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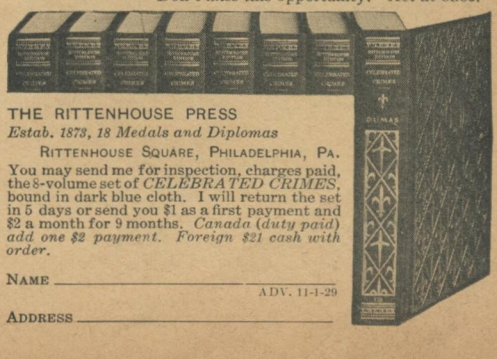

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Nov. 1st, 1929

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Volume 72
Number 4

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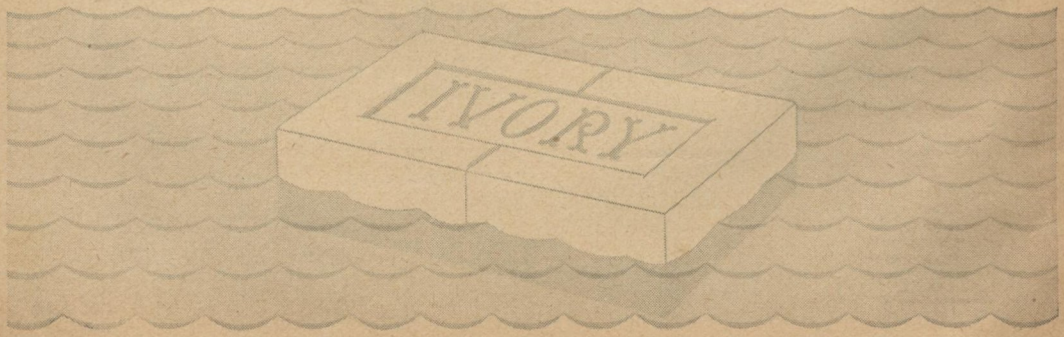

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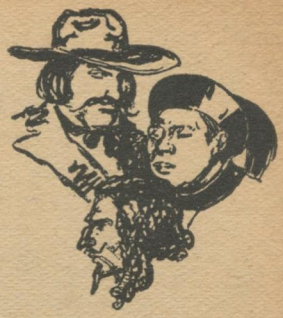

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EDITOR

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Hashknife and Sleepy return to try

The Luck of San Miguel

A Novelette of the Arizona Range

By W. C. TUTTLE

IT WAS the last day of the fall roundup, and the sun was only an hour high above the Oregon hills. Cowboys were unsaddling at the corral, laughing, joking, looking forward to the evening in town, when with pockets full of money they might woo the goddess of the green cloth and drink enough to cut the alkali from their dry throats.

Over in front of the bunkhouse squatted Dell Stewart, foreman and part owner of the Double Circle, a huge bundle of currency in his gnarled hands, ready to pay off the boys in cash. Dell smiled a trifle wistfully as he looked at the money. He knew where it would go. Those wild riding punchers would not keep it long.

Dell thought they should, because winter was coming on; but he knew they would not. They would spend it on wine, women and cards, caring little for tomorrow. Now they were heading toward him, and he began paying them off. It was a simple operation. No payroll, no signatures. Each man accepted his wages, bobbed his head in acknowledgment, grinned and headed for the bunkhouse.

The last man from the corral was Blue Snow. In garb he was little different from the rest of the punchers, except that he wore leather batwing chaps, instead of the woolskins. Perhaps his hat was a bit higher in the crown, his boots shorter.

In height he was about five feet eleven inches, rather slender, narrow waisted, but with good shoulders. He stopped between the corral and the foreman, removed his hat and wiped his forehead with his sleeve, disclosing a well shaped head and a mop of curling brown hair, badly in need of trimming. His eyes were a frosty blue, his nose well shaped; thin lips and a stubborn chin. He was only twenty-four, but looked older.

A string of wild geese were honking high overhead, and he stopped to watch their flight southward. Finally he came on, dangling his big Stetson in his right hand.

"Geese startin' early," he remarked. "Looks like an early winter, Dell."

"Pretty good sign, Blue," replied the foreman, as he handed the cowboy a number of bills and a letter.

"Got it in town this afternoon," he said, indicating the envelope.

Blue stuffed the money in his pocket and opened the letter. For several moments after reading it he stared rather blankly, a queer, tight expression at the corners of his mouth.

"A letter from the Old Man," he said slowly.

"Your father?"

"Yeah. Read it."

The foreman took the letter, noted that it was from Sunset, Arizona. The letter read:

> Come home, son. Seymour showed me your letter. I hope you get this one, because I need you down here. They've about busted me. Come home.—YOUR DAD.

The foreman handed the letter back, but stopped to glance at the address.

"Your name's Blucher, eh? That's why they call you Blue?"

"That's the reason, Dell."

"Goin' home?"

Blue sat down on the steps, rested his elbows on his knees, as he idly shaped and

reshaped his big hat. One of the punchers yelled at him:

"Hurry up, Blue. We're pullin' out pretty quick."

But Blue did not answer him. He turned to the foreman.

"I reckon I will," thoughtfully. "I ain't heard from the Old Man for six years. Couldn't hear, 'cause I never wrote, and he didn't know where I was. About a month ago I got to thinkin' about him; so I wrote to the banker in Sunset, askin' him how the Old Man was gettin' along.

"This is the answer—askin' me to come home. You know, Dell—" Blue took a deep breath— "I never expected the Old Man to ask me home. Me and him had a quarrel six years ago. I was eighteen—knowed it all. There was a girl—daughter of a man dad didn't like.

"Lookin' back, I can see a stringy sort of a kid, with a stub nose and red hair—lotta red hair. She was sixteen. I dunno what I was thinkin' about, when I went and asked her dad to let me marry her. I didn't drink at that time; so I reckon I was plain loco.

"Well—" Blue grinned shyly—"he kicked me off the porch, and I lit on my head in a rose bush. When I got out of there, her dad was gone back in the house, but the girl was on the porch. She asked me if I was hurt. I was all scratched up and I hit my head on a rock, but the hurt wasn't in scratches and bumps. She said to me:

" 'I don't think pa likes you—but I do. Let's run away and get married.'

"Well, that looked like the only thing to do. I went back home, and dad cornered me. He wanted to know about the scratches and bumps; so I told him how I got 'em, and I also told him we were goin' to elope.

"Then he sat me down in a chair and told me plenty—and I told him plenty. I told him he was a damned old fool, Dell. He got kinda white and walked away from me. That night I packed my warbag, saddled my own cayuse and pulled out. Oh, I've been plenty sorry over what I called him. Many and many a time I've wished t' God I hadn't said that.

"He'd kill a man for sayin' that to him. If it hurt him, it hurt me jist as much—mebbe more. I worked my way up to Portland and got me a job in a wholesale house, where I stuck for a year. But you can't make a stock clerk out of a puncher. I went over to eastern Montana and Dakota, worked back into southern Idaho, always punchin' cows. Went down in Colorado for a spell, but finally came up here. Every cent I own is what you jist gave me; but it's enough for me to get home on. I'd like to stay and work for you, Dell, but I realize that your regular hands are plenty to handle the work for the winter."

"That's right," admitted Dell. "I like you, Blue. You're a top hand and you won't have no trouble landin' plenty jobs. But if I didn't have a darn man, and you was askin' for a job, I'd—well, I'd rather see you pull out for Arizona. You're the only son?"

"Yeah. Mother died when I was twelve. There's jist the Old Man and me."

"You ought to be together, Blue. When are you pullin' out?"

"Right now."

"Sandy is goin' in with the buckboard pretty quick."

"Fine. I'll bale up my saddle and throw it in the back."

"And wake up in the mornin' broke?" asked the foreman.

Blue shook his head quickly.

"There's a train to the Coast at eight o'clock—and I'll be on it."

The foreman held out his hand and they shook solemnly, gripping tightly.

"Good luck to you, Blue Snow."

"Same to you, Dell Stewart—all th' time."

"There's one of them big seamless sacks under my bunk, and there's a sack needle stickin' in the wall near the winder."

"Thank you, Dell."

"Write?"

"Shore."

"Huh! Mebbe so. I'll have heart disease, if you do."

"I'll kill you inside six months."

"So long, pardner."

"*Hasta luego, compadre.*"

It was a simple leave-taking. Dell went back to the ranch-house, while Blue found the sack, baled his saddle inside it, and threw the bale into the back of the buckboard which Sandy McKeown was taking to town. The other cowboys pulled out ahead of them, whooping their way to town, six miles away.

"Leavin' the country?" asked Sandy, eyeing the baled saddle.

"On the eight o'clock train for the Coast."

"Uh-huh," dubiously. "I've started six times m'self, Snow—and I ain't never got as far as the depot yet. Allus wanted t' go back to Iowa. Born there."

"Been back since you was born?"

"Left there when I was six, and I'm fifty. Gawd, ain't it funny how the call of home comes to you at times? Git in. You won't git past the first saloon, but I admire your resolutions."

But Blue Snow fooled them. He went straight to the depot, bought a ticket through to San Francisco, and sat in the little depot until the eight o'clock train came along. He did not even tell the boys goodby—he did not dare. It was the first time in six years that he had not led the hilarity of pay night.

Blue Snow was drifting home.

IT WAS several days later, and Jerry Falconer was also heading home; coming back from a trip to Phoenix, where she had been to purchase her trousseau. Jerry had been properly christened Geraldine, but no one in Sunset City, except the minister, ever called her Miss Geraldine.

Jerry was rather tall, slender, with a wealth of copper-red hair. Her eyes were as blue as the Arizona skies, a straight nose, tilted a little, and a laughing mouth that almost drove the cowboys to distraction. A vote would have proved her the most beautiful girl in San Miguel Valley, by long odds.

Jerry was twenty-two, rode like a cowpuncher, swore like one, when the occasion demanded it, and did not admire her own reflection in a mirror. In other words, Jerry was not vain, detested adulation and wished she had been born a boy.

Her father objected to her going alone to Phoenix, but she went. The town of Sunset City did not cater to prospective brides. William Falconer, owner of almost everything worth while in San Miguel Valley, swore by all the Arizona gods that no daughter of his could ever make a trip alone to Phoenix to buy wedding clothes. It is presumed that all the gods of Arizona threw him down in favor of Jerry. Now she was on her way back, bringing a trunkful of clothes.

It had been a wonderful experience for the girl, except that once in awhile she would think calmly about the coming wedding. And when she did think of it, her eyes clouded a little and she wondered. She had known Ed Reed three years, two of which he had been foreman of her father's Double Diamond outfit. And for three years he had made love to her.

Reed was thirty, a big, handsome man in a swarthy way, and capable. Jerry was forced to admit that Reed was capable, that he was good looking. There were other good looking men in the valley, but none dared cut in, as they said, on Ed Reed. Perhaps Jerry did not realize this. She was not egotistical. Perhaps the lack of suitors had given her rather an inferiority complex. Ed Reed or nothing —and Jerry did not want to be an old maid.

She arrived at the town of San Miguel late in the evening, without sending word to her father at Sunset City, which was eighteen miles away on a stage line. She would take the Sunset stage the next morning and have her father send in a conveyance to Sunset City after her arrival there.

She stayed all night at the San Miguel hotel, and was at the stage station at nine o'clock, where old Chub Needham

was loading the old fashioned vehicle. Chub had known Jerry since she was a little girl. Chub was sixty, bow legged, bald headed, with a long nose and little gimlet eyes above an enormous gray mustache.

The wind was blowing a gale and the old man's eyes were so full of sand that he rubbed them tearfully before recognizing her.

"Dag-gone!" he grunted. "Hello, Jerry. Got back safe, eh? Purty hat you got on. Gawd, every time I look at you, I cuss m' age. Goin' up with me? Yea-a-ah? Windy, eh? That was your trunk I jist packed on, wasn't it? Uh-huh. Wind's goin' to be hell up along them Rattlesnake grades. Ol' dust is pretty deep, and this wind will shore fog plenty. As much as I'd like to have you ridin' with me, I s'pect you better ride inside this trip."

Jerry nodded, realizing the wisdom of Chub's prophecy regarding the dust and sand along the grades. A man came from the office and handed Chub a sawed-off Winchester shotgun, which Chub proceeded to load, while the man talked to him in low tones. The old driver nodded and tossed the gun up on the high seat, before opening the door for Jerry.

"If the wind dies down, I'll ask you up on the seat," he told her.

"Thanks, Chub."

"Got a lotta sense," mused the old man to himself, as he climbed up on the seat, kicked off the brake and spoke sharply to his four horses. "Lotta damn' women would insist on settin' here outside. Jerry's got plenty o' sense, y'betcha. Almost as much sense as a man."

It was none too comfortable inside the old stage. Dust filtered through the creaking doors, and the old springs were worse than none on the rough road. The windows were too dirty for Jerry to see through, but she did not mind that.

They struck the grades and began climbing. It was really a one-way road. with an occasional turn-out here and there. Off to the right was Rattlesnake Cañon, and at times there was a perpendicular drop from the narrow grade to the bottom, hundreds of feet below.

The Hairpin turn was the bad one, circling one arm of the cañon. Rounding a cliff, the road doubled back for nearly a half mile, made a sharp turn to the left and ran back, paralleling itself for about half a mile, where it again turned to the right. From the cliffs, where it made the right hand turn, across to the point where it again turned to the right, it was not over four hundred yards on an air line. In other words, the road made a loop of over a mile to progress four hundred yards.

WHILE the stage was yet a quarter of a mile from the cliff turn, a man climbed off the road on the upper side, crouched down in the rocks and remained there until the stage had gone past and disappeared. Then he climbed down again and continued walking up the hill.

It was Blue Snow, a bit disheveled, badly in need of a shave, limping a little in his high heeled boots. Blue had arrived early that morning on a freight train—broke. He had underestimated the amount of money necessary to bring him home from the North, and a poker game in Frisco town had reduced him to the necessity of beating his way for the last few divisions.

But Blue did not mind that part of it. He was still too proud to ask any favors. He had been away from the valley for six years, and it was against his nature to let any one know he had come back broke. He did not know that Chub Needham was still driving the Sunset stage, until he saw that familiar face. He was almost at the point of yelling to Chub to give him a ride, but thought better of it. No use advertising the fact that he had started walking.

Blue was in no hurry. It was eighteen miles to Sunset City, and three miles more to his father's Bar S Bar ranch. He would circle Sunset City.

"I'll have a fine pair of feet by the

time I get home," he decided painfully, as he reached the cliff turn and stopped in the shade.

He could see the dust from the stage across the cañon. In fact, the stage had left a dust screen behind it all the way around the Hairpin. Blue sat down on a rock and rolled a smoke. Tobacco was running low, so he made a skimpy cigaret. The wind was still blowing, but he was out of the dust. He could not see the stage; he decided it had made the turn over there. Off came his boots, and he sighed with relief as he removed his socks.

"Ain't been barefoot for years." He grinned to himself. "Mebbe I'll bust a few toes, but anything is better than blisters on your heel."

He leaned back, smoking thoughtfully, working his toes in the cooling breeze. Suddenly he sat up straight. From far across the cañon came the echoing report of a shot. Blue squinted thoughtfully. No hunting around there. Farther back in the hills, perhaps—

Then came two more reports, their echoes blending, banging back and forth from the sides of the cañon.

"That's danged queer," muttered Blue. Nothing to be seen, except some buzzards circling high over the cañon. "Nobody on the stage, except old Chub. What would he be shootin' at, I wonder?"

Blue got to his feet and tucked his boots under his arm. He had only taken a few steps, when two more shots echoed across the gorge.

"Sounds like Fourth of July," he told himself. "Mebbe some of the natives got their calendar mixed up a little. Anyway, I don't suppose it means much. Mebbe old Chub met a bear on the road and it wouldn't give him the right-of-way."

But it was not a bear that met the Sunset stage that morning. As old Chub swung his four horses around the curve at the finish of the Hairpin, a masked man was on the edge of the grade, covering the driver with a six-shooter. With a grunted oath the old man threw on the brake, swung back hard on the lines, stopping the team short, caught the tight lines between his knees and lifted his hands.

"Git down," ordered the masked man hoarsely.

Old Chub dismounted slowly, wondering if it was worth while for him to resist. He was debating the advisibility of this, when the man stepped over and took Chub's revolver from his holster.

"Open the door," growled the man, and Chub obeyed.

Jerry, knowing nothing of what had taken place, and thinking that Chub was inviting her to ride outside with him, stepped out of the doorway and down on the step. Seeing the masked man she stopped short and took a deep breath.

"Git down," said the man harshly.

"You better, Jerry," advised Chub a little shakily, and Jerry obeyed.

The man seemed to study her closely through the eye holes of his mask. She was evidently a problem he had not taken into consideration. Finally he said—

"Turn around and walk back the way you came, miss."

Jerry glanced back along the grade.

"You mean I—"

"That's right—walk. Jist keep on walkin'."

"You better, Jerry," said old Chub softly.

Jerry shut her lips tightly and looked at the masked man, who swung the muzzle of his gun to cover her.

"Git goin'," he said roughly. "It's the safe thing for you to do."

And Jerry obeyed. A few yards took her out of sight, but she kept going. It was possibly five minutes later that the first shot was fired, and Jerry stopped, turned around and went back. A foolish thing to do, perhaps. Then came the two shots, and she stopped. Her eyes were full of dust, and she was wearing pumps which were already full of sand.

She sat down on a rock beside the road and emptied the pumps, after which she wiped the dust out of her eyes. Then came the second shots. Jerry did not know how many shots had been fired;

the echoes confused her. There might have been a dozen shots, as far as she was able to determine, because the echoes seemed to come from every direction.

She sat there for quite awhile, but finally decided there was no sense in her walking back toward San Miguel; so she headed in the direction of Sunset City. The stage was not where she had left it; but farther around the turn, on a straight piece of grade, she found it.

The stage had been left, blocking the road, with the horses headed into the rocky wall at one of the few turn-outs.

Slumped sidewise on the seat, his head and one arm flung over the side, was old Chub Needham, his sightless eyes staring down at the dusty road, a round blue hole through his left temple, his face smeared with blood. The old driver of the Sunset stage had taken his last ride.

Jerry spoke to him, but she knew he would never answer. She did not know what to do, standing there on the edge of the narrow grade, her clothes whipping in the wind. The four horses seemed contented, the lines wrapped around the brake. Jerry went around to look at them from the right hand side. Her intention was to drive the stage to Sunset City. She had never driven four horses, but she felt capable of doing it.

But the dead driver was sprawled on the seat, one foot over the side. She was afraid to touch him for fear he might topple off, and she did not feel able to take him off the seat and put him inside the stage. Anyway, she remembered that the sheriff and coroner should see him first.

She was in the angle between the team and the cliff when Blue Snow came into sight. Jerry saw him as he came around the curve. She did not recognize him, and she was unable to say just why she did what she did; but before he saw her, she stepped inside the stage and softly closed the door. The window on the left hand side was nearly opaque with dirt, but she saw and recognized him, as he came up and stared at old Chub Needham. Blue was still carrying his boots.

AFTER a long look at the dead driver he sat down near the edge of the grade and slowly replaced his boots. Jerry watched him through the dirty window. Blue seemed at a loss what to do. He scanned the road, the surrounding hills, studied the depths of the cañon and finally rolled another cigaret. He seemed to take it for granted that the inside of the stage was empty.

Jerry Falconer was the "stringy sort of a kid, with a stub nose and red hair" that Blue had told Dell Stewart about in the Northwest. She had told Blue she would wait for him until the end of time, and here she was with her wedding clothes, getting ready to marry another man within a week.

"Why didn't you write to me?" she whispered, her nose against the pane.

Blue spat reflectively, hitched up his overalls and climbed up over the right front wheel. Jerry could tell by the jerking of the stage that Blue was doing something with the body, and she was afraid he might intend putting it inside the stage.

But Blue had no intentions of that kind. He swung the body around on the seat, found a length of rope, which he looped around the body and tied to the back of the seat. Then he carefully swung the team away from the wall, kicked off the brake and headed for Sunset City.

Fifty feet farther along the grade the leaders shied to the left, and Blue jammed on the brake. It was the mouth of a little side cañon, cutting back from the grade. It was almost overhung by a giant manzanita bush, to a limb of which had been tied a sorrel horse, saddled and bridled.

And lying at the base of the manzanita, one booted foot almost in the wagon rut, was the body of a man, face down, arms outstretched, the right hand half clutching at a heavy Colt revolver.

Swinging the leaders farther in against the wall, Blue set the brake solidly, fastened the lines and climbed down, his

heart pounding wildly. Even with the man's face obscured, Blue knew who it was. The man's hat was off, and there was a huge mop of gray hair, which Blue remembered so well.

He leaned against the wheel, sick at heart. Finally, with a choking sob, he went ahead and knelt beside the body, turning it over tenderly. He had not been mistaken—it was his father. Blue got to his feet, staggering a little. He did not hear Jerry Falconer leave the stage, did not know she was within miles, until she said—

"Blue, what happened?"

He turned and looked at her, but she was staring at the body. There was no greeting of any kind. It was as though they had never been apart.

"That's dad," he said chokingly.

"Yes, I know," she replied. "What happened?"

"The horses shied," he said, "and I saw him there."

"He—he's dead, Blue?"

"Yes. He's been shot."

Blue rubbed his eyes and stepped over by the rocky wall, looking at his father, his lips twisted strangely. The sorrel horse moved nervously, jerking back on the tie-rope. Finally Blue turned to Jerry.

"Old Chub is dead," he told her.

"I know."

He looked closely at her for several moments, at the stage, back to her.

"Where did you come from, Jerry?"

"I was on the stage all the way from San Miguel. The holdup man made me get out and walk back. Where did you come from?"

"I—I was walkin' home from San Miguel. Jist got back, you see."

"Did we pass you on the road?"

"I hid, when the stage came along."

"Oh."

"You've changed, Jerry."

"But you recognized me."

He nodded slowly.

"I guess I would—any time. Well," he continued, turning back to the body, "I guess there's nothin' to do, except take him back. If you'll open the stage door—"

Picking up the body of his father, he carried it over and placed it inside the stage. He took the gun and dropped it beside the body. Old Chub was a more difficult proposition, but he managed to lower him to the ground, then place the body inside the stage.

For several moments he leaned against the wheel, his face buried in his arms, breathing heavily. Then he helped Jerry to the seat, climbed up beside her, gathered up the reins and drove slowly along the narrow grade.

"I'm glad you came back," said Jerry simply.

"I'm glad I did," he replied. "Dad said he needed me."

"I saw him about two months ago and he said he had never heard a word from you, Blue."

"He hadn't—at that time. I came as soon as I heard from him. I've been all over the Northwest country, Jerry. Never stayed long in one place. Do you remember a song old Graveyard Jones used to sing about 'a rambling wreck of poverty and a son-of-a-gun to boot'? That's me. Broke flat. I came to San Miguel on the deck of a box car, without enough money to pay my stage fare to Sunset City. Walked and dodged—dodged so folks wouldn't know I was too danged poor to ride. It's funny I'm tellin' you this. You see, I never intended tellin' it to anybody, except dad. You don't look like my old Jerry. I've thought of you a lot, but it wasn't about a beautiful young lady. No, sir, it was about a lean lookin', red headed kid. I can see you yet, Jerry; the day your dad booted me off into the briars. Remember it? I said I'd come back some day and get you. But you can discount all that—now. I couldn't even take myself away, unless I walked."

"I remember it," said Jerry. "We had wonderful ideas, Blue."

"Kids do," sighed Blue. "I reckon your dad did the right thing."

Blue's voice was strained, unnatural,

but he wanted to talk; wanted to forget as much as possible. Later on he would be able to think calmly, but not now. Suddenly he remembered he had left the horse tied to the manzanita bush, but it was too late to go back. He would ask some one to go after it.

"Things haven't changed much around here since you left," said Jerry.

"You've changed."

"I don't feel any different."

And then they struck the downgrade to Sunset City, where it required considerable concentration on the part of the driver to swing the four horses around the narrow turns and keep the rear end of the stage from parting company with the team.

SUNSET CITY had been in existence about thirty years, and as some cowboy wag had said, "The only paint they ever had in the town was when a war party of Apaches came in and swiped the postmaster's hair."

There was one main street, bordered closely by false-front buildings, which in turn were bordered with wooden sidewalks, undulating to conform with the doorways of the buildings, none of which were on the same level.

The total vote of Sunset City was less than two hundred, but it was the county seat and of great importance in San Miguel Valley. William Falconer was the big man of the valley, financially and politically, somewhat of an egotist, hard headed and inclined to domineer.

He owned the Double Diamond cattle outfit and was a director of the Sunset City Cattlemen's Bank. Falconer made an effort to control the politics of the valley and probably did to some extent. He boasted openly of his own honesty and was somewhat flattered when anyone referred to him as "Honest Bill" Falconer.

But, big as he was in his own estimation, he hated two men—Jim Snow, father of Blue Snow, and Jeff Blondell. The trouble with Jim Snow dated back to the time when Snow swore out a warrant for the arrest of Falconer, charging that the Double Diamond had stolen three horses from him, alleging that the brands had been altered. Reed swore they were part of a shipment received from Texas. Snow swore to shape, color and markings, and said that the brand had been altered so as to be unreadable; but the judge declared the evidence insufficient for a conviction.

Freed by the court of any and all blame in the matter, Falconer still hated Jim Snow for even hinting that the Double Diamond would do such a thing.

His hate against Jeff Blondell was of a different nature. No one knew much about Blondell. He drifted into Sunset City on a horse about a year previous to the homecoming of Blue Snow. Blondell was of medium height, swarthy of skin, with a broken nose, a cruel mouth and habitually bloodshot eyes. He was typically a tough cowpuncher, a mighty drinker and an inveterate gambler.

Sunset City looked upon him with a certain suspicion at first. He put up at the livery stable, apparently too short of cash to afford a hotel room. He did not get a job, but graduated from the stable to the hotel, wore better clothes and seemed to acquire a little money. He was not a good poker player, but a consistent one, and drank steadily, paying in cash. Gradually he became one of the men about town.

But Blondell did not like William Falconer. He heard Falconer reciting his own virtues one day, after a few drinks, and Blondell remarked openly that he would not trust any man who bragged of his honesty. Falconer was indignant, but he did not awe the broken nosed gentleman from nowhere.

"Crooks speak for themselves," said Blondell recklessly. "Honest men let their deeds do the speakin'."

And these words, spoken in the presence of possibly a dozen men, galled the soul of William Falconer. He went to Singer Sanderson, the sheriff, and told him to keep an eye on Blondell. Singer found out why, and was amused.

It did not take much to amuse Singer Sanderson. Neither did it take much to amuse Smoky Woods, Singer's deputy. There was little reason to watch Blondell. No crime had been committed.

In fact, it had been a long time since the sheriff's office had done more than tack up reward notices and serve notices in civil suits. There had not been a prisoner in the jail for over a year.

Old Graveyard Jones did not like Falconer; neither did he like Blondell—but he did like Jim Snow. Graveyard was nearly seventy, looked sixty and acted twenty—a tough, wiry old rascal, who handled his own little outfit alone and feared neither man nor devil.

"That there Blondell is a danged parachute," he declared.

"What's a parachute?" queried Singer Sanderson.

"Don'tcha know what a parachute is? It's a feller that lives off'n his feller men."

"You mean a parasite," corrected one of the gamblers in the Sunset Saloon.

"I mean a parachute," snorted Graveyard. "A parasite is only a small form of the animile."

It just happened this day that Graveyard Jones and Smoky Woods sat on the sidewalk in front of the sheriff's office, lying to each other, as usual. Graveyard claimed to have been a member of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police at some remote time, while Smoky claimed the Texas Rangers as his alma mater. Both of them lied, and they both knew it, but it made for conversation.

"I 'member one mornin'," said Graveyard reminiscently, "when the general calls me into his office. This was in Vancouver. He says to me—

" 'Graveyard, I'm askin' you to do somethin' that I wouldn't even do m'self, but she's got to be done for the honor of the force.'

"Well, I knowed it was somethin' terribly particular, but I didn't quail."

"You didn't what?" asked Smoky gloomily.

"Quail."

"Oh, quail. Didn't you mean duck?"

"I said quail and I meant quail, Smoky."

"Go ahead."

"Well, he says to me, 'Graveyard—' "

"Jist a minute. Did they call you Graveyard at that time?"

"Shore. He says, 'Graveyard, there's a dirty murderer hidin' out on the bank of Athabasca. Go git him or die in the attempt.' Jist like that he said it."

"And you died."

"I got m' man, that's what I done. I allus got m' man. I borrowed me a couple dogs and I—"

"Bird dogs?"

"Man hunters."

"Oh, yea-a-ah. You mentioned quail, so I thought— Go ahead, Graveyard."

"It was about nine o'clock in the mornin' when I started, and I was up at the lake about sundown; so I—"

"Athabasca Lake?"

"Shore. It was about sundown—"

"Let's make it some other lake. I heard you tell this one before, and I been lookin' at a map of Canada. She's pretty close to a thousand miles from Vancouver to Athabasca Lake, on a air line."

"Smoky, I didn't travel no air line," said Graveyard sadly, "and as far as you lookin' up that lake on a map—how old was that there map?"

"Not over a couple years, anyway."

"There you are," triumphantly. "Couple years, eh? You go find a map that's about fifteen, twenty years old. That there country changed a hell of a lot in that len'th of time."

"Oh, shore, I realize that. I 'member one time when I was down on the Pecos River, trailin' some Mexican hossthieves—"

"Here comes the stage," interrupted Graveyard. "Mebbe it's a lucky thing for them Mexican hossthieves."

Smoky got up and yawned heavily.

"Did you get your man on Athabasca Lake?"

"Nope," grinned Graveyard. "I caught him next day at the upper end of Hudson's Bay."

THEY walked across the street, as the stage drew up in front of the postoffice. Several others had come up to meet it, but no one seemed aware that old Chub was not driving until the horses stopped and Blue Snow climbed down among them. Jerry remained on the seat.

Graveyard was the first to recognize Blue.

"Hyah, kid?" he grunted. "Where did you come from, anyway?"

"Hello, Graveyard," softly; and then to the crowd, "Where's the sheriff?"

"What's wrong?" asked Smoky, shoving forward.

"Plenty. You're Smoky Woods, ain't you? I'm Blue Snow."

"That's right," said Smoky. "Blue Snow. You've changed a lot. But what's gone wrong? How come you're drivin' the—"

Blue opened the door of the stage, and the crowd surged forward to see the two dead men inside. A cowboy ran across the street to get the sheriff, who came running over, questioning the cowboy. The sheriff paid no attention to Blue Snow until he discovered that one of the dead men was old Chub. Some one told him Blue Snow brought in the stage.

By that time a goodly portion of Sunset City was there, and among them was Charles Seymour, the tall old banker. Some one helped Jerry down, and she went into the postoffice to escape the crowd.

They took the bodies out and a doctor examined them carefully. Blue had nothing to say until the sheriff asked for an explanation.

"Better talk at your office," suggested Blue, and the sheriff nodded.

"How much does Miss Falconer know?" asked Smoky.

"Better bring her along," replied Blue.

Smoky brought Jerry to the office, and the sheriff shut the door against the crowd. Blue detailed everything he knew, and Jerry told her part of it, which corroborated what Blue had told them. Their story was already told, when the doctor and the banker came over to the office. The doctor was carrying a package in his hand. Smoky let them in, and the doctor placed the sealed package on the table.

"This package was inside the shirt of Jim Snow," he said. "I found it in making my examination."

The sheriff looked at it, examined the unbroken seals and the address.

"This is yours, ain't it?" he asked the banker, who nodded gravely.

"Unless I'm badly mistaken that package contains twenty thousand dollars worth of negotiable bonds," he said.

"You found that inside my father's shirt?" asked Blue.

"Yes," nodded the doctor.

The banker cleared his throat harshly.

"We found the receipt book in old Chub's pocket. There were two packages receipted for at San Miguel. The other one contained ten thousand in currency."

"Jim Blue didn't have it, eh?" queried the sheriff.

The banker shook his head.

"Didja examine the strong box?"

"Hardly a strong box," said the banker. "It never was locked. In case of a holdup, they would take box and all. No, it was empty."

Smoky Woods turned from the window.

"Here comes Falconer," he said.

"Let him in," grunted the sheriff, and in a moment William Falconer, the big man of San Miguel Valley, came in.

He was a big man, physically, slightly gray, hard featured, with greenish gray eyes deeply set under heavy brows. He nodded shortly to the men and turned to Jerry.

"Why didn't you send word of your arrival? A nice mixup, this seems to be."

Jerry merely smiled at him, and he grunted angrily. Turning around, he looked at Blue Snow quizzically.

"Came back, eh?"

"Yeah," replied Blue softly.

"Uh-huh." Turning back to the sheriff, "Well, what's happened, outside of two men dead?"

"Ten thousand dollars missin', it seems."

"Missing, eh? Bank money?"

"Bank money," echoed the banker. "We found the twenty thousand worth of bonds inside Jim Snow's shirt, but the money is gone."

Falconer was puzzled. The sheriff told him what Blue Snow had explained, and Jerry recited what she knew about it. Falconer drew the sheriff aside and they talked confidentially for several moments, after which the sheriff came back to Blue Snow.

"You won't mind us searchin' you, will you, Snow?" he asked.

Blue flushed hotly and was about to argue, but finally shook his head. The search was fruitless.

"I reckon that's all for you, Snow," said the sheriff. "You'll be around here for awhile?"

"I expect to," replied Blue coldly, and walked outside.

Falconer turned to Jerry and questioned her closely.

"Jerry, how much time elapsed after the stage stopped, until you got out and saw Blue Snow with the body of his father?"

"I don't know. Perhaps it was a full minute."

"What was he doing, when you saw him?"

"He was standing there, looking down at the body."

"Did he have anything in his hand?"

"I didn't see anything."

"Did he leave you and walk around the other side of the stage, out near the edge of the grade?"

"No."

"You didn't see any package on the seat, after you got up there with him?"

"No, I did not see any package."

"Are you figurin' he might have pitched the package over the grade?" asked the sheriff.

"It is missing," replied Falconer. "Money hasn't wings."

"All right," growled the sheriff. "We'll search every place he might have throwed it away."

"You don't think Blue Snow had anything to do with that missing money, do you?" asked Jerry.

"You bet he did!" snapped her father angrily.

"Wait a minute," drawled the tall sheriff. "You don't know any more than the rest of us, Falconer. It ain't square to accuse a man thataway."

"Don't be a fool, Sanderson. Jim Snow held up the stage. He and old Chub fought it out, both of them dying. Blue Snow found his father, and it's a hundred to one shot that he found that currency. Blue is nobody's fool. Even if he wasn't crook enough to want that money, he'd get rid of it to protect the old man's name. Of course, he never found the package inside the old man's shirt, or that would have disappeared too."

"I don't believe it," said Jerry firmly.

Falconer laughed harshly, but made no reply.

"We'll make that search right away," said the sheriff. "I don't reckon there's any more talking to be done."

"As far as I'm concerned, no," replied Falconer.

"We will take the two bodies down to my place," said the doctor.

One of the boys brought in the two guns from the stage, and an examination showed that Jim Snow's gun had been fired three times, Chub's twice. They were both single action Colt weapons, Snow's being a .45, while Chub's was a .38.

The sheriff turned to Jerry.

"How many shots did you hear, Miss Jerry?"

"I can't say how many. The echoes—"

"I know. Maybe Blue counted 'em. Could you swear that the robber who made you walk back from the stage, was Jim Snow?"

"He was masked," said Jerry.

"I know that, but the size of him, the clothes—"

"I haven't the slightest idea," smiled Jerry. "It was the first time any one ever pointed a gun at my head."

Sanderson grinned.

"I don't blame you; I know how it feels."

As he and Smoky went to the office they passed Blue Snow, who was standing at the edge of the sidewalk. Sanderson stepped up to him.

"How many shots did you hear?" he asked.

"I think there were five."

"That's right. Your father shot three times and old Chub fired twice."

"I didn't have any gun," said Blue bitterly. "I pawned mine in Frisco; so you can't hang me for doin' any shootin'."

"Nobody wantin' to hang you, Snow."

"That's great. Didja expect me to have that money in my pocket?"

"I didn't."

Blue smiled grimly.

"I reckon Falconer did."

"Well, I wouldn't let that git me down, if I was you."

"Ain't nobody goin' to get me down, Sanderson."

"That's the stuff."

"The Old Man wrote me that he was gettin' a bad deal down here—so I came down to help him. I reckon I came too damn' late."

The tall sheriff squinted thoughtfully.

"Said he was gettin' a bad deal?"

"That's what he said."

"Who was givin' him a bad deal?"

"That's what I came to find out."

"Uh-huh. Well, I dunno anythin'about it. Your dad was close mouthed, you know."

"He was a square shooter."

"I know it, and I'm sorry as hell about this deal. I liked him and I liked old Chub."

"And they've always been friends," added Blue.

"Shore have. Well, I'll see you later, Blue."

"Goin' to see if you can find where I threw that money?"

The sheriff turned his head and looked back at Blue, but did not reply.

"He's no damn' fool," chuckled Smoky Woods.

IT WAS late in the evening in the town of Gates Ajar, forty miles east and across the San Miguel range from Sunset City. Gates Ajar consisted of a little depot, a saloon, with possibly six rooms on the second floor for transients, a combination store and postoffice, and a section house.

It was too small to show on the map, and passenger trains only stopped on a flag. The only light in the town at this time in the evening was in the saloon, where a smoky old lamp hung a few feet above the faded green cover of a poker table. There were four men at the table, two dressed in range clothes; the bartender in shirt sleeves, bareheaded; the fourth was a thin featured man, with a closely cropped gray mustache, wearing a gray business suit.

He was drinking steadily, and seemed peevish over a run of bad luck. Several times he had torn his cards across and demanded a new deck. The stakes were fairly high, and an observer might have noted that the other men were, in the parlance of the initiated, whipsawing him at every turn.

The man was not a clever player or he would have realized that it was three men against one, but the one man was getting more intoxicated all the time, playing recklessly. It was also apparent that a small town bartender and two cowboys were in no financial condition to be playing for such stakes.

It was about the time when the gray suited man emptied his billfold to purchase more chips that two cowboys rode into Gates Ajar, and guided their horses to a hitch rack across the street from the saloon.

One man was tall and thin, astride a tall gray horse, and the other was stocky, broad of shoulder, riding a chunky sorrel. They dismounted and stood on the short length of wooden sidewalk in front of the postoffice and store.

"This must be Gates Ajar," remarked the short one. "What a name for a town!"

The tall one laughed softly, throatily.

"Probably named by a psalm singer, Sleepy. One light in the place, and that's over a poker table, unless my eyes deceive me; and unless I'm badly mistaken, Jack Wilson will be under that lamp."

"Beyond the shadder of a doubt, as the lawyers say. Anyway, they'll know if this is Gates Ajar, and where we can stable these broncs."

As they stepped off the sidewalk and started for the saloon, both men stopped short—the sound of a revolver shot thudded within the saloon. There was a sudden commotion in the place, a sharp exclamation, a confusion of voices. Came the sound of another shot, the tinkle of shattered glass, and the bar was in darkness.

The two cowboys stood rooted to the spot, staring toward the dark saloon. It was possibly twenty seconds later that a match flared, as some one tried to light a lamp. The two cowboys went toward the doorway and, as they stepped up on the wooden sidewalk, they heard the drumming crescendo of running horses, heading away from town.

They stepped inside; the lamp flared up. The fat bartender, his forehead beaded with perspiration, placed the lamp on the poker table and looked at them shakily. The gray suited man was sprawled near the table, a chair lying across his legs.

"What happened?" asked the tall cowboy calmly, his level gray eyes fastened on the frightened face of the bartender.

The bartender licked his dry lips, rubbed the palms of his hands on his hips and looked down at the figure on the floor.

"God!" he said softly. "Must 'a' got him dead center."

The tall cowboy stepped over and swung the man on the floor around to where the light would fall on his face.

"Jack Wilson," he said.

"That his name?" asked the bartender, and the tall one nodded.

"Didn't you know him?" queried the short cowboy.

The bartender shook his head quickly.

The tall one had been making a swift examination, and now he stood up.

"Who shot him?" he asked sharply.

"I didn't know 'em," replied the bartender. "Couple punchers. Came in this evenin'. Poker game and plenty whisky. Accused one of 'em of stealin' a card."

The bartender cut his sentences short, taking a deep breath between.

"Is he dead, Hashknife?" asked the short one.

"Not yet. Is there a doctor around here?"

"Up at San Miguel. That's thirty-five miles up the line. No doctor around here."

Two more men came in. One was only partly dresssed. He was the postmaster and storekeeper, and the other worked in the store for him. They had heard the shots. The bartender explained what had happened, but they made no comment.

"Did you know this man?" asked the storekeeper, addressing the tall cowboy.

"Yeah. His name is Jack Wilson, and he's a buyer for Kinnear & Company, Kansas City. We came here to meet him tonight. We saw him day before yesterday at Clinton, and he told us to meet him here, because he was shippin' a bunch of cattle, and we were to go East with him."

"Shippin' a bunch of cattle from here?" queried the storekeeper. "Kinda funny."

"What's funny about it?"

"Whose cattle?"

The bartender laughed shortly.

"I guess he drank so much he imagined he was shippin' from here. There ain't a shipment of beef around here."

From far down the line came the shrill whistle of an engine. The tall one turned to the storekeeper.

"We've got to get this man to a doctor, and if that train stops here—"

"Freight," said the other man, looking at his watch. "It'll stop for water."

The bartender secured a blanket, and with it as an improvised stretcher, they

carried the wounded man up to the little depot, where the conductor let them place him in the caboose. As they placed him carefully on a wide seat, some papers slid from a pocket of his coat, and the tall cowboy picked them up. One was a telegraph blank, folded, and was apparently a telegram which he had written but not sent.

KINNEAR & CO, KANSAS CITY.
SHIPPING ONE HUNDRED CROSS EIGHTY-FOUR AND WILL SHIP AGAIN NEXT WEEK FROM SAN MIGUEL IF POSSIBLE.
—WILSON

"I dunno whether he wanted that one sent or not," said the tall cowboy, as he borrowed a pencil from the conductor. He wrote another telegram on the back of an envelope.

AL KINNEAR, KINNEAR & CO, KANSAS CITY.
JACK WILSON PROBABLY FATALLY SHOT STOP RUSHING HIM TO DOCTOR AT SAN MIGUEL SO ADVISE ME THERE AT ONCE.
—HASHKNIFE HARTLEY

HE HANDED this telegram to the conductor and asked him to send it from San Miguel as soon as they arrived.

"We'll be there some time tomorrow," he told the conductor, and a few moments later the train clanked away from Gates Ajar.

Hashknife Hartley and Sleepy Stevens, his stocky companion, went back to the saloon, where they found the bartender mopping up the floor.

"I shore hate for a thing like that to happen," he puffed. "Kinda ruins trade. Gives a place a bad reputation."

"Keep thousands away," smiled Hashknife. "You didn't know those two cowboys, eh?"

"Never seen 'em before. Couple of drifters."

The bartender did not look at Hashknife, as he denied knowing the killers. He had encountered the steady gaze of those level gray eyes just after the shooting, and they made him feel uncomfortable. Hashknife leaned back against the bar, a tall, lanky figure, lean of face, generous of nose and with a wide, thin lipped mouth. His big sombrero was tilted back on his head; his long fingers deftly rolled a cigaret.

Both men were clad in well worn batwing chaps, worn boots and battered hats. Their belts were handmade, fitting perfectly to the sag of their holstered guns. Sleepy Stevens' features were blocky—jaw square, blue eyes encased in grin wrinkles. He seemed to be smiling with the world—or at it.

"Kinda funny about this Wilson goin' to ship from here," said the bartender, as he took his pail and mop behind the bar.

"Uh-huh," replied Hashknife thoughtfully. "Did he ever ship from here before?"

"I never did see him around here."

The bartender turned to the back bar and replaced some glasses.

"Who owns the Cross 84?" asked Hashknife.

"The what?" asked the bartender, turning quickly.

"The Cross 84."

"Oh, I dunno much about brands around here. Don't remember seein' any."

"Uh-huh. The man who was shot had a telegram he was goin' to send East, and it said he was shippin' a hundred head of Cross 84. I thought mebbe he was shippin' from here."

"Couldn't have been here."

"Prob'ly not. How about a room for the night?"

"I can fix you up."

"Stable for a couple broncs?"

"Back of here's a little stable you can use."

They put up their horses and went back into the saloon. The bartender took them to an outside entrance, where they mounted some rickety stairs and went

down a narrow hall to a small room. The bartender lighted a lamp. It was an end room, the one window looking out toward the little depot.

"Ain't much," said the bartender, "but you can't expect much here."

"This is all right," smiled Hashknife.

"Can do," grunted Sleepy, pulling off his boots.

The bartender left them, and they heard him go down the creaking stairs. Hashknife sat down on the foot of the bed, thinking deeply. Sleepy looked at him curiously.

"Funny deal, eh?" he said.

"That's right," nodded Hashknife. "I'll bet anythin' the bartender knows who shot Wilson. He might have been packin' a lot of money. One of the men shot him, and they had plenty time to rob him before one of 'em was wise enough to shoot out the light. Shot it out before anybody had a chance to see who they were. The bartender was prob'ly in on the deal."

"He's got snaky eyes," mused Sleepy. "He'd never identify 'em. Unless Wilson lives, we'll never know who shot him."

"Yeah, and it's a hundred to one shot that Wilson don't live. That bullet hit him just above the heart. I doubt if he's alive now."

Sleepy finished undressing and crawled into bed. Hashknife fumbled in his vest pocket and took out an empty tobacco sack.

"You got any Durham?" he asked.

"That's the sack I let you have, Hashknife; I'm all out."

Hashknife sighed and got off the bed.

"I'll go down and see if the bartender's got any. Be back in a minute."

He went down the hall in the dark and picked his way down the stairs to the outside door, which was slightly open. There were voices out front, and he stopped at the doorway. Two men seemed to be in low toned argument on the sidewalk, and he recognized the bartender's voice.

"I tell you I don't know who shot him. They was a couple—"

"You said that before, and I don't believe it even this time."

"I wouldn't lie to you, Jeff."

"You'd lie to your own father. Why didn't you stop 'em?"

"It was all so danged quick. They shot out the light, and—well, come in and see that lamp, if you don't believe me."

"What about them two waddies that showed up right away and sent the man to San Miguel?"

Ensued a fairly complete description of Hashknife and Sleepy.

"They said they was to meet Wilson here and help him take a shipment of cattle East," said the bartender.

"You don't know their names?"

"Nope. I heard the short one call the tall one Hashknife."

"What?"

"Don't yell. I tell you they've just—"

"What was that name again?"

"Sounded to me like Hashknife."

"The hell you say!"

There was a period of silence, broken only by the soft scruffing of soles on the wooden sidewalk. Then the bartender said softly—

"What about 'em?"

"What you don't know won't hurt you. This is a hell of a mixup, if you ask me."

"You stayin' all night?"

"I shore ain't—if you've got a fresh horse to let me have."

"There's my brown mare back in the stable. There's a couple broncs in there that belong to them two strangers, but my mare is in the rear stall."

"All right. I'll swap back with you in a few days. S'long."

Hashknife heard the man go around the building, while the bartender went into the saloon. Hashknife slipped out and followed around the building. He hoped to get a good look at this party, but the man brought out the brown mare, switched his saddle from the back of another animal, stabled the one he had been riding, and left town, traveling west. In the dark Hashknife was unable even to get an idea of the man's size.

He went back around the building and

entered the saloon, just as the bartender was ready to put out the light and close the place. He was a bit startled at sight of Hashknife, but the tall cowboy's alibi for being down there seemed to satisfy him. He sold Hashknife a quantity of tobacco, closed the saloon and followed him up the stairs.

"I live in the bridal suite," he grinned, as he stopped at a door, holding a lighted match in his fingers. Then, apparently as an afterthought, "I plumb forgot to have you boys register for your room. It's the law, you know."

"Put us down as the Smith brothers," said Hashknife seriously.

"Oh, all right—thanks."

HASHKNIFE told Sleepy what he had heard, and the next morning they took a look at the bay horse in the rear stall. It was wearing a Cross 84 brand.

"Kinda makes me figure that the bartender is a liar in the first degree." grinned Hashknife. "I dunno what it's all about, but there's somethin' danged crooked about it. I wish I knew who the stranger was. He shore knowed me by name."

"Nothin' strange about that," laughed Sleepy.

Hashknife nodded gloomily, as he leaned against the stable door. He did not desire notoriety. In fact, he desired nothing more than to be unsung and uncursed. Just to be known as a cowboy, trying to get along. But, looking down their twisting back trail, which led up and down the West, from Alberta to Mexico, he realized the truth of Sleepy's remark.

Hashknife, christened Henry, son of an itinerant minister of the Gospel in northeastern Montana, started early in life as a cowboy, drifted from his home range and eventually worked his way down to the cattle outfit after which he received his nickname. Born with a keen mind, a love of adventure, and an overwhelming desire to see what was on the other side of a hill, he met Dave—Sleepy—Stevens, another drifting cowboy, and they rode away together one spring morning, following the trail of Fate.

At times they would handle a case for the cattle associations, clear up the case and ride on, refusing further assignments. They did not care to be under orders from any one. Again, they would work a few weeks on some cattle ranch, draw enough money to replenish their outfit, and ride on. Always the other side of the hills called to them.

Both of them had known Jack Wilson for years, and when they met him in Clinton it was not difficult for him to talk them into going East with his shipment of cattle. They needed a change. But that deal was all off now, and Sleepy realized that fate had dumped them into trouble again. With the tenacity of a bulldog, Hashknife would dig up and cling to every shred of evidence, until he proved who shot Jack Wilson. Sleepy did not analyze anything, but he had a dogged faith in Hashknife's ability, a ready gun and the nerve to use it.

The bartender was still in bed when they saddled their horses and headed up the road which led to San Miguel. They had heard of the San Miguel Valley, but neither of them had ever seen it.

There was not a town between Gates Ajar and San Miguel, and at times the road was little better than a trail. It was nearly three o'clock in the afternoon when they arrived at San Miguel. Hashknife inquired at the depot regarding the telegram to Kinnear & Company, and found a reply waiting for him.

VERY SORRY ABOUT WILSON STOP ADVISE FURTHER AS HIS FAMILY LIVES HERE STOP WILL YOU HANDLE DEAL FOR US AND BUY ONE HUNDRED FIFTY HEAD BEEF IN SAN MIGUEL VALLEY STOP AM WIRING SAN MIGUEL BANK TO COVER PRICE STOP ADVISE AT ONCE STOP WOULD SURE BE GLAD TO SEE YOU AGAIN

—AL KINNEAR

The depot agent directed them to the doctor's house, where they had taken

Wilson, but told them he feared Wilson was dead when he arrived. The doctor confirmed this, and Hashknife wired Kinnear again to wire the doctor a disposition of the body, and also accepted the order to purchase the one hundred and fifty head of beef animals in San Miguel Valley.

Hashknife also wrote out what he knew about the shooting and gave it to the doctor to forward to the sheriff, as Gates Ajar was not in the same county as San Miguel. The old doctor seemed to be an active source of information, and he gave Hashknife and Sleepy a résumé of what had happened to the stage between San Miguel and Sunset City, two days previous.

He had his information from Sanderson, the Sunset City sheriff, who had been in San Miguel, and who had searched every likely spot for that package of money between Sunset City and the point where the stage had been stopped.

Hashknife and Sleepy spent the night in San Miguel, and Hashknife made discreet inquiries regarding the Cross 84, but no one seemed to know anything about the brand.

The next morning they headed for Sunset City. Hashknife remembered what the doctor had told them, and was able to find the spot where the holdup and double killing had taken place.

"Not much mystery about this deal," said Sleepy. "Holdup man kills the stage driver and is killed himself."

"And," added Hashknife solemnly, "the holdup man, just before he died, swallered the ten thousand dollars worth of currency, and the coroner forgot to perform an autopsy."

"Yeah, I forgot about that," said Sleepy. "But wasn't the son of this here deceased bandit mixed up in it?"

"Shore. He came all the way from Oregon to take the money and throw it over the grade."

"Aw, hell!" snorted Sleepy. "You never believe anythin' you hear."

"And only half that I see, pardner. Mistakes are the easiest things in the world to make."

"Uh-huh. Well, I'm glad we're only down here to buy cows."

"I'd almost forgot the cows."

"I'll remind you of it every little while."

About a mile north of Sunset City, along the main road, was the old cemetery, surrounded by a broken down fence, grown up with weeds, many of the wooden headstones sagging drunkenly. As Hashknife and Sleepy came in sight of the cemetery they noticed four men standing close together at a new grave, while a short distance away from them was a woman on horseback.

"If that's a funeral, it shore ain't well attended," said Hashknife, and by mutual consent they swung off the road and came up along the old fence.

The four men were Blue Snow, Graveyard Jones, Smoky Woods and the Reverend Mr. Oscar Sundborg. The lady on the horse was Jerry Falconer. As they rode up, the minister closed his Bible and motioned for Graveyard and Smoky to fill the grave.

HE TURNED from the grave, replacing his hat, but Blue Snow spoke to him and he stopped. Blue took a bill from his pocket and handed it to the minister, who apparently started to refuse, thought better of it, and pocketed the money. He was a sallow blond, with a weak chin and a certain air of sanctimony. The two cowboys had seen Blue give him the money, and as he went past them, Sleepy said seriously—

"What's salvation worth around here, Parson?"

The minister stopped and looked sharply at them, a trifle belligerently, perhaps, but turned away and walked slowly down to the road. The girl had heard Sleepy's remark and was looking at the two cowboys when Blue Snow came up to her.

"Jerry, I want to thank you for comin' here," he said. "It was mighty kind of you."

"He was always nice to me," she said

simply. "I don't see why folks act as they do."

"I guess you can't blame 'em," he replied slowly. "I hope your dad won't be mad about you comin' out here."

"I don't see what difference that could make to him."

"I shore hope it won't, Jerry."

"Don't worry about that part of it. I'll be going now."

"Goodby, Jerry, and thanks a lot."

"You're welcome."

She rode past the two cowboys at the break in the fence, and they watched her ride down to the main road, turning toward town.

"Gosh!" exploded Sleepy softly. "Beautiful red hair."

Blue had gone back to the grave, where he talked with Graveyard and Smoky. Blue's horse was tied at the far side of the cemetery, and as soon as the grave was filled he shook hands with the other two and went to his horse. Hashknife dismounted and walked over to the grave. Smoky leaned on his shovel, perspiring copiously, while old Graveyard tried to arrange a crude headboard. A deputy sheriff's badge attracted Hashknife's attention when he looked at Smoky.

"You're the first Arizona deputy I ever seen actin' as a sexton," he said.

"Somebody had to do it," replied Smoky. "You'd think the old man had cholera, instead of bullets, the way folks act. There ain't a damn one of us so good we can't shovel dirt in on top of a bandit. I like that girl's nerve. Her old man and the old man we jist planted have been enemies for a long time. He'll prob'ly give her hell for comin' to the funeral."

Hashknife smiled at Smoky.

"I dunno the details, pardner. You see, we just got here."

"There ain't much details," said Graveyard, wiping his hands on his overall clad knees. "Jim Snow held up the stage, pulled a gun fight with the driver, and they both got killed. They buried the driver this mornin' and this place was filled with folks. This afternoon we buries old Jim—and you saw the crowd. That was his son who jist rode away."

"Who was the lady?" asked Hashknife.

Smoky grinned widely.

"She's Jerry Falconer. Her dad owns most of this country, and he shore hated hell out of poor old Jim Snow. Mebbe Jim hated him plenty, too. You see, that money was for the bank, and Falconer jist about owns the bank. He owns the Double Diamond outfit. Lots o' folks think Jim Snow stuck up the stage to git some of Falconer's money."

"I heard about that in San Miguel. Do you know anythin' about a Cross 84 outfit around here?"

"Ain't none," replied Graveyard, spitting at a lizard. The deputy shook his head.

"How much of an outfit does young Snow own?"

"Remains to be seen."

"The reason I asked you was because I'm buyin' cattle for Kinnear and Company of Kansas City and I need a hundred and fifty head of good beef."

"Where's Wilson?" asked Graveyard slowly.

"Somebody killed him over at Gates Ajar day before yesterday."

"The hell you say!" snorted Smoky. "Who killed him?"

"Nobody seems to know. His body is at San Miguel now."

"Well, I'll be terror stricken!" exclaimed Graveyard. He shoved his hands deeply in his overall pockets and squinted at Hashknife.

"And you're takin' his place, eh? Hundred and fifty head of beef." He turned his head and looked closely at Smoky. "I'll betcha Blue Snow can jist fit you out with them there beef critters."

Smoky grinned widely, started to say something, but changed his mind.

"Did Wilson ask you to do this here buyin' for him?" asked Graveyard.

"He didn't live long enough. I wired his boss, who happened to be a man I knew several years ago, and he wired me to do this buyin' in place of Wilson. You boys knew Wilson pretty well, eh?"

"Pretty well," agreed Graveyard solemnly.

"Anythin' against him?" queried Hashknife.

"No-o-o," drawling.

"No-o-o-o-o," echoed Smoky, scratching his chin violently. "Graveyard, you better get hold of Blue and let these gents talk beef with him. My name's Woods—Smoky Woods, deputy sheriff. This here gent is Graveyard Jones."

"Mine is Hashknife Hartley," grinning, as they shook hands. "The gent on the horse is Sleepy Stevens. C'mon over, Sleepy, and meet Smoky Woods and Graveyard Jones."

In the meantime Jerry rode back to town. Ed Reed and Falconer were standing together in front of a store, and Reed tied Jerry's horse. She knew her father was angry and that Reed was not at all pleased.

"Kinda funny—you goin' out to the graveyard," said her father coldly.

"It was anything but funny," said Jerry.

"Folks will probably have plenty to say about it."

"It wasn't hardly the thing to do," added Reed. "Not under the circumstances, Jerry."

"Circumstances have nothing to do with it," replied Jerry coldly.

"Buryin' a murderer and a thief," said Reed.

Jerry flared quickly. Stripping off her glove, she took off a ring and handed it to Ed Reed.

"That will end any right you might think you had to criticize my morals, Ed."

And with that parting shot, Jerry walked past them and entered the store. Reed glowered at the ring, his lips shut tightly, while William Falconer almost exploded.

"Damn women! Her mother was thataway, Ed. You let me handle it, will you? I'll make her take back that ring. My Gawd, everythin' is ready for the weddin'—and this had to happen!"

Reed smiled sourly.

"Young Snow is behind this. I happen to know she saw him here yesterday, and they talked quite awhile."

"The hell she did! I'll stop that, too. I'll—"

"She's of age."

"She's my daughter. Don't you want her?"

"I was goin' to marry her, wasn't I?"

"Well—" angrily— "I wouldn't let no son of a murderin' thief beat me out of my girl, I'll tell you that."

FALCONER turned and walked into the store, leaving Reed alone, looking at the tiny gold circlet and small diamond in his big hand. He shut his fist tightly and walked across the street to the Sunset Saloon, where he drank several glasses of raw whisky. He was there when Hashknife, Sleepy, Graveyard and Smoky came in. Smoky nodded to Reed, but old Graveyard did not even look at him. Graveyard and Smoky were carrying their pick and shovel.

"Got him planted, eh?" queried Reed sarcastically.

"We buried him," said Smoky slowly.

Graveyard turned his head and shot a venomous glance at Reed.

"Blue paid the preacher," said Smoky, "so there wasn't any charity mixed up in the deal."

Jeff Blondell came in, and Smoky introduced him to Hashknife and Sleepy. He accepted a drink, inquiring casually about the funeral. Hashknife looked Blondell over, taking note of the broken nose, cruel mouth and mean eyes, and filed him mentally as a bad actor. Blondell wore his gun low on his thigh, the bottom of the holster tied down to a rosette of his chaps.

A little later Hashknife walked down to the office with Smoky and met Singer Sanderson, the tall sheriff. Hashknife told him about the shooting of Wilson, the cattle buyer. Sanderson knew Wilson. Smoky told Hashknife who Reed was, and that Reed was engaged to marry the girl who had been out at the cemetery.

Hashknife asked about Blondell.

"*Quien sabe?*" replied the sheriff. "Been here quite awhile, acted like he was broke when he came, but got money from somewhere. Don't work, pays his bills and plays poker most of the time. As far as we know, he's on the square, and he minds his own business."

A little later Hashknife and Sleepy stabled their horses and secured a room at the Sunset City hotel. Old Graveyard was still at the saloon, getting more intoxicated all the time. Finally he flourished his pick dangerously near the polished top of the bar and announced—

"Gentlem'n, I'm goin' and shell shome cows."

"Whose cows?" asked the bartender.

"Bar S Bar cows, 'f it's any of your business."

Ed Reed pricked up his ears.

"Yesshir," nodded Graveyard owlishly, "I'm goin' shell cows to Kinnear, an' 'f I ain't, I'm a liar. Goin' shell hunner'n fif'y head. Gimme 'nother drink, and then I'm goin' shellin' cows."

"There ain't even a buyer in the Valley," said the bartender.

"Zazzo? Huh! Hell of a lot you know. He was in here with me. Wilshon got killed in Gates Ajar, and thish is new buyer. Well, here's m' regards, an' may you all die from a fishbone in your windpipes."

Graveyard swallowed his drink, took a tight grip on his pick and staggered out to his horse. Ed Reed scowled thoughtfully, went outside and saw Hashknife and Sleepy entering the hotel. He sauntered over, and met them outside a little later.

"Are you the new buyer for Kinnear?" he asked Hashknife, who nodded.

"My name's Reed—foreman of the Double Diamond outfit.

"Yeah. Glad to meetcha, Reed. What's on your mind?"

"You need a hundred and fifty head of beef?"

"Somethin' like that."

"All right, we can fix you out."

"That's fine—but I've kinda halfway made a deal."

"With Graveyard Jones?"

"Well, it ain't his beef, but—name's Snow, I think."

Reed laughed harshly.

"Never mind him. I doubt if Snow could sell you that many head right now, and even if he could— Lemme tell you somethin'. The Double Diamond has always furnished Kinnear with beef. In fact, we had an agreement with Wilson to buy nothin' but Double Diamond in the Valley."

"And if he bought from anybody else?" suggested Hashknife.

"We'd find another market—and we're the biggest cattle raisers in this part of the State."

"In other words, you hogged the show," said Hashknife coldly.

"We delivered the goods."

"What other buyers come in here, Reed?"

"None. It wasn't worth their while."

"Nice little game of freeze-out, eh?"

Reed shrugged his shoulders.

"Call it that, if you want to; but if you're so dead set on buyin' some Bar S Bar stock, I'd advise you to wire Kinnear and tell 'em the situation out here."

"They probably don't know it," agreed Hashknife.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Al Kinnear is a mighty square shooter."

"Square shooter or not, he wouldn't cut off his own nose. Think it over."

Reed turned and walked back across the street. Hashknife grinned softly and looked at Sleepy, who was looking at Reed's broad back.

"Well, what do you think of that?" grunted Sleepy.

"I think I'll look over some of them Bar S Bar beeves."

OLD GRAVEYARD was not too drunk to remember what he was to do, and early the following morning Blue Snow came in to see Hashknife. Smoky Woods introduced them. Blue explained that he had no way of knowing much about the

Bar S Bar cattle, but he did want to make a sale.

"Things have been pretty rotten around here," he said. "The Double Diamond have hogged everything, kept buyers away from us, until the Circle J and our outfit are just about broke."

"I heard somethin' about that," smiled Hashknife. "How about Jones' cattle? If you can't furnish all the hundred and fifty, why can't he run in some of his?"

"He could," said Blue eagerly. "He's goin' to help me round up mine, and if you can wait a couple of days—"

"Shore—we'll wait."

Hashknife was willing to wait, because he wanted to know more about things in San Miguel Valley. Smoky was a good source of information, and in one day Hashknife had a fairly complete history of the Valley. Smoky showed Hashknife the two revolvers used at the holdup, still containing the empty cartridges. Jim Snow's gun, a .45, contained three empty shells, while Chub's was a .38 and contained two empty shells.

Blue Show had told of hearing the five shots fired. Old Chub had been hit once, and Jim Snow twice. Hashknife examined the guns closely, a queer expression in his gray eyes.

"You never found that package of currency, eh?" he asked.

"Nope. Me and Singer hunted every place along the grades, too. Pshaw, I reckon every puncher in the country has sneaked down there and looked. Old Falconer kinda wants to arrest Blue Snow, but he's scared he'll never get that money back if he does. If Blue hid it, he'll never tell. Queer kid, that Blue Snow. He wanted us to give him the old man's gun. I dunno—mebbe we ought to do it."

"You keep that gun," said Hashknife quickly. "Keep 'em both."

"What for? The case is—"

"Lock 'em up in the safe, Smoky."

"Huh?" Smoky eyed Hashknife quizzically. "In the safe? F'r gosh sake, what good are they now?"

"You keep 'em where nobody can get at 'em."

"Well, I'll tell Singer what you said, but—what do you know, Hashknife?"

"This case ain't closed, Smoky."

Smoky told the sheriff what Hashknife had said, and the sheriff took the two guns out and looked them over carefully.

"Funny idea," he commented. "Ain't a thing about them two guns. What's the tall feller got under his hat, anyway?"

"He says the case ain't closed, and for us to keep them guns hid."

"He's a queer sort of a jigger—" thoughtfully. "Well, we'll foller his hunch; lock 'em in the safe. I just saw Falconer and Reed ride in, and Falconer had blood in his eye. Mebbe he's sore about Snow gettin' a chance to sell some stock."

"I shore hope Snow sells 'em."

Falconer did have blood in his eye, and he went straight to the little law office of Henry Van Dorn, who handled the affairs of the Double Diamond. Henry was five feet six inches tall, and weighed two hundred and thirty pounds, stripped. He was about forty years of age, nearly bald, very florid and always short of breath.

When Falconer came from the office he joined Reed at the store, and they talked together for awhile. Hashknife and Smoky came across the street from the Sunset Saloon, and Reed spoke to Hashknife.

"Hartley is your name, ain't it? I want you to meet Mr. Falconer."

Falconer merely nodded, not offering to shake hands, and came quickly to the point.

"I understand you are thinking of buying some cattle from Snow."

Hashknife nodded shortly, wondering what Falconer might have to say.

"Before I went too far with that deal, Hartley, I'd look at it from a legal point of view. Those cattle belong to the estate of Jim Snow, and until that estate is settled Blue Snow can't touch a single head."

"I forgot about that," smiled Hashknife. "However, I think Graveyard Jones will be able to fill my order with his brand."

Falconer laughed heartily.

"Graveyard Jones! He hasn't that many."

"Kinda stuck, ain't I?" grinned Hashknife. "Well, how about your brand?"

"Come out and talk it over at the ranch."

"All right—tomorrow."

"Suits me. Are you goin' to buy for Kinnear all the time?"

"I dunno."

"Well, you come out tomorrow and we'll talk beef."

Hashknife realized that Falconer had the best of the argument, and that Blue Snow had no legal right to sell the Bar S Bar cattle. It would be a bitter dose for Blue Snow, but he would have to swallow it.

That afternoon Hashknife and Sleepy rode out to Snow's ranch, and found old Skipper Franklyn, the cook and housekeeper of the Bar S Bar. Skipper was seventy, skinny as a rail, with one single lock of hair on his scalp. He was a little man, hawk faced, with huge gnarled hands, a pessimistic view of life and a wonderful flow of profanity.

"Knowed you the minute I clapped eyes on you," he told Hashknife. "Blue described you perfect. You're the buyer, ain'tcha? Git down, both of you. Blue is out, runnin' down some dogies—him and that ancient mummy of a Graveyard Jones. C'mon in and rest up."

They followed him into the little ranch-house and sat down on an old horsehair sofa, from which the hair was protruding in spots.

"We've had a lotta damn' grief around here," offered Skipper. "Suppose you heard 'bout Jim Snow gittin' killed. Yea-a-a-ah, Jim got leaded plumb t' heaven. Lotta folks think he went the other way, but I knowed him better than they did."

Skipper wiped away a rheumy tear and picked up his old cob pipe.

"You don't think he robbed the stage?" asked Hashknife.

"Robbed hell! No! Jim Snow was headin' for San Miguel. Not that he ain't justified, if he did stick it up. That there damn' Falconer outfit have jist about ruint everythin' for anybody else around here. They broke Jim, and they broke Graveyard Jones. We're hangin' by the skin of our teeth. Course I'm sorry old Chub got killed. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. If you don't believe it, look at m' teeth. I started out in life with a perfectly good set, now look at the damn' things. Only three in m' head, and they never touch. For the last ten year I've been jist punchin' holes in m' grub."

"You look healthy," grinned Hashknife.

"Healthy? Say, I can flop half the smart punchers in this country, even if I was a old bull skinner when they was still wearin' three cornered pants."

"You've been around here a long time, eh?"

"Long? My Gawd! They built them San Miguel hills since I come here. This wasn't no valley in them days. Fact of the matter is, the lowest part of this valley was a hill in them days. Yessir, I've been here a long time."

"You've seen a lot of changes," sighed Sleepy.

"Changes? Well, I've seen all there is."

"You knowed the cliff dwellers, eh?" said Sleepy innocently.

"Know 'em? Huh! I showed 'em where to build their mud shacks."

Sleepy subsided, while Skipper filled his pipe.

"I'm sorry I didn't find Snow here," said Hashknife. "I just discovered that it wouldn't be legal for Blue Snow to sell me any Bar S Bar."

"Mind repeatin' that ag'in?"

HASHKNIFE explained the legal difficulty, and Skipper exploded with wrath.

"That's Falconer! Darn his sneakin' skin!"

"I'm sorry, but he's right. I shore wanted to buy Snow's cattle."

"And now you can't do it. Gawd, that'll be hard on the kid."

"Did Jim Snow leave any will?"

"'Course not. He never knowed he was goin' to git killed."

They sat around for an hour or more, listening to Skipper's opinion of things in general, and Blue Snow rode in alone. His horse was played out, and Blue was minus his smile, as he shook hands with Hashknife and Sleepy.

"Graveyard went home," he told Skipper.

Skipper nodded and indicated Hashknife.

"He brought some damn' bad news."

"Falconer dug up a legal snubbin' rope on you," said Hashknife. "Until this estate is settled, you can't even sell a horn off one of your cows."

Blue scowled for a moment, but nodded slowly.

"That's right. Anybody ought to know that much. But it don't matter, Hartley. Me and Graveyard have shore covered a lot of territory, and we dug out less than a hundred Bar S Bar. And none of 'em fat enough for beef. There must be a lot more in the hills, but they've probably drifted on to the north range."

"And Graveyard ain't got enough for a shipment?"

"Not as many as we have. I reckon we're stuck; but I want to tell you I'm shore obliged to you for offerin' to take our beef. It was a lot more than this man Wilson ever done, as far as I can learn."

"Falconer owned him," growled Skipper.

"Did Falconer ever try to buy you out?" asked Hashknife.

Skipper shook his head violently.

"Not him! He'd freeze us out first. Jim Snow has been hangin' on by the skin of his teeth. What can you do? Kinnear gits the cream of this country. We could herd out to San Miguel and give the things away, I suppose, or kill 'em here, feed 'em to the coyotes and sell the hides. Either way, we'd lose our shirt on the deal."

Hashknife understood the situation. It was not the first time that a big outfit had declared a boycott on small stock raisers.

"Mind tellin' me what you know about that holdup, Snow?" asked Hashknife.

"There's nothin' to tell," said Blue gloomily.

"You heard the shots fired, didn't you?"

Blue nodded and explained how he happened to be on the grades, and his reasons for not wanting to be seen.

"There was one shot fired," he said. "Pretty quick after that there were two shots fired fairly close together. I suppose it was more than a minute before the other two sounded."

"You found the driver on the seat, dead?"

"Yeah, sprawled on the seat."

"After you got up on the stage, could you see the other body—the body of your father?"

Blue shut his lips tightly for a moment.

"No, I didn't see it until the horses shied a little. He—he was lying at the mouth of that little gully, and his horse was tied to a bush just beyond him. You couldn't see him from where I first got on the stage."

"Did you have a gun with you at the time?"

Blue reached in his pocket and handed Hashknife a pawn ticket on a San Francisco loan office.

"I needed the money worse than I did a shootin' iron," he said.

"What the hell are you—a detective?" asked Skipper suddenly.

Hashknife grinned slowly.

"I'm buyin' cows for Kinnear."

"You shore ask a lot of questions," growled Skipper.

They rode back to Sunset City and stabled their horses. Sleepy did not ask Hashknife any questions, but he knew his tall partner was doing much heavy thinking. They found Smoky Woods at the sheriff's office and sat down with him to discuss the cattle situation. Smoky was mad over the deal, as he wanted, so he said, to have the trust broken.

A commotion had started over in front of the Ace-High Saloon, on the east side of the street, and the three men went out

quickly. Several men were in front of the saloon, and among them were Ed Reed and Jeff Blondell. Blondell was mopping his face with a handkerchief and Reed was removing his coat.

"Oh, oh!" grunted Smoky. "Somethin' has gone wrong."

Blondell threw the handkerchief aside and stripped off his coat. Both men had removed their belts and guns. More men were hurrying up the street toward the saloon. There was no preliminary action. Reed, the larger of the two, lunged straight at Blondell, swinging both fists. No boxer was Reed—just a slugger. For a moment it seemed that he had Blondell pinned against the wall of the saloon, but he got away, snapping Reed's head back with a short left to the jaw. Perhaps the blow had more effect than it seemed, because Reed turned awkwardly, dropping his guard, and Blondell lashed out with a straight right punch, which seemed to catch Reed square on the point of the chin. Reed's shoulders thumped against the wall, and he slithered down to the sidewalk, knocked cold.

Blondell put on his coat, picked up his handkerchief and came past the sheriff's office, heading toward the Sunset Saloon. His nose was bleeding a little.

Gradually Reed regained consciousness, but even after he got back on his feet he staggered weakly. One of the men put on his belt, while another held his coat and, after a short conversation, Reed went to his horse and rode back past the sheriff's office, heading toward the Double Diamond.

One of the men came over to the office, grinning widely. He did not know what the fight was about. Reed and Blondell had been drinking together, he said. Neither of them was drunk. Suddenly Reed smashed Blondell on the nose, knocking him down. The men got them outside, where they decided to fight it out with their hands.

"I reckon Blondell got revenge," grinned Smoky.

"That was a sweet punch," laughed the man.

"Have they been enemies long?" asked Hashknife.

"Hell, they've been good friends all th' time. This shore was a quick turn."

Ed Reed went straight to the Double Diamond, feeling a bit sick. It was the first time he had ever been knocked out, and the dose tasted bitter. And to be knocked out by a smaller man! The Double Diamond ranch-house was a rambling old building, nestled away in a grove of ancient live oaks—a picturesque old place, with flagged walks and thick walls.

THE BUNKHOUSE, built within the patio, was of adobe, but the rest of the buildings were of frame construction, weathered to a neutral tone. The Double Diamond hired six cowboys, exclusive of Reed the foreman. An old Chinese cook had been at the ranch since Falconer had acquired it. He and Marie, an old Yaqui squaw, ran the house and kitchen. There was no servant problem at the Double Diamond.

Reed stabled his horse, went to the well beside the stable and washed his face. His jaw was swollen a little, but he had no marks, for which he was thankful. Marks might require explanation.

Jerry was out in the patio, playing with a pair of black kittens, when her father came out to her. He had been in a vile humor ever since she had given Ed Reed back his ring. He watched her for awhile, his hands shoved deep into his pockets, lower lip protruding thoughtfully. Then—

"When are you and Ed goin' to get married?"

Jerry placed one of the kittens on a bench and turned to her father.

"Am I supposed to answer that question, dad?"

"You bet."

"Never."

"Oh, don't be foolish. Just because he didn't like to see you—"

"Let's not discuss Ed Reed."

"Well, we're goin' to, just the same. Everybody knows by this time that you

turned him down, and he's sick about it. He never did anythin' wrong."

Jerry stroked the kitten thoughtfully.

"The matter is settled as far as I am concerned, dad."

"Yea-a-ah? I suppose the return of Blue Snow settled your mind, eh?"

"Blue Snow had nothing to do with it."

"And after you went and bought a lot of weddin' clothes and—"

"I can make them over."

"I'm not kickin' about the money you spent."

Jerry laughed shortly.

"Well, I'm glad that is settled."

"It is not settled. You're not givin' Ed a square deal. Folks are talkin'. They know you was—that you got stuck on Blue Snow years ago. They know I kicked him off the ranch. Now, he's back, and you bust up with Ed. You know what they're sayin', don'tcha? They say you're still stuck on Blue Snow."

"You can't shoot folks for thinking," said Jerry slowly.

"You ought to—for thinkin' that way. Son of a murderin' thief."

Jerry shut her lips tightly and her hair seemed to flame up from the roots.

"That is what Ed Reed called him," she said. "You are parroting Ed Reed. Why don't Ed go and say that to Blue Snow? I'll tell you this much—I'm not in love with Blue Snow—but I detest Ed Reed."

Jerry picked up the kitten and went into the house, her father looking after her, a scowl on his brow. Slowly he turned his head and saw Reed in the patio gate. Reed had heard what Jerry said. He came in and the two men looked at each other.

"I reckon I talked too much," said Reed glumly, "and as far as that goes, you talked too much just now. Let her alone. You can't drive Jerry."

"Damn it, you can't even lead her," growled Falconer. "What happened to your jaw, Ed?"

Reed felt of his swollen jaw. No use lying about it.

"I smashed Blondell in the nose today. He mentioned the fact that I wasn't goin' to get married. He wanted to fight it out, so we went out on the sidewalk. I guess I slipped—" lamely. "Anyway, he —aw—it didn't amount to much. It's a little sore."

"Kinda swelled. Did you see anythin' of the buyer?"

"They rode in just before the fight, and I think they went out to tell Snow that the deal was off."

"Did they see the fight?"

"I dunno."

Reed sighed deeply and felt of his chin.

"This deal has got me all unhooked," he said miserably. "I know what they are sayin'. I don't want to start any trouble around here, and today I got to thinkin' I'd go away for awhile—until it's forgotten."

Falconer nodded grimly.

"I know how you feel, Ed. It might be a good thing."

"I think it is the only thing I can do to keep out of trouble. If you don't mind givin' me a layoff, I'll pull out tomorrow mornin'. Mebbe I'll be back in a couple weeks—mebbe a month. It all depends."

"Sure, that's all right. Where'll you go?"

"I dunno. Mebbe I'll pull west, cross the Divide and—"

"Why not go down to Phoenix or over on the Coast to some big town?"

"No, I don't want big towns. I dunno where I'll go. But I'll let you know where I stop."

"All right, Ed; I'll give you a check tonight."

"Thanks."

Falconer watched the hunched shoulders of his foreman go out through the patio. He felt genuinely sorry for Reed. A vacation would do him good. Falconer decided that he would personally help select the hundred and fifty head of beef for Kinnear & Company. He felt better, until he thought of Blue Snow.

"If she wants to love him, she better love him at a distance," he told himself. "I kicked him off this ranch once, and I'll do it again if he ever sticks his nose inside the place."

JEFF BLONDELL had nothing to say about the fight. His nose, already misshapen, showed little signs of having been hit by Ed Reed. That evening Hashknife had a chance to see the six cowboys from the Double Diamond. Smoky pointed them out—Harry Bond, Dick Lasher, Molly Malone, Terry McQueen, Bun Parker and Matt Sullivan.

McQueen was a wild eyed sort of puncher, and Hashknife felt that he had seen McQueen before. Malone was small, scrawny, hatchet faced, with mean eyes and bad teeth. The rest of the crew were ordinary looking fellows, out for a few drinks and a whirl at the games. Smoky introduced McQueen and Malone to Hashknife, but they did not linger long with him. Malone asked Smoky about the fight between Reed and Blondell. He said he had only heard Reed's version and wanted the straight dope on it.

"Where's Reed tonight?" asked Smoky.

"Too sore to come in," grinned Malone. "I think he's goin' away tomorrow for a trip."

"Business?"

"Naw," grinned Malone. "You know his girl throwed him down, didn't you? Well, he's kinda sour on the world, sore at everybody in it, and he's goin' to go away for awhile."

"I heard she ditched him," said Smoky. "Wonder what was the trouble."

"Another man, I reckon—owner of the Bar S Bar."

"Whatcha know about that?" grunted Smoky, as Malone walked away.

"He seems like a good kid," replied Hashknife.

"Yeah, he's all right; but Falconer never would let Jerry marry him."

"How old is this lady?"

"Well, I s'pose about twenty."

"And she's got red hair."

"Uh-huh."

"Want to make a little bet with me, Smoky?"

Smoky shook his head.

"I never thought about her age, and I done forgot about that red hair. I'll jist keep my money, pardner."

"I thought you was goin' to try and find out who shot Wilson," said Sleepy that night as they were going to bed. "You ain't done a thing."

"I'm not worryin' myself about the man who killed Wilson," said Hashknife. "Do you remember on jist what part of that horse's anatomy we saw the Cross 84 brand?"

"You mean over at Gates Ajar? Right shoulder."

"Good! I thought it was, but I wasn't sure."

Hashknife still had Wilson's telegram, which was to notify Kinnear & Company that he was shipping one hundred Cross 84. Where was he going to ship those cattle, wondered Hashknife? The telegram stated that he would try and ship again next week from San Miguel. The mysterious man who had ridden in late at Gates Ajar was riding a Cross 84 horse, and Hashknife wondered if this was merely a coincidence.

"What's the Cross 84 got to do with this deal?" asked Sleepy.

"Because," replied Hashknife, "there ain't a Cross 84 in this State. I looked at the brand register at the sheriff's office. Wilson was going to ship Cross 84 beef, according to this telegram, and next week he expected to ship from San Miguel. We were goin' to meet him in Gates Ajar and help nurse a train of cows to Kansas City. Either Wilson was crooked, or he had a touch of sun, 'cause nobody knows of that Cross 84 outfit."

They went out to the Double Diamond the next morning and had a talk with Falconer. The big cattleman was inclined to be domineering, possibly because he thought he had an advantage, and wanted more than the market price. Hashknife knew prices and he knew cattle, which Falconer soon found out.

"Kinnear asked me to buy this beef," said Hashknife. "There wasn't any prices mentioned, but they wouldn't expect me to offer you a bonus. As far as I'm personally concerned, it don't make any

difference whether I buy your cows or not, Falconer."

"I don't have to sell to Kinnear," retorted Falconer warmly.

"That leaves us deadlocked. I'll wire Kinnear in a few days and tell him what happened. If he wants to pay you more than he does anybody else—"

"Well, I wouldn't quarrel over a few dollars, Hartley. I've always sold to Kinnear; so I reckon we can get together. How soon do you want 'em?"

They settled the details of delivery at San Miguel, and went back to Sunset City, where Hashknife wrote a wire to Kinnear and gave it to the clerk at the stage station to send from San Miguel. Later in the day some of the Double Diamond cowboys were in town, and one of them told Smoky that Ed Reed had started on a vacation.

Blue Snow and old Graveyard came in that afternoon. Both men looked tired, as they dismounted at the sheriff's office. Singer Sanderson was at the office, and Blue sat down with him. Blue had his father's papers, showing the roundup reports for two years, which he spread out on the sheriff's desk. The fall count showed five hundred and eighty-seven head of Bar S Bar cattle, sixty head of horses. The spring count only showed three hundred and ten head of cattle and forty horses.

"What's the answer?" queried the sheriff.

"Shrinkage," said Blue bitterly. "Right now I'll bet there ain't over a hundred head of Bar S Bar cows in these hills, and —well, I won't swear to the horses, but there ain't no forty head left.

"Looks kinda funny," nodded the sheriff.

"Dad knew it, Sanderson. He wrote me that he was gettin' a bad deal."

"Who from?"

Blue shrugged his shoulders and looked up at Hashknife, who was in the doorway.

"Do you think your cows have been stolen?" asked the sheriff.

"They're gone. Cattle usually stay around their own range, unless somebody takes 'em away. Hello, Hartley—" nodding to Hashknife.

"Well, what's to be done about it?" queried the sheriff.

"I dunno. I thought I'd let you know what it looks like. I've got to see a lawyer about the ranch. You knew the Double Diamond stopped me from sellin' beef to Hartley, didn't you?"

"I heard they did. What lawyer are you goin' to get?"

"Van Dorn, I reckon."

"He's attorney for Falconer."

"Yeah, I know he is; but he's a square shooter."

"That's true."

"Well, he better shoot square with me," said Blue coldly, as he picked up his papers. "I didn't know how things were goin' down here with dad, or I'd have been here sooner. The Bar S Bar is goin' to belong to me now, and I'll stop losin' stock, if I have to feed a few rustlers to the buzzards."

BLUE left the office and went to find Van Dorn. The sheriff was going to San Miguel on a matter of business, and Hashknife wrote out a telegram to Al Kinnear and gave it to the sheriff to send.

HAVE YOU BOUGHT MANY CROSS EIGHTY-FOUR BRAND AND WHERE WERE THEY SHIPPED FROM STOP ANSWER AT ONCE AS IT IS IMPORTANT.
—HARTLEY

The sheriff brought the reply back with him the following morning, and it read:

PLACE NAMED GATES AJAR STOP HAVE BOUGHT TWO HUNDRED SEVENTY-FIVE HEAD.

It was signed by Al Kinnear. Hashknife smiled grimly and pocketed the telegram. This was evidence that the Cross 84, whatever it consisted of, was near enough Gates Ajar to use that station as a shipping point.

"This is how it looks to me," he told

Sleepy. "Wilson was as crooked as the rest of the bunch. He bought stolen cattle cheap, probably payin' cash, instead of a check, and kept the difference. The man who rode that Cross 84 bronc was the man who was to make the sale—but he was late. Wilson got into a poker game with a couple punchers, prob'ly two of the gang, while he was waitin' for the main jasper to show up; and they framed to kill him for the cash in his pocket."

"And the bartender was in on the deal, eh?"

"To the extent of trade, prob'ly—mebbe hush money. He knew who done the killin', but he wouldn't tell. He couldn't afford to tell."

"Don'tcha think Wilson was one awful fool to want to hire me and you?"

"Mebbe Wilson wasn't such a fool, at that. Lookin' at it from a cold blooded angle, mebbe me and you wasn't supposed to ever leave Gates Ajar."

"Oh!" grunted Sleepy softly. "I never thought of that."

"We've stopped quite a lot of rustlin', Sleepy."

Blue Snow came in that afternoon; he was at the lawyer's office when Jerry Falconer came in, driving a spanking gray team and a newly painted buckboard. Hashknife saw Blue Snow come from the office of Van Dorn and meet Jerry in front of the stage station, where they stood and talked for possibly fifteen minutes.

A little later Hashknife met Jerry in a store.

"Dad said if I saw you to invite you and your friend out to supper," she said. "You see," she added with a twinkle in her eye, "Dad wasn't so sure about your credentials; so he sent a wire to Kinnear the other day."

"Yeah?" curiously.

"I guess he is satisfied now. Anyway, he wants to talk with you."

"All right, Miss Falconer," grinned Hashknife. "We'll be out."

"Come out tonight. Dad likes to talk."

"Well, we can do that—and thanks."

"Supper about six o'clock, but come before that, won't you?"

"Sure. We're always ahead of the supper bell, ma'am."

He and Sleepy rode out about five o'clock, and Falconer welcomed them warmly. He did not evade mentioning the wire to Kinnear, but showed them the reply.

HASHKNIFE HARTLEY BUYER FOR US STOP IF YOU'VE GOT ANY HORSE-THIEVES RUSTLERS OR GUNMEN IN YOUR COUNTRY THEY WILL STAMPEDE STOP BEST REGARDS TO HIM AND SLEEPY STOP YOU CAN BANK ON HIS INTEGRITY

—AL KINNEAR

Hashknife grinned widely.

"That sounds like Al. We worked together, before he got into the meat business."

"That telegram interested me," said Falconer, as they sat down in the big living room of the ranch-house.

"In what way?" queried Hashknife.

"About the horsethieves and rustlers. The sheriff was out here today, and we had quite a talk. Now, I don't want you to misunderstand me, Hartley. There has always been bad blood between me and Jim Snow. He's dead now, and his son will probably take his place. I've no use for the boy. Jim Snow accused me of stealin' his horses. That wasn't true. It hit me hard, bein' called a thief; so I blocked him from sellin' his beef. I wanted to break him, and I think I just about put him on the rocks. You've heard about it, I reckon."

"Yeah, I heard quite a lot about it."

"All right. Blue Snow has been makin' a rough count, since you tried to buy his cattle. He showed the sheriff a roundup tally for last fall and this spring. And—" Falconer shut his jaw tightly for a moment—"that count shows a big shortage. It revives that old gossip, I tell you! Blue Snow might just as well accuse me of stealin' his damn' cows!"

Hashknife eyed him closely.

"What has this to do with me, Falconer?"

"Would a man in my position steal cows?"

"Well," Hashknife half closed his eyes thoughtfully, "you might as well steal 'em as to keep him from realizin' on 'em. Accordin' to my views, a boycott is the same as a steal."

"You're pretty damn' frank with your views, Hartley."

"You asked my opinion."

"But I never stole his cows."

"I never said you did. What have you got against Blue Snow?"

"Against him!" exploded Falconer. "He's like the old man. I—I had a lot of trouble with him," he finished weakly.

Hashknife grinned widely.

"He thinks a lot of your daughter."

"Yeah? What do you know about that part of it?"

"What I've heard."

Falconer leaned back in his chair.

"Well, I dunno," wearily. "Jerry was to have married Ed Reed, my foreman, this week. Everythin' was fixed. Why, Jerry even went to Phoenix and bought her weddin' clothes. She was on her way back—on that stage, when it was held up. Now she won't marry Ed. It busted him all up, and he's gone away for awhile. Couldn't stand it. You see, everybody knew about it, and he thought they was laughin' at him. He's a serious sort of a feller."

"Do you think Blue Snow had anythin' to do with that?"

"I don't know. Jerry refuses to give any reason. I sent Blue Snow a note today, warnin' him to keep away from here."

"Do you think that was the right thing to do, Falconer?"

"That was *my* business."

"Oh, shore. But put yourself in his place; what would you do?"

Falconer scowled at Hashknife for several moments.

"If you thought a lot of the girl, and you knew she thought a lot of you—" suggested Hashknife.

"We won't discuss that part of it."

"It's worth discussin'. If I was you, I'd ask Snow to come up here and have a talk about it. Let your daughter in on the discussion."

"Not a damn' bit of it! His father murdered a man, robbed the stage. Why, that currency belonged to me, I tell you! Either Blue or his old man got that money. And you ask me to let— You're crazy, Hartley."

"Suppose his father hadn't killed that stage driver, hadn't stolen that money—"

"No supposin' about it—he did."

"Outside of that, the boy is all right, eh? You merely disliked him because he loved your daughter."

"Well?"

"That closes the incident. Let's talk about somethin' else."

"I'm willin'. Every time I talk about it, I get sore."

The conversation switched to shop talk of the cow country. The cowboys finished their supper, and went out. Hashknife heard Malone tell Falconer that he and Terry McQueen were going to town, and wanted to know if he wanted them to get anything at the store.

THE OLD Chinese was a good cook, and the visiting cowboys thoroughly enjoyed the supper. Jerry seemed in good spirits, laughing and talking with Hashknife. Falconer eyed her closely. For the last few days she had been rather quiet, and this was a decided change.

After supper she went with them to the living room and played a few pieces on the organ. Falconer wanted to talk; wanted to tell how he had made a success of his business, and Jerry left the three men together to smoke and talk. Hashknife was sitting near a window opening on the patio, and he saw Jerry pass the window.

From the bunkhouse came the tinkling of a mandolin, the deeper strumming of a guitar. Falconer talked on and on, occasionally stopping to fill his pipe. Neither Hashknife nor Sleepy were inter-

ested, but were obliged to listen patiently.

It was nearly nine o'clock when Falconer finished.

"I reckon we'll be driftin' back," said Hashknife, getting to his feet.

Falconer protested, got their promise to come back again, and called to Jerry.

"She'd want to tell you good night," he said, as they walked out to the patio.

Jerry stepped up on the porch as they came out.

"I thought you was up in your room," said her father.

"It was too warm, dad."

"It is warm tonight. Hartley, I'll call one of the boys to bring your horses."

"Never mind that, Mr. Falconer," replied Hashknife.

He turned to thank Jerry for their evening at the ranch, when something seared across his cheek, thudded into the wall behind them, and from somewhere close at hand came the report of a gun. None of them saw it flash.

Hashknife flung Jerry away from the light of the doorway, sprang out at right angles from the steps, drawing his gun. The shot had come from somewhere in the patio. The cowboys were running from the bunkhouse, questioning.

Hashknife was hunched low, heading for the angle of the patio, where a big oak tree threw a heavy shadow. A man was trying to get over the wall. Hashknife heard the scrape of his clothes, the thump of a boot.

"Stop where you are," ordered Hashknife, and the noise ceased.

"Got him?" asked a cowboy hoarsely.

"Got somebody," replied Hashknife, as the man stepped away from the shadow, his hands half raised.

It was Blue Snow. They led him over to the house and took him inside. Jerry's face was white, her eyes wide with fright. Falconer's eyes narrowed and his voice was vibrant with anger, as he faced the young cowboy.

"Murderin' folks must kinda run in your family, Snow," he said.

"I never fired that shot," replied Blue evenly.

"Where's your gun?" asked Hashknife.

"Didn't bring one."

"Probably threw it away," said a cowboy. "We'll take a lantern and see if we can find it."

They ran to get the lantern. Hashknife's right cheek was bleeding a little and he mopped away the blood with a handkerchief.

"I guess we'll take you to town, Snow," said Falconer. "I suppose that bullet was meant for me."

"I never fired that shot," repeated Blue. "I never had a gun with me."

"Right now is the time to settle this proposition," said Hashknife. He turned to Jerry. "This is like gettin' a tooth pulled; it'll hurt for a minute. Today you met Blue Snow in town and you asked him to come out to see you tonight. Mebbe he asked to come. Anyway, that doesn't matter. You knew your father would be busy talkin' to us; so that fixed the deal up fine. Blue crawled over the patio wall near that tree, and you met him out there in the dark. That's your business—not mine, but I want to get it all straight. How about it, Snow?"

Blue looked at Jerry, his lips shut tightly.

"That is all true," said Jerry softly.

"Damn' fine business!" snorted Falconer.

"Now," continued Hashknife, speaking to Blue, "after Jerry left you—she could see me through that window, and she knew her father would be busy until I got up—what happened?"

"I watched her go to the house and meet you. Then I started to climb over the wall, and that shot was fired from just outside the gate. It wasn't over thirty feet from me. I saw a little of the flash. Well, it kinda stunned me. I didn't know what was wrong. But I decided that my best bet was to get out of there; so I—well, you stopped me, Hartley."

"That's a pretty good story to make up in a short time," said Falconer.

"And I'll bet big odds that it's true," said Hashknife.

"Why would I shoot at Hartley?" asked Blue.

"Maybe you didn't," said Falconer.

"Why would I shoot at you?"

"I warned you to keep away from here, Snow."

"Yeah, I got your note. I suppose it was from you. You see, you forgot to sign it—or was you afraid to sign it?"

"I reckon you knew who it was from." Falconer turned to Jerry. "You've made a nice mess of things, haven't you?"

"You can drop that," said Blue coldly. "I insisted on comin'."

"She didn't have to let you."

The cowboys came back in, carrying a lantern.

"We can't find any gun," said Matt Sullivan. "There's none in the patio, and he couldn't throw it very far over the wall."

"That part of it's all settled," said Hashknife. "Snow never had any gun and he never fired the shot."

"If he didn't, who did?" demanded Falconer. "You're too danged quick to exonerate him, Hartley."

"Well, I was the only one who got marked." Hashknife laughed.

Terry McQueen and Molly Malone came back from town, and the cowboys met them outside the house, telling them what had happened. McQueen gave Falconer the mail.

"You boys didn't meet anybody between here and town, didja?" asked Hashknife.

"Not a soul," replied McQueen. "We rode slow all the way back, but we never seen nor heard anybody."

"Where's your horse, Snow?" asked Hashknife, and Blue grinned.

"I've got him staked out in the brush."

"You may as well ride back with us."

Falconer swore under his breath, but did not protest. He turned away, when Blue shook hands with Jerry.

"Thank you, Mr. Hartley," she said, as she shook hands with him. "You saved the day."

"The day ain't all saved—yet; but we've made a start."

BLUE had little to say as they rode back toward town, but when they parted he shook hands with both of them.

"I was a fool to go out there," he said. "But I shore was lucky to have you there to square the deal for me, and I appreciate what you did. If you can ever use me for anythin', yell my name. I'll have a gun with me next time."

"I may need you, Snow. *Hasta luego.*

"*Buenas noches, caballeros.*"

"Who do you reckon fired that shot?" asked Sleepy, as they went on.

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"He's a good shot."

"How do you figure that out?"

"Takin' a chance on pickin' you out of that group at that distance, and in a bad light."

"It shore was too close for comfort. Well, they've showed their hand, whoever they are, Sleepy. Too danged much publicity. We'll either have to change our names or get out where nobody ever heard of us. Scared, cowboy?"

"Tremblin' all over."

They went to the Sunset Saloon, and Hashknife tried to find out what time Malone and McQueen left town, but no one seemed to have paid any attention to the hour they left. The sheriff listened to what happened at the Double Diamond, but did not seem to have any theory to offer, except that Falconer had lots of enemies, and that the shot might have been intended for him.

Blondell heard Sleepy telling Smoky about the shooting, and came over to Hashknife, questioning him about it. Hashknife told him what he knew of the affair. Blondell had no comments to make, and Hashknife wondered what Blondell's interest might be. He did not trust Blondell, but he found that Blondell had been around the saloon all evening, which was enough alibi to clear him of any hand in the matter.

Blondell was somewhat of a mystery to every one, but Sunset City had become used to him. To Hashknife he was a sinister figure, getting a living from

somewhere—but where? What kept him in Sunset City? According to all Hashknife could learn about him, he seldom left town. It seemed that Blondell drank plenty of liquor, but kept a silent tongue in his head.

"If Blondell ain't wanted some place, I'm a Chinaman's uncle," Hashknife decided. "And, if I'm wise, I'll keep an eye on Mr. Blondell."

Hashknife found that Blondell was in Sunset City at the time of the stage robbery; so that excused him. In fact, as far as Hashknife could discover, Blondell's only fault lay in the fact that he came there broke, got money in some mysterious way, and continued to get it. He minded his own business. His fight with Ed Reed was the first time he had been in any trouble in Sunset City. He never mentioned what it was about, but the general opinion was that Blondell had joked Reed over losing his girl.

Hashknife and Sleepy rode out to the Bar S Bar ranch the next morning, and found Graveyard Jones there with Blue and Skipper.

"Well, they haven't killed you off yet," smiled Blue.

"Give 'em time," grinned Hashknife.

There were a couple of Bar S Bar horses in the corral, and Hashknife took a look at the brand. The brand itself consisted of a short bar, a large S and another short bar. Hashknife called Blue over to him and they stopped beside a light sorrel, on which the brand showed plainly.

"What didja want?" asked Blue curiously.

"Watch this."

Hashknife drew his forefinger through the first bar, continued the S to an 8, and drew two lines on the last bar. Blue scowled thoughtfully.

"Do that again, will you Hartley?"

Hashknife did it over again.

"Makes it a Cross 84, don't it?" queried Blue. "Why—"

"Somebody," said Hashknife softly, "has been sellin' Cross 84 beef to Kinnear, and shippin' 'em from Gates Ajar."

"Yea-a-h?" Blue hooked his thumbs over his belt, as he studied the lean face of Hashknife. "Are you sure of that?"

Hashknife showed him the wire from Kinnear.

"That was an answer to my wire, askin' him about buyin' Cross 84."

"So that's where the Bar S Bar has been robbed, eh? They took 'em over the range, altered the brands and shipped 'em as Cross 84. Well, I'm goin' to Gates Ajar, Hartley."

"Wait a little while, pardner. I—I don't think the time is ripe. There's a lot of Cross 84 beef over there right now, but they can't ship 'em. It'll take quite a while to dig up another buyer. Let things drift for awhile, and we'll go with you."

"Does the sheriff know about this?"

"Nope."

Old Graveyard was all excited. He wanted to go right over to Gates Ajar and hang somebody. Skipper insisted that he would go along and tie the knot.

"We'll go when Hartley gives the word," stated Blue. "I'm backin' his play from now on. Has this deal got anythin' to do with somebody takin' a shot at you last night, Hartley?"

"I'm afraid it does."

"Do you think somebody in San Miguel Valley rustled our cattle?"

"Somebody in San Miguel Valley took a shot at me. I don't reckon any of them Gates Ajar rustlers would ride plumb here to shoot me. How easy is it to get across that range?"

"Easy as shootin' fish," replied Graveyard. "All open country to Antelope Pass, and a good trail through to the other side. Why, you could almost drive a wagon over there, without no road. The railroad aimed to come through and take in this valley, but they finally went straight north and swung around to San Miguel."

BLUE decided to go back to town with them, and they went to talk with the sheriff. Hashknife took a pencil and outlined the Bar S Bar, showing the sheriff how simple it would be to alter it to a Cross 84.

"But we've got to keep this quiet," said Hashknife. "If there's any slip, we'll never get 'em for the job. They could dig out, leave the cattle and we'd be holdin' the sack."

"That's true," replied the sheriff. "But what's our best move?"

"Do you know the sheriff of the county over there?"

"I do. His name is Dick Redman, and I'm not surprised that they were able to ship stolen cattle in his county."

Hashknife laughed softly.

"I wondered what kind of a person he was. You see, he should have served me and Sleepy with a subpena to appear at the inquest over the body of Wilson. Mebbe he passed it up cold."

"Knowin' who killed him," nodded Sanderson, "he prob'ly would."

Old Graveyard came in later and he went to supper with Hashknife, Sleepy and Blue. The old man was wearing his gun. Blondell came in to supper, nodded to them and sat down at the back of the room. Hashknife noticed that Blondell watched the front windows fairly close, and wondered if he was looking for somebody.

Before they finished eating Terry McQueen, Molly Malone and Matt Sullivan came in to eat. From their conversation it developed that that was payday at the Double Diamond, and they were out to celebrate. As Hashknife and his party went outside, they met Harry Bond, Dick Lasher and Bun Parker, the other three punchers from the Double Diamond.

"Ain't nobody killed you yet, I see," remarked Harry Bond laughingly.

"Not yet," replied Hashknife. "How's everythin', boys?"

"Finer'n frawg hair," said Bun Parker. "Falconer's comin' in tonight."

"He allus comes in to pack us home," laughed Lasher, as they entered the restaurant.

Smoky had eaten earlier in the evening and he met them at the Sunset Saloon. Sleepy and Blue started a pool game, and the others sat down to watch the play. Blondell came back from the restaurant, watched the play for awhile, and sat down against the wall. At times he eyed Hashknife speculatively, his sombrero low over his sullen eyes; again he would watch the front of the building.

"Nervous," decided Hashknife.

The boys came back from the restaurant, and soon a sizable poker game was in progress, but Blondell made no move to get into it. A little later Falconer came in. He seldom drank, but tonight he asked Hashknife to join him at the bar. He nodded coldly to Blue Snow.

"You asked somebody about the Cross 84 brand, didn't you, Hartley?" he asked.

Hashknife nodded, wondering what this would lead to.

"Today I ran across a horse with that brand, out near my place."

"Well?" queried Hashknife.

"It was the first time I ever saw that brand, and I knew you inquired about it."

"Oh, yeah. When Wilson was shot he had a telegram written out. It hadn't been sent, I reckon. He mentioned the Cross 84, and I was curious to know where that brand was located. It didn't matter."

Falconer laughed.

"I thought I was bringin' you some news. The boys made another search this mornin', but they couldn't find any gun. It begins to look as though Blue Snow had nothin' to do with that shot in the dark."

"I knew he didn't."

Falconer sighed deeply over his drink and shook his head.

"I don't *sabe* women," he confessed. "I had a run-in with Jerry after you left."

"She's got plenty red hair," said Hashknife.

"Her mother had it, too. I wish Jerry would marry Ed Reed. He's been like a son to me. I could trust him with everything."

"She will marry Blue Snow," said Hashknife.

"Over my dead body!"

"Yeah? Well, it ain't no killin' matter."

"I can't see what there is about that damn' kid. Reed was worth a million like him."

"That might all be true—and when you married Jerry's mother, there was probably a lot of men worth a million of you."

Falconer shoved his empty glass across the bar, and studied himself in the mirror of the back bar for several moments.

"I never looked at it that way, Hartley. Mebbe there was. But damn it, all I want is for Jerry to get a good man, and I don't like Snow's reputation. He's a drifter. His father murdered a man I liked and stole a lot of money."

"That's a queer way to look at it, Falconer. There's nothin' in heredity—not that kind. If your father had been a horsethief, would you give yourself up to the sheriff? You let the girl pick her man. She's got to live with him."

"He's got nothin'."

"What did you have before you got married?"

"Things are different now," evasively.

"I'll bet you couldn't pay the preacher."

Falconer's eyes widened a little, as he stared at Hashknife.

"Who told you that?"

"A good guess, wasn't it?"

Falconer laughed shortly.

"I was afraid for a minute that you was a mind-reader. I was thinkin' the same thing."

They both smiled, and Hashknife ordered the drinks.

"I like you, Hartley," said Falconer slowly. "I don't believe we'd hitch very long, because you speak right out; but—mebbe I need it. I want you to come out tomorrow and look at the beef I've got for you."

"All right."

"It'll take all one long day to drive to San Miguel."

"Kinnear didn't say anythin' about bein' in a hurry; it's all right."

BLONDELL got up from his chair, stopped and looked at the poker game for a few moments, and sauntered past them, going to the door. Hashknife was standing with his back to the bar, leaning back on his elbows. He saw Blondell stop in the doorway, looking at the lights across the street. Then he stepped down the few inches to the sidewalk—stopped short.

From the right hand side of the doorway came the report of a revolver shot. Blondell did not move for several moments. He seemed to hunch his shoulders a little, took one slow backward step, then fell half into the saloon.

Hashknife was the first man to reach the doorway. He stepped over Blondell and ran to the corner. The alley was dark. Men were picking Blondell up, carrying him back into the saloon. Men were running from the restaurant, from the stores. A cowboy went running from the saloon, heading for the doctor.

They stretched Blondell out on the floor. Hashknife quickly cut away his coat and shirt. The bullet had struck him on the right side just below the arm pit, and apparently had ranged straight through.

"Bad?" queried Falconer nervously.

"I think he was killed instantly," replied Hashknife. "Probably went on through his heart. The doctor can easily tell."

The old doctor's examination was brief. He shook his head, closed his case and dusted off the knees of his trousers.

"The man is dead," he said crisply. "He never knew what hit him."

Hashknife sighed and looked down at the battered features of their mystery man, wondering if he would ever know what the mystery was. Some one got a blanket, and four of the cowboys carried the body into a back room, where they placed it on a table.

The cowboys took a drink and stood around thoughtfully. It had ruined their payday. The sheriff and Smoky came just before the body was taken out.

"What can I do?" Smoky asked helplessly. "No use runnin' around in the dark."

"Not a bit," replied Falconer. "You wouldn't know which way to go."

"Damn' queer thing," muttered Terry McQueen. "Who would kill Blondell?"

"Shoot a man in the back," growled Malone. "Gawd, he never had a chance!"

"Don't anybody know anythin' about Blondell?" asked Hashknife. "He must have some relations somewhere—somebody who would like to know."

"He never told anybody," said the bartender. "I've known him ever since he came here, but he never talked. Drunk or sober, he kept still. Allus wore a gun. Never smiled much."

"Did he ever go away for any length of time?"

"Kept a horse in the livery stable, but he didn't ride much."

"What brand was on that horse?"

McQueen and Malone looked quickly at Hashknife.

"I dunno the brand," said the bartender.

"It was a Double Diamond," said McQueen. "Reed sold it to him."

"I remember that," said Falconer. "It belonged to Reed. He told me he had sold it to Blondell. He also sold Blondell a saddle."

McQueen nodded, and the boys returned to the poker table, trying to force their interest back to cards.

Falconer went across the street to the biggest store, and Hashknife wandered up the street a way, where he sat down on the edge of the sidewalk. He wanted to think, to try to puzzle out why any one would try to kill him, and why some one had killed Blondell. Who was Blondell and what had he done, he wondered? Did Blondell know some one was looking for him? He had acted nervous.

Why did Malone and McQueen look at him so quickly when he asked what brand Blondell's horse wore? All the Double Diamond cowboys were in the saloon; so none of them could have fired the shot. It would be difficult to connect Blondell with rustling operations over around Gates Ajar.

Every one agreed that Blondell had had no trouble with anybody, with the exception of his fight with Reed. Reed was gone from the Valley. Anyway, their fight was nearly even. Both men had been knocked down. In fact, Reed probably hurt Blondell worse. It was not a matter to commit murder over; so Hashknife discarded any thought of that incident.

As he sat there in the dark he saw two men go diagonally across the unlighted street above him. They reached the sidewalk and went on to the front of Van Dorn's little law office. Hashknife heard them unlock the door and go in, closing the door behind them. The shade was nearly down, but he saw the sudden glow of light, as they lighted a lamp.

There had been nothing furtive about their movements; merely a couple of men going into a law office. But something urged Hashknife to go and see what it was all about.

"That's a funny hunch," he told himself, as he got to his feet. "I must be gettin' jumpy."

He pulled his hat tighter—there was a little wind—and went slowly down the sidewalk. For several moments he stood listening, but could hear no sound from within the office. As he stepped in closer, the lamp was extinguished, and a moment later a man came out so suddenly that he was almost against Hashknife before the cowboy could move.

There was a startled curse, and a revolver was fired so close to Hashknife's face that the powder burned him. Instinctively he ducked low and flung himself forward, clawing at the man with both hands. He collided with him and they crashed back against the building; but before Hashknife could get his balance, the man swung at his head with the gun; overswung a little, and his hand and gun butt came down squarely on Hashknife's head.

The blow was sufficient to knock the

puncher to his knees, and in a daze he heard the man running. Some one was yelling over near the saloon, probably unable to tell where the shot had been fired. Hashknife sat there long enough to get back his scattered senses, swore at himself for getting knocked down, and finally got back to his feet. He balanced himself against the door frame and lighted a match, before opening the door.

On the sidewalk were several papers and a letter in a legal size envelope, and Hashknife picked them up. Stepping into the office, he lighted the lamp.

Some one had seen him light the match, and several men came running over from the saloon. Hashknife unconsciously shoved the papers into his pocket and looked down at Van Dorn, the fat attorney, who had been struck over the head, and was just beginning to recover. The men crowded in. Van Dorn's small safe in the corner of the room was wide open, and several papers were scattered about the floor.

THE SHERIFF came striding in, and Hashknife turned to grin at him.

"What's goin' on here?" demanded the sheriff. "Who hit Van Dorn?"

Hashknife rubbed his sore head and tried to remember just what had happened. Van Dorn gaped vacantly at the crowd, a trickle of blood running down his nose. He rubbed it off with a pudgy forefinger and looked at it.

"Mebbe the fat feller knows," suggested Hashknife.

"Somebody socked you?" asked Sleepy anxiously.

"Sat me down real quick," grinned Hashknife. "Powder burned me a little, too, when his gun went off in my face."

"What happened to you, Van Dorn?" asked Falconer nervously.

Two of the cowboys helped Van Dorn to a chair, and one of them mopped his head with a handkerchief.

"He—he hit me on the head," said Van Dorn foolishly.

"Who hit you on the head?" asked the sheriff.

"A man."

"Who hit you, Hartley?"

"Same party," grinned Hashknife.

Van Dorn looked at the open safe, his brows knitted thoughtfully.

"That is funny," he muttered.

"Remember what happened?" asked Falconer.

"Why, yes, I remember now."

He rubbed his head for several moments.

"Some one knocked on the door of my house. I went to the door, and there was a masked man. He threatened me with his gun, warned me not to talk, and made me go with him. I—I didn't know what to do. He brought me down here and told me to open my safe. I tried to explain that there wasn't any money in the safe, but he made me open it. And then—I guess he hit me."

"What do you know, Hartley?" queried the sheriff.

"Well, I saw 'em go into the office," replied Hashknife. "I dunno why I came over here. It was just a hunch. I was tryin' to hear what was bein' said in there, when the light went out and a man stepped out so quickly he almost bumped into me. He fired his gun in my face, and when I grabbed him, he socked me over the head."

"What was in your safe, Van Dorn?" asked Falconer.

"Only private papers," painfully. "Not a cent of money."

"It looks as though he had taken all of 'em, except these," picking up a few and placing them on the desk.

Van Dorn was not attentive. His head was his chief concern, and he did not seem interested in any investigation.

"You better see a doctor," advised Falconer. "Want to go to his office, or have him come up to your place?"

"I think I'll go home; I'm sick."

"How's your head, Hashknife?" asked the sheriff.

"Oh, I didn't get hit so hard," grinned the tall cowboy.

Most of the crowd went back to the Sunset Saloon, where they crowded around the bar and asked one another foolish questions. A murder and a robbery gave them food for conversation. But Hashknife was not interested in their arguments. His hunch was working again, and that hunch told him to keep out of the light.

He went past the hotel entrance and stopped at the corner. From there he could hear the voices over in the Sunset Saloon. Several men were in the hotel office, talking things over. Hashknife knew there was a rear entrance to the upper floor of the hotel; so he went cautiously around to the rear, halting at the corner.

Some one was back there. He could hear him crossing the yard. It was too dark to distinguish objects very well, but he was sure he saw a shadowy figure going up the outside stairs. Of course, it might be some one connected with the hotel.

Moving cautiously, he reached the bottom of the stairs and climbed up to the open door. Peering down the dark hallway he could see a faint glow of light from the front stairway, and could hear the dull buzz of conversation from the office.

Slowly he went down the hall to his door, halting against the wall. He knew the door was partly open, because he could feel the draught. It was evident that the window was also open. It had been shut when he left, and the door had been locked. But the door would be a simple matter for any one with a pass key or a piece of bent wire. Still, the fact remained that the door was partly open and also the window.

"Queer," said Hashknife to himself. "If somebody wanted to bushwhack me in my room—why leave the door and window open?"

These thoughts flashed through his mind, as he flattened against the wall near the door, and the answer came in the smashing report of a revolver shot.

Wham! Wham! Wham! Three more shots, the flashes lighting the hall. A space of two or three seconds, followed by another shot—another. Six shots in the space of ten seconds.

Another shot, a choking grunt, and a man stumbled out of the room, backing erratically in the dark. Hashknife dived into him, like a halfback making a flying tackle, and they went crashing down along the wall. Quickly Hashknife caught his arms, but the man made no effort to free himself.

Men were running up the stairs, and one came crowding from the rear, carrying a lamp. Hashknife called for them to hurry. Sleepy, the sheriff and Blue Snow were there. They had been looking for Hashknife. He let go of his captive and got to his feet.

The man was of medium height, swarthy, black haired. He blinked at the light, his lips shut tightly. More men came down the hall, and among them was Falconer. They were all trying to question Hashknife, who knew little more than they did. He went into his room, which was acrid with burned powder, found a match and lighted the lamp.

LYING against the wall, his head almost against the window sill, was Ed Reed. He was still alive, but hit hard. Hashknife picked up his gun, as Falconer shoved forward, his jaw sagging.

"Ed!" he almost shouted. "Ed, what happened? My God, are you hurt bad?"

"Bring the other feller in here," ordered Hashknife, and they carried him in, placing him near Reed. The two wounded men stared at each other, blinking in the light.

"What's it all about, Hartley?" asked Falconer. "Can't you talk, man?"

Hashknife laughed harshly.

"They got their wires crossed, I reckon. Both of 'em layin' for me, and they got each other."

No one made any comment. Hashknife swung out the cylinder of Reed's gun and removed an empty shell. Glancing at it quickly, he turned to the sheriff.

"Go and get the gun Jim Snow used."

"I'll get it," said Smoky quickly. "You stay here, Singer."

"You're pretty damn' smart, Hartley," said Reed painfully.

"Not very. Why did you kill Jeff Blondell and rob Van Dorn's safe?"

"You don't know, eh?"

"Not yet."

Reed laughed hoarsely.

"You'll never know from me."

"You stole Bar S Bar cattle and altered the brand to Cross 84."

"Did we? Prove it, damn you!"

Hashknife smiled queerly and turned to the other man.

"You're the man who killed Wilson, eh?"

The man said nothing. Perhaps he was too sick to deny anything.

"Didn't Wilson play the game accordin' to your rules?"

"Tell him nothin'," groaned Reed. "He don't know a damn' thing."

"Let's see if I don't. One of you was delegated to kill me tonight. It wasn't settled jist where the killin' was to be done; so this friend of yours decided to pull it off here in my room, but didn't tell you, Reed. Evidently he wanted to keep under cover. You killed Blondell, and you recognized me when we tangled in front of Van Dorn's office. Mebbe you thought I recognized you. Anyway, you made a guess that your friend had missed out on his end of the deal; so you came huntin' me."

At that moment Smoky came in, bringing Jim Snow's six-shooter. Hashknife opened the gun and examined the empty cartridges, comparing them with the one from Reed's gun.

"That cinches you, Reed," he said. "Your gun is loaded with the same brand of cartridges that you used to kill Chub Needham and Jim Snow. For fear that somebody might hear those shots and wonder who fired all of 'em, you put two empty shells in Snow's gun, makin' three, with the one he shot at you.

"Blue Snow thought he heard five shots. I figure there was six, and that two were fired so close together that it sounded like one. Chub never fired a shot, but you shot his gun in the air twice. Your first shot killed Chub instantly. A moment later Jim Snow came in sight, headin' for San Miguel. You swapped shots together, and you hit him. Then you shot again real quick, and he went down.

"But you made a mistake when you put them other shells in Snow's gun. The firin' pin on his gun hits dead center, while the pin on your gun hits low on the cap. You stuffed that package of bonds inside Snow's shirt and kept the money for yourself."

"That's what Blondell said," mumbled the other man. "He said Reed done that job and never split with—"

"Shut your damn' mouth," groaned Reed. "You yaller dog!"

"What's the good of it? We're cinched. Get a doctor, will you?"

"Who tried to kill me the other night at the Double Diamond?" asked Hashknife.

"Reed," replied the other man. "Rotten shot. I told him—"

"Wait a minute. Who stole the Bar S Bar cattle?"

The man laughed shakily. He was getting weak from loss of blood.

"Hundred head at the old Ox-Bow ranch near Gates Ajar. Me and Reed and—Blondell . . . Find the rest if you can."

"What about Wilson?"

"He got 'em for half what they was worth."

"And you didn't sell the last time, eh? You killed him and took all his cash."

"Have it your own way."

"You dirty quitter!" grated Reed, but the other man did not hear him—he had fainted.

Falconer's face was white, his lips set in a grim line. He would have staked his life on Reed's honesty.

"Somebody better get the doctor," said Hashknife. "I don't think he'll be of much use to either of 'em, but we better

get him. Now, Reed, tell us why you cracked that safe?"

"I'll see you in hell, first, you dirty snooper!"

Hashknife had shoved his hands deeply into his pockets, and now his right hand came out, holding the few crumpled papers he had picked up in front of Van Dorn's office. He looked at them curiously. One was a large envelope, apparently containing a single sheet of paper, and on the outside was written in ink, JEFF BLONDELL—PRIVATE.

Some of the men moved in closer, wondering what was coming next. Reed saw the envelope and his face twisted curiously as Hashknife tore it open, taking out the single sheet, folded once. Swiftly he read it. Reed tried to move, groaned hollowly and sank back.

"Will you quit now?" asked Hashknife, but Reed refused to answer.

Hashknife turned to the crowd.

"Listen to this letter, folks:

"To be opened and read only in case I disappear or am killed in a mysterious way. This is my agreement with Van Dorn, who knows nothing about the contents of this letter.

"My name is Henry Blondell Jeffries. Two years ago I was released from the Montana State Penitentiary, where I served a full term of five years for train robbery. While in the penitentiary I met a convict named Reed Haskell, who was serving twenty years for robbery and manslaughter.

"Reed Haskell is Ed Reed, foreman of the Double Diamond outfit. He and another convict named Tony Blackburn slugged a guard and escaped. They both know of this letter, which I use as a safeguard. Either one of them would kill me like a snake, if they wasn't afraid this letter would be read.

"Reed Haskell, or Ed Reed, as he is known here, is paying well for what I know, and if you doubt my word, they can easily identify him at the pen.—HENRY BLONDELL JEFFRIES, OR JEFF BLONDELL.

"And there you are," finished Hashknife.

The crowd was silent. Reed was staring at the floor, eyes nearly shut.

"I suppose your friend is Tony Blackburn, eh?" queried Hashknife.

Reed nodded shortly, as the doctor came in, carrying his valise.

"One thing more," said Hashknife. "The night Wilson was killed, wasn't it Blondell who came over there, ridin' a Cross 84 horse?"

Reed nodded again.

"He wanted all the money, I suppose?"

"The dirty rat," whispered Reed. "He had me cinched."

The crowd moved out to give the doctor more room. Falconer took Blue Snow by the arm and they moved down to the hotel office with Hashknife.

"I'll make good on them stolen cattle, Blue," he said. "I reckon your father was right. I'm sorry as hell—and that's all I can say."

"That's enough," said Blue slowly. "I'd like to ride out and tell Jerry what happened."

"Fine. She'll understand. You see, she's got a lot more sense than her dad."

Blue turned to Hashknife and they shook hands silently. Falconer watched Blue go striding out through the door, his chin in the air for the first time since he came back to Sunset City.

"He'll do well," said Falconer softly. "Blue knows cows."

"Knows girls, too," said Hashknife seriously. "It's a danged lucky thing he came back to this country—lucky for both of you."

Falconer nodded slowly.

"Yea-a-ah, a mighty lucky thing for me and mine, Hartley. But the luckiest thing in the world that ever happened for all of us was when a long legged puncher came down over the Rattlesnake Cañon grades, lookin' for a shipment of cows."

"And tried to bust the trust."

"It's busted, Hartley."

Smoky came in from the street, still excited.

"Terry McQueen and Molly Malone pulled out south, just after all the shootin' took place," he panted. "The bartender saw 'em go."

"I wouldn't chase 'em," said Hashknife slowly. "They'll be dodgin' all their life, anyway."

Falconer put a hand on Hashknife's shoulder.

"Hartley, I need a foreman, and I need two more men. You're not a regular buyer. Hang your hats at the Double Diamond—you and Sleepy. One of these days I'll want to step out, and I want a good man to run the business."

Hashknife squinted thoughtfully over his cigaret.

"Well, I'll think it over, Falconer. Will you see that Kinnear gets a good break on them beeves? You know what I mean."

"I shore will. But—"

"Thank you kindly; and I'll let you know about the other."

Some of the men were coming down the stairs, talking, arguing. Hashknife stepped outside, where Sleepy was standing beside one of the porch posts, holding the reins of their two horses. Without a word they mounted and rode down the street, passing out of Sunset City in the darkness.

"I dang' near accepted a job," said Hashknife.

"No!"

"Yeah."

"I seen Falconer talkin' with you. This deal kinda knocks his horns off, don't it?"

"Complete."

"Which way, cowboy?"

"Lemme see. North is San Miguel, east is Gates Ajar. What's south?"

"A lot of tall hills."

"Good—we'll go south."

And they went down through the darkness of San Miguel Valley, chap knee rubbing chap knee, while the distant stars seemed to tumble down over the tops of the southern hills, which beckoned them on to see what was on the other side. What had just happened was all in a day's work—tomorrow was merely another day.

The LOST LEGION of the KALAHARI

By LAWRENCE G. GREEN

HIS FACE was the color of the veld —a hard brown, baked by the sun that can be so pitiless in the open spaces of Africa. His lounge suit was creased, as if it had been lying at the bottom of a tin trunk for a long time. He told me that he was on leave from the Legion of the Lost.

The French Foreign Legion is not the only band of adventurers condemned to the hardships of desert exile. My visitor was a trooper in the Bechuanaland police —a hard bitten body of sailors, soldiers, wanderers from all the fighting forces of the British Empire and most of the public schools of England.

The Bechuanaland police are responsible for law and order in the Kalahari Desert, that great stretch of almost waterless country into which you could drop England comfortably, yet in which you will find only a few score white people.

In the Kalahari, says my friend the trooper, live the loneliest folk in the world—farmers and traders who spend years there with never a glimpse of a new white face. Some of them live more than five hundred miles from Mafeking; and that is a journey of thirty days by ox wagon, and not to be lightly undertaken.

Thirst, drought, distance and heat—these are the enemies of man in the Kalahari. Lions and jackals are dangers too, but they are more readily faced than a desert trek in the dry season. From April to August, when the *pans* are full of water, any one can cross the Kalahari. In summer you need an airplane to make the journey with reasonable safety. Yet men snatch a living from this sandy wilderness.

It was the late Cecil Rhodes who first opened the Kalahari south of Lake Ngami for settlement. Many took their cattle hopefully to the Promised Land, but very few remained. News of the little lost colony which decided to see the game through seldom penetrates to Mafeking, the nearest outpost of civilization. The trooper who visited me is one of the few who know the life they are leading.

They have no churches, no shops, no schools, no doctors, not even a wireless set. Yet most of them seem happy. Some of the exiles have journeyed to Mafeking only to be married—a month in an ox wagon for the ceremony should be a strenuous test of affection.

Cattle on the way to the market are driven by native herdboys, and many die on the way. The *t'sama* melon, which contains a little moisture, is often their only nourishment.

The only people who thrive in the Kalahari are the bushmen. It is almost their last stronghold in Africa, and they are as shy of white people as the most timid buck. They sleep under the sky, seldom twice in the same place; and for clothes they wear the skins of animals or nothing at all. It is difficult to picture these wizened little creatures with their bows and poisoned arrows as human beings. In captivity they die after a few weeks, like wild things in a cage.

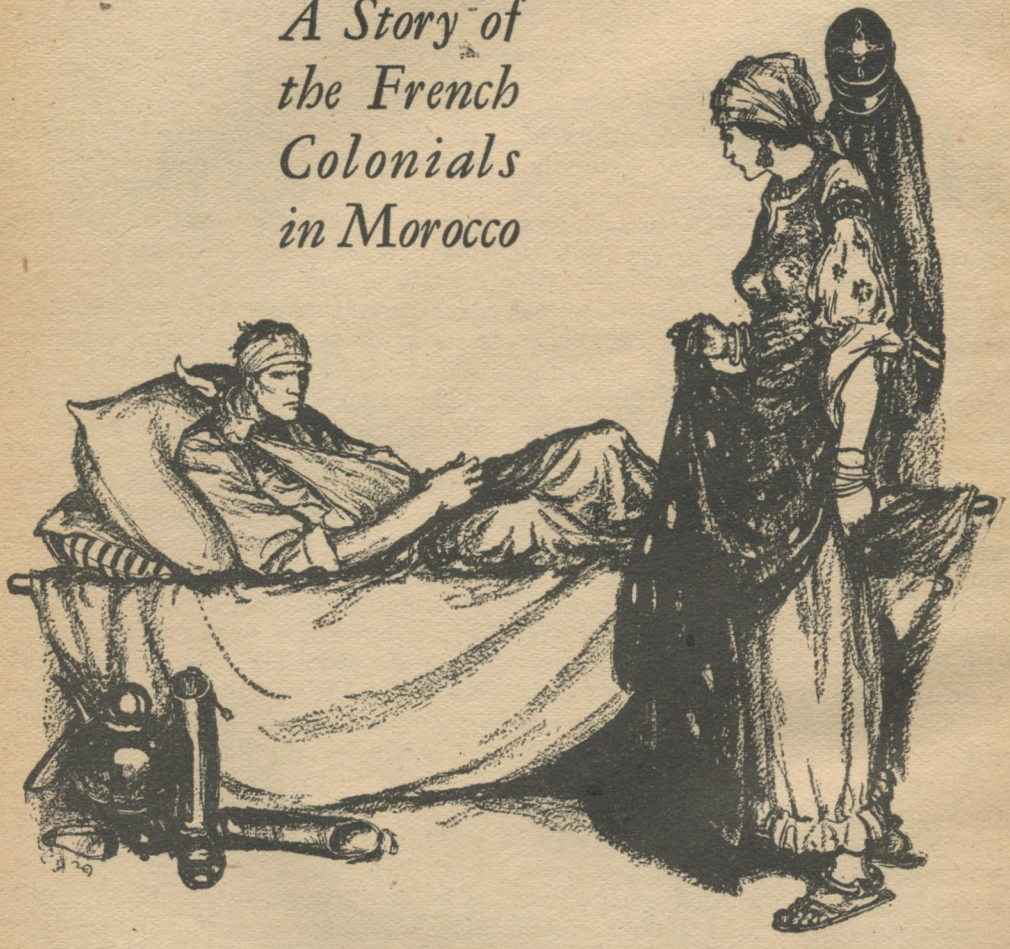
Kalahari traders deal in skins with the natives. The magnificent *karosses* that are sold in Johannesburg, the lion, leopard and silver jackal skins, come from these lonely traders, with long intervals between supplies.

Life in the Kalahari, swears the trooper, is an ordeal that many of the fittest do not survive.

INSTEAD

by GEORGES SURDEZ

A Story of the French Colonials in Morocco



"WE'VE got to find one," the broad shouldered private in the lead said tensely.

He shifted the straps crossing his back, and the leather creaked faintly under the weight of the filled cartridge pouches. Beneath the battered vizor of his uniform cap small blue eyes gleamed in a flat, unintelligent face, tanned and coarsened by exposure.

Four men followed him up the wooded slope, four men in the khaki of the French Colonial army. Two of them proceeded as did the man who had spoken, cautiously, bayoneted rifles grasped tightly, necks strained forward. The other two were a team of auto-riflemen. One held the weapon ready, muzzle high, while his mate lumbered at his side, laden with ammunition. They appeared worried. Anywhere in the undergrowth might lurk Shloh tribesmen, a truculent, restless breed of Moroccans, skilled in the wielding of blades and the handling of modern rifles.

It was growing late in the afternoon, a thin fog clung to the vegetation, and despite the strong sun, they felt cold.

"We've got to find one, because that's the last thing we can do for the lieutenant," the leader repeated. He had a name and number on official records, but was best known as Thirsty.

"Yes?" Renouel queried sarcastically. "Can't say I ever found them growing on trees, although I've been many places in my life. We're five miles from the column, and if the mountaineers spot us—"

"They retreated this morning; the fighters are miles away by now, over there, somewhere." Thirsty indicated the distant blue crests of the Middle Atlas, visible through a cleft in the lower hills. "Anyway, listen to that!"

Far to the southeast volleys crashed in the thick forest. The van of the French column had reestablished contact with the fleeing foe. The hammering, stuttering shots of machine guns strung out. Clear, metallic bugle notes echoed. By these sounds the five troopers could follow the progress of the engagement, knew when such and such a company of the Legion, of Colonials or Tirailleurs swung wide in a flanking movement.

"There may be stragglers," Renouel objected.

"They keep pretty well bunched up these days. But some of the women hang back to bury the dead. Every time I've gone on patrol after a scrap I've seen some. We've been out two hours now."

They halted for a rest. They were uneasy, for Renouel's words had sunk deeply. They were five, and they had an automatic rifle. Being trained soldiers, three of them veterans of the World War, they believed themselves superior to their enemies. But five men, no matter how well armed, were just five men in the woods. Tales of men butchered, memories of sentries discovered at dawn, slashed up by night prowlers, were recalled. They swore softly, with side glances toward Thirsty, stern, silent, waiting for them to regain enough nerve to follow him.

"Funniest undertaking I remember being on, this one." Renouel wiped the perspiration from his face with his neck cloth. "I mean looking for one this way. It's an idea that would come to nobody but Thirsty. And we stand a good chance of being court-martialed."

Thirsty rested the butt of his rifle on the ground, hands locked on the grip of the bayonet near the rifle muzzle, glanced at the four pityingly.

"I didn't force you to come. If you want to go back, go. I'm not scared."

"You talk like a fool," Renouel said wearily. He drank from his canteen, rose. "Come on."

THEIR section commander, a lieutenant, had been wounded that morning. A nice chap, Jean de Ploesmer, a Breton and a gentleman, twice cited at twenty-one. The beardless face of a lad perched on the shoulders of an athlete; a kid, whose voice rang shrill and excited as a girl's, yet who played a man's part under fire, who revealed keenness of wit and the craftiness of a veteran.

In a skirmish fought at sunrise, at the foot of the slope they were now climbing, he had been hit several times. The braid and epaulettes had marked him out for snipers. Two bullets in his skull, two in his bowels, one in his left arm. Five wounds in five minutes.

He had stood for fifteen minutes longer, directing the combat until reenforcements arrived. The blood had seeped through the cloth, made widening spots on his neat uniform, with the enameled badges on the left breast. A prideful, egotistical kid, De Ploesmer, with his two medals and his ironic smile. The girl's voice had grown weaker, weaker, until his knees had buckled, until his body had deserted his spirit. His detachment had been left behind, to assure communication and guard the wounded.

De Ploesmer had been laid on a narrow cot in a tent. The military doctor had visited him. The young officer demanded the truth, was told that he would probably be dead by the end of day. He had there-

fore written to his family, cursed at times because of his limp fingers, fumbling pen holder and cigaret. Pride, pride—a prideful kid.

Thirsty and his comrades had gathered near the tent, anxiously. The doctor told them the truth, bruskly, and invited them to leave. But they remained, hovering about uncertainly, puzzled that a time had come when with all the good will in the world they could not help.

A man can control himself under pain until his brain is attacked and overcome. De Ploesmer, delirious, cried and complained. The doctor went in and came out again shaking his head. The privates stood idle, while the endless talk of their lieutenant revealed to them an entirely new side of his personality: a man who loved living, who loved women, who played tennis.

Toward noon, De Ploesmer called for his mother, called steadily, with the wailing impatience of a five year old child in a dark room.

"*Maman—maman—maman—an—an—an . . .*"

Not an odd cry for a wounded man whose mind has left him, whose fear of ridicule, whose poor pride have been vanquished by delirium. Thirsty and his comrades had heard many other men, older and tougher than the officer, call for their mothers. But De Ploesmer's wails brought him back within his proper setting, matched his gentle eyes and his thin voice, were more fit to come from his curved lips than the curses and snarled orders spoken in action.

"*Maman—an—maman . . .*"

Regardless of the doctor's orders, Thirsty and Renouel had entered the tent. Thirsty sat on the folding stool at the head of the cot on which lay his chief's torn body. Taking Renouel's small hand, he placed it on that of De Ploesmer.

"Here's your mamma, Lieutenant. She's here."

He must do something to end that cry, to give the wandering soul of the young man an earthly anchor before the end. But De Ploesmer, delirious, was still the observant lad who spotted a loose button, a rusty buckle, a dry breechlock.

"That's not her," he said angrily. "That's not a lady at all." His hand groped upward, touched Renouel's chest. "Go away—go away—*Maman!*"

"Get out of here," the doctor ordered, arriving suddenly. He followed the privates outside, read their agony in their eyes and relented, explained.

"His whole soul is in his hands. That often happens when a man's near his finish. They feel long after they stop seeing."

"Would it do any good to have a woman, Major?"

"I don't know, Thirsty." The doctor mused awhile, then looked up. "Wouldn't save him. Might quiet him. But—there's no woman around. The column is out only for a couple of days, so even the sluts didn't come along. *Bon Dieu*, Thirsty, you're not crying?"

"It's the sun, Major. Can't you give him something to ease him?"

"More than I've given him would kill him." The doctor shrugged. "I'm not allowed to do that. Don't worry, he's no longer suffering physically. Just wants—well, listen to him." He laid his hand on Thirsty's shoulder with a quick surge of fraternal understanding. "Beat it, now. It won't do you any good to listen."

"Would a woman fool him, Major?" Thirsty persisted.

"Might," the doctor admitted unguardedly. "Beat it."

Then Thirsty had an idea which would have occurred to no one but him. He was a sentimentalist, a man of undivided, doglike affection. As a matter of fact, De Ploesmer had never shown him especial favor; the exacting friendship existed only on one side. But it was real.

He gathered his four comrades, men who had enlisted with him, who had shared his early struggles in the Colonial regiment. No one of them but was his superior in education, in intelligence, yet no one of them over whom he did not hold authority, due to superior emotional capacity, a queer, puzzling magnetism.

The strength of his muscles and tendons seemed to vibrate his will through his less vigorous mates.

They had done a mad thing, the five of them; gone forth into hostile territory, into the hills, to seek a woman.

THIRSTY went on through the woods, bayonet ready, eyes straining, with the call of De Ploesmer vibrating in his ears.

"*Maman*—"

The Shloh women were white, were like all women, like French women. That there was anything ludicrous in this quest for a mother, arms in hand, occurred to none of them. They marched on, five men; four irresolute, doubting, the other with a faith as strong as a steel plate.

Something stirred under the trees, two hundred yards away.

The troopers halted; Renouel mechanically lifted the muzzle of the automatic higher. They waited for many minutes, breathless. Even Thirsty appeared impressed by the need for caution. With such marksmen as the hillmen, to be discovered first meant the end. A crackling of carbines, a pattering onrush, knives. They would be reported missing, their bodies found mutilated long after when the column had concluded its work of pacification.

"*Allons*," Thirsty murmured at last.

Stronger sunlight ahead revealed a clearing. They crept noiselessly to the last fringe of shrubs. Thirsty parted the twigs.

Two women were working silently, taking down a small tent. There were rolls of straw mats on the ground, a bundle to which cooking pans had been tied. A few yards away was a patch of freshly turned earth—a grave. One of the women was very young, thirteen at most. The other was older, though Thirsty could not guess her exact age. It was difficult with mountain women whose bodies waste, whose faces wrinkle according to the labor they do, their station in life. If a wealthy man's woman, she was near forty; if a poor man's wife she was twenty-five.

Both were garbed in faded, sacklike clothing, which left arms and the greater length of the legs nude. Where exposed, the skin was tanned. Elsewhere, as they moved, it was very white, delicately veined with blue. White women both, Berbers of pure breed. The faces were alike in regular beauty of features—straight noses, black eyes, firm lips and rounded chins. Alike also in animal timidity, animal fierceness.

Thirsty smiled. There were no armed men about or the two women would not have shown such caution, would have chatted. He turned, peered at his friends over one shoulder, his grin widening when he read relaxation in their faces. They had arrived at the same conclusion, were breathing easier.

Thirsty rose and ran forward.

A startled cry came from the younger woman, who sprinted for the shelter of the trees and vanished. The older one hesitated, saw that her retreat was cut off. She produced a knife from somewhere in her loose garments, half crouched and waited.

"Never mind the little one," Thirsty called out.

He dropped his rifle, stepped forward; the woman withdrew before him, afraid but uncringing. Admiration for her courage stirred him; for the first time, his slow thinking brain informed him that she could not guess his good intentions, that he should have brought an interpreter. One could not think of everything, however.

"Easy there, good woman," he begged.

Renouel had handed his automatic rifle to his mate, and was circling to approach the woman from the rear. She turned slightly to keep her eyes upon him. Thirsty took advantage of the diversion and leaped forward. He dodged an upward thrust, delivered with strength and skill, which would have ripped his belly open. Renouel clasped the woman about the knees to tumble her in a heavy fall on the grass. Thirsty twisted her wrist until the fingers released the knife. The two soldiers were scratched and bitten in the brief struggle.

She became motionless, her eyes closed. Thirsty's laugh startled her. She looked at him, looked at Renouel who smiled as coaxingly as he could. Thirsty tossed the knife away. Once free, she rose and stared at them defiantly.

"Don't be scared, old girl," Thirsty advised her.

He pointed toward the foot of the slope, made reassuring gestures. Afraid she might bolt away and be lost, he tied her wrists, kept the end of the rope in his hand. She did not weep, not being of a weeping race. Thirsty ordered:

"*Allez, hop! Balek—balek!*"

"Been in the hills?" the bewildered sentry at the camp greeted the group.

"Sure—" Thirsty shrugged—"what of it? They don't eat men raw up there. Where's the major?"

"Near the fighting. A sergeant's in charge here."

"That doesn't bother me," Thirsty declared, snapping his fingers. "How's the lieutenant?"

"Quiet, now. Yelping so loud awhile back that I could hear him from here. Listen—there he goes again."

Thirsty led the way to the supply wagons, found a native teamster, a Kabylian, who could speak and understand the dialect, being also a Berber.

"Tell her all she's got to do is to come into the tent with us and let the lieutenant touch her. She's not to talk a damned word. Tell her, too—" Thirsty eyed his captive critically—"that she better wash up first. We'll let her go before night. But if she speaks a word in there, we'll crack her on the head with a gun butt. Tell her."

"She says she understands," the Kabylian assured, after conversing a few minutes.

Thirsty led the way to a brook, superintended her ablutions. It would be dark in the tent, he explained to the others, but one must be careful. A dark cloak was procured, draped on the woman's shoulders. Her eyes, steady and hard, had not changed expression.

THE WHITE bandages around De Ploesmer's head were conspicuous in the semi-obscurity of the tent. Thirsty allowed the flap to fall, showed the woman how to sit on the folding stool. She obeyed stiffly. He hesitated an instant longer, shrugged, then gestured for the woman to take the officer's hand. Again she obeyed. Thirsty thought that probably, sometime, somewhere, she had squatted near wounded Europeans, and that her treatment of them had not been so human.

The steady moaning of De Ploesmer ended abruptly. He stirred, groaned as he tried to move the hand of his wounded arm. Then he chuckled contentedly and Thirsty felt a flooding surge of happiness running through his own body. Eh! Wise ones might call him a fool.

"Who's there?" De Ploesmer asked in a whisper.

"Thirsty, Lieutenant. I've brought her."

"Yes, she's here," De Ploesmer said dreamily. "It was a long way to come."

His fingers crept up the woman's arm to her shoulder, slid along her neck, to her throat. Thirsty could see her profile outlined against the thin streak of light peeping through the closed flaps. Stern face, set lips, eyes wide open and hard. Then Renouel moved, the bulk of his body shut out the ray. The lieutenant's murmur rose like the hum of a satisfied child.

He brought the woman's hand against his cheek, held it there while he prattled. Everything was going well—De Ploesmer had not much longer to live. In a few minutes, an hour perhaps, the orderly had said, he would be gone. Thirsty was content, with a bizarre, all pervading elation. The fools who said it did not matter—who knew whether it did or not? Men sought happiness all their lives. What greater service could he have done his chief than to bring him happiness in his last minutes?

De Ploesmer had urged the woman to bend close to him, clasped her shoulders with his sound arm, her cheek against his own. Good thing, Thirsty thought, that he had made her wash!

"Why don't you talk to me?" the officer asked suddenly. But he soon forgot, and lived only for the touch of the woman's hands on his burning skin. "You were a long time coming upstairs, mother. I called you a long time. I'm sick to my stomach and my head aches. It's scarlet fever again, isn't it, mother?"

Thirsty, watching alertly, became aware of a new movement, that was not made by De Ploesmer. The woman's hand which was not held by the lieutenant was on the man's cheek, on his throat. Was she trying to choke him? One never knew with those savage fools! No, for the officer was still talking, talking, endlessly.

"Petting him," Thirsty thought. "*Bon Dieu*, she has more sense than I believed! She's tumbled to what we want her for, is doing her best to have us treat her good. The guy who said women were smart that way had good sense!"

The private admired good sense about all things. A new sympathy welled in him, a sort of liking for the creature. What if she would have acted like her sisters had she found this man wounded in the open? The poor fools did not know any better; it was the way they were brought up.

"*Indharen—tament* . . ."

Thirsty sought the source of this new voice, deep, stirring. The woman was speaking, despite his warning. He touched her shoulder warningly, but dared do no more, for De Ploesmer held her close and would suffer from the least effort to part them. She shook off his hand, talked on, gently.

"She's spoiling it," Thirsty whispered to Renouel.

He stood behind her, helpless. The murmur in that alien tongue continued; De Ploesmer would soon know he had been tricked. The private rolled thoughts of murder in his head.

Then the young man resumed speaking, seemed to answer the woman's whispers. The weird conversation went on. Instead of shattering his illusion, the woman's voice had helped it.

Thirsty had the brutal sensation that those two, the man of his own race who was dying and the alien woman he had captured, understood each other and left him aside, feeling, for the first time, the full extent of his ignorance and stupidity. They whispered a long time, French answering Shloh, Shloh answering French, whispered until the young man's voice dwindled away steadily, became a gloating, throaty gurgle of pleasure, dwindled, dwindled and died.

At last the arm fell; the woman straightened and rose. She stood beside the cot until Thirsty had drawn the blanket over the face, then went out. The privates followed her. All was ended.

Outside they saw that the slanting sun was about to drop below the horizon. The world seemed aflame, and the crests of the distant peaks glistened red.

"They understood each other, I tell you," Thirsty addressed Renouel, his heart heavy.

"What are you going to do with her?" The other pointed toward the woman.

"Wait here a minute," Thirsty suggested. He returned with the Kabylian interpreter. In his hand he held a beautiful knife, cased in a silver ornamented sheath, for which he had given the bulk of his meager savings. "Tell her I give her this to replace the one I stole and threw away. It's the best I could find. Tell her she can keep the cloak, too."

For the first time, Thirsty saw a change in the steady black eyes of the woman, like a faraway gleam of sunlight in a dark path. Her full, firm lips lifted over her even, white teeth. She spoke.

"She says he was young," the Kabylian translated.

That was all. Thirsty escorted the woman to the outposts, stood and watched her straight silhouette disappear up the slope, among the trees. Gone to join her people, people who understood her tongue.

HORRORS *of the* JUNGLE

An adventurer's own account of his amazing experiences along the uncharted reaches of the Amazon

By JOHN FRANKLIN

IN THE year 1924 I decided to go to South America. I read much about the mysterious Amazon jungle, and on a bright and sunny April morn I started for that country. After a short and uneventful voyage I landed in the port of Buena Ventura, on the west coast of Colombia. As I had no previous experience and did not know the language of the country, I had a great deal of difficulty with the custom officials. But after two days of waiting I received a permit to land, and took the first possible train for Cali, Colombia, Department of Cauca. There the industries in the main are agriculture, cattle raising and mining.

I stayed at the Hotel Majestic, which has all the comforts and conveniences of any hotel in a civilized country. I decided to stay there for two weeks to get myself outfitted for the trip into the interior, and also to learn what chance a white man would have in business. I hired a peon to look after my saddlehorse and packmules, of which I had three.

The day before I left Cali I met in the plaza a young Dutch sailor who had run away from his ship. He was very dirty and shabbily dressed. He told me what hard luck had been his fate; he was broke. Sympathizing, I gave him the price of a meal with the request to meet me at the hotel. He wanted to know where I was going and I told him I was going to hunt for *balata*—rubber. So he begged me take him along. I promised to do so on condition that he would do as he was told.

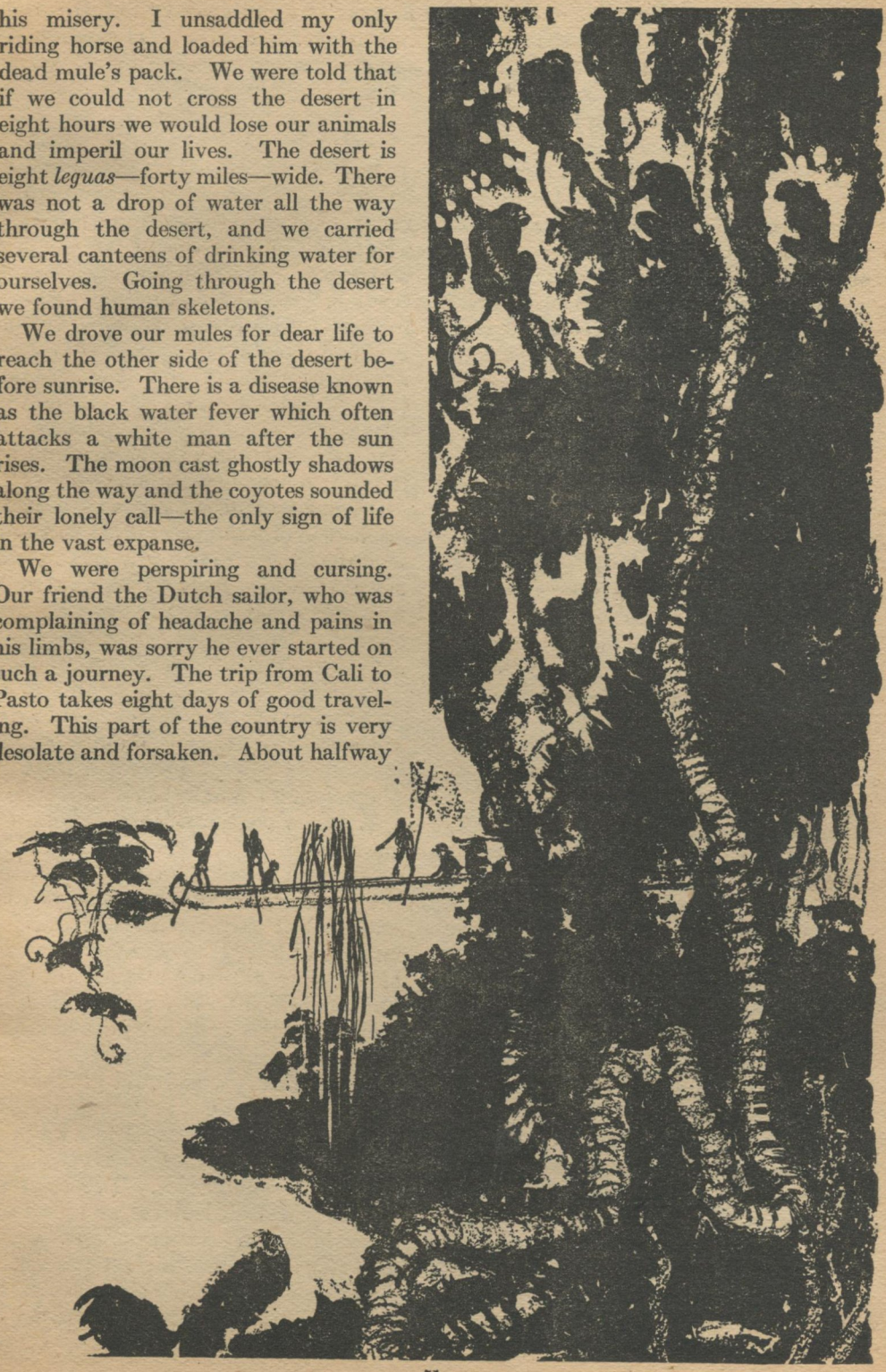
We left Cali, going by way of Popayán to Pasto, six hours by horse to the border of Ecuador.

We had to cross the terrible dead valley, which lies a hundred feet below sea level. It is so unbearably hot that a man can not travel during the day. That night we crossed the valley. I had hard luck. One of my mules slipped over a precipice and broke his leg. I had to shoot him to relieve

his misery. I unsaddled my only riding horse and loaded him with the dead mule's pack. We were told that if we could not cross the desert in eight hours we would lose our animals and imperil our lives. The desert is eight *leguas*—forty miles—wide. There was not a drop of water all the way through the desert, and we carried several canteens of drinking water for ourselves. Going through the desert we found human skeletons.

We drove our mules for dear life to reach the other side of the desert before sunrise. There is a disease known as the black water fever which often attacks a white man after the sun rises. The moon cast ghostly shadows along the way and the coyotes sounded their lonely call—the only sign of life in the vast expanse.

We were perspiring and cursing. Our friend the Dutch sailor, who was complaining of headache and pains in his limbs, was sorry he ever started on such a journey. The trip from Cali to Pasto takes eight days of good traveling. This part of the country is very desolate and forsaken. About halfway



we came to Catolick Convent and were invited to a meal. We had to tell the news of the outside world to the *madres*. We met two American prospectors who worked a claim somewhere in the mountain, but they were broke and in need of supplies. During the entire trip we were only able to procure *pan-de-mais*—corn cakes—and dried meat and *plátanos*, no other foods being available. At every *posada*—inn—we had difficulty in feeding our animals on account of lack of grass. It was necessary to feed them sugar cane. The *posadas* were thatched huts made from leaves of the sugar cane and *plátano* trees. As a rule such a station was inhabited by an Indian family who ran the place. Outside of the huts there were a few naked children, playing with dirty mongrels in the sun, and sleepy looking buzzards were sitting on top of the huts, waiting for their meal. On the way we met a dying American prospector who had been robbed of all his belongings by his peons; he was in the last stages of starvation. We supplied him with food and sent him back to the hospital at Cali with one of our packmules.

When we arrived on the outskirts of Pasto six Colombian policemen arrested my sailor partner and put him in jail. I asked the reason why and was told that he was wanted for theft. The next morning I went to see the judge and he said he had a telegram to send the sailor back to the seaport under heavy escort. That was the last I ever saw of him.

I sold my packmules for half the price I paid for them and engaged a teaming contractor to bring my equipment over the Andes into the valley of the Amazon jungle. We traveled fourteen thousand feet high over the top of the Andes. It is the most desolate spot on God's earth. We had to cover our faces with handkerchiefs on account of the high altitude. Every few feet on the way we found a grave of some poor peon who had died of exposure. I was cold and frozen stiff in the saddle. We found tracks of bears and gazelles and we saw eagles flying over our heads. The wind was howling like a million demons and a heavy fog was partly hiding the face of the mountain; you couldn't see three feet in front of you and we had to go by the sound of our horses and call to one another.

We had to cross a creek that came down from above through a narrow crevice. Often we had to cross waterfalls, with the result that we got soaked and wet. When we got to the other side of the mountain we traveled over a trail that was very narrow. We had to walk carefully and close to the wall, because one false step would land us a thousand feet below. My horse, being very nervous, had to be kept under control. Above and below there were bushes and small trees interwoven with vines which bothered the horse, and I had to ride in a bending position.

Often I had to cut my way with the machete in order to proceed. I and Señor Kawrera, the teaming contractor, were mounted, while the four peons were on foot. At times we would hear the peons cry out at the top of their voices—

"*Burro, macho, caracho, vaya.*"

We had sixteen packmules all told and each carried two hundred pounds of weight in the pack. Every few minutes they had to adjust a pack to prevent it from slipping over an animal's head.

We were continually excited until we got down into the valley. We could find no shelter anywhere or build a fire, since the ground was wet, so we had to travel until we got on the other side and down into the valley. It took us four more days of traveling until we reached the River Caqueta which flows for thirty-five hundred kilometers and then joins the River Amazon.

I paid Kawrera and said goodby. All of a sudden we saw the steaming jungle as far as the eye could see. There was nothing but countless trees of every description, species and color. The panorama was a sight I shall never be able to describe in words. It was glorious. On one side of us stood the highest peak of the Andes and on the other side the steaming jungle. We were standing over a gorge spanned by a hanging bridge. I had a

queer feeling for the unknown—the jungle where no pioneer had ever trod the ground, the unconquerable jungle and the call of the wild. It said to me, "Stop, stranger; don't go any farther or I will destroy you."

The moment we got near the jungle we heard thousands of different noises such as the blabber of the parrots, the thundering of cataracts, the whistling of *kamerans*, the howling of monkeys and the chirping of myriads of strange birds. The monkey is the loudest noise maker in the jungle.

On the edge of the jungle there was a small Indian village consisting of fifteen families and as many thatched huts built round a schoolhouse and a church. It was run by a Catholic priest. He was the supreme ruler of the region of Cacita. His name was Gaspar de Pinnel, a descendant of an old aristocratic family in Catalonia, Spain. He was the second highest priest in rank in the Republic of Colombia, a sub-prefect. He was assisted by six sisters. There would be one or two monks traveling among the Indian tribes to teach them religion. They are very brave apostles. They teach the little Indian children how to read and write in Spanish.

When we arrived in the village all the maidens and boys surrounded us as if we were an object of great wonder. At the invitation of the sub-prefect I went to his house and was questioned as to my business and where I came from and what nationality I was. After I had satisfied his curiosity he became cordial. He gave me a few good points on how to travel and how to avoid bad Indians. He said there was a tribe of savages who practised cannibalism not very far away from there, about six days distant. Sometimes the government sent small expeditions of soldiers to round them up and punish them, but they never had a chance to see any of them.

He told me that rubber hunters in company of two monks from his station left on a visit to a friendly tribe. They were lost in the bush and were surrounded by savages. They put up small fight, since the monks never carried any arms and the two hunters had single barrel shotguns. The monks raised their hands but were cut to pieces. One of the hunters managed to shoot at close quarters and killed an Indian. The other hunter was drilled by a poisoned arrow and fell dead. The first hunter fled like a madman to the river where he found his canoe. He was badly wounded but got back to the station to tell what had happened. A few months later a strong party under the command of a police officer tried to find the bodies of the slaughtered men. They found only a few bones lying here and there in the jungle. There were indications that the Indians had had a cannibal feast.

AFTER staying a week with the priest to get rested up from the hard ride over the mountains, I succeeded in locating a suitable dugout canoe, about eighty feet long and three feet wide. I placed my boxes and bags inside and told the Indians to build a thatched roof in the center of the canoe for protection against the sun and rain. Then we tied a log on each side of the canoe to prevent it from turning upside down. We were loaded to capacity. We had to leave a space open in front and at the stern for the *bogas* so they would have ample room to handle the long sticks when pushing off. After the Indians had wished me good luck and *bon voyage*, I started early in the morning with a halfbreed interpreter and two young Indian bucks, for the unknown. During the first day on the river we had to cross several miniature waterfalls. This was very troublesome. We had to unload the cargo and carry it over the trail to the other side of the river. Then they would pull the canoe with a rope.

The river in many places was shallow and we could not make any headway. We traveled about two leagues that day. The two Indians knew every inch of the river for many miles, since they often went on hunting trips far inland. We saw many beautifully feathered birds, and monkeys and small and large snakes basking in the

sun. We were traveling very close to the bank of the river. One big red monkey was sitting on a branch right above our heads. I took my .22 Winchester and shot him. With a squawk he fell into the water and sank like a rock.

A little later I shot a *panchil*. This is a big black bird that weighs about four pounds. The *panchil* seems to be related to the *cameran*, but they differ in size and form of the head. The male *cameran* carries a beautiful silky crown of feathers. I cured these crowns and later sold them in Pará. *Camerans* are very wild and difficult to shoot. At sundown they go to roost on a branch about a hundred feet above the ground. This is the best time to get near them as they can not see in the dark. The wings of this bird when flying make a whistling sound which can be heard for quite a distance.

About an hour before sundown we found a *playa*—a dry sandy island—in the center of the river. In the hot season when the river is low it is possible to see many small islands rising out of the water. They are free of mosquitoes and very clean. Those islands are the breeding ground of turtles which bury their eggs from one to two feet in the sand. A two hundred pound turtle will lay as many as three hundred eggs in a night. The shell of the egg is very soft and bursts if squeezed lightly. Very often the jaguar and panther raid those islands during the night. A panther will eat as many as five hundred eggs in one night. These egg pockets are difficult to find; the turtles leave no tracks in the sand. The Indians, however, know where to find them.

When we saw this island it looked good for a camping ground, so I told my three companions to go back to the mainland and cut some young saplings and leaves for a roof. They cut four sticks about six feet long with forks at their ends and three poles of ten feet with which we built the hut. We fitted the sticks into the forks and covered them up with wild banana leaves. These can be found all over the jungle. In half an hour they had the hut erected. While the Indians were engaged in this task I unloaded my cooking utensils and prepared a meal.

We had sufficient meat of the *panchil* for the four of us. We cleaned the bird and boiled it in water for two hours. Then we put some yucca roots in the pot and cooked that for another half hour and then had our stew ready. The meat tasted better to me than chicken. By six o'clock it was very dark, so I lighted my lanterns and hung them up inside the shack. We sat around until about eight o'clock and then prepared to turn in.

I lay on my back feeling quite contented, looking up at the stars. A fresh breeze was blowing from the mainland. I kept awake for a couple of hours, listening to the concert of the wild beasts.

When I was almost asleep something woke me up. I didn't know what it was, so I grabbed my pistol and jumped out of the hammock. The minute I landed on my feet some grunting creature brushed past my leg. I saw a dark shadow moving toward the water and fired six shots in succession. This woke up the whole camp. The intruder dived into the water with lightning speed. I questioned the Indians as to the beast. They said it was a *capybara*—a sort of water hog. They can stay under water for a long time. At night they come ashore and feed on grass and leaves. Some are yellow and others have gray fur. Their meat is not edible. They are about the size of a six months' old domestic hog.

THE NEXT morning we got up early and made a meal of *plátanos* and *cassava*. When I left Pasto a "*cautchero*" told me not to take any flour along because it would get moldy. So I took only canned goods such as pork and beans, rock salt, loaves, sugar, coffee, tea, hard biscuits, oatmeal, a good supply of eggs, yucca, *cassava* and *plátanos*. *Cassava* is made by the Indians out of a root and tastes like bread without yeast and salt. The liquid is extracted and the residue dried and pulverized to flour. This is placed on a hot flat stone and mixed with tapir grease. After roast-

ing it for a few minutes you have a cake that looks like a Jewish matzoh. This preparation has been known to the Indians for thousands of years.

They say that a dead Indian chief on a full moon night came to a young Indian princess when the tribe and herself were dying of hunger on account of scarcity of game and roots. The chief told them how to make *cassava* cake and so saved the Indian nation.

After the meal we broke camp, loaded the canoe and started off. The half-breed Indian began to complain about the mosquitoes. These are small flies which can penetrate the small mesh of a mosquito netting; they are a great nuisance. It's hardly possible to breathe or talk when they are about. They cover the whole face with their slimy bodies, enter the mouth, nose and ears. After they sting they leave a little black spot on your skin and it can not be washed or rubbed off and will stay there for a week. My face and hands were covered with these black spots. Also, they are great germ breeders of malarial fever.

After sundown another breed of mosquitoes relieve the others. These are called *zancudos* in Spanish and are far worse than their little brothers. When they sting they leave blood on the skin. After awhile you feel itchy and you start scratching until it swells to a boil. Often a mosquito bite of this kind will cause a tropical ulcer that never heals until the foot or hand rots away. The natives in the interior often suffer from this malady. Most of the Indians, though fairly healthy, are subject to malaria fever like the white man, but they don't know what ails them. When they are attacked by the fever they will not touch any food and they use some herbs of the jungle. If they get well, all is well, but if there is a high temperature they jump into the river to cool off. Consequently, they die of pneumonia; and I have known one whole tribe of men, women and children to die out.

The *zancudos* are the most persistent bloodsuckers I have ever known. As soon as one of them, a sort of advance guard, finds your camp, in a few minutes, as if he had given a signal, the whole horde comes along and you hear the maniacal buzzing of countless *zancudos* around the camp. The bigger you build the fire the worse they become. They are not afraid of smoke. I was sitting all night near the fire, fighting these mosquitoes. I couldn't stay in my hammock, as they stung through the blankets and entered the meshes of bar. The second and third nights I was also up; I couldn't sleep and was on the brink of insanity.

We hung up part of the bird that was left over from the supper ten feet from the ground and next morning there was nothing left but bones. Big black ants went up and down the string and ate the meat. The halfbreed interpreter and the Indians could not stand the pests either and were awake half the night. They wanted to go back home. I reminded them of the contract they had made to take me to another tribe of Indians where I could get substitutes. They had mosquito nets made of linsey cotton but mine was of the type made of material manufactured in civilized countries. They had two sticks tied to the top of the netting to keep the borders straight and lift the net three feet from the ground. There is room for two persons under one net but the air is very hot and foul.

The natives feared only the big tiger ants. Their sting is worse than that of the bee, and a big swelling forms at the tender spot. They advance like a legion of soldiers and destroy everything in their path. They eat clean to the bone and leave nothing. They have sentinels posted at every hole that leads to their underground chambers. They don't work like the common ants but fight among themselves and devour any insect that crosses them or intrudes.

There is a big spider about the size of a dollar that climbs up and down the tree in the daytime and sleeps at night. God help the man who touches him unknowingly, because his sting is even more poisonous than that of the coral snake. Then there is a reddish gray scorpion that

can not be found after stinging. The first sign of the trouble is a feeling as if an electric current is passing through the fingers, followed by three days of fever and severe sickness. This is the jungle where countless vermin crawl out of the ground and plague beast and humanity.

The spirit of the jungle! The eyes that can see in the darkest recesses of your soul. Then there is the groaning night bird. After it is dark it begins to groan and lament as if the woods were full of ghosts. It reminds one of a graveyard, what with the chorus of the big white owl joining in the concert. There is a nameless bird that walks most of the time on the ground and his "*u-hu-ooo-ho!*" keeps up to let everybody know that he is there. Fleet butterflies of flaming colors, with four eyes, brush one's cheeks. Then the creeping, treacherous bat that attacks human beings when they sleep. It gets up close to the body and sucks blood without the victim's knowing it. In severe cases men are known to have died before morning from such a sting.

All of a sudden the penetrating cry of the black panther, stalking his prey. You hear grunts and snapping of teeth when the male and female fight over their feast. Time after time one hears the whistling love call of the tapir for his mate. Then some disturbance in the undergrowth, and like magic they all disappear. Everything is still once again.

The third day out, we came across a swarm of otter with their dog-like heads jutting out of the water. They were playing like children. They are larger than the North American species and have short reddish brown fur. I raised my Winchester, aimed and fired, making three hits. But I only wounded them.

The Indians are gifted with the talent to imitate the calls of the various beasts of the jungle and for the first time I had occasion to hear them give the battle cry of the otters. By holding the palm of the hand to the mouth and working it to and fro while shouting "*wa-wa-wa*" they could give a surprisingly good imitation of the otters' call. The otters, on hearing it, turned round and swam straight for the canoe to attack. Raising their bodies halfway out of the water, they came very close up to the boat, snapping with their razor-like teeth.

The Indians bent over the gunwale, cutting and slashing into the bleeding mass. The scrimmage lasted about a minute and then the whole swarm turned helter-skelter in flight. Since we went with the current, which was about seven or eight miles strong, we could not maneuver as we liked. We managed to kill three otters. We skinned them, stretching the skins out on sticks. Ordinarily, one makes a small incision in the fur on either side and forces a sharp stick into the holes. Some arsenic lotion is rubbed on the inside of the skin to prevent worms from spoiling the fur, and then it is put out in the sun to dry.

I felt so happy over our catch that I issued a tot of *aguadiente*—rum extracted from sugar cane—to each Indian. They got drunk, since they were not accustomed to strong drink, and went to sleep in the bottom of the canoe.

In paddling the canoe one sits in the bow and another in the stern. The one in the stern paddles and steers at the same time. When moving against the current when the river is low and narrow you take a long aspen branch, about fifteen feet long, scrape the bark and polish it smooth, sharpen one end to spear point, and stand on the bow of the canoe and dip the pole till it touches the bottom. This is a very slow way of traveling, but there is no other way. It is necessary to have an extra pole with a fork instead of the sharp point. In the case of a strong current you go near the bank, hook the pole to the nearest branch above your head and push off. Sometimes it is very perilous to keep near the bank, since branches hanging over the water are often level with the gunwale and therefore may upset the boat. One has to keep bending all the time to avoid being caught by the branches. Often there are a lot of poisonous snakes hanging among the branches, to fall on your head or into the canoe. That is why rivermen

do not like to travel in the night except in cases of emergency. Many a fine man has lost his life that way.

All along the bank one sees small turtles, and the moment one gets near they all jump into the water.

THOSE river Indians are called *bogas* and are experts at handling canoes. Sometimes one can not fathom the strange nature of the Indians. They will leave you without any notice and are very superstitious and often run and hide in the jungle. For three days we made camps on the edge of the banks; we could not find any *playa*, and the river was flooded and on either side of the river the trees were under water for miles and miles inland. We traveled on the average from thirty-five to forty miles a day.

On the fourth morning I decided not to break camp. I wanted to look around for game, so I told the Indians to get busy and find a suitable spot to hunt. We turned off the main river and went to a *laguna*. The water changed color to black and I couldn't see the bottom. Those *lagunas* were full of big black snakes which measured forty to fifty feet in length and were as thick as a full sized man's body. They make a lot of noise —rattling—with their tails; it can be heard for miles away. They are not poisonous but are very dangerous. They will lie in ambush for hours at the edge of a lagoon near a trail.

In the evening the beasts come for their drink. The snake raises its head a few inches above the water. It resembles a dead log without a motion. When the beast gets close to the edge of the water one smack by the snake with its tail knocks the animal over. Then the snake coils its long body around the victim's body and crushes it to pulp. Then with one long gulp the snake devours its prey, and after its feast the snake dives back into the water Rarely will these snakes attack a man in a canoe; only in a few instances have they ever been killed by a human being.

As we traveled on the *laguna* we sighted big gray monkeys. The Indians said they were good to eat, so I told them to halt, and we made the canoe fast to a tree. I left the interpreter to watch the canoe. The two young bucks and I went ashore. In the beginning we had to cut our way through the jungle. It was very slippery and we made slow progress until we reached higher ground. Then we sighted monkeys immediately above us about one hundred and fifty feet away in the top of the trees. There were about twenty pairs. They jumped from branch to branch and tree to tree, in some instances a distance of fifty feet or more. They landed on the branches with a crash, keeping their tails around the branches to steady themselves.

I told the Indians to keep quiet and to pass over the rifle. I loaded it with .30-30 soft nose bullets. The monkeys were covered over with leaves—difficult marks to hit. They walked back and forth, but finally I got my mark on a monkey, pulled the trigger and fired. Down came the monkey, making somersaults as it hit the branches in the downward rush. When I examined the carcass I found the bullet had nearly severed the head from the shoulder. It was a male and weighed about forty pounds. The others above us turned and fled, jumping from tree to tree so fast that a man could not follow, and I had to let them go. We hung the monkey up eight feet from the ground by the end of a rope.

As we went deeper into the bush the underbrush gave way to a clean carpet of grass, making progress easy. The trees were getting sparse. We could see for quite a distance and pretty soon we could follow the tracks of pigs. It must have been about noontime, but in the jungle it was twilight. The sun could not penetrate the close web of the leaves. The wind began to blow from the north and we could smell hogs.

"*Puerco del monte*," cried one of the Indians, and began to run.

I followed in my heavy lace boots as fast as I could, but could not keep pace

with the Indians, I was so heavily dressed. Soon I began to perspire and fear that I might get lost in the woods. I lost sight of the young bucks and had left my compass with my effects in the canoe. I started to worry and fired a couple of shots in succession which brought the Indians back. I rebuked and cursed them and told them to go slower.

This was the first time I saw the Indian method of hunting. A man might walk about five paces in an upright position in order to keep the game in sight. On either side he would place a twig, leaving it on the ground, and at a turning a couple of twigs close together to show that one went in another direction. So, when trekking back for the canoe, we followed the markings and got safely to the river. This is the quickest way to keep close to game.

As we got nearer to the swamp where the hogs were hiding the odor began to get stronger. We had to avoid all unnecessary noise. The two Indians carried machetes. For awhile we followed a tapir trail to make it easier going. Often had I to run with my head bent down close to the ground to avoid becoming entangled in the vines. I fell several times on my face; my shirt was in tatters, hanging from my body, my face was scratched from the thorns till it was bleeding. My breath came in gulps—and no game in sight. Ahead of us I heard grunting, squealing and the snapping of the boars' tusks. There must have been about five hundred of them in the vicinity of the swamp. We crossed a trail trodden over with deep hoof marks of countless hogs.

Both the Indians were naked, except for a loin cloth. Their faces were painted red and white, and long parrot feathers were placed in their ears, the lower part of their noses pierced by wooden disks. Around their ankles they had rings made from the bark of a tree; around their necks they carried strings of red and blue glass beads. They told me to stay and wait, as they intended driving the wild hogs toward me. So they went in opposite directions and very soon I heard a racket. They beat the machetes against the trees and started to howl like a pack of wolves. The hogs became so scared they would not follow the leaders and broke from cover, running in all directions. It was so sudden that I had no time to get my rifle, which was resting a couple of paces away against the tree.

One big boar ran straight for me. Its eyes were red as fire; froth oozed from its nose. It was a full grown boar with narrow flanks and tusks measuring about four inches. For the moment I was dumbfounded, but eventually came to action. In a flash I drew my gun from the holster; the boar was almost on top of me before I fired from the hip, sending a bullet through the spine. With a grunt it fell on its side and died.

I fired a couple more shots at two hogs that tried to run me down. I killed one and the other tried to slip between my legs. I gave it a powerful kick in the ribs; it turned its head sidewise and slashed at my leg. I lost my balance, falling against a tree. The minute I slipped I fired a third shot at the hog which had tried to rip my leg but missed. It jumped over a fallen tree and went out of sight.

I looked in another direction and saw a bunch of hogs running away. I steadied myself and fired the three remaining shots and killed three hogs. I was so excited that I felt no danger.

The Indians, being just young boys, were very scared. When the hogs started to run they climbed a tree. The whole affair did not last any longer than a minute.

In five minutes the Indians made baskets out of leaves strong enough to hold the hogs, which weighed about a hundred pounds each. We turned around, found the trail and headed back toward the river. When we got back to the canoe I told them to fetch the other hogs we had shot, also the monkey I had hung up in the tree. While I looked after the canoe I also sent the interpreter along to help the others. He objected, saying he could not go, because he had "*paludismo.*" I

kicked him in the shins and told him not to come back without the hog.

After an hour or so I heard them coming back at top speed, all excited and talking to one another. The only thing I could make out was that a jaguar had taken advantage of our absence and made off with our dead monkeys. I took my gun and went ashore to the spot where I had killed the monkey, but there was nothing in sight. I saw the broken string hanging from the tree. We found tracks of a full grown jaguar and blood—the monkey's—on the ground. We followed the track for awhile until we lost it in the underbrush.

We returned to the canoe, put the dead hogs in the canoe and left the *laguna*. By the time we got back to camp it was dark. I was feeling very tired and I told the Indians to build a fire, cut the meat into chunks and smoke it. After that I turned in.

As we had sufficient meat now to last for quite some time I decided to spare my ammunition.

As a side line I was prospecting for gold.

I had fifty dynamite sticks with enough fuses and caps to do some fishing. I had brought an extra amount along with me in case of emergency. In that region there is a fish known by the natives as *baranca*. When full grown it weighs between two hundred and two hundred and fifty pounds. It is a fighting type of fish and can only be caught at night. The natives know well how to hook it. Sometimes the Indians spear them from a canoe, and have to work for two hours before finally landing one. The easiest way to kill the *baranca* is to use dynamite, although we can not regard the method as being very sportsmanlike. One cuts a stick into three pieces, attaches a cap and fuse to a cartridge and throws it into the water where the fish are thickest. The Indians dive into the water and fetch the dead fish, which are eventually cut into long strips, salted and rolled. In this way they can be preserved and kept for at least six months. Most of the salted fish is shipped to Manaos and Pará.

BY NOW the traveling was becoming monotonous. Every five miles or so we sighted a forest which, at a distance, looked like a wall. When we got up to the supposed barrier we found that the river simple made a turn. The River Cacita runs almost in a straight line as far as a big waterfall, then changes its direction slightly and eventually empties into the Amazon. The River Putamayo runs in a zigzag course, joined by thousands of small streams and lagoons before reaching the Amazon. To get to the Putamayo *via* the Amazon River, one takes a one hundred ton flat bottomed steamer from Iquitos, Peru. From the latter place to the mouth of the Putamayo River takes four days by steamer. First of all one crosses Brazilian territory on the left bank of the Putamayo, followed by ten days' travel by steamer before arriving at the Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company concessions.

In 1910 during the time of the wild rubber boom this company produced the biggest output of rubber in the world. Since that time, however, the production of raw rubber in this region has dwindled, due in the main to the competition of the vast output of rubber in the British territories in the Far East. In 1925 I spent a month at the headquarters of the Peruvian company. They shipped about a hundred tons of *balata* every three months to Iquitos. They have a big radio station there and are able to send messages to all parts of the world. The superintendent of the company has been stationed at this post since the time rubber was tapped on a small scale—1908. They once used the Putamayo Indians as slaves.

At one time a strong, unprincipled force of company employees raided the Indian villages, surrounded the inhabitants and drove the male members in batches to headquarters in slavery. The women were commandeered by halfbreed Peruvian employees to act as wives. Some time after that the day of reckoning arrived. A strong force of savages of a strange tribe broke through the wire

fences of the various stations and massacred all the Peruvians in camp, freed the prisoners and burned the houses.

We had an instance of that in 1915 at a place situated on the bank of the Jaguanee. The native Indians attacked the camp in the still of night and murdered hundreds of Peruvians. To retaliate, the Peruvian employees shot down the Indians at the slightest provocation if they did not do as they were told or did not bring enough rubber to headquarters. There were several Peruvians to every group of fifty Indians between the Rivers Cacita and Putamayo.

Often the native Peruvians would cross the border into Colombian territory, overpower the natives in that region and bring them back to work as slaves. That was one of the causes of the misunderstanding between the two countries in 1910 and very nearly resulted in the declaration of war between the two republics. There were several guerrilla fights, however, between the Colombian and Peruvian rubber hunters. The Peruvians claimed the right and left bank of the Putamayo River and the territory situated between the Cacita and the Putamayo, which in reality is Colombian soil. When the declaration of independence was signed a Colombian commissioner traveled in those regions and made an agreement with the native Indians, finally declaring that they were natives of Colombia.

The Indians tap the rubber tree to extract the "milk" which is taken to a certain place to be "cooked". The mass of rubber is treated thus until the liquid evaporates and forms into flat twenty-five pound cakes. A native is able to carry four or five of these rubber cakes—on his shoulder or in baskets made out of leaves—for days and days through swollen rivers and over slippery trails without any real food. Coca leaves will keep him on his feet. It is from these coca leaves that cocaine is extracted. They grow wild in the jungle. In time of famine every Indian—man, woman and child—carries a small brown bag around his neck containing coca leaves. They roll a couple of these coca leaves and chew them, and can be regarded as dope fiends.

The drug maintains them through hunger and hardships. After great suffering they arrive at headquarters and line up into queues at the company commissary. Here they are cheated out of months of hard labor. The remuneration is something like a bottle of cheap drink, a small amount of powder for their shotguns, a can of two to three year old sardines and a handful of candy for their children. It is atrocious, and yet the Peruvians call it civilization.

For days and days we traveled in a zigzag course. On all sides of us there were tall trees. All around us on the horizon, as we may say, was an ocean of trees. We sighted mahogany trees, cedar trees and numerous other hardwoods. All the turns in the river are given a name by the Indians. For instance, one corner they called "Mother Of Christ"; another, "The Monkey Without A Tail"; and so on.

We found a lot of delicious fruits known only to the Indians, and I must admit that they improved our appetite immensely. One fruit resembles a lemon in color, but the skin is like an eggshell. A slight pressure on the outside shell will split it and expose the fruit. Inside one finds two pits and around these a thin layer of a milky substance. This melts like candy when placed in the mouth and is sweeter than any fruit I have ever tasted. The Indians call it *shaki*. There are numerous other fruits that are quite edible and known only to the natives.

THE WITTOTO and Curequache tribes manufacture a beverage called by them *ci-cia*. The women bite a chunk of the fruit, mix it with their saliva and then spit it into a tub. To this they add sugar cane treated in the same way. They cover the tub with banana leaves and expose it to the sun. In fourteen days the beverage is ready to be drunk, and I can assure you that it has a powerful kick. With this drink they often celebrate special occasions, such as when a

boy takes a wife. It is very interesting to see them preparing themselves to receive the young bride and to view the ceremonies they go through before the bride is handed over to her husband.

The women of the village have a special thatched hut reserved for this purpose. They rub wood ashes into the bride's body. This is done continually for three days except when the maiden eats. To get the ashes off the body they use tapir grease. The object of this is to hound the evil spirits out of the body. In seven days she is ready for the ceremony.

When a baby is born the whole tribe gets together and participates in an orgy of drinking *ci-cia* all day and far into the night. Consequently they afterward lie on the ground in stupor for several days and nights.

Often a massacre grows out of a slight argument. The Indian tribes practise both monogamy and polygamy and some tribes have young women who are the property of the tribe in general. The Wittoto is one of these tribes. They build long community houses on high poles situated about six feet above the ground. Inside are hammocks lying side by side, with no partitions to separate the room into divisions. In this way as many as twenty-five or thirty families can sleep in the room, with no privacy of any kind.

These Wittotos inhabit the region between the Rivers Cacita and Putamayo. They number anywhere from ten to fifty thousand and are divided into sub-tribes, each with a chief. Some of these Wittotos are hired out by white men to seek rubber. Money has no value to them, except silver pieces out of which they make necklaces. These are the tribes who often live close to mission houses.

There is a town on the border of Colombia called Florencia which the Wittotos often visit to sell their wares and make exchanges. The Wittotos are very filthy in their habits and somewhat mean. Some of them practise a very primitive mode of agriculture by cultivating pineapples for which they charge exorbitant prices. Some of the tribespeople, both men and women, wear cotton shirts. They are sometimes visited by missionaries.

They are very easy to befriend. About fifteen years ago they were regarded as cannibals. There are still some Wittoto tribes which practise cannibalism. The women are very ugly looking and dirty, for they seldom wash themselves. The men are short, stolidly built, with Mongolian features, such as a flat nose, sleek eyes and high cheekbones. They are very clever at weaving hammocks and baskets. When a man goes hunting he invariably carries with him a blowgun and poisoned arrows. They use two kinds of arrows, short and long; the former are used for killing birds and for boys to play with, while the long arrows are about two feet long, with sharp needle-like tips, dipped in the poison extract of a secret plant growing in the jungle.

They also use a weaker poison made from the *cassava* plant. The root of the *cassava* is crushed to pulp, placed in a long leather or cotton bag which is hung in a tree. At definite intervals they squeeze the lower end of the bag to get the juice out. Later on the bag is taken down, and by this time the *cassava* pulp is free of poison and ready to be made into *cassava* bread.

The Wittotos are cowardly, treacherous and dishonest. Notwithstanding their evil habits they are great rivermen and experts in building and manipulating dugout canoes. The only tool they possess is a machete with which they do everything. It takes them two days to cut a big hardwood tree down. Then they pull the log to a nearby river and commence to build a canoe. They build a small fire on the top surface of the log and gradually burn it down to the required size and shape. After that they finish and trim the outside with their machetes.

AFTER a week of traveling we landed in a *mestizo*—half-breed Indian—village. The inhabitants are descendants of the original negro slaves who ran away from their Spanish tormentors. They

killed their masters, burned the plantations and fled into the jungle. They established a settlement on the bank of the River Cacita and kidnapped Indian wives. They speak Spanish and are very superstitious. Once or twice a year a Catholic priest pays them a visit.

In time of danger they transmit messages by tom-tom. If there is any meeting of importance to be held they beat the tom-tom, having specific beats to represent a code language.

About fifty families live in this *mestizo* village and their houses are built on poles about eight feet above the ground. They make their entry by means of a round pole, fixed at an angle of 45°, with notches cut on one side to serve as steps, while the other side is smooth. The last person entering the hut turns the pole around so that the smooth surface is facing outwardly in order to prevent intruders from entering. The huts are arranged in a circle, with a hard trodden yard in the center. In the middle of this yard there is a big wooden cross, alongside of which an altar is placed for outdoor prayer meetings.

These people are gifted with a sense of humor. One species of South American monkey closely resembles a *mestizo* child. These people claim a superior culture, a similarity to the monkey and regard the latter as a member of the family. It is their belief that several thousand years ago their ancestors and the gray monkey came from the same stock.

This village is located on the right bank of the Cacita River and from here a narrow trail leads through swamp land to another village inhabited by a tribe of Indians called Borros, a distance of about four leagues away. At present these two tribes are on friendly terms and trading of such material as rubber and hides is carried on between them.

The Borros are quite different from the Wittotos in that the Borros are taller and heavier built, the eyes typically Indian and they lead nomadic lives, moving from one location to another as conditions require. They are fighters at heart. Except for a loincloth worn by the men, both sexes go nude. The married woman paints her cheeks and forearms as a sign that she has a husband. The maidens bear beautiful and varied designs on their bodies. The young warriors adorn themselves with parrot and eagle feathers and many coils of glass beads around their necks.

Their chief occupations are fishing, hunting and fighting with other tribes. They are far more primitive than the Wittotos. They manufacture vases from clay and paint these over with beautiful designs. They are not so adept, however, at weaving hammocks and baskets as the Wittotos. They marry when very young. As a rule a boy fourteen years of age possesses a wife; and a middle aged Borro has two or three. Their weapons are practically the same as those of the Wittotos.

About ten years ago a very ferocious battle took place between the *mestizos* and negroes as allies against the Borro Indians. The *mestizo* tribe was the victor because it was better armed with such weapons as blowguns. They drove the Borros away from the river. At the present time, however, they live in peace.

The negros and the *mestizos* are closely related, as I have already mentioned. The former live in single families on the left bank of the Cacita River. They raise yucca plants, sugar cane, a little maize, plantains and a curious kind of potato. Two months in the year they migrate into the heart of the jungle in search of ball and *balata* rubber trees. They know how to tap the trees and extract the milk. They inhabit a region extending for about fifty kilometers on the left bank of the River Cacita. Usually they are hired by white people and will migrate as far as the Amazon River, Manaos and Pará. They are more dependable than the Indians, although not willing to travel at night.

The *mestizos* are simple minded but good natured. They are always obliging to strangers who require their services. If any attempts are made to abuse them, however, it is well that one pack up and clear out while the going is good. They

are very cautious in their dealings with strangers, although they will often accept a few silver pieces. At the time of my arrival in the village a big crowd had assembled to see me arrive. The headman of the tribe placed the best house in the village at my disposal. This is used by the priest during his stay for a few days every year. Otherwise it is unoccupied. I felt this to be intended as a great honor.

They were surprised that one man carried so much baggage about with him. During the first night in the village I occupied myself with opening the boxes that contained trading goods. These wares were laid on the ground for inspection. The news went round like wildfire that I was ready to do some trading. Very soon all the members of the village were loafing around and admiring the goods I had. In my collection a few Spanish shawls were included and I made a gift of one of these to the wife of the chief.

All the inhabitants of the surrounding region were there, with the exception of the negroes who lived across the river, which is about three-quarters of a mile in width at this point. The negroes would not visit the first night but promised to call on the following day to do some trading. I gave the children some candy and the men received cigars.

Gradually the crowd dwindled and went back to their huts, promising to give me a busy time on the following day. As it was my intention to stay but a few days I felt very anxious to begin bargaining as soon as possible. On the day following I traded my old canoe for a new one which was ten feet longer and made of a better quality of hardwood. It was indeed a work of art, considering that they had made it with only a machete. They never rush work, but take as much time as possible. With the old canoe I gave a muzzle loading gun and one pound of powder. For the guns I had paid twenty-eight dollars a dozen.

Two years before my arrival an epidemic had wiped out half the population of the village. The nearest doctor lives a month's traveling from Florencia, Colombia. This doctor is a graduate of the medical school in Bogota and his favorite prescription is purgatives. Since this region is in Colombian territory the government of that country provides the natives with so many pounds of Epsom salts and a few ounces of quinine, to combat malarial fever, which lasts them but a few months. I gave them sufficient medicine to last them some time.

After trading some beautiful hides of snakes, beavers, otters and spotted jaguars and about five hundred pounds of *balata*, I decided to inoculate the children against smallpox. Their parents were very grateful, although somewhat suspicious. When I returned to that same village in about ten months' time, on my way back to civilization, they told me that there was now not a single case of illness among them. I always carried a medicine chest along with me in addition to medical books on first aid treatment which helped me to take care of my own health in case of sickness.

EVERY month or so the natives have big gatherings of a mysterious nature. Some of the negroes living on the left bank of the river practise African voodoo worship. As a rule they build a big fire in the woods away from possible intruders. Then one hears the beating of tom-toms all through the night. A week before the meeting they go out into the forest in search of game for the big feast. They roast and cook meat day and night in preparation for the ceremony. Their favorite meats are monkey, alligator, iguana—a lizard about three feet long—turtle and three toed sloth.

When living with the *mestizos* I tried every means possible, such as making handsome presents to the women, to get to one of these mysterious and strange meetings, but without success. When these meetings, lasting two nights, were going on, my hut was closely guarded all night. The second night my curiosity got the better of me. I sneaked out unobserved and found the path clear. I had a

.45 Colt revolver strapped to my hip and went quietly toward the river to the place where my canoe was tied up.

Just as I was raising my foot over the gunwale somebody fired a shot behind me. I felt the burning powder on my face, turned round swiftly with my gun in hand, determined to punish this daring assassin. I found four shotguns trained on me. I raised my left hand as a sign of surrender. I asked them the reason why they had shot at me. They answered that I had been given a warning and that the other side of the river was taboo, forbidden.

My stay in the village was brief, and on the fourth morning I prepared myself for further travel. The *mestizos* had several hunting dogs and I procured one in exchange for a new machete which had cost me at the wholesale price of eight dollars and fifty cents per dozen. I was given a great farewell by the whole village; the people congregated on the bank of the river to see me off. They assured me that if I needed any *bogas* I could have the best man in the village. Smilingly, I replied, "*Muchos gracias, señores,*" realizing at the time that I might need their services at any time.

After I returned the salutations by shouting "*Gracias, familias, adios,*" they fired a salvo of shotguns in the air as a farewell. My halfbreed interpreter tried to desert me in the last minute, but I caught him by the neck and pulled him back into the canoe.

The two Indian boatmen took hold of the poles and pushed off into the current, setting our course for the River Caguan—a river never visited before by any white men or traders. According to the rivermen the distict was inhabited by a ferocious tribe of hunters. I was told that if a person landed in this region he had practically no chance of getting away with his head.

That, however, did not deter me, since I was so well armed that I could start a little war of my own. My rifles and ammunition consisted of two high power rifles, an automatic rifle with explosive bullets, a 94 model .30-30 carbine, a .22 Winchester rifle, one thousand rounds of high power ammunition, four kegs of powder containing six pounds each, fifty sticks of dynamite, four dozen muzzle loading shotguns for trading and about fifty pounds of buckshot. In addition, I was supplied with two hunting carbide lamps, one hundred pounds of glass beads and many other useful things which, to the Indians, appeared attractive.

After proceeding for about two hours the Indian boatmen began to talk in low tones, giggling occasionally, and once in awhile cast vicious looks at me. Gradually they reduced the speed and eventually stopped paddling altogether. The canoe was drifting toward shore, but the boatmen took no notice and sat in the bottom of the boat. I did not say anything until I realized that we were coming up to a heavy log appearing above the water which might upset our canoe. I told the Indians to set to work and they obeyed my command by paddling until we were clear of the log; after doing this much they rested their paddles again.

As we were drifting with the current and whirlpools I realized the necessity of doing something, so I got into action. I drew my gun and aimed at the Indian standing in the bow and told the interpreter to explain that if he did not get down to work immediately I would be compelled to shoot them.

He grinned, but his eyes showed hate. To prove that I meant what was said I pulled back the hammer of the gun. When they heard the click they became frightened and started to grunt and talk excitedly to each other. Since I did not speak the Curaquache language I could not follow their conversation. I fired a shot in the direction of the boatman standing in the bow in order to scare him; this had its desired effect.

Both of them, in unison, placed themselves on their knees and commenced to paddle as they had never done before. They had seen on the last wild hog hunt what could be accomplished with a pistol and they knew well that it was not a thing to play with. I did not care so much

about attaining a high speed as for having the boat under control, so I requested them to slow down a little and to take it easy. We were proceeding at a good rate by now, since we had the current in our favor, and when things had quieted down a bit I opened one of my boxes, took out a cup and a bottle of *aguadiente* and gave each Indian a drink.

In addition, I gave each one a handful of cheap cigars, which caused them to assume a better disposition. I asked the interpreter to explain the curious behavior of the boatmen. From his story I gathered that both the boatmen and himself were afraid of the head hunters and that they would not proceed up the River Caguan with me but would rather go home.

We had traveled for about four hours when a tropical thunderstorm threatened. Dark clouds hovered in the sky and it went dark almost immediately. Terrific lightning flashes illuminated the sky; blasting thunder rocked the jungle, followed by a heavy downpour of rain such as is experienced nowhere but in the tropics.

It seemed that the whole Oriente was in the grip of nature's elements. We all got drenched. I had my rubber poncho packed away in one of the boxes. We could not see any island; it was very dark and the rain continued.

We had some sort of roof in the center of the canoe, but it was not sufficient protection against that cloudburst. The leaves that formed this roof were absolutely dry long ago from the continual heat of the sun and it was high time that another one was built.

At the first suitable landing place we made our boat fast to a tree. Stepping ashore, I slipped but with the aid of one of the Indians managed to scramble to safety. A narrow path led to higher ground and there were signs of human habitation. We followed for awhile a trail that ran alongside the river until we came to an apparently much used path, with trees cut down on either side, until we found ourselves eventually at the hut of a rubber hunter.

THE HUT was empty. A couple of baskets containing farina hung from the roof, a few dirty pots and blankets lay here and there and a hammock was slung across the room. I requested the boatmen and interpreter to unload the cargo and carry it into the hut, which was about five hundred feet away from the landing place. I gave them assistance. The ground was very slippery, but after an hour's hard work we succeeded in transporting all the cargo, leaving the dugout canoe empty; as an additional precaution I pulled an extra rope through the ring and made it as secure as possible to the tree.

In the meantime one of the Indians had built a big fire on the hearth inside the hut, while another occupied his time in cleaning and preparing a monkey for cooking. I should have said that on the way down from the last village I had shot a monkey perched on a tree in order to supply my Indian staff with meat. To them a monkey was a first class feast.

We sat down to a meal composed of coffee, preserved pork and some beans. The time was now rather late. When we first sighted the hut we happened to see a jaguar or tiger running out and this was a certain indication that the hut was not inhabited by the rubber hunter. I decided to search for this intruder, whatever beast it was. So I fixed my hunting lamp on my head and put in enough carbide to last for four hours. As arms I carried my 12-gage shotgun loaded with heavy slugs. Ordinarily I filled and loaded my own cartridges, since I possessed a loading machine and twenty-five empty brass shells. After loading up I decided to apply some candle grease to make it waterproof.

I applied a light to my lamp and walked into the woods, following a wide, well beaten trail, and with the aid of the carbide lamp I could see for about a hundred feet ahead; in fact I could see the eyes of the smallest insects. I kept on walking till, suddenly, on one side of me I could hear a *tap-tap-tap*. I realized immediately that it was our customer of recent

acquaintance and turned round to play the light in the direction whence the sound came. I discovered myself face to face with a big spotted jaguar.

It did not move an inch, and the big diamond-like eyes were plain in the light. I raised the shotgun, aimed at a spot between the eyes, pulled the trigger. A crash, and down went the jaguar like a log. The beast had taken the full charge of buckshot in the head. I was glad to find that no damage had been done to the fur. Deciding that I had done enough hunting for the night, I left the corpse on the ground and trailed for the hut.

When I arrived at my place of rest there was not a single soul to be found. I whistled and called at the top of my voice but received no reply. I realized that something was wrong and ran at top speed toward the river, slipping and sliding and knocking my head on trees and branches as I ran. When I reached the landing spot I found my big canoe was gone with no sign of the interpreter or the Indian boatmen. The cowards had deserted me.

They had taken advantage of my absence to abscond with my hunting dog, saddlebags filled with tobacco, cigars, some provisions and a muzzle loading rifle, together with the canoe, my most valuable property.

I was alone in the woods.

What could I do now? I knew that I had to stay in this spot and wait until some hunter came along and picked me up.

I walked back to the hut, placed some more fuel on the fire, rolled in my blankets and went to sleep. The following morning I woke up with a chill and fever. My limbs and muscles were stiffened and wouldn't respond to movements and I knew I was in for a bad attack of rheumatism. With the greatest effort did I succeed in assuming a sitting position. Having had help all along on my trips I thought there would be a fire going and hot water ready for my coffee. I had trained the halfbreed interpreter and two Indians to understand my needs in the morning and, of course, finding nothing prepared, I thought it was a bad dream. Suddenly, I realized that it was not a dream—I was alone.

I felt as helpless as a baby. The day before, during my travel down the river, I had been exposed to the elements for half a day; this was the consequence. Every white man who is unfortunate enough to be caught in a downpour in the jungle should take extra precautions to keep his body dry. This was the penalty for my simple carelessness.

As I was sitting in an upright posture, reviewing the situation, I came to the conclusion that without outside assistance in such a predicament I would be alone and imprisoned for some time, and might perish. I turned around and crawled on my hands and knees to the medicine chest; every move was agony. With the utmost effort I succeeded in opening the box to get the medical book that would give some advice as to how I should treat myself.

After studying its contents for awhile I diagnosed my symptoms as rheumatic fever. I took a bottle of laudanum and from another case a bottle of Hennessey brandy. I made a concoction of one cup of brandy and fifteen drops of laudanum and swallowed it. In about half an hour I felt relieved, so much so that I was able to start a fire. On hands and knees I boiled some hot water and prepared tea with lemon, mixing the latter with a portion of rum. I rolled myself in my blankets, and in a short time I was slumbering peacefully.

A HEAVY crash in the trees near the hut woke me up. On looking round, I found a group of big gray monkeys jumping from tree to tree, migrating from inland to the river. I was in a sweat, although feeling much better. Convinced that the fever had left me, I tried to move about. But my joints were still stiffened.

During the day I took two more doses of brandy and laudanum, and busied myself with keeping the fire burning. Naturally, being stranded in the jungle with no means of getting out and having no help in time of sickness, the day seemed to drag.

About five o'clock in the afternoon I fell to sleep and what a lovely dream I had. I was on a four masted bark going round Cape Horn and the experiences I had had when a sailor on fine old sailing ships in the days of youth were lived once again. I came out of the slumber about four o'clock in the morning. It was damp and dreary. Rising slowly to my feet, I found the stiffness had abated.

The second day was much the same as the first with no means of relieving the monotony.

On the third morning I cooked myself a breakfast of oatmeal, bacon, beans and coffee. I was almost famished. After satisfying my appetite I searched for a suitable piece of wood to make a crutch and managed to limp as far as the river. I looked in all directions for signs of human beings, but to no avail.

I built a fire from which emanated a great deal of smoke which would serve ideally to draw any passerby's attention. The sun began to rise in all its glory and made me feel very cheerful, with the howling monkeys starting their usual morning concert. Keeping a sharp lookout for any strange canoes, I kept the fire well fueled close to the bank of the river.

The next five days were passed in the same manner, and by the seventh day I felt my old self again. Looking round the jungle, I discovered several rubber trees which had been tapped by the missing hunter. I did not dare venture too far away from the camp, considering the valuable cargo and equipment I had there.

On the eighth morning of my enforced stay something in me urged me to start out again on the trail. I listened to this urge and decided to venture out. So, arming myself with an automatic rifle and hitching a belt of cartridges round my hips, together with a handful of farina in my pockets, a little dried meat and a pocket compass, I set out on a two-hour hike. On the way I shot a jungle fowl, a type of bird that is unable to fly. It weighed about three pounds and its plumage was composed of gray and brown feathers.

Attaching my prey to my belt, I went forward until I arrived at an open clearing where a few trees had been cut down. In the middle of this clearing was a hut about the size of the one I had taken possession of near the river. Approaching this shack, I found the air contaminated with a powerful odor, and on getting to the doorway I found two bodies lying on the ground in an advanced stage of decomposition. One of the bodies was that of a white man, dressed in short cotton pants and a shirt of the same material. The feet were partially covered with leather sandals. The other body was that of a half breed woman, probably a member of the Wittoto tribe.

I came to the conclusion that they were rubber hunters and in all likelihood the owners of my hut close to the river, and no doubt had been murdered by Indians about three months previously. Their faces had been devoured by some animals, and the back of each body had been pierced by a poisoned arrow.

I dug a grave with my machete and placed the two terribly mutilated bodies in it together. After awhile I began to realize the cause of that urge within me to go into the jungle—probably nature's command for me to go and do my duty for the dead. After the burial I set back for the hut.

A few hundred yards away from my destination I heard voices. Immediately I stiffened, brought the rifle up to the shoulder, with my finger on the trigger. Whether enemy or friend lay in wait, I would not be caught napping. Stooping down, I went round the hut as stealthily as possible. When I came close to the shack and almost on top of the culprits, to my surprise, I found two familiar figures whom I recognized at once as members of the *mestizo* village I had left some days previously. It was a great relief, and I could not help but salute them gladly.

They turned round, ran up to me with broad smiles on their faces, so glad they were to find me alive. They shook my hand warmly and then asked me about my future projects. I told them I would

need at least four *bogas* and a new canoe, due to the old boat's having been stolen. I described to them how my other boatmen and interpreter had deceived me and left me stranded in the jungle. On hearing this my newcomers began to curse, calling them everything under the sun and demanding reprisal.

When I suggested undertaking a punitive expedition after the absconders they shook their heads, saying they were lost; even the priest of the mission would not be able to locate them as they would hide themselves in the jungle for a year or so and would not even return to their wives.

We sat down to discuss matters. After some talking one of the *mestizos* decided to go back to his village to put the matter before the head man. They promised to help me get back to the mission, but I assured them that I would never do that. I promised them valuable gifts if they would secure a new canoe and four *bogas* for me to go to a point where I could get Indian *bogas* to relieve them.

Since I was so well armed, I convinced them that there was nothing to be afraid of if they accompanied me as far as the River Caguan. In the tropical jungle the *mestizos* or negroes think more of their wives, homes and children than all the gold of the world put together. A man who is not married is detested and ignored. Some time before this an Indian belonging to the Curaquache tribe asked me if I had a wife and when I replied in the negative, he proudly led me to his wife, barely more than a child. She could not have been more than twelve years old. On her shoulder she carried a basket, with a baby in it, with a strap made of bark placed over her forehead to suspend it. The head was slightly bent to prevent the strap from slipping over her face.

In addition to attending to their domestic duties, the wives accompany their husbands on long hunting trips; not in any case, however, will they desert their babies. Any animals that are killed during these hunting trips are carried by them. These women never complain but do their duty without whining. If a husband, once in awhile, offers to carry the burden, it is usually taken as an insult. The favorite pastime of the husbands is to while away their time in their hammocks, chattering like parrots. The women perform all the menial work in the yucca patches and in the house.

In eating they sit on their haunches around the fire, the men always taking care that they get the most tender meat out of the pot. What is left is given to the wives, children and dogs. His primary consideration is to keep a good stock of poisoned arrows and his blowgun in trim, and also to acquire the technique of a good shot.

I have met boys ten years old who could puncture a card right in the center. I spent a whole afternoon with them once, watching them go through their training. To test their ability I fastened a card with the ace of spades on it, to the top of a twenty-five foot pole and requested the warriors to stand fifty yards away and aim at the mark. Every time a boy would make a direct hit, he was presented with a cigar as prize. Ultimately the battle between the older men and the boys became very keen, and in one hour my stock of cigars was depleted.

After making an agreement that one of the *mestizos* should remain with me in the hut and the other two go back to their village to get assistance, with a promise to return in two days if possible, my prospects became very bright. Traveling against the current takes twice as long as with the current, but the canoe these men had brought along was of a racing type, a light boat; and with such experienced boatmen it would not take them very long to return with the necessary help.

In manipulating the canoe one of the *bogas* stands in the stern in a perfectly erect position. He advances a few steps toward the bow, swings the pole over his head, dips the pointed end of the pole alongside the canoe till it touches the bottom. He then bends the body forward and with a strong push the canoe shoots forward like an arrow.

I HAD to cook the evening meal. The fare consisted of the usual items, such as bacon, beans, coffee and a handful of farina. I invited the other men to partake of the food. After satisfying our hunger, and placing more fuel on the fire to keep wild beasts at a distance, we turned in and dozed off to sleep. Waking up early the following morning, while still dark, I saw one of the *bogas* getting ready to depart. He took his blankets, mosquito bar, and a few plantains, and with a salute to his comrades away he went on his journey. With that I turned and fell into a slumber again.

On waking up the second time it was broad daylight, and I decided to wash and dress myself while one of the *mestizo* aids was busy attending the fire. Settling down to a long wait for help from the nearby village, I decided to attend to my equipment; so I took the rifles apart, cleaned and oiled them, as well as repaired my torn breeches. Among other things I had a dozen watches. Taking one of them, I showed it to my Indian friend, who stood aghast when he heard it ticking as I placed it to his ear. This was the first time he had seen a watch. When he heard the *tick-tick* he jumped to one side, his eyes bulged and he retreated step by step. He was absolutely scared of it. I motioned with my hand and laughed, and finally convinced him that it was not a thing to be tabooed but something to keep time.

The sun was now over our heads and in explaining to the Indian I told him the watch should register twelve o'clock. Whether in the daytime or nighttime, it would be possible to tell the time from the watch. Removing the cover, I tried to explain the intricacies of the mechanism, how it worked and that it had been manufactured by human hands. After he was convinced that the timepiece was not dangerous the *mestizo* held out his hand and wanted to keep it.

On condition that they would accompany me as far as the River Caguan I would present each *boga* with a watch and a machete. The one half promised to go along but would not vouch for the other men. To change the subject he began to talk about hunting, and informed me that he knew of a salty marsh where we could hunt tapir. Not having seen one of these animals in all my travels, I became greatly interested and wanted to set out immediately. He gave me a setback, however, by saying that the tapirs did not visit the marsh until nighttime, and so we had to postpone the trip until late in the day.

My chief desire was to have a good supply of meat in stock. Before setting out, we extinguished the fire and the goods we possessed for trading purposes were covered over with tarpaulin and leaves. Among the paraphernalia we took along were a 12-gage shotgun, a hunting lamp filled with carbide, a blanket and some matches. We followed the course of the river for some distance and then turned in a westerly direction.

From the time we left the hut progress was difficult, for we had to circle lagoons, cut our way through undergrowth and cross many small creeks. Very often our way was barred by tree stumps; and great discomfort was caused by mosquitoes.

Having high laced boots, I could not walk briskly and often had to seek the aid of a pole to cross the creeks. I found the water inhabited by numerous small fish, and at one spot I saw some electric eels. I stepped to the edge of the water and one eel approached slowly. Not wanting to be stung, I stepped back. This type of eel resembles a snake in many respects. Desirous of securing one of these eels as a specimen, I shot the best I could lay my eyes on; it measured about four feet in length, with a flat head.

We started again on our trail in search of tapirs. Since these paths for the most part are covered with undergrowth I had to walk with my head and shoulders bent forward. It was twilight and somewhat difficult to see very far ahead. My face was bleeding from scratches caused by thorns and hanging vines. The *mestizo*, however, appeared to have natural ability to avoid these obstacles and tear

his way through. It is a gift of all inhabitants of the jungle. Several times my jungle friend stopped to amuse himself by watching me fight the network of barriers, stumbling over slippery roots; more than once I came very near strangling myself in the twining vines. Perspiration ran down my face, my hair and clothes were covered with slimy worms and insects; and in trying to brush them off, my hand would be covered with blood.

Indeed, I felt so miserable I thought of giving up the idea of hunting. On the other hand, I did not want to give the native the impression that I was exhausted. After two hours of slipping and stumbling we came to a wide, open trail covered over with a carpet of grass, with tall, stately trees, mostly hardwood of varied species, growing on either side. Most of these trees were exceedingly tall and hard, especially one that made me think of Eiffel Tower. The wood was as hard as steel and with an ax it was impossible to leave even a scar.

After an hour's travel from this spot we arrived at the "*sallow.*" The area around this marsh land was traversed by numerous trails. All the wild beasts of the jungle visit the spot every two or three months and approach it only during the night. One finds practically all the quadruped animals together, grazing peacefully, and such a spot can be regarded a the meat storage of the jungle people.

There are many of these salty marshes all over the Oriente. At one time, watching from a lookout, I saw hundreds of tapirs feeding on grass and leaves.

In calling on its mate, the tapir makes a whistling sound. It is said by the Peruvians that after eating tapir meat for five years blue spots will break out all over the body. The average animal is three and a half feet high and the skull is very hard; a .30-30 bullet will not penetrate it.

At the marsh I sank up to the knees in slimy water. There were evidences of oil everywhere, and by dropping a lighted match we could have started a fire immediately. We cut some trees, branches and leaves to build a watch tower near a trail close to the edge of the marsh. I lighted my hunting lamp, but took care not to expose the light, and then settled myself down to wait for any game to put in an appearance, keeping as quiet as possible.

It was very dark and rain started to fall. Now and again big bats flew past my face, their wings flapping my cheeks. My watch registered eleven o'clock, but we decided to carry on the vigil. After awhile we heard something on the trail above us. The native gripped my hand and whispered in my ear—

"Tapir."

The tapir, by the way, is an exceedingly wary animal, and will move about with very little noise. I heard the beast brushing against leaves as it made its way toward the "*sallow.*" When about ten feet away the animal stopped, opposite our trail; it must have scented us. Immediately I exposed the light and turned it round in the direction of the animal. It appeared hypnotized, standing in the same spot as if it were helpless. I could see everything distinctly and, bringing my loaded shotgun to my shoulder, I pulled the trigger. The animal made a slight movement, proceeded a few steps, then rolled over on its side, dead.

It was a full grown tapir, with a freakish front hoof composed of five toes. Ordinarily one finds only four toes. After having such luck, we built a platform three feet from the ground and made a fire under it. The tapir was cut into pieces, laid on the stage and allowed to roast. Since this first experience, I have shot several tapirs, and regard myself as quite an expert.

The following morning my *mestizo* aid made a couple of baskets with straps of wild banana leaves. Loading only the choicest parts of the tapir into these baskets, we started back for camp. It took us five hours without any undue exertion. We felt very tired, with no desire to eat. I threw myself on the ground and fell asleep.

In the morning I went down to the river and, gazing in a particular direction, saw three specks in the distance. As they

came closer I found they were three canoes, each manned by two *bogas*. In the largest canoe there were two women. As they approached the landing place I hailed them. They recognized my voice and came alongside. After fastening their boats to a pole on the bank, they came ashore and shook my hand.

From their conversation I gathered that the head man was suffering from malarial fever and had sent another man as his representative. He had agreed to sell me the biggest canoe he possessed; in reality it was the largest boat of its kind I had seen since leaving the mission.

The representative was a tall man, about six feet two inches, and very well built. On his leg he had an ulcer that needed attention. My first duty was to give the necessary treatment. Then they all sat down, with their legs crossed, to discuss plans. While the women were preparing the meat of the tapir for a meal, the men, including myself, argued over various things.

Eventually they all agreed to take me back to the mission, but I insisted they should accompany me on an exploration of the River Caguan, and perhaps the River Orinoco in Venezuela.

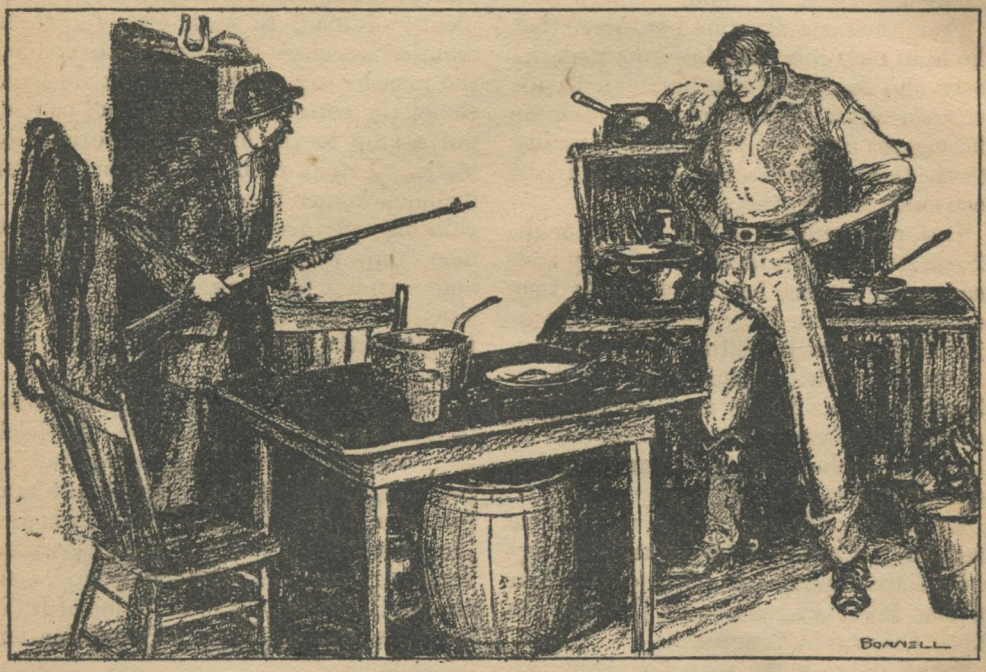
I had been on the road for about two and a half years, traveling, exploring, hunting and prospecting; but in reality my chief object and interest was to do some trading with the Indians.

After making some very tempting offers—a muzzle loading rifle, one pound of powder, a new machete, twenty-five bars of black and white cotton cloth and plenty of food, to each *boga* for three months' service—the women overruled the men by saying that they would have to get the cotton cloth. That, of course, put a stop to the offer that I originally made. I told them that I had never included women in my party. In order to gain my permission to accompany the men, they promised to do the cooking and washing for their food. They persisted in their demands, so that I had to grant the request, much against my wishes.

The object of this final trip was to make headway for the River Caguan and back to civilization by way of Venezuela, for the purpose of securing equipment and provisions for further explorations in the jungles of that part of the world, where very few white men have ever trod, and especially to study a certain tribe of Indians about which little or no information is available.

FORGETS EASY

By R. E. HAMILTON



Ghost Fingers and Bad Memory enact a Drama of the West

ADOGIE broke away from sixty cows in the middle of the road and romped back into the Wickham yard, tail aloft. Ike Wickham emptied his mouth of an impediment to his speech, in the shape of several mangled inches of chewing tobacco, and swore.

"The gate!" he roared. "Forgets Easy, you poor cow nudger, you left the gate open again. What the hell?"

"Yes, suh," said Forgets Easy gently. He had been intimately conversing with two point men but he ambled into the yard, retrieved the heifer and closed the gate. "I'd remembered it in another minute. Yes, suh." He smiled ingratiatingly, the slow smile of Tennessee. "Ain't no man can forget so many things as I can. But I always remember them before long and perform 'em with all the more distinction in the end."

The point men laughed.

"Sure," said Wickham with heavy sarcasm. "Sure. Nothing to worry about. Our land jest lays along a little old railroad track. If we leave a gate open we can go back couple hours later and close it. Half our stock may be veal cutlets a-laying on the ties by then, but that don't matter."

With withering contempt he turned his back upon his men and resumed conversation with the foreman of the Boxed Horseshoe.

The sixty cows had been cut out of Wickham's main herd and were milling in the road to Caliente. They had at that moment changed owners and become Boxed Horseshoe stock, but because the Boxed Horseshoe was short handed, Ike Wickham had obliged by lending two boys from his own outfit to point them into their new range. As for himself, he had arranged to ride up by train, call on the owner of the Boxed Horseshoe and spend the night celebrating the deal over several dark bottles. But now he hesitated.

He held a canvas sack between his hands. It was very heavy, and where it did not clink pleasantly it crackled with an even more interesting sound. Inside the sack were the entire proceeds of the sale.

"I never see so many silver dollars before," said Ike. "It looks like cleaning day at the mint. What you want to bring it to me this way for? Didn't the Boxed Horseshoe never hear of a little piece of white paper known as a check?"

"No one never criticized me before for bringing spot cash," said the foreman, aggrieved. "Anyways, the Boxed Horseshoe has quarreled with all the banks in the State and now they banks in their own flour barrel. But I don't see no cause to complain. You got a safe. What else is a safe for?"

"Yes," said Ike Wickham dubiously, "I got a safe. But the ranch is sure goin' to be deserted, what with me on the train and Blaine and High Heel both ridin' into Caliente."

He surveyed his ranch with a worried frown. His land followed the railroad bottoms—a long narrow stretch of grass fed by underground springs—with the desert threatening to encroach on either side. Cottonwoods sprinkled it, the railroad bordered it on the north. Up this railroad track, three hundred yards, stood a water tank where trains took on water, and where bums, riding the bumpers, occasionally swung off to beg for jobs or handouts from the Wickham outfit. The ranch buildings sprawled in the dusty sunshine. Three men were going to be left behind, in charge. Ike Wickham looked them over. Of these three—

First, there was the bum, now engaged in whitewashing the chicken coop. He called himself Mounce. He had dropped off No. 4 one hot morning two weeks ago and had asked for a job. Rode out from Ogden in an empty box car, he said. He could do carpentering, mend leather, whitewash the buildings—would learn to fork a horse. Anyway, he was hungry and Wickham had taken him on.

Second, there was Forgets Easy, the rider from Tennessee. Ike Wickham, looking at him, swore. He stood there, this youth, draping his long body against the fence, his hat pulled over his sunburned nose. He was addressing remarks to Blaine and High Heel in a gentle voice that drawled on and on in a monotone and convulsed his hearers.

"Likely," said Wickham aloud, "he's forgot to mend them pack panniers and straighten the railroad fence and ride to Los Ingratos for them nails. He won't think of them until day after tomorrow when he's in the middle of something else."

Ike could remember times when Forgets Easy had crawled out of bed in the middle of the night and ridden five miles after something that had slipped his mind —the damn' fool! He grinned in spite of himself. Oh, well, he was a good kid after all. Honest? Sure. And in an emergency he was right there. There was the time the man-killing bronc took after Blaine. And the day of the sandstorm . . .

"Easy," he called.

"Orders?" inquired the delinquent one.

"You know the rifle in the kitchen? Load it and leave it lay there. Never know when it might come in handy."

"Yes, suh."

"Do it now, while I got my eye on you."

Forgets Easy grinned and departed to obey, circling around the rear of the ranch

to the kitchen, a separate lean-to that had no connection with the other rooms.

IKE WICKHAM turned to consider the third man who would be left behind, and was reassured. This was Quiros, the old Mexican cook. His one shortcoming was that every second month, on payday, he rode enthusiastically to town and drank himself into insensibility, returning three days later, disheveled but at peace with all the world. However, his conduct on the ranch was exemplary; he had a naive sense of justice, he was trustworthy, he could handle a gun.

"Oh, hell!" said Ike. "There ain't no real reason I shouldn't go."

He marched into the ranch-house through the front door. The safe stood in his bedroom, on the ground floor. Into it he tossed the sack, with its cheerful sounding contents. He closed the safe carefully, listened for the click, then whirled the dial. He stepped outside.

Quiros, the Mexican, stood waiting for him.

"Today," he reminded delicately, "it is payday."

"Huh?" said Wickham.

"Sure, yes."

"Lookahere," said Wickham. "It is payday, for a fact. But it can't be helped. The calendar, as far as you and the boys is concerned, is got to stand still until I come back."

"But it is payday," reiterated Quiros tranquilly.

"Every one of you has got to stay here on the job," continued Ike relentlessly. "So try and hold your patience. Tomorrow morning I will arrive on No. 4 and ladle out that cash which you all so misguidedly thinks you deserves."

"But it is the first of the month," said Quiros blankly, "and—"

"Oh, shut up, will you," said Wickham, "and listen to what I'm a-telling you. If I pay you today, you will streak for Los Ingratos and the Palace Café where you will become *non compos mentis*. Easy will forget every obligation he ever had, take a high dive behind a pile of red, white and blue chips and stay there until the tide's receded—if it takes a week. Well, I ain't going to stand for it—not today."

"But—" said Quiros.

"For the love—" began Wickham, but at that moment Forgets Easy came running.

"The train," he yelled. "I heard her whistle beyond Whipcord Pass. You better beat it, Boss."

Wickham cursed and ran. The train crawled across the desert and halted at the water tank. The boss, enthusiastically cheered by his outfit, made a final spurt and caught the last car as it was moving away.

"That was a right good jump for fifteen stone," said the foreman of the Boxed Horseshoe critically.

"Likely he seen a handsome female a-settin' in the observation car," said Forgets Easy. "That might inspire sech a kangaroo caper. Well, *bon voyage*, boys."

Blaine and High Heel began to drift the she-cows down the trail.

"*Adios*, Easy," they said. "We'll bring you back a alarm clock from Caliente. Now don't go workin' too hard and wear yourself all out while we're away." Before he could frame a retort they were out of earshot.

As the herd dissolved into a cloud of dust, which in turn vanished on the horizon, Mounce, the bum, straightened his back and let the brush slide down into the pail of whitewash. Guardedly he looked about him.

The heavy hush of the desert lay everywhere. Glittering in the sun ran the railroad track, extending east and west out of sight, curling gently like a sleepy snake across the warm floor of Nevada. Beside it ran parallel the brownish green swath of Wickham's land, and beyond that, where the springs gave out abruptly, the desert. There was no place where a man might hide except in the tangles of mesquite that sprawled across the desert, and here there would be no need of hiding, except from buzzards, after twenty-four hours without water.

Intersecting the railroad track at the point where the ranch house stood, there ran a thin trail to Caliente, nearly a day's ride away; to Los Ingratos in the opposite direction, a six-hour ride, a little sun broiled town where the Wickham outfit bought its supplies. But beyond this town lay the desert again with not even the railroad to point the way. And even to Los Ingratos a man must ride—and the bum had never been astride a horse.

So the only way of escape for Mounce was the railroad. He turned his attention to it again. Three hundred yards down the track rose the tank. The time was now eleven minutes past one. At four o'clock a train would come from the west, stop briefly at the water tank and thunder on. It would be No. 3, the last train until tomorrow—and tomorrow Ike Wickham would return from the Boxed Horseshoe.

The canvas sack was locked in the safe, in Wickham's bedroom. Mounce, seemingly so intent on his whitewashing, had never taken his eyes from that sack during the entire transaction of the cattle deal. When it had disappeared into the bedroom he knew where it had been put. He knew the plan of the house; he was aware of the rifle in the kitchen. Concerning the safe itself, he was almost more familiar with it than Ike Wickham. He had noted its size, number, make—its considerable age. Among the dark and devious passages of Mounce's mind was a groove set apart for such knowledge. He had always found good use for it.

BETWEEN the canvas sack filled with money and the eager Mounce there stood the safe itself, whose combination he had not yet learned, and the two men —Quiros, the Mexican; Forgets Easy, the rider from Tennessee. These obstacles must be passed by four o'clock that afternoon.

Quiros had a pony, a wall eyed pinto, saddled in the corral, in anticipation of his trip to town. Now as Mounce covertly watched he walked sadly down the lane of pepper trees, unsaddled the horse and opened the gate to let it go. Then he toiled back to the ranch, his saddle under his arm.

Mounce approached.

"Wanted to go to town, didn't you?" he inquired in sympathy.

"*Si*," said Quiros regretfully. "It was payday."

"Dirty deal y'got," pursued Mounce, feeling him out.

"The boss t'ink I wished to get drunk," explained Quiros, "but no, it was not so today. The boss, he do not understand. Today I have promise to pay a man sixty dollaire, second payment of a small piece of land and a shack. Maybe I would get drunk afterwards, who can say? I hope not. But now, maybe I will lose that land where I wish to retire by and by."

"Say," said Mounce, "that's raw. It sure is. I wouldn't work for a man like Wickham. I'd get back at him, some way."

"Oh, no," the Mexican hastened to assure him. "Ike Weekham, he is a good boss. I have work for him twenty year. He did not understand, that is the matter." Resignedly he began to whittle a piece of wood.

Mounce swore silently and sank back on his heels to meditate upon another procedure.

There was that loaded gun in the kitchen. If he could persuade one of these men to ride away on an errand, then he could shoot the other.

"Why don't you ride to Los Ingratos and explain the situation to the feller that's holding your land?" he asked. "And after you done that, why, if you've been cooking and riding for outfits around here for twenty years, you ought to be able to get drunk on credit."

"No use," said Quiros. "The word, he is not so good as cash. The man say, 'Today you must pay,' and that is that. Besides, the boss order me to remain around the ranch until he come back. To be sure, if I had the money, I take the chance and go. It is sad to lose my little piece of land."

"It's worse than sad," said Mounce. "It's a dirty shame. It's hell."

He thought swiftly to himself, "Now I'm on the right track. He's playing into my hand. But I got to work fast." He could feel the minutes ticking away.

"You think he would have understood, do you?" he egged the Mexican on.

"Sure," said Quiros. "But then the train come. *Dios*, there was no time."

"Well," said Mounce, "if he would understand, maybe you and I could fix a way. If you was to take out your salary from the money he's got in that safe, why it's owin' to you, ain't it? And we could put the rest back and it would be all right. You get what's comin' to you and save your land."

The old Mexican stared at him.

"Out of the safe?"

"Sure, just your salary—what's coming to you. Or only sixty dollars. Put all the rest back."

A light dawned on the Mexican.

"And it is payday. To every man his salary should come, on payday, *no es verdad?* You think it no harm, then?"

"Of course not," said Mounce. "It's what Mr. Wickham would want you to do if he knew the facts of the case."

"But how can we open a safe?" persisted the Mexican. "It is very difficult, no?"

"I," said Mounce cheerfully, "will open that safe." His mouth fairly watered. He laughed. "You wouldn't understand, Quiros, old boy, but that's my racket. Ever hear of Cracker Moses Mounce? No, I hope not. Anyways, I'm him."

"You mean that you make safes?" said Quiros. "That is your business?"

"I make them open," said Mounce. "Sure. Sometimes it is a very profitable business; at other times, not so good." He grimaced, thinking of a recent speedy exit from Omaha, with the aid of a box car.

"Well, then," said Quiros cheerfully, "we go tell Easy. He will help us."

"Hell, no!" shouted Mounce so sharply that Quiros jumped. "That's what I wanted to talk to you about. We got to get him away from here. You got to think of something that will take him away."

Bewilderment, also a faint spark of suspicion showed on the face of the Mexican.

MOUNCE doused the spark instantly.

"He'll want his pay, too. If he knows that you're gettin' your money, he'll want the same. Then he'll go to Los Ingratos and gamble it, and there won't be nobody here but me. And when Wickham comes back, there'll be hell to pay. Now, there ain't no reason why Easy can't wait until tomorrow. He ain't got no piece of land. Why, look at me," continued Mounce nobly. "I ain't asking for my pay, am I? Yours is an emergency case. We'll take your sixty dollars out of the safe and put the rest back and lock it up. That's simple. Why," he finished with a burst of wide eyed candor, "you can stand by and be sure it's all done proper."

Quiros considered.

"That is so. Somebody should remain behind. Well, to keep Easy from knowing that we open the safe, maybe I remind him to mend those pack panniers in the tool house?"

"Not far enough," said Mounce promptly. "He might come back."

Quiros hung his head in thought. Finally:

"My horse," he exclaimed. "The little wall eye pinto—the one I release from the corral. No one can catch that horse but me, but few know that. I send Forgets Easy to catch the little wall eye horse and I will say I must have him *pronto*, I wish to take him to town to sell. *Sangre de Dios*, that is a scheme! See—"

He shielded his eyes and pointed along the bottom land. Four hundred yards away the wall eyed pinto was grazing peacefully beside the railroad fence.

"That ain't very far," said Mounce, doubtfully.

"No," said Quiros, "but it is plenty far enough." He laughed. "When Forgets

Easy reach that point, the little wall eye horse will be one hundred yards farther, and after that still one hundred yards, and so on, forever." He slapped his leg and laughed. "If we had the time, it would be very funny to watch. Ha-ha!"

"Yeah?" said Mounce grimly. "Well, you know more about it than me. Shoot." To himself he thought, "It ain't a very sure plan, but I can't think of nothing better."

Forgets Easy had gone to sleep under a pepper tree. Quiros approached and woke him gently.

"Forgets Easy," he said, "my wall eye pinto has broke loose from the corral. Will you catch him, please?" He pointed down the track.

"Can't you go yourself?" said Easy, and yawned. "Ain't often a cowman gets a chance to lay down and sleep in the daytime—not with this here outfit."

"Me," declared Quiros, "I have to prepare supper."

"What's for supper?"

"Mulligan," said Quiros rapidly, "and hot biscuits. Of course—" he spread his lower lip, shrugged his shoulders and turned out his palms indifferently— "if you do not wish that, I can heat up some can of beans very quickly, and still have time to catch that horse. Maybe, with so many away for supper, that would be better anyway."

Forgets Easy galvanized.

"Hash slinger," he declared, "remain here. I would go out and wrangle a hippopotamus for mulligan and hot biscuits."

He ambled briskly toward the corral and climbed aboard his own horse, taking a rope and hackamore.

Mounce, the bum, watched him doubtfully. He was not yet satisfied with the ruse. Suppose the Mexican should be mistaken? Suppose for once the wall eye pinto should be caught? The Tennessean would be back in half an hour and then . . .

So he too approached the corral.

"Say, bo," he said confidentially, "to get that horse, you have to pass down near the crook in the railroad fence. Ain't it so?"

"Why, sure," said Forgets Easy. "What's a-preyin' on your mind?"

"Well," said Mounce reticently, "I was overhearin' the boss a few minutes before he took that train, and he was remarkin' that you'd probably neglected to mend that fence. 'If so,' he said, 'I'll fire him to hell, the loafer.' "

"Oh, he did?" said Easy coldly.

"So," went on Mounce, "I thought if you was to get the pliers out of the tool honse and fix the fence while you was down there, why, it might save you some trouble. I just thought I'd mention it."

"Oh, yes?" said Easy. "This concern for my welfare is sure accommodatin' of you, brother."

The hint of sarcasm was not lost upon Mounce. He lowered his own eyes to hide an answering gleam of malice. A sudden inspiration seized him, tickled his fancy.

"And I thought, maybe, if you was goin' to the tool house, you'd oblige by bringin' me back a piece of sandpaper." His eyes were still humbly downcast, his voice endeavoring to be friendly. "It's a long walk down there in the sun, and I ain't used to this desert light, yet. I—got a bad sun headache."

Forgets Easy was disarmed.

"Why, sure, bum, I'll bring it. Why didn't you say so? What yo'-all goin' to do with sandpaper?"

"Just a little odd job," said Mounce, enjoying himself. "I'm going to surprise the boss with it when he comes back."

"You sure are a son of a gun for work," said Forgets Easy. "Doin' extry jobs with Wickham away and a sunstroke. Stars in your crown, brother. Stars in your crown."

He rode to the tool house, brought the sandpaper back to Mounce and drifted away, out into the white sunshine, in the direction of the wall eyed pinto. As he moved off, the clock inside the ranchhouse struck two.

"Now is the time," said Mounce softly.

"Sure," said Quiros pleasurably, overhearing him. "And I will help you."

THE MEXICAN'S part in the proceedings, however, proved to be slight. In fact it dwindled to a no more important rôle than holding the shirt of Mr. Mounce while that individual struggled in the heat with the safe.

The bum's first move was to sandpaper his already thin skinned fingertips. Next he touched the dial with a delicate hand and pressed his body as close as possible against the safe door. His ear was flattened against the metal.

Quiros waited expectantly. With the faintest perceptible pressure, the least perceptible movement, Mounce slid the dial around. Nothing happened. He slid it farther, delicately forward, delicately back, his ear acutely sensitive to the first shifting of the weights.

The clock in the kitchen struck the half hour—half past two. Sweat rolled from Mounce's face. As he knelt before the safe his naked back glistened.

At 2:45 the Mexican's attention began to wander.

"Tomorrow," he said, "how the boss, he will be surprise. 'Mistaire Weekham,' I will say, 'please pardon me. What you theenk? We got your safe open, I take sixty dollaire out of what you forgot to pay me, and I save a nice piece of land—'"

"Shut up, you damned fool!" cried Mounce, nerves shattered. "Shut up!"

Quiros stared, amazed. The little sparks of suspicion kindled again. Why should this man be so crazy to recover sixty dollars belonging to some one else?

At that moment, without a creak, without a whisper, the door of the safe swung open.

Quiros crossed himself.

"A *sombra*, a ghost," said he.

"Ghost fingers, you mean," said Mounce. "Safe fingers. That's what I was born with, Mexican. Safe fingers, safe ears."

His voice and his hands trembled eagerly. He clutched the sack.

"Now, the sixty dollaire," said Quiros, troubled. "Then we put the rest back, *verdad?*"

"It's heavy," said Mounce. "Mostly silver and gold. I can't hardly lift— Yes, sure, your sixty dollars."

He untied the sack and adroitly spilled some coins on the floor, as if by accident. He stooped, pretending to pick them up. Quiros bent down to help him, feeling under the bed, beside the chair.

Mounce grinned and straightened. He swung the sack over his head and brought it crashing down on the skull of the Mexican.

Quiros dropped upon his face. The few dollars he had retrieved flew from his fingers and scattered on the floor. He rolled half over and lay still, his forehead against a castor of the bed, his arms flung out. He made no sound. Drops of blood began to ooze from under his thick, grizzled hair.

Mounce picked up the fallen coins. He threw them on to the neat bed and, dumping the rest of the money from the sack, spread it over the bed too, and began to count. Once, while he was counting, he jumped violently, but the sound he heard was only the clock, striking three. When he had finished he replaced the money in the sack and retied the mouth. Then he put on his shirt and closed the door of the safe.

He stooped for a last look at the Mexican. There was no change, except that the slowly welling drops of blood had ceased.

He began to think of the train. In thirty minutes it would be time to start for the water tank. He wondered whether Forgets Easy, pursuing the horse somewhere near the railroad fence, would be able to see him. Probably not, he decided, for the ranch buildings lay between. Although it was much too soon, his ears were subconsciously attuned for the distant roar of the train. He sat down on a chair to wait.

Suddenly cold perspiration sprung out on his forehead. There was a sound in the distance. The train? For a sharp second he wondered whether the clocks were slow —then realized that what he heard was not the sound of wheels.

Tr-r-rup — tr-r-rup — tr-r-rup — He stumbled to the window just in time to see Forgets Easy come galloping back, past the corral and up the long lane of pepper trees, approaching the house.

Mounce spun around swiftly. He seized the form of Quiros by the shoulders and rolled it over, under the bed. The quilt, hanging down, concealed it. There were drops of blood on the rug. Noting that the pattern was the same on the under side, he reversed the rug. The blood no longer showed.

Forgets Easy had ridden around to the rear of the house. Mounce could not see him through the window, but he could hear the horse stepping in the yard and hear the swish of the pepper trees as he passed. He remembered the rifle in the kitchen. If it came to a showdown he wanted to be near that rifle.

He pitched the heavy sack of money behind the door and dropped a blanket over it; then, desperately trying to show no nervousness, he left the bedroom and walked out of doors, around to the back of the house, toward the isolated kitchen. In the glare of the yard he came face to face with Forgets Easy, who had just dismounted.

"Hi," Mounce hailed him as casually as he could manage.

"Hi," returned Easy.

Mounce turned away from him and stumbled across the threshold, into the dark kitchen. The gun stood in the corner. He pulled a chair in front of it and sat down, facing the door, pretending to examine the sole of his shoe. Maybe Easy would go away again.

He heard the creak of leather boots as the Tennessean stepped toward the kitchen.

Mounce wet his lips.

"I notice you didn't catch that horse."

Forgets Easy laughed.

"Say, they ain't any man got so slippery a memory as I have. Listen to this one: I chased that fool horse an hour, and then I thinks, 'I'll set down and rest, and while I rests I'll be a-tinkering with that fence.' And then I discovers that here I'd forgot to bring the pliers."

"The pliers?" repeated Mounce, red with vexation at the result of his own meddling.

"That's what," said Easy cheerfully. "Now, if you hadn't asked me to fetch that sandpaper while I was in the tool house, why, I'd remembered them sure. What's that you're sayin'?"

"Nothing," said Mounce savagely, examining his sole.

"Where's Quiros?"

"I don't know." Mounce sat upright in dismay. "Why?"

"While I'm here I aim to ask him what's the secret words he whispers into the ear of that paint horse. I'd as soon wrangle a greased catfish as that animal. Likewise—" he looked around— "I don't see no vestige of that mulligan it was goin' to take all afternoon to sling together. How come?"

Mounce's hand moved an inch toward the rifle. Should he shoot now? But even if Easy should look in the bedroom for the cook, a cursory glance would reveal nothing wrong. While he hesitated the Tennessean moved away.

He heard Easy walking through the house, calling vainly. Mounce watched the kitchen clock. The minute hand was racing. In twenty minutes the train would be at the tank. He should be starting now.

"He ain't nowheres," said Easy, returning, "unless he's sleeping on the chicken roost. Well, I'll get my pliers and be on my way."

"Oh, yeah?" said Mounce, rising in relief. "Well, while you're gone I'll find the Mexican for you and give him a prod toward supper."

"You do that thing," urged Easy. "And tell him that catching this horse will cost him two cans of peaches extra. Stomach—" he rubbed his middle— "set up and commence anticipatin'. Good news, friend, good news!"

"Sun's gettin' lower," croaked Mounce feverishly.

"I'm on my way," replied Easy. "I'm —why, what the hell!"

Mounce followed his glance and stiffened.

Dragging himself across the yard, leaning heavily against the pepper trees, came the apparition of Quiros—Quiros, who had been left for dead. His face was yellow as wax. There was matted blood in his hair and a streak of dried blood ran down his neck.

"A *sombra!*" Mounce repeated the Mexican word in horror. "A ghost!"

"Easy!" the hurt man called with weak lips, "Easy—" Quiros fell across the threshold of the kitchen.

"Why, he's fainted," said Easy. "What's all this? He has a lump on his head like a grapefruit."

His eyes turned, wide and hot, upon Mounce.

"You filthy bum! What's the answer to this? I might know, it's the money in the safe! Here, leave that gun lay!"

But Mounce already had the rifle in his hands—was sighting.

"Back toward that door," he snarled. "Back out. Hesitate once and you'll get this in your guts—or your eyes, whichever I decide on. This is my racket, cowboy. Understand? You're out of it."

EASY was covered. The practised hand of Mounce kept the sights trained alternately on his stomach and on his face. The muzzle of the rifle looked a mile wide to the cowboy. He began to back.

"Faster," said Mounce. "There's a train I have to catch, and I'm goin' to lock—"

Easy's retreating foot struck the arm of Quiros. He stopped, blocking the door. At that moment the faint whistle of the train sounded. No. 3 was crawling out of Whipcord Pass. Easy's eyes lighted.

"Go on!" shouted Mounce. "Go on, move! You're blockin' my way. No? All right then, it's O.K. with me."

With the sights trained fairly between the eyes of Easy—who could not resist a gasp—Mounce pulled the trigger. Four sounds came almost simultaneously—a sharp click from the rifle, a curse from Mounce, another click and then a laugh from Easy.

The gun was empty—quite harmless.

"I win," Easy yelled.

He seized a chair and flung it. It caught the stock of the empty gun which the bum was about to raise as a bludgeon, and knocked it out of his hands.

Mounce reached backward, blindly, grasping for any weapon—encountered a flatiron that Quiros had left on the cold stove. Easy ducked, and as he did so he snatched up the fallen gun. Mounce aimed his missile low and the iron caught the Tennessean below the knee. Easy groaned but managed to keep his feet. Picking up a second chair to shield himself, he edged toward a shelf.

Another iron sailed through the air and shattered the protecting chair. Easy dropped the broken pieces of it. Like lightning his free hand flew to a china bowl on the shelf behind him. Mounce saw that he had picked up a cartridge. Faintly, a long way off, the bum could hear the muffled roar of the train. He gathered himself and leaped for the gun in Easy's hands. There was a flash and the whole kitchen shook with the explosion.

Forgets Easy leaned limply against the wall.

"Hot mama!" he said. "Fastest loading I ever done." He drew his hand across his eyes. "Oh, Lordy, how my leg hurts!"

Mounce, the bum, lay sprawled on the kitchen floor, unquestionably dead.

With an effort Forgets Easy limped toward a corner to a pail of water. He found a towel, dragged the pail over to where the Mexican lay and, sitting down beside him, began to wash away the blood—to bathe the swelling.

"Looks like your hair saved you," he said. "I never see any one with so much hair as a Mexican."

"My head," groaned Quiros, opening his eyes.

"And my leg," echoed Easy. "If that iron had been a pound heavier it'd broke the bone. Looks like you and me has got at least two weeks' vacation comin' to us."

He squeezed out the towel and smiled, the slow smile of Tennessee.

"Listen to that train a-roarin' by. I'd

sure like to get up and wave at her. Might be a pretty girl in the observation car."

"He did not shoot you!" Quiros made this surprised discovery.

"Not me," said Easy. He shifted his hurt leg to a more comfortable position. "It was this way. The boss, he gives me orders at noon to load his rifle. Well, just as I'm about to fill her up I hears his train approachin' through Whipcord Pass, and I runs out like hell to tell him. Now, when this here fracas happens and Mounce is preparin' to blow off my scalp lock, I hears No. 3 whistle down the Pass and it reminds me like a flash that I never did load that gun. So I decides to face it out."

"Very brave," approved Quiros.

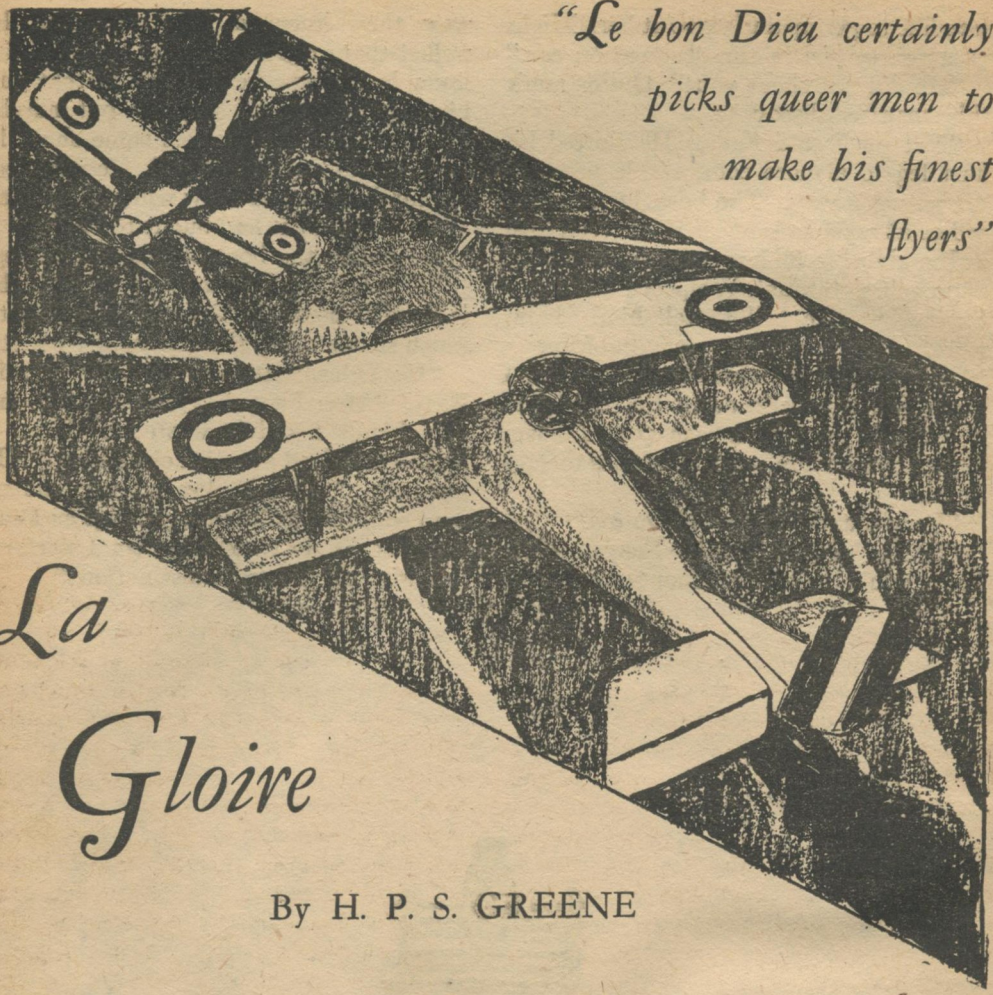
"Brave nothin'," said Easy. "My knees could have struck out sparks the way they knocked together when he pulled that trigger. After all, how did I know but maybe he had loaded that gun himself? How did I know but maybe Wickham might have left some shells in her? But I took a chance." He whistled. "Is my hair turned snow white, Mexican? Well, if it ain't it had ought to be."

He pulled the boot off his bruised leg.

"And Mistaire Mounce, you are sure he is dead?" persisted Quiros, his credulity much shattered by the afternoon's events.

"He is emphatically no more," said Easy. "After I got that gun back into my own hands I didn't waste no time. I loaded and fired her with one flicker." He laughed. "Ain't I always said that no man could forget so many things as I can but when I do remember 'em I perform 'em with all the more distinction?"

"Le bon Dieu certainly picks queer men to make his finest flyers"



La Gloire

By H. P. S. GREENE

PIGGY VAN ANTWERP thrilled as he stood at the entrance to the *promenoir* of the Folies in his brand new ambulance driver's uniform, donned for the first time that afternoon. His chest, which was round and hard like a keg of nails, expanded. Then he stalked forward on his thick, sturdy legs.

Often there was a thrill about the Folies in wartime. The vitiated air of the place vibrated, as if to the organized cheering of thousands at a football game. Many cold, thin blooded people saw only a disgusting debauch; but there was something there besides that.

It was the scene of the last fling, the desperate groping for joy of hundreds of miserable, hopeless men, who knew they were going to their deaths in a welter of flame and steel and blood and mud—tomorrow, or next week, or next year. The war had gone on for two years, and for all they knew it might go on a dozen more.

No, the scene was not edifying; but there was a gripping vital quality about it. Piggy felt as he had when he had heard a long cheer with his own name three times at the end, when he was grunting his way through the opposing guard and tackle. He shook himself and passed on to the seat in the theater for which he had bought a ticket.

There the atmosphere was different. The music seemed lifeless, the girls on the stage machine-like. A man sang a song

in French. It must have been comic, for the crowd laughed. Then in the middle of a verse the spotlight left the singer and focused on a box which held a single, brilliant figure. A wild cheer rose from the crowd.

The man in the box seemed slender, but tough and strong, like fine steel. The blue cloth of his tunic glittered with medals in the light. He raised one hand to his *képi*, which was cocked over his right eye above a flashing smile. He was the epitome of that gay jauntiness which a Frenchman can attain better than any one else.

"Arsene! Arsene!" the crowd roared.

Piggy Van Antwerp gasped at the name. It was familiar—who had not heard of the remarkable rapscallion who had blazed his fame across the sky? The man who was supposed to be king of the Apaches of Paris, and a "gentleman burglar"; who was known as Arsene to the Parisians, loved for his very crimes, as well as for his many victories over German airmen. The cheering went on for minutes before the spotlight went back to the stage and the ace sat down.

With the mob Arsene enjoyed to the full "*La Gloire*," which, to the French means glory and fame and honor, and other things, besides. Piggy Van Antwerp, like the other men in the theater, envied him.

The performance seemed flatter than ever to him, and he soon left his seat and went back to the *promenoir*. From one of the high stools at the bar he looked at the crowd.

He saw hard bitten, dangerous men from Australia and other far spaces of the earth. Foppish, dangerous men from luxurious French *châteaux*. Ferocious, whiskered, dangerous men from Central Europe. And women—women—women.

One was at his elbow talking to him, and he looked down. She had a sweet face and innocent eyes, except for something which flickered deep inside them. She was saying that she was Belgian, and telling of the horrors of her escape from the Germans in their drive. Piggy wondered how much was true and just what caused the look of tragedy he thought he saw in her eyes. Another voice cut in upon the girl—a hard, American voice—

"Get away from that tart."

Piggy looked up. He saw a tall, thin, marble eyed man in a uniform like his own, except that it bore three blue stripes on the sleeves. It was Major Higglesby of the ambulance office in Paris. Major Higglesby was a cold man.

"Get away from that tart, or I'll have you thrown out of the Ambulance Service," he repeated.

"To hell with you and your Ambulance Service," said Piggy Van Antwerp.

Next day he enlisted in the aviation section of the Foreign Legion. He was in pursuit of *La Gloire*.

Several months later his chase took him to the Osprey Squadron on the Front.

He was the only American at the time in that *corps d'élite*, and he was there because he had been the best flyer in his class at the school of Paupote. The Ospreys were a very famous squadron indeed, under the command of the famous Captain De Vincennes. One of its members was the great Arsene, greater than ever now, promoted to lieutenant and second in command in obedience to the clamor of his Parisian audience against the wishes and better judgment of the French army authorities.

The Parisians loved Arsene. Had he not stopped the show at the Folies three times by throwing gold pieces among the chorus girls? Had he not pulled a gendarme's mustaches out by the roots and rammed them down his throat in the Champs Élysées? Had he not knocked down a member of the Chamber of Deputies who was reputed to be hoarding and profiteering in sugar, and robbed him of thousands of francs on the Boulevards, besides bringing down sixteen more Boches?

After the last exploit the citizens of Paris demanded and received his immediate release from jail. They loved him twice as much as the aristocratic,

immaculate Captain De Vincennes, with his countless generations of knightly ancestors, and an even longer list of enemy planes brought down.

PIGGY VAN ANTWERP was unpopular from the first with the Ospreys. The Frenchmen did not like his broad, blond, flattish face, his stolid air, or his slowness at comprehending their language. And there was something else besides.

After he had been in the squadron two weeks, and during that period had brought down four German planes to De Vincennes' three, and Arsene's two, the captain called him to his office. He looked at the American curiously for the hundredth time and thought:

"*Le bon Dieu* certainly does pick out queer men to make his finest flyers. That procuring Apache, Arsene, and now this barrel of a man!" Aloud he said:

"Why did you attempt to conceal the fact that your mother was German and even now is German in her sympathies? Didn't you know you would be found out?"

"I was afraid that I wouldn't be allowed to enlist if they knew," replied Piggy. "My father is Belgian, and I am American."

"Yes, I know," said Captain De Vincennes. "It is not the fact of your German motherhood—La France is like a beautiful woman whose lovers come from all over the world to fight and die for her." The man's obvious, passionate sincerity robbed this statement of any histrionic quality. "It is not the fact alone, but that you tried to conceal it. That is why the others in the squadron were warned to watch you. Now that you have done so well, marvelously, in fact, I am sorry that occurred. But I, at least, am your friend." He held out his hand with a charming smile.

Piggy was young, and his eyes smarted as he left the office. But his jaw was broader and harder than ever. He went to the canteen.

Arsene was there, and he was very flush with francs and quite drunk. He had been to Paris the night before, and when he came back he had much money, and the bar was covered with champagne. Arsene talked loudly. He made broad hints to the effect that he had pulled off a famous *coup*, and that he was a remarkable man. Frenchmen admire a bluffer more than a quiet man—if he can make good his bluff. Piggy Van Antwerp did not. He noticed Arsene's white face and the pinpoint pupils of his eyes.

"I believe he is a dope fiend after all," he thought.

The Apache turned and saw him. His ordinarily debonair countenance set in the cruel glare which it must have worn when he spotted an unsuspecting piece of German "cold meat" in the air. He hated the newcomer who had downed more Boches than he in the last two weeks. He sneered:

"So the boar was Belge, the sow Boche. I hardly know which is worse, but the offspring certainly is dirty."

Then, as Piggy started forward, the gangster's body whirled, his foot shot out, and the heavy heel of his boot caught the American on the jaw. He fell like a steer. But he dragged himself to his feet and came on.

That was more cold meat for Arsene. Besides a *savate* artist, he had been a flash as a middleweight boxer before the war. Cunningly he set out to cut the dazed man's face to pieces with his ringed hands. Blood spurted at each slashing, twisting blow. But Piggy came on.

The Frenchman grew just a little careless, and the American lunged with astounding quickness. One big fist struck just below Arsene's breastbone, and he went down. Later they carried him away. He was in bed for a week.

Piggy left the canteen unmolested but followed by a dozen pairs of angry eyes. That night he sat in his room alone, and the next day, with only one eye open, he brought down another Boche. But not a man in the squadron except Captain De Vincennes spoke to him.

Two days after he was able to get up

and around and fly again, Arsene seemed quite gay. In the canteen after lunch and before the afternoon patrol he drank champagne. Tearing sheets of paper into small pieces, he scribbled various messages on each one, while three or four of his satellites read them and laughed:

With my best hate, dirty pigs of Boches.
—ARSENE.

Look out, Wilhelm. I will visit you professionally some night at your palace after the war, if not before. How's your sister?
—ARSENE.

"My little messages will be well received, no doubt," chuckled the Apache ace, as he wrote these, and others much less polite, and very much more vulgar. Piggy Van Antwerp was sitting alone in a corner, watching him silently, when an orderly came in and called them for patrol.

CAPTAIN DE VINCENNES led a formation of four which included Arsene, Piggy and the fat, jovial Du Plessis. Four aces are sometimes quite unbeatable. But not when the opposing player produces a dozen aces from his sleeve—or from the sun. They had hardly a moment's warning when the *Jagdstaffel* was upon them.

A moment's desperate dog fighting, and Du Plessis went down in flames, with a German to keep him company to his destination. Given a chance, the Nieuports could have outclimbed the heavier Albatrosses, but they had no chance. They could not climb and fight too. They had to fight for their lives, and Germans were always above them.

Piggy caught a robin's egg blue Albatross through his sight and let him have it in one rake from his Vickers from nose to tail, and the German went down spinning. Then the American saw another Nieuport going down. It was De Vincennes, and he was spinning too. Arsene was clear, and he was cutting for home. It was the part of wisdom, Piggy knew. But De Vincennes had called him friend. He stuck and fought above his falling captain.

The Germans got in one another's way. Piggy worked on the little manettes which controlled his rotary motor's air and gas, the trigger on his stick, like a musician on a loved instrument. His tracer bullets streaked the sky and an Albatross fell, and another. They came down fast all the time, until he could see the trenches below. And then he could see myriads of little figures moving there. It was the *poilus* waving their arms and cheering his gallant fight.

As Piggy brought his shattered, straining little Nieuport level and headed for home, he saw that the German planes had cut away from the French guns on the ground. He saw nothing of Captain De Vincennes, and his heart was heavy as he skimmed his ship along over the trees and brought it down on the Osprey 'drome. He felt that he had lost the only man among his comrades who was his friend.

But a few minutes later another splintered, beribboned Nieuport came to earth. It was Captain De Vincennes, and his helmet was cut by an oozing, blackening furrow. Yet he smiled as he said:

"For minutes I must have been stunned. I found myself flying toward Berlin."

He climbed out from between the wings of his little ship and stood upon the ground. Then, still smiling, he crumpled into a heap. They carried him to his room and laid him on his bed and called for surgeons. When the doctors came out their faces were grave. Later the general commanding the army corps came and carried the captain away in his own limousine to Paris, whence he sent him to Nice.

It was announced that he would be on leave for at least a month, and Arsene, who had landed almost unnoticed during the excitement over the captain's wound, assumed command. He and Piggy found nothing to say to each other until the next day. Then Arsene spoke.

"We must be growing to be bad shots," he said. "We need practise. Perhaps there are some among us who shoot very badly indeed. We must find out. We will all shoot at the sausage between

patrols. Let me see—" he paused and looked around over the assembled Ospreys, as if attempting to decide something—"Sergeant Von—I mean Van Antwerp may first tow the sausage."

Piggy did not start at this news, for he had been expecting it from the moment Arsene had made his announcement. He knew only too well what towing the sausage meant. At flying school he had seen disgraced pilots, who were being punished for some serious offense, towing a cylinder of light cloth ten or twelve feet long by two wide at the end of a cord, while enthusiastic student marksmen poured machine gun bullets at and all around it. Occasionally they came very near the tower indeed, which was where the punishment came in. Arsene was watching him, and Piggy saw a lust for his death in the Apache's cruel, glittering eyes. We knew that he was marked.

But he flew, and towed the sausage after him without a word.

Arsene went up first to show them how it should be done. Ordinarily pilots at the Front would have had a great deal to say about such extra flying and target practise, pointing out emphatically that there were much better targets only a few miles away. But the Ospreys did not question the orders of Arsene.

They respected and admired Captain De Vincennes, but they had to "hand it" to Arsene. He got away with things that made them envy him, and they basked in the glory of being in his squadron. Besides, had he not just won three more victories while defending their Captain De Vincennes, victories joyously and enthusiastically confirmed by the admiring infantry?

And where had this American upstart been then? Observers said that at the beginning of the fight one Nieuport fled.

As he towed the sausage Piggy thought of those things, but as far as he could see there was nothing he could do. Captain De Vincennes had been unconscious during the latter part of the fight, and the infantry could not be expected to know the differences in the markings of planes tearing and twisting around the sky. Indeed, they often did not know friend from foe. And who would take his word against that of the great Arsene? He knew that his claims, if he made them, would only bring ridicule upon himself. So he kept silent and towed the sausage through the air.

A machine gun crackled behind him, and he knew that Arsene was shooting his target full of holes. He faced straight ahead, full of grim hate for the man behind him. Then his hate turned to choking rage. A stream of tracer bullets cut the air a foot above his head, and he involuntarily shoved his Nieuport forward into a dive.

As he brought it out, another ship passed him, driven by a grinning fiend. Piggy knew then that Arsene was playing with him and that death was as near as it had ever been over the lines or would ever be again. But he straightened out and towed the sausage back over the airdrome.

The next day and the next he towed it, and Arsene played. His toys were flaming bullets traveling at thousands of feet a second, and a human body in a flimsy, inflammable, motorized kite.

Piggy wondered whether his mother had not been right after all—the French a race of cruel, treacherous dogs. He wondered whether he were not fighting on the wrong side. How easy it would be to cut his motor and glide down into Germany when he was over the lines. The worst would be a prison; perhaps they would do him honor—let him fight against Arsene.

What a blow it was to all his dreams that had come the night he had first seen Arsene at the Folies and told Major Higglesby to take his Ambulance Service and go to hell. Only one thing kept Piggy from deserting—the thought that perhaps Arsene feared him and was trying to goad him into doing that very thing.

Piggy often wondered why Arsene did not kill him and get it over with. Was it only because of the Frenchman's love

of torture? Or did he fear that it might appear suspicious? Still, the Apache had his chances over the lines in some furious dog fight, when no blame could attach to him.

But had he, after all? In a dog fight things move so fast with planes whirling at more than a hundred miles an hour through the air that perhaps his chances had not been so easy after all.

IT WAS over the lines that things broke at last. It was a quiet, high patrol. The Germans were not in the sky, Piggy thought, as he looked around, and up, and down incessantly, without seeing a ship, or even the glint of the sun on a wing anywhere in the vast reaches of the sky. Even the anti-aircraft guns had given it up for a bad job and were quiet for the time.

Bang! Wheeeeeeeeeee! A report and the sound of a projectile tearing a ragged hole in the air—loud sounds to be heard above the whining drone of the rotary motors.

Piggy jumped and glanced hastily around. No Archie shell had burst near, and he started at once to fall behind the others as his tachometer showed a slowing of his engine's speed. He knew what had happened; the same thing had occurred to him at school.

A spark plug in the rotary motor had blown out or broken off, and been hurled screaming through the cowling which covered the engine. The other five planes of the patrol, led by Arsene, did not slow up, so, rather than fall behind, Piggy piqued a little to gain speed and tried to keep a position below the others.

Arsene had been in fine spirits that day, drinking champagne like a tourist in his native Montmartre and writing his little insulting notes. Now he was throwing them over the side of his ship, and the white scraps of paper fluttered back from the blasts of the propellors, and passed instantly from sight. Something hard and heavy struck Piggy on the head, and he slumped forward against the instrument board. The ship went down in a swift power glide, the missing motor still full on.

Bang! Wheeeeeeeeeee! The sound of another spark plug blowing out roused him. He shook his hard head and quickly cleared it. Where was he?

In the air. There were the eternal trenches not far below him. But what trenches? He looked around, and saw another Nieuport shepherding him down. The grinning face of Arsene seemed to be right at his left elbow. Far above, the four other Nieuports were circling on guard.

Piggy pulled up and to the right—away from Arsene. Immediately the Apache ace pulled away in an Immelmann turn. The whole thing flashed through Piggy's mind even before the other came for him, hurling his streaking lead. He had turned toward Germany to widen the distance between himself and the Apache. That would be the excuse for shooting him down—that he had been going to try to make a landing in the enemy lines.

Now the showdown had come at last. He would have to fight for his life in a crippled ship against one of the first aces of France. What a prospect opened before him, even if he won! But he must fight, none the less. Here was his chance, such as it was. Quickly he dived to gain speed, and then pulled up in a reversement. Arsene's bullets missed him and tore his wing, and then the fight was on. But to maneuver at all, Piggy had to keep going down.

Losing altitude terribly, the two planes dived and zoomed and gyrated. Each man was filled with a bitter, personal hate for his adversary, and the fighters stood their little ships on their tails, like horsemen on mettlesome steeds. The other Frenchmen hovered uncertainly. The Nieuports were too agile and too nearly identical for them to risk a shot.

And then it happened, so quickly that no one knew what, except the two fighters, and one did not know for long. One of the battling twins caught the other before

the sights of its Vickers, the gun rattled, the tracers and solid bullets streaked, and a little Nieuport crumpled, smoked and flamed, and joined the other débris in No Man's Land. The survivor staggered southward a mile or so, losing altitude all the time, until it splattered itself over the surface of a rough field.

Piggy Van Antwerp sat stupidly in the wreck. In the bottom of the twisted cockpit was something white—something he had not seen there before. He picked it up and found a flattish stone, wrapped in white paper, with a streamer of white cloth attached. He unwrapped the paper and read the words inscribed on it. Then, as he was suddenly surrounded by the babbling crowd of soldiers with which all France seemed to swarm whenever a plane landed, he stuffed it into his pocket.

All around him were *poilus*, all ridiculously alike; short, sturdy legged men, with hard bearded faces.

"What was it? Whom did you bring down?" they all were shouting.

"Arsene," Piggy said dully.

"*Quoi?*" shouted several who thought they had caught the name, but did not believe their ears. A sudden, miraculous hush came.

"Arsene," said Piggy. "I brought him down."

Several strong hairy hands seized him. They tugged and dragged him out into the field. Men hit and slapped him. He fought back and knocked them scattering. They piled upon him like the sea.

"Arsene!" they shouted. "The pig has killed Arsene!"

They got him down and trampled on him, and it took a two-star general to pull them off his senseless body.

"Stand back, my children," the general shouted. "You are Frenchmen, not barbarians. The man must be insane. He must be examined. He must be tried. We must learn his accomplices. Be assured that I shall see justice done."

Piggy came to himself in a dark prison near Paris. He was bruised and sore from head to foot, in every muscle and every nerve. His pockets were empty. He could hardly move to dig an iron spoon into a plate of lentil soup. In the capital crowds were howling for his blood. He was guillotined in effigy on Montmartre.

His jailer, a very patriotic Frenchman who looked as if he should have been east of the Golden Horn, told him all about it and spat in his soup.

It has been discovered that even in America he was known as "Le Peeg," which meant *cochon*. He had treacherously killed the great Arsene. The news was easily verified. The pilots of the Ospreys flew around and talked. He was a spy. The message he had tried to give the enemy had been found on him. It told of movements of artillery and troops. He was a German-American sent to France especially by the kaiser for his foul purpose. Why had not he been torn to pieces at once? He must be tried and executed immediately.

Piggy Van Antwerp was in prison for days. Different officers came and tried to make him reveal the identity of his accomplices. Piggy said nothing. He was bitter and hard.

At last he did not look up when people came to the door of his cell. It opened one day and a man came in and embraced him. It was Captain De Vincennes.

"My friend," he cried, "I came from Nice at once. I have convinced them at last. First I proved the letter found on you was in the writing of Arsene. But that was not enough. I had to find the agent from whom he received the reward for his treachery—from a woman he'd abandoned. Come, you are free."

Piggy followed him slowly. The captain took him to a tailor's shop where he was poured into a uniform designed for some one else. Then he had to go to the Invalides to be decorated and kissed and later to a dinner in his honor. The French never do things by halves.

Americans in the Aviation and the Ambulance were proud to claim acquaintance with Piggy Van Antwerp now. The name had caught on everywhere and was

the toast of Paris. Was he not an American, and was not great America coming into the war?

That night, in spite of his weary protests, Captain De Vincennes dragged him to the Folies and into the same box on the right side where he had first seen Arsene.

"It is your duty," the captain said simply. "Our people are weary of the war and the air raids, and we must encourage them all we can. They need an idol—an air idol. You destroyed one, now you must take his place."

Piggy stood up stiffly in the spotlight and the mob cheered.

"*Vive le Peeg! Vive l'Amérique! Vive le Presidong Veelsong!*"

Piggy Van Antwerp was tasting "*La Gloire*," and it was like ashes in his mouth.

ÑANIGO

By C A. FREEMAN

ÑANIGO! The very name of Cuba's voodoo gangster secret society, which the government is trying to wipe out, strikes terror to the hearts of those who have incurred its enmity. Of African origin, the first rites of the bloodstained lodge were observed by slaves who sought to revolt against cruel and tyrannical taskmasters, and they have persisted down to the present day. Originally all members of the cult were negroes, but now it includes not a few whites who are either as debased by superstition as the blacks, or who have joined it for the protection it gives to criminals.

Aside from its voodoo element, which includes devil worship and sometimes the sacrifice of human victims, the Ñanigo society militates against law and order. Its machinations are not confined to the large cities. It operates in the *campo*—the countryside—much in the manner of the Black Hand or Mafia. The strain of negro blood which predominates in Cuba is perhaps responsible for the fear in which the Ñanigos are held, and it is common report that a few high officials are secretly its members.

Ñanigo social meetings are always watched closely by the police and *rurales*, and the use of the *bonga* is prohibited by law, the *bonga* being the conical African drum believed by the authorities to rouse savage passions in the breasts of those who listen to its throbbings.

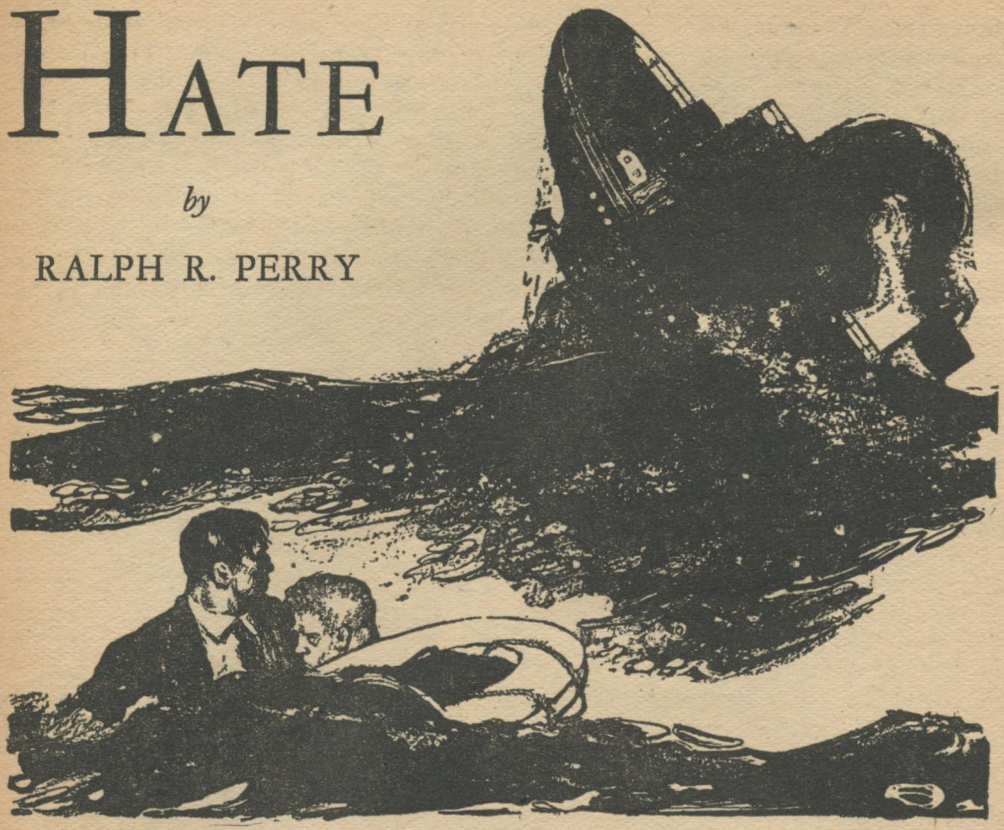
But few of the British West Indian negroes who throng to Cuba to labor in the cane fields are Ñanigos, nor are the Haitian negroes who have their own form of voodooism.

Native Cuban negro men and women, and other blacks who speak Spanish, form the great majority, the whites being almost entirely Spaniards of long residence in the republic.

HATE

by

RALPH R. PERRY



A Story of a Strange Meeting on the High Seas

"WELL, are you going to watch them drown?" Gus Fichtel snarled.

With utter disregard for the spray which drove across the *Arroya's* boat deck, of the wind, of the cold of a North Atlantic November gale, he faced the skipper and the lifeboat crew, hatless, without oilskins—just as he had rushed from below when the SOS of the *Grossewald* had been received.

ON BEAM ENDS SINKING LAT 48-20 LONG 65-37 HURRY

—VON HOHENBURG

It was three o'clock when the wireless operator of the *Arroya* picked that appeal out of the ether. It was four o'clock, with the gray dusk of gale and rain thickening into the gloom of night, before she heaved-to to windward of a hulk wallowing in the trough of the seas.

Throughout that hour Fichtel had tramped the boat deck like a madman. His lean figure quivered with passion, in his gaunt face his eyes burned, for before them the name "Von Hohenburg" danced in letters of fire. Not a common name. Could it—could it be *his* Von Hohenburg? Was the vengeance he had sought vainly

through a year of war and ten years of peace within his grasp at last?

The sea was very rough, but to square accounts—to use Von Hohenburg as the Prussian had used him, to make him taste the same fury and despair, Fichtel would have taken a lifeboat into the heart of a typhoon. He waited for no answer to the challenge flung at his shipmates. He sprang to a lifeboat and ripped off the cover.

The gale tore the canvas from his fingers and kited it, flat and stiff as though the cloth were a sheet of tin, halfway to the *Grossewald*. A wave, flattened by the wind, gray and creamed with foam, engulfed the cover; broke an instant afterward upon the doomed wreck.

"Keep your head, Gus," replied the skipper of the *Arroya*.

It is not pleasant to watch fellow sailors drown, but it is harder for a captain to see his own lifeboat smashed and the sea licking clean above the spot where his own crew has failed in the fight to accomplish a rescue.

Through binoculars the skipper studied the dangers. The *Grossewald* lay on her beam ends, exposing the red paint of her bottom. Around her a mass of wreckage —broken cargo booms, the remains of her lifeboats, a hatch grating—heaved and battered at her iron plates. Her foremast was gone, her bridge was a wreck. The crew, what was left of them, clung to the bridge framework and the weather rail. Their heads could be seen even without glasses, tiny black dots against the gray-white of the sea.

In such weather the *Arroya's* boat would probably be swamped before it was clear of the davits. To row three hundred yards would tax the strength of the most powerful men; and to take sailors off that hulk without getting the boat smashed by floating timbers—

"Too rough now," the skipper decided. The group of boatmen awaiting his orders stirred; he sensed their approval. "We'll stand by till the sea moderates."

"When the sea moderates there'll be nothing left afloat," snarled Fichtel.

From the skipper's hand he snatched the binoculars. He looked for the flag first—discovered it to be the red, black and gold of the German Republic. Von Hohenburg would be in a German ship. With an effort Fichtel steadied his hands. One by one he trained the glasses on the sailors clinging to the rail. The powerful lenses brought face after face seemingly within arm's length. Faces wrung by terror, pallid from exhaustion, blank with despair. But all were strangers. Next, the men on the bridge.

As Fichtel shifted the glasses he cried out, and his knuckles whitened from the convulsive clutch of bony fingers. So close that he might have seized the thick throat, the face seared into his memory rose to confront him. The aquiline beak of a nose, the high cheek bones, the strong willed, implacable lips were unchanged by the passage of eleven years.

Von Hohenburg's features exhibited no fear now, as they had shown no pity then. Fichtel had last seen that face disappearing down the conning tower hatch of a U-boat. The hatch had closed, leaving Fichtel and the eight other survivors of an Allied cargo steamer standing ankle deep in water on the narrow U-boat deck. Around them was a gray sea, slick with oil, dotted with flotsam from their sunken ship. A hatch grating, a cargo boom, a lifeboat splintered by a shell. Off on the horizon an Allied torpedo boat charged toward them, belching black smoke.

Gently the U-boat sank from beneath their feet. The nine survivors fought in the cold gray water. Those who could swim were dragged down by those who could not. Only Fichtel managed to reach a floating oar. His buddy, helpless from a shell wound, was torn out of his arms by a drowning shipmate. He clung to his oar while the destroyer circled, threw his head back and screamed whenever a depth bomb sent a column of spray and black smoke aloft. If hate could have guided the bombs Von Hohenburg would have died then, in gurgling, chlorine stinking dark.

BUT THE destroyer failed. She returned to pick Fichtel up, and he cursed the bluejackets who pulled him from the water for coming back with their job undone.

"He never gave us a chance!" Fichtel raved. "We fought him when we never had a chance, but he can't do murder and never pay up. My turn will come. Listen to me, you! I'll get him, I tell you!"

The pharmacist's mate who acted as doctor aboard the destroyer ascribed that threat to shock and hysteria. He wrapped Fichtel in hot blankets, administered a hypodermic, and was satisfied because the gaunt seaman fell asleep.

"I'll get him!" Fichtel said when he awoke.

The pharmacist did not want his patient to brood.

"Snap out of it! Who do you think you're going to get? The whole Heinie navy?"

"His name is Von Hohenburg. I savvy *Deutsch*," said Fichtel. "He sunk our ship and drowned my buddy."

"All right! I ain't arguing he's not a damned murderer. But that ain't so unusual in this man's war. Didn't we go after the sub without waiting to pick you up? If we'd been close enough when he started to submerge we'd have dumped an ash can on the whole kit and boiling of you. That's orders. Bomb submarines. If you ain't sure whether a sub is Boche or Allied, bomb it anyhow. Maybe this Von Hohenburg knew that."

"What do you know about it?" said Fichtel. "He wiped us out like you'd step on a bug, without caring one way or the other. Don't tell me not to hate him."

The gaunt seaman sat up in the bunk, flushed by excitement and fever.

"The sub was cruising along the surface when we sighted it," he burst out. "Von Hohenburg didn't even submerge. He knew he had us cold. His crew came up on deck—no hurry at all—and manned their gun.

"We swung our old ship around and ran. The chief engineer screwed down the safety valve, and the ship began to shake all over with the speed she was making. Speed! Yeah—just nine knots to outrun a U-boat that could easy do fourteen! The skipper sends a wireless. He comes running to us, back at the three-inch gun we mounted aft, to say there's a Yank destroyer on her way. I guess that was you?"

"That was us," said the pharmacist's mate. "We told you to fight."

"We fought—like an anvil fights the hammer," answered Fichtel bitterly. "We set the sights for extreme range. Our shot fell short. They saw the little plume of spray; the U-boat was far beyond. Out of range."

Fichtel's fist clenched on the blankets.

"But *we* weren't out of range. That sub was four miles off on the gray sea. It was safe from us. We knew it and Von Hohenburg knew it. He stayed out of range like a coward, and smashed us shot by shot.

"The flash of their gun was like a stab of orange fire. We'd fire back, and wait. First a leap of spray where our shot struck. Then we'd hear theirs coming. *Wh-o-oo-wham!* We'd duck. A shell exploding on your deck makes an awful noise. We'd look around to see what was gone, to see what men were down.

"The galley was blown to splinters. A shell made junk of the smoke stack and our speed went down. We hoped Von Hohenburg would come closer. But he was smart; he reduced speed, too.

"A flying piece of iron broke my buddy's hip. I dragged him clear of the recoil of our gun. I'd sailed with him for years and I couldn't do more for him than that. I was too busy passing ammunition—shells that fell short in the sea and tossed up a bit of spray ten times a minute.

"And on every exchange—*wham!* A little thin smoke drifting over our decks. Another jagged hole. Maybe a man that screamed, or sobbed. The sobbing is worse.

"At the gun we kept on passing shells. If we could just have hit the U-boat once. If we could even have gone a shot over,

so Von Hohenburg would think he *might* be hit! Nothing doing. We could just take what they sent."

"It's over now," interrupted the pharmacist's mate.

"It won't be over while I'm still alive," snarled Fichtel. "Our ship went down awfully quick. A shell ripped through our stern without exploding. It went clear to the boilers. The deck heaved, and broke in two amidships. Steam billowed out at us, but we were flung into the sea before steam grew hot enough to burn. I grabbed my buddy's shoulder, and then the suction took us down. I don't know how far. Everything went black. I came to on the surface, with an oar in my grip. That gave just support enough to keep Billy's nose and mine above the water. Probably I should have been glad when the U-boat came nosing through the oil and ashes that floated on the water. We were drowning, all nine of us.

"Von Hohenburg stopped the sub as close to us as he could. The gun crew tossed us lines and hauled us aboard. We huddled together on the open deck. Underfoot the plates were slippery, and we were so all in that standing up was hard. The Heinie's crew went down a hatch, and Von Hohenburg leaned out of the conning tower to watch us.

" 'Why didn't you surrender?' he said. His English was good. No more German accent than I've got, though he spoke like a Britisher.

" 'Who wants to know?' I answered.

" 'Overlieutenant Franz Von Hohenburg,' he answered, with a smile that was like a crack in the wooden block of his face. 'You are the captain of the—'

" 'Chief Officer of the *Nokomis*, if that'll do you any good,' I said. I was fighting mad because he'd never given us a chance, but I was thinking of Billy, then. 'Sit down, Billy. I can't hold you up,' I whispered.

" 'Nix, Gus! That'll bring me too close to the water,' he whispered back, and shook a little in my arms. Then I sighted you. So did Von Hohenburg. He began to lower the hatch cover over his head.

"He knew Billy was hurt," continued Fichtel. "He didn't say a word. That wooden face didn't change a muscle. Straight in the eye he looked at me through the crack as the hatch came down. He wouldn't give us a chance. He might have told us to jump. There was my oar floating somewhere around. Other driftwood. But he—all he thought of was his own skin."

"Maybe," said the pharmacist's mate, for Fichtel had dropped back on to the pillow, exhausted by emotion.

"You think I'm out of my head," gasped the gaunt seaman. "Maybe I am. If we could have fought him back—if he'd let us go down with our ship, I'd be willing to call it war. But he gave us a little hope, and then did murder. I'm going to get square—on some German."

"Ain't you German yourself?"

"Born in Stuttgart. Is that my fault?" Fichtel snarled.

The pharmacist's mate made no answer. Gradually Fichtel's eyes closed. He slept again, and by the next day he was able to move around the destroyer. He was hollow eyed and taciturn. To no member of the destroyer's crew, nor to any shipmate subsequently, did he ever refer again to his hatred.

YET THE desire for personal vengeance never left him. Years of frustration only strengthened it into a fixed and overmastering idea, so that, standing hatless on the *Arroya's* boat deck, where Captain Oliver saw a rough sea, Fichtel was conscious only of a bit of water separating him from Von Hohenburg. While the lifeboat crew shrank from danger he regretted only the delay which must precede the consummation of his vengeance. Disregarding the captain's order, he stepped to the patent davits and commenced to crank the boat out over the *Arroya's* side.

"Going alone?" the captain demanded.

"I'm going somehow," said Fichtel. "*You* don't have to. Are you stopping volunteers?"

A freckled sailor pushed out of the life-

boatmen and whirled the forward davit crank excitedly.

"Here's a Galway lad will go wid ye!" he sang out.

"Who's coming beside Connor?" Fichtel appealed. "What say, sailors? We need five more on the oars. You rowing stroke, Jim? You've been in the Coast Guard!"

"I doubt we can make it," replied the big lifeboatman thus singled out.

Jim Gill was a slow moving, slow spoken man from the sands of Cape Cod. He was forty, with a broad flat face and a small pug nose. His hair was the ash blond color that is almost white, and while his strength would be invaluable on an oar, he was spurred neither by the enthusiasm which flushed the Irish lad's freckled countenance nor the secret hate which made Fichtel tremble.

The gaunt seaman was on the brink of failure. He swung the lifeboat out, prepared it so that the crew had only to take their places before he replied.

"That might be you and me over there, Jim. They're watching us every time they shake the spray out of their eyes. Are you going to stand here safe and let them hope, until the sea comes along that tears their fingers loose? Maybe it ain't too rough, Jim. We won't know till we try."

Fichtel ended with a snarl, stepped into the boat and seized an oar to fend off from the *Arroya's* hull.

Jim drew a long breath. With leaden feet he moved reluctantly from the ship into the lifeboat. With almost equal slowness four more oarsmen seated themselves on the thwarts.

"S'pose we got to go," Jim muttered. "I think you're crazy."

"Not me," Fichtel whispered back with fierce triumph. "I was near drowned once, and I'm squaring up." Aloud he shouted, "Lower away!"

The skipper scarcely had need to slack the tackles. That launching was the gale's work. A wave heaved up, and the lifeboat staggered on the crest, fell as the wave dropped with a swoop that turned Fichtel weak from stomach to knees. One instant the *Arroya's* wet plates loomed above the crew like the side of an iron wall, the next they crouched as the boat was towed upward toward the dangling falls which swung ready to brain them. Fichtel lunged against his steering oar to throw the boat stern in. Jim was pale as paper, yet he planted his oar butt against the ship's side at exactly the right moment, and fended off till the veins swelled on his forehead, till the oar cracked.

Strong as a bull, he held the boat clear. As they lifted on the third wave ten feet of water foamed between them and the *Arroya's* side. They got out oars, and Jim set the stroke.

"You done good, Jim," Fichtel said.

"How are we going to get back? Never hook a boat on to them falls. Swinging like whip lashes, they be," muttered the big sailor.

Fichtel crouched over his steering oar. His left elbow was crooked over his face to shield his eyes from the spray that blew in level volleys off the surface of the sea.

"I don't know, Jim," he answered indifferently. "Ride out the gale in the open boat, I expect." Fichtel's moment had come.

He rose, swaying to the pitching of the lifeboat. Fifty feet away the *Grossewald* drifted with astonishing speed. Jim had to row steadily to maintain their position. Even without glasses Von Hohenburg's features were distinct, and Fichtel knew that his own figure was conspicuous, that his voice would carry clearly down the wind.

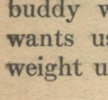
"Von Hohenburg! Do you know me?" he shouted. "Remember the sailors on your deck in 1918?"

The Prussian lifted binoculars. Incredulity, astonishment, recognition flitted across his face. To Fichtel the slight movement of the lips were like shouted words; he was disappointed only that when the glasses were lowered Von Hohenburg's expression was wooden. He pointed toward the stern of his ship.

"Wants you to row aft. We can't come alongside," muttered Jim. "So you know

him, huh? Now I see why you brought us out."

"No, you don't. I came because the—" Fichtel checked the expletive on his lips. To tell Jim this man had drowned his buddy was impossible. "Of course he wants us aft!" he said, and threw his weight upon the steering oar.



THEY reached the stern before the first sailor was able to work his way along the rail. The decks of the *Grossewald* were pitched at an angle so steep the sailor could not keep his feet, even by clinging to the rail with both hands. Twice he slipped, and once a big wave buried the rail and forced him to hang on desperately. His feet twisted in the wash like bits of rag.

Fichtel sent the lifeboat as close beneath the overhang of the stern as his crew would take her. Connor braced himself in the bow, holding a boathook. The sailor leaped for the boat. Though he landed in the sea, a life preserver kept him afloat. Connor grappled him with the boathook, drew him alongside, and hauled him aboard.

"How many of you?" shouted Fichtel in German.

"Fourteen left," the rescued man answered. "Seven were in the hold trying to shift cargo. They never got out when the ship was thrown on her beam ends. Two more were on the well deck. I tied a rope around our captain. He tried to reach them, but a great wave flung him against the bulwark. His arm and leg—"

"Did Von Hohenburg know me?" Fichtel interrupted.

Hoarsely Jim whispered to learn what this jabber in a foreign language was about.

"Shut up. He can't speak English," said Fichtel, who hoped none of the boat's crew could speak German. He believed they could not.

"He knew you," said the rescued man. "He told me, 'Never have I forgot that face.' "

"And that was all?"

"That was all. Our men are afraid. They have held on in one place so long they fear to move. But the captain knew you could not come alongside. He told me to go first, because I was second mate. When the men see me in the boat, they will dare to jump also, no?"

"It's a wonder he didn't come first himself!"

"*Ach, nein!* Do you not understand? He can not!" cried the rescued German in startled protest at Fichtel's savage tone.

"I can wait. His coming last makes it easier to leave him," the gaunt seaman muttered to himself. "If the wreck will just float that long."

He might have added, if the strength of the boat crew held out, for each individual rescue involved a minute of intense exertion and peril while the lifeboat maneuvered close to the *Grossewald's* stern. The wonder was that Connor's boathook drew ten men in succession from the water before there was an accident.

For a long time the eleventh man refused to jump. Ropes draped from the *Grossewald's* taffrail floated in the water to entangle him. A big timber washed and thumped against the stern, and Fichtel's boat was thirty feet away. Waves hurled it forward almost upon the ship. Jim's oar would bend as he set the pace for a dozen fast strokes, while in the bow Connor shook his boathook, encouraging the German, cursing the sea as though the water had ears to hear and a purpose to thwart the rescue.

Perfect timing was essential, and the man jumped unexpectedly. Connor had to reach too far. He was overbalanced when his hook caught in the sailor's oilskins. Instead of drawing the man aboard, he was pulled himself into the sea.

"Pull!" Fichtel shouted to Jim.

Dropping his steering oar, he leaped from stern to bow, skipping somehow from thwart to thwart over the oars, and slipped over the side into the water. He held on to the boat's lifelines; he caught Connor's foot, but the boat slid down the steep side of a wave and crashed against the ship. Wood cracked and water spurted through the bottom.

Jim and the other oarsman kept their heads. They rowed furiously, without losing stroke. Their steadiness prevented the boat from turning broadside to the waves and capsizing, though on the following sea a second collision was averted by a margin of inches. The rescued sailors reached over the bow and drew Fichtel aboard. He had clung to Connor; Connor to his boathook. The eleventh sailor was pulled aboard, but his teeth chattered from shock and terror. The others were all exhausted and on the verge of panic, for the ten successful rescues only magnified the peril of attempting more, now that they had glimpsed disaster.

"One more man!" Fichtel shouted. "Jim, you steer. I'll pick him up."

"There's water in the bottom!" shouted the big lifeboatman.

"I told you to steer," Fichtel said.

He realized he had revealed his actual purpose, for there were still two men aboard, and yet from the rescued sailors huddled between the thwarts came no contradiction. The twelfth German was waiting to jump, but Von Hohenburg was not yet in sight.

"Gimme me hook! I'll git all these square headed slobs if I gotta dive to the bottom!" shouted Connor, fighting mad.

"You'll sit down, lad," Fichtel contradicted.

He wanted the boathook in his own hands when Von Hohenburg appeared. Skilfully he caught the last sailor, pulled the man aboard with one heave of a powerful arm, and waited.

No one came.

BEHIND Fichtel a German cursed, ripped off a shirt, and tried to stuff the cloth into a spouting crack.

"We're sinking, Gus!" Jim called from the stern. "Come on away! He must have got washed over trying to get aft!"

"No," said Fichtel hoarsely. He caught the last man to be rescued and shook him to and fro. "Where's Von Hohenburg—your captain?" he shouted in German.

"Not coming."

Fichtel's arms relaxed. He gulped, unable to speak coherently; his eyes probed the German's uplifted face.

"*Ja wohl!*" the sailor affirmed. "His will is to go down with the ship. Did the second mate not tell you? There were two Von Hohenburg tried to rescue. He broke his left leg and arm. He could not hold the rail. For us to carry him he would not permit."

"Why?"

"His orders we do not question. But, because no man could bring another. I could barely hold on alone."

"Damn what he wants," said Fichtel. "The skipper's crippled!" he shouted to Jim.

The flat faced seaman shrugged. He gestured at the crowded boat in which the water was above the bottom boards. The rescued men had begun to bail with their hats, but without saying a word Jim implied their efforts were futile, that the lifeboat must start at once for the *Arroya*.

"I can swim, Gus," yelled Connor. "I can climb up one of them ropes hanging over the stern."

"You'll stay here," Fichtel answered. "That ship's sinking. I—" the gaunt seamen rose—"don't get me wrong, Connor. I hate this skipper worse than hell. Take Jim's orders, and don't play the hero. I won't be doublecrossed after eleven years!"

As the boat was flung close to the *Grossewald* by the sea Fichtel leaped for one of the dangling lines. He managed to climb it, and worked his way with reckless haste toward the bridge. The *Grossewald* was on the verge of her final plunge, and Von Hohenburg must not go down with the belief that he drowned by his own choice.

The Prussian sat on the steeply slanting bridge. His broken leg stuck straight out along the deck; his arm was bound inside his life preserver.

"I could save you," Fichtel said. "I will not. Do you remember why?"

"I remember." Von Hohenburg's expression was wooden, though behind the mask muscles twitched from the pain of

broken bones. "I remember other faces, too. Many things I had to watch. My teeth clench, but my face shows nothing, lest my own crew think me weak. It was war; what I did was duty."

"It was murder!"

"Not eleven years ago. But war hates pass, while between man and man hate lives, is it not so? I have seen faces in my dreams, and woke in sweat. But were there war I would do the same again. You have seen only my face, *nicht wahr?* Punish quickly then, for the ship sinks."

"I've dreamed of tearing out your thick throat. Of grinding my heel into your eyes," Fichtel said, yet he made no move to execute the threat.

He would be revenged, but that would give him no pleasure. Von Hohenburg's leg stuck forward helplessly. His left arm was wrapped inside the life preserver, his right had to grip a stanchion to keep him from sliding off that sharply slanted deck.

"You can do both." Von Hohenburg's stolid expression altered. Grim humor came into the pale blue eyes and twitched his stern lips. "You can not rescue me, nor will you be picked up this second time. It will hurt me no more than my leg. Why not?" he asked.

"Can't you grovel, damn you?" snarled Fichtel.

Von Hohenburg's eyes widened, but before he could answer the ship lurched and rolled ponderously over. He was flung into Fichtel's arms, and the two slid into the water. A wave broke upon them. They were carried down wind, hurled over and over as a bather is flung about by the surf. Fichtel felt the suction drag him backward. His lungs were bursting. He held Von Hohenburg in the frantic clutch of one who is half drowned, and when at last the buoyancy of two life preservers began to drag them upward, when Fichtel's head broke through the surface for a mouthful of blessed air, he continued to hold on. Von Hohenburg was limp and unconscious. The vengeance sought for eleven years had become puerile.

Of rescue Fichtel never dreamed. Something struck him a heavy blow on his shoulder, but he thought of nothing but drift wood, and only grasped at it instinctively. Yet what he had gripped was the head of a boathook; he was seized and hauled upward. Dimly he realized that other arms had snatched Von Hohenburg, but he did not care. For a moment he fainted. When he came to he lay in the stern sheet with his head between Jim's knees.

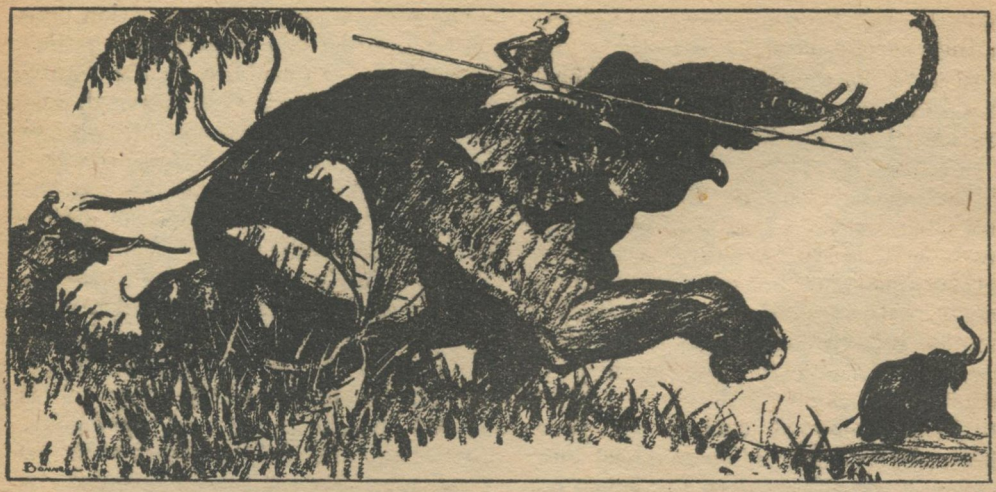
"Didn't you—row back?" Fichtel gasped. "You were scared—"

"Sure I was scared, but I had to stick, didn't I? I've been scared all along," growled the big lifeboatman. "When the water rose high enough to bail it, we could keep it from rising any higher. We'll float until the sea calms enough for the *Arroya* to pick us up."

"Von Hohenburg—"

"He's living. I thought you hated him?" Jim answered.

"I did," said Fichtel wearily. "War and peace. Kill them one year, save them the next. I don't know why. A man has to do what he must, however he feels, eh. Jim?"



Poo Lorn the Terrible

A Tale of the Teak Forests

By REGINALD CAMPBELL

POO LORN the Terrible, his work over for the day, brooded alone in the teak forest. Round his great forelegs were iron hobbles which, though allowing him to move slowly forward while grazing, prevented him from straying too far from the humans he served and hated.

His hatred for these humans, implanted in his fierce soul since he had been a tiny *butcha* elephant, had of late doubled in intensity; for queer, nameless instincts were beginning to urge him to make a long journey to the north.

Poo Lorn rapped his trunk against the ground, swished with ears and tail his formidable, gigantic body, and strove fruitlessly to rend apart his hobbles. The iron links seared into his flesh, and he rumbled with wrath. Why had he been kept in durance vile for all these years, when there were other elephants who roamed free and wild through the jungle ranges?

Many, many seasons had passed, so it seemed to him, since he had been broken to harness, and his mind went dimly back to his youth. He remembered the first four years of his life when, as a little, squeaking *butcha*, he had run by the side of his gentle mother, who had worked for the same teak company of which he himself was now the slave. These years had been, perhaps, the pleasantest of all, for then at least he had been free of the shackles that since had bound him. During this

period he had invariably kept close to his mother as she prodded and thrust the great teak logs down the rolling forest hills into the swirling rivers below. Neither by day nor by night had he ever left her side, for she was his sole protector. By day she shielded him from the heavy, unwieldy balks of timber that might crush his little body, and by night she was his sure safeguard against the yellow ghosts with amber eyes that rippled through the darkened jungle.

At last, however, on one never to be forgotten day, some of the dusky Siamese and Lao natives who worked for the company had come to him. Under the directions of a white man, they had roped and dragged him away from his gentle mother. He had squealed and fought and given them more trouble than any small elephant they ever could remember, but all his struggles had been in vain and soon he found himself securely bound between four stout posts that had been sunk in the earth. Tied fore and aft to these posts, for three whole days and nights he had fought to be free, till, worn out by exhaustion, he had ceased his plunging and suffered himself to be approached by a mahout.

Thus did Poo Lorn, taught by bitter experience that men were stronger and wiser than he, enter into captivity.

There followed for him a long period of howdah work, the howdahs and weights in them increasing in size as he himself grew in stature, and by the time he had reached the age of fifteen the white man who ruled the company's teak forest adjudged him strong enough to commence his real task of dragging timber.

Poo Lorn almost liked this change in his duties, for the terrific exertion of pulling the inert, dead weight logs of teak gave him something on which his rising strength could bite. Nevertheless, as one by one the seasons passed, so did his hatred of servitude grow and grow. He began to give trouble to his mahouts, with the result that only the most skilful and fearless among them could handle him. As for the remaining elephants belonging to the company, even they held him in considerable respect, for once a certain Poo Sen, who was a bully and one of the most powerful animals in the force, had attacked him for no apparent reason. Though years younger than his aggressor, Poo Lorn had fought back with a cold, silent ferocity that had soon driven Poo Sen, humbled and panic stricken, out of the clearing in which they had battled.

The news of this exploit went the round of the company's coolies and mahouts; and, mindful of Poo Lorn's fierce mien and magnificent gait, they had named him the Terrible.

Of this Poo Lorn was naturally unaware, though of his bodily power he had recently come to be fully conscious. For, as he now stood brooding alone in the forest, he had reached his twenty-sixth year, and thus was in the first bloom of that gigantic strength that was soon to make him famous throughout not only the length and breadth of Siam, but also the lands of the Leu, Karen, Kamoo and a dozen other jungle dwelling tribes.

Poo Lorn the Terrible swayed his vast bulk and brooded on the wrongs done to him by mankind.

AS EVENING mellowed over the earth, Poo Lorn grunted, for his ears had caught the sound of bare footsteps approaching. A moment later his mahout, Ai Kham, came into view. Ai Kham was lean, swarthy, villainous and without doubt the most daring of all the company elephant riders. Poo Lorn hated him, as he hated, with one exception, the rest of humanity. But Ai Kham was possessed of a spiked iron goad and a wicked little dagger, both of which weapons were capable of inflicting unpleasant, smarting wounds. Poo Lorn therefore suffered the hobbles to be taken off his legs and swung across his broad back, after which the mahout climbed on to his massive neck.

Guided by deft touches behind the ears, Poo Lorn was then headed through the silent forest in the direction of the native village of Mong Ngow, a fact which told

the elephant that the weekly inspection by the great white man of the company was taking place that very evening.

Soon the towering jungle foliage gave way to a broad path, and five minutes later Poo Lorn was muffling noiselessly through the dusty, crowded marketplace of the village. Surly pariah dogs, with fleabitten heads and cringing flanks, slunk away at his approach. Gaily appareled Lao girls, laden with fruit, salt and tobacco, ran timidly into their huts, while even the menfolk shrank to one side, for was not Poo Lorn the Terrible walking in their midst?

The village ended, and the white gates of the company compound came into view. Poo Lorn swung through the gates and entered the garden, where the evening sun was casting tints of rare beauty over the emerald green of the lawns and the coconut palms that waved their stately fronds in the rapidly cooling air.

The remaining company elephants had already gathered in the compound, and Poo Lorn took his place at the head of them. A short period of waiting ensued, then from a large bungalow built on the right of the premises there emerged three human beings. They were the white manager of the company, his wife and their little girl of twelve. All three passed along the line of elephants and finally came to a halt before Poo Lorn, whereupon a strange thing happened. Though the two elder people remained at a safe distance from his tusks, not so the little girl of twelve, for she ran up to him and gave him a thick, sticky ball of the pounded tamarind he loved.

Poo Lorn slowly chewed the ball, the while she stroked his heavy teak scarred trunk, and soon a deep rumble of satisfaction came from the depths of his gigantic body, for he was now with his only friend. Her father he hated, since he knew by instinct that he was the man responsible for this long captivity of his; the mahout he hated; humans of all kind, whether white, black or brown, he hated with the whole strength of his being. But the one exception was this little girl who for eight long years had never failed to be kind to him whenever they met.

Poo Lorn rumbled again, and perhaps his thoughts went back to that first meeting with her. He, then seventeen years of age and already gaining a reputation for fierceness, had come into the compound for the usual weekly inspection. The child, a tiny tot of four, had broken away from her mother and, after the manner of children, run right in under his tusks. The onlookers, fearful of enraging him, had signaled to his mahout to remain absolutely motionless, and Poo Lorn, undisturbed by the goad, had made no effort to savage the child. Instead, he had gazed down curiously at this strange little creature below him. She had laughed, and with chubby hands that knew no fear endeavored to seize the tip of his wriggling trunk. The baby hands had tickled, and at their touch Poo Lorn had been conscious of some strange emotion arising within him. He had touched her with his trunk, which made the child laugh again and prattle in delight.

She had finally run back to her mother, who, weeping, caught her to her bosom. Poo Lorn's mahout had then swung him off to the forest, but the child had waved goodby, and that had been the beginning of a friendship which had increased with every succeeding year.

"Mother—" the girl's face, tanned by sun, flushed with excitement, now turned to her parents—"I don't believe he's fierce at all. Why, I believe even you could feed him. Come and try. I'll stand by him while you do."

"Your mother," broke in the manager, who was a practical individual, "will do nothing of the sort, Elise."

The speaker paused, then flung up his arms in admiration of the animal that towered above his daughter.

"My God," he breathed, "if Poo Lorn isn't just the grandest thing alive!"

Now there was reason for this remark, as the last rays of the setting sun were shining fully upon Poo Lorn the Terrible, revealing every inch of him. Though not yet full grown, he stood nine feet ten

inches at the shoulder, and his weight was well over six thousand pounds. The great curved tusks, gleaming in the sunlight, showed up in vivid relief against the dark background of slate colored skin. In the giant head, that had the driving power of a slow motion sledge hammer, his two little eyes were molten, reflecting the unconquerable soul within. Behind the head his broad, shapely back swept downward in one long line of symmetry, ending in a pair of thickset, stocky legs that were capable of dragging the largest teak log ever extracted from his native haunts.

"I can't get into the mind of that elephant," said the manager to his wife, as he gazed thoughtfully at Poo Lorn. "He's an enigma to me, and I did think I knew elephants. However, one always learns."

Elise came running back and took her father's arm affectionately.

"What can't you understand about him, daddy?" she asked.

"His mind, as I've said before, for goodness knows I've never ill treated him, yet he seems to hate the lot of us."

"Well, he doesn't hate me."

"You're the one and only exception, little lady."

"Perhaps Poo Lorn wants his freedom," ventured the manager's wife timidly.

"I'm sure he does," said Elise in positive tones. "Why don't you let him go, daddy?"

"What? And lose the best timber working elephant the company possesses? No, I'm not a fool! Still—"

The manager bit his lip and a frown crossed his forehead, for he had heard certain tales from the natives concerning Poo Lorn. Though his mother had been the very gentlest of females, rumor had it that Poo Lorn's sire was a wild elephant which had got in among the tame workers as they grazed at night in the forest. He, the manager, had at first been inclined to smile at the story, but now, in view of Poo Lorn's apparent hatred for all things human, he was beginning to place some credence in what he had heard.

"Ai Kham," said he finally, "from now on take double care that Poo Lorn's hobbles are well secured."

The mahout salaamed and then, as the light was failing, returned Poo Lorn to the forest. There he slipped on the shackles, and the leviathan was left to graze his fill before another morning's work should come in the rushing, teak strewn jungle streams.

AS THE darkness deepened, so did that strange desire for the north come upon Poo Lorn with double force. Presently clouds swept over the sky, and growls of thunder began to roll sullenly over the tree clad hills. The rain and the wind tore through the storm tossed foliage, and the thunder and lightning bellowed and flared in tune with the wildness of the night.

Electrified, well nigh maddened with the shrieking of the tempest, Poo Lorn fought with the hobbles as never he had fought before. Under the terrific strain the stout links bent, twisted and finally snapped. With his great trunk, which had the strength of a live steel cable, he wrenched the broken ends from off his legs. He was free.

Immense, mysterious, he surged forward through the shouting darkness, heading northward. He traveled all night and far into the next morning and then halted to rest in the heat of the day. He drank from a jungle pool, squirted streams of water over his body, and with his forefeet he kicked up some loose earth into a little mound. This earth he seized with the curled end of his trunk, and then sent it flying all over his dampened form. Covered thus with a thin layer of mud, he was now protected from the myriads of stinging pests that constantly harassed him, and therefore at leisure to graze in peace and comfort. He fed for four hours, slept for two, then on he went again. Just before dark he passed a herd of wild elephants and some young bulls; they swung round at his approach and looked at him in threatening fashion.

Though the desire to join this herd was strong within him, he took no notice of it for the moment and, passing unchal-

lenged, continued on his long journey to the north. On, on, on he went, guided by the blind, nameless instinct that had been implanted in his soul for as long as he could remember.

Thirty days later Poo Lorn returned to that very same herd. The journey being over, and the object of his quest discovered, his wish was now to consort with his wild brethren and become their lord and ruler. He rolled slowly in between the huge bulks on either side of him, whereupon the herd abruptly left off grazing and called to one another. The females, as ever vastly pleased to have some cause for fright, squeaked in terror, but not so their old leader, an enormous bull standing well over nine feet. He challenged, and Poo Lorn accepting, the pair met in a large natural clearing in the forest with an impact that literally shook the earth.

And then, for three whole hours, there took place one of the most terrific battles that had ever been waged in the jungle mazes. The old bull was wily and, being the winner of a dozen other fights, at the beginning he took this young intruder to be an easy prey. As for Poo Lorn, who up till now had only experienced one contest worth mentioning, he soon found himself fighting for life against this tremendous antagonist.

As usual, he battled in complete silence, using every ounce of his fresh young strength to overcome his enemy. They fought all through the clearing, then lurched and stumbled into the surrounding forest. Great trees were sent crashing to ruin by the shock of their gigantic, straining bodies, the noise of the falling branches mingling with the shrill trumpets of the old bull in one vast paroxysm of sound. Bamboo clumps were torn up and flung to one side as if by a whirlwind, but in the end by sheer, downright strength Poo Lorn prevailed, and the old tusker, staggering and bleeding from a hundred wounds, shambled off through the trees to disappear forever from the sight of those he once had ruled.

Poo Lorn then returned to the terrified herd. He flung up his tusks, gleaming red and white in the fiery rays of the sun, and let out one great screaming trumpet of challenge. Though he was not yet full grown, none of the remaining bulls dared to oppose him, and thus did Poo Lorn come into his kingdom.

The months that followed passed pleasantly for Poo Lorn. Since his defeat of the old bull no animal questioned his right to leadership, and consequently he was free to take the herd to whatever haunts he might choose. In the main, he elected to stay in the locality where first he had found them, for the position was favorable. There were large jungle streams with deep pools in which they could bathe every morning and evening; there were cool, inviting clumps of bamboo under which they could rest in the worst heat of the day and, best of all, the grazing everywhere for miles around was plentiful.

Thus a whole year passed without incident, and then danger threatened in the shape of some men under the command of a native chief. This chief had tracked down the herd, and now, with the aid of flares and tomtoms, he was hopeful of driving it down a steep *nullah* into a large bamboo stockade he had built for the purpose of trapping the beasts. But the chief had reckoned without Poo Lorn, who held the advantage over other wild elephants in that he had behind him a full twenty-five years' practical experience of man.

Though in most herds females are usually to be found in the van of the grazing animals, Poo Lorn had always been careful to occupy this position himself, and now, as he heard the clamor behind him, he slowly moved forward, only to arrive shortly at the head of the *nullah*, which had steep, unscalable banks on either side. Here he halted abruptly, for along that *nullah* was danger, he reckoned, else why did these men desire the herd to enter this creek?

Poo Lorn swung round his bulk and, passing through his flustered herd, approached the line of humans behind them. They were shouting, yelling, beating drums and making every kind of noise;

but to Poo Lorn they did not appear so very formidable. Poo Lorn gave one great bellow and, at a fast shuffle, charged straight at the thin line of beaters. The remainder of the herd, after a momentary hesitation, followed him, with the result that the dusky Laos and Kamoos who formed the gang were cast aside like chaff before the wind.

Dropping their weapons, they fled for their lives, and when the last of the elephants had disappeared from view they hastened to the stockade, where the chief was patiently awaiting the arrival of his victims. The Laos then spoke to this chief, and their words were short and to the point. They had been engaged, so they said, to help in the work of trapping elephants, but not super-elephants.

"Super-elephants?" the chief had asked in puzzled surprise.

Yes, for at the head of this herd was an elephant of the size of ten whole elephants in one. Here the Laos exaggerated, but may be pardoned for so doing, since they were very, very scared. It had been utterly fearless of them, they continued, and had charged them in spite of the fact that they had yelled and shouted till their lungs had well nigh cracked. They therefore signified their intention of taking no more part in the affair, and the chief, being wise in his generation, acceded to their wishes and abandoned the attempt, leaving Poo Lorn and his companions free and unmolested in the forest.

BY THE time Poo Lorn had been three years with the herd, that strange, restless urge to go northward assailed him again. Accordingly, one dark night he stole from the midst of his herd and with giant legs strode off to his secret destination. He reached it safely, then returned the way he had come, but a month had elapsed before he was back in the grazing grounds. And of the herd he found no sign.

He wandered around in the neighborhood, sensed their trail, and followed it. It led in the direction of the village of Mong Ngow, fifty miles distant. Pausing only for brief intervals to rest and feed, he swung through the forest glades till he was within two miles of the village, whereupon the sound of bellows and trumpetings smote upon his great waving ears. He now advanced more cautiously, and soon, peering from the shade of his leafy screen, he saw that his herd had been captured and was enclosed inside a large stockade.

The stockade was bristling with wicked bamboo spears, and all round it were the tame elephants of the very company for which he had worked himself.

For awhile Poo Lorn watched the scene. Then he noiselessly retreated and put a good five miles between himself and the stockade. Halting in a thick clump of evergreen, he brooded. So his herd, the herd he had ruled for three long years, had been captured in his absence—by the white man, of all people. That the hated manager was responsible for this he knew by instinct rather than by reasoning, and gradually Poo Lorn's fierce soul was consumed with a wrath that was as cold as it was terrible. To rescue his companions was impossible. One course, however, did remain, and that was to wreak dire vengeance on the humans who were the natural enemies of his kind.

Though the desire for vengeance was hot in his mind, he did not hurry. Instead, he remained near his place of concealment for the whole of one week, by the end of which time the moon had waned and the nights were at their blackest. Choosing his hour well, he then stalked through the jungle. An hour's walking brought him to the well known path that led to the village, and shortly the sleeping marketplace loomed up on either side of him. Here he came to a standstill, towering upon the dusty track like a huge shadow, as black as the night that clothed him. On the last occasion when he had been in this selfsame village a mahout had sat astride his neck and chains were upon him. Now, however, he was free, free to use his gigantic strength as and how he liked.

He approached the tallest of the huts,

which happened to be the headman's. It was built on tall stilts, which served to protect the inmates from the dampness of the rains and any possible attack from wild animals. Curling his trunk round one of these stilts, he pulled. The post snapped like a twig. Then a second was split asunder, and the flimsy hut swayed and toppled to the ground. The headman and his wife, by the merest chance escaping with nothing worse than bruises, fought out of the wreckage and fled screaming down the path.

Poo Lorn, having trampled the broken hut well under foot, then proceeded to further demolishment. One shanty after another the whole way along the line was hurled down and pounded to pieces with a slow thoroughness that was all the more destructive, the while the villagers, aroused by the frantic shouts of their headman, rushed wildly for some place of safety, without so much as a thought for their scanty possessions left behind.

When the last of the huts was a mere twisted heap of splinters, Poo Lorn made off for another destination. This was the hated white man's compound, which he would now lay waste as he had the village. In his cold, callous rage the memory of the little girl who had once been his friend was lost upon him. He was now a pulsating engine of destruction. Immense, implacable, he stalked on through the velvety night toward the compound where, unknown to him, the majority of the villagers had fled, seeking the white man's protection.

The Laos had assembled in the middle of the huge garden, and at their head was the company manager, clad in a dressing gown he had thrust hastily over his pajamas. His features were pale and drawn, though in his heart was a silent prayer of thanksgiving. His wife and daughter were absent on holiday and were now hundreds of miles away in civilized Bangkok, but—and here Fate smiled grimly—with them had gone his only heavy rifle, which he had given them to have repaired. The weapon he now grasped was an ancient Winchester, almost useless against an elephant, and since the night was very dark, he had little hope of stopping Poo Lorn should the elephant choose to attack the compound.

The manager frowned and, after giving directions to the crowd to scatter if Poo Lorn appeared, he held his gun ready.

Poo Lorn arrived at the white gates of the compound. They were shut, but this did not trouble him; they dissolved in a sharp crackling, and a moment later he was striding across the lawn. He saw the black mass of people ahead, curled his trunk over his tusks, and charged. The humans scattered to left and right, whereupon the dim shape of the white man's bungalow rose up in the distance behind where they had been. Poo Lorn made for that bungalow. As he did so a loud report sounded and he received a sharp sting in the side, of which he took no notice whatever. He shuffled straight on, intent on the bungalow.

Arrived there, he immediately began operations. The building was, like the headman's, supported on posts, though the latter were made of heavy squares of teak and were stronger far than any in the village. Poo Lorn therefore made no attempt to pull at them, but, stooping, placed the thick root of his trunk, at a point nearly between the eyes, against the stoutest of the posts. He then heaved with the whole might of his body, and the post split and fell.

After two more had been dealt with in the same manner, he drew back a few paces from the bungalow, for he was no fool. Many a time during his servitude to man had he cleared stacks of teak logs in the rivers, and he knew the danger to life and limb that arose as they came tumbling and crashing down. This bungalow, too, was large and heavy, and accordingly he realized that it behooved him to keep at a safe distance when it fell. He therefore went round to the jutting front veranda and pushed at the outside edge with his tusks. The whole building swayed, then a second report rang out. The sting of the bullet served merely to give Poo Lorn added impetus, with the

result that the bungalow toppled over sidewise like a pack of cards.

He trod and thrust savagely at the ruins and, when destruction was complete, turned his attention to the last remaining large building in the compound, which chanced to be the company's office. This having gone the way of the rest, he then made for the forest again. As he recrossed the lawns he was vaguely aware of figures flying hither and thither, and of confused crying and shouting, but he took no heed of the tumult. He, Poo Lorn the Terrible, had had his revenge.

He swung through the ruined village, where no one dared to hinder him, and plunged into the jungle. He passed the hobbled elephants of the company, who called nervously, but these also he ignored; and after forty-eight hours' travel he was back in the deserted grazing grounds.

There he resolved to remain alone for the rest of his natural life. No more company for him. The presence of wild companions might bring humans to the spot again, the humans who threatened to prevent him from returning to that distant goal far away in the north. No, he would remain alone, but—should these humans attempt to recapture his own giant body, he, being free and unhampered by any timid herd, would deal with them in dire and terrible fashion.

Poo Lorn brooded, then resumed his interrupted feeding.

II

TIME had wrought changes in Mong Ngow, for, though the buildings of the village and the company compound had been quickly rebuilt after Poo Lorn's raid, a new master had come to rule the little community. The old manager and his wife had retired to England, leaving Elise to be the mistress of the compound. Married to the young assistant who had succeeded her father, she was now a comely woman of twenty-five and the proud possessor of a daughter of her own, a wee tot of four years who was a miniature replica of herself.

She, Elise, often spoke to her husband of the great Poo Lorn, whom she remembered well, and the husband, being young and enthusiastic, thought long in the lonely watches of the night, for many were the tales he had heard whispered among the Lao coolies and mahouts of the company. It was rumored, so they said, that Poo Lorn still roamed the forest ranges but two days' travel from Mong Ngow, and that by now he had reached a fabulous size and strength.

If, reasoned the new manager, he could recapture Poo Lorn, the feat would be a feather in his cap and would undoubtedly bring him into the good books of the firm. He therefore turned the matter over in his head, and finally, when the hot weather had arrived and the jungle was a bare wilderness of parched trees, he judged it time to act. The rainy season having long since passed, the tame elephants of the company were free from timber work, as also were the coolies and mahouts. Accordingly, he sent for his headman, and soon runners were scouring the forest in all directions.

Their task was made easier for them by the scorching March sun, which had burned out the tangled masses of creeper and vegetation that flourished in the rains. The runners returned to Mong Ngow at the end of the month with important information. Poo Lorn, they reported, had been located in a thick patch of evergreen some sixty miles from the village, whereupon the manager ordered an immediate palaver and the compound buzzed with activity.

POO LORN the Terrible was standing, alone as ever, in the thickest part of the forest, where dark evergreen trees shaded him completely. He had been unmolested for ten long years, and with every one of those years his stature had increased. Being now thirty-eight, he had reached the very prime of his health and his strength. He stood a full ten feet at the shoulder; his tusks were just short of one hundred inches on the outside

curve, and in the whole of the vast jungle ranges extending from India through Burma to Siam there was no elephant mightier than he.

He had led a peaceful, easy going existence, for during this period he had remained completely undisturbed by the men he hated. There were the jungle people, of course—queer, stunted little beings who sometimes passed near him as he grazed, but these he knew were very different from the natives who dwelt in villages, and accordingly he made no effort to pursue them.

These jungle people were mostly nomads. They built precarious huts, then left them for others, and at all times they lived in great fear of elephants. Poo Lorn in particular they revered; they soon made a god of him and worshipped him from afar. As time went on, and he showed no inclination to savage them, they became bold enough to approach him timidly with offerings of choice jungle fruit. He suffered them to do this, for he liked the fruit, and thus the seasons passed for him in quiet, restful freedom.

Every now and then, however, that strange desire for the north would return and, quitting his favorite grounds, he would make the long journey there and back again. On these occasions every living creature of the forest gave him wide berth, though once a rogue elephant had attacked him. The rogue was a large, powerful beast, made doubly strong by solitary brooding that had reached the point of madness. Its eyes glowing wickedly, with a hoarse bellow it had surged forward upon Poo Lorn, but from the very start the brute never had a chance. Moreover, it never had a real opportunity of giving battle, since Poo Lorn had simply annihilated it. With one mighty smash of the head he sent the animal sprawling, then with trunk, tusks and forefeet he pounded and tore till the body was a mere mass of flesh and blood upon the ground. This done, Poo Lorn the Terrible, with scarce a wound upon his body, resumed the even tenor of his ways.

But now his freedom was to be disturbed at last, for he sensed that men, together with the tame company elephants, were approaching him. So, after all these years, they were pursuing him again? Well, let them come, for he, secure in his own strength, would disdain even to move as yet. He therefore waited and, with his head in an even line with his body, listened intently.

Presently he saw that a cordon of tame elephants, mounted by mahouts and men carrying ropes, had completely surrounded him. His method of dealing with this situation was simple and direct. He charged straight at the cordon, knocked over the elephant that happened to be in his way, and escaped, leaving the others gaping.

Slackening his pace, he moved leisurely on for a mile or two, but he had not reckoned with the plans of the young and enthusiastic manager. The latter, being fully aware of Poo Lorn's terrific strength, had arranged for constant relays of fresh men and elephants to harry him by day and by night and thus bring him to the point of exhaustion. In consequence there followed for Poo Lorn forty-eight hours of continual movement. Again and again he broke through the cordons, shifting gradually to the westward as he did so, but the only result of his efforts was that, after a brief interval, more of his enemies came up and surrounded him.

As the third day dawned a great weariness overtook him, though his proud spirit was still unconquered. Now he knew of a swirling river, with countless waterfalls and rapids, that still ran fast and deep in spite of the hot, dry weather. He had crossed this river once before, and he knew that he could do the same again. He therefore made a final charge against the line of elephants, then made for the river with speed. He arrived at the river bank and was preparing for the plunge, when the crackling of bushes sounded behind him, and he whirled. A tall, rangy elephant, with long, clean legs that had enabled it to get well ahead of its companions, was bursting out of the fringe of jungle and was almost upon him.

Now Poo Lorn was tired out, and the river had yet to be crossed. He therefore resolved to take to the water at once, when suddenly the mahout on his aggressor's head caught his eye. The mahout was none other than Ai Kham, the man who in the past had ridden him, bullied him and given him a dozen stinging wounds.

Weary as he was, Poo Lorn charged. As usual, the rangy elephant was knocked clean off its feet and rolled bellowing on the ground. Ai Kham and the three men he had with him for the purpose of roping were thrown clear, and all four rushed for the safety of the nearest tree, up which they skimmed. Poo Lorn, arriving at the foot of their refuge a moment too late, had to be content with pounding and thrusting at the base. The tree, however, was a huge forest giant and beyond the strength of any elephant to bring down; so he soon gave up the attempt and then, on hearing sounds that denoted the arrival of more pursuers, turned round and entered the cool embrace of the river.

Seven more tame animals, including one on which rode the young manager of the company, burst out on to the bank in time to see Poo Lorn's giant form surging across the boiling stream. They saw the whirling eddies, they heard the deep rumble of the waterfalls, and they knew that there was only one elephant alive who could cross that fearful expanse of hidden snags and death traps. With their hearts in their mouths they watched Poo Lorn's gallant struggle. Every few minutes he would completely disappear, save for the tip of his trunk that still showed above the sun dazzled water. Then up he would come again, his broad back resembling the top of a huge whale. For a full half hour he fought with every ounce of his last remaining strength, and when he finally gained the safety of the opposite bank an involuntary sigh of relief went round the spectators.

"Of a truth," said one of the mahouts, as Poo Lorn swayed into the wall of forest that clothed the farther side, "Poo Lorn has earned his freedom."

The others echoed approval, and even the manager bowed his head in silent agreement.

TWO DAYS later the white man, having marshaled his elephants and dispatched them to rest camps, was back in his comfortable bungalow in Mong Ngow, where he told his wife the whole story. Several of his best tuskers were lamed, his men were exhausted, much company money had been expended, and still Poo Lorn roamed free as air. As a dutiful wife Elise at first sympathized with her husband's misfortunes, but when he had come to the end of the tale her pretty features took on a determined expression.

"And now leave him, Ernest, leave him," she said passionately. "Don't I know Poo Lorn? Don't I remember how much he used to hate every one who worked for the company? Why, he might attack the compound as he did once before, and now we've got little Elise to think of."

"I'll have a heavy rifle ready for him if he comes," answered her husband grimly, "but I'll leave him alone as you say, my dear. And now to pay my mahouts."

Leaving the bungalow, he crossed over to the company office, where he found his mahouts and coolies awaiting the extra pay promised them as a reward for their exertions. He handed each of them the sum of ten ticals in Siamese Treasury notes, and the last to come before him was Ai Kham, the erstwhile rider of Poo Lorn.

"Lord," said the mahout, as he pocketed the cash, "I desire a reward above the others, for was I not the first to reach Poo Lorn when he stood on the river bank? Lord, this was so, and thereby I incurred much danger."

The manager considered the remark. There was no mention in the contract for any outstanding reward to be paid, whatever the risk of life or limb. Nevertheless Ai Kham had undoubtedly shown great bravery, and an exception might be made in his case. Five more ticals were therefore handed the mahout, who then spoke again.

"I also desire a rise of ten ticals a month in my wages," he said in easy tones.

To have asked the old forest manager for this unheard of sum Ai Kham would never have dared, but this new white lord was comparatively young and inexperienced, and the mahout was going to take full advantage of the fact.

"Thou talkest monkey's talk, Ai Kham," answered the other after a pause. "Dost thou not know that no mahout on earth receives the wages for which thou hast asked?"

Ai Kham was ready with his reply. Having served the company for as many years as he could remember, he felt that he was master of the situation. How, indeed, could the company get on without him, for was he not quite the greatest mahout in all the world?

"Lord," said he, "I ask for this sum because there is no other mahout like me on earth."

The manager glanced at the villainous features of the native, and read him like an open book.

"Thou hast a swollen head, Ai Kham," he told the man.

"It is the master who has one," answered the mahout surlily.

Now if there is one thing that no white man at the "back of beyond" can allow the natives to do, it is to answer in insolent fashion. The white man in the depths of the wilderness lives by prestige, and prestige alone. Once that has gone, honor, security, even life itself is at stake, and consequently the manager's sunburned features reddened in anger. He was in half a mind to strike the man, but that would merely serve to lower his prestige still further. He therefore pointed to the open door of the office, and his words were short and to the point.

"Ai Kham, thou art dismissed from my service forever!"

The full significance of this remark seemed lost on Ai Kham for awhile, but finally, as the horrible truth dawned on him, he swung on his heel and walked out of the compound. He passed through the village and soon reached the forest, where he sat down beneath a shady tree.

He, once a great mahout, even at one time rider of Poo Lorn himself, was now a man without a job and of no more importance than the lowliest pariah dog that ever sniffed round a garbage heap.

The sun climbed down in the heavens, and by the time evening was dreaming softly over the land a great desire for vengeance enveloped him, vengeance upon the white lord who had humbled him to the dust.

Now how best accomplish this? Steal his late master's money? No, that was always safely locked and guarded. Murder him, or his wife, or his child? No, murder was a nasty word, and at the thought of an executioner's sword in distant Bangkok, Ai Kham paled under his tan. Then what else remained?

He could think of nothing for the moment and soon, as the light was beginning to fail, he returned to the village and entered the local grog shop. He tossed down a dram of the fiery rice spirits, and then inspiration came to him.

He would steal the child.

By so doing he would wreak the most terrible revenge possible on the man he hated, but, having once captured the infant, what should he do with it? Kill it? No, that was murder again. Soon, however, the influence of the liquor helped him, and he remembered how once he had seen a queer village situated some four days' journey away from Mong Ngow. It had been a strange village, built right in the heart of the jungle and cut off entirely from the haunts of normal men, and to this place he would take the child. Arrived there, he would secretly deposit it at dead of night near the headman's hut, after which he would flee for the border, and once in Indo-China a position as mahout in a French company might be obtained.

As for the child, the parents might or might not find it. In either case, many moons would elapse before they would be able to trace it, and meanwhile the villagers would take care of it. They might leave it to die, of course, but that was

their affair and he, Ai Kham, would be guiltless of that nasty word murder.

Having come to this decision, he laid his plans for the capture. The white lord and his wife were, he knew, in the habit of going for rides on their Shan ponies in the cool of the evening, leaving their daughter under the care of the Lao *ayah*. On occasions the *ayah* would walk through the village with the child and saunter a short way up one of the paths leading right into the jungle. This she was expressly forbidden to do by her white mistress, but the *ayah*, being young and pretty, was possessed of a lover, and what better meeting place could there be than the cool, green glades of the towering forest?

The habits of the *ayah* being the subject of common gossip among the native population of Mong Ngow, Ai Kham had often heard of these stealthy meetings, and now, he reflected, they would aid him greatly in the kidnapping of the child. As for the four days' journey that would follow, a bag of rice and some buffalo milk would suffice for both him and his captive, and his lean, wiry strength would accomplish the rest.

Ai Kham grinned maliciously, then gulped a third tot of fiery spirits down his parched throat.

TWO days passed without favorable opportunity, but on the third Fate smiled on him, for, from his hiding place, he saw the *ayah* come out of the compound for her evening walk with the child. He followed the pair till they reached the forest path, whereupon he cut through the jungle until he was opposite them. He saw the *ayah* glance round for her lover, who had evidently not yet arrived on the scene. The child, profiting by her nurse's inattention, ran to pluck a flower that grew on one side of the track.

Like a tiger Ai Kham sprang. In a flash he had seized the child, and a moment later he was safely under cover again and was fleeing through the jungle. He heard the scream of the *ayah* as she noted the disappearance of her charge, but without so much as turning his head he raced forward through the rapidly increasing gloom.

Little Elise struggled at first, then her movements ceased and she began to cry in a sustained, hopeless kind of way that would have cut the heartstrings of any one save Ai Kham. He, however, spoke not a word to her, but pressed on ahead, intent on putting as many miles as possible between him and Mong Ngow. Though middle aged, he was still as tough as whipcord, and the weight on his shoulder troubled him not at all. The hot season, too, favored his advance in more ways than one. Save for the thousands of tall trees that grew everywhere, the jungle on the whole was burned clear and open. Moreover, the earth, parched by the blistering rays of the sun, was as hard as a rock and would leave no telltale footprints behind. Still, a nameless fear lent wings to his feet, and not until midnight did he come to a halt. Utterly exhausted, he lay down and slept, the weary child lolling beside him.

At dawn he was awakened by Elise's crying, whereupon he set himself to be as pleasant to her as he possibly could, for he realized that should the child prove rebellious his task would be all the more difficult. He washed her face at a neighboring pool, then fed her with rice and buffalo milk, and in spite of her misery she ate the mess hungrily. When she had finished, he talked to her in the Lao language, which she could prattle almost as well as himself. He told her that the *ayah* had been a very, very wicked woman from whom he had rescued her. He said also that her mother was at present in a faraway village to which they were now traveling, and that in two days' time she would join both her parents again.

Little Elise gazed at him wide eyed as she heard the words. She wanted to believe him, for no child understands lying; nevertheless there was an expression in Ai Kham's villainous features that she feared by instinct and, torn between terror and belief, she remained quiet for the rest

of the day, so that Ai Kham was able to make good progress toward his secret destination.

By eleven o'clock the following morning he came to a thick patch of evergreen jungle that made traveling more difficult. This evergreen was, he knew, part of the range where Poo Lorn had been wont to graze, but now, he was glad to think, the elephant was in all probability miles away on the opposite side of the deep, swirling river it had swum when pursued. He therefore pushed on fearlessly through the tangle of thick vegetation and, after half an hour's desperate scrambling, he reached the limit of the evergreen. Clear, open forest glades now stretched again before him. Heaving a sigh of relief, he advanced a few paces and put the child on the ground.

He rubbed his aching arms and took a deep breath of the fresher air, but a moment later he froze, still as a statue, for some fifty yards ahead of him a great elephant was standing.

A slight puff of wind blew, and at the scent the elephant swung round and faced him. It needed no second glance to tell Ai Kham that it was Poo Lorn who loomed up in the sunlit air and, as he took in the elephant's baleful glance and its gigantic size and stature, fear caught the man with icy hands. Ignoring the child, he turned and fled through the dense jungle maze.

The elephant followed on incredibly swift feet.

POO LORN grunted and, leaving the trampled man, resumed his interrupted grazing. After a short period of rest, he had recrossed the dangerous river, and now he was back in his favorite haunts again. Here he would thoroughly recuperate after the terrific exertions to which he had been subjected, and then he might raid the village of Mong Ngow once more. Today, however, some strange chance had brought the hated Ai Kham right into his power, wherefore had he slain him. His desire for revenge sated for the moment, Poo Lorn concentrated on feeding.

He broke off the branch of a tree and, with one clean sweep stripped the leaves from the stem and placed the luscious foliage in his mouth. He chewed slowly. Then a strange noise smote on his ears and, curious, he approached the spot from which it came. Some sixty yards' progress brought him to an open patch of ground, in the center of which was a small human being, wailing its heart out in forlorn, helpless crying.

Poo Lorn strode up to this queer object, and felt it with his wriggling trunk. His brain groped vaguely and soon memory winged back through the years. Here was the same little girl who had been his friend so long ago. True, this friend when last he had seen her had been very much bigger, but—Poo Lorn's brain stopped at that—without doubt it was the same little girl, become unaccountably smaller.

Elise, the younger, had by now stopped crying, and with the fearlessness of extreme youth was gazing up at him. Though lonely, tired, almost dumb with unspeakable misery, she yet felt that in the giant beast above her at least she had no enemy. She smiled through her tears and called him in Lao a great, whopping elephant.

Poo Lorn towered over her, in his mind a nameless wish to do something for this small human who talked to him in that fearless and beguiling fashion. Presently he was aware that the position in which he was standing was uncomfortably hot and, lifting the child tenderly in his trunk, he set her down in the shadow of a tall *yang* tree. There he pondered, and soon a desire for some long grass he saw in the distance assailed him.

Leaving Elise for the moment, he shuffled toward the grass and plucked some. As he returned with a large bale in his trunk and mouth, a peculiar scent wafted through the air. Quick as a gigantic kitten, he lurched, bellowed and charged. The great tiger, which had been slipping like a shadow toward its prey, snarled, and with flattened ears and gleaming fangs

slunk hurriedly away from the one he knew to be king of the forest.

Poo Lorn went back to the child and, perhaps with a vague idea of giving her food, placed the bale of grass beside her. The grass, however, served its purpose. It was cool and inviting, and Elise was sleepy, for she had already had her rice and milk that morning. She rolled over on to the grass and slept immediately.

Poo Lorn remained on guard. How could he leave her, when danger ever threatened from those slinking, yellow shadows?

The hours passed and presently queer guttural cluckings sounded behind him. The jungle people had come to make him an offering. They salaamed reverently to him, and one of them advanced and placed a large *papaya* timidly at his feet. Poo Lorn ripped open the fruit and the child awoke. She stretched out chubby hands and grasped the fruit, which she began to eat thirstily.

Poo Lorn watched her, and the fact that she ate this *papaya* made his brain almost capable of deduction. Though, being an animal, he could not reason from one stage to another and thus arrive at a definite, logical conclusion, yet here were facts that were plain. The jungle people were humans. The child was a human. Both ate *papayas*. Both made the same noises and were possessed of the same smell, at least to him. Instinct said, therefore, that they should live together.

When Elise had finished her meal, Poo Lorn pushed her very gently toward the jungle people, who had been staring in breathless astonishment at this remarkable white infant. At his action they glanced nervously from the elephant to the child. It was evidently their lord's wish that they should take care of this newcomer; accordingly, one of the biggest of the men picked up Elise, who screamed and fought to be free. The jungle man held on, however, for Poo Lorn was showing no sign of remonstrance, and it was obviously his command that they should take her to their home.

They turned and began walking toward their little colony, Poo Lorn following. They came to their leaf hut, into the largest of which they carried the child. Elise the younger had entered her new home.

III

THE JUNGLE people proved kind to little Elise, and gradually the memory of the compound at Mong Ngow, her parents, and the Lao and English languages became dim ghosts of the past. She learned the jungle dialect, a monosyllabic language full of clicking, animal-like noises. She learned to accustom herself to the diet of fruit and berries, relieved by occasional feasts of pig and barking deer, which formed the fare of her companions. She learned also to imitate the soft *whoo* of the hairy gibbons that capered among the branches high up against the tropical sky, and soon most of the cries of the forest beasts were known to her.

The sound she loved most was the deep rumbling that warned her of Poo Lorn's approach, for it was then, and then only, that she was allowed to venture far from the safety of the huts. Running out to meet him, she would prod and pound him with her baby hands. Sometimes he would lift her with his trunk to allow her to scramble on to his neck, and then the two would go for long saunters down the silent forest glades. He seemed to know that he held a precious little life upon his gigantic head, for he never forgot to tear out of his way any overhanging bamboo that might wound the child above him. As for Elise, secure and happy on her lofty perch, she loved these journeys above all things, for many strange sights came then to her eager eyes.

Great antlered *sambhur*, followed by packs of yellow, bushy tailed wild dogs in pursuit, would come blundering past them. Sleepy brown bears, awakened by Poo Lorn's proximity, crashed through the bamboo brakes, frantic with terror. Animals of every kind gave way to their lord and king, and little Elise was justly proud of him.

Being only a child, there were days, however, when she grew very angry with Poo Lorn should he happen unwittingly to displease her. Seizing a stick, she would beat him with the whole of her tiny strength, and Poo Lorn loved it all, for he liked being scratched. Then Elise, weeping bitterly for having hurt her greatest friend, would feed him with *papaya* and bananas, and generally make a great fuss over him till the waning light warned her it was time to return to her hut.

On occasions, notably at the change of the seasons, the jungle people would leave their dwellings and build others a few miles distant. With them went Elise, and Poo Lorn, following the trail at leisure, never failed to put in his appearance before she had been in her new abode a week.

In this manner there passed two years, and then, when Poo Lorn had reached the age of forty and the girl was six, the call of the north returned to him.

As before, he made the journey there and back in a month, but when he arrived once more in the colony, there was no sign of Elise.

The jungle people, fearful of mien, prostrated themselves many times before him. They told him how, shortly after he had left, a Lao forest hunter had chanced to pass near their huts. He had evidently seen the white child, for seven days later a large company of Laos had arrived and surrounded the settlement, giving the dwellers therein no chance to flee. Among these Laos there had been a great white man and a woman who was his mate. These two had taken the child, and the woman had wept exceedingly, which was strange, for should not a mother be glad to regain her long lost offspring? The party had then disappeared, carrying the child with them, and they, the jungle people, hoped Poo Lorn was not angry with his servants.

All this Poo Lorn heard, but naturally could not understand. Strangely, though he looked for the little girl and was disturbed at her absence, no anger against the jungle people was aroused in his baffled brain. Instead, the vague resentment he felt at losing her somehow became linked with the one undying hatred he knew—that for the company that had enslaved him and for all the white race.

He brooded. First, a white man had kept him in bondage for the whole of twenty-five years. Second, a white man had taken his wild herd away from him. Third, a white man had nearly recaptured him again. And now a white man had stolen the little creature whom he had come to love more than anything else on earth. It must be a white man, for no other dared incur his anger.

Poo Lorn, leaving the jungle people unmolested, swung through the forest, heading for Mong Ngow. The village he would leave alone this time, for he would go direct to the company compound. There he would not only lay waste the buildings, but he would kill. He would kill the white man and any human being he came across. In his cold rage the fact that by so doing he would, in all probability, slay the very thing that he loved was lost upon him, and he stalked on, terrific, implacable, the most colossal engine of destruction the forest had ever known.

AT MIDNIGHT thirty-six hours later he was within two miles of Mong Ngow. Here a large tree, blown down by a storm, barred his path, and to avoid it he would have to make a slight detour. Heavy though it was, he jabbed his tusks under the tree and hurled it bodily into the surrounding jungle, where it fell with a crash. Then on he went. He passed through the village and arrived at the white compound gates, which were open. A moment later, unseen by the sleepy Indian watchman, he was striding noiselessly across the lawns, over which a faint moon was shining. He reached the bungalow in which were the people he hated.

He heaved mightily, and one post, which was nine inches square and made of solid teak, snapped like a twig. *Crack!* A second post was down, then a shouting came to his ears and the figures of a man

and a woman burst from the building and fled across the grass. Poo Lorn, desisting from his efforts, turned and shuffled after them; the bungalow could wait for the time being.

The compound was a large one, being a full two hundred yards in length, so Poo Lorn knew that he could easily catch the fugitives. Should they gain the temporary safety of any other houses, these also he would knock down; should they make for the forest, he would slay them just the same. He was almighty, all powerful, as sure as death itself.

The man was running with the child in his arms, while beside him ran his wife. He had no weapons capable of protecting them for, lulled by a long sense of security, he had given up the practise of keeping his heavy rifle in the bungalow, and it was now locked away in the strong room of the office.

When halfway across the compound, he glanced over his shoulder to see that the elephant was gaining rapidly on them. Still running, he thrust the child toward his wife.

"Take her!" he shouted. "Then make for the village."

Elise, the mother, slackened in her stride, and thought flashed like summer lightning in her brain. Her husband was offering to act as a decoy, and would meet almost certain death. Still, mother love seized her and she grasped the child, at the same time casting a swift glance behind her. The elephant was almost on top of them now. With the child still in her arms, she swung round and faced the oncoming leviathan.

"Poo Lorn!" she screamed. "Poo Lorn. *Haouw!*"

It was an old command she had taught him, taught him when she had been a little girl of twelve, and at the words the training of years prevailed and involuntarily Poo Lorn found himself halting. He glared at these humans, and then, in the arms of the woman, he beheld the little creature whom he loved, whereupon sanity partially returned. How could he hurt this woman without hurting his tiny friend also? Moreover, what was that voice that awoke distant cords in his memory?

"S-s-s-h," whispered Elise to her husband, who was standing white lipped beside her.

She began to talk to Poo Lorn in quiet, soothing tones, and soon the elephant was conscious of a strangeness in events. There was the little girl he loved, but with her was some one else of whom he had been fond, and he had thought them to be one and the same. Puzzled, yet still hostile, he advanced a pace, and the humans stood their ground, for they knew their only chance was to remain quite motionless.

And then did little Elise stir into activity. She strove to be free from her mother, and began speaking to Poo Lorn in strange, clicking, animal-like sounds. Poo Lorn rumbled with satisfaction and finally, at her shrill behest, knelt humbly on the ground.

Poo Lorn the Terrible was terrible no more.

One hour later, the broken bungalow posts having been shored up for the night, little Elise was fast asleep again in her tiny cot.

Beside the cot stood her father and mother, and their features were pale, for they had been inwardly giving thanks for a great deliverance.

"It seems," whispered the wife presently, "that Poo Lorn and Elise know one another. Whatever can it mean?"

"We must wait," answered her husband, "wait till Elise has picked up our language again and forgotten her jungle talk. Then she'll be able to tell us everything. Meanwhile, I wonder if it's safe to leave Poo Lorn where he is, though I don't see what we can do to move him. We'll have to let him alone."

He glanced out through the open window to where Poo Lorn was standing, a vast black shadow, intent on keeping the bungalow free from all harm now that his loved ones slept therein.

"I'm sure it's safe," said Elise—the mother—gently.

THERE is now an elephant in the teak company's service who is not like other elephants; he works when and how he likes. Sometimes, when the rivers are in flood and the teak logs booming and piling up at rock strewn bends, he will plunge into the torrent and join his tame peers. No mahout is on his head, yet, aided by the terrific strength that only he can muster, he will clear stack after stack, sending the huge balks of timber riding like fleets of matches down the boiling current.

On the other occasions, when it is his pleasure, he will push log upon log down the steep, forest clad hills toward the creeks below, whereby the company profits greatly. Yet will he never drag a log, for to drag means that chains must be put round him, and this he will never suffer.

There are weeks when he will return to his favorite grazing grounds, but more often than not he will be found in the Mong Ngow compound, where a strange sight will be seen. Little Elise has now two small brothers, and of an evening, when the sun is mellowing over the world and the screening flocks of minas and parrakeets are flying to their nests, the children will bully Poo Lorn. At their stern orders he kneels, with his hind legs bent and his forelegs out before him. They cluster round. They play hide-and-seek on either side of his giant body. They tug at his great waving ears. They pound him with their tiny fists, and he, who could slay them with one careless movement, endures it all gladly, for they are his friends.

At times, however, even they can not bend him to their wills, and this is when that strange, nameless instinct for the north assails him. Perhaps the urge will come when they are playing all around him. He will rise ever so gently, lest he hurt them and, softly pushing them to one side with his trunk, make for the compound gateway. The children stare after him, and there is mingled sorrow and understanding in their eyes, for they know that Poo Lorn has temporarily passed beyond their ken.

He strides silently through the dusty, crowded marketplace of the village, and the inhabitants bow low before him, for is he not Poo Lorn the Terrible, the mightiest in all the land, bound now on some secret mission of his own?

He enters the quiet forest, and thereafter for fourteen whole days and nights he pushes northward, stopping only to graze and for the three hours' nightly sleep that is necessary to his kind.

On the fourteenth day he reaches a vast stretch of thick thorn jungle through which, though impenetrable by human beings, he pushes his great bulk with ease. The jungle soon gives way behind him, and he comes to a huge wall of rock, some sixty feet high and a mile broad. This rock is in the very heart of the wilderness, and no man living has been within a hundred miles of it, as it is situated in the wildest portion of the Salween Me Kong watershed.

In the center of the wall is a gaping hole, leading to a vast cavern within, but Poo Lorn does not enter that mouth—not yet. Instead, he halts before the opening and raises his trunk. Though a silent animal as a rule, he now gives forth one great, screaming trumpet that, caught up by the barrier of rock, rolls round and round in stupendous clanging echoes.

They seem to speak, those echoes. They seem to say:

"I am Poo Lorn the Terrible. I have fought with man, and conquered him, thereby earning my freedom and my right to the burial place of the wild."

Gradually the echoes die away. He stands motionless for a time before the entrance to the cave, then, confident that the locality is as safe and undefiled as when he first visited it, he swings his massive head and with noiseless, majestic gait starts on his long journey back to the humans who are his servants.

For thirty, forty, even fifty more years he will stay with them, but when the final call comes to him, the call that tells him his days are drawing to an end and the last sickness is at hand, he will return to the north and enter, for the first

and only time, the mouth of the cavern.

For in that cavern lie the remains of his wild sires, from those of his father to those of his mighty ancestors who stalked the earth when history was dim. Wherefore had Poo Lorn the Terrible, guided by the sure, unerring instinct of his race, fought with the whole of his gigantic strength for the right that is every wild elephant's right, namely, to die in the place appointed, where neither the hand of man nor the tearing beaks of the jungle vultures can disturb his last, long rest.

PRIDE

By HAROLD WILLARD GLEASON

THERE'S a white fleecy cloud where the sun disappeared,
(Break out more cloth, and batten her down!)
The Old Man is squinting and scratching his beard,
His beetle-brows knit in a frown.
And likely she'll wallow, and likely she'll strain
Ere morning breaks over the ocean again;
She'll creak and she'll groan, poor old lass—but in vain—
(Break out more cloth, and batten her down!)

Ruffle of wind off her bow to the west,
(Lash down her boats—clear decks with a will!)
Gallant old lady, though stern be the test,
Keen for the struggle she'll thrill!
Salt and apprentice, stand by in the gloom,
Braving the smother of spindrift and spume,
Sharing wholehearted her glory—or doom . . .
(Lash down her boats—clear decks with a will!)

Seven days out, and a rival to lee—
(Trim all her sheets, and make her gear fast!)
Old as she is, Callao shall see
The broom at the head of her mast!
What if she pitches and plunges and moans,
Awash with green water and racking her bones?
She'll drop her hook first—or we'll meet Davy Jones!
(Trim all her sheets, and make her gear fast!)

SHAVINGS

The Acid Test of a Man Reclaimed

By STANLEY JONES

McCARRON never quite succeeded in banishing the blind terror of that foggy June night. The stealthy scuttle along walls gray with the sweat of souls confined. The frantic scramble when the pacing figure reached the far end of its beat. The shouts, the spurts of flame, the keening bits of lead which ripped past with the quick *zzz-st!* of torn canvas.

He had run his heart out that night. Had run until the breath tore at his raw throat and he floundered drunkenly into the fastness of the canebrake. There he lay panting, fingers clenched in the wet moss, until the awesome wail of the siren whipped him up and sent him plunging still deeper into the swamp like the hunted animal that he was. When his legs dragged and buckled, knee deep in the brackish water, McCarron cursed them like a crazy man.

Deeper and deeper he had stumbled, driven by the most elemental of instincts, that of self-preservation. Behind that, in McCarron's case, spurred a corroding sense of injustice. Circumstantial evidence had netted one more innocent, though McCarron himself had to admit the ironic perfection of the pattern. Admitted it, while he raged inwardly and watched his chance with the silent, catlike concentration of those about him.

"If I ever get out," he assured himself, on a thousand bleak occasions, "if I ever get free of this, nobody'll ever get the chance to point at me again."

Well, he had gotten free of it, and with

the scars of only two years, instead of ten, on his gaunt young face. Had waited them out in that cursed swamp until every man of them had given him up, with the possible exception of Mike Madden. Mike had put McCarron in, and he never gave up any man until he saw him in the morgue, properly tagged. That was Mike for you, all right. A big heavy shouldered "harp" with the soft voice of a woman and eyes like blued steel gimlets. Mike took nothing for granted; he was the concentrated essence of skepticism, that basic quality in every first class detective.

McCarron used to dream of him, for the first two years after his escape. He would jump from his bed, sweating, wrap himself in blankets, and sit peering out into the early morning hush of the little New Hampshire mill town. Looking and listening, his heart thumping to a faster cadence at the footfall of some belated worker yawning home from the night shift. And next day the superintendent, a kindly old German, would pat his shoulder.

"Hanlon—" waggling a knobby finger under McCarron's nose—"it iss not good for promising young man like you to miss oudt on sleep. The boss, he hass hiss eye on you. You will do well if you don't break down. A leedle *schnapps* you need before you turn in, yess?"

McCarron, or Hanlon, was promising. The very haunting fear of a hand on his shoulder drove him into the daily routine with a mild fury incomprehensible to his easy going fellows. He was first on the job and last to leave. He jolted fifteen miles on the rattletrap trolley, three nights a week, to take the course in wood working at the Lebanon Trade School. He minded his own business. The mill people liked him, from Silas Alger down to Gimpty, the lame and toothless night watchman. He grew a bristling black mustache and consciously cultivated the habit of drawing one eyebrow far down, until it became a muscular fixture. He ate prodigiously and padded his naturally spare frame with sixty-five pounds in the course of two years. Nobody, he was sure, would have recognized in him the emaciated fugitive who had dragged himself out of a Georgia canebrake and made his painful way North via the side-door Pullmans. That was a closed book, never to be reopened.

FIFTEEN years slipped by. Good years they were for John Hanlon, too. Old Schultz had gone to his reward beyond the celestial Rhine, and in his place Hanlon ran the works. Not just the one mill, now, but four. On the ground glass door of Hanlon's spacious office, "General Manager" was inscribed, in neat gold letters. He was on the way to being made a director—the youngest who had ever sat around the table in that august assemblage of graybeards presided over by Silas Alger. And he was married.

To do him justice, he had been spiritually torn for five years before asking Betty Wilson to share his life. Had tried to picture every eventuality which might arise. Had even tried—more than once—to blurt out the truth of his past from the agony which so wracked his soul. But he loved her too deeply—or too selfishly—to dare risk losing her. And surely, he told himself, the danger was now no more than a disappearing phantom on the horizon of his new life. They were very happy.

One Saturday afternoon they drove over to the courthouse in the neighboring town of Lyme. A stolid farm hand, starved of everything save food, had committed a particularly revolting ax murder which had commanded headlines from Maine to Florida. With belated animal cunning he had directed suspicion elsewhere until tripped up by sheer chance and some unusually smart detective work. His trial, which could have but one outcome, had proved a lure for the morbidly curious from five States. Hanlon and his wife arrived just as a recess was declared. They strolled around, exchanging nods and commonplaces with friends.

"Come on, Jack," urged Betty, tugging

at his arm, "there's a man going to blow a whistle, and if we don't hurry we shan't hear a thing."

"Well," smiled Hanlon, "we might possibly live through it, even if we didn't. Personally, these things don't appeal to me."

His wife smiled up at him and squeezed his arm, her dark eyes mischievous.

"Like hearing that thrilling siren on the new fire engine, I suppose? Or Greg Demont's hounds tonguing it off across the river bottom? Goodness, I never thought I'd marry a man who'd bury his head under a pillow at such sounds as those!"

Hanlon grinned, but it fell a bit flat.

They found themselves herded into the third row as proceedings were resumed. Hanlon did not relish any part of it. The old familiar tenseness pumped up his heartbeat until tiny beads of sweat popped out on his face. He frowned at the seat in front and gripped it in order to concentrate more effectively. He could not bring himself to look at the frightened wretch who stared and stammered so dumbly at each barb of the prosecuting attorney. Why on earth had he come? With a fierce desperation, Hanlon forced his mind to consider the problem of four new lathes which had to be installed in the chair section of the mill. He had achieved a measure of detachment when Betty's hand pressed his arm.

"Don't turn right now, dear," she whispered, "but when you get a chance look at that man just to the left of the sheriff. He keeps staring at you—or somebody right back of you—in the strangest way."

Hanlon raised his eyes with a jerk. Couldn't help it to save him. And despite his iron self-control he knew that the color was draining from his face.

Mike Madden had not changed much. The black shock of hair had silvered. He had two chins suspended from his hard Irish jaw, and the squint lines radiating from the keen blue eyes were more deeply etched. But he still cocked his head and hooked one thumb in the familiar attitude in the pocket of his expansive vest. Even the stub of cigar—it might have been the same one which Mike had carried the very first time Hanlon had seen him.

Their eyes met in a protracted clash which was no less a clash for being wordless. Hanlon, gripping the chair back, forced himself to lend as casual a character to it as his jumping nerves would permit. Let his glance wander unhurriedly past to the grave face of the judge after the proper interval. He had read no flash of certainty in the blued steel gimlets—rather a questioning surprise.

Hanlon wet his lips covertly under his black mustache. If only Madden would look away now all would be well. But Madden did not look away. And when they filed out of the courtroom into the fresh coolness of late afternoon, Hanlon felt eyes on his back as he climbed behind the wheel of his big sedan.

Inching out of the driveway in the stream of cars, his heart skipped a beat as a glance into his mirror revealed a powerful figure making unobtrusive note of his license number. Hanlon's young wife rallied him from his frowning preoccupation on the long ride home through the purple twilight.

A few days later, Madden came to Bradford. Armed with the prestige of his work in the case just concluded, and a letter of introduction to Silas Alger from an official in the Department of Justice. He took a room in the Bradford House, and Hanlon saw him for the first time when Alger was showing him through the mill. They came into Hanlon's office, followed by the boss of the planing section.

"John," beamed old Silas, "want you to meet Mr. Madden. He's just settled here for a little rest after his great work in apprehending that farm hand over to Lyme. We want to make him feel at home."

Somehow, Hanlon gained his feet and murmured conventions. Behind the

sound of his lips his brain was working furiously. This man had nothing on him —not a thing. He was just gambling on the tenuous thread of a memory—a nagging suspicion which would not allow his bloodhound sense to rest until he had run it down. Just gambling, but the stakes were staggeringly high to John Hanlon. The other—sizing him up so quietly—had nothing to lose. Why couldn't Madden let well enough alone? God knew that he, Hanlon, had at last won to a place in the world by untold toil and self-denial. Who was this man to stumble across him now and threaten to send the whole beautiful structure crashing to earth? A healthy reaction of anger surged through Hanlon, strength and confidence pulsing in its wake. He faced the other with a frank, disarming smile.

"You do us honor, Mr. Madden," he said. "It isn't often that a real celebrity finds his way into this sheltered spot. We shall do everything—" turning to Silas Alger—"to make your stay as pleasant as possible."

"That's right, John," approved Silas paternally. "And now, will you take Mr. Madden through the new plant? He is tremendously interested in industrial machinery, he says."

"Certainly," smiled Hanlon, and held open the door. "It must be quite a relief after dealing so exclusively with flesh and blood, isn't it, Mr. Madden?" Madden started, conscious that he had been staring.

"It certainly is," he said, in his curiously gentle voice, "Mr.—what was the name again, please?"

HANLON'S waking hours, in the ensuing six weeks, were taut with nerves. Madden's quizzical squint seemed to be forever turning up to send his heart pounding against his ribs. There was no decent way of avoiding him except by running away, and this Hanlon dared not do lest it strengthen the other's suspicions. They were always meeting. And always, it seemed, by chance, though as time wore on Hanlon knew that it was not chance, but rather the most adroit of planning which brought about these trying contacts.

"The Zachs are giving a little dinner tonight," Betty would inform him, on his arrival home, "and they want us to come. I told them we'd love to."

Hanlon would groan inwardly, but could not well refuse in a community so small. He knew that Mike Madden would be there. Had probably instigated the affair by urbane Celtic compliments to buxom Katie Zach on the pure genius of her cooking. He would be watching Hanlon from the moment of arrival. Studying his face, his head, his every insignificant gesture. Forcing opportunities to engage him in conversation—asking polite questions which forced Hanlon to be constantly on guard lest he drop some hint which might somehow supply a piece of the missing pattern which Madden sought.

He had to keep constantly in mind the revised story of his life which he had rehearsed so many times that it had become all but truth, even to Hanlon himself. He became moody, preoccupied, and night after night his wife would awake to find herself alone in the bedroom. Hanlon would be trying to read himself into an hour or two of restless slumber in the library, or prowling ceaselessly about the house on slippered feet.

Madden spent much time in the mill, where his bluff manner and quick repartee soon made him a prime favorite with everybody save Hanlon. He was forever "happening in" on the latter, and since he was generally quite content to sit by the window and smoke and pretend to read the newspaper, John had no good reason to object. But he was forever conscious of the big man's quiet scrutiny, until sometimes it seemed that he could no longer restrain the overwrought impulse to spring up and cry:

"Well, why don't you come out with it? If you think you've got anything on me, get it over with, for God's sake!"

"Ever been South?" Madden asked him once, as they lingered over a late luncheon.

He carefully knocked off his cigar ash into the empty coffee cup. Hanlon froze to a rigid watchfulness.

"No," he replied, as casually as he could. "Never south of Louisville. Why?"

"I thought you might have bought that last yard shipment of yellow pine down there," he remarked. "Don't see much wood as sound as that up North, here, today; but nobody knows it's down there unless they're familiar with the South. They use it a lot in the big factories in Georgia and—" the blue gimlets lifted sharply to Hanlon—"in the prison shops."

Hanlon's heart stopped dead for so many awful minutes, but he rallied from the barbarous cut. His hand trembled only a trifle as he summoned the waiter for the check. And he met the intense gaze across the narrow table with what—to a less observant man than Madden—would have passed for interest in a bit of casual information. But he knew, as they left the club, that Madden had made triumphant note of the momentary shock which he had registered. And that night the big detective checked out with no word as to his destination, or when he might return. Yet Hanlon knew that he would return to force things to a decision. Madden was built that way.

Five days passed. Six. A week. Hanlon was almost to the point of daring to hope that Madden might have decided, after all, that the game was not worth his time and energy. Then, one morning, his wife's voice on the telephone.

"Mr. Madden is back, dear, with another man named Raynor. . . . Yes, he's nice, but not so nice as Mr. Madden; doesn't have much to say. . . . Mr. Madden wanted you and me to take lunch with them today at the hotel. I thought it would be fun, if you could make it. . . . Oh, please try, dearest. Mr. Madden made me show Mr. Raynor all through the house—he seems as much interested in it as we do. . . . They liked your study so much—I could hardly shoo them out. . . ."

The animated chatter rambled on, but Hanlon heard no more. Indeed, he scarcely collected himself in time to say goodby when Betty ran down through sheer exhaustion. His mind darted over the conversation like a bright needle. Who was Raynor? Why had he come back? Was he some one whom Madden banked on to identify him? Probably. What were they doing, running through his house under pretext of a friendly call? Snooping about his study? Hanlon jumped nervously to his feet and paced the floor, hands locked behind his back. Well, he would not join them at lunch, that was flat! He was through playing mouse to Madden's catspaw.

Hanlon slammed back into his chair, chin on fist. But he could not concentrate on the work before him. Madden's rugged face flickered tantalizingly between his eyes and the neatly tabulated estimates. What did the pair of them have up their sleeves?

SHORTLY before noon, Hanlon seized his hat and started for the Bradford House. He hated and feared the idea, yet found himself still more uneasy when facing the unknown. Better come to grips and try to match their game, whatever it was. He passed friends whose faces were no more than smiling pink blurs, and rendered a mechanical salute as he hurried past.

"Yes, sir," said the respectable clerk at the sedate old Bradford House. "Mr. Madden's in No. 40, Mr. Hanlon. Shall I phone him?"

"No, thanks," said Hanlon. "I'll just run up."

Stepping lightly along the worn crimson carpet of the dim corridor, Hanlon paused at No. 40. The door was slightly ajar, and from within drifted the murmur of low voices. Heart pounding, Hanlon cast a quick glance up and down. The corridor was empty. He stepped

close and cautiously laid an eye to the opening.

Madden, his broad blue back to the door, was sitting on the bed. Raynor, a thin, tight lipped man with furrowed brow and a rumpled gray suit, was beside him in a chair. They were intently scrutinizing something on the little table between them. At first glance Hanlon thought they were playing cards, but Raynor's first words dispelled that impression. He shook his head and tapped some pieces of white cardboard which bore dark smudges.

"Only *sure* way to match 'em up," he said, in a clipped nasal tone, "is to match 'em up, Mike. This other business—" he pushed some small objects impatiently aside— "is too chancey. It's sloppy. I don't like it for a damn, if you ask me."

"I know it," nodded Madden, and fingered his second chin. "Still, I sort of hate to really bear down until I'm sure, though I'm as certain now as anything lacking the actual prints could make me, Bill."

Raynor snorted and snapped his fingers.

"Hell! Then go to it. You can always apologize and all that sort o' boloney in case you've pulled the wrong one out of the hat."

"Well, all right, then," decided Madden, after a long minute of deliberation. "After lunch—and we mustn't forget to return these things, either."

He scooped up the articles on the table, which Hanlon's straining eyes immediately recognized as his hair brush, paper knife and a small copper ash tray which he kept on his desk at home. Fighting down an insane impulse to fling open the door and confront the pair, he tiptoed hurriedly down the corridor and left the hotel.

Scarcely able to think coherently, he strode blindly back to the mill. Once in his office, he held out his trembling hands, palms up, and stared at them as though hypnotized. So that was the idea, was it? A fingerprint expert— Why, they had even stolen things out of his house in the hope of finding the damning evidence. And after lunch they were coming. Out in the open at last. He had fooled Mike Madden on all but the acid test; there was no disguising those tiny concentric circles on their little pads of flesh. To the rest of the world he might be John Hanlon, on every other count, but a single roll of inky finger across a paper, and he was Bartley McCarron, out fifteen years and still wanted. Hanlon paled and dropped into a chair.

Wild ideas rocketed through his brain, knocking over the solid furniture of his mind like a blind man in a strange room. He would flee—he had the money right there in his strong box. But he would be caught. He would kill Madden. He would kill himself. He would—Hanlon cursed himself for his indecision as the hands of the clock moved inexorably round to half past twelve. They would be coming soon. He jumped up and stepped to the window. To his over-sensitized perceptions, the usual noon hour quiet took on the air of malignant expectancy, of breathless waiting for the inevitable.

Hanlon peered out, to duck back instantly. Madden and Raynor were coming up the brick walk, their footsteps echoing loudly in the hushed air. Hanlon heard a workman call a genial greeting to the big detective—heard Madden's bluff response. They both laughed.

Hanlon groaned and buried his face in his hands in an agony of suspense. Fifteen years shot to hell—and all the rest of the years to come. Betty—position—friends—the respect and love of a great many worthwhile people, hard won by his own efforts—fifteen years—

"Here they come." Hanlon's lips formed the words.

A hand on his door knob galvanized him to panicky action. As it turned, slowly, he stepped lightly out of another door and into the piney smelling expanse of the planing mill, closing the door softly behind him.

The workmen were resuming work. Wiping mouths on the backs of capable

hands as they filed in and started the wheels a-whirring and the long belts on their singing undulations after the brief respite. At the far end, as Hanlon walked hurriedly toward it, one of the smaller circular saws whined savagely and tore into a knot. He stepped behind a stack of chair rungs and looked back. Madden and Raynor must have seen the door close, for they were coming through now. Walking a little faster, eyes darting about, mouths set. Hanlon was cornered. Keeping the stack between them, he zigzagged to the far corner of the long room and slipped behind one of the slowly swinging planes. There he paused, white and desperate. He could go no farther.

The man tending the long knife as it passed and repassed over the fragrant yellow sticks looked at Hanlon curiously.

"Go tell Earley I want him," ordered Hanlon hoarsely. "I'll tend the machine." The man hurried off, looking back over his shoulder.

"Hurry!" snapped Hanlon, eyes blazing. The man broke into a startled lope.

Mechanically, Hanlon slid the sticks under the razor edge. It was an old story for him. Adjusted to a hair, the blade slid back and forth, dripping lazy yellow shavings from the end of the table. Hanlon stared at it, fascinated by a sudden wild idea. His breath came faster, and he licked his dry lips as he tiptoed to the corner of the machine. Mike Madden and Raynor were coming down the center. Walking like eager cats, on the balls of their feet. Mike caught a fleeting glimpse of him as he withdrew.

Hanlon jumped at the plane. Murmured something, half prayer, half curse. Whirled the adjusting wheel expertly, narrowing the clearance of the gleaming blade. Kneeled until he was on the same level. Then, his face a strained plaster mask, he steadily extended his hands.

Mike Madden lifted him inertly from the floor. Staunched the gush from palms and fingertips with his own white handkerchief. Carried him between rows of wondering carpenters to his office, where the mill doctor scolded as he bandaged and bandaged.

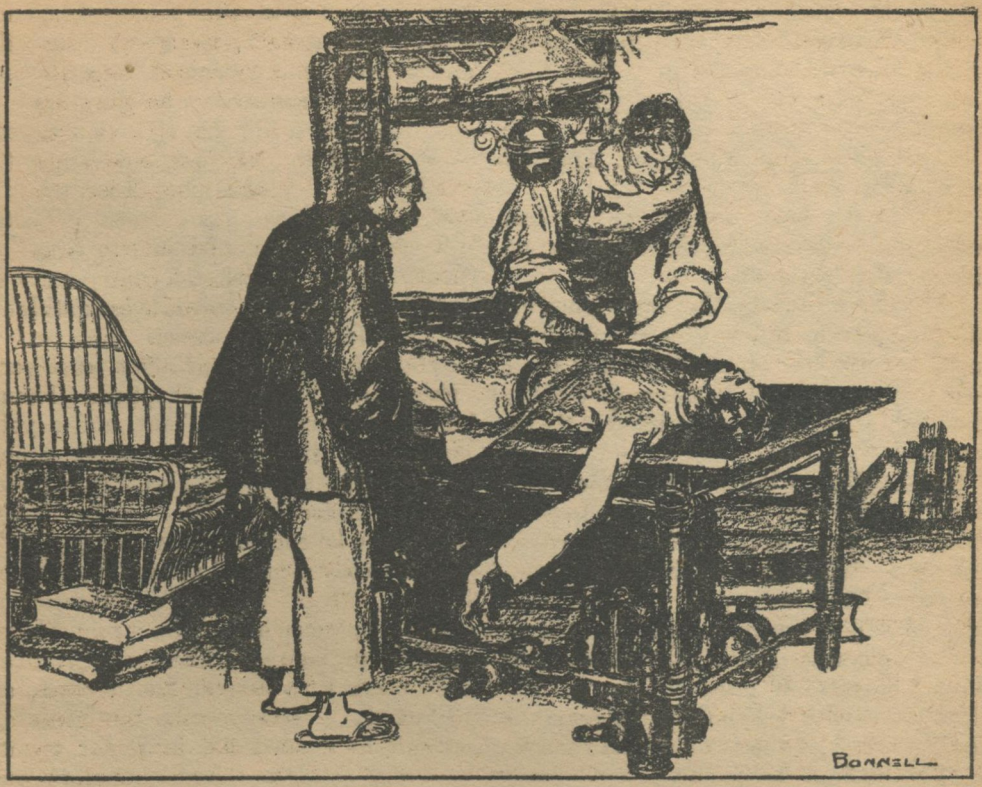
"You shouldn't be getting curious about machinery now," he snapped, in his querulous Yankee twang. "Ought to know better—let the Swedes and hunkies run it. Be weeks before you can even hold a knife and fork."

Hanlon's eyes flickered weakly past the leathery little man to Madden's great bulk. Hanlon's hands were raw tortures, goaded by a thousand devils, but there was ease in his mind and heart for the first time in months. And though his words were for the doctor, Madden grinned down a broad, ungrudging grin at him.

"Guess you're right, Doc," said John Hanlon faintly. "You always get into trouble when you get too doggone curious, don't you?"

Madden gave his leg a spontaneous pat of tribute.

"You said it, but you'll get over it; and you'll never have to get curious again. My hat's off to you, Mr.—Hanlon."



WHISKY JACK, M.D.

A Tale of the Java Seas by R. V. GERY

IT WAS Jevons and Vincente who cut her out—Melissa Harlow, I mean—from her party of sightseers in Macassar, and snatched from her neck the little chamois leather bag with the stone in it. It was Miles Kenyon who went to the Dutch police about it and in so doing came across that rather remarkable little Hollander, Cornelius Van Tromp. And it was a person from Amboyna, by name Otto Braun, who stole the stone from the original thieves, as the three of them were leaving the hue and cry behind them, deckhands on old Andries' *Hendryk Van Dam*, most accommodating of tramp steamers.

Jevons shot him—the person from Amboyna—in four different places as he ran frantically down the steamer's deck, and Andries was not pleased.

"Now see what you haf done," he grumbled. "There is no doctor on this ship profided and the man will die, and there will be a—how you say?—shtink! Not?"

Jevons looked up at him from a hurried search of the limp form on deck.

"Lend us a boat a couple of hours,"

he said. "There's a feller inshore here'll do our job all right. Put the three of us off with a crew to bring the boat back, an' that's the last you'll 'ear of this little caper."

Andries considered a moment. Then he nodded.

"*Ja*, in the name of God, go! I can mark you as deserted on the log. I do not like murder."

"Murder my auntie." Jevons grinned up at him while the sallow Vincente fumbled in his turn for the stone. " 'E ain't dead —not by no means. Just 's well 'e ain't, the blighter. We 'aven't finished with 'im yet."

So the *Hendryk Van Dam*, most accommodating of tramps, ran inshore awhile and dropped the three of them over the side—the gentleman from Amboyna, by name Otto, extremely unconscious—just as Miles Kenyon, that most rising young physician, and Cornelius Van Tromp began to burn the wires to Andries' destination with descriptions and demands for the arrest of the two original thieves.

"Go the limit, Inspector," Kenyon said fervently.

Van Tromp turned ruminant blue eyes on Melissa, then exhausting her memory and patience in answering the questions of a meticulous Dutch police clerk; the diamond's size, whether it was eighteen carats or twenty, its value, color, provenience and past history; above all, what she was doing carrying a stone of that size round the world with her.

"For all the world," the flushed Melissa told Kenyon, "as if I'd been the thief myself!"

The inspector turned seriously to the telephone at his elbow and called the harbor master.

Jevons, the Limehouse dock rat, and Vincente, who was some incredibly complicated mixture of Latin and Asian out of Goa, looked at each other as Andries' men pulled them shoreward, and their look was not one of content. They had each of them thoroughly frisked the person of the unconscious Otto, but to neither of them had been vouchsafed so much as a glimpse of the diamond he had lifted from them. It was gone, vanished, and the two faced each other with the same suspicion unspoken on their lips.

"This 'ere's a fine game!" Jevons spat over the side and regarded Vincente blackly. "An' what's more, I ain't a bit sure— 'Ere, turn them damn' pockets o' yours out," he added suddenly.

Vincente drew back.

"Why?" he asked, with a quick stiffening, as if for a spring.

" 'Cos I bloomin' well don't trust yer, Mister Dago!" Jevons snapped. Then, with a swift change of front, and a yellow toothed grin, "Fair's fair, all the same; we'll just go through each other, so's to 'ave no ill feelin' about it, eh? Don't reckin you love me any more'n I do you."

The Goanese looked at him vindictively, but submitted with some form of grace—conscious innocence, it might have been; and the two solemnly went over each other with a small tooth comb, so to speak. The results, entertaining enough to a specialist in minor crime, were zero as far as the missing stone was concerned; and the boat grounded on the beach with the pair once more contemplating each other with looks of blank disgust.

II

HALF a mile up the beach, apparently quite incurious of their arrival, a tall man was stumbling back and forward, talking to the land crabs in a high pitched, cultured voice. The subject of his discourse appeared to be pathology; as a matter of fact it was a jumble of scraps of old lectures on that subject, delivered fifteen years before by a professor to certain audiences twelve thousand miles away. The man who was now addressing the crabs was the professor in question.

Wing Lo, the decrepit Chinaman who was at once butler, factotum, maid-of-all-work, and now and then theater assistant in the bungalow sardonically named Saint's Rest, received Jevons and Vincente with their burden and hooted

gloomily in the direction of the figure on the beach. The ex-surgeon waved a grimy hand and scrambled clumsily up the muddy slope to the veranda.

He was exceedingly drunk, this medico. In fact, exceeding drunkenness had been his normal condition for as long as that coast had known him. He had dropped off a liner in Macassar one fine day, thrown off the decencies of civilization as a man throws off a coat, gone on a violent drunk for a month, and then come down coast to take over the ramshackle bungalow that stood on a little promontory backed by the forest. Since then he had lived there, alone except for the Chinaman and his liquor, doing a little doctoring as occasion arose, but normally in an alcoholic haze. They were rather proud of him in those parts, and had long ago given up speculating on his past; as Whisky Jack he was an accepted part of the landscape, along with one or two other human curiosities who made their habitation in that region of conveniently short memories.

He staggered into the house, taking no notice of Jevons and Vincente at the door; he threw a dull glance at Otto, stretched flat on the table, and shuffled into a frowsy little den filled with dusty bottles. Wing Lo followed him.

"You opelate?" he asked hopefully, as the doctor poured a couple of fingers from a vial into a beaker. Wing Lo had seen some curious surgical achievements on that table in the bungalow's living room.

Whisky Jack jerked the contents of the beaker down his throat, gasped as if from a cold plunge, and turned to the Chinaman.

"Not this time, Wing," he said with a smile. "You'll have to restrain that passion of yours for the knife, old man. This fellow's too far gone."

"Him die?" Wing Lo asked the question with the complete impassivity of his race.

"Him very much die." Whisky Jack took out a battered probe, tested a blunt scalpel on his fingernail and hunted round for something to serve as dressings. "In fact, unless I'm a good deal wrong, my amiable friend, him dead already. Still, we'll see."

He went out into the dirty living room, where the unfortunate Otto still lay on the table. Jevons met him.

"'Ow long'll 'e be, Doc?" he asked with a forced cheerfulness.

"How long'll he be what?" Whisky Jack turned a whimsical glance on the tattered little cockney.

"Before 'e's on 'is feet again, Doc." Jevons let a trace of anxiety creep into his voice.

Whisky Jack chuckled indulgently and turned to the table. He was surprisingly sober now, and the hands with which he made his investigations were steady. He was gruesomely alert over the still figure for a few minutes; then he turned to Jevons once again.

"Feet aren't any use to him where he is," he pronounced. "He's dead—dead as Dennis. You kill him?"

Whisky Jack fired the last question abruptly at Jevons, but the other was too occupied to hear him. He burst into a flood of profanity, and dragged the glum Vincente out on to the veranda to a conference in excited whispers. The doctor looked at the pair for a moment with curiosity.

"Now, I wonder," he said, half to himself. He turned to the body on the table and inspected it carefully again.

"H'm," he went on. "Not much doubt what got you."

He picked up his rusty probe and began an idle hunt for bullets. Jevons and the Goanese still whispered outside the window.

Suddenly Whisky Jack looked up, and shifted his position slightly, so as to put his back between what he was doing and the two outside. He worked gingerly for a second or so with his instrument; then he was looking down at something lying in the palm of his hand. His sallow, aquiline face turned a shade whiter.

"So," he murmured, and glanced up at a shuffle on the floor, to meet the ophidian brown eyes of Wing Lo.

III

THE THREE of them, Kenyon, Melissa and the stocky little Dutch captain of police, stood behind the coamings of the government launch *Utrecht* and watched the low coastline fly past them. Pursuit of the thieves had been immediately imperative, since wherever they were overtaken Melissa must be present to identify her property; and, since Van Tromp himself was the kind of policeman to handle affairs in person rather than send subordinates on the task, and Kenyon trailed Melissa assiduously for reasons of his own, there were three in the party standing talking in the afternoon light.

Inshore, a mile away, Whisky Jack's bungalow showed against the sky, crouched on its low promontory. Van Tromp was telling Melissa some of the peculiarities of its owner, just when, with glasses, he might have seen on the bungalow's veranda that which would have brought the *Utrecht* to an abrupt halt in her feverish course.

"One of our curiosities—" Cornelius spoke with a certain pride— "an Englishman, a doctor and, Almighty, a drunkard! He is harmless, but he patches up half the rogues that get cut up hereabouts. They call him Whisky Jack, and there are plenty of reasons."

Kenyon looked over his shoulder.

"Englishman, eh? And a doctor? What's his proper name?"

Van Tromp appeared to search in his memory.

"*Na*, I have forgotten. Some Englisher mouthful, pardon—" He turned to the quartermaster at the wheel. "Jan, what is his name there?"

The stolid sailor grunted.

"Shirriff, *mynheer inspektor*, he used to call himself, before he went down the coast."

Kenyon pricked up his ears.

"Shirriff?" he said, half to himself. "Now where—"

Melissa laughed.

"Another of your long lost friends, Miles?" she asked. "He seems to find them all over the East," she added to Van Tromp.

Kenyon frowned thoughtfully.

"I've heard that name before, somewhere," he said. "But I can't tell you where . . ."

Cornelius looked back at the bungalow astern, silent and menacing under the strong sunlight, and shook his head.

"This coast is full of such lost friends," he said quietly.

WHISKY JACK looked at Wing Lo with a quizzical twinkle in his deep set eyes, Melissa's diamond glittering in his palm. The Chinaman bent over the stone, as if in salutation to it.

"*Aih*," he breathed reverently. "Him plitty. Where you find him?"

"Give you three guesses, Wing, and you'll be wrong." The doctor turned again to the ripped body on the table. "Well, old man, you chose a funny hiding place for your loot; but it seems to have worked well enough."

He drew the coverings over the unfortunate Braun, and the bullet wounds into one of which the desperate man had thrust his plunder, and glanced through the window at the two muttering on the veranda. Wing Lo touched his elbow.

"What you do, Doc?" he asked softly.

Whisky Jack stared once more at the diamond. Then he slipped it into his pocket.

"Finding's keeping—hereabouts," he said grimly. "There's a lot I can do with this . . ."

Wing Lo followed him into the little surgery, full of anxiety. He watched the doctor fill himself a tumbler of spirits and drink it down; then he addressed him again in tones of entreaty.

"You go 'way, maybe? Leave this place—leave Wing Lo here?"

Whisky Jack laughed.

"Why, you old sinner! What's that to you?"

The Chinaman bowed, with fluttering hands.

"In China I have dead father, dead mother, brother—all fambly. No see them—" he spread his palms to emphasize the length of his absence—"dead maybe; live maybe. Wing Lo want die in China. You go 'way, you send him China too, maybe?"

There was an earnestness in the old man's manner that made Whisky Jack open his eyes. He held out his hand.

"If I go, you go too, Wing," he said, a bit huskily. "You've been a good boy to me."

Wing Lo was beginning a flowery expression of his thanks, when the door of the surgery was rudely burst open and Jevons stood on the threshold with Vincente.

He eyed the two insolently.

"See 'ere, Doc," he began, "there's something fishy about all this."

"Extremely so, I fancy." Whisky Jack's tone was that of Harley Street. Jevons glared at him.

"None o' that," he snarled. "Where's that stone?"

Whisky Jack stood seventy-five inches off the floor, and rowed No. 6 in a certain university eight long ago. Moreover, neither whisky nor slack living can altogether deprive a strong man of the punch that is his, or the ingrained habit of staring down an inferior.

"You damned little backstreets rat!" The doctor took a pace toward Jevons, and his voice boomed with a long unpractised imperiousness. "What's that to you?"

He hit the very astonished Jevons a sharp half-arm jab on the point of the chin, and that individual, being taken unawares, dropped forthwith to sleep in the arms of his dusky satellite. Vincente spat something venomous in Portuguese, and to his further unlimited shock and horror found himself summarily treated in like manner.

Whisky Jack stood looking down at the two limp figures for a full minute. Then he smiled amusedly.

"Good gad!" he remarked, as if to Wing Lo, who was staring at him transfixedly. "It's thirty years since I did that . . ."

He inspected his knuckles with care, as if to make certain there was no damage done; then he grinned again like a schoolboy and turned to the Chinaman.

"Come along," he suggested. "These fellows go armed, I'll wager. Look 'em over, Wing."

The yellow man bent for a moment over the two on the ground, and produced a flat and wicked looking blue automatic and a sinuous knife. Whisky Jack dropped them both into a drawer of his lamentable desk, then hauled the reviving Jevons to his feet.

"Now," he boomed in a parody of a bedside manner, "your complaint, my dear fellows, calls for one remedy only. Change of air, coupled with exercise. That's my prescription for you, so get out while you can, my boys. Your friend on the table's dead, if it's any news to you; and as for the question one of you had the damned impertinence to ask me awhile ago, I'm not clear what stone you mean. If it's a diamond, why, here it is."

And he fished the glittering thing out of his pocket, tossed it jauntily in the air, caught it and replaced it. The two thieves goggled at him.

"Now git, *imshi*, scat, *futsack*—whatever way you like it best—out of here! And if ever I come across you two again I'll—" He shook his bony fist threateningly at them and vanished into his den, whence came the pop of a drawn cork in celebration of his victory.

Jevons and Vincente looked at each other, and at old Wing Lo standing impassive at the door. A rapid run over themselves revealed their unarmed condition; and with curses many, black and melodramatic, they limped out of the house in the strong afternoon sunshine, as discomfited a couple of rogues as the Java seas could produce.

Nevertheless, Wing Lo looked after them with something like anxiety as they staggered down the path. Then he turned into the house, where the doctor was once again devoting himself with gusto to his favorite pastime. As he drank, he laughed.

IV

FIFTY yards down the promontory side, there was a tiny pocket in the enveloping woods; a little green glade among the trees, as it were. Jevons and Vincente sat on their hunkers in its confined space and swore violently and with point.

"The dirty thievin'—" Jevons broke off, almost with a grin at his own epithet. Then he went on seriously.

"Listen 'ere, you! We've got to 'ave that sparkler. See why, don't yer?"

Vincente looked at him with the stupidity of the East when it desires to baffle, and there is no blanker stare. The cockney leaned forward and spoke almost into the other's face, shaking an agitated forefinger under the Eurasian's nose. His voice was hoarse with excitement.

"Wot kind of a life's this, up an' down this 'ere damn' coast—a trick on a cargo boat now an' again, an' mebbe a little smugglin' as a sideline, like; sneak thievin' in an' out o' these dirty little Dutch towns, and prayin' 'eaven some potbellied cop ain't after us. Drinkin' rotgut, when we can get it, an' eatin' like pigs. 'Avin' anythink white in petticoats lookin' down its nose at us—we ain't fit to associate with 'em, thank yer!"

He paused and fairly spat in rage.

"An' why? Why, me copper colored jewel? Because we ain't got no boodle. That's why. Cripes, let me lay 'ands on 'arf—a quarter o' what 'e's carryin' in 'is pocket up the 'ill there, an' it ain't no bloomin' East for me no more. No, it's a P an' O 'ome from Singapore, an' the stewards sirrin' me, an' good old London ag'in, an' the lights an' pubs an' decent lush an' girls—" He broke off, licking his lips at the thought.

"An' for you, Vincente, me buff colored *amigo*, what'd it mean to you? Rupees, eh—'undreds of 'em. 'Ear 'em chink, me lad! An' you'll go back to your fambly 'ome, which is Gawd knows where, but you've got one, an' set up as a bloomin' king there, wiv lashin's to eat an' drink, an' call on any man's daughters to fill your 'arem— Ain't it so, me buckaroo of a *chee-chee* rajah?"

The Goanese stared at him inscrutably, with the sleepy, yellow tinged eyes of his kind.

"And, senhor?" he inquired gently.

"Well, why don't we go in an' get that stone off of 'im? 'Twouldn't take no doin' at all—there's only 'im an' the lousy chink."

Vincente rolled a cigaret and nodded slowly.

"And then, senhor?" he asked, with maddening deliberation.

Jevons swore again, vehemently and between his teeth.

"Wot the 'ell's the good of beatin' about the bush like this?" he demanded plaintively. "Are you comin' up with me to *puckarow* 'im up the 'ill there, or ain't you?"

The other smiled as if in gentle toleration of his violence. Then he spread his hands apart in the gesture of helplessness common to all Latins.

"We are unarmed, senhor," he stated simply. "On the other hand, he has his own weapons as well as ours—and I see his yellow man watching us from the door at this moment."

Jevons screwed his neck round the edge of the undergrowth.

"An' that's a fact!" he agreed, with a further exercise in blasphemy. "Well, what about it?"

"Have you a plan, senhor?" Vincente took a blade of grass and began to plait it between delicate brown fingers. Jevons frowned.

"No," he confessed at once. "'Ave you?"

The Goanese expanded into an oily leer.

"Of a certainty, senhor!" he said diffidently. "If the senhor will listen to me. . . ."

V

WHISKY JACK lay flat on his back, snoring thunderously, his impressive nose the channel for mighty blasts that echoed through the empty bungalow. Wing Lo looked at him

anxiously from his post in the doorway, one eye on the pair down the hill.

"It is written that in wine is a strong man's consolation," he said to himself sententiously. "Also, that it is well to assist the incapable."

He hesitated a moment and then slipped to the doctor's side. Cautiously he fumbled in a pocket, removed the great glittering stone and returned to the door, his inscrutable brown gaze on the pathway. The sun slipped westward, and the shadows lengthened into evening; but there was no sign of the two ruffians down the hill, nor sound, except the faintest of murmurs now and again.

Whisky Jack snored on, muttering to himself now and again, and stirring sometimes in the half stupor of the alcohol addict. Wing Lo went in to him, to pack the pillow higher under his head; the doctor murmured a petulant imprecation at him.

Suddenly from outside came outcry, the babble of two voices, high pitched in furious altercation. The Chinaman ran to the doorway, and Whisky Jack sat up slowly, rubbing his eyes.

Down the path, amid the dappled shadows, Jevons and the Goanese were locked in a desperate embrace, cursing each other fluently and gasping and tripping on the slippery matted grass. Wing Lo grinned at the doctor.

"Damn' fools fight!" he chuckled. "Be rid of him, maybe."

Whisky Jack scrutinized the struggling pair indulgently.

"Let 'em alone," he said. "They can't do each other much harm. Begad, though, look at that, Wing!"

Jevons tore himself loose from the Eurasian with an effort and struck once and twice with something that glittered. Vincente clapped a hand to his shoulder, stumbled and collapsed in a heap.

The doctor ran heavily down the glade to where Jevons was standing panting over his victim, a reddened pocket knife in his hand. He turned a yellow toothed grin on Whisky Jack.

"That's done for the swine!" he gasped.

The doctor knelt over the Goanese.

"No such thing," he pronounced. "Next time you stick a man with a toy like that, my friend, try three inches lower down. This fellow's half scared to death, that's all."

He turned to Wing Lo, attentive at his side.

"Pick him up, the two of you, and bring him in. I'll fix him in five minutes. What was all that about?"

Jevons bent over Vincente, anxiety beginning to be apparent on his face; the Eurasian opened his eyes once, thought better of it and closed them again with a moan.

"'E ain't 'urt bad, Doc, is 'e?" the cockney inquired solicitously. Whisky Jack snorted.

"Not he. Bring him up to the house and I'll have him on his feet in a jiffy."

He shrugged his big shoulders and preceded them through the veranda into his surgery. They laid Vincente on a couch, and the doctor bent over him once more.

Jevons stood in the doorway, hesitating as if in doubt of the proper attitude for him to adopt. Wing Lo awaited orders.

"Hot water, Wing!" Whisky Jack stripped the singlet from Vincente's shoulder, and the Chinaman passed into his kitchen.

Then, in a flash, the two leaped on the unsuspecting doctor. Vincente, miraculously recovered from his swoon, caught at his feet and jerked him to the floor, while Jevons, the small knife in his hand, pinioned him round the neck and drew back to strike. The Goanese cried a warning at him.

"Wait, senhor, wait! The stone first!"

Wing Lo padded swiftly to the door, a rusty skillet in his hand. Jevons reached across to the bureau drawer and yanked out the revolver.

"You savvy hands up!" he snapped, and the yellow man's crooked fingers flew skyward.

For an instant the group remained immobile, as if struck to a tableau; then the doctor began to struggle furiously, threshing the Goanese about the floor like a

hooked fish. Jevons scowled wickedly at him and shifted the revolver to his left hand.

"'Old 'ard, Vincente!" he panted. "Lemme 'ave a *dekko* at 'im!"

There was the empty whisky bottle on the floor, rolling ready to his hand. He grabbed it, and struck with vicious expertness at Whisky Jack's graying head. Then he rose to his feet, drove Wing Lo before him into the kitchen, locked him in, and returned to Vincente, in time to find that ingenious opportunist busy with the pockets of the inert form on the floor.

Jevons kicked him without undue passion.

"'Ere! None o' that," he said. "Fair *dos* for both of us."

He stooped and caught Whisky Jack under the shoulder blades.

"C'mon," he went on. "Let's get 'im outside. 'S too bloomin' dark to see in 'ere."

VI

A MILE to seaward the power launch was flying east, with Cornelius Van Tromp, Melissa and Miles Kenyon crouched under the cowl. The light was beginning to fail, and it would have taken sharper eyes than theirs to have distinguished the form of Whisky Jack, strapped to a chair, and carried into the veranda by Jevons and Vincente.

Ahead, the *Hendryk Van Dam* came lumberingly to an anchor in a tiny harbor, and Andries, having seen his cargo beginning to be broken out, retired to his cabin and *schnapps*, with a grumbled thanksgiving at being clear of thieves, murderers and other like fry. He prepared to devote himself to an evening of Schiedam and *scat* with his burly mate.

Two hours later the good skipper's peace was rudely disturbed by the roar of the power boat's engine and the sudden arrival over the side of that much respected official, Inspector Van Tromp.

Andries rose, his brow corrugated into wrinkles, for Cornelius did not leave his base in Macassar without urgent cause. He was at once made aware of what that cause was.

"*Ja, mynheer inspektor*," he said in some agitation, "there was trouble, and I put the three of them ashore."

"Where?" Van Tromp fixed him with a cold official eye.

Andries told.

"One of them was injured, mynheer, and they said to me they would get him doctored."

Without a word Cornelius dropped over the side again.

"Full power!" he cried to the engineer. He pulled Kenyon apart into the bow. "You are a stranger to these parts, sir?" he said in English.

Kenyon nodded.

"Why?" he inquired.

"There are strange things to be met with in these seas." Cornelius set his head on one side and regarded the other with a twinkle. "You have maybe some influence with—" He nodded toward Melissa swaying to the rush of the seas.

Kenyon grinned a trifle sheepishly, and Van Tromp went on.

"See to it that she remains on board tonight," he said shortly. "You are capable of handling firearms?"

He handed Miles an automatic and went aft to confabulate with his engineers.

Melissa greeted Kenyon's announcement with speechless attention; when he came to his earnest end, she laughed delightedly.

"Do you think you can keep me out of it—now?" she said. "I'd like to see you try!"

THE DARK hung clammily about the bungalow. In the surrounding woods, blacker than the moonless night itself, beasts moved with faint rustlings, and there was now and then the crash of branches as some preying animal sprang to its kill. Beyond that and the murmur of the sea on the beach, silence.

Jevons and Vincente padded softly about their victim, by the smoky light of a hurricane lamp. Whisky Jack still sat

inert and unconscious in his chair, lashed to the arms with ropes, his head on his breast, while the two strove to rouse him to consciousness. In the kitchen, Wing Lo had ceased his frantic efforts to escape, and now, doubtless, awaited events with the easy fatalism of the Orient.

Jevons flung another bucket of water over the doctor and stood off, watching its effect.

"Gawd!" he remarked piously. "I must 'ave clouted 'im one! 'Ere, you 'ave a try at 'im."

The Goanese stooped over the still form, set his ear to the heart and flicked up an eyelid with his forefinger.

"He lives," he said unconcernedly. "In a little he will recover, and then—" he eyed Jevons malevolently. There was mistrust instinct in the look, and the cockney was quick to feel it.

"An' then wot?" he asked brutally. "Then I s'pose you'll do yourself proud, finishin' 'im. Well, go ahead an' do it, me murderin' beauty—'e's tied up, ain't 'e?" He spat contemptuously and Vincente started as if he had been stung.

"Have a care, senhor!" he growled. "This is not the time for jesting."

Jevons curled his lip at him scornfully and was about to pursue the subject a great deal farther, when Whisky Jack in the chair stirred, and the pair turned their attention to him once again. Another bucket of water, skilfully doused over his head and shoulders, and the doctor came to himself with a groan.

Jevons bent over him solicitously.

"'Ow d'ye feel, Doc?" he inquired. "'Struth, you must 'ave a good 'ard skull."

Whisky Jack shook his head muzzily, as if to clear the cobwebs from his brain. Then, as the light dawned upon him, he glared fiercely at Jevons.

"Well?" he asked in a thick voice.

Jevons pulled a battered old deck chair up to him and sat down.

"See 'ere, Doc," he began ingratiatingly, "me an' me yeller pal 'ere ain't on this job for a joke, as you may well lay to. So you'll 'ave to listen careful to what I'm goin' to say to you, 'cos it ain't said in play, nor in kindness neither, by Gawd! Where's that damn' stone?"

Whisky Jack met his ferret's eyes with a stare from which the uncertainty of unconsciousness was fast vanishing. A grim little smile twisted the corners of his mouth.

"So that's it, is it, my little friends?" he asked steadily. "Well, since you've had the opportunity of going over me, I've no doubt you should be able to tell me that better than I can."

Jevons showed his teeth in an unpleasant grin.

"Oh, no, yer don't!" he jerked out. "None o' that closed-up stuff for us, mister. It's either you or us—an' I reckon you'll know pretty fair which it'll be, if it comes to it. We ain't neither of us the stuff to stick at little things like 'urtin' people to get what we want."

He paused menacingly. Whisky Jack threw back his head and laughed till the bats fled out of the eaves.

"Why, you poor little rats!" he cried. "I believe you're threatening me."

Jevons fell abruptly silent, and the two thieves sat face to face with their victim for a long minute. Then the cockney jumped to his feet.

"Come 'ere!" he called savagely to Vincente, and the pair vanished into the house.

For a long twenty minutes they were absent, and Whisky Jack had leisure to consider his position. There was not much doubt of its nature; his years on that coast had taught him to recognize sculduggery, and dangerous sculduggery, when he saw it. And in his own mind there was no particular uncertainty of what might be awaiting him at the hands of the two ruffians inside the bungalow. A few moments tentative struggling with his bonds convinced him that mere escape was out of the question; and his mind, practical by instinct, turned to the only possibility—Wing Lo the Chinese.

As for the stone itself, it was clearly vanished. An instant's thought narrowed its whereabouts to two quarters—either

the Chinese himself, or one of his assailants. Probably, he thought to himself, the latter; if so, and one of them was doublecrossing the other, the outlook for him was a poor one indeed. Obviously they would apply whatever ingenious form of violence they were now maturing, until— With an effort he drove his mind down the other trail, that of the Chinaman.

Wing Lo, he argued, might well have abstracted the stone while he slept—possibly as a kind of security for his pledged return to beloved Cathay. In any event, where was the old man now? Killed, maybe; although he had a faint but clear notion that it would take more than Jevons and Vincente to trap that wide-awake old fellow to his end. At any rate, what hope there was, and it was a slight one, rested in him.

His mind turned, as men's minds will in the face of imminent peril, to old and faraway scenes—Guy's Hospital, Harley Street, and the familiar London lights; the rattle of the traffic in the Strand, the hush and iodoformed efficiency of the operating theater . . .

He almost drowsed off to sleep in the midst of his reminiscence, while the sea rippled placidly on the beach a hundred yards away, and a low moon swam slowly upward, throwing a patch of silver light on the veranda floor.

Then there came the sinister padding of naked feet on the boards, and the two men returned, Jevons carrying in his arms a brazier of glowing charcoal, and the Goanese swinging an iron rod. The cockney set his burden down before Whisky Jack and regarded him triumphantly.

"Now then," he began in a low, venomous whisper, "where's that stone?"

VII

WING LO sat on the floor of his dark kitchen, and meditated amiably on the folly of the white man. Between his fingers there was the soapy feel of Melissa's diamond, and his placid smile grew yet more expansive as he pictured himself at ease for the rest of his life among the joss sticks and paddy fields of distant China.

The mere fact of his being at the moment incarcerated in a pitch black kitchen, and with something more than an outside chance of a violent end at the hands of Jevons and Vincente, worried him not at all. There was always the way out of things, and Wing was not a Chinaman for nothing. Whichever turn the Fates gave to affairs was all one to Wing Lo.

But of one thing he made up his old mind as he squatted on the floor; the two thieves should not lay hands on the diamond, whatever treatment they might choose to mete out to him. He mumbled a Chinese saying to himself about the vengeance prepared for the iniquitous.

In the rest of the house there had been silence for a long time. Now it was broken by the murmur of voices, and the pad of feet in the empty rooms, and he heard Jevons and Vincente on the veranda. With an effort, and by laying his ear to the wall, he could just catch the words; and for ten long minutes he remained immobile, his wrinkled yellow face a study in changing emotions.

The sounds that come to him through the wall were not calculated to maintain his composure unruffled. The cockney's voice changed from wheedling to threats, from threats back to cajolery again, and finally rose to brutal menace. Wing Lo grasped the situation promptly, and his hands crimped with new anxiety as he lay flattened out, his ear to the woodwork; a new light broke upon him, and his visions of the celestial kingdom began to fade before it. Whisky Jack was in desperate case, and the old Chinese had all his countrymen's ideas of loyalty.

Jevon's voice suddenly gave place to that of the Goanese, silkily incisive and with deviltry in its smooth tones; it had a carrying quality not present in the cokney's, and Wing Lo could catch every word.

"Enough of this, senhor! You will discover nothing by threats. Permit me—"

There was a pause, and then a mut-

tered "Gawd!" from Jevons. Followed a deep, irrepressible groan, and through the door filtered a horrid and not to be mistaken smell of burning flesh. Then once again Vincente's voice, deadly and persuasive.

"You will speak now, eh, Doctor? Remember, this is only a little—how do you say it?—lark! From this we proceed—Senhor Jevons, blow a little on the charcoal—to more interesting experiments. Red pepper, for instance, or the *bastinado* on the feet. Ah, believe me, Doctor, we in India know a little about persuasion!"

Another pause, and then again:

"No? You are a little obstinate, surely. Senhor Jevons, the iron once more, if you please. Now, Doctor, a small touch here—a trifle only, eh?—but it has its merits as a maker-up of minds, does it not?"

Wing Lo heard Whisky Jack fighting his bonds, and the chair creaking under his struggles. Then there was a deep and bitter curse from the doctor, a high cackle of laughter from Vincente, and another agonized groan. The Chinaman suddenly hauled himself to his feet.

"In a friend's misfortunes is the revealing of generosity," he said to himself sententiously. "Nevertheless, this individual parts from the treasure with regret."

He thumbed the stone again lovingly, and commenced to hammer on the door.

"Hi, you damn' feller outside!" he cried in his pidgin English. "You makee leave dolctol alone. Him no have diamond—Wing Lo have him here. Open door!"

Outside on the veranda Vincente looked up from his grisly work; Jevons jumped to his feet from his position over the brazier, and their eyes met.

"Stay here, Vincente—I'll let the old devil out."

Jevons started for the door, but the other raced after him with a snarl. Among these thieves, honor was all very well, but vigilance profited a great deal more; and the two of them almost fell over each other in their mutual anxiety to prevent any of the overreaching either would have been delighted to attempt. Jevons wrenched open the door, and Wing Lo, came out, blinking in the lamplight.

"Well," Jevons shot at him, "where is it, you damn' yellow idol? 'And it over, now, or I'll *marrow* the life out o' you!"

The Chinaman was looking at the half conscious doctor with horror. He turned to Jevons, who swung the pistol threateningly, and then to Vincente, suggestively busy over the glowing charcoal.

"You two velly much no-good man," he observed severely. "Suppose p'lice him come, you catchee plison quick—savvy?"

Jevons grinned at him cheerfully.

"Yus, I don't think," he replied ironically. "Now, come on, chinky—out with it, or we'll 'ave to attend to you as well as 'im!"

He nodded at the doctor in the chair, and Vincente idly advanced his iron to the victim's scalp. Whisky Jack, scarred and blistered, writhed helplessly and opened his eyes.

"That you, Wing?" he asked hoarsely.

The Chinaman turned on Jevons.

"You let dolctol go—I give you stone," he said hurriedly.

Whisky Jack found his voice.

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Wing!" he said in something of his old decisive tones. "You stick to it, my boy—savvy? And as for you gentlemen—" he favored his torturers with a twisted smile— "go on, if it amuses you!"

Vincente gave a kind of yelp of fury and advanced the white hot iron again; Jevons covered Wing Lo with a hand that shook with rage. For an instant the group stood as if transfixed, weirdly illuminated by the smoky lantern; then the Chinaman, with a pitying glance at the doctor, reached into the folds of his jacket.

Outside, underneath the steady lap of the waves on the beach, came an almost inaudible stutter, the roar of the *Utrecht's* hard driven engines. None of the four heard it, since Jevons had leaped for the stone, snatched it, and fled out of the veranda into the darkness; Vincente followed him, swearing in an admixture of brimstone Portuguese and Tamil; and Wing Lo bent over the doctor, cutting his

bonds and rendering hasty first aid to the seared and blackened flesh of his head and face.

VIII

THE *UTRECHT* took the beach with a rush, and Melissa tumbled into Kenyon's arms. They had been deep in an acrimonious argument, Miles ordering and Melissa laughing at his pretensions; and the sudden involuntary physical contact loosened restraint in the half angry man, with inevitable results. Melissa slipped out of his embrace and landed on the beach, in high indignation.

"Now just for that you'll see!" she called back to Kenyon. "Stay behind? Indeed! Who d'you think you're ordering about—kisser of unprotected females!"

There was that in her tone which brought Miles over the launch's side in adoring subjection. Cornelius Van Tromp turned from an excited Chinaman.

"Robbery," he said shortly. "They still have your stone, mademoiselle. It remains to be seen where they have—"

He whipped round suddenly at a sound in the darkness of the forest a hundred yards away—snarls, oaths, a yell and, clear above the waves, a shot. Van Tromp jerked out his automatic.

"We are answered," he said. "Adriaan, take the left; Jan, the right. Mynheer, with me in the center—"

Melissa stepped to Kenyon's side, but Van Tromp laid his hand on her arm.

"No," he said, with much authority. "You will kindly remain here, mademoiselle. This is no work for women."

Melissa would have protested, but the little Dutchman brushed her aside unceremoniously. The four men advanced cautiously toward the dark woods, and the girl was left with Wing Lo and the empty power launch at the water's edge.

Thirty yards away, where the trees abruptly ended and the beach, pitted with land crabs' holes, began, Jevons lay motionless, watching the group tigerishly. In his hand was the pistol, still smoking; and somewhere in the blackness behind him lay what was left of Vincente, one obstacle out of his way. He saw Van Tromp and his companions move off cautiously, and under the moon Melissa and Wing Lo standing by the launch; a wild scheme took possession of him. Very quietly he began to snake forward across the beach.

Melissa, still warm from Van Tromp's summary treatment of her, and incidentally in a tremor of anxiety for the young doctor away in the darkness under the mysterious trees, strained her eyes after him, and had no thought for a nearer menace. Wing Lo sat with his back against the power boat's bow, apparently lost in thoughts of his vanished China. Jevons wormed his way along the sand within ten feet of them, and then, collecting himself, made a sudden leap for the boat.

Melissa's scream and the Chinaman's exclamation were simultaneous with Jevons' curse as he found the boat's nose wedged in the sand. He threw the whole of his weight frantically against the bow, in an attempt to thrust it into deeper water; but the old Chinaman—stung out of his race's dislike for personal combat—flung himself upon him. Jevons turned swiftly and shot him, the pistol muzzle almost touching his body. Wing Lo dropped, a limp heap, and the cockney hurled his weight once more on the boat's side.

Melissa subsequently denied, to Miles Kenyon and the world at large, that she had taken any violent hand in affairs at that juncture; but the fact remains that the scarecrow figure that dashed stumbling across the sand found the cockney savagely attempting to tear himself loose from a pair of remarkably strong young arms, and just sufficiently hindered thereby for Whisky Jack to get in a crushing blow on his skull with Vincente's iron bar, picked up at random on the veranda. Jevons fell over Wing Lo, and the doctor turned to Melissa.

"Hurt?" he inquired.

"Not a bit," Melissa panted. Then, as Whisky Jack bent hastily over the cock-

ney and rummaged in his clothes, she added, "Has he got it?"

Whisky Jack straightened himself suddenly and faced her, the diamond in his fingers.

"What did you say?" he asked in a creaking voice.

"Has he got my diamond?"

Whisky Jack stood impassive for a second, the moonlight playing on his seared and scorched brow, the two motionless figures at his feet, and Melissa before him.

Then he gave vent to something between a sigh and a grunt.

"Apparently," he said gravely, and was presenting it to her as Van Tromp and Miles Kenyon hurried anxiously to the scene.

Once more there was a body on the improvised operating table in the bungalow's living room. Whisky Jack bent over it, instruments in hand, while Kenyon watched him admiringly.

"Lucky for him he's a thick cranium." The elder man delicately raised a sliver of bone. "I hit him hard enough to brain an ordinary case!"

He worked on, finished his task, strapped up the cockney's head, and stood erect, to find Kenyon with outstretched hand.

"Congratulations, Sir Alexander!" There was something like reverence in Miles' tone. "We've a lot of technique to learn yet—some of us!"

Whisky Jack stepped back, stared at Kenyon, and his face clouded.

"You have my name, I see, sir," he said stiffly. "I had hoped it was by now forgotten."

Kenyon smiled.

"We still talk of you in Harley Street, Sir Alexander." Then, with a young man's daring, "Why not come back to us?"

Sir Alexander Shirriff strode to the window and stood looking down on the moonlit sea, and the beach of his lectures to the land crabs. There was a long silence.

Then he turned to Kenyon again.

"No, my boy," he said gruffly. "Better leave Alec Shirriff here as Whisky Jack—it's more his line now."

"Nonsense, sir!" Miles laid a hand on the other's bowed shoulder. "There are a dozen men in London who'd meet you at Tilbury Docks, and more than gladly."

Whisky Jack smiled at him, a trifle ruefully.

"Kenyon," he said, "this thing is a coincidence—and one of fortune's little practical jokes. An hour ago I had made up my mind to do just what you say, and I held in my hand the passport to it. Now—" he spread his hands apart, and looked round the dirty room—"no, my boy, you take the girl off, and leave us here—Whisky Jack, and old Wing. I'll patch him up in a month."

Kenyon went to the door by way of reply.

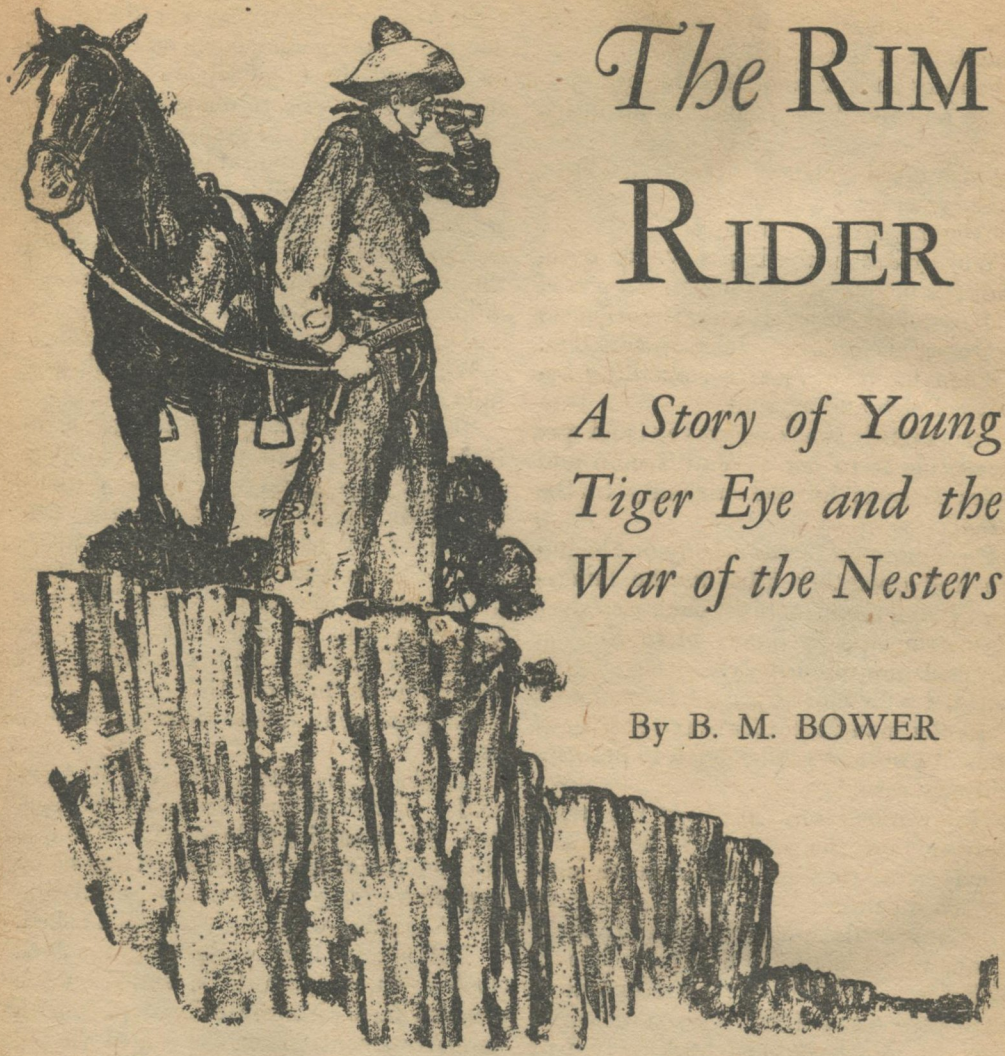
"Melissa," he called. "This is Sir Alexander Shirriff, dear," he announced, as the girl came in, wide eyed. "You've robbed him of his chance of getting home by recovering your stone, he says."

"What do you mean?" the girl asked.

Miles told her, while Whisky Jack looked on, a grim little smile on his scarred face. Melissa colored pink with embarrassment. Then she ran to the old man, and fairly dragged him from the room.

"Leave him to me, Miles," she said over her shoulder.

Miles Kenyon glanced at Jevons on the table, grinned, and followed the pair with his hands in his pockets, and a look of complete content on his face.



The RIM RIDER

A Story of Young Tiger Eye and the War of the Nesters

By B. M. BOWER

THE KID was scouting along the rim of the Big Bench, playing his mouth harp as he rode. Softly, because yo'-all had to be mighty careful nobody down in the valley noticed and took a long shot at you just for luck. Lead hornets buzzed quite plentiful down there where the cow thieves lived and a man had to be careful how he rode. But shucks! Yo'-all couldn't hear that mouth harp any farther'n you could flip a rock with your thumb and finger.

So the kid played "My Bonnie Lies Over The Ocean" with variations he had made up all by himself while he rode the long trail from Texas. Any mouth harp player could play "Bonnie," but nobody played it just like the kid. Same way with the "Mocking Bird." Yo'-all had to know mockers before you could play that piece so it sounded like anything at all. The kid could do it. He could start the chorus same as anybody, "Listen to the mocking bird—" and from there on he could trill and warble and twitter and cheep that old mouth harp for half a mile, Pecos going at a walk with his head swinging low, half asleep.

The kid didn't play the mocking bird

now. You had to have your mind at rest and nothing to do but ride the long trail when yo'-all put the mocker into that tune. Couldn't play it worth shucks when you didn't know what minute yo'-all might have to quit playing and grab your gun and shoot. So the kid played "My Bonnie" softly and his eyes glanced warily this way and that as he rode.

Bad country up this way. Worse than down on the Brazos when pap and Buck Thomas got to fighting the Gonzales boys. Never knew what minute a Gonzales might try to pot-shot you just 'cause you were one of old Killer Reeves' boys. Up here it was worse, because the whole blamed country was out gunning for each other. Nice country, but plumb full of ornery, no account cow thieves that wouldn't wait to see if a fellow was all right but would holler, "Draw, you coyote!" and come a-shooting, plumb crazy-like.

Rode at the kid like that, one of them did. That was day before yesterday. The kid was riding down off the hill, meaning to ask the first rancher he met for a job. Singing along, plumb happy and content. Never thought a word about having trouble, when here comes this feller riding and hollering—

"Draw, you coyote!"

Well, the kid drew, all right. No boy of old Killer Reeves could be slow with a gun and keep his hide on his back. Not while pap was alive, he couldn't. Didn't kill the fellow, though. Didn't have to. Didn't aim to kill a man, never no time, no matter how the play came up. Pap done killing enough for the Reeves family, and the kid had left Texas just to keep from killing somebody. Folks know your old pap was a killer, they think yo'-all have just naturally got to be a killer too. Force you into it. Pull out and go North —that was the kid's way of solving the problem.

Funny, though. If Nate Wheeler hadn't come riding and shooting thataway, the kid wouldn't have met up with Babe Garner. Wheeler fell off his horse dead, but it wasn't the kid that killed him. That was Babe shot him in her head with a rifle when he saw Wheeler was going to kill the kid right there in the road. Shucks! It shuah was worth riding all the way up from Texas to Montana, just to meet up with a fellow as nice and friendly as Babe Garner was. Took the kid right to camp with him and made him feel to home. The kid felt a warm wave of gratitude shoot up his spine at the thought of Babe's fine hospitality and friendship. Couldn't beat that nowhere, not even back home on the Brazos.

Shuah was a snaky kinda country the kid had got into, though. The kid didn't know just all the ins and outs of the fuss, for Babe Garner didn't tell any more than he had to and the kid had been taught to ask blame' few questions. But Babe seemed to think the kid ought to be told enough so he wouldn't go riding straight up to a man again in this country. The way Babe told it, the cow thieves that let on like they were nesters had banded together to wipe out the Poole, which was a big Eastern outfit. Babe was a Poole rider. He said the nesters were stealing the Poole blind and the bosses back East wanted it stopped. Babe said the Poole wouldn't stand for no more and they now looked on all cow thieves same as they did on wolves. Varmints to be got rid of. Nate Wheeler was gunnin' for Poole riders, Babe said, and that was why he rode at the kid thataway.

Babe said the kid could stay right there in line camp with him and ride for the Poole. He said the kid would be on the payroll because the Poole shuah needed good honest men and Babe would send word to the boss he had one over here. That was shuah white of Babe, and again the kid felt that warm, boyish glow of gratitude.

THE KID played absently, his thoughts dwelling on what Babe had said. Babe seemed to think Poole riders had to be fighters. Maybe he ought to tell Babe he wouldn't kill a man for nobody; he'd seen

too much of that back home. But Babe never asked him if he'd kill a man. Babe knew he could shoot and would shoot, and he seemed to kinda take it for granted that meant shoot to kill. The kid hated to lay down on Babe, but it was kinda hard to explain just how he felt about killing. Anyway, Babe never asked him a word about that part. If he did, the kid would tell him straight out where he stood.

Poole riders kinda expected to down a man for keeps if it came to gun play between them and nesters, the kid reckoned. Babe said ranching was just a blind with the nesters, and they really were outlaws that made a business of robbing and killing and slapping their brands on Poole stuff. Brand the calves and beef the cows and peddle the meat to butchers in the towns around that stood in with the gang. Babe said the Poole had tried the law and it wouldn't work, because the Poole was an Eastern firm and all the nesters and town folks hung together. No jury in the country would convict a cow thief, Babe said. So the Poole was going to shoot it out with the gang. He said the kid must keep his weather eye peeled and not let any rider get within gunshot of him unless he was a friend and a Poole man.

What the kid should do if the man turned out to be a rustler, Babe didn't say. Reckon he thought a man just up from the Brazos would know without any telling. Draw and shoot—and be darn' shuah yo'-all do it quicker than the other feller. That was the way it was when Nate Wheeler rode at him. If that was a sample of what the folks in the valley were like, the kid decided that Babe Garner didn't make the story half strong enough against the cow thieves.

Riding slowly along the rim of the bench land as he thought things over, the kid stared curiously at the country spread below. Little hills and wide valleys all covered with grass and flowers, and meadowlarks singing on every bush and weed, and a creek running along the bottom of every wrinkle between the hills—all down in there was cow thief country. All that wide stretch away north to the Missouri was cow thief country, too, according to Babe. Back up here on what Babe called the Big Bench was Poole country. Nesters in the low land, Poole in the high country, and the cattle drifting back and forth between—or being driven back and forth, as the case might be. All mixed up, going where the grass looked greenest and the winding creeks coolest, and only the brands to say which was which.

That rough country away over there next the river, that was Bad Lands, according to Babe. That was where the cow thieves drove the cattle they stole. Had their little ranches back up here in the coulees and planted oats and wheat and ran their fences where all the best water and grass would be inside. Looked like honest nesters getting a home fixed up for their families and never harming anybody—but they were all banded together against the Poole, stealing cattle, running off horses, shooting Poole riders on sight.

The kid's job was to ride along up here on the rim, just lazy-like, and watch through field glasses for any bunch of cattle being rounded up or driven along in the nester country below. Anything that looked like a roundup down there, or even a bunch of riders going anywhere, the kid was to ride to the top of a small pinnacle standing back from the rim of the bench and signal with a little round looking glass Babe Garner had given him.

It wasn't much of a job. The kid would rather ride with Babe, wherever it was he had struck out for at daylight. But Babe didn't act like he wanted anybody along. Just gave the kid the field glasses and the little looking glass and told him where to go and what to do, and to look out no nester went to bouncing bullets around him. Watch the valley and report any movement of men or cattle. Three quick flashes for a bunch of riders, and three—two—one for riders driving cattle. Then one flash if they went toward the Bad Lands, two for the

river, three for the Big Bench. Poole headquarters was back somewhere on the Big Bench and it was somebody at the ranch would get the signals, Babe said. Easy. Too blamed easy for Tiger Eye Reeves from down on the Brazos.

The kid watched faithfully for awhile, halting Pecos behind boulders while he got off and focused the glasses on this ranch and that ranch and the tranquil rangeland in between. Quiet as Sunday afternoon in a Quaker village, down there. Chickens walking around hunting grasshoppers in the edge of the grain fields—darn' good glasses, that would show you a hen after a grasshopper three, four miles off. These belonged to Babe. The kid hoped he wouldn't be needing them today. He liked Babe Garner. Shuah would hate to have anything happen to him. Any cow thief got Babe— The kid did not follow that thought to its conclusion, but his yellow right eye—the one that looked at times like the eye of a tiger in the face of a boy—took on a menacing stare altogether deadly and misleading. They shuah better not touch Babe Garner!

THE MOUNTED and rode slowly on to where new vistas presented themselves. Coulees whose high, sheltering arms had blocked his view lay wide open to his sight and the kid once more dismounted and settled himself comfortably on a rock while he inspected each ranch in turn and compared it with a map of the valley he had found that day when he first met Babe Garner. The day Nate Wheeler was shot. Every ranch was marked on the crude map, and the man's name and brand set down by each little square. Most of the names had an X in front; the kid didn't know why, unless it meant cow thief. Or maybe it meant honest nester—only that would make most of them honest and Babe said they were most all thieves.

Nobody seemed to be stirring in the valley. No riders bobbing around on the levels, nobody working in the fields, no dust cloud showing where cattle were being held in a roundup. Babe thought there might be some action today, but there wasn't. Reckon the nesters were laying low; waiting for dark, maybe. Over across there was Nate Wheeler's place, back in a deep coulee. The kid could see the trail down off Big Bench where he had been riding along down, singing or playing his mouth harp or something—anyway, not looking for trouble—when Nate Wheeler came spurring straight at him, hollering—

"Draw, you coyote!"

The kid's mouth drooped a little at the corners as the very spot seemed to spring right at him through the powerful glasses. Damn' fool, comin' at him thataway without waiting to see who he was meeting up with. Clipped a lock of the kid's hair, that's how close he came to killing. All the nesters like that one, it shuah did pay a man to watch out for 'em.

The kid swung the glasses farther, into the coulee and along the trail to the gate and on up to Wheeler's cabin. There he held them steady, little puckers showing in the skin around his eyes, he squinted so. His lips fell slightly apart while he watched. No wonder the valley was empty and no nesters stirring! Having a funeral for Nate Wheeler, that was why. Yard full of wagons and saddle horses, men standing around outside the house, not talking but just standing there looking sour. Every one packin' guns. A Poole man wouldn't stand no show a-tall in that crowd. About as much show as a brush rabbit with a pack of hounds. If they knew who it was shot Nate Wheeler—if they knew it was Babe Garner and Tiger Eye Reeves—hell shuah would be a-popping right soon!

"Nate Wheeler shuah must be a right populah man," the kid murmured to himself in his soft Texas drawl.

But his forehead pulled into deep lines of puzzlement while he gazed. Something about that crowd over there in the coulee nagged at him with a sense of strangeness, but it wasn't the guns and it wasn't the harsh quiet of the men.

The kid sharpened the focus a little,

still gazing with his forehead wrinkled, trying to figure out what was wrong. Now the men were edging back from the door—plain as if he stood in the yard with them he could see all they did. Plain as looking at a play on the stage. Fetching the coffin out, now. Just a board box with strap handles nailed on, nesters all stretching their necks like turkeys in a grain field, minding their manners but wanting to see it all. Something mighty strange, though. And then the kid knew what it was. There weren't any women at that funeral. Nate Wheeler had a wife and a baby, but they weren't there, either. Just men, not dressed up in their Sunday clothes but wearing colored shirts and overalls. Not shaved, either. Looked like they had just stopped by from their work. Plenty of guns, though, and belts full of shells.

Seemed like he could hear the wagons rattling. Never knew yo'-all could bring wagons so close with glasses you could hear 'em rattle. The kid stared for two seconds longer and took the field glasses from his eyes.

Instantly that grim gathering in the coulee receded into the slight movement of vague dots three miles and more away. The scene was gone, wiped out by the distance. Instead, the kid was staring down off the hill at a wagon that came rattling down a long slope directly toward him. The driver was standing up lashing the horses into a run with the long ends of the lines which he swung like a flail upon their backs. The wagon was jouncing along over hummocks and a woman with her bonnet off and her hair flying straight out behind her like the tail of a running horse was hanging to the seat like grim death.

II

THE KID needed no field glasses to see what happened next. A man on horseback came tearing up over the top of the little ridge. He started shooting, but he didn't hit anything at first and the team came on, leaving the road at the first turn and streaking it straight down the slope. The driver didn't seem to care where they went so long as they kept going.

Then the horseman rode closer, still shooting. The driver of the team made a sudden dive down on one of the horses and rolled off on to the ground and lay still. The team turned a little and snagged the front wheels in a big clump of buck brush they tried to straddle. Right lucky they stopped there—they'd have piled up in a deep little gully in another ten feet. The girl jumped out and started running for the hill, the man taking after her, yelling for her to stop. But she didn't do it, though. She kept right on along the edge of the wash.

She was a girl, all right. The kid knew that as soon as she jumped out and started running. She didn't run like a woman, kinda stiff and her shoulders jerking, taking little short steps and maybe hanging to her skirts with one hand, holding them up out of the way. This one legged it for the hill like a boy.

The fellow after the girl was trying to catch her before she got in the rocks where he couldn't ride. He'd have to go it afoot then and she'd have a better chance. It kinda looked as if she might make it all right, especially when she went over that wash in one long jump like a deer and the fellow's horse balked and reared back on the edge. That made the man mad and he pulled down with his gun and sent a bullet kicking up the dust right in front of her. That scared her so she stopped, not knowing which way to turn. The fellow didn't shoot again but took down his rope and jumped off his horse.

The kid was waiting, with his blue left eye squinted nearly shut and his yellow right eye open and staring like a tiger watching till his supper walks a little closer. They kept coming, closer and closer, and the kid's gun barrel jabbed forward and spat its opinion of such doings.

The man was widening his loop as he ran, but he dropped it as his arm jerked

down to his side. Wore two guns, though. He started to draw his gun with his left hand, and the kid's gun spoke again. The man gave a jerk and turned and started running off up the slope, ducking this way and that like a coyote dodging a wolf hound. Then suddenly he sat down right where he was and leaned over sidewise, acting kinda sick.

When the kid took another look at the girl she was lying on the ground all in a heap like she'd fainted or been shot or something. The kid watched her for a minute and saw she didn't move, so he slid down the bluff like a rolling rock, bringing smaller stones, gravel and sand along with him and gathering momentum as he came. He wished he could travel airline like his bullets; he could go so much quicker and easier. Still, he wasn't long on the road.

Then, just as he was slipping and sliding and digging in his heels to stop himself beside the girl, a shyness seized upon the kid and dyed his face a deep crimson. He was awful sorry for her and he hoped she wasn't hurt, but he hung back and didn't want to touch her or turn her over to see if she was dead. Her hair was all down over her face. One foot, clad in a boy's heavy shoe, was thrust straight out beneath her plaid gingham skirt. The kid thought of a thoroughbred colt when he glanced at her ankle, and looked quickly away. Then he heard her give a deep, gasping sigh and stepped back a little farther. If she had just fainted she'd be coming to in a minute and she shuah wouldn't thank him for standing there gawping at her thataway.

The kid went on down the hill, a little surprised to see how far the girl had run from the wagon. Maybe he could do something for her pappy; he reckoned it was her old pap driving the horses, because he had long whiskers blowing out to one side of his head when he stood up pouring the gad to the team. Shuah would be hell if the old man was killed. Fine doings, taking after an old man and a girl like that!

The kid walked over and stood looking down at the fellow on the ground. The man glared up at him like a trapped wolf. A tall, lean man with a high thin nose and his eyes set too close together, meanness emanating from him like a visible thing. Both ears were swollen and red, a puckery round hole showing in the outstanding shell of each. The kid eyed those ears with the peculiar and personal interest of one who gazes upon his own handiwork and is rather proud of the job.

"When I plugged them eahs," he drawled contemptuously, "I shuah thought yo'-all was just a plain skunk. I wisht I'd known then yo'-all was half skunk and half sidewindah!"

He turned and looked over to where the horses stood panting on the brink of the washout, the wagon tilted perilously over the stout old bush. It seemed as though the man huddled on the ground moved his legs a little; a feeble motion hardly more than a twitching. The kid walked over there and lifted him into the shade of a bush.

Old man, all right. Her old pappy, shot in the back without a chance in the world to help himself. Didn't even have a gun on him. Old farmer, by the look of him. Bald headed and little and old. Skinny old neck wrinkled like an apple that's laid out through a cold snap. Wasn't dead, though. The kid pulled the old man's shirt out of his overalls and took a look at the wound, small and bluish at the back, torn and bleeding in front. Too far over to one side to kill him, looked like. Reckon it was that knock on his head, right to one side of the bald spot where the hair was thin, that laid him out.

The kid investigated the head injury, exploring with gentle fingers too wise for a boy. But he had grown up in a harsh school and he had looked upon many hurts in the twenty years that he had lived. That shot in the side—that looked like it wouldn't amount to much. The knock on the head might or might not be serious, the kid thought. Didn't seem to be any crack in the skull, but

still you couldn't tell, with an old man like him. Have to wait and see how it panned out.

THE KID got up and looked in the wagon. A sack of flour was there, and a box of groceries all jumbled together, and a demijohn lying on its side. The kid hoped it held whisky, and reached a long arm for it. Shuah enough—old pappy liked his eye-opener when he got up in the morning, and was taking home a jugful. The kid gave him an eye-opener now, holding the old man's head up and tilting the jug to the ashy lips pinched together in the long beard. Then he poured a little in his palm and rubbed it on the blue lump in the thin gray hair, and after that he trickled a pungent little stream on the bullet wound, front and back. Pap always claimed whisky was good for hurts. Kept out bloodpoison. Carbolic acid or whisky—pap always favored the whisky.

The kid was thorough. He tilted the jug again to the old man's mouth, and this time there was a definite attempt to swallow the stuff. The man's faded blue eyes opened and he stared vaguely up into the kid's face.

"Reckon yo'-all's feelin' some bettah, suh," the kid said shyly. "Right smaht crack on the haid, but the whisky'll keep down the swellin'." And when the old eyes still questioned, the kid offered further encouragement. "Bullet dug itse'f a trail in yo'-all's side, but it ain't deep nohow."

The old man opened his mouth and moved his jaw uncertainly, trying to speak. His eyes never left the kid's face.

"Pete Gorham, he ain't feelin' so peart himse'f," the kid observed mildly, glancing over to where he had left Pete.

Abruptly he laid the old man down and stood up.

"Yo'-all ovah theah, *seddown!*" he called sharply, and went over and sat Pete down rather violently. He yanked off Pete's suspenders and tied his feet together with them before he returned to Pete's victim.

"Where's Nellie?" The man was still dazed, but at least he could speak once more.

The kid gave a sigh of relief.

"Why, suh, she—" he turned and looked back toward the hill—"she's comin'. She'll be heah directly, suh."

And he bethought him to tilt the jug again to the old man's lips, quick, before the girl got there. Women were queer. They'd know there was a jug in the house and they'd sweep all around it, but they made a fuss if their men took a drink out of it. The kid had always wondered at the way his mother and sisters had always acted about pap's whisky jug.

The drink revived the old man a little. but he seemed to have only a vague idea of what had taken place.

"Team run away," he mumbled. "Throwed me out. Where's Nellie? She was in the wagon when the team run away."

She came, wearily choosing the easiest way through the rocks and brush, her long yellow hair pulled forward over her left shoulder and her fingers moving mechanically with three strands big as a well rope, braiding them together as she walked. Her face was pale and finely sprinkled with freckles and her mouth drooped at the corners, but the kid thought she was beautiful and he blushed a dark red as he tipped his hat to her. When she came up he retreated to the nearest horse which stood with sweaty flanks heaving spasmodically after the run. The kid stood at its head and pulled the forelock smooth under the browband while he watched the girl with sidelong glances from under his hat brim.

"You hurt, pa?" The girl sank on her knees beside the old man. "Pete shot you, didn't he?"

"Pete? Pete who? The horses run away. Guess they throwed me out. Where was we goin', Nellie? Wasn't we goin' some place?"

"We was goin' home, pa." She was kneeling there looking at the blue lump on

her father's head, and from there her staring eyes turned to the bullet wound in his side, which the kid had left uncovered ready for further ablutions of raw whisky. "Don't you remember when Pete Gorham took in after us, and you remembered you never got your gun back from the bartender before you left town?"

"Town? What town?" The old man lifted a shaking hand to his head and winced as his fingers touched the lump there. "Horses run away, I remember that. Did we go to town? I can't remember any town we went to, Nellie."

"You *don't?*" The girl sat back and stared at her father with a puzzled look of horror. "Don't you remember we went to Nate Wheeler's funeral yesterday and you read a chapter in the Bible there at the grave over by Hans Becker's house where they had him?"

"Becker, Becker? No-o, I can't—"

"Well, don't you remember we drove right from Becker's on into Badger Creek, and stayed all night at Uncle Jim's place? And don't you—"

"Jim?" The old man's groping was painful to see. "Jim—kinda remember something about Jim—don't know who he was—"

"Uncle Jim tried to make us stay in town till the Poole outfit is cleaned out. And you wouldn't, because you was afraid they'd steal everything off the ranch. You—was drinkin'." In spite of her worry and her pity her voice sharpened at the charge. "You was so mad at Uncle Jim you forgot to go back and get your gun, so when Pete Gorham come after us—"

"Pete Gorham! Who's he? I don't remember any—"

The kid's hand left its slow stroking of the horse's sweaty jaw. He walked over and stood beside the kneeling girl, bashful but determined.

" 'Scuse me," he said diffidently, gun hand going to his hat brim when she looked up. "Did yo'-all say Nate Wheelah's funeral taken place yeste'day?"

The kid stood there, paralysed at his own temerity. He almost wished he hadn't spoken.

THE GIRL stood up, her yellow head just about even with the kid's pocket where the mouth harp stood on end alongside his bag of Bull Durham. The kid's ears turned a slow and angry red under her gaze.

"Why, of course, it—" She checked herself abruptly, one swift, troubled glance going to her father on the ground. "You must be a stranger in the valley if you don't know—"

She cast a swift, suddenly enlightened glance upward.

"Are you one of them Poole rim riders?"

The kid turned his head and sent a glance back up the hill. It looked pretty high from down here, and the rough ledge formation at the top did much resemble a rim. His eyes turned to the girl and the red slowly faded from his ears and neck.

"I happen to be up theah when Pete Gorham shot yo' pap," he said with slow meaning. "I taken it upon myse'f to stop Pete befoah he could carry out his plan."

"Well, wasn't you rim riding on the valley?"

"I just happen to be theah at the time."

"You're a Poole rider, ain't you?"

"Poole! Poole rider!" The old man scrambled to a sitting posture, his face working furiously as memory came back with a rush. "One of them Texas killers, I betcha! Was it *you* dry gulched my son Ed? Where's my gun?" He clawed futilely at his hip where no gun was holstered. "If it was you killed my boy—"

"No, suh, it wasn't me." The kid's thumbs went instinctively to his gun belt, hooking themselves negligently over the edge; as negligently as a tiger draws its front paws back toward its breast when it hears a strange sound in the bush. "If I was a killah, Pete Gorham would be daid right now, 'stead of settin' ovah theah with both arms broke."

Both the girl and her father looked in the direction indicated by the kid's languid left thumb. The girl gave an invol-

untary shudder and closed her eyes for a second.

"Even if he's a Poole rider, pa, he—done us a big favor," she said, a little color staining her cheeks. "We got to be grateful for that."

"Yo'-all needn't be," the kid said shyly. "I got a plumb dislike fo' that *hombre*, anyhow."

"Are you the feller that shot Pete in the ears? They was talkin' about that yesterday at Nate Wheeler's fune—" She caught herself up, biting her lip.

"Nate Wheelah's funeral," the kid finished softly. "Yes'm, I had the pleasuah of earmarkin' Pete the othah evenin'."

"Then you're one of them Texas killers, all right. They said it was a Texas killer done that. Pa, ain't you able to get in the wagon? I can drive, if you can set and ride."

She was in a hurry to get away from him, even though he had saved her from that skunk, Pete Gorham. Saved her old pappy's life, too, most likely. The kid swung on his heel and gave all his attention to backing the wagon off the buck brush so the team could be turned around. They wanted to get away from him. Well, he was anxious too that they should go.

The old man kept bewailing the loss of his gun while the girl was tearing cloth from her petticoat to bandage over the bullet wound. The kid kept his back turned until he knew she had finished. Her pap wanted another drink, and the girl didn't want him to have it. Just like a woman. Rode with the jug in the wagon; knew it was there, knew it was full of whisky, and yet she didn't want her old pap to have a drink now when he needed it to brace him up for the ride home. Plumb simple, the way women acted sometimes.

The horses refused to back into the scraggy branches of the bush, and only reared and struck at him with their front feet where he stood with his hands on their bridles, trying to force them backward. The kid calmed them with soft words and a pat or two. Then he unhooked them from the wagon and led them out of the way while he lifted the wagon off the bush with a powerful heave or two. The girl left her father to come and help him cramp the wagon and back it around so it headed up the slope again. But she didn't say a word, and when he went for the horses she returned to her father, her long yellow braid swinging on her shoulders as she walked. The kid caught that detail in a swift glance as he drove the horses to the wagon.

He worked swiftly, surely, his capable hands never wasting a motion, never uncertain of the thing they should accomplish. The spring seat had jounced loose from its grip on the wagon box and he replaced that with two yanks and a shove that set the clamp in place. The wagon tongue had a splintery crack down half its length, and he sliced off the ends of the long reins and strapped the tongue so that it would hold together for the trip home—wherever that was.

HE PICKED up the scattered grocery packages and replaced them in the box, found the old quilt that had been folded to serve as a cushion on the spring seat, and refolded it lengthwise, shaking off the dirt it had collected when it fell from the wagon. This must serve as a bed for the old man. Not much better than the bare wagon box, but it would help a little. The team was restless, wanting to go home, and the kid turned to the girl.

"If yo'-all would be so accommodatin' as to come hold these hosses a minute," he said stiffly, "I'd be shuah pleased to tote yo' pap ovah and lay him in the wagon."

A hot streak went crimpling up his spine when her hands touched his in taking the lines, and because of it he turned away so that she could not see how red his face was all of a sudden. Burned like fire. He stooped and lifted the old man up in his arms like a child.

"I kin walk, dang ye!" he cried pettishly.

But he couldn't, except with the help of

the kid's arm under his shoulders, taking all the weight off the wobbly old legs.

The kid had brought the jug along, dangling it awkwardly beside his legs so the girl wouldn't see it if she should happen to look that way. When he had the old man around at the back of the wagon he gave him another swig of whisky, his broad shoulders blocking the girl's view of the reprehensible proceeding. And when the old man's hands reluctantly let go of the wicker covered jug, the kid poured whisky into one palm and bathed the high lump alongside the bald spot before he corked the jug and lifted him into the wagon. It was not going to be a comfortable trip, but it was the best he could do.

"We're much obliged," the girl said constrainedly, as the kid walked past her to the horses' heads so that she might safely climb up to the seat. "Even if you are a rim rider for the Poole I want to thank you for—all you've done."

"Don't mention it," said the kid, in the carefully polite tone his school teacher had taught him not so many years ago. "It was no trouble a-tall."

She looked at him doubtfully, lifted a foot to the hub of the front wheel and hesitated, glancing in upon her father, who was babbling incoherent threats against the Poole riders who had shot his son. Then she looked at Pete Gorham, who sat cursing beside a sage brush, took her foot down off the hub and came over to where the kid stood stroking the nose of the horse he was holding by the bridle.

"If you don't kill Pete Gorham he'll kill you," she said in a fierce undertone.

"It'll be a right smaht while befo' he's able." The kid did not look at her.

"That don't make any difference. Pete's part Injun. He'll wait." She glanced again toward the querulous murmur of her dad's voice. "You better quit the Poole and get outa the country," she said hurriedly. "The valley folks 'll kill you—" From the corner of his eye the kid saw the quick, anxious look she gave him. "I dassen't tell you—" she took a long breath—"but the valley's wise to you rim riders!"

She seemed to think even that was saying more than she dared, for she turned sharply away and climbed into the wagon. The kid stood back and tilted his hat for goodby and the team lunged forward in little rabbit jumps until the slope and the girl's firm hands on the lines slowed them down. She could drive, all right. The kid waited until he was sure of that before he turned to other matters.

He went over to Pete Gorham and sacrificed an almost new bandanna and his neckerchief to make bandages, and adjusted them with crude efficiency while Pete snarled threats and curses. But the kid didn't care for that. He had so many other things to think about that he scarcely heard what Pete was saying. He removed the suspenders from Pete's ankles, lifted him to his feet and faced him about toward the valley.

"Go hunt yo'se'f a coyote den and crawl into it," he advised harshly, and started back up the hill, climbing like one in a great hurry.

III

THE KID crouched again on the rim of the Big Bench, scanning the valley through field glasses that seemed irresistibly drawn to one certain spot no more than half a mile distant. She could drive, all right. That darned pinto was a mean devil—shying at his shadow and always biting at the sorrel, trying to pick a fuss. The girl could handle 'em all right, though. Yellow braid blowing across her shoulders like a great rope of gold shining in the sun—The kid caught himself maundering and moved the glasses away from the team and wagon just dipping into a hollow.

There went Pete Gorham, heading straight out across the valley to some ranch on the other side. Staggered like he was drunk, but the kid reckoned that two shot arms was enough to make a man feel kinda sick. Bullets through both ears, bullets through both arms—have to

start in on his legs next, if Pete tried any more cussedness.

The kid's lips thinned and straightened when he remembered that girl running for the hill, Pete after her with his rope. Any other man would have shot to kill. Pap shuah woulda laid Pete out too daid to kick. But somehow this thing of killing—it was plumb easy to do, but yo'-all never could put the life back in a man once you'd shot it out. Pete Gorham would shuah get his some of these days; but the kid didn't want to be the one that did the doing.

Funny, about the nesters being wise to Poole rim riders. The kid wondered if the girl meant there was somebody hiding out among the rocks waiting for a pot shot at him. Didn't seem to be—not right along here, anyway. They could have downed him like a rabbit while he was climbing the hill. Would, too, if they had been cached within shooting distance. Funny the girl didn't realize that. Reckon maybe she was just giving him a hint same as Babe did, so he wouldn't ride along too careless. If the nesters really were wise to the riders on the rim watching the valley, why didn't they have somebody up here to take a shot at one? If he was a nester and knew the Poole had somebody keeping cases, he shuah would guard the old rim. He'd fix it so they couldn't come snooping along and see everything that went on down in the valley.

The very silence and emptiness and apparent safeness of the rim troubled the kid. They knew, all right, or the girl wouldn't have told him so—and be so scared to tell. Rim rider—a Poole rim rider. That shuah sounded like they were known and talked about, or the nesters wouldn't have a name to call them by. Didn't bother her any to think of it, either, any more than it did to call him a Texas killer. That's what Pete Gorham had called him, too, that time he earmarked Pete. Well, if they talked about 'em so much they had names all made up to call 'em by, it shuah did look plumb strange—

The kid abruptly swung his glasses over to where the funeral procession had been starting away from Nate Wheeler's place. That funeral was another strange thing. Buried Nate Wheeler yesterday, she said. Then what did they want to carry out a coffin and start another procession today for? The kid couldn't see any sense to that. Plumb crazy, it looked like to him.

Now the coulee across the valley lay empty, open to the sun and the wind that swayed the tall weeds and bushes. With the glasses he swept a prairie dog village and saw the fat little rodents running from mound to mound, comically busy with their own affairs, stopping to chitter and gossip while one stood up beside his burrow keeping watch over the town. Nobody within half a mile of them, that was sure, or there wouldn't be so many out of their holes. The funeral procession was gone. Nate Wheeler's place was deserted.

The kid searched the valley with eyes keen as a hawk's. He glanced up at the sun and made a swift mental calculation. He hadn't spent more than an hour down there at the foot of the hill. Less than an hour, according to the sun. A funeral wouldn't go far in an hour. Two miles, three miles, maybe, if the horses stepped right out.

Plumb strange, that was, having a funeral twice for the same man. At Becker's place, yesterday, the girl said. Didn't mean to let that slip, either. Said he was buried right on the ranch. The kid got out his map and looked for Becker's place, then tried to locate it in the valley. All he could see was the crablike claws of a coulee so nearly closed that even from the rim he could not look in upon Becker's ranch. No Poole rider could see what was going on at Becker's—at least from this side of the valley.

The kid rode slowly back the way he had come, watching this way and that, mindful of the girl's warning but keeping an eye on the valley, too. Especially on the wagon crawling up a long hill, the old man in the back sitting up and trying to steady the jug to his mouth. The kid

chuckled boyishly at that performance, and he grinned when the girl finally set the brake and stopped the team, and climbed into the back of the wagon and took the jug away from her dad, arguing furiously with him. The kid's eyes softened when he saw her stop and bite her lips, on the brink of tears.

Darned old fool, what'd he want to go and make her cry for? Must have hit that jug of booze pretty often before the kid looked, because he shuah did act oary eyed, waggling his darned old fool head and arguing and gesticulating with his hands. Side couldn't hurt him much, or his head either, the way he acted. Man as old as him oughta have some sense. Getting drunk right in front of his own daughter! Shuah didn't show much respect for her, making her cry like that, after all she'd had to stand for—Pete Gorham trying to kidnap her right in broad daylight thataway.

THE KID turned away from the vivid pantomime in the wagon, and looked for Pete. Might as well make shuah he wasn't trying to trail the girl. No, Pete was still going straight across the flat, making a beeline for Becker's coulee, as nearly as the kid could judge. Satisfied, he turned the glasses again upon the wagon.

Shuah was a pretty girl. The kid never had seen such yellow hair in his life. Shuah wasn't much like that darned stuck-up girl back home that had made fun of his yellow eye. This girl Nellie never noticed his eye. Never gave it a second look. Ladylike little thing—and that old rip of a pappy of hers was making her cry. The kid wanted to go down there and give the old man a shuahenough talking to, but he'd need Pecos and there wasn't much chance of getting a horse down off the hill right along there. Take an hour to catch up with 'em afoot. Longer than that; it was farther than it looked, when you took into consideration all the hills and hollows that would have to be crossed.

He sighed, and gave another sweeping glance at the valley. Shuah was a funny thing about that funeral. Maybe they were just trying to fool him with it. Maybe they wanted to go all in a bunch somewhere and couldn't figure out any way to keep from being seen, and maybe they just had a fake funeral to fool any Poole rim rider that happened to be keeping cases. Plumb foolish. Easiest way was to send somebody along over here to bushwhack him. The kid gave a sudden grunt of understanding. The nesters had sent somebody, all right. Or they thought they had. They'd sent Pete Gorham. And Pete had kinda got sidetracked, thinking he could kill off that old man and get the girl.

The kid's face darkened at the simplicity of the crime. Pete had thought he could do a thing like that and lay it to the Poole. The nesters would never think of a valley man doing it. They'd blame the Poole, and they'd go gunning after them harder than ever. If he hadn't come along and stopped the thing when he did Pete would have a fine frameup on the Poole. Shooting an old man in the back and carrying off a girl would shuah stir things up around here. But Pete didn't make it stick. The kid had come along and fixed Pete good and plenty for a right smaht while, and the girl and her pappy knew just what kind of a skunk Pete was. There'd be a hanging bee, he reckoned, as soon as the nesters found out about it.

Now the girl was up on the seat again, driving, and the jug was up there alongside her out of the old man's reach. The kid wished he could change places with that jug—and blushed at the thought. But he watched her, riding along the rim in the direction she was taking so that he kept nearly opposite the wagon. He was not afraid of being ambushed from the rocks. He had settled that possibility when he settled Pete Gorham.

Little by little the kid pieced together the sentences she had spoken.

"Are you a rim rider? . . . Even if he is a Poole rider, he's done us a big favor—" This to her old pappy on the ground. She

meant the way he stopped Pete Gorham. She—when she was going to get into the wagon, she stopped long enough to come right up to him and tell him—well, maybe she didn't tell him anything much; anything Babe hadn't told him. But it was the way she said it. It was her voice.

There was something in her voice that was like her hair. Something like gold. Of course, yo'-all couldn't say a voice was yellow, or had a shiny sound, but yo'-all could kinda imagine it was like gold. That girl down in Texas—her voice was like a tin pan. Funny about voices; they say more than the words, sometimes. More than a person wants their voice to say. Hers did. Hers said she'd shuah hate to have anything happen to the rim rider.

The kid rode dreamily along, watching the wagon as it bumped over the dim trail in the grass. Watching just in case she might need help or something. Team might run away, or her old pappy might take and fall out of the wagon, the old fool. Girl like that suah oughta be wearing pretty clothes and sitting in a rocking chair making lace, or playing the organ or something like that. Girl like that didn't belong with no nester outfit. She oughta have some big rich cattleman for a pappy and ride around on a nice, gentle horse.

But the kid soon changed that imaginary setting for her. If she were the daughter of a rich cattleman, he wouldn't be her equal. She'd be so far above him he wouldn't even have the right to go and sit in her parlor on Sunday. All he could do was tip his hat when she rode by. No, he reckoned she was all right just as she was. Time enough for a silk dress and a nice parlor when—well, when she got into a home of her own. She wasn't so far up in the world she wouldn't look at a fellow just because he was a cowboy working for wages. Even if he was a Poole rider. Her voice shuah didn't sound as if she'd hate a fellow for that.

The wagon finally turned into a shallow depression and was seen no more from the rim. The kid marked the place where she lived; marked it with a special significance in his mind. It wasn't down on the crude map he carried, but he could have ridden straight to her ranch in the blackest night. Over across the valley a fellow might be able to look down into that basin from the rim. The kid's eyes chose a point where he meant to try it first chance he got.

He got off Pecos and found himself a shady place under a shelving rock and sat down, resting his elbows on his knees that he might hold the glasses steadier. Now and then he swept the valley with a perfunctory glance, but most of the time he was staring at the ridge which hid her home. A thin line of cottonwoods ran up along a creek there. There were places where the tops of the trees showed above the ridge. One place where the ridge dipped a little, the kid thought he could make out part of the roof of a building. Might be rocks, but it shuah did look like a roof.

THE SHADOW of the Big Bench crept farther out into the valley. The kid traced its bold outline dreamily, his gaze wandering here and there; but like a compass needle swinging to the north, it always came back to that line of cottonwoods running up behind the ridge, and to that brown splotch which might be the roof of a house. He wondered if there were hired men on the ranch to do the chores. Nesters didn't hire much help—not if they were honest. Good looking team and a pretty good harness and wagon, though. No poor trash would have an outfit like that. Maybe there was some fellow there, somebody she liked—

The kid stirred uneasily and let the glasses drop from his eyes. A shadow was sliding stealthily down the rocks beside him, a big hat and a pair of shoulders growing larger and longer as he looked. The kid sprang up like a startled deer, his gun in his hand and pointing straight at the man who stood looking at him. Then suddenly the kid smiled sheepishly and tucked the gun back in its holster.

"Come alive like a rattler, didn't you?" Babe Garner grinned. "Saw a leg sticking out from behind the rock and I thought they'd got you, Tiger Eye. Say, that's the second time you've throwed down on me. You always that quick?"

"Reckon I try to be, Babe," the kid drawled diffidently. "Pap always told me I nevah'd have to be too slow moah'n just once."

"I could 'a' got you that time, Tiger Eye, if I'd wanted to. Any nester want to slip up on you, he could 'a' done it." Babe eyed him curiously. "You been asleep?"

"No, I been watchin' the valley." The kid lifted the glasses by their rawhide thong to show Babe, but he did not lift his eyes to meet Babe's keen glance.

"Hunh!" Babe's tone sounded skeptical. "See anything?"

"Saw a funeral ovah to Nate Wheelah's place."

"You didn't report it to the Poole," Babe charged grimly. "What was the matter? Paralyzed, so you couldn't git to the pinnacle?"

The kid's yellow right eye took on the curious, cold stare of a tiger. That was because of Babe's rebuke. But the eye softened immediately, and that was because the kid loved Babe.

"No, suh, I was right busy soon aftah," he said mildly.

"Doin' what?"

"Shootin' a rustlah, suh." Funny, but the kid never had called Babe "sir" before; but then, Babe never had used just that tone to the kid.

"Hell! Why didn't you say so?" Babe's tone had warmed amazingly. "Some one tryin' to dry gulch you, Tiger Eye?"

"I reckon he was aimin' thataway, Babe."

"You son of a gun!" Babe stepped forward and clapped a hand admiringly down on the kid's shoulder. "I knowed there was some reason why you let that damn' fake funeral get by. I told the boys you had a good reason for not giving the signal. Got you a rustler, hunh? I knowed you was the goods, Tiger Eye!"

"Yo'-all says it was a fake funeral, Babe?"

"Shore, it was a fake. One of the boys got wise they was goin' to pull off something. You was sent over here to keep cases, but one of the boys over at the Poole happened to see 'em when they come up on the bench. Old Man, he suspicioned something was wrong about that percession, so he sends us all over to the buryin' ground over on Cotton Creek. That's where they was headin' for. Shore, had more mourners than what they figured on!"

"Yo'-all didn't fight 'em, Babe?"

"No—shore, we didn't. Ain't p'lite to fire on a funeral, Tiger Eye. But we shore beat 'em to that there buryin' ground! Thirty-five punchers was settin on their horses back on the ridge about a hundred yards away when that funeral percession come along. There wasn't no grave dug, but we set there and watched 'em dig it.

"They shore acted mournful, Tiger Eye! Them with six-guns and us with rifles laid across our saddles and never sayin' a damn' word. They never, either. But you bet your sweet life they was thinkin' a-plenty! Nervous as cats. In a damn' hurry, too. Didn't dig that grave more'n two feet deep."

"Yo'-all shuah they buried Nate Wheelah ovah theah?" The kid was trying to keep his glance away from a certain line of cottonwoods in the valley.

"Nate Wheeler? Naw, they never buried Nate Wheeler there. Jim Poole's nobody's fool. He saw through their little scheme right off. They buried *something* all right, because we set up there on the ridge and watched 'em so they had to. I guess you don't savvy, Tiger Eye. You're a stranger in the country. It's like this. Right up the creek about four miles from that burying ground is the Poole ranch, and it's a good nine miles across to Cotton Creek from here. If they got over on Cotton Creek with a funeral percession they could sneak on up the creek to the Poole. Nine miles in plain sight of the

ranch, and four miles under cover. Savvy now?"

"Shuah so, Babe," said the kid, his thoughts flashing to the girl and what little she had dared to say.

"They thought nobody'd ever think a funeral would turn itself into a raidin' party. They know they're watched, and they know the Old Man is kinda hangin' back and don't want to start nothin'. So they frames up a little s'prise party of their own. They shore had it," Babe chuckled, pulling out his bag of tobacco and his little yellow book of papers. "Nothin' to do but go on and bury what they brought and go off about their business. And that's what they done."

"Shuah hope yo'-all didn't have no trouble, Babe."

"Never had a word of trouble, Tiger Eye. Old Man, he was runnin' this and he won't start nothin'." Babe's eyes veiled themselves suddenly from the kid's questioning stare. "Know what they done, Tiger Eye? They knowed they had to go through with that buryin' or we'd smell a rat. So they did. They buried a coffin full of rifles they aimed to use. When they was gone the Old Man had us dig up the box and open it."

Babe folded a paper into a trough, sifted in a little tobacco, evened it with a careful finger tip, rolled it deftly and drew the edge of the paper lightly along the tip of his tongue before he pressed it down and folded up one end. He fished a match from a pocket, flicked his thumb nail across the head, got a flame and lighted the cigaret. The kid watched him, his mind piecing together certain details of the story which Babe did not know.

"I shore was worried about you, kid," Babe said finally, breaking the match stub in two before he threw it away. "The Old Man was kinda dubious about you. But I told him you're on the square and you'd 'a' signaled from the pinnacle if something hadn't happened."

"Shuah would, Babe. That funeral looked plumb strange to me. I had the glasses on 'em and I was watchin' to see wheah they went."

"Where'd that feller jump you, Tiger Eye—if it's a fair question?"

"Back down the rim about a mile."

"Unh-hunh. Must 'a' took you quite awhile." Babe fanned the smoke away from his face while he looked hard at the kid.

"Takes a right smaht while, Babe, to trap a wolf."

A strange, implacable look came into the kid's boyish face. Babe looked at him and looked away again.

"Well, let's go," he said after a silence, and there was a new note of respect in his voice. "I'll tell the Old Man how it was. You done the right thing, Tiger Eye."

IN THE cabin at Cold Spring line camp that evening Babe Garner lay on his bunk with a novel held before his face, but he didn't turn two leaves in an hour. He was listening to the kid play his mouth harp and he was wondering a little at the breed of men that came up from the Brazos. Hard—that's what Babe called the kid. Smooth cheeks and wavy red hair, always ready to give you a smile for every pleasant word you spoke, not much to say but with a voice soft and mellow and full of music. But hard. Hard as nails. Kill a man in the afternoon and sit and play the mouth harp like that all the evening. Babe was pretty hard himself, but he wasn't as hard as that.

Over by the stove with his booted feet cocked up on the hearth which he had neatly brushed with a wild duck's wing, the kid was playing the mouth harp, his slim brown fingers cupped and touching the metal where the nickel was worn through to the brass. He played "Listen To The Mocking Bird" with all the trills and warbles and low mating calls and shrill pipings he had ever heard from the mockers flitting about in the hackberry bushes of Texas. He played "My Bonnie Lies Over The Ocean" three times, with a haunting wistfulness in the tones that made Babe Garner chew his underlip and think yearningly of a girl he used to know in Wyoming when he was about as old as Tiger Eye.

And then the kid played another tune which he had never cared much about until today, and his mind clung to the words until his cheeks were hot to the touch of his fingers:

> Come, love, come, the boat lies low,
> The moon shines bright on the old bayou;
> Come, love, come—oh, come along with me
> And I'll take you down-n-n to Tennessee!

"Say, Tiger Eye, you shore can make a mouth harp talk," Babe said from the bunk, when the kid's dreams could no longer be compassed by the music and he sat staring at the smoky bottom of the dishpan hanging back of the stove—and seeing a girl running toward him, her yellow hair flying out like a golden pennant behind her.

"Shuah talks to me, sometimes, Babe," the kid murmured in his soft Texas drawl.

"Time to roll in, though. We got t' be ridin' at dawn."

"Comin' right now, Babe." The kid set one foot on the floor and laid the other across his knee, tugging gently at heel and toe. "Moah rim ridin', Babe?"

"Why? You like rim ridin', Tiger Eye?"

"Shuah do, Babe."

Hard. Just a kid—twenty last winter, he said—couldn't even raise more than a little reddish fuzz on his upper lip. But hard. Why, men with half a dozen notches on their guns had more feeling than he showed. Play like that on the mouth harp right after— Oh, hell! Babe sat upon the edge of the bunk to pull off his own boots, but instead of doing it right then he sat staring at the kid's dreamily smiling profile.

"You shore look happy tonight, Tiger Eye."

Roused from his thoughts, the kid stood up and stretched his strong young arms to the ridgepole. From his slender middle his leather cartridge belt sagged to the right with the weight of his heavy six-shooter in its holster. His yawn was healthily sleepy but still smiling.

"Shuah feel thataway, Babe."

Babe pulled off a boot with a vicious yank and sat holding it in one hand while he eyed the kid.

"Damned if I can see what there is to be happy about, Tiger Eye."

The kid stood with his thumbs hooked inside his gun belt and stared reflectively at Babe while he considered that remark.

"Damned if I can eithah, Babe."

Babe looked at him, gave a grunt of complete bafflement and dropped the boot with a thud. Hard. A killer that loved to kill. Born in him, most likely. Babe frowned as he turned back the blankets to crawl in. He liked the kid, but damn it, he was too cold blooded. Too hard.

"Stahs are shuah big and close tonight, Babe," the kid said later, lifting the lantern chimney in its wire cage to blow out the flame. "'Peahs like yo'-all can most reach up and touch 'em with your hands."

Babe rolled over and looked at the kid.

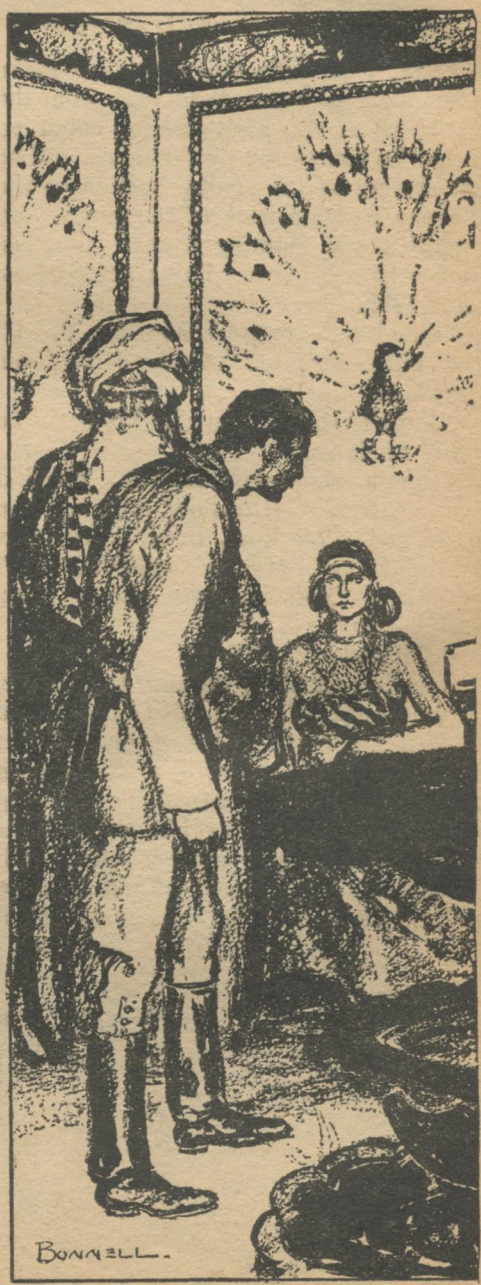
"Some folks can easier touch hellfire than stars," he said significantly.

"I'm shuah reachin' fo' stahs, Babe."

The kid's lips looked tender and smiling still as he pursed them to blow out the light.

Part III The INVISIBLE

A Novel of the Afghan Border by the Author of "King of the Khyber Rifles"



IN PESHAWAR, where India's forces fret, protecting the British Empire against invasion, the high commissioner listened to Major Glint's story. Glint had been horsewhipped by Gup McLeod. Then the high commissioner heard Tom O'Hara, veteran secret agent, promise to find Gup. All present knew that Gup McLeod was in Jullunder.

Jullunder was a sore spot in the administration's routine, because it nestled in the hills between Afghanistan and India, more or less holding the key to Khyber Pass. It was supposed to be ruled by a rajah, but the widow of the late rajah held the balance of power.

Gup was a puzzle to the British. He had resigned his commission in the Indian service in a climax of disillusionment which had been eating into him since the cruel days of the Great War when his company had been destroyed and his wife had proved faithless. Since Gup had whipped Glint, he was a fugitive. And, since he had been led into that indiscretion by Rahman, aide of the ex-Ranee, his path led toward Jullunder.

What a mad path it was! Tunnels, hidden trails winding down narrow ledges where camels had to be blindfolded—

GUNS of KABUL by TALBOT MUNDY

finally leading into a mountain fortress as fast as Gibraltar, and larger.

There the dominant ex-Ranee of Jullunder had gathered her forces against a day of ominous decision. Inevitably she must cast her lot—with the British; or with the Emir of Afghanistan, who planned to invade India; or with Jullunder as an aggressive state. Her soldiers had been reared on plunder and had to fight in some direction.

Before this Ranee had married the late Rajah of Jullunder she had been a noted singer in London. She was English by birth, and her name—once upon a time—had been blazoned from a thousand electric lights: Lottie Carstairs. When Gup discovered her as the leading spirit of Jullunder he was astonished; the next instant he was in love with her. But, being Scotch, sensitive and stubbornly moral in spite of rebellious tendencies, he refused to forsake Britain for the sanctuary of an ambitious woman.

She wanted Gup to command her army. He refused.

"Come and sing," said Gup. "That is something you understand."

"Very well," she replied. "And tomorrow you answer—whether you command my army or return, a prisoner, to Major Glint."

CHAPTER XII

"I PREFER MY VICTORIES TO LOOK LESS LIKE A ROUT!"

GUP STRODE into the great room, where there was yet no sign of morning through the tinted window panes. Music was still coming from the balcony, but it was tired stuff without inspiration; the

unseen musicians appeared to be merely killing time. Gup counted heads; there were eleven women in the room, of whom three were yawning and one was asleep; she awoke with a start. The dark complexioned girl, who had met him in the door when he first entered, arose from a heap of cushions and came toward him, extending her right hand.

"I am Harriet Dover to you," she said, smiling. "I have an Indian name, too, but never mind that. I may not have even a head a month from now. Let's not be formal."

"Formality is good for people who think they know just what's going to happen, isn't it?" said Gup.

The others clustered and she introduced them—three with English names—a Russian—a fair haired Swede or Norwegian. The rest were high caste Indian women. One had the Brahmin caste mark on her forehead. They were all in Indian costume.

"Take the throne," said Harriet Dover. "We will sprawl around and worship."

"I might look like a comic opera king, but I don't sing well enough," Gup answered.

"Better take it. Men of your build don't look dignified on scented cushions. If it should happen that we've been admiring the wrong man we'll all be pretty little corpses in a row so soon that nothing will matter anyhow—not even ridicule."

They all smiled at that. They looked brave enough for anything and rather proud of being in rare danger.

"You have been told, haven't you, exactly what to say to me?" Gup suggested. "Say the rest of it. I'll listen. Thanks; no, I'll stand up."

He was already wondering whether he had not let himself move too swiftly in the other room; shock tactics are good, but he knew there is a proper time and place for them, as well as an opportune moment and a wrong place. Inevitably, by a law as unavoidable as that of gravity, all captains of suddenness suffer reaction and wonder whether slow caution would not have been wiser after all. Slow men, in the same way, suffer pangs of self-doubt, wishing they were swift. Only fools and fanatics have no doubts, it being out of the blinding dust of doubt that the artillery wheels of destiny come rolling. Blücher arrived in a cloud of dust at Waterloo.

Harriet Dover met Gup's eyes and smiled in the Celtic way that is called inscrutable. Whatever that smile was intended to do, it made Gup suspicious of her. He sensed treachery; and he thought her eyes looked tired from too much thinking.

"We are loyal," she answered. "We are all in the same predicament. Why shouldn't we use the same arguments?"

"The predicament is?"

"We are women!"

"And the argument?"

"We need a man, though we hate to admit it. We can do any man's job—except make women believe in us! We thought we could stir Moslem women, so that they, in turn, would stir their men. What happens is we stir the men and make the women sullenly suspicious. We don't need you to devise our strategy; three of us in this room know the theory of war at least as well as Sandhurst, or West Point, or the École Militaire can teach it. We don't even need you to lead men into battle; a Joan of Arc can outlead a Julius Cæsar. But we need a spectacular man, to make women rally. We need a Rustum—an Iskander."

Gup knew the Himalayan superstition that the great Alexander of Macedon shall return to the world and lead the Hillmen to a holy war. He knew the theory that nothing is more sweet in Allah's nostrils than the smoke of idolatrous cities, nothing more holy than Hillmen enriched by the plunder of India's plains. He smiled as a man might who hears an old song repeated.

"If you will stand like that, and smile like that, and let the Moslem women see you, India is ours," said Harriet Dover.

"I don't want India," he answered. "Do you?"

"Not an India re-civilized? Not an

end of injustice and superstition? Abolition of caste! The release of four hundred million people—perhaps the release of all Asia from bondage to outworn ideas!"

He smiled again.

"Sweetness," he suggested, "out of savagery? Sweet water from a bitter spring?"

"Nonsense!" she retorted. "That is one of the old moth eaten phrases that we intend to teach men to forget! Nobody in his senses imagines that more than a fraction of Asia is ready for self-rule. We will take those who are ready and make them rulers of the others, teaching the others gradually."

"Let's see," he said. "Aren't they trying something of the sort in Russia? Why not watch the Russian experiment before trying it out on such a grand scale?"

"Ours won't resemble the Soviet system. Ours will be absolute monarchy, benevolent in aim and motive and observing rigid principles of right and wrong."

"If I knew right from wrong," said Gup, "I might agree with you—or I might not. I don't know."

Harriet Dover's brown eyes darkened and the line of her lips grew straighter. It began to be obvious who was the Ranee's chief adviser.

"What would your solution be?" she asked him.

"I haven't one," said Gup.

"You won't command her army?"

Something warned Gup not to answer. No man knows what intuition is. It sealed his lips. There began to come glimmer of morning through the tinted window panes.

THEN the voice of Lottie Carstairs — strangely different from that of the ex-Ranee of Jullunder, though she was the selfsame woman; the voice was younger and had more mirth in it, although it vibrated with a thrill that might mean nervousness. He turned to watch her enter through the door between the rooms, but her back was toward him; she was speaking between the curtains; some one in the other room was talking rapidly in a language that Gup hardly understood.

The startling thing was, that she was dressed as Lottie Carstairs now—not in a stage costume but in something fresh from Paris and a Paris hat. Gup wondered why she had ever been willing to hide such legs within the shapeless folds of Moslem trousers.

When she turned she was smiling. She was a vision in cream and pale blue, as radiant with life as he had ever seen her. He could almost have held out his arms to her, but the other women in the room made him self-conscious.

"You look marvelous," he said. "But the dress isn't enough. Sing! Bring back the old days and the old ideals."

But her bright face clouded. Harriet Dover and the other women were silent, glancing at one another. Harriet seemed to gather the others' discontent into her own dark eyes; she broke the silence.

"What would happen to us all if you were seen in that kit?"

Lottie Carstairs vanished. The ex-Ranee of Jullunder stood there in the same dress and the same high heeled shoes. They were the same eyes, too, but they blazed indignantly, where less than a second ago fun had looked forth.

"Stop that music!" she commanded. "It will drive me crazy! Send the musicians away! You may all go too," she added, controlling herself with an effort. "Go—go anywhere!"

"If you are seen in that dress, it will be all over the Hills, within a day or two, that you are only an impostor pretending to cherish their ideals. Here, use this," said Harriet Dover. She took a *sari* of cloth-of-gold from the throne chair and offered to drape it over the offending dress.

"You may go. Did you hear me?"

Lottie Carstairs snatched at the *sari*. It fell to the floor. She put her foot on it.

Harriet Dover led the retreat, which was sullen and not graceful; but they turned and curtsied one by one as they filed out through the door by which Gup had entered when he first came. It looked like a climax of long hidden irritation. There was an unseen struggle going on.

"And now sing," said Gup, "before you murder some one."

For a second he expected her to do one thing or the other. Her lips moved and the Lottie Carstairs radiance almost trembled into being. She almost yielded to him, or so he thought. But the sound of a gong came through the curtains and she shook that mood off.

"To hear them—and you—talk, one would think I was incapable of thinking. One would think it was not I but a committee that had this vision and made it come true."

"You promised to sing. You are dressed for it."

"Did I? Am I? The mood has passed. I will sing when you give me your promise. Why sooner? Shall I sing about their fears and your Scots religion? I feel more like killing some one! When I have won you—"

"You won me years ago," said Gup. "You can't un-win me! I address myself to Lottie Carstairs."

"I prefer my victories to look less like a rout," she retorted. "However, I will win. Do you mind picking up that *sari*? I dislike asking you, but I'm supposed to be a queen. I mayn't wait on myself. But those idiots were right, I must wear it; this dress won't do—not yet, but I will change all that. Now I suppose I must send for them again, and I suppose I must apologize. Do you ever feel like crying? No, of course you don't, you enormous mass of Calvinistic egoism! Oh, I hate you! Daylight—and a dozen chiefs have come—the brutes expect to be received at this hour! Does it penetrate through your obstinacy what a difference it might make if I could introduce them to my new general?"

"You may say I am your new counselor," Gup suggested, smiling down at her.

He knew she was as lonely as himself. He felt an impulse to take her in his arms, but in spite of his recent boldness he was almost childishly shy with women. She might have misinterpreted his motive. He did not in the least mind smashing her house of cards, but her self-respect was as important to him as his own. Besides, he did not suppose that kind of woman was to be won or weakened by any assault on her personal dignity.

"I will tell them that, if you will consent to command my army," she retorted. "Oh, I hate you and I admire and pity you! What a man you are, and what a pawky little penny-wise Scots conscience! Those twelve chieftains out there, who are eating bread and honey in my back hallway and glad to get it, have more real resolution in their little fingers than you have in your whole strong body! They have more to lose than you have—they are chieftains, each with a little army of his own. They have the courage to come and discuss war. They would follow a man like you to the ends of the earth after one swift look at you. And you? You stand there afraid to lead them! Yes, you are afraid! You are afraid of the old nurse's schooling that you call your conscience! You forget that John Knox was a fighter, and Robert Bruce and Wallace. So was every one of your national heroes."

"You look splendid," he said, "when your eyes blaze, but I like you better when you smile."

"I will never smile at you again unless you yield! I loved you when you threw three men out of the room. I hate you, I despise you when you are afraid and when you preach! Go; leave me to do a man's work! Jonesey will show you the way. You may go where you like—yes, to the devil, or below the border, where Glint will—"

It was possibly Gup's face that made her pause.

"I will not go below the border," he said calmly. "I will stay here and do

what I can to save you from the consequences of your own mistake."

"Why not say sin? The word was on your lips, you preacher! I tell you, you shall not stay here except on one condition. You know the condition. I promised you twenty-four hours. If you yield, you shall never have to yield to me again. If you yield, I will put such a sword in your hand as no man ever had before. If you refuse—well, you will be another of my cherished illusions gone up in smoke, that's all. I will turn my back on you forever and try to forget you; and when I can't help remembering you, I will think of you as the coward. There, I have said it. Do you like the word?"

"Not much," said Gup. It brought the blood to his temples, but he made no retort.

"Then go, and leave me to talk to men of courage! You will find Jonesey outside that door. He is to guide you anywhere you please and he is to answer all your questions."

GUP BOWED to her. He felt he was missing an opportunity, yet he was so old fashioned in his prejudices that he saw no way to improve the situation. She was his hostess, never mind how she had inveigled him to be her guest. And he loved her. There was no logic in that. He had no right to love her. Certainly it conferred no right on him to say more than he had done; in fact, he had even stretched a point. If love was what the poets say it is, then was he not, by loving her, condoning everything she stood for? But can a man prevent himself from loving?—or was it untrue? Was he only feeling an emotion due to too much mental torture followed by sudden relief? He would find that out. So he strode to the door with a smile on his lips that gave the lie to bewilderment. He was too well mannered to appear indifferent, too proud to turn again and plead. He did not glance over his shoulder.

He pushed the door open and almost stumbled over Jonesey, squatting like a Hillman on the mat outside. The Pathans, whose heads he had recently cracked together, stood with their backs to the far wall. They grinned at him; his method suited their notions perfectly; so would they, too, have treated eavesdroppers, only that they might have used steel in place of bare hands. They admired his prowess.

Nor was Jonesey resentful. He got up and began leading the way through another door and along rock hewn corridors that echoed to the tread of the Pathans who followed at a decent distance, tramping like boot shod infantry.

"Ex-Indian army soldiers," said Jonesey. "All such savages are proud of being drilled, although it bores them to learn. Thank you for not kicking me. Any man may get punched or chucked out, if Allah wishes. But there is nothing either in the Bible or the Koran about being meek when you're kicked. What a colossally strong man you are."

"You seem to me to be a ridiculous person," Gup answered, prejudice no longer urging him to be polite.

"I am indeed. It is my business," said Jonesey. "I am the hardest worked court jester that the world has ever seen. I even keep the charts with all the pins in them that show where our food for powder frets in unmapped villages. Care to see them? I will show you charts that the Indian government would pay for by the inch. They would cover each inch with sovereigns as high as you could pile 'em without spilling—and cheap at the price! Come and look."

He led into a low rock room where tables stood, and on the tables there were British-Indian survey maps, corrected in colored inks and with colored pins stuck all over them.

"Even airplanes, you know, can't get that information," said Jonesey. "See, there are all the footpaths, mule tracks, caverns, villages, water, stores of provender, numbers of rifles and ammunition, names of headmen, names of *mollahs*, time required for messages to go by runner, numbers of camels and mules avail-

able, census of men, women and children —and—most important of all—temperament, affiliations and politics of every headman, village, district, tribe and group of tribes. Me—I—Mollah Ghulam Jan—opprobriously known as Jonesey, did it."

It was hard to believe him. He looked like a monk, with his stiff black beard and his shaven head, the long brown smock and sandals, and the staff on which he leaned, a monk who might have been a poet or a maker of stained glass windows. If he had stepped down out of a picture of the middle ages he would have been more credible.

"Why did you do it?" Gup asked him. "If you'd wanted money, the Indian government would have paid you. You're not the sort of man who seeks power—"

"Passion!" Jonesey interrupted. "The selfsame reason why I played the organ in chapel at home when I was ten years old, with whooping cough and chilblains. Passion! They used to have to stop the service while I whooped with my head in a bag behind the organ. Even so our Ranee of song and dance has had to hold up her campaign for a less spiritual empire while I plodded over mountain ranges and made notes with pin pricks under the Arabic letters of the Koran I carried. It was the only safe way; they would have skinned me if they had seen me writing anything. I detest being skinned. I have skinned myself on nearly every crag of the Himalayas. Necessity knows no law. Hillmen have no sense of a stranger's privacy. So I invented a kind of pin prick shorthand, spoiled a Koran—bad luck, so they tell me; but I never did have luck, so what's the difference?"

HE INVITED Gup to see the radio.

"We can send and receive, but we don't dare send. The Indian government might listen in. However, we pick up a lot of their messages, and we have a Russian who is good at decoding. Let me show you our plant; the antenna is as artfully hidden as my virtue."

Gup did not crave an exhibition of the Welshman's showmanship. He was not a customer for a throne. He would have liked a horse—the big black stallion again for choice—on which to ride away to some place where he could think uninterrupted.

"To the devil with your radio," he objected. "Introduce me to some solitude."

Jonesey looked swiftly sidewise at him.

"Come and see our gas plant. We've a Russian who makes poison gas from stuff we dig from the old mine workings. He is an artist—loves it—he is well worth studying. And it's wonderful poison. One sniff, and you have all the solitude you wish, in the realm from which no traveler returns. You wouldn't wish to return, not into the same body; bodies that have sniffed it don't look pleasant. A sort of cyanide, I think he said, but I don't know chemistry. We couldn't use it unless the wind were just right; the second hand gas masks that some munitions dealer sold to our Ranee's agent let it through like water through a sieve. It cost us nearly ninety men to make that discovery, but it did good in the long run; there is now a wholesome superstition that it might not pay to trespass into these caverns. Sometimes it's not easy to get even the right people to call on us. However—"

He became aware by no particularly subtle process that Gup was becoming angry. The staff was snatched out of his hand; one end of it poked him rather shrewdly near the liver.

"I said solitude!"

"This way, sir. Pray accept my apology. I had catalogued you in my mind as a suitable king. I retract. You will make a perfect emperor—a Cæsar. After you are dead, if it is not lese-majesty to speak of death with reference to you, they will deify you. It was a violent temper, you know, that made Charlemagne, Nero and Henry the Eighth so successful. This way, please. I could

kill you very easily, but I don't want to become a fugitive from injustice."

He led in and out of ancient passages that were sometimes squared and finished, with padlocked doors to right and left, and sometimes rough with the original pick marks. They were shored in places, but not with timber; whoever the previous owner had been, he was a man who commanded plenty of skillful masons; wherever the roof of a tunnel was weak it had been supported by a beautifully built stone arch. Some one else had fitted doors into the arches, but all those doors were open at the moment, to let the fresh air flow.

"We could barrack a hundred thousand men unseen," said Jonesey, "but we couldn't feed 'em. Some one invent riflemen who don't eat, and I'll conquer the world—and then the moon and Mars. Bellies are worse than bad feet. You can fix bad feet with worse whisky, but you have to feed bellies. However, there are five thousand men eating their heads off, now, within a quarter of a mile of you. You couldn't find 'em in a week. It's a great place, this. My own belief is, some of Alexander's men got lost up here and took to mining, but the mine was already ancient when they got here. And there has been some one else since their day, but who *he* was, only Allah knows. Sometimes I think not even Allah knows all of it. Here's the entrance. How do you like the view?"

Gup stood under a huge stone arch and stared at the blistering whiteness of the boulder strewn valley floor. The half that was in shadow was more tolerable to the eyes, but gloomier than hell's gate —shuddersome, comfortless. The half that lay in sunlight was a wilderness of agony. It suggested one of the dead craters of the moon. There was even a sort of island near the center that might have been left there by a final spasm of the fires within a dying earth. On the side on which Gup found himself, half in shadow and half in sunlight, a bulge of the enormous wall projected overhead to a distance, in places, of about two hundred feet, so that it would be impossible from above to see the entrance to the caverns or the almost countless openings that had been cut into the wall. The waste rock dug from the mine had been used for a fill, and had been leveled, so that there was a terrace, about a hundred feet wide and more than a mile long, curving around that end of the ravine.

"It isn't only ants that work!" said Jonesey. "How would you like that job, without machinery?"

The windows of the Ranee's fan shaped chamber were in plain view, half a mile away. From the mouth of a nearby tunnel came the mutter of a muffled Diesel engine and the faint purr of a dynamo.

"How did you get your machinery down here?" Gup demanded.

"Ah!" said Jonesey. "If you knew that, you would know the way out!"

Gup's jaw jerked forward.

"Does that mean I'm a prisoner? You were to answer all my questions."

"I answered that one. No, you're not a prisoner, but you don't know the way out. A king in prison would be a dangerous nuisance, whereas an ignorant king is nothing out of the ordinary. But let me ask *you* a question. What do you suppose caused this pock mark in the earth's hide? Does it occur to you that an enormous meteorite may have struck the earth here and exploded? Something spectacular happened. Too bad that it happened before there were men in the world to witness it. I wouldn't mind dying if I could be snuffed out by such a thunderbolt as that. It would make me feel important, and it's our feelings that matter; nature insults us when it wipes us out with microbes or a one-inch bullet —not that we don't deserve the insult, but who wants what he deserves?

"Look up—up there against the sky. It's seven thousand feet from the floor to the top of that crag. Do you notice how the explosion, or whatever it was, threw up a lip like the splash of a bursting bubble? It leans outward. It makes this place almost impregnable, almost undis-

coverable. Airplanes can't see much. Except at noon there's always enough shadow to make photography impossible. They daren't fly low because of the danger of forced landings; and if they fly high they can't see detail. How do you like our parade ground?"

He indicated the wide terrace, but Gup took no notice of the question. He was almost spellbound by the huge, raw horror of the place, although he noticed that it had no such effect on the men within sight. He could count about a hundred individuals, each attending to some task or other; there were several cleaning mules at a cavern mouth at the far end of the terrace; others in the distance appeared to be women carrying bags of grain toward the great central mass of boulders, from which he could now see thin blue smoke ascending. Twenty or thirty men were cleaning rifles near another tunnel mouth. Somewhere close at hand a man was singing.

GUP STRODE out on the terrace. Jonesey followed him and the two Orakzai Pathans came striding along behind. It was Gup's first taste of the lack of privacy that makes crowned heads resemble gold fish in a glass jar. He resented it. He ordered Jonesey to keep out of reach unless he wanted to be pitched off the terrace, so Jonesey fell behind. Having no hat, Gup did not care to expose himself in the glare; he turned to the right, in shadow, and walked rapidly to where the terrace ended in a flight of rough steps leading to the boulder strewn floor of the gorge.

"It's like an open sore in earth's side," he reflected. "If there's anything in the theory that like produces like, it's a suitable throat to spew forth death and ruin. Is destiny intelligent? And if so, why am I here? Why is she here? Are good and evil synonymous terms? Can good come out of evil? What's to be done? What if I do nothing? What then? Why is it that a man can't see the proper thing to do?

"It would be so simple to do the right thing if we only knew what it was. Death doesn't matter; nobody minds dying if there's a decent reason for it. There's probably a decent reason for living, if we only understood it. There's a decent thing to do now—but what? Why should I love that woman? God knows. I don't. I only know I do love her. Are love and destiny the same thing? If so, why the perfectly unnecessary hell when two tides meet? Perhaps this world is hell, with heaven to be won by enduring the torment, as the Moslems seem to think. If so, let's clean up hell—that's obvious. But how?"

He hardly looked where he was going. The way before him was between huge, tumbled boulders that cast shadow within shadow. They were all unclimbable; there was nothing to do but follow the winding track between them; it was a maze where a hundred thousand men, if they had food and water, could hide indefinitely. They could not even be shelled effectively by long range cannon; the surrounding crags were too high and there was too much cover between boulders. They could easily hide from airplanes; a hundred bombs might kill a few, not many. Nothing less than poison gas could drive them out.

He shuddered at the thought of poison gas. If it were true that they were concocting some devil's brew with cyanide within those caverns, duty was plain; he must prevent that, at whatever risk. However, Jonesey was an imaginative liar and it seemed hardly likely they would have the necessary knowledge or appliances. If they made the stuff, how could they store it? Anyhow, he hoped that it was a lie. And if it was true, he hoped that she had had nothing to do with it.

"God, what a weird world! Ruin—outlawry—this place—offer of an army—offer of a kingdom—and in love with the woman who trapped me into it! Can you beat that?"

He arrived at a place where a track led up the cliff side. There was a ledge, no

great distance up, from which he should be able to see the entire grim panorama, so he climbed the track. Jonesey called to him that the track led nowhere, but followed him, since he insisted on taking it.

He soon discovered that Jonesey had not lied, or had apparently not lied; there was the ledge, and beyond that nothing, so he sat down on a boulder, staring at the view.

Hearing Jonesey's approaching footsteps, he gathered a handful of small rocks and began to pelt them at him.

"Stay below there!" he commanded. "Damn you, I want solitude!"

Jonesey turned back.

"All right, Tiberius!" he answered. "All right! Consider yourself on Capri! But if you try to move out of my sight, I shall follow even if I have to shoot you in the leg to slow you down a bit."

Gup watched him scramble up a boulder from which he could see the ledge, and for a moment or two he wondered in which direction he might move in order to escape out of sight, but he could see no way.

The great cliff rose sheer behind him. On his right, and in front, the ledge ended in air. It was only a big rock projecting from the cliff side. And he had been wrong in supposing he would be able to see the entire floor of the gorge; he could see less than half of it.

However, it was a good enough place in which to sit and puzzle out what he ought to do.

* * *

And Love has more resources than the whole
Vast aggregate of nature and all things
That force has made and gathered. As the hole
Is to the spade, or as the song the diva sings
Is to the source of music, so are all
The fruits of being to the spiritual Cause
Which makes men be. Lo, he who loves may call
On That, whose instance knows no pause.

CHAPTER XIII

"SWALLOW YOUR DOSE!"

DOWN the face of the cliff was a gash like the scar left by a thunderbolt. It ended in a jumble of broken rocks in which scrawny thorn bush and starved weeds fought for a living. Gup sat near that, since it camouflaged him. There was no object in being difficult to see, except the satisfaction of annoying Jonesey—that and the habit that humans share with certain animals of liking to lie hidden in the intervals of one mood and another.

For awhile he watched men like insects moving among boulders. They were as hard to explain as insects—streams of them going both ways to and from an opening in the cliff face near the Ranee's windows; it looked purposeless, and yet there was a suggestion of purpose. The silence was almost stupefying; the great gorge seemed to swallow sound and to change it, by an unearthly alchemy, into something of which space is made. The feeling of vastness and unreality kept on increasing. It was nightmare land.

So a voice meant nothing, not for a few moments. It was almost like the voice of conscience or a memory of speech heard long ago. It issued from behind him, as it might be from the air or from the solid cliff and it was almost toneless. It was so free from emphasis that it stole on the ear rather than spoke into it, with the result that Gup did not turn his head, even when he recognized it as the voice of some one hidden in the bush behind him.

"Think you're out o' luck, I suppose! You're lousy with it! All the luck of every idiot in India added into one heap wouldn't match yours! If you look my way before I tip you to, I'll brain you with a lump of rock, you ostrich! Got your head so stuck into the luck, you can't see daylight! I'm Tom O'Hara."

"Cheerio, Tom."

"Shift yourself. Sit on that other rock, so that you can see me sideways. Put your elbow on your knee—chin on your

hand—hide your mouth and talk, don't whisper."

Tom O'Hara's owl face peered out from a maze of weeds and thorns. He had on a turban with the green patch of a *hajji* who had made the holy pilgrimage to Mecca, and he appeared to be dressed in the rusty brown garb of a Moslem *mollah*. His owl eyes were aglow with the fever of love of his job, a glow that any one may interpret as he pleases; under that turban it looked like religious frenzy, a sure passport in the Moslem hills.

"How did you find me, Tom? How did you get here?"

"Easy. Knew of this place long ago. I knew it'd come to this. I said it. I wrote it. By and by they'll blame me for it. Who cares? I've a girl in Copenhagen. They can send me the sack for a wedding gift, and I'll turn farmer. Hell of a good place for raising cows is all that country around Copenhagen."

"But how did you get in?"

"Curious, aren't you? I rode in, along with a dozen Shinwari headmen who would sell their souls for a half chance to go raiding. They're war hungry—haven't seen a sight of loot since the emir poisoned his uncle. Your friend Rahman found 'em up-pass somewhere asking the way to this place. He brought 'em along; he had Pepul Das with him. And I'm a very holy gent from Samarkand, where I've been all winter, preaching *ghaza*—holy war. They naturally brought me with 'em. I'm that holy, though, I had to say my prayers, and I say 'em solitary, that being a special extra vow I took in Mecca, where the Prophet spoke to me in a dream by night; and any one who sees me praying has his luck queered permanent. I came and sat up here to look for you; and if your luck weren't Allah's own with diamonds on it, I might be looking for a week. Who's your friend on the rock?"

"One of his names is the Mollah Ghulam Jan."

"Not Jonesey? Lord, we *are* in luck! Has he finished those charts, I wonder? He's been making 'em for three years. I'd give one eye to copy 'em. Maybe I will. Maybe I'll swipe 'em. There were only two thieves crucified—I'm still living by my wits. Now gimme your news."

"I am offered," said Gup, "the command of an army."

"I said it! You accepted it? You snapped it?"

"Naturally not. What do you take me for?"

"I gave you credit for being two eyed, you long faced Caledonian! I wrote it. I said all that fellow Gup McLeod needs is a job o' work. I told 'em: he's a Covenanter out of employment. I said give him something difficult and dangerous to do, with peas in his boots and a hair shirt, and he'll spike hell's cannons; but if you don't, he'll spike yours. And I made 'em listen—dammit! And here you are—and you turn the job down! You ostrich!"

"You want to see me invading India?" Gup asked, his lips white with contempt. There was no humor in him at the moment.

"Sooner see you try it than see you sit here like a virgin Andromache waiting for your modesty to save your virtue! Nobody needs virgins nowadays. Listen, you anachronism—you Highlan' hellcat with a Covenanters' muzzle! Get your claws out—get 'em busy!"

"How?" Gup asked him.

"First I'll tell you why. They've kep' this *subskyrosavitch*, which is Russian for a ten ton censorship. The Punjab is seething; ninety per cent. of the Sikhs are ready to revolt and raise hell; and that's not half of it. There's lots more, spoiling for self-rule. You know what that means—how many cutthroats that means? All right. The Emir of Afghanistan, with a new throne under him, mind you, that makes him feel like Pharaoh on a hot stove, knows about the Punjab. He's no Solomon, but he can pick 'em when the cards lie face up. He's heard of Mustapha Kemal and Mussolini. He knows Europe is stone broke and sick o' fighting. He'd be crazy if he didn't cut loose. He's all ready to come howling

down the Khyber with a quarter of a million Afghans into the Punjab—and up with the Sikhs—Allah *strafe* India! Get me?"

"Yes," said Gup, "I know that."

"And you sit there mooning! And you offered the command of an army, by the best looking woman east of Europe, full o' money and notions—and the meat on the table—dammit! All you have to do is grab it! You ostrich! Can't you see that if you take her army by the snoot, and you a known outlaw, nobody knows where you'll lead it! Will you march on Kabul? That's what the emir wants to know. And who tells? Is it likely he'll waltz into India, with you and maybe fifty thousand Hillmen sweating blood for a chance to fall on his rear and loot his baggage trains? And are the Sikhs so crazy that they'll take a chance until they know whether you're for the emir or agin him? Not much! Sikhs have had a taste or two o' being bad boys all on their little lonesome! Oh, you ostrich! Think o' Glint's peeve when he learns it was Gup McLeod who saved India! We might pull strings and fix it so that Glint has to be on parade when they make you K. C. M. G! They'll sure do it! You can make 'em do it! If they didn't do it, they might think you'd cross the Rubicon like Joan of Arc and rub their smellers in the dust!"

"Not so simple," said Gup. "It's her army, not mine."

"And she a woman? And you looking like a flame headed Launcelot out of a book by Dumas? Is there anything simpler? Ain't it cushy? What do you want—a bath chair and a trained nurse? Dammit! If I had your good looks and, say, half o' your luck, I'd lead a raid on Kabul that'd make her army sick o' fighting for a couple o' generations! I'd make the emir sick, too. And I'd make her sick o' spending money! After that, if I liked her well enough, I'd set her to cooking and keeping house and milking a cow or two o' mornings. If not—I'd let the Government have her for Exhibit A, Example B, o' playing poker without knowing who she's up against."

GUP SCOWLED, although he liked the theory and he loved Tom O'Hara. He suspected Tom would give him no false tips, even for the sake of statecraft. But it is not easy for a man like Gup to love a woman, lie to her, betray her and then laugh, not though he save her from ruin and death by doing it.

"I'd have to pledge my word," he said, gritting his teeth.

"Go ahead then and pledge it! Me, I'd pledge it on a stack o' Bibles—and I'd kiss her on the mouth and call her puss-in-the-corner names. I'd put a helmet on and get myself a ramping big horse. I'd talk about plundering India's plains, to get the army gingered up—and I'd act that treasonable that they'd find a new name for it! And all for the love of—"

Tom O'Hara hesitated. He was watching Gup's face, his owl eyes wide and his weird nose moving like an owl's beak.

"For the love of country, honesty, or a woman—which?" Gup asked him.

"Nix on any of 'em! For the love of acting like a man. Will you do it?"

Gup sat silent. It was not argument that reached him; it was contact with a friend whose purpose and integrity were flint-like. A spark had struck. He felt a new flame burning in him, as he sat toying with a rock that he tossed from hand to hand. He stood up. Suddenly he threw the rock; it smashed on the boulder below within a foot of Jonesey, who scrambled to earth in a hurry.

"I will do it," he said calmly.

"I knew it."

"But listen, Tom, I—"

"Dammit, don't talk slop to me; I've a girl of my own in Copenhagen! You're in love with her. I knew it. Any ostrich could see that with his head in a barrel o' sawdust. Take a tip; if you're only *in* love, get it over with and get out. But if you love her, use your whip. I don't mean that too literal, but let her know who cooks the hash and who finds fault with it—you get me? Women are like horses. Let 'em know who's master, let 'em know it, mind you, and no guessing—

and there ain't a thing they won't do, nor a fence they won't face for the sake of proving 'emselves fit to look you in the eye."

"Thanks, Tom. I daresay you know."

"And here's another tip for you: the Afghan emir means it. He means to invade India. He's coming quick. Lottie Carstairs of Jullunder has a pipe dream of a kingdom of her own between Afghanistan and India. Am I right? The emir wants an empire—all the way to Delhi. Don't argue with me. I know it. And if you think the emir hasn't tried to win her alliance you're as crazy as she'd be if she fell for it. And if you think he hasn't got some treacherous specimens cuckooed into her own nest, working against her, you're just plain ignorant of how they play that kind of game."

Gup paced along the ledge, stood staring and strode back. Then he picked up another rock for Jonesey's benefit in case the Welshman should start up the track.

"Now listen, Tom. If I do this, I've got to lie to her. I've got to explain my change of front. An hour or two ago I refused her offer point blank."

"Easy. Glint has had you posted. There's a reward out—five thousand rupees for you, dead or alive. You can say you saw me and I told you how your own crowd have condemned you without giving you the benefit of doubt."

"Is it true?"

"True as I'm sitting here. The only friends you have left are the few you'd let sell you if it'd save a ticklish situation. How many might that be—two, three men in Asia? Are you going? Take that fellow Jonesey with you and keep an eye on him; he knows me by sight, and I want to get my fingers on his charts."

"All right, Tom." Gup stared straight at him. "And thank you."

The owl face nodded. The curved, beak-like nose spread slightly and a maze of wrinkles rippled upward as white teeth flashed in a cherubic smile. Then the face resumed its solemnity.

"Swallow your dose and get a move on!"

"All right, Tom."

"And listen: watch that Dover woman. She's as treacherous as Talleyrand and Judas Iscariot rolled in one, and she's got more brains than either of 'em! Don't forget now that I said it."

* * *

But he must love. It is not written that his lust
Shall be the law of heaven. Crave he for the fruit
Who tilled no tree—the weariness and dust,
The seeming for a moment and the fruit
Of tasteless victory are his, since Fortune drew
Him to the lists of disillusionment to earn
Through failure Faith—that Phœnix, born anew,
Whose magic is so simple to apply, so hard to learn.

CHAPTER XIV

"YOU ARE THE LEAST TOUCHY—THE LEAST VIOLENT—THE LEAST UNREASONABLE MAN I KNOW!"

"YOU ARE to come with me," said Gup.

He was another man; he whistled as he walked and Jonesey had to hurry to keep up with him.

"Why this sudden interest in my society?" asked Jonesey. "It is merely minutes since I was a spiritual stink under your nostrils. I suspect you of enmity, by Allah, veiled and vile."

"I have slightly changed my mind about you," Gup answered.

"Oh. What shall I do about that, I wonder? Allah! Nothing is more uncertain than the temper of these Nordic blonds; the only certainty about it is that they will first get thoroughly self-righteous and then commit atrocity in the name of virtue. I prefer animals as less exasperating; however, you were going to tell me—"

"This," said Gup. "From now on I expect you to report to me direct. If I as much as suspect you of not doing that—"

He hesitated. However, he had to begin. A commander-in-chief—more particularly of an army of lawless mountaineers—must be ruthless in enforcing discipline. He must apply the very principles he hated. In the name of right he must do wrong.

"I will send you," he said, "to where you may discover which is the true religion, even if I have to kill you with my own hand."

Jonesey's brown eyes wondered at him, but Jonesey's face was lighted with mischievous amusement, two sides of his character, almost like two colors, vying for supremacy, not blending, not able to blend, and both controlled by something else.

"You Nordics," he retorted, "are in love with violence. That is because you violently hate your own shortcomings, instead of being amused by them as a sensible person would be. However, I can lie like Ananias. Very well, sir, I am at your service. I will report to you direct. I swear I will report to you direct. Shall I call you your Majesty, Cæsar, Imperial Highness?"

"You may call me Gup Bahadur."

"That is rather a good name, Gup Bahadur. It doesn't mean anything, but in the long run nothing means anything, so what's the odds? Shall I tell you the actual truth for once—just this once—naked truth as near as I can tell it?"

He stopped, persuading Gup to face him. He leaned on his long staff, peering into Gup's eyes. He resembled a monk more than ever; the wrinkles on his weathered skin were like writing on parchment—cryptic written statement of his unbelief in everything that the beautiful brown eyes had seen, and that the satyr's ears had heard; nevertheless of his faith in something. The faith had baffled him; it was there but he could not grasp it with his intellect.

"If you make good as Gup Bahadur I will serve you as one man seldom serves another. By your eyes I can see you have crossed a Rubicon. And you won't turn back. I am as big a fool as you are; I also refuse to turn back. And fools are happier than wise men, until folly and wisdom meet in one big melting pot; we call it death. I have studied all religions and all governments. I have read and talked philosophy until my eyes burned and my throat was dry as leather. Fortunately spittle comes to its own rescue, even after such a course as that, so I spat on all of them."

He spat by way of illustration, exceedingly wetly and loosely, in the Moslem fashion that expressed scorn beyond control. Then he went on:

"I eliminated all the nonsense. There was this left: every man his own hero, his own guide and his own redeemer. But I am a bad guide except over mountains. As a hero, I find there are holes in me; I don't hold heroism. And I can't redeem a billygoat. Nevertheless, I refuse to be robbed of amusement; and I find life interesting. Then what?"

He prodded the ground with his staff, leaned on it, straightened himself and continued:

"Nothing left but this: I will find someone else who shall be a hero, a guide, a redeemer. I will not believe in him, of course; that would be too stupid. But I will act as if believing in him. When he falls down, I will leave him flat and find another. Or look for another; they are not easy to find. In that way I shall amuse myself, and I may learn something worth knowing. I will place at the service of such a man all my incredulity, my knowledge of things that are not what they seem to be, my expensive experience of man's ingratitude, my immodesty, my genius for lying, my irreverence, and no small zeal. But beware of my zeal; I leave nothing undone; I make mistakes as accurate in detail and as hard to undo as a treasury statement. Do you wish to be that hero? Would you like me to think myself—"

"I don't care a damn what you think about you or me, so long as you obey me," Gup interrupted. "I don't propose to waste one thought on you except as being a useful person who does what he's told. Do we understand each other?"

"Perfectly. You are the hero! You shall be that until you fail me by becoming sentimental or in some other way arousing my contempt. I am free with my fancies. However—"

"What?"

"I am commanded not to let you out of sight. I shall return you to the heroine —this side up, unbroken so to speak— before I put the hero in her place in my heart. In at one door, out the other! You will go the same way when a better man, or better woman shows up. But you are the most interesting yet."

"You are to come with me," said Gup. "What are those men doing, streaming back and forth near the Ranee's windows?"

"They are carrying silver rupees."

"Why?"

"From a hole where they were buried and cemented up, into a treasury room near her apartment. It was I who buried them. We were a long time making this place ready. Do you realize how much money it takes to keep a Hillman army sitting still? Overlook one payday, and then count how many men you have tomorrow morning. The unpaid remainder will be tough and hungry, spoiling to be led toward the plunder and very mutinous. Money, money, money! The rupees were safer buried in the open, where they could be swept by machine gun fire, than in the caverns, until we were thoroughly organized. We have a properly underpaid guard for them now that is stupid enough to be loyal, so into the cavern they go. But they melt, O Allah, how the money melts! And there's no way now of cashing drafts on Europe and then smuggling the silver across the border. Time is the most expensive commodity in the market. If you asked me, I should say action is indicated— very sudden and not limited by other people's feelings."

"But you weren't asked," said Gup.

He climbed the rough steps to the terrace and entered the huge arched tunnel mouth, alert now to his bearings and striding with a step that echoed down the passage ahead of him. He was not conscious of dramatic movement; he did not know that his stride had changed or that his face was now a picture of determination. He was not even thinking of himself or of his own predicament. Whether he was ridiculous or heroic, wise or unwise, he neither knew nor cared. He had made up his mind. He had accepted a job and he was going to finish it as swiftly as he could and with the aid of every faculty he had. And strangely enough, the prize was not Lottie Carstairs. The goal was as suddenly clear in his sight as the sun on the rim of the world at daybreak, but the prize was nothing to be told in words or even to be thought in communicable phrases. It was something abstract and intangible that he might, or might not be able to share with the woman whom he knew now that he loved; that depended on her. What depended on him, he would do. For the time being he was determined not to think about his love for her.

So he strode along intricate passages, noticing on the way what had escaped his notice on the way out, because he had then been interested only in his own way out of an infernal difficulty. Now it was the difficulty that was interesting and not a detail of its setting escaped him. New admiration for Lottie Carstairs swept over him, a new respect for her.

The few men he passed were on their rounds inspecting something for which they were responsible to some one higher up. There was organization here and a master genius controlling it. Control, he reflected, is not physical; if it were, the bulls and elephants would rule; nor is it merely intellectual, or the scholars would govern the world. In essence it is genius. He wondered whether he himself had genius. He was going to find out.

WHEN he reached the door of her apartment, he struck it a blow with his knuckles that rather disconcerted him; he had not meant to make so much noise. However, he was kept waiting a long time and it was a suave little Bengali clerk who opened it at last—a lean man with brown intellectual eyes, who smiled as men do who have had to do much thinking behind a mask of disarming pleasantries.

"Her Highness is not able to see you at the moment," he said in fluent, beautifully pronounced English.

"Who are you?" Gup demanded.

"Her treasurer."

"Does she know I am here?"

"I suspect not. But she is holding a *jirga*—conference."

Gup turned to Jonesey.

"Leave those Pathans outside and follow me in," he commanded. Then he strode into the hallway, pushing aside the astonished treasurer. "Go in to the *jirga* and say Gup Bahadur is out here waiting. Or shall I go in unannounced?"

The treasurer glanced at Jonesey's face for an explanation, but Jonesey had closed the door behind him and was staring at the wall, apparently seeing, hearing, saying nothing, but nevertheless exuding mirth.

"I will not wait long," said Gup in a voice whose restraint suggested steel springs and a trigger. The treasurer's surface serenity wilted and the inner man appeared.

"I suspect you will wait until she wishes to see you," he answered, glancing over his shoulder at two Pathans who stood by the door of the fan shaped room with bayonets fixed on modern British army rifles.

Gup nodded.

"I will report you," he said, "for a plucky attempt to do your duty."

He thrust him aside and strode across the square antechamber toward the Pathans, who barred the door against him, bringing down their bayonets to the charge. Without turning, he reached for Jonesey's staff, snatched it and thrust at the door between the sentries, striking two resounding blows.

"Announce Gup Bahadur!" he commanded.

The door opened from within, a scant six inches. A man's voice asked angrily what the noise was all about.

"Gup Bahadur!" said one of the sentries.

"Gup Bahadur!" the voice inside the room repeated.

There was a moment's pause. The door opened wide. Gup strode in, with Jonesey at his heels.

It seemed a different room, now that the sunlight streamed in through the tinted windows. Rahman was there, with Pepul Das, both of them robed in rich silk over their traveling clothes. They and twelve bearded chieftains sat in a semicircle on the floor before the throne, each with a silver tray in front of him, on which was coffee in Dresden china cups. They were all arrayed like Rahman; it was rather obvious that the silken robes were either a loan for the occasion or a gift.

But she—and she was neither the Ranee now nor Lottie Carstairs but some one who combined the qualities of those two with something spiritual added—outshone them all. A screen of peacock feathers had been set behind the throne chair. She was wearing no turban now; her hair was loosely coiled beneath a golden *sari*. Her coat was blue, over a rose colored smock and Moslem trousers. Her diamonds flashed like dew on roses in the sun.

One glance at Gup's face satisfied her. Her lips moved in a slow smile and her eyes laughed triumph. Gup thought she caught her breath, but that might have been his own imagination. Her voice was in perfect control.

"My commander-in-chief," she said, almost casually. "He has come in haste to attend this *jirga*. Therefore I excuse him, and I request you nobles to excuse him for not wearing more suitable clothes —are my servants asleep?" she added

suddenly. "Why is he offered no chair?"

There was a servant in every window recess and four more stood with their backs to the rear wall. Gup wondered how many of them were spies in the British service. Two of them brought a chair and set it, obeying a royal gesture, where the sunlight formed a pool of light on a Persian rug. Gup bowed and sat down, with a window recess on his left hand and the semicircle of chieftains on his right. On his right there was also the balcony over the door; it was full of women, but they were veiled and he could not be sure that Harriet Dover was among them. Rahman's face was an enigma. Pepul Das blinked at a window pane. Jonesey sat and leaned his back against the door.

"And now," said the Ranee, "I will listen to your views if each noble will speak in turn." But there was a long silence.

Gup noticed that she spoke the uncouth northern dialect with difficulty, but he admired her, nevertheless, for not using an interpreter, although he thought he saw two of the chieftains almost shudder at the mispronunciation of their cherished gutturals. Then, for no reason whatever, it dawned on him that she was much more helpless than she knew. She was alone—more utterly alone than he was, in spite of her women—in spite of her army. He remembered the poison gas. He almost doubted that she knew about it; he could not imagine her using such stuff against savages for the sake of her own ambition. There was something tragic about her loneliness, as if she were surrounded by false friends whom she had begun to suspect. He sat watching her eyes and wondering why he had been such an idiot as not to know he loved her, in the old days when he might have saved her—and himself—from so much anguish. Together they could have lived a life worthwhile.

At last a chief spoke, cross legged on a rug and very upright, but not able to look royal as she did. He was only self-assertive. She was aware of essential dignity, which is different.

"By Allah," he began, "we believe it is true that there are fifty thousand who have sworn to follow you. And some say more. But you offer to set up a government here. But we know it is true that the Punjab hungers to rebel; and that means opportunity. The Sikhs, it is said, would rise like one man if a *lashkar* came down from the North to their aid. Peshawar is in the way, like a rock in the way of a mountain torrent, but a torrent can flow past such obstacles. No fortress and no artillery can prevent the will of Allah."

THERE was a murmur of assent. The Ranee watched the chieftains' faces with eyes that betrayed only interest. Her still hands rested on the chair arms. The blue, unswollen veins of her bare feet did not suggest excitement or anxiety. Gup crossed his legs and noticed that the pressure of his own heart's beating made it impossible to keep the free foot still; he set it on the floor again. The chieftain resumed:

"You should make cause with the emir and march with him into India. The emir of Kabul offers us more than you offer."

"I offer you nothing," she answered, "except honor and what comes of that. I make no promise in advance to men whose courage and good faith I have not yet tested. If you prefer to trust the emir you have my leave to go."

It was a royal answer and it even made Gup's blood go leaping in his veins. There was a murmur from the women in the balcony. The chieftains glanced at one another. Rahman sought Gup's eyes, met them and nodded three times. Then another chieftain spoke up, rougher of voice and gesture than the first.

"By Allah, I say a thousand men will follow where I lead. But shall I lead them as a stream flows, knowing neither why nor whither? Allah gave men understanding for their use, so let there be understanding. Therefore, I say this: that the emir would pay a high price for

our friendship. Aye, and, by Allah, he leaves Kabul for a pledge behind him! Let him play us false or lead unwisely—lo, we turn and plunder Kabul to reimburse ourselves! Furthermore, if we follow him into India, and if Allah wills that our arms are successful, it is stipulated in advance that this one shall have so much gold and so many women and so much land—and this other shall have so much—and this other. All is written. You should make us a better offer."

"I did not even invite you to come and see me," said the Ranee.

Gup rose out of his chair and cleared his throat with a noise like the crash of command on parade. She nodded to him to speak and her eyes glowed as if light shone through them.

"It is not I," said Gup, "who make agreements—" and he used their gutturals as harshly as they did; his vowels were solid and rounded; his voice was resonant and deep; it was as Hillmen love to hear their language spoken—"but it is I who will lead this army in the field. And I will lead it northward, against Kabul, if I see fit. If I go by way of your valleys someone's grain shall feed the horses, some one's sheep shall feed our fighting men and some one's gold shall pay them! It is for you to say whose grain and sheep and gold it is to be. As Allah is our witness, if Allah wills that this Ranee shall sit on the throne of Kabul, is there any man here who can prevent it? Ye speak of understanding. Which of you can prophesy whether I lead north, south, east or west? And when I begin? And how swift my marches?"

Silence fell. Dark eyes watching Gup from beneath overshadowing turbans tried to hide consternation. The Ranee sat motionless, that look of ancient Egypt stealing over her face until she seemed like Hatshepsut in an hour of mystic meditation. Gup resumed. He used no gestures and not much emphasis; he understated the strength of his new found arrogance, thus multiplying its effect.

"I need no more men. I have enough friends. It is agreeable to me now to learn who my enemies are. One false friend is worse than a hundred manly enemies who name the cause of their quarrel and take up arms. If ye prefer the emir's promises say so, and let the emir keep them if he can."

A man who had not yet spoken stroked his beard by way of calling attention to himself.

"As Allah is my witness," he said, "this is a page from another book."

Gup sat down, praying that this bluff had not succeeded too well. The speaker continued:

"It is not our custom to be ruled or led by women. The emir is a man, but he neither fills the eye, nor the ear, nor makes the spirit burn within a man as you do. What we lack in this land is a leader. By Allah, if you can lead as you speak, you are he! And, by my beard, I am no dependent of Kabul. Speak again. Tell us more of this matter."

Gup took his time. It is a mistake to be in too great haste to speak, in any northern gathering; men like deliberate, slow phrases, weighed in the mind before the mouth utters them. And Gup was not sure of himself; he was banking on the scant advice and information he had had from Tom O'Hara. He wanted no more men, lest the Ranee's army grow unmanageable and break through into India in spite of him. What he did want was disaffection in the ranks of the Emir of Afghanistan's adherents—that, and he also wished the news to filter through to Kabul that there was at least dickering to be done, and perhaps a stiff fight to be faced, before the emir's army could pour down the passes into India. He suspected that every word he uttered would be reported in Kabul within a week or ten days, exaggerated almost beyond recognition; spies would pick up his words in Kabul and relay them to the Indian government. He hoped, but doubted, that the Indian government would put a right interpretation on them. Oddly, he did not think that Tom O'Hara might be sending word through.

"I have spoken," he said, when he did stand up. "It seems to me, ye think ye know more than I know. If so, I will eagerly match my ignorance against your knowledge!"

He sat down again. The chieftain who had spoken last stood up. He bowed—twice. The second bow was deeper than the first but Gup took no notice of it.

"Knowledge and ignorance, who shall judge between them?" he said sententiously. "Nevertheless, it is a reasonable thing that men who are to risk their lives should know why and whither and what next?"

"Do you know tomorrow's events, or can you cancel yesterday's?" Gup retorted. "Who is there in the world whose life is not hourly at stake? And what matters, so be that a man dies fearless?"

"True. Allah judges our hearts. And none knows whom the dark angel shall overtake next. But though a man be fearless, it is just that he should know what to expect in this world. Let us at least learn of the reward."

GUP RECOGNIZED the beginning of one of those endless, half philosophic and wholly noncommittal arguments that Hillmen love. They would be willing to talk in that strain until midnight, whereafter they would weigh each phrase in search of something on which to base further discussion. He decided to end it abruptly. He wanted the news to reach Kabul that he was bold and confident enough to reject overtures of aid.

"It is written," he said, "that in this world there is nothing worth striving for. The Prophet wrote that Isa saith this world is a bridge; pass over it but build no houses on it. There is no goal that a man can reach in this world, nor any reward, that shall not be as dust and ashes. I am a Ghazi. It is Ghaza that I make. I seek a spiritual goal and the reward of Allah! Men who question me concerning payment and reward for the loan of their rifles in Allah's name, belong not in the ranks of Allah's *lashkar*. Let them join our enemies and learn whether or not God guides my fighting arm."

He sat down in awful silence. Not a finger stirred. He looked calm, but his heart was beating like a trip-hammer and he was wondering how long he might be able to keep up that rôle of Ghazi. He had read the Koran many times but his theology was woefully weak; almost the first question was likely to expose his weakness. And it came, Gup wondering why he had blundered into such an indiscretion. He could read fear in the Ranee's eyes. A sidewise glance at Jonesey revealed mischievous amusement. The oldest chieftain stood.

"Your Honor is of our faith? Circumcized and properly provided with a letter saying at which college and by whom he was accepted as a true believer? It is lawful to demand that such a letter be produced."

Gup took his time again, wishing he had bitten off his tongue before he used phrases that were only meant, in the heat of a moment, to explain ideals in a language they would understand. Exasperated by being taken literally, as he ought to have known he would be, he was on the verge of letting ill temper get the better of him. If they should call him a false Ghazi and send that accusation leaping from mouth to mouth of fanatics who knew nothing but the dry dead letter of their faith, the game was lost before it was begun. The Ranee's own army would melt; there would be no one to hang on the flank of the invading Afghans. They would burst into India, the Punjab would rise in revolt, there would be a swath of rapine and of dead and dying, all the way from Khyber mouth to Bombay.

He rose very slowly to his feet, his brain as blank as if he had been stunned. But intuition is not seated in the brain; it merely uses it, and uses it more readily when the brain is not busy with suggestions.

"Where," he retorted, "is it written that Allah made you, but not me? And if I swear that there is one God, shall God deny me? And if God deny me not, does

your unbelief matter? Shall I answer to God, or to you? And which is better? A written testimonial that any clever rogue might forge, or a man's deeds? Which of the two shall Allah justify?"

He stood, with his teeth set so tightly that the muscles of his jaw rose in knots. The chieftain's pointed question had been a thrust that pricked him where he kept his fury against all dry bones of bigotry encumbering men's inward faith. The very thought of bigotry could make him as bigoted as anybody else. He hated cant with such a livid hatred that he had formed a new cant of his own. He despised intolerance to a point where intolerance entered into him and made him furious. But his fury was magnetic.

And in the ensuing silence the Ranee's calm voice spoke, from the peacock throne, the ancient formula that none may ignore and not name himself an ignorant, ill mannered fool—

"Ye have my leave to go."

Again silence. Had she opened her lips, that would have amounted to permission to speak while taking leave. They bowed, hesitating, hoping for the chance to get a word in. Stately and solemn and dignified then, they filed out from the presence. It was not until the door had closed behind them that the voice of Jonesey broke on the stillness.

"Allah! The Omnipotent made ingenuity! I will forge you the letter you need. It shall be signed by the Imam of Istamboul. I will spread it across Asia that you are a true believer!"

"Not if you're eager to live, you won't," Gup answered. "If you tell 'em one lie about my religion, I'll break your head with that staff you carry. That's the only point on which I'm touchy."

"You are the least touchy, the least violent, the least unreasonable man I know," said Jonesey. "May I wait outside?"

* * *

And they are ignorant who think that Love is meek.
No arrogance, in all uncounted realms
Of endless universes spiraling, can speak
With magic such as Love's, that overwhelms
All opposites and pours its course
So full of tributary forces that a stream
Flood-swollen from a trackless source
Is as a shadow to it, in an idler's dream.

CHAPTER XV

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN, SIR, BY DISASTER?"

BUT JONESEY changed his mind—something that only a corpse may not do. It was the servants who filed out one by one, obedient to a gesture. One veiled figure remained in the gallery, four ivory white fingers on the edge of the stone betraying nervousness. Then the Ranee stepped down from her throne; she laid her *sari* aside; instantly the woman in the gallery removed her veil, revealing Harriet Dover, dark eyed and intense. There was no sound now. Jonesey approached, his bare feet silent on the three-deep rugs, and they faced one another, Jonesey leaning on his staff.

"What has happened?" she asked. Her eyes were liquid with a triumph that included doubt and saw beyond doubt to a victory not yet won. Delighted, she was also suspicious and doubly on guard. "You yield as breathlessly as you refused to yield. What has happened?"

"I have been told," said Gup with grim lips, "that my countrymen have condemned me unheard and have posted a reward for me, dead or alive."

"So you turn on them? You accept my offer?"

He nodded. There was silence again in which his windy gray eyes looked into the depths of hers—a long silence, in which even Gup's steady breathing was hardly audible.

"You lie lamely," she said at last. "You are too honest. You can think treason, but you can't hide it."

Silence again, until Jonesey spoke—

"Oh, the power of silence!"

It was true. Silence was giving Gup time in which to turn words over in his

mind. He hated lying, even after he had recognized the necessity. If he could, he preferred to tell the truth so subtly that she would misinterpret it. Afterward he would be able to quote his own words, in his own defense. It was not yet clear to him that love between two strong characters is a battlefield in which no quarter may be asked or given, but the strength of each devours the weakness of the other until only love is left. He had to conquer her, not explain himself. He could feel that, but he did not understand it yet.

"It is they," he said, "who have done treason against me. They shall regret it."

"Who told you this news?"

He evaded a direct answer—

"I will discuss that with you when we are alone."

She glanced at Jonesey.

"Did he speak with any one?"

But Jonesey had no opportunity to answer. They were interrupted by the voice of Harriet Dover, ringing low contralto, ominous, as she leaned over the gallery:

"In one short paroxysm of grandiose boasting your Nordic blond has undone the work of weeks! I warned you to test him before you trusted him!"

The Ranee ignored that but her eyes darkened angrily. She spoke to Gup again.

"Did you mean what you said about marching on Kabul?"

"How can I answer until I have seen the army I must lead?"

"Are you willing to take oath before the army?"

Gup did not dare to hesitate.

"Certainly," he answered.

"You shall review the army, and you shall swear yourself in at the same time," she said, staring at him. "However, I have not forgotten how your countrymen sold Mary Queen of Scots to Elizabeth, and Charles the First to Cromwell."

Gup winced. He hated history; it is too full of the lapses from common decency of every nation under heaven.

"Let us draw up that oath with caution," she went on. "Harriet Dover shall make a draft of it that won't leave you even a beggar's loophole."

He smiled at that. He knew that if he should ever decide to break an oath he would need no loophole. He would smash the thing in fragments.

"All right, draw it," he retorted. "If it suits me, I'll swear it. If it doesn't I won't."

"Any stipulations?"

"None," he answered. "I have decided to take up the sword and by the sword I will win or fail. If I win, you win. If I fail, you will very likely die with me. If you don't give me your complete confidence, I will treat you in the same way. Accept my sword or leave it."

"It isn't your sword that I doubt," she said, looking straight at his eyes. "Nor do I doubt you; you are of the stuff of which heroes are made. But I do doubt your Covenanter's conscience."

"Doubt it then," said Gup. "I don't have to command your army."

But if she had taken him at his word, he had already made up his mind to seize command. It may be that she understood that. She was reading him as if his eyes and his face were the score of new, intriguing music.

"If you play me false—was ever another woman, placed as I am, rash enough to run that risk? You have nothing to lose, no pledge to offer. As a pledge, even your life is worthless; you would throw it away as some men throw the stump of a cigar. If you should fail me, do you know what I would do?"

"I can guess," said Gup.

"I would realize that my own judgment and my own ideals, my own wit and my own reason were all worthless. I would realize that my life's work is nothing, can amount to nothing and has gone down like a pack of cards. And I would have no compunctions left of any kind."

"Most of us feel like that," said Gup, "until the house of cards falls. Mine fell, so I know the sensation. The trick is, not to try to build another dreamland. Build with bricks next time. Or build

some other fellow's house. Our own don't matter much."

"If you fail me, I will never again trust any one," she answered and Gup wondered at her emphasis.

It did him good to hear it. He recognized familiar symptoms. It made him realize that not only he had had to face a crisis, in which the devils of despair had done their utmost. He was emerging, robbed of nothing except trash. He wondered how she would emerge. He intended to spare her all he could.

"Who steals my name," he thought, "steals nothing. But if he should steal my own opinion of myself—"

He smiled at his own sententiousness, reminding himself it was a time for deeds, on which the fate of India might hinge, not for self-examination. Let the lords of destiny make use of him as he was; he could not change himself in that hour. He decided to begin now, instantly, to force the underlying secrets to the surface so that he might judge the situation and develop plans. But to do that he had to deal in words first; he had to drive a wedge into the split that he discerned between the Ranee and Harriet Dover.

"How much authority has Miss Dover?" he asked.

"She is the first woman secretary of state who ever lived," the Ranee answered. "Her authority is not very clearly defined; we have had no time for definitions. She and I have worked together from the first."

"Always together?"

"Sometimes we have not had time for conference. I have trusted her implicitly."

"You will have to trust me. You will have to work with me," said Gup, "if you propose to look to me to save you from disaster."

"What do you mean, sir, by disaster?" She looked more royal than he had seen her yet.

"I have not yet seen your army. But you lie between two armies, each of them stronger and better equipped than yours. I know that. You will be ground between two millstones unless some one wiser than Miss Dover manages your foreign policy. As commander-in-chief I have a right to know what Miss Dover has been doing."

The Ranee glanced at Jonesey.

"Ask Miss Dover to come here."

She and Gup then faced each other in a strained, uncomfortable silence.

"Do you think," she asked at last, "that I would be afraid to have you killed if you should play me false? I suspect you already. Why did you insult those Shinwari tribesmen?"

"Do you call what I said an insult? I don't think they did. I took my cue from you."

"You said too much. It will reach the emir. You intended that?"

HARRIET DOVER came in with Jonesey before Gup could answer. As a matter of fact he did not know what to answer: whether to take the credit for a deliberate attempt to offend the emir, or to admit that he had merely spoken at random, intuitively taking a downright attitude toward men who he thought were bluffing.

Harriet Dover's soft, dark Celtic eyes observed him calmly, but he thought he detected something other than calmness in their depths. The Ranee spoke first—

"Harriet, what understanding have we with the emir?"

"None yet."

"Anything tentative?" Gup asked her.

"We have been in communication for some time, through unofficial channels—through spies and so on."

"What was the subject of negotiation?"

"None. He wanted to know what our intentions were. There was some very cautious inquiry as to whether we would make common cause with him if he should decide to invade India. Also he wanted to know what our claims amount to—how much territory we pretend to govern."

"What was your answer?"

"Very evasive. Practically nothing."

"What did you mean just now by saying that I have undone the work of weeks?"

"I regret having said that. I am almost on the verge of a breakdown from overwork. I was annoyed by your taking the reins in your own hands." Suddenly she flared up. "You were chosen for brawn, not brains. It is your business to command the army, subject to the Ranee's orders; mine to attend to negotiations."

"What are your plans? Why was I chosen, as you call it? What do you wish me to do with the army?" Gup asked her.

"If you wish to know the truth, I had nothing to do with choosing you. That was Rahman's doing. I objected to it, and to you. Nevertheless, I have loyally concurred, since I was overruled."

Gup turned to the Ranee.

"Thanks," he said. "That is as much as I need to know at the moment."

But Harriet Dover was not to be dismissed so easily. She declared she was feeling faint and asked whether she might be seated. At a nod from the Ranee she took the chair on which Gup had sat during the conference with the Shinwari chiefs. She sat sidewise, so that Gup saw her in profile; he decided she was suspicious and keyed to alertness, not faint. He turned to the ranee again.

"You expect to establish a kingdom here? Am I to use this army for defensive purposes?"

He knew that was an awkward question. There is only one kind of defense for a new kingdom between two ancient adversaries. Even a dreamer would understand that. Rahman entered and stood silent.

"Harriet and I are not quite in agreement," said the Ranee. "She has tried to persuade me to make an alliance with the emir. I prefer to let him invade India if he chooses. I see no advantage in an alliance with him. I have forbidden overtures."

Then Rahman spoke:

"By Allah, Gup Bahadur, now you know why I was at such pains to choose a man to lead us! By my beard, it is right to let the emir run his race; and he intends to do it; he will shoot down Khyber like a landslide. Then, say I, fall on his rear! And, lo, we have a kingdom. Who shall deny us? The British? They will be grateful. The emir? He will be caught between two armies and routed. And I say—by my beard, I say it—march on Kabul. Half Afghanistan would welcome us; the other half would submit and be taught to be glad we had come. By Allah, I say, march on Kabul while the emir runs his head into the Indian noose!"

Harriet Dover leaned back in the chair looking tired of an endless argument, but her eyes were bright and her voice was almost savagely dynamic:

"Do you think the emir is such a fool as that? Well—wait and see. I have done *my* best. Remember, this army has no artillery."

"We will take the emir's," Rahman assented cheerfully.

Gup decided he had driven in his wedge; if he should go too far just yet he might cease to be the unknown quantity that it was necessary he should be. He even tried to patch up temporary peace with Harriet Dover, although instinct as well as reason warned him that she was a dangerous friend and a deadlier enemy.

"There is time for us all to agree yet," he said, smiling at her.

"Time?" she retorted. "Much you know! The emir won't wait."

"How do you know that?" he asked her suddenly.

Perhaps he spoke too sharply to a woman who had been living on her nerves for weeks. She winced and glared at him with hatred. For a moment there was almost triumph in her eyes, or so Gup read it; it was as if she forefelt triumph and tried to mask it. However, she mastered herself and when she spoke her voice was calm.

"One expects to be able to guess things after studying a situation as long and minutely as I have studied this one. We will see whether my guess is right or not."

She got up and went to the Ranee's side, putting an arm around her.

"Let Lottie decide it. After all, we

must follow her fortune, mustn't we? What do you say, Jonesey?"

"Something funny, I suppose," said Jonesey. "I think Gup Bahadur will spring a surprise on us. Is that funny? Or will it be?"

As a woman who owned an army and was bidding for a kingdom that Iskander of Macedon won and lost, the Ranee surely was entitled to the last word, but Gup deprived her of it.

"Lunch—" she began.

He saluted.

"Send me out a sandwich, tea in a bottle, no cream or sugar. Jonesey and Rahman shall show me the stores, ammunition and so on—possibly the men, too. You and Miss Dover can draw up the oath that you want me to swear. Am I excused?"

He saluted again and backed toward the door, where Jonesey and Rahman joined him, Rahman bristling like a hedgehog with belligerent emotion, but exuding friendliness. However, Gup noticed that Jonesey exchanged glances with Harriet Dover before closing the door behind him. He wondered why. He pondered that.

* * *

Within this life no moment and no man
May boast the long war won. Each victory reveals
Another view, another challenge in the van,
New opportunity. Faith's magic heals
Old wounds and weariness, relights old fires
That died untended, shows in vision vast
A new goal, new resources—then requires
Accounting of today, tomorrow, not the past.

CHAPTER XVI

"WE MOSLEMS ALSO BELIEVE THAT EVE PERSUADED ADAM."

GUP HARDLY believed his eyes. Afterward, almost nobody except Tom O'Hara and a few Indian government spies believed what preparations had been made within those caverns for a war that should alter the map of Asia. There was even a factory for making smokeless powder. There was no artillery, but there were machine guns by the hundred and enough ammunition to outlast weeks of heavy fighting.

In a cavern near where those were stored was a Pathan ex-British-Indian army infantryman with six subordinates, who instructed the tribesmen in squads of twenty, all day long, until squad after squad was sent home competent to handle machine guns in action. All they needed was mechanical instruction; they were born fighters, of much experience, who knew every trick of taking cover and every yard of their rock strewn mountainsides and valleys.

Some one had studied the secret of discipline, not of a standing army in rigmarole routine barracks, but of an irregular army in the field whose whole genius and only chance of living must consist in ferocious attack; an army that should live off an enemy's country and contain within itself small units that could automatically absorb recruits from conquered territory; an army that could move like lightning and strike venomously. Lessons had been learned from Iskander of Macedon and Genghis Khan.

Each squad of twenty had elected their own leader, to whom they swore implicit obedience. Those leaders were taught in a school in the caverns. Each ten leaders presently elected one to whom, in turn, they swore obedience; and that one was initiated into a sort of secret aristocracy that flattered vanity while at the same time providing an atmosphere of mystery. Thus the higher ranks were closed against sedition seeping from beneath.

It is mystery, of course, that wrecks conspiracies. Successful ones are those whose leaders avoid the mystery that calls attention to them too soon. Nevertheless, they must have mystery, since without its dramatic cloak their followers would soon lose faith and interest. So each initiate of the inner circle, elected from below, was sworn to secrecy in the

presence of his own subordinates, who were required at the same time to take oath not to question him or to discuss his secret comings and goings. From this inner circle selection was made from above with vows of secrecy again, renewed, until there were actually only ten men justified in believing themselves in the Ranee's confidence; of the ten, one was a Russian, one was Jonesey and another was Rahman.

Rahman and Jonesey showed Gup through the caverns, introducing to him the individuals who had charge of the various stores. Rahman had been captain of the smuggling of supplies across the border; his horse business was the excuse for passing to and fro. And his pride as he viewed the stuff in store was something that he had to let escape in words, lest it choke him.

"By Allah, we used our wits! It was a simple matter for her agents to buy guns and ammunition, hospital supplies and all sorts of engines for making things. By my beard, the money hunger and the craving for meat and women are one; they cause men to sell what they have, for what they have not; they will sell in the face of the Prophet and in spite of all the laws that were ever made by governments. It was easy to buy. It was easy to bring the stuff to India. But how do you suppose we got delivery?"

Gup betrayed suitable wonder.

"Well, this was my thought: we ordered the greater part of it consigned to the Emir of Afghanistan, in Kabul, to be routed by way of the Khyber Pass. And, by Allah, on its way up the Khyber we stole it! He knew nothing. He knew less than nothing. I have a friend in Kabul who is in the emir's ministry, so when the Indian government sent telegrams and documents the answer came swiftly; the goods were ordered cleared and sent on up the Khyber. They were supposed to be the emir's troops that came to act as escort to the camel trains. *Wallah!* It was I who led them, and I led them hither! There was not a man in the escort who had ever seen Kabul; and, by my beard, nine-tenths of them are in these caverns now."

"What has become of the other tenth?" Gup asked him.

"*Mashallah!* It is marvelous how easily a talkative man dies," he answered. "And that is an important matter, concerning which it is well that we should speak now."

They were standing in the jagged mouth of a tunnel, with the huge, grim gorge below them, and behind, in a cavern at the tunnel's end, millions of rounds of British army ammunition in the original boxes. Rahman stroked his beard and drew attention to the fact that he intended to speak with great discretion and in confidence. He laid a finger on his nose and rubbed it for a moment. He touched his dagger hilt and glanced at Jonesey. He stared down into the gorge, then up again and met Gup's eyes.

"When a man falls from the summit yonder—to the bottom of this place—he is dead, by God."

Gup nodded.

"We have had such accidents."

Gup tried to measure with his eye the sheer face of the cliff that Rahman indicated with a gesture. He guessed it at several thousand feet without a visible foothold.

"Hitherto," said Rahman, "since we lacked a man with enough spirit and force of character to rule our Ranee, she has ruled us. And, by the beard of him whom Allah loves, we have had to rule ourselves in spite of her, much of the time! For she has issued strange orders, such as no man in these mountains ever heard of. She, who expects to send her *lashkars* screaming into battle, commanded that none shall be slain for disobedience!"

JONESEY, leaning on his staff and framed in the opening against a blue sky, so that he looked like a saint in a stained glass window, spoke, with raised eyebrows and scandalized lips:

"Do you realize the full significance of

that? The full enormity? The only really popular sport in these mountains is murder. True, there is a secondary sport —that of cutting off the nose of one's rival in love; but that is on the whole more dangerous and is a game that is only played by the strictly Corinthian set. The universal outdoor sport during nine months of every year is murder, without any rules, and no quarter asked or given. It is such sportsmen as those who are to be chidden, not slain, for disobedience! And, by the Prophet's beard, the strange thing is that we don't dare to disobey her!"

"No," said Rahman, "since to disobey her would end in no man's obeying any one. And after all, it is she who holds the purse strings. And it was she who thought of all this and who had the courage to seduce us into it."

"We Moslems," Jonesey remarked, "also believe that Eve persuaded Adam."

"Therefore," said Rahman, "seeing that her law was inconvenient, we appealed to the law of Allah, who made universes and decreed that such as have no wings shall not fly. Who is she and who are we that we should change the law of Allah?"

"Unthinkable!" said Jonesey.

"And so," said Rahman, "they who disobey in little matters, such as killing each other in anger or stealing each other's goods, are chidden; but they who talk are blindfolded, lest they should behold the fruits of sin and repent too swiftly. It is not good for a bad man's soul to repent in too much haste. And their hands are tied, lest they should do themselves an injury, owing to great grief caused by naughtiness. But since Allah decreed that men shall walk, not fly, their legs are left free. And they are led to that summit yonder, where they are turned around several times and then allowed to walk in whichever direction Allah chooses."

"What if they walk the wrong way?" Gup suggested.

"Bahadur," said Rahman, "there is nothing wrong and no wrong way in all God's universe. There is a precipice on both sides. Ten steps, one way or another, and they test the law of Allah which says weights fall downward. And at the bottom they are dead."

"Well," said Gup, "what is your point?"

"It pleases us that a man has been found who shall command this army. Let there be no more nonsense about not killing. An army is not the blossom in a cherry orchard breathing perfume for birds to sing about. An army stinks! An army marches! An army fights! And, by my beard and by my father's beard, an army slays or it is slain! It is neither wise nor merciful to wean on pap such children as must fatten on the raw wind! Neither is it wise or merciful to wean young fighting men on punishments that would make an Afghan woman smile!"

Gup avoided argument.

"What they probably need," he said, "is to have their noses rubbed into a fight."

Fighting was probably unavoidable, there had been so much preparation for it. He could certainly not prevent it by preaching peace to people who think peace is merely a time of making ready for the next invasion of some one's else country. The tide was rising; at the best he could only guide it, narrow its course and make it expend its violence in the direction where it could do least harm. He began to feel sorry for statesmen, instead of rather despising them.

"And the news from Kabul?" he asked. "When will the emir move?"

He was wondering why Rahman, an Afghan who owned property in Kabul, should be at such small pains to disguise contempt for his own emir. No law can make a man admire his king, but kings who hear rumors of disloyal speech can confiscate, and rumors fly like birds where there is neither road nor telegraph.

"God knows," said Rahman. "He is only an echo in the skin of Abdurrahman, who was a ruler whom Allah loved. It was Allah's will that the great Abdurrahman should eat what he could earn in

poverty and exile until the time came when he had learned how to rule. And, by my beard, when that time came he did rule. Neither did he poison any one to reach the throne. But when he died, came Habibullah Khan, who was a weakling. He died by poison. And then this man, who is like a valley bred stallion fed on poor hay, full of big notions but without stamina and swiftly wearying of hardship. He will snort at a challenge afar off and ignore the danger close at hand. When he does move he will be swift, but he will spend his effort swiftly. He will burst into India and win a victory or two perhaps; and then, because none has faith in him, his generals will get out of hand. From informing him they will turn to advising him, and from advising him to letting him consult with them. And from that it is one short step to ruin—and our opportunity. For I tell you, Gup Bahadur, as Allah is my witness, men whose leader has failed them by being as feeble as themselves desire another leader as dry men thirst for drink."

"True," said Jonesey. "And a leader must conquer his friends before he may safely tackle enemies."

Gup was thinking furiously, as both men knew; they were watching his every gesture. He was beginning to feel now the reins of this team he must drive. He suspected Jonesey of being the originator of the whole plan, but no matter; Jonesey and Harriet Dover possibly concocted it between them. Rahman was an incident, like himself. They had chosen the ex-Ranee of Jullunder for their purpose because she had youth, charm, wealth and the necessary resentment against the Indian government to make her welcome the suggestion and accept it as her own idea. Perhaps they had never even thought of it themselves until they saw her. And she had run away with them; she had had too much character and independence to suit Harriet Dover, not enough cynicism to suit Jonesey, and she was of the wrong sex to suit Rahman's notions of what might be accomplished with an army in the field. They had chosen himself to provide the missing element. Well and good; he, too, would run away with them! Rahman and Jonesey exchanged glances, noticing the new expression on his face. They lingered, expecting him to explain himself, but all he said was—

"What are we waiting for?"

PRESENTLY they introduced to him a Russian—a dun whiskered man in smoked glasses, whose fingernails were nearly destroyed by chemicals and whose whole body had been twisted by privation. He spoke very little English but was anxious to talk in fluent German about his soul and about psychic forces that, he said, were changing human beings into something else. He was not mad, but he had run from Czarist and succeeding reigns of terror, southward through Siberia and into Tibet, where they had flogged him and then shown him mysteries that stirred imagination. Enormous altitude and bad food had contributed.

Escape from Tibet had been an ordeal that destroyed all interest in anything but psychic life and he saw that in terms of chemistry, because chemistry had been his first love. Gup was a chemical compound. So was he, and the hills and men's souls. Everything was chemical. But Gup, who had been paid sixpence a day extra in the army for knowing German, wanted to know what the product of all that theorizing was.

"How much gas have you made?"

"Come and see."

He led through tunnels that made Rahman shudder and howl whole verses from the Koran, so that the tunnels boomed and re-echoed with Arabic and voices seemed to come forth suddenly from caverns that they had gone exploring, driving in front of them gibbering *djinns*. The Russian's electric torch showed hideous, fantastic crag and somber shadow. There was a warm wind that felt like the breath of some fabled

monster; it was sour with the same faint venom that Gup had noticed on the Russian's clothing, a suggestion of bitter almonds. At the mouth of one cavern he paused and sent the torchlight streaming in, not offering to enter, but motioning to Gup to step forward and look.

There lay eleven human corpses in a row, but they hardly looked human. They were naked and resembled mummies, only that they were yellow and most of the skin, parts of the dried flesh and even some bone had been eaten away.

"Who are they?" Gup demanded.

"Some of my men. *Nitchevo*," said the Russian. "They were disobedient. But it doesn't matter. They touched what was forbidden, and now what are they? The same, doubtless, only chemically changed. And where are their souls? *Nitchevo.* They are somewhere. Possibly they have gone into the cyanide. But I will show you others, older ones."

He led along a wider tunnel, downward now by steep hewn steps that had been worn by the tread of human feet. They reached a shaft and descended it by a wooden ladder into a cavern that had no other entrance than a hole in the roof. It was a huge place, its floor covered with sand that bore no close resemblance to the rock which formed the roof and walls. There were the rusted remains of what appeared to be a very ancient iron ladder. And around the cavern, their backs to the wall, like ghosts in conference, sat more than a hundred dead men. They were all naked. Some of their heads had fallen to the floor, but some were grinning, their dry, drawn lips exposing yellow teeth in shrunken gums.

"Some more of your men? Why are they all naked?" Gup demanded.

"Look," said the Russian. "Some of their hair, their nails and their skin has also vanished. No, these were never my men. I am not so ancient. They have jewelry. Some of them have weapons. Go closer and look, but don't touch! That short man in the center, whose head has fallen into his lap, appears to be the chief."

What with the sand underfoot and the cavernous silence, the weird attitudes of the dead and the light pools formed by the electric torch, there was a sensation of being under water. Footsteps made no sound. The echo of the Russian's voice and of Rahman's endlessly repeated verses from the Koran suggested the sound of water slopping into far off crevices. But in sharp contrast to that the dry air made the lips crack and the eyes feel prickly. Gup strode nearer and knelt on one knee to examine the man who, the Russian had said, was the chief.

He appeared to be holding his head in his hands. It had fallen and lay looking upward at the place where it had been, suggesting an unseen phantom head still in position and gazing down at it. The features were not recognizable, but there were Persian rings on the fingers of both hands, a Persian bracelet on the right wrist, and there was an ivory hilted, double bladed Persian dagger on the sand near the withered feet. Wherever metal touched, the flesh was eaten to the bone and the bone seemed rotten with a greenish yellow fungus.

"Come away," said the Russian. "And don't stir the sand as you walk."

Gup returned to the foot of the ladder.

"Who are they? How did they die?"

"Who knows? *Nitchevo.* They are dead," said the Russian. "They are possibly some of Iskander of Macedon's men, and I think they committed suicide. There was an earthquake. You know, this is a great neighborhood for earthquakes; there have been dozens in this place in two thousand years. There is one cave where I have found the feet and hands of men who were crushed under a wall that simply folded down on them. But as I say, I think these committed suicide."

"Why?"

"Who knows, and what does it matter? The hole overhead was open when I found it but the iron ladder had been unhooked and laid on the sand. It may be

they were starving, or surrounded by enemies. They were here for the gold, I suppose, but there is no sign of their having found any; most of the gold had been dug out long before their time."

"But what do you think killed them?"

"This sand underfoot. Don't disturb it. There is an inch or two on the surface that is more or less harmless, nowadays. In their day, even the surface was probably poisonous. I think they sat there, said their prayers to whatever gods were fashionable at the moment, kicked their heels into the sand—and died."

"In Allah's name, let us get out of here!" Rahman exploded. "Devils are in this place!"

He began to climb the ladder. Jonesey followed, protesting he was not afraid of devils but of foul air.

"Which is the same thing!" said the Russian. "Watch lest that fool drops his staff into the sand! He might stir something. Some of the ancients had more knowledge than our scientists credit them with. Long before these men's day this cavern was a cyanide tank, although I haven't had time to examine it and study out the process that they used. This sand is a sediment left by evaporation; the lower layers are probably extremely rich in gold; I intend to find out when I have time, but one has to be careful with such stuff. Cyanide is deadly. Let us climb."

Gup followed him up the ladder, demanding his torch for a last look at the hundred and one dead men seated where they had sat, perhaps two thousand years ago, for their last conference.

THE RUSSIAN had grown garrulous; he hung like an ape from the ladder and chattered his views in German:

"These are the most amusing caverns in the world. There was everything here formerly, even radium, but there is almost nothing left except death and deadly poison. It is the most incredible geological mixture; it is as if all the leftovers were thrown here when the world was finished and hell was not yet thought of—I mean, of course, before men came and made hell necessary chemically and in every other way. It may have been hell's architect who did the original mining here! There were all the ingredients!

"Most of the cyanide comes from potassium ferrocyanide in contact with sulfur at high temperature caused by burning oil, but I can't tell you how the distillation takes place; Satan himself could not enter those caverns! Take a last look.

"Can't you imagine those poor fools, more than a thousand miles away from home—they may have been deserters from Iskander's army—heartbroken at finding no treasure in here—perhaps hungry and hunted by the sweet philosophers who live in these mountains, sitting down perhaps to share their last crumbs, probably thinking that the fumes and burning oil and boiling water were the work of Pluto and his devils—perhaps ignorant that the sand was full of deadly poison, or possibly knowing that and—oh, what a pity we can't look back and see—

"But they'll invent a machine one day for doing that, and then we'll know what idiots our ancestors really were, which will explain why we are idiots and it will all seem so hopeless that we will destroy ourselves and let the insects try to run things. Have you a cigaret?"

Gup had to urge him up the ladder. They followed Jonesey and Rahman to a breathing hole hewn through the rock where twenty men might stand and stare into the gorge. They were a thousand feet above the boulder strewn floor, and from another tunnel, nearby, came the alternating sob and muffled thunder of underground boiling geysers. Nevertheless, there was no steam.

"There is a natural retort down there," said the Russian. "It condenses against almost ice cold rock and—but you ought to come and see the stalactites!"

"How much poison gas have you made?" Gup asked him.

"Very little. Twice enough, perhaps, to destroy all the life in this gorge in ten seconds. I can figure it for you mathematically if you wish."

"What is it in?"

"Glass containers. Simply smash them and there you are, wherever that is. Everybody in hell or heaven instantly—in other words, in a different chemical combination. I sometimes think of doing it."

Gup gave him one of the Ranee's cigarets and held a match for him. Never, even when he thrashed Glint, had he felt so impelled to do murder; one quick shove, and the Russian would have tested Newton's law of gravitation and Allah's rule that only they with wings may fly.

"Before we try to use that stuff," he said slowly in English, "I will have to get some instructions from you."

Even Rahman gasped. No ordinary death could trouble Rahman, but—perhaps he was astonished at the sudden change in Gup's attitude; he had not imagined him capable of such thought. He seemed not to know whether to admire or shudder. Jonesey merely blinked. The Russian became genial—

"I am at your service."

"Do me a favor now," said Gup. "Where are your quarters?"

The Russian pointed down into the valley, toward where thin smoke rose above a pile of tumbled boulders.

"I used to sleep here but it made me nervous, I have a hut down yonder."

"Writing materials? Good. Then go now and write me a report—in German, if you like—on your poison gas and how to use it. Have it ready when I send for it tonight."

The Russian walked off, looking happy, and Gup waited until his irregular footsteps died away in the distance; he had noticed it was never safe to trust the echoes in those tunnels; sometimes they repeated words distinctly at great distances, and sometimes not.

"Cement?" he asked at last, looking at Jonesey.

"Lots of it—in bags. I showed it to you."

"Take a dozen men and cement up the cavern where he keeps that damned stuff. Use plenty of small rock and make it solid—one cement, two sand, three rock should do it—several feet thick. If you leave an opening that I can find I will stuff you through it. Report to me as soon as you've finished. Come along, Rahman, let's look at something wholesome. Let's see the stables. Oh, and by the way, Jonesey, take away that Russian's boots and pants and lock him up."

TO BE CONTINUED

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Jungle Etiquette

REGINALD CAMPBELL, whose yarn, "Poo Lorn the Terrible", you will read in this issue, reminds us that, up to the present writing, no one has discovered that mysterious region where all good elephants go to die. Somewhere, according to theory, there is a tidy sum to be picked up in old ivory—that has been accumulating since the Flood! Mr. Campbell remarks in part:

(1) It is known that wild elephants occasionally absent themselves from their herds for long periods, though the reason for this has not been discovered.

(2) Save in a few isolated cases when a plague has swept the jungle, no human being has ever come across the body of a wild elephant that has died a natural death in the forest. The natives of the various jungle villages that are scattered throughout India, Burma and Siam have never been known to see one, nor have any of the numerous white sportsmen who have shot big game for years.

Considering the size of an elephant's body, this is remarkable, and the natives have therefore many theories as to what becomes of these animals. One particular story is told by dozens of different races inhabiting the three countries mentioned above, and the tale is that elephants have some vast burial ground in a valley of rocks situated miles away from the haunts of man.

Sanderson, probably the greatest authority on elephants that has ever lived, mentions this native theory in one of his books. He ventures no opinion on it, however, because he can think of no better explanation himself that can contradict it.

Hence the ending to my story, "Poo Lorn the Terrible".—REGINALD CAMPBELL.

Kruger's Millions

APROPOS of Mr. Ribbink's novelette in the July 15th number of *Adventure*, Mr. J. Hudson from faraway New Zealand has kindly forwarded us the following clipping on Oom Paul's Gold:

Colonel Deneys Reitz recently cleared up the mystery of the missing Kruger millions. He said people believed that when the late Paul Kruger, former President of the South African Republic, was leaving Pretoria, on 4th June, 1900, the day before British occupation, he took with him bar gold to the value of £1,000,000. The tradition persisted to this day, and had caused the most astonishing train of disasters. At least fifteen people had lost their lives searching for the treasure, and it had led to murders, drownings, and death by hanging.

It was true that when President Kruger, accompanied by the speaker's father, Dr. F. W. Reitz, former Transvaal Secretary of State, left Pretoria, they took with them £80,000 worth of gold bars. That was all they had left for the purpose of founding a new capital at Machado Dorp in the Transvaal near Delagoa Bay, but the gold was sent to France, where it was sold.

"I asked the late General Louis Botha," said Colonel Reitz, "how he accounted for the delusion that the gold was buried somewhere. He replied that it was due to soldiers believing that bar gold was contained in wagons sent into the wilds, while these really contained ammunition." Colonel Reitz referred to one version that said the gold was sunk with a schooner in St. Lucia Bay. Many lives were lost in trying to salvage the wreck.

Newspaperman's Lament

MOST old-time newspapermen, like old sailors, begrudge their romantic profession its despotism. The question of how to escape from the reporter's job into some other equally inky career is a difficult one. Perhaps in the dim future it will be possible for authors to phone in their fiction to the magazine editors—and all the old reporters will be famous . . .

That there story in the August 15th issue called "Gangster Town" is by an old-time newspaperman, I see in the author's letter to Camp-Fire. And it sure is a catsy story.

Theodore Dreiser, Irvin S. Cobb and a lot of other famous writers got their training chasing news. It is said by many "experts" that there is nothing like newspaper experience for the young man who is going to write fiction, and since they can point out instances of men who began as newspaper reporters, everybody seems to think that this is the only way to prepare for a writing career. Of *Adventure's* writers, Newsom, Pendexter, Raine and Spears, among others, have at some time or other worked on newspapers.

All right.

But if you ask me—and I have knocked around on papers for more years than I care to admit—I'll say this: If a fellow hangs around on a paper for a year, say, it may do him a helluva lot of good, because that isn't a long enough time for him to fall into a groove.

But if the reporter sticks around for a longer time he'll never get the right slant on writing fiction. To begin with, by the time he has written 1500 words he will be all written out, because newspaper training teaches a man to "boil it down."

Besides, the first thing that they teach a cub is how to write a lead. That is, how to tell who, what, where, when and how in the first paragraph. Could any instruction be more harmful for a prospective writer of stories? You bet your boots it couldn't! I know from my own attempts to write fiction that what I do is give a synopsis of a story instead of the story itself.

But of course a fellow like F. P. A. (New York *Morning World*) writes in his column that he hates the chaps who say that they're going into newspaper work for just awhile. He thinks they ought to stick around (like I did, fool that I was!) until they have acquired a stock of hack habits that make them hopeless. Look at F. P. A. himself. Or Heywood Broun. Both of them have tried to write fiction, but if you ask me—well, *quoi dis-tu, monsieur?* What is your opinion?—HERMAN OLNEY PARSONS

State's Evidence

MR. B. turned State's evidence, implicating his accomplices in a murder. They and Mr. B. received the death sentence. Our correspondent goes on with the story, and asks the question: What should the Governor have done?

The detective who arrested Mr. B went before the Governor and asked him to commute Mr. B's punishment to life imprisonment. Now, I want to ask *Adventure* readers— What should the governor have done? Without B's evidence the others would have gone scot free. In my opinion B should have received the death sentence. I can see no reason why B's sentence should have been lightened for murder.

Perhaps I may see another's opinion.

—GERALD BIEDERMAN

THE CELESTIAL SWAP

If I attain to Paradise
When I at last make my demise,
An ad will shortly then occur
In the Celestial Courier,
Like this:

To Swap

In Heaven's Estate
A mansion fair, with Pearly Gate
And Jasper Walls that stretch afar,
Upon a newly gold paved street.
Also a crown, untrimmed but neat,
Will trade for one small private star.
Must have a trout stream cold and clear,
Where drink the brown bear and the deer;
A hill that shoulders out the sky,
A cabin neath a fir tree high,
A view; no others need apply.

And if my terms do not quite suit
I shall with courage resolute
Throw in my golden harp to boot.

—MABLE I. CLAPP

The Legion

REMINISCENCES of a member of the original American Legion. The letter is a copy of a letter to the *American Legion Monthly*, which Mr. Gospo has kindly given us permission to print.

COPY

Mr. John J. Noll, Associate Editor,
The American Legion Monthly.

I have been reading with some interest the letters between yourself and Commander J. J. Burke in the Sept. issue of *Adventure Magazine*. About the old and the new American Legion. Yes, the American Legion was first organized in Feb. 1916—and I was one of those who joined. At the time I was a member of The Adventurers' Club, of New York City, and I still hope to be one. I joined at one of our meetings of the Club, which same was held at Keene's English Chop House, on Broadway opposite the Metropolitan Opera House At the time there was present, Theodore Roosevelt, Sr. and Jr.; also Major General Wood, Captain Johnson, his aide. Albert Payson Terhune, Paul Thompson, City Photographer, and quite a few other prominent men. We also organized what we called Boyce's Tigers. We all drilled at Governor's Island under Capt. Boyce, President of the Ellis Adding Typewriter Machine Co. We started to drill with broomsticks. I am enclosing my receipts for my dues and receipt showing I was a member of the old American Legion, also a letter I received from Capt. L. K. Van Dusen, Capt. Ordnance Dept., U. S. R. The letter came too late. I was then in the army at Camp Upton, Yaphank, L. I. Hoping this will prove to you all, that Comrade Gibbs is wrong and very much wrong too, in his claim that the name originated in the 97th Battalion Canadian Expeditionary Forces. I also have my button from the old American Legion.

—THOMAS B. GOSPO

WE SHALL conclude this friendly discussion of the origin of the name "American Legion" with the following letter from Commander Burke, who reminded the "Then and Now" department of *The American Legion Monthly* that *Adventure's* legion was the first American Legion. Of course, it was prewar—and the present American Legion is an entirely different organization.

I just wish to acknowledge having observed the article in the Camp-Fire, September 1st, 1929,

issue of *Adventure* Magazine, dealing with the American Legion, and I wish to express my thanks and gratitude to you for your so fine acknowledgment of the correspondence.

I was somewhat under the impression that you were not interested in the matter. The Legion, of course, I imagine, resented the fact that it took the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States to tell them something about their organization.

Regardless of the statements of their comrade, Mr. Gibbs, that the name originated in the 97th Battalion, CEF, and was adopted in Paris, France, for the first time, when they got together after the Armistice to start a permanent organization, I just wanted to correct them.

I was among the first, together with my shipmate, Paul A. Kline, and a host of other men, to enroll in *Adventure's* "American Legion," prior to the World War. There was no equivocation, delay, waiting for draft or other coercion in our case; we "shipped," April 6th, 1917, on the declaration of war, for service at sea, and I'll say that fully 60% of the Philadelphia Boys, who shipped as the crew of the United States Ship *Chicago*, the gallant and famous old flagship of the White Squadron, were men who were enrolled in *Adventure's* "American Legion."

How gallantly they upheld the traditions of the famous old cruiser is on record in the Navy Department, Washington, D. C. This, to my mind, was the real "American Legion"; everyone of them saw service overseas, during the winter of 1917 and 1918, and naturally, all of them, with the issuance of the September 1st, 1929, issue, read what you had to say with great interest. We thank you.

—"JIM" BURKE, Commander
Captain H. G. Sparrow Ship, No. 1269, All-Naval-Post, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U. S.

Speaking For John

COMRADE WILLIAMS, of the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, obligingly comes forward with some engaging information about John Franklin, who makes his début in *Adventure's* pages with "Horrors of the Jungle", this issue. Evidently our author is an advocate of the old adage, "Actions speak louder than words".

John Franklin was recently referred to in a Chicago paper as "A New Trader Horn". He was a seaman in the British Mercantile service before the Great War. On the outbreak of that catastrophe he joined the 8th Battalion, Middlesex Regiment, and served in France.

Imbued with the spirit of adventure and having read so much about the mysterious Amazon jungle, he decided to set out for that region and see for himself.

After purchasing equipment in New York he sailed for Colombia, landing on the west coast. Having secured native aid, he crossed the mighty Andes, plunged into the burning jungles of the Peruvian Amazon, suffered the nerve racking effects of malaria fever and heat, he eventually reached the coast of Venezuela. During the four years spent in those desolate regions exploring, prospecting and adventuring his only companions were natives, except for an occasional rubber hunter met in desolate regions.

A few weeks ago this man, in Chicago to see relatives or friends, came to the Museum and has given us some valuable advice regarding the conditions in various parts in South America, which, it is hoped, will be visited by an expedition conducted by this Institution in the near future.

Franklin anticipates returning to the jungles of the Amazon within a few weeks.—L. WILLIAMS.

Gold Bug

THE policy of *Adventure* does not permit us to serve as recruiting agents for junkets into strange parts. But we do not see any harm in giving you Comrade Albert de Baer's letter in which he announces his project. Comrade de Baer is a geological engineer of Hollywood.

I am intending to go to the Territory of Baja California, Mexico, for the purpose of prospecting for placer gold. Instead of using the old time rule of thumb routine I intend to apply modern geophysical methods to placer prospecting.

As Baja California is about the wildest and least known section of the world and practically unpopulated except in relatively few places along the Gulf Coast and the Pacific shoreline, this work can only be carried out by a small party.

Among the readers of *Adventure* there are undoubtedly some who would like to undertake a trip of this kind and I would like to get into touch with them, with a view to getting together a small party to go down there.

If you can assist me through the pages of Camp-Fire I will greatly appreciate the favor.—ALBERT DE BAER.

Code

THE SERIES of Military Intelligence stories by Ared White (there's one slated for the next issue) has inspired some very interesting remarks on secret communication by Brother Schwartz.

Since espionage intrigues me immensely, it was with much enjoyment that I read Ared White's very excellent "The Spy Trap." Of all the war stories that I have read during the last ten years, those which dealt mainly with spies and codes interested me most.

I wonder if any of the readers have ever delved very deeply into the systems of communication used by the various Intelligence Departments during the World War. The code Mr. White sets forth so cleverly in his novel brings to my mind the "stencil code" in use in the late war.

This particular code consists of a stencil, which is nothing more unusual than a sheet of paper with slits cut into it long enough and wide enough to allow a two or three syllable word to show through. The stencil is placed over a dull and diffuse letter and the words which show through the cuts in the stencil form an independent message. The slits themselves form a regular design and their distances from the margin and from each other must be memorized by the spy, who will then have to compose his letters and the interior message with careful relation to the cuts in the stencil. Each had six or seven variations of the trick to accommodate all sorts of word combinations necessary in his secret reports.

The receiver of the letter would have the different stencils on file. Perhaps mention of a day in the week informed him which combination to use. He would place the proper stencil on the letter and the intelligence transmitted by the spy would be exposed to his view.

Ciphers and codes were also used by the Greeks and Romans. They used pigeons, and, it is said, they even trained swallows to convey military messages. A resourceful Greek, the Tyrant of Miletus I believe it was, wishing to stir up a revolt against Darius, but fully aware of the Persian vigilance, had the head of a slave shaved and wrote his message on the bald pate. He then let the slave's hair grow again and then dispatched him to Aristogoras the Ionian, who acquainted himself with the message by the simple process of shaving the slave's head again.

Pretty ingenious, *nicht wahr?* Anyway, let's have many more spy stories by Ared White.

—MAURICE M. SCHWARTZ

Could You Name A Month?

The world is thinking seriously of making itself a new calendar. If sometime it is accepted, it will have:

1. Thirteen months each of 28 days.

2. Each year one extra day, possibly to occur at (or before) New Year's Day.

3. Every four years *another* extra day, somewhat on the principle of our present February 29th.

* * * * *

The advantages of this proposal are sound. If a man wanted to forecast a happening to occur four months in the future, he could tell you the day of the week—*because all days would correspond to their monthly dates, always!*

To illustrate:

Every week starts on Monday. Every first Sunday is the seventh day. All right. What day will be Christmas, 1935? Let's see. It will *have* to be Thursday, under the new system. Anyone can figure it out; any man can carry the calendar *in his head*, instead of having to consult art atrocities put out by the life insurance or brewery companies.

Frankly, I do not expect this change to occur very soon. The world still is having stubborn difficulty adjusting itself to the metric system and daylight saving; and bringing the inhabitants of a planet out of their ingrained habits usually takes two or three generations or aeons. Suddenly insisting, no matter what some people believe, in the thirteen-month year, probably would cause a dozen or more tea-kettle revolutions. I have no desire to start them. Let's never have a fight over the calendar!

Yet the new thirteen-month year probably will come about. Some time—not right now.

And what will we name the new month?

What will we call it? Are *you* able to name it? If so, and you win the contest which *Adventure* is going to run, you will receive a splendid prize—and this will be announced soon. Any letters which come in from this date on will be considered for our prize contest.

* * * * *

Every year there will be one extra day, for which we have no name. What will you call that? It can not be Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday or Saturday. But what will *you* call it? We will have a prize for the best name.

Every fourth year there will be one other extra day. What will *you* call this other extra day? You will have a prize for that.

Of course it is necessary that all of these titles be adopted by all nations on earth; and therefore no matter what *Adventure* does, the world may use something else it wishes. But in the meantime, it looks like a good game. —ANTHONY M. RUD

ASK Adventure

For Free Information and Services You Can't Get Elsewhere

Boulder Dam

BRIEFLY, here are the conditions in the Las Vegas area.

Request:—"I am writing to ask you some questions concerning Boulder Dam.

What are chances there for work? Have they started working on it yet? Condition of country? Schools? Climate? Is it a snake country?

Is there land there that a working man can afford to buy that will stand a chance of getting water?"—HAROLD HUGGINS, Hoquiam, Wash.

Reply, by Mr. F. W. Egelston:—There will be nothing doing on the Boulder Dam for at least another year. Las Vegas is full of people looking for work, and none to be had.

That is a desert country and very hot. Las Vegas is a good town, with excellent schools.

You can get desert land under the Pittman Act near Las Vegas. There is an artesian belt there and under the Pittman Act the settler is allowed to file on four sections so that he may develop water on one of them, relinquishing the other three. This development by drilling is rather expensive, but once water is secured all kinds of subtropical fruits, such as dates, figs, grapes, etc., may be grown.

There will be little or no irrigation water furnished to Nevada land after the dam is built.

Write to the Agricultural Extension Service, University of Nevada, Reno, Nevada, for information upon reclaiming desert land by drilling wells in the Las Vegas area.

Venom

ON THE virulence of various snake toxins. An alligator story.

Request:—"Is the snake which the West Indian Negroes in Central America call a name which sounds like 'tommygoff' the same thing as the bushmaster I read about? I don't remember ever hearing of a bushmaster anywhere in Central America, but heard plenty about tommygoffs, and saw more than enough.

How far apart would it be reasonable for fang marks on a victim to be? A doctor in Panama swore the fang marks on a dead child that he examined were three inches apart. That sounded like a long way to me, and others there, but old-timers—I started to say old liars—here in Arizona claim they've seen rattlesnake fang marks as wide apart as that.

If, as I assume, the tommygoff and bushmaster are identical, how do you rank them in regard to poison in relation to the rattler and cobra, say? Would a bite to an adult be fatal, provided he had his tools with him, permanganate, etc., and knew how to use them? There used to be argument about that.

Here is a story that was as well authenticated as possible, and I'd like to hear your opinion on it: Man swimming near river bank. Something grabs him by foot. He grabs small tree on bank. Both hold on and pull. Something has to give, and in the end, the man's foot comes unjointed at ankle, an unseen attacker walks off with it, and the flesh of the man's leg as far as the knee, leaving bare bones as far as ankle joint. By that time, men who have been attracted by victim's howls arrive and pull him out. Grateful corporation buys him wooden leg, and he had the wooden leg to offer in proof of the story. There was always argument as to what had hold of him. I maintained that it must have been an alligator, if anything, and bar sharks. Did you ever hear of an alligator doing such a thing? The river was full of them, and they did very well on dogs."—S. GREENE, Douglas, Arizona.

Reply, by Mr. Clifford H. Pope:—I do not know the name you give for the bushmaster. It is sometimes called "surucucú" or "mapepire." It occurs in Panama and southward to Bolivia and Brazil.

This snake may be told by the presence of small scales on the *ventral* side of the last fifth of the tail. Other vipers have the usual regular plates to the very tip of the under surface of the tail.

I measured the distance between the fangs of a large diamondback and find it to be barely an inch, so certainly the story about the fang marks three inches apart is a gross exaggeration, to say the least.

Amaral gives a list of sixteen deadly snakes, rating them according to the amount of poison produced by each. The bushmaster takes the laurels. It is also named by this same investigator, along with Russell's viper, as requiring the maximum dose of serum to counteract its bite. We may conclude that the bushmaster is a highly dangerous snake. If one had the proper serum along and knew how to inject it and remain quiet afterward, there might be good chance of recovery. However, I would not say as much for one's chances if permanganate and ordinary bleeding were relied upon.

I do not believe that an alligator or a crocodile would pull straight against a foot that it had seized under water. These creatures have a method far more effective, i.e., they instantly revolve rapidly on themselves and then in a jiffy twist and wrench anything into submission if not into parts. I would give the most powerful man two seconds as the greatest length of time possible to retain hold on an object after seizure of his foot by a crocodile or alligator bent on business.

Rooi Nek

THE genesis of an epithet.

Request:—What is a *rooi nek* and where did the term come from?—C. JARVIS, Orlando, Fla.

Reply, by Mr. F. J. Franklyn:—The term *rooi nek* so often met with in stories written about South Africa means "Red Neck" and was given to British Soldiers serving in S. Africa in the campaigns preceeding the Boer War. During the Boer War the term became go generally used that even an English settler or an Africander would speak of a soldier with British uniform on as a Red Neck. Years ago the British Soldier wore a high stiff collar, or neck band, attached to his uniform. The rays of the African sun quickly made the soldier's neck very red, hence the word evolved by the Boers. A great many of the Boer songs so much sung on commands are about the "*verdommed rooi neks.*"

Employment on Steamships

SO MANY questions relative to obtaining employment on steamships are regularly received by Mr. Reiseberg, in charge of the "American Waters" section, that he has taken occasion to cover the subject in the following brief treatise. A helpful list of steamship companies is appended.

THE term, "Merchant Marine" is a broad abstract term meant to cover all the merchant shipping, whether privately or publicly owned. The crews on regular merchant ships do not enlist as in the Navy but sign articles of agreement at the beginning of each voyage for a round trip and are paid off when the ship returns to this country. If their services are satisfactory and they so desire, they can "sign on" for another voyage.

During the World War, the U. S. Shipping Board conducted a school for training seamen. This school has been abandoned, but the Shipping Board has created the position of "deck boy" for the purpose of affording an opportunity for training to young native born Americans who desire to follow the sea for a livelihood. These positions are restricted to young men of good moral character between the age of 18 and 23 years, who desire to stick and make good, as there is no more room for the drifter at sea than in any other occupation. In starting to sea, therefore, work, strict attention to duties, and application are required.

In the position of deck boy, the boy is required to do regular sailor's work on deck. He is a member of the crew. Shore leave is granted in home and foreign ports at regular intervals, depending upon the requirements of the vessel.

After he has served six months as deck boy at $25.00 a month (in addition to food and lodging), he is promoted to the grade of "ordinary seaman" at $47.50 per month, provided deportment and work are satisfactory. After serving six months as ordinary seaman, he is eligible to take the examination for "able-bodied seaman" in which grade he receives $62.50 per month. All of this time will count on his subsequent examination for deck officer, the lowest grade of which is "Third Officer," which position pays from $140.00 to $155.00 per month. At the end of one year as a Third Officer, he may take the examination for Second Officer, then for First Officer and then Captain. The above applies only to U. S. Shipping Board vessels, and information on rates of pay, etc., on foreign owned ships must be obtained direct from the operating companies.

APPLICATION for a position on a privately owned ship should be made direct to the company which owns the vessel. A list of some of the principal steamship companies is given below:

Admiral Oriental Line, 1519 Railroad Ave., S., Seattle, Washington.

Alaska Packers Ass'n, 111 California St., San Francisco, California.

Alaska Steamship Co., 120 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

American-Hawaiian Steamship Co., 8 Bridge Street, New York, N. Y.

American Scantic Line, 5 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

American South African Line, 39 Cortlandt St., New York, N. Y.

American-West African Line, 17 Battery Place, New York, N. Y.

Atlantic Refining Co., 260 S. Broad Street, Phila., Pa.
Baltimore & Carolina Steamship Co., Pier 5, E. Pratt St., Baltimore, Md.
Bull Steamship Co., 40 West St., New York.
Cities Service Transportation Co., 60 Wall St., New York, N. Y.
Clyde Steamship Co., Pier 36, N. R., New York, N. Y.
Dollar Steamship Line, 311 California St., San Francisco, California.
Dougherty Co., Hearst Tower Bldg., Baltimore, Maryland.
Eastern Steamship Lines, Portsmouth, N. H.
Eastern Transportation Co., Ford Bldg., Wilmington, Del.
Export Steamship Co., 25 Broadway, New York, N. Y.
Grace Steamship Co., 10 Hanover Square, New York, N. Y.
Gulf Refining Co., West 7th St., Port Arthur, Tex.
Inter-Island Steam Navigation Co., Fort & Merchant St., Honolulu, Hawaii.
Los Angeles Steamship Co., Wilmington, Calif.
Luckenbach Steamship Co., 44 Whitehall St., New York, N. Y.
Mallory Steamship Co., Pier 36, N. R., New York, N. Y.
Malston Co., Dover, Del.
Matson Navigation Co., 215 Market St., San Francisco, California.
Merchants & Miners Transportation Co., 112 S. Gay St., Baltimore, Maryland.
Munson Steamship Line, 67 Wall St., New York, N. Y.
Mystic Steamship Co., 250 Stuart St., Boston, Mass.
Nelson Co., 230 California St., San Francisco, Cal.
Ocean Steamship Co., Savannah, Ga.
Oceanic & Oriental Nav. Co., 215 Market St., San Francisco, Cal.
Pacific Steamship Co., 1519 Railroad Avenue, S., Seattle, Wash.
Pan-American Petroleum & Transport Co., 714 West 10th St., Los Angeles, Calif.
Southern Pacific Co., 165 Broadway, New York, N. Y.
Southern Steamship Co., 321 Commercial Trust Bldg., Phila., Pa.
Standard Oil Co., 225 Bush St., San Francisco, Calif.
Standard Shipping Co., 7 West 10th St., Wilmington, Del.
States Steamship Co., 810 Porter St., Portland, Oreg.
Submarine Boat Co., 5 Nassau St., New York, N. Y.
Tacoma-Oriental Steamship Co., 915 Washington Bldg., Tacoma, Washington.
Texas Co., 7 West 10th St., Wilmington, Del.
United Fruit Steamship Corp., 17 Battery Place, New York, N. Y.
United Steel Products Co., 30 Church St., New York, N. Y.

Machine Gun

THE principle of the water cooling system.

Request:—"How were the machine guns cooled? I understand that they were water cooled, but I can't see how the gunners carried enough for that purpose during a drive like the Meuse-Argonne.

Was the automatic rifle used to any extent during the World War?"—J. M., Compton, Cal.

Reply, by Capt. Glen R. Townsend:—The Browning Machine Gun is water cooled. The amount of water used is small. Three and one-fourth quarts fills the waterjacket and the evaporation is not rapid at the ordinary rate of fire, and a condensor serves to reclaim some of the evaporated water so, that the water supply was not a serious problem in France, although it might be in a dry desert country. In the World War the American troops did not get the Browning gun until mid-summer of 1918. Divisions sent across before that time were armed with the Vickers, a water cooled English made gun, or the Hotchkiss, an air cooled French made gun.

The automatic rifle was used to a very considerable extent. However the Browning automatic was not completed in time to be issued to more than a few divisions. The Americans in France chiefly used the French Chauchat, (Sho-sho).

British Columbia

THE Cariboo District truly seems to be a "happy hunting ground" for the sportsman.

Request:—"I am interested in securing information regarding a hunting and fishing trip in British Columbia.

As far as possible, and in as much detail as you may give me, here is what I wish to know:

1. Various kinds of game and fish.
2. Best equipment to be used in the way of rods and guns (not so much the make, but calibre and weight).
3. Proper clothing and camping equipment.
4. Approximate cost of hunting licenses, guides, duties, etc.
5. Names of deportations, responsible guides.
6. Best scenes for hunting and fishing.
7. Accommodations in debarkation city, rate and names of most desirable hotels, inns, camps, etc., and any other data that will go to make a trip as complete as possible."

FRANK WINCH, New York, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. C. Plowden:—The best fishing is in summer and hunting is in fall and winter months. I hardly know how to advise you to combine the two but here goes:

1. Fish trout (all kinds), salmon (ditto), cod, halibut, bass. Game: deer, mountain goat, bear and elk

in Coast districts. Central Interior—cariboo, moose, mountain sheep and goat, mule deer, and bear. Grizzly bear in mountain districts. Timber wolf, coyote, cougar and wild cat. Birds include grouse, many kinds of duck, ptarmigan, wild geese, snipe pheasants and quail.

2. Five kinds of salmon frequent the tidal and fresh waters, the "spring" taking the troll; ordinary, stuart; and steelhead, a salmon fly. Equipment strong salmon rod and tackle and light trout rod. Best rifle .30-30, and 12 bore shotgun.

3. This entirely depends on where you go and when, for we run from moderate climate south to the Arctic north. If the latter, when you select your district, write to provincial police, who will put you in touch with a guide who would find you camping equipment and transportation. Otherwise you can have all the sport you need in reach of hotel. Write to police of district you select.

4. Full license is one hundred dollars. Cost of guide again wholly depends upon where you go as well as upon what he has to find in the matter of horses, tents and equipment hangs.

5. When you've selected your district write Game Commissioner, Gov't. Buildings, Victoria, who will send you names of guides for that place; also write Bureau of Information, Gov't. Buildings, Victoria, for their free maps and printed matter in game an fish and general sport.

6. Cariboo District, Climate moderate; easily reached by rail and car and offers all the sport the soul of man can need.

7. Vancouver is your debarkation city. Hotel Vancouver is the best, rooms from $4. Hotel St. Regis from $2, and scores of others. Population over 200,000. Map of Cariboo District shows many towns and villages all of which offer accommodation averaging $5 inclusive.

In conclusion I advise the Cariboo District. Book to Quesnel by P.G.E.Railroad from Vancouver, pick up a local hunter there as guide, get a pack horse, tent and supplies and go where sport and spirit moves you. Plan nothing. You can get all a man needs two days from there. Countless streams swarming with fish and game everywhere, or charter a launch from Vancouver, all supplies aboard and accommodation, and go up coast stopping anywhere you please. All the shooting you need within reach of your boat, and salmon up to 60 lbs. This would cost about $10 a day and in my opinion is better still. We have some 4000 miles of inland water for your efforts, deer shot off the boat if you feel lazy.

Stamps

WHERE to sell them, and the best general catalog.

Request:—"I have an old collection of U. S. and foreign stamps, about 50 or 60 years back.

Can you furnish me with name and address of any person or firm who would buy such if of any value?

Do you know where I can procure a list of valuable stamps?"—JAMES H. CLEWS, Paterson, N. J.

Reply, by Mr. H. A. Davis:—You may procure a catalog of all stamps ever issued with their prices from the Stamp & Coin Shop, 406 15th St., Denver, Colo. The price is $2.00 postpaid. This concern also buys stamps and stamp collections. Write them giving a description of what you have.

Rifles

DEFINING two special types.

Request:—"Will you kindly tell me in your column, the exact meaning of 'express' and 'magnum' rifles?"
—A. E. RAMSAUR, Atlanta, Ga.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—The express rifles are those propelling the projectile at a somewhat higher rate of speed than is customary with rifles of that caliber; take for instance the hollow point bullet fired at about two hundred feet more velocity in the old .30-30 cartridge than was originally designed for.

Magnum refers to a rifle using a cartridge case with a considerably greater powder capacity than was customary in that size, as well as a heavier bullet. These weapons, originally European exclusively, are now made by Hoffman and Griffin & Howe in United States, and are becoming yearly more popular for larger sorts of game.

Hubble-Bubble

IT HAS always struck us that this Turkish version of a pipe ought more truthfully to be called a machine, but then, we've never smoked one.

Request:—"I would appreciate information in regard to making hookahs or water-pipes. If possible I would also like to know where the different materials may be purchased so that I can make a cheap one as an experiment before making an expensive one."
—F. A. LANE, Miami, Fla.

Reply, by Mr. George E. Holt:—The principle of the water-pipe—hookah, narghili, hubble-bubble—is extremely simple. First there is a bottle serving as a container for water. Second, there is a tobacco container, usually of meerschaum, set into the cork of the bottle, a glass pipe extending from it down into the bottom of the bottle. Third, there is at least one rubber tube (more if the pipe is to be used by several smokers at the same time) which is connected to a second small glass pipe running through the cork; the lower end of this glass pipe must be above the water line in the bottle; on the other end of this rubber tube is the mouthpiece. The action is merely this: the smoke from the tobacco is drawn from the tobacco container down through the pipe into the bottom of the bottle, whence it arises through the cooling water and is drawn off through the second pipe and rubber tube, being cooled en route.

This being the principle of the pipe, it follows that

it can be made of any materials which permit of the principle being followed; but at the same time it would probably be just as cheap or cheaper for you to buy a water pipe ready made. I would think that you should be able to find one among the tobacco shops of Miami; if not, one would certainly be available for something less than $5.00 in New York. I would suggest you ask the United Cigar Stores and other of the larger tobacco houses in Miami, and if you fail to get one there, try Schulte, or other of the big tobacco houses in New York, or most any of the houses importing Turkish goods—although an importer will charge you more for such a pipe than will a tobacco company. You ought to be able to get a pipe for $4.00 or $5.00 that will be perfectly satisfactory, the only difference between the least expensive and the most expensive being not at all the service that it gives, but the materials of which it is constructed. Some of them are very beautiful, the bottle being encased in silver or gold filigree, the mouthpieces of real amber, often jeweled, etc. But the $5.00 pipe gives you precisely the same kind of a smoke as the $5000 pipe.

Now a word about tobacco for these pipes: Ordinary tobacco can not be used successfully. I used such a pipe for some years, in Tangier, and only other tobaccos could be used. I always used the Persian leaf, which is stronger than the Rock of Gibraltar. Such tobacco has to be washed before being smoked. You take a handful of the leaf, crush it up and slowly pour at least a quart of water upon it as you hold it, squeezing constantly as you would a sponge. At first the water which runs off is almost black. Gradually this lightens until it is almost clear. Then the tobacco should be squeezed dry, packed into the pipe bowl with care, so that it will be neither too loose nor too tight to burn well.

The smoker must now have available glowing charcoal (usually served by an attendant). This small lump of fire is carefully deposited on the tobacco in the center of the pipe bowl and the smoking begins. The charcoal must be replaced by hotter pieces from time to time in order to keep the pipe working successfully. That is the regulation water pipe smoke. Some of the milder tobaccos are smokable without washing and without charcoal fire; merely lighting with a match, but it is very difficult to keep the hubble-bubble going with that kind of tobacco, because one can not smoke it rapidly enough to keep the tobacco ignited.

You must understand that in the smoking of the water-pipe you do not "drink" the smoke in the same way that you do in an ordinary pipe, but inhale it directly into the lungs. With the ordinary pipe, cigar or cigarette, one first fills one's mouth and then does the inhaling; but with the water-pipe you inhale directly into the lungs with no intermediate inhalation. This means that you get one hundred per cent. kick from the tobacco and that three or four inhalations—of the Persian tobacco at least—is quite sufficient for some little time. The first time I smoked a water-pipe I nearly fell off the balcony at the third inhalation. But it may be said of it, "It satisfies".

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. DO NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

A Complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

THE TRAIL AHEAD

The next issue of
ADVENTURE
November 15th

CIPHERS in sheet music, in innocent appearing photographs, in quinine capsules and the petals of flowers—Captain Fox Elton, of the Military Intelligence, had solved them without difficulty. But now came the most mysterious message of all.

The HOUSE ON RUE CARNOT

By ARED WHITE

And—Other Good Stories

WOLF BAIT, a powerful complete novel of an English nobleman who came to the sunburnt West, by WILLIAM WEST WINTER; IN RUSSIAN WATERS, a story of the Arctic ice fields, by R. W. ALEXANDER; CHOCO STORY, adventures in the wild marsh country of Colombia, by GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES; THE FARING FORTH, a glamourous tale of the Crusades, by HAROLD LAMB; TIGER EYE, a novelette of a nesters' war, by B. M. BOWER; HELL QUENCHERS, a story of the Texas gushers, by FOSTER-HARRIS; THE BUCKO SERGEANT, a story of the Northwest Mounted, by JOHN BEAMES; and another splendid instalment of THE INVISIBLE GUNS OF KABUL, a novel of Khyber Pass, by TALBOT MUNDY.

Your *face* knows it's winter..

And so does your Gillette Blade, for it has extra work to do

THE biting winds of winter contract your skin, make it rough—hard to shave. Your razor then has a far more difficult job to do than it has in summer.

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Because your smooth, sure Gillette Blade never changes, under *any* conditions. It can't. Machines, accurate to one ten-thousandth of an inch, ensure its even precision.

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You may not wear the same face in November that you do in May, but count on Gillette Blades to shave you smoothly, swiftly, surely. They keep your face feeling young, and looking it. Gillette Safety Razor Co., Boston, U. S. A.

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