it to them, though, goddam it."

"Oh, come on, John," Price said. "It wasn't anybody's fault."

"Yes, it was. I let us get sucked into that."

"No, you didn't. It was a perfect set-up, that's all."

"That doesn't make any difference to Wilcox," Bass said.

"Wilcox killed?" Wales said.

"Yes. And Haynes is pretty bad. Simpson says the rest will be all right. But just the same . . ."

Wales did not say anything more just then. He had never seen Bass let down in just this way before, but ambush always left you feeling impotent and critical of yourself. It was a feeling of being cheated, that your casualties could have been avoided, if only you had not done this, or had done that.

He stood watching Swett and some of the others helping Simpson take the injured into the mill. There were two of them on blankets rigged as stretchers, and four on foot. The four were walking slowly over the ground, leaning with their arms across the shoulders of the men who walked beside them to give support. They had the look of vessels that might spill over if handled carelessly. You always thought about the venom and the aloe root when you were hit with arrows, Wales was thinking—as some of them were. And Wilcox. That shy, young boy who looked as fresh as Sunday school. And maybe Haynes, too, the one who shot so well. They were both young men, about

the youngest on the rolls, but were the old men, even so.

By now the men were going into the mill to stow their gear and learn from Swett where they would bunk. A few were bathing in the race, but most were sorting out their gear and slowly getting organized. Ambush was too demoralizing to come back from quickly.

When he had dressed he went into the sick bay which Simpson had set up, and talked with the injured men until mess was served; after eating he pulled Price's gear from the wagon and helped him take it into the mill. Price was the only one who wasn't down about the ambush, but Wales was getting tired of hearing about him on the goddam ground before he knew it, and hearing it in the particular way that Price told of such things. He was aware of being very patient toward him, though, because he couldn't tell what part of his critical attitude was due to the way he related him with Marion.

"Listen," he said finally, "what about the Post?"

"Breckinridge? Oh, hell, it's gone," Price said.

"Burned?" Wales was trying to think how Breckinridge would look when it was burning.

"Hell, yes. Went fine, too. I never thought she'd go like that."

"What did you do? Was this in the morning?" He wanted to hear it all, and he was surprised to feel the way he did.

Price looked up from the bag he was emptying on his cot, and laughed. "What the hell, Fred; it burned. Sure—it was in the morning. Right after mess. The last breakfast."

"Come on," Wales said. "What did you do? How long did it take?"

"We just stood around and watched it, that's all. Somebody threw a lot of coal oil around first. I don't know how long it took. It went fast, though. What difference does it make? God, who cares?"

"I don't know," Wales said. "I imagine Phil Simpson cared a little."

Price was hanging his clothing on the nails behind his cot; he turned slowly around and looked at Wales.

"Yes, I guess he did, at that," he said. "They'll get them

out of there, won't they? I mean his wife, and Fox. And the rest of them?"

Wales could see the orange flame splintering through the black rolling smoke; behind it there would be the grey of early dawn.

"Some time, I suppose," he said. "Not for a while, though."

Price wagged his head, as if he, too, could see it all again.

"Y'know, there were quite a few of them, weren't there? Besides ours, I mean. But you had to know them when they lived to make them real."

"You can imagine them pretty well," Wales said. "They were human beings, too."

"Yes, I guess you can," Price said, but Wales knew that Price could not really imagine anything like that. Price's mind just skimmed the surface of whatever it touched.

They went outside again to the fires, where most of the men were sitting around with smokes and coffee now. Wales saw Bass near a wagon with Swett and Simpson, and he went over with Price to join them. He shook hands with Simpson, whom he had scarcely seen in the furor of arrival, and told Bass the reports were up to date.

"Except for today," he said. "We just got back. I'll have it in the morning, though."

"That's all right," Bass said. "I'm not reading anything tonight. How is it in the south?"

"They've about gutted this country now. It's really a mess down south. About the only life we saw was buzzards."

"Yes," Bass said. "It's about the end of everything around here now. Have you heard anything from the Eighth?"

"No, not yet," Wales said. "It's about due, though, according to what Anderson said before. They'll be bringing the mining people up from Tubac soon."

"I don't suppose you patrolled that far," Bass said.

"No, not this time. We could have with another day, but I didn't like to leave this place too long. What do you hear from Mesilla Valley?"

"Well—there's another column coming out," Bass said. "We hear so, anyway."

"Do you think there's something to it this time?" Wales said.

"Could be. A man named Baylor is said to be in command. It's not confirmed, though." Bass paused and smiled. "Still, the man has a name this time."

"Still rumor, though," Price said with a cynical laugh. "They're too damned busy packing up to run to check that kind of stuff."

"What about Allis?" Bass said. "Has he heard anything?"

"I haven't seen him yet. But I talked with his daughter, Marion. He's all involved with Tyson over something just now. Apparently, he's going to believe it when he sees it though. I guess they've been sending him a string of rumors, too."

"Yes, we're all in it together, that's sure," Bass said. "Being down here, we'll be working pretty closely with him now."

"That's right, he's got a girl, hasn't he?" Price said. "Thanks for reminding me, Fred."

He winked and Wales wished he did not feel self-conscious having Marion discussed. He wondered if it showed in his expression, and felt it might since Price was having his little joke with him—if it was a joke.

"Yes, he has—but a little advanced for you," he said to pass it off.

"Now, I'll have to show you that isn't so," Price said. He looked around at the others, who were watching Wales and smiling. "Anyone for Alfredo's? That was a dry ride, men. How about it, Phil?"

"Thanks," the Surgeon said, but shook his head. "I'd better stick around. I want to see how Haynes is going to go."

"What about the rest of you?" Price said.

But nobody answered him because there was a sound of many horses on the road. When he placed it, Wales looked toward the town and presently saw then passing dimly against the lights. They came on over the river in a loosely gathered body, and as they neared the mill he saw the peaked hats on their heads.

"Hey," he said, and laughed. "It's Salazar."

"Who's he?" Bass said. "What's he got there, anyway?"

He was looking hard, and beginning to smile, for now the body of men was close to the compound wall and they could see the tall shafts whose blades flickered when they caught the light.

"That's old Don Diego," Wales said. "He's got Salazar's lancers. By God, he's got them, too!"

"I'll be damned," Price said, and laughed. "I forgot about him."

"You mean, he's going out with those?" Simpson said.

"Sure, he is," Wales said. "Why not?" He was feeling suddenly loyal to Salazar.

"Say, this is something," Price said. "This is something out of *The Cid*."

By now they all were walking toward the gate, and others were coming from the fires. The riders came on up the grade, and when abreast of those who had come out to watch, Salazar lifted his hand. He swept off his high sombrero in a burlesqued bow, and laughed.

"Look!" he shouted as they halted. "Look at these, my lancers! My borrachos!"

They looked at them; and they were all shapes and sizes, all ragged and dirty and slightly cock-eyed from the recruiting ceremonies at Alfredo's. They sat humped in their serapes and high hats, and their lances were made of old knives and bayonets lashed to mescal stalks that wavered as they held them. Neither were their horses very good, but all were smiling and seemed to care for nothing.

Salazar was smiling most of all; he was treating it as a joke, but there were serious overtones.

"Look at them! How do you like my bravos?"

"They're fine," Wales said as Salazar leaned out to shake his hand. "I hope you get there all right."

"Why not? By dawn, perhaps. Look—you should come with us." He laughed in another outburst and he waved his arm at the troopers.

"I don't know about that," Wales said, and then he introduced Salazar to Bass and the others who stood around watching with amusement.

Bass did not say very much at first. He rubbed the back of his neck and watched them with his ready smile; but it was oddly dignified when he shook Salazar's hand, who bowed very low with his beard stuck in his chest. Nobody

laughed then except Price who had been laughing all the while.

"Good luck," Bass said when they were ready to leave. "Watch your flanks."

"Ha! A tactician! Yes, I will watch all that." He embraced them all with a sweep of his hat as he put it on again. "You come to the San Juan."

"Thank you," Bass said. "We'll try to do that some day."

"Fine! That will be an honor. We will kill a sheep for you." He pulled his hat down tight, looked around him at his men, and raised his arm. "Adios, senors."

"Adios," they all said together, and waved their hands.

"Adelante!" Salazar shouted, and his arm came down. The animals moved ahead and the men lurched and wavered with their lances circling above them. They were all gone quickly because there was a turn and a thicket of mesquite trees on the edge of the dark.

The troopers were all hooting and laughing as they went back to the fires.

"Say, that crowd's half tanked up," Simpson said.

"That's how he recruits them," Wales said. "They'll be all right in the morning."

"If they don't stick each other in the dark," Price said.

"They'll never get there," Simpson said. "The Apaches'll get them first." He laughed; and then all of them laughed together at the absurd spectacle.

"I think Salazar knows his business," Wales said, beginning to feel a quiet resentment at all this disdainful ridicule and laughter. He was ready to believe that Salazar could do whatever he wished.

"Oh, come on, Fred," Price said. "Lances are medieval."

"If that's all you had, you'd use them, too."

"That's got nothing to do with it. They're medieval all the same." Price laughed. "And Mexicans—hell. They're out of their minds." He looked at Bass. "What about it, John?"

"Maybe so," Bass said. "But they did pretty well with lances at San Pasqual."

"Say—that's right," Wales said, and he was glad that Bass remembered. They were going through the dark toward the fires, and he looked at him and smiled.

Later in the evening the yen for Alfredo's gathered steam, and most of the men went into town. Wales, however, held back pleading paper-work, though this wasn't altogether true, for he really meant to go to Marion's once he felt sure that she'd left the presidio. But there was no point in inviting levity on the subject, and it was at least partly true that there were papers to be attended to. There always were.

He worked on these in the small room that had been allowed them for staff work; and for half an hour remained submerged in the returns and accounts that covered his week's command of the Tucson detachment. Then, when he was about to leave he heard a clamor in the compound. Outside he saw a knot of troopers gathered about a fire, and one of their number, who seemed to be down, beside it.

It was Burkhardt, a Pennsylvania boy, swearing in awful German, sitting in a heap on the ground. He was holding his head in his hands. Dust and rents marked his uniform, and his nose was bleeding.

"It was a girl done it," someone said, and the men laughed.

Wales looked around. Two or three others were also disheveled and battered, and he knew there had been a fight.

"Bitch!" Burkhardt said, and mopped at his nose with his sleeve. "Verdamned bitch!"

The men laughed again. Mannion came up from the race with a pan of water and a towel, which he gave to Burkhardt. It was plain that he too had been involved. But Wales was not surprised.

"Now, stick your bloody face in that," Mannion said. He turned to Wales. "The girl was only the start of it. There were men, too. It was up at some dark place behind the presidio. They was Anglos, mostly, by their looks—secesh, by their talk."

Burkhardt looked up, his face red and streaming. "They kept saying that word—damnyankees, only it was goddam-yankeebastards."

"We had only four," Mannion said. "And there must have been twenty of them—well, eight or nine, anyhow. We did well to get out as we did, in the dark and all."

"Yes, I guess you did," Wales said, and he was not much surprised at the development. Something of this kind was bound to happen sooner or later.

"I'd like to go back there with a crowd," Mannion said, "and take that place apart. I would now."

"Well, you'd better not," Wales said. "We've got enough on our hands in this town without inciting riots." He began to move away. "Keep the men here, Mannion. I'm going to take this to the captain."

"I'd be pleased to join you, sir," Mannion said, grinning.

"Not on your life," Wales said. "Don't stir out of this place again tonight. That's an order. And you'd better post your sentries pretty carefully, too."

There was really no need for special vigilance, Wales thought as he entered the road, but the suggestion would keep Mannion in line. However much the trouble seemed one of those sudden, spontaneous things that happen where soldiers and women and barrooms mix, the involvement of Secessionists could be more than coincidence. They were always around, and he remembered Jarret's knocking into some of them that evening several weeks back. It could work both ways. So he was careful as he made his way toward Alfredo's; but that, too, was needless, and he arrived soon enough without incident.

The place was as it always was, drowned in smoke and sweat and noise and half-dark. The same girl was throwing her legs high in the same dance, and the same men were sitting around the room, shouting and waving their glasses at her. There was the same feeling of forced conviviality thinly over-riding the pervading depression.

Bass, along with Swett and Simpson, was at the bar. His reaction was about as Wales's had been.

"I suppose we have to look for that. How many were there?"

"Eight or nine. Mannion said twenty at first."

"Probably seemed like twenty in the dark. They seem to be getting bolder."

"Likely had news from the Rio Grande," Simpson said.

"They have their sources, I imagine."

"Everybody knows but us," Bass said.

All four drank and for a moment watched the dancing,

singing girl. Wales had gradually grown aware that Price was not there, and now he wondered.

"Well, the men'll have to stay in groups, that's all," Bass said. "Six at a minimum. I'll be damned if I'll keep them at the mill." He turned to Wales. "Maybe you'd better run this up to Allis, Fred. He may have something on it. He'll want to know in any event."

"All right," Wales said. But he was thinking, still, about Price. He was wondering if he'd gone to the presidio, and then if Marion would be there now at nine-thirty.

He did not stop to look, however. He had never felt at ease there, and just now it was the last place on earth that he would choose to encounter Price and Marion together. His dislike of being party to the kind of spectacle which such a meeting might provide stayed with him until he reached the gates to Allis' house, which were open, and he forgot that there might be other such places.

Then as he stepped into the quiet dark beyond, something warned him of human presence, and he stopped in midstride. While his heart slammed in his chest and the attack on his men leaped into his mind, he stared ahead through the blind black, wholly alert.

But there were no saloon brawlers here. Nor were they Rebel partisans who slowly acquired form and substance beneath the pepper tree. It was Charlie Price and Marion, standing together beneath the branches.

Unknown, he watched them, and they made no move or sound to show their awareness of him. But then few people would when submerged in each other's passions.

THAT WEEK, SUMMER CAME. It came on the annual shift of airs from the Gulf of Mexico, the heat and moisture pumping north and west until they enveloped the whole territory. Wales thought it a kindly providence that made memory what it was, because he had forgotten how bad the atmosphere really could be and was surprised that you could breathe fire and yet survive. But they had done it for a part of last year, too. And now it had come again.

It was the moisture that made you think that you were going to suffocate. You could stand it hot and dry, but the sudden shift to high humidity half-smothered you. Although you perspired all the time you still had the feeling that your pores were never open and that sooner or later your juices would all boil over.

It was a time when there were thunderstorms around the valley ranges in the late afternoons and early evenings. They sometimes watched the storms building over the Catalinas and the Rincons in the east, and above the Santa Ritas in the south. Ordinarily, they began with clouds gathering like white sheep, and then turned into towering anvils as they grew larger and joined others, and in a mass swelled grey and black with moisture, their deeps and canyons ribbed with lightning.

Soon, you would hear the rolling thunder far away, and as the sky darkened, the lightning would become more vivid, until the peaks ran with fire. When the clouds ignited, the water would descend in a solid mass, and the crests were often obscured by the rain. Sometimes it came sweeping down the slopes and out over the plain, and you would see it as an opaque curtain drawing slowly down until all behind was hidden. Sometimes, too, it reached the town, but mostly you had to watch it falling far off and wish you were there.

These storms, whenever they reached the town, arrived on an avalanche of wind and dust. You would see it shining in the reflection of the sunset thirty miles away. It

would tower like a golden wall that would seem unreal until the trees began to bend and you felt the driven sand biting. If there was rain, it would begin as mud falling to earth.

Sometimes they were cheated, and there would be no following rain at all; there would be only the roaring wind and dust, with the rain avoiding the center of the valley. But there was always dust in summer, whether the wind of a storm was blowing up or not, and the heat gave it an aggravating quality. It got in everything, and there was nothing to do but live with it. You found it in your bed, you ate it with your food, and there was always a film of it on your gear. Intermingled with the sweat of your body, it made furious rashes on your feet, in the bend of your elbows, behind your knees and in your crotch. Men developed painful, running sores and harnessed animals galled more easily. You always found a scum on the drinking water in the ollas, and when they were taken down and cleaned, their bottoms were thick with sediment.

There was scarcely a place into which it did not penetrate, and for a while, as a point of principle and sanitation, you struggled to keep ahead of it. Pride kept you at it. There was something seamy and unmilitary in letting it get the upper hand, but sooner or later you let your standards fall, and worked at it only on occasion. When you reached that point, you felt you had been faced with compromise, at least, if not defeat; and thereafter, because pride had been involved, you had a lively hatred for dust.

Summer was an unbelievable season in the desert. The mountains blazed and shimmered like apparitions. All detail became submerged in a milk-white trembling haze, and the distant ranges acquired the blue of iron slowly heating in a forge. Wonderful lakes appeared but they were cruel jokes receding ever away. All the colored life of spring turned grey and dormant, and the reptiles were scarcely seen at all except at night. The rattlesnakes began to lose their skins, went briefly blind, and were more dangerous than at any other time of year.

Every day the clouds would gather on the peaks; and in between the heavy storms the air would steam with moisture. By the time the southern winds began to send the dust-devils spiralling into the sky, the inferno was

complete. Nobody believed they were the restless ghosts of Apache dead, but when you watched their aimless, tawny drift across the desert your mind still turned toward Apaches.

There was a respite when the rains came down gently. Violence was a characteristic of the summer storms, but a few were calm and quiet. On these occasions you could let your body drink in the rain until your pores seemed to run over. Then, for a while, the dust was washed away, your body ceased itching, your flesh grew pliable and soft, and you were clean.

They patrolled during all this time, but there was not very much activity. By now the greater portion of the population along the river had been driven from their farms and ranches, and those remaining in the south were keeping close to Tubac and the fortified mining camps until time for their evacuation. There were said to be a few at Arivaca, too, which lay west of the river through the hills; but little was known of them, and they were a matter for the Fort Buchanan crowd anyway.

And Wales kept thinking of that air of waiting which, in its desolation, the country seemed to have. It seemed to anticipate some great final excess, and he came gradually to think that whatever was going to happen next would come when all these people at last headed north.

But now and then there would be groups of stragglers coming up the Camino Real without a patrol to bring them in. They were always die-hards who had made their lonely stand against the Indians at some isolated farm or ranch until they had exhausted their food, their casualties had become too great to bear, or there had simply been no point in going on. One night they would pile such possessions as they could carry onto a wagon or cart, gather whatever stock that might have lasted through the long assault, and head north. Sometimes they made it in safety, and other times their crosses would be found along the road by some patrol, or by other parties who followed.

To Wales there was a particular kind of valor in the endurance of these people, and whenever he saw them on the road, he was reminded of the finer implications of that old

argument with Marion. By now it was related to his understanding of the appalling waste and ruin they had encountered on reconnaissance. The impression was profound, and the sense of tragedy was heightened by a frequent consciousness of shame which came over him. These days, it stayed just beneath the surface of his mind, ready to pounce upon him in the angry words which Anderson had used, or in the tones of Marion's gentle irony, or simply in the reproach of the anonymous faces passing by.

He shied away from a fuller exploration. For, by implication, admitting the Army's responsibility for this wretchedness involved a charge of blindness, even negligence, and his loyalty would not allow that. He could accept occasional ignorance and stupidity; he could believe in the incompetence and vacillation at Mesilla Valley, and even accept the guilt of isolated staff cases in Washington. But to suspect the whole structure of command suggested the indictment of all that the Army had ever been, the betrayal of its dead, the defiling of its banners, the arraignment of its body of tradition. Simply to contemplate a serious examination of the subject was to question his patrimony, for in a very literal way, the Army had been his entire life. He had been born and raised at West Point, and his father had taught mathematics on the staff there. Even in those early years it had seemed foregone that he should make a career of the Army himself. And after his father had fallen at Chapultepec there had been no question.

As a matter of confidence, he tried to believe that all of this was unavoidable, or at worst the human lapse of individuals far removed from the field, shifting papers in bureaus. But the persistence of his strange sense of guilt compelled him, in his devotion to the service, to take on his own shoulders a share of whatever blame existed.

Late one afternoon, when they were coming in from patrol, his horse cast a shoe. Since they were near town, he let the men go on, and dismounted to lead the horse the rest of the way. They had approached the Camino Real obliquely, and so he did not know about the carreta coming up from the south until he heard the squeaking of the wooden wheels.

It was a couple of hundred feet away when he looked around and saw the carreta loaded high with household goods. The irregular boring of the hubs gave its motion an illusion of limping effort, and it waddled in and out of the ruts and mud puddles like a weary animal.

There was no illusion about the weariness of the people to whom it belonged. On top of the swaying pile, an elderly woman sat, in a dark shawl, holding a small white kid firmly in her arms. A barefoot boy was leading the nanny on a rope, and two young men with antique smoothbores walked on either side in their peaked hats and guaraches. A younger woman of a worn attractiveness walked with an old man beside the oxen which were pulling the carreta. She held a child's doll in her hand, but there was no other child except the boy who led the goat. They were trailed by a limping cow with the stump of an arrow in its flank, and all were walking in the heavy manner of those who carry a part of their burdens in their hearts.

Feigning an interest in the shoeless hoof, Wales stayed at the side of the road. He soon became aware of their hostility, and there was no exchange of recognition as they passed. They were deliberately watching the road, and he felt their contempt more strongly than if they had turned and reviled him.

He knew he should move away, but he was arrested by the procession. It was hard to analyze his feelings, but he remembered hearing of religious penitents who seek absolution through performing specific acts. He did not know if this was really how he felt or not, for it was more intuitive than logical, and he could not explain it to himself. But he felt compelled to witness their passing, and to submit to whatever abuse they might subject him to.

They passed him in their rags, their filth and tatters. As he dropped the hoof and straightened, the old man turned around and looked at him. He was small and thin, and though he did not speak, his eyes burned. For a moment he simply looked, and Wales began to have a premonition and he simply stood there as the old man leaned down beside the oxen, scooped up the mud and threw it in a dribbling stream. Wales knew the old man was not afraid of him, for he could see that he had reached that point where he had only defeat and hopelessness left to him.

The others had reached it, too, for they made no effort to halt his throwing. They watched it all with stolid quiet, while the old man bent awkwardly down to scrape, and rise to throw. Wales could feel it splatter on his boots and legs, and he still did not move. The old man became infuriated at this and threw more wildly. The mud flew into the air and over the cart and over the animals and people, too, so that Wales was suddenly sorry for him, and wished that he would hit him solidly at least once. He did not care about his clothes. He was trying to understand the simple fact of this angry and wretched man. He was wondering what would happen if their situations had been reversed; and he felt he might be watching himself.

At last the old man stopped and leaned against a wheel; sweat streamed down his face and he sobbed with exertion. The younger woman came to take him by the arm, speaking softly to him as she led him back to the oxen. Beyond that, nobody spoke, and no one looked at Wales, either, as they moved onward again.

Unaware of the wet and mud on his trousers, he watched the carreta limping toward town. He knew he had been foolish, and that nothing had been accomplished. He was only certain that he felt the plight of such people more deeply than ever before.

THE BEGINNING OF SUMMER was a quiet time mainly, and patrols encountered little trouble. With the exception of the San Juan, the farms and ranches along the river were all but empty now, as were the mines, for they were open to attack and activity was limited to the reduction of ores above ground. The miners and their families holding out at Tubac and Arivaca would be the last to come out, and after that all would be finished down there. Salazar alone would be left, and he was thought of only as a gesture now. No one knew if he was still living or not, but few believed that he could last long.

During a part of this time there was rain for nearly a solid week. The evening storms were all spectacular and violent, but during the daytime hours the rain was soft and quiet-falling. Sometimes there would be a sunny interlude in the early afternoon, but soon the sky would fill again with clouds, and the rain would come down. There was mud too. The roads and trails were turned into a slippery, sucking mire, and the mounts' hooves balled up so badly that soon more time was spent cleaning them than in the saddle. It got to be so exhausting and pointless that, after a day or two of struggling with it, patrols were cancelled.

After that they stayed at the mill for the rest of the rain. For the first time in weeks there was an unbroken period for poker, writing letters, the repair of leather or hardware, and excursions to Alfredo's.

There were letters, too, from home, and the courier came with news that the Army of the Potomac had been formed. The dispatch from Mesilla Valley also revealed the rumored Colonel Baylor to be a true fact and that he was advancing on the Rio Grande. Until the courier came, there had been nothing definite for weeks; now it made them wonder what was going on. It began to look like something big was going to happen soon, and perhaps, everywhere at once.

Wales did not see very much of Marion during this time because an outbreak of dysentery kept her working at the presidio day and night. She was busy all that while and although there was time for Wales to see her off and on, the occasions were always brief, and she remained capricious.

There was Price for Wales to think of, too, and perhaps it was just as well that they had little chance to be by themselves. It was impossible for him to close his mind for long against the spectacle of their dark embrace beneath the pepper tree, and he could not help but wonder how often the same thing might have happened before or since. At the same time, the possibility of something serious between Price and Marion did not seem to square with what he knew about either one of them. Price was so ephemeral, such a lightweight, while Marion's true life was at a level so much deeper.

But then he could not really be sure of anything. His own involvement rendered objective judgement faulty. All in all he had the feeling of surviving an explosion which had touched himself and Marion alike, but whose permanent effect was not yet known. Sometimes he could believe that he alone had suffered the full concussion of the blast, and that she had escaped unmarked. But there were other times when he was not so sure. Once or twice he caught her watching him with an eye so candid that her business with Price became a species of nonsense. But he knew it was not. No business of that kind was likely to be nonsense.

All he knew for certain, though, was that it was a hell of a thing to be falling for a girl.

Everything changed with the end of the long rain and the attack on the Infantry evacuating Tubac. Wales was still asleep and the pounding hooves were a part of his sleeping until he heard Mannion shouting above the sound. Then he wakened quickly, jerked into his boots and trousers and went out into the early light.

A rider had entered the compound on a mule, and a number of the other men had gathered around him now.

He was trying to talk, but he was bloody from wounds and Simpson was trying to get him down.

They were moving him off on a stretcher when Wales came up to the crowd which had begun to break up. He saw Mannion in the poor light, and touched his arm.

"What's going on?" he said. "That man's hurt."

"The Chiricahuas done it," the Sergeant said. "They nailed a part of the Eighth."

"Hell—where was this?"

"This way of Tubac somewheres. He's been riding about four hours. They shook him loose in the night some time."

"They must have been getting civilians out of there and got caught," Wales said. He was looking around the muddy compound as he buckled his belt. "Where's the Captain?"

"Over there," and Mannion pointed toward the crowd around the moving stretcher. Wales caught sight of him, and came up as Swett, who had been talking with him, left.

"What's going on?" Wales said. "Are we getting out of here?"

Bass was no more dressed than Wales, and his face still had that pasty look of abruptly broken sleep. "Yes, and pretty quick, too," he said. "Better eat something."

"What was the Eighth doing out in the rain?" Wales said.

"They got into Tubac before it started and were heading out with the civilians when it quit. It looks like the Chiricahuas were waiting for them."

"They must have had a goddam army," Mannion said.

"They had enough, I guess," Bass said. "The Eighth has only a couple of platoons on this. The rest were all evacuees. That's why they forted up."

"I'll bet Anderson's got something on his hands."

Bass drew a breath, and said flatly, "He was killed. The rider said he got it on the first volley."

"Anderson?" At first Wales thought only of the word. Then the name became the blond-headed man who had been angry with the way of things. He could hear him laughing at the girl who danced in Alfredo's.

"I guess Lieutenant Jarret must be running it down there now," Mannion said.

"Anderson—well, Christ." Wales thought of Anderson down there somewhere on the river. The air of waiting in that country struck him again, the feeling of latent menace, and he knew he had expected something of this sort to happen. Yet he was surprised, in the way you always feel surprised when something shocking, however expected, really does happen.

He looked at Bass again. "The Chiricahuas must be standing them to a siege."

"It looks that way. They know there's no relief nearby."

"And they can always clear out when they see it coming."

They were walking toward the mill and Wales became aware of an acceleration in the normal routine. The fires had been lit and the cooks were noisy with their pots and pans. Everyone was in a hurry to pull themselves together. He noticed that dawn was clear for the first time in a week; in the east the sky was red. The earth was wet, and he could smell the deep old smell of manure and horsehair in the rain. He was conscious of detail, the way he always was when they were pulling out.

When Bass left him at the door to find Simpson, Wales went in to get his gear. In the darkness of the room, he made out Price near one of the windows, pulling on his shirt. He turned around as Wales came down the aisle between the cots.

"Who was that fellow on the mule?" he said. "What's going on out there anyhow? I just woke up."

Wales reached up to his shelf for a pair of socks, and sat on the edge of his cot to remove his boots, which he had worn barefoot.

"Didn't you hear the yelling?" he said.

Price laughed. "Someone's always yelling out there," he said. He came around the end of his cot and looked at Wales. "Is it a secret?"

"No, it's no secret," Wales said. "A courier from the Eighth. They got jumped this side of Tubac. I guess they're in a jam."

"I'll be goddamed," Price said. "Have they got civilians with them?"

"Yes, they've got civilians with them," Wales said as he pulled on the socks and then the boots again. He felt

mildly resentful of Price. There was something callous in Price's being asleep with this happening, although he had been asleep himself. At least he'd made an effort to get up, while Price had just wallowed in bed. Yet he knew that was only a part of why he felt as he did toward Price.

But he went on with it, and at the end told him Anderson had got it.

"Well," Price said. He sat on his cot and reached beneath it for his boots. "That's a hell of a shame."

"Yes, isn't it?" Wales said. He stood up. "You'd better get your gear together; we're pulling out."

"I know we're pulling out," Price said. He looked up and smiled. "Don't get excited, Fred."

"I'm not excited," Wales said, although he knew he was, and he knew that Price knew it, too, and enjoyed it.

"Yes, you are," Price said, and stood up. "You're red hot, Freddy boy." He laughed. "It's that girl; she's got you squirming."

"Like hell she has," Wales said.

"Oh, yes, she has," Price said. "And so have I."

"Like hell," Wales said again. He was angry now. "Do what you like with her, if you can."

Price laughed again. "Old Iron Guts in love. Quite a spectacle. Well, maybe I will do what I can with her."

Whatever prompted Price to call him that Wales could not think, but it would not be complimentary. More than anything else just then, it reflected Price's knowledge of Wales's lack of social grace and ease. Price, who had it in abundance, could make love to a girl and think nothing of it, but not Wales. There was a moment now when his control was shaken, but it passed when others began to enter the room.

With a conscious effort, he turned away from Price, and called to Simpson, whose cot was across the aisle from his.

"That fellow have any more to say?" he asked the Surgeon.

"Not too much. He was pretty well cut up."

"From what I saw, he looked it. Lucky to be alive, I suppose."

"Yes, and he's still in the woods," Simpson said, his slender and colorless hands moving quickly to sort his equipment.

"They were taken by surprise, is about all," he added.

"Did you find out where it happened?" Wales said.

"Not too well. He wasn't very clear. We'll have to go by the time. It seems to be about four hours; that'll have to do."

The room was full of racket as men stamped in for their gear and left again. Bass came over from his cot with his glasses and map case.

"Are we ready? We're pulling out in a hurry."

"Just about," Price said, getting active now.

Wales had everything down and set to go. He loaded his revolver last, and slipped it into the scabbard on his belt. "Who are we taking, John?" he asked.

"Just about everyone. Except Swett and the Headquarters boys. But, everyone else will go."

"D'you think it's going to be that big?" Price said.

"I don't know," Bass said. "That's why they're going along." He looked around at Simpson. Everyone was ready now, and waiting in the middle of the room for him. "How about it, Phil?" Bass said.

"I'm coming," Simpson said. He looked up from the pile of equipment. "What about a wagon?"

"Down there?" Bass said. "Too slow. We've got to travel in a hurry."

Simpson let his equipment lie and straightened up. "It sounds like we're going to need some transport for the injured."

Bass shook his head. "If so, we'll use one of theirs. That's the best we can do."

"I don't know about that," the Surgeon said. "A lot of their mules have been killed."

Bass wagged his head and smiled. "I know, I know. You'll have to make out, though. There isn't time to split the troop for an escort." He hefted the leather case which held his glasses. "Come on, Phil, we've got to go."

But Simpson did not seem to be in any hurry. He came to the end of the cot. Wales could see the Surgeon's face quite clearly as he stood in front of Bass. His skin was the sort that never tanned, but his face seemed to have less color than even that kind of skin should have.

"Well, what about all those supplies I ordered from the

Department?" He spoke louder now, and pushed his chin out.

Bass looked at him carefully. The atmosphere seemed charged with pressure.

"I don't know where they are, Phil. You'll have to do the best you can. Can you take some lint and blankets?"

"There're plenty of blankets, but what about my antiseptics? It's going to be fine down there without any antiseptics."

Everyone was very quiet now. Wales became aware of thinking this was not exactly a discussion any more. He was remembering, as he knew they all remembered, that Simpson's wife was in the ground back at Breckinridge.

"They just haven't come," Bass said quietly. "You'll have to do without somehow."

"Christ, I know that," Simpson said. He put his chin out further. "Why do we always get the rag-ass end of everything out here?" His voice went higher. "What in hell's the matter with those bastards?"

"Come on, Phil. That won't help. It's just the way it is. Everything's like that."

Bass spoke calmly and persuasively, and that made Simpson madder.

"You're goddamned right it is! That's the trouble with it. And it burns my ass!"

He finished in a shout, and Wales began to have the quiet feeling that today began something new. He could sympathize with Simpson's anger, because it was related to his aggravation with Price. Simpson's antiseptic and Price's sloth and callousness were corollaries, but were only representative of other pressures bearing on the mind. This catastrophe along the river had given them a lively urgency, and it was easy to believe that nothing would be quite the same from now on.

THEY WERE ON the Camino Real in less than half an hour after the rider came. The sun had reached the valley by then, and the heated air was soggy. The week-long rain had bogged the road so badly that in certain parts it was under a sheet of water. Every foot of the way was mud and ooze, and on the sides the vegetation had sprung up sudden and lush with a green, vibrating life. They were soon as wet from sweat as if they had been in the millrace, and after an hour were so stained with mud that their uniforms had lost color. Their horses foamed with lather that became chocolate brown.

They rode at an alternate lope and a walk, stopping only from time to time to clear the mounts' hooves. While the pace was not very swift, it was good considering the road, and better than expected. From what they knew, there was a chance for trouble around four hours out, but it was nearer three and a half when they rounded a bend and began to hear firing. It seemed a long way off but since the sound was softened by the humid air, no one was surprised to see the wagons when the road straightened again.

From there on the view was clear. The wagons had been gathered at a point of rock beside the road in a defensible position. There were three, and their bluish paint made a clean mark against the rain-washed rusty butte where they had stopped to take refuge. A haze of smoke hung faintly in the air over them. People could be seen behind the wagons and the rock, and the bodies of several mules were strewn on the road beyond. A grassy and gently sloping plain stretched out for half a mile or so between the river and the road, and a line of skirmishers had dug themselves into position part way down. They were keeping up a sporadic holding fire against the Indians who were on the river, hidden in groves of trees and dense brush. They could not be seen, but they were bold because they'd stayed through the night to fight again today. Dawn

was their natural time, and as a rule, they were shy of adventuring in the darkness.

From where the road turned straight, the troopers rose to a gallop, and soon were seen by the lookout. Down on the plain, the skirmishers let off a volley, and a ragged cheer broke out from the huddle of wagons. The evacuees and soldiers gathered there came to their feet and waved and craned their necks, and Wales felt a great surge of emotion in the air and an echo of it in himself.

They arrived in a welter of mud. A mass of faces crowded in and hands reached to touch the lathered horses for assurance. As they dismounted, Jarret pushed through the crowd, smiling broadly with lips which had turned black from biting the tails from the paper cartridges.

"By God, you're here," he said as he took Bass's hand. "Christ, I wondered if he made it."

"Yes, he made it, all right," Bass said. "He got in around dawn. Say—I'm sorry about Anderson."

"Yes, a hell of a thing," Jarret said. "A goddam ricochet from nowhere—right at the start, not a mile back." He stopped and shook his head; but as his feeling of relief out-weighed his sadness over Anderson, he smiled again. "By God, it's good to see you. How are you, Price, Wales?"

They were covered with mud and foamy lather from their horses, but they said they were fine.

"You look in a mess, though," Price said.

"Yes, it's a hell of a mess," Jarret said. "You should have seen us getting here. This is nothing."

"You're in command here, aren't you?" Bass said.

"Yes—now," Jarret said. "Captain Masefield is going up by way of the Cienega on the other side of the Santa Ritas. He's got everyone from the Sonoita and Babocomari."

"I see," Bass said. He took a long look around him at the crowd behind the wagons and the rock. "How many do you have here?"

"Altogether, two platoons and about a hundred evacuees. The Captain has the rest. They hit us back there about a mile. They got our scout, too." Jarret rubbed the back of his perspiring neck. "We ran a goddam gantlet getting here."

"You'd be worse off if you hadn't. This looks pretty good in here. You got the civilians out of it, anyway."

"Yes, they came out of it pretty good. Except for them, we could give the Indians a fight. God knows there's plenty of water for us. I think we could hold out indefinitely."

Simpson came up with a medical kit and a roll of lint. He shook hands with Jarret, and asked about the injured.

"About fifteen," the dark lieutenant said. "Eight dead, all told. Sergeant Cooper will take you around."

He spoke to a wiry, bluff-faced man whose ears were burned by the sun, and when Simpson had gone away with him Bass looked up at the face of the rock beside them.

"I guess we'd better get at this thing," he said. "Let's go up on the rock for a look." He took his glasses out of the case and handed it to Wales. "Do you want to have the men stand by?" he said.

Wales gave Bass a nod. He went to the men and had them check their rigging and change the loadings in their weapons. They were standing by their horses, waiting among the watching evacuees who were waiting, too. The good feeling engendered by the troopers was still upon them, and they were smiling among themselves and stroking the animals. Wales did not believe that it would last long once they got to town and understood the extent of the surrender, but he was grateful for it now.

He came back to the foot of the rock as Bass and Jarret reached the ground. Price and Mannion joined them as Bass began an explanation of what would have to be done.

"We'd better go in on the flanks. That will give the skirmishers a chance. We can't work in thick brush like they can. We can only draw fire while they move in, then hold the flanks when we get down there."

"Yes, it's close as hell down there," Jarret said. "And wet. We tried to fire it last night, but never got it started."

"No, the rain's against you," Bass said. "It's all green down there anyway."

"We're going to split this up?" Wales said.

"Yes, that's best. Your men can move up then, can't they, Jarret? What do you have down there, anyway?"

"One platoon. Yes—that should take the pressure off. It's too open for them otherwise. They'll be all right once

they're in the brush. D'you think one platoon's enough?"

"I don't know. That's up to you. You've got to keep something in reserve."

"I know. It'll be all right. You'll have to pull that fire off, though. We'll be nailed flat, if you don't."

"We'll draw it off, all right," Bass said. "We'd better keep something back here, too. How about it, Charlie?" he said to Price. "You can bring a wagon down with Simpson later, if we need it."

"All right. I don't care either way." Price mopped his forehead where his hat had left a crease. "Make her quick, though. It's goddam hot up here."

"It's going to be hotter down there," Wales said to him.

The general strategy settled, there were details; and after these were squared away, they mounted. Jarret went out to the skirmish line in a dodging, weaving run, and then the bugle sounded.

They were in the open very quickly when the signal for the charge was given. The troopers spurred away in a lunge, their revolvers at their shoulders and a yell sounding behind them. The plain was deep in grass and there were groups of mesquite trees and grassy hummocks where the skirmishers had burrowed in. The heavy trees and thick aquatic growth began around four hundred yards below the road and continued to the river where its density was worst and would be hard to penetrate by horse. The river flowed behind all this, and though he could not see it through the tangle of underbrush and trees, Wales knew it was running high and swift with the run-off from the mountain rains.

He saw all this at a glance, and after that he was trying to find the Indians. He could not see them, but they soon began to fire and he could approximate their position. He saw the smoke burst raggedly out of the entanglement and then he saw the rising dirt ahead of him. It was at a distance and told him that their range was bad, and that they were excited by the appearance of the cavalry. It was good to see that they were nervous, but he knew that the second volley could easily be different.

From the point of rock, the columns of moving horses curved outward in two crescents. Midway down the plain there were nearly two hundred yards dividing them. The

skirmishers were in between the columns in the grass, and as the riders drew the fire from the Indians, their line began to move on. Wales was going at a dead run now, and as the men arose, he saw the sunlight glittering on the bayonets. The men were walking slightly stooped, as if they faced a high wind, and had their rifles aimed from their hips. He could see the trouser stripes move up and down as they advanced. He heard them shout, and then as they began to leave his vision they were running. The last he saw of them was Jarret, who was out in front, shouting and waving his revolver as he ran.

After that there was a time when everything was telescoped together. The balls were kicking closer, and the arrows were flicking by in a whisper and a streak of light. His stomach had begun to tighten, and he was aware of leaning forward and peering from beneath his hatbrim. This was all defensive nonsense, a kind of reflex he had developed to a charge. He was not afraid of being nicked, but he didn't like to think about it and he reacted this way automatically. What he dreaded most was being pinned beneath his mount should it fall.

When the second volley rustled around them and off, they were quite near the brush. The outer fringe of growth lifted around them and they halted in a clearing, where a Private took the animals off to stake them on picket. Wales spread the others in a line extending toward the river, with fifteen or twenty feet between each man.

They no sooner had the flank secure than the racket in the thicket began to grow louder. The Apaches, frightened by the enfilading fire, were yelling and shooting in all directions, but mostly at the Infantry now, which they could see advancing directly toward them.

Wales could see them, too—a part of them, laboring through the dense undergrowth. They had slowed to a walk again and were coming on with their bayonets level and faces grimly set. They were walking in line abreast, catching it because they were erect and more easily seen than those on the flanks. Two went down while he watched—a boy with red hair, who simply placed his musket on the earth and lay down on it. He had an arrow in his throat. The other, a corporal, took a ball somewhere in his middle and fell into the brush, thrashing. And there were

more too, likely, because the bugle was sounding for reserves.

But there was no time to look for them because the violence in the thickets beyond had increased again. The Indians had heard the bugle and now, disorganized and panic-stricken, were stampeding for the river with the bayonets of the Eighth at their backs.

In the confusion and gunfire, they seemed to be running everywhere, and a half a dozen of them crashed suddenly against the flank that Wales's crowd was holding. They came out like rabbits flushed from cover, and Mannion rose from the ground and hit the first with his gun butt, which stunned him, and sent him reeling. The next fell by gunfire, then Mannion gripped the carbine by the barrel and began to swing.

The others were getting into it then, but action of this kind was too confused for Wales to keep straight. All he could ever do was wade in where needed. Everything now became a thrashing mass of naked, greasy bodies and sweating men wearing blue. He heard the shouting of his men and the bloody-murder yelling of the Indians, and he was pulling his revolver out again because his carbine was too awkward.

The revolver was coming slowly, though. It was slow because the buck who had been grounded was rising again. He came to his feet and leveled an ancient pistol at Mannion's back, and Wales could see the surprise in his face when it failed to fire—and then astonishment as Wales got his own revolver free at last and fired. The Indian went over in a heap, still amazed and trying to understand what had gone wrong.

Although the flank held, the Indians in the middle had got away and the troopers followed their withdrawal toward the river until the line of Infantry came all the way through. Wales could see the gaps in the even spacing as they came through the brush. Some of them had dropped, the dead and badly injured, and many of the bayonets looked oddly rusty.

Recall sounded then. They got their horses from the brush and headed up the slope. They rode slowly because Gleason's elbow had been shattered by a ball, and Burkhardt had caught a lance in the lower leg. Burkhardt swore

in mixed German-English all the way up, but Gleason swayed along in a state of shock, his face masked in white.

When they came onto the plain again Wales saw the crowd of Infantry in position ahead. Most of these were from the second platoon and had come down as reinforcements. Some had gone in behind the skirmishers, but these had stayed to guard the rear and to give protection to the wagon which Price and Simpson had brought down for the wounded. Over on the left, the first platoon was just beginning to emerge from the tangle of brush and trees, and far beyond them he saw Bass's crowd returning. Everyone was coming wearily and slowly up the gentle plain. Among the Infantry, the walking wounded were being helped along by able-bodied men, and those unable to walk were carried on improvised litters. He could not yet tell about the far-off riders, but one was carried prone across his saddle. Although he wondered who it was, he wasn't sure he wished to know just now because the dead alone were carried that way.

As they came up to the wagon with Gleason and Burkhardt, Simpson came around from the tailgate to help remove the injured and lay them on the blankets which were spread on the grass. He did not spend much time on Burkhardt right away because Gleason was the one who needed it, and when he had bared the bloody and crooked arm he pursed his lips.

"I'll be needing two strong men," he said, not looking at Wales. "Better make it three."

"All right. D'you want us now?" He did not have to ask what Simpson was going to do.

"In about five minutes," Simpson said. "I'll patch up Burkhardt first. Gleason's going to take some time. There's going to be a lot going on around here in a while."

Wales nodded, said, "All right, I'll be back," and walked to his horse. He loosed the cinch and led the animal to the picket rope laid out by Mannion, and turned it loose.

Then he went over to his men. They had been resting in the grass, but now they had all risen to watch the riders coming from below. They were standing silently,

waiting for it to be explained. The line was coming on slowly with the led horse at the rear so they could not tell who was carried. One of the others was supported by men on either side of him, but even he was too far away to recognize. It was bad to stand there wondering who it was. Running them through your mind made you aware of a variation in your sense of loss for each one. To find that you might feel more strongly for the death of one man as against another seemed shocking—as if you had stumbled onto some horrible secret about yourself.

When they rode up they came in a turning arc, and stopped before them. All of them looked as the led horse came around and halted, and they knew who it was.

It was Soames, the one who had been so good with sabers.

They got him down, laid him on the grass, and put a blanket over him. Bass gave his head a shake when Wales stood up again and looked at him.

"They tried coming through our flank," he said, getting down. "They came right out of the ground at us; they were right there when we finally saw them." He nodded at Soames beneath the blanket on the ground. "He just caught the brunt of it."

"Ha, the same with us," Mannion said. "They was climbin' all over us like monkeys before we knew."

"Yes, they lie around like grass beneath your feet," Wales said. He looked along the line. The man held in his saddle was Smollet, a boy from the Middle West. One of his arms was soaked with blood, and he held it carefully cradled in the other.

"Smollet caught one, too," he said.

"Yes, and we'd better get him down," Bass said. "How did you come out on your side?"

"Better than you, although Gleason's going to lose an arm. Burkhardt has a leg cut. Everyone else came out good."

Bass nodded, and looked around as they walked toward Smollet. "Well, that's not too bad, but it's bad enough. Still, it's better than the Infantry. They caught hell on our side."

"Yes, on ours, too," Wales said.

Getting Smollet down, they took him over and set him

on one of Simpson's blankets. Others carried Soames, and after Simpson shook his head, they put him in the wagon under the seat, and pulled the blanket up over him. The Infantry were dropping on the grass, and Jarret's casualties were filling the open ground by the wagon. All of the others were sitting or lying around, waiting for whatever would happen next to be decided.

"They're the hell out of there for now," Jarret was saying when Wales came over. "Over the river, anyway."

"Yes, but you'll have to watch it down there," Bass said. "They've got horses on the other side."

"I know. I think I'll put skirmishers down there for a while tonight. I doubt they'll try it again, but they might."

"Can't you get this thing on the road again today?" said Price, who had come up from wherever he'd been.

"I don't see how. These injured have got to be fixed up."

"We've got some wagons need it, too," the Sergeant with the flaming red ears said.

"Yes. It'll be tomorrow, all right. And mules. They killed a lot of them."

Bass took off his hat and rubbed his head. "Well, there's not much question about it then. We can bring some mules down to you in the morning, though."

"Be obliged," Jarret said. "And I think your Surgeon wants some of the bad ones to go back tonight. Take the wagon he's been using."

"All right, we'll take them. He can't do much beyond first aid here. Do you want some of our crowd to stay?"

"Well, yes, if you can spare them. They'd be good as scouts." He looked away toward the river. "I don't like the look of this. They're too damned thick. It's hard to believe they're all for us."

"I've been thinking that, too," Bass said; but he shrugged it away as beyond fruitful thought just then. "All right, I'll give you half a dozen, and Price. Is that all right with you, Charlie? You haven't had it too rough today, have you?"

"Sure, I'll stay," Price said, and he grinned. "I've just been lying around under a mesquite tree. Fred can handle things in town for me."

Wales said nothing. Bass put on his hat.

"So, that's it," he said. "We'll see you in the morning with the mules."

Wales went back to Simpson, who was crooking his finger at him now. The Surgeon had his instruments spread out on a cloth on Gleason's blanket, and the two men assigned to him were standing by, waiting.

As he knelt at Gleason's head to hold his shoulders, the other two knelt at his legs. There was no need for him to do this—there were plenty of other men; and the compulsion that he felt to help was vague. It seemed related both to their steeply rising casualty rate, and to the bearing which their withdrawal had on morale. In their abandoning the country, he was growing conscious of feeling abandoned for themselves too. And as he'd felt compelled to stand and face that bitter old man with his mud, so now did he feel required to fully share the pain and misery of his men.

"Are you ready?" Simpson said; and when they were settled, they nodded.

Wales did not like to look at Gleason's glistening face just then, but when he screamed he knew that Simpson had begun working.

THEY WERE BETTER than five hours returning, and it was dark when they reached the mill. The wagon of dead and injured men caused delays, and late in the afternoon a thunder shower had deepened the mud in the road again. There were frequent stops to free it from the mire, and the wounded screamed and moaned with the punishment of the road.

During all of this time, Wales was thinking of Marion because she was the only way of escaping this misery for even a while. He saw her very vividly in his mind, and it surprised him some because there had been other times when he could never be exactly sure of detail in her appearance. But now, as if to reject this atmosphere of pain and wretchedness, his perception of her was clearer than it had ever been.

There was another reason for his concentration upon her, too. He had come to a point where he believed that they ought to reach some kind of understanding. In the back of his thoughts, he had begun to feel a kind of quiet desperation that had nothing to do with Price, but was concerned with the trend of events. His awareness of it had developed with the appalling rise in casualties, and had been sharpened by today's action. While he had faith in his ability to survive, the vagrant chance that he might not was always there. It was almost axiomatic that a soldier should believe in his own invulnerability, but now they had a war of attrition on their hands. He had no sense of being doomed, but the possibilities had never seemed more ripe. Everything seemed to be accelerated now; time had become a commodity, like money, and if he and Marion could have anything together, he had better find out soon. Should his turn to get it come up, he did not want to go out feeling cheated of anything.

When they arrived at the mill around nine he shaved and bathed, and when he had dressed and eaten he went up to the presidio to look for her. The mill and the town

were full of Masefield's crowd which had arrived in the afternoon. The presidio was jammed with all of the evacuees who had come up with him from the grasslands and the valleys beyond the Santa Ritas. The streets were as badly mired and rutted as the Camino Real and the presidio more packed with wretched people than at any time Wales remembered. It had been bad enough with all of the dust and heat, but the mud multiplied the misery. Dust you could sweep aside or water down, but what could you do with mud?

He looked around the presidio for some time. When he failed to find her he went over to one corner where the Surgeon had an open-air infirmary for the ill and injured evacuees. A tarpaulin had been raised on poles as a shield against the rain, and those who had come in for treatment lay around on blankets between them and the mud.

Simpson was making bandage out of manta yardage. His face looked waxen in the lantern light and his motions were those of a man who has done a thing so often he no longer has to think about it.

"Have you seen Marion around here anywhere?" Wales said.

"Not for a while," the Surgeon said, glancing up. "Here, hold this," and he handed Wales a length of sheeting to hang onto while he ripped it into shorter pieces.

"Where did she go, d'you know? She usually helps out with the food."

"I think she went up home," Simpson said. "She went up to see about more food. They're running short around here, now."

"They ought to draw on Tyson for supplies," Wales said. "He's the only one around here with anything in quantity."

"I guess they tried that earlier," Simpson said. "He doesn't want to hand out anything without a voucher, though."

"Well, Allis can sign one, can't he?" Wales said, and pulled on the cloth to stretch it tight. "He's got the authority. He's all the government there is around here now."

"I suppose he can. I think Tyson wanted Bass to sign it, though."

"Hell, Bass has been away all day. Tyson knows that. He saw us leave."

Simpson shrugged. "All I know is what I hear. I think he and Allis are on the outs about something. Hold that tighter, will you?"

Wales leaned his weight against the cloth. "What in hell's the matter with that guy?" It had nothing to do with him, but he was irritated anyway because he could have been at Marion's by now, and here this cloth had held him up. Tyson simply magnified his irritation, and was a thing on which to take it out.

"Look—I'm just a medic, Fred. How do I know what goes through that silly bastard's mind? Goddam it, can't you hold that tighter?"

"Christ, I am," Wales said in half a shout, but when he looked at Simpson's face the senseless irritation left him. Behind the Surgeon was a day of battle casualties and here he was still at work with the end not in sight.

Wales laughed, suddenly abashed, and said, "I'm sorry. I'm not very good at this."

It was the last piece and it tore with a high sound. Simpson gathered up the strips and folded them.

"Oh, you're all right," he said, and smiling now, he stacked them in a pile on a little table. "Maybe we all just need a damned good drunk."

"Maybe you're right, at that," Wales said. "Any more?"

"No. That's it. Thanks a lot, Fred. You can go."

"All right. I'll see you later on."

He waved his hand and walked toward the gates. Passing through, he looked back at Simpson beneath the make-shift shelter. Already he was back at work—on one of the refugees.

There was less of a wait in front of Allis' this time, and Marion opened the gate for him. She held an oil lamp which made highlights on her cheekbones and her forehead. She was smiling, too. "Hello," she said. "I was just going back to the presidio. Did your Surgeon tell you where I was? He said you'd got back."

"Yes, I was looking for you down there. He said you'd come up to see about food."

"Yes, that's right. Tyson won't let them have any. He wants Bass's signature."

Wales was not much interested—the last time he had paused in this gateway, Marion had been yielding to Price's blandishments—but he tried to seem interested. He told her what Simpson had said.

"No, he won't take father's any more. They've quarreled again, or fought, or whatever it is they do when they're together."

"I thought your father laughed at Tyson."

"Not so much any more. It all depends. This was the same old thing, I guess. But they quarreled over you once."

"Me?" and Wales was surprised.

"Your men. About that fight. Tyson owns the building where it happened. He owns that whole block back there, though it's mostly a warehouse full of food that people need and can't get. Anyhow, father criticized him for his choice of lessees; he even went up to see for himself, but he was barred."

"My God, he's got police power!" Wales said. He was annoyed; not so much with Tyson and Allis, and their haggling, but mainly because it seemed so often to get in the way of Marion and himself.

"Oh, yes; but you know how he is. That he laughed off. Later, Tyson came to say it was an error. Then they quarreled again."

Wales said nothing to that. There was not enough in it to hold his mind. He kept seeing her in Price's arms beneath the dark pepper tree.

Aware of his diffidence, Marion changed the subject. She placed the lamp in a niche in the wall, and put her hands together at her waist.

"Your Surgeon said the fighting was heavy," she said. "I'm sorry about your friends. It's hard to think of the proper thing to say." She hesitated, moving her hands in a gesture of inadequacy. "Everything seems to be happening now. I hope you're careful in those places."

"I'm as careful as I can be," he said, and then he smiled. "I've always been lucky, anyway."

"Everybody thinks they're lucky," Marion said.

He was looking at her glossy hair, and all at once it

seemed to him he hadn't seen her in a longer time than he could remember. He had never seen her look more beautiful and all of the things he wished to say to her went into a whirl in his head.

"Marion . . ." he began, then stopped. He had a throttled feeling and knew himself to be clumsy and inept.

"Yes?" she said, and she was watching him with that perceptive awareness now. Her eyes were wide and deep, like those of a doe in the flush of dawn when a sound arouses its attention.

He began again. He carefully put his hands along her upper arms. It would be a time to be like Charlie Price, he thought, to have his charm and ease and his facility with gracious phrases. But he was no Charlie Price. He was Fred Wales, who had spent his whole life in a barracks, and whose natural reticence was complicated by a graceless Army atmosphere extending as far back as childhood.

When he finished he let his hands return to his sides; aware of a kind of heavy, waiting stillness about them. Marion unclasped her hands and looked at them, and then she turned slowly away and walked to the pepper tree.

There was a circular wooden bench around it and when she lowered herself she raised her hands to her face.

She said. "Oh . . ." in a breath, and lowered her hands and looked at them in the dark. Wales sat stiffly on the bench next to her, shy now and feeling more awkward than he ever had before. It was curious to remember that he had once held her passionately in his arms, but now that he had said this, their relationship was altered entirely. A couple of dozen words had almost turned them into strangers. He watched her profile in the faint light reaching outward from the lamp, and shook his head.

"It was a stupid thing to say," he said.

"Oh, no!" she said, and turning quickly, she raised her hand to his face. "Don't say that. It was beautiful."

He shook his head again. He took hold of the wrist of the hand she held against his face. "No, it wasn't. It wasn't the way I wanted to say it at all. But I meant it."

"Oh, I know you did. And it was beautiful. I feel honored. Truly honored, Fred."

Whatever he had thought she might say, it was not that.

He could not tell exactly how he felt she might react, but it was not this way.

"Honored?" he said. It was not his own voice, and he knew that it conveyed to her his feeling of astonishment because she drew her hand away and, with the other, briefly raised it to her face again.

"Oh, Fred—I don't know what to say."

"You could make it yes or no," he said.

"Oh—I don't know—I don't know. Everything's in such an awful mess. If there were only time to think, or a place in which to think—without everything getting in the way."

"Well, there isn't," Wales said. "We both know that."

He had heard all of this before. It seemed to keep cropping up whenever they met. He began to have a dull, heavy feeling in his head.

"I know that," she said. "I was simply wishing, that's all. It would be nice if someone could wave a wand and take this all away. Even for a while."

Wales gave a short, ironical laugh. "I'm afraid I lack the touch for that. That's more in Price's line."

It had ugly and lamentable overtones, but he did not regret it. Price had been present in his mind all along, and now beneath this tree, where Wales had seen him embracing Marion, he was more strongly felt than ever. Yet a part of Wales could still stand off and marvel at a man's capacity to so senselessly and swiftly turn to hurt the one for whom he cared so.

"I wish you wouldn't say that all the time," Marion said. "Or say it the way you do. I see quite different things in each of you."

"I don't always say it," Wales said. But he thought it, and if she sensed that, it would be the same thing.

"You say it enough," and Marion looked at her hands. "But there are other things to think of."

Then she looked up, and feeling filled her voice again. "My father's being recalled. The courier came in with it today. Because of my brother."

"I'm sorry," Wales said, but he had little feeling for what she said. "I didn't know."

Then Marion laughed in a way that made him look at

her sharply. "And the same dispatch told of my brother's death in action. Isn't that beautiful?"

"God!" and Wales felt that one. And it was beautiful, too, if you liked that kind of beauty.

"Yes. Father's gone to see Bass about it now. And something else has happened, too. The war's got bigger all at once; something happened at a place called Bull Run. Haven't you heard of that?"

"No," Wales said, and shook his head. "I left right after I got cleaned up. I don't know anything about it."

He felt he was reacting as he had before. It seemed unreal and did not touch him, but rather was an intrusion.

Marion moved her hands vaguely again.

"So, you see—I don't know." She stopped, and went on. "It's all so dreadful. I'm afraid—I just don't know."

She stopped again, brought her hands flat against her temples, and the tears ran bright on her cheeks. In a blind move, Wales brought her face against him with his arms about her. He was filled with a feeling of compassion, so abrupt and large, that he felt half-suffocated, and it was complicated by an understanding of his insensitivity of a moment ago. Some of the things that he had said, felt or thought, did not seem very attractive now.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," he began, and then, as she looked up, he bent his head and kissed her. He kissed her tenderly at first, and then more avidly as she became responsive. He felt her arms reach upward on his shoulders, and as her hands pressed on his head and neck, the tenderness gave way to his awareness of immediacy and the flight of time, and he felt his arms draw tighter about her.

"I meant what I said," he whispered against her lips.

"Oh—please; I don't know—"

"I did. Everything. All of it. I meant it all."

"Oh—" she said in a low cry, like a bird which sees some preying creature in the grass. And all in a single, fluid motion she slipped out of his arms and arose. "I have to go—please, I don't know—please."

She put her hand out toward the tree, and turned away; she was walking swiftly and then she began to run toward the house—across the patio and through the long portales.

Wales did not stand up until the patio was quiet again

and she was gone. Walking slowly over the tiles, he felt a return to the daze in which she had left him on that other time, except that now he was unaware of any exhilaration. While she hadn't refused him altogether, neither had she accepted.

And he still could not tell where Price fit in; but he did, somewhere. And as long as love and reason were incompatible, it was easy for Wales to think of him as looming very large in the picture.

He forgot about Allis being at the mill until he saw the light in the room which Bass used for an office. The door was open wide for ventilation, and they sat in shirtsleeves at the battered field desk. Coming down the aisle between the cots, he could hear them speaking and since the tone did not seem confidential he went on to the door where Bass waved him in.

"Hello, Fred, have a chair."

Allis looked around and got up to shake hands. "Hello, Fred. How are you? Busy day, I hear."

"Yes, busy enough. Quite a change from last week."

"That's what John's been telling me," Allis said.

Allis resumed his seat, and Wales went over and sat in a rawhide chair before the filing cabinet. Bass leaned back and clasped his hands together behind his head.

"I haven't been up in town yet. Anything going on?"

"About the same," Wales said. "There's a hell of a crowd at the presidio—all those who came in with Masefield. I ran into Simpson up there; he's got something on his hands."

Bass nodded. "Yes, he's got a load, that's sure. But he's splitting it up with Masefield's Surgeon now. Fellow named Wells. He's been helping out with our boys here."

"Well, that's something," Wales said. "He can stand a hand."

"I wonder if you met my daughter up there anywhere," Allis said to Wales.

Wales smoothed his wrinkled trousers over his knees. He felt self-conscious with Allis now. As with Marion, his relationship to Allis had seemed to undergo a subtle change within the last hour.

"As a matter of fact, I did," he said. "I saw her at your home. She'd gone up to see about food for the presidio."

"Yes, they're running short," Allis said. "As a rule, the requisitions are my affair, but our friend, Mr. Tyson, has lost his confidence in me, so I've come to appeal to your commander. You see, I'm being recalled."

"Yes, she mentioned that," Wales said. He stopped, spread his fingers on his legs and looked at them. "She told me about your son, too. I think it's a rotten shame."

"I don't believe they can help themselves," Allis said. "Governments often become irrational at times like this. There always seems to be a certain amount of cannibalism at first."

"It's still a shame," Wales said, though he was not entirely surprised at Allis' detached view. Had it happened to himself, he would have felt outraged; but Allis' reaction was consistent with his outlook.

"Perhaps—in the abstract, yes," he said. "But when faced with a threat, or a disaster, it's natural to turn on one's own until a way is found to make things right. I'm no isolated case." He paused and smiled. "History swarms with scapegoats."

Wales did not like the sound of the word disaster. He sensed that something big had happened, and that all of this was simply a preliminary.

"Was this Bull Run business a disaster?" he asked carefully. "I don't know anything about it. Marion mentioned a place with that name, though."

"Yes, it's in Virginia," Allis said. "Not very far from Washington. The Army of the Potomac took a licking there."

"I see," Wales said, and he knew he had been right. "That means everything's blown up, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it's on for sure now," Bass said, still leaning back, his head cradled in his hands.

"How did they do it?" Wales said. "The Rebs, I mean. I suppose the Federals were outnumbered." He looked at Bass and then at Allis; he wanted very much to have the Federals outnumbered.

"As a matter of fact," Allis said, "it was the other way around. It was a rout, apparently."

"A rout?" Wales was appalled. It struck him in the

same place where that sense of guilt or shame had struck him.

"According to the report," Allis said looking directly at him and now it seemed to Wales that Allis saw something in him that Wales did not entirely know about himself.

He began to speak, but stopped again. Allis smiled and leaned across to slap his leg.

"But, of course, you know how those reports come through," he said. "We rarely get the straight of anything."

Then he put his hands on the sides of his chair, and stood up. "Well, I'll be going along for now. Whatever else, there's still the paper work."

"Yes, we can always count on that," Bass said.

"Can't we, though? Thanks for handling that requisition for me."

"Things like that make me want to slap this place under martial law. Who does that bastard think he is, anyway?"

"Something of a personage," Allis said, smiling. "And he is, too, in his way."

"Marion said he barred you, when you went up to that place where our men had their scrap," Wales said.

"Not exactly," Allis said. "It was his lessee."

"What?" and Bass took his hands from behind his head. "By Christ, I'll send a platoon up there and level the whole area!"

"Oh, I shouldn't bother," Allis said. "Tyson came around later and said it was an error. He was very nice about it; as nice as he can be, that is."

"Did he let you in, then? By God, I'll get you in there, if he didn't."

Allis laughed. "Oh, yes—in a day or so I got in. It's nothing much, really. Warehouse, largely. And the bar, of course."

"What about that bar?" Bass said. "Fred, here, told me that there might have been Secessionists involved."

"Well, perhaps," Allis said. "The lessee told me nothing, of course. He claims he can't be responsible for his patrons."

"I can make him responsible," Bass said. "Or Tyson. That might be better."

Allis did not speak again right away, and when he did

it was slowly, as if he had to arrange carefully each thought before he turned it free. Nor did he look directly at Wales or Bass, but into his mind.

"I don't know that I would," he said. "When I was in that place, it grew on me that his dealings are rather larger than I'd thought. There seems to be a good deal of movement of supplies in and out; it makes me believe that the town is largely dependent on him for provisions. Should he feel himself harassed, there might be genuine suffering among the population."

"You mean he might close down?" Bass said.

Allis shrugged. "Perhaps. Who knows? I have the impression that he prefers a benign climate for his operations. He is deeply devoted to his investment, I know."

"We could handle his operations," Bass said, but without enthusiasm.

"And his sources of supply?" Allis said. "That's where you're in for trouble."

"I know," Bass said, and he nodded. He drummed on the desk again. "I suppose the Secessionist element depends on him, too."

"Well, they have to eat like everyone else."

"That's not quite what I mean," Bass said.

Allis had been looking toward the old wooden file, but he brought his glance around to Bass now. To Wales, who watched, the move seemed careful, and he sensed something changed in the atmosphere.

But when Allis gave his light, dissembling laugh, his hesitation, if it had been that, vanished, and Wales thought then that he might have been mistaken.

"Well, of course," Allis said, "merchants are obliged to take a large view. *Pro bono publico*, or something like that," and he laughed again.

"We don't want it too large, though," Bass said. "But you're probably right about bothering him. I don't want to run his damned warehouse for him—or this place either."

"No, it is sometimes best to let sleeping dogs lie," Allis said, and he began to gather up his papers. "The phrase sounds better in Latin, but I can't think of it just now." He laughed, and held out his hand. "I'll get up there now

and then to see what's going on, even though I now lack portfolio. Good night," and then as he turned to leave he put his hand on Wales's shoulder, and Wales felt once more that Allis saw something in him that he, himself, did not know.

"Don't let them get you down," he said to Wales. "Everything takes time, you know. It all comes out in the wash."

Neither Wales nor Bass spoke again until Allis had left the building. Then Bass leaned back once more with his hands behind his head.

"Tyson doesn't seem to like our friend," he said.

"I know," Wales said. "Tyson told me as much."

"He keeps reminding me of Allis' background—Buchanan and all that Virginia business—bears down really hard. Kind of odd."

"He reminds everybody," Wales said, and he remembered what Marion had said. "Allis used to take it as a joke. But I wonder how he feels now."

"I doubt it's a joke any longer. Still, you can't tell too easily with him," and Bass smiled and made a shape with his hands. "He takes the large view. But his family and all it means finally got to him in Washington. They've got the knives out for his kind now. He isn't alone, and some will wind up even worse when the patriots get through with them."

"How do you mean that?" Wales said, though he felt he knew.

"Well, you heard what he said about cannibalism. And he's right, too. There's nothing so full of fight as a civilian patriot."

"He may be lucky, then," Wales said, "to get by with only a recall."

"If he has got by," Bass answered, "altogether."

"Yes," Wales said, but his mind had moved back to Allis' parting remark which now was clear, and he began to think that his reaction to Bull Run must have seemed naïve. For a moment he felt a sense of irritation, which had less to do with Allis than with himself, because it was possible that the viewpoint of the other man was more valid than his own, which was conditioned by devotion.

He picked up the report and when he'd read it through he knew the action had gone as Allis said. There was little detail, but he could not escape the conclusion that something had gone wrong that had no business going wrong. He felt he would like to know, and yet another part of him was shy of knowing. It made him angry to read this thing, and to read still more between the lines.

Throwing it on the desk, he caught Bass in his old air of casual watchfulness. Bass had seen through his surface calm as easily as Allis had seen through it.

"It must be nice to have a sense of history," Wales said. "But me—I keep wanting to know what's going on."

"Yes, very nice indeed—and I keep wondering too. But we can't very well help what happens where we aren't."

Smiling, Bass leaned forward and for a moment Wales felt threatened with one of Bass's little homilies on what should not be taken seriously or personally. But Bass simply glanced at the report which Wales had thrown in front of him, and smiled again.

"Maybe we'd better go up to Alfredo's for a while," he said. "A couple of snorts would hit the spot now."

Wales was surprised enough to laugh aloud. "By God, they would. D'you think the mules can get down to Jarret alone? Snorts pile up sometimes. This could be one of those times."

"With geometric progression, under certain circumstances; and it's true this could be such a time." Bass picked up a pen and idly worked the feather along his ear. "Yes, the goddam mules have to go to Jarret . . ."

They discussed it with solemnity, and in the end, made grave resolves to limit their consumption. Coldly analyzed, it made no difference whether Wales had one or a dozen, for the thought alone was instrumental in pushing back the creeping desperation. The filth and squalor of Alfredo's had now become a haven against all the forces of disaster.

Going up the muddy road, they settled the matter of the mules. It was agreed to borrow Masfield's instead of using those which Swett had found in town. Masfield's would be weary, but were harness-broken and could be more easily controlled.

In some way this decision settled in Wales's mind with the authority of a clean, naked truth.

I'm glad we're taking Masfield's mules, he thought. They'll be tired, but we won't have to break them on the way. I wish that everything was so simple to work out.

AT MIDNIGHT a thunderstorm shattered the humid quiet. Although little rain fell over town, the wind was violent. In the mill, the dust of grain and desert choked breathing; doors and window shutters swung, creaked and slammed, and the men were up and down all night trying to control the ventilation.

But in the morning the wind had died; the sky was clear and hot, and they were on the road at dawn. Because of Allis' removal from civil authority, Bass remained in town and Wales had charge of the column of mules.

For some miles south of town, the road was fair, but they soon came into a stretch where the downfall had been heavy. From there on the column's pace was slow and labored, for the Camino Real was damaged in many places. There were wide gaps incised by torrents pouring down the mountains, and all of the lower areas were filled with standing water. The whole of the valley steamed beneath the brazen sun, and the journey, which took five and a half hours, seemed endless.

The column arrived around eleven. Nothing much had changed, but having been expected, their welcome was more subdued than on the day before. The enthusiasm of the refugees was dampened by the night's rain and the morning of wet heat. And since the Indians had not attacked them again, there was not the fear either. Now, while they were glad enough to see the troopers arrive, it seemed related more to the presence of the mules which made their departure imminent.

While Wales staked out his animals, Price and Jarret returned from the plain. The skirmish line was still the same as yesterday, except that Price had set up roving, mounted pickets on each end of it.

They exchanged hellos, and Wales passed around a packet of small cigars.

"Where'd those mules come from?" Jarret said as he looked around. "They look like ours."

"They're yours, all right," Wales said. "They came up with Masefield yesterday afternoon."

"I thought so. I'd know that big, black bastard anywhere. He about kicked my brains out one time."

"I don't think he's got the steam to do much kicking now. I brought these because they were good and tired. We'll be busy enough without breaking fresh mules to harness."

Jarret grunted and turned around again. "So, Masefield made it all right. What kind of a trip did he have?"

"All I know is that he got there. Some of his people were cut up, though. They were keeping Simpson busy enough."

"They probably got jumped, too, like ourselves. It's been wild over that way right along. They just hang in the trees, like leaves."

"And they're all coming over the mountain now, no doubt," Price said. He drew on his cigar and smiled at Wales. "Thanks for the treat, Fred. My first contact with civilization in days."

Price and Jarret sat down in the muddy grass. Neither one had had much sleep, their jaws were frowzily unshaven, and their uniforms could hardly be recognized.

"Enjoy it while you can," Wales said. "Anything doing last night?"

"No, there wasn't much going on," Price said. "A shot now and then. About the same this morning."

"Just enough to let us know they're there," Jarret said. He ticked the grey ash from the end of his cigar. "And waiting. They probably *have* come over the mountain now. It's getting to be what I felt yesterday. Pretty big."

Wales looked at the trees down on the river. The sun stood at the zenith, and the green crowns glistened. Down below, the mass of leaves and trunks were ranked in dark shadow. The trees, the tangled brush, the stretch of plain, seemed in the noonday sun to have a glimmering, panting quality—yet innocent, too, and pastoral. But, of course, it wasn't. There were more Indians down there now than ever.

He sighed and turned to Jarret.

"When do you want to pull out of here?" he said. "We have to eat, and the animals ought to get a rest."

"How about an hour?" Jarret said. "We'll have to hitch up, you know, and get loaded."

"I guess that's all right," Wales said. "Do you want us for patrol?"

"Well, yes, you could patrol along the plain, if you want. I doubt they'll come out of the brush by this light, but they might. If you're down there, though, they're not so likely to."

"All right, we can do that. Half up here and half down there should do it."

"That sounds good enough," Jarret said, getting off the ground. "I might as well start getting them organized," he said, and walked away.

While the loading and hitching were going on, the troopers broke their rations out of their saddle bags. While they ate, Wales and Price sat beneath a wagon and discussed the division of their men; Price's crowd could take the first shift down below because their animals were fresher. Wales did not like telling Price to watch himself down there, but he did because it looked like rain and the visibility would be bad. The clouds were piling white above the Santa Ritas, pristine now, with gleaming tops and shaded pearly grey convolutions beneath. But they would change.

By the time the loading was completed, and the men were mounted, the swelling grey below had darkened and washed the white on the tops out altogether. As the column pulled out, Wales looked at the pocket watch his father had left him. It was nearly one, and the sky was half in blue and sunlight, half in darkness, with the blue receding. In a little while, as he had thought it would, the rain started.

They went on through the rain along the Camino Real. As soon as the sun had gone the afternoon seemed gloomy and dismal, even before the rain had commenced. The rain came out of the Santa Ritas in grey gusts which seemed like clouds of mist as they swept off the slopes and foothills and across the plain. At first the wind blew, too, and everyone went forward with their heads bent down looking out on the road.

In the wagons the people were mixed; some were women and children, some were injured, some soldiers. The Infantry sat in ranks, their rifles held upstanding and their forage caps placed over the muzzles to keep the water out of the barrels. They had broken their tunics out and wore them over their heads, and in the poor visibility they all looked decapitated. The women and children had covered themselves with shawls or other garments and looked like mushroom patches in the wagons.

Behind the wagons came the walking evacuees and those Infantry whose seats were occupied and who later on would change with those now riding. To the sides, ahead and at the rear, the men of Wales's detachment rode along—their hats over their eyes, their shoulders hunched. A few odd head of stock trailed along on ropes behind the evacuees. And at the very end was all that remained of the carretas that had started from Tubac, for many had been abandoned as the oxen or burros became too weary. Of those left, you could almost guess the ones that had a chance and those that didn't. By now the road was so bad it was only a matter of time before the wheels surrendered to the mire. It took animals in prime condition to haul those great old carts through the muck for any great distance, and few were.

The wind had stopped and now the rain was falling straight down. They moved on slowly. There were long halts, too, when wagons mired in the sea of mud and the walking men would push and heave on the wheels, and more than once a second team would be needed to make the difference.

After a few such times, only the women and children were allowed to ride, and the Infantry, all marching along like headless men, began to sing a song they called *Green Grow the Violets* which had been sung in the Mexican War in 1847. Coming out of the headless tunics now, it was not very musical, but it touched some part of Wales, and he sang along too. He knew it was a song his father might have sung while marching on Chapultepec. It had a lilt, and was the kind of song his father would have liked. Quite suddenly, he seemed to see him very vividly, and he wondered whether he had ever marched along in the rain through Mexico, feeling the weight of

things gone wrong. He wondered if his father had ever felt an awful gnawing doubt about the Army while he sang about violets growing green.

They had been going along for a couple of hours when there was a flurry of shooting down below. It was the first intimation he had that there was trouble. He had felt a certain uneasiness, off and on, that Price's men were riding in too close, but the rain and mists had altered his depth perception and he'd given Price the benefit of the doubt. Periodically throughout the afternoon there had been isolated fire, a favor really, for it kept them watchful of the trailing Indians. But this was different. Now, with the solid volley, he knew that Price had grown careless.

Signalling Mannion, Wales pulled off to the side; below, those of Price's men whom he could see were all in the same plane with the trees and brush, but he could not be sure if they were on the edge, or a hundred yards out.

But they had got too close, and his first reaction was of anger. Price had been a fool, and he had been a fool to send him down. But Price had been the bigger fool to take the chance.

Then, as a part of the anger, he was apprehensive; this could be a diversion, and he looked quickly at the line of hills behind him on the other side of the road. They were nearer than the trees, and there was nothing to prevent the Indians from skulking over there to take up positions. It was the kind of thing that made him instinctively afraid, and he knew he could not take any more of the mounted men away.

"I'm going down," he said when Mannion came up. "Watch those hills in back of us."

"I better come along," Mannion said. "I don't like what's going on down there."

"Neither do I, but you stay here. And watch those hills. They may be up in there." His horse could feel the excitement of something soon to happen, and began jiggling.

"You better let me come along," Mannion shouted above the sound of the turning horse and the rain.

"No!" Wales shouted. "And, tell Jarret to keep the column moving!"

Then he let the animal have its head. It sprang away,

and almost at the same time the firing down below was broken off, and there was a movement among the troopers to withdraw. Returning toward the plain, they saw him coming down, and as they bent their line toward him he knew one was missing. But they were anonymous in the rain and mist until they drew closer and he saw Price was gone.

Everyone talked at once; they waved their arms and pointed below; Wales rose up in his stirrups and yelled for quiet. An acting sergeant named Molino pulled at his hat.

"Well, they'd been snipin' at us," he began, and then went on. They'd been following along with them all the time. They hadn't scored, but they were plenty of a nuisance. Finally, the lieutenant spotted some; he gave a whoop, and in he went.

Molino pulled at his hat again.

Wales listened while he felt the rain beat on his hat and shoulders. Molino told it well enough, but Wales was thinking now of Price and his stupidity, because his heedlessness had put the whole column into danger. In the back of his mind, he was aware that he had been determined to see these people into town without further danger. It was a highly personal thing and, in the way that he had faced that old man, it had certain aspects of a redemptive act. Now Price might have bitched it.

In all the time he had known him, Price had never enraged him as he did now. That he had the capacity for such anger surprised him. In that second of revelation, he felt that he had glimpsed a part of himself he was better off not knowing, for on strictly personal grounds he discovered he was capable of leaving Price.

But he could no more do that to Price than he could to any other of his men. He was bound to them as though chained, and it made no difference who they were or what they might have done. Dead or alive, he would have to get Price out of there.

Nobody knew where he was because the brush was higher than a mounted man. It had sucked him up like a jungle; they'd gone whooping in after him but Price had vanished.

All that could be done was to go back over the ground.

After he got them turned around he put them all in a line with gaps of thirty feet or more, and brought the line in parallel to the brush so they could ride along the fringe. He was counting on the chance that someone might catch a glimpse of Price in passing. There was only a vague possibility that such a maneuver might work, but for the moment it was something to believe in.

They went along that way for a quarter of a mile or more. Everyone was soaking wet and rode in a hunched and deadened attitude, with only their eyes alive. A mild but gusty wind was coming off the Santa Ritas now, and sometimes it made them avert their heads so that the slanting rain did not blind them.

The Indians knew about it, too, and during one of these intervals Lopez raised his arms. He was thirty yards ahead of Wales, and looking up at the end of a gust, Wales saw his arms spread slowly back. It was a gesture so peculiar that Wales could only think that he was stretching and he didn't see the arrow until the tracker began to fall.

It was one of those times when too many things began to happen all at once. He knew they had been jumped, but everything about that fact was fragmentary. He heard shouting to his rear, and on his right the high, shrill yelling of the Indians; there was motion in the brush and the flutter of arrows overhead—an ancient musket boomed, and to the rear again a rattle of revolvers in reply. Once he saw rain glint on naked flesh and pulled his head down as the arrows came, and when he looked again he had got by. The single definite thing he knew was that the tracker's horse had panicked, and that his own pounded after it.

By now the sounds were mostly to the rear and there were no more arrows. The tracker's horse plunged through a thicket, into the clear and through another thicket. Trying to sit erect, and with the arrow in his chest, Lopez swayed and reeled before the savage blows of the tearing brush.

Wales was gaining on him when he felt his horse begin to loosen. It had a sickening rubbery give to its stride, and the whole of its frame began to sag. He wanted to

look around to find the trouble, but the animal veered and there was no time to turn because the trees were there. He flung outward from the horse, knowing that he was going to hit them. There was only time to raise his arms and yell, but he didn't even hear the yell because his crashing fall was too loud.

He plowed through the tearing, wiry brush, slammed into something solid, bounded off, and raised a plume of mud and water as he skidded into the earth. In his mind the sun rose to a fiery noon and fell off into inky blackness. There was a sound of cymbals and he went off into the vacuum of this black remoteness.

His breath was completely knocked out of him and far out in these ringing voids his lungs clutched involuntarily at air, and breathed. The brass clashed far away and he breathed again, and now the brass was altogether gone. He opened his eyes, or perhaps they had been open all the time, but now he saw out of them.

At first he did nothing at all. He lay on his stomach and the side of his face, his arms outstretched, still in that protecting attitude. He lay beneath a thicket of dense brush in a wallow of mud and water. A roaring sound, which puzzled him, came to be rainfall on the leaves overhead; it soothed him, and the mud beneath him was soft and cool.

He began to see things under the brush. He saw them as a small animal might, unobstructed by overgrowth. The boles of the trees rose all around him and stretched out of sight. They stirred what seemed to be some distant memory, and when he saw his horse the memory came nearer. The horse lay some yards off in still another copse, an arrow behind the saddle. The horse and the trees were like pieces of broken crockery gathered for restoration.

Now he heard distant gunfire and the thudding of running horses. How had they got so far away? How had he got in here? Ah . . . Lopez. Where was Lopez now? And that other thing—Price, of course. He remembered Charlie—and where was he? How could he ever find him now?

He remembered the Indians, too, and the recollection of the Indians galvanized the vagueness of his thoughts. Something warned him to get away from his fallen horse.

It was only a matter of time before they stumbled onto it.

He put all of his concentration into getting out of there. At first he was afraid of what might happen when he tried to move. Then he got his arms beneath him and came away from the mud with a sucking sound, got his elbows under him and firmly planted. Everything seemed to work; he was aware of no particular pains, and he could feel sensation in all of his limbs. He began to think that he had not really hit the trees at all; evidently, the brush had turned him aside.

Next, he came to his knees and began to back away, meaning to get as far as he could from the horse in the shortest possible time. Backing was quicker than going forward because the horse lay ahead of him. He had no idea where he was with relation to the plain, but that did not concern him now.

When he had gone a number of yards in whatever direction he was heading, he stopped. The horse was out of sight and now there was only the brush and the over-reaching trees. He was becoming accustomed to the sounds of this place and he stood as quietly as he could and listened to them. Overhead there was the dull roar of the rain falling on the broad palms of the sycamore leaves; the lighter drilling on the cottonwood leaves, and on the brush beneath. It fell in soft splats into the mud and earth about him, and with not much sound at all upon his flesh and clothing. The firing seemed a good deal farther off than before, and he no longer heard the running horses at all.

There was a new sound, though—the river. It was more than a sound—a vibrant physical force, deep and solid in the air and in the earth too. He began to feel it in his knees and thought it might be a hundred yards off; less, perhaps.

He squatted in the downpour like a frog, listening to its swollen passage through the land. Together with what he knew about the firing, it told him he was getting farther from the plain where his men were.

Was it better to wait here on the chance that they would reach him before the Indians? Or should he strike

out for the plain, and hope they saw him when he reached the fringe—if he got that far? Perhaps he ought to wait for dark. But where would the column be then? What would happen if he yelled and fired his revolver? If he stood right up and did it now?

These schemes moved through his mind, but there seemed to be too many imponderables involved. It was hard to think—the rain kept beating on his head. There ought to be some quiet place to work it all out.

In a moment the problems solved themselves. Still another sound began to reach him, and when the brush began to move and bend before the horses, he remembered what he had seen espaliered on the wagon wheel. He had only the time to throw his body flat before they appeared, before he saw the mounted Indians. They were twenty yards off and they were riding at an angle from the river; he saw their naked flesh and wet hair hanging lank beneath their headbands. They went past him in an endless line, but he dared not think about their numbers; he thought of absolutely nothing. He shut off everything inside himself. He did not even move his eyes, but kept them fixed on the point where he had seen them first, immobile. They were going toward the plain, but they would find him if he thought about them as they passed by.

When they had gone he knew that everything was settled. He got his knees and elbows underneath him and began to move. He was heading for the deeper brush and high aquatic grass along the water, and he drove ahead with all the strength he had. He lunged on through the shredding brush, the mud and falling rain. He hardly looked where he was going at all, and when exhaustion overtook him he collapsed, dropping flat in a splash and a skid with the undergrowth high above him.

He lay there for a moment and when he looked up it was not from recovered strength. In the second of falling an image had crossed his eye, but his obsession with escape had delayed its passage to his brain. The image was a man, and he lay scarcely twenty feet ahead. His mouth was drawn in the grimace of one who counts the seconds to some apocalyptic moment. His eyes were fixed in a

stare across the barrel of his revolver. A yell rose in Wales's throat, but died before it reached his lips, for instinct told him that he would not be heard. The man was Charlie Price, and he was dead.

AT FIRST HE wouldn't believe that Price was gone, and it was not until he'd opened his tunic and seen the gaping wound that he took it as a fact.

After that there was a time when he tried to dig a decent grave but the razor-edged aquatic grass cut his hands; nor could he make headway through the tangled roots of the trees beneath the mud. It was grueling, painful work; and even his saber was little help against the wet, springy wood. But he worked in a kind of daze. He scarcely noticed these hindrances. The danger of delay left his mind, and he forgot the Indians. He forgot his anger, too. Its origin was far beyond this dripping jungle and, as with others whose lives had gone to memory, Charlie's faults came to very little now. Charlie had simply been himself. Wales labored, and mourned him in the rain.

The grave was shallow, and the mound high, but it was finished. Wales rose, holding Charlie's weapons. At least the Indians would not find these.

He turned his back on all that remained of Charlie Price and moved away through the grass and brush toward the river. While he was conscious of the urgent need to get out of there, the numbing fright was gone. Now, if they were going to come, he was of a mind to let them, and he would fight them where they found him. It was a time when his personal safety seemed not to matter too much, and he felt a desire to go at them with his saber.

Still, he was thinking clearly enough about his situation. He'd settled on the river as a means to bypass all the mess around here. The trunk of a downed tree, or a large broken branch should be enough to float him for a couple of thousand yards or so, and into the clear. That these rivers below the Gila flowed north had only seemed an oddity before, but now it was a useful oddity.

The river seemed nearly under his feet before he saw it. The high sharp grass grew clear to the over-reaching

banks, then ceased abruptly. Below, the water flowed in a swollen turgid mass, wildly alive with the heaving flotsam gathered up in its journey down from the mountains. Though he had no choice, he was wary of submitting to the grip of that savage vitality.

But there was nothing else to do, and he did not have to look around for something to suit his purpose. The bench was awash with a wreckage of broken timber. By gripping the long grass near the roots, he eased down the sloping bank and when he felt unyielding wood beneath his feet he let go. The limb had broken off some sycamore in the Santa Ritas. It was large and heavy, and he felt it would be less capricious in the current than a smaller one.

When he had his breath he lay on the trunk and dug his boots in the sand while he fended the bank off with his hands. At first it was very slow, but after that the angle of the bank began to change more swiftly, and by the time he floated freely the limb was gathering speed.

As soon as his feet lost contact with the bottom he drew along the trunk and wrapped himself in the spreading limbs. Out of the reach of the water he had a feeling of security, and let himself relax. He was trying to remember to guide the limb along the bank, but fatigue struck at him and he began to doze. He had never been so tired and it was a grueling struggle to keep awake.

Half the time he could not really tell if he was awake or not, and at last he commanded himself to raise his head and look about. What he saw alarmed him. The willful currents had got him in their grip and he was far from the bank, out toward the center where the force was strongest and most fickle, and it was going to have its way with him. A single moment of rest had cost him his control and he was at the mercy of the river.

At first he became excited and tried to kick and use his arms, but it got him nowhere. The great limb turned, heaved and swayed, circled and shot ahead. Currents seized and freed it; foam and spray broke over the branches, drenching him. Once, it nearly sank, as some deep-lying eddy sucked from below. Though he had gone through desert heat and mountain cold, the pulse of natural forces had never caught him so nakedly as they had now.

After a while he saw a point come out of the far bank, a sand spit connected with the mainland by a patch of reeds. Though he'd wished to avoid the further shore, it was hardly a matter of choice, and when the limb passed near the spit he kicked and bucked and kicked and bucked. The limb drove into the spit, caught, held and swung away again. It lurched slowly into the wide eddies of the other side, caught once more in the main current which sent it off at a tangent toward the slower water behind the spit. It had exactly enough momentum to touch the bench with its furthest tip. He kicked and bucked against its weight again, and this time when it touched, he pulled himself up over the many branches, under them and around them, more in the water than out, until he fell face into it and felt the sand and gravel against his knees.

He crawled the rest of the way. He came out of the water and went up the shallow bank like an old reptile, through the sand to the reeds and grass. His mind was full of phantoms now. He hoped that Jarret had kept the column moving on. He wondered how the Indians had got across that torrent with their horses—somewhere there must have been a ford. And Charlie—where in hell was Charlie's saber? He must have dropped it overboard. But all these thoughts formed and dissolved away before he could grasp them clearly.

All this while he was crawling. He didn't think of where he was going to hide because he was simply going on instinct now, and when it told him he could not be seen from the west bank any more his arms and legs stopped working and he dropped flat in the grass.

This time he lay a long while and he was not sure what warned him to move on unless it was some part of him that clamored against sleep. Whatever it was, he roused and again became aware of the rain and grass and of the thunder of the river all around him.

At first he only lay there with his head above the reeds. The trees were up ahead of him some yards, and the river lay behind and to each side. The rain was lighter now, and above him the sky seemed darker. From the look of it, he must have lain there half an hour, or so. Probably two, or

two and a half, had passed since they'd come down to look for Price. By now, it might be five, or six o'clock in the evening.

It looked dry beneath the trees and he began to move slowly that way. He had no idea yet how he was going to join his men again; but he was conscious of the hazards he faced and one was lying out here for all the passing world to see. At least the trees gave shelter, and would be a place in which to think without having this infernal rain beat on his head. He had never been so tired of rain; his head was actually tender from the constant drumming.

He crawled most of the way, but at a fallen sapling he rose. He was getting his leg across a limb, but when he heard the sound of walking, he stopped in midstride. He heard it coming through the trees between the surges of the river and the pounding of his heart.

He saw nothing right away, but the sound came nearer. Since movement would draw attention, there was nothing to do but stand and wait. His mind leaped over the possibilities; his cartridges, though greased against rain, were ruined by the river. His revolvers—he had Charlie's in his belt—were useless. Any defense would have to depend on his saber; but he had wanted to meet them with his saber.

The remembrance brought him into a wide, cooling calm. The feeling of finality drove all of the speculations from his mind and it was clear as glass. It was dominated by a hope that they'd come near enough for him to get at them. There was even a sense of triumph.

He stood with his hand on the hilt and watched the charro coming through the trees. The charro carried an antique matchlock, and was trailed by three other men, all alike in their peaked hats and ponchos, which were slit to admit their heads, and their white pajama trousers, grey and heavy with water. They did not see him right away, but the one who wore the sharp beard looked at him as they passed beneath the trees. He made a sound, which stopped the others, and stared at Wales. And then he laughed as he recognized him. It was Salazar.

"Ha!" He gave a shout. "Caballeria!" and Salazar came ahead laughing. "What are you doing thus?"

Wales did not try to speak right away. He felt some part of him give way inside, and he was loose and weak all

over. His mind became chaotic and kept repeating that it was Salazar before him. This apparition that he saw here was Salazar.

Then he felt foolish standing astride the limb. Salazar was patting him and laughing in his face, and the others all stood smiling around him.

"I was in the river," he began. He stopped, because it was a poor beginning, and began again. "We were over there, and the Indians came. I lost my horse and got into the river, but the current caught me." He waved his arm at the further shore and let it go at that.

"And brought you here!" Salazar shouted. "How fine!"

They helped him over the limb. Salazar kept saying "fine," and "very good," and laughing in his fierce way as they unhitched him and walked up to drier ground under the trees.

As soon as they arrived, Salazar became concerned with his condition, and examined him. The others stood around in their dripping ponchos watching and smiling at him as though he were still a child.

"I'm all right," Wales said. "I flopped in the mud, that's all. Everything feels all right."

"What do you call this?" Salazar said. "Here, on your arm; this? Does it hurt you? It must be fixed."

Wales had not known about the gash below his shoulder and was surprised to see it. It was deep and bloody, and had a lurid look against his wet skin. Still, it did not hurt, though it would in time.

He shook his head and for a moment he felt the return of weakness. He felt on the verge of physical illness, and he slid down to the ground and leaned on the tree. One of the men gave him a brown cigarro, and with a flint and steel, struck a light.

With the first drag, the illness left and he looked around. They all were sitting now, lighting smokes of their own.

"What are you doing here?" he said to Salazar. "Are there Indians around?"

"No, they are gone now. They are over the river now. We have watched them since they passed the San Juan. There are more than we have ever seen before."

"Perhaps they are your Indians," a short man said to Wales. He had a long mustachio. "Did you fight them?"

"They came after those people we were bringing up from Tubac," Wales explained. "They've been after them a couple of days."

"Those who passed by here on horses?" The short man seemed surprised. They spoke in Spanish which was hard for Wales who had barely a working knowledge of it.

"No," he said, and tried to make it simple. "There were others first. They came on foot to begin with. The riders came today. I saw them after I'd been thrown."

Salazar nodded. "The ones of today we have seen; they came out of the mountains and we followed them. But not the others. We knew nothing of any others, or of fighting. Where was this fighting?"

"On the other side, between the river and the road." He tried to think of something more exact, and he remembered the point of rock. He explained about the siege and the fighting along the edge of the brush.

Salazar slowly wagged his head and smiled. "It is many leagues to that place. You had a nice siesta floating in the river."

Wales put his hands up to his head and tried to remember it again. He hadn't thought that he'd gone to sleep, but all of that seemed far away and now he did not know.

"Yes, I suppose I did," he said. He took his hands away. "How can I get over there again?"

"Over the river again?"

"Yes," Wales said. "All of my men are there."

Salazar laughed indulgently. "Fine," he said. "Yes, very fine. Look, we will all go to the San Juan. I have an old woman who will fix your arm."

"No; my men are over there. And all those people we were taking out." He was suddenly full of a consciousness of those people and his men; he felt almost derelict in his duty because he was not with them. "I have to get back to them," he said.

Salazar held his cigarro in his mouth and spread his hands.

"But, amigo, the river is higher now. Look for yourself. It will be morning before you can safely cross again."

"Where's the ford? The Indians got over somehow."

"The Apaches will be there. The Apaches will have the

ford. They are everywhere. This is a big thing they have begun."

"I don't care. I have to get back. I don't even know what's going on." He began to rise. He was full of visions of disaster on the other side.

Now they all rose, and Salazar grew adamant in his protests. "It is impossible to cross. You are too weak. The river is too high. You will be swept away."

Wales stood up, but set his back against the tree because there was an alternate light and darkness in his eyes, and his head was giddy. He felt no pain, but nothing seemed to work right.

Salazar held him gently by the arm again.

"Listen to me; I will send Lucero to learn of the battle. He will wait beneath these trees, and when the river subsides a little he will cross."

Lucero was the one with the mustachio, and though he did not know any English, he recognized his name, and smiled. The way in which the rain dripped off the points of his long mustachio reminded Wales of Mannion, and all of his objections and determinations were again vivid. At the same time, that other part of his mind that weighed judgments and decisions, had begun to function, and he knew he could never cross over tonight, himself, that he was on the point of exhaustion. And it was true about the water being higher now. In the gathering dark he could see it lapping in the reeds where he had rested. There was no sign any more of the limb on which he had floated.

When they came out into the rain once more the sky was almost dark, the wind had died away and the lightning rain was falling vertically in finer drops. The even opacity of the clouds seemed to be diminishing, for they possessed that individual quality which often marked the end of a summer storm. While there were not yet any breaks, it seemed to indicate broken sky before too long.

They went off on a long sandy ridge, passed through a sink of mud and deep reeds and into another grove of trees. Other men were waiting there. There were horses, too, which stood as horses always do in the rain, their

heads lowered and their tails drawn against their rumps. Overhead, the rain fell softly upon the roof of leaves and obliterated all other sounds; and when all were mounted they rode out like dark silent ghosts.

The grove was small, and at the end of it they turned east toward the Santa Ritas. It was all changed then because they were leaving level ground and were in the open once more, getting into low hills which approached the foothills. The soil, which had been sand along the river, had turned to caliche and there was soon that familiar trouble with the animals' hooves, and there were frequent halts in order to clean them.

But this did not last long, for they were soon among the grassy hills, and they could move on without delay. The rain had dwindled, and in a while they sometimes saw a field of stars shining between the parting clouds. The clouds no longer had that dark, burdened look, and though they seldom saw the moon, its light shone coldly on the clouds' edges, and now and then came down between them and lay on the mountains.

Riding in single file, they followed the climbing trail quietly. Where the trail was wide enough for them to ride abreast, Wales could talk to Salazar and he related the facts of the engagement and the deaths of Price and Anderson. But most of the time, they rode in silence. Though he was weary beyond anything in his memory, he was not particularly uncomfortable and he was able even to doze in fitful snatches. Sometimes his mind turned toward the column over the river, but there was nothing he could do about it now, and it seemed far away. The intervention of events had removed that care from his hands, which invited a certain relaxation. Although he sensed its wrongness, he was enjoying an abdication of responsibility.

He was awake and asleep, and when he wakened for the last time they were coming into a meadow cupped in a circle of hills. Beyond a line of thick, live oak, there rose a dark mass which soon became a high wall entered by a gate. Water flashed in the pouring moonlight, and he could hear it flowing in the acequias of the field.

As they came nearer, there were people, too; charros who came running from the gates carrying lanterns. Wales could see their teeth reflected in the lanterns and in the

moonlight, and hear their laughter and their bare feet as they took bridles at the bits and led the riders in. For a moment it seemed a part of a dream he might have had. It was out of another time, and in the beam above the gate he saw the carved Castillian rose. There had been many of these places in the early days; they were mostly ravaged into ruin now, but the few that remained still recalled traditions of the Alcazar.

THOUGH HE WOULD not have thought it possible in the afternoon, he slept that night in a bed; and in the morning, he found himself in a high, airy room. Three walls were blank, but a fourth had windows and a doorway into the plaza, and as these walls had all been whitewashed with the yeso of the country, the room was filled with clean light.

Overhead, heavy vigas supported the ceiling. The floor was packed earth hardened with ox blood, he supposed, and sprigs of green grew out of the cracks and seams in the adobe at the outer walls. The room was fairly large. There was an old trastero in one corner, and a table in the middle. A rounded, hive-shaped fireplace had been built in another corner, with a line of colored tiles arranged across the front of it. There was a crucifix on the wall behind the bed, and all of the furnishings were made of pine. All seemed very old, too, and inner-glowing in the way that pine becomes with age.

He sat up on the edge of the heavy bed and examined his arm. While he slept, it had been treated with a preparation he could smell, but not place, and bound. Moving it carefully back and forth, he felt the expected stiffness, but there seemed to be no pain which might indicate infection.

When he was satisfied with that, he got up and dressed. His clothes lay on the table, and during the night they too had been attended to, and were clean and dry now. It gave him a peculiar feeling, bordering on delinquency, to think that so much had been going on while he had been sleeping.

He dressed slowly, favoring the arm, and went outside. It was a brilliant day. The sky appeared as blue and hard as turquoise. The highland air was braced with piney down-drafts from the peaks. It had an exhilarating quality wholly absent from the valley steeped in summer heat-haze.

When his eyes became accustomed to the blast of sun-

light he made out Salazar across the plaza, sitting in a rawhide chair beneath an oak tree watching him approach. A pair of these oaks grew out of a surface of reddish tile near one of the walls. A circular stone well had been dug between them, or perhaps they had grown up after the digging of the well. On a low, pine table lay a cluster of grapes, a platter of tortillas and a bottle of wine. Salazar today wore closely fitted leather trousers, the seams ornamented heavily in silver, and iron spurs with great dragging rowels. Wales knew these outlandish spurs with their gold rosettas to be a personal conceit of the oldtime hacendados; but Salazar wore them with a flare that told Wales he was being entertained, and he felt free to smile over them.

"Durmio bien, compadre?" Salazar said, arising and bowing with a laugh.

"Oh, si, dormi muy bien," Wales said in his awkward Spanish. "I slept like the dead."

Salazar raised his hand and stuck his beard in the air.

"Ho!" he said. "Time enough for that. Just so you are rested. How goes your arm today? Does it hurt you? It was treated in the night."

"Yes, I discovered that," Wales said. "It feels all right. Somewhat stiff, but that's about all."

Salazar smiled at this, and they sat in the rawhide chairs and began to eat and drink. In between his rapid bites, Salazar went on about the arm. He explained that his old woman, who had fixed it in the night, was a curandera of such outstanding capabilities that she had the cure for any ailment one could think of. She had put the seeds of the Guadalupana vine upon that arm. Wales was not familiar with the Guadalupana vine? Well, amigo, it was known to be a very holy remedy, for upon those seeds appeared the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a miracle worth noting in itself. The odor which one noticed was mescal, in which they had been soaked; but, pray, no laughter, please! While it was true that a borracho might smell of such all of the time, under these conditions mescal enjoyed a state of grace. A religious man might even consider it a saintly fragrance.

And there were more; oh, yes, many, many more. There was an herb for everything. No illness could be so mysteri-

ous or grave but what an herb could not be found for its cure. Should one's stomach be enfermedad, there was tea brewed of marigold, the herbs of the borracho or the angel. Should one's kidneys fail, the roots of the bull nettle would encourage them to function.

Oh, there were hundreds. Carramba! There were thousands! With the proper herb, a gallo could even influence the course of love. The señoritas would follow him like a manada of mares. Salazar stroked his beard and laughed.

Beneath the spreading oaks, they talked and ate the food, and drank the wine. Off and on, Wales would wonder if Lucero had come back, but he did not ask. Although he wanted very much to know how things were going in the valley, simple courtesy forbade him to bring it up while they ate. In this place, one would be expected to follow the somnolent pace of custom, with worldly matters excluded from the digestive process.

He popped the grapes in his mouth and looked over the plaza. He could not escape the feeling of having returned through the stream of time to the middle ages. Everything here at the San Juan was of thick adobe and heavy beams of pine, the buildings on three sides, their backs a part of the high walls rising above them. The light was warm and golden on the straw binder in the brick; it would change according to the light all day long, but always remained mellow and soft.

In the fourth wall, through the open gates, he saw the cattle grazing on the vega where the acequia ran. They were black-horned, and many were of that coarse-haired, mealy-nosed strain you often saw in that region. Horses and burros stood in a pole corral within the gates, and kicked their feet and swished their tails at flies. The wall in which the gates were built was splashed with pomegranate and bougainvillea that shone red in the sunlight. They went clear to the top and he could see the sentries eating pomegranates while on guard. One of the buildings was a chapel, and around it were many graves with desiccated flowers and weathered wood ornaments on them. Some of them were fairly fresh, because the earthen mounds were darker and higher than others, which were lighter in color and smoothly barren. This varied coloration suggested something of the spread of time involved

between the oldest and newest dead, and he felt the San Juan to be a strange, ancient place. While he could recognize the air of former richness, and even splendor, it was poverty-ridden now; but still it lived.

When they had finished the food, and the last of the wine had washed it down, Salazar took from a pocket in his stitched vest a pair of black cigarros, gave one to Wales and put the other in his mouth. He lit them both, and as the blue smoke rose beneath the branches of the trees he leaned over and touched Wales on the leg.

"We will hear Lucero now," he said, smiling. "He returned from the river while you slept, and is waiting to tell us what he found. He is my principal scout, and will know everything; he is one of my viejos."

As though the lighting of the cigarros was a sign agreed on by pre-arrangement, Lucero appeared in a doorway and walked across the plaza. He wore the white pajama trousers and guaraches and the tail of his shirt was knotted at his middle. On his head was a straw sombrero, with a scarlet band around his head under it. As he came through the shadows of the trees, his teeth were very white against his dark complexion.

"Como le va?" he said as he stopped in front of Wales.

"Me siento bien," Wales said. "Como le va?"

"Oh, bueno. I feel fine, senior." He removed the sombrero.

"You look all right to me. Was there any trouble?"

"No, senior. No trouble. It all went well."

"Well, I'm glad you got back all right," Wales said. "Won't you sit down?" Wales used his Spanish, poor as it was.

There was another of the rawhide chairs, and when Lucero had sat in this Salazar gave him a cigarro which he lit. He breathed the smoke in the air and smiled again at Wales.

"Yes, it all went well. I crossed the ford in the dark; there were Indians, but I went around them."

Wales nodded, and asked Lucero if he had seen the column. "It may have kept on moving," he said. "Unless the Indians broke through."

"No, I did not see your column," Lucero said. "Of course, I was compelled to remain in hiding in the brush, and did not get out on the plain. But later, when the clouds began to clear, and the fighting had ended, the Camino Real was empty."

"That would mean they got away," Wales said, and he felt a sense of vast relief come over him. Jarret had kept them moving. He felt exultant over this, yet at the same time he felt misgivings, for if the column had not stopped it meant the Indians had been held to the brush; that the fighting had been heavy and that Mannion and the Troop had borne the brunt of it.

He asked about this, and it was as he thought. Indeed, Lucero said, the fighting had been heavy down there. He had been there for the last of it. There were many Indians. He had counted fifty mounted Indians alone. Who could say how many were afoot? He had burrowed into the ground like the roots of the grass and seen as much as he could. The Caballeria? Oh, yes, there were many of them down there, and the Infanteria, too. Yes, there were plenty of soldados, though not so plentiful as the Indians. But they were victorious, the soldados. The air was a spider web of shooting; they nearly trampled him underfoot. He would have tried to speak with them, but they were flush with the heat of battle. Lucero spread his hands, smiling. By the grace of God, a man has but one life.

There was more, and when he finished there were questions. In general, Wales could see how things had gone and felt gratified. The column had got away and the attack had been repulsed. While his misgivings for the casualties continued, for the moment at least, they were overshadowed by his enjoyment of triumph.

As Lucero put on his hat and left them, Wales was suddenly filled with the need to leave this place and return. The San Juan now seemed to be a hiatus in his life, and the account of the fighting had abruptly filled this vacuum with all kinds of demands, emotions and desires. He had scarcely been here overnight, but its curious antique character created the illusion of a far longer time.

Wales ground out the butt of his cigarro on the tiles. "Well, that's good news, at least. I expect I'd better be getting back. Can you let me have a horse?"

Salazar raised his brows. "But, amigo, you have just arrived. What of the sheep I would kill for you?"

"I'm grateful for everything you've done," Wales said, "but I should be getting back. It would please me more if you used the sheep yourself."

"And what of the fandango I would hold for you? What of the honor of my house?" Salazar laughed. "What of your arm, amigo?"

Wales was glad of the laugh because he knew he felt impatient, was afraid it showed and had no wish to offend. He touched Salazar on the knee, and smiled.

"I'll have to take advantage of your honor. I'd like to stay a while. But now my men are waiting. Things will be happening in town."

"Ah, that is your curse, you gringos," Salazar said, and laughed as he shook his head in a parody of sadness. "You say there is no time. You are wrong; there is time for all things, if you do not squander it. You will find that out one day."

Salazar frowned as though he were contemplating some far off thing in memory, then laughed again. He brought his hands down flat on his knees, and stood up.

"Very well. Yes, you may have a horse. I shall make arrangements for an escort. Will tomorrow be all right?" He smiled at Wales. "I doubt the land will be swallowed up before then. I have lived here all my life. I rode the temporales as a nino, and the land is still the same as it was then."

"Yes, tomorrow will be fine," Wales said. "But I don't need an escort."

"You would not go a thousand varas alone," Salazar said. "The Apaches are everywhere."

"They're cleaning out the valley," Wales said. "I doubt they'll come as far north as the way I'll take."

"I would not support that view with dinero," Salazar said. "There is more to this, I think, than meets the eye at present." He shook his head, and looked away across the walls as if to penetrate some obscurity which yet defied penetration. "It is a big thing, amigo, that I know."

"How do you mean that?" Wales said, and he remembered Jarret's remark again, and his own impression of

sinister power and force, and of great numbers of hostiles gathered in the wet, dripping trees.

"They are not simple raiders. All the war chiefs are with them. That we have learned. But it is no one thing," and Salazar laughed again. "More, it is a feeling—but enough of one to take you down with an escort."

"All right," Wales said, and he gave it up, though he still felt that he could make it by himself. But he was aware now of feeling queerly abashed, for while they had joked about his leaving, it was not a joke altogether, and he felt he had been treated to an insight into some of Salazar's attitudes.

For most of the day he took his ease beneath the live oaks by the well. The sun reached over the zenith and the shadows of the buildings shortened, and then grew long again as afternoon aged. Doves flew over the plaza and sat hooing in the trees. The horses and burros drowsed and switched their tails. Now and then a cow bellowed out on the vega. There was a sleepy drone of insects and a burbling undertone of water flowing in the acequia. Off and on, women came to the well; they would smile shyly at him and go away again, the water lapping over the rims of the wooden buckets.

Toward the middle of the afternoon, there were children, brown and laughing, running through the sunlight filling the plaza. They were playing that Indian game of throwing staves at colored hoops, and they shouted and raised the dust as they chased them over the ground. Four boys and two girls were playing the game together, and a fifth boy was squatting on his heels against a building with a parrot sitting on his shoulder. One of the girls had hair of a reddish color, and Wales knew that the Andalusian blood of some of the old Conquistadors had resumed life in her again. This reminder of a vanished century made him conscious again of the easy interchange between today and yesterday; the subtle shift of time, from now to then. That none of them seemed aware of the closing circle of annihilation beyond the walls made it seem as though the San Juan's timeless atmosphere had worked an enchantment holding them immune to danger. But he knew it hadn't. It

was simply that such matters ran fleeting through their consciousness. Children were too literal-minded to grasp the sense of unseen and long-hovering danger. He knew the quality to be a blessing of sorts, for the sound of their carefree laughter in the sunlit plaza suddenly filled him with sadness.

THEY LEFT AT DAWN. In the escort were seventeen men, every adult male on the San Juan including Salazar, and all rode with their lance butts in their stirrups, the blades receiving fire from the rising sun. The sky swelled with color and the air was coming down from the highlands, sweetened in pine-scent. The early light rose up behind the peaks of the range and slanted down to coat the tawny, grassy hills below in velvet. While it was true that the Apaches favored dawn for raiding, it was a time when it was hard to believe the country was infested with murder and pillage.

It was beautiful in the foothills, even though you knew the beauty was deceptive. In those early hours you saw the moist, glistening grass still bent low where deer had bedded. Sometimes you saw their heart-shaped tracks, brush freshly nibbled on, or their black, varnished droppings. It was the time of day when wildlife was most active; turkeys gobbled, and went off in a floundering rush as you neared; rabbits sat up to look, their ears translucent in the low light, and streaked off. Ground squirrels scurried away into burrows. Jaybirds scolded from trees and tanagers went over the grass like rainbows. Every now and then there would be quail exploding from the grass under you—always frightening because you would be thinking of Apaches, and when you heard the sudden drumming your middle jelled, and you looked wildly around. They had topknots on their heads, and flew low in a roaring blur. There were doves, too, which were elegant and erratic in their flight, but they never startled you as quail did. Their singing seemed to have that quality of lament that runs through Spanish music.

At noon there was a halt to eat the jerked beef and goat cheese which the men had carried in morals hung on their saddle bows. They were out of the grassy highlands by now and descending toward the lowlands in the valley. While they were still in grass, the grass was shorter and more

patchy, and Wales could see the desert growth along the lower slopes and feel the heat rising from the sandy plain. In a while they would enter cactus, and far away he saw the heat haze in the air about the mountains in the valley. The haze hung onto them like shrouds and made them fade to grey, so that they seemed partly under water.

It was another hour before they reached the plain and mid-afternoon when they pulled up to a rock tank in a stand of palo verdes where the animals could be watered. This tank was a pocket in a stony outcrop known to be dependable for run-off in the rainy seasons. Wales was grateful for the halt, and for the stand of trees which threw a patch of shade, however meager. This northern stretch of the valley was the broadest part, and the jolting ride in the oppressive heat was beginning to tell on him. His arm was stiff and sometimes pained him if he held it wrong; and the accumulation of fatigue had given him a headache which was aggravated by the pounding sun.

When he dismounted he felt light and dizzy for a moment, and before the horses drank, he filled the straw sombrero they had given him and poured it over his head. Then he went to one of the trees and lay beneath it on his back, with the hat under his head. He put his arm over his eyes to shield them from the glare because the palo verde tree has no true leaves providing shade, but simply long greenish spines.

When Salazar had got his pickets set out, he came to the tree and sat down beside Wales. He had a moral of cheese and beef, and over his shoulder a strap attached to a water jug made of the skin of some animal.

"Here, amigo, food and drink," he said. He put the moral between his legs, removed the water skin from his shoulder and pulled the stopper out. "What would you have first, beef or cheese?"

Wales sat up and put his hat back on again. In the last few miles, he had begun to feel peculiar in the stomach, and he was not sure that he wished to eat again.

"I think I'll try some water first," he said, and took the skin from Salazar. "My guts don't feel too good."

"Your stomach is bad?" Salazar smiled. "We should have some marigold for you. And the old woman to fix it."

Wales tipped up the skin and drank. The water was

warm, but palatable, and the skin did not smell, as he had thought it might.

"I think it's better now," he said. "I think it was the heat, and all this riding."

"Would you like some wine? Someone has some wine, I think."

He began to rise, but Wales shook his head. "No, the water's fine for now. Everything's all right. I don't need any wine."

"Well, then, some beef," the old man said. "You need something solid. And there is salt on the beef. Salt is something you need in this heat."

He looked into the moral, took out some of the strips of jerky and handed them to Wales. Wales set them on his leg, selected one and whittled on it with his pocket knife. It was firm and dry, and not too hard to cut. When he put a small piece in his mouth, he held it there experimentally before he chewed and swallowed it.

Salazar watched him with an amused suspense.

"Does it go? The beef is all right. The salt and the dryness will be good for you. Swallow it, man."

Wales nodded, chewed it thoroughly, swallowed and laughed.

"Yes, it's all right. You're right about the salt. Everything's fine now. I feel really hungry."

"Ah, then there is nothing to worry about. Eat it all. I will find the wine." Salazar stood up. "The wine will help your blood."

Wales was beginning to feel embarrassed at all the attention he was getting, but Salazar would probably like some wine himself, so he did not object.

"When are we going to pull out?"

"Soon. There is plenty of time. You eat and rest for a while."

"How far are we from Tucson now?" Wales said.

"Oh—near enough. Some hours." Salazar laughed at his own vagueness. "But we will have to be careful near the river. There may be Indians there. I have Lucero watching."

Salazar went off for the wine, and Wales continued eating. He ate slowly, a piece at a time, and chewed it all up carefully before he swallowed. All around him the others

were eating, too, and some had finished and were sleeping with their hats set over their faces. Having drunk what they were allowed, the horses had been put to graze on the scatter of filaree brought up by the rains. It was very hot and calm, and he could feel the sweat course down through his hair and run along his face and neck.

When he returned, Salazar took the stopper from the skin of wine and passed it to Wales.

"Take it for your health," he said. "It is from the San Juan."

Wales took the full skin, tipped it up to his mouth, and drank. It was drier than the wine he had been given before, and had a light and wonderful flavor.

Salazar sat down and watched with pleasure.

"Do you like it? Drink again, amigo. It is the best we have ever made."

"Yes, it's fine," Wales said, savoring the taste. "It's good and dry."

Salazar nodded his head, and smiled.

"And old," he said. "Old things are the best."

"Except for women," Wales said, and laughed.

"Ho, all the gallos talk that way," Salazar said. "But wait. Wine is more important at my age. You appreciate the old things then."

Wales drank again, lowered the skin and held it out to Salazar. "Well, I appreciate this," he said. "But you'd better take it now; you can't have much left. I didn't see your vineyards at the San Juan."

"No, they are no more," Don Diego said. "We have only a few vines these days. Los Apaches . . ." He looked away, and then at the bulging skin which Wales held out. "But we still have plenty of wine. Drink. Drink again."

"No. After you. I've had enough for now."

Salazar said, "Pah!" in an explosive laugh, took the skin from Wales.

He drank, and as he watched him, Wales could see the sweat and dust which caked the creases of his neck beneath his beard. As though he saw it for the first time, he was arrested by the sight of it, and by his rags and filth. He looked around him at the other men, the sorry animals and makeshift weapons and he suddenly saw them all in a cold, hard light entirely devoid of those Quixotic heroics

he had, unconsciously, perhaps, allowed them. They were gallant, yes, but they were poor and dirty; they were wretchedly equipped, and they were fighting for their lives. He saw them now as men engaged in survival, and what he thought and felt was the same as on that day when that old carreta came limping up the Camino Real.

It was all there, but the sense of shame was in a new dimension now because they risked their lives in order to insure his—while he was a part of the very thing responsible for the danger in which they lived. He could not get over the compulsion to take upon himself a share of the blame for whatever had brought this all to pass.

There was a feeling of finality in this ride across the plain, a belief that he would never see these men again, that made him want to talk to Salazar. He knew what he wished to say, but did not know how.

"Don Diego," he began, and Salazar looked at him. "I want to thank you for all of your trouble in my behalf . . ." It sounded stilted, and he stopped because it was a poor beginning.

"For what?" Salazar said, and threw up a hand to dismiss it. "It is nothing; it is a pleasure." He smiled, and raised the skin to drink, as though the matter were forgotten.

"No, it's not nothing, at all," Wales said, "as you say. It means a great deal. And I'm only sorry I can't return the favor. I'm sorry we're not staying on to help . . ."

He stopped again, and made a gesture which embraced the men, the horses and the lances leaning among the trees. They represented what he still could not accept—an open indictment of the Army.

Though he'd stumbled over the words, his meaning was perceived by Salazar; he shook his head slowly.

"Do not feel badly, friend," he said. "At the San Juan, there has been fighting for a hundred years. We are used to it now. We are used to depending on ourselves."

"I know, but it needn't be that way," Wales said.

"Perhaps, but it is a condition of existence. We are on the frontier, here. We have always been at the end of the world."

"Agreed, but is it not the responsibility of whatever government you have to give you protection?" He was

simply skirting the point, he told himself; he wasn't admitting anything.

Salazar shrugged, thought for a moment, and smiled.

"It would be kinder to say they have the responsibility of intention; and our governments have always had most excellent intentions. But we have always been colonials, and our land has never possessed those riches which intrigue the interests of governors and viceroys, and fire them with zeal in the performance of their duties. A few troops now and then at Tubac or Tucson, and a yearly deputation of tax collectors. But a veritable cornucopia of intentions."

Salazar laughed, and reached across to Wales and slapped his leg.

"Do not misconstrue me, friend. I do not complain. If those who live here did not love it, they would go away. We are not chained, you know. But events have made me a realist."

"You don't sound as though you had expected much of us," Wales said. He had asked for this, but he knew he had hoped for something else. It was better to fail ambitious expectations than have no expectations of one at all.

"Events," Salazar said, moving his shoulders. "I have been weaned from great anticipations. But I believe you will return one day," he added quickly, as though conscious of a lapse in his customary courtesy. "I believe you Yanquis will return."

"Someone will come back," Wales said; but he believed he sounded fatuous, and the words to be of little meaning in the face of their leaving the country.

When Lucero returned, he and Salazar held a private consultation composed of gestures and noddings toward the river. When this was finished, the men mounted and the line set off across the plain.

It was getting to be the hottest time of day, with the sun almost directly in their faces. Wales could feel it as a physical burden on his head and shoulders, and a searing flash when it sometimes slipped beneath the brim of his sombrero. Sweat poured down his face and flanks; he was stiff and sore again from the rest, and rode with his hands

braced on the pommel. Off and on, he would be conscious of a dull throb in his head, and knew he could have done without the wine. Up ahead of him, Lucero was telling Salazar about the sign he'd found along the river, but Wales could not get interested. Indians bored him now, and he wished he could sleep.

Because it was the only way to get his mind away from his discomfort, he thought of Marion. He tried to think when he had seen her last, and for a moment felt surprised that he could not remember right away. Between that night and now, his time-sense had been distorted by events: the muddy fight along the Camino Real, the nightmare in the river, the languid San Juan. They merged in his mind, and in a mass seemed to fill his whole memory.

And now I wonder what in hell's happening in town, he thought. I wonder if she's there, or what. Maybe she's already pulled out with her family; they were going to leave. The thought came from nowhere, after the manner of important bits of information which become submerged by the sheer weight of other matters, and then surface again.

He was frightened by the implications of this sudden thought because he knew that if she had departed, he had lost her; or, rather, that he had lost whatever chance there may have been of possessing her. Small chance of meeting soon again with a war between them.

And there was still Charlie Price to think about, too. Though he was dead and gone, still he could live on in her memory.

Then he was arrested by another thought; what if the Troop had left, too? While they wouldn't depart on Masefield's standing orders contingent on the final party of refugees arriving in Tucson—they could have got their own by this time. At first he rejected this alarming possibility, but the distortion in his time-sense confused his memory of the days involved since he'd lost the column. How many *had* gone by? He tried to steady his head and think. How many now, goddam it, Wales? Three? It could be three. What about two? And how many nights? He shook his head. He could not decide. It was too difficult to think, out here in this pounding sun, on this bruising animal.

But what if they *had* pulled out? That would mean that Tucson was a Southern town now, and wouldn't that be fine when he walked in. . . .

When he looked up again, the trees were very near, and there were Indians among them. The Indians surprised him because he'd forgot about them; he had been indifferent to the possibility of running into them, and now he was surprised to see them so near. With Salazar in front, the line came through a swale grown up in mesquite trees, and at the edge of that they saw the Indians among some ruined buildings along the river. They were two hundred yards off, and seemed like supple children playing in the sun. In their clouts and colored headbands, with the sunlight shining on their smooth skins, they had an air of innocence. The scene was primitive, but pastoral; and rather than impending danger, it suggested some joyous heathen rite.

But it was strange, too, that they should be here so near town, poking about in old, long-since looted ruins.

Salazar raised his arm, and the column halted. Lucero and Wales joined him and they sat beneath a mesquite tree a moment, watching. Wales felt his reaction to the meaning of all this tardy and piecemeal.

"He with the hawk feathers in his hair is Cuchillo Negro," Lucero said, pointing with his arm.

"Ah," Salazar said. "And there also is Delgadito." He laughed softly.

"Santiago was with them earlier," Lucero said. "But I do not see him now. No. Hold. There, he is. Near the edge of the trees toward the town."

"Yes, he watches," Salazar said. "How nice."

Dulled and sickened by the long day's ride through the heat, Wales became aware only gradually that the Indians beyond were something more than casual looters. All were not in the ruins; some had drawn apart at the edge of the wood facing the town.

Still, none of it meant much to him at first.

"They watch," Salazar said, and he laughed softly again. "And now we watch them. Their principal war chiefs are there."

Wales stared hard. All at once, he began to understand. The Indians ahead were an advance scout. But it was

ridiculous for them to think that they could take the town—even if the troops were gone.

He said so, to Salazar.

"Ah, so," Salazar said. "Folly indeed. But what if they intend otherwise? What if they intend an ambush for the troops and civil population when the march begins to the east?"

Then, suddenly, through Wales's dulled mind, the clear truth came. He was brought face to face with a glittering revelation.

"I'll be goddamned!"

"Please," Salazar said, smiling fiercely at Wales. "Please; think of the opportunity. We are not damned, but blessed."

Because the Indians were not accustomed to surprises originating in the mountains, they failed to see the lancers in this moment of discovery and appraisal. But they had horses grazing in the trees, and these put up their ears and turned their heads toward the column. Even then the Indians did not look, until the wariness of their mounts became too obvious to ignore any longer, and they turned from whatever they were doing and looked to the east. Everything changed with that. They could see the lancers now, in the mesquite growth. Wales could hear their shouting, high and thin, and see the amazement in their actions and posture. Some stood, briefly rooted in shock. Others broke immediately for their horses. A few collided violently, and fell down. All of them were shouting wildly and getting in each other's way. Three of the horses bolted, and ran off trailing their picket ropes behind them.

All this happened very quickly; the line had not moved from the time the Indians were sighted, but it did now. This state of turmoil could not last for long, but the Indians would not be dangerous while it did.

Salazar was shouting orders now, and everything was run together in rapid sequence. All the animals were prancing and the men were getting their lance butts out of their stirrup leathers. Salazar was shouting, "Pronto! Pronto!" and trying to get them organized. The lances circled and swished above their heads. Wales pulled Charlie's revolver from his belt, then remembered the condition of his cartridges and pushed it back. He looked

up as Salazar pushed through to him and shouted something.

"Andale! Andale!" Salazar was shouting at him.

"What?" Wales said. "What?" His horse was prancing wildly and he was trying to pull his saber out.

Salazar waved his arm and yelled, "Andale!" again. He held a lance upthrust in his other hand. "Get going!" he shouted, with his beard in Wales's face. "You can make it! There is the town! Ride for the mesa!"

"No!" Wales yelled. "I'm going in with you!" He had not been really aware of their nearness to the town, but it meant nothing now.

"No! It is the only way! Look—it is there! Run! Ride it, man!" His face was red and the veins stood out in his neck.

Wales got the saber free at last. The scabbard had been full of dried mud. There was a hell of a racket all around, and he leaned out to shout at Salazar again, but Salazar rode into him. The horse struck that of Wales's on the shoulder with its full weight, and Wales reeled in the saddle as it turned about. It was ahead of the other one and started moving with the shock. From the tail of his eye he caught the flicker of Salazar's quirt across the animal's rump, and he grabbed the saddle bow. The horse went off in quick, high leaps like one half-broken, in the early morning.

The mesquite slashed at him, and he let the horse run where it would until he got on the other side of the swale and slowed it down and got it turned around. Salazar's crowd was well away from him by now, their lances level, riding for the trees. He could see the sunlight flashing on the blades, and beyond, the Indians running madly for their mounts.

He rammed his spurs to the horse in order to get whatever he could from it. He was twenty yards or so behind the others and this was a sorry animal he rode, but none of the other men had spurs except Salazar.

This had all come off too quickly for him to analyze his reaction, but it seemed a natural thing to do. What surprised him was his awareness of a savage joy, entirely different from his normal emotions at such times. It was concerned with a sense of freedom, of release from obliga-

tion. Around him there were no men for whom he was responsible; there were no carretas, limping stock or stumbling lines of refugees. There was no one whatsoever for whose welfare he must pause before he acted. There were no commands or orders by which he must be guided, or abide. None of the frustrations of mass actions applied to him here, for he was an individual whose destiny at this particular instant was of his own selection. Here and now, the abortive muddle-headedness of Washington or Mesilla Valley had no meaning. They had nothing to do with it at all; even Bass had nothing to do with it.

It was all himself, Fred Wales, free-lance of the moment, striking his personal blow in the name of conscience and his fallen comrades.

It was worth it having spurs. He came slowly through the ruck, drawing beside them one by one, then passing on. There was a rolling pall of dust and in it everyone looked hazy. When he came abreast of Salazar, the old man simply glanced, then looked again and glared. His expression was of disbelief, astonishment and happy outrage, all run together. He stuck his beard at Wales, and yelled; Wales wagged his head and laughed. Salazar yelled again and shook his fist, but there was not any time for conversation now, for they had come among the Indians.

Wales saw them straight ahead, some mounted, some on foot, some still trying to mount, some turning to fight as best they could, some fleeing in panic through the trees. He saw them in a second of arrested motion, his eyes freezing them in many attitudes, some grotesque, others lithe and graceful—bronzed limbs, startled eyes, mouths shaped to shout, colored headbands, the flapping of boot-top moccasins, the arc of a bow in tension, a horse reared up, a picket rope snaking over the grass, a buck with a wart on his cheek, a fusil raised to fire, the mane of a horse straight up, and flared as though the wind had caught it.

It was wonderfully clear and precise, but in another instant it was all run together; it became a yelling, screaming, crashing chaos. They were not approaching the Indians any more, but were into them. The fusil went off with a bang and a gout of smoke. Arrows flickered in brief, glistening streaks that whispered by. Wales felt

his horse trip over something with its hind legs, then right itself. Beside him upright nakedness appeared; he brought his saber down and saw blood spray in the sunlight as the blade bit in. Off to one side, an Indian, taken on a lance, ran on in queer vaulting strides propelled by the momentum of the lancer's horse behind him. A horse screamed, and mount and lancer went down together, transfixed by a single arrow. Weapons gleamed at intervals in the choke of dust. Wales hacked and thrust at anything in front of him; one time a mounted Indian appeared beside him, and each gaped at the other in amazement as they met and passed. Sometimes he saw Salazar, sometimes not. He would hear him shouting, then he wouldn't. Sometimes he heard nothing but his own shouts and the clash of metal, and saw only dim shapes cloaked in dust, like figures which appear and disappear in mists. And all of the time he felt a wonderful exhilaration in his freedom, and a terrible satisfaction in the toll his saber was exacting.

Then, abruptly, he came through it all and out beyond the bare earth of the plain into the grass beneath the trees. He came out with a number of others and they wheeled among the shadows, turned and halted. The rest of them came out in singles or by twos and threes, and as the dust began to clear away they could see the shambles of the Indians lying among their downed animals. Those few who had made off were being pursued, but most had fallen in the first onslaught.

By now the men with whom he had come out were getting down to finish the wounded, loot the dead or attend to their own injuries; but Wales did not dismount. He was waiting there for Salazar and Lucero, who came out last, together.

"They are dead, those three," Lucero said as he arrived beside Wales. "They will not plan pillage and death for others again."

"No, they were the brains," Salazar said, halting. "The rest can do little without them now."

"And now they are brainless," Lucero said, and smiled. "But I can take the heads to make sure."

"Perhaps our old woman would pickle them for us," Salazar said.

Wales laughed. The high, good feeling of the fight was in him, still.

"Que barbarra!"

"Ho!" Salazar said. "Well, we are not barbarians. No, let them lie, Lucero. The vultures will care for them."

Lucero went off to the men, and Salazar turned to Wales.

"Fine, very fine," he said. "You have a chance to flee, and what do you do?" He jammed the point of his bloody lance in the earth and crossed his hands on the wide, flat pommel of his antique saddle.

"Yes, very fine indeed," Wales said. "I was simply returning your hospitality. After all, you once said that we should ride together. As a matter of fact, you made an invitation of it."

"Ah, so," the old man said, frowning and smiling together, as he sometimes did. Then he gave a shout of laughter. "And, so we have!"

"Yes, we have," Wales said. "And I wish there could be more. But for now . . ." he began to add, then stopped; he shrugged and when he smiled his lips felt flat and strained.

"Ah, yes, I know," Salazar said, and nodded his head. He kned his horse in closer and put out his hand to Wales who took it in his own, and squeezed it hard. "Perhaps another time eh? Some fine manana? If God wills it. Adios, mi campanero."

"Yes," Wales said, "adios. I'll leave your horse in town for you. Thanks much again."

"Ha, the horse! You may keep it in my memory!"

"I don't need a horse for that," Wales said.

"Nor I, amigo," Salazar said, as he backed his mount. Don Diego was smiling very fiercely now. "Adios; yes, God be with you."

"And with you," Wales said as he began to neck his horse around.

The animal turned, and when he had waved to them all he let it pick its way through the trees. Then he was aware of something binding in his chest, and he did not look backward at Salazar, and though he rode in shade the sunlight seemed to stream hard against his eyes. It had just occurred to him that Salazar's gallant charge had

saved the march to the Rio Grande from assault. That in a sense he was the saving instrument of those soon to abandon him.

In a while he was aware that he still held his bloody saber in his hand.

AFTER THAT there was the letdown from the action and he felt overcome with listlessness. Nothing seemed to matter much. He watched the land go by indifferently. He was conscious of the ford at the river, of the sloping plain beyond, and of the road. But he took them as they came.

He was aware of something nagging him that he should be concerned about. It slipped his mind until the sentry at the mill came in view, and he then remembered his doubts about the status of the town. He had forgotten that they had been more or less resolved through the simple fact of the Indians' surveillance; but that they were proven groundless now seemed not to affect him either way.

Then there was another time when he was recognized and when everything became slightly unreal. A hullabaloo went up as Bass and others in the Troop caught sight of him and pulled him bodily from the horse. Shouting and yelling, they paraded through the compound with him until, at last, the Surgeon emerged from the mill in a flood of invective and got him away from them.

Finally, he was sitting on his cot. Simpson went away to get his kit, and Bass and Mannion, returning when the Surgeon had cleared the room, sat on a cot across the aisle. They kept shaking their heads and grinning at him.

"Where in hell have you been?" Bass kept asking. "We went down there yesterday and combed that goddam country."

"Oh, God, everywhere," Wales said. "In the river, up at the San Juan eating grapes, coming down the mountain. You name it."

"You ran into Salazar?" Bass said. "What a letdown! Hell, we thought the Indians had picked you up!"

"They damned near did," Wales said. "Just luck they didn't. I see you made it back, all right," he said to Mannion.

"Yes, around midnight," Sergeant Mannion said, and

then his red mustachio bristled. "I was all for stayin' on to look for you, but that Lieutenant Jarret said to keep goin'."

"He was right," Wales said. "That's what I told you, too. You wouldn't have found me anyway."

"By Lord, I thought they had you," Bass said, and laughed again and slapped him on the leg. "We tore the hell out of it looking for you yesterday."

"You just wasted time," Wales said, and although that was true, he knew that he was moved that they should spend such effort looking for him. He found that he was smiling very broadly, and he knew that he'd never thought he'd be so happy to see this place again.

He looked at Bass again. "I imagine you ran onto Lopez, though. I lost him when I spilled, but he didn't look like he'd have far to go."

"Yes, we found him, all right," Bass said. "For all the good it did. Came onto your mount, too."

"They got your riggin', though," Mannion said, as if he felt remiss about the Indians reaching it first.

Wales nodded, but he was thinking about the others who had fallen. He would rather put that off, and simply enjoy the pleasure of being back, but the engagement was a fact and it was no good putting off a summary until a more convenient time. There was never a convenient time.

"Yes, Masters and Bishop," Mannion said in answer to his question. "Allen hurt; Glencoe, too, but not bad."

Wales was nodding his head as though it were a reflexive action set in motion by this litany of death and injury.

"That's a shame," he began, and then he stopped because he had been struck by the appalling insufficiency of words. Four dead, counting Charlie, and two hurt, and he said it was a shame! He looked at his hands, and as he saw their filth and grime he felt filth and grime all over him.

"We found Charlie, too," Bass said in a quiet voice.

"I wondered if someone would," Wales said, looking up again. "I was afraid the Indians might."

"You had a nerve taking time for that," Bass said, and

his voice had grown louder. "That could have cost your life."

"I don't know that I thought of it at the time."

"No, I guess you didn't," Bass said, and Wales, with mild surprise, was conscious of anger in Bass. But then, with the suddenness with which it had appeared, the color left Bass's face again and he smiled.

"Well, I'm glad you're back, you bastard," he said. "You gave me a hell of a scare, goddam it."

There was a sound and Simpson came along the aisle with his kit and a pan of hot water. He scowled at Bass and Mannion as he dropped his kit on the floor.

"So long as you sneaked back in, you might as well hold this," he said to Bass, and he gave him the pan of water.

"Tough guy," Bass said, still partly angry, but happy, too, and showing it that way. "You don't own him."

"For the next ten minutes, I do," the Surgeon said. "Take off your shirt," he said to Wales. "Where in hell have you been?"

"He's been lying around at the San Juan, eating grapes," Bass said.

Simpson paid no attention to Bass because Wales had bared his arm and he was bending over the wrapping.

"What's this?" he said of the medication, as if he was suspicious of whatever it might be.

"Guadalupana vine and mescal," Wales said, and he laughed. "Salazar's old woman put it on."

Simpson rinsed it with the water in the basin.

"It's not a bad thing, either. They have a pretty extensive pharmacopeia, some of those old herb women. She probably saved you from gangrene."

"Served him right, if he'd got it," Bass said. "Come on, Fred. Tell us about it. How did you meet up with Salazar, anyway?"

"I guess you'd say that he met up with me," Wales said. "I was in the river; or rather, I'd just got out of it."

Once again, as when these things had happened, he was bothered by the intervals of time in between them, and the order of the days and nights. Considered now, it sometimes had the aspect of something which had never happened.

But he explained it all as best he could; often he forgot

things, and would have to go back over the ground again and pick them up. It was quiet in the mill. Simpson worked in silence, and the others listened from the cot. Nobody interrupted him; they would simply nod, or smile or shake their heads. Bass was laughing quite a lot, but when Wales got to the lancer charge, Bass put his head in his hands and groaned.

"I can't see what you did that for," Bass said.

"Go in with Salazar?"

"Good Lord, yes; you must think you grow on trees. What're you trying to do with me?"

"Well, there was nothing else to do, they were simply there," he said. He could never explain to Bass his reasons, for they were private and a part of his feelings for all that had happened in this country.

He would rather they talked of something else, and so he asked how things were in town.

"Y'know," he said, "I had the queer idea that you might have left. I wasn't sure until I understood what those Indians were up to."

"Well, we're not far from it now," Bass said. "Masefield's pulling out in the morning with the evacuees. We'll follow in a couple of days, I suppose."

"I imagine you know that you can thank Salazar for a clear passage," Wales said.

Bass gnawed on his knuckles. "Yes, I know," he said. He looked up and smiled. "And how ironic it all is, too. Somehow it seems to suit his character."

It was true, Wales thought, in its way, though he was not really thinking of that just now, but of the grimy, tattered lancers' wild charge. But it was as Bass said, ironic; and sad, too, and forlorn, and the epilogue would be sadder.

He made an effort to put it out of his mind. He thought about Marion, but he did not ask about her just yet.

"What else is new?" he said.

"Swett's going down toward the Canoa to find a Rebel supply cache we've heard about."

"For Baylor, you mean?" and Bass nodded.

"It was Tyson's work. He's been moving the stuff out of that warehouse area of his little by little over the past month."

"Well, I'll be damned," Wales said, though he was not

so much amazed, because it seemed to fit his estimation of the contractor. "How you'd run onto this?"

"That conversation we had with Allis a few nights ago. It made me wonder. He seemed to think it entirely unnecessary for us to inspect that area. So, of course, I did."

Wales found himself sitting straighter.

"And you found the stuff, then?" he said. He did not ask if Allis was involved. He was afraid to. All at once, Allis' concept of morality combined with the constant reminder of his background began to make his involvement seem possible. If you heard a thing enough, you began to believe it in spite of yourself.

"Oh, no, it was gone by then," Bass was saying. "So I talked to Allis again, and finally got it out of him. He knew all along what Tyson was up to."

"I see," Wales said. But he really saw another obstacle between Marion and himself—one that could mean the end of all hope; and he felt a dull unreasoning anger with Allis and the incomprehensible weakness that allowed him to be drawn into this mess.

But it was against Tyson, who had known and planned with foresight and intent, that his anger flared up.

"The son of a bitch," he said. "I'd like to see the Indians catch up with Tyson some day."

"A little late for that now," Simpson said. "Hold still, can't you?"

"What do you mean by that?" Wales said.

But it was Bass who answered. "Tyson's dead, fella."

"Dead?" It was hard to believe. Few had impressed him as harboring the instinct for survival as strongly as Tyson had.

"Dead he is," Bass said, "and Allis killed him. Shot him down at his home."

"What?" It did not make sense at all. Allis had never struck him as a violent man; moreover, Allis had never seemed to take Tyson very seriously. "I'll be goddamned. What in hell for?"

"I'm not really sure," Bass said. "Something to do with blackmail, maybe." He hesitated. "I haven't gone very far into it yet. It only happened last evening. Mannion saw it, or almost."

Sitting on the edge of the cot, Mannion rolled his eyes

up in thought. Having been out of the conversation for several minutes, he was preparing himself to speak at length.

"I heard it," he said to Wales. "I heard it first, then I went in and seen it. I had a patrol up that way around ten o'clock. When I came to the wall around the house, I noticed the gate was part open, and I thought to look in. But I hardly stood down and stepped through into the patio than I heard what sounded like a shot from somewhere inside the place. Right afterwards, I seen a man come out of a room that gave out onto the patio. The room had light in it, and as he passed beneath the portales into the open, I could see him against it clear. I noticed that he was heavy and big around, and that he was walking slow and kind of spraddle-legged and partly up on his toes, too; he had his hands and arms around his middle, hugging himself, as if he was cold, or as if he was trying to hold things in. The whole thing caught me by surprise, you might say. I'd have sworn it was a shot we'd heard, yet it was a strange place to hear one in, and I wouldn't have bet one way or the other until the man caught sight of me and put out his hand as if asking help. I'd have bet money then, all right."

Drawing breath at this point, Mannion glanced around to see if he was holding his audience. Whatever tragic or sinister overtones were implicit in the event, they had become secondary to the graphic quality of Mannion's telling. Though well accustomed to death and violence, Wales felt arrested by the dark drama, and he knew that Mannion, himself innerved by bloody action, recognized it in him and relished the suspense of his relation.

"Well?" Wales said, and Mannion went on, but not before he'd rolled his eyes ceiling-ward again, arranging the picture in his thoughts—and also stretching the waiting moment.

"Like I said, I would've bet then, sure enough. He was still about five yards away from me, but I could tell he was mortal wounded because his hand, lifted that way, seemed to put him off balance, and in another step or two his knees unstiffened and grew wobbly, like rubber. Then, by God, they gave way altogether, and he came slamming down on the tiles. It sounded like a quarter of beef

thrown out of a wagon, and he hit so hard the force rolled him over onto his back. I seen then that he was shot, though there wasn't any doubt in my mind any longer. I knew who it was, too. It was Tyson, all right. He lay spread-eagled in the patch of light from the house and he'd landed pretty near at my feet. I had only to bend a little to see the hole bored through his brisket, and to hear him, too."

"Did he speak?" Wales said, but he was caught up so completely in the narrative that the question did not seem to come from him at all.

"Well, not exactly. He tried to, I guess. A little. It was only a gurgling, though. And a funny thing, that hole in his middle gurgled, too. Of course, that could have been his digestion, or something; a man of his size would be a heavy feeder. But it didn't last; I doubt it went on for half a minute. Then, all at once, a shudder rippled through him, that's just what it did, rippled, like wind moving through tall grass. And when it passed he kind of sank down into himself and the tiles, too, and I knew he was dead."

"And that was all?" Wales said. Somehow, it seemed incomplete. It was as vivid as Mannion's devotion to detail could make it, still it lacked something; it was a fact, but one left hanging.

"Well, no, not altogether," Mannion said. "When I looked up again, I saw a man standing in the doorway to the house. He made no move to come out, but I knew by the shape he made against the light that he was the Commissioner, Mr. Allis."

"And that ended it," Wales said.

"Just about," Mannion said. "Except that all at once it seemed a strange and peculiar place for there to be a man shot down and killed like that; it wasn't no common barroom or saloon or alleyway. It embarrassed me, you might say, a thing of that kind happening where it oughtn't, and with people that it oughtn't, even accidental. For a fact, I didn't know but what it was an accident, and when I knew for certain who it was standing there, beyond, I thought to make out I hadn't seen anything, and I asked was anything wrong?"

When Mannion finished a little quiet settled down. The

image that he had put together, built up, nursed, and teased along to its climax, remained dominant for some moments. Then Bass stood up and went to the window. Mannion, as if resting from violent exercise, let himself ease back on the cot. Wales, though, remained as he was, submitting to Simpson's ministrations; but thinking, or feeling, rather, because thinking was too hard—feeling Marion slip farther and farther away before the crush of events. More than anything else, Tyson's death meant that to him just then.

"I suppose it's all involved with that supply cache," he said, finally, when he could get his mind around to reasons, to motives.

"Perhaps," Bass said. He stood facing the window, looking out. "His statement was very brief. I'm not sure it was altogether rational. You kept cropping up. You and the fight along the river. And taking time to bury Charlie, and being missing in action. There were things you'd said, too, or that he'd thought you'd said. He made a remark about that—'out of the mouths of babes', I think it was."

Bass's voice seemed remote to Wales, and when he finished speaking he still faced the window. The silence in the room was heavy and awkward and Wales felt his face grow hot. He did not know whether he was angry or embarrassed or what, but he had never felt before just as he did now.

Finally, lamely, Wales said, "Where is he?"

"Under house arrest," Bass said. "At home."

"When is he going out?" He meant Marion, too, and he was thinking of her again.

"I'm not sure," Bass said. "Maybe tomorrow, with Masefield. I've got to work it out first."

It was quiet again, while Simpson wound the bandage around the gash, tied the ends and smoothed the wrinkles.

"That'll hold it," he said. "Maybe you ought to stay in bed for twenty-four hours."

"Fat chance," Wales said. "But thanks for everything."

He flexed his arm. Simpson put things into his kit, and Mannion took up the pan of water, now quite discolored. It reminded Wales of a bath and shave; he needed them both badly.

"Is there any hot water?" he said to Bass, who remained

as the others were leaving. "I think I'll go out for a while."

Bass said he would see about hot water. He turned when he spoke again.

"Where are you going, Fred? Up to Allis?"

"I don't know. Maybe." The question annoyed Wales. "What difference does it make?"

Bass shrugged his shoulders in a way that made plain he understood Wales's annoyance. "None, perhaps." He stepped away from the window toward the aisle. "If you do, though, and you talk to him, you'd better remember something."

"What's that?" Wales said, and he knew that Bass was not a friend just now, but his commanding officer.

"Just this. When you come back, you'd better be careful what you tell me, if anything. I'm in charge around here now, and I haven't yet decided what to do about him. But if I have to convene a court on him, he might come out of it pretty badly."

For a while after Bass went out, Wales tried deliberately to put Allis out of his mind. Kicking out of his clothing, he felt overcome by fatigue, and swung his legs up on the cot and lay back. All of the time he'd been away, he'd been thinking of Marion, and now that he was back he felt more doubtful than ever; depending on her true feelings for Charlie in life, his death could complicate things badly. And this thing about her father could make it all still more uncertain. He realized then that he could not put Allis from his mind. He tried to remember just what Bass had said, but it had been too vague to pin down—except that part about himself, which had made him seem naïve, in the way that Allis often made him feel. Still, he did not know what it all came to, and perhaps it was better not to wonder—just as it was better not to wonder about Marion too much. Still he could not help but think of the many times that he had gone up to look for her, and he halfway wished that this could be like all those others, instead of what it was. Perhaps it would be best if he did not go up at all, but simply let it die. But, of course, he knew he'd go. It was a queer drive that made a man go on

to learn something that he wasn't entirely sure he wanted to know.

Dusk had fallen by now, and through the window he could see the flambeaux blazing before the presidio, far up the road to town. He made himself get up then, shaved and dressed himself and ate in the mess before leaving. He wore a clean uniform and his boots were polished. He was careful to keep to the side of the road, avoiding the muddy chuckholes left by the rain. He wanted to look his best, although he knew that it would not make any difference how he looked in the end.

Now, as always, there were crowds, and whenever he thought of Tucson at some later time, he knew that he would think of it in terms of all these people. They were normally quiet, but tonight there was a great activity in town. Many were burning such possessions as they would be unable to carry to the Rio Grande. There were many fires, even in the drier places in the road. Cattle, burros and horses known to be unfit for the journey were being slaughtered for meat. Shots and animal screams came through the dark. Secessionists walked openly in the streets beneath the wary eyes of Infantry who stood guard. The cantinas and the bars were packed, for who could say where or when another might be found? Men yelled and sang, and when their revelries spilled out into the streets, they yelled and shouted there. Often their false hilarity degenerated into arguments and drunken rolling tussles in the dust and mud of the road. No one was happy to be leaving home, but it seemed most obvious among the revellers because they made such efforts to dispel their sadness.

It was quieter in the presidio, if only because the more excitable people were out in the streets. These within the walls were doing whatever they had to do before leaving. Many were gathered around the fires, waiting for tortillas. Lines of them strung out from the well with water skins or clay ollas; a few people had gourds, and some had vessels made of reeds calked with resin. Some were sleeping underneath their makeshift shelters by the walls; some lay in the open with a blanket, or only a garment, beneath them. Both Simpson, and Wells, the Infantry Surgeon, were having a last look at the sick and injured.

There were little knots of the very old sitting hunched in their serapes, nodding their toothless wrinkled heads at tales of yesterday. The yesterdays were best, for what could this doubtful future hold for age? As ever, the children ran about and played, and Wales could not avoid thinking of the children running in the sunlight of the San Juan plaza.

He could not find Marion right away. A number of the women who were helping with the food were going about with trays, but none was Marion. One time an elderly woman stopped to ask if she could help him, but she had come from a hacienda so remote that neither one could understand the other. The colonial flavor of her dialect had been preserved by isolation. He was on the point of going to Marion's house when his way was blocked in passing the fires again. Two women were lifting a large comal, and when they set it down and turned, he saw her.

She saw him at the same time, and at first, neither spoke. Her lips were slightly open, as though she had been interrupted in a word. She was standing perfectly still. Only her widening eyes betrayed the awakening of surprise. To Wales it was as if all time had stopped; and as if they were in some way isolated from the busy, noisy crowd.

It became, then, like that other time when motion, held arrested in his glance, became unfrozen.

In a low voice, she cried out, "Oh! Oh! It's you. You're here!"

Her face became alight and she came into his arms swiftly and he could feel her warmth through every part of him.

"Oh!" she cried again, "you *did* come back!" She was speaking with her lips against his face and he could feel her trembling. He was aware of trying to talk to her, but he could think of nothing except that this was all the crawling through the brush, the drifting down the river and riding over the heated plain, the rain and sun, the dust and running sweat.

"But they said the Indians got you," she said.

"No," he said, "it only seemed that way." He could not yet believe that this was really happening to him. He was filled with a numbing, radiant amazement.

But it was true because he felt her warm and soft against him, with her arms held tightly round his neck.

"You don't know what it was to hear that," Marion said.

"But it wasn't true," he said. "I was perfectly all right all the time."

"But nobody knew that here."

"All the same, I was," he said.

"The bottom fell out of everything," she said, and then she let her head fall back and he could see the tears and laughter mingling together in her face. "I was such a goose. All the things you said that night—and I ran away from you. And now this. Life is so short—the shortest thing there is."

She stood away at arm's length to look at him. She shook her head and laughed, and he became aware that they were being watched. Some young girls were giggling and pointing their fingers at them.

She began to speak again, but Wales had heard enough for now, and he pulled her close against him again. They could always talk. But this was not the time, for he was now too full to speak at all. In a sense, it seemed indecent that he should feel so happy in the midst of misery and tragedy; and that he should finally understand that Charlie Price, dead and gone now forever, had never really counted.

THEY CAME OUT into the dark street and walked with arms linked toward Marion's home. Neither had mentioned Charlie Price nor Allis, and Wales did not like to spoil the mood by doing so. But he knew he ought to say something about her father. He supposed he'd see him soon, and he ought to know as much as he could first.

"Bass said your father's in a jam and that Tyson's dead." It was not a very good beginning, but he could not display total ignorance.

"Yes," she said. "He shot him; it finally got to be too much."

"I'm sorry," Wales said, and he wondered what had got to be too much.

"I'm not," she answered. "There was a kind of black-mail going on."

Wales had heard that women could be more ruthless than men; but he could not remember having seen it face to face before now.

"I meant I was sorry for you, your family—your father."

She moved her hand vaguely.

"You'd think we'd had enough for a while. I guess not, though. But something had to give. You knew that Tyson worked to get my father removed as Commissioner, didn't you?"

"No," Wales said. "No, I didn't." But then he was not surprised; it would be like Tyson, for whatever reason. "Is that what brought it on?"

"Partly, I suppose. But only indirectly. He knew about that; it even amused him some. That was when Tyson used it as a threat."

"A threat?"

"Tyson was dealing with the Secessionists here, and father found that out. That also amused him, at first."

How anyone, even Allis, could find treason amusing, was beyond Wales's immediate grasp, but he did not say

that. Instead, he said, "He should have stepped on that right away."

Marion gave a short laugh. "I told you once that he was bored, didn't I? That he bored easily? The only diversion a mind like his can find out here is people. That's what Tyson meant to him."

A man of parts, Allis had called him. Wales remembered that; he could see the glint in Allis' eyes even now.

"He could have done something, though," he said, and it was clear enough to him. Matters that concerned Tyson always were.

"In time, he tried, when he saw where it was leading. In the beginning, though, Tyson was only seeking favor with local Secessionist leaders—supply and provision matters on a personal basis, I imagine. Father was intrigued by that. Debasement conditioned by foresight, I think he called it."

It was the view Allis would take, Wales thought—the academician's curiosity aroused.

"He could wink at that," Marion went on. "And he could stomach Tyson's balking over escorts for the Breckinridge wagons, too. That also intrigued him—on the human nature plane."

Wales gave a start. He'd always laid that to simple greed. It had never struck him as an instrument to indicate Tyson's shifting loyalty.

"I wonder what kind of mind the man had," he said.

"So did father. It was wonder that kept him interested so long. And quiet. He found out in time, but it was too late then, and no longer amusing, either."

"What was that?"

"When he learned that local Secessionists were organizing a supply depot for Baylor on provisions Tyson gave them."

"He could've stopped that. He just had to tell us."

"He wanted more evidence. It had to be complete, all added up. An education like his won't abide half measures. He was fascinated too, though hardly amused; he told me that. Then when he discovered that Tyson was involved as well, was a moving spirit, in fact, he couldn't go to Bass with it, because Tyson was waiting for him."

"Waiting?"

"It seems he's known what father was up to all along. He'd smelled him out like an animal. Men living as he did develop a sense for that, I suppose. At any rate, he was ready; he knew all about us, our family background, father's politics, our difficulties in Washington, everything. One word from father, oral or written, to any level of authority and Tyson was going to implicate him, too. The very fact that father had let things go so long would be against him. Father knew he was trapped then. He couldn't let us in for that on top of everything else. For all his peculiar ways, he loves us."

"And that was when he backed off," Wales said—and all at once the talk with Allis at the mill had a new dimension—his reluctance to have Tyson harassed, or his warehousing examined by Bass.

"Yes. He only watched then."

"And Tyson went his merry way."

"But more carefully. He was cautious enough to clear his warehouse, and he kept right on discrediting father in town—in a general way, that is, as he had for some time. A safety measure, I suppose. And of course he wrote Washington, adding fuel to the fire for father's removal. Still very general, we learned from friends there—all in the line of making himself look lily-pure in the event that father went back on him and told what he knew."

"Your father didn't let it out, though," Wales said.

"No. Not then. He might have, perhaps, if we hadn't learned about my brother's death at that time. But that stopped him cold. He couldn't inflict disgrace and notoriety on us, too. It would have killed my mother."

Wales did not ask what finally had put events into motion. It made him uneasy to think of Bass's rambling but highly suggestive remarks, much less talk them over with Marion, and in any event there was no time, for they had come to the gates.

Then, all at once, he knew that her mind was on it, too. She put her hands to her face, and he heard her crying. Drawing her toward him, he felt her wet face pressed against his own, and her voice reached his ear.

"It was your taking time down there to bury Charlie that touched him off. It seemed to make everything jell in

action. He went really wild. I did, too, but for different reasons. You shouldn't have done that, Fred."

"I couldn't help it," Wales said, which was true. "I don't think I thought much about it at the time." And that was true, too.

"Not that he oughtn't to've had something decent." She drew back her head and looked up at him. "Please don't think I used him against you, Fred. I liked him; I honestly did. He took me away from all this."

"I know," Wales said. It was as he'd thought, but still he didn't know how he felt about that. Perhaps it made no difference.

"But you can't go away from it," she said. "No more than you can take it all on yourself. Neither way is any good. I know that now. I've tried both. You can only do the best you can with what you have yourself, wherever you happen to be."

Wales did not bother to answer that. Her lips had lifted close and he pressed his own downward. He felt no need to say that he knew she no longer felt obliged to hold back because of events, or because of the actions of people for whom she could not be truly responsible.

"Watch your step," Allis said. "Don't trip over the shackles."

At the doorway to that same large and splendid-seeming room where he had met Allis for the first time, Wales looked toward the tile floor. But there were no shackles in evidence.

"My little joke, friend," Allis said. "One must not submit altogether to adversity."

Marion left him at the door. Stepping in alone, he picked his way among crates and boxes, some already filled. Papers and books and maps seemed stacked and piled everywhere in an atmosphere of complete disarray.

"How are you?" Allis said, and held out his hand.

"I'm all right," Wales said. Then he almost asked how Allis was, but caught himself and said, "It's good to be back."

"Yes, I imagine it is." Allis took his eye away from Wales, almost shyly. "We were—well—worried here until

word of your return came up from the mill a while ago." He looked back, smiling quickly. "And if you wonder how I am, I'm quite fine, thank you. Here, have a chair; take that one."

Wales thanked him, grateful for the diversion. He did not understand Allis, and he never would.

"You don't mind if I go on packing, do you?" Allis said.

"Oh, no. Go right ahead. I won't stay long anyway."

"Well, don't rush off. A man in house arrest appreciates callers. Are you embarrassed?" and Allis shot a sly smile. "You shouldn't be. The charge is only murder, and complicity in treason."

"Why, of course not," Wales said, though he was, but not for the reasons Allis gave. "It's not a charge yet, though, is it?"

"No, not yet. That will depend, I expect." He lifted books and placed them in a box. "Tell me about your adventures. There's plenty of time. We ought to have a parting glass, too."

Wales told him, not all, but most all, omitting only that relating to Charlie Price. Allis, listening while he went on packing, nodded, smiled, showed amazement or shock or sadness, according to the telling, and in the end, had questions. But he honored Wales's omission.

"Well, I've been active, myself," Allis said afterwards.

Wales shifted in his chair. "Yes, I know." He waited, feeling uneasy now and wondering how it would be to hear this explanation in terms of himself, for that was what he understood it to be.

But Allis surprised him—or rather, gave the thing an unexpected direction.

"Here, you can read this, if you like," Allis said, and his smile told Wales that he understood the younger man's uneasiness. He pulled a folder of papers, bound in fiber covers, from the desk and passed it over. "It is my dossier, Fred. It tells the fearful tale, or the nub of it, anyhow. Read it."

Wales did so, but the reading was not exciting or even disturbing at first glance. To an eye trained in ration returns, equipment listings, tables of organization and the like, it resembled nothing so much as the summation of an order drawn upon some unnamed commissary on behalf of

some unnamed regiment: the tons of dried and jerked beef, the bushels of wheat ground into flour, the maize, the hay—grown, cut, dried and baled—the manta yardage, even medical supplies. It was only a little at a time that the implications began to emerge from between the lines of this compendium. The gathering and preparation of this vast and highly detailed amount of minutae revealed not only intimate knowledge, but infinite patience, and—most damning where Allis was concerned—a long period of time.

Had the document been prepared for legitimate use by Union forces, the accomplishment might well earn the author a commendation. But for Allis, with his unhappy background, his excess of worldly tolerance and the weight of Tyson's planned ruin against him, it could be quite different. Depending upon the outlook of whatever Board that got their hands upon it, it could even mean hanging.

Wales finished and looked up. He held the papers out to Allis, but Allis signed them away.

"No, you keep it. Give it to Bass—he'll find it interesting, though he knows a lot of it already."

Wales did not want to keep this information, much less give it to Bass, but it was hard to refuse a request. Allis needed friends, now, and help—though it was hard to see how this would help him.

"And, while you're at it, give him this, too," and from the desk again he took a double-barrelled derringer and handed it to Wales. "The dread instrument . . ."

"Well, I don't know," Wales said, and he wanted to refuse this, too; but in the moment of hesitation Marion entered the room with the Madeira on a tray along with goblets, and he hastily slipped it into his pocket.

When he set it down, Allis filled the goblets and passed them around.

"Well, here's to parting," he said, and he raised his glass, "whether by rope or by wagon."

"That's not funny," Marion said.

Allis drank before he answered.

"It's not for my own amusement. And it's not really a bad farewell. But, forgive me," and he smiled at them both. "By which ever way, however, I find now that I shall miss this country. I've just begun to understand it."

He raised his glass, holding it to the light. "It's the color, I think. It finally got to me."

"Color?" Wales did not understand. He would never take this country as colorful. "In the spring, perhaps, when the desert flowers—and the sunsets, of course."

"Well, yes," and Allis kept looking through his glass at the light, refracted so splendidly by the Madeira. "There is that, true. But I was thinking more of noon."

"Noon?" Wales was not aware of any noontime color. All he could think of was the glare, the glare and the heat.

"So very common," Allis said. "So common, perhaps, that they go unnoticed until your attention is directed to them."

And still Wales could only think of the glare. He said so. "There's only that. It blinds you, almost. Pure white—" He thought a second. "And shadow, too, of course."

Allis stood quite straight. In his hand he held his glass extended toward Wales; he was smiling.

"And shadow is black," he said. "Glare and shadow. Black and white. I've lived my life in grey lands, or in a grey environment, but I know of another now, and I have you to thank for that. Now, drink with me, please, and then you and Marion run along. Salud!"

Wales learned what he had truly come to learn, he supposed, and having done so, he felt too shy and bashful to speak beyond the toast. But he knew he was grateful to Allis, too; for the first time in his remembrance, he felt he had been joined in the isolation of his own beliefs.

When they left, a few moments later, Allis was sitting down with his glass, preparing to read from *Faust*, Goethe's work that concerned a man who had sold himself to the devil.

NOW IT WAS NOON, and they were gone. Were he to look back, he might see the dust rise high beyond town and an easterly wind might bring to him the creak and rumble of the wagons and the sound of the drivers shouting at the mules. But he did not look back, for in a way he felt relieved that it was all over. Nor had he any need to protract the melancholy moment in pursuit with the eye; his mind still carried the image of the long files pulling up the street, the high blue wagons filled with shouting, waving Infantry, the gabble of sorry refugees laden down with their tattered bundles and looking about as though to store in their minds the sum of their living in this town and valley—and in the van, the lurching ambulance, was Mrs. Allis sitting upright like a graven image, the elderly Tia Carlotta up to her reddened eyes in her rebozo, Marion leaning out and blowing kisses, dressed in silks and brocades for the East, so that she seemed already far removed from him. And Allis loaded down with all that he could not get into his boxes and crates, squinting carefully from one side to the other, as if to fully comprehend what he had finally come to see in the black and white of the day. He was going out with Masfield after all.

There in the blazing sunlight, everything seemed at rest and almost deathly in silence in contrast to the teeming life of the weeks just departed. Once every so often, he passed by one of those who had stayed on, indifferently poking through the abandoned goods of those gone. Here and there, beneath the little shade they could find, were men from a pair of squads from the Eighth who had remained with Jarret to patrol the town until they too went out when orders reached the Dragoons.

But he was used to seeing people in a mass, and the few individuals simply emphasized the air of desertion.

Now that it was no longer occupied, the presidio had acquired an air of still greater age and it was already old. In the heavy walls, he was aware of cracks and seams

which he could not remember having seen earlier, although he knew they must have been there for years. But a place required the presence of people to keep it timely and contemporary, and it was strange how quickly it resembled a ruin when it was empty of life.

There were still some people there, but only a few, seen as he passed the gates. They were old, and appeared to have been left in the belief that they could not endure the journey. Silent and depressed in dark pools of shadow cast down by their sombreros, they were waiting, as were the valley and town, for whatever fate had in store. They seemed to have been gathered into the antique atmosphere of crumbling walls, the erosion of sun and rain, and he was startled to think that, like the presidio about them, they had the appearance of having lived past their time.

Wales walked slowly back through the town, thinking again of last evening when he'd gone back to the mill. He'd gone directly to Bass's office with the derringer and dossier, or whatever it really was, aware that he did so reluctantly and only because Allis had asked him to.

Bass was in, writing at his field desk, and when he saw Wales in the door, he looked at him quite carefully. Then he looked at the derringer in Wales's hand and the fiber-bound papers under Wales's arm.

"Well," he said, and he smiled, "so that's where you've been. Let me see that thing."

Wales gave him the derringer. He did not yet give him the papers, though. He was still thinking about those.

"Now, these are interesting little trinkets," Bass said. He held it as a lady holds a teacup. The barrels were blued steel, the grips rosewood. "I don't know that I like them, though—do you?"

Wales thought carefully. It was not always easy to tell where Bass was leading. And he remembered his warning.

"I've never used one," he said.

Bass looked at the proof marks. "A Remington." Snapping open the action, he looked into the breech end of the barrels. "Forty-four, I'd say. Respectable. But a very light frame. I'd doubt its accuracy, except at close range, wouldn't you?"

It was safe to agree, Wales thought. "It was designed with that in mind, I imagine."

Bass nodded, while he studied the weapon. "Inherent limitations. And I imagine a man clearly intending to kill another would know of those limitations and compensate for them—even at close range. Wouldn't you?"

Wales agreed again. He began to understand. Bass raised the pistol, and sighted through the barrels at the yellow lamp flame.

"But I notice that only one barrel of this thing has been fired."

Wales had noticed that, himself. He had paused to look while entering the mill; it had seemed to be worth knowing before he faced Bass.

Bass closed the action and sighted around the room at random. "Now, I tell you what, if I were meaning to kill a man down stinking, rotting dead with this thing, I'd let him have both barrels. And I might reload and give it to him again. How about you, Fred?"

Wales did not miss the point. Bass's eye was fixed hard and smiling upon him.

"Yes, I'd think I'd do the same thing. I'd want to be sure."

"That's right. Self-defense—well, that might be different." Bass laid the pistol on the desk and leaned back. "Great many imponderables here, Freddy. Not much to go on. I dread to think of convening a court to sift through nothing. I don't have the time for that now. Too much chaos and uproar. Now, if I had something really impressive, some concrete, convincing thing . . ."

He'd been looking at the ceiling, lounging back in his chair, half smiling, but he looked at Wales now, his eye traveling to the papers Wales still held beneath his arm, then up to meet Wales's eye.

Wales understood. Bass knew what he had. And he would hand them over if asked or ordered to do so, but not otherwise. He had discovered that certain aspects of Allis's grey, borderline world could be appreciated.

"No," Bass said, and he sat forward now, "too much inconvenience and doubt involved there for me just now. I think I'll pass the buck to Mesilla Valley." He waved his hand vaguely in the air. "I'll write up something or

other on it before we leave, or on the way, perhaps. But Allis might as well go out with Masefield in the morning. What do you think?"

"I think he'd like that," Wales said carefully. "And I think it would mean a great deal to his family."

"No doubt," Bass said. Then, more generally, "I suppose they're busy up there, packing and all. I wouldn't want to crate his library." He glanced at the papers Wales held. "Seems to be weeding out here and there. Right?"

"In a way, I think you could say that."

"Well, good reading, Fred. I wish I had the time, but if it's hot, tell me about it. Anything with sex."

"I haven't found any yet," Wales said.

"Well, I don't want to see it, then. Damned monk wrote it, likely." Bass put the derringer in a shallow drawer of the field desk. "You might send a runner up to Allis' with the word; I imagine he's wondering."

"All right, John," Wales said, and moved toward the door, but Bass stopped him there and Wales turned and saw his curved, hard smile.

"One more thing, Fred. Pass the word that, when we leave we'll travel light. Wounded take precedence over baggage in the wagons. Nothing but essentials will be allowed; only absolute necessities. Understand?"

Wales nodded, and left the room. He went out through the room where they slept, and where a few were now asleep, and outdoors toward the fire. A handful were gathered, drinking coffee.

"As you were," Wales said, as they began to stand. "I just want a man to go to Allis'."

One came forward and Wales gave him the message. As the others turned to watch the runner merge with the dark, Wales let the papers slide into the fire. It was a moment before they were noticed, and they were burning well when one of the men leaped forward to pull them out. Wales stopped him, though. "They don't matter. Let them be. They're only excess baggage." And then he gave them Bass's order concerning that.

There was not much sign of life at the mill when he returned. Swett had gone to the Canoa under escort, and

Bass had gone with another on business out to San Xavier. Jarret was prowling the town. Except for Simpson and the injured in the infirmary, the place was empty.

He went on in and lay on his cot. There was a drowsy heat and a drone of insects in the room, but though he felt sleepy, it was another of those times when he was physically ready, but mentally too alert.

He lay on his back and stared at the ceiling overhead. He was surprised, and then he was not surprised at all, to find Marion's face against the cobwebs stitched in the beams. Very clearly he could see her in that moment of surprise last evening, and her eyes growing wider as belief began to take hold of her.

Then there was another one, when later they had sat beneath the pepper tree and talked of getting married when the columns rejoined in Santa Fe. That was good, too, but not so good as the other, which ended doubt.

Then Marion went away and whole cycles of events passed through his mind to be projected above. Queer, fragmentary visions of sunlight, gunfire, running horses, rivers churning, a laughing Salazar, the dawn at Breckinridge, rain, Indians. They were all in a jumble of disarrangement, but were related, too, for they had happened. Things were finished here, but still his mind would not let go. Today was the definite, finished, perfect end, but still there were the questions and the doubts and all of the fears that had been riding on him through these weeks.

Rolling onto his side, he saw the cots going out and away in two lines on either side of the aisle. Barely half had blankets on them now, and he could see the faces of his fallen comrades, as they had been in life. The worst of it was not that they were gone, but whether or not their loss was justified; and he knew that deep inside him lay the fear of one day learning that they had died in vain.

He no longer doubted that something was wrong. He could face that squarely now, although the nature and extent of it eluded him.

Yes, there was something wrong, and he could now believe that its source lay in the leadership at the top. Until now he'd been able to regard it as a maddening product of bureau confusions and, with respect to the

Territory, a kind of clumsiness complicated by ignorance and by distance from the scene. But now he felt there to be a pattern of general mismanagement; and as it must be responsible for the loss and ruin of the Territory, the same must be said for the Bull Run fiasco, and even for Allis' spiteful dismissal. And many more by now, perhaps, of which he remained unaware.

It was all tied together, and he began to think that nothing could be accomplished anywhere until it changed. Considered so, it gave an awful vision of an over-burden of self-saving brass whose main business was preserving the status quo and nourishing mediocrity. At a time when imagination and inspiration were most in demand, such virtues were discouraged. Nobody thought any new ideas because that might make command competitive. The bright young men—if there were any bright young men—were not allowed to swerve from the proven way, for the pyramid of seniority might be threatened, and that could not be borne. However aggravating all this might be in peace time, it was a fatal luxury in war.

Was this the way it really was? Or was it simply a notion grown out of his own experience? He knew it as a daring act for him to plow this virgin ground, and he would rather than events prove him wrong than right in the end. But however he looked at them, the facts would not change, and he was afraid that they were just symptoms of something bigger.

Nothing happened for another day. Marion had been gone for forty-eight hours when orders came from Mesilla Valley. Wales had been up in town and the grooms were working on the courier's horse when he came back to the mill. Some of the men were standing around the animal, talking, and Mannion turned when he entered the compound.

"They're here," he called. "The orders came."

"About time," Wales said, approaching. "Have you seen them?"

"No, the courier took them in. It's Santa Fe, all right, but the route's been changed. We've got to by-pass Fort Fillmore. He said Baylor took it."

"Baylor took Fillmore? I'll be goddamed." He went off at a lope for the mill.

His head was all in a whirl. What if Baylor had sent outriders on ahead? Had the courier warned Masfield's crowd in time, or what? Fillmore lay on the route. He stumbled at the doorway, swore aloud, regained his feet and went down the aisle. Through the doorway to the office at the end, he saw Bass and Jarret talking, and the legs of the courier slanting out from a chair. They all looked up when they heard him coming.

In the room there was that heavy atmosphere of bad news; Bass sat hunched across his desk in a cloud of smoke, and the other two were slouched in chairs opposite him.

"What's this about Baylor taking Fillmore?" Wales said as he came in and looked around at them.

Bass nodded. "Yes, that's right," he said. "Fillmore's fallen. Baylor took it."

"Baylor took it, hell," Jarret said in a laugh. "Lynde gave it to him. Western hospitality, me boy."

"What's that?" Wales said, looking blankly from one to the other, and then at the courier, who had risen when he came in. He was covered with mud and dust, and there were circles beneath his eyes. He was blond, and in a way he looked as Anderson had looked, but he was younger.

"Is that right?" he asked the courier.

"Yes, sir, that's about the way it went," he said carefully, and standing at full attention because Wales had spoken sharply. "Major Lynde surrendered it. Baylor has it now."

"The boy observes a term of charity in behalf of rank," Jarret said with his cynical laugh again. "Major Lynde delivered it as a gift. On a goddamed silver salver. Without a fight."

"Without a fight?" Wales said. He looked at them all again, but could not believe it.

"There was no fight," Bass said quietly. He sat straighter at his desk. He had their orders underneath his hand. He looked at Wales, and blew a band of smoke in the air. "He gave it up, all right; and he had seven hundred men."

"Seven hundred men?" Wales said, and he could hear an echo of it in his head.

"There were seven hundred, sir," the courier said. "They were marching onto the plain when I rode away. The band was playing something, but I couldn't hear it very well because of the wind."

"The band was playing?" It was so grotesque that he laughed aloud, and yet a detail as bizarre as that made the whole thing credible. He saw it all in his mind, and heard the music playing. Seven hundred men. Seven hundred men the Major had to hold the Rio Grande—and for all west of that, there were only a hundred Infantry, and thirty Dragoons, at best—more often less.

"Well . . ." he began, but stopped for he believed it then. But he was at a loss to put his belief into words. Then quite suddenly he thought of Marion again, and Masefield.

"What about Masefield?" he asked the courier. "Were you able to head him off?"

"I stopped with him a while last night," the young man said. "Yes, he knows everything. They're going to by-pass Fillmore now. They were burning everything and turning north."

"I see," Wales said. He looked out of the window and he could see the fires consuming the luggage and possessions of the column. He wondered if Marion had had to burn her colored skirts and blouses.

When he looked around again, the courier had left. Bass and Jarret were in their chairs, staring at nothing.

"What about Colonel Canby?" he said. "Where in hell was he?"

"Likely picking his nose in Santa Fe," Jarret said, and laughed again. "At least he's not with Lynde where he belongs."

"Is that what the courier said?" Wales asked Bass.

"Something like that. Not in so many words." Bass picked up their orders and let them fall. The way he let them fall was the way he felt. "But he's not where he ought to be."

"That's just fine," Wales said, beginning to feel it now, with the numbness of his first reaction wearing off. "Our whole ass-end shot full of holes."

"We'll get out of here, all right," Bass said.

"Hell, I know that," Wales said. He closed his hand in a fist. All of this on the Rio Grande confirmed what he had feared and fought away from him. Now the doubts were doubts no longer, but certainties. They were facts, and had become the affirmation of all that he'd questioned. It was all true now, no longer just circumstances he had pieced out in his mind. That his own particular loyalty had bade him resist the indications so long, served only to make it worse. Now that they had been exposed for what they were, he felt victimized.

He dropped into one of the chairs and crossed his legs. Now it all began to flatten out on the lowest possible level and his feeling of personal outrage made him ready to believe the worst.

"When are we pulling out?" he said to Bass. Bass was reading the orders again, and looked up at him.

"Tomorrow some time, likely. We'll have to get Swett's bunch back here first. We're going to burn this place, too."

"You mean this?" Wales said, and he moved his arm to mean the mill.

Bass nodded. "And everything in it. All the stores. We'll have to shoot the beef." Bass picked up the sheaf of orders once more. "It's all in here."

Wales shook his head, but he believed it. It was simply an anticlimax now. "What about these people here? Can't we give the food to them?"

"No, we're not allowed to. They're afraid the Secessionists might get it."

"After all this, they're afraid of that. Good Lord . . ." and he threw his head back, laughing.

"Don't be sentimental," Jarret said. "Starving's not so bad. They say you get less hungry after a while." He stood up. "I'm going into town. This might get around."

"Yes, you'll have to watch it now," Bass said.

"We'll be all right. When're you going down for Swett?"

Bass pulled out his pocket watch.

"Right away, I think. I doubt we'll be back here before midnight. Can you hold things down while we're away? I can leave a few with you."

"Hell, we can hold it down, all right. Don't leave anyone on our account." Jarret waved from the door as he went

out to the other room. "See you at the bonfire, boys," he called.

Wales did not get out of his chair right away and he did not say anything either. He felt as if everything had now become a load on top of him. It would be nice if he could take it all in stride as Bass seemed able to take whatever happened, or even to have a cynical eye like Jarret—or like Charlie Price would have had. They would not feel this sense of betrayal and outrage.

But he was cursed with a sense of values and beliefs that wouldn't allow anything like that. Perhaps they were naïve, and too near perfection for the real world, but still they were his, and there was nothing he could do but live with them.

He knew what he was now: an idealist—a dirty word in certain times and situations. And the worst of it was that such people had no defense before those human failings so inevitable when principle surrendered to the lure of expedient.

"John," he said, and he leaned forward. "What about all this, John? Where do we go from here? I don't just mean Santa Fe."

Bass examined the ash on the end of his cigar.

"I don't know, Fred," he said. "Just keep going, that's all; there's nothing else. Just keep going until it breaks."

"But where are the men to think it out?" Wales said. "We sure as hell don't have them now. God! Look at it! If all that's happened so far is any indication, the country's finished in this thing before it starts."

Bass still watched the end of his cigar; and his nod seemed not so much in agreement as in understanding of Wales's point.

"It looks that way, all right," he said. "But don't you think they'll show up some day? It's going to take some time to get the deadwood out. Think back—we always seem to start this way."

"Isn't that what Allis said?" and Wales remembered he had.

"Do you think he's right?"

"To a degree," Bass said, and then he smiled. "Of course, I can't claim as long a view as he takes, but it

always takes time to get things going. But they'll show up some time, these men."

"And, what if they don't show up, what then?"

"You have to believe they will. They always have before. We built a country with them—and I'm not waving the flag at you, but it happened that way. By the time all the chips were down, the men were there and ready."

"And you think they'll show up again, in time?" Wales said.

Bass nodded slowly, but did not speak.

"When?" Wales said. There was something in this, but there had to be more.

Bass shrugged and blew out another cloud of smoke. "When all the deadwood's been tried, perhaps. I doubt it'll happen before; but you've got to believe it will because there's not much point in anything if you don't."

"No, I guess there isn't," Wales said. He was aware of its appeal, but its uncertainty made him uneasy. Yet there seemed to be nothing else.

"In other words, there's nothing to do but take our knocks and wait?" he said. "Just hang on?"

"And hope," Bass said, nodding his head. "Yes, we just hang and hold up our end of it, that's all. And believe."

He ground the cigar in the tray and the smoke came up in a spurt, then died. "That's the important part—to believe in it. There's nothing else to do."

"No, apparently there isn't," Wales said, and though its very indefiniteness stood opposed to the certitudes to which you grew accustomed in the Army, he could see that Bass was right. While he was used to practical solutions and results—things that he could visualize and get his hands on—it at least held out something to him. It was dependent on time and chance precedents, but it was still hopeful and that would have to do for now even though he knew he'd wanted more.

"You can take one grain of pleasure in all this, anyhow, Freddy," Bass said.

Wales looked up. Bass was smiling his thin, hard, curving smile; but it was a poor time for jokes.

"How do you mean?" he said, and he waited.

"In the present situation, the business of our friend Allis ought to pretty much care for itself."

It was a moment before Wales remembered that Mesilla Valley was now in Confederate hands and that the Union command there no longer existed.

The Canoa would be a couple of hours along the Camino Real. They were not going exactly there, but into the hills beyond the river where the cache was known to be. Swett would be up there because the inventory was large, and Swett would want to enumerate everything before destroying it.

There had been a little argument with Bass over Wales's coming along. Bass had said that Wales had done enough. But Wales had told him he was only coming along because he was bound to finish what they'd started out to do. He felt so much disgust with those responsible for all of this that he was determined to do exactly opposite. And anyway, wasn't it a part of hanging on?

But now, as they rode down the road, he wasn't really thinking of the Canoa, but of what they had talked of and what it all came to. He turned everything over in his mind as a man spades garden soil, still seeking the certain among uncertainties, and assurance where it did not exist. He wanted to have it all laid out, but he was beginning to see it as hinging on events, something that he had to take on faith. There was no real assurance, and he began to understand that the only evidence of what he sought lay in the past, and that the past could only indicate the future. There was no guarantee involved, only the probability; but it would have to serve as the basis for hope. From there on he had only faith to go on, and he'd better believe in it because none of this expense in life and effort meant anything unless he did.

And the strange thing was, the more he thought of the situation, the better it became. It was true that in the past such men as were required had appeared when most needed. He'd wanted facts, and this was one which he could seize upon. It came to him almost as a revelation, for he knew all about those men and how they had risen from nowhere to channel the energies and spirit of the country in the paths required to meet the crises of their times. The people of those days must have known their

agonizing moments, too. Yet they had had faith and hope, for had they not, there would be no country today.

It had the effect of squaring his perspective and of setting his mind to rights once again. He became aware that his sense of desperation was easing, and he began to feel more at home with himself. He looked around him as they rode. The mud in the road had dried, and the coats of the horses threw off highlights in the bright sun. Their harness jingled and the brightwork flashed and glittered as they moved on. The guidon jiggled overhead. The K was badly faded in its field, but it flew proud and saucy still. Smiling at it, he found that he knew where his faith began.

He looked about him at the country, too. There had been no rain for three days and the valley air was like that of the highlands. The sun, inclining westerly, put a softly satin light on the grassy hills. Reefs of wildflowers pressed at the roadside. Down across the plain the river flowed along slim and blue among the high, green heads of cottonwoods and willows.

Today this place of murder, wrath, and smoking ruin was a smiling land, drenched in sunlight; and in the curious way that hate and love can exist in each other, so did Wales find that his feelings for it, which had been so clear before, had grown complicated. Their forlorn defense of it had made it a part of him; and regardless of its alien aspect, his memory of their fighting here exercised upon him the claim of blood relationship.

As he was bound to other regions of the country by birth, so now was he bound to this one by death. He was shocked, but it was true. For Charlie Price, Soames, Fox, Haynes, Wilcox—all of his friends and comrades, as well as all those many other named and nameless dead, had bought it for the nation with their lives, and it was now consecrated ground.

THE END

of an Original Gold Medal Novel by
John Prescott

100 INFANTRY 30 DRAGOONS

... a pitiful handful of soldiers to protect the whole smouldering region beyond the Rio Grande in the days just preceding the Civil War.

It was a hell of a job, a hell of a land. To Fred Wales and his men it was one long battle between Monotony and Death in a vast desert that stunned you with its golden hues, strangled you with its sweltering heat.

Then the guns at Sumter sounded and Bull Run took its toll—and Wales knew this was the land that would be caught between the savagery of the Indians and the raging forces of the South. And his soldiers were the men who would baptize it with their blood.



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