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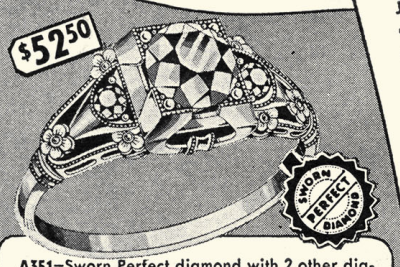

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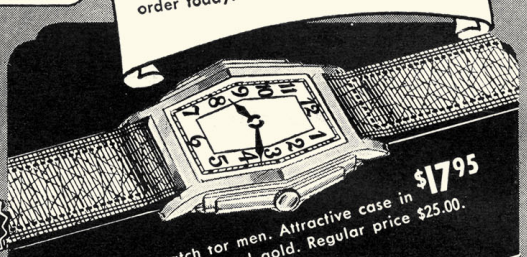

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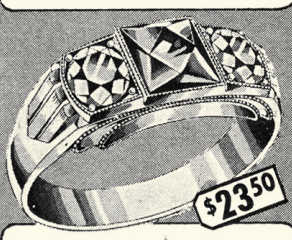

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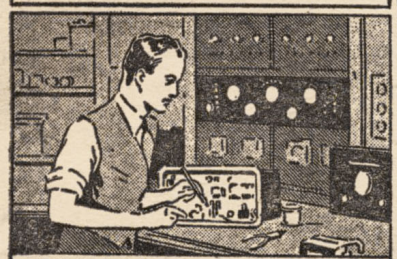
"The training National Radio Institute gave me was so practical I was soon ready to make $5, $10, $15 a week in spare time servicing Radio sets."



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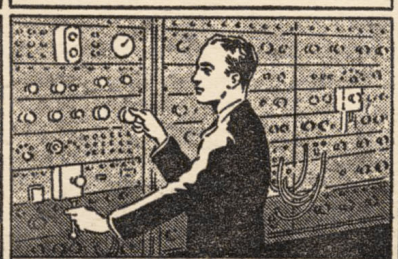

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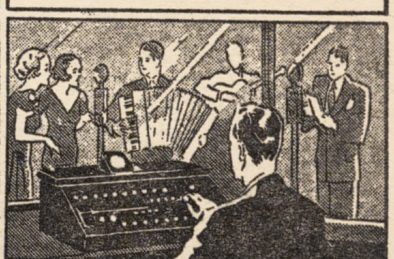

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Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

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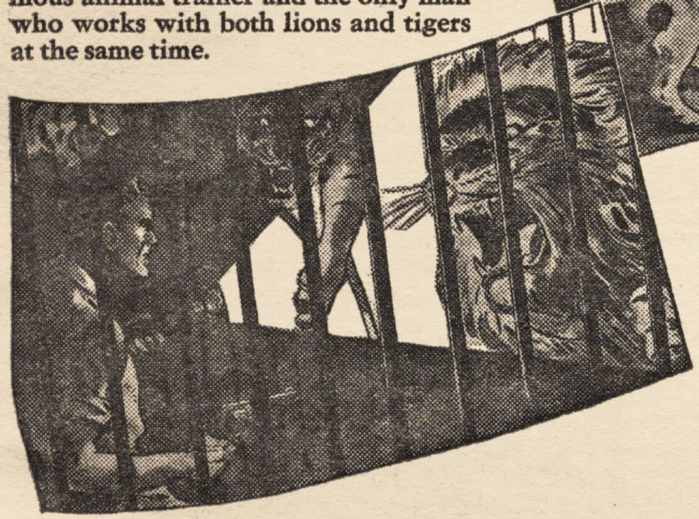
"MURDEROUS 'JUNGLE-FEVER' WAS IN THEIR EYES"

CLYDE BEATTY, CAGED WITH SNARLING JUNGLE CATS, FACES BLACKEST MOMENT OF DEATH-DEFYING CAREER

1 "It was one of those days when you know something's going to happen," writes Clyde Beatty, world-famous animal trainer and the only man who works with both lions and tigers at the same time.



2 "The animals had been sullen during the matinee. They came tumbling into the big cage for the evening performance with that murderous 'jungle-fever' still in their eyes, squalling, spitting and making passes. If they once drew blood it would be just too bad!

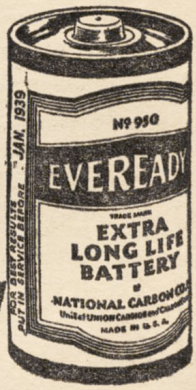
"And then, with that cage full of mixed cats raging at me and each other ...the lights went out!

3 "In the flicker of an eyelash the huge, glaring big-top went dead black! In the dark the snarls of the beasts sounded twice as loud. Green eyes glowed. In an instant they would leap for me!

"I jumped back, pressed hard against the steel bars of the cage. I whipped out my flashlight, flung the beam square in the startled face of the nearest cat, then gave it to another and another.

4 "In a moment (a mighty long moment), the trouble was repaired, the lights flashed on again and a tremendous sigh rose from the crowd. I was still alive. The power of *fresh* DATED 'Eveready' batteries had held at bay the fury of the jungle!

(Signed) Clyde Beatty"



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LOST TRAILS

Hans A. Schnell, 253 Cumberland St., Brooklyn, wants word of his brother Fred Schnell, last known address Middlesex Hospital, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Gilbert Thompson, about 43, Swede, former member of Medical Corps 89th Division during 1917-1918. Last heard of he was living in Cloquet, Minn., in 1925. Anyone knowing of him please write to James C. McKinney, CO. 3855 C.C.C., Groveland, Calif.

Anyone who was in the 4th Casual Company, Camp Lewis, Washington, please write to Clarence Parker, Gerber, California.

James P. FitzGerald, serving about the *U.S.S. West Virginia* in 1933, write to K. Downes, 231 George St., Peterboro, Canada.

Information desired regarding James Conroy Kennedy, originally from Wisconsin, last heard from in 1929 while working on construction project near Barranquilla, Colombia, S.A.—A. Kennedy, 2209 Barnard St., Savannah, Ga.

Wanted: Address of Alfred Willy, who was at Los Zanos, Philippine Islands, in 1915, Alfred W. Southwick, 78 Burnside Avenue, Newport, R. I.

Emile Cuschina, of San Jose, California, get in touch with old friend Bill Gianella, Marysville, Calif.

Wanted—word from Otto Meyne, formerly Battery D, 7th Field Artillery, Madison Barracks, N. Y. Nevin Hayes, 1012 Wood St., Wilkinsburg, Pa.

John V. Gatton, now 27, last heard from leaving Joplin, Mo., for New Orleans, in 1931. Notify mother, Mrs. Ida Gatton, Danvers, Montana.

Word wanted of Jack Oliver Hanlon, who left his home in Seattle, Wash., Oct. 23, 1932, and was a regular reader of Adventure. Notify his mother, Mrs. W. F. Hanlon, 2321 Fairview No., Seattle, Wash.

I would like to get in touch with Edwin P. Ford, ex-marine, *U.S.S. New Mexico*. Believe him to be in Baltimore, Maryland. H. C. Price, Route 1, Box 380, Modesto, California.

Duane William Peterson, was last heard from in Fort Bayard, New Mexico. Was formerly with Coast Artillery Corps—7th, Fort Scott, San Francisco. Mrs. Justina Rennie Cranz, 6298 Del Valle Drive, Los Angeles, California, wishes words of him.

S. F. Wilson, U. S. Navy, would like to know the whereabout of Harvey Ingersoll last heard of living at 509 Ganson Street, Jackson, Michigan. Write to him at 5529 Cranshaw, Detroit, Michigan, or U.S.S. Bridge, Mare Island, California.

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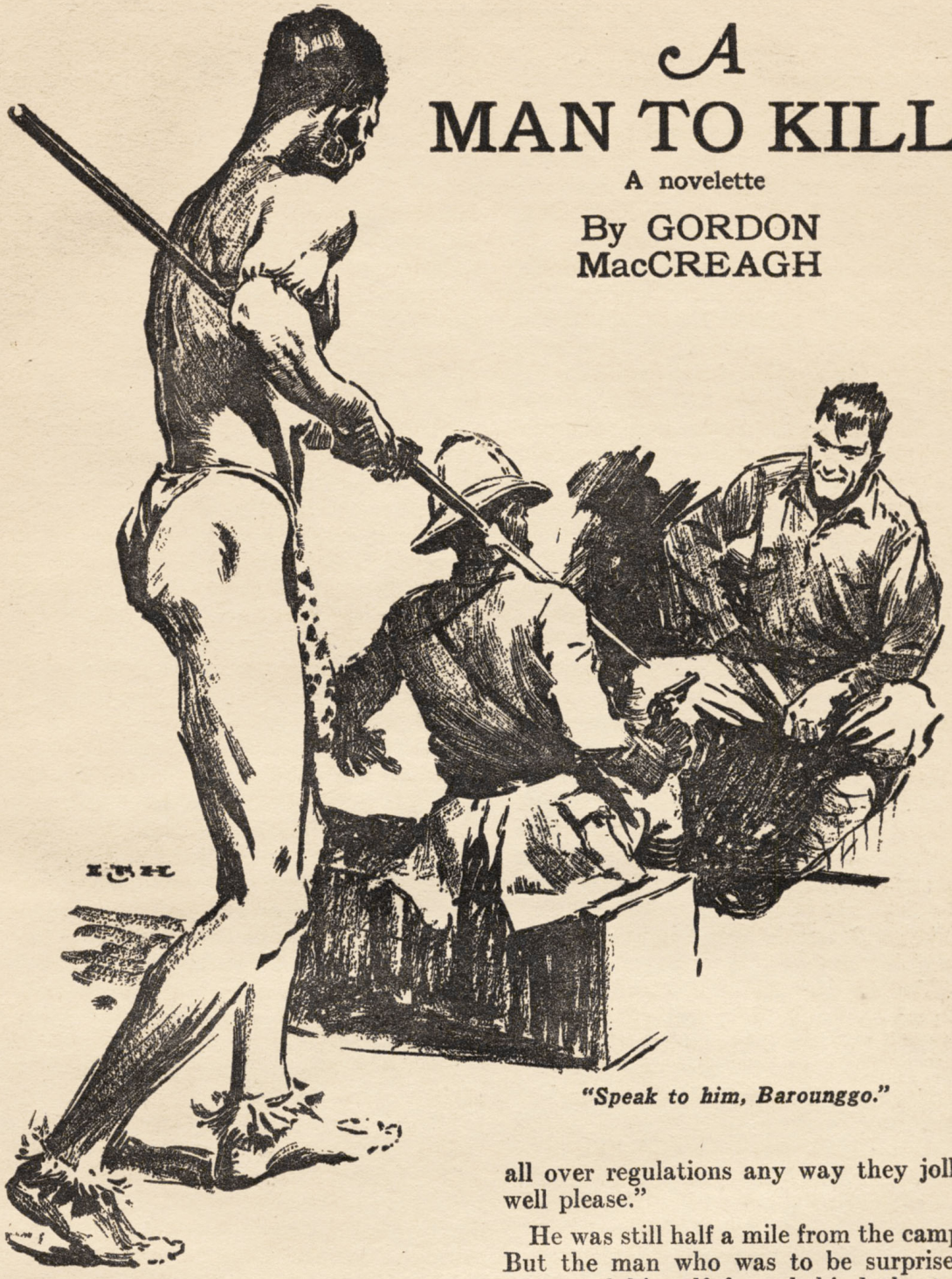
A MAN TO KILL

A novelette

By GORDON MacCREAGH



"Speak to him, Barounggo."

CAPT. HAWKS of His Majesty's East African police strode very determinedly towards the little camp under the shade of the flat, umbrella-top acacias. He was hot under the collar for reasons more than the slanting sun, and he swore as he stumbled over the stiff bunch grass tussocks.

"Give this blasted foreigner a healthy surprise. Can't let 'em come trampling all over regulations any way they jolly well please."

He was still half a mile from the camp. But the man who was to be surprised separated himself from behind the tan and brown broken sunlight of a mimosa trunk and grinned most amiably at the officer. A tall, hard figure and rangy. Sun tanned and khaki clad, he looked as though he might have been carved out of a tough length of that same tree trunk and jointed together with steel wires. He said: "Ah! Come on into the camp, Sergeant, and sit. Been expecting you for three days. You're just in time. I'm

sort of figuring to shoot a man this night, and I'd like for you to be a witness."

Thin wrinkles that narrowed the man's eyes progressed into twin deep grooves to restrict the spread of his lips and extended on down to cut the lean grimness of his jaw.

Captain Hawkes was too suddenly taken back even to unbutton the flap of his pistol holster that regulations prescribed to be carried—a little ineffectually for a quick draw—snug on the right side of the tight belt. But he was just as grim as the other, and very precise. Captain, late of the 72nd Punjabis; sergeant now of the police; but the military precision stuck; not only in the stiff carriage and trim mustache, but in the neat uniform, cut by an English tailor, precisely buttoned and belted—and very hot.

Ex-Capt. Hawkes of the Punjabis was very new in the East African police, and very impatient with the easy going methods of some of the old-timers. But all his military experience had left him incapable of contemplating the possibility of ever having actually to use his gun. The majesty of the law was with him in a land where the Law was something that white men knew to have teeth in it.

The tall man's grin, however, was remaining amiable.

"C'm on in," he said, "and let me give you a drink. It's pretty hot walking until the sun drops below the scrub line."

Determined Sergeant Hawkes was, but not unnecessarily hostile.

"Well, I'll do that," he said. "I'll take your drink; but I'm warning you, you'll do no shooting for a while. I'm arresting you for shooting that elephant."

"Oh! About that elephant?" The man's hard grin remained as though it had been carved in to stay.

An enormous black man heaved himself up from his hunkers in front of the tent and threw off the blanket that Africans *will* wear whenever doing nothing.

Splendidly naked, the man wore only a leopard-skin apron and fringed garters of monkey hair flowing from little spurs at elbow and knee. He saluted with a spear that had a blade nearly three feet long.

"By Jove!" Sergeant Hawkes' hard eyes bored keenly at the formidable shape. "What kind of a native is that?" Hawkes' speech was no indication of sissiness; it was just his heritage of a military aristocracy.

"Masai. An *Elmorani wa-simba-muuwaji.*"

"An *elmor*—what?"

"Meaning he's killed his lion single-handed with a spear."

"Hmfh! And—good Lord! What's this one?" The sergeant's eyes were adjusting themselves to the sudden dimness of the tent after the blinding sun. "This fellow a trained monkey or something? Not a pigmy, is he? They tell me you can't make servants of those chaps. Sort of a freak show you have here, Mr.—er—what?"

"Hottentot. And as smart as the other is savage. And the name, Sergeant, is King."

THERE were officers in Africa who would have stopped to do a lot of thinking. But that name meant nothing to Sergeant Hawkes. He swilled his drink around in the glass and looked through its murky flatness as though it were the rarest of wine—it was lemon, squeezed into the lukewarm melange of liquids that comes from a water hole where animals drink.

"Aa-ah!" The sergeant gulped the half of it.

"People call me Kingi Bwana."

The sergeant gulped the remaining half. "Aa-ah! That was a life-saver. And I'll have another of the same, if you don't mind. Almost sorry to have to take you in, Mr. King."

King said only: "I'm beginning to suspect, Sarge, you're sort o' new in the country."

The Hottentot was smart enough to know all the symptoms. Another drink was waiting.

"New here," Hawkes admitted cheerfully. "But experienced enough to know how to tap you on the shoulder and warn you that anything you say may be used against you."

King was just as cheerful. "We'll come to that later. For the present there's more important things, like this man that I think I'll have to shoot."

Hawkes could see the humor of that. "Ha-ha! You bally Yankees, I understand, have an idea that you can spoof your way out of getting what you call a ticket, eh? Not with us, Mr. King. You can't go shooting an elephant in a British colony without a license and not have us jump you. I'd have been here even sooner if the dashed plane hadn't set me down at the wrong camp.'

"When you're older in the country," King grinned, "you won't try to spoof me with that kind of yarn. Bush telegraph reported three days ago that you were coming to look into the disappearance of Ogilvie."

"Bush telegraph? Dash it all, my dear sir, you don't swallow that, do you? Though some of the old-timers at H.Q.— What do you know about Ogilvie?"

"Ogilvie was a very good friend of mine. Pulled me out of a fuss with a lion once, and got himself clawed close to the limit. A whole white man, Ogilvie. I just heard about him. Been away myself for a couple of years—up in this mess that's Italian Ethiopia these days."

"Ethiopia? Then that means you've come without a passport too. Damn it, Mr. King, some of you foreign blighters just don't seem to realize that international boundaries are serious things nowadays, and the Law is— This is a lot more serious than just an unlicensed elephant."

"A whole lot more serious. Like this man I'm telling you about that I want you to be witness when I—"

"Don't play the fool, Mr. King." Sergeant Hawkes' patience was used up. "I'm sorry, but I've got to arrest you."

KING still grinned and lounged his length on a chop box over his cot. The sergeant sat on a similar chop box at the tent flap.

"Well, all right then," King said. "Let's be serious. What are you going to arrest me with?"

"What I'm going to—" The significance of the insinuation required some time to take hold. He stared at King. Then, "Oh, well, if you put it that way—" Not very expertly he unbuttoned the flap of his holster and produced the service revolver. "I'm sorry you make me do it this way."

The grin remained confident on King's face.

"Now I'd say," he told the sergeant judicially, "you're a pretty good type of athletic Britisher. You've played a lot of polo in your military service, and you've shot tigers in India. All in all, you're probably a good man with a rifle. But your regulations never teach you fellows anything about small gun play. You're slow as glaciers."

Sergeant Hawkes said: "You can't fool me, my good man, by looking over my head, behind me. I know about that trick."

King said: "Speak to him, Barounggo."

"Haya!" A great voice boomed over the sergeant's head and cool metal touched his neck. The flat of it slid along his skin until a foot of spear blade stood out under his chin, where he could see it without dropping his eyes from King's.

"And even if I didn't have him—" King said. "Look, I'll show you something about guns." He made a blurred movement to his shirt front, under his arm, and the sergeant was looking at a flat little blue automatic. "I'll bet you wouldn't even have frisked me for this. You fellows rely a heap too much on the majesty of your law—and you're a long way away from it just now." He laughed and threw the automatic onto the camp table. "Come on, Sergeant, I'm not fighting the British Colonial Empire. I got more important things to do this night. Put up your gun and call it even—until tomorrow, and we can argue about elephants again." His gun was shameless.

Sergeant Hawkes was brave enough, but not a fool. He put his regulation revolver on the table.

"You're being a bloody idiot," he said. "And I'm not giving in. I warn you, I'm going to arrest you."

"As inflexible as glaciers," King grinned. "Yeah, your crowd has the

reputation of getting your man, same's your Canadian bunch. So I'll warn you, tomorrow you'll be sending for reinforcements."

"If it takes the British army," Hawkes said curtly. "We'll take you, my dear fellow. Don't you worry."

"Oh, I'm not. By the way, who was it informed you about that elephant business?"

"A native, name of Mosha. I happended to be at Todali outpost, and I had the Port Sudan plane detour me off here."

King nodded, looking narrow-eyed into the hazy nothings of dusk. "Ah, Mosha, was it? So nobody has killed Mosha yet? A good runner, that fellow; a four-day trek for him to Todali. Went to a lot of trouble to inform, didn't he? If old Sarge Rowland had been at Todali, he'd have been wondering about that. I'll be attending to Mosha." He shrugged his wide shoulders out of a dark reminiscence. "But come, come. Darkness deepens, and we have a man to shoot. Your duty as a police officer compels you to come along and stop me. You agree, it's a truce till tomorrow?" His cheerfulness was false. There was a deadly seriousness underneath it.

The sergeant said: "I think the sun's hit you in the head. But I'm coming, of course. And all right—it's half time till tomorrow."

"O. K. Your word on that goes with me. Better maneuver that gun of yours into its case. You'll be needing a rifle. I'll loan you one. You look hard enough to do a fast ten miles yet tonight, even on top of the six or so from that trader camp where the plane dropped you."

"Do twenty, my dear chap, to keep you in sight," Sergeant Hawkes growled.

King gave quick orders. To the Hottentot: "Kaffa, the usual precautions. Only that you will shoot any visitors more than the *askaris* can handle."

The usual precautions meant that Kaffa would perch, apelike, in a tree, from where the surprise value of sudden bullets upon dumb raiding spearmen would be immense.

"Barounggo, the soldier rifle for the Polis *Bwana*. Plant out your night guard, and we go."

THE Masai handed Hawkes a heavy-stocked military rifle and a cartridge pouch and went out to bully his men. King grinned again at the policeman's indignation. "Yes, yes, I know. Your regulation .303, and it's against your regulations that I should have it; but that's the one you'll use best, if you have to—which, Mister, I'm hoping for both of us you won't."

The great Masai was ominously growling at the *askaris*. Eight of them; fine stalwarts. He had picked them and trained them under his own ruthless driving, but he remained ever dissatisfied of their performance. Porters they had been originally, gawky oxen with nothing other than strength to recommend them; and they still carried the loads necessary for King's meager camps and covered distances with them that the ponderous *safaris* of less hardened travelers would never believe. But the contemptuous designation of *wa-pagazi* they had shed, for the Masai had beaten into their beings the miracle of putting spears into their hands and making fighting men of them, *askaris*.

Obediently they were disposing of themselves around the camp fringe as sentries.

Hawkes hazarded the remark, half incredulous: "How long will they stay there after we're out of sight, if a lion comes roaring round? Or the ghosts that these African chappies seem to fear more than anything else?"

"Pity you haven't got the Swahili as yet." King told him. "His last exhortation, I mean. He was telling 'em: 'If trouble comes and the camp suffers, let no man of you be alive when I return'."

"Hmfh! Another ruffian who thinks he's far from the Law. And you're expecting to get trouble?"

"Nope. Excepting to make it. Just being cautious here."

King set a stiff pace into the low hills that were already black against the last purple of the sky. "Got to make time in the open. We'll not have to bother about lion trouble here."

"No? Well, I'm glad you're so certain about lions at night, too."

King chuckled out of the dimness ahead. "I figured they'd be in the back of your mind, and yet you got the guts to tag along anyhow. You'll learn to be a cop yet, soldier. About lions: there's been no game in sight for three days, so they'll be wherever the meat's gone. So we can hike right along here; we'll hit rain forest and wash ravines in those hills, and then we can afford to slow up. The killing isn't due till high of moon."

Sergeant Hawkes was toughly skeptical. "You don't spoof me with that killink talk, my dear man, even if I don't know yet what this madness is."

King's voice came back without the chuckle. "This is Africa. And there's things that a white man's *got* to do in Africa. Come ahead, tough guy."

SERGEANT HAWKES had no immediate comment. This King fellow talked with a cold-blooded callousness that made the possibility of anything serious seem far and improbable. And yet the hardness of that grim face didn't look as though it invented ghost stories. If it laughed, it laughed at the precariousness of life just as it did at the seriousness of official regulations. Damned exasperating, but—

"Blasted efficient sort of a beggar." His conclusion grunted from him as he stumbled along.

"Huh?" said King's tall shadow from ahead.

Hawkes was still thinking. A vague recollection was coming to him of something he had heard.

"Would you be that King fellow who used to be in this country and of whom they said, wherever he was there was trouble?"

"No sirree!" King's voice sounded genuinely alarmed. "Don't let anybody give me that kind of a rep. I'm the Kingi Bwana that was born into the ill luck to be often enough where trouble was. Ask your chief at Nairobi; he'll tell you.

"And then the trouble usually cleared up? By Jove, I'm remembering about some of those stories."

"This one won't." King's voice was suddenly grim and hard. "Not till you dig in and clear it up yourself. I'm telling you, Mister, you've dropped out of the sky into a party."

The moon was showing over the scrub tops now, white and big enough to be blamed for the heat of the night. It helped Sergeant Hawkes a lot. King and the Masai stalked along as though they walked by the feel of the ground underfoot, like elephants, and as silently. Hawkes was sweating a pint per mile. He was glad when King called a breathing halt at the base of a dark rounded boulder that stood incongruously alone, in the middle of the empty rolling grass land.

King mopped his face. The Masai seemed to be as incapable of perspiration as an iron statue.

"If they'd had the decency," King said, "to wait a month, you'd be using a blanket.

"Who are 'they'? What's all this bally lunatic mystery?"

"It's an interesting thing," King said. "Talking about glaciers and you British. How this rock ever got here. This is the edge of the great African rift. Something in the old red hot days went boom and split the continent pretty near in half. There never was a glacier to roll rocks along and leave 'em lying along its front. Yet you'll find things like this every now and then for miles."

"Really, my dear chap, I can't get interested just now," Hawkes grumbled. "What's African geology got to do with a white man crazy in the African night and me following him like a bally ass?" And he added the logical thought: "Why don't I just pot you from behind for a homicidal maniac?"

"Regulations, copper," King derided him. "Your hide-bound Law don't let you. Now in my own country a tough cop would call this a kidnaping and take me in on a stretcher."

"Savages," Hawkes grunted.

"Yeah." King said dryly. "We're going to meet some, and you'll see what savages are like. You'll learn, Britisher, how good is your Law and your regulations at the far ends of 'em. Come ahead. We got to watch that moon for straight shooting."

CHAPTER II

DRUMS OF DEATH

THE rain forest began like a sudden wall. There was no gradual merging of trees into the grass land. A wall of timber stood like an irregular palisade, white in the moonlight, leaving the black shadows of a Dantesque inferno between. But no tangling vines yet. A breeze, gratefully cool, drifted out of the woods.

The Masai lifted his head and sniffed the high air with broad twitching nostrils. You could almost see his ears set forward, animal-wise, to catch vagrant currents of sound. He grunted.

"*I-me-maliki.*

"Means, 'They have commenced the business'," King translated.

"Commenced what?"

"I can't hear it myself yet, but it'll be ju-ju drums."

"Meaning what?"

King's head was turned to catch the sound. Hawkes could not see his face in the shadow, but his voice was as cold and as harsh as a file. "Meaning that a man is going to die this night, pretty horribly. Unless we can stop it—which we can't."

Hawkes' skin suddenly tingled.

"How d'you know anybody is going to die? What I mean, the way you say?"

"I don't absolutely know. Nobody knows for sure about ju-ju, except the devils that's in it. And only the toughest cops butt into it. But me—By God, I *got* to butt in."

King jerked his shoulder to throw his rifle sling from it; automatically, his face drawn in tight lines of thought, he opened his rifle and thumbed the breech to assure himself of a full load. He shrugged his preoccupation from him and tried to talk with the old carelessness. But it was not very convincing.

"Tough enough to tag along, copper?"

"I'm keeping you in sight, Chappie. Don't forget I've arrested you."

"Stiff-necked egg, ain't you. Okay, never mind African geology for just now; you'll get interested in that later. Right now African anthropology is your business. This marks tribal borders. Plains men, like plains animals, won't come in here; because the tree devils, you'll understand, jump on the back of their necks out of the dark."

Hawkes was unconsciously whispering. "By holy Jove! I'll believe 'em. Anything could happen in these shadows."

"Just about anything will." There was mirth in his voice. "These people are Wallegas, two and a half times as primitive as your nomad cattle farmers, and that's saying plenty of words."

With the trees the terrain changed as though heaved out of the plain by the thrust of giant roots. As suddenly as the tree fringe, there was a ridge of shale rock, and beyond it rising ground, and, cut by the rain into the rising ground, little gullies. Later, deep and darkly impenetrable ravines.

The Masai, flitting in advance from shadow to shadow, like some great ogre, peered into the yawning crevasses, lay on his belly to sniff into them for local whiffs of the things that die in African gullies. Uncannily, using all the animal senses that supplement vision in the dark, he remembered locations that he had traversed before, whether it would be practical to climb down the steep sides and up again without breaking a limb or whether one would have to skirt the edges to find a better place. Sometimes the better place would not be for a mile.

Fitful gusts of air carried the growl of the drums, throbbing to crescendo waves, and carried them away again till you could not know whether you still heard drums or whether the insects of the night jungle had been hypnotized by the impelling repetition to buzz and thrum in the same diabolical vibration. But enough of the persistent cadences came over.

"Yeah," King breathed. "That beat means a killing for this night at top moon. C'm on."

THE Masai felt and snuffled his way through a dark terrain growing ever steeper and craggier, until the throb of the drums prevaded the air all about

them, thrown back and sublimated by rocky echoes so that there was no longer any conception of direction.

The vibration was a live thing in the air, a thing to be felt on the skin as well as heard. The repetition of its rhythm fairly beat into a man's senses. It was all new to Hawkes, and a little frightening. He whispered his feeling.

"I've heard Hindu drumming in India, and that can be sort of intoxicating. But this—I can jolly well imagine how this would whip up a man to any bloody madness."

"Yeah," King said. "There's all the devils of old Africa in this. And African devils live on blood, red and hot."

The Masai climbed a steep rise to peer over, a grotesque, gorilloid shadow, spread-eagled in a moonlit patch. He turned and beckoned the white men on.

They scrambled up, and as their heads topped the rise the thunder of drums hit them like gunfire. Hawkes' impulse was to duck.

King laughed harshly. "It may yet be just as dangerous." And to the Masai: "Good work, Barounggo. There will be a stick of tobacco upon our return, if—

A black ravine fell away before them—they could not tell how deep. But intermittently, between waves of drumming, they could hear running water, quite far down.

Across the ravine, at a height almost directly across from them, on what seemed to be a wide shelf, a great fire blazed. From the recesses of solid shadow around it the drums roared out.

But King was not looking at that just now. He was peering into the ravine, listening to the water. Dubiously he muttered: "It may be a life-saver yet. Deep and steep, and hell dark. Ought to give us a good ten minutes start, maybe fifteen." And, stubbornly: "Damn, a good man ought to be able to run away from all Africa with fifteen minutes start." He drove his elbow at Hawkes. "Look there, copper. There's something that your Law never sees—And the moon, like I said, is just about overhead."

Hawkes, of course, had looked over there first of all; but, not knowing what to look for, he had understood nothing of the devil doings. His attention had wandered back to King's mutterings. He could sense tension in the air, but not the closeness of death. He did not know that, all unconsciously, he was trying to emulate King's coldly callous approach to impending violence.

"Macabre sort of setting, isn't it, old man? What's it all about, and what mad thing are you proposing to do?"

"Propose to shoot into a full moon ju-ju and then see how fast we can all of us run." King shoved his hard-set chin out across the ravine. "Look over there. Hell, what else can we do?"

ACROSS the pit of the ravine, as it might be in a far amphitheater, the great fire burned a yellow circle out of the crowding shadows. Posturing shapes flitted intermittently before it in black silhouette. An endless line of them, leaping high, bending low to crawl belly flat, in all the African conceptions of deviltry.

Far enough to be flattened and silenced by distance, it looked like something unreal, like a filmed representation of hell. Only that the wind brought the ceaseless waves of the drums, thundering and ebbing; and with their ebb came hoarse, horrid screams.

"There? D'you see it?" King gripped Hawkes' arm; his voice was as thin and tense as a plucked wire.

"By Jove! What kind of business is it?"

"You don't see it. Watch over the fire as the drums let down. That's so they can enjoy the shrieking."

The drum waves ebbed again, and Hawkes saw now a frame that looked like a cross; a thing that staggered drunkenly on insecure footing and threw an unholy lurching shadow on the ruddy back-drop of fire-lit trees. Its fitful movements seemed to be controlled by men who raised and lowered it with ropes.

It lowered with a hellish deliberation over the fire again, and in the bright glow Hawkes could see now a darker blot attached to it that screeched horribly.

"By God!" It's—" Hawkes' voice caught in his throat. Studied casualness was gone. "Is it a man?"

"That one," said King, "will be Ogilvie's head boy!"

"Good God! How d'you know? Why—what hellish thing is happening?"

King's voice seemed to Hawkes incredibly cold and deliberate.

"Head boy was a mission convert. The cross is just African humor."

Hawkes had no such cold-blooded hesitation. He swung his body over the lip of the ravine. "We can get there in time to stop it."

King grabbed his sleeve and dragged him back.

"You can't. Nobody can. There's a thousand black men there, drunk with drums and the *madawa* drug, all howling blood-mad."

"But good Lord—"

"There's no good Lord in African ju-ju. I've seen one of you nervy Britishers walk into a native village single-handed and drag your man out by the ear—in daylight. But there's nobody can fool with a ju-ju crowd on their own mad night."

"Then—what can we do?"

"So I figured," King said, very coldly and very methodically, "I'd have to shoot him at long range. I wanted you along as a witness. And if we can get clear with our own skins afterwards, that'll be our good luck.

Hawkes stared at him.

"Or maybe you had better," King said. "You're an officer."

Hawkes' eyes were big. They stayed fixed, as though glassy with death themselves.

King's cold deliberation broke. He flared out at the policeman: "Man, d' you have to debate the question while they torture him?"

Hawkes voice croaked at last from his throat.

"I couldn't do it."

"Damn your regulations!" King snarled at him. "The hell with anything that's so hidebound that—"

Hawkes flared back at him: "Ah, shut your dashed Yankee yelping. I'd do it in a minute. Only I couldn't. Of course it's justified. But—darkness, distance, an' all. We can't sit here taking pot shots at the poor devil. How much time would that mob give us?"

King glowered at him. The Masai spat out into the darkness: "These be an ape people, for only the rock baboons delight in doing hurt. Slaying indeed is a little thing. I in my time have—"

"Peace, slaughterer!" King told him; and with that he got a grip again on his nerves. "Okay, Britisher. If you got the guts to make your own where your Law don't reach— What'd you make the range?"

Again Hawkes was staring at him. "You mean you'll—Good Lord, it'll be incredible shooting! All of six hundred."

King shook his head. "Four-fifty—hope to God."

He lifted his rifle to his ear and listened while he clicked the Lyman sight to that elevation. "And you're a witness. There's a smart voodoo chief over there would send a hundred blacks to swear to murder; and I've seen your impartial British justice hang a white man on less evidence."

He shuffled to find a place where he could lie prone on his belly. The thunder of the drums ebbed and awful shrieks floated across the black ravine.

Hawkes' breath shivered in his throat. "Hurry up, man."

BUT King was chillingly slow in making sure. He took a little vial from his pocket and dabbed a spot of luminous paint on his front sight. "Going to be damned little time for miss and try again. Barounggo, old night watcher, how far say you?"

The Masai's opinion had no hesitation. "A distance that I can run while the gray crane cries twelve times."

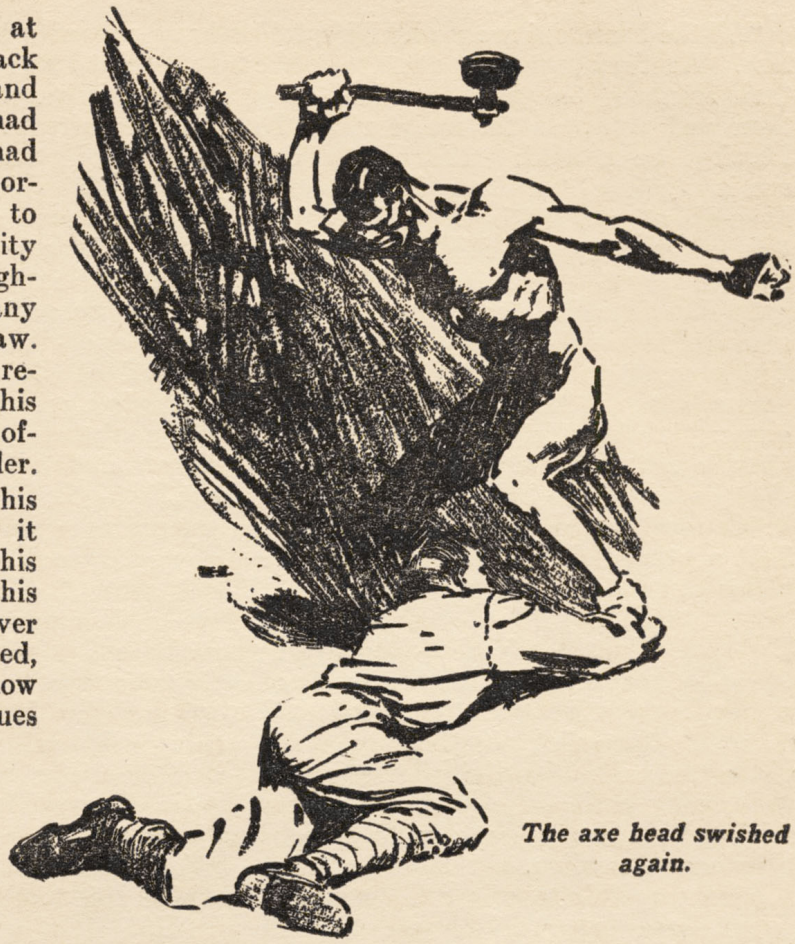
"And that's as good as a clock." King muttered into his rifle butt. "He makes it four hundred. But he always thinks he can run faster'n anybody else. I'll stick to four-fifty."

He composed himself rigid to wait through the drumming thunder until it would ebb and the grisly cross would descend once more over the fire's light. Hawkes' eyes strained out towards the far leaping devil forms and he held his breath as tense as though it was he who aimed. Taut and ready to snap. Minutes!

He had aimed a rifle at men before now—at black men and brown men and white men. But that had been different; that had been duty, patriotism, orders from his country to kill. The responsibility came down from the highest, spread over many shoulders. That was Law. Here he felt that the responsibility lay on his shoulders alone. He, an officer, was giving the order.

Hours! He held his breath. He could hold it not one more throb of his pulse that pounded in his ears. The cross dipped over the blaze that crouched, waiting for it, and now sent long red devil tongues out to lick at it. The agonized shriek came over the ravine. And King fired.

The shriek cut mercifully off. The drums muttered on; their beaters had heard nothing.



The axe head swished again.

The cross dipped into the licking lips of the flame and staggered upwards again, as though its own tendons were seared to distortion. And then, at the lack of its shrieking response, a confused yelling began.

It swelled in volume to howl down the crescendo of the drums; to spread until it seemed that the whole further hillside was howling surprise and rage out of its infernal shadows.

"Golly, what luck!" King heaved himself to his feet. "Jump now, copper, while the going's dark and bad. Hear 'em! There must be two-three thousand. And thank Pete for this good black ravine. Damned if I don't think we'll get clear."

It was a mad and bruising race down the black hillside. Into gullies, along their rocky bottoms, out where the going seemed better. The first fifteen minutes of it with not a sound of pursuit.

"Could it be," Hawkes panted, "that the sudden miracle of that shot has scared the swine?"

"Wait," King said. "I mean, come on."

In a little while there was no possibility of hopeful guessing. A wave of brute howling came down the wind as the first hunters climbed the lip of the ravine that had blanketed all sound. More howling all along a wide line as others topped the rise.

"That's a good fifteen minutes start." King grunted. "More'n I hoped. And as long as we don't make too much racket they won't know any better'n general direction in the dark—and they'll scatter to cover a wide front."

The Masai cursed the complicated oaths of his kind. "May hyenas dig up my forebears. *Bwana*. This is disgrace to melt a spear. Never have I fled from apes before. May sewage run in my veins. Here, *Bwana*, is a good place to stop and give battle."

"All the Elmorani are mad," King told him. "As they must be ever to make their manhood test against a lion. Stay thou and fight. As for me, I run." To Hawkes he panted: "It's plenty I've run in my time, and plenty it'll be again. How about you, Britisher? What about this ballyhoo that a British soldier never runs?"

In King's ability to mock again at sacred things was a comforting indication, now, of escape. But Hawkes could see no humor in it. He grunted, between gasps: "It's been in history, Yank, that they've run. But never, by God, that they haven't come back."

"Chances look now like you'll live to fight another day, if we once make the plains country."

AND reach the open plains they did, though the howls of the wide-spread pack followed them right to the black edge of the tree belt. Plentifully bruised they were, with their faces and bare knees slashed by springy branches to copious bleeding. But alive.

King was able to grin once more between huge breaths. "Phe-e-ew! Ain't run that much since me and some Ethiops chased the Eyetalian army at Shebbeli. We can let up a bit now. Those monkeys won't know but what some good herdsmen might be laying for 'em in this territory. Thank Pete, I've said more'n once, for hereditary enmities—which your holy government knows about, too, and plays both ways across the board."

Hawkes remained sturdily dense to levity.

"My government knows enough," he growled, "to jump very fast on that sort of deviltry."

"That's talkin', copper. And, come camp, I hope your conscience'll let you sleep as well as I will. I'm telling you, fella, we've had us a day."

For all of which, long after Hawkes had flung himself onto King's camp cot and dozed into nightmares, they kept waking him up to hear King prowling outside amongst his *askari* sentries.

"So it's not so dashed safe as you like to make out," he murmured out of his hazy exhaustion when King's dark silhouette stooped under the tent flap.

"Just being cautious," King told him. "Just a mite careful."

In the morning Hawkes was profuse with his apologies. "Dash it all, old man, I slept in your cot all night, while you —I don't know—'pon my word, I was so tuckered that I didn't know what—"

King was astoundingly cheerful this bright morning. "In my country," he grinned at Hawkes, "a cop never explains to a prisoner. Today is tomorrow, and you're arresting me for crimes—elephants and unlawful entries and what not."

Hawkes remained stolid. "You said it yourself, Yank. That will come later, rest assured. There are more important things just now. I've jolly well got to go back and teach that voodoo chief a thing or two."

King chuckled. "But there was something else I said: Today you'll be sending for reinforcements."

Hawkes scowled at him and drummed his fingernails against his front teeth. "You mean, I couldn't—*we* couldn't snaffle this blighter together?"

"Ho? It's we, is it? You figurin', copper, I aim to shove my face into that mess again?"

For the first time Hawkes grinned at him. "You know dashed well, you ungodly bounder, I couldn't shove you out of it."

King's grin was as hard and as bleak as ever, because the contours of his face were that way; but there was just a shade of difference to it. He was genuinely pleased.

"Well, now!" he said.

"But I'm not condoning the other things." Hawkes could remain impartially friendly about that. "I've got to uphold the Law, old man."

Impiousness came back to King's grin. "Inflexible is the word, ain't it. Well, set and let's coffee up and I'll tell you about it. And first lemme tell you for a treat that this Hottentot makes *coffee*. Times are, I almost figure the mission laid on me by the Lord is to travel around Africa and let my Hottentot teach you Britishers how to brew a real drink."

HE SAT on his chop box and breathed in the aroma of a brew that even Hawkes admitted was not so bad. King lit his pipe and fired a didactic finger at Hawkes like a gun.

"Now listen. I've seen British guts pull off some hair-raisin' things in Africa. But you're up against a tough layout here. These Wallegas are pretty far on the edge of things, and they don't know so much about the old British Lion."

"It's time they were taught."

"Time and past. But look. That village is ju-ju headquarters. There'll be, judging from the spread of last night's yelping, a couple of thousand tribesmen gathered from around the hills; and that's a little more'n just prestige can handle. These Wallegas are some different from your tame Kavirondos and Wakambas and all these plains fellows."

"Well then," Hawkes said doggedly, "if it takes the British army."

"Good old Pax Britannica. But the old British army, as you won't admit, but everybody else knows, takes as long a time to get moving as a steam roller."

"But it keeps moving ahead." Hawkes defended instantly.

"Granted, most of the time. But you can't go ponderously official here. There's complications."

"What complications? The thing, in the long run, is a simple case of law enforcement. These swine have committed a brutal crime; they must be taught their lesson."

"And damn well will be." King's agreement was suddenly grimly vengeful. "But listen. Ju-ju runs in threes. Too deep for me to know just why; but there's a scientific sharp I know is writing a whole book, "The Persistence of the Trinity Theory in African Theomorphy", which is a whole mouthful of words. But it means that three nights from now, or mid-moon of the last quarter, another jamboree is due."

Hawkes sat looking at King with widening eyes, nervously turning the tip of his trim mustache.

"And Ogilvie had two other servants! Loyal British subjects!"

"Good God!" Hawkes remained frozen; only his finger tips twisted with a tiny grating sound on his mustache tip.

King leaned over the little camp table, firing a fierce question that crackled like fast shooting.

"You got the guts, copper, to swing your own bat, hard and fast? Take a responsibility on your own?"

Hawkes stared at the pointing finger, as though held up by it to deliver all he had. He began to nod. Slowly at first, then doggedly.

"Yes, I— Dammit, by George, of course. That's what white officers are for, to take responsibility when higher orders are not available."

"Good lad. What's the best you can do in three days?"

It was an ultimatum as suddenly shocking as a death sentence.

Hawkes considered it, drumming his nails on his teeth. "I've got two native constables at the Todali outpost."

King cursed the meagerness of the colonial system. "Two men to look after a district as big as Texas! But—" He began to nod, too, in dour disgust. "Your two and my eight *askaris* makes ten. The Masai is as good as five. The Hottentot can shoot pretty well, and a couple of the *askaris* know how to bang off a gun."

It all sounded utterly mad. A handful against a tribe. But black men led by white prestige had accomplished miracles in Africa before.

"Look. Flag down that return plane and write a noteful of all the authority you got. Order him to heave out mail and bring back your two cops; and tell him to heave out more mail and bring spare guns and all the old uniforms in the locker. If they don't fit the size of my men, it don't matter. We'll rip 'em up the back and tie 'em on. Uniforms carry an awful punch of authority."

Hawkes was being carried into the sweep of the dynamic current. "By Jove, that'll be quite an army, what?"

King grinned back at him. Look, now. The plane detoured you. Its track'll be passing about fifty miles east. You sit and pack your letter with dynamite. I'll get the Masai ready to carry it—call his brag about how good he can run. He'll do it all right; and he has sense enough

to tear up sheets and peg out an S.O.S. on the grass where the pilot can't miss it."

CHAPTER III

"OUR BACKS THEY WILL NEVER SEE!"

THREE days was long waiting, when the momentous and only subject of discussion was the madness of raiding a tribe with fourteen men all told. Hawkes, with military precision, wanted to plan a campaign. King scouted the thought.

"What can you plan? There are no rifle pits and trenches and barbed wire to crash through. Bamboo huts and garbage piles, that's an African village. There's no staff headquarters to capture and paralyze the brains of the enemy. All you can plan is surprise—and the jolt of that is worth half their force, because they'll never suspect we'd have the nerve."

"But my dear chap, you've got to tell your men what to do."

King wouldn't listen. "Tell your two. Mine know what to do—jump in and shoot or spear everything they can see as long as they can stand. That's the way the African fights. It takes ten years of drill to make a machine soldier of him."

"But—"

"And I'll tell you this more about Africans that's all to our good. A daylight African is a lot tamer than a midmoon African crazy with ju-ju drums and witch doctory.

"Well, that's something to be jolly well thankful for. Still—"

"And here's something more that counts their numbers down. Between jamborees a lot of 'em will be back in their own villages, getting grub; for the African has never been able to organize a commissariat. And the men left in this village will be getting over their ju-ju drug; it'll take long minutes to soak into their thick heads just what's happening. Surprise. That's the only thing we can plan. Surprise 'em at hot noon and sock 'em."

Hawkes laughed with an excitement that was mounting, perforce, to the reckless. "Dashed if I don't think we can make a go of it, old man."

"Hell!" said King. "They'll be a bare five hundred of 'em."

Hawkes' precise training still had worries. "D' you think your Masai boy made the fifty run in time? D' you think the plane spotted his S.O.S.? D' you think—"

"What you got to worry about is whether the pilot accepted your order."

"Oh, he'll do that. My word, I made it strong."

AND the pilot did. With dusk of the third day two native constables tramped in, loaded down with guns and clothing like a pair of junk men and complaining in thick-lipped half English about their dignity as soldiers being ruined by the disgrace of porterage.

They brought a note from the pilot. Typically British. "Sorry I couldn't drop your johnnies any nearer, old man. No possible landing terrain. Wish I could come with you on your binge. Luck."

Hawkes could still find incompleted details. "What about the Masai getting back? Fifty and back is a lot of foot slog."

"He'll be back. It's not so much for a good runner." King grinned with tight lips. "By the same token friend elephant-informer Mosha will be home in time for the killing that's been due him these couple of years."

The Masai came in sure enough, some time during the night, and, iron man that he was, he was up and haranguing his *askaris* with the dawn. It was a long speech, full of grandiloquent brag about his own past exploits that must be a shining example to them, and of blood chilling threats of his wrath, should they not make it so. The gist of it all, the not-to-be-forgotten ultimum, was:

"You, whom I picked from the jungles as cattle and made into *askaris*, you have beside you two soldiers of the *Bertisi Serkali*. Let no man of you show a lesser killing than they."

The *askaris* yelled and leapt in the air, slapping their buttocks and shadow-fighting their spears.

King chuckled at Hawkes over the

Pistol empty, he smashed his rifle butt.

enameled coffee cups. "You fellows will never do it, of course, but that's the stuff that hits the African in the fighting spot."

Hawkes, of course, was on the immediate defensive. "We manage to do pretty well with our fellows, I think."

"In ten years." King laughed at him. "Yeah, with ten years of drill you can beat a little white man discipline into the African skull. Barounggo has had these lads in hand barely one—and you watch 'em fight, soldier."

Hawkes laughed too. "Hope so, old fellow. We'll need it."

Even the *askaris* were able to laugh. Gripped by that mysterious exhilaration that comes to fighting men about to meet odds, they guffawed at their own grotesque fitting into old uniforms too small for their bulk, ripped and laced with strings. And they made the old boast of soldiers, whatever their color, the world over.

"Let but the fronts be whole, Bwana. Our backs they will never see."

And one ebullient egoist started a scramble for the better garments, announcing confidently: "For each man that I slay I take me one such golden medal of the *Beritisi Serkali* to make me a necklace." He meant the lion and uni-

corn-monogrammed uniform buttons.

"By Jove," Hawkes admired, "they've got the right spirit."

"Yeah." King looked them over critically. "Uniforms. That's one thing you British have done. You've taught Africa that your uniform can't be licked. Let's get going. Take it easy before the day's heat hits the plains, and save our breath for the big rush."

IN THE daylight jungle, Hawkes was continually aghast at the rocky steepness of the gullies they had so precipitately traversed by night.

"With the devil on his tail," King grinned, "a man can do things." But the grin was tightening up on his face. It was a contortion of his lips and eye corners; there was nothing of humor to it.

By daylight one gully could be found leading into another. The raiding party, grimly silent all of them, followed the bottoms. Never on a sky line, never on any ridge where the wind could catch and carry a sound or scent. Running water told them when they were in the big ravine.

"Surprise," King muttered. "And the luck is running with us. Better find the first ford, Barounggo, and keep on their side."

They crept along as silently as animals in bare feet. King, in moccasin-soled Adirondac boots, Hawkes, in regulation hard leather footwear, made an appalling racket over loose stones and rubble; but the wind, of course, filtered down the ravine.

They came to a place where refuse littered the ravine side in an accumulated avalanche of the years, the inevitable signature of an African community. Above them, straggling like a monkey roost along a rock ledge where they could not see it, must be the ju-ju village.

King looked to Hawkes and nodded, pointing up with his eyebrows. All unnecessarily, of course; he did not even know that his own tension was out-functioning his habitual close grip on his emotions. Hawkes whispered:

"Look at their eyes. They've got the spirit, by Jove."

The men's eyes were rolling, showing much white; the eyes that Africans show alike when they are afraid or when they "smell blood." Thick lips, straining apart over big white teeth, showed that these men were not being afraid. They were out to hunt. Whether their game were men or feral beasts they were eager.

"A little up-wind, of course, Barounggo." King said.

Hawkes, remembering some of the rules of hunting feral beasts in India, thought to offer a quick objection.

"Not up-wind, old man; their dogs will smell us and give the whole show away."

King could still grin. "You wanted to plan a strategy of attack. Here's the only strategy. Rush 'em from up-wind and set fire to the first huts. Their own women and brats barging around will raise a confusion that's worth a hundred men."

THE Masai picked his way, as cautious as a hunting leopard, up the ravine slope. So far the good luck of surprise had been with the raiders. But it was expecting too much of fate to hope that such should last.

The Masai was close to the lip of the ledge on which the village nestled, when footsteps slip-slopped along a path. Bovinely heavy-eyed, a scrawny, quite naked black man stumbled along the path. A brute-jawed lout, it was easy to picture him howling delight at a fellow human's torture.

The Masai was at the very edge of the path, his great bulk only half concealed by a bush. The other raiders were close in a straggly line, deploying to jump the lip of the ledge as best they could. Every man's breath froze on the intake.

The tribesman saw none of them. Dull-eyed, he shuffled on. Breaths let go softly. The Masai, moving like a huge cat, rose up in the path behind him and drew back his arm with the great spear blade on a level with his own ear.

A magnificent shape of destruction, he might have been an out-size copy of the javelin thrower done in black granite.

But then the Masai changed his mind. Nobody in Africa knew better than he that it was difficult to spear a man so suddenly dead that there would be no last shriek.

Softly he stooped to lay his spear on the ground and then his legs bunched ready under him; with a short, rushing bound, like a lion springs on an ox, he launched himself at the man.

One great hand clapped over the fellow's mouth, the other found his middle. The man flung arms and legs wide, but not a sound came from his throat. The Masai's lower handhold slid down the man's body to his thighs, and he spread his legs, while his toes searched for a grip on the ground.

He set himself, and then the watching men could see the power of the great fellow swelling into the muscles of his shoulders and back.

Like, M'fumbuli, the great earth spirit of his own savage mythology, he heaved on the man's face and thighs, his own knee in the victim's back; and as M'fumbuli draws force from the earth through his toe tips, the power swelled bigger and knottier into the Masai's muscles. The black boy's limbs writhed hideously; there was a crunching crack, and they writhed no more.

The Masai straightened up and threw the body over the path's steep edge.

"Whau!" his deep voice growled. "That one, perhaps, is one who chased my honor from me the other night."

Over his kill he forgot the need for silence. The body rolled chunkily down the ravine side with a clatter of stones and debris.

A boy's face appeared over the edge of the higher shelf to see what occasioned the noise. It took perceptible seconds for the thought to impinge upon his brain that here was death. Then he yelled shrilly and his face disappeared.

Hawkes' hoarse shout was on his heels. "Mark away! Over the top, men!"

THE rush of men was after him, yelling now, as Africans must. Straggling bamboo huts were before them. All the dogs in Africa seemed to be there, yelling defiance. Sleepy men were ducking out from low doorways, lurching back to grab up spears.

One fellow, less sleepy then the rest, stood before the huts. The Masai, running as well as ever he bragged, outstripped his own racing mob. The fellow lunged a spear at him. The Masai twisted his stomach aside and drove his great spear like a lancer. A foot of the blade stood out behind the fellow's back.

"Ss-ghee!" The Masai hissed his imitation of a spear entering meat and bone. His impetus twisted the fellow round like a top, dragged out the blade, and he raced on.

The raiding mob yelled for blood be-

hind him. It was King who retained presence of mind to stop and set fire to the first hut.

King saw little of that fight. His whole energy was applied to fighting his own way through to find the largest hut in the most favoured location; it, he knew, would house that blood-lusty young juju doctor chief. He fought through a scrambling, howling free-for-all. Black bodies weaving, white eyeballs staring, arms waving, and the whole of Africa yelling.

He passed Hawkes and his twin native constables, all three kneeling with their backs to the wall of a hut. He yelled, "Come on! Get the chief! Nail him to a tree with a spear through his chest, and the rest'll run."

They didn't hear him. They knelt in admirable discipline and fired precise volleys.

King fought on, yelling. The fires he had started fought behind him, roaring and eating up bamboo and thatch.

He found his hut. It was unmistakable. Apart, a thing of mystery and blood, fenced with the clap-trappery of the craft and skull-topped poles.

"If only he's still skulking in there!" King grated hoarsely; and in the same moment, looking at the blackness of the low door, he half hoped that the man might not be there. There was no time for thought. He dived for the opening and squirmed as he rolled, grabbing wide into the dimness for standing legs.

The air swished. An axe head chunked into the hard-stamped earth floor. Missed him! His hands found legs and heaved at them. A bulky body sprawled down on him. Together they rolled. The axe head swished again. King caught an arm. A hand caught his wrist. They rolled. Teeth bit into his neck, like a dog ape's gnawing for the jugular vein. King smashed a fist on its ear. It yelled, spluttteringly through a full mouth, and the teeth let go. They rolled.

"The brute's as strong as a gorilla!"

At dusty dim intervals King could see black silhouettes ducking out through the beehive doorway—women, ululating shrill news of death within.

Not yet. But all to the good, King knew furiously, for the demoralization of the brute's people. The fight was a struggle to determine whether the axe would break free first, or the pistol butt.

As strong as a young gorilla, and with teeth to help. But King had the white man's weapon that the African never understands. At furious intervals he had a spare fist. At furious intervals it hit something.

The axe fell somewhere. The brute howled and pushed away to struggle to its feet. King with it. They wrestled furiously. Clawing hands on King's throat. Big teeth gibbering close to his face. His own hands were on the brute's throat.

They whirled. King's back crashed against the central roof pole of the hut. It felt like a broken spine. King whirled away from it, swinging to retaliate for the maneuver. The brute's head crashed against the pole. Its yelp was a groan and its big body shuddered.

A fury of victory surged through King. Ruthless.

"That much for Ogilvie!" His breath hissed through a bitten lip. Like a hammer thrower, stiff-armed, he whirled his body again and aimed the brute's head at the post.

"You did it, you swine!" The brute's ear thudded squashily on the post and it shuddered enormously.

"You tortured him!" Again King battered the lolling head against the post.

"You burned the grand big heart out of him!" And once more, with all of King's strength at full arm swing. The brute's head went limp on its thick neck and it sounded like a bag of broken crockery.

AND then King knew that the choking smokiness of the hut was not kicked dust but fire roaring in the thatch.

He lurched out into the sunlight; and there were men, his own men, running frantically about, looking for him. Hawkes, too, bleeding but alive.

"Great Scott, old man!" Hawkes had the trained unemotionalism of the British soldier in victory. "You look like you'd been in a dog fight! You're bitten like— Come, let's get out of these blaz-

ing huts. We were thinking you must be down somewhere."

Sanity was coming back to King. "Where's Barounggo and the Hottentot?"

"I saw them around. Come on to a cool spot beyond the village. By golly, what a strafing we gave 'em!"

Beyond the village limits, where the fire would not reach, the Hottentot was binding gashed men with whatever bits of dirty cloth he could find. The Masai appeared, smeared with blood as though he had been painted with it. None of it seemed to be his own. He reported:

"Four of my *askaris* have fought their last fight with much honor. Death is a little thing and is better than life such as these."

He pushed forward two abject things, Ogilvie's servants, yammering still with the terror of the death from which they had been rescued.

The two constables were scratched up, as was Hawkes, but nothing serious.

"Discipline." Hawkes pointed the moral to King.

"Yeah. But I'll bet you my boys got more notches to their spears." King looked back bitterly on the burning village. "That's what hurts 'em. Burn up their pots and blankets; that hurts 'em more'n some dead men."

The rescued servants still groveled in their terror. Among men who had fought and killed and still licked their wounds, they were objects almost of disgust. King could see that Hawkes thought the same.

"Not worth my good four," he told Hawkes. "But—British subjects."

"Yes," Hawkes affirmed soberly. "And must be protected."

King only growled.

"Well," Hawkes said, "it's done. Let's collect prisoners and go."

"Ah! Prisoners!" King turned to the Masai. "What prisoners are there, Barounggo?"

The Masai tapped snuff from a little horn that he carried in his ear lobe and sniffed it hugely. "For myself, *Bwana*," he said, "the fight was too fast to stop and tie up prisoners. I shall ask my *askaris* whether any man fought so poorly as to catch a prisoner."

A little farther down the ledge was the place of the sacrifice. The crude cross still stood, awaiting its next offering. One of the servants screamed.

King, his face set in a hard mask, plowed his boots through the cold ashes, kicking up a cloud of smothering dust. Out of it, expressionless, he picked a charred skull and stared at it. Then methodically he set to wrapping it in his handkerchief.

"Good Lord, old man." Hawkes was shocked at his apparent callousness. "What d'you want that thing for? We have all the evidence we need, with these two men as witnesses."

"The hell with your witnesses," King snarled at him. He finished wrapping the skull, and he very nearly fooled Hawkes with the hardness of his tone.

"I'm no ethnologist. But, looking at it, I'd say this was Ogilvie." He strode on. "And still the job wasn't good enough." He scowled a last bitter look at the smoke of the village, a black plume against the sun. "Come ahead. Let's go."

HE STALKED ahead in silence, fast with long plunging strides. It was not till they were away out on the plain that he was done with his brooding and he shook his black mood from him. Not till he came to the rounded boulder beside which he had once before stopped for a breathing spell. He waited till the rest came up with him, and he was grinning.

"These rocks," he told Hawkes. "About the African geology that I told you you'd become interested in. This long line of 'em at every five miles. It wasn't inflexible glaciers. It was Britishers. Brought 'em here in trucks. They mean, in big loud tones on both sides of 'em, 'No Trespassing'."

Hawkes stared at him before the significance of it soaked in.

"You mean—" His jaw dropped.

King grinned shamelessly.

"Yeh. It's the border line of your empire. Where we've been is Italian Ethiopia."

"But— But, good God, man, interna-

tional boundaries, these days, are—"

"Yeah," King laughed at him. "So you said about me, coming over."

But— My sacred word! This constitutes an armed raid into the territory of a sovereign power! And the Italians are so—"

"Yeh, the Italians are so— And you British are so—" King's laughter left him and he was brusquely fierce. "Listen, Britisher. Suppose you'd known, what would you have done? You'd have reported regretfully to your chief, and your chief would have reported to your Colonial Government, and your Colonial Government would have reported to your Home Government, and where would you have got? And in how many months?"

"Well, but—"

"And this border line is two months' journey from headquarters, on foot! And you had your two sacred British subjects to rescue before this very night! Not that I give a hoot about your subjects. But—" King's rush of words choked down to his grim mood again and he walked on in silence. Slowly then it came through his teeth:

"Those murdering monkeys got Ogilvie. And Ogilvie, I'm telling you, was a whole white man. Worth ten thousand filthy ju-ju devils and ten international complications!"

He stalked on. Hawkes was beginning to appreciate the justification of his action, but the official aspect of it still appalled him. King waited once more for him to catch up, and he was laughing at the anxiety on Hawkes' face.

"Don't worry about international complications. Have common sense and shoot in your report that you rescued your two good subject and punished Ogilvie's murderers and did a job of holding up white man prestige. You don't have to draw a map of the place."

Hawkes could see the glimmerings of an out. Enough, at least, to laugh.

"I'm beginning to understand what those headquarter fellows meant about 'that cunning devil, Kingi Bwana'. You made something of a bally ass of me, leading me into this sort of a mess."

"You'll learn, copper," King said dryly. "Like you learned to do a good job here. And it wasn't me that started it. Friend Mosha— Hey, Barounggo! Did anybody kill Mosha?"

The Masai solemnly drew his thumb diagonally from his left shoulder to his groin. "It was long due, *Bwana*, and our honor was involved."

"Aa-ah! Well, that slick ju-ju doctor sent Mosha to wheedle you into arresting me and snaking me away from here. He knew durn well I shot that elephant on the other side of your No Trespassing sign."

"Oh! You did? Well, my word! What I mean, dashed slimy of the beggar. But now that you remind me of it—" Hawkes was embarrassed and painfully apologetic. "I'm awf'ly sorry, old chap, but I've just go to arrest you for coming over the international line without a passport. Sorry, but—"

King laughed without a worry in the world.

"Inflexible as glaciers. Well, copper, I'm not fighting the British Empire. Ogilvie saved me from an African lion once. I guess, on his account, I can take what the British lion has to hand me."

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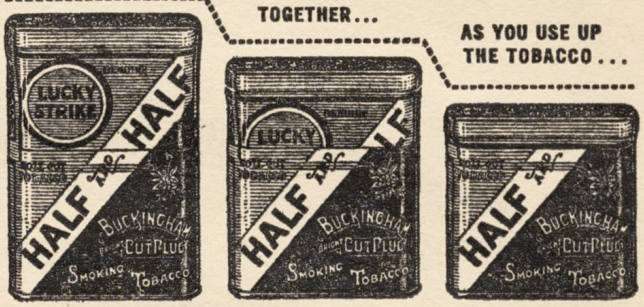

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"Come and get it!"

BULL HEAD

By ARTHUR O. FRIEL

HE WASN'T such a real bad egg. An outlaw, sure. A rebel. A killer, sometimes. A tough bull to lock horns with any day. But there are worse hombres than El Toro here in Venezuela.

So Dugan says, anyway. And Dugan ought to know. He rode with El Toro's gang once, down on the *llanos.*

Dugan? Friend of mine. Big dark lad, about my build. Fact is, some folks have taken me for him. And we do drift around some together. But my name's Hart. And I'm just a lazy loafer, meek and mild, who'd rather run than fight any day. Dugan's different. He—

Wait a minute.

Hey there, you! *Oiga! Sí,* I mean you,

you overgrown ape, and those three other mud-faced thugs with you! Spit this way again and I'll rub your nose in it and make you like it! Think you're tough? Don't like North Americans, maybe? *Pues,* what are you waiting for? Just spit once more and see what happens!

No? Then get to hell out of here! You don't belong in this *taberna* anyway. There's a dirty rum hole down the alley that's about your size.

Hm! No action, after all. Let's see, now, where was I? Oh yes. Well, about that fellow Dugan—

Dugan had been knocking around on those wild plains south of here, where it's every man for himself and the devil take all. He had gone in there broke, and he was coming out the same way. But he had a horse, some food and water, and a gun on his belt. And he was moving. So he was quite contented, in his way. He was one of those lads that have to keep traveling.

Now he was jogging along in empty land, heading north, riding loose, taking the fierce sun on his shoulders and half sleeping in his saddle. Around him was nothing but thin sun-browned grass and, sometimes, small dull-green clumps of cactus or thorn-bush. And, just to keep himself company, he was dreaming about old things up in the States. A white man all alone down here has to do that. And he has to pick some pleasant memory, too. If he lets his past mistakes get hold of him they'll get him down.

So now Dugan was living over again a big night in an oil town, with a riproaring dance going on and a fast-stepping girl in his arms and a red-hot fight afterwards with a fellow who thought he had a mortgage on that girl, when—

"Alto!" said a voice. "Halt!"

A quiet voice, but hard. A voice from behind. Dugan stopped; turned in his saddle, saw a heavy-set man on a powerful horse. A swarthy man under a broad straw sombrero, with a big black mustache and a hard jaw; and, lower down, a brown hand resting on a long holster—ready to draw, but in no hurry.

"Bien. I'm halted," Dugan said. *"Pues'qué?* So what?"

THE other fellow said nothing for awhile. He looked Dugan all over again, sizing up his big frame, baggy old clothes, and belt-gun. His horse moved up at Dugan's right. The rider sat now looking at Dugan's square face and steady brown eyes. Then the man from nowhere asked:

"Where are you going?"

"Nowhere, if it's any of your business," said Dugan. "Just taking a ride. And how about you?"

The big mustache pulled down at one side, up at the other, in a queer smile. Then the stranger said:

"Give me your gun."

"Try and get it!" said Dugan. He didn't move a muscle, just waited. The other man gave him another long look. Then he dropped his hand off his holster and laughed loud.

"Yah-ha-ha! Hombre, you've got nerve!" he said. "You tell me to try and get it? Me? Yah-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

"Oh, is this funny?" Dugan asked. "All right. Ha. One ha for you. And here's another."

With that he had his own gun out and up. But the other fellow only laughed harder. He swayed in his saddle, looking at Dugan like a cop watching a kid getting tough with a dummy pistol. And Dugan soon put his gun away, feeling a little chilly. Either this queer bird was nuts, or else—

Sliding a look around, he found that the bird wasn't altogether cuckoo. To left and right were other men on horseback, with rifles across saddles, ready for action. At least a dozen were in sight, and probably plenty more behind him.

So the laugh was on Dugan, all right. But he tried not to show that he knew it. He just sat quiet, waiting for the next move.

"Gracias," the boss of the gang chuckled. "Thanks, big bad man, for not shooting poor little me with your big bad gun!"

"Don't mention it," said Dugan. "I never like to hit anybody less than my own size. And who are you, little bad man?"

And for a minute that seemed to be the pay-off. The other fellow's head came

down and his shoulders came up, and his eyes glowered like a mad bull's. His hand jerked to his holster. So did Dugan's. Then they sat still again, watching each other's eyes.

A long time passed. Or so it seemed to Dugan. Then slowly the gang boss loosened up and twisted his mouth in that crooked grin of his. And he said:

"I am one called El Toro. Or, as some say, El Toro Bravo, the Wild Bull of the *llanos*. You may have heard the name."

"No," said Dugan. "Does it mean anything?"

And that nearly touched things off again. Dugan knew it probably would, and knew he hadn't a chance if it did—except that he'd get this El Toro before the gang got him. But Dugan was always like that: the tougher the spot, the harder he got, unless he knew he was up against the law—and even then he sometimes slipped.

Now El Toro's eyes turned hot again. But he didn't do anything. His gang knew well enough who he was, and he had his own ideas about Dugan. So he said:

"*Pues*, let's get acquainted. I have a little camp near by, and it won't be healthy for you to travel farther just now."

And that was true enough. It was about noon, and it's just as well not to ride after noon down here if you don't have to. And right now—

"Oh well, if you put it that way," Dugan said, loosening up, "where do we go from here?"

"Follow me," said El Toro.

He turned his horse and trotted away. Dugan followed, and the silent gunmen closed in behind. And they stayed silent, men and horses both. Only a faint swish of thin grass under soft-stepping hoofs—that was all. Not a rattle, not a clink, not a voice or a snort. Just shadows.

A QUEER outfit, you might say, to belong to a wild bull. But not so queer if you know fighting bulls—killer bulls. When they mean business they don't make much noise. They come and get you, and if you aren't looking or listening you're got. And this El Toro gang were go-getters.

Llaneros, all of them. Plainsmen, practically born on horseback. Lean, wiry men, yellow or brown, wearing slouchy old felt or straw sombreros, dull shirts and pants; carrying old .44 rifles, with revolvers and machetes and short belt-knives.

Fighters from the ground up, but able to sink into the ground too—and not dig any trenches, either.

Now they all swung off eastward and rode into a dull thicket of thorns. Inside was a cleared space, with a pool of water, newly dug up out of the dry earth. Hammocks hung low among the stubby thorn trees, and over a smokeless fire of dry wood a bunch of small kettles were giving out smells of rich *sancocho*. That's slum, or stew, and if you're fussy you'd better not look at what went into it.

At that, you eat worse stuff in some restaurants up home.

Anyway, it all looked comfortable. Dugan swung off his horse after El Toro, and the gang took the animals away.

Dismounted, the Bull certainly looked his name. Short legged. Broad bodied. Thick shouldered, thick necked, heavy headed. But not thick brained. Stroking his mustache, he said:

"As a matter of form, hombre, I will ask you to strip clean. Keep your gun, if you like."

His mouth smiled, but his eyes didn't. And Dugan, with nothing to hide, said:

"As a matter of form, I'll do just that."

Pulling his gun, he clamped it between his teeth and shed his shirt, pants, and sandals.

Stripped, he took the gun out of his mouth and loafed, while El Toro sized up his muscles and the gang gave everything else a thorough frisking.

They dumped his pockets, finding practically nothing. They felt his belt, peered into his holster, turned his sandals inside out. They searched his hammock-roll and saddle and clumsy cowhide stirrups. They even emptied his calabash water bottle.

"It would seem," said El Toro then, "that you have no money."

"Money?" said Dugan. "What kind of stuff is that? It's been so long since I saw any that I've forgotten."

The Bull grinned, and some of the other lads chuckled. Money wasn't what they were after. Now that they had found no papers they seemed a little more friendly.

But now, while Dugan pulled on his clothes, El Toro asked:

"Where did you get that pistol, hombre?"

And that gun did need explaining. It didn't add up with the rest of this vagabond's rough-and-ready outfit—a military automatic, in an army holster; an officer's side-arm. But Dugan had an answer.

"It used to belong," he said, buckling his belt, "to one Colonel Guevara, down south of here. Know him?"

El Toro's black brows drew down. Other men stood very still.

"I have heard the name," said the boss. "What about him?"

"He's dead."

"How?" sharply asked the Bull.

"Shot," said Dugan. "He got in my way. Also in my hair, if you know what I mean. Somehow a gun went off. Then —well, this gun was better than mine, so now I'm wearing it."

All of which was true, but deceptive. Colonel Guevara, a court-martialed officer, had retired to his home ranch, plotted a revolution, been caught at it, and shot himself to dodge public execution by army men he had twice double-crossed. Dugan, drifting along, had taken a temporary job as Guevara's bodyguard without knowing what it was all about, and been double-crossed too.

So when the pinch came he hadn't played dumb hero to save the old crook. He'd saved himself, with quite a few bullets trying to stop him. And right now he might be in for a long prison term (or a short finish) if certain army men caught him.

But that was his own business. And now he yawned and looked around, seeming to look for his horse, but sizing up faces. Maybe this gang might like to hear of Guevara's death, or maybe not. It all depended on whether they were hooked up with Guevara's plot. There are a lot of rebel gangs down here, and a stranger never knows their angles; maybe they have working agreements, or maybe they fight one another on sight.

Nobody here, though, looked sore at Dugan's news. The wiry riders looked at one another and smiled like steel traps. Their boss said:

"Most interesting. I would like to believe it. But *no importa*—it doesn't matter, just now."

He turned away. But his voice and his crooked smile and his whole manner got Dugan's goat. A man can say plenty without exactly speaking the words. And this El Toro's tone said:

"I think you're a lousy liar and a sneaky spy. I haven't got anything on you yet, but I will. And then—"

DUGAN didn't wait for them. He went to work now.

"Hey, you!" he said. "Wait a minute!"

Forgetting where he was, he spoke English. And El Toro, swinging back, said in English:

"Well, what?"

The sound of his own language coming back at him jolted Dugan a little. But he went on:

"Well, this! I don't like you. I think you're a low-down yellow-belly. A belly full of wind, with no guts. A cheap little gangster, with a gang of gunmen ready to shoot me in the back, but too yellow to stand up to me alone. If you think different, show me I'm wrong!"

El Toro's eyes lit up like a new saloon. And, standing square on his heels, he asked:

"How do you want it? Fist or gun?"

"Any way that suits you!" said Dugan. "Just start it!"

El Toro threw up his head. He laughed loud. His hands tossed off his sombrero and ripped off his shirt. And over his shoulder he ordered:

"Tomás, take my gun!"

A lanky brown lad behind him slid up, pulled his gun from the holster, slipped it under his own belt, and backed away.

El Toro kicked off his sandals, dug his toes into the hard ground, and stood waiting—a power-house of hard muscle, with tough fists hanging low.

"I'd like the fists," he said. "And, big boy, you'll be surprised!"

Dugan was surprised right then. When any South American with a gun on says he wants North American fists, it doesn't add up. And when the fellow's shorter than you are—

Dugan peeled his own shirt and handed his own gun to a decent-looking brown fellow. And to El Toro he said:

"Come and get it!"

The bully-boy came. He came head down, and he stayed that way; in a crouch, fighting low. Ring rules don't count down here. Or in some places up North either. And it was just as well for Dugan then that he'd fought in places where everything goes. This Toro knew his rough stuff.

Hitting down with his fists, hitting up with his knees, suddenly shooting wicked uppercuts for Dugan's jaw, he bored in with never a let-up or a back step. He gave plenty, and he got plenty. And, boy, could he take it!

Dugan's fists grew numb from cracking down on that thick-boned bull head. His legs got tired by dodging or blocking the things El Toro was trying to do lower down. So finally he clinched.

At that, El Toro grabbed and just hung on. Dugan guarded against a new body-trick; but it didn't come. The tough bull was practically out on his feet.

So they stood a minute, both of them about sunk, but still looking good to the gang. Just winded, as far as anybody outside knew, and going on from there. And Dugan had enough left to put El Toro away with one last short-arm jolt under the ear. But he didn't let it go. Instead, he said, very low:

"Hold up, guy! You've got more to lose than I have if we finish this. Let's call it a day."

El Toro pulled a deep breath and got new strength. And he muttered:

"Well, if you feel that way about it—"

So Dugan backed off, saying out loud:

"My mistake, fellow. You're none of those things I called you, and I take 'em back. Stop this one, and then let's eat!"

He swung a slow haymaker. El Toro parried it, stepped back, and grinned.

"*Cra!*" he said. "That was the best fun I have had for a long time!"

Which, to the gang, was the perfect end of a swell show, with their boss getting a little the best of it. And now those silent fellows blew off steam. They laughed, yipped, yelled *bravos* at both the scrappers, then shut up like clams when El Toro growled:

"Quiet, you! Where do you think you are?"

At that they looked around and listened. And two of them, carrying rifles, walked outside the bush.

EL TORO and Dugan took their own guns back from the fellows holding them, then walked together to the pool and washed. While they cleaned up Dugan said:

"I don't know whether I can eat or not. You pushed my insides all out of whack."

"Glad of it," said El Toro. "If my jaw still works it's no fault of yours."

"You're lucky if it does," Dugan told him. "I've completely busted some jaws with a lot less work."

"I can believe it," El Toro admitted, looking at Dugan's big hands. "Say, where did you get the big idea that I was yellow?"

He was still speaking English as easy as Dugan's own. And for the time they felt very easy toward each other. So Dugan said:

"Hell, I didn't think so. I was just sore about something. But where did you ever get so good with your hands? Up North?"

"Up North," said El Toro. His heavy brows pulled down again.

His hard grin twisted across his dark face. Then his teeth snapped shut, and he yanked his clothes on and went away. Dugan rubbed himself down and dressed and followed. And they didn't talk again for some time.

Everybody ate, and Dugan found his hammock hung alongside El Toro's, and they took a siesta. Dugan rested easy,

with his gun under him. When he finally yawned and sat up he found El Toro awake and watching him, with something like slow-burning fire deep down in his dark eyes.

"Anything on your mind!" Dugan asked.

After a minute El Toro asked:

"Want to join up with me?"

"Doing what?" Dugan parried.

"You know."

Dugan knew, all right. And in a way it was a good proposition. With considerable circumstantial evidence against him here and there and no witnesses to prove his story of some fatal accidents, Dugan was hangman's meat. So his best bet now might be to go the whole hog and have a hard gang fighting with him against all comers. But he said:

"No, thanks."

"Why not?" growled El Toro, sitting up.

"Because," said Dugan, "I can't stand being bossed around. You're a gang boss, and you have to do your stuff. I'm damned independent, and I'll stay that way."

"Hm!" said El Toro, through his nose. "Let me tell you, hombre, not many men are invited to ride with El Toro!"

He spoke Spanish now, and was getting bull-headed again. Dugan stood up.

"Look here, fellow," he said. "You heard what I just said. That goes. And get this: I go my own way. I was going it when you sneaked up on me out yonder, and I'll go it again when I'm ready. And I'm about ready now. I've enjoyed my little visit here, and when I travel along I'll forget I ever saw you, if anybody up ahead asks any questions. But you and I just don't hitch."

He said it calmly, and after scowling at him a minute El Toro took it the same way.

"*Bien,*" he said. "Stay independent, then. But you can't ride north alone yet."

"Why not?" Dugan demanded.

"Because I ride that way tonight myself to attend to some unfinished business. You will ride with us."

With that he stood and walked away. Walked with something of a swagger, too, ready to let anybody know he was boss, if any of his gang thought different after seeing him take such a pounding by Dugan. None of them did. They took his orders and went to do this or that without questions. Good soldiers, those lads. And, in any man's army, El Toro would have been a good top-sergeant.

Dugan, left alone and adding things up, got an answer now. This gang had "unfinished business" up north. They'd started something they couldn't finish; or, maybe, looked it over and faded out without really starting it. There were no wounded men around here. So they hadn't horned in too far. But they had stirred things up. And if Dugan had gone on riding blind he'd have bumped into bullets or a rope without knowing why.

El Toro, hiding out now, but watching out too, was bull-headed enough to go back at what he wanted when he was ready. And he wasn't letting any leaks go ahead of him. So, though he now thought Dugan was all right, he was taking no chances. Which was good sense.

NOW the gang got ready. The sun was far down, and in its last glare the brown fellows fed and watered themselves and their horses, looked over their guns, rolled up their hammocks and supplies, smoked *cigarrillos,* swapped short jokes, and waited. Dugan and El Toro ate without talk. El Toro inspected his revolver, a heavy, old double-action .44. Dugan didn't look at his own .45. He knew it was ready for work, and was willing to let anybody else gather that idea. And so came night.

When darkness shut down, somebody walked around with water and doused the last low cook-fires. Then for a long time the thorn-bush was quiet. The night wind whispered, and cigarettes glowed red, and overhead big dark clouds drifted across the huge stars—and that was all. Finally Dugan yawned out loud:

"Oh-ho-hum! Are we going anywhere tonight?"

Quick laughs came out of the dark. More than one of those silent men was itching for action.

"Shut up!" El Toro snapped. And everybody shut.

Then soon came a small beat on the north air; a beat of small hoofs, coming on fast, that you'd never have heard unless your ears were tuned for it. Suddenly a voice outside bit off one word, and the hoofs stopped.

There was a low mumble. Then a horseman came through the thorn-path, and, behind him, a squatty shape on a burro. And the last one, breathing hard, said:

"*Hecho, capitán!* It's ready, chief! The soldiers rode north at sunset!"

"Ah!" said El Toro. But then, suspicious: "All of them?"

The monkey-shape on the jackass hesitated; then said:

"Not quite. A few stay on. Eight men and an officer. But they don't expect anything."

"Ah!" said El Toro again. This time his voice rumbled with satisfaction. "A little fight, then! *Bueno!* We can take care of nine *soldados,* even in a fort! And then, *por Dios,* I will cut the tongue out of that foul *jéfe civil* who called me a son of a dirty squaw! Ha-a-ah!"

He was roaring now, kicking the ground back with his heels. Suddenly he jumped high and came down on the back of his horse. That horse had been waiting a long time, and now it reared, hitting out hard with its fore hoofs; came down, kicked at the sky with its hind legs; then went out of there like a bat out of hell.

As he went, El Toro bellowed again. And his men, swarming onto their own mounts, whooped like Indians. Dugan, suddenly all lit up, let out a wolf-howl. The whole little troop went roaring out onto the *llanos,* aching for a fight.

Dugan didn't like *jéfes civiles.* A *jéfe civil* down on the plains is a combination of mayor and chief of police. Some of them are all right—but mighty few. The rest are small-town big-shots, chesty politicians, squeezing graft out of people who can't fight and jailing or slyly murdering their enemies. We've got some in our own noble North too. And along Dugan's back trail were a couple of dead ones—up home and down here. Now, getting more of El Toro's idea, he was all for it. This wasn't just an outlaw raid for plunder. It was the pay-off on the dirtiest kind of insult.

Under the stars they all pounded north. And for awhile all bets were off. El Toro, on horseback, was a double-powered wild bull on the prod. He bellowed high and wide at the night, letting his reins lie loose. And the looser they lay, the more his horse worked. Nose up, neck down, that animal just leveled himself out and reached for distance. They knew each other, those two. And, man, how they traveled!

Behind them, the gang kept up, hard on El Toro's heels. All but Dugan and one other. Dugan's horse was a good tough *llanos* beast, but not good enough here. He tried. And Dugan kicked him along. But after awhile they found themselves almost the tail-enders of the also-rans. The tip of the tail was the squatty monkey on the short-legged burro. He was away back now, and not trying hard.

Then Dugan's head began to work again, and he told his horse:

"Oh well, take it easy, boy. This isn't our fight. And we don't want to fight soldiers anyway."

He slowed down, letting the gang draw away. But they didn't draw far. All at once they slowed too, looking back. Then several of them stopped, turned back, and swung in behind him.

They didn't say anything, just gave him thin grins and trotted along easy. But it was plain that they weren't going to lose him. And the others, up ahead, watched till he closed in on them; then took a gait not too fast for his nag to hold. They all traveled now with no more yelling, settling down to a smooth, steady advance, mouths shut, minds set on the night's job. A job of killing. Or worse.

Worse, because a quick clean killing is one thing, and taking a man apart *poco-á-poco,* a piece at a time, is something else. And if El Toro meant what he'd said, he intended to do real Spanish work on that *jéfe civil.* And the more Dugan thought about that the less he liked the idea.

But, kill quick or slow, El Toro had put Dugan into this thing up to his neck. The gang that had heard this drifter throw some bull about shooting an ex-army

colonel was expecting him to show something against some more army men. If he did, he'd be an outlaw for fair. On the other hand, if he welched—

Well, he hadn't a chance, anyway. At least, not yet. So, as usual, he took things as they came and let the next thing come along.

THEY all traveled on, with the north wind blowing the small sounds of their travel away behind them. After awhile a late old moon came up over east. And up ahead a dull blotch of trees grew larger. And finally the gang halted on the bank of a slow dark river, wide but shallow, crawling weakly along at the bottom of a deep cut in the dry land. Over across, little clay houses showed, pale yellow, dark-shadowed by low stout trees.

Everybody listened. No sound came, except the flapping of leaves in the strong night wind. But now El Toro was in no hurry.

While the horses breathed he rode quietly back to Dugan. At the same time several men dismounted and walked away west, following the tree line, carrying no guns, but with bare machetes winking in the moonlight. Soon they were gone.

"Why the delay?" Dugan asked.

El Toro said nothing. He watched Dugan again. And in the low moonshine his eyes gleamed like those steel blades gone west; cold, hard, ready for cutthroat work. Then they swung away, and he sat with a hand on his own machete hilt. A moody, savage cuss, and in a killing mood now. So Dugan and the others sat quiet awhile.

Then the men who had gone out came marching back fast. At the last they broke into a run and proudly showed their boss an army rifle and an army cap. And one said:

"The bridge is open now, *capitán!*"

"*Bueno!*" said El Toro, low and hard. "But we don't use it. Give me that gun!"

Swiftly but softly he pulled the breechbolt out of the captured rifle, dropped the gun, heaved the bolt far away. Then he ordered:

"*Adelante!* Forward! You, hombre, come with me!"

Dugan came. The two rode to the head of the gang. El Toro's horse worked down the steep bank, waded across the shallow stream, climbed the other side. So they were in the town—because El Toro didn't do things by the book.

Guard a bridge, the military books say. Guard a road, a path, any usual approach. So these soldiers here had done, and now they were a sleepy sentry short, and these raiders just walked across a waterway that hardly cooled the horses' bellies.

Over here everything was dead quiet. Not even a dog barked. And, dead quiet, the gang moved between houses and out into a small plaza: the usual Spanish square, with a mud church bigger than anything else, and little mud houses making up the rest of it. Some houses were connected by long walls; others stood alone. And nowhere in sight was any man.

El Toro stopped, grinning around. His head lifted high, and his breath came loud out of his nose; and, believe it or not, his horse did the same.

Then the master gave a short grunt, and several of his gang rode softly to right and left. Two or three disappeared behind a block of houses opposite the church; a block with one solid front of wall. Others stopped at the ends. So all exits were covered, and El Toro and a dozen more held the front.

"A-a-a-h!" said El Toro. "Hold everything, men! Don't shoot till you're shot at. Then—you know. Fire back at the flash."

"*Ssssí!*" came soft hissing answers. And hammers clicked back.

DUGAN looked around at the other houses lining the plaza, and the stubby little church behind. Churches down here are built thick and strong, and many a time they've been *casas fuertes*—forts—in the local wars. The old Spanish *padres* planned them that way. Dugan, who had traveled some, asked:

"Sure you've picked the right house, Toro? What about those others?"

"Cómo?" El Toro scowled at him. *"Cra,* are you telling El Toro something? What do you think you know about this place?"

"Nothing," said Dugan. "That's why I'm asking."

"Oh. And are you by any chance getting cold feet?" the raider sneered. "Those houses belong to sheepish villagers who couldn't shoot guns if they had any. This one is it. One *jéfe civil,* one *teniente,* seven *soldados,* all cuddled up together under the one roof. Where else would they be?"

"I wouldn't know," said Dugan. "And, speaking of cold feet, let's see how hot yours are. You haven't shown me anything yet that gave me any chills."

Which, reminding El Toro of the way Dugan had held him up that afternoon when another sock would have laid him out, was a red flag in the bull's face just now. His gun pulled halfway up from its holster. Dugan sat quiet, holding his eyes. Then El Toro swung away, remembering what he was here for. And, all alone, he rode to the middle door in that silent yellow block.

His gun butt hammered on that thick door. The echoes bounced around the hollow plaza. The little town woke up.

Thump-thump-thump-thump-thump went the butt. Then it stopped, and El Toro's horse backed away a little. Gun up, El Toro waited.

The door stayed shut. But along the wall, and out around the small square, other windows and doors sneaked open. Heavy wooden window-shutters creaked, and tough doors swung back a few inches. Dugan, looking around again, saw them all, but saw no faces.

El Toro, too, looked around, and grinned white in the moonlight. He wanted an audience, and he had it. Now he advanced, hammered again on the door, and again backed.

A voice at a window asked:

"Quién es? Who's there?"

"El Toro!" bellowed the Bull. "Come out, Señor Don Diego Diaz! Come out, you son of a pig and a dog, and meet the man you called a son of a squaw!"

His roaring voice filled the still plaza. Nothing happened.

Nobody came out. No rifle-barrels slid out of the windows. No faces showed. Everything got silent again. Then the sleepy voice inside gave a loud yawn and said:

"Buenos noches, El Toro! Good night! *El señor* Diaz is not here. He went to Caracas with some soldiers at sunset. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

The bullet-proof window banged shut.

EL TORO sat paralyzed. So did Dugan and all the gang. What a flop! No *jéfe.* No fierce revenge that would make El Toro's name feared from the Gulf to Brazil. Nothing but a ha-ha, and El Toro dragging out with his tail down, to be laughed at all over the *llanos.*

But El Toro wouldn't take that. After a long minute he yanked his horse out and away to his gang. He hissed through his teeth, and his eyes blazed like hell-fire. Swinging short, he let out a bull-chested noise without words. And from all around that ha-ha house his watchers came at a gallop, closing into a hard knot of fighters at his back.

Dugan, following the general idea, got his gun loose. The *jefé* and the soldiers were all gone? Then why had a soldier been left to guard a bridge? Just in case somebody came along to steal something in this village that had nothing worth taking? Not likely. And besides—

That was as far as he got. Just then hell broke loose.

Crrrack! went guns.

Army rifles. Rifles right and left and behind. Over in those sheep-houses and back in the church.

Crrrack! More rifles than El Toro had counted on. A lot more.

A trap. A trap baited by that monkey-man on the burro—a double-crosser who'd been bought by El Toro, then bought higher by army men out to get the Toro gang. A trap so well planned that nobody here had even sat up to watch it. The shiftless sentry at the bridge had fallen down on his job of shooting and running in; but with El Toro himself telling the world who he was the trick had worked out all the better. Soldiers all around, using their heads, holding their fire till El Toro

bunched his raiders all together again—

Crrrack! Cross-fire. And that was the crack-up of a lot of hard eggs.

El Toro and Dugan, heading the gang, didn't get theirs yet. Bullets tore through the men and horses massed behind them. Bullets crackled overhead—a lot of them. Most of the ambushed soldiers must have been shooting high, forgetting the lift of their guns or deceived by the thin light. But enough of them fired low to do a job.

Raiders flopped, yelling. Horses reared, squealed, plunged down or bucked sideways or spun around to face the firing—with their riders firing back. Those tough lads weren't standing still and taking it. At the first crash they changed ends and let go. And men on the ground, shot out of their saddles but still able to shoot, fought while they could.

They fired at flashes, as per order. Some of those flashes stopped. But more of them kept up, and more men and horses went down. And everywhere around that hard-walled square racketed that deadly *crrrack.*

Fast work, it was. So fast that before El Toro and Dugan could change front it was practically done. So fast that Dugan had to think hard, afterward, to remember all that happened in less than one full-sized minute.

Now El Toro was riding again. Not out south, running for the only open escape. He took the hard way.

Backing off from falling horses that were doing their crazy worst to knock over his own, the Bull swung around the end of his smashed team and charged straight up the field. Charged the whole hidden army gang. Charged with his gun hammering at flashes ahead.

With him went Dugan. Dugan wouldn't fight the army. Oh no. He was only fighting flashes, shooting as hard as El Toro, hoping he killed somebody at every shot, and aching to blast this whole tricky town off the map. Sneaky stuff, ganging up on a man from behind, always got Dugan red-hot.

So now he and El Toro rode hell-bent up that plaza, shot at by every army gun. Behind them, the blunt bangs of the Toro gang's old rifles went dead. And at the end of the square El Toro's revolver and Dugan's pistol were dead too; shot out.

Then El Toro turned away from it all. His horse swerved out of the northwest corner of the town, out to the open plains. Dugan's followed on. Back in the village the army guns ceased fire.

OUT on the empty land El Toro dropped his reins and reloaded his gun. He fumbled the job. His horse kept streaking away, flattened out for speed, and the rider sat easy as ever. But his fingers had a hard time hitting the holes in his open cylinder, and he dropped several cartridges. Dugan, snapping in his own spare clip, looked back but saw nothing dangerous. Then he watched El Toro, but kept his mouth shut.

Their horses wanted to get far away from there, and they let the brutes have their heads. Another thick cloud crawled across the weak moon, and for awhile they traveled fast in darkness. When at last the moon came out again it wasn't on their right rear, but square on their left. El Toro had swung south.

While they rode without light, Dugan had felt himself over for any leaks, and found none worth bothering about. Maybe you know how it is: When you're set on busting the other fellow you don't really feel what he's handing you; you find out afterwards. And, by Dugan's dumb luck, all the bullets in that hot plaza had done nothing but nick his hide in a few places. But El Toro's luck had been different.

The tough Bull was traveling now with his head down and his big shoulders sagging. His horse was slowing up, too. Dugan kicked his own horse up alongside; took a long look, and said:

"Hell, man, you're hurt!"

Hurt was no name for it. Shot through the guts. His pants and his horse were red with it. Those army bullets do plenty. Why El Toro was still alive Dugan couldn't guess, except that El Toro was El Toro.

Now El Toro took a slow breath and stopped. While his horse breathed he pulled up his shoulders and sat fairly

straight. And slowly swaying, he said:

"Just a little tired." He swallowed. "I need—a rest."

He swallowed again; then looked away eastward, toward the hidden camp where he and Dugan had met that day. His right hand fumbled inside his shirt, and came out with a wet red money-belt.

"Keep this," he said, "while I'm resting. And—if you ever see that dirty monkey that sold us out today, do what I'd do! Will you?"

"As near as I can," Dugan said, through his teeth. "But if you think you're turning me loose now, you're wrong. I'm still trailing along."

El Toro said nothing more in words. He dropped the belt. His hand dropped too, to his gun. He managed to haul the old thing out and point it at Dugan.

And his sick eyes said:

"Damn you, get out!"

Then, while Dugan still looked at him, he slowly turned his horse away. And the two of them walked out. Just walked, with the horse stepping gently and the man again sagging down. And Dugan, watching, swallowed something himself and let them go. Soon they were gone.

El Toro Bravo, the Wild Bull of the *llanos*, had gone away to die alone.

And when Dugan, a day or so later, looked into that money belt he found considerable. Gold pieces. Venezuelan *morrocotas*, Mexican *veinte-pesos*, American double-eagles, even some European odds and ends. All gold, anyway. And I don't have to tell you how rare gold coins are these days.

But now Dugan just picked the thing up and turned north and jogged along with an eye and ear to the east. And nothing happened.

As far as any of those soldiers knew, he and El Toro were just a couple of crazy shooters who ran the wrong way in that scrap and somehow got out. And, as far as I know, nobody's sure yet that the bones they finally found away out on the *llanos* were El Toro's.

The horse was gone, they say, and the saddle was all chewed up by wild animals, and they couldn't find his gun anywhere. Well, they wouldn't. El Toro would throw that gun into some waterhole, and unsaddle his horse and send him wild and free, before he fell dead.

And, let them say what they like, he wasn't such a bad egg. Plenty tough, and bull-headed, and in some ways a little thick. He had a hate on the world, and he was too suspicious of a square-shooter like Dugan. Something was missing somewhere in his make-up. But, all in all, he was more of a man than some others I've seen. And if Dugan ever drifts back down there and hooks up with that *jéfe civil*—

What's that? The hell you say!

One of the brave boys behind the walls that got shot that night was the *jéfe civil* himself? Hidden in the church —trying to shoot El Toro in the back— he got his when El Toro charged, shooting blind?

Man, oh man! I'll have to tell Dugan about that!

Ha-ha-ha! Ho ho ha ha ha!

"Watch you now," the hunter whispered.

BLACKCOCK'S FEATHER

(Third Part of Five)

By MAURICE WALSH

THIS is the story of me, David Gordon, and it begins on the day I landed in Dublin Town in Ireland to find my dead mother's people.

Half Scotch, half Irish as I was, it was no country for a stranger who could not prove his allegiance in the war between the English and the Irish, as I was soon to learn. Queen Elizabeth's William de Burgh had just been appointed lord deputy of that troublous land, and I chanced to meet Francis Vaughan, a kin of his, who tried to enlist me into his invading army, but without success. I had no mind to do sword work for a queen who had sent Mary of Scotland to her death.

In Dublin I met Colum O'More and Cathal O'Dwyer, two Irish fighting men, and saw Colum slain brutally by Captain Cosby of the Englishers, and from that day my course was set. For I drew sword to avenge my friend, and only Vaughan's intervention let me escape the gallows.

As it happened, the long arm of Eliza-

beth reached out for me even at the Ulster border. Francis Vaughan, a good soldier for all his court-made foppishness, tried to bring me back, knowing that I was no friend of his people. But my sword sheared his blade in two and I outrode his men to escape.

I was no fighting man, but as I rode on, I was promising myself two things. Captain Cosby would die by my own sword—and my father, who had married the daughter of an Irish chief, would have a son fighting by the side of her countrymen.

My next of kin, I learned, was Donal O'Cahan, my cousin, and I found him at Dungiven. My cousin had a true Irisher's stubbornness—enough to get himself betrothed to Amy Burc, daughter of an Englisher, who would have none of the match. Which showed he knew but little of our clan's way of doing things. The lady was willing, so one dark night we took to saddle and set upon the Englishers as they were taking the girl away from her happiness. It was a good fight while it lasted, but when it was over Donal had found himself a bride, and dead Englishmen sprawled on the dark Galway road.

It was every man for himself then. We were in hostile territory, many days' riding from our clan, and with the countryside roused to slay us on sight.

But Donal laughed confidently and said to his lady, "In a week you will rule us at Dungiven. Two's-about, David, and let us go!"

CHAPTER IX

FLIGHT

FULL dawn found us deep in the woods north of the Athenree road, and there we made our first halt where a tinkle of water ran under mosses near the ruins of an old Christian, or it might be pagan, shrine. We had camped at this place on the outward ride two nights before, and had hidden, in a hole under the brambles, a couple of skins of wine, a bundle of barley scones, and the cooked hind-quarters of a fallow-deer. Besides this provender we had the remnants of Ruari's calf, which reminds me to say that the herd had been untied from his tree before we left the Esker, and had made straight for the Clare fastnesses as the only safe place for him.

Before we set teeth in food Father Senan did his great duty. He washed his hands and his face in the running water, extracted from his satchel a rumpled surplice, a broad purple ribbon and a thin book with a ragged leather cover, and called his congregation together. And there in that little glade he wedded Donal and his lady. I stood up behind Donal's shoulder, and Tadg Ironhand, her foster-father, stood at Lady Amy's. And as I stood there I wondered at Donal and I wondered at myself. Here was I, a man of twenty-eight, and I knew nothing of love. Was there something missing in me—and for me? Was all my youth wasted? Here, now, was my cousin Donal, who, having trifled with love in his time, was at last daring death for himself and all of us for this one woman. What was woman that such should be? I looked aside wonderingly at this Amy Burc, for the first time at leisure to contemplate her.

She was beautiful, no doubt, with her poised head and delicate coloring, but to me she was not half so beautiful as my dear cousin, Donal Ballagh, with his black hair a-curl on his white brow and that firm mouth that could laugh or grow stern. She was tall and slender in her riding-kirtle, and from the coif on her head had strayed a ringlet of copper-red hair, and on her white round neck a small pulse beat and beat. I could see the long lashes cover her eyes, and her eyelids were so thin and pure that I could swear her eyes were blue beneath.

And then she turned to give Donal her hand, and she smiled for him. Dhia! would a woman ever smile that way for me, light in her eyes and tenderness about her lips? She looked over Donal's shoulder and saw my interest and my dourly-troubled gaze, and she smiled to me too—a little wistful and beseech-

ing smile, as if saying, "Please think kindly of me, for I will be good to this man you love." But it was her first smile for her lover that made my heart turn over in my breast. . . . Alas! once in La Soye a poor trull had kissed my hand, and once a virago had scratched me when I had knocked the man that beat her into the kennel. And that was all I knew of women.

After the marriage the old priest said a longish prayer, and as I knelt on the long grass, damp with the night's dew, I felt myself go slack and drowsy and weighed down with an utter weariness. I filled my lungs with a deep breath and looked round at the men. They too were a-sag, kneeling on one knee. It was again some comfort to me that these tough men of war also felt the strain. But the comfort did not abide, for in that moment of low ebb my thoughts turned bleakly to the long and weary road that lay before us.

Dungiven seemed woefully far away, and how might tired men and one gently-nurtured woman twist a safe course day after day through a land raised before them? All I wanted then was a long sleep, and that I could not yet have—perhaps never.

A good meal helped us all, and something of the old gay hardihood came back to the company. Donal, his wife, the priest, and I ate together, and for the first time we had leisure to talk. But we talked little. The lady looked at me out of shy eyes. I suppose the hatchet grimness of my Scots face made her think me stern and cold; whereas I was merely more shy than she was. Also, she might have heard some of the men talk wildly of my bloodthirstiness in fight. For, by way of praising my first foray with them, they credited me with things that never happened—or that I had no memory of. Donal, the newly-wed, was silent too, but his eyes were eloquent with love and hope—and a great fear as well; his happiness was in his hand, but not securely, and many days must elapse before he dared look happiness in the face.

When we had finished eating, Donal called us all together.

"Now, my clan and my children," he said, making a play of words in the Gaelic, "here is where the roads divide, to meet at Saimhor or at Roe, and God guide us, every one. Ye know the rule of old: scatter wide and avoid fight. A dead enemy ties a string to your feet. As we know, the wood-kerns will already be on the trail, and riders gone the open road to warn Cong and Tuam and Athenree. Let not more than two men keep together, for the meshes of the net are close; but ye have broken many a mesh before now, and will again, God aiding. Go, then, and remember, my heroes, that ye are hurrying to a wedding feast at Dungiven, and that that feast will last a day for every day ye have ridden with me on this great venture. God with us!"

EACH man in turn came leading his spent horse, saluted his chief, bent knee to his lady, and was gone. Tadg Ironhand came last, and the lady, with an impulsive gesture that I liked, clapped her soft hands each side of his great shaggy head and kissed him on the brow.

"Tadg, my only father now," she whispered, and for a moment, like a child, he laid that great head down on her shoulder. Oh, but this was a kind and lovely woman!

I went to where Benmee hung her head, too weary to nibble the grass, and found Father Senan groaningly regirthing the heavily-padded saddle on his own thick cob. I gave him a hand.

"Tell me, fighting friar," I put to him, "would another sword be a help to those two back yonder?"

"Do you know the road?"

"Could you not be answering my question first?"

"I could if I liked, Albannach hothead. Am I not hard at the thinking? Look you, son! If these poor beasts of ours were fresh, an extra sword—and a sparth as well—might help to break a road for you two if we found it closed. But as we are, we are done, and them with us, if ever it comes to sword work—and four horses make a trail that the kerns can follow."

I led Benmee back to the glade where Donal and his bride waited, and Father Senan followed close behind.

"Wait, David," said Donal lightly. "We four are going together."

I was as light as he was. "Are we so? Here is a cunning old popish friar, and like a leech will I cling to him, and he a weasel in the woods. We meet at Dungiven."

Donal caught me at the shoulder and looked into my eyes.

"No use wasting words on you," he said, and scowled at the old friar. "Bring him home, Senan, or—" He turned away.

Lady Amy reached me her hand, and I bent knee, and for the first time that I could remember my lips touched a woman. Her fingers pressed on mine, gently firm.

THERE, then, were old Father Senan and I setting out together for Dungiven, and we began by turning our faces from it.

"A cunning old popish friar, I heard you call one," he chided.

"Choice words."

"So! Cunning will I be, then. More cunning than fox or weasel—as men can be and are. Follow on, thou Albannach half-calvinist." He led away westwards without any northing, though Dungiven was north and by east, and I made no protest.

The sun was four hours high before ever he cried halt. We had come as fast as our tired horses could travel, but very circumspectly—deep in the woods, away from the bosky margins of marshes and pools, prying into open valleys before we crossed them, never once following a man-made track. Once we circled round a township of clay bothies, and once a herd's dogs barked at us as we disappeared into the trees. But no man accosted us, or, I think, put eyes on us.

We made our first halt at a woodland lochan—a bonny quiet pool deep in the wilderness. The wood ridges came shelving down to it on all sides, and on three sides it was fringed with a thick belt of whins still patched with fairy gold and crackling softly in the summer heat. Tall and ancient whins were they, and rabbit-runs led deep under them in low dark arches. At one end was a level spread of good grass, with the four stone walls of some ancient ruin.

Our first duty was to the horses. We let them cool off, rubbed them down, and gave them water sparingly, after which we moved aside some dead bushes in the doorway of the ruin, tethered the beasts inside, and replaced the branches. Then, with swords and sgian, we cut for them two armfuls of the freshest grass, and hoped the juicy food would not gripe them.

"And now," said the old priest, "you and I will be a pair of buck coney. Come!"

He led the way along the wood-edge, treading carefully on firm ground that took no mark, until we were near the far end of the lochan. There he folded his cloak over head and shoulders, lay on his belly, and wriggled under an archway in the whins. I did likewise, and followed him deeper and deeper until at last we came out on a tiny island in that rustling sea—a wee patch of gray stiff grass with the twisted stems standing up all around it, and the air full of the mystic, dry, pleasant odor of the golden bloom.

'The secret chamber of our palace," he whispered pantingly. "Thanks to God, and to Him will we give thanks at last. We will now say one or, maybe, two rosaries in thanksgiving and petition."

We were on the westward side of the loch, and by getting our heads close to the whins our eyes were shaded from the strong sun. With my sgian I gouged out two divots for our hip-bones, and we spread our cloaks over them.

"Pray away, holy man," I agreed out of a yawn, wriggling into comfort.

He started valiantly, and valiantly I responded. The drone of his voice was not unpleasant. I found myself being soothed by it, and sometimes slurred the response. . . . It was the voice of Senan. . . . It was the voice of Turlough singing a new song. . . . It was the long sough of the sea. . . . It was only a whisper in a gathering silence. . . .

When I waked, long after, the old man was sound asleep, his face gentle, and his fingers were still and loose in the middle of the second decade.

That was a great sleep surely. It was evening then. I sat up and looked around me. The sun was down behind the western ridge, but the tree-tops across the lochan were suffused red glory. I let the old man sleep on, clasped my hands over my knees, and watched the glory lift and fade. A saturnine mood, not unpleasant, came gently on me. I lost sensation of time and space. I had no desire to move from that place any more. Lapped in a quiet wilderness, safe in the heart of it, danger forever banned the ring of it, why trouble with the vain urges of head and heart? Why not be passive—like the whins—like the trees—like the cool loch water? What was life, then, but a little ripple in a great stillness . . . ?

THE old priest's voice roused me against my will.

"Rain in that sunset," he said, "and it is we who will know it before morning." He was sitting up, his arms lifted in a great long yawn. "You let me sleep, Davy. I dreamt I hooked a four-foot salmon and he pulled me into the Pooka's Hole, where I swam better than he did, and raced him all the way to Limavady. Would you be telling me, now, what you appropriated out of that store of provisions back yonder?"

I felt for my satchel. "A shin-bone, it looked like."

"I saw you. Only a shin-bone! There was the bottom of a skin of wine, and a bit of haunch left over. Who got them?"

"They are not far away. I saw you, too."

He chuckled, climbed stiffly to his feet, and looked out over the loch.

"Look at that, now," he cried delightedly. "A thousand of them."

I jumped to my feet and looked. The day had been a still one, but now a small thin air was drifting down from amongst the trees, setting the old whin stems acreak and lightly rippling across the face of the water. But besides that faint ripple of the breeze the loch was ringed all over by the lift and dip of thousands

He had all the world's luck.

of feeding trout. Most of the fish coming clean out of the water were small, but here and there a big back fin cut the surface and a fat ripple ran as a broad fluke flicked over.

"On the take," said I sadly, "and nothing to take them with."

"'A cunning old friar!'" said he, "and cunningly the Albannach cleaved to him. Wait ye, my jewels!"

Forthwith, and in haste, he lopped off a four-foot length of tough whin stem, twisted and awkward, but pliable enough once he had trimmed it clean.

"Worms!" scoffed I. "Where will you get them this dry weather?"

He snorted at the word, and gave me a scornful eye. "I hoped I had taught you better than that," he said, and was busy emptying his satchel on the ground —venison, wine-skin, and priestly gear. At the bottom was a beautifully-made, thin, wooden box, and this he snatched. It contained a dozen feathered lures of

his own tying, a length of line woven of finest flax, and an assortment of tail-pieces plucked from a gray-horse brush.

"What would you be saying now?" he questioned.

I looked over his shoulder. "That moth with the furry body."

He glanced at the sky. "Too clear a while yet. This scrap of tinsel and cock's plume—we will try them with that."

WE forged a road down to the water and looked it over from behind the shelter of a whin. The drift of air went up the loch over our right shoulders, and the depth of the water close in was not less than a foot over a gravelly bottom.

"Look," he whispered—"a nice one cutting water. You try him, Davy."

But I respected the glisten in his eye, and pointed to the boil and ripple within reach of his makeshift engine. Head below the whins, he crept forward, and trailed his line in the water to straighten it. Even as he switched it out a small fish came to the fly and kicked itself free with a splatter. The short word the churchman said was of the church, but not reverent.

And then he started to fish. Ill-equipped though he was, he skillfully laid his lure like a kiss across the ripples. And he had all the world's luck. Like enough, that patch of lochan had never been fly-chased since time began, and the trout were greedy as pike. He caught five or six sizeable ones, then a half-pounder, and then lost a sturdy fighter. Thereafter came a lull, and he slipped off his horse-boots and waded into the water. There he caught another half-pounder, and luck finished with him. A monster took his fly, kicked angrily, and went straight away from that place with a yard of horse-tail as well as fly. Whereas the holy fisher said many words that were neither holy nor churchly.

"I am sorry, David son," he said humbly. "Wait till I tie on another fly for you."

"No!" I stopped him. "After you cursing every trout in the loch, seed, breed, and generation?"

So we went back to our horses, moving cautiously among the trees and looking in over the broken walls. We saw nothing to disturb us, and Benmee was glad to see me. They had finished their provender without hurt, and we cut them some more. Then, with flint and steel, we started a little hot ember fire with dead furze roots, and cooked our fish on forked sticks, and the priest, searching his wonderful satchel, brought forth a small purse of dry salt.

"Trout," said he, his mouth full, "like all fish, eat best fresh, and our bit venison will come in handy the night that is before us. But—and mark this—I have known the bottom of a wine-skin to taint the liquor after long jolting."

"I take the first mouthful, then?"

"Surely! The Albannach be an honest race—and you keeping your palate in the hole at the bottom."

So we finished the trout, and thereafter finished the wine, and as we drank we discussed our plans.

"Not a stir will we stir out of this," said the priest, "till the moon tops the trees. We might be safer in the dark, but the lie of the land is not known to me, and the dark has many traps besides Sassenach soldiers on the Menlo road."

"When do we turn north?" I put to him.

"As soon as that way is safe. The first drive of pursuit will go that airt, and I am seeking to get outside the brunt of it. Since the days of Shane and the coming of the new church I have once or twice—aye! four or five times—been hunted—like a wolf—and I ever found it a good rule to follow behind the hounds nosing for me. Tonight—and tomorrow—we will keep striking west and by north for the shores of Corrib, slip our way between Cong and Tuam, and make for O'Connor Roe country, where my tonsure might save your flaming head."

I ran my fingers through the upthrow of my red hair.

"No!" said he. "It is but a warm brown."

And I grinned at the lie.

When the moon showed through the trees we went out to the waterside to look and listen, and were mightily star-

tled by the scurry of a herd of fallow-deer that had come down to drink where a small stream gurgled out of the loch.

"A good sign," said Father Senan, when he got his breath back. "The deer would not be here if men lurked in the woods. Let us to the road, son."

After the startle of the deer everything was very still and very peaceful, too. The belt of whins was a gray shimmer and the woods a quiet blackness, and the water before us a shining silver shield, except where the topmost branches of the trees, with the moon behind them, cast a lovely lacework of shadow. The quiet and peace of that lost small water abided with me the rest of that night.

All night we slowly worked our way north and by west. Our tough little horses had been freshened by the long rest, and we ourselves, after such a fine sleep and sound meal, were again restrung for the adventures on the road.

An hour after midnight the moon clouded over and the rain came sighing over the woods. That rain held steadily for three hours, and slowed our pace. The rain itself we did not mind. We but wrapped our long cloaks round us, pulled the hoods over head, and the oil-impregnated wool, with its skin lining, kept us dry and warm. Sometime near dawn we rested against a tree and ate the last of our provisions, and I shared a bannock with Benmee, who nibbled it daintily out of my fingers.

At full daylight we examined the country before us from the head of a slope. It lay below us, flat and heavily wooded, mile after mile, until at last and far away it lifted into a low ridge, bare of trees.

"Corrib Loch is at the other side of that drum," Father Senan told me. "There will be a township or two down there in the woods—which are not as thick as they look—and we must find an Eirannach and a Christian sometime today or starve. Shall we strike on for a piece?"

I agreed, and we went down into the plain. But before going the priest wrought a remarkable change in himself. Up to now no one would have discerned in him the churchman—his tonsure hidden under a leather morion with a steel rim; a war-cloak over his knee-long saffron tunic, that was belted with leather instead of the cord of his order; and his sparth-ax never to be mistaken for a crook. But now he hung his morion on the saddle-string and draped cloak over it, and there was the Celtic tonsure from ear to ear, filmed with a ten-days' growth of iron-gray, but plain enough. Somehow that tonsure gave his bearded face a certain mildness, not noticeable under the morion. He was not done yet. He unbelted his tunic, pulled it over his head, turned it inside out, and there was the habit of his order, short indeed, but of the proper black, with cowl flat on shoulders and cord sewn round waist. Now, truly, he was a friar and could never have been anything else. He reached me his sparth-ax.

"Sling it this side of your hip," he requested, "and if I have to snatch it—well and good."

"If we meet Bingham's riders now, you will burn," I warned him.

"And you hang. Where the difference? Let us on."

It was well on in the morning before we came on signs of a township. First we struck a pannier-track leading our way, and this we followed with due precaution, the friar moving ahead at each of its many twists and examining the track beyond before his signaled me to follow. For the better part of an hour we went thus, and then, at one wide curve, he checked and gestured me aside urgently.

Not far behind him was a low-growing hazel in full verdure, and I swerved Benmee into the shelter of this and peered through the branches at Father Senan's broad back. Beyond him I could see a few yards of the path before it curved out of sight, and on this presently appeared a barefoot Irish villager, a middle-aged man, with a dark lean face and a wild-cat-skin cap on his cropped head. He halted before the friar, took off his cap, and bent knee in a short quick bow to the Church's blessing. This portended well, and I listened with open ears.

"God and Mary's blessing with you,

my son," said the priest in a mild fervor.

"God and Mary with you—and Saint Patrick," came the response.

"Where does this road lead to, my child?"

"To my township of Bellaghy, reverend father, a mile back from here in O'Flaherty country."

"Is there a priest with you in that place?"

"My grief! no, father. A true priest has not come our way these months."

"Alas! for our religion—"

"Are you looking our way, father?" he asked eagerly. "You will be a thousand times welcome."

"Is a queen's priest with you?"

"Mary mother! we are all Catholic, thank God. We are poor, father, but you will be safe there. No Saxon soldier troubles us these days."

"Then I will come. But there is one with me—a young brother straight from France—not yet a holy man of Mother Church, but on the road."

"He will be welcome, too, father."

So I came out from my screen of hazels and saw the surprise in the Irishman's eyes. What with my bulk below warcloak, my equipment, my feathered bonnet, my days'-old scrub on chin and cheek, I must have looked anything but a man leaning to holiness. Afterwards the priest denied as much as a single small lie. His brother I was, as were all men; my celibate ways showed a churchly leaning; and out of France had I come, if not straight, not unseldom in a hurry.

The Eirannach, Murrigan O'Flaherty Dhu by name, led us back to his township, and he was a proud man of his find. We were indeed very welcome amongst these simple and primitive clansmen, and it was heart-warming to see their love and loyalty towards the wandering friar, and, in some reflected degree, towards his brother in disguise. They regaled us of their best, procured from somewhere a flagon of Spanish wine in addition to their own heady brew, piled fresh beds of bracken for us, and permitted no one in our vicinity while we rested.

And, indeed, Father Senan did not rest for long. He was a new man in his priestly calling. Weary and worn as he must have been, an old man who had borne the strain with tough fighting men, he rose to do his duties finely and tirelessly in that hamlet of lowly men. In that place that had been without a minister for so long there was much for him to do: children to be baptised, couples to wed or to have their bonds made regular, the last Sacrament to be administered to two or three who were sick, a new house to be blessed, and the shriving of many who believed themselves to be sinners. Poor sinners! There was not amongst them one sinner as I knew sinners.

CHAPTER X

SURROUNDED

A FINE fresh morning it was after that night of rain. The sun was above the trees, and the sky, far and pale and fragile, was without a cloud; and high up in it a lark soared and sang. Here and there a thin smoke of vapor rose off the wet grass, eddied, quivered, and was gone. And a thrush, after his breakfast, sang six notes of a song.

After a fine meal we decided that we would leave the township early in the evening, make for Corrib side, and never cry halt till we were past the danger-spot of Cong. But that choice was not long left to us.

There came a stir and flurry outside our door, and in hurried Murrigan Dhu with one of the outposts. These outposts had been set to watch the inlets to the village, Mass being a heinous offense and punishable with death. This one had been stationed on the southern track and had a disturbing tale to tell.

He had met one Eoin, son of Gannon, from the township of Clounacaora, six miles south, and had learned that a troop of English horse had billeted in that township the previous night. Eoin had been out with the MacWilliams against the English before the truce, and in the night he had stolen away with his neck. The Sassenach were drawing a net through the woods, he said, for the stragglers of a terrible northern raid, while

a body of light horse and kern had made a dash to block the Curlew passes.

Two hundred of the O'Cahans from north of Tyrowen, so the story went, had come like a flame on Dunkellin, put the garrison to the sword, cut out Rickard the Sassenach's tongue, burned down the dun, and were off to the north with the Baron's daughter, twenty maids, and six crocks of gold. Our poor little raid, that had looked so fine and bold, had grown prodigiously in the telling, and I began to think small of myself. We had but emptied a few saddles, stolen one calf, and abducted one willing maiden—nothing to boast about any more.

We did not tarry long in Bellaghy after that news. We made our churchly calling an excuse for haste, and the clansmen, whether they suspected us or not, did all they could to set us on our way. In less than a quarter-hour we were mounted, the priest had given his final blessing, and we were a-gallop out of the hamlet north and by west.

We had gone a mile when I called to mind a good undershirt I had washed and left hanging on a hawthorn bush near a waterfall. I cursed shortly.

"Curse away, fellow-soldier," said the friar. He had re-turned his tunic, and his bearded face was stern under its morion. "You see," he explained with grim humor, "if it comes to the bit, I would rather hang than burn."

And indeed we got overclose to a hanging that day.

We had ridden an hour at a speed to conserve our horses, but we were not as watchful of the road in front as we should have been. We looked for danger from the rear, and kept eyes backward wherever the ground gave us prospect. Thus it was, we came ambling down a brae, round a clump of briar, and out on a wide wagon-road. And there, not two hundred paces on our right, was half a troop of English horse advancing toward us at a foot pace.

WE DID not wait to count the enemy. The shout they gave seemed to act as a spur to our mounts, and we were across the road and into the trees at top speed before they had set hooves a-clatter. The woods were open here, and the ground rising gently to the ridges hiding Corrib; but though we were in a tight place our strait was not yet desperate. Our horses were handy and quick, and the pursuers heavily mounted. Given an open way, an occasional marsh, a few clumps of undergrowth, and we might easily win clear. Already we had gained ground. The half-troop was spreading out fan-shape, instead of making a direct push for us, and we thought that a foolish proceeding at the time. But we did not know that the country ahead was patrolled by the other half of the troop. We learned soon enough.

We rode full gallop up a long glade, swerved with it to the left, and there, full in our path, was a big man on a big horse, a giant fellow in buff with a peaked casque above his eyes.

"We're for it!" Andrea Ferrara grated and sang out of scabbard. I was riding half a length behind and holding Benmee in. Now I gave her knee and she was abreast. "I will take him," I shouted to the priest. "You keep on."

The trooper faced us solidly in the middle of the glade, and already his heavy sword was out. I was close to him before I saw who it was. Tom Pybus! the man I had drawn sword on twice already. "God!" was the thought in my head. "One of us will kill the other this time."

But neither of us did. I suppose the big fellow knew that he was slow with his weapon and that I overmatched him, or it might be that he had no mind to press me. Instead of using his weight to charge me down he reined his horse stiffly and, as I came at him, his blow was hesitating and loose-handed. I parried so fiercely that the hilt was jarred out of his grip, and there he was at my mercy. He swayed his head and shoulders away from me, and I had only to run him through the belly.

I could not. Instead, I thrust foot under his and shot him clean out of the saddle. And he had not thudded on the ground before I had bundled by and was up with the priest, who had checked his horse and armed himself with sparth.

"*Mhuire!*" he cried; "you killed him."

"You could not kill that man."

I glanced over shoulder, and there once more was Tom Pybus trundling after his horse. I had to laugh.

"He fell like a sack of stones," called the priest. "Was it the hilt?"

I shook head. "Press on! Luck comes with him always."

But our luck did not overtake us yet. We labored slantwise to the head of a long rise, and below us was a shallow valley, and beyond it a stiff brae jutted with black and colored limestones. The bottom of the valley was a chain of thick clumps of blackthorn and bramble with a gleam of running water showing between. We raced down the slope, the air singing in our ears, broke between two clumps, and came to a racking halt on the brink of a brawling torrent, brown and swollen by the rain.

THAT torrent was not more than a dozen long paces wide, but it doomed us more surely than a great river. For the depth and rush of it between tilted slabs of stone made it wholly impassable—mounted or on foot.

To our right it slanted away from our pursuers, who were still over the ridge, and, in a last effort, we forced our horses that way through the undergrowth. In less than a minute we came to where it again curved back, and, midway in the curve, a great shelf of limestone shouldered out of the rush of water. It was some four yards out from the high bank on our side. Father Senan in after days computed it at six or maybe seven spades, and used to boast that while I jumped the whole way he jumped most of it. Between us and that slab the water ran deep and strong, but beyond to the shelving bank it appeared fordable. I looked at the torrent, and it was forbiding. I looked at the stone, and I liked it better. It offered a chance of escape, and we had no time to look for a safer one.

I hurled myself off Benmee and slapped her on the withers. "Good-by, lassie! You carried me well." There was little time for farewell.

Father Senan was at my side.

"I can never do it, David," he cried.

"Do it we must," I shouted above the rush of the waters. "Stand back!"

The undergrowth gave me two short paces. I twisted cloak under arm, gripped my sword-scabbard high, took the quick-kick-and-jerk of the hop-step-and-leap—and leaped. The stone jarred me to the neck, my feet slipped into the water, but already my hands were secure on a jut of rock, and I pulled myself to security. Father Senan was on the brink, looking down on me and shaking his head.

"Throw me your ax," I shouted to him, and that he did. I grasped the jut of rock with one hand, grasped the socket of the ax with the other, and reached the four-foot handle as far as I was able.

"Jump!" I dared him furiously. "Jump—and drown—or hang! Jump!"

LATER, he said it was the fury in my eyes that compelled him. He pressed morion down on his head, gathered his cloak, and threw himself forward. He clutched all hands at the ax-haft and soused under. The shock of his weight all but wrenched my fingers from ax and rock, but, luckily, the rush of water and my pull carried him round to the back-swirl behind the shelf, and there I held and hauled him, got a hold of his collar, and dragged him belly-down to precarious safety.

He spluttered through bearded lips, winked the water out of his eyes, and stared at me speechlessly. I gave him no time to get wind or tongue back, but caught him round the waist, cloak and all, and plunged feet first into the rush beyond the rock. We found bottom knee-deep; the water ridged up our thighs, but our solid weight withstood the pressure, and we made the other bank in one desperate splashing rush. And it was then we heard the shouting behind us; and there came a scutter of horsemen down the slope.

"David," cried my stout old warrior, "with ax and sword we can hold this against them."

"Not against arquebus. Come on!"

We faced the shelving bank and the rock-jutted brae above and started the slow climb. What risk or safety was

beyond we did not know—nor care very much then.

Our pace was tardy now. The old priest who, on horseback, had stood the strain with the best, was short of wind and limb, and was soon spent amongst those slippery bosses of sun-hot stone. He lagged, and I waited for him.

"Oh, Davy! Davy!" he panted. "I am old and done. Be not minding me. You are young—you make on—"

In reply I caught him at the belt and pulled him in front of me. Then, indeed, I should have thanked God for strength of body and lung. But I had no time, and I needed all that was in me for the work in hand.

In a little while the old man could do no more than keep feet under him, and I pushed him upwards like an unwieldy sack.

Three-quarter-way up I was forced to halt. Face-down over a rock, I struggled to get my breath, and never before in my life did I experience that terrible whooping indraw that fails to fill the lungs. I thought my heart would burst.

The priest lay against me, speechless, and gently patted my shoulder.

"Look!" he whispered at last.

Down below us many horsemen were forcing a way along the torrent-side, looking for a crossing-place, but none had yet ventured our road. One man directly below us had dismounted and was busy over the priming of an arquebus. I filled my lungs once again, and resettled my grip. The old man groaned with the effort, and we resumed the climb—slowly and slowly. We were near the head of the brae when the tensely-waited-for bellow roared behind us and the lead spattered the rock at our side. We were over the top before another shot could be fired.

There we halted, drawing in the air open-mouthed, the blood hissing in my ears, my head dizzy, sweat salt on my lips; and, once open, our mouths stayed open, and our eyes stared in front of us. For there before us was the wide reach of Loch Corrib, the water we had been trending towards so eagerly for two days, and now it hemmed us in and betrayed us. We stood at one horn of a deep bay, and on our right hand, where we had hoped to hide in the woods, was a mile-wide stretch of deep water. We could not hope to get round the detour of that inlet before our pursuers found a road to us.

CORRIB is a great expense of inland sea, a good thirty miles in length and, at this point, some three miles across. The far shore lifted into a fine wooden ridge, gapped by the gash of an inlet going back into the breast of big hills —great purple masses of hill, peaceful and remote under the high summer sky. Over there was safety, here death was at our heels, and, between, Corrib waters shimmered in the sun.

"David, son," said my old friend, stilling his panting breath, "I am old and done, and why should two of us suffer? There is no more good in me."

A hot anger came over me. Had the old fool no sense? How could I face Dungiven and the soldierly men who held it, knowing that I had left the old priest to die?

"Oh, David—David!" he cried then, seeing the anger in my eyes. "I do not want to be the death of your mother's son—the woman that I loved—the only one."

That touched me. I put my arm round him.

"Since you are the only father I have," said I, "I will not part with you this day. Come! We will work round by the trees close to the water."

So we went down the slope, linked together. And we did not hurry. The old friar could not, and, since I was tied to him so irrevocably, a mood of desperate quietness came to me. No, not quietness!

A strange satisfying humor that gave me a sense of pride in myself. By the goodness of God, if we were going to die we would die side by side, and my name and nation would not be a byword in the mouths of men.

So we came to the trees, went quietly through them, and came round a patch of wild raspberries above the fine gravel of the shore. And there a tall man, leaning to pick a berry, started upright and swore a sudden short oath.

WE WERE startled too. I swung the priest aside and grasped at my hilt. And, grasping it, I had Andrea Ferrara out and on guard. For one glance told me who this man was.

He was Captain Sir William Cosby of Cong, the slayer of Colum O'More. Here now was death close to us—and to him. My mind leaped to the conclusion that he was here with his men and that the end had come for us.

"Draw!" I said in my throat. "I will kill you this day before I die!"

His hand was at his hip, but there was there only a dagger. He was not even in his soldier's dress, but wore a doublet and hose of black and red, and, instead of casque, a flat-topped slashed cap. As I came at him he snatched at his poor weapon, gave back a step, and crouched on guard, but in his glazed eye was the knowledge that death was at his throat. It was so easy to break through that guard. It was too easy. I hesitated.

And as I hesitated a woman screamed at my left hand. And though she screamed she was bold. She came round the raspberry canes like the wind and, unhesitatingly, drove between Cosby and me. My flickering blade was not a hand's-breadth from her shoulder. She looked from one to the other.

"What is it?" Her breath was drawn in sharply. "What is it, Captain Cosby?"

A young maid she was, and bonny too. I could note that even in the stress of passion. Not very tall, with black hair waving and the good blood not yet ebbed from her cheeks. Frightened she might be, but not dismayed, though Father Senan says that my ferocious mien should have dismayed any Christian maid.

"What is it, Captain Cosby?" she asked again. "Who is this man?"

"A rebel outlaw," said Cosby, swallowing his palate.

But I was no longer paying attention to man or maid. They were of no interest any more. For, glancing by her shoulder, my eyes saw something that made my heart jump. Down at the edge of the water was a small cobble—a lovely, shapely, God-sent small boat, painted green and white. There it was. I blinked my eyes to make sure of it.

I glanced at the priest. His eyes were on it too. I bellowed at him. "Go on! She is ours."

Life had come back to my old Trojan. He hesitated not at all. He scurried. He clattered on the gravel, shoved the boat's head off, fell over the bow, scrambled to a thwart, grasped oars, and with a practised flick had her stern on to the shore. "Come on, my hero!" he roared, a fine vigor in his voice. "Ours she is."

The flaxen mustache that bushed up over Cosby's cheeks twitched, and his teeth showed. But he did not move. Step by step I went backwards to the gravel. I was taking no risks now.

And again this young woman flew lightly between us, and now, instead of fright, there was the flare of battle in her eye.

"You hulking red savage!" she cried, "that boat is mine!"

I retreated steadily, and she faced close to me.

"Dare you steal it?"

I was on the gravel now.

"You will hang—"

"Without it," I finished for her.

She must have seen that I was past moving, and, for the first time, she showed dismay. She threw her hands out in an impulsive gesture and her eyes widened.

"But I must be home."

"Walk," said I.

"To the other shore?"

A long walk surely.

"You brute!" Anger and dismay in her tone. "I must be home. My mother—" She wrung her hands and half-turned from me.

My heels splashed in the water, and I paused before I swung for the boat. I paused because, before she turned away, I saw virginal fear in that maid's eye, and something that was almost a prayer to Heaven—or to me.

And then and there I acted on impulse. Maybe it was not impulse after all, but a sudden knowledge that it was not right to leave the maid alone in this wilderness with a brute—and with rough soldiery on the hill behind. I strode at her, caught her round the waist with

my left arm, lifted her high, pounded into the water, and dropped her without ceremony into the bow of the boat behind the priest.

"Home to your mother, vixen," I cried, "and keep better company."

I dragged at the gunwale and vaulted clean over the oar into the stern. That maid had not once screamed or struggled in my arm.

IT WAS then that Cosby made a final essay. He rushed forward into the water, growling, dagger lifted, teeth bare, and, forthwith, I did my very utmost to get him. I put arm and shoulder behind that long lunge. He braked himself desperately, head thrown back, and the drag of the water on his feet helped. My point just reached him below the breast-bone, and steel jarred on steel. It was true, then, that he wore mail. The shock knocked him flat on his back with a great splash.

"Dhia! He is spitted," cried the priest.

"No! but he will be," I shouted, and then and there would have leaped back and pinned his throat to the gravel. But at that the oarsman tugged full strength, the boat shot out into the loch, and I fell breast down on the sternboard, my long blade trailing in the water.

The flurry and the fury were not yet finished. As I scrambled to my knees a great shout burst from the hill, and men on foot came pouring down to the lochside.

Two were well ahead: a trooper armed with arquebus and a tall officer carrying a naked sword.

The trooper pulled up on shore, looked at his priming, and brought his weapon to the level. I turned to the maid in the bow.

"Down!" I ordered her, and she crouched her dark head to the gunwale. Some instinct brought me to my feet to draw the bullet high. But the bellow of the explosion never came. For the tall officer came bounding behind his man, struck him a mighty blow under the ear, and laid him flat on the gravel. I knew that tall officer. He was Sir Francis Vaughan.

CHAPTER XI

CAPTAIN BEVINDA'S GIRL

SUDDENLY, as it seemed, a great quietness had come about us. There was only the click and feather of the oars, and a soft gurgle at the bows; and all about us was the wide reach of Corrib.

The friar was a good oarsman, but his wet clothes hindered him. Moreover, his cheeks above beard were strangely pale and his breath blew through his lips. So I slipped off my cloak, and placing my hands over his, stopped the sway of his body. We changed places. As I sidled by him in that swaying little craft I glanced at the maid, who was now sitting up in the bow. She had uttered no word yet, and now she did not even glance at me. Her eyes were across the water to the group on the shore, a frown of some perplexity was on her brow, and a soft dark curl, darker than the frown, was on her brow too. I had to dispose of my long scabbard by her side, and she quickly moved her dress aside out of the way.

I was not so deft with my oars as Father Senan, but I had strength and again my wind, and I lifted the boat through the water at a fine surge direct for the Connemara shore. The sooner we got there the better, though our pursuers had a twenty-mile circuit to reach us.

The old man made himself comfortable in the stern, eased his heart with two or three deep breaths, and bethought himself of his calling. He looked up at the sun-full sky.

"Glory to God and His Blessed Mother, and all the Saints," he gave thanks, "that saved our lives this day!"

And at last the maid behind me spoke. "Why!" she cried, in some surprise; "you are a priest, after all."

"And a poor sinner as well," he said. And added, "You need have no fear, my daughter."

"I am not afraid," she denied. "I never was afraid." She said it proudly—too proudly for my taste.

"You will forgive us, my daughter," said my wise old man at last. "We had

to do it. We were flying for our lives from the English soldiery—"

"Why? Because you are a priest?"

"There was another reason too— and if anytihng it was a better reason."

"But how should I know?" she made complaint. "This ruffler brandishing a sword before a man defenseless—if he had said but a word!"

I made the boat leap. Here was feminine malice.

But my old friend had a salty tongue too.

"He is a very hasty young man, this young man, surely," he said, mildly sardonic. "A great pity the four of us did not sit down to it—and the day so fine."

"But there was no call for swashbuckling," she gave back spiritedly. "And, though you may be a priest, a wolf sometimes puts on sheep's clothing—with his brother, the red wolf."

My sorrow! but she was quick as an adder that day.

"Our acts belie us, my daughter," said the priest quietly, "and we hope to prove that to you. If you tell us where you live, we will row you as near as we may with safety—and be thanking you."

After a pause she told him. "That gap opening between Inish—between these two islands. In there."

I turned to look where she pointed, and saw the mouth of an inlet open between rocky bluffs. It was still a long mile away and some distance to my left, and I set the boat's head for it.

"Cashlean-na-Kirka, the dun of the great Captain Dame Bevinda O'Flaherty, is somewhere in there?" half-queried the priest.

"She is my mother," said the maid. "I am her daughter Eithne."

"At your service, my lady," he gave back, a trifle blankly.

ALL Gaeldom had heard of Queen's Captain Dame Bevinda O'Flaherty of Cashlean-na-Kirka. A widowed great lady, with one daughter and a mind of her own. Because of some private quarrel with the MacWilliams and the O'Kellys she had armed her stronghold with a culverin or two, garrisoned it with a standard of ferocious O'Flahertys, and held it against all comers. And then she made petition to Elizabeth, the English queen, for permission to do these things she had already done.

"Bevinda!" said that queen, reading out the strange name and swearing a customary oath. "S'death! but these wild Irishmen have outlandish names. Bevinda! Still, the man is well disposed, and in our grace we will make him a captain." So the dame got her captain's commission, and was more than equal to it. And though men laughed, there was no ridicule in their mirth, for Captain Bevinda was as good as any man of her clan, and the men of her clan knew themselves to be a shade better than the best.

And here now was her dark-haired daughter, whose boat we had pirated, whose body we had abducted, who was powerful enough to more than double the mounting dangers of the road—and we were rowing directly into the jaws of the tigress. I slowed down my rate of rowing, and was not at all happy in my mind.

And then a fine memory struck me. Had I not heard some one say the name of this maid before? . . . I had. . . . And I had it. Donal Ballagh, that last night at Dungiven, had spoken of a visit to Cashlean-na-Kirka, where he met his lady, and where lived her dark-haired friend named Eithne ni Flaherty—who could make my tough heart turn over. Dark-haired she was, indeed, and this day my heart had turned over once or twice—but not for her. . . .

There was some way out of this, now, if only I could think of it.

I looked at Father Senan. Here was the man with the cunning, wise tongue. Let him resolve this instead of David Gordon of the Scots hard head—and the sullen face to spoil his work. I chose my words carefully.

"This lady," said I, looking at him intently, "is a friend of her who was Amy Burc."

He stared at me in complete amazement, his face vacant of all but surprise. Before the import of my words could

reach him the maid behind me spoke quickly, anxiously.

"Amy Burc — my friend—who was?"

Then he got it. His eyes beamed.

"My darling fellow!" he cried. "My sound man! The rope is not made would hang us, nor the tree planted to make a faggot for our burning." He smiled at the maid over my shoulder. "Your friend is well, my lady," he told her. "But she is no longer Amy Burc."

At once she knew what he meant.

"Oh!" she cried, high and happily. and I heard her hands clap together. "Has she got her gallant young O'Cahan?"

"She has surely—her own Donal Ballagh." He looked at me gratefully. "This, my friend, is David Gordon, his own cousin; and, in religion, my name is Senan. I married the young pair yesterday in the woods north of Athenree, and they are off north for Dungiven. It is a great tale."

I did my utmost to get him.

"How splendid!" Her voice was warm and glad. I drew a deep breath of relief. I could feel the new mood that came about us.

She was so eager that she forgot for the time the hulking red savage. "Why," she cried, "I was with Amy that morning our plans failed us—and I was with her two nights ago at Bingham's feast. Tell me, father."

He cleared his throat like the story-teller he was, and a wicked humor made me laugh at him. I glanced at the eager maid over my shoulder, and she caught my red eyes.

"A brief tale," said I, "and easily told. Two hundred men of the O'Cahans, as well as a red savage and an old done friar, raided down from Dungiven, put the Dunkellin garrison to the sword, cut out Rickard the Sassenach's tongue, burned his dun, and made off north with his daughter, twenty maids, and six crocks of gold. That is all."

"Oh!" breathed the lady weakly.

"Oh, surely!" said I, very pleased with myself. "Red gold and red-haired maids, every one."

"Would you add a dark-haired one for contrast?" She came back on the recover, and got within my guard.

The priest laughed. "Never mind what he says, Lady Eithne. He is only repeating some of the wild rumors that are already gone abroad. This is the true tale."

AND there and then, as I drew steadily on the oars, he told the tale, and he told it well. He began it at Dungiven with the message that came for Donal, and he finished it at Corrib shore; and, like all good story-tellers, he added an

inch here and there to stress the risk and the daring. But foolishly, and for no reason at all, he would dwell on what he called my leadership in the ambush —and lie shamelessly at that, until I could stand it no longer.

"Bah!" said I. "What saw you—and you hiding in your bush?"

"Head under wing—ay!"

"And tumbling Dunkellin off his horse."

"Fright that was. He rode over me."

But the lady was eager to hear, and hear it all. She did—and some besides. But at the very end she surprised the story-teller.

"Oh!" she cried, pain in her voice. "The pity that ye should spoil it all for me at the end." She brought her palms together. "Why the threatening sword and the—the terrible words? If I—if you told me—"

"My dear daughter," placated the priest hastily, "before we saw you we saw this Captain Cosby—and we thought we were only deeper in the net with his soldiers all round us. And forget not, Lady Eithne, that though sword was drawn, no blood was spilt, thanks to God."

"But it might. This—your friend—was eager for blood. He said so! That lunge was made to kill."

Father Senan looked at me, and I could not or would not help him. That lunge was meant to kill, and she knew it.

This business of the brute Cosby seemed to touch her very closely. She would not leave it. She put another question to the priest. "Who was this man—this Colum O'More that was killed?"

"Of Offaly—a noble friend to the North."

"In fair fight?"

He looked at me troubledly.

"He was my friend."

"But a soldier has to fight," she cried, almost plaintively, "and—sometimes—to slay. Captain Cosby is a soldier—hard, but a great fighter for his queen—and my—my mother's friend. Why this ugliness of killing?"

If Cosby was her friend, or her mother's friend, I could say nothing.

I pulled strongly for the land, here heavily wooded to the water's edge, and skirted along on the fringe of the trees. The strong tower was now hidden behind a nose of land, and, on our rounding that, it still remained hidden by another farther on. Between the two points a bonny small inlet was thrust in among the hills.

"In here," said the lady shortly.

THE thought came to me that in here we were on the wrong side of the main inlet to make good our escape. But I said nothing, and did as I was bid. At the head of the water a strong stream came down brawling from the hills—and a prime trout-stream by the look of it. The lady's hand directed me, and we grated to shore just outside the outward drive of the current. At once I jerked in the oars, stepped over the side into a few inches of water, and lifted the bow to the gravelly edge of the beach. I stood within hand-reach of the maid, but she looked past me at Father Senan, and spoke quietly to him: "Ye will be safer for the present this side of the loch—if ye trust me."

"With our lives—and in your hands they are, my lady."

"Listen, then. You see this stream—the Glosha. There is your road. Follow it up into the hills—four miles it might be, and not a hard road. Halfway up you will strike the pannier-track from Cashlean—at Glounamaol—and, following that, you will come to the deer-warden's bothy in the Glen of the Echo. Tell old Garrodh that I sent you. He lives alone with his hounds—and you will be safe with him. No one goes that road, and the stags still in velvet. And note this: he has never forgiven my mother for being known as a loyalist. Food he will have—it might be venison, for sometimes, he says, a hart breaks a leg slipping on the Linen Apron—which is a lie, I think. In the morning, at the latest, more will be sent—and the way may be open for you. Now you must hurry—and I must hurry too."

"Oh, kind one of the heart!" The old man's voice was vibrant.

She flushed a little, lifted to her feet, slipped daintily on to the thwart and

"You will not go, though you die!"

over it, and reached hands for the oars. The priest stamped across the gravel to the grassy shore, and I grated the boat out into the water. There she deftly swung the little craft stern round, and looked at me evenly for the first time. Her oars were lifted out of the water, and she leaned forward, the handles under her young breasts.

And I drove myself to do the right thing.

I strode into the water knee-deep and took off my feathered bonnet. Some impulse of flight came on her at that, for she quickly straightened and dipped oars. I laid a holding hand on the stern.

"My lady," said I, "I ask you forgiveness. I am sorry that I hurt you."

"You did me no hurt, sir." She was as quick as that.

"No!" said I then. "It is for my own hurt I ask forgiveness."

She looked at me puzzledly, and then smiled suddenly.

"As for forgiveness, Master Gordon," she said, "I forgave you long ago." Then she leaned forward and spoke in a low voice that the priest might not hear. "Your old friend, I think, will not be fit for travel for a day or two. A priest, he will be safe with us, but there is no need for you to stay."

I glowered at her from under sullen brows. Would she, too, have me forsake this, my old hero?

"For him there is no danger," she replied to that glower, "but for you there must be."

"Can I go, then?" I asked simply.

And then a warmth came into her eyes and her face, and a small thrill into her voice. "You may," said she; "but you will not, though you die."

The oars ridged the water, the stern slipped from under my hand, and she left me there watching her.

CHAPTER XII

"YOU HAVE THE HILLMAN'S EYE!"

WE TOOK near on two hours to reach the deer-warden's bothy in the Glen of the Echo above Glounamaol, and this though the road was no rugged one. The old father had been pressed too hard, and, though he hid his weariness under a gay humor and all his many halts were to admire the bonny trout-pools and fishing-runs so plentiful along the stream, he made no remonstrance when I gave him a hand over the steeper bits.

The deer-warden was soon apprised of our coming. The approaching path was in view of the bothy for its whole length, and we had not taken a hundred strides on it before the boom of a great dog's barking filled the bowl.

"Give me back my sparth," cried the old warrior, who knew how savage hounds could be.

But these hounds were well trained. They stayed close by the house they guarded, and presently ceased barking. A man appeared outside the door of the bothy, looked long at us from under his hand, and turned back into the house. He did not stay long inside. In less than half a minute he was back in front of the door, his two dogs at his side. And there he waited for us.

"He is taking no chances, this old fellow named Garrodh," said Father Senan. "Look at him."

We were near enough to see that he had armed himself with a long-bow tall-

er than himself, and that it was ready strung, and that though he leant on it easily his feet were set in the archer straddle. And when we came nearer we saw the feathered end of an arrow peeping from his oxter.

WE CAME slowly up the last rise to the bothy, and out on the level patch in front of it, a spread of short crisp grass with a deer-flenching gallows standing up in the middle of it. The great dogs, one dun and one brindled, slipped forward before their master, crouched back on their haunches, and from deep down in them came a sound, not so much a growl as a note struck on a bass string. We halted side by side, and the deer-warden leaned on his bow over against us, and was in no hurry to talk.

An old man he was, but straight and not lean: with great hunches of shoulders, a sandy beard, and eyes washed clean of blue, so light were they. And his great hand grasping the bow was like a ham in size and color.

"God and Mary with you, O son!" saluted the priest.

"And Saint Patrick with ye—father!" he responded in a surprisingly high voice. But he made no move to welcome us. After all, not every man with a shaven pate might be trusted.

"You will be Garrodh, the deer-warden?"

"Garrodh, son of Garrodh, descendant of Eochy, who died on the field of Athenree."

"Rest his soul! A bad day yon for Connacht!"

"And for Edward the Bruce." He glanced at my Scots bonnet.

I could feel the astute Gaelic twist of my old friend's mind as it wrought over the problem. He began again, and this time more frankly. "I am one Senan of Arachty, and this is David Gordon, cousin to O'Cahan of Dungiven."

Old Garrodh's cold eyes leaped to mine, and it was as if some memory warmed them.

"David Gordon!" said he. "Is it not the strange thing?" Then he went on in a spate. "Young Donal Ballagh I know. He was in this place a week before Christmas and shot a yeld hind—a strong shaft to his ear, with this. No seven-times-damned arquebus with him! Look you, now! The man that would stalk the red gentlemen of the hills with a roaring bull throwing a lead ball this way and that way, no more, maybe, than breaking a leg and frightening all the Joyces—that man is face-set for the roasting red flags of hell. There was a Cosby of Cong—"

"That man will be roasted, if he is not careful," put in Father Senan. "And roasted he will be as well if he is careful—the Lord forgive me for judging him."

"You know him."

"Twice this day he and his *Sassun deargs* loosed arquebus on us."

"Lucky for you it was not me had you at the end of a shaft."

"Is Garrodh, descendant of Eochy, on the side of the Sassenach?"

"He is not," he flared, "what ever side Bevinda O'Flaherty is on—God give her sense."

"So said your young mistress, Lady Eithne, when she saved our lives in her white and green boat. 'Go to Garrodh, the deer-warden,' she said. 'There you will be safe.' "

Garrodh threw the strung bow over his arm "Could you not say that before, holy man?" he cried, striding forward and tendering the hand of welcome. "Here you will be safe, or nowhere safe. Come away in."

THE bothy was built roughly of stone slabs, clinched with clay and thatched with long heather. An open porch faced the pony-track, and in there was the hounds' sleeping-place. And, strange enough in a hill-bothy, the two small windows were glazed in green glass. During the hunting-season the chieftainess and her guests used it for days at a time, and this accounted for its size and fittings.

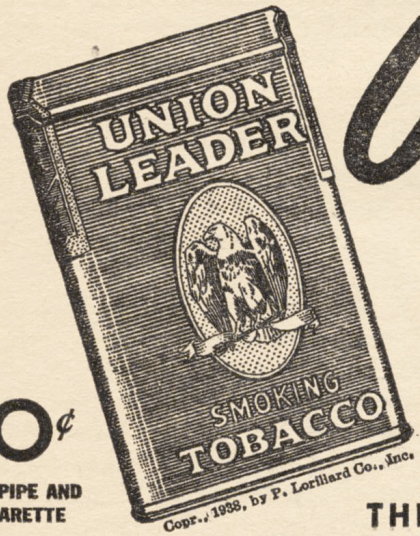
As I entered the front door behind the old hunter I saw the back-door over his shoulder, and, as I looked, it closed the last few inches slowly—just as if some one had pulled it to behind him.

PALS

...through the years

IN 1907... "Meetin' the right pipe tobacco is pretty near as difficult (and important) for a man as courtin' the right girl. I didn't get hep to Union Leader until a travelin' man loaned me some about the time this picture was made. But I've had cause to thank that fellow ever since for my favorite smoke."

TODAY... "Here's the 'right gal, the right tobacco' and me, all pictured together. When a man, woman and tobacco get along good as us all these years they got to have something. Union Leader's got enough goodness to last a man all his life." C. S. Ross, Route 3, Farmington, Ia.



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ALWAYS... Since it made its bow, over a third of a century ago, UNION LEADER has been a favorite of American smokers. This tobacco is flavor-filled Burley from the hill crops of Kentucky. Mellowed in oaken casks and specially processed to remove all trace of harshness or tongue-bite. It's the friendliest smoke a dime ever bought.

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FOR PIPE AND CIGARETTE

THE GREAT AMERICAN SMOKE

Garrodh treated us in princely fashion, and by that time we needed his generosity. There was no venison, but there was mountain mutton, with oaten cakes, butter that had been cheese-seasoned in a peat-hag, and milk lashed with usquebaugh. And, eating done, he built up the fire of bog-pine and peat, and soon the old priest, busy at his tale, sat in an armed-chair before the glow, clad only in Garrodh's woolen cloak, while his own clothes were steaming at one side. Though my horse-boots had been water-filled more than once that day I did not yet remove them, and I kept sword behind my hip out of sight. The memory of that closing door stayed with me.

In time, with an excusing word, I got up and went out the front door. The two hounds were in the porch, and the dun one came and smelled my long boots. I flicked a finger, and he lifted massive head to my palm.

"Come, lad," I invited, and he followed a few paces, thought better of it, and walked back to his post.

I went across the green under the deer-gallows, and looked down into the cup of the little valley. The sun was setting, and the hollow down there seemed deep and far away, and a thin band of haze, faintly pearl, lay along the course of the stream. The bald heads of the hills were a sad orange, and a single cloud above them was redder than red fire. And no bird sang.

I stood there, full of a great loneliness, a devastating knowledge of my littleness —that terrible evil of knowledge that knows that whatever one does leads nowhere for ever and ever. "That being so," I thought, "let one do what is to do and be done with it."

Quietly I walked around the cow-byre and found that the back door of the bothy led into a deep fold that curved back over the rim of the valley. I went along this fold until it led out into thick heather, and there before me was the true wilderness. A wide, savage, sterile glen sloped up and up into the face of a great hill that was darker than purple, and the whole floor of the glen was a jumble of immense gray boulders. There an army might lie hidden, and if any one had come out the back door he was safe from all searching.

I stood for a time, knee-deep in the tussocks, looking up that savage and lonely valley, and was about to turn away when a movement in the heather caught my eye. No breath of air had moved, yet, over there a little way, a tuft swayed aside just as if a hand had moved it to make a peep-hole.

That mood of deadly calmness still on me, I hesitated not at all. I walked slowly forward, not even placing hand on hilt. "Up!" I spoke softly. "There is no fear." And the heather shook and a man scrambled to his feet.

"Cathal O'Dwyer!" I cried then. "My own friend!"

"Brother!" Wistfully welcome was his smile. "You have the hillman's eye."

Cathal O'Dwyer of the Glens it was, but a Cathal woefully changed. His fine mop of flaxen hair was tousled and lusterless, his face worn thin. His right arm was bandaged across his breast and the end of a wooden splint showed on the back of his hand.

I strode forward and placed my hand gently on his shoulder.

"A long way from home, Cathal friend," said I, "but glad am I to see you."

"Far and far," said he, his voice shaken; "but where else would I be? Crosby the Killer still lives."

"You are hurt?"

"His work. He wears a chain shirt next his skin. I had him at sgian-point and broke blade on him—not far from here. I escaped into the woods, but he did this with a French pistol. This is a known refuge, and Garrodh set the bone. But I think that I was not in my own mind for many days. I am better now—and better seeing you, David Gordon."

As we walked down the fold I was perplexed and troubled. This man, given a fair chance, would slay Cosby—and Cosby deserved slaying. Yet the Lady Eithne—or her mother—thought highly of him. How highly? Ah well! It was none of my business till I found that out. . . .

CHAPTER XIII

REFUGE

I SLEPT well, and did not dream of running water or green seas roaring. Senan and I lodged in the ben-room of the bothy, while Garrodh and O'Dwyer made beds of heather and their cloaks in the kitchen. Once or twice in the night I thought I heard the old priest groan at my side, but when I waked in the morning he was sound asleep, and I slipped off the couch without disturbing him.

Garrodh and Cathal were up and busy at the newlit fire, and a fine fragrance came from where trout were curling on a home-made grid.

"Pity you have not any for yourselves," I said, looking over the old warden's shoulder.

"You will let us have the tails, anyway," he chuckled. "Our holy man is still at the sleeping."

I found him lying on his back, but not sleeping, and there was a twist on his face this fine morning.

"Slugabed!" and my hand reached for his shoulder.

"No, lad!" and he winced. "My old enemy is on me, and I knew it would." And, seeing the concern in my face, he added hastily, "It is nothing—only a stitch that plagues me whenever I get wet all over."

"Where is it?"

"Here—below the small of the back and across—like a knife if I move—What is to eat in the house?"

This was better. "Trout," said I. "You will not be fit for your share?"

"Mhuire! you Albannach rogue! Not more than two, and pink in the flesh."

If he could be so choice in his diet there could not be much the matter beyond this painful muscle-seizure across the loins. Painful it was beyond a doubt, for as we propped him on the couch he cursed us warmly.

"Ah, ha!" said Garrodh. "It grips you. Well I know the twist, but in this house is the thing will burn it out of you in three days."

"Burn! You—"

"Protect us all! It is only the first run of the still, and warmer than new wool. Wait you and see."

WE fed him sparingly out of prudence, and then turned him, protesting furiously, on his face while Garrodh rubbed into his loins a cloudy liquid with a pungent odor. The great fleshy hand moved with a surprising gentleness, and, whether it was the soothing or the liquid, our patient was much relieved of his pain.

Safely on his back, he stopped a groan and smiled at me. "That is better. But, son, it will be the best part of a week before I can march."

"There is no hurry on ye, surely," said Garrodh hospitably.

"I know, a friend. But in the heart of Connacht there is always danger for a man of Ulster, and Cosby the Killer I do not trust. Look, Davy! As a priest I am safe, since Captain Dame Bevinda is loyal to the Church, but a young lad in a feathered bonnet, with a mile of sword at hip, is in the mouth of danger."

I shook fist under my old man's nose.

"I will stay," said I, "and drown you in the first peat-hole we come to, so that I can tell Dungiven what fate took you."

Father Senan caught my hand and squeezed it. "O dangerous fist!" He stopped and listened. "Who is coming?"

The sound that had come to us was the clink of a horse's hoof close at hand. Followed immediately the deep bay of a hound.

Garrodh peered through the window and laughed. "My dear lass, Lady Eithne! Look!"

I looked, and saw no one. "Where?"

"There—that far curve of the track."

And, following his pointed finger, I saw in the distance, close to where the path came out of Glounamaol, a lady on pony-back.

Old Garrodh laughed again at my surprise.

"But this is the Glen of the Echo," he explained. "A strange thing and uncanny—but it makes this house a safe place. A word whispered, a stone turned at that point there—and at no other—

and the sound travels to this one spot like it was whispered in your ear. Sometimes it frightens me. Yesterday, the holy man here was looking for his sparth-ax when the hound barked—and I in for my long-bow."

A groan from the bed made me turn. The priest lifted on an elbow and fell backwards, hot-worded.

"My life!" he cried tartly. "If I was not crippled or had one here with decent manners, this darling one that succored us would be met and welcomed on the road."

"She knows the road herself," said I sourly, and marched out of the room.

Cathal O'Dwyer was at the back door.

"I go to my hole in the heather," he told me through door chink. "It is not good to give any one too many secrets to keep."

I looked long at my bonnet lying on a bench. After a time I took it up and smoothed out the blackcock's feather, and, after a longer time, turned and walked, slow-footed, into the open.

EITHNE O'FLAHERTY came riding slowly—very slowly—and I met her halfway. She drew the pony to a halt, and I came to a halt myself, a good pace short of its nose.

"Well, Master David Gordon," she cried gayly, "are you feeling less bloodthirsty this morning?"

Her laughter rippled and made me smile. I might have told her that her own biting mood of the day before had vanished very completely.

"A good morning to you, Lady Eithne," I saluted, bonnet off.

"Bloodthirsty? No! And in no mood either to run away with twenty red-haired maidens?"

This was pricking me hard. "Red or dark," said I, "I would liefer run from."

"But, being brave and courteous, you haste to meet one. Is that it?"

"Your kind-heartedness deserved—"

She laughed, her hand stopping me. "Poor—poor! Kind-heartedness is a poor compliment when one is young—so I am told. Why not turn me a neat compliment about Maeve of Connacht or Deirdre of your Ulster?"

"But that one had red hair,"

"To be sure—to be sure! Red-gold for the Gael always!"

I think that she was hurt, and from us she deserved no hurt.

"Dark hair is very beautiful too," I said bravely.

"Thanks for your second best, Master Gordon. But why tarry here? You will need your breakfast?"

"I have just had it, my lady."

"I am sorry. I bring you some—and am without mine—only a little."

"Mine was little too," I lied handsomely.

"Let us to more, then."

The pony went by me and I laid a hand on his haunch, and, as I walked, my head was level with the maid's shoulder. There was a pannier-straddle across the beast's shoulders, and she sat on a saddle-pad behind it, one foot in a leather loop. She wore a white coif on her hair, but that vagrant curl had escaped to play in the morning air. Her neck in the opening of her close-fitting riding-tunic was finer and whiter than a lily, warmer than the heart of rose. Indeed but she was bonny, with a wholesome flavor to her like good wine.

She was silent in some mood of her own until Garrodh came out to us at the deer-gallows.

She went in at once to Father Senan, and commiserated him and comforted, and impressed on him that he was safe in the Glen of the Echo, and need be in no hurry leaving it. And she would see that proper dainties were provided him.

"He is after a hearty breakfast," said I at that.

"A splendid fine breakfast, surely," he agreed courteously, his warm eye on me.

"We are going to have some now," I hit him. "In these panniers, Lady Eithne?"

"At that side are a brace of cold fowl and a pasty, and at the other, some flagons of Bordeaux wine."

The old man gazed at me with solemn and unforgiving eye.

"Pasty—and he in his bed—never! The wing of a chicken at sundown, may-

be! And wine—the dry wine of Bordeaux in particular—is too heating—"

"If it does not gripe you," he exploded uncontrollably, "I fail in my office." He jerked on the couch, and yelped at the twinge.

"Be not minding the tyrant, Father Senan," she soothed him. "Your share I will see to."

She turned to me, a light in her eyes.

"Why, Master David," she cried, "you are not so solemnly serious after all."

EITHNE O'FLAHERTY did not stay long with us that morning. She gave Garrodh some directions as to our care, made note of a few needs, talked a while with the priest, and got up to go. Whereupon that man commanded me, like father teaching unmannerly son: "David, lad, you will see Lady Eithne to the corner."

So I placed the wine flagon well out of his reach, and did as I was bid.

"That old man loves you," she said, as we went.

"I do not think he hates any one."

"But you he loves—and you him."

"Love?"

"Ah! perhaps you keep that for your lady?"

I threw up my head and laughed. "Ladies will spare me."

"And why!"

"Need you ask?" said I, looking at her under sullen brow.

She looked at me puzzedly, and then smiled. "Did you not meet any darling ones?"

"None to know."

I could have told here that I had seen some beautiful women that were proud, and many beautiful ones that were pitiful. The proud ones never saw me, and the pitiful ones—but, indeed, of them I had no hard word to say, for I do think they were pitiful because they were kind. But I did not tell her all that and she remained in a muse of her own till we came to the mouth of Glounamaol.

"To-morrow—or next day," she told me, halting the pony, "I will send or bring more food, though, judging by your second breakfast, your appetite is small for your inches. I know! It was kind of you to pretend, when I was so hungry. . . . I think that I am sorry for all I said yesterday."

"A brute—a ruffler—a hulking red savage!"

"Oh!" she cried in dismay, her hand to her mouth.

"I deserved them."

"No, no! It was but the temper of the ferocious O'Flaherty. But you know that if ever you anger me again I shall call you dreadful names." She touched the pony with her heel, and called back, "But I shall not mean one of them."

I stood watching her, bonnet off, and her live young shoulders swayed lissomly to the quick amble. A pleasant and happy maid. Bonny she was too, and her eyes—yes! I liked her eyes best. They were dark, but, unlike many dark eyes, they had depth, and they had a way of growing small and crinkling at the corners when she smiled . . . I could see her smiling now. Impish she was, and given to teasing—and hot-headed, as I knew, but behind all was a balance that held against waywardness. . . . But what knew I of woman—this kind of woman? Sir Willian Cosby was her friend—her mother's friend, she said. . . . Could she not see the brute at the core of him? Ah well! she might make a man of him. None of my business. I was done with him except in the chances of war. But Cathal O'Dwyer was not. Well, that was none of my business either—and let Cosby look to himself.

CHAPTER XIV

DEATH AT FIFTY PACES

THE next morning I did not wait for Senan's bidding to be escort, nor did I breakfast beforehand. I went down to the burn, bathed, and shaved too, kept an eye on the path in case any one came, and when the lady appeared, took the brae at an easy slant and met her farther than half-way.

"Well, David Gordon," she called, her eyes a-crinkle. "Is your breakfast with you this fine morning? Ah! pity that I had mine."

"And a fresh trout for you, Lady Eithne."

"But I had breakfast very early, and —but oh! ravisher! the tale of your doings has come to Cashlean-na-Kirka."

"Mine?"

"Were you the only reiver of your three hundred—the number of ye has grown to that, and your maidens to two score, not all red-haired, a drove of kine, and two pannier loads of gold. Which poor maid did you seize in that accustomed way, ribs a-crush, and no word said?"

"She was named Eithne," I gave her bravely. "And more than I bargained for, so I dropped her."

"I deserved that." She lifted her young neck and laughed, and kept me looking at her. "Like an empty sack you dropped her in the bottom of the boat, and she said a word to herself that she has already got a penance for. But my question! Were you the man of Ulster who wore a blackcock's feather in a Scots bonnet?—like the devil's horns, they said!"

"There it is."

"And did you slash a man's head off back-hand?"

"I did not."

"And did you kill the captain of Rickard's guard with blow of hilt?"

"Knocked him off his horse only."

"He was Langdon Coote, and a famous swordsman."

"Better than I—and unlucky."

"Your Sir Francis Vaughan knows who Blackcock's Feather is. You know I have met your gallant man of the English."

She paused, and then explained with some care: "That is how I was across Corrib that day. Sir Francis was coming to see my mother, and I—and Captain Cosby—went to bring him the short-cut. Ye gave him a long ride to Cong. He spent last night with us, and I told him the true tale of the raid on Dunkellin. He would scarce believe ye were only half a score."

"Fourteen."

"Near enough. Sir Francis is a gallant gentleman and your friend."

"A gallant enemy."

"He thinks highly of you too. He said that four times you had a man at your mercy, with danger around you, and did not strike to kill—and that once he was the man."

This was rating me too highly.

"But, Lady Eithne," I tried to explain, "one was but a cut-and-thrust trooper, and Vaughan had only a rapier against a heavy blade of Ferrara."

"But Captain Cosby you would have killed," she hits quickly, "though he had only a dagger. There was death in your eye and in your arm."

"We were in a net and desperate."

"You called him a terrible name. You must have quarreled bitterly—and he killed your friend. In fight?"

I had nothing to say.

"You know," she tried again, "my mother thinks highly of Captain Cosby. He is a notable leader and a notable man in his own country, where he has large estates in the shire of Derby."

"He would be safer there," said I.

"Is that a threat?"

"No. A warning."

She left that subject be, and we went on silently for a space.

THE deer-warden met us on the green.

"Garrodh," said the lady, "I told my mother, who has eyes, that I was riding up to look over your ground to see if the wolves were amongst our young ones. A good excuse?"

"Surely, my heart! And no need to make a lie of it either. A grand day for the heather is in it."

"If Father Senan can be left alone for a small while." She looked at me, her eyes crinkling.

"Left alone he will be, anyway," said I.

So the three of us took the two hounds, and a pony loaded with our dinner, and set out. And in a valley turned to the sun we had our dinner companionably together, and talked of deer-craft as practiced here and in the Highlands. All those hours among the hills Eithne O'Flaherty was no more and no less than an eager youth. She was no longer the subtle woman playing the one game. She proved to me that, apart from her sex and her beauty, she had an

appeal that would outlast youth and mere love. Oh, but she was the splendid fine companion!

Some time in the afternoon we turned the shoulder of a hill, and there, far below us, was Cashlean-na-Kirka on its promontory, and beyond it Corrib water sending its far arms into the dark of Galway woods. There on the hill-side we parted from our lady, with a promise that she would come to the Glen of the Echo as soon as she might, and we stood and watched her winding downwards on the deer-track till a fold in the ground hid her.

GARRODH, on the long circle homewards, was mighty particular to keep the stags to windward, and occasionally crawled to the crown of a ridge for closer scanning. "Good heads all," he muttered to himself, "and some better than good." On the third or fourth time that he went through this business he gave a grunt of satisfaction. "Look!" he pointed cautiously. "See that second-season hart with only one prong and it crooked. An old Monarch gave him that last back-fall—the puppy!"

"Maybe," said I, "that fellow will break a leg at the drinking-place."

"Hero! You know the game. To tell truth, there is nothing in the house but salt pig, and our holy man might like a change from speckled trout—and dainties." He proffered me his bow. "Would you be drawing shaft on that fellow—running?"

"I? At fifty paces, standing, I might notch him."

"You are welcome to miss."

"And we needing venison—no!"

We were lying on the edge of tall heather on the head of a slope,and below us ran a long strip of young herbage where the ground had been burned. At the far end of this a clump of hart browsed, heads facing away from us against the drift of air, and amongst them the fated One-prong. We slid back into the hollow, and while I held Branog, the dun hound, Garrodh gave the brindled bitch her instructions. He said no word, but his hands were eloquent. The great animal trembled and

"I have no purse, highwayman."

whimpered softly, and, at a final signal, went off full stretch along the bottom of the hollow. Then Garrodh leisurely strung his bow, chose an arrow carefully, and we crept back to our vantage-point, Branog at our heels.

"Watch you, now," the hunter whispered.

Nothing happened for a long time, and then a single hart lifted a head and looked against the wind. Garrodh nudged me. Yet the stags went on browsing, but their heads were now turned to us, and gradually they began to drift nearer. They were in no hurry. They walked a few smooth strides, nibbled daintily amongst the young heather, and again moved forward.

"A wise bitch, Breacan," whispered Garrodh. "She is crawling back there, not showing an ear-tip."

The whole business was very simple and very sound, like all good work. The deer drifted along until they were level with us, and it might be forty paces out. Then Garrodh got to his feet, quietly—not hurriedly, and the stags threw up their startled heads, took one look, and away like the very wind. But before ever they took the first bound came a twang clear as a note of music, and One-prong pitched forward, scrambled to his feet, and fell again.

"Too far back in the belly," shouted Garrodh, starting forward.

The wounded beast rose and staggered, and then Branog was on him, and he was ours.

And we had fresh venison for supper.

CHAPTER XV

"THEN? THEN I DIE."

I DID not put off my breakfast this morning. Suddenly it came to me that my courtesies might be misread, and I had not courage enough to be thought a fool.

I had my morning plunge, and went straight back to the bothy, where I helped the one-handed Cathal with the platters and Garrodh at rubbing spirit into our sick man's lions. And, the work done, I strolled into the open with Branog, dropped into the valley, and strolled down the course of the stream. Indeed, I was not watching where my feet took me and was somewhat surprised to find myself on the pony-track at the top of the Bald Glen.

There I lay on my back in the cushion of heather and, with half-shut eyes, stared up into the fragile morning sky. The lark's song came to me and the busy chirp of a stone-chat, but these only touched the edges of my mind, for I was wondering to myself on the strange charm of our perilous safety in this fastness of the moors. It was like a valley out of a great dreaming. It was like a serene island in dangerous seas, We were bewitched in it and in content. In content! Ah! but the dangers that lurked without must be faced sometime. Sometime? Soon now . . .

There in an hour—or in two hours—Eithne O'Flaherty found me. The pony shied as I sat up, and she slipped to the ground on her two feet.

"I have no purse, highwayman," she cried "You must take myself."

I was about to scramble to my feet, when she stopped me.

"Stay," she commanded. "I will sit and rest." She let the pony move along the path, and came and sat on a heather-tussock below me.

And there I sat, and was surprised to find that she was beautiful, with lovely color in her face, and her eyes deep and lightful. Bonny I knew she was, and bonny she had been in my mind's eye as I had lain there thinking, but, somehow the mind's eye recalls color and spirit but dimly, and there before me, now, in the flesh she was a lovely woman, with some tenderness of air about her that made my thick blood run warm.

"Sorry I wakened you," she said. "What were you dreaming?"

"A fool's paradise."

"And who was in it with you?"

"You were—for one."

"And were we happy?"

"I was."

"And it was a fool's paradise?"

"I was doomed to the outer wilderness."

"And I too?"

"No."

"I was left alone?"

"No."

"But I might be lonely."

"Why should you be?"

"Why, indeed? But one cannot help loneliness." She spoke in that low soft way she sometimes had, and then quickly shook her dark curls. "Ah! but let us not think too much of tomorrow," she cried. "This is my day, and I am queen over this my valley, and you are—what you are, I do not know. Today is ours, and today I am in no hurry. My soldier mother is away to Galway with Sir Francis and Captain Cosby to council with Governor Bingham. So, instead of breakfast, you will give me dinner, and you will show me how trout may be caught with a bird's feather."

And all that day we had together.

WE went fishing in the afternoon.

But we did not catch many fish—only two, and these at the beginning. Truth to tell, I am ever inclined to close my mind down on the business in hand and ignore all other things. Why my lady saw me crawl behind a whin, and then a second whin, and waft my fly not undeftly over a rising trout, and hook my fish and land him workmanlike, she was surprised and pleased, and applauded my skill. But when I merely glanced her way and did the same trick over again at the next run she realized that her presence was of no importance to this business, and quietly took the proper steps.

When I saw with satisfaction a nice fish break water at the tail of a pool, and had worked my way into position, she came and lifted her head over my shoulder, and moved it about better to see what was doing.

I did not rise the trout. Nor the next —nor any more. Patient I was, and patiently told her what not to do—and patiently she did it.

"Woman!" I boomed at last. "Are we here to catch trout?"

She chuckled happily. "Why, no! Now that I have seen you do it, it no longer interests me."

"Well, then?"

"I think that I would like to sit down here in the sound of running water and linnet's singing and watch the kine grazing—and listen to you, and you talking."

So we sat in the grass at the stream edge, our feet on the gravel.

"Talk away, then, Queen of the Bald Glen," said I.

"But I want you to do that."

"About what?"

"Yourself, surely."

And I was silent as a stone.

"Well?" she demanded.

"Do you not hear me saying all there is to say?"

She turned her face to me, smiling out of her dark and deep eyes. "You are my subject in this my dominion, and I must know all of you before I reward you."

And she did get me to talk about myself. It was mostly a matter of question and answer, for there was not much that I would tell freely, and some things that could not be told, but I was as frank as I might be. Yet it could be that my meagerness gave her an impression that I had depths beyond her plumbing, and that would touch the woman in her.

"You are a loyal man, David," she said at last, "and you have been very lonely."

I turned over on my face at her side, propped chin on hands, and watched the clear water check and streak over bright gravel.

"Let me see," she speculated, "what qualities you have for that future. Loyalty—yes!" And then she teased me. "Are there others?"

"Plenty," said I. "I play a port out of tune, dance a spring unspringly, wrestle a man fairly, swing a shinty club dangerously, point blade clumsily —"

"Soldierly arts these."

"The arts of a plain soldier."

She was wearing a light scarf of grass-green silk, and the soft summer air blew it softly across my face. I caught it in my fingers and held it under my chin, and that tie between us made me strangely talkative.

"Wait, my queen," said I. "Let me get this clear to myself and you—so that my reward shall not be too high —nor too low. A plain soldier! There is my career. Never to lead armies but in dreams. A standard of foot, a squadron of horse—it is in me to command so many, and be careful of man and horse. That is the art I am now learning, and this the land to teach me."

"But if the truce lasts?"

"It will break."

"And will the north win?"

"The English are hard to beat."

"They have been beaten." The Gael spoke quickly in her.

"And will again, but besides being good men in war they have the arts of the Greeks, and will keep the clans divided. That much I have noted. But I see, too, that the English will never subdue the Gael as long as mothers bear

sons. Yet in my view will the north be beaten—this time."

"And then?"

"Many of us—those who come out of it—will be forced to fly, and there is a colonel of pikes—now in Arras—who would welcome me with a tail of gallowglasses."

"And then?"

"Then I die."

"Die?"

"So, my sovereign for a day. I am, this bright hour, making that clear to myself. A leader of gallowglasses cannot expect to draw old breath. This year—next year—it might be ten years—we die—a plain soldier's fate. We grasp it, and there is an end to all foolish thinking."

"David Gordon," she cried hotly, "you are no friend of mine."

"I am," said I.

"You are not. What I will make you I do not know—I do not know—but you will not catch that trout."

I did not.

CHAPTER XVI

SANCTUARY'S END

TEN days we stayed in the Glen of the Echo, and I know now that there was no need on us to stay longer than half that time. Whether it was the salving with raw spirit or his eagerness to be at the fishing, brave Senan was hobbling about on the third day, fishing on the fourth, and fishing every day after that; and he and Garrodh failed to convince the other as to the superior merit of lure or worm. In my opinion Garrodh was the more adept on his own water, but I did not say so.

After the fifth day my old friend had a shame-faced eye when I caught it, and, now and then, a side glance showed that he was aye watching me with a speculative look. And oh! but his back would keep troubling him. He used to scramble painfully up the brae of an evening, grumbling, "The fool I am! The old fool I am! Tomorrow I will be on my back again." But tomorrow he was out with his fishing-pole, bright and early, and kept his grumbling for the evening.

Ten days! And nine of them the finest days that fine summer. The nine finest days in all my life—up to that time. And our lady came to see us every day. And every day I met her on the way and went part of the way homewards with her, a little farther every day, until soon I did not leave her till the turn of Glounamaol. Beyond that she would not let me go, for safety's sake.

AND so came the ninth day and the end of this our kingdom.

That day Eithne did not come in the morning, and I was weary listening for the warning from echo-point. Nor did she come at noon or in the afternoon. But when the sun was already reddening she came hurrying. We heard her at echo-point, and Garrodh, looking through the window, stopped me with his great hand as I moved to the door.

"Look, a friend! She is taking it out of the garran. There is hurry behind her—and maybe hurry on us too."

He and Senan gathered our few chattels into a bundle, so that, if necessary, we could retreat into Carrigdhu and leave no sign. But there was no need. When she reached the edge of the green there was no one on the track behind her, and I met her outside the door. There was some ebb of color from her face and her eyes had a dark glow, but gay and gallant were her head and her voice.

"My reign, alas! is coming to an end," she cried; "and this my kingdom perishes. A lost glen—a stony valley—water singing to itself alone."

Like fine singing that was, and my throat filled.

"Where is my holy man?" she asked.

"Here, my Queen," said he, coming out of the door.

"Are you fit for the road, Father?"

"Any road—or to the world's end."

"Tomorrow night must it be, then." She spoke quickly. "My mother talks of coming to see Garrodh, and I think that she has a suspicion. I have been

careless, I fear, and she knows that I am in this glen every day. That she would know, for nothing can be hidden in her own house. Some one followed me yesterday, and what was seen I do not know. But do not fear. She is frank, and noble too, and will do nothing by stealth. Tomorrow—tonight, if she questions me there is nothing I can or would hide, but you must be ready. She takes the raid on Rickard the Sassenach lightly, and says he deserved what befell him—that he is not worthy of alliance with O'Cahan blood. Listen, now. David, you will meet me tomorrow—an hour after dawn—at the mouth of the Glosha. I will row the boat across, and we will hide it under the bushes. Then at the first dark of the evening you will go down, and Garrodh—are you there, Garrodh? You will row then to the north side—to the spring of Tubberglass. You know it?"

"Well I know it, my heart."

"There and nowhere else. Now I shall have to hurry. I could not get away till my mother was at the milking bawn, and I fear she will miss me. No, David, you must not come. I will ride hard all the way."

I lifted her on the pony at the edge of the green, and she grasped my hand in a hand that was strangely cold.

"In the morning at the Glosha," she whispered, and was gone.

THE larks were up as I went down the track in the morning, and up in the sunlight above the crown of the moors, though where I walked was still in shadow; and when I got amongst the trees in the lower glen the thrushes were singing. A pleasant morning, but I was in poor tune with it. I was facing out into the world again, and taking with me an experience that had shaken the roots of my life. Evermore now would I see things from a new angle; evermore now would my best days be touched grayly, my spirit a little more lonely, life a little bleaker. But I would be more a man too, and understand men better. And one had to go on living.

When I got in sight of Glosha mouth I saw the white and green boat resting its nose near a thick clump of water-willow. Eithne I did not see, but she would not be far away.

I hurried on to the boat. The oars lay across the gunwale and still dripped water. I turned and scanned the slope of grass and the few bushes along the shore, but my lady remained hidden. Then I whistled softly, and at that the water-willow rustled and a cloaked woman came around the side of it. But she was not Eithne O'Flaherty!

A tall woman with a hunting cap, eagle-plumed, on her dark hair, the long Irish cloak on her shoulders, and a hazel staff in her hand. There was no mistaking who that woman was. There counld be only one woman with a face like this face in these parts; a harsh and weathered face, but the face of a great lady. That long nose and long chin proved the obstinate breed of her, and the dark eyes, deep-set under level brows, showed fire kept in place by strength. This surely was the Captain Dame Bevinda O'Flaherty.

And I was neatly in her trap.

She walked across the grass and halted before me on the edge of the gravel. Her lower lip, not thin but finely chiseled, was pressed firmly against the upper; and she slowly looked me up and down.

"Shelterer behind a maiden's skirts!" she said, in a slow musing voice. There was no cut in that strong voice, yet I felt a cut. "You are one David Gordon—the man they call Blackcock's Feather?"

I took off bonnet and bowed.

"Cousin of O'Cahan?"

And again I bowed.

She took her time, and I waited. Her eyes were on my face, and it was not a face to win me grace. I was entirely at her mercy on the shore of Corrib. My old priest, indeed, was safe in the Glen of the Echo. We were neatly parted, and, no doubt, her fighting men guarded the pass—and a score of them hiding in these bushes. I could face back there and die on the road, or I could die fighting here—or I could make essay to seize this white and green boat and die on the water, boats all around me.

"Go on, sir," she said, reading my

thoughts uncannily. "I am only a woman."

"Play on, Bevinda of the O'Flaherty," I said then.

"Play, sir?"

"Surely. You can kill or let me go in your own time."

"Kill you! Why?" There was the bite.

But I was minded to bite too. "I expect no mercy from the Sassenach."

"Sassenach!" Out came the blood of her. "I am Captain Bevinda O'Flaherty, and I make allies where I choose." She calmed herself with firmness. "You were with O'Cahan? Who is with you here? Oh! I know your story. A priest? He has been ill?"

"And is well now."

"Why did you stay in danger?"

I could not tell her. I could not tell myself.

"Did you think to copy your cousin?" Cutting smooth the question.

"You do not know your daughter, Dame O'Flaherty," was all I said.

"No? But I know a romantic little fool," she cried smartly, and was again calm, her eyes intent on mine. "Your attention, Master Gordon. I will let you go from here in safety if you make me one promise—on your honor, which I will grant, as an O'Cahan."

"And a Gordon."

"So! Promise that you will not seek to see my daughter again."

I had that much in me to answer on her last word. "I will not promise," said I.

"It would be a promise easy to keep," she urged calmly. "You are little likely to see her again. She is betrothed to Sir William Cosby, and she is crossing the Irish Sea at Advent—when she marries him. Well?"

"I will not promise," I repeatedly dourly.

She looked at me long and steadily, and then she smiled, and I knew whose mother she was.

"No," she said half musing, "it is not a promise that Blackcock's Feather would make—nor any man. I will not press it. The O'Flaherty's can take care of their own."

I waited for her final word, steeling myself not to glance at the bushes on the shore.

"Listen, now, David Gordon," she said. "I do not harry hunted men. This boat will be here for you and the priest at the fall of night. Garrodh, the false one, will row you to a place of safety; and tell you your old friar to keep wide of Cong, and cross Moytura waste in the dark. That is all."

She turned from me, and walked directly to the little boat. And I came behind and held the bow. Her hand rested on my shoulder for a moment as she stepped over the gunwale.

"You are a foolish man," she said, "but you are strong."

"And ugly."

"No—not ugly—strong. That is why I am not afraid of you. Men like you do not know how much to dare."

She reached me her hand, and I bent over it.

"O great Lady!"

"I am sorry," she murmured. But for what I did not know at all.

IN THE gloaming we crossed the north side of Corrib, and left Cathal O'Dwyer behind and lonely in the Glen of the Echo. His wasted face was set to hide the grief of parting, and his gray eye avoided mine. Before we left I took him aside and placed hand across shoulder, a habit of mine.

"Come with us, brother," I reasoned with him. "There will be work for you in the north, and it may lead this road. Come!"

"Where Cosby is, there I stay," he said, gloomily firm.

"Must you kill the man?"

"Need you ask?"

"I need. Look! The lady that saved our lives—do you know that she is plighted—"

"By her mother?"

"I know not."

"Her mother, surely." He looked at me closely. "I will kill him, David Gordon."

"Or he you."

"My luck." He caught my arm in a firm grip. "And then?"

To that I said nothing, but I knew in

the marrow of my bones that if Cosby slew this man I would pursue him to the brink of hell.

Very quietly we slipped through the quiet water that gleamed palely to the darkness of the shore, and no word broke the soft lapping ripple at the bow of the little boat. We felt subdued, pressed under by the weight of these outer skies.

In the half-dark of the summer night Garrodh, rowing softly, brought us to shore amongst a jumble of rocks, where a spring ran down over green mosses and tinkled murmuringly as it fell. There was deep water close in, and I was able to land on a flat boulder, while the old friar, sighing to himself, stumbled against the gunwale, and handed me out our well-stored satchels. Then I helped him ashore, and we buckled ourselves for the road. Garrodh was leaning at the bow, holding the rock, and there the priest gave him his final blessing, and I bent down and took his great hand silently.

"Ye will go in safety," he whispered. "In my bones I feel it—and I know too that you will come this way again and you not hiding."

His words heartened me. I straightened up and turned away, and gooseflesh shivered over me. For a hooded woman was there before us, and she had made no sound. Eithne O'Flaherty! Well I knew her, though her face was only a pale oval in the half-light.

"Come!" she whispered to us, and leant towards the boat.

"Garrodh, wait for me." She caught the priest's sleeve. "There is need to hurry now."

She led the way on a path amongst the rocks, and we kept close behind. Beyond was a bare patch, and then a copse of hazel with the beginning of a track winding up a brae towards the open. And bridle-tethered to the hazel branches were two horses.

"You know them?" she whispered.

One was the priest's thick garran. The other was my own bonny mare, Benmee. As I untied the reins she snorted softly into my face and nuzzled my breast with her small shapely head.

"Lassie—lassichie!" I greeted her. "You the darling!" And rubbed between her ears.

Eithne laughed lowly.

"Oh, but you can make love too, David," she said. "Your gallant enemy, Sir Francis, brought her to Cashlean—our spoil, he said; but it might be that he guessed ye were not far away. . . . But you must go now. My mother is waiting for me at the next point, and I promised—I promised not to be long."

Eithne was gallant and kind to the end.

"Good-by, comrade," she said, a throb in her voice, and reached me her hand. I took it and held it, a firm, dry, small hand. I chose my words slowly. "You Queen, I subject—that always. Your need is mine—alive or dead."

"Will you know my need?"

"I will, by the goodness of God."

"For that I will pray, then," she said.

I did not even kiss her hand. I but held it in my two for a moment, let it go gently, turned and sprang on Benmee, and went driving head-down through the hazels. I never looked back.

(To be continued)

Sarah was out for blood.

SEAFARING MR. McQUOCKLE

By BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR

A MAN should be master in his own house, Ernie McQuockle told his wife in a voice shrill with anger.

"A *man* would be," Sarah retorted. "You're just a contrary runt. An' you ain't got a house. What we live in is a miserable shack a Siwash would be ashamed of. Don't be tellin' *me* where I get off. Loafing in the woods for two days with people that wouldn't spit on you in town! Shut up, an' get that clothesline fixed, like I told you."

Ernie glared at Sarah McQuockle. That hurt. In a vague way he wondered why they fought so often. But he was too stirred up to think clearly, to realize that with the deadlier of the species his technique was all wrong. A five-foot-two man weighing a scant hundred and twenty needs something on the ball to deal with a wife who is a hundred and seventy pounds of strong bone and pliant muscle.

Sarah McQuockle had bright red hair and she could get red-eyed at the turn of a word, although her eyes were gray when they weren't sea-green. Sarah was born a Maguire, and the Maguires were all big and strong and short-tempered.

He looked his wife up and down, from her parted red lips to the bottom of the faded overalls she wore. Red hair, flushed face, a flat stomach and a high, rounded bosom that was heaving now. It didn't occur to Ernie that Sarah McQuockle was a good-looking wench. All he saw was a red-faced termagant in a boiling rage, who made him jump when she yelled.

Ernie was in a considerable rage himself, though he looked only worried and apologetic. It didn't matter to Sarah that the two days she accused him of loafing in the woods had netted him twenty dollars for showing city slickers where and how to catch trout. Nothing ever mattered to Sarah when she got going.

Ernie was tired of it all. He seethed with resentment, frustration, all those pangs of hopeless inferiority which psychologists regard as fatal to a man's well-being. So Ernie lashed out:

"I'm goin' trollin'. To hell with you an' your clothesline!"

THE front of the McQuockle split-cedar cabin gave on a short slope, at the foot of which lay a float landing. A fish-buyer's scow took up one end. Half a dozen West Coast trollers clustered about that. The boys were polishing spoons, fixing gear, or simply loafing.

Ernie was just stepping on the float when Sarah overtook him. Ernie heard her stride after him, and he hoped she wouldn't shame them both before that crowd. Generally Sarah never let up until she had reduced Ernie to a figurative pulp.

That was now Sarah's purpose. She reached for Ernie. He dodged once, but Sarah was quick, she was strong, and she was out for blood.

"You'll tell *me* to go to hell, will you?" she panted.

She slapped McQuockle. Her palm popped on his cheek like an oar-blade smacking water. Then she clenched her fists and socked Ernie with both hands. Sarah didn't paw or scratch. She had grown up with a brother who liked to box. She knew how to hit.

Ernie also knew that she could hit. He covered up defensively. Sarah beat his arms down and popped him right and left, along with a fierce oral commentary on his habits and ancestry. She didn't stop until she had Ernie looking like an amateur who had gone a bad round with a professional. Then she stepped back and sneered:

"So you're goin' trollin', are you? All right, get out an' troll. An' don't show your monkey face around here again with any five or ten dollars for a week's trip. You're useless around home, an' a insultin' little brute besides. If you can't come home with enough to pay the grocery bill you needn't come back at all."

Sarah flashed her eyes over the group of fishermen, shook her halo of red hair and stalked back up the path.

"You're damn right I won't come back," Ernie whispered.

The trollers were laughing openly, and that burned him up. Ridicule added to a skinned nose, a mouse gathering under one eye and a slightly swollen lip made Ernie McQuockle's internal pressure register high.

His boat, the *Colleen,* which like Ernie himself was undersized, unkempt, and had seen better days, lay alongside the *West Wind.* Manned by Gabe Maguire and Johnny Van Tromp, the *West Wind* was one of the bigger and better offshore salmon trollers, deep, beamy, fast and able. Gabe happened to be Sarah's brother. A black Irishman, a moose of a man. No diplomat. Gabe was almost as tough a proposition as Sarah McQuockle, and as free with his tongue. He had looked with distaste on the McQuockle brawl. As Ernie went down on his own deck Gabe said to him:

"Why'nt you'n Sarah stage your fights private? You two give me a pain in the neck."

Ernie McQuockle was small, but a very compactly built little man, and active. He looked mildly inoffensive, which really was his nature. But too hot a fire always makes a full kettle boil over.

Ernie stooped. Out of his fish box he took a picaroon, an implement with a four-foot ash shaft and a curved steel point as sharp as a needle. He bounced off his own boat to the *West Wind's* afterdeck with that picaroon held like a spear.

"You black Irish ape!" he said hoarsely. "You start ridin' me an' I'll run this through your gizzard. You side of beef on the hoof! I've had enough from the Maguires today."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Gabe said in sheer astonishment. Johnny Van Tromp

turned his round Dutch face the other way to hide a smile. It made Johnny think of a rabbit bristling up to a rhinoceros.

"Okay, okay," Gabe said. "No need for murder in the family."

"The family," Ernie McQuockle snarled, "is all shot to hell, from now on."

He had that picaroon held low and aimed right at Gabe's waist. Gabe Maguire, an experienced brawler, big enough, fast enough, cagy enough to take Ernie McQuockle apart with one hand, took a couple of steps backward. He leaned against the pilothouse, staring at his under-sized brother-in-law very much as Balaam must have stared at the ass when it spoke.

Ernie stepped back aboard his boat. He threw down the picaroon with a clang, dived into his doghouse cabin and started the engine. He cast off the *Colleen's* line and moved away.

"I'll be damned," Gabe Maguire repeated. "Now if that half portion would go for Sarah like that she'd have some respect for him."

"He'd have a case," Johnny smiled, "of self-defense."

"He'd never get away with it," Gabe shook his head. "Ernie hasn't got the beef to handle Sarah. You don't know her like I do. I was raised with Sarah. She's a cyclone when she starts an' it don't take much to start her. That's about the fourth time she's beat Ernie up in the last couple years."

"And that's the holy state of matrimony," Johnny Van Tromp said thoughtfully.

"Holy hell!" Gabe snorted.

"You said it," Johnny replied.

A cable length off the Ivy Cove float the *Colleen* drove by the stern of a fat white yacht. *Cumulus,* of Seattle, across a mahogany transom. There were men and women in her cockpit under a temporary awning. Men in creamy flannels and tennis shirts. Women in cool, immaculate linen dresses. They looked at Ernie and they seemed to be laughing. They were the people Ernie had guided to trout streams, the people Sarah McQuockle said wouldn't spit on him in town.

One girl had red hair that shone in the sun like burnished copper. She waved a hand languidly at Ernie as he went by. Ernie McQuockle, moved by an obscure impulse, shook his fist at her.

Not that he had anything against her, or any of them. He didn't care two whoops about them. But that flaming red hair was a symbol of tyranny.

IN THE troubled passage—now mill-pond smooth—between Cape Scott and Lanz Island, two weeks to a day after the battle of Icy Cove, Ernie McQuockle met a string of trollers slashing south. Five of them, each one's stem cleaving the other's wash, like a flotilla of destroyers outbound under sealed orders.

McQuockle looked regretfully at his own haywire outfit. Ernie had light brown hair, a nose too large for his face, and mild blue eyes. Too mild for his own good. The bruise Sarah had put on his sunburned beak was gone, but the memory lingered still. She had called him a no-good runt. That was an exaggeration. Ernie had several handicaps as a salmon troller—not the least of which was his wife—but he made a living. He had left Sarah once before. She had got the Provincial Police after him, and Ernie came back. But this time he wasn't going back.

So he looked after those big, able offshore boats and envied them a little. He knew them all although he was not in their class. The *West Wind* led the line. *Iron Duke II,* the *Shamrock,* and the original *Iron Duke.* Bill Steele's wife stood on the afterdeck of the *Silver Swallow,* a red beret on her brown head. It reminded Ernie of Sarah. Only Sarah never went out with him. She got seasick. It was the only weakness Sarah McQuockle admitted.

All go-getters. They passed close. Gabe Maguire and Johnny Van Tromp carried aboard a big, stubby-tailed gray tomcat. The animal stood with his forefeet on the *West Wind's* bulwark. Ernie could almost see the yellow of his eyes.

Seagoing trollers, with seagoing wives, and a seagoing cat. Familiar on six hundred miles of coast, from Swiftsure Lightship to Hecate Strait. High boats

wherever they fished. Any of them could winter in California and have money left in the spring, while he, Ernie McQuockle, could hardly make enough to keep his wife in groceries. Well, that was hardly correct. He couldn't make enough to keep peace in the family. But then, a man couldn't keep peace with Sarah McQuockle, no matter what he did.

"Where," Ernie asked himself, "is that bunch headed now? They've located salmon. They wouldn't leave the Cape only for somethin' better."

And then on a crazy impulse he swung the bow of the *Colleen* around and plowed in their wake. He had no business to follow them. That quintette was headed offshore. Ernie McQuockle hadn't the rig to work offshore. He helmed a twenty-eight footer with only six horsepower. The open Pacific was no place for the *Colleen*. No one was more aware of that than Ernie.

Perry Connor gave the *Iron Duke II* an extra notch and slid up abeam of the *West Wind*.

"Hey, Maguire," he bawled. "Look what's on our tail."

"Gee whiz," Johnny Van Tromp looked astern through the binoculars. "It's McQuockle."

"The damn fool!" Gabe growled in his barrel chest. "Stop her, Johnny. Lay-to till he catches up. I'll tell him to get to hell back inshore where he belongs."

"Listen, big boy," Johnny Van Tromp said, "The high seas is free to all men. Last time you told Ernie what he should do he went for you with a picaroon."

Gabe grinned at the recollection.

"Leave him be," Johnny advised. "The glass is steady. We'll have another coupla days fine weather. Ernie knows we ain't steamin' out here for our health. If he has guts enough to come out here he's entitled to a chance at them fish."

"Yeah. If we hit that school again," Gabe said.

"We'll hit 'em again," Johnny answered confidently.

THEY left the *Colleen* until she was hull down. But they were not on that school of salmon long before McQuockle hove up over the ground swell.

Ernie McQuockle, dragging thirty-fathom lines loaded with thirty pounds of lead, with the added weight of a struggling salmon as big as a small mud-shark, began to feel as if he were hauling a succession of hundred-pound anchors. They came fast. He no more than gaffed one before another hooked on. They were heavy, fighting fish.

The *West Wind* had put over a float that carried a red flag on a bamboo stick. All that afternoon the six boats marched across the slow undulations of the Pacific, a mis-named ocean in a rarely benign mood.

They worked within a sighting radius of that flag. The water was full of darting pilchards, but the salmon were just as partial to brass wobblers as they were to their natural food.

Ernie McQuockle's fish box was full and his arms ached before sundown. He envied those roomy able boats the power gurdys that reeled their lines in to the first lead. They could pull three fish to his one with no effort, and fish in weather that would drown him. Still, he was getting his share. If this calm just hung on—

He was glad to see the *Iron Duke* hoist her trolling poles to the mast and the others follow suit. Ernie wondered if they would run in to Quatsino, or if they had ice.

They stood away toward the distant bluish shore of Vancouver Island for half an hour, leaving McQuockle far behind.

They were all anchored up on the forty-fathom contour when he came along, riding to a hundred and twenty fathoms of line. Gabe Maguire waved him alongside. He knew Ernie didn't have line to reach that depth, nor a winch to get his hook up if he could reach bottom.

"Tie on astern, Ernie," he said.

"You fellows iced up?" McQuockle inquired.

Gabe nodded.

"How about me stowin' my fish in your hold?" Ernie asked. "They'll keep better. I'll be loaded below the Plimsoll line if I get as many tomorrow."

"Your cue is to boat it inshore tomorrow," Gabe growled. "You know

you shouldn't be away out here in that crate."

Ernie McQuockle merely grinned as he forked up springs with his picaroon. He knew that. But he was there and he had taken a lot of salmon.

"You done darned well, for pullin' lines by hand," Johnny Van Tromp remarked when Ernie's catch was stowed on ice.

McQuockle grinned again. He thought so himself, but it was pleasant to have a high-line troller tell him so.

Ernie let the *Colleen* drop back on a hundred feet of line. He lit his fire, cooked, ate, and turned in all standing. Daylight came all too quickly in midsummer.

For a few brief ticks of the clock he thought about Sarah. He had been out two weeks. He had made some money and sent most of it home. But he himself wasn't going home. Never again. And yet he missed Sarah McQuockle. Miserably he acknowledged that he must be fond of that red-headed fire-eater. He wouldn't have minded so much the whiplike lash of her tongue if only she would stage her fights privately.

Sarah took good care of things, Ernie admitted. She cooked like a chef. She darned his socks and kept his shirts clean. Upon occasion she would throw her arms around him and kiss him with a fine Irish fervor. But she was just as likely to be screaming at him within half an hour. It was no good. A man couldn't go on being shamed by an outsize wife with a punch like Jack Dempsey. To hell with Sarah McQuockle! He would live alone and like it, even though he knew he would have liked Sarah there beside him right now.

Only Sarah couldn't stand the sea when it got lumpy. That was her one weak point—and Ernie's refuge. Afloat she couldn't get at him.

THE sun rose on a calm sea, on five able trollers and one hay-wire outfit, dragging salmon out of the deep. The spring salmon of the West Coast is the lord of the salmon tribe in size, gameness and flavor. His firm red flesh goes into cold storage, to reappear at fancy prices on the tables of people who never know and do not care by what risk, hardship and disaster their baked salmon comes to their dinner plates. But the trollers know, and they troll with one eye on the glass in a calm, wondering how long Boreas will sleep.

The sun reached the top of his east-west arc. Often at mid-day the spring salmon takes a marine siesta. The six boats got together. In that slow, smooth swell they could lie gunnel to gunnel without chafing or bumps. Collectively they had over fifteen thousand pounds of fish and their ice was melting fast. For such contingencies they had a form of co-operation. They loaded all the salmon on one boat and sent it in to sell the catch and bring out a load of ice.

The *West Wind* elected to make the run.

"You better tie on astern an' go in with us, Ernie," Gabe said.

"Me? Tow in? What the hell do I want to be towed in for when I'm gettin' *hiyu* salmon?" Ernie demanded.

"Because you shouldn't be out here," Gabe declared. "You know that. This calm won't last. It's curtains for you if it comes on to blow. We might pick you up, but you'd sure as hell lose your boat."

Ernie shook his head. He wouldn't even argue the point.

"You sell my fish, big shot," said he. "An' give half the money to Sarah. I'm fishin' while the fishin's good."

SARAH McQUOCKLE came down to the fish-float when the *West Wind* docked. When the last fish had been forked off Gabe said to Sarah: "Come on aboard an' have some coffee with us."

Sarah, parked on a berth below, said: "Seen anything of Ernie?"

"Yeah," Gabe nodded. "He's fishin'."

He looked at Ernie's slip, counted sixty dollars off a roll of currency and handed it to Sarah McQuockle.

"My gosh," she remarked, "Ernie musta struck it good. He sent me forty dollars less'n a week ago from Shushartie Bay. Where's he fishin' now?"

"Forty miles offshore with us," Gabe

told her. "Where he has no damn business to be. But there he is."

"Offshore?" Sarah echoed. "You tell him to get in off the open sea or I'll snatch him bald-headed. Is he gone crazy? The *Colleen* ain't fit to be out where you go. There's springs right here in the Sound. The boys are gettin' fair catches. You tell that half portion I said for him to come home or God help him."

"He says he ain't comin' home no more," Gabe grinned at his sister. "I don't blame the little guy, either. You raise too much hell for any man. I won't tell McQuockle nothin'. You want to get in his hair, you come along an' tell it to him yourself."

"Me go offshore?" Sarah cried. "Gabe, you know a half hour's rollin' in a boat makes me want to die."

Sarah McQuockle's gray eyes filled with tears. Her lips quivered.

"Gee whiz!" Gabe said. "Do you feel that way about him?"

Sarah's face lost that woebegone expression. She bristled.

"You tell Ernie McQuockle," she stormed, "I said for him to come in from offshore. If he stays out there till he gets into trouble I'll tear an arm off him an' beat him to death with the end of it when he does come in."

Gabe Maguire shook his head. He looked at Johnny Van Tromp. Johnny wisely had nothing to say on that subject, just then.

"You're a proper hell-cat," Gabe said irritably. "If I was Ernie McQuockle I'd take a club to you."

"He ain't man enough," Sarah retorted. "An' neither are you, you big hunk of cheese. You just tell him I said for him to come home—or else."

"Okay, okay," Gabe grumbled. "It's your party, sis."

Ten miles out Gabe said to Johnny Van Tromp: "Y'know, I believe Sarah's downright worried."

"Sure," Johnny answered. "She likes the little guy."

"I guess she does," Gabe agreed. "But Lord, the way she goes for him reminds me of a song I heard once:

'It's all very well to dissemble your love,
But why did you kick me downstairs?' "

Johnny Van Tromp laughed soundlessly. His eyes turned to the barometer. He tapped gently on the glass face. The needle dipped a fraction.

"It's goin' to blow," Johnny said. "That little westerly air is backin' agin the sun. She's dropped steady since noon. Damn, we never do get more than three days calm weather. It's goin' to blow, Gabe."

"Let her." Gabe Maguire shrugged his heavy shoulders. "If it didn't blow most of the time there'd be ten thousand fair-weather trollers out here, an' no more big killin's for guys like us that can stand dirty weather."

DARKNESS closed over the *West Wind* long before she raised the fleet at anchor on the forty-fathom bank. Ernie McQuockle cast off from the *Iron Duke* and eased over to fork spring salmon by the dozen into the *West Wind.*

"Holy Mackerel!" Gabe exclaimed. "You sure knocked 'em dead this afternoon."

"They bit good," Ernie agreed.

He dropped back to the end of his line, smoked a cigarette and turned in. He hadn't asked about Sarah and Gabe didn't pass along her dire threats. Ernie went to sleep peacefully, hoping for another big day.

A week or two like that and he could almost buy a new boat. If he just had a big husky packet. These offshore trollers were the boys that rang the bell.

Ernie was jolted awake by his bunk trying to get out from under him. The *Colleen* pitched and rolled. He could hear wind. When he looked out he could see riding-lights dancing. He could see little patches of white in the darkness.

"Damn!" he muttered. "I guess I won't be able to fish today."

He went back to bed. Sometimes a southeaster came on, suddenly, like that. Sometimes it died at daylight. Sometimes it blew for three days. This was an offshore wind. The *Colleen* began to do more violent acrobatics. She took up the slack of her line with vicious jerks. Ernie dozed and waked to listen sleepily

and dozed again. He didn't like it but he wasn't worried. If it got too tough they would run for shelter, and the *West Wind* had him in tow.

Ernie came wide awake with a jolt, scrambling on hands and knees on the floor, pitched right out of his berth. The *Colleen* rolled like an empty barrel. McQuockle knew he was broadside on and he couldn't understand that until he stuck his head out the doghouse. The riding lights of the fleet were intermittent pin pricks of yellow in the distance. His tow-line had parted.

Those offshore trollers, accustomed to riding heavy seas, lifting and falling easily in deep, slow rolling packets, would all be asleep. Until somebody wakened they wouldn't know he was adrift.

McQuockle listened to the banshee screech of that wind in his wire stays and decided he had better get back to the tow-line. He started his engine. The moment he gathered way he jumped off the top of a big one, buried his stemhead in the next and took solid green right over his foredeck. A lot of it climbed over the house into his open cockpit. Not so good. He slowed down. At less than half speed the *Colleen,* short on the water line, with low freeboard, still shipped a lot of water. And slowed down he lost ground, made sternway under the fierce pressure of the wind, now half a gale.

He turned a flashlight into the cockpit. One glance showed him more water swashing around than he liked. He couldn't get back to the anchorage unless he drove full speed. If he drove her he would swamp in ten minutes. He tried it. A couple of nose dives convinced him. Too much of the Pacific ocean came aboard to keep him company.

"I gotta ride it or swim, I guess," Ernie told himself.

He had no sea anchor, so he made one out of a pair of oars, a couple of pieces of extra timber, lashed with his anchor-chain and the small anchor for a weight to hold it down. He eased that over the bow, getting himself thoroughly drenched. But when the line came taut that improvised sea-drag brought the *Colleen's* head up to the wind.

After that there was nothing he could do but pump bilges and trust to the McQuockle luck—which had never been anything to write home about.

Ernie sat on the cabin floor and changed his soaked clothes for dry. He was uncomfortable in both mind and body, with a still too long night ahead. His alarm clock said twelve-thirty when he shut off his engine. He didn't like to think how far offshore he might be at daybreak. The *Colleen,* light, shoal-draft, made leeway like a chip in a mill race in spite of the sea-anchor. All Ernie had to console him was that if she did fill she wouldn't sink. There was no ballast in her. If the seas didn't tear her apart she would afloat, even awash.

But he would lose some good fishing and the boys would lose time and burn gas looking for him. And—and—well, it was just too bad but there was nothing he could do about it. Only comfort himself with a cigarette and flinch when a big one broke right against the *Colleen* and made her shudder.

Ernie McQuockle thought once that it would be much pleasanter to be warm in his bed at home. This reminded him of Sarah. Like her the storm was gusty, violent, disturbing. On second thought Ernie decided he would rather not be at home. He could get along better in a storm at sea.

DAWN flowed over the *Colleen* with a tremendous sea running. A dirty sea, breaking sharp because that offshore wind drove against the swell that still ran in from mid-Pacific. But the wind was easing off. That sea would settle, Ernie hoped, in two or three hours, if the southeaster didn't freshen up.

Land lay under the horizon eastward, but not within range of his eye. He had made a lot of leeway. With the wind dying he lifted high and sank deep, but those great green mounds were smooth-topped.

As Ernie scanned that empty circumference he got a flash of something white. He watched. Presently he saw it again. It looked like a boat. He could only get glimpses, when he rose on a wave-head.

Eventually the little air that still blew wafted a white-hulled packet toward him. A small vessel with a towering mast.

That would be a yacht. Blown offshore like himself. Yachts and salmon trollers don't mix much, but both are subject to the hazards of seafaring. Ernie watched her drift down on him while he cooked his breakfast. His wooden drogue held him. He felt better after coffee. The sun made a bright heat as it swung higher. The sea was fast ironing itself out. Ernie judged that he could run without shipping water, so he started the mill. He felt just a trifle exultant. He had weathered a quick blow and he was going to get back under his own steam.

Hand on the steering wheel, Ernie gazed at that white hull, rolling broadside in the trough. Her tall stick, and a shorter one aft that he could see now, swung in an arc across the blue sky, like a pendulum. Why didn't the fools get sail on her, or use their auxiliary power? Why lie in the trough and roll the sticks out of her?

And then Ernie headed up for that ship, because it struck him that there must be something wrong. After all, yachtsmen are seamen, too. There must be something amiss aboard that snow-white hull for her to lie there waving her varnished spars like bare, appealing arms.

McQuockle slowed down off the yacht's quarter. *Cumulus,* of Seattle, across a mahogany transom. Lettered in gold leaf. So? Ernie McQuockle wondered if the men in creamy flannels and the women in immaculate linen dresses were all seasick below. He wondered if the red-haired girl would come up and languidly wave a hand at him. He wouldn't be rude this time and shake his fist.

"*Cumulus,* ahoy!"

His voice sounded puny in that empty waste of water. Jade-green billows slid gently under both boats. A frowzy salmon troller and a spotless white yacht nodding to each other.

"Ship ahoy!" Ernie bellowed again.

"Funny," he muttered.

He circled the yacht, hailed her repeatedly. As he crossed her bows he saw a chain hanging bar-tight from the cat-head. Yachts drag anchors off bottom as well as lesser craft.

"By ginger, I'm goin' to board you," Ernie McQuockle said aloud.

It was a tricky maneuver, but Ernie had a keen eye and a sure foot. He came up on her quarter again with a line in hand from his forward bitts. Waiting his chance, he put the *Colleen* right against the *Cumulus* as they slid together down a slope like a pale lawn, kicked his clutch out and jumped, grabbing a mizzen stay. With one foot on the *Cumulus'* rail he shoved the *Colleen* clear with the other. They slid apart and Ernie made his line fast to a cleat.

The companion was closed. Ernie pushed back the slide and opened the door. He yelled. His voice boomed hollow in an empty cabin. He went down the steps.

McQuockle came back on deck in a few minutes. Everything was stowed shipshape, everything in its place—except a crew. Ernie looked her over from lazarette to chain locker before he could convince himself she was really an abandoned ship.

"She's a derelict ship!" he said, as if he scarcely believed his eyes. "Damned if she ain't! Abandoned on the high seas. Salvage!"

THE west coast of Vancouver Island can qualify with the Goodwin Sands and Cape Horn as the graveyard of ships. Its three hundred mile seaward stretch of cliff, sand, and reef is one long scroll of wrecks, strandings, disasters. People who live long on a treacherous shore know the difference between land law and the law of the sea. Ernie McQuockle was no sea-lawyer but he knew maritime practice. Salvage! He looked at the varnished spars and polished brass fittings. Alow and aloft the *Cumulus* was built and rigged without regard to expense. A rich man's nautical toy. The percentage of an abandoned vessel's value allowed a salvor by admiralty law made Ernie McQuockle's mouth go dry with excitement.

With jib and jigger set the *Cumulus*

ratched along close enough to the wind to kill that beam roll. Once under way Ernie lashed the tiller and tackled the auxiliary engine. After a false start or two he got it firing, and then the *Cumulus* got into full stride. He stood away for the Island coast, riding the tiller, chanting in a reedy tenor:

"Blow the man down, o-oh, blow the man down!

Give us some ti-ime to-hoo blow the man down!"

A far thin, drone set him scanning sky and sea. Plane or speedboat? A plane. He marked it, a tiny speck in the blue. It took form, slanted down over him, banked in a close circle a hundred feet above the *Cumulus* main truck.

Ernie waved a hand genially. Naturally they would send a plane out looking for a packet like that. Ten to one she had dragged off some anchorage. No matter. She was an abandoned ship on the high seas. He was in possession, and possession was more than nine points of maritime law. They couldn't land to board him in that swell.

The plane circled him two or three times, then soared like an eagle away southward.

After a while a dot over his bow became two trollers with tall poles lashed perpendicularly. They came abeam, swung about, and closed in on the *Cumulus*. *West Wind* and *Iron Duke II*. They were not close enough to recognize Ernie at the tiller, but they knew the *Colleen* in tow.

"Hey," Gabe Maguire bawled. "Is the little guy off that boat aboard you?"

McQuockle took up the yacht's chromium-trimmed megaphone.

"Touch your cap when you speak to me, you blighter," he roared. "I'm skipper of this packet."

Gabe Maguire knew him then.

"When did you sign as deckhand?" Gabe shouted.

"I'm cook, captain, an' the whole blamed crew, an' nuts to you, you black Irish ape!" McQuockle hurled taunt for taunt.

The *West Wind* and the *Iron Duke II* hung on his flanks like outriders by a royal coach. The blue haze of Vancouver Island showed on the skyline. McQuockle shifted course as soon as he got a bearing on Cape Cook. Gabe Maguire sheered in close and yelled: "You're standin' too far south."

"I'm bearin' where I aim to go," Ernie retorted.

"What's the big idea?" Gabe demanded.

"Do I have to fill your empty head with my ideas? Ain't you got none of your own?" McQuockle howled through the megaphone. "Salvage is the idea, you dope! I'll make Kyuquot tonight, pick up a Siwash for crew, an' sail this packet right into Victoria."

"I guess you got a number one salvage claim all right," Gabe shouted back. "Don't let nobody get a line on you, or you'll lose your claim, maybe. I guess you're proud of yourself, eh, you half pint of misery! We figured to find you floatin' on a hatch cover, an' here you come sailin' a millionaire's yacht. I guess you don't need no wet-nurse to Kyuquot."

"I don't need no wet-nurse nowhere," Ernie bawled angrily.

"Tell that to Sarah McQuockle," Gabe boomed. "Well, so-long, half-pint!"

The *West Wind* and the *Iron Duke II* sheered off. Ernie watched them go hull down. He steered a southerly course. The sea-worn bluffs of Cape Cook took form on his port beam. The entrance to Kyuquot Sound gradually opened in the distance, a toothless mouth in the rugged face of Vancouver Island. The *Colleen* dragged astern like a Pekinese pup on a leash.

The *West Wind* trolled, a few days later, with a flock of boats on the twelve-mile bank off Kyuquot. The *Silver Swallow* slid by. Bill Steele craned his neck from the wheelhouse window to yell: "Look south a ways, Gabe. Seafarin' Mister McQuockle is with us again."

Ernie forked off a fair catch of springs in Kyuquot harbor that night and tied alongside the *West Wind*.

"Well," Gabe inquired. "How did the salvage business pan out?"

"That Seattle owner," Ernie told him, "was so tickled to see his boat again that he offered me five thousand bucks

without no further proceedin's. A admiralty court might 'a' give me a little more. But the guy was decent an' kept lawyers out of it, so I took his offer."

"How did he lose her?" Gabe wanted to know.

"Anchored off Klahowya Beach. They was all ashore at the hotel. Anchored too short, I guess. That southeaster just blew her to hell and gone."

"Nice pickin's for you," Gabe commented. "What you goin' to do now you're filthy with money?"

"Go fishin' in style," Ernie grinned. "I got me a peach of a little offshore troller for three thousand. Not quite finished. I'm goin' back in a week an' get her. An' I got two thousand cash in the bank."

"You better stay close inshore till you do get her," Gabe advised. "You might get caught in another offshore wind an' not be so lucky. You better go home, Ernie. With a stake like that Sarah'll fall on your neck."

"Yeah?" Ernie's tone was skeptical. "She'd more likely crown me. Naw, I ain't goin' home. Sarah's welcome to half of all I make. But I ain't goin' home no more."

The little man said that rather wistfully. Gabe Maguire thought he knew how Ernie McQuockle felt. The little guy was all right and Sarah McQuockle *was* a hell-roaring proposition.

"You know, Ernie," Gabe said in his deep bull voice, "Sarah would be a honey if you could hold her down. You ought to try beatin' hell out of her, just once."

"You're tellin' me," Ernie snorted. "You're twice my size, an' a scrappin' hound to boot. I been told *you* tried beatin' her up when you was both about twenty an' you didn't do so good."

"We-ell," Gabe said apologetically, "she's a woman. I didn't like to hurt her."

"Sez you!" Ernie jeered.

"I'm goin' to Victoria next Saturday," he went on, "an' take over that new packet. Don't you tell Sarah, Gabe. She'd come to town an' land on me like a ton of brick."

Gabe didn't say anything more. After all, Sarah McQuockle was his sister. Gabe had a sneaking admiration for Sarah in spite of her tempestuous ways. He suspected Ernie McQuockle had too. But Gabe also understood that even a mild little man like Ernie McQuockle might have a pride that would not allow him to go on kissing the hand that smote him.

The springs played out on twelve-mile and the *West Wind* cruised north to Quatsino. There were a few salmon around. When the *West Wind* tied up at Icy Cove no smoke streamed from the McQuockle cabin. The storekeeper said Sarah left on the *Maquinna*.

"Bet she lit out for Victoria," Gabe said to his partner. "Bet she raises hell with Ernie. What a woman!"

THE *Maquinna* called, not many days later, north-bound, to dump off freight and passengers. Johnny Van Tromp had just got back from the postoffice with mail when a strange troller, glossy white with bright oak trim, came sliding into the Cove.

The name lettered on her bow was *Sarah M.* and Sarah M. in person stood in the wheelhouse door while Ernie McQuockle eased alongside the *West Wind*. Gabe and Johnny made his lines fast. Gabe stared at his sister. She must have come all the way from Victoria on Ernie's new troller. Sarah, who always got seasick in a small boat.

Mrs. McQuockle looked like a million. Gabe hadn't seen her in town clothes for so long he had forgotten how she could look. In a black tailored suit, with a jaunty little round felt on her flaming hair she was certainly a handsome woman, in her strapping high-bosomed fashion. She had done a good paint job with lipstick and rouge. And her gray Irish eyes were smiling. Ernie himself had on overalls. But his hair was combed.

"Come aboard, you guys, an' look the ship over," Ernie invited.

Sarah McQuockle went below. Gabe and Johnny looked the *Sarah M.* over topsides and then went down to take a squint at the engine and the interior. There were comfortable bunks and a convenient galley.

"She's well put up," Gabe declared. "Looks able, too."

"You'd say she was able if you'd come round Cape Beale in her yesterday," Ernie grinned. "Sarah, how's about some tea an' toast?"

"Sure," Sarah nodded. "Would y' light the Primus, Ernie, please?"

Gabe's eyes widened. Please? It wasn't in character. Sarah should have said: "You git that stove goin', Ernie McQuockle, an' be quick about it."

Sarah put on a big figured apron and made the tea. Served it with toast and cake. She got out a knitting bag and her needles clacked industriously while the men smoked. Johnny Van Tromp excused himself.

Ernie rubbed his butt in an ash-tray and said to Gabe: "Sarah's goin' fishin' with me, now we got a boat she can turn around in. I had to get me an oversize boat to fit her."

"Huh," Gabe rumbled. "An' her the jane that always gets seasick."

"Well," Sarah McQuockle said placidly, "I'm goin' to give it a good try."

"Sure," Ernie put in. "She's goin' to troll with me an' like it. Ain't you, Sarah?"

Sarah's red lips parted in a smile. She nodded. Ernie pinched her arm playfully and she made a face at him.

Gabe Maguire removed himself from that scene of complete domestic tranquility. He went stamping down the *West Wind's* companion steps.

"Hell's bells an' pickled onions!" he exploded at Johnny Van Tromp. "How do you suppose the half-pint tamed Sarah McQuockle? Why, he's got her eatin' outa his hand!"

Gabe hadn't marked the amused grin on Johnny's face.

Johnny put the paper down. His mouth opened but no sound came forth. His eyes half closed, his shoulders and his belly shook. Johnny always laughed like that, deep inside.

He poked the *Victoria Colonist* at Gabe, indicating one item with a hook-scarred forefinger.

"Read it an' weep," said Johnny, and began to rock on his bunk.

Gabe's eye conned the printed lines:

In Magistrate Sowerby's court this morning a West Coast troller, Ernest McQuockle of Quatsino Sound, was charged with disturbing the peace by beating his wife in a public place.

Police Constable Reeves testified that he was called by the management into the lobby of the Oak Leaf Hotel, where he found the defendant holding his wife down on her knees by a firm grasp of her hair, while he struck her repeatedly with his right fist.

Ernest McQuockle, in defence, stated that his wife had on various occasions assaulted and humiliated him in public. When she appeared in the hotel lobby and attacked him, he lost his temper and retaliated, he asserted.

Mrs. McQuockle corroborated her husband's testimony. She admitted making a violent scene, and stated that she did not blame her husband for subduing her by force.

Ernest McQuockle is a very small man. Mrs. McQuockle overtops him by a full head. In court she presented a commanding figure, a square-shouldered, muscular young woman.

Magistrate Sowerby decreed that under the circumstances he would assess a nominal fine of ten dollars and costs.

The couple left the courtroom arm in arm.

"Well," Gabe Maguire grunted sourly. "*I* don't see nothin' to laugh about. Scrappin' in a hotel lobby an' gittin' hauled into court!"

Gabe's morose accents seemed merely to increase Johnny Van Tromp's amusement.

OVER in the cabin of the *Sarah M.* Ernie McQuockle once more assured his wife that she would soon get used to bouncing around on the ocean.

"I hope so," Sarah said, her tone slightly doubtful.

"Sure, you will," Ernie insisted. "If you do get seasick you'll get over it. It's all in your head, anyway."

"I thought it was in my tummy," Sarah replied. "Maybe you're right, Ernie."

Ernie McQuockle put a short, muscular arm around his wife's waist.

"Sarah," he said, "you're a honey. But from now on, I'm *always* right."

Sarah McQuockle bent over. She had to. Ernie's head barely reached her shoulder. With a humid, almost maternal, look in her gray eyes, Sarah McQuockle planted a kiss on Ernie's ear.

"Can you take it, feller?"

TEN DAY STIFF

By ROBERT E. PINKERTON

RED McKEE drove up the twisting canyon road, thick dust swirling from the wheels of his new fifteen hundred dollar car. Red was thirsty and hungry. His head ached. He did not have a dime in his pockets. His gas tank was nearly empty. And he did not know what the end of the road might hold for him.

Yet Red sang as he drove. His voice lacked the sweet rhythm of the motor but it was exultant and reckless as no motor could ever be. His face was askew with an ingrown grin and his blue eyes danced to the ribald words rather than to the music.

Rarely had Red known what the road held for him. Never had he cared. He was a quartz miner, a hard rock man. He called himself a stiff. And because his skill was great and grass was always greener on the other side of the range, Red was known to his kind as a ten day stiff.

"This glory hole's deep enough," and Red would be on his way, Leadville to Grass Valley, the Coeur d' Alene to Bisbee.

Now, as he sang, the Mother Lode canyon forked and Red found himself at the Lucky Look Gold Mine. The sheave wheel was spinning and miners streamed from the shaft collar. A thick, solid man stood beneath a sign, "Rustling 4 P. M. Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays." Red parked his car.

"It's Monday," he said.

Dan Connors, foreman of the Lucky Look, did not glance at Red. The challenge in words and voice had told all

Dan needed to know, and Dan's eyes were suddenly busy with odd corners of the West that only the reckless may see.

"When you were last in the Horseshoe," Dan began softly, and then remembered he had not seen Colorado for twenty years. He whirled on Red, scowling, voice harsh.

"We're drivin' a raise. Slabby ground. A dozen phoneys found it too tough. What's your name?"

"Red McKee."

Dan Connors grunted. Red knew he had heard it often.

"Day shift," Dan growled. "And rub lard on your feet."

"Rovin's in your own eyes," Red retorted. "What's living if you can't go where you wish?"

"I'm no bum!" Dan roared. "I can always eat. I got two suits o' clothes. The banker calls me 'Mister'."

"Quit belly-achin'," Red said. "You tied the cookstove to your own neck. And maybe a cradle, too."

He swaggered to the bunkhouse, and he felt that he could swagger. A foreman had admitted need of a hard rock man, and had been told a stiff is still his own boss.

Miners stared curiously when Red entered.

"Home guards and phoneys," he muttered, and strode to a large calendar.

Red had done this many times, but never with such zest. His pencil scored a big cross on the four and then, with impudent, shaded lines, another on the fourteen.

Muckers stared enviously, for here was a man who balanced destiny on wanton shoulders. But down the hall came a miner who laughed.

"Scratchin' yer mark in the sand," he jeered.

Red whirled angrily, but only to grin. His trail had crossed Biff Torney's many times.

"Don't see your cross on the calendar," Red retorted.

"Got a contract," Biff said. "Good one comin' up. I'll go partners on with you. Ten a day apiece."

Red McKee hesitated. Like all stiffs, he loved a highball job, with wages set by his own skill and energy. But there was the defiance of Dan Connors to think about.

"Naw," Red said. "The cross stands. Go find me a drink, Biff, while I put my car in the shade."

Red drove to an open garage. As he turned in, another car backed out and crashed a fender. Rage pitched Red to the ground.

A girl jumped from the other car. Black hair and sooty lashes, rosy cheeks against white skin, slender waist and sloping hips—the curses jammed in Red McKee's throat.

"My foot slipped off the clutch!" she pleaded.

Red glanced down.

"Such a little foot!" and he wondered who had spoken.

"Your car is so grand!" the girl rushed on. "I'll pay for having it fixed."

"It'll never be fixed," Red said. "I'll brag about it in a dozen glory holes."

The sooted lashes lifted, the full light of gray eyes was turned on Red McKee, and when Mary Connors looked, things happened quickly to a man.

"Your foot might slip again," Red said as he opened the door of his car for her.

Mary Connors laughed to cover swift confusion. Women were instantly aware of Red McKee, of the crinkle in his hair and the sparkle in his eyes. The impudent set of his shoulders attested reckless audacity.

"I was going to get my mother," she said.

Red glanced at his gasoline gauge, but he touched Mary's elbow and helped her in. Out of gas, out of luck, and Red always rode his luck.

He had enough gas. Almost before Red was aware of it he was back before a cottage near the mine. Dan Connors, foreman of the Lucky Look, sat on the vine screened porch. Red grinned, and helped Mary and her mother to the ground.

"You like the car so well you'll have to drive it," he said. "Tonight."

"I'm sorry," Mary answered. "I promised—"

"Then tomorrow night," and Red was gone.

MARY and her mother went up the steps.

"Don't I keep a car for you?" Dan Connors stormed. "What you ridin' around with a bird like that for?"

Mary explained about the crumpled fender.

"I felt so ashamed," she said.

"You'll feel more so if you have anything to do with him," Dan snorted.

"You know him?" Mary asked eagerly.

Dan scowled when he saw the light in her eyes.

"One o' them hell-raisin' stiffs. Here today and gone tomorrow. Breakin' rock, breakin' heads, breakin' the hearts o' decent women—stay away from him."

"And Jim Baird being a mucker, which he hates, so he can get the ranch paid for and marry you," Mrs. Connors added.

Mary smiled. As in her mother, the Lorelei strain ran deep, that desire to change not only the pattern but the very warp and woof of a man's life. Mrs. Connors had done it to Dan, and now Dan blundered on.

"This McKee put two crosses on the calendar."

Only her mother saw Mary's eyes glow to that challenge.

"Don't get silly notions," Mrs. Connors warned.

"And a stiff's a stiff till he's patted in the face with a spade!" Dan roared. "Bums, rovers, drinkin', fightin', gamblin', high gradin'—leave 'em be!"

Mary was suddenly demure. "A ten day stiff! Like you were before mother saw you, dad."

But that night she snuggled closely to Jim Baird when they drove to a movie. He seemed so solid and so safe.

"Do we have to wait until the ranch is paid for?" Mary asked.

"No," Jim said slowly. "It's only I want things right for you—and sure."

She squeezed his arm with sudden fervor.

"I do love you!" she whispered fiercely. "Don't forget that. Ever!"

"Course not, honey. You worried about something?"

"Not worried. But even when women are sure—" She was silent a moment. "Sometimes all of us act like silly fools."

And Mary Connors was ready when Red McKee arrived in his big new car the next night.

Mary drove. Red had promised that, and he found he could look at her all the time. He discovered that the black hair was silky fine and alive. Long lashes swept up to her brows or stroked her cheeks. The white skin of her throat pledged rushing color. And when the gray eyes turned his way Red felt the shock of an entrancement that had never come to him before.

"You're about ten levels above any—" he burst forth, and as suddenly clamped his lips. The only women his life permitted were of the dance halls. Many had caught Red's eye for the moment; none had ever held him a day.

"Ten levels above what?" Mary asked.

"Them girls in the movies," Red answered lamely. "Like to go to a show?"

"I'd rather drive, and I must be back early."

Red smiled. It would be dark in a movie, and he wanted only to look at Mary Connors and wait for the tingling shock of her glance.

This strange effect of her eyes perplexed him. Always Red had been alone against the world. Swelling ground and deadly gas, looters in gambling and dance halls, mountain snow and desert sand, these rub the soul's skin tough. Hardness was the armor of Red and his kind. He had traveled only violent roads, never asking favor from a boss or quarter from a foe.

Yet Red McKee felt the soft influence of Mary Connors when he was a thousand feet beneath her the next day. He told himself that the world was full of women for the taking and the leaving, but here was something he might be loath to leave. That night he drove to a schoolhouse where Mary had said she would be dancing.

Red saw her through a window, in Jim Baird's arms. Music did something to Mary. Red felt his heart pounding.

Then he saw her lift her face to Jim's. He saw her hand tighten on his arm. The white skin of her throat flushed as it had promised. Dark lashes fell and her head dropped to his chest.

"And him a mucker!" Red snarled.

The thought thrust him into the hall, and before the music started again he faced Mary.

When they danced together her gray eyes lifted to his, but with a hint of laughter. Her throat remained white and her hand lay lightly on his arm.

"Ten days here, ten there—you dance in many places," she bantered.

"I kept rovin' because I been lookin' for you," Red said.

Mary laughed gaily. "Breaking rock, breaking hearts—more mines for a stiff than ports for a sailor."

The arm about her tensed.

"I never looked twice at a woman before," he said harshly. "But you've got eyes like short fuses. You've started something."

"It was my foot, not my eyes, that slipped off the clutch," Mary insisted demurely.

"You know what I mean. You know you only got to look at a bird and he's rum-dumb. You can't laugh me off."

Mary stood still.

"I'm not a dance hall girl," she said in a low voice. "You can't take a ten day chunk out of my life."

She started to walk away. Red seized her arm.

"Anybody asked you for ten days?" he demanded. "How you know anything less'n life will suit me? What's to stop me staying at the Lucky Look and getting your dad's job?"

Her eyes were still bright with scorn and suddenly Red knew that those questions should have been statements. For the first time in his hard, heedless life he found himself pleading.

"I don't mean to get rough. Aw, come on and dance."

RED drove away as soon as he came off shift the next day and after supper he went to Dan Connors' cottage. Dan, his wife, Mary and Jim Baird watched him swagger up the path.

Red gave Mary a box of candy, largest and best he could find in a town down the valley. He presented it awkwardly, almost rudely, for he saw a derisive glint in Dan's eyes.

"Pounds of it!" Mary cried as she opened the box and passed it. Dan took a piece suspiciously.

"Stiff's liable to drop a fuse cap among 'em," he growled. "You buy candy at every glory hole, Red?"

"I never bought any before," Red answered harshly.

"Mostly liquor and silk stockings a stiff gets stung for. Half the gold mined goes to dance halls."

"But Red's car is grand!" Mary protested.

"Bet a gambler paid for it!" Dan snorted.

"Took two of 'em to find enough," Red agreed gloatingly. "And after the first one had whittled a big stake down to twenty dollars. I took a drink, walked around my chair and began to pull ground. Got the auto dealer out o' bed at midnight. He was till morning countin' them silver half dollars."

Dan chuckled.

"Biff Torney says you didn't do so well down at Jackson," he suggested.

Red was trapped and did not know it.

"Couple o' gamblers got my stake, all right," he admitted readily. "But I caught 'em cheatin'. You could 'a' made a hundred an hour panning the broken glass for four bit pieces."

It was stuff of the hard rock saga, the roving, the fighting, the amazing recklessness that is life itself to a stiff.

"Then the police came," Dan prompted.

"Wasn't so bad. Jail keeper was an old hard rock man."

After Red and Jim Baird had gone, Dan confronted Mary.

"See!" he roared. "I told you what a ten day stiff is like. Leave 'em be!"

But when Red McKee drove up early the next evening, Mary waited at the gate. She slipped behind the wheel.

"You knew I was coming," Red grinned.

Mary smiled and busied herself with the gears.

"Can we go down to the big highway?" she asked.

They returned at dusk. Baird was coming out the gate.

"Oh, Jim!" the girl cried. "I'm so sorry!"

But excitement burst through her contrition.

"It was flying! Seventy-eight! Like forty in our car. Red dared me to keep the throttle open. I almost did."

The thrill of it still held her. Jim did not speak. He was looking at Red with new appraisal. Red saw.

"Next time you'll do eight-five," he laughed.

Exultant, he drove away, and that sense of triumph held through the following day. But at night he found Dan alone.

"She's gone down in the valley with Jim," the foreman said. "About how they'll fix up his ranch when they move in."

Red experienced a strange, sick sensation. It was not his voice that asked, "You mean they're goin' to get married?"

"Sure," Dan grinned.

"An apple knocker for Mary Connors!"

"It's always 'maybe' findin' gold, but you can count the trees on a fruit ranch."

"And you a stiff!" Red snarled.

"She's ten times better off married to a rancher," Dan retorted hotly.

"A girl with them eyes! Ain't you ever seen her walk? Ain't you ever heard her laugh? It's a man she wants."

"She's got one."

"You never saw a hay shaker that was," Red sneered. "How you know this Baird—?"

He broke off, his eyes savagely alight. Dan spoke, but the miner did not hear. Red walked swiftly away, and in the morning he sought the shift boss as the men waited for the skip.

"That's a tough raise," Red growled. "The pilgrim helpin' me's no good."

He looked around, and his eyes found Jim Baird's.

"Give me that big mucker," Red said.

"That raise is too risky for a green man," the shift boss objected.

Jim heard, and Red still stared hotly.

"You mean he's yellow?" Red asked.

"What you gettin at, McKee?" Jim demanded.

"I don't want nobody hurt," the shift boss insisted.

Red and Jim did not hear. Their eyes were close now, Red's glinting contempt, Jim's steady and defiant.

"Lead me to it," Jim said harshly.

THEY went down in the skip together, got off at the 1200 level. Neither spoke. Red got 120 sticks of dynamite and three dozen fuses from the powder monkey. They walked on in the main drift for half a mile, sharing the lethal burden.

When they reached the raise and started to climb, Jim found himself in a chimney being cut through solid rock to the 1000 level. Until then he had worked only in a drift, where a man could walk in or out and steel rails gave a sense of connection with the surface. Here he was in a manway, half of the four and a half by nine foot bore, in a small space further contracted by heavy timbering, by water and air lines and timber slide.

Jim was big, and his heavy rubber coat bulked larger. He squeezed up on crude ladders slanting from side to side in ten foot flights, up 180 feet, fifteen stories of an office building; up into an eternal black midnight that mocked the feeble glow of his carbide lamp; up in the damp chill of dripping water—and always with mind and shoulders weighted by sixty sticks of dynamite.

Jim Baird climbed in this ventless flue that ended in the dead solitude of the earth's core—a quarter of a mile down, a half mile back into the heart of a mountain, now up to utter isolation and defenselessness.

"Cozy hole," Red jeered when they reached the top.

Jim's light glinted on wet jagged rocks close to his head, on rough sides and a slanting platform of heavy timbers and planks. Under the planks the chute dropped 180 feet. Under the short logs were the interminable ladders and slow descent. Even a voice could not get out of that closed chimney. The two might be standing on a star, for all their connection with the world.

And hate was packed in that remote and constricted space. Each man knew it. Red's eyes had a sardonic gleam, but Jim's were unwavering.

"Now what?" Jim asked.

"Count the trees and figure how many peaches you'll pick next year," Red retorted.

"Tell me," Jim said evenly. "That is, if we came up here to dig."

Red caught the challenge of that. They stood close together on the bulkhead beside the big pneumatic drill. The little flame in each man's hard boiled safety hat lighted the other's face. Red McKee had spent a lifetime in such tiny borings in the backbone of the earth, but Jim Baird, his skin a-tingle to the crushing forces about him, stared as steadily.

"We came to dig!" Red snarled. "First of all, I'm drivin' this raise. Get that?"

"All right," Jim said. "What do I do?"

"There's plenty. It's no 'round's a shift' here. We blast when we're ready. Blast, timber, drill, blast! I'm showin' this farmerfide outfit how to drive a raise. I'm showin' you, if you stick it out."

The chinks of that chimney top were crammed with the savage clangor of Red's machine while he drilled the last three holes. Jim sorted dozens of lengths of steel, sent the dulled ones down the timber slide in a bucket.

As when a ship goes into action, they cleared the decks, took down the heavy machine and lowered it to a safe place in the manway. Red worked swiftly, with fierce concentration.

"Pass up the powder," he barked.

For more than an hour, and with great care and skill, he poked sticks of dynamite into twenty-four five-foot holes and adjusted fuses. If water dripped from a hole he used two of the black ropes as insurance against an unexploded charge.

"Don't want a hole to pop off in your face," he said with mock cheerfulness.

Jim removed the planks over the fifteen story drop. Red rolled back two heavy logs of the bulkhead for an exit.

"Ever spit a fuse?" he asked.

"No," Jim said.

"You're goin' to now. Take that end."

Lamps in hand, the two stood beside the black hole of the chute. Fuses hung from wet rocks in which dynamite waited. Each man had only room for his feet.

"Then what?" Jim asked.

"We get out. And we got no time to look at scenery."

They touched flame to the split ends of the fuses. Tendrils of smoke curled up to form a solid mass against the top.

"Make sure each one spits," Red snarled.

Smoke choked them as they crouched lower. Three dozen black ropes carried fire to 120 sticks of powder.

"Out!" Red shouted.

They dropped through. Red replaced the heavy timbers to protect the manway from an avalanche of blasted rock. Jim was thumping down ladders. At the first station Red opened the valve of the airline to clean out the gas of burned dynamite, and its screech shrilled after them.

"Keep goin'!" Red roared. "Gettin' hot up there."

Jim's big body in flapping rubber coat found the passage tight. The manway was black beneath him. The ten foot ladders slipped past in endless succession. It was down, down, interminably and desperately down.

They reached the drift at last. Jim ran a few yards. Red stepped to one side and waited. The first blast came. He pressed his body close and counted, up to twenty-four.

"We'll get timber while the gas cleans out," Red said. "Unless you've had enough."

"We'll get the timber," Jim answered harshly. "Only we didn't do so much. No rock came down."

Red laughed. "That'll be a nice little job for you. This quartzite is slabby. Piece jammed in the chute last round. When the shifter can give us trammers, it'll be up to you to loosen it—if you're still in this glory hole."

THEY got the timber. Red, driven by Jim's refusal to run, took him back before the gas had cleared. It made their heads ache as they climbed the narrow flue.

And Jim continued to stick in the days that followed. Blast, timber, drill, blast—breaking rock, adding to the framework of their ever rising structure, toil-

ing desperately, hating, defying—they drove the raise.

Hate and contempt and defiance crammed that jagged black niche in the heart of the earth, and yet Red McKee remained first of all the stiff. Risk and effort and accomplishment below ground were as much a part of his life as reckless audacity in the free world above. He had proclaimed that he would work only ten days, but his stiff's pride demanded that he show results.

And Red showed them. He might taunt Jim Baird. "Had enough, farmer?" came each night when they quit, "Goin' back?" after each blast. But Red knew all the mine talked of his progress. It even reached Dan Connors' porch.

"I hear Jim's getting to be a real hard rock man," the foreman said one night.

"In five days?" Red sneered.

"Shifter says a man who sticks with you ain't a phoney."

"No mucker drives a raise," Red growled. "What's he do that any pilgrim couldn't?"

"I'm goin' to give Jim a chance as a miner," Dan chuckled. "More money for the ranch."

Red jumped to his feet.

"Let's get out o' this!" he exclaimed savagely to Mary. "Air's too fresh around here."

Savage though he was, a pleading note had crept into his voice that halted the "No" already formed on Mary's lips. She walked with him to the car and they drove away.

"You goin' to marry that apple knocker?" Red demanded.

"I've told him I will," she answered.

"You can't do that!" he snarled. "You got to give me a chance. I said you couldn't laugh me off."

"I'm not trying to laugh you off," the girl said gently.

"Listen, Mary! I'll quit rovin'. Get a contract and make a big stake. You're not the kind to get mucked down in a ranch. Sometimes they grow too much fruit. They never yet got enough gold."

"How about a year from now?" she asked. "It's always been ten days with you."

"I'll stick. I'll show you what livin's like."

"Your kind. Risks and excitement, always uncertainty—and fear. Living for you, but how about me?"

And past that, Red could not go. He was baffled and bitter the next morning as he and Jim walked to the raise. Danger had not driven Jim to the surface. Red even sensed elation in the other man, and Jim's words confirmed that.

"You may think you're driving, but this chute's to be cleaned out," Jim said when they reached it.

"That's my business," Red retorted harshly. "Mine and the shifter's. Don't let what Dan said go to your head. You're a long way from being a stiff yet."

"Three rounds, and all that muck stuck up there. You don't even know where it is."

"We'll find it," Red snarled.

Each with a sack of dynamite, they climbed in silence, and in a new, acute tension.

The narrow shaft was choked with it, and that feeling grew as Red loaded the holes and prepared the fuses.

Jim lifted the lagging from the chute and they took their precarious places, lamps in hand.

"So you're a real hard rock man now, eh?" Red taunted. "What'd you do if I ran off with your girl?"

Jim's glance shifted to the black pit beneath Red.

"I know Mary," he said quietly.

"We'll see if you do," Red laughed. "Get busy."

They touched flame to fuses. Bitter smoke curled. Soon the lamps were back in their hats and they started down.

Flight after flight, always with thought of fifty pounds of dynamite and the sure crawling fire, Jim slid down.

But he stopped. A tremendous roar filled that narrow flue. It was as if all the blasting in the mine were being done in the raise. The timbering shook. Cannon bellowed. A thousand express trains rushed through.

And the noise came, not from above, but from below.

It ceased more suddenly than it had begun. Red laughed.

"Your chute's cleaned out," he said. "But those fuses didn't quit burnin'."

They scrambled desperately down, six more flights, thinking only of the black ropes hissing in the darkness above. Then Jim's feet found space. There were no more ladders.

Red McKee came quickly down beside him. He took a nail from a pocket, dropped it. It tinkled on rock.

"Can you take it, feller?" Red asked quietly.

Red knew. The muck in the chute had slipped and then broken through worn lagging into the manway. Below them slabs of rock and timbers had wedged solidly across the raise. The two men were sealed in the chimney, buried in the solid core of the earth.

And up above them the crawling fire reached the powder. In a steady, thundering salvo a howitzer they themselves had loaded hurled rock into the chute. Air blasted down the manway. Twenty cars of shattered quartzite crashed on the lagging beside them.

At any instant this fresh downpour of rock might loosen the muck jam beneath and carry everything, timbering, themselves, a hundred feet to the bottom of the raise.

SILENCE came at last. They stood together on a short plank, the last station above the pit.

"Mary Connors will have to start all over again," Red said in a flat voice.

"What?" Jim snarled.

"Won't take her long. Short fuses in them eyes."

Jim glared, but his voice was calm.

"You mean we're trapped?"

"Eighty car loads o' muck between us and the bottom."

"We can stick here."

Red laughed. "When we burned a hundred 'n' twenty sticks o' powder up there? How'll the gas get out?"

Already gas had reached them with its lethal promise.

"Air'll drive it past us," Jim said.

"Don't hear it up there, do you?" Red jeered. "Line's broke below."

"Then we're—?"

Red laughed harshly. "My number was on one o' them sticks o' powder. And I never saw it."

Jim Baird started, then shoved his face closer.

"You think you're a tough bird, McKee!" he burst out savagely. "You're only yellow—taking the soft way out."

"Yeah, it's soft," Red agreed derisively. "We just stay here and watch the lights get dim."

"It ain't only us that stays. You dragged Mary along to stand the grief. Your kind always does."

Jim stooped and lowered his lamp to push back the blackness beneath. Gas touched his lungs and he coughed. He stretched out a foot and pushed against the timber slide.

"You got no chance, feller," Red said.

"Chance!" Jim snarled. "You think you live hard, but you die easy. She's waiting, and you take it like a rat."

Jim leaned across the manway to hold his light behind the timber slide. Gas strangled him.

"She's waiting," he whispered. "I'm going."

"A ground squirrel couldn't get through that muck."

"There's a way down behind the timber slide."

"It's squeezed sure!" Red protested.

"I'll take that chance," Jim answered.

"But muck above and below—you'll be hamburger when she sees you."

"She'll know I tried."

Red McKee did not answer. He was scarcely aware that Jim had slipped behind the broad planks of the timber slide, for suddenly Red understood what Mary had said the night before. He had thrust his hard, reckless life between her and the peace and security she sought. In that moment Red knew that no matter what else he might have given Mary, he would always have given her grief.

"Hi, Baird!" he called. "Wait till I have a look."

Red started down behind the slide, slipping, clawing, lowering himself with knees and elbows, squeezing through the narrow space. Gas was in his lungs now. His head was swimming.

"How about it?" he asked when he

saw Jim's light flicker beneath his feet.

"Slide's squeezed in," Jim answered. "But I can work through—to the muck."

"Don't do that!" Red shouted. "When they loosen that muck from below you'll be ground to bits."

"She'll know—didn't quit," Jim whispered.

Though penned in that narrow space, Red fought fiercely to grasp the coat tails dragging above Jim's head. His efforts loosened a broad plank of the slide. He could bend down.

"You're not going!" Red said fiercely as he tugged at the coat. "Don't want her—see you—mincemeat."

Jim was barely conscious now. Red held him.

"Can't hang on—this gas," Red muttered.

He drew nails from a pocket, found a piece of muck and nailed the coat tails to the timber slide.

Jim clawed upward to slip out of the heavy rubber coat. Red put a foot on his shoulder to hold him down.

"Take it easy, kid," Red whispered. "She'll know."

It was all Red thought of, to keep Jim there above the muck. Red had no hope. His head was bursting and he knew they could last only a few minutes. He swayed dizzily, and when he reached out to check himself he touched the air line.

"Maybe pipe's only split," he muttered. "Maybe—some pressure. Line old —rusty."

He stooped and battered with a piece of muck at the pipe beside Jim's head. His carbide lamp was barely alight in the thickening gas. His head threatened to explode. He felt that he was swimming in space.

"May be she—won't have—fear," he muttered.

He kept pounding, fiercely, desperately, even after his eyes were closed and he could no longer hear.

It was many hours later when an exhausted rescue crew had cleaned out the muck and climbed into the raise to find Jim Baird hanging by his coat and Red McKee crumpled above him, a thin air stream feeding them life. And it was still another hour after that, when Jim and Red had been laid on the floor of the bunkhouse, that Red opened his eyes.

At that moment Mary Connors rushed in through the door. Red saw her dimly, and his heart fluttered as it had when he had first seen her ten days before.

But after one glance Mary ran to where Jim Baird lay.

Red turned his tortured head away. He could hear excited voices, and once the sobbing relief of Mary's laugh.

It killed the terrible ache in his head, that laugh. He thought of the long lashes and the white throat, of the eyes with short fuses in them, and of the long roving road that once more stretched into the future as into the past.

"She didn't like the roving," he thought. "The roving and what it does to a man. But without the roving I'd never 'a' had her look at me that way she has."

After a long time Red opened his eyes again, but all they could see was a blank wall, and a big calendar, and the "fourteen" blocked out with a heavy cross.

Red felt that the cross stared back, mockingly, and with all the impudence he had put into its shading. He scowled at it, but at last the old ingrown grin spread across his face? Painfully he rolled over and got to his feet.

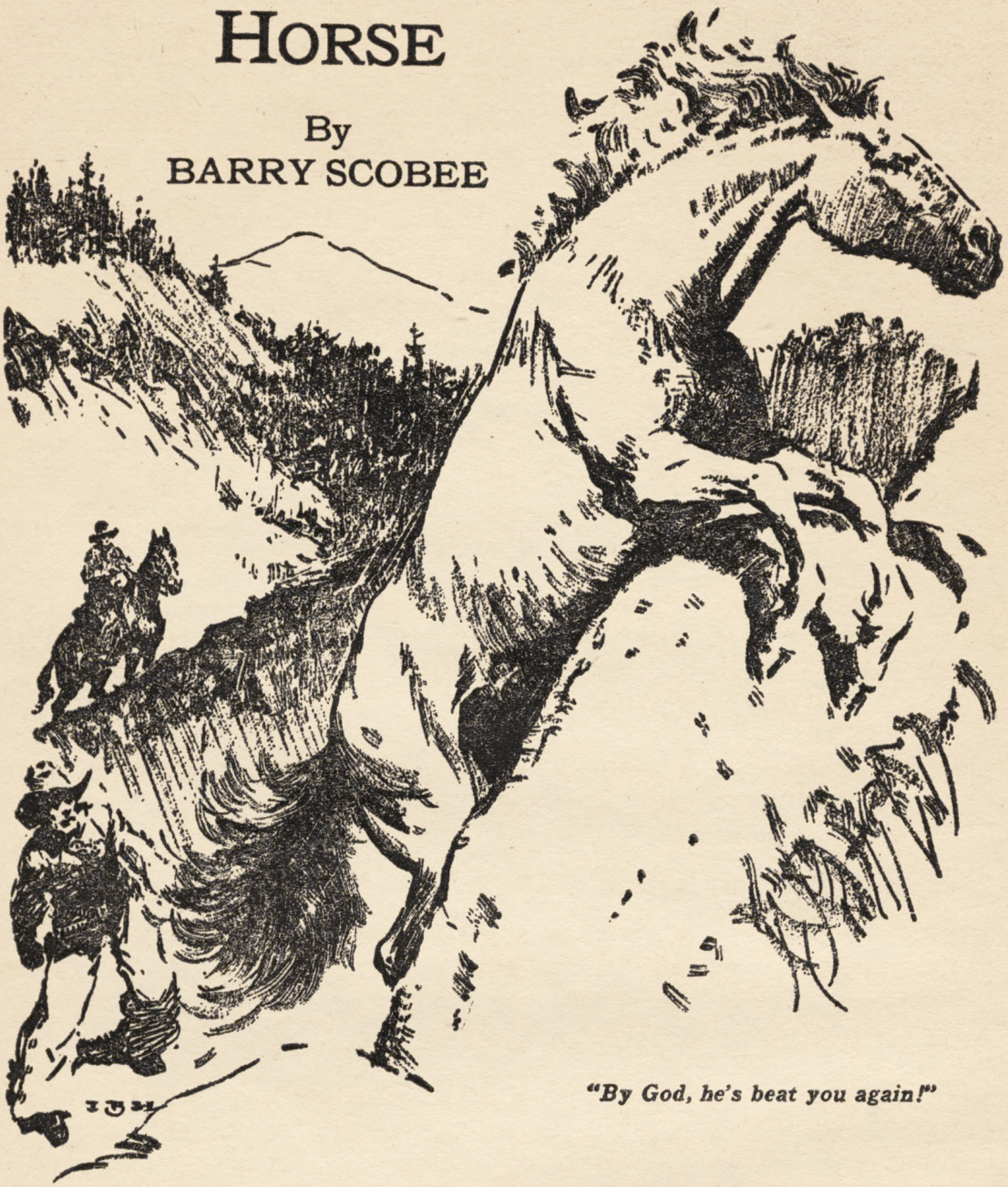
"Hey, Biff!" he called when he saw Torney. "Get me my time. And bring my car."

"Take it easy, feller," Biff urged.

"Easy! I got to get out o' here. Ain't this the fourteenth? Didn't I put it there—the mark of a ten day stiff?"

MOUNTAIN HORSE

By
BARRY SCOBEE



"By God, he's beat you again!"

FOR a moment the majesty of coming day was greater to Barney Yoakum than his necessity to remain unseen, and he paused openly on a jutting crag of the rocky pinnacle to gaze at the blazing eastern edge of the world, awed by the drama of the birth of light.

Gawd, how he had missed this daily miracle of the mountains, down there in the lowlands prison—"behind the walls" for seven months, in the lowland heat, in the beating rains, breathing the heavy air, until his instincts for law obedience had been blunted and he had escaped. And now, three weeks here in these Southwestern badlands near his own little ranch.

Eager, watching men were all around him, closing in on the badlands. Not searching for him. Not knowing that he was here. But closing in on him all the same, in their attempt to capture a horse, the wild palomino stallion, Great Golden,

who had ranged for years back and forth across a hundred miles with his mares and colts, while men spent time and money trying to get their ropes on him, to make him prisoner in their corrals, to own him, to display him, to boast that they had captured the smartest and mightiest wild stallion in all the Southwest.

Barney moved on, mounting upward. He knew that he had no time to lose if he were to gain the sharp summit of Needle Rock before the rising sun painted the lone pinnacle a golden red and, perhaps, marked him out to the circling eyes. But once up there he should be safely hidden until the horse hunt was finished, for who would make the difficult climb just to view the scenery?

Then, as his hand felt for a new hold, he caught a movement down below. A shaking of the bushes. Just where the brush and scrub-oak ended at the base of the barren pinnacle. Was a man there? Had eyes found him? Barney pressed close into the shadows of the rusty rock.

The movement came again, then a horse appeared—the hunted palomino with his golden body and lighter, almost flaxen mane and tail, dodging from a gully into a tiny, dense thicket, bellying down into it, burying himself from sight.

Barney glowed, as at sight of an old friend. "Hi, boy!" he whispered, and laughed. Men supposed that Great Golden had never been touched by human hands. That was one reason why Colonel Colby Winston had spent money and the time of his men trying to capture the horse—his arrogancy craved to be the first to touch an untouched wild stallion. And it was, in part, the reason other men vied with one another.

But Barney knew better. A year ago he had come upon Golden at a waterseep all but dead on his feet from a shoulder wound that had become flyblown, a black and ugly mass. He had doctored the horse, put a rope on him, and got him on the road to recovery. Golden had responded to the kindness, but had never fully surrendered. With the rope on his neck he was still a wild and restless thing. Barney had got to thinking a queer thought—that the stallion had the spirit of an eagle, that he could not endure in captivity; and in the end Barney had put aside his desire to own the animal, had removed the rope, patted the arching neck in farewell, and let the golden body flit away to its native wildness.

Barney's hand went to his belt, but no gun was there. It wouldn't do any good anyhow to fire and scare the horse away from the thicket. Golden was surrounded; he could not possibly escape through the encircling men.

Barney resumed his hand and foot climbing. He had been to the summit years before. A little nest was at the top, behind the jagged rim. The sun was nearly up when he finally squeezed through a narrow slot into the hidden space—to find himself being grinned at by a man who sat hugging his knees, a gun dangling from one hand.

"Houser!" Barney breathed. "You!"

CHRIS HOUSER chuckled, easy, confident.

"Saw you coming, Yoakum. Five hunnerd bucks crawling right into my mitt."

"So that's what they are offering for me, is it?"

"That's what. And I'm sure as hell going to collect it."

"That's you all over, Houser," Barney declared. "You killed Old Man Spence. You swore it on to me. You and your noble boss, the honorable Colonel Colby Winston. It would be a neat finish to sell me back to the walls for the reward."

"I killed old Spence?" the bony-faced man jeered. "The jury said you killed him."

"They didn't say it very loud, Houser. If they had really thought I was guilty they would have given me the rope. They see-sawed it down to four years. And if Winston hadn't lied on the stand they would have cleared me."

"You just think so. An' anyhow, me buckaroo, you're going back to serve the rest of your time."

"Maybe not, Houser," Barney countered. "They tried me as soon as I was arrested. They put the speed on. I didn't have time to think. But I've had time, down there. I've looked around, since I've been up here on French leave."

"Looked around?" Houser's close-set eyes narrowed. "What d'y mean?"

Barney laughed. If only he could bait Winston's foreman into spilling beans!

"What could I mean, Houser?"

"Not a damn thing, Yoakum," the man growled from heavy lips stiff with the scab of perpetual sunburn. He straightened to his stringy six feet and pointed his six-gun to the sky. "Three shots is the signal the horse is found—"

"The horse!" Barney exclaimed. "You know where Golden is?"

"Think I'm blind? I saw him hide himself like a slick wild steer, down there in that patch o' catclaw."

"You'll never get your ten-pound, bullying fists on him if I can help it, Houser!" Barney spat.

"You can't help it." Houser's thick finger squeezed the trigger three times. "That'll bring the boys," he said. "Now four shots for you, in two pairs."

"Got it all rigged up, have you, Houser?"

"Well, knowing you was at large and that you been getting fed by that man you've got hired to hold your ranch down, some of us thought we might scare up a rabbit out of the bresh today."

Houser watchfully opened the cylinder of his six-gun, worked out the three empty cartridges, and inserted fresh ones. "Now," he said, and lifted the gun.

"Just a minute, Mister, before you fire that signal," Barney said hurriedly. "How about that other gun?"

Houser's arm and jaw dropped. "What other gun?"

"THOUGHT that would stop you, Houser," Barney said curtly. "Let's put our cards down in sight. Then we can figure out the ace—the one in the hole. Old Man Spence sold a little bunch of yearlings to Winston, that day, for cash. You knew I went over to Spence's place every once in a while to see how he was getting along. You probably saw me riding toward his house that evening. You and your boss were hazing the yearlings on to Winston land.

"I don't know just how you worked it to get to the house. Maybe a steer got away and you rode back for it. It was just short of dark. You dodged into Spence's house, shot him, grabbed the money, and hurried back to Winston. I got to Spence before he'd quit bleeding.

"I notified the sheriff. At the trial you swore you saw me riding up to the house. Winston took his cue from that and swore he saw me running away from the house. He knew damn well it was too dark for him to be sure it was me. But I was just a little two-by-four ranchman, so what the diff? As a matter of fact, it was you he saw running away, back to where you had left your horse."

"You're crazy!" Houser said thickly.

"You shot Spence with a .38," Barney pushed on. "Not that gun in your hand, which is a .45. You used a .38 because this whole country knew my gun was that size. Somewhere between the shooting and when you got back to Winston you got shut of the guilty .38, and the money, or Winston might have noticed them. You got rid of that gun in a space of three or four acres of brush and rocks. I've gone over two-thirds of that ground on my hands and knees, combing every brush clump, turning over every rock. If this horse-hunt hadn't started up I'd had a few more days. I would have found that .38, Houser, and it would have been traced to you."

"You're crazy as a loco heifer," Houser snarled, fury pulsing in his neck.

"Prove it," Barney defied. "Go ahead and fire your signal shots that I am found, if you dare. Bring your men and let me tell them the story of the missing .38, if you can face it."

Houser's sun-scabbed lips stretched away from his long teeth in wolfish wrath. Then with a defiant tweak of his whole body he fired the gun into the sky—fired twice, and twice again.

"Now git to crawlin' down the rock!" he ordered. "So they can grab you."

UNDER Houser's threatening gun Barney pushed through the jagged slot in the little rim, started the hand and foot climb downward, puzzled in every thought. Had he been wrong about the hidden .38? Was Houser willing to face

the men with Barney spilling his suspicions?

Barney looked up. Houser's bootsoles were a dozen feet above him. The stringy, round-shouldered foreman had replaced the six-gun in its holster, because he needed both hands to make the descent. Barney dislodged a loose stone and it went clattering down toward where Great Golden crouched in the thicket.

"Watch y'r knittin'!" Houser rasped. "You'll scare that stud out. He thinks he's hid and won't move, and he's hid to anybody comin' up from below. He's my meat."

"Not if I can scare him off, he isn't," Barney retorted. "I'd rather see him dead than a prisoner of you and your tin-voiced boss."

Houser did not reply. Barney looked up again, and froze. Houser had lifted up a boulder as big as his head. He hurled it straight at Barney with both hands.

Barney was holding with his finger tips, his boot toes on a tiny shelf. He tried to dodge, felt the boulder strike. His face was bumped violently against the pinnacle wall. He hung on dizzily as he vaguely heard the boulder strike and shatter far below. Instinctively one hand let go and felt his head. His hat was gone, and at his cowlick spot a raw knot was rising. His nose was dripping blood. An inch or two closer, he realized, and the boulder would have sent him plunging to his finish. A blow struck his left hand—Houser kicking it with his heavy boot.

Barney wiggled out of reach. A wider ledge was six feet below him. He twisted sidewise, squatted and dropped. Then went jogging off, monkey-like, to one side. Dropped a little lower. He could hear Houser grunting, and looked up. A piece of rotten rock the size of a baseball broke off in the man's fist. Houser hurled it at Barney, and missed.

"Fine shot!" Barney jeered. "So you sure enough don't want me to tell the story of the missing .38, do you? And you don't want to put a tell-tale bullet hole in my carcass. But if you can knock me off you can say I fell."

"Hell," Houser snorted, "they ain't no .38 nor any other gun hid down there."

A sixth sense told Barney the man was telling the truth.

"Ho you got it yourself, huh?" Barney said. "Socked it away where it won't be found. Why you trying to chunk me off the roost for, then?"

"You're worth five hunnerd bucks, dead er alive, I reckon, and I ain't goin' to let you scare that thousand dollar stud."

"Why just a thousand?" Barney wanted to know. "He's worth ten thousand."

"Because Colonel Winston is offerin' a thousand bucks to anybody that leads the stud to him. Me, or any of the hands, or anybody else."

"Fifteen hundred for me and the horse," said Barney. "You'd swaller your soul to get that, Houser."

"It's more'n I make in a year," Houser smirked.

Barney knew then that Houser would shoot him if he had to, to get that money. He kept working steadily downward. Houser kept after him, with the ungainly spryness of a bear. He hurled two more fist-size rocks. As the climbers neared the bottom Houser grew desperate. Barney edged first to one side, then the other, to keep from being directly in the path of boulders that Houser might roll. Then, without warning, he found himself at the end of a narrow ledge and could go no farther ahead, nor up, while below his heels was a twenty-foot drop to a smooth slope of rock that slanted downward clear to the base of the pinnacle.

Houser chortled, sensing the situation and swinging swiftly down. "I got you now, jailbird!"

Houser dangled himself from a narrow ledge by his finger-ends, his long arms letting him far down. He kicked at Barney's bloody face and missed. He swung a bit nearer and stamped down on Barney's fingers with his boot-heel. Barney's hand slipped from its hold.

"Watch out, Houser!" he warned. "Two can play at that game."

"How?" Houser retorted, and stamped at Barney's other hand.

Barney caught the descending boot and jerked it aside. Then he jerked the

leg outward over his head. Houser's fingers slipped from their hold. His long body shot down past Barney in a darting streak, as the man grunted in surprised terror. . . .

When Barney had worked his way down to the foot of the sloping rock, he found Houser doubled against a clump of bushes, stunned and blank-eyed and gaping for breath.

"You ought to have been killed, you big ape," Barney murmured. "But you'll come out of it directly."

He reached for Houser's gun, then backed off hastily.

"Let that be," he told himself. "Fugitive from the pen with a gun is a candidate for anybody's lead."

He went plunging down through the scrub-brush, to slack up as he approached Great Golden's hideout; went on cautiously, talking softly.

"Golden! Long time no see you. It's me, Barney. Listen, old hoss, we've got to clear out, or we'll both be jugged."

Golden let him get almost within arm's reach, then he could stand it no longer and sprang out.

"Golden!" Barney pleaded, holding out his hand. "Listen, boy, they're too close. You're worth a thousand old round dollars. We've got to get away. Let me on your back and I'll get you out. Listen, Gold Boy—"

But Golden, blowing out his breath, kept off, exquisitely tempted to let Barney's outstretched, gentle fingers touch him again after a year, but not quite able to keep his hoofs on the ground.

Then a horse stirred in the brush a short distance away—a saddled horse tied to a bush, Houser's, no doubt—and at the sound Golden was gone in a flash, into the dense scrub-oak.

Barney ran to the saddled animal, flung himself up, and struck out after the stallion.

BARNEY knew of a way by which the wild stallion might escape the ring of men. It was a slot in a cliff wall called the Keyhole, which opened into a cavern eaten out by water in ancient days. The roof had caved in long ago, leaving a jumble of slab rock and boulders. A bearded old horse-hunter working with Mexicans had told him about it two years before, when Great Golden had given the hunter the dodge through the tricky outlet.

But Golden was not headed toward the Keyhole. He had plunged into the broken ground and deep brush in the middle of the badlands. Barney spurred after him. He caught a glimpse of the palomino as the horse flashed across a glade, two hundred yards away. Barney was without chaps or leather jacket. The brush tore at his clothing. His face and shirt were bloody from his bruised nose. As his horse lunged through the growth a cat-claw bush left a long scratch across one cheek. Then the horse came to the bank of a ditch and stopped. Barney heard a man call, not far off.

"Hi, that you, Lathrop? You hear Chris Houser's shots that the stud and Barney Yoakum was found?"

"Yeah," came a growl in Johnny Lathrop's voice. Lathrop was Barney's friend. "All right about the horse, but I hate it about Barney."

"Whatcha aching about that convict for?" Barney recognized the voice as that of a fellow named Simons, one of the Winston hands. "He killed Old Man Spence in cold blood, didn't he?"

"No!" Lathrop bit off.

"The hell he didn't!" Simons scoffed. "Well, guy, if you run acrost Yoakum don't lend any helpin' hand. Hear me? That punk is worth five hunnerd simoleons, on the hoof or down. And the horse is worth a thousand. So hands off, bully."

Barney heard them pushing on through the brush. Other riders were making noisy sounds far down in the broken jungle of rocks and ditches. One of them called: "Close in, over there! Tighten up! That stallion can slip through like a snake." Simons called from higher up, impatiently.

"Hi, Chris, where you at? Got anything treed?"

Then Houser's sudden bawling came rolling down the slope.

"He's stole my horse! That damn killer has got my horse! Watch out for Yoakum on a horse!"

"Where's the yaller stud, Chris?"

"Yoakum drove him off," Houser mouthed. "Yoakum tried to kill me. He'll try to chouse that stud out past the men."

"Down below!" Simons' bawled. "Yoakum's on a horse, driving the stud! Tighten up—close in!"

Barney urged his mount along the bank. Presently he was able to cross. He rode a little farther downward, hoping to see Golden again, reluctant to escape and let the horse be captured.

He should have got out during the night, he told himself, instead of depending on the imaginary safety at the top of Needle Rock. Maybe he could get away now through the Keyhole. No good letting himself be taken by this mob. They wouldn't listen to him accuse Houser. If Houser had got the .38 away from the Spence place there wouldn't be any evidence worth a thin dime. They'd give him the bum's rush back to the pen so fast it'd take his breath.

Lord, if only he had that thousand dollars Winston was offering for Great Golden! He could maybe buy him a high-power lawyer and get a legal stay till Houser could be cornered—somehow check the bum's rush back to the walls, down there in the low country, where the rains beat, and the heat was sticky, and every breath was thick and heavy. . . .

A SUDDEN booming voice down below snapped Barney out of his preoccupation.

"Hey, up there! Somebody get to the Keyhole. They'll slip out that way."

Instantly, like a croaking echo, Houser shouted from above.

"Keep away from that Keyhole!"

Then Barney saw the wild stallion. Saw the golden body flash around a rocky upthrust, heading straight in the direction of the Keyhole. Barney spurred after him. The hollow-log booming voice down below came again.

"Is anybody getting to that Keyhole?"

A rider much nearer to Barney, the clipped voice of Colonel Winston himself, cut through the jungle.

"Never mind the Keyhole! It's blocked!"

"Stay away from that Keyhole!" Houser howled. "I'll get there and keep him out."

Barney caught something curiously urgent in Houser's tone, something like panic. Then Winston's clipped, penetrating voice came again, not far away.

"Close in, men! Close in! The palomino is right here. I saw his yellow hide!"

Then Barney saw Golden, a stone's throw from the Keyhole. The horse was planted spraddle-legged behind a screen of brush, head up, mane bushed, every muscle in him at the utter alert.

Winston called again in his oddly carrying voice.

"Make haste, men. He can't get through the cave. Push him against the wall. We'll hem him in."

"Stay away from that cave!" shouted Houser, crashing along in the brush.

"What's eating you, Houser?" Johnny Lathrop asked, not far off. "You got something cached in that cave?"

"He'll break a leg in there," Houser rumbled. He'll kill himself." Houser shouted again. "Go easy, men. Let me get to the Keyhole and keep him out. He'll bust a leg on them loose rocks."

Barney saw the great golden stallion turn and trot, tail up, toward the black slot of the Keyhole.

"Close in!" came Winston's order.

The rock wall curved away on either side of the slot, like a wide-spread horseshoe. Barney could hear riders down below beating the brush toward the end of the wall. Golden was a prisoner already, he told himself, with perhaps seventy-five men closing in on a half mile circle. Golden nor any other wild stallion could break through that ring. Barney felt heartsick. Winston, who would get Great Golden, had no love for the horse. He wished only to own him, control him, master him and break his spirit.

Barney saw Golden pause at the slot, look back. Saw him throw up his head in final defiance, and heard his mighty blare of wrath fill the rincon.

Then Golden wheeled, flung up his tail, and went pushing through the slot, which was barely wide enough for him to pass.

Barney jumped his horse forward. In a moment he was close enough to hear

Golden in the cave, trampling over resounding slabs of fallen stone. He tried to urge his mount through. The gelding would not go in. Barney slid from the saddle and thrust through on foot.

Golden had clambered up the great slanting pile of boulders and tilting slabs. He was at their summit, where they piled against the back of the cavern. The open sky was above, and lacy pine tops beyond. The bearded horse-hunter had told with glowing eyes of how Golden, in this situation two years ago, had reared up mightily, set his forefeet on the ledge up there, and bounded out to freedom.

But now another slab had fallen from the corner of the roof that remained. It stood on edge, baring the way. No horse, Barney told himself ruefully, could get over it. And it seemed to Barney's quick appraisal that the slab would fall inward at a slight push. It must weigh a ton or more. It would break Golden's legs, or shear them off.

Barney pushed farther in, sinking halfway to his knees in dry leaves.

"Golden—listen, boy," he was pleading. "Come down off there, fellow. Come down."

Golden whinnied, a horse's eager hello. But he only crowded a little farther up, prancing, rearing slightly with his forefeet, getting ready for a try. And abruptly he did try. He stretched mightily upward, but his forehoofs lacked an arm's length of reaching the top of the slab. As he slid slowly down, the slab teetered until Barney thought certainly it would tumble. Golden caught his balance and stood still, uncertain, looking down past Barney through the slot.

"They'll get you out there, Boy," Barney breathed, hopeless and weary. "Stay here and let me handle this."

Barney went back outside. Colonel Winston was racing up. And Barney bristled, as he always did in the presence of the man.

"Is that wild stud in there, Yoakum?" Winston demanded, without surprise at sight of Barney, and with the thin, emotionless arrogance that characterized him.

"Yes," said Barney.

"Go in and rope him and lead him out, Yoakum."

"And hurry," Barney said thinly, "so you can have me on my way back to the pen."

Winston eyed him narrowly.

"Yoakum," he said, "I see you're bent on trouble. I'm well aware you have never liked me. That is of no consequence. Use your head. I am aware you have a way with horses, as your father had before you. You can go in there and rope that stud with less ado about it than any other man here. Bring him out and I'll pay you the thousand dollars I am offering for his capture."

"Get myself a thousand dollars," jeered Barney, "so I can blow it on a wild spree behind the walls."

"See here, Yoakum, I am a man of influence at the State Capitol. Bring out that horse and I'll see that you are pardoned, or at least paroled."

Deep wrath of half a lifetime boiled in Barney. His hand shot out, finger pointing, and his voice was vehement.

"Winston, you have an idea that every man has his price. You believed it about my father. You wanted his little ranch —mine, now. The little home he loved. You thought you could buy it to add to your kingdom, if you kept prodding him with a price, and about fences. You hounded him to his death. That's what it amounted to. Then you swore me into the pen.

"It was your testimony that turned the trick. But Dad never had his price. And I haven't any, Winston. Not with you. I'd rather go back to stir for twenty years than to give you the satisfaction of owning Great Golden. You and your dog Houser. Showing him, bragging how you always get what you want, keeping him as a prisoner in your high corrals, breaking his spirit. Why, damn you, Winston, he's my horse. I half tamed him—"

HOUSER and three or four men horseback burst from the brush, Houser coming in headlong strides, a strange excitement upon him. At sight of Barney and Winston he began to shout wildly.

"That yalla stud in the cave? Let him out! Git away from that hole. He'll break a leg. He'll kill himself!"

Other riders came breaking from the brush. The nearest ones vaulted from their saddles before their horses could stop. They came striding forward in grim eagerness, sliding loops on their ropes. Houser rushed for Barney, his sun-scabbed lips back from his long teeth again. His long arms flung out, and before Barney could sidestep he was thrown aside. Then Houser was plunging into the slot.

Barney went clawing after him. The other men rushed in, pushing Barney against Houser, every one bent on getting his rope on the stallion first.

Golden leaped away from the noisy men, clawing back up to the top of the slanting rocks. He bristled and bared his teeth and blared his fighting challenge. Then he was leaping up higher, to the last stand. He started to rear, but as if remembering his failure of moments before, he dropped down again to all four feet.

There was a little ledge slightly higher than where he stood, hardly large enough for a dog to perch on. The men saw the horse mount up to it in a compact knot, with all four feet, his four hoofs together in a space no larger than a man's two spread hands. Then, without pause, his magnificent golden body straightend up, and up, against the sky, until he stretched his full length. He lunged, then —leaped upward with all the power of his mighty hind legs. His forelegs went across the great loose slab. He clawed with his hind feet, grunting. His body writhed, shook forward, and he was over. Over and out of sight.

"By God!" Barney cried. "He made it —he's beat you again!"

The great slab was tilting slowly inward, unbalanced by the horse's final heave. All at once it pitched down, crashing and thundering, carrying rocks and dust and loose debris. And a tin pail. A common gallon syrup bucket, which rolled to the middle of the floor, losing its lid as rocks struck it, and spilling its contents before astonished eyes—paper money and a stubby, pearl-handled revolver.

"So that, Houser," said Barney in the stillness, "is where you hid the loot and the gun. No wonder you didn't want the stallion prowling in here."

Houser's tongue-tip ran over his roughened lips. Then he squawled and lunged to swoop up the telltale articles. Johnny Lathrop, Barney's friend, shoved against Houser's upturned rear and sent him sprawling headlong. Houser scrambled to his feet. But Colonel Winston was squatting by the bucket, plucking up the money, and the men were bending around him to see.

"Umm—" murmured Winston. "The exact amount, and the same money, that I paid to old Spence. And this gun"—he opened the cylinder and peered closely at the cartridge butts—"is a .38. One cartridge fired. Damn it, Houser, didn't I see this gun in your possession a year or two ago? How do you account—"

They realized then that Houser was no longer there. They crowded out through the Keyhole. Houser's horse was gone. The man was gone. Other riders were just coming from the brush. Winston turned to Barney.

"All right, Yoakum," he said in his cold, clipped tones. "This lets you out of the picture. And we'll not bother further with the stallion, at this time. My ex-foreman, Houser, will require our attention just now."

"Winston," said Barney, "if you've got a drop of sporting blood in your veins you'll never try again to capture Great Golden, after that jump he made to keep on being a free horse—and I'll bet you couldn't get half a dozen men to help you."

The bear struck first.

WILD BORN

By KENNETH GILBERT

IN THE soft May night The Pool lay like a fragment of dark glass on the forest floor. When the full moon was almost overhead, its reflection was a white-gold disk that seemed to float on the placid surface. Save for one shore, where the feet of countless generations of wild folk had worn the ground bare as they came to drink, The Pool was screened by rank thickets of devil-club and the spreading limbs of cedars. By day, a circling eagle could look down and see it, but a casual wanderer in the forest would not know of The Pool until he stumbled upon it. And yet the wild creatures had always known of it, for

they came from miles around to taste its ever-cool sweetness.

Intuitively, too, they knew of its hazards. Foes as well as friends came here to drink, and the matchless beauty of the spot was but the setting of tragedy. Only the unwary and trusting ever failed to sense the hidden menace.

The blacktail doe was young and had yet to learn the lesson that craft and vigilance are the price of life in the wilderness, or she would never have lingered by The Pool this night. But having come to the thicket just before dark, she now stood weak and trembling over her new-born fawn, the first she had mothered.

She was not aware that there was hardly a chance her tiny baby would survive the night. An old doe would never have been overtaken in her hour so near the place where dread killers came to slake their shirst. But the trim, slender-legged blacktail was less apprehensive than she was intoxicated by this miracle which had occurred to her. She reveled in a bewildering sense of bliss and contentment which stilled her fears.

It seemed to her that surely this was the handsomest deer baby the wilderness had ever known. Her heart swelled with pride and mother-love. The world was good and kind, and must be rejoicing in her happiness. Her fatuous belief must have brought a smile to the somber faces of the wood gods, who lurk in the forest depths and pull the strings of their wild-born puppets.

Yet little Mowitch, as the Indians would have called him, bore a sign which the same red men would have said placed him under the sheltering wing of Saghalie, the Creator. If the stripes of the chipmunk's back were caused by the gently stroking fingers of Saghalie, then surely the delicately-spotted coat of the fawn was the work of the same divine hand.

The pattern of it made the fawn's soft body blend with the earth upon which he lay, where broken patches of moonlight sifted through the tangle of limbs overhead. His miniature black hoofs were tucked under him, his large ears perked forward comically and his clouded-blue eyes were mild and curious.

He was scarcely larger than a rabbit, and his immature mind was a blank page upon which must be written all the lore of his kind. He was puzzled and somewhat fearful at the bigness of the world, but he was content so long as his mother was with him. It was as though he understood that the feeble spark of life within him could be so easily quenched, and there were powerful forces which portended his doom. But he clung to faith in his mother—and, mayhap, he wore the mark of Saghalie.

As though aware of the almost overwhelming odds against his surviving even until dawn, nature had bestowed upon him a queer gift. He had little body-scent, and this was his shield and armor against enemies. He could make a mock of their keen noses. Yet it seemed hardly sufficient advantage to cope with cunning foes who knew this secret, and who would start hunting for him if they discovered the doe. But the young mother, still gripped in the spell of the miracle, saw or felt nothing to alarm her.

In fact, the spring woods, redolent with the pleasing aroma of budding wildflowers and freshly-broken soil where growing things had pushed through, never seemed more peaceful. There was no wind and the air was clean. Not so much as the snapping of a twig beneath a stealthy foot broke the stillness.

The doe was hungry, and she bethought herself of a marsh where pond-lilies grew thickly and the succulent bulbs could be had for the taking. She placed her cool muzzle on the fawn's soft neck and breathed a motherly admonition for him to remain quiet until she returned. He twitched his ears as though he understood and, with the inherent instinct of obedience heavy upon him, he did not stir as she moved off silently through the thickets.

WHEN she had gone the world seemed the same as before, yet he knew a pang of loneliness and the temptation was great to call his mother back. But she had assured him that there was nothing to fear, and that he must be patient. The moon rose higher and

spilled its pale, unearthly light through the interlaced branches above. It revealed him more clearly, yet the camouflage of his coloring was so perfect that he seemed part of the gray and black earth. The illusion was heightened by his utter quiet.

Minutes passed and he lay there as though frozen. At last, however, his sensitive nostrils were assailed by a faint, offensive odor, and soon there was a pattering sound in the nearby leaves. Presently a small, dark-brown creature with a slender, snakish body appeared at the edge of a nearby brush-clump and stared around with beady eyes, nose twitching as it sampled the air.

The mink which had come prowling up the brook which drained away from The Pool could not smell Mowitch, yet some satanic instinct of the hunter told the furred killer that there was prey close at hand. The cold merciless eyes of the dark assassin stared straight at Mowitch without being able to dissociate the fawn from its surroundings. In a moment more the mink would have been gone, but one of the fawn's ears twitched at the bite of a mosquito.

Instantly the mink stiffened warily. Then it made out the helpless Mowitch, and its eyes glowed with blood-lust. It took two looping bounds toward its intended prey, but stopped suddenly with its evil mask twisted into a snarl of fear as it looked upward. For the forest had echoed to a hollow, booming cry. A bar of moonlight that lay along a limb almost overhead revealed a ghostly bird with fiercely-blazing orbs.

The great horned owl, which had come on hushed wings through the trees, would have made short work of the fawn, even as it did the big snowshoe rabbits. Its ears were like the most delicate of microphones, attuned to catch slight sounds, and if little Mowitch had so much as shifted his position, the feathered killer would have heard him. But Mowitch made no sound.

The mink did, however—and the next instant had leaped for the security of the brush as the owl stooped on a steep glide and struck. Clutching talons just missed the darting, twisting body; but the mink vanished and the owl rose with a hiss of rage and floated silently off through the trees. It passed so close to Mowitch that the fear-stricken fawn could feel the air stirred by the broad pinions, and the sudden coolness was like the chill of death, but the gray ghost went on with unseeing eyes.

Yet that lugubrious hunting cry seemed to be the signal for the wilderness to awaken. From nearby came the plaintive chirp of a bird disturbed in its slumbers, while in the distance was the echoing *tunk-a-lunk* of a bittern or thunder-pumper spearing frogs by his favorite swamp-hole. But at The Pool itself the silence had become oppressive, intense, as though the wild folk had received warning of some dread presence among them, and were waiting in apprehension. Even the fawn caught the under-current of alarm, and he remained as unstirring as a mottled lichen on a log.

Then, from out of nowhere came a wraith-like materialization. One moment the shore was empty, and the next a great cat stood there, tawny gray in the moonlight, its rounded tail writhing nervously, ears laid back and eyes glowing with lambent flame as the light found reflection in them. The sleek head was turned from side to side as it listened, and the blackish nostrils dilated and contracted. But, like all felines, the big cougar's nose was none too good. At last its lips wrinkled as though in a soundless snarl of disappointment. As yet no game had come to The Pool this night.

Yet game would come, for the cougar had often made kills here. He had vast patience and could wait instead of hunting at random in an effort to stalk a deer. With lithe grace, the muscles rippling liquidly under his smooth pelt, the cougar climbed into the upper fastness of a huge cedar, and draped its length along a limb which overhung the waterhole. From this position he could see and hear everything that came to The Pool, without being seen himself—and it would be death for any lesser creature to pass beneath that limb. Not twenty feet away little Mowitch lay in frozen horror, instinct telling him that here was the formidable foe of all deer, and that it would be a long chance indeed if the cat did not see him.

IT SEEMED impossible that he could remain so moveless that the topaz-jade eyes of the killer in the tree would not discover him. He had a strong impulse to get up and try flight, for he had not only seen the huge cat but still smelled him. Yet the sheltering wing of the all-wise Saghalie kept him hushed and quiet, and death waited hard by but did not strike. The fawn did not so much as move a muscle. At last the cougar's basilisk gaze shifted to the trail leading to The Pool, and suddenly he grew tense at a growing sound.

There was a careless approach with crackling twigs and rustling bushes, and then a morose old black bear which haunted the hog-back ridges each spring, came shuffling into sight. He was thirsty and hungry and in a truculent mood. As he waddled along the path beaten firm by the feet of many wild creatures, his pointed nose caught the acrid taint of cougar. Instantly he stopped and sniffed the ground, the bristly hackles on his shoulders lifted warningly.

He knew that the cat was near, and he rumbled hatred. Between bears and cougars there has been feud since the dawn of time. The bear was not seeking trouble, but he would not go to any great pains to avoid it. He regarded this land as part of his own range, and he was jealous enough to dispute it with any cougar that he met. More slowly now and with manner alert, for he would not let himself be caught at disadvantage, he went on to The Pool and drank long and noisily.

But he was still uneasy. The cat smell lingered in the air, but he had no way of telling where was the maker of it. He prowled along the edge of the water-hole, digging out and devouring with relish the roots of skunk-cabbage and the fiery jack-in-the-pulpit and, his appetite partly appeased, was on the point of going elsewhere in search of meat when he heard a thin, reedy cry that halted him abruptly.

His reddish eyes shone with anticipation, and involuntarily he licked his chops. For he knew what manner of thing it was that had made that cry, having slain many a deer fawn or elk calf in his time. Also, he knew that it was difficult to find one of these toothsome morsels for, curiously, he could not smell them.

And that single wail had been so short that he could not make out whence it came. Too, the thick forest gave the sound a ventriloquial quality that was deceiving. But he realized that the fawn was very close and, stealthily, he began the hunt for it. It seemed certain that the cruel wood gods were going to deliver the hapless fawn to an insatiable foe.

Likewise the cougar heard that cry, and knew its meaning. He gave over hateful contemplation of the bear long enough to raise his head and peer about in the thickets. His jaws slavered at the thought of such a meal. It was not to his liking to give up his vantage on the cedar limb while the bear was prowling about below, but that fawn-cry had an appeal that was hard to resist. He would not seek a fight with his ancient enemy, but by the same token he would not avoid one if it came to defending meat that he had killed. Noiselessly he started to descend the tree, but stopped as he heard a new footfall, so soft that his ears hardly recorded it.

Another visitor was coming to The Pool! The cougar's muscle tensed as he once more settled himself on the limb, his green-gold eyes narrowed watchfully.

There was movement up the trail. A patch of moonlight on the ground was darkened, and a tremor of excitement passed through the lank body of the cat. Into a clear spot stepped a springy-footed blacktail buck, his size fixing him as a king of his kind.

He was as hornless as a doe, for he had cast his antlers on the last snows of winter. Because he lacked those weapons, he would be fair prey for the cougar, and in a moment he would pass directly under the limb where the killer waited.

Even the bear was aware of his coming, and looked up. The black hunter shrewdly guessed now that the cougar probably knew of the buck, also. In times past the bear had driven cougars away from their kills. He had but to wait now and the thing might happen

again. The situation became fraught with delightful possibilities.

Noiselessly the bear moved toward the advancing buck, ready to be at the death. At that instant the fawn gave its bleating cry again.

PERHAPS little Mowitch was so alarmed by the nearness of the dread slayers that he could no longer keep silent. Likewise he had become tremendously lonesome for his mother. He was hungry and he knew that she had been gone for a long while, longer than a mother should be away from her baby.

At that moment the frantic doe, having been mired in the bog where she had waded out too far in her search for pond-lily bulbs, had at last dragged herself free and was returning swiftly to the spot where she had left her little one. In her mad haste now she would probably blunder into the deadly ambush of The Pool. But her thoughts were only of her fawn, and her fears were great that something had harmed him. Recklessly she plunged ahead.

Surely the grim wood gods were chuckling in glee at the dire situation they had created. More and more the purpose of their seemingly blind strategy was becoming apparent. Mowitch was the factor which had upset the dramatic balance. If he had not been at The Pool this night, bear and cougar would have gone their respective ways, keeping the grudging truce, but hatred and the eagerness for a kill were powerful incentives to throw discretion aside.

The fawn's first cry had been given without realization that it betrayed him. But he needed the comfort of his mother, and he knew of but one way to summon her. Then his tender nostrils whiffed the musky odor of bear, and he heard the shaggy beast moving about in the brush. Instantly he was petrified with terror. Closer and closer came the bear, and the panicky fawn struggled with the impulse to run, weak and uncertain though his untried legs were. But the age-old instinct to lie moveless came to save him just in time.

Suddenly he was sure that the bear had found him, for the beast's piggish eyes peered at him but a few paces off. Yet after that horrifying moment the black death swung away and resumed its search, trying to pick up a scent which did not seem to exist.

As the bear vanished and Mowitch heard no more of him for a time, the fawn's terror disappeared. His hunger was more intense, and again he was impatient for his mother. Involuntarily he wailed once more.

That cry was like a spark which exploded a situation whose pent-up tensity neared the bursting point.

AT THE quavering sound the big blacktail buck, whose suspicions were not yet aroused, stopped short with a whistle of interrogation. Since he had cast his horns he had been sulking alone, and he had no liking for fawns. But the clan call was not to be ignored. At that moment, too, he caught the smell of bear, and he blew again in anger.

His act meant more to him than he could have foreseen. As he hesitated he glimpsed one of the deeper shadows above, detach itself and fall lightly and unerringly toward him. Involuntarily he flinched—and saved his own life. Claws and sinewy forelegs that were intended for his neck, which they would snap with deft precision, slid off his flank as he pivoted and sprang away.

The claws had raked him like searing fire, but this only served to speed his going. Wisely he knew that he was no match for this huge cat. Had it been the love moon of late fall, when his antlers were heavy and polished for battle and he was insane with a fighting rage that scorned odds, the buck might have tested his prowess against the tawny killer, but such mad truculence was lacking now. He whistled mockingly as the forest swallowed him. Yet his brief appearance had served the purpose which fate desired.

Crouched beside The Pool, ears flattened and tail lashing savagely, the cougar hurled after the vanished buck an explosive snarl that was like a malediction, a hair-raising squall that began on a low note and ended like a sob.

This display of ill-temper was rare

with him, for he was usually a silent hunter cunning enough to keep his whereabouts unknown as much as possible, that game might not be frightened away. Yet his anger had been whetted to a new edge of ferocity by the night's happenings. It seemed to the outraged cat that the bear had probably slain the fawn by now and was feeding full, while the rightful lord of this domain went hungry. A coward ordinarily, the cougar was an old one and could be courageous enough when aroused. At that instant his gaze fell upon the black interloper who seemed to blame for the spoiled hunting.

Less than ten feet away the bear, likewise ruffled, saw warfare coming. That drop of the cougar almost in the bear's face, the fiendish scream in the bear's ears—these could mean nothing less than challenge. Convinced that the cougar was going to attack, the bear struck first. With a purring whine that broke into a roar, he charged.

Like a skilled fencer, the cougar leaped nimbly aside and counted coup with a knife-armed forepaw that slashed deeply into the bear's neck and shoulder. In retaliation the bear wheeled and, before the cat could recover, came to grips with his hereditary foe. Thick arms locked about the cougar's body, while strong jaws sought the throat-hold, yet the cat's hind feet were ripping the bear's pelt and flesh like a buzz-saw. Clinched thus, the fight-maddened beasts rolled over and over upon the ground, wreaking fearful havoc with claws and fangs, while the night-silence was shattered by terrifying sounds.

As suddenly as it had begun, however, the battle ended, for each realized that the other was too dangerous. It ended in a grievous draw and they broke free, glad to drag themselves away, to suffer for days from their wounds, if death itself did not overtake them. A moment more and the shore of The Pool was empty and peaceful again.

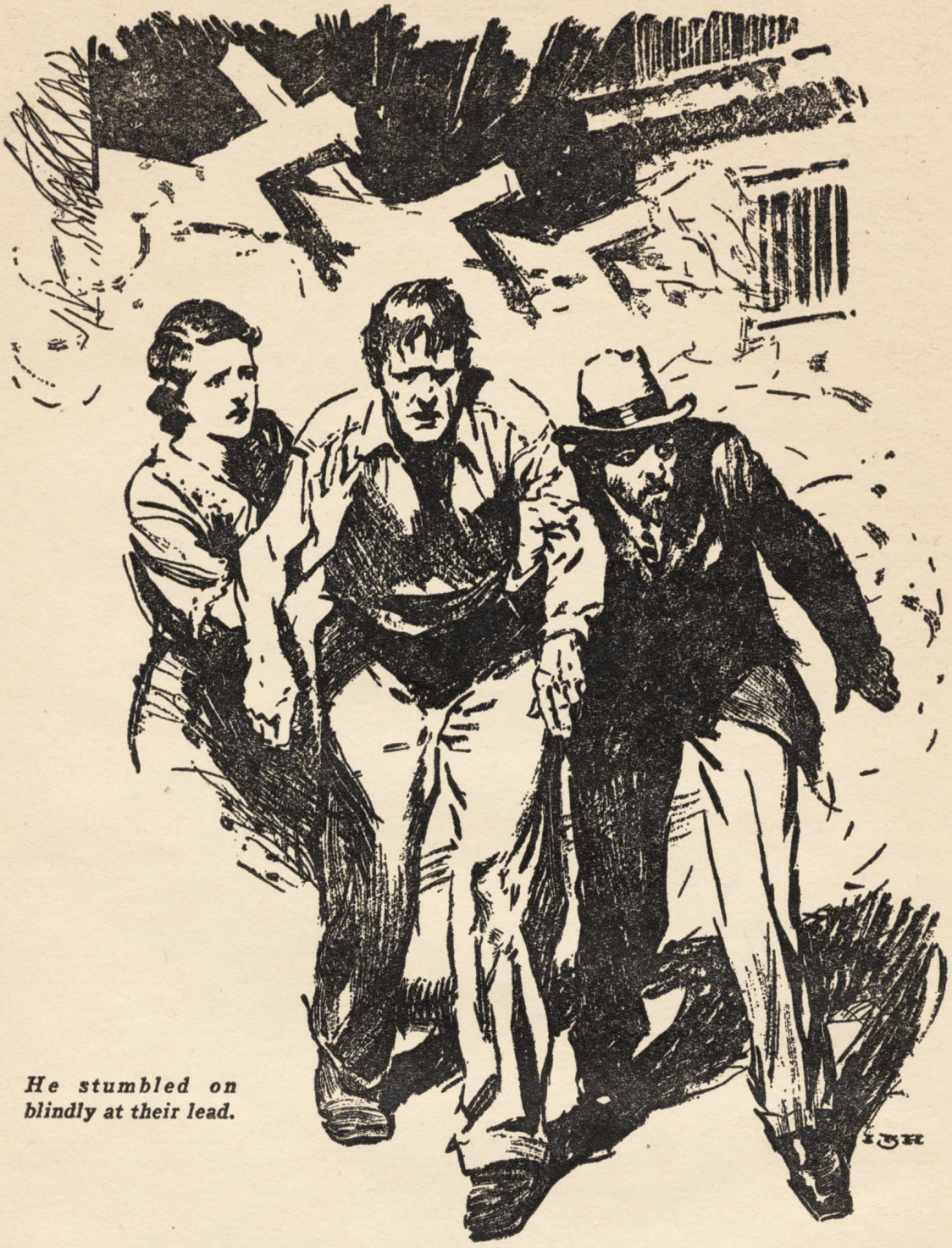
THE fawn lay in appalled quiet. Nor did he move at once when the doe, mud-caked and with flanks heaving from her run, came bounding up. She was alarmed by the cat and bear smell which lingered about the place, and her eyes were bright with apprehension as she looked around for further sign of the killers. The hair along her spine was raised threateningly, and she snorted in fierce defiance, stamping her feet and shaking her head as though warning the foe that she would battle to the death.

But after awhile, when nothing answered her bluffing challenge, she turned to the fawn and went over him anxiously with her nose to discover his hurts. He bleated happily, assuring her that he was unharmed, and managed to stand up on his wobbly legs. She stood there quietly, proudly while he fed, and mother-love welled up in her many times so that she had to turn often and caress him with her damp muzzle. This baby of hers, this first-born, had a glorious destiny which stretched ahead like a smooth trail without turnings. Some day he would be a noble buck, and with his great antlers he would uphold prowess among his kind when the love moon rose on still, fall nights, and the crisping leaves of brown and red lay banked in windrows beneath the alders and aspens. Never had the world seen such a handsome fawn. The doe's eyes were soft and misty as she licked his speckled coat.

As the false dawn lightened the thickets about The Pool, before the deeper dark which preceded the real day, she moved off through the spring woods, and little Mowitch, his fears and needs assuaged, followed her contentedly.

Before she left, however, she did a curious thing. In her scouting of the thickets for possible enemies, she came across the departing trail of the blacktail buck, and her ears twitched in remembrance. It was more than chance that she chose the route he had taken, even though he apparently was likewise bound for that far valley where many deer gathered.

Rather, perhaps, it was the pride of a young mother, for she knew the trail was made by her mate of the previous fall, with whose band she had "yarded" that winter. Now she was returning to him, bringing home her sheaves. Mowitch would meet his sire.



He stumbled on blindly at their lead.

THE HUNCHBACK of MADRID

By WILLIAM E. BRANDON

HE COULD be seen almost nightly, in the Café de Libertad, on the Calle de Carmen. He was small, but large-headed, and he was hunchbacked. The deformity raised his left shoulder above his right, and thrust his head forward so that it looked like a balloon moored to his skinny, twisted neck. His eyes lacked a cripple's bitterness, but they were sad, and, since when

he spoke to you he had to glance upward, it seemed that his expression was at times calculating, carefully secretive. But that was out of his character.

He wore a carefully pointed Van Dyke; he was always neat with his clothes, and that alone set him a little apart in Madrid. His hair and eyes were jet black and his aristocratic face was unlined, but these definite things in no way detracted from the indefinite aura of age about him.

It may have been his dress, or his manner, or his twisted shape—vaguely resembling the bent stoop of great age—which made him appear older than he was. He was extremely sensitive about that, as he was concerning his malformed back; always, with a new acquaintance, he would thread into the conversation: ". . . but of course, I am only fifty-six years. . ." He looked seventy.

His speech was slow and cultured. Many believed that 'before the invasion' he had been, perhaps, a professor; it was strange that no one knew exactly, as he seemed to know everyone in the city. It was understood vaguely that he was an official, someone in the government, or someone of use to the government, and he was regarded with great respect.

He never spoke anything but Spanish, and that perfectly, although with a slight accent which caused others to wonder about his home—Valencia, Castile—none seemed to fit. But that was a small thing, perhaps a hidden impediment in his speech.

So it was quietly and regularly that he lived, with daily visits to one of the half ruined buildings along the Calle Mendez Valdes, which housed yet some of the government offices, and evenings spent in the smoky Café de Libertad—quietly, until that night when he appeared with a strange and beautiful girl, who looked beside him like a slender willow standing close against a broken stump, and he introduced her to Francisco, his waiter, as his wife.

He paid no attention to his other acquaintances of the café that night; he sat late, talking to the woman he had named as the Senora Varro, and as he talked he watched her slender, smooth cheeked face—watched her dark blue eyes as she spoke. She wore her black hair coiled in a knot, low on her neck. She smiled easily, and her eyes sparkled with a beauty and gaiety that wasn't forced in them; it was as though the grotesque old man across the table from her had magically blanketed his imperfections with a new and startling personality. . .

He left, late, with his young wife, and the café was busy with amazed gossip after they had gone.

That was the last time Senor Varro was seen. Those who were used to his regular presence wondered—but not long. Many were disappearing in Madrid. There had been, that night, an air raid, and perhaps the Senor Varro had been unlucky enough to walk from the cafe into the district of its objective.

The girl? They shrugged at the thought of her; but it would be pleasant, at that, to meet her and endeavor to cheer her early widowhood, if that it was. But naturally she would have gone with her husband, and if the Senor Varro had gone to death—well, then, it was sad to think of the young Senora, so beautiful and full of happiness.

Perhaps that had happened, or, it may have been, other things. Many were disappearing in Madrid. . .

So, to know the story, it is necessary to go back to the morning of that day when Senor Varro appeared with his young and beautiful wife.

SENOR VARRO breakfasted in his room. He used canned heat for his coffee, drank it black and without sugar and ate with it two slices of coarse bread. He finished the bread, then sat long over the cup of coffee, smoking a cigarette, gazing soberly out of the window at his elbow.

His room overlooked the Calle Mavor; it was a six-story, rickety frame building and Varro's room was the only one occupied on the third floor. The three upper floors had all been empty since the first air raid, months before, when the top floor had been blown half away. One other bomb had hit the building since, but it had only bored its way

through to the basement and for some reason had failed to explode.

Varro concluded his breakfast, washed the thick coffee cup in the cold water remaining in the granite bowl on his wash stand, and prepared himself to go out. He brushed his coat and hat carefully, put them on and stood sidewise to the cracked mirror, jerking the coat in the position that would least reveal his deformed back. He took some pains in pointing his beard, watching steadily in the mirror with a serious and unblinking stare.

He heard quick steps in the bare hall outside, and his hand stopped as he listened. The steps stopped at his door and were followed by a knock. Senor Varro stood still, looking into the mirror at the reflection of the door behind him.

The knock was repeated, and the thin door shook slightly under it.

Senor Varro turned, with a quick movement, like a hopping bird; silently he slid open a drawer in a small stand and took out the final article of his dress. It was a hand grenade, of the pineapple type, controlled by a pin, which, when jerked out, exploded the bomb after an interval of ten seconds.

Varro turned back his coat and slid the grenade into a special pocket, sewn into the coat's back, just under his left shoulder with the coat again buttoned the bulk of the grenade rested under the bony hump in Varro's back, and so was not noticeable except as a small exaggeration of the deformity.

He looked again in the mirror, satisfied himself, and opened the door.

A young girl stood in the gloomy hallway. She wore a dress of soft wool which clung to her form and outlined it in an interesting manner; her black hair was coiled low on her neck, contrasted the paleness of her skin.

She looked at Varro and smiled. She seemed a little excited, but there was no apology or embarrassment in her presence. She asked: "Senor Varro? I—I came to see you on a most important matter. May I come in?"

Senor Varro lowered his surprised eyes and stood back from the door.

"Indeed," he said. "Please do so." He apologized for the poorness of the place and seated her in his only good chair; he sat on the bed, a springless cot shoved against the wall.

The girl said: "You are the Frederico Varro who is—connected with the government?"

Varro hesitated. Questions were seldom asked him, and he never answered directly those which were. Finally he nodded, glancing up at her from beneath heavy eyebrows which met over his high, aquiline nose. He looked down again and spread his hands. "In, of course, a very small way."

"Yes," she said swiftly. "As a clerk in the office of Jose Martinez, Commissioner of Protection, are you not?"

"Eh?" He stiffened, and, for an instant, stared at her in half angry astonishment. He let out a deep breath, slowly, watching her. "*Dispénseme, Senorita.* It is not so generally known."

"With so many changes," she said softly, "those things are not." She added, with an innocence which doubled the force of the words: "Then you are Fred Varr, aren't you?" She spoke the question in English.

SENOR VARRO leapt to his feet, lurching awkwardly with the sudden movement; his hands were unsteady. He answered her, still in Spanish: "I do not understand." He paused; he was breathing rapidly. "I am very sorry; I must ask you to leave. I can not understand the reason for your coming here, but your questions are absurd."

She smiled. "And my behavior most suspicious?" She rose; her glance at him was wistful. "I shall have to tell my story—someplace else."

"Senorita—what do you want?"

"You are Fred Varr?"

"I—since you insist it is so I will not argue it with you. You may believe it if you like."

"You understand my English."

He lost his sharpness; his eyes resumed their faint, resigned sadness. He said in English: "Yes, I do. You must be American yourself."

"I'm Anne," she said quietly. "I'm Virginia Harley's daughter, Captain Varr." She was looking at her hands.

"My mother died in 1928." She glanced up at him. "I don't expect the fact that I am her daughter to be of any use, of course, but. . ."

He sat very still. "But you thought I should know? Why? I've been dead to her and even to my family for over twenty years. I didn't know—"

"John Hatch is my father's name—you don't remember him? He came from the same town. We've been living in Paris for several years. He was crippled in the accident in which—mother was killed. I work in Paris, in the travel office of an American magazine, and — naturally, there is a great deal of talk in Paris these days. By listening to enough of it I learned about your place here, since there were some things I knew that others didn't—I had heard mother talk so much of you."

"Then she did—" he began abruptly, and then checked himself.

She said: "I knew of course that you had flown with the American Army in the World War, and that after you were wounded you deserted. After that, mother sometimes heard news of you—rarely. I knew that you were wanted by the police of several governments; our office sometimes gets such circulars." She smiled a little. "Although I'm not definite as to what your crimes have been."

He nodded, without taking offense; his gaze was dreamlike.

"Very ordinary," he said. "When I crashed in the war, I came out with the back you see, so, obviously, I had no wish to return to—anything. I found myself extremely bitter, but I have learned that it is useless; a general anger is usually unrewarded. I was well acquainted on the continent, and in the last few years I have found enough of entertainment, and profit. So." He sighed, reached around under his coat and drew out a flat cigarette case, offered one to the girl.

He held a match for her, went on, as he lit his own: "So, you find me, and say you expect your relation with Virginia Harley to be of little use in what you wish to get. You expect to find me heartless—I am. The fact that you are the child of a woman whom I once wished to marry means nothing to me; my name has been Varro for years; Captain Varr died in a hospital in Brest." He watched the smoke curling upward from his cigarette. "Who would not be heartless? I see them look at me; I hear: *Qué feo!*—how ugly'! *Ay,* I am. And if not that, I see the disgusting pity, such as is in your eyes now. There can be nothing left in me but the wish to hurt back."

"And you have?"

He nodded soberly. "Enough to be well hated, many times. You are shocked."

"No. I expected—that is, I had heard. In those French circulars your alias was given as The Monster." She saw the brief flash of his smile, and an unaccountable impulse made her return it; the harsh printed words of the French circular seemed unreal and far away. "I recall a mention of murder."

He shrugged. "It was necessary for my own safety; he was a fool, and of little use to his government at that. You see, I am frank." He paused. "Frank enough to repeat that the mention of your mother's name only touches my memory; it does not pierce it. I have schooled myself well. You are to me as any stranger; keep that in mind, if you still have your request."

"I am sure that if I were to hand over your *dossier,* as much as I have, to the government officials here, it would be unpleasant for you. I wasn't counting on my mother's name—I had thought I wouldn't mention it—but as it doesn't weigh with you, neither will it with me."

She leaned forward in her chair. Her deep blue eyes were steady. "Certainly your superiors here in Madrid don't know who you are, and I can furnish them at least a partial record."

"So you came to blackmail me into doing what you wish?"

She had been going more tense as she spoke; now her slender arms were rigid.

"I want you to get Jaime Montez released and out of the country." And, having said it, her hold on herself broke a little and she slumped back, as though all the energy in her body had gone out with the words. A pulse beat rapidly at the base of her white, slender throat; her lips trembled a little.

SENOR VARRO twisted up his head and studied her through the wreathing cigarette smoke. "Even if your threats—ah—inspired me to such an effort, it would be quite useless. Jaime Montez is guilty of treason to the government, and as for his safety, he is probably already executed."

"No!" The cry broke from her like a sob. "He can't be! He—"

Varro shrugged. "A short while ago two freight trains were bombed, on their way into the city. They were carrying new tanks from Russia. Shortly after that a new squadron of Mosca fighting planes was based at what we shall call *Campo D*, somewhere beyond the Rio Manzanares. That same night they were bombed so thoroughly by a squadron of Junkers that the entire group was wrecked.

"Another time, one of our squadrons took off in a short bombing expedition—they were Breguets—and they were met, on their course, by a tremendously superior force of Fiats and Heinkels. They suffered heavy losses that time, the Breguet bombers and the old Nieuports that were their escorts.

"Jaime Montez flew with that squadron, and yet he returned unhurt. Montez was at *Campo D*, when the new Moscas were brought in, and Montez knew of those trains of tanks and anti-aircraft guns. But that wasn't all. A few days ago we received a new type of fighting plane—a monoplane, resembling the American Army P-26 type, but a better fighter.

"We were anxious to keep its specifications secret: all the pilots had orders to destroy their ships if forced down in Rebel territory. However, the night after they arrived, one of them was stolen. Incredible? Certainly, but it was done. But in that, Montez attempted too much, and was apprehended. Unfortunately, the plane has not been found, and Montez refuses to tell where it is. That is your lone hope that he still lives; they may be waiting to force that information from him."

"He didn't do it," she said. "He didn't do any of those things. They were pinned on him by someone else, so that the real one could escape." Her voice was shaking. "They won't give him a chance! If they would let him free, for a while, he thinks he could find the actual traitor—but they don't believe him. I've been to all the American diplomatic officials, but they can do nothing. He signed to fly for the Loyalists, you know, in Mexico. He took a Spanish name, and came here on a Mexican passport. And especially, they say, with such evidence against him—they can't help."

"His real name was James Monte?"

"Yes. His contract with the Loyalists was to be up next month, only a few days away. And after that—we were going to be married."

A little disapproval came into Senor Varro's eyes. "He is a poor choice; he's not to be trusted."

"No, it's not that. He's only reckless; he doesn't think and look ahead. But now—" She broke completely, tears rolled down her white cheeks, and she buried her face in her hands.

Varro said gently: "What made you think I could help him?"

She recovered her voice, answered in muffled tones: "You're in the temporary government here, and you know how to do such things. You're the only one in Spain that I knew of, and the only one that—that—"

"That you thought you could force." Varro sat still and watched her as she dried her eyes and looked up at him. He folded his hands across his knee. "I'm sorry. I can't do anything."

"But you must! I tell you, I'll take everything I know to your superiors here, unless you will." She jumped to her feet. "I'll go at once. I mean it."

"Yes," replied Varro patiently. "Of course you do. But wait and think. You slipped across the Pyrenees without legal entry into the country—that's the only way you could have come in. You hoped to get what you had come for and be back in Hendaye by tomorrow. You under-estimated the vigilance with which the Loyalist intelligence watches for visitors. They are aided by these many uniformed youths you have seen here—we sometimes call them our home guard. Even now, without a doubt, they are

aware of your unauthorized presence here and are searching for you. When you go to them with your tales about me . . ." He leaned back on the couch and smiled. "You understand, do you not? I am known here, and my word against that of a young girl, in the country with false entry, would be by far the better. Instead, my dear," he said softly, "of having the upper hand over me, you have managed to involve yourself in serious difficulties of your own. Forget James Monte, and put all your effort into getting safely back to France. That will be enough to keep you busy." He turned to the window. "Look." He pointed down to the street below.

They were in the central part of the city; the street was crowded. A covered truck pushed its way through, siren going, motor roaring in low gear. Anne Hatch, so amazingly like and unlike Virginia Harley, stood at Varro's shoulder and watched it. Varro said: "There have been many picked up by such trucks. I have seen them jammed like cattle lorries. And those who ride in them are seldom seen afterwards."

The girl cried out, shortly, and stepped back from the window. Her hand was over her mouth. "It's stopping here!"

Senor Varro curled the point of his beard around his forefinger. "Yes. So it is."

She stared at him with widening eyes. "You—"

"Oh, no. I had no way of sending for it." He smiled. "You mistrust me so much?" He motioned to the ragged screen which stood before his wash stand. "Behind that," he ordered. "It's not much help, but probably all we'll need."

HEAVY steps stamped down the hall. Senor Varro threw open his door. His face was cheerful. He spoke to the two guards, mentioned one of them by name.

The guard bowed his head briefly. "You excuse our interruption, Senor Varro. We are searching for a girl—she was seen in this house, it was thought, not so long ago. There has been no one on this floor?"

Varro assured him that there had not. The guards thanked him and went on up to look at the empty floors above.

Varro called the girl out from behind the screen; his movements were calm and unhurried, even a little as though he had been amused by the guards' visit. He said: "You see?"

She whispered: "Yes. You could have told them—you could have given me to them."

He spread his hands. "After all, my wish to do hurt doesn't extend quite so far. You have your chance to return to France—but empty handed."

"No," she said. "I won't do that."

"I assure you your risk is very real. And there's nothing you can do."

"I can go to the prison; I can try to see him; I can—"

"You can throw away your life by such a gesture."

"It doesn't matter. Can't you see? It wouldn't be worthwhile living without him. I've known that the last months, while he's been down here."

"You say that," said Senor Varro tonelessly. "But even I have found a little interest in life." He saw her eyes and read them. "But you believe I have lived worthlessly, while you are young, and everything is ahead of you, a chance for a decent realization of certain hopes. Is it so?"

"Oh, I didn't—"

"Sentiment speaks out there. I've learned to do without that ridiculous emotion. In fact—" Varro stood up and peered humorously at her— "I couldn't have lived with it. There's nothing in my soul but iron, my dear, and it's as hard and twisted as my back. But you were certain of that, even before you came, eh? So come with me."

He opened the door, but she held back, her eyes questioning; she was afraid of the crowded streets and the open daylight.

Varro smiled thinly. "I'm going to safeguard your presence until tonight. Understand that what I do is done only to protect myself; my interest in anyone else is void. You have done a foolhardy thing in coming here, and for my own protection I must get you out. Not because of my past, which you proposed to lay before the officials here—

you have seen how empty that threat was—but because your presence here is undoubtedly connected with Jaime Montez, and if it should be further traced to me it might easily become unpleasant."

"But I don't see how—"

"The guards' description of you is probably inaccurate. They only know of a young woman without the necessary papers of entry. As my wife, you would have no need of such representation. We will be married at once. You will then return to this room and wait until evening. Then—Do you know how to find the Parque de Madrid? But no. Better the Puerta del Sol, it is near here. I will meet you there at eight o'clock. For a while after that we will be seen together, and later, well, we shall see—" He chuckled at the look in her eyes. "Ridiculous, is it not? But—" He stood back to follow her out of the room— "At times the ludicrous is the imperative."

SENOR VARRO sat in his office, bent over his desk; his deformed left shoulder blade was thrust up behind him almost like a stunted wing. He was working a telegraph key. The set was a hidden one, cleverly attached to the government's own wire; many messages were sent from Varro's building daily, and the government technicians, under the stress of the war, lacked efficiency.

Varro concluded his message, and, working carefully, dismantled his set. The east wall of the office had been half shattered at one time by a bomb, and the set had been built into it and covered with a piece of plaster.

Turning to his desk, Senor Varro unlocked its bottom drawers; from behind them he took two sheafs of stiff paper. He folded these and put them away in his inside coat pocket. He went on through his desk, taking out personal objects and dropping them into his pockets. Finished, he stood up, looked around the small room, sighed once, and went out.

It was already dusk; within a few minutes would be dark, but the long lines still stood at the food stations, patiently awaiting supplies.

Varro saw them, one twisted queue after another. He saw buildings left in ruins, as though some giant child had knocked down his houses of marble and cement blocks yet in places where the effects of attack were not in sight, it might have been any other city: streets crowded, noise and color, good silk dresses displayed for sale behind cracked show windows; except for the signs. These were everywhere, strung across the streets, pasted thick over house fronts, building fronts, churches; graphic, block lettered signs, always before the eye; Varro read them mechanically as he passed. Inspiration, exhortation, instruction; vermilion cubic symbols dancing an exclamatory arc over the skull of the Republica.

It was eight o'clock by the time he had reached his living room, and the girl was gone. He hurriedly rolled back the rug, took two sheets of the same stiff paper which had been spread beneath it.

He had two other men to see, and one he met only a few blocks away, near the building which had housed the Madrid branch of the Chase National Bank.

He was a tall, furtive man. He said swiftly, in Spanish: "The shipment has been effectively blocked." He grinned with one side of his slack mouth. "Two cruisers took the ship this morning. Your information was correct and you will be paid accordingly."

Varro peered up at him. "When?"

The tall man hesitated. "See me tomorrow, at—" He glanced around, lowered his voice and gave an address. Varro nodded, and the other walked away.

Varro limped along the sidewalk slowly. He was smiling. The tall man was one well placed in an organization of rebel spies in Madrid. Senor Varro had worked with them, often, without learning, or wishing to learn, their personnel or headquarters. A week ago he had given the tall man news of an oil tanker bound for the Loyalists, its liquid cargo more precious than food. He had received half his payment at that time, and the other half would be forthcoming tomorrow.

He shrugged. That would be tomorrow.

He saw the second one he was looking for, a pot-bellied, bearded German who

fell in step with him without speaking.

"I have news for you," Varro announced softly.

The German kept his eyes ahead. "So?"

"It is valuable."

"I will pay as agreed between us."

Varro chuckled. He gave the address the tall man had left him. "Go there tomorrow before noon. Take some men with you."

The German glanced once at him, slipped an envelope into his hand, quickened his rolling pace and went on. Varro turned back for the Puerta del Sol, but hesitated for a moment in the shadows by an empty building to count the German's payment. It was correct. It wasn't much, but it was better than the nothing he would receive, if he would wait for tomorrow—

He met Anne Hatch, now the Senora Varro, at eight-twenty and took her with him to the Café de Libertad. He gave her the German's money, with the request that she keep it until he asked her for it. They sat a long while in the café, ate their dinner of beans and rice, and many saw them together there, and heard from Varro's waiter, Francisco, the news of such an astonishing wedding of beast and beauty.

Several were in, during the evening, who were thought to be connected with the Loyalist intelligence. Senor Varro saw them all. He had nothing to fear for the present from the intelligence. The German he had met was an officer of the army; he had often been aided by Senor Varro in the past; he thought Varro a valuable man, and only infrequently wondered at the manner in which he came upon his information.

IT WAS past midnight when he followed his wife out of the café, with Francisco's curious congratulations echoing after them. They made their way across town, through the dark streets, to Varro's destination. The girl didn't question him and he didn't speak, until they had reached a darkened street intersection which seemed to be on the edge of an unkempt park.

Varro gestured vaguely. *"El Parque de Madrid."* He motioned to a square building looming black and squat on the other corner. "At one time it was a great banking house. What is left of it is sometimes now used as a special jail."

She involuntarily took his arm and stared at him in the darkness. "You don't mean—"

"Silencio—listen."

Far way a sound was rising in the night, a thin note of terror, winding up, increasing in volume until it was shrieking out a rounded, chilling howl. Others took it up, like farm dogs at night following a leader's barking.

The sound of the sirens was frantic, wild, ear-splitting; the girl shuddered a little and held closer to the hunchback at her side.

He raised his other arm and pointed into the air. She heard, above the thin scream of the warnings, the faint, half throbbing drone of planes. She turned up her face and stared into the blackness of the night, half lit by dim stars, and when she first saw one ship as a flitting shadow across a distant star, she jumped, nervously, as though there had been no danger in them until they could be seen.

Varro tugged at her arm, pulled her down flat on the ground; he said in her ear: *"Aparatos.* Bombers." He listened another moment. "They are Junkers. Above them is a formation of Heinkels. All German planes—and, wait—there is also a squadron of Fiats. Hear them. There is a great fleet. And the sirens—you recall the places marked *refugios?* At the sound of the siren all are supposed to take shelter in such places, but few do any more; a great many stand in the streets and watch, until the last moment."

His fingers tightened on her arm. "That popping sound is the anti-aircraft. Watch now for the concentration of light. The sky will be full with this one."

She saw the sharp-cut beams of lights and the puffs from the archie batteries, and above it all heard the steadily increasing drone. It happened before she knew it, although every nerve was await-

ing it. Varro pushed down her head; she heard the rushing, instantaneous, whispering whistle and then the ground shook under a terrific smash.

The sky was lighted. Across the street the trees of the park stood out in ghostly greenish white; bombs seemed to be exploding all around them, turning the night into a torn chaos of sound and blasting sheets of ragged light; the earth trembled under a quick succession of shocks; one hit near them, spouted dirt high into the air, showered them with clods and stones.

Varro, at her side, was counting, in a dry, hollow monotone, like a phonograph record under a scratchy needle. He suddenly shouted into her ear: "Now!" and jerked her to her feet.

THE echoes of the explosions still boomed through the air; it had been only a second since the last one had hit. But there were no more.

He held her hand and ran with her, half hopping, towards the black building that had been a bank but was now a jail. It had been hit, perhaps more than once; dust clouded up around it, and a half of it was curiously sunken in, like sagging canvas.

Above, the bombers were wheeling for a second attack, but Varro halted the girl for an instant and pointed upward. She could see, crisscrossing the black screen, tiny twin streaks of flame, and the steady drone of motors was replaced by a varying hum and roar.

Varro said: "That will be the Russian fighters. One squadron will be taking the fighting escort above, while another dives on the Junkers. See, you can follow their maneuvers; they are in formation."

She shook her head helplessly. It was like a spattering of senseless fireworks in the sky and she could distinguish nothing. She said: "They bombed this very place! It's a wonder we—" and she suddenly stopped, at the thought which occurred to her. She saw Varro's eyes gleaming in the dark.

He led her, through the choking dust, into the ruins of the jail; there was no light inside, and for a moment no sound that they could hear. Then, beyond, voices came to them—one screaming, in short, convulsive spasms of sound, others raised in an excited undertone.

Varro picked his way, kept the girl's hand; she sensed that they were entering a corridor with walls and ceiling still intact; she heard Varro measuring his steps as he walked. He stopped. "Here." He called in a low voice: "Monte!" There was no answer.

He felt for the door, and found that the force of one of the explosions had ripped it half from its hinges; he shoved it aside and entered the cell. A match flared in his cupped hand.

The girl gave a startled cry, and ran to the figure stretched face down on the floor; part of the ceiling had caved in and the floor was littered with debris. Varro ran his hand over Monte's head, said quietly to the girl: "He's only stunned. Can you help me carry him?" He was struggling, trying to lift Monte's shoulders. "It's a long way."

She moved to help him without answering. She was crying.

The cool breeze in the night outside returned to Monte enough consciousness so that he could help himself, and, by staggering between them, walk and relieve them of his weight. But he was dazed, out on his feet; his eyes stared ahead like a sleepwalker's and he stumbled on blindly at their lead.

The first light of morning was streaking the horizon when Varro stopped. He released Monte's arm and let him slide down to sprawl on the ground; he would need rest, and sharp control of his senses.

They were out of the city, beside a sagging, long deserted barn. Toward the southeast there was a continuous murmuring sound, like the faraway roar of the sea.

Varro motioned toward it. "We are near the lines." He pried open one door of the barn and disappeared inside. The girl looked in after him, accustomed her eyes to the gloom of the place, and saw, standing like a pinioned hawk, a monoplane, large motored and stubby winged.

Varro called her to help him, and between them they rolled the ship outside. They stretched Monte on the ground

near it, and Varro sat down patiently by him to await the full return of his consciousness.

HE LOOKED at the girl's face; it was drawn with weariness, but her eyes, when she looked down at Monte, were alive with a great joy and tenderness. She felt Varro's eyes on her, and met his glance. Through the night she had followed him unquestioningly; she had understood only after they had James Monte with them. Now she saw that the look of him seemed even older than it had seemed before.

He reached around inside his coat and brought out his cigarette case, lit one. "It is a beautiful ship." He chuckled briefly, without humor. "You are not surprised."

"No. I think it's the stolen Russian plane, the one Jim was convicted of taking."

He nodded, stroking his beard with a thumb and forefinger. "It is obvious that it must be so. So, obvious that it was I who stole it."

There was no accusation in her eyes when she answered. "And you who gave the Rebels the information about the two trains that were bombed, and the location of the flying field that was wrecked, and the course of the attacking squadron that was surprised. But why did you pick Jim to take the blame?"

He shrugged. "Someone had to, and he was the most convenient. I was even unaware at the time that he was an American. I learned that later. A few words dropped in the right places, and a notebook aptly found in his quarters was sufficient."

He looked at her directly. "So you say I am a Fascist spy, and have been, all the while I was a member, in a small way, of the government here. I wish to tell you that such is not the case. I have never been a spy. A traitor, a thief, a killer—but no spy, in the sense of an enemy agent.

"I have lived by my wits—that is so. But I've sold always to the highest bidder, without matter what flag he flew. The money, in this case, is not with the rebels. I received certain things which I needed in my other work, by serving them. The money, the real money, comes from far away." He regarded the tip of his cigarette. "Japan, you know, is interested in Russia. Vitally interested, and willing to pay the highest market prices for specifications of Russian tanks, artillery and aircraft. Also, they are happy to know how Russian material and men stand up under use, and for a member of the government, in a small way, these things were readily known." He pinched out the cigarette, carefully, with his finger and thumb. "I'm carrying, say, ten thousand dollar's worth of such specifications in my pocket now." He smiled at her eyes. "That is, in a forced sale. Sold leisurely, they should be worth much more."

Anne Varro said: "But why did you—"

He avoided her question. "You're wondering, perhaps, about last night? The real mission of those bombers was a powder factory, a few miles north of Madrid. I only notified them that that jail, which had once been *una casa de banca,* was now in service as a munitions warehouse. They tried to include it in the same trip. It covered our mission admirably, did it not?"

"But why? Why did you do it, if—"

He said. "It is getting light, and I believe your Jaime Montez is awakening. The ship is ready to fly. He can get her safely to France. Tell him to put her down in a meadow there and get away before they catch you in it." He got up awkwardly.

"And you? Surely, after what you've done, in protecting and being seen with me, you're in danger? Perhaps even now they are suspicious enough to—"

"That is absurd. And beyond the fact that I have no reason to leave, I have no other place to go. And—three cannot ride in that plane."

"But—"

He turned to face her; he had taken a few short steps away. His big head was bent forward on his stringy neck. "As for the civil ceremony by which you were married to one Frederico Varro, a citizen of the Republic—a divorce in Paris will be easy for you. Although,"

he said quietly, "it was not exactly you that I married."

He turned around and limped across the field to enter a small wood, thinned by bombing; he went through to the other side of it, and stopped there to lean against a tree and wait.

THE SUN had risen when he heard the first whine of starter from the plane, and a few moments later he saw it lift above the trees, reaching for altitude with its powerful and amazing ease. He could see the two heads outlined above the cockpit rim.

He walked on out of the wood and turned toward Madrid. Off to the right the roar of a truck's motor caught his attention. He stopped and looked toward it.

It had left the road and cut for some distance into a broken pasture; now, it was stopped and two men were standing by it, watching the sleek Russian fighter hurtling into the sky.

Senor Varro saw, a moment later, that they had noticed him. It was useless to run. Anything, now, was useless. He stood waiting, like a patient gnome, while the truck bounced toward him. It drew to a stop. The two men in it were uniformed as guards.

One of them swung down from the running-board. "Senor Varro. It is lucky we find you here. We have been looking for you."

"You have?"

The man laughed.

"We have learned that that woman you had last night——your wife, you know—was a certain one here with false papers to visit the traitor Jaime Montez. And you did not return to your room last night, and today Montez has disappeared. The plane you were just watching, Senor Varro, it wouldn't be the stolen ship that we've been hunting?"

Varro didn't answer. The intelligence officer laughed again. "The few hours of safety you gave the woman may be costly, Comrade. We weren't sure until too late to get her also, but you should have known that we would be surprised that one so charming could stomach—"

Varro's sad eyes glittered. "Amuse yourself, Giorno."

"I intend to. I've never trusted you. You often gave Kraken information, but I have always been suspicious. You've played both ends against the middle; we now know enough to be sure of that. And I was personally pleased when the order came for you."

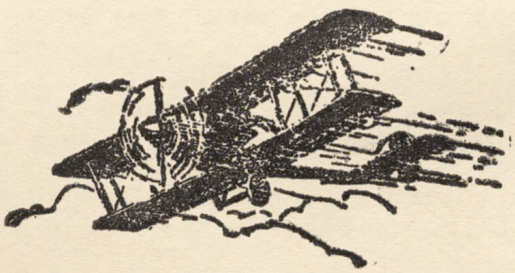
"So. It did come."

"Do you take us all for children? Even Kraken knows now that as you gave us information, so did you sell us to the Fascists. Last night, I saw you. Such a woman the wife, suddenly, of such a little, twisted beast! Did you think I would not investigate?"

Varro sat in the wide front seat, between the two guards. They were back on the road, rattling toward Madrid. Varro's eyes were lowered; he seemed resigned and thoughtful.

He reached around under his coat and brought out his cigarette case; he seemed to have trouble in reaching it.

He opened it and took out a cigarette, and as he did so he let a small metal pin fall from his fingers. It rolled on the jostling floor boards of the truck.



THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers, and adventurers meet

"THE Hunchback of Madrid" is from the hand of William Brandon. With this story he makes a goal he has long wanted—his father had a story published in *Adventure,* and now so has he. William Brandon says:

I was on the bum for three years, covered over sixteen thousand miles, found the slowest drag in the country on the Frisco line and walked around the brush country of south Texas for three days without food or water. That was during one of the Rio Grande's spells of running over. I got one thing from that schooling. I heard it said best by an old half blind bo who had marched with Coxey's army: Plinging's gravy on the long stem. Which, translated, means that in the long run you get what you ask for; one fact that's worth more than a good many others that take longer to say.

In between jumps and after I left the road, I worked on newspapers, and gradually worked my way out of same by trying to build my own weekly out of an advertising throwaway. On to factories and mills and a dozen or so other jobs along the way.

I've been writing for five years, totalled up about a quarter of a million words and would still rather tell a story than listen to one. Lived in most parts of this country and once out of it; when I'm ready to go some place to stay it will be to New Mexico, where my family once owned a small ranch on which I lived for three years. I'm not now in any hurry. I remain in disagreement with Sr. Varro, who believed that the manner of his death made up for his life—and so his living was only a preparation for an honorable death—and I'll stick to a line of T'ao Yuanming's, the Chinese scholar: "Let me empty this cup, if such be the will of heaven;" or, the purpose of life is living, so enjoy what you've asked for.

Right now I'm enjoying a minor tradition. Twenty years ago, in 1919, my dad published his first short story in *Adventure** I'm looking forward to the day when my grandson will celebrate the centenary.

Vit. Sta.: Born in Kokomo, Indiana. 1914.

*The story was "River Law," by W. E. Brandon, September, 1919.—Editor's note.

EVERY time one of our *Ask Adventure* experts brings out a book, we like to point out that fact here and wish the book well. This time it's Charles H. Hall, expert on oldtime sailoring, ship modeling and architecture. Mr. Hall grew up in square rig, so to speak, spending his hours after school climbing around the sailing ships on the Brooklyn waterfront. He joined the U. S. Naval Militia in '93 and retired in 1909 as a two-striper. He served as ensign in the Spanish War aboard an old Civil War monitor, *Jason*, that still had shot marks on her turret that she got off Charleston. He went to Yale and M. I. T., became a naval architect, a member of the staff of *Yachting*, and has cruised in everything from a skiff with a sprit-sail to a battleship.

His new book is "An Introduction to Seamanship," published by Kennedy Brothers, New York. The usual book for amateur sailors is filled with directions for making knots and splices, tells you that you must dry your sails, which side of the boat is port, and what a compass is for. Mr. Hall assumes some knowledge of these matters and goes into more important concerns—handling a boat around a dock, what to do when aground, what to do when the weather gets bad, and what to do when it gets worse, etc. His book is heartily recommended to those who sail or run motorboats.

IT is to be hoped that whenever our *Lost Trails* bring together two comrades whose trails split years ago, they'll write in and let us know. First, so that we can remove the notice and make room for another request; and second, it's an ingratitude if they don't. We're glad to have this letter from G. C. Hagerman, P. O. Box 1907, Washington, D. C.

Many thanks for your publishing my enquiry re. W. P. Liebenrood in your "Lost Trails."

Within the last few weeks I have heard, from two sources, the particulars of his death in 1918 in South America, while making a desperate effort to stop the runaway engine of the train of which he was conductor, after it had been abandoned by the more cautious and wiser engineer.

Had hoped to find him alive but am glad to know that he died in action as he would have wished.

Again thanking you and wishing continued prosperity to your magazine.

Yours truly,
G. C. Hagerman

SOME interesting navy lore comes to us from Jay Earle Miller, of Chicago, in a letter supplementing recent question-and-answer concerning plans of Civil War river gunboats.

Mr. G. C. Reid may get some information of value about the Mississippi river gunboats of the Civil War from "The Monitor and the Navy Under Steam," by Lieut. F. M. Bennett, U.S.N., published in 1900 by Houghton, Mifflin & Company.

It is also possible that the original plans of one or more of these gunboats may be found in the War Department archives, instead of the Navy Department, because the original fleet was built and operated by the army. The navy did not take over, as I recall, until after Farragut captured New Orleans and started up the river to take Vicksburg.

It is also possible that Mr. Carl Mittman, of the Smithsonian Institution may be of help. The Smithsonian has had a WPA project at work redrawing plans of the ship models in the Institution's marvelous collection and, while I am not sure Mr. Mittman has a river gunboat among his models, it is quite probable that there is at least one, and that plans are available for it. Whether they would include sections showing interior details, however, is doubtful.

Mr. Reid is right in assuming that these vessels were shallow draft, and practically all machinery and equipment was above the water line—a fatal arrangement if enemy shot pierced the gun casemate, as happened to the *Mound City*, one of the army fleet, at St. Charles, on the White River, in Arkansas. The armored casemate, with sloping sides, greatly resembling the *Merrimac* arrangement, apparently was one huge compartment covering both the engines and the gun deck.

I encountered Lieut. Bennett's book some time ago while seeking further information about the *Virginius* affair, which nearly

brought on war with Spain in 1874. Captain Joseph Fry, of the *Virginius,* was the Confederate commander in the battle with the *Mound City* at St. Charles in 1862. He had been a midshipman and lieutenant in the American Navy prior to the war, but, after joining the Confederate cause, was placed in comand of a squadron of rebel gunboats. His fleet had been chased up the White River, and at St. Charles Fry landed his guns, erected two batteries on shore, and sunk his ships to block the channel.

Commander Kilty, of the pursuing U. S. fleet, was accompanied by troop transports, and when he arrived, flying his flag on the *Mound City,* he landed an Indiana regiment, then attacked the first battery while the soldiers slipped around to take the second battery from the rear.

A Confederate shell pierced the casement of the *Mound City* and passed through the steam drum. Nearly eighty Union soldiers were scalded to death, and the rest, badly scalded and many already wounded, leaped overboard and attempted to swim to safety.

The other gunboats launched their boats and sent them to the rescue, at which point the Confederate battery opened fire on the men in the water, killing many of them with grape shot.

Fry himself was wounded and captured before the day was over. He maintained he thought the small boats were carrying a landing party, and that his order had been to fire on the boats, and not the *Mound City* crew. Nevertheless, while he was recovering from his wounds in the Federal Hospital at Memphis, an attempt was made by Union soldiers and sailors to assassinate him, and he narrowly escaped.

In 1873 Fry was in command of the *Virginius,* a filibustering ship of doubtful registry, but flying the American flag when it was captured near Jamaica by a Spanish gunboat. Taken into Santiago de Cuba, Fry and his 52 passengers and members of the crew were tried by a hasty and unfair summary court martial, stood up against a wall, and all 53 shot.

President U. S. Grant had, sometime before, prepared a proclamation recognizing the belligerent status of the Cuban rebels, but Secretary of State Hamilton Fish had pigeon-holed it, so the U. S. was officially neutral, a fact which helped Fish work out an amicable settlement, helped somewhat by the belief in the North that Fry, at least, had only got his just deserts.

In his reply to Mr. Reid in the July issue, Mr. Charles H. Hall refers to Gideon Welles' poor opinion of the Porters. Besides having a bad reputation, at least with the Secretary of the Navy, for veracity, David Porter also was hot-headed and vindictive. After the fall of New Orleans Porter accused three of the captured Confederate officers (all former comrades in arms before the war) of firing the Confederate ironclad *Louisiana,* while under a flag of truce, in an attempt to send the flaming hulk down among the Union ships. Farragut placed the trio, Captains Wilkinson, Beverly Kennon and Commander I. K. Mitchell, under special restrictions on Porter's complaint, prohibited any intercourse with them, and sent them north on the *Rhode Island,* to be confined in Fort Warren, Boston Harbor. There they wrote their denials of Porter's charge, sent them to Welles, and the latter promptly removed the restrictions, without bothering to investigate Porter's accusation.

The three rebels probably felt their ostracism rather keenly, for Wilkinson, who had been a shipmate of the *Rhode Island's* skipper, Captain (later Admiral) Stephen Decatur Trenchard, wrote of the trip north:

"The noble commander of the *Rhode Island* most of us had known of old as a prim little precisian, and a great stickler for etiquette, and by no means a bad fellow; but so strict a constructionist that he probably would have refused to recognize his grandfather, if it were against orders. But he had a humane disposition under his frigid exterior; and allowed us all the comforts and privileges compatible with discipline and safety.

Wilkinson's companion, Captain Beverly Kennon, by the way, was the second of that name to come to an unfortunate end in the American Navy. The first Beverly Kennon, also a captain, was killed on board the U.S.S Princeton in February, 1844, by the explosion of the great 12 inch cast iron gun Peacemaker. Others killed were Secretary of State Abel P. Upshur; Secretary of the Navy Thomas W. Gilmer; Captain R. S. Stockton, U.S.N., designer and constructor of the ship —the first to be powered with Ericsson's screw propeller and first ever built with all machinery below the water line—Col. David Gardiner, of Gardiner's Island; Virgil Maxey, of Maryland; and a negro servant. President John Tyler, who had gone on the cruise to see Peacemaker fired, saved his life when he refused to come on deck to see the final shot, as he was busy in the cabin "necking" with the fair Miss Julia Gardiner, daughter of the colonel. The president had the colonel's body taken to the White House to lie in state, took Miss Julia along, and, shortly after the funeral, they were married.

ASK *ADVENTURE* expert Robert Spiers Benjamin was much interested in Alan Villier's article "Little Ships Are Safest." They've all gone through Panama, where he has been for some time, and he writes us of some odds and ends.

All of the ships that Villiers wrote about have come through here. He may be interested to learn that the crew of the *Ho-Ho*, who were so loudly laughed at when they started, accomplished the virtually impossible. Let alone journey to the far corners of the earth they made what is probably the longest single leg at sea without touching land—B.A. to Hobart, Tasmania. Villiers remarks that they probably will arrive at their final destination. They *did* and when they reached the Statue of Liberty it was their *Ho-Ho*.

Another young chap, Kim Powell, came down to Panama along the East Coast in what was barely a canoe. Central Park Lake would have made a more fitting scene for his craft but he got here—much to the astonishment of the Canal Zoners, pilots, and local skippers who saw the landing. Kim Powell is now a mate on a coastwise schooner, making a run on a vessel twenty times as large as his own craft but covering only a tenth the distance.

Bill Robinson and his wife are an old story to local Cristobal mariners. They've always arrived safely despite hell and highwater. The *Igdrasil* skippered by Maine Schoolteacher Roger Strout, with his wife, indeed did make it as Villiers presumed.

Then there's the *Driftwood*. The *Driftwood* was no more than just that. Three fellows from local New York waters gathered up some old wood and lumber from the beaches and by dint of much work and not a little skill put a boat together that faintly resembled the species *ketch*. They sailed, they did. Nerve could hardly describe their disappearance over the horizon. The West Indies, the Panama Canal, and the *dinero* it cost to transit. Then the South Seas. The last I heard about them they were still going strong—just *driftwood*.

On a somewhat more grandiose scale, there was the Barkentine *Cap Pilar* which sailed from this port about ten days ago for London, via the West Indies. Almost two years ago the party of twenty-four started out on the trip aboard the 120-some odd foot barkentine. Theirs was not merely a little boat ride, they really made a cruise in the sense of the word used by Raymond-Whitcomb and the Cook Wagons Lits. people. They didn't, any of them, have much money. But a little multiplied by twenty-four Englishmen, including a few Scots, makes quite a bit. With as much precision, only infinitely more fun, as the *Queen Mary* entering New York on time, the party rounded the globe. Adrian Seligman and his wife were the ring leaders. According to the members of the party the whole thing came off with hardly a single fist fight which, as Alan Villiers intimated in his article, is quite incredible. They made a pretty sight sailing their barkentine out of here under full sail.

There is another side—we received a cable at our office here on the waterfront, requesting information on a Lieut. Commander Harry Mathes who left Norfolk early in March in a 36-ft. schooner, the *King John*. He was bound for Porto Rico, and then the Canal. He was a retired naval officer and so the Navy bothered to cable for information, from Washington. The poor Lieut. Commander is probably well salted down in Davy Jones' locker by now. And there are many more, only no one ever bothered to check on them.

VOLUME 100, Number One—so reads the title page of this issue. Six numbers make up a volume; this is copy six hundred and one, and we have readers who have missed none of them. This issue is our anniversary of twenty-eight years of continuous publication.

In an age when many so-called pulp magazines live for only a few or a dozen issues, twenty-eight years seem like a ripe maturity. But it is nothing at all to the immortality that has been promised us.

The Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company has asked permission to reduce our magazine to microfilm, to be placed in a Time Capsule of Cupaloy at the New York World's Fair Grounds. We told them to go ahead. We understand the Time Capsule will be opened some time hence—five thousand or ten thousand years.

What our reader then will be—what he'll think, look like, eat, or wear—we don't know, but the same rule goes for him as for the rest of us. If he doesn't like us, our stories and our Camp-Fire, or if his sharp eye finds anything wrong or amiss with us, why then, we say—we on the editorial staff, with a kind of chuckle as if the joke is on him—just write us a letter.

H. B.

ASK ADVENTURE

Information you can't get elsewhere

SALTING the golden egg.

Request:—What is "gold sniping"? Is there anything printed on the methods used in "salting" mines?

Can you recommend any general books on gold and silver mining? I shall be very grateful for your expert advice.

—Leo Odlozel, Oakland, Cal.

Reply by Mr. Victor Shaw:—Go over to San Francisco, to the Ferry Building, Embarcadero, and ask your State Bureau of Mines for their Bulletin No. 92, "California Gold Placers". Also ask them for literature on placer mining, and lode mining methods.

They're very willing to show you about panning, rocking, sluicing, or handling mercury, and retorting amalgam, etc. The methods of rock mining are more numerous and complex and they haven't time to even indicate much on that; but you can send $3 (maybe via your local book dealer) to McGraw-Hill Book Co.; 330 West 42nd St., N.Y.C. for "Handbook for Prospectors", which you will find covers everything on placer and quartz-lode mining, and prospecting.

Another fine practical book on placering is, "Prospecting and Operating Small Gold Placers", sold by Mine & Smelter Supply Co.; Denver, Colo.

Now here's another which you should own, viz.: a report on all gold placer areas of Arizona, by the Mines Dep't., University of Arizona, Tucson. It costs only thirty-five cents, but covers beside the data on State placers, everything necessary to know about the metal gold, how to build and use rocker and sluice, how to manipulate a goldpan, how to handle mercury, retorting, outfitting, camp cookery, remedy for snake bite, etc. Very complete, and its title is Bulletin No. 135.

The California Mining Bureau can furnish State mining laws.

The term, "gold sniping", is applied to placer miners who merely work the river bars and bank gravels for gold by panning method.

There is nothing on the subject of salting mines in print, excepting some possible mention of various methods in fiction, or special articles. Every old mining man with a wide experience picks up data on this subject, for while many former methods are now so well known to the industry as to be practically useless, new ones are being invented constantly. I have also known of many of these, for example:

One of the earliest known methods was by shooting gold dust into the face, or heading of a rock tunnel with a shotgun. Very crude, but it used to work well when first used.

Another more recent method came to light in a placer operation down in South Africa, where the labor was native blacks. Crooks staked a large area of gravel and put up a sale to a big English mining company, who sent engineers there to sample for average gravel value, to operate on a big scale. The owners never touched anything, and these engineers of the company ran all gravel through sluices they themselves set up, but had native blacks do the shovelling in, also cleaning up, under their own direct supervision. The returns were just about right as to values, not too high but with enough gold shown per cubic yard to permit a profit if worked by machinery. The sale was concluded, price paid, and this company installed a big dredging plant sent from London and went into operation. The first clean-up showed not a single color of gold, let alone any "pay"; and later investigation showed that all the blacks working on the sluices had chewed tobacco loaded with flour gold and each one spit into the sluice boxes. It's been

done also by loading cigarettes with fine gold and flicking ashes into a rocker, or sluice, or pan.

Another scheme: engineers sampling a quartz mine take their own samples, sack them, number them, and seal them; but crooks load a hypodermic with chloride of gold and stick the needle into sample sacks to make them assay whatever is considered a wise value for that particular ore.

DESIGN for amphibian living.

Request:—I am very interested in swimming and would appreciate it if you would answer the following questions:

1. How long each day and how many days a week should a swimmer train?

2. Does hard work interfere with swimming?

3. In training in a pool should a swimmer swim distance such as one-quarter to one mile daily or shorter distance? Should this be done at top speed?

——Fred J. Muerrle, New Haven, Conn.

Reply by Mr. L. De B. Handley:—The average competitive swimmer should train daily, or as often as possible, adhering to the following routine: first, a swim of 440 to 500 yards at moderate pace, but not too slow, paying close attention to each part of the stroke in turn, endeavoring to improve form; next, three or four short sprints at top speed, say one length of an indoor pool, or from 20 to 33 yards; lastly, a few minutes devoted to the practice of racing starts and turns. This routine should be departed from once or twice a week, however, if the swimmer lacks the opportunity to compete often. He should then cover the distance of his next race at fast clip, instead of doing the customary stretch at moderate pace.

The second question is not quite clear. The terms "hard work" and "interfere" can be variously interpreted. If by "hard work", you mean intensive and strenuous manual labor, and by "interfere", the curtailing of swimming speed, then I may state that such labor, or any form of exercise which tends to harden the muscles, will impair swimming speed to the extent to which it deprives the muscles of limberness. Muscular suppleness is essential to the attainment of a maximum of speed in swimming.

Unless a swimmer is training for contests of one mile and upward, it is unnecessary for him to cover more than 500 yards daily. I still speak, bear in mind, of the average competition. Some men require harder training and profit by doing 880 or 1000 yards as a matter of routine, but they are the exceptions to the general rule.

A LINQUIST looks at lingo.

Request:—I am a student at the University of Washington and am very interested in a certain Mediterranean jargon called Lingua France, or Frank.

As far as I have been able to discover from various sources (very rare) in the libraries, this language is a mixture of several European languages (French, Italian, etc.) and Arabic. It is used by the sailors in dealing with the natives. If you know anything at all about this language, can speak it, or know of anyone who can, would you please let me know. I could correspond with anyone in English, French or Esperanto.

If I could do anything for you in return for this favor, please let me know.

——F. R. C., Seattle, Wash.

Reply by Captain H. W. Eades:—I have your letter in regard to the term "lingua franca." I note with interest that you are a student at the University of Washington. I graduated from the same university myself a great many years ago.

"Lingua franca" is a term used in different parts of the world to apply to various "bastard" forms of speech used as secondary to the indigenous form of speech, thus enabling intercourse to be facilitated. English is frequently called the lingua franca of the whole world, as, at one time, French was the lingua franca of diplomacy. English, in various forms of distortion, is spoken all over the world, e.g., the "pigeon" or "pidgin" English of the South Seas and the Kroo dialect of the West African coast. In special areas are found examples of a lingua franca such as: 1. so-called "Mandarin Chinese," 2. Malay of Polynesia, 3. Hindustani of India, 4. Swahili of South Africa, 5. the pidgin Japanese of the Orient, 6. the Creole dialects of Guiana, and 7. the Chinook of the North Pacific coast states.

Perhaps the best known lingua franca, that is, to the white race, is the lingua franca or common language spoken in the Mediterranean countries by sailors, traders, and soldiers in dealing with natives of different nationalities, especially with Arabs, Turks, and Africans. The term "lingua franca" (i.e. "Frankish tongue or language") originated in the name *franc* or *Frank* (French) used by the Arabs to designate the Crusaders, and hence any Latin Christian (the Byzantine or Greek Christians were called *rums* or *Roumi*). It is by no means the general language of the

Mediterranean litoral, and is not constant in form. In Egypt, for example, the lingo (this term itself is contracted from "lingua") used by sailors and Arabs is a mixture of English and Arabic, mostly Arabic. The real home of the Mediterranean lingua franca is in the Levant, that is, the coast of Turkey, Syria, and Palestine, and the adjacent islands, where it originated, and this is where it is used in full blast. The predominance of Venice and Genoa in the Levant came to make the Italian the *franc* par excellence, and in fact the lingua franca of the Mediterranean Levant has a predominant Italian base, with an admixture of Arabic, Greek, and African elements, and more rarely, of French, Spanish, and Portuguese. In Tunis and Algeria, French, especially during recent years, has been important in contributing a large vocabulary to the lingua franca, as has Spanish in Morocco and Southern Spain, but even in these regions Italian has great tenacity.

The various lingua francas of the Mediterranean, including that of the dominant Levantine lingua franca, are not hard to pick up, as will be appreciated from their origin and use. The characteristics most prominent in the lingua franca are, as regards syntax, the reduction of all verb forms to the infinitive for present and future tenses and imperative and to the past participle for past tenses, thus you don't have to worry about irregular verbs; of all pronouns to the objective case, and of all nouns to one number (either singular or plural): *Ti stare bona genti,* "you are a good fellow." The objective case is often represented, as in Portuguese, by the preposition *per* (for): *Mi amor per ti,* "I like you." As regards vocabulary, the substitution of picturesque words for the less expressive is common: *cunciare,* "to fix," has become almost universal for *fazir,* "to do," and so, *massar il fogo,* "kill (or put out) the fire." The alteration of Romance words by giving them the meaning of words of similar sounds in some other language is also common: e.g., *fantasia,* "fancy," "imagination," has come under Arabic pressure to mean "conceit," "boastfulness." Thus, *no pigliar fantasia,* "don't get impudent."

The earliest mention of the Levantine lingua franca occurs in Venetian trading documents of the eleventh century. In the sixteenth century, Levantine characters were frequently introduced into Italian comedy, as in the "Cingana" of Giancarli di Rovigo (1560) and they were made to speak this humorous dialect. Such types occur in the Spanish plays of Lope de Vega, Acevedo, Guevara and Calderon. Perhaps the most famous examples of lingua franca on the stage are furnished by Moliere's *"Bourgeois gentilhomme."* Extensive specimens of the Spanish variety of lingua franca occur in Haedo. *"Topografia i historia general de Argel,"* Valladolid, 1612 of the French lingua franca in the *Dictionnaire de la langue franque* (Marseilles, 1930) published by the French government for soldiers. Consult Hugo Schuchardt, *"Die lingua franca"* in Zeitschrift fur romanische Philologie (Halle, 1909).

The British consular agents and, I believe, also the U. S. consular agents throughout the Levant have Levantine interpreters attached to their staffs (or they used to). I suggest (it is just a suggestion) you write a feeler to the U. S. Consul at Smyrna, Turkey, and ask him for the name of a textbook (in English) of Levantine, and the name of the publisher. This is the most widely used form of Mediterranean lingua franca.

If three is anytihng further you want to know, do not hesitate to call on me.

CIVIL War reverberations. The Tapajoz River Colony.

Request:—Some time ago I read that immediately following the American Civil War, a group of southern slave-owners emigrated to the Tapajoz River country in the Amazon valley to set up a slave-owning society there. This effort turned out to be a complete failure, and many of them returned to the United States. Some remained, and I understand that their descendants still live there.

I will greatly appreciate any information which you can give me on this particular colony and a list of books in which I might read further about them. Specifically, I would like to know:

How numerous are these people?

What is their economic condition?

What is their cultural status, degree of literacy, general morality?

Have they retained racial purity, and if not, to about what degree has intermixture extended?

What are the occupations of these people?

What contacts do they have with the outside world, particularly with the United States?

Do they still speak English?

What is their relation to the Brazilian government?

How do their neighbors look upon them?

All of these questions may be imposing upon you, for I am sure that to even brush on an answer to many of them is a big job in itself. But I am very much interested in this group of people, and I will greatly appreciate your trouble.

——James W. Thompson, New Orleans, La.

Reply by Dr. Paul Vanorden Shaw:—Before I answer your questions about the Tapajoz River settlement of Americans, I should prefer to answer them about the settlements of Villa Americana and Santa Barbara, twenty-five or thirty miles from the city of São Paulo. These towns were likewise settled by Americans right after the Civil War and this colony is more interesting, perhaps, because it is larger, and also because it has remained more or less unassimilated.

At a guess, I should say that the descendants of these people at the present time number between two and three hundred. Their economic condition is that of the Middle and Lower Middle Class, and I should say the same about their cultural status.

They have kept more or less to themselves, as far as marriage is concerned, especially those remaining in the districts of Villa Americana and Santa Barbara. To this day they speak English, intermarry with each other, which has not improved them any, and do not mingle much with their neighbors. Many, however, have left the settlement and have come to São Paulo, Rio, etc. Here, also, they tend to marry Americans or English, but you will find many examples of marriages with Brazilians, too. There has been no mingling of Indian or Negro blood, as far as I know.

Those in the original district are, of course, farmers, but those who have left it have gone into other fields. They have the same contact with the States that the average emigrant has with his mother country of two or three generations ago. They like to go back home, but I imagine not very many of them are able to. Most of them still speak English and with a Southern accent, but, of course, they all speak Portuguese. Their relation to the Brazilian government is the relation of the average citizen to the government, I suppose. How do their neighbors look upon them? Well, they are neither Brazilians nor Americans and a rather strange mixture of both, and theirs is the fate of a settlement of foreigners in the States or in any other country.

As to the Tapajoz River colony, it is much smaller and I understand it has "gone Brazilian" completely, that it has intermarried with Brazilians and does not even speak English any longer. I know very little about them except that the town in which they settled is very poor and primitive.

I rather doubt whether it is possible to find anything written on these settlements in the United States. I know of three women, Americans, who are gathering information about them, but nothing has been written so far and probably will not come out for some time.

CLEANING coins by electroplating.

Request:—Could you give me any information about cleaning silver and copper coins?
—E. R. Downs, Long Beach, Cal.

Reply by Mr. William L. Clark:—There are three electrolytic systems for cleaning coins. The first and simplest method, good for tarnished silver, is to place a sheet of aluminum in a boiling solution of one heaping tablespoonful of washing soda to one quart of water, then put the coin in contact with the aluminum plate. Keep the coin in the solution until the tarnish is all loosened and then clean with a silver cleaning cream, containing no jeweler's rouge.

The second method, for more stubborn coins, particularly those with a great deal of corrosion, is to place them between two zinc plates in a 10 percent solution of Sodium Hydroxide (lye) for several hours, until the corrosion is all loose and then clean as before.

The last of these methods is to use a storage battery trickle charger and a two percent. solution of Sodium Hydroxide in a glass container. The plus terminal of the charger is connected to a platinum electrode, which in the solution becomes the anode. The minus terminal is connected to the coin and becomes the cathode. In this process free hydrogen comes off the coin and oxygen off the anode. With this system the heaviest corrosion can be reduced and good results obtained. Coins with a light tarnish can be cleaned in about five minutes and some ancient coins with a very heavy, hard corrosion have been kept in this bath for as long as nine months.

In all of these methods, the cleaning is the same after the bath. A tooth brush can be used with the silver cleaning cream, and afterwards, rinse well in hot water, and wipe the coin with a soft rag. All silver and new copper can be lacquered after cleaning with a good grade of cellulose lacquer diluted one half with thinner. If the lacquer is too thin, rainbows will be seen on very smooth surfaces, and if too thick, the lacquer itself will be seen. Coins must be absolutely clean before lacquering. Old bronze or copper can be rubbed with beeswax or olive oil after cleaning.

Some coins can be cleaned entirely by washing with soap and hot water, or with the cleaning cream.

These processes generally work well, but on some pieces, when the corrosion has gone too far, a coin will break down in part or entirely. The subject is still open for experimentation and improvement.

A WORD to the wise—about rifles.

Request:—To come to the point, what do you think of the Russian rifles? I ask this in reference to those that have been rechambered for the .30-'16 cartridge. Are the bolts strong?

What about the receivers and barrels? Which is a better caliber, the .30-'16 or 262 mm. for this rifle? Would there be any danger of blown-out bolts or receivers with the .30-'16?

—Fred Krause, Yorba Linda, Cal.

Reply by Ol' Man Wiggins:—In regard to the Russian Nagants rifles, sold cheaply here by various dealers, I can say that I have fired the rifle in its original caliber, and found it accurate, powerful and reliable, when used with American-made sporting ammunition. It had to be sturdy and simple to be serviceable in the hands of the Russian peasant soldiers of the Czarist Armies, you know. I am under the impression it's still the service arm in Russia, and I'll admit that I agree with the Soviets in at least this one thing.

But, stay clear of the Russian rifles altered to use our .30 model 1916 ammunition. We've had at least one blow up near here, wounding the rifleman seriously and just missing blinding him.

The gun was not designed nor constructed for any such pressures as the Service load develops. I have been informed of others in different places behaving likewise.

A good mechanic can easily fit a .30 caliber barrel to the Russian action, but it should be chambered for the .30 Krag cartridge, which this action handles all right. At least, it did in the riffe I saw. I worked Krag shells through the action to try it out.

But I'd advise leaving it in its original caliber, remodeling it a bit and attaching better sights for a sporting rifle, if you intend to use it much.

Or better yet, join the National Rifle Association, and get you a good used Model 1917 or Enfield, built originally and carefully for the Service ammunition, and be safe with it.

BARRACK room battles.

Request:—Some fellows here have been having an argument over different armies and several queries regarding the U. S. Army are still being disputed among us. I should be very glad if you would clear the air.

Would a British subject be permitted to join the U. S. Army under any conditions, i.e. say he decided to become an American subject and settle in the United States permanently?

What is the pay of a private in the U. S. Army?

Do men enlisting in the 'corps' or special branches (such as medical supplies, or transport) receive more pay than those in the infantry?

What is the duration of the term of service or enlistment?

—H. London, The Brigade Laboratory, Ambala, India

Reply by Major Glen R. Townsend:—No, a British subject cannot enlist in the United States Army. Only citizens of the United States are accepted for enlistment. This regulation has been tightened up within the last few months. Formerly it was possible to enlist in the army upon taking out "first papers," i.e., making a declaration of intent to become a citizen. Under present regulations, however, full citizenship is essential; and to acquire full citizenship requires a minimum period of five years' residence in the United States. Of course, a former British subject who has become a citizen in accordance with the law would be eligible to enlist on the same basis as a native born citizen.

The pay of a private in the United States Army is $21.00 per month; pay of a private first class is $30.00 per month. A private or private first class may also hold a "specialist" rating (clerk, cook, mechanic, etc.,) paying from three to $30.00 in addition. This is cash pay.

Rations, quarters, uniforms, medical care, etc., are furnished by the government. This is explained more fully in the pamphlet I am enclosing.

Rate of pay is the same in all branches of the army (we call them "arms" and "services," the arms being the infantry, cavalry, artillery, etc., and the services the quartermaster, medical, etc.). The only difference is that in some arms or services (the Air Corps, for example) there are a greater proportion of non-commissioned grades and specialists then in others.

The term of enlistment is three years except that original (first time) enlistment may be made for one year. This also applies to all arms and services.

May I add that one of the pleasures of *Ask Adventure* service is corresponding with readers in the far corners of the world, and I hope that the above information will be of interest to you of the Indian Service.

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Middle Western U. S., Part 1 *Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.*—JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, care of *Adventure.* **2** *Upper Peninsula of Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and border waters; touring fishing.*—R. P. LINCOLN, care of *The Minneapolis Tribune,* Minneapolis, Minn. **3** *Missouri, Arkansas, Missouri River up to Sioux City, Ozarks, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Mississippi and Lake Michigan.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.* **4** *Ohio River and Tributaries and Mississippi River.*—GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton, P. O., Ingram, Pa. **5** *Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana swamps, St. Francis, Arkansas Bottom.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S., Part 1 *Maine*—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. **2** *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, 29 Baldwin St., Aimes Pt., West Haven, Conn. **3** *Adirondacks, New York*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif. **4** *New Jersey.*—F. H. BENT, 251 Third St., Fair Haven, N. J. **5** *West Va., Md., District of Columbia.*—ROBERT HOLTON BULL, 842 Spring Ave., South Hills, Charleston, W. Va. **6** *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C., S. C., Fla., Ga.*—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care *Adventure.* **7** *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia.*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

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