ADVENTURE NOVELS

JAN.—15¢

WHEN THE DEATH BIRD SINGS
by Murray Leinster

VILLAGE OF THE DEVIL-DEVIL DRUMS
by Will F. Jenkins

and Short Stories

ALL STORIES COMPLETE

also

Cliff Campbell
Peter B. Kyne
Eugene Cunningham
THIS CHRISTMAS give a genuine diamond or a fine watch—the finest and most lasting of gifts! Take advantage now of these amazing values and ROYAL’S extremely liberal terms. Pay next year in easy monthly payments you’ll never miss.

Send your name and address now with only $1.00 deposit—just state age, occupation and if possible 1 or 2 credit references. All dealings strictly confidential. No direct inquiries—no red tape—no interest or extras—no C.O.D. to pay on arrival.

10 FULL MONTHS TO PAY 10 DAYS FREE TRIAL

We’ll send your selection prepaid for your examination—and if you can surpass our values anywhere, just return your selection and we will promptly refund your full deposit. If fully satisfied after 10 Day Trial Period pay only the small amount stated each month.

Satisfaction Guaranteed

Every ring or watch carries ROYAL’S written guarantee backed by 42 years of fair and square dealing. Buy now to avoid the Xmas rush!

America’s Largest Mail Order Credit Jewelers.

FREE NEW XMAS CATALOG

New 35 page “Book of Gems” featuring hundreds of special values in genuine blue-white diamonds, standard watches, fine jewelry, novelties and silverware, etc., in ROYAL’S liberal TEN PAYMENT PLAN. Address Dept. 58-B. ROYAL DIAMOND & WATCH CO. Established 1895

170 BROADWAY N.Y.
I'LL TRAIN YOU AT HOME
In Your Spare Time For A GOOD RADIO JOB

Many Radio Experts Make $30, $50, $75 a Week
Do you want to make more money? Broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to $5,000 a year. Spare time Radio set servicing pays as much as $20 to $50 a week—full time servicing pays as much as $30, $50, $75 a week. Many Radio Experts operate part or full time Radio businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, service men, up to $6,000 a year. Radio operators on ships get good pay, see the world. Automobile, police, radio, commercial, Radio and sound systems offer good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises many good jobs soon. Men trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio.

Many Make $5, $10, $15 a Week Extra
in Spare Time While Learning
Almost every neighborhood needs a good spare time serviceman. The day you enroll I start sending you hearty lessons showing how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and ideas that radio expert pays him money for hundreds. I send Special Equipment to conduct experiments, build circuits, get practical experience. I GIVE YOU A COMPLETE, MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT TO HELP SERVICE REPAIRS QUICKER—SAVE TIME, MAKE MORE MONEY.

Find Out What Radio Offers You
Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 16 years old. It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities, also those coming in Television; tells about my Training in Radio and Television; shows you letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing and earning; shows my Money Back Agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste or a postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President. Dept. 7MA2
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

J. E. SMITH, President. Dept. 7MA2
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out the opportunities in Radio and exploits your 50-30 method of training men at home to become Radio Experts. (Please Write Flatly)

NAME ________________________ AGE __________
ADDRESS ________________________________
CITY __________________________ STATE __________

Please mention DOUBLE ACTION GROUP when answering advertisements.
4 COMPLETE NOVELS

WHEN THE DEATH BIRD SINGS ......................... Murray Leinster 6
JUNGLE
They stole the disk of beaten gold from the temple of the sun... and then the death birds came and chirped upon the breasts of dead men...

THREE MODERN MUSKETEERS ......................... Peter B. Kyne 50
THE SEA
Cap’n Scraggs, first mate Gleney, and chief engineer McGuffey embark on some very unusual adventures starting with running guns to a Mexican revolution and ending very close to being the main ingredients of a cannibal’s stew pot.

VILLAGE OF THE DEVIL-DEVIL DRUMS ................. Will F. Jenkins 75
MALAY
A white man, stalked by the head hunters of the Solomon Islands, fights primitive passions and hatreds in the Village of the Devil-Devil Drums.

SHANGHAIED .......................................... Brian Loomis 89
BARRABY COAST
He bucked the most ruthless element of the Barbary Coast, this young southerner did, and he fought them to a bloody finish even though getting himself shanghaied was to be his only reward.

4 COMPLETE SHORT STORIES

SAGEBRUSH SLINGS THE BULL ......................... Cliff Campbell 31
CENTRAL AMERICA
A sea-going cowboy starts a neat little international crisis in a fiery Central American port.

LONG AND SHORT ................................. Eugene Cunningham 40
TEXAS
An outlaw bronc pitchforks Sod Timmons into six-gun trouble in Texas.

THE SMART ONE ........................................ Samuel Taylor 85
NORTHWEST
Hard to beat Fox Phillips, the smartest guy in the Yukon.

BRAND OF THE MAVERICK ............................... Hamilton Craigie 113
WEST
Grim and bitter are the ways of the West, especially when a man disobeys the unwritten law of the frontier.

FEATURE

THE RAMBLER’S CLUB .................................... 122

FOR THE BEST IN POPULAR FICTION, READ A DOUBLE ACTION MAGAZINE
—Double Action Western, Real Western, Western Action Novels, Real Northwest Magazine, Complete Northwest Novel, Adventure Novels, Smashing Western, Action Packed Western, Double Action Gang, Blue Ribbon Western, Blue Ribbon Sports, Cowboy Romances, Ten Story Sports, Intimate Confessions, Famous Western Magazine.

LOOK FOR THIS TRADE MARK.

ADVENTURE NOVELS and SHORT STORIES, published bi-monthly by Chesterfield Publications, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, Ill. Editorial and executive offices at 60 Hudson Street, New York, N. Y. Application for second class matter entered at the Post Office at Chicago, Ill. Entire contents copyrighted, 1937, by Chesterfield Publications, Inc. Single copy price 15c, yearly subscription, $1.75. For advertising rates write Double Action Group, 60 Hudson Street, New York, N. Y.

Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelopes, and are submitted at the author’s risk.
PREPARE NOW FOR A BETTER JOB IN ELECTRICITY

BY 12 WEEKS TRAINING IN THE BIG COYNE SHOPS

Get into a real live, money making field where thousands of men make $30, $40, $50 and up a week in the fascinating field of electricity. Prepare today for your start in a field that is full of opportunities for the trained man.

Learn by Doing — in 12 Weeks

on real motors, generators, engines, etc. The remarkable "Learn by Doing" method used in the great Coyne Shops trains you in Electricity and its many branches in 12 weeks. Actual shop work — not a correspondence course — you don't have to recite. Instead you are trained by actual work in wonderful, modern daylight shops on the finest kind of Electrical equipment, under personal supervision of expert instructors. That's why Coyne Training prepares you for your start in this field, in a short time.

You Don't Need Previous Experience or a Lot of Book Learning

Many of our successful graduates have not even completed common school. At Coyne you learn by actual experience on a wide variety of up-to-date generators, motors, dynamos, batteries, automotive and aviation engines, electric signs, etc.

Outstanding Offer! PAY COST OF TRAINING AFTER YOU GRADUATE Over a Year to Pay in Small Monthly Payments

Get your training first — then pay back tuition in easy monthly payments starting 5 months from the date you start school, or 2 months after the required training period is over. And you'll have 18 months to complete your payments. Mail the coupon now and I will send you, without obligation, full details of this astounding offer!

EARN LIVING Expenses While You're Training!

Many of my students work part time to help pay their living expenses while they are training.

EMPLOYMENT Help For You After Graduation

My Graduate Employment Service will give you employment help after graduation. You are also entitled as a graduate to free consultation service any time you need it.

MAIL COUPON NOW!

H. C. LEWIS, Pres.
COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. 87-41, Chicago, Ill.

Please mention DOUBLE ACTION GROUP when answering advertisements
Three hundred and sixty-five days from now—what?
Will you still be struggling along in the same old job at the same old salary—worried about the future—never able to make both ends meet?
One year from today will you still be putting off your start toward success—thrilled with ambition one moment and then cold the next—delaying, fiddling away the precious hours that will never come again?

Don't do it, man—don't do it.
There is no greater tragedy in the world than that of a man who stays in the rut all his life, when with just a little effort he could advance.
Make up your mind today that you're going to train yourself to do some one thing well. Choose the work you like best in the list below, mark an X beside it, and, without cost or obligation, at least get the full story of what the I.C.S. can do for you.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
BOX 5788-D, SCRANTON, PENNA.
Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject before which I have marked X:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architect</th>
<th>Structural Draftsman</th>
<th>Sheet Metal Worker</th>
<th>Plumbing</th>
<th>Bridge Engineer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building Estimator</td>
<td>Structural Draftsman</td>
<td>Boilermaker</td>
<td>Steam Fitting</td>
<td>Bridge and Building Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contractor and Builder</td>
<td>Management of Inventions</td>
<td>Telephone Engineer</td>
<td>Heating</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elevator and Building</td>
<td>Electrical Engineer</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Air Conditioning</td>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural Draftsman</td>
<td>Telephone Engineer</td>
<td>Mechanical Draftsman</td>
<td>Steam Engineer</td>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural Engineer</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineer</td>
<td>Machinist</td>
<td>Steam Electric Engineer</td>
<td>Coal Mining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of Inventions</td>
<td>Marine Engineer</td>
<td>Patternmaker</td>
<td>Marine Engineer</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical Engineer</td>
<td>Air Brake &amp; R. R. Signaling</td>
<td>Diesel Engines</td>
<td>R. R. Signalman</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric Lighting</td>
<td>Highway Engineering</td>
<td>Aviation Engineer</td>
<td>R. S. Signalman</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welding, Electric and Gas</td>
<td>Civil Engineering</td>
<td>Automobile Mechanics</td>
<td>Air Conditioning</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Shop Blueprints</td>
<td>Surveying and Mapping</td>
<td>Refrigeration</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheet Treatment of Metals</td>
<td>Business Training Courses</td>
<td>Business Training Courses</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>Technical and Industrial Courses</td>
<td>Technical and Industrial Courses</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Management</td>
<td>Bookkeeping</td>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic Management</td>
<td>Secretarial Work</td>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountancy</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost Accountant</td>
<td>Salesmanship</td>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. F. Accountant</td>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>Technical and Industrial Courses</td>
<td>Technical and Industrial Courses</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Management</td>
<td>Bookkeeping</td>
<td>Secretarial Work</td>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic Management</td>
<td>Bookkeeping</td>
<td>Secretarial Work</td>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountancy</td>
<td>Bookkeeping</td>
<td>Secretarial Work</td>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost Accountant</td>
<td>Bookkeeping</td>
<td>Secretarial Work</td>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. F. Accountant</td>
<td>Bookkeeping</td>
<td>Secretarial Work</td>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>Bookkeeping</td>
<td>Secretarial Work</td>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Management</td>
<td>Bookkeeping</td>
<td>Secretarial Work</td>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic Management</td>
<td>Bookkeeping</td>
<td>Secretarial Work</td>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountancy</td>
<td>Bookkeeping</td>
<td>Secretarial Work</td>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost Accountant</td>
<td>Bookkeeping</td>
<td>Secretarial Work</td>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. F. Accountant</td>
<td>Bookkeeping</td>
<td>Secretarial Work</td>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>Mine Foreman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

| Bookkeeping | Secretarial Work | Carpenters | Mine Foreman | Mine Foreman |
| Bookkeeping | Secretarial Work | Carpenters | Mine Foreman | Mine Foreman |
| Bookkeeping | Secretarial Work | Carpenters | Mine Foreman | Mine Foreman |
| Bookkeeping | Secretarial Work | Carpenters | Mine Foreman | Mine Foreman |
| Bookkeeping | Secretarial Work | Carpenters | Mine Foreman | Mine Foreman |

DOMESTIC SCIENCE COURSES

| Millinery | Foods and Cookery |
| Tea Room and Catering | Management, Catering |

Name: __________________________ Age: ____________ Address: __________________________

City: __________________________ State: __________________________ Present Position: __________________________

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canada, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

Please mention Double Action Group when answering advertisements.
FREE TRIAL of my Rupture Invention

If It Doesn’t Stop Your Rupture Worries It Doesn’t Cost a Cent!

SEND you my Rupture Invention on trial because captured people have been fooled so many times by quack schemes and worthless “cure-alls” that they don’t know what to believe. There are as many kinds of rupture trusses as there are blacksmiths. All of the makers CLAIM wonderful and unusual qualities for their products. But I say: “Seeing is believing.” If you have a reducible rupture I KNOW what the Brooks will do for you—BUT I won’t make any claims. I want you to try for yourself. I'll send it to you on trial. Keep it ten days—at my risk. Lay aside your old truss. Then see how the Brooks Invention gives you these three big advantages. Remember these are not claims. These are the benefits the Brooks MUST bring you before you decide to keep it.

1. Immediate restoration of normal physical activities. Walk, run, bend or stoop without fear of having the AIR-CUSHION pad slip and let your rupture down.

2. A Support so comfortable, so light in weight and inconspicuous, that you soon forget that you are wearing any support at all.

3. It Must hold your rupture in exactly the right position to give Nature the greatest chance to heal—to strengthen the muscles and close the opening. If the broken ends of a bone are not held together the bone will never knit. The same with rupture. If the rupture is not held properly Nature hasn’t got a chance.

REMEMBER, I don’t promise a cure. I don’t make any claims. You don’t have to take my word for a thing. You see for yourself, and then decide. Send your name quick for my Book and for my Trial order blank. All information is free. There is no charge now or at any other time for all the facts and the free trial plan of this world famous Rupture Invention that has come to thousands of people almost like the answer to a prayer. Surely you owe it to yourself to investigate, for you have everything to gain and nothing to lose. Send the coupon now and you will soon know what it is like to be Free of Rupture Worries.

CONFIDENTIAL COUPON


Please mention DOUBLE ACTION GROUP when answering advertisements.
A THRILLING NOVEL OF INTRIGUE AND ACTION IN THE CENTRAL AMERICAN JUNGLES

CHAPTER I

COMPRESSING his lips grimly, Tommy Dorrance drew bead upon a spot where the undergrowth was a little darker than a plant should be.

He fired, and there was a yell of pain. In another moment a queerly-barbed arrow slit through the air within a foot of his head, and a second passed just above him. Garrez tugged at his arm.
When the Death Bird Sings

by MURRAY LEINSTER

They stole the disk of beaten gold from the Temple of the Sun—and then the death birds came and chirped upon the breasts of dead men—

"Down!" he cried urgently. "You're giving them a target!"

Tommy slumped abruptly and a moment later crawled from his lurking-place.

7
Arrows and cast spears were making it entirely too warm. However, he caught sight of a splendid mark, and fired again.

As he ducked from the spot, he heard Garrez fire twice, but a few paces away, and then Steve Bray's repeating shotgun boomed.

In the jungles of Honduras, highly ethical notions of the impropriety of using buckshot against men are not popular.

The Indians from the Sun Temple seemed to draw back. For some moments only an occasional arrow was launched in deadly silence. Tommy heard the sharp crack of Coleman's sporting rifle, followed by a yell of pain.

Tommy paused to wipe his forehead, and found Garrez close beside him. The latter was watching the little clear space before them with the keen intenness of a man to whom jungle fighting is no new thing.

"Where's Anne?" demanded Tommy suddenly. "Where is she?"

Garrez did not look away from his alert survey of the clearing, rank with jungle grass, that lay between them and their pursuers.

"Safe enough," he said softly. "She is with the mules and the treasure, on ahead."

With a curiously graceful gesture, he thrust forward his rifle and fired. The shot was followed by a howl.

"I only winged him," he said disgustedly. "Yes, Anne is with the treasure. The muleteers will guard her."

"But a flanking party—" began Tommy, in quick alarm.

Garrez shook his head.

"These *hombres* are stupid," he said scornfully. "They'll never think of that. And there are five rifles with the treasure. We are only four here—and the *Indios* are getting ready to rush."

Tommy made sure that the magazine of his rifle was full, and reached behind him—he was lying prone upon the ground—to loosen his revolver in its holster.

Five feet before him, the jungle ended for a space, and in that space tall grass grew straight and rank beside a little stream, which was barely an armsbreadth wide.

Beyond, the sheer wall of the tropic forest rose again, unspeakably beautiful and barbaric and gorgeous in its riotous foliage, but also unspeakably baleful in the hint of evil its very luxuriance gave.

The greens were too green, the horrible green of living things that feed upon death; the garish flowers were too blatantly alluring, and everywhere there were hanging long riatas of strangling vines and creeping plants that choked the massive trees upon which they grew.

The jungle was an insane admixture of life and death, of living things growing terribly upon the rotting bodies of the fallen; of trees taking their food from the decaying trunks of still other trees, and themselves being slowly strangled by a caressing, traitorous vine.

Orchids showed themselves, here and there, blooming vividly in the festering warmth and humidity of the shadowed forest.

The jungle was doubly menacing to the four white men who waited, arms held in readiness and eyes keenly searching for a sign of an advance. Hiding among those trees and that eager, insistent undergrowth, there were savages, driven by fanatical hatred to brave their rifles and bullets in an attempt to take their lives.

The jungle was silent, now. All the wild things had fled at the sound of fire-arms, and not even bright-plumaged parrots fluttered and chattered in the trees.

The monkeys, shyest of shy creatures, had fled in panic-stricken silence through the tree-tops.

Only the crawling things that burrow in the earth and hide among dry leaves remained, and they had hidden themselves in humid hollows and unwholesome places, to wait until this strange disturbance should have passed.

The jungle lives its own life, an infinitely busy life, full of breath-taking dangers and heart-stopping terrors, but the jungle does not like even that perilous life of its own to be disturbed by the quarrels of two-legged beings with fire-sticks that wound at an inexplicable distance.

The four white men knew the silence for what it was. The Indians on the other side of the clearing would rush, presently. Members of a tribe but little known, they were not cowards, and they were fighting to avenge an insult to their god.

So the four white men eased themselves
into comfortable and strategic positions, from where they could pour out a deadly fire across the clearing, and waited for what they knew would be the most desperate and deadly fighting of any they had undergone.

Steve Bray and Jim Coleman, close together—for it is well for two men to fight together, particularly when it is likely that the fighting will come to close quarters—Steve Bray and Jim Coleman talked a little, in low tones. Their weapons were loaded. Their hands were steady. They were prepared in all things as well as they could prepare. Therefore, they talked, still keeping their eyes keenly upon the space across which the Indians would presently rush.

Tommy and Garrez, on the other hand were silent. Garrez seemed to be straining his ears for a sound coming from the enemy. Tommy was thinking anxiously. He wished that Anne were in safety,.... Anne was Jim Coleman's niece, and should never have been allowed to come on an expedition like this.

She was ahead, with the treasure, guarded by the four mestizo muleteers. Tommy would have given a great deal—certainly all of the treasure—to have had her safely down to the coast. And the treasure was no small one. Many men would have faced death for it, and a few had died in a futile attempt to reach it.

The whole thing had started when the Coleman's yacht dropped anchor off Ciudad Daliana. The place was barely more than a village, but with its stretch of golden beach, fringed with gently waving palms, and with the shining white of houses peeping from the green, it had looked like fairyland. There were some ruins a few miles inland which had never been explained, and Jim Coleman wanted to look at them.

Honduras was not the center of a civilized nation when the Spaniards discovered the coast, but there were a few mysterious carved stones that antiquaries had puzzled over. Coleman was no absent-minded pedant. He was at least as much the sportsman as the scholar, and the combination of unexplained ruins and excellent shooting had been too much for him.

TOMMY had been a guest on the yacht, picked up in Panama, and brought on down as a member of the small party of friends on board.

In Ciudad Daliana, Coleman had met Garrez, owner of a splendid hacienda far inland. Garrez was an educated man and an ardent amateur naturalist, for which pursuit he had ample scope on his estate. It was upon the fringe of civilization, and from its borders the jungle stretched away, supreme ruler of the soil.

Coleman, Tommy, Anne, and Stephen Bray—another member of the yachting party—had accepted Garrez's invitation to visit his hacienda.

From there, a hunting-party had been arranged on the spur of the moment, and then that hunting-party had gone on further than it originally intended to look at a tiny group of ruins of which Garrez had heard.

In the ruins they had come upon a mystery, a Temple to the Sun, far south of Mexico and still farther from Peru, an anamoly in religion and still more an anamoly-in-progress. For, in these modern times, pagan priests officiated, offering sacrifices to the god of day, and the symbol of the sun was a great disk of nothing more or less than beaten gold.

It was that disk of beaten gold, and precious pearls sacred to the kindred deity of the moon, that had formed the burden of Garrez and his four mestizo muleteers when they staggered into the explorer's camp at midnight after an unexplained absence.

They had raided the temple, slain two priests who watched its portals, and now they loaded the treasure on the mules that had borne their luggage.

Flight for the whole party, became imperative.

The tribe of Indians about the temple was a small one, but the warriors would be up in arms at this affront to their deity, and they would be in no frame of mind to distinguish between the white men who were guilty and the white men who were innocent. Besides that, the Americans of the party needed the guidance of Garrez and his followers in order to get back to the coast.

Willy-nilly, they had to protect Garrez, because he was a white man, and willy-nilly they were forced to accompany him on his hasty flight.
In the constant danger that had followed, it was useless to reproach Garrez. Reproaches would no no good. The treasure was stolen, and even its abandonment to the pursuing natives would not slake their thirst for revenge.

In a week of flight and pursuit, of ambushes and retreats, of sudden flights of arrows from the jungle and desperate attempts by the infuriated savages to rush their camp, the fugitives had not lost a single man.

Tommy had a bandage about one arm, where a spear had grazed it.

Garrez wore a compress upon his shoulder, where an arrow had penetrated to the bone and stopped, but the weapons were evidently not poisoned, and neither had suffered more than was to be expected from the comparatively slight injuries.

One or two of the muleteers had more or less trivial wounds, but the fighting strength of the party was unimpaired.

Not so the Indians.

Reckless from instinct, and doubly reckless from their conviction that they were fighting to avenge an insult to their god, they had lost man after man from the white men’s bullets.

Tommy had at first fought reluctantly, but a sudden realization of what capture would mean to Anne had turned him into a deadly and merciless shot, who fired whenever a brown arm showed from the jungle. Now he realized that the crucial moment had come. Either they would beat off the savages with such terrific loss that no further attempts would be made upon them, or they would die there amid the sweltering tree-ferns and omnipresent creepers.

GARREZ was listening intently. He was the only one of the party who understood the Indian tongue, and even he understood it but imperfectly, and from its similarity to more widely-known languages.

Now, suddenly, a voice was raised in the jungle opposite them. A man’s voice cried out shrilly.

“They will be coming in a moment,” said Garrez quietly. “It is no use to be silent. He called to Coleman and Steve Bray. “They come in a moment. Buen viaje!”

That was a particularly ghastly jest—the words of parting to a friend about to take a journey. He turned to Tommy, smiling.

“Who knows?” he said lightly. “Perhaps we are all going upon a voyage?”

His white teeth parted in a smile, but Tommy was in no mood for smiling. He was still thinking of Anne, and visualizing in an agony of apprehension what her fate would be if she were captured. He had given her a small revolver and told her what to do if they should fail to stop their pursuers. . . .

The jungle erupted a mass of brown bodies, bent double, at the same instant that a flight of arrows whined into the bushes about the white men.

As they had been watching, so had those others, and the arrows came all about the spots where they waited.

With his lips set tightly, Tommy fired with a sort of desperate coolness. The clearing was perhaps thirty yards across. The Indians would cover that in five seconds or less.

Obscurely, Tommy was thinking of collegiate sprint records. Four seconds for the thirty yards. In that time he could get in perhaps four aimed shots. . . .

One man went down, then another. The third shot missed, but the fourth bowled over a man, who fell, screeching hideously. Tommy lost sight of everything else. Dimly he heard the cracking of Garrez’s rifle beside him, and the heavy boom of Steve Bray’s repeating shotgun.

Jim Coleman was firing, too, with a light sporting rifle that sounded like the snapping of a whip and that put one bullet, precisely, exactly where its owner wished that bullet to go.

“They will not pass us,” said Garrez, in a strange calm, shooting down a yelling man not three yards from the muzzle of his gun. “Let’s rush them.”

He stepped out from the trees and gripped his rifle like a spear, with his right hand in the small of the stock. Tommy sprang to his feet and smashed his own weapon on the head of an oily savage with an up-raised spear, then leaped into place behind Garrez.

Garrez’s gun was an auto-loading rifle, practically an automatic, and held as he held it, was doing terrible execution. Using the barrel to fend off a spear, he
presented its muzzle to the chest of a gigantic Indian who had rushed at him with the evident intention of grappling and pulled the trigger. The man was nearly blown in half.

Whirling, Garrez flung the butt cruelly into another’s face and pressed his own shoulders to Tommy’s, facing the milling mass about him with a queer smile. His rifle rose and fell with lightning speed, and every now and then its muzzle belched flame.

Tommy’s own rifle had been broken with his first blow, and he stood back to back with Garrez, a revolver in each hand. He was not smiling, but his eyes glowed fiercely.

The thing was as a nightmare to him.

FIERCE bodies flinging themselves at him, only to collapse as he fired. One man, shot through the body, crawled toward him, coughing a crimson stream as he came, but with a venomous knife still clutched in his hands that wavered with his weakness. Garrez and Tommy were slowly circling about each other, now, back to back, and Tommy lost sight of the man. He saw him a moment later, crumpled up and still.

A spear flashed past his shoulder, and he staggered as a hairy being seized him. An instant more and the man had collapsed. The muzzle of Tommy’s revolver had touched him when the weapon exploded. Then the revolver clicked on an empty shell, and he tried to take the one he had held in his left hand—but his left arm hung limp, paralyzed by a blow he had not noted.

He stooped in a frenzy of haste for the pistol, lying close beside his feet, and the next instant he felt a shock from behind. Garrez had collapsed.

Then, in a sudden fury, Tommy snatched up the weapon and whipped about like a madman. Foemen were becoming scarce, but three men rushed at him with uplifted spears, and his pistol flashed three times. Once he missed, and fired again.

He had two more shots, and the realization came upon him like a cold shower. He hoped that Anne would remember to use the revolver. . . .

There was a report almost from between his feet, and he turned with pistol upraised to see a spear fall weakly to the ground as a savage in all the barbaric splendor of a chief’s costume clutched his hands to his breast, toppled slowly and fell. Garrez moved heavily.

"I thing that is the end," he said calmly. "This was a good fight."

Steve Bray’s shot-gun boomed a little distance off and Tommy faced about just as the two other white men of the party emerged from the jungle. Steve Bray looked thoroughly angry.

Jim Coleman was very pale, and trailed his rifle behind him in the manner of one ashamed. They came toward Tommy and Garrez, and suddenly Tommy heard a voice crying out.

The chief, the last man to fall, had managed to raise himself and was staring up into Garrez’s face, his own contorted with hatred. Weak, and gasping for breath, he extended one arm and cried out in the unknown tongue of the strange tribe.

Garrez watched him, his teeth showing between his lips in that same strange smile with which he had faced the others of the tribe, but a few moments before.

Coleman came up to the others, white and ashamed.

"I feel like a butcher," he said in a low tone. "My God! Look at this thing we’ve done!"

"They were brave men," cried Steve Bray angrily, then his voice broke. "Oh, did you see them fight? Did you ever see men fight like that? Bows and arrows against buckshot—and they tried to rush us!"

Garrez turned from the dying chief.

"Oh, they are dogs," he said lightly, "and we breed dogs to die well."

"It was your dirty treasure—" cried Steve Bray furiously. "It was that damned gold you took—"

An arrow, winging its way viciously across the clearing, struck him. Jim Coleman caught him by the arm. Garrez snatched the rifle that Coleman had dropped and emptied the magazine into the bushes.

"But as I said," he observed calmly, "they are dogs. Even a whipped dog will snarl and snap. And you should have heard the chief curse us."
CHAPTER II

NIGHT hung over the jungle.

The long moss hung down from trees like the beards of gnomes, seeking to listen to the words spoken by the campfire. The camp, itself, was no more than a space hacked clear by machetes, in which a fire burned fitfully, now sending up a tall flame which lighted the trunks of the high trees about them, and now dying down to little more than a glow. Somewhere nearby the mules moved uneasily.

The calls of night-creatures echoed in the obscurity, and everywhere were the almost indefinable rustlings of furtive movement. A moth fluttered over the fire, and for an instant its eyes were turned to glowing carbuncles by the reflection of the flame.

And yet, over all the multifarious rustlings and movements of the forest, a brooding stillness hung... the brooding of the jungle.

Those by the campfire spoke softly and silently. Depression was upon all of them.

Steve Bray lay in his blankets, his shoulder encased in bandages through which an ominous stain had crept. Anne sat close beside him, and now and again her hand fluttered over his forehead, but her eyes were turned upon Tommy, who sat with his head in his arms, resting upon his knees. Ever since the fight, Tommy had been struggling with a deathly nausea which came over him at the memory of the butchery they had been forced to do. Jim Coleman cleaned his rifle without a word.

Only Garrez was idle. He gazed into the fire with knitted brow.

A little apart, his four muleteers talked softly, in the sibilant Spanish of the coast.

There was the sound of sleepy chirping, and Garrez raised his head. For some moments he strained his eyes in the darkness, and then he fixed his gaze upon the cause of that drowsy sound. Half a dozen tiny, corpulent birds, with strangely misshappen bills, were gathered upon the branches of a small berry-bush that was at the very edge of the clearing the party had made for themselves.

For some minutes Garrez looked at the tiny birds steadily, then returned to his gaze at the fire. Slowly a curious, twisted smile appeared upon his face. He looked up again at the tiny birds and shrugged his shoulders slightly. Then, abruptly, he spoke.

"Did I tell you what the chief said in his curse?" he asked.

There was no answer. Anne passed her hand over Steve Bray's forehead and looked again at Tommy. Jim Coleman glanced up from his rifle and returned to his task of polishing its bore. Tommy did not move. The four mestizo muleteers pricked up their ears, but only momentarily. They were too much occupied in speculating upon the value of the treasure that lay in blanket-wrapped packages in the center of the clearing to be much interested in curses, superstitious as they were.

"The chief," said Garrez in a peculiar tone, still looking at the plump little birds, barely visible in the glow of the camp-fire, "put a curse upon us. And the curse has appeared."

From the intonation of his voice, it was impossible to tell whether he was in earnest or not. He seemed to be saying something which he knew was a jest, yet which he was unable to dismiss as a jest.

"What is the curse?" asked Steve Bray grimly, from the blankets in which he lay wounded.

"I do not know whether to laugh or not," said Garrez slowly. His voice shook a little. "Those birds are the curse."

STEVE BRAY turned his head and made them out. He watched them for a moment in silence.

"Well, what do they do? What are they? I admit I'm not frightened, yet."

"I do not know what they are," said Garrez, watching the birds as if he were unable to take his eyes from them. "I am an amateur in ornithology, and I think I know the birds of Honduras fairly well, but I do not know what they are. I have only seen one before, in all my life."

He rolled a cigarette with hands that trembled a little.

"Three or four years ago," he said a moment later, "a man came out of the jungle, arriving at my hacienda. He was a white man, and he was nearly exhausted from his travel, and from lack of sleep. He told me that he had not slept in seven days, but he would not sleep until I promised him that I would set two men to watch
over him and not let any birds come near him. He spoke incoherently of death-birds being sent after him by 'the high priest.'

“I thought him a little mad, but I promised, so that he would sleep, and naturally I kept my promise, even to a man I thought was mad. My two men watched over him while he slept for thirty-six hours.

“They came to me, when he had wakened, and they were frightened. They said that a little red-and-white bird had hovered about, trying to get in the room in which the stranger was sleeping. It was seen, once, fluttering towards a doorway in quite another part of the house, as if it were trying to reach his room through a passageway and a door. I laughed at them.”

Garrez, who all this time had held his cigarette unlighted, now struck a match. The flame trembled as he puffed.

“The stranger woke, and slept again,” he went on, aware that his companions were all listening, though they made no comment. “I asked him about the ‘death-bird’ he had mentioned. He would not explain, but became terribly frightened. He would not explain about the ‘high-priest,’ either. But he begged me to place the same guard as before, when he slept again.

“I did so, and again the little red-and-white bird fluttered persistently about the room in which he slept. My men again told me, but I did not believe it. I was very busy, or I could have gone and seen for myself. The stranger had been with me for a week, and had recovered somewhat from his ordeal, when one night the servant who watched over him still—at his insistent pleading—slept while the stranger slept too. And in the morning my man came to me in terror.”

Garrez was staring fixedly at the sleepy, chirping birds upon the bush.

“The stranger was dead,” he said abruptly. “And when I went into his room I saw a little red-and-white bird sitting upon his breast, singing loudly. When I approached, the bird flew away. I had never seen it before, nor since—until now.”

With a hand that shook, Garrez pointed at the bush.

“Those are the birds—all of them like the one I saw before. Now, what am I to think?”

He paused and laughed a little, uncertainly.

“I am an educated man. I have lived in New York, in Paris, and in Madrid. Surely I am not superstitious, but I do not know what to think. When we came to bury the stranger, we found that he had concealed upon him a number of pearls of rare quality. I never knew who he was, or where he came from, or anything about him. I know that he came from the jungle, dying for lack of sleep, yet afraid to sleep because of a little red-and-white bird that he called the ‘death-bird.’”

“There are pearls in there,” said Steve Bray, glancing at the packs that contained the treasure.

“Yes,” said Garrez. He spread out his hands. “Also in the temple from which those pearls came there was a high-priest. He—he is dead. And also—and this is the point of my story—the chief who cursed us, dying, cried out a number of phrases I did not understand and then told me triumphantly that ‘death-birds would sing upon our breasts.’ Now, for the second time in my life, I see birds that are like the little red-and-white bird that fluttered about the chamber of my guest, trying to enter. I am a naturalist, but I never saw such birds before. What am I to think?”

“You might think,” said Steve Bray grimly, “that a good many men are dead to-night because of your looting that temple. Savages, maybe, but damned brave men. With spears and bows and arrows, they stood up to our repeating rifles.”

HE TURNED away his head. Tommy looked up.

“It’s gotten on your nerves like the rest of us, Garrez,” he said wearily. “I don’t think that I’ll ever be able to forget that fight. It was horrible!”

Garrez raised one hand to where a strip of plaster held a pad of gauze to his head.

“I do not think that I thanked you for standing over me when a spear grazed my skull and felled me,” he remarked. “I do that—”

“It was nothing,” said Tommy in a flat, tired tone. “I was fighting for Anne, you know, Garrez. I’d do it over again for her, but for myself, I’d rather be killed than have to go through it once more. And you
dropped a fellow who was about to spear me from behind. So don't let's talk of obligations or thanks. We're even.

There was silence for a little. Anne's hand fluttered lightly over Steve Bray's shoulder, and she looked at Tommy, across the fire.

"But—but those birds," said Garrez nervously. "There was no mark upon the stranger I spoke of, but he lay dead, with the death-bird singing upon his breast. The curse of the death-bird has been put upon us. What shall we do?"

"Nothing," said Tommy wearily. "It's just silly superstition. You know there's nothing to it."

Garrez stared at the birds. They did not look like deadly creatures. In the dim light from the camp-fire, they seemed merely very sleepy, very plump little feathered creatures, with rather ridiculous bills. They chirped drowsily upon the branches of the bush. It was impossible to think that they could threaten sudden and mysterious death. Only Garrez, of any of the party, seemed to be prepared to give the matter a second thought.

But at sunrise Tommy was wakened by a loud, shrill bird-song. He listened uneasily for a moment. He realized that it was morning, and that he had not been called for his share of sentry-duty.

For a second he was annoyed that the others had thought to favor him in any way because of a very minor injury, and then he sat up. The first thing he saw was Anne's face, frozen in an expression of horror.

With the motion, Tommy was out of his blankets and with a revolver in his hand. Anne frightened meant Tommy in action to defend her. But he saw no sign of danger. And then he realized what she was looking at. Miguel, one of the muleteers, had not moved since he lay down the night before. His face was uncovered, and one look at it told everything. And sitting upon the blankets just above his breast, a little, plump, red-and-white bird with a ridiculous bill was perched, singing lustily. The other muleteers were gazing at the sight in superstitious terror.

When Tommy advanced, the bird flew off into the underbrush. They examined Miguel and found him dead, stone-dead, without a mark or sign of any sort upon him. But the thing that made them feel queerly uneasy and full of nameless terror was the fact that when the other three muleteers had prepared a shallow grave in the jungle, and returned for the body, they found the same little red-and-white songster again perched upon the dead man's chest, singing lustily and cheerfully, as if shrilling some news to unseen watchers.

CHAPTER III

THE PUMA froze into utter stillness. A tiny wild pig, evidently just part-ed from its mother, was rooting hungrily in the undergrowth.

The puma was waiting for two things, first for the small piglet to come a little nearer so that its spring would be the more certain, and secondly for some assurance that the sow was not near enough to come to the rescue of her offspring before the puma could have the little creature safely out of her reach.

Tense silence hung over the spot for a few moments. The puma was like a statue, eyes fixed upon the unconscious victim he had selected. The small pig, bulging fat, was listening just as the puma was listening, but the little pig was lost and very lonesome. He gave a plaintive little whimper, and turned again to his rooting.

A moment later he had come upon a succulent root and was eating it voraciously, with small, shrill grunts of contentment. Slowly, by almost imperceptible degrees, the puma bent in preparation for his spring —and then suddenly there was a sound in the distance that caused the piglet to stop even his satisfied feasting. The sound of shot hoofs striking the soft soil, and then the jangling of metal upon metal came faintly through the jungle. The little pig was alarmed, and consequently he was alert.

The puma launched himself in a perfectly judged spring—and the pig jumped in a panic-stricken bound and darted away through the underbrush, squealing shrilly in his terror and with a very bad-tempered puma on his trail.

In his terror, the piglet was heading straight for the sound of hoofs and harness, and before the swift, silent leaps of the pursuing cat could overtake him he had dived into a very labyrinth of twisted roots.
and creepers. He kept on, still squealing shrilly, and the puma knew that in that maze of vines and rootlets no animal as large as himself could keep up with or overtake the squealing, terrified small porker. He gave up the chase in disgust, and then paused before taking his way to other and possibly more profitable hunting-grounds. The hoofs and the muted jangling of harness were drawing nearer. For a moment the puma delayed his departure to investigate the sound. Still and silent in the underbrush, he saw a procession go by.

Garrez rode first, upon a mule whose ears flopped despondently. No horses could live long in the jungle, but a mule could endure its unwholesome depths, and was in consequence the mount of all who dared take goods into its festering fastnesses.

Garrez rode in advance, his rifle held negligently across his saddle. He seemed to be thinking, for there was a curious thoughtful smile upon his face.

Coleman came next, his gaze fixed upon the pommel of his saddle, thinking as deeply as Garrez had been. Coleman’s graying hair strayed down into his eyes, and he abstractedly brushed it back impatiently with his hand. From the length of time the party had been away from civilization, there was not one whose hair had not grown longer than the conventions decree.

Two of the mestizo muleteers followed Coleman, leading the loaded mules, upon each of which was a heavy pack. One of them bore a small package wrapped in blankets, which was less in bulk but evidently as heavy as the more obvious loads upon the other animals.

Anne Coleman rode beside Steve Bray, though the trail was hardly wide enough for two animals to move abreast, and she held out one arm to support her companion. He was propped up in his saddle and rode with compressed lips to keep from giving utterance to the suffering caused by the jolting of his mount.

Anne made a strangely beautiful picture, riding through the jungle in the stained and worn garments of one who has been out of touch with the world for a long time. Her hair peeped out from below the soft Stetson hat she wore, and its faintly ruddy glow formed a perfect contrast to the greenery that was her background.

Anne Coleman was a singularly beautiful girl, even if her expression at the moment was of anxious solicitude and sympathetic sorrow.

The puma did not wait to see the remainder of the cavalcade pass by—half a dozen more mules in charge of the third and last muleteer, with Tommy Dorrance bringing up the rear. Tommy was acting as rear-guard, and was all alertness. He saw the dusky form of the puma slipping away and wondered that a big cat should be moving about in the day when the sun was barely setting, but he was more intent on the important problem of whether or not the Indians from the sun temple had finally given up the pursuit. He did not bother to attempt to bag the puma, and so was indirectly the cause of the death of a green-and-gold parrot, which was the puma’s next meal.

Perhaps a hundred yards on down the trail, Garrez looked steadily to one side and waved his hand.

“Señor Coleman,” he said softly. “Look there.”

Coleman looked, and shrugged his shoulders. A little red-and-white bird soared upward and was lost among the hanging vines that crept up to and encroached upon the trail. It was a plump little bird, with a ridiculous bill.

“The death-bird?” he asked skeptically. “They have not bothered us for two days.”

“No,” said Garrez slowly. “They have not. Had we better make camp?”

He drew rein and surveyed a part of the jungle next to the trail with keen eyes. A camp had been made there before, and the undergrowth was not as thick as elsewhere. Garrez looked over the ground thoroughly, nodded to himself, and dismounted. A moment later he had begun to clear away a space large enough for their camp, with his machete.

Night fell swiftly, and by the time that a clearing had been made and a fire started, it was dark.

Garrez glanced at Tommy.

“We will post a sentry, as usual?” he asked. “Had we not better put a man back on our trail for a little? I do not think there are any of those Indios following us, but they would follow on the trail faster than through the jungle.”
Tommy nodded indifferently.
"Shall I take the post?" he asked.
"I will put Pepe there to watch," suggested Garrez. "Just for a few hours, Pepe!"

The muleteer rose, and took a quantity of the half-cooked food in his hands, then hesitated.

"¿Señor, yo tengo que voy solo?"

He did not wish to go back along the path alone. Evidently, Garrez had not been the only one to see the death-birds.

"Voy contigo," said Garrez briefly. "I will go with you." He turned to the others.
"I'll post Pepe a couple of hundred yards back."

He and the muleteer disappeared into the gloom, and the others spread out their blankets in preparation for sleep, after their meal.

A LONG day's march through the jungle, especially when it is necessary from time to time to cut away creepers that block the trail, does not leave a man with much energy for conversation around a campfire. Those who were comparatively unhurt were nearly exhausted, and Steve Bray, who had ridden the whole day with a severe wound, was worse than exhausted. Anne, who had constituted herself his nurse, drew Tommy to one side.

"Tommy," she whispered anxiously, "Steve is worse. He has a fever, and I'm worried about him. The wound ought to be closing, now, but it isn't."

"The jungle's not a healthy place for wounds," said Tommy grimly. "The only thing to do is to push on and get him into clean air. This place is soaked in fever and corruption."

"But he—he can't stand another day like the last two," protested Anne in alarm. "Really, he can't."

"We'll fix him a litter between two mules," said Tommy. "We may have to throw overboard some of that infernal treasure to do it, but that won't matter."

"Señor Garrez will protest," said Anne, "and the muleteers . . . ."

"Let them!" snapped Tommy. "Steve Bray is more important than any damned loot they may have."

Anne's eyes softened as she looked at Tommy. He was half-dead from fatigue, and there were deep lines of exhaustion under his eyes, but at the suggestion of opposition to his decision to jettison the treasure that had cost them so dearly, his hand had gone instinctively to the revolver in his belt. Anne put out her hand and laid it on his sleeve.

"We'll get him through, Tommy," she said softly, and went back to her patient.

Tommy looked at her wistfully. He believed that she loved Steve, and he loved her very dearly. If she loved Steve, he would fight all hell bare-handed rather than that she should suffer through the death of the man she cared for.

The decision had not come to him without suffering, but he had managed to make it, and once made he resolved that Steve should be saved, for her, at any cost.

Coleman looked up suddenly.

"Garrez's been gone a long time," he said sharply. "He was going to post Pepe a couple of hundred yards back, and he's been gone nearly half an hour."

Tommy frowned. It was true. Garrez had been gone a long time, much longer than was necessary for the mere posting of a guard. Tommy's fatigue was extreme, but he rose to his feet and picked up one of the rifles.

"I'll see what's up," he said quietly. "He hasn't been hurt, I'm sure, because he or Pepe would have made a noise, or the Indians would have yelled. Still, I'll take a look. Give me a flashlight."

He stepped from the circle of firelight and paused to cock the weapon in his hand. Despite his assurance, he felt a sudden wave of uneasiness pass over him.

Cautiously, holding his rifle in one hand with his finger on the trigger, so that he could fire from the hip on the instant of an alarm, he made his way down the trail in the direction in which Garrez and Pepe had disappeared.

He took the flashlight in his left hand and held it high over his head, to press the button. Pepe and Garrez, meeting him, would know what it was, but a possible superstitious Indian would thing it something supernatural.

He flashed the lamp, and a cone of light shot ahead. There were the creepers and strangling vines hanging down, obscuring and covering the trail, but no sign of anything menacing. Tommy stole on, listening intently.
Garrez, returning, would not attempt to move quietly.

A hundred yards through the darkness, and Tommy collided with the scaly trunk of a tree-fern. He paused and shot his light before him. He had been about to turn off the trail and wander into the jungle. With the light, he could see clearly, and made his way back to the path he should follow.

With the light still glowing ahead of him, a sudden movement upon the ground caught his eye, and a tiny rustling caused his finger to tighten convulsively upon the trigger. But then he saw the cause. What seemed to be a thick tree-limb was gliding swiftly into the undergrowth. A boa had been waiting in the trail, for prey in the form of the wild things which used the pathway in the absence of men, its makers. The light had alarmed the huge snake, and it had fled.

Tommy dismissed it without further thought. Constrictors do not attack men when they can secure easier and less dangerous victims.

Tommy was beginning to be badly worried, now. He had come at least a hundred and fifty yards, and had seen no sign of either Garrez or Pepe.

He stopped and listened. He heard a sound like the breathing of a drunken man—labored, stertorous breathing, as if every inhalation were an effort and every exhalation an agony.

Cautiously, Tommy crept forward, keeping the white cone of light darting about from a spot above his head. Even if an Indian braver than the rest should fire at the seemingly ghostly light, shining so in the midst of the jungle, Tommy's arm was but a slender target, and even that was in darkness.

And then Tommy heard a drowsy twittering. In spite of himself, his blood chilled, for the twittering was precisely the sleepy note of those little red-and-white birds that Garrez had pointed out upon a bush as the mysterious death-birds. With the muzzle of his rifle, Tommy pushed aside the long, moss-coated riata of a hanging vine, and saw two dark forms upon the ground before him. In a moment he had stepped forward.

Garrez and Pepe, the muleteer, lay upon their backs in the trail, as if they had fallen asleep. The muleteer was dead, but Garrez was breathing thickly and heavily, like a drugged man. And a little, plump, red-and-white bird was sitting upon the breast of each man, chirping drowsily. They were death-birds.

CHAPTER IV

Tommy staggered back to the camp with Garrez on his back, and he and Coleman went back again to bring in the dead muleteer. Anne was working over Garrez when they came in with their grisly freight, and she looked up at them with something of hope in her eyes.

"I think we're going to save him!" she cried. "I've been doing artificial respiration, and he's breathing easier."

In the flickering light of the fire, it was impossible to see clearly, but Garrez's color seemed to have come back and he was undoubtedy breathing with less effort than before. He seemed to be unconscious. Tommy nodded to Anne, and bent over Pepe's inert body to listen in vain for the sound of a heart-beat. The man was dead, though his body had not yet grown cold. One of the two surviving muleteers was watching Tommy with a strange intentness.

"¿Señor no es muerte?" he said timidly, when Tommy straightened up. "¿No es muerte?"

Tommy nodded.

"Yes, he's dead," he said in Spanish. "I don't know what killed him. There was a bird on his breast."

The mestizo muleteer seemed to turn pale beneath his swarthy skin. He saw Tommy gazing at him, and ventured upon a word of explanation.

"Fui mi hermano, señor," he said sadly, and turned away. "He was my brother."

Tommy went over to where Anne was still working upon Garrez as she would have worked upon a drowning man. Seemingly, she had hit upon the only thing that would have helped. His breath had been coming in labored gasps, as if he were strangling from partial paralysis of the muscles of the chest, and Anne had reinforced those flagging muscles with her own. As a result of the air she had forced into his lungs, he was now breathing more easi-
ly, and presently stirred weakly, then a moment later opened his eyes.

"Feel better?" asked Tommy. "They nearly got you then, Garrez."

Garrez struggled weakly and after a moment managed to sit up.

"¡El diablo!" he gasped. "How did I get back here?"

HE COUGHED and gasped for breath again, then took several long breaths and stared about him.

He took a handkerchief from the pocket of his khaki shirt and seemed about to wipe his forehead, then stopped to gasp for breath once more.

Tommy explained in a few pithy sentences how he had looked for and found him and Pepe stretched out upon the road, Pepe dead and Garrez apparently dying, with little red-and-white death-birds upon their breasts.

"We had picked upon a place," said Garrez, between fits of gasping which gradually became fewer, "and Pepe was settling himself in it. He had flashlights and had scouted about and made sure there were no snakes there. Then a little bird fluttered about my head, and suddenly I felt sleepy. I got my flashlight upon the bird and saw that it was a death-bird, but I could not catch it or hope to shoot it with my revolver. The thing whirled off into the darkness and then dashed against my face. I thought I caught a whiff of some strange odor. Again and again it fluttered about my head, and I felt heavy and lethargic. I could barely keep on my feet. I called to Pepe, but he did not answer. I staggered out into the road and fell over him, and then—I lay where I had fallen."

Anne had listened with a pale face. Now she turned again to Steve Bray. Steve was very weak, and Anne had placed her blankets close beside his, so that he could rouse her if she were asleep and needed her.

Tommy and Coleman helped Garrez to his feet and drew him to one side.

He staggered a little as he walked, and every now and then he was forced to stop in the middle of a word to gasp painfully, as if he were strangling, but he tried to smile even as he did so. Tommy could not help but admire the gameness of the man. He had been similarly gallant in their last fight, and had showed himself utterly fearless, but he looked at the still figure of Pepe without emotion.

He seemed to be typical of those Spaniards who had been the Conquistadores, fighting as readily as they ate, absolutely brave—and absolutely without compunction over the misery they wrought.

It was Garrez who had raided the Temple of the Sun and carried off the disk of beaten gold and golden ornaments that it had contained. That treasure, whose value none of them knew, had been taken by Garrez, without the knowledge of the others.

The fighting and the deaths that had followed were all the result of Garrez's racial love of gold, but he did not seem to feel any regret over the results that had accrued.

"Look here, Garrez," said Tommy abruptly, "I'm worried about Steve. Anne tells me she doesn't think he'll live through another day like to-day. And you'll probably be in bad shape after your little experience. I think we'd better cache the treasure and make a couple of litters to carry you and Steve in. We'll need two mules apiece for the litters, and we haven't four mules to spare unless we throw away every ounce of supplies we can possibly dispense with, and cache the treasure to boot."

"Oh, no," protested Garrez. "Not cache the treasure. You know that we all share in that equally. I have told you so before. And my muleteers would object."

"But Steve will have to have a litter," said Tommy grimly, "and you won't be in any shape to stand a day of traveling after your experience to-night."

"We should strike a settlement tomorrow or next day," said Garrez—and suddenly stopped to gasp for breath. He recovered in a moment and smiled weakly. "We should strike a settlement shortly, and it would be absurd to throw away the treasure we have fought for."

"I haven't fought for it," said Tommy bluntly. "I've fought for Anne. And I'm willing to sacrifice all the treasure in the world for Steve. Look at them, now."

HIS voice was wistful as he said the last. Anne was bent over Steve, and he was
talking to her softly, with the expression upon his face that a man only wears when talking to or of the woman he loves.

“You’re game, Garrez,” said Tommy frankly. “I like the way you fight, and you’re dead game. But we’ve simply got to get Steve in to civilization, and between treasure and a white man’s life, the treasure has got to go.”

Garrez shrugged.

“Perhaps,” he said with a faint smile, “none of us will reach civilization. I think you will agree that I might well be like Pepe, yonder.”

He indicated the dead muleteer, lying with a blanket thrown over him. Then his gaze traveled on a little farther and he shivered. In the firelight, a little bird could be made out, sitting on a tiny bough that projected into the clearing. As the others followed his glance the little bird flew sleepily away.

Garrez looked at the others with an air that apologized for his show of horror, but their own faces reflected some of his own emotion.

A moment later, Garrez had returned unsteadily to his post beside the fire and had rolled himself in his blankets.

Coleman and Tommy, when some time later Anne had fallen asleep, examined the dead muleteer carefully. There was not a mark upon his body, anywhere. There was absolutely no sign of anything that could have caused his death, but he was nevertheless a dead man, and finally Coleman looked at Tommy with something like conviction in his face.

“What about it, Tommy?” he asked uneasily. “This makes two men who have died like this. D’you suppose those damned birds actually . . .”

Tommy threw out his hands.

“I don’t know,” he said wearily. “We’ll just have to carry on, and watch carefully over Anne. Whose first trick is it for sentry-go?”

“Mine,” said Coleman, whose face was a mask of fatigue. “I’ll wake José in an hour, then you come on, and then Juan.”

Tommy nodded and stumbled over the camp-fire and flung himself down. In a moment he was asleep, twitching a little as a man will twitch when he is utterly worn out. He was awakened by Coleman, who shook his arm roughly, and opened his eyes to find that it was day.

“José fell asleep,” said Coleman harshly. “Get up.”

Tommy scrambled to his feet, alert and apprehensive. There was that in Coleman’s expression that roused him instantly. Once on his feet, he heard the shrill singing of a bird.

José, one of the two muleteers who had been alive the night before, lay with his back against a tree-trunk, just as he had fallen asleep while on sentry-duty—but a little, plump, red-and-white death-bird was singing upon his breast. Tommy’s jaw set like a steel trap. And then he saw Anne weeping.

Steve, too, was motionless in his blankets. And another of the tiny songstres was thrilling a joyous song from its perch upon the blankets that covered him.

CHAPTER V

Tommy finished lashing a pack in place and turned to the next animal. They had just buried the three men who had died since the previous sundown and were preparing to go on. Only five of the party were left, now, Coleman, Tommy, Garrez, Anne, and one of the muleteers who had started with them.

Juan, the sole survivor of the original four, was stolid of appearance and brave to recklessness. Since the death of his brother, however, he was quieter than before. Tommy saw him staggering to one of the mules with one of the blanket-wrapped packages that contained the loot from the Sun Temple.

“Here, what’re you loading that for?” he demanded angrily. “We don’t want the damned stuff.”

Garrez interposed.

“Oh, let him load it,” he said calmly. “We have plenty of mules, now.”

Tommy hesitated, then laughed savagely.

“Yes, we’ve plenty of mules. Go ahead and take the filthy stuff. It’s cost enough lives to be precious.”

He helped Anne to mount and stood beside her mule for a moment. She was very pale, but she summoned a smile as she looked down at him.

“I—I’m sorry, Anne,” he said humbly. “You know I’m sorry about Steve. I—I
wish it could have been me, instead. There never was a better pal than Steve.”

Anne put her hand on his shoulder, and tears came into her eyes.

“He—gave me a package,” she said unsteadily, “to give to a girl he loved, if he didn’t get out to civilization. And it will break her heart. . . . I am sorry, too, Tommy. . . .”

For an instant Tommy’s heart stood still. She hadn’t loved Steve! That talk with him, the night before, had been about the girl he loved, not a declaration of his love for her! And then Tommy gave a little sigh of relief. It had been hard to grieve for Steve as a pal, when his death insistently put forward a suggestion that now Anne might be won, in time.

A part of Tommy’s grief, despite himself, had been purely grief that Anne should suffer, even by the death of the man he had thought his successful rival. But now the tumult of his emotions was cleared away. Steve was dead, but it was Steve, his friend, and not the Steve that Anne loved.

Tommy fumbled with a strap of the saddle for a moment, and then looked up at Anne.

“When we get to civilization, Anne,” he said quietly, “I—have something to tell you. I thought you cared for Steve, and didn’t speak because of that. But when we reach civilization—”

Anne moved a little, and then touched Tommy’s hand gently with her own.

“Yes, Tommy,” she said softly. “Then . . .”

She moved away and Tommy sprang into his own saddle. He reined in until he faced the little mound of earth in which Steve lay between the two muleteers, ignorant and perhaps evil men, but brave after their fashion. He touched his hat stiffly, in the manner of a salute. He and Steve had fought together in another cause than this, and perhaps a better one.

“Good-by, old pal,” he said softly, and turned his mount away, to move off after the others.

As he joined them, he saw that Garrez had observed his little farewell. He was smiling faintly. Tommy flushed.

“He was, indeed, a very brave man,” said Garrez gently, and reined aside to let Tommy pass.

That day was a terrible one. They were near the edge of the jungle, now, and were reaching the low ground near a river. As a result, the trail led past swamps and morasses, from whose festering depths came evil odors and still more evil insects. In the depths of the forest there had been ticks and ants, some of them with formic-acid-poisoned mandibles whose bites were torment. But here there were mosquitoes in clouds and swarms, midges and gnats, which hovered about the travelers like a mist and tortured them.

Garrez dug into his saddle-bag and produced ointments that lessened the sting of some of the bites and whose scent fended off still others, but enough remained to puff out the faces of the Americans with their bites.

“A naturalist is useful,” said Garrez with a smile. “He must know the habits of birds and insects and their likes and dislikes. But I confess that I do not know of anything that mosquitoes dislike as much as I would wish them to.”

He said this when offering Anne a salve to spread upon her face, which was swollen from the uninterrupted attack of a cloud of insects.

They rode on and on, pushing aside the moss-laden riatas of the hanging vines in order to pass, and gradually becoming soaked with the drops of moisture that rose from the swamps to condense upon the leaves of the jungle plants.

Once they had to ford a small swamp, and on the other side Garrez called a halt. He and Juan dismounted and went over the hoofs of their mules, using small sticks to scrape off the animals’ legs up to the fetlocks.

“Leeches,” said Garrez smilingly, “and it is quite incredible how much blood they can drink.”

He showed them a shapeless thing in his hand, swollen to the size of a pea, and blood-red from the fluid it had already sucked from the animal to which it had attached itself.

They rode on and on, forever on through the trail that gradually became less overgrown and less obstructed by the ever-present creepers. The green slime of swampy ponds gleamed through the riotous growth of vegetation about them, and Garrez looked at Juan and nodded.
"Si, señor," said Juan stolidly. "Somos cerca á un ciudadina."

Tommy translated for Anne's benefit.

"We're nearly at a village," he said quietly.

It was Coleman, however, who discovered a hoof-print in the trail, and their joy at the undoubted proof that other men had been before them, and not long before, was intense. A mile further, they saw the mark of an axe in a tree, and felt that they were in a metropolis. They did not stop for a noon meal—not after they saw a shack built with white men's tools, slowly falling to pieces in a tiny clearing that was swiftly reverting to jungle.

They pressed on, beating the air before their faces to drive off the hordes of insects that pressed about them. Between the dank walls of jungle on either side they rode, and their mules seemed to be infected by their own haste to reach a haven, for they mended their pace and moved almost eagerly.

Just at sundown they reached the edge of the jungle. A low, muddy stretch of open ground lay before them, dotted here and there with bits of rank growth, and far beyond they saw the gleam of open water, and more precious still, they saw a tiny village upon the river's bank. There were all of a dozen wattled huts perched crazily about the edge of the river, and one of those huts, they noted with something of awe, was built of sun-dried bricks and possessed—marvel of marvels—a galvanized iron roof! That was civilization indeed!

CHAPTER VI

TOMMY lay back in the crank little dugout and felt a great sense of luxury steal over him. They had arrived at the little river-side village the evening before, and had passed the night in a house, and Anne had slept upon a bed. She boasted of it to them in the morning, but admitted that she had not slept as well as she could have expected. It was too soft. Tommy, alone in one of the huts with Jim Coleman, had slept like a log from the moment he had flung himself down, and now, he reflected with satisfaction, he would be able to lie quite still all day long and watch other men paddle.

Garrez had learned that his hacienda was but two days' paddle down-stream, and had arranged for canoes to take them there. There were three paddlers in Tommy's canoe, and he and Juan, the muleteer, were passengers, with a pile of their luggage amidships.

Tommy lay with his back against a soft bundle of their possessions, and simply soaked himself in inactivity. For two priceless days of twenty-four hours each, he need not move hand or foot. The "tame" Indians hired by Garrez would not only paddle him safely and speedily down the river, but they would cook his meals, they would pitch a dingy battered tent that had been purchased for Anne, and—if he desired it, they would even roll cigarettes for him. Tommy had stuffed his pipe full of particularly atrocious tobacco and meditated upon the recklessness with which he smoked pipeful after pipeful. For weeks past, he had measured out a daily allowance of tobacco jealously, lest he be left with nothing to smoke. Now, he felt as if he possessed an unlimited supply.

The last and final touch of luxury he had left for the last. He had a clean shirt! A new shirt! Bought from the storekeeper who lived in the house with the iron roof, Garrez had produced it that morning with a smile of triumph and Tommy had hastily retired to put it on, discarding the torn and clumsily-patched garment he had worn for weeks and washed when opportunity offered.

Tommy beamed fatuously at the universe and smiled at Juan, who lay sprawled out like himself, smoking cigarette after cigarette. Tommy had tried talking with Juan that morning, and found that Juan had nothing to say. He could not talk to the paddlers, because they were Indians and spoke no Spanish. Only Garrez could talk to them, and Garrez was in the larger canoe, on ahead with Coleman and Anne. Still, in his happiness, Tommy felt that he must talk to someone, or give vent to his satisfaction in some fashion. He began to hum a little tune that he had heard in New York, the last time he had been there.

"Lord!" he said to himself. "That tune must be old now. Let's see. I heard that six—no, eight months ago. There'll have been at least four news ones that have set
the town afire, that everyone was dancing
to..."

He glanced at Juan, and something in
Juan’s stolid contemplation of the jungle
they were leaving behind struck home to
Tommy.

"By George!" he said to himself in sud-
den contrition. "That chap left his brother
in there, and Steve is back in there, too."

His gaiety vanished and he fell into
formless musings over the events that had
taken place far back in the fastnesses of
that terribly beautiful and terribly deadly
forest. He remembered the Sun Temple,
with its little band of fanatical priests,
two of whom had been slain when Garrez
and his four muleteers had raided the
temple at midnight. The great golden disk
of hammered, virgin metal was wrapped
in a tattered blanket and aboard one of
the two canoes.

Then, too, there were strangely-shaped
ornaments of mysterious import, wrought
like the sun-emblem itself from hammered
metal and decorated with rudely-cut gems
and softly lustrous pearls. Those pearls
must have come from the coast hundreds
of years before, or else as Coleman had
suggested, have been brought down from
Mexico or all the many miles from Peru
when the sun-temple was founded by
priests fleeing from the Spanish invaders.
Tommy began to wonder idly what the
treasure they had won so dearly was worth.

NOT worth what it had cost, he decided
grimly. It had cost Steve’s life, and
Steve was the best pal a man had ever po-
sessed. And those Indians who had pur-
sued them... They had been brave men,
those Indians. Facing bullets and buck-
shot with puny bows and arrows...

Steve had been praising them when the
last arrow of the fight had struck him.
They had found the man who fired it, later,
killed by one of the bullets Garrez had
sprayed into the underbrush.

Garrez was a queer sort. Brave, yes,
but queerly unscrupulous. It did not seem
to trouble him, that because he had desired
the loot in the sun-temple he had killed
two men outright, and then had caused
the death of many others. Four men in his
own party had died, the three muleteers
and Steve, and Tommy could not guess
how many of the worshippers of the sun-
god in their attempts to avenge Garrez’s
raid on the temple.

Tommy, himself, grimaced uncomfort-
ably as he recalled that he had accounted
for some of them. That fight in the clear-
ing, for instance... He had not been
fighting for the treasure, but to protect
Anne.

And then Tommy’s face softened as he
thought of Anne. She had gone into the
jungle with them, thinking that they were
going upon a hunting trip. Even when
they had discussed going to the sun-
temple—Garrez had heard of it vaguely
as an undescribed ruin—Anne had had
no suspicion that anything but the anti-
quarian poking about of which her uncle
was so fond was in order. Neither had any
of the others, of course.

Jim Coleman would never have taken
his niece into danger if he could have
helped it. But from the starting out upon
the hunting trip, Anne had never com-
plained of hardship. Not even when they
were being hunted like wild things by the
Indians of the Sun Temple had she uttered
a word of reproach even to Garrez—and
Garrez had assuredly earned reproach.

Tommy reflected, now, that a part of his
misery had been due to the fact that she
had been so uniformly a good pal to all of
them. He had read her friendship with
Steve into a romance, and it had hurt him,
and possibly it had hurt Steve. But now
Steve was dead, and if he knew anything
—Tommy had not thought sufficiently of
the hereafter to have a clear notion of the
state—if he knew anything, he knew that
Tommy was sorry, and sincerely regretted
him as the best friend he had ever had.

Really, it spoke enough for Tommy that
he had been prepared to risk anything to
get Steve through to civilization, believing
that Anne loved him. It is not every man
who will make sacrifices for a successful
rival, and to do so a man must love the
woman in the case very deeply. Tommy
did not think of that, but he did allow
himself to think of Anne, and of her little,
faint, wistful smile when he had spoken to
her that morning, and spoken of a thing
he wished to tell her when they were once
more safely in civilized territory. Anne and
he would be very happy... .

Curiously enough, Tommy’s mind had
not run upon the death-birds, so when he
looked up presently, smiling from his thoughts, and saw Juan staring at him with eyes that were distended with horror, he stared back, vacantly, for a moment. But then he heard a chirping, and realization came upon him with a rush. He darted a startled glance about him.

There sitting upon the gunwale of the canoe, barely beyond the reach of his fingers, a little red-and-white bird sat. It chirped through a ridiculous bill, and looked altogether like a plump, impertinent little bird that might sing beneath one's window on a Summer morning. But it was a death-bird, one of those same small creatures that had perched upon the breasts of the four men who had died without any sign or cause of death, and it sat upon the gunwale of the canoe and gazed impudently at Tommy, with its head upon one side. As he looked, it hopped a little nearer.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN the dugout drew up to the bank where the larger canoe had landed, Anne waved her hand gaily to Tommy. His face was grim and set, and he leaped ashore and made his way purposefully over to the pile of luggage that had been stacked up in the center of their camping-place. Juan, the muleteer, was looking at him with eyes that were pools of terror, and hastily put himself as far away as possible.

Anne took a step or two toward him, but Tommy seemed to be paying no attention to her. He drew a light double-barreled shot-gun from the beap of luggage and broke it expertly, thrust in two shells and caught up a handful of others. Then he strode perhaps fifty yards down the bank and sat down with the shot-gun across his knees.

Anne looked at him apprehensively, but Tommy sat quite still and quiet.

Presently he filled his pipe and lighted it, and sat silently by the bank, smoking, with the air of one who is coldly determined and is waiting for something. Anne could not understand, nor could she understand why Juan was talking to Garrez in Spanish, in a frenzy of terror. Then she heard a shot. Tommy had fired at something, and had evidently hit it, for he was reaching down into the rank grass and picking up a tiny thing which he examined closely. He put it close to his face, as if he were smelling it, then flung it to one side and tramped back to the encampment empty-handed, with his shot-gun under his arm. He extracted the shell and put the gun with the rest of the weapons, and came over to Anne.

"You wanted to speak to me, just now?" he asked.

"Tommy—what was the matter?" she demanded, searching his face with her eyes.

"What did you shoot at?"

Tommy shrugged his shoulders.

"Death-bird," he said laconically. "It's been hanging around me all day, so I shot it. Couldn't detect anything queer about it when I picked it up, though. It was just like any other bird, it seemed to me—but I had blown it pretty well to pieces."

Anne caught her breath, but before she could speak, Garrez came over with an air of some concern.

"Juan tells me a death-bird has been fluttering around you all day!" he said anxiously. "He says you've been fighting it off with your hands."

Tommy nodded.

"I just shot it," he said quietly. "It won't bother me again."

He went to help with the erection of the tent that had been brought for Anne. There was a certain satisfaction in his air, but Anne could not repress a shudder. Tommy had been forced to accept, provisionally, the theory that the death-birds actually caused the death of those about whom they fluttered. Having gone so far, he debated whether or not a particular death-bird might not have selected an individual victim. It was certain that this bird had paid absolutely no attention to Juan, though in the same canoe, nor to the Indian paddlers.

Tommy was quite aware that his train of reasoning was nothing short of insanity, but no other line of thought was possible. If the impossible were true, and the magicians of the sun-temple Indians had actually been able to put a curse upon them, and that curse were executed by small red- and-white birds, the slaughter of those birds would at least hinder the completion of the doom the savage sorcerers had decreed.
TOMMY ate his evening meal with a good deal of satisfaction and an excellent appetite. The day of absolute rest had recruited all his faculties, and he was lazily content. Mentally, he was perfectly alert. Even as he reasoned out his course of action upon a superstitious premise, he was aware of the essential impossibility of the thing being true, but a night of rest in the village, without fear of attack or danger, and another long day of rest in the canoe, had let him relax until he was able to realize that fact, and yet act upon the theory of its opposite.

A man who is keyed up does not gamble well, and Tommy was gambling for his life, betting upon an explanation he knew could not be the true one. Those tiny, plump birds with the ridiculous bills simply could not have caused the death of Steve and the three muleteers. And yet they had... He smiled faintly at Juan, when he saw that worthy gazing at him in something close to terror. Juan looked upon him as a dead man already. But Tommy, filling his pipe beside the camp-fire smiled serenely. He would not be killed as the others had been. Why, Anne loved him! Tommy was like every other man in love. He could not conceive of death when there was so much for him to live for. He turned his head to smile at Anne, and saw her gazing at him with a soft light in her eyes.

For an instant, across the camp-fire they looked into each other's eyes without pretense, and Tommy's heart sang at what he read in her gaze.

Suddenly her cheeks blanched and stark terror stared from her face. Her mouth opened in a wordless gasp, just as Tommy felt a light touch upon his shoulder. He jerked to one side, swiftly, and a tiny feathered body tumbled clumsily down his sleeve, then spread its wings and shot through the air toward the forest near-by.

"A—a death-bird!" gasped Anne. "It—it lighted on your shoulder!"

Tommy had killed one of the little red-and-white creatures not an hour before, the death-bird that had hovered about him the whole day. He had blown that small bird to bits. But now another had come to take its place, and ignoring all the other members of the party, had come to rest upon his shoulder.

Half an hour later, when he rolled into his blankets, with a shot-gun close beside him, Tommy heard a sleepy chirping close beside him. As he turned, quickly gripping his shot-gun, he saw one of the strangely-billed little thinks hopping lightly from one grass-stalk to another, pausing, at last, not a yard from his head to look at him with its head on one side.

When Tommy moved suddenly, it spread its wings and flew away. He was able to follow its flight by the dim light of the camp-fire and saw that it did not go far, alighted within a few yards and seemed to disappear.

Tommy lay motionless in his blankets. The others were turning in, one by one. Anne was exhausted, unable to recuperate from her weeks of hardship as tommy had done in a single night and day of rest.

The Indian paddlers were sleeping in their canoes. Juan lay on the farther side of the clearing, not far from Garrez, and Coleman lay across the flap of the tent in which Anne had retired. He was sleeping peacefully, with a bit of mosquito-netting—bought at the settlement they had just left—propped up on two sticks to keep off the mosquitoes that swarmed about the river. Tommy had arranged his own mosquito-netting similarly, and by looking across the clearing he could see a tiny patch of white where Garrez had done the same.

A SUDDEN idea came to Tommy. Perhaps five yards from where he lay, a densely-leaved shrub grew to a height of about four feet. In the shadow of that shrub he would be unseen... Tommy had already determined that there would be no sleep for him that night. He was struck by the fanciful notion of hiding himself there and watching over the camp. He could advance no plausible argument for doing such a thing, and could only class the impulse as a "hunch."

Then, as he debated it, he was struck by a possibility. How did the death-birds know them from other men, if not by scent? Perhaps... Some vague notion of blood-hounds and the habit of putting them upon a trail by letting them sniff at a bit of clothing came to him. Half-smiling at the absurdity of his own notion, Tommy unobtrusively kicked his blankets into the semblance of a sleeping figure, then removed his canvas jacket and slipped off his
shirt, the new one given him by Garrez that morning. He stuffed it with a crumpled end of his blanket and let one sleeve project, cunningly arranged to seem rounded by an arm within.

Then he drew the water-proof sheet partly over the whole as they were accustomed to do when rain threatened, and crept silently over to the bush he had noted.

Mosquitoes assailed him instantly, but little daunted by the “dope” with which every one of the party had smeared their faces. Tommy buttoned up his canvas coat and squatted down to wait, still mildly curious to know why he had done such an insane thing.

Long hours went by. The fire died down from a flickering flame to a barely discernible glow, and then that vanished. Tommy squatted in the shadow of the bush, nodding now and then, but wakeful on the whole. He had no notion of sleeping while a death-bird continued to pay him such flattering attention as he had been shown that day.

Suddenly, he snapped into wakefulness with a start. He had heard a twig snap in the brushwood on the edge of the clearing. Tommy felt himself go tense. He listened breathlessly. Far off in the jungle, a jaguar screamed in agony. It had been impaled upon the sharp horn of a grazing buck as it made its spring. Through the night came all the furtive noises of the jungle. There was the sound of some creature drinking at the river, only fifty yards away. But the sound that had come from the edge of the clearing was not repeated.

Only the starlight illuminated the scene, and in its glimmer Tommy made out a little blur of white that was the square of mosquito-netting, propped over the top of his blankets where his head would have been.

By turning his head, he could see the outline of the small and dingy tent in which Anne was sleeping, with a smaller patch of white where Coleman, her uncle, lay before the flap of the tent protected like the rest against the swarms of biting insects. Tommy turned his head slowly and made out even the tiny patch of lightness that marked Garrez’s blankets.

There was the whir of wings, and something rose from the clearing, apparently frightened. It circled overhead for a moment, and then descended close to the spot where Tommy’s blankets lay. Tommy heard two or three drowsy chirps. A death-bird had settled on his bunk. Then there was the infinitely soft rustling of a body creeping across the rank grass. Tommy thought instantly of a snake, and rose sharply to his feet, pressing the button of his flash-light and flinging his revolver forward at the same instant.

Something showed in the grass, and he fired. There was a commotion, and—a coat-sleeve with a white man’s hand was lifted for an instant before it collapsed again.

Horror-struck, Tommy plunged toward the spot, playing his light upon the fallen body. He saw glistening, close-cropped hair, and a white skin. Blood was flowing from a deep scratch across the scalp. Purely by accident, Tommy had “creased” the man who had been creeping forward silently through the grass, and he had fallen unconscious. The man’s two hands clutched two tiny phials, little glass phials, and Tommy plucked them from the limp fingers before he turned over the figure with his foot. Then he gasped. It was Garrez!

Coleman had leaped from his blankets at the sound of the shot, and now plunged forward, rifle in hand. Tommy was uncorking one of the phials when he reached the spot.

“Tommy!” gasped Coleman. “What’s happened?”

“Garrez was sneaking toward my bunk,” said Tommy coldly, “and I shot him without knowing who he was.” He extracted the cork from the first of the two little bottles, and sniffed at it. “Cyanide,” he said grimly. “I begin to understand a few things. They use cyanide fumes to kill insects, don’t they?”

“Yes . . .” Coleman was utterly bewildered. “But how—why, why was Garrez creeping?”

Tommy uncorked the second phial and sniffed at it. It had a strangely pungent, aromatic odor, like the juice of an aromatic fruit or berry. Tommy began to think, grimly. He heard flying footsteps and turned in time to see Anne come rushing toward him, and at the same instant felt something fluttering eagerly, anxiously, about his hand.

“The death-birds won’t trouble us any
more," said Tommy grimly. "Just flash that lamp on me for a moment."

The white beam of light struck upon him and outlined his hand in a vivid glow. And one of the little, plump, red-and-white songsters was fluttering anxiously about Tommy's hand. He held his arm rigid, and the impertinent little creature alighted upon it and hopped awkwardly to where the unstoppered phial diffused a pungent, fruity fragrance. Then the little bird tried eagerly and persistently to thrust its ridiculous bill into the liquid, growing vastly excited and impatient, as if that liquid were more fascinating than any other thing in the world.

CHAPTER VIII

TOMMY flung the bird from his wrist and replaced the stopper in the small glass bottle. He turned and surveyed Garrez again, by the beam of light from the flashlamp. Garrez had been fortunate in merely being knocked unconscious. The bullet had slid along his scalp and half an inch lower would have meant his death, inevitably. But as Tommy looked at the man, there was something in his glance which said that perhaps Garrez was not so fortunate after all.

He disregarded the flow of blood from the scalp-wound until he had tied Garrez's hands and feet securely. Then he straightened up.

"Anne," he said briefly, "I'm going to take him in your tent. We want to get some information out of him. I wish you—"

he turned to Coleman—"would go down to the canoes and quiet down the Indian paddlers if they have been alarmed by the shot. Then get Juan and come here."

Juan was already on the way. Awakened by the shot, he had sat up and seen the flashlight being pointed down at something in the grass. Remembering the death-bird that had hovered about Tommy, he had forsworn given Tommy up for dead, and had laid down precipitately to cross himself many times and utter frenzied prayers, pleading with all the saints to intercede and secure his safety. But then he heard Tommy's voice, twice, and rose incredulously to see what had caused the shooting. His eyes fairly bulged from his head when he saw Garrez unconscious on the ground, bleeding from a wound in the scalp and bound hand and foot to boot.

"Here, Juan," said Tommy authoritatively in Spanish, "take hold of his feet while I take his head. We want to get him in the tent."

"But—señor," protested Juan in amazement, "he is tied!"

"Yes," said Tommy grimly. "I tied him. Among other things, Juan, he killed your brother. Come with me and I will show you."

THEY bore Garrez's limp form between them, and laid him upon the improvised bunk in which Anne had been sleeping but a few moments before. Anne watched helplessly. This was a new Tommy to her, a stern and implacable man. He pulled out a bit of absorbent cotton and gauze and bound up the wound, which had already almost stopped bleeding.

He eyed Garrez grimly for an instant and lifted up his head, to work with his fingers at the third vertebra, far up at the base of the skull. Massage at that spot will bring any man out of unconsciousness which is not coma. Barely five minutes had elapsed before Garrez sighed and opened his eyes. He looked intensely astonished for an instant, even incredulous, then glanced searchingly at each of them, tried to move his limbs and found that he was tied, and smiled faintly, even mockingly. Tommy took the two phials from his pocket and held them before Garrez's eyes.

"Yes, Garrez, we've got these, too."

Garrez searched his face for a trace of doubt, but found none. He looked at Anne, and she turned away her head with a shudder.

Jim Coleman was looking at him with a jaw as grimly set as Tommy's own.

Only Juan, standing uneasily by the door, looked bewildered.

"It seems," said Garrez clearly, still smiling that slightly mocking smile, "it seems you've got me."

Tommy nodded, eying him watchfully. Garrez drew in a long breath, and Tommy spoke quickly, without rancor.

"Don't call to the paddlers," he said quietly, "because if you do, you're a dead man before they get here. You're the only
man who can talk to them, so I'd rather you didn't, just now. Garrez, why did you kill your muleteers and Steve, and try to kill me?"

Garrez shrugged, bound as he was. "It was the treasure, of course," he said lightly. "The fewer who reached safety, the fewer it would have to be divided among. As for our friend Steven—well, I saw him in sentimental talk with Anne, and I had plans to make Anne my wife. Who knows?" He smiled inscrutably. "She may be, even yet."

Anne shuddered, but Coleman moved suddenly. "You—I!"

Anne sank down and put her face in her hands for an instant, then looked up appealingly at Tommy. But Tommy's gaze was fixed sternly on Garrez. Juan, by the tent-flap, shifted his feet uneasily. "Señor," he said timidly, "I do not understand."

Tommy's lips parted in a mirthless grin. "Neither did I, until a moment ago. Tell him, Garrez. Your game's up."

Garrez smiled amusedly at the bewildered Juan. "I will tell thee," he said scornfully, using the familiar "te," because thou hast no bowels for revenge."

And with a curious cruelty, he went over the tale of his doings, selecting his Spanish words carefully, so Juan would comprehend fully. "I had heard of the sun-temple before," he said deliberately, "from a certain man, your cousin, who once saw them and escaped with his life. He worked upon my hacienda, as you remember, and you will remember that he disappeared suddenly. That was because he had roused my curiosity with a portion of his tale, and I made him drunk upon mescal and learned all that I wished to know. Then, lest he tell the tale elsewhere, I took him with me upon a hunting-trip, and he did not come back. He had told me of the treasure in the temple, and I began to lay plans to gain it, but there were difficulties. It was these Yanquis upon their yacht that gave me my idea. I needed mules to carry the treasure I would gain, and I needed men to guard it. I could not trust my own men, so I invited them upon a hunting trip, and then led them to the sun-temple. The Indians of the sun-temple were peaceable, and we could go there in safety. I would need riflemen when we came back."

Garrez suddenly paused and switched to English. "I'm telling this as much for your benefit as for Juan," he said pleasantly. "Would you mind giving me a cigarette? I've been poking about in that jungle for an hour, trying to get close to you, quietly, and I need a smoke."

SILENTLY, Tommy thrust a cigarette between his lips and held a match. "Go ahead," he said coldly, when the cigarette was well lighted. "We all understand Spanish."

GARREZ smiled faintly. "When it was proposed that Anne should go; I had no objection because you three Americans would fight the harder with a girl to protect, besides the treasure I expected to gain, and I read you as gentlemen, who would not insist on a division of my loot—when I had raided the temple with only my own men, and without your knowledge. All three of you showed yourselves exactly as I had anticipated. You did not desert me when I turned up in camp with my treasure, and as I thought, you fought very gallantly when the Sun-temple Indians followed us. The only difficulty was that in the meantime I had fallen in love with Anne."

Garrez had forgotten that he was supposedly talking for Juan's benefit, and was looking at first one and then another of the Americans as he spoke. "But I know women," he went on, smiling. "And I knew that Anne loved either Steve or my friend Tommy, here. When we had the final fight with our pursuers in the clearing, I was still undecided which one it was. And then, matters played into my hands a little. The chief, whom I shot as he was about to spear Tommy from behind, made an oration to us before he died. He really did curse us—particularly me. It seems that they knew I and my four men were the ones who had raided the temple. But there was nothing in his curse, of course. I did not give it another thought until that night, as we camped, I saw some little birds upon a bush close beside our camp-fire. I recognized them. They are not common birds, particularly
in the low-lands, and they have no vulgar name, but they are of the finch family and they are avid eaters of the seeds of a certain berry. It is to them like catnip to cats, for instance. The only thing is, that so far this season the berry isn’t ripe, and their bills are queerly shaped and they can’t dig through to the seed and pulp until the berry has grown soft. Well, knowing their passion for that particular berry, the matter was easy. I invented the story of the stranger and the death-birds, and told it to you and to my muleteers. Later, when it was my turn to watch over the camp, I gathered the berries from the bush on which the little birds were resting, and crushed them. The juice is very fragrant, and the birds will follow it anywhere, just as a cat can’t resist catnip. And I sprinkled a little of the juice upon Miguel’s breast, and then I took the little bottle of cyanide I used for capturing insects—I really am something of a naturalist—and poured a little upon a cloth, which I placed where Miguel would breathe the fumes from the cyanide, little by little. In the morning, he did not wake up, and you were all horrified to see the little bird sitting upon his breast, actually fascinated by the berry-juice I had sprinkled there, but, as you thought, singing in ghoulish glee.”

Garrez paused.

“Would you mind shaking off the ash from my cigarette?” he asked politely. “It is going to fall down my neck in a moment, and will be uncomfortable.”

When it was replaced in his mouth, he puffed comfortably for a moment.

“I killed Pepe in much the same manner, except that I had to struggle with him for a moment as I held the cloth over his face. I had borrowed his weapon a moment before, and then I strangled him with cyanide and sprinkled the berry-juice upon his breast and my own. I had seen one of the birds just before making camp, and knew that they would not be far off. So you found us when you came to our rescue, and I was very impressively dying. Actually, I was laughing at you, except Anne, for the seriousness with which you took my acting. Juan,” Garrez suddenly gazed amusedly at the muleter, “do you understand how I killed your brother?”

Juan’s hands had clenched, but as Garrez stared at him, he unclenched them, looking a little frightened.

“S-si señor, yo comprendo,” he stammered.

“And, of course,” said Garrez lightly, to the others, “it was very easy to attend to José, when he went to sleep. Everyone thought me very ill, or dying. It was unfortunate that Steve woke and saw me as I placed the cloth where José would breathe in the fumes.”

“What! Steve caught you? It was Tommy who snapped out the question.

Garrez nodded slowly, and blew a long puff of smoke into the still air of the tent.

“Oh, yes,” he said pleasantly. “I did not know it for a moment, but I saw him move suddenly as I crawled away from José. Steve was trying to reach a revolver. I had to threaten him. I put a revolver at Anne’s head and swore that if he made a sound I would pull the trigger. Rather than let me do that, he gave up his attempt to alarm the rest. It would have been of no use for him to have exposed me, he thought, if Anne were killed the first thing. So as I held the revolver at Anne’s head, he submitted to breathe in the cyanide fumes and died. I found that he had done a curious thing, though. With his hand beneath the blankets he managed to write a few words. ‘Garrez killed me and the others. Kas.’ Of course, I destroyed the message. Steve was a very brave man.”

An inarticulate sound escaped from Coleman’s lips, and Anne stared at Garrez as one would look at an unspeakable monster. Then she buried her face in her hands and sobbed.

“Oh, the rest is simple,” said Garrez airily. “I gave Tommy a new shirt, this morning, as a present. Before I gave it to him, I had sprinkled it with the berry-juice that lured the little birds. I thought it would give him something to think about, and when he had worn himself out with sleeplessness, I intended to finish him like the others. Coleman and Juan I could attend to when we reached the hacienda, and then I would have the treasure all for my own, and I would have Anne for my wife. I admit, the prospect pleased me.”

“I’d never have married you! Never!” cried Anne, in a muffled voice.

A light of infinite cruelty shone for an instant in Garrez’s eyes.
“I think I could have persuaded you,” he said suavely. “But now, what are you going to do? My dear friends, you can’t take me to my own hacienda, because my servants would kill you, if necessary, to release me, and you dare not risk releasing me. I am the only man who can communicate with our paddlers, and I shall certainly urge them onto our original destination, and being Americans, and gentlemen, you cannot kill me in cold blood, the only possible solution, because I am quite helpless. So, after all, I think it quite possible that things will work out as I planned, and Anne may yet be my wife. I think the pearls in the treasure would become her mightily.”

“We will see,” said Tommy grimly. “And in the meantime, we’ll gag you, lest you start talking with our paddlers.”

Garrez grimaced as Tommy forced a gag between his teeth with no gentle fingers, but as they went out of the tent his eyes still twinkled sardonically. It was true, that their position was still precarious. The paddlers had been instructed to take them to his estate, where they could not hope to keep him prisoner. They had no means of communication with the Indians to get them to change their destination. And the only thing that would settle matters was the death of Garrez, and as he was now helpless, it was impossible to kill him in cold blood.

Suddenly, without pretense, Anne clung to Tommy and sobbed.

“It’s all right, dear,” said Tommy soothingly. “I’ll get you out all right.”

“Not me—” sobbed Anne desperately, clinging to him, “not me—without you.”

But as Tommy strove to comfort and calm her, the sky began to lighten in the East, and the dark river paled and became a stream of silver, and the terrible darkness of the forest became the wierd beauty of a tropic jungle. The bronze figures of the native paddlers stirred in the canoes, and stood erect. The first rays of the sun smote upon them. A little stream of smoke rose from a spot where they built their fire to cook a morning meal. Day arrived, with all the wonderful beauty of a tropic morning, when all the world seems newly made and glistens in the golden rays of the new-risen sun.

It was Jim Coleman who saw Juan come out of the tent in which Garrez was a prisoner.

“What were you doing in there?” he demanded sharply.

Juan’s stolid face was touched with a faint smile.

“Señor,” he said apologetically, “he said that he killed my brother. I never heard of a man being killed that way, so I went in and tried. And he told the truth.”

Juan moved on down toward the fire where the paddlers were preparing breakfast. Suddenly, a little red-and-white bird swooped down from nowhere and darted into the tent. Coleman followed a moment later. Juan had done as he said. The two phials that had been taken from Garrez lay empty upon the floor. Juan had very evidently gone about his business very deliberately. The breast of Garrez’s shirt was wet with the greenish juice of the berries he had described, and there was a little trickle of liquid from Garrez’s lips where Juan had carefully poured the cyanide upon his gag. The expression upon Garrez’s face showed that he had seen Juan’s preparations and suffered agonies of terror. His face was contorted horribly, and the cords that bound his hands and feet had bitten into the flesh from his convulsive struggle against the inexorable fate he had prepared for himself. But now...

A plump little red-and-white bird hopped impatiently upon his breast. As Coleman turned away, the little songster opened his ridiculous bill and began to sing shrilly.

AND then Coleman heard a cry outside.

Anne was calling happily.

“Uncle Jim! Uncle Jim!”

Coleman came out of the tent. Tommy’s arm was unashamedly about Anne and she was clinging to him with one arm about his neck while she pointed with her free hand. And there, far down the river, a launch was moving toward them, splitting the still water of the river with beautiful precision, breaking its surface into a thousand ripples. Coleman stared.

“I know that launch!” he cried suddenly. “The Geographic Society has an expedition down here. That’s their launch! They’ll get us back to the coast in a jiffy!”

And he danced like a madman while Tommy swung Anne into his arms in an open bear-hug and kissed her while she
laughed and cried and kissed him again in turn.

But Juan sauntered up from the camp-fire, where the morning meal was not yet ready. His gaze fell upon two or three blanket-wrapped packages among the pile of luggage. Those blanket-wrapped packages contained the treasure that had been taken from the Temple of the Sun. Juan figured that he would have to divide with the three white people, but at that . . . Juan's stolid face beamed a little as he seated himself comfortably and gazed at those small but very heavy packages, and wondered how many pesos, gold, the treasure was worth. The future was very bright for Juan, and for Jim Coleman, and for Anne, but most of all, he would have said, for Tommy.

RIDE LIKE HELL!

to the nearest newsstand to buy your
copy of the December issue of

COWBOY ROMANCES

for 10 cents!

It's bound to be a sell-out!

Look at this line-up—

LOVE LAW
A stirring, book-length novel by
ZANE WARBRIDGE

Also—
S. OMAR BARKER
CLEE WOODS
LARRY HARRIS
CLIFF CAMPBELL
GUNNISON STEELE

Crammed to the Hilt With Western Action

DON'T MISS

FAMOUS WESTERN MAGAZINE

DECEMBER ISSUE, ON SALE NOW

5 COMPLETE SHORT NOVELS FOR 10¢

FEATURING
WAR ON COMANCHE by G. W. Barrington
HELL FOR A GRINGO by Will F. Jenkins
GUN TALK by Paul Evan Lehman
OPEN AND SHUT by Wm. Patterson White
TEXANS BRAND by J. E. Grinstead
A seagoing cowboy starts a neat little international crisis in a fiery Central American port.

Sagebrush slings the bull

by CLIFF CAMPBELL

"Sagebrush" Garrick had made his request and stood watching doggedly for an answer, though he knew in advance that he would be refused. The town of San Julio de Santander lay white and glistening beneath the tropic sun and the Worcester was a floating oven, lying at anchor in the harbor. Sagebrush had asked for shore-leave in spite of an announcement that none would be granted. But then, an up-bringing on a cattle ranch is not the best preparation for strict naval discipline.

Lieutenant Kenton frowned.

"It was announced there'd be no shore-leave, Garrick," he said briefly. "The people ashore hate Americans like poison. They'd make it a diplomatic incident if an American sailor spat on the sidewalk. There'd only be trouble if men went ashore."

"I want to see a man, sir," said Sagebrush doggedly. "I want to see him pretty bad."

"You won't see him this trip," Lieutenant Kenton told him shortly. "I'm sorry, Garrick, but there'll be no shore-leave."

Sagebrush saluted and went gloomily forward. He cast a longing glance shoreward. There was a man in that town he did want to see. One Manuel Casal, late of Montana, had excellent reason for picking out a residence where Americans were not welcomed. He had left the neighborhood of Sagebrush's home very hastily, with an enthusiastic posse behind him. He would never return. And though Sagebrush had no homicidal intentions, he did want badly to get Casal within reach of his fists. Among other reasons was the fact that Casal had once insulted a girl Sagebrush had been in love with. She had married someone else long since, but Sagebrush held that there was a debt of honor..."
to be worked out on Casal’s swarthy features.

There was a musical chugging at the ship’s side. Sagebrush glanced down. A launch was waiting at the landing-ladder and an officer was descending to go ashore. Sagebrush’s frown deepened. He looked longingly at the water, but there was no chance of swimming ashore, even allowing for a breach of discipline. The harbor was full of sharks. And besides, Sagebrush had grown up where an irrigation-ditch was considered a river. He could swim, but not the mile or more to land.

Suddenly, however, his face brightened. He sauntered over to the rail. He recognized the officer as one who detested any interference with his routine. That an officer of proven diplomacy was being sent ashore to bargain for fresh fruits, instead of a steward, should have shown Sagebrush clearly that Americans were unwelcome on land; but Sagebrush had been accustomed to act first and get out of trouble afterward. He leaned over the rail.

The chugging of the engine changed its tempo. The launch backed from the ladder and headed for shore. And Sagebrush fell overboard.

There was no possible excuse for it. There was no reason on earth for him to hit the water with the resounding splash with which he did. The railings were in place and the Worcester was as steady as a rock. But Sagebrush came to the surface, puffing and blowing, and heard a yell from the deck above him. Then he trod water until he felt the throbbing of the launch’s engine. He heard crisp orders.

“Steady! Right! Stop her!”

A boat hook jabbed him in the middle of the back and he was hauled out of the water, dripping.

“What the devil made you fall overboard?” demanded the shore-going officer sternly. He was known on the ship as a martinet and a hater of anything that interfered with his precisely fixed routine.

“I thought I saw a shark, sir,” said Sagebrush meekly, “and I leaned over too far to look, sir.”

The officer stared at him suspiciously, then shrugged.

“Very well, but I’m not going to put back to the ship to let you off. Go forward and don’t drip all over the cockpit. You’ll have to wait with the boat’s crew until I get back.”

Sagebrush moved forward, grinning when his face was turned away. He borrowed the makings and smoked comfortably until the launch had landed and the officer was ashore. Then he rose, stepped out on the wharf—and in thirty seconds the boat’s crew was swearing in awe.

Sagebrush had walked briskly to the nearest street, turned down it, and vanished. He had jumped ship in a foreign port, where Americans were hated cordially. What was worse, he had jumped from a ship whose Old Man was rabid on the subject of popularity of the navy. To go ashore anywhere without leave was bad enough, but if Sagebrush got into trouble, and in San Julio de Santander it was more than likely, the Old Man would strain the regulations to find a long and lingering punishment for him. There would be nothing too severe, in the Old Man’s estimation, for a man who had added to the unpopularity of American sailors in a foreign country.

But Sagebrush, trailing a trail of seawater behind him, strolled cheerfully if somewhat grimly for the center of the town. He was in quest of a man who had undoubtedly become a prominent citizen of a city that hated gringoees, and he had as his object the alteration of that prominent citizen’s personal appearance.

IT WOULD seem to be a hard task to find a single man in a strange Central American town when one was a member of a hated race and was working against time. Patrols from the Worcester would be scouring the city for Sagebrush in an hour or less. But he, knowing his man, had little difficulty. In less than thirty minutes after landing he sauntered up to the Hotel del Primero de Mayo, which is to say the Hotel of the First of May. Top-hatted functionaries talked with many animated gestures outside. From within came “Bravos” and the sound of cheering.

Sagebrush shouldered his way through the throng, with a lazily drewled, “Perdoname, señores,” in that unmistakable accent of dobie Spanish spoken by a border ranchman. The accent caused heads to turn. His uniform, that of a despised gringo sailor, caused men to frown. He reached the great
doorway of the hotel and a liveried servant gaped at him.

"Amigo," said Sagebrush evenly, "where's this here banquet? I want to see a man."

A big poster inside the lobby was a duplicate of the one that had led him to the spot. Translated it read:

**BULL FIGHT COLOSSAL**
**SIX BULLS WILL BE KILLED BY**
**THE CELEBRATED MATADOR**
**SEÑOR DON MANUEL CASAL**
**WHO WILL BE TENDERED A BANQUET AT**
**THE HOTEL DEL PRIMOER DE MAYO**

There was much more of it, to the effect that there would be a tremendous bull fight that afternoon. The matador would be one Manuel Casal, a citizen of San Julio de Santander and celebrated for his late successes in Rio and other places. A banquet would be tendered the illustrious one at the Hotel del Primero de Mayo. The banquet would take place before the bull fight, on the off chance that Casal might not survive to attend it afterward.

"Amigo," repeated Sagebrush Garrick evenly, "where's this here banquet?"

The servant puffed. He barred the way with truculent dignity and began to inform Sagebrush that while he lived no gringo would be admitted to the sacred precincts of the Hotel del Primero de Mayo. He began to inform Sagebrush. That was all. He never finished. Sagebrush reached out two powerful hands and placed one on either side of the servant's face. He lifted that discourteous one from the floor, advanced four steps and deposited him in a cuspidor. Then he repeated his question a third time.

A dazed, dense silence filled the place. A common sailor had invaded the aristocratic hotel! Worse, an American sailor! Still more horrible, he had stretched the neck of the fat servant until it creaked. Indignation seethed in the breasts of the top-hatted spectators. It seethed discreetly because many of them were likewise fat and none of them had any desire to have his own neck stretched until it creaked. But nevertheless it seethed.

**SAGEBRUSH** turned to them.

"Where's that banquet?" he demanded with a certain deadly mildness. "I want to see a man."

The need for a reply vanished. A burst of laughter came from above. Then a voice, evidently making a speech, continued grandiosely, to disparage all "Yanquis."

Sagebrush knew the voice. He plunged for the steps that led to the second floor. Behind him, stout gentlemen mopped their brows and demanded that the police be sent for. The Guardia Civil. The garrison! A mad Yanqui sailor had invaded the city, spreading ruin.

The rising flood of angry demands for the police broke off abruptly. Twin yells from above-stairs cut through the murmur in the lobby and hushed it. When one accord, the top-hatted gentlemen oozed swiftly into the street, there to send indignant messengers demanding regiments of cavalry to quell the riot, which was Sagebrush.

The yells had come from two other servants before the door of the banquet-hall. They had been posted outside the door for impressiveness, but had craned their necks within to hear the speeches. Sagebrush came up to them and stopped.

"Amigos," he said mildly, "I want to see a man in there."

They whirled, and from enjoyably hearing the celebrated matador explain how despicable were all Yanquis, they gazed into the steel-blue eyes of a Yanqui in person. Moreover, a Yanqui sailor. Still more, a sailor whose hands were closing and unclosing hungrily. They backed away from the menace of his appearance, but they backed into the doorway, jamming it completely.

Sagebrush reached out and seized each one by a projecting ear. He banged their heads together and drew them ungently out of the way. Hence the yells. Then he strode grimly into the banquet-hall.

It was a peculiar scene. Many tables were formed into a hollow square, resplendent in white cloth and shining silver. At the head of the square there was a splash of vivid color. The cuadrilla—you might call it members of the gang—of bullfighters were present in their regalia. Picadors in vivid yellow. Banderilleros in their bravest and best. And in the center was Manuel Casal in the scarlet-and-gold magnificence of the matador himself.

He held aloft the estoque, the short
sword with which the bull is slain. All
the rest of the implements of the bullfight-
ers were in evidence. There were lances,
banderillas, capes and red flags, and even
the banderillas de juego, which are darts
with fire-crackers attached to be used in
case the bull turns out a coward.
Casal held the sword extended.
"And señores," he said boastfully, "the
secret of my success and courage is that
when I receive the charge of the bull and
plunge this sword into his heart, I con-
sider him a Yanqui, and the hatred and
contempt——"

He never finished. His mouth dropped
open. Sagebrush Garrick, merely a rather
stocky sailor in a very damp uniform,
walked purposefully into the room, placed
his hand on a fat shoulder, vaulted the
first barrier of tables and went grimly
down the empty central space toward him.

Casal’s face went pale. He recognized
the intruder and panic overwhelmed him.
The sword dropped to the table as he tried
to bolt. But his chair tripped him and
Sagebrush dragged him to his feet and
slapped his face.

In an instant there was an uproar. There
was champagne on the table and there were
empty bottles on the floor. In consequence,
blood ran hotter here than in the lobby.
Tables crashed and upset. A swarm of
shouting men plunged for Sagebrush. Casal
was wrenched from his grasp and he began
to have his hands full.

YOUR Central American may not be
formidable singly, but in bunches he is
hard to handle. Bottles came hurtling to-
ward Sagebrush. He drove his fist home
into a raging face and someone caught him
behind the ear with a wild wallop that
staggered him. Hands were clawing at him.
Fists were pummelling him, and about him
was the roaring of an angry mob.

He saw it as a series of flashes. A lean
and angry face changed to blank astonish-
ment as he landed on it. Fists waved be-
hind the crushed mass of bodies that imme-
diately surrounded him. They were clutch-
ing at his arms while they rained blows up-
on him. Somebody down on the floor was
dragging at his legs. A bottle crashed to
splinters against the wall above his head.
Plates came sailing through the air. He
was down for a moment and raged up to
his feet again, shedding his assailants by
shaking them off. He flailed out viciously
with his fists. Science was out of the
question. If he struck out, he hit some-
thing.

Scowling, contorted, hate-wrenched
faces hemmed him in. Sagebrush saw but
one friendly face in the crowd, and only
glimpsed that once. It was one of the pica-
dors, grinning cheerfully, with wide-set
eyes that twinkled. Sagebrush staggered
under the terrific pounding he was receiv-
ing, though he gave at least as good as he
got. Something heavy half dazed him as it
struck him on the temple. Then, fighting
madly with a dozen hands clinging to his
arms, he was going down——down——
Bang! Bang! Bang-bang! The ban-
quett-hall was filled with smoke and a roar-
ing as of guns. There was a frantic yell.
"Yanquis!"

Shouts and screams arose, while the ex-
plusions continued with nerve wracking
violence. The hall emptied streams of thor-
oughly scared men who had forgotten their
rage in fear for their skins.

Sagebrush got doggedly to his feet, look-
ing desperately about him for further foes.
And he saw one man picking himself up to
join in the flight of the others and another
sleeping blissfully from a wallop on the
point of the jaw. For a third there was
only the man with the friendly grin blow-
ing on his cigarette and lighting the fuse
of one of the banderillas de juego. They
are steel darts with a pack of fire-crackers
attached to each one. In a bullfight, if the
bull turns craven and will not fight, they
are attached to him and lighted, when the
noise sends him into a frenzy of rage, and
he will face and kill anything that comes
before him.

"Vamonos, señor. They weel be back in
a moment," said the picador cheerfully.
He grinned at Sagebrush. "I worked een
Texas once," he announced proudly.

The second pack of fire-crackers began
to explode with a tremendous fuss. It
sounded like a machine-gun in the room.

"Umph," said Sagebrush dizzily.
"Thanks. You pulled 'em off me with
those fireworks. Much obliged. Where do
we go from here? Were’d Casal go? I
want to see him?"

His newly proven friend led him swiftly
out of the door and down a long corridor.
It was utterly deserted and there was no sound, save that below there arose a trampling of hoofs and excited voices.

"Hasten," urged Sagebrush's guide. "Soldiers 'ave arrive."

He whisked Sagebrush out of a door, across a narrow alley, and then they dodged underground, it seemed. Presently they emerged to climb many flights of stairs. Then the picador opened a door, led Sagebrush within and sat down in a chair to laugh.

"That ees as we used to do een Texas," he explained between chuckles.

"What's the idea?" demanded Sagebrush. "Where's Casal? I want to see that man."

A brown hand pointed to the window. Sagebrush looked down. A little way up the street there was a milling of men in front of the Hotel del Primero de Mayo. Troops had arrived in response to the urgent demands of the top-hatted gentlemen of the lobby. Numbers of the Guarda Civil—the police—explained volubly why they did not enter. At last a dozen soldiers with fixed bayonets were shepherded into the door. They looked very unhappy.

"And all that for one gob!" said Sagebrush in awe.

"My name is Ramirez and I used to work een Texas," his companion told him proudly. If possible, his grin widened. "Conchita!"

A girl came in from the next room. She smiled shyly. She was a very pretty girl.

"My wife," said Ramirez proudly. "She married me w'en I came back from Texas."

"Pleased to meetcha," said Sagebrush dutifully. He turned again to Ramirez. "But look here. I came here to see a man—"

"Oh, the señor Casal," Ramirez shrugged. "He is mos' likely een the palacio of the Presidente, for safety."

Sagebrush's face fell.

"I'd just get in trouble if I went after him there," he sighed. "And I came ashore just to see him."

Ramirez beamed.

"Me," he said cheerfully, "I don't like him also. He would like to make love to Conchita. But I cannot kill heem, because that ees not what they do een Texas."

Conchita's expression had changed at the mention of Casal's name. She fairly hissed a single word which indicated her opinion.

"Me an' you both, ma'am," said Sagebrush cordially. He touched a rapidly blackening eye. "But lookahere, Ramirez. How am I goin' to get at him?"

He heard a snappy, familiar sound. One glance out of the window and his face grew acutely mournful. A patrol of sailors from the Worcester was marching down the street toward the scene of the excitement. Sagebrush had a flash of completest illumination. That patrol and several others had been sent ashore to look for him. He was in bad for jumping ship. Lieutenant Kenton had told him that the people here would "make it a diplomatic incident if an American sailor spat on the sidewalk." But Sagebrush had done nothing so innocuous.

He had broken up a highly formal banquet by assaulting the guest of honor. He had gone into a mix-up with the most prominent and influential citizens of the nation. The minister of war, it might be, was nursing a black eye. The vice-president of the Republic, quite possibly, was tenderly touching a recently maltreated nose. And the Old Man of the Worcester was rabid on the subject of the popularity of the American navy. Any man who lowered the prestige of the navy was on the Old Man's black books for life. And Sagebrush's performance would be the subject of diplomatic correspondence, at least.

He groaned as he foresaw what was in store for him.

"Lordy!" he mourned. "I sure have got myself into a peck of trouble. Now, Ramirez, you gotta help me out. How am I going to get at Casal? I came ashore to see that man."

The bull ring was a riot of color. The sand strewn arena was freshly raked and cleaned. The stands were packed. From the box of the Presidente de la Corrida hung a magnificent tapestry, dangling almost to the sand of the arena itself. The president of the republic had condescended to become president of the bull fight, and above his head a splendid canopy rose against the sun.

The cuadrilla of the bullfighters made its triumphal entry. First came the municipal officials in gorgeous costumes of gold lace. Then Manuel Casal in gold and scarlet, with silken stockings on his legs, a vivid
cloak flung over his shoulder, and swaggering with conscious grace at the head of his assistants. The assistants were scarcely less eye-filling than the matador himself. The picadors rode in brightest yellow upon their antiquated horses, their legs armored against the horns of the bull. The banderilleros with their streamered darts strove to imitate the swaggering grace of their master. And last of all, the boy with the team of mules to drag the dead bulls from the arena rode with the air of a conqueror.

Vivas split the air. From his box the president tossed down the key to the bull pens. The municipal officers retired. The cuadrilla withdrew behind the low barrier built for their protection.

Sagebrush grunted to himself from his seat. He was hunched up beneath a monstrous sombrero and a huge cloak covered his uniform. He squinted down in hopes of catching a glimpse of Casal and saw him sitting at ease on the farther side of the arena. He had his knees crossed and was smoking a cigarette. He was too far away for Sagebrush to hope to catch him.

The bull emerged, charging wrathfully. A streamer with the colors of his breeder attached was dangling from his shoulder. Raging and deadly, he plunged to the center of the arena and stopped. He stared angrily about him and pawed the ground. He bellowed a challenge to the world.

A picador rode for him with a shrill yell. The bull charged instantly. As the monstrous head and wide spread horns came within a dozen feet, the picador, grinning, lifted his blindfolded mount into a wild leap. The horse's hoofs cleared the bull's head and came down thumping upon the monster's back. Scrambling wildly, the scared animal managed to alight on all fours behind the raging bull.

The stands howled with delight. The bull snorted and pulled up, infuriated by his miss.

"Good for Ramirez," grunted Sagebrush to himself, "but I came ashore to see a man."

Casal did not look pleased. The spectators were delighted with the courage and aplomb of a mere picador.

A second rider in yellow spurred toward the bull. Again the animal charged. This rider awaited the last instant of the charge, swung his mount out of reach of the horns, and twirled almost upon a ten-cent piece to ride parallel to the monster. For a second or two horse and bull ran side by side, and in that instant the picador wriggled from his saddle and jumped the intervening distance to the back of the bull. He balanced himself there, cossack fashion, belaboring the raging animal with his short lance and yelling joyfully.

He jumped off near the barrier and ran laughing to a place of safety while banderilleros caught his mount for him. A moment later he was forced to appear and bow to the plaudits of the spectators.

Casal looked acutely uncomfortable. He did not at all relish this applause for his subordinates. As a matter of fact, these particular men had never fought in the arena with him before, and in consequence had not been fully impressed with his demand that no one else of the cuadrilla should do anything to merit especial mention. The stands were already wild with enthusiasm. Your man of Spanish blood does not relish bull fighting primarily for the brutality of the sport, amateur observers to the contrary notwithstanding. The chief fascination lies in the watching of cool headed daring in the midst of very real danger. And the preliminary skirmishes of the picadors had whetted the appetite of the audience for something unusual.

Casal bit his lip as the spectators roared their enthusiasm. He snapped away his cigarette and spoke sharply to a chulo nearby. A moment later, though this was but the suerte de picar and the first part of the fight, he strode out into the arena with his cloak over his arm.

Howls of delight burst from the crowd. Sagebrush Garrick, with a monster sombrero on his head, grunted savagely.

"Umph!" he said disgustedly. "He's got to do a i'l showing off himself. Now, if he'll only come over thi...away——"

With conscious grace, Casal flirted his cloak before the eyes of the bull. The animal bellowed and rushed for him in savage rage. Casal flirted the red cloth at the very end of his arm, and only Sagebrush noted that it was of very light material that would float well away from his body. With flashing eyes and heaving flanks the bull flung himself at the irritating cloth. Casal flicked
his cloak away an instant before the needle-sharp horns would have pierced it. The bull thudded past and Casal pointed to his feet. They were close together. He had not moved them.

The crowd applauded, but it was not the wild enthusiasm that it might have been. Casal could feel the lack. He frowned angrily. He stared about him haughtily and then waved his cloak again. The bull fixed him with reddened, raging eyes. Suddenly he plunged at the irritating man.

Casal ran towards him. Now, a bull charges with his head held low, prepared to make a wicked sweep with his horns. But not infrequently he closes his eyes the instant before he expects the impact to take place. This bull did the same. In that second Casal leaped up upon the massive head. It is not an unusual trick. Dexterously performed, it is a feat to stir the blood. But it was undeniable that Casal had leaped the fraction of a second before it was quite necessary. And atop the bull's head he slipped. He came rolling off the animal's flanks, over and over in the sand. It was humiliating at best, and for an instant it looked as if he had been trampled on. There was dead silence over the bull ring for the interval of a breath.

In that moment of stark stillness a voice said sharply in English,

"There he is! Under that sombrero!"

And Sagebrush turned around with a start. He stared into the angry face of Lieutenant Kenton, coming toward him with a patrol of sailors from the Worcester behind him. They had been looking for him and now they had found him.

SAGEBRUSH jumped up just as the assemblage found its breath again. Casal was on his feet once more, scratched and infuriated. By his expression he was raking the depths of Spanish profanity for a means of relieving his emotions.

Things began to happen. Sagebrush had come ashore to see a man. That man was out in the arena yonder. A little way off was a patrol of sailors coming toward Sagebrush, to take him back to the Worcester and the brig. And the Old Man was rabid about the popularity of the American navy, which Sagebrush had not helped at all that afternoon.

He rushed down toward the arena, flinging down the steps amid the uneasily murmuring spectators of the bullfight. He vaulted the railing and landed in the corridor behind the barrier just as a stentorian voice shouted,

"Garrick! Halt!"

Sagebrush found open passage to the arena at hand. He scrambled up over the barrier, only intent on getting in one or two really good wallops on Casal's countenance before the patrol took him, and squarely beneath him was the bull. It was pawing the ground while its piglike, angry eyes surveyed the arena lustfully for a foe that could not dodge it. Sagebrush landed right side up on the bull's back. For an instant he was as astonished as the beast. Then he dug his heels into its sides and groped behind him until he found its tail. He twisted that tender member and the bull started on a maddened, bellowing rush that was unstoppable.

The stands full of spectators were hushed in incredulous amazement for a moment. Then a roar of wrath went up. A sailor, a Yanqui sailor, had plunged into the bull ring in the midst of the sacred festival of the bull fight! Men grew purple. The president of the republic crimsoned at the affront. The spectators jumped to their feet in an angry, chattering mob.

Sagebrush went careering about the arena atop a crazed monster while pandemonium reigned. One of the picadors attempted to head off the bull. Sagebrush flapped his hat over one of the bull's eyes and the creature swerved. It went straight at the picador and only by frenzied spurring did the man escape. Ramirez was grinning cheerfully from the sidelines. A formless roar of fury came from the crowd about the arena.

Then a shout began to make itself heard. It was taken up by a hundred throats, then a thousand. Then the whole mob was shouting fiercely.

"El estoque! El estoque!"

They called for the matador to use the sword, to kill the bull on which the stocky sailor in his dragged uniform was riding madly back and forth.

Casal came out. He had to. One eye had been blacked in the Hotel del Primero de Mayo, and his formerly splendid costume had been ripped and dragged by his roll in the sand a moment before. He was not
an imposing figure as he faced the mad-
denied animal.

Sagebrush let out a yell of joy as Casal
appeared. His hat came down with a
swish across the bull’s forehead. He
reached back and twisted the creature’s
tail again. As if that were an accelerator,
the bull charged furiously, bellowing in in-
sane wrath, straight for the wavering figure
of Casal. Sagebrush began to hunch him-
self forward as he rode. He got as near
the neck as he could and waited there with
glistening eyes for Casal to come within
reach. Of course he expected the bull to be
killed under him, but when the beast
dropped, Casal would be near at hand.

Forty yards, thirty yards, twenty yards! Casal heard a wild yell from Sagebrush’s
lips. It was the same yell an enthusiastic
poser had once let out when they were hot
upon his trail. Casal was shaken by his
earlier experiences. With the bull coming
toward him as an incarnation of maniacal
rage, he was shaken more. And Sagebrush’s
yell completed the rout of his courage. A
madman astride a mad bull was too much
for him. With a sudden gasp, Casal turned
and fled in blind panic.

HE COULD not escape. The bull ran
three yards to his one and the animal
was past steering now. It plunged for his
fleeing figure with horrible ferocity. Then
half a dozen things happened all at once.

Ramírez, the grin wiped off his face,
came charging out with his short lance
held ready. He would turn the bull or be
tossed from the saddle. He had to pass
within a yard of the panic-stricken mata-
dor. His horse loomed up above the hys-
terically scared Casal. And Casal in a
flash of blind and utterly unreasoning ter-
ror struck with the sword in his hand.

The horse reared frantically from the
pain and fell on its side. Ramírez was
pinned by his leg beneath it, squarely in
the path of the bull. A terrible scream rang
out behind the barrier. Conchita dashed
out, crying out in terror, to be by her hus-
band in the death that drew near to him.

And then Sagebrush, his face set grimly
and very white beneath his tan, grasped
the horns of the bull with his hands and
flung his whole weight into a terrific
wrench.

It was a job for a strong man. It was
bulldogging from a reversed position. Done
slowly enough for the bull to realize what
was being done, it would have been useless.
But with complete suddenness and such an
outpouring of strength that every muscle in
Sagebrush’s body cracked, it worked! His
whole weight and every ounce of energy he
possessed twisted at the bull’s neck. It
snapped over. The monster careened and
drewl, a bare ten feet from where Ramírez’s
horse kicked wildly upon the ground.

Dazed but still raging, the bull strug-
gled to get on its feet again. Sagebrush
was off its back and tugging at Ramírez.
Armored as the picador’s legs were against
the horns of the bull, he was uninjured by
the weight of the horse, but no sooner had
Conchita seen him drawn free than she in-
continently fainted.

The shouting had died down sharply at
the imminence of tragedy. But the inhab-
itants’ view of Sagebrush Garrick changed.
They might not like Americans, did like
brave men and nervy ones. With all the
suddenness of their Latin temperament
their view of Sagebrush Garrick changed.
Now there was another roar, but it was a
roar of applause.

“Viva! Viva! Bravissimo!” Men
threw their hats into the air. They flung
them into the arena. Feminine scarfs flut-
tered. From the most abhorred of human
beings Sagebrush had become a hero.

He stood helplessly with the unconscious
form of Conchita in his arms. Ramírez
grinned at him.

“Tha’s how they do it een Texas,” he
said cheerfully.

Suddenly he stooped and picked up the
short sword Casal had thrown down after
his senseless blow. He ran half a dozen
paces and waited.

The bull was in full charge again. It
was silent and deadly and for all its bulk
the monster ran with a deadly swiftness.
Its eyes were wide open and glittered wick-
edly. A bull that has been trained to fight
and bred to be deadly is a venomous thing.
It was a full ton of malignant destruction
that was rushing upon Sagebrush and his
burden. But Ramírez in his not-too-well-
fitting yellow costume of a picador stood
in between.

His left foot faced the charging animal.
His right was half a yard away and turned
at a right angle. He stood still, grinning
cheerfully, as the bull lowered its head and swept up to him with wild ferocity. The needle-pointed horns were less than two feet from his body, it seemed, when he dropped on his right foot, bending his body nearly to the ground. The horns passed over him. And then he snapped upright almost under the bull’s body. The sword flashed for a bare instant. And the bull dropped dead as a stone. The hilt of the sword projected from its fore-shoulder in just the one spot that made its blade range in and downward to the heart.

Ramirez shook himself and came beaming back to Sagebrush.

“I had t’do that firs’,” he apologized. “Thanks for w’at you did.”

Sagebrush shook hands. And the pandemonium that had arisen before was as nothing to the noise that rose to the skies now.

Sagebrush started to carry Conchita toward the barrier. Ramirez came with him, ignoring for the moment the yells that praised him.

“Now listen, Ramirez,” said Sagebrush anxiously. “There’s a patrol from the ship lookin’ for me. I ain’t got much time and you gotta help me out. You see, I want to see a man!”

SAGEBRUSH drifted into the little room of the bullfighters underneath the stands with an expression of serene contentment upon his face. His knuckles were badly scratched and bruised. Lieutenant Kenton and half the patrol were waiting for him. Ramirez grinned cheerfully as he reentered Conchita, still a trifle pale, smiled shyly at him.

“All right, sir,” said Sagebrush contentedly, to Lieutenant Kenton. “I’m ready to go back on board, sir.”

“You fix heem?” asked Ramirez, before the lieutenant could reply.

“He’s back yonder,” said Sagebrush placidly, “but I’m afraid he ain’t in any shape to kill any more bulls today.”

“That’s all right. Bueno!” Ramirez’s grin widened. “Me, I am matador for the res’ of this corrida. An’ after. Conchita likes it, hey?” He glanced down at her, then up at Lieutenant Kenton. “I used to work een Texas,” he added proudly.

Lieutenant Kenton coughed.

“Garrick,” he said drily. “You’re under arrest for a number of things you’ll probably remember. But in the mean time the president of the republic wants to see you in his box. I think he’s going to invite you to a banquet.

Sagebrush stared at him.

“That doesn’t lessen the fact that you’re under arrest,” the lieutenant hastened to add. Then he dropped his rank for a moment. “The Old Man is mad as blazes,” he said with a twinkle in the eye. “He has you slated for forty years on bread and water. But the president here has just given me an official message inviting the whole crew of the Worcester ashore as the guests of the nation. I think the unpopularity of Americans is pretty well ended by your bulldogging stunt in the arena there. Considering all that, I wouldn’t worry too much. If you want to accept the invitation the president is going to give you, I’ll take it on myself to give you leave until it’s over. When you come back on board, though, you’ll certainly go into the brig for a while.”

Sagebrush heaved a sigh and looked at his knuckles.

“Thank you, sir,” he said contentedly, “but I think I’ll just go shake hands with the president and go on board ship to the brig. I just wanted to come ashore to see a man.”

“WHO’S GOOFY NOW?”
THAT’S WHAT “LEFTY” GOMEZ ASKS IN HIS ARTICLE
“SLANTS OF A SOUTHPAW”
IN THE DEC. ISSUE OF
BLUE RIBBON SPORTS
ON SALE NOW

ALSO IN THE SAME ISSUE—
Frozen Assets—Hockey—Arthur Mann +
Golden Gloves—Boxing—Spencer Towne +
Sentimental Quarterback—Football—Glenn Long
Talking Pitcher—Baseball—A. R. Thurman
Death Jump—Ski Jumping—Samuel Taylor
+ Beethoven’s Fifth—Baseball—Bob De Haven
LONG AND SHORT

A WESTERN STORY

by EUGENE CUNNINGHAM

An outlaw bronc pitchforks Sod Timmons into six-gun trouble in Texas.
“How do I love thee? Le’ me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when—when—”

BLUE JAY BANNISTER stopped short in his singsong chant and scowled mournfully down at Sod Timmons, who was hunkered against the outer wall of the livery corral.

“Damn it all,” mourned Blue Jay, “I jist can’t drop a loop over the rest of it, Sod, and it’s plumb beautiful, too. Who was it the schoolmaster says made it up? Mis’—Smith? Nah, not Smith. Brown? Brown-ing! That was her name! You shore ought to be mighty thankful she done that poem; Sod. And that the schoolmaster told it to you. Now—”

“Will you go plumb to hell?” inquired Sod furiously. “Or am I going to chunk this rock at you and knock a hole in that hole you’re already packing in your head?”

“Why, Sod!” cried Blue Jay reproachfully, his lean dark face and black eyes alike very sad. “You hadn’t ought to take the friendly sympathy of your bestwisher thataway! Why, I never had nothing to do with finding your note to Aggie and sticking it up on the postoffice door. You can’t blame that on me, Sod.”

Sod merely shrugged his shoulders angrily and continued to scowl at his boot toes. And those very boot toes added to his ugliness of mood. For they were scuffed almost through the leather and in a week or so, Sod thought, his sockless toes would be shining through. And his overalls were more patches than pants; his faded old denim shirt wouldn’t have been stolen off a clothesline by a swamp-nigger. His yellow hair needed cutting—if only to keep the long locks of it from sticking through holes in his ancient Stetson.

The trouble was that he had always worked for his father and mostly without pay—regular pay, anyhow. Old Man Timmons had plenty of land and ran lots of cattle and some very fine horses. But mention money to him and he would howl like a turpintined wolf for a week of Sundays.

“Aggie’s in town,” Blue Jay drawled suddenly. “Don’t jump thataway, cowboy! Not till I git done. Old Weatherford brung her in. I see ‘em come in the buckboard a spell back. Weatherford, he’ll likely comb you if he sees you. What the hell you want to go writing her poems for, anyhow? Honest to goodness, Sod! Sometimes I do marvel about you. And I almost give up hope of making anything out of you a-tall.”

“Yeh?” snapped Sod, stung out of his silence at last. “And who set you up as my guardeen, anyhow? I reckon if I want to walk right down Main Street with all of Meiggsville looking at me I can do it. It’s a free country, you know.”

“Shore! Shore you can! But you won’t want to, Sod. Old Weatherford is a right previous old cross between a cloudburst and a keg of blasting powder. I shore hope you won’t want to, Sod. I don’t mind being one of your pallbearers but I do hate to have to go scallyhooting all over the State of Texas picking up pieces of the late lamented. ‘Slaunch-neck’ Wilson’s in town, too. He come with old Weatherford and Aggie—powerful queer hombre, Slaunchneck. But you got to say one thing about him; he shore is a sticking fellow. I don’t know as ever I see a fellow stick tighter to a gal than Slaunch-neck, he sticks to Aggie.”

Sod’s brown face and neck grew fiery red and his gray eyes were hard and bright as he listened to the cheerful gossip of his closest friend. For this Wilson—who had been named “Slaunch-neck” because of his peculiar twisted way of carrying his head—was indeed a powerfully queer person. Grim-faced, not much to talk, he wore a six-shooter in a very accustomed way and once or twice during the six or seven months of his residence in Meiggs County he had demonstrated an amazing speed and accuracy with the weapon. And only a week before he had made Sod Timmons look the small boy, in the store here at Meiggsville, before people.

“Listen!” Blue Jay snapped, “Set down! I said I was mightily disgusted with you, Sod, and I mean every word of it. Looky here! You’re mighty nigh twenty-one year old, you are, and you ain’t got enough money or prospects to wad a lady’s gun. You let that measly old skinflint, your pa, run it over you. Shut up! I’m doing the talking today!”

“You’re skeered to outface Old Man Timmons and make him pay you a decent
price regular—and you're the best hand with good hawsses in this country. Think he don't know it? Well, anyhow, you're honing to get yourself all married. But Aggie, she knows you ain't got a thing but a sweet disposition. Old Weatherford, he knows you can't show the first side of bacon and sack of meal towards starting out to feed Aggie. And there's Slaunchneck honeyfuggling around, packing money and the ways of a man. You blame Weatherford for leaning toward Slaunch-neck when he's aiming to pick him a son-in-law? Damned if I do and I've known you since the time Scotty Mcdougal blew in a dime up at the Dallas Fair."

CALCULATINGLY he watched his friend. For Blue Jay's purpose was to make Sod good and hostile, but not enough so to bring on a fight with him. He judged that Sod was ripe for two revolution he proposed to incite. He hunkered down beside Sod and tapped him on the knee.

"Boy!" he said earnestly, "I don't know what the hell you want to go git married for, but if you got to have that bolt of calico to make you so's folks can live with you, I'm backing your play. Now, I got you a job and if you'll take her, you'll get regular pay and a chanct to stand up on your hindlegs and look like a man."

Sod eyed him uncertainly. He had a good, clear picture of what would happen if he left his father and went to work for any rancher or farmer in the whole Meiggs River country. His father would ride up to the place and look at him out of those grim gray eyes of his. He would lean a little sideways in his oldfashioned Mexican saddle and spit—Old Man Timmons could spit with more expression than any man in Meiggs County. Then he would snarl deep in his throat.

And Sod knew that immediately he would feel precisely as a colt might feel, when Old Man Timmons' unerring loop dropped over him. His father would tell him to come on back home "and start hustling." And meekly he would come.

Blue Jay read his mind easily. For he recalled one time when Sod had quit for the sixty a month offered by a horse-trainer. He tapped Sod's knee again.

"It's a job as deputy sheriff," he said quietly. "Fifty a month and horsefeed; expense money when you're away from town. I fixed it up with Denver Jones. He says he'll give you a jobje's right shy of deputies, you know—on a six-month contract and nobody can bust that contract—not you nor yet your pa."

Sod started to shake his head. He had never thought of being a peace officer and he didn't know that he particularly liked the idea. And thought of what his father would say and do made the prospect even less an attraction.

"Slaunch-neck told Aggie you was yeller," drawled Blue Jay reflectively. "And I told him you'd show him. I said you was going to be a deputy and Aggie, she said if you was, you wasn't yeller and if you wasn't you was—"

THIS barefaced lie brought Sod Timmons to his feet with mouth set in a hard line. Blue Jay grinned inwardly and rose also.

"Reckon we'll find Denver in his office," he said, and hooked an arm in Sod's. "Now I want that you should remember that when you git that lil' old tin star onto your vest, I'm a privileged hairpin, me. I'm aimin' to be political boss like you read about in the Santon and Dallas papers and I want some practise to git my hand in, at doing things other folks git arrested for even thinking about."

He managed to steer Sod—who was not in a mood that made for keen observation of things about him—by ways that brought them to the red brick courthouse without running into anyone better avoided for the time being. Blue Jay saw the big, grim figure of Slaunch-neck Wilson, with the white bone handle of his Colt showing even at seventy-five yards as a sinister sort of twinkle. But the big man was not with either Weatherford Blaines or—that tempting brunette armful, Aggie Blaines.

Little old Denver Jones was at his desk sitting with his bootheels hooked in the rungs of his chair and his ancient black Stetson—full of the dents and creases of long service—upon the back of his grizzled head. He looked up at them with a single narrow blue eye and if there were any expression upon his seamed mahogany brown face, it was hidden somewhere in the wrinkles.
“Here’s your deputy, Denver,” grinned Blue Jay. “I don’t g’arantee him to be fierce right now, but if you feed him jist a li’l raw meat with some gunpowder sprinkled onto it, for a spell, he’ll likely roar like a bull. Sod’s the only man in this country ever rode Waco Bob’s Funeral Wagon outlaw, and me, I figure I’d rather take on the Youngers and Daltons and Jesse James, with Sam Bass and Billy the Kid for pot-liquor, than to straddle that curly devil.”

“How you feel about the job?” inquired Denver, of Sod. “I ain’t hiring you for a gunman, remember. If you think all you got to do is strut up and down with six-seven six-shooters on and sprout a long moustache, I don’t want you. What I need is a boy with a kind of average balance between his arms and legs as to length and speed of moving. The job is to do whatever I tell you to do.”

“I reck’n I can stand that.”

“First thing I want you to do after I swear you in is to go down to the Star Hotel and hootie that crazy Irishman Shea. He’s lying in bed there with a six-shooter in each hand and he’s got a broken leg. He swears he’s going to shoot the first man that comes in. He pined Elijah Outlaw a while ago—tore his ear plumb off when Elijah peeked inside the door. Something’s got to be done. Shea’s leg has got to be fixed or he’ll likely die.”

Sod’s face went white. Shea was about the outstandingest expert with a Colt’s .45 for a hundred miles in any direction. If little Denver here was sending someone else to quiet Shea, it must be a stiff proposition. But he thought of Aggie and he thought of Slaunch-neck.

“There’s a li’l bitsy window high up in the wall of that room,” he meditated aloud. “Reck’n I can drop a loop over Shea through it—if I don’t make too much noise. Will you come along and rattle his door-knob a li’l bit, to cover me?”

Denver nodded, stared harder with his one eye, then motioned with a lean and gnarled right hand.

“Lift your paw. Want to swear you in.”

He produced a worn Bible from the desk and so Sod Timmons became a legally appointed deputy sheriff of the County of Meiggs, State of Texas. When the small ceremony was finished, he accepted the nickeled shield of the office, pinned it to his old shirt and looked steadily at the sheriff.

“I’m going after my rope. I’ll meet you at the hotel.”

For the first time, a ghost of amusement showed at the sheriff’s mustache-shaded lip corners.

“Se’ down,” he counseled. “I jist wondered how you’d take that job. I roped Shea through that window you mentioned, a while back. He shot the ceiling full of holes, but he’s fixed up now. The business I need some help on is not jist that damned county seat. It’s—”

“The stage robbings!” Sod nodded with a flash of inspiration.

“Ex-actly. ‘Tain’t no more my grief than ’tis two, three other sheriffs’. But this ‘Long-and-Short’ combine, they have stuck up the mail stage twict in my county and so it don’t make a bit of difference to me if they’ve stuck it up more’n a dozen times in neighboring counties. I aim to try to hog-tie ’em anyhow.”

“What you got on ’em?” asked Sod curiously. He had heard—in common with the rest of the county—a good deal about this tall man and small man who robbed passengers and mail sacks almost regularly on the mail stages.

“Nothing. Nothing but what everybody knows. I got a list of the places where the stage had been held up—fo’teen of ’em. But that’s all.”

“And they’ve been covering a stretch of country better’n two hundred mile long—”

Sod commented sardonically. “Looks like it’s going to be right hard to catch ’em.”

“Likely,” agreed the little sheriff in indifferent tones. “Not a thing about their tracks around the Turkey Crick holdup that sticks out different. But we’ll git onto it right away. If you want to fix up some, tell Jim Arden I said you could have anything in his store you wanted and to charge it to me. You got a good hawss and saddle. You’ll want a .44 Colt, if you ain’t got one. There’s a extra Winchester carbine—.44—here. Handy to jist have to pack one shell-belt.”

SOD thanked him and he and Blue Jay went out. And in Arden’s store Sod made more purchases than ever in all his life together. He dressed in a storeroom out
back with Blue Jay watching critically—
dark homespun trousers and a blue flannel
shirt with neckerchief of the same color;
new boots; fifteen dollar gray Stetson;
waist-length riding jumper of brown duck;
last—and most impressive of all to Sod—
a walnut-handled .44 Colt in new scabbard,
sagging from a filled cartridge belt.

They came back into the store and there
stood Slaunch-neck Wilson in his custom-
ary hipshot posture, with right thumb
hooked in the shell-belt near the white butt
of his six-shooter. And old Weatherford
Blaines was at the counter arguing with
Jim Arden about the price of a set of buck-
board harness. Aggie, a slim, olive skinned,
amazingly alive heartbreaker, was beside
Slaunch-neck, matching ribbons from a
dozen boxes.

Sod’s face went scarlet with sight of that
trim figure in fresh pink linen. A pulse
began to hammer in his brown throat. She
was to him the most lovely thing in all the
world and his case looked so hopeless.

Slaunch-neck Wilson’s small black eyes
widened with sight of Sod’s new outfit.
Then slowly he grinned—an unpleasant
grin, for he had found the nicked shield
on a pocket flap of the jumper.

“For what ails ye?” he drawled.
*Weathford, ye see whut I see? Then
it’s so!”

Sod flushed hotly, but hardly knew what
to do. Blue Jay, however, was not one to
be easily disconcerted.

“I reckon Weatherford does, all right,”
he drawled. “So you can figure it so. And
I’d like to ask if there’s something about
Sod and me, any one of you both, that seems
to worry you some? If there is something,
maybe you’ll speak out now, like a lil’ man,
before we’re out of hearing? You see, Wil-
son, Sod, he’s a mighty good natured kind
of hairpin; he’ll stand a lot of hurrahing.
But me, I’m different; I ain’t a bit good
natured and I don’t stand for a bit of hur-
rahing unless it’s from somebody I like.”

And he regarded the big man fixedly.
Slaunch-neck glared at him; his original
impulse to shivaree Sod having to be put
aside—as Blue Jay had intended it should
be.

“Listen!” snarled Wilson. “I ain’t got
time to be playing with lil’ boys and for
another thing I’m always skeered I’ll hurt
‘em without knowing it—”

“I figured you’d be skeered of some-
thing,” Blue Jay nodded contemptuously.
“Your kind generally is.”

“If you fellers want to fight, take your
war outside,” Jim Arden snapped chillily.
“I don’t aim to have my store smashed up
and my customers bothered with quarrel-
ing. I got a double-barrel Greener here
and I’m a man that shore does protect his
rights.”

“He won’t come outside, Jim,” Blue Jay
soothed the storekeeper. “So don’t you
worry about your place being messed up.
He—”

“Ye think so?” snarled Wilson furiously.
“Ye jest put your foot out’n that door and
I’ll clean your plow so fast ye’ll think ye
sat onto a buzz-saw.”

Ostentatiously, he unbuckled his gun-
belt and laid the white-handled Colt on
the counter. Blue Jay, grinning as at the pros-
ppect of a circus, slipped his hand inside his
shirt and drew his own six-shooter from
its shoulder-holster and laid it on the coun-
ter. Sod watched with a frown. There was
something about this business that he didn’t
like. But by the unwritten law of the town,
there was nothing for a deputy sheriff to
do—yet. Two men who wanted to have it
out fist and skull could do so if they ob-
erved certain conventions—stayed in the
street, for one thing.

He followed to the door, looking side-
long at Aggie as he passed her. There was
a faintly contemptuous smile on the girl’s
red mouth which Sod interpreted as ex-
pressing her opinion of him for letting Blue
Jay start the war with Slaunch-neck. It
made him furious—mainly because he knew
it was justified. He should have been the
one to talk up to the big fellow.

Slaunch-neck had stopped three feet
from the door on the dirt sidewalk and
with big fists doubled up, waited for Blue
Jay, who had paused on the door sill to look
at him. Suddenly, with a wild yell, Blue
Jay leaped at Slaunch-neck, his arms swing-
ing. And so abruptly, unexpectedly, did he
come, that he landed four hammer-blows on
Slaunch-neck before the big man knew that
the battle was on. They flailed wildly away
at each other, neither knowing enough to
block or interpose a guard.

Sod watched scowlingly. He wondered
if he shouldn’t interfere. But two things
checked him; a natural diffidence and the
fact that he couldn’t be sure that, in his place, Denver Jones would have stopped the fight.

Slaunch-neck was trying to get hold of Blue Jay now. His long arms were actually around the smaller man when Blue Jay, heedless of that, dropped his head against the other’s chest and whanged away at Slaunch-neck’s stomach with pile-driver blows—a half-dozen of them, accompanied by great, audible panting sounds. Slaunch-neck reeled back and Blue Jay was too winded to follow him. He merely watched while the twisted-necked one sat suddenly down in the dirt and then dropped flat on his back.

SOD came outside. He looked at Blue Jay, then at the fallen Slaunch-neck. He wondered if, in Blue Jay’s place, he could have put his big rival down that way. He thought bitterly that he would have given a year of his deputy’s pay to do it. Slaunch-neck rolled over on his side and Sod stared almost absently at him. It was curious, how different the big fellow looked down there. He started to tell Blue Jay that he thought he had knocked the kink out of Wilson’s neck, when he noticed a peculiar movement of Slaunch-neck’s hand.

Impulsively he sprang forward. Slaunch-neck’s hand came flashing up and a bullet sang past Sod as he came rushing. So new was the feel of the Colt on his hip that he had no thought to jerk it out; to fire.

“You lowdown skunk!” he heard himself snarling, as if it were someone else. “You lowdown skunk, you!”

Slaunch-neck altered the direction covered by his pistol-muzzle; now it was trained upon Sod. A bullet bit through the sleeve of Sod’s new shirt and stung like a wasp. Then he was close enough to kick Slaunch-neck’s hand and send the Colt flying. The big man had evidently recovered his wind. He rolled over and came to his feet. Blue Jay was coming forward, but Sod was beyond caring for what might have awed him ten minutes before—the size of the man he hated.

TOE to toe they met and flailed away—at face or body regardless. A haze floated before Sod’s eyes, as much from the exertion of the fighting as from the effect of Slaunch-neck’s blows. He knew nothing, thought of nothing, but to slug away at the other as long as he had strength. He almost fell when Slaunch-neck collapsed, but caught himself in time to stagger to one side.

“Watch out, Sod!” cried Blue Jay. “Maybe the son of a dog’s got another gun on him.”

But Sod lurched forward grimly; his face was swelling in divers spots: his lip was puffed and split and a thin trickle of blood ran down his chin. He saw Slaunch-neck hazily through the mist that seemed to be caused by a blackened eye. Twice he reached for the big man before his hand closed on Slaunch-neck’s shoulder.

“Git up!” he said thickly. “Git up. You’re going to the calaboose.”

Still he did not think of his Colt. He had never used a gun very much. It was not with him, as with Blue Jay and other cowhands of the region, a sort of extra finger. He shook Slaunch-neck viciously. Then a hand touched his arm.

“Le’ me take charge of him, son,” drawled Denver. “What you going to charge him with?”

“He shot at Blue Jay and me with a gun he’d hid out. He was supposed to be fighting Blue Jay fist and skull. He unbuckled one gun in the store. I don’t know what the law name is—general skunkery, I call it.”

“Bannister—was going for a gun!” Slaunch-neck panted, getting slowly to his feet. “I could see him—from the ground. ’Course I pulled, then.”

“You’re a double-dammed liar!” Blue Jay cried hotly. “I got no gun on. I left the only one I had in the store. You—I’ll go get it and we’ll settle this augering right now. I—”

“Shut up, Blue Jay,” commanded the little sheriff. “He’s got you out-lid. But I don’t ’low no shooting on my main street. Wilson, you git onto your hawss and you hightail it. And if something was to happen and you never come back, I reckon I’d figure that was plenty quick enough to see you again. Blue Jay, you come on to the co’t house with me.”

Old Weatherford Blaines came through the growing crowd, his dark face angry.

“Looky here, Denver,” he addressed the sheriff angrily, “you got no business telling folks they got to stay out of town. This
is a free country and Wilson's going to marry my gal. I'm standin' behind him—"

"Going to marry your gal, is he?" drawled Denver Jones reflectively. "Himm! Seems to me—but, of course, she's not my gal. He goes out of town right now, Weatherford! You know me well enough to tell when I'm joking you—and when I ain't. If he ain't hightailing it in three minutes, into the calaboose I slam his hind-end—after I apologizing to that Mexican that's in there now. 'Assault with intent to commit murder.' That'll be the charge, and likely he won't make ball."

"What you doing here? In that rigout? With that tin badge on you?"

Sod turned guiltily at sound of his father's grim voice in his ear. But the sheriff's single eye took in more, folk said, than most men's two. He saw the maneuver and came swiftly to Sod's assistance.

"Sod's a deputy of mine, Timmons," he said metallically. "He's signed up for six months and that agreement ain't going to be busted, neither. After his time's up he can quit if he wants to—and go back to working for you at six-bits a month, sunup to sundown."

"Sod!" cried Aggie suddenly, from somewhere in the crowd before him. He could not see her because of his damaged eye.

"You hurt!"

"Your pa's new son-in-law done it!" he answered viciously. "He thought I was going for a gun, too. He's a busy thinker, he is—especially about hiding out a gun."

Then he turned to his father. "Denver told you what I'm doing with this badge on. Like he said, it sticks for six months. After that, I'll maybe talk to you—about wages."

And he turned abruptly away, leaving Old Man Timmons utterly voiceless for perhaps the first time in his grim life. The old man stared after Sod, a lean hand rubbing his oak block of a chin. But there was no anger in his face; rather, as he shook his head slightly, there was a slow wonder and—almost—admiration.

SOD came riding back from the Rattlesnake headquarters ranch a week after the fight. His eye was still slightly greenish, but his lip had healed, like the bullet burn on his arm, and the bumps were gone from his face. He felt well and he told the strawberry gelding that he liked the deputying right well. He had hardly realized how his father had rough-ridden him, until he had got out of the old man's reach.

But mentally he was much upset. Word drifted through the country that Aggie Blaines was certainly going to marry that big slaunch-necked gunman. Some said that the day had been set. Sod had not seen the girl since the day in Arden's store—and he knew, now, that Blue Jay had just lied about her being interested in his taking the deputy's job.

Nearing the crossroads above Pecan Creek, it occurred to Sod to jog over to the burned schoolhouse. He had not seen the ruins; had been halfway across the county from the fire, serving writs. Nobody knew how the blaze had started; some of Blaze Kelly's Circle-K boys had seen the smoke and investigated. They had found nothing but smoking embers.

He turned the strawberry up the path from the Meiggsville fork of the road and reined in to look. The little old frame building had been a regular torch. Sod's mind went rambling; back to the days when he and Aggie Blaines had attended the old school. He recalled how he had first fallen in love with Aggie, watching her black braids bobbing as she played the squawking old organ. It was not a musical country and Aggie's ability to play the organ had seemed marvelous to him.

He got down, letting fall the split-reins. The strawberry fell to cropping the bunches of grass that grew here under the pecan trees. The trustees had bought a couple of other better organs, since Aggie's playing days. But Sod was sure that none of them could have given the latter-day scholars the thrill that the old one had given him, on rainy days of the past.

We're marching 'round the levee;
We're marching 'round the levee;
We're marching 'round the levee;
For we have gained the day!

He chanted the old song softly as he looked around the ruins. He wished he could find that old double desk where he had once carved "S and A." He would hide it somewhere and go out and sit with it before him and think how miserable he was, with Aggie married to that—to Slaunch-neck Wilson.
“What the hell?” he asked himself curiously. “That organ never burned clean up, now! Where's all the metal thingumajigs and doodads, That's funny. Yes, sir, it's really funnier'n that. I wonder if somebody could've— By Jiminy! I bet that's why the schoolhouse burned. Somebody come along and stole that new organ and set fire to the place to cover it up.”

He swung up into the saddle and the strawberry was tickled with rein-ends until he stretched his foxtrot into a hard trot and then a long, effortless lope. Sod rode like a part of his mount. He might not be much of a hand with a gun, but there were mighty few—if any—who could touch him as a rider. He came splitting the breeze up Main Street and slid his horse to a stop before the court house and was off before the dust had begun to rise.

But there were several men in the office and Sod stopped short at the door to stare. Some strangers. Then there was old Judge Higgins, the county attorney, pulling absentely at his gray billygoat beard. And Jim Arden, who was postmaster, as well as storekeeper.

“C'mon in, Sod,” Denver Jones called quietly. “Stage has been robbed again. Got three thousand off these two gentlemen. Went through the mailsacks; got a lot of registered packages. We're going to hunt the robbers.”

“Where was it robbed?” inquired Sod, frowning. This, he sensed, was no time to be reporting stolen organs.

“Same as last time—Turkey Crick ford. Long and Short combine again, too. I would like mightily to glimpse them fellers once—over my front sight.”

“Long and Short,” repeated Sod thoughtfully. He turned to one of the two men Denver had said the robbers had stripped. “Anything particular about these robbers? Anything to look for?”

“You can't tell much about a man when he has a flour sack over his head and you glimpse just his eyes through holes cut in the sack,” shrugged a portly eastern-looking man. “One was fairly tall—nothing extra, I'd say, but around five-ten or five-eleven. The other man—one that went through us and the mail—was a man of five-five or thereabouts, I think. Both had on old coats and raggedy pants—and boots.”

“What kind of guns?”

“All I saw the little one brandish was a Winchester. That was when they stopped the stage. The other, the big one, had a stag-horn handled Colt.”

“Stag-horn. Not so many of them around here. We mostly run to bone or pearl or walnut or plain black rubber.”

“Well, Sod, le's git going,” said Denver. “Only way I know is to see where their trail leads to—and in that bunch of rocky ridges they can easy lose themselves. That was the way it was last time.”

Denver and Sod, with a half-dozen men from town, rode east to where the road crossed Turkey Creek. They could make out the tracks in the dust around the scene of the robbery, but as Denver had anticipated so doefully, the hoofprints vanished in the rocks of the broken country south of the creek and Denver drew in with a drawing oath of irritation.

“Le's scatter, fellers,” he said. “Either them fellers has got a camp in the neighborhood, or they're hightailing it clean out of the country. Either way, our only chance is to come onto their trail. We'll spread out like a fan and see if anybody ahead has saw 'em. We'll meet around sundown at Jergen's place due south of this. Now, remember, one man ain't expected to go fighting them two. Just git onto their trail or locate 'em if they're camped. Then we'll all close in.”

SOD found himself riding over a country barren of tracks—and straight for the Blaines ranch. It was ten miles and he covered it in a little over two hours. He looked calculatingly down at the gelding. This made thirty miles for him, today, but with a short rest at Blaines', he would be good for the trip to Jergens'.

Smoke curled lazily from the big fieldstone chimney of Weatherford Blaines' rambling log-and-frame house. Sod's heart began to hammer. He wondered if Aggie would be home. What would she say to him? What would he say to her? Old Weatherford didn't count, today; he came riding as a peace officer hunting a criminal. He turned a little sideways in the saddle. Down the slope a mile or so was the house of Slaunch-neck Wilson, where the big
gunman headquartered his small trade in horses, with a puncher and a negro cook—Sod had heard—as his outfit.

If Slauch-neck were here at Blaines’—but he was not. Sod halted and received no answer. He was half pleased, half disappointed. He went inside the long living-room. There was Aggie’s hat hanging on a chair. He halted again, but there was still no answer. So he came back out and sat on the long gallery, waiting for his horse to rest.

He went back into the house after a time, intending to get a drink. And now, in a corner of the living-room, he saw a parlor organ. He stopped short. Aggie had not had that organ long; it was only two months, now, that he had been unwelcome at the Blaines’ house. She had not had it on the occasion of his last visit. He went over to it and stared curiously.

Suddenly his face whitened; he gaped at the instrument as if it had suddenly altered its form before his eyes—and in some degree, it had done just that. For he recalled the organ stolen from Pecan Creek School.

“My Lord!” he breathed, devoutly enough. “Old Weatherford’d never—”

HE WALKED around the instrument, staring. A memory, dim, acted upon almost without thought, moved him. He pulled the organ out from the wall and peered at its back. And there was a plate of sheet tin, with the letters pressed into it—Property of Pecan Creek Schoolhouse.

“It can’t be!” he muttered. “Old Weatherford’s straight as a string! He would never— He must have bought it off the thief, without knowing it! That’s the way it must’ve happened.”

He pushed the organ back and went over to sit on the arm of a chair and stare at it. He was blind—and deaf—to everything else around him.

“What ye gaping at that organ about? Think it might explode, maybe?”

Sod whirled to face Slauch-neck Wilson, who stood just inside the door, in his customary hipshot posture, with thumb hooked in shell-belt just above the curving white butt of his long-barreled Colt.


“What was ye agaping at the organ for, then?” Slauch-neck asked, eyeing him malevolently.

Sod considered flashingly. Even to Slauch-neck, the son-in-law-to-be of old Weatherford, he was not going to tell what he knew of that organ. He would tell Weatherford, so that the old man could go into town and report how he had bought it.

“Why, I reckon I jist happened to be looking thataway,” he shrugged. Sounded weak, even to him—and what if Slauch-neck had suspicions about the organ’s title! He acted as if he had.

“Keep your hand away from that gun!” snarled Slauch-neck abruptly.

Sod jumped at the sudden command and looked wonderingly down. Mechanically he had reached to his belt, to hitch it up. Then he flushed and looked up quickly at Slauch-neck.

“Looky here,” he snapped angrily, “don’t you be telling me what to do! I happen to be a deputy sheriff of this county and I pack a gun to do what I please with. You better remember I’m an officer.”

“I don’t give a whoop what ye are. Ye don’t run no blazers over me, sonny! I’ve chewed up fellers twict as hefty as ye’ll ever be. I said, ‘keep your hands away from that gun!’”

For answer, Sod dropped his hand to the Colt butt and jerked out the weapon flashingly. It was the result of accident rather than any particular skill, but he had Slauch-neck covered before the gunman’s Colt had cleared holster-top.

“Stop it!” Sod cried thinly. “Stop it, or I’ll cut you in two!”

Sullenly Slauch-neck stared at him, then let his hand fall away.

“Reach down—slo-ow. Unbuckle your belt and let it drop. Move! I’ll shoot if you crowd me.”

Slauch-neck wavered, but under the compelling muzzle of Sod’s Colt—held now with two hands—he obeyed. The white handled gun, scabbard and belt, all thudded to the floor. Again Sod moved his gun-muzzle and his prisoner moved sideways in obedience to the gesture.

“I don’t know what’s ailing you, Wilson,” Sod said thoughtfully, “but you’re acting like you’re either drunk or crazy,
trying to bulldoze a deputy sheriff and for no reason at all that I can see. If I want to sit here and look at that organ all day, that's my business and none of yours. Where'd Aggie get it, anyhow?"

"I bought it for her," shrugged Slaunchneck. "And if ye think ye'll get away with this—"

"You gave it to her?" Sod said wonderingly. "Well—"

Automatically he turned to stare at it. Out of the corner of his eye, he caught a blur of movement. He whirled back—and Slaunchneck was covering him with a Colt. The weapons roared almost together. Twice, Sod flipped back the big hammer and let go. He was conscious of a thin scream from outside the room and of bullets thudding into the wall somewhere around him. Then Slaunchneck dropped his gun and came crashing—knees bent limply—to his face.

Sod streaked across to him. stood for a small time staring down, then turned him over. Slaunchneck groaned dismally. Sod was vastly relieved at this sign of life. Mechanically, then, he went over to pick up Slaunchneck's second gun—and jerked back his hand as from a rattler. For that gun had stag-horn handles.

"So you're the stage robber!" he cried, and somehow knew that he was not misled by the testimony of those handles.

"Answer up!" he snarled. "Answer or, so help me, I'll finish you here and now!"

WEAKENED, Slaunchneck nodded and there came running swiftly through the door a slender figure, to throw herself upon Sod and cry out, asking if he were hurt.

"I nearly fainted when the shooting began, Sod!" breathed Aggie. "I came up while you were quarreling about the organ and I was afraid to come in. Did you call him the stage robber, Sod? Then his man, Brown, is the other one. I'm so glad; so glad! I hate him, Sod. But pa said I had to marry him."

There sounded outside the clop-clop of hoofs. Aggie whirled toward the door.

"Quick, Sod!" she cried in a gasping whisper. "It's Brown—with pa."

Sod walked out upon the gallery and saw a wizened figure sitting his horse beside old Weatherford.

"Just stopped in to ask you if you'd saw any stage robbers," he managed to tell Weatherford in almost calm tones, as he walked out toward them.

"Nah, I never. And if that's all you want, why, you're ready to go, ain't you?"

"Almost," Sod grinned tightly. With the words, he jerked the astonished Mr. Brown from the saddle, rammed his Colt muzzle into the prisoner's side and spoke sideways, but very clearly, to Mr. Weatherford Blaines.

"Mr. Brown, here, is also called Mr. Short. Mr. Slaunchneck Wilson—and he ain't no more slau-horn-necked than I am, really—he is Mr. Long. Together, they are Long-and-Short, the stage robbers. And I got Mr. Long inside right well ventilated. There's five thousand dollars reward on the two of 'em. That's mine, and I aim to use it in marrying Aggie. I shore aim to do just that—if I have to kill off all her kinfolks to git to do it peaceful."

And if this were not enough to shatter old Weatherford's established ideas of what was due him, as a man and a father, sight of Aggie, who had ever been a most obedient child, marching coolly out to stand beside Sod and eye him without any awe whatever, must have been.

DOUBBLE-ACTION WESTERN

DEC. ISSUE NOW ON SALE

FEATURES—
ALL STORIES NEW!
ALL STORIES COMPLETE!

2 ACTION-PACKED NOVELS
HELL'S SIX-GUN VOLUNTEERS
by Ed Earl Repp
RECRUITS FOR BOOTHILL
by Cliff Campbell
also—ACE GUN HAND
by Eric Thane
POWDERSMOKE ORPHAN
by Ralph André
and—S. Omar Barker
Stanley G. Allen
THREE MODERN MUSKETEERS
A COMPLETE NOVEL OF HI-JINKS ON THE HIGH-SEAS
FEATURING, CAPTAIN SCRAGGS, FIRST MATE GIBNEY,
AND CHIEF ENGINEER MAC GUFFEY

by PETER B. KYNE

With a Terrific Boom
the Ancient Cannon
Fired Its Load at the
Oncoming Government
Schooner
IT WAS fully a week before Captain Scragg's mental hemorrhage, brought on every time his mind reverted to his loss on the "ginseng" deal, ceased. During all of that period his peregrinations around the Maggie were as those of one for whom the sweets of existence had turned to wormwood and vinegar. Mr. Gibney confided to McGuffey that it was a toss-up whether the old man was meditating murder or suicide. In fact, so depressed was Captain Scraggs that he lacked absolutely the ambition to rag his associates; observing which Mr. McGuffey vouchsafed the opinion that Scragg's was "tetched a mite in his headblock."

"Don't you think it," Mr. Gibney warned. "If old Scragg's crazy he's crazy like a fox. What's rillin' him is the knowledge that he's stung to the heart an' can't admit it without at the same time admittin' he'd cooked up a deal to double-cross us. He's just a-bustin' with the thoughts that's accumulatin' inside him. Right now he'd drown his sorrers in red liquor if he could afford it."

"He's troubled financially, Gib."

"Well, you know who troubled him, don't you, Bart?"

"I mean about the cost o' them repairs in the engine room. Unless he can come through in thirty days with the balance he owes, the boiler people are goin' to libel the Maggie to protect their claim."

Mr. Gibney arched his bushy eyebrows.

"How do you know?" he demanded.

"He was a-tellin' me," Mr. McGuffey admitted weakly.

"Well, he wasn't a-tellin' me." Mr. Gibney's tones were ominous; he glared at his friend suspiciously as from the Maggie's cabin issued forth Scragg's voice raised in song.

"Hello! The old boy's thermometer's gone up, Bart. Listen at him. 'Ever o' thee he's fondly dreamin'.' Somethin's busted the spell an' I'll bet a cooky it was ready cash." He menaced Mr. McGuffey with a rigid index finger. "Bart," he demanded, "did you loan Scraggys some money?"


"What d'ye call a little bit?"

"Three hundred dollars, Gib."

"Secured?"

"He gimme his note at eight per cent. The savin's bank only pays four."

"Is the note secured by endorsement or collateral?"

"No."

"Hum-m-m! Strange you didn't say nothin' to me about this till I had to pry it out o' you, Bart. How about you?"

"Well, Scraggys was feelin' so dog-goned blue—"

"The truth," Mr. Gibney insisted firmly, "the truth, Bart."

"Well, Scraggys asked me not to say anythin' to you about it."

"Sure. He knew I'd kill the deal. He knew better'n to try to nick me for three hundred bucks on his dangd, worthless note. Bart, why'd you do it?"

"Oh, hell, Gib, be a good fellar." poor McGuffey pleaded. "Don't be too hard on ol' Scraggys."

"We're discussin' you, Bart. 'Pears to me you've sort o' lost confidence in your old shipmate, ain't you? 'Pears that way to me when you act sneaky like."

McGuffey bridled. "I ain't a sneak."

"A rose by any other name'd be just as sweet," Mr. Gibney quoted. "You poor misguided simp. If you ever see that three hundred dollars again you'll be a lot older'n you are now. However, that ain't none o' my business. The fact remains, Bart, that you conspired with Scraggys to keep things away from me, which shows you ain't the man I thought you were, so from now on you go your way an' I'll go mine."

"I got a right to do as I blasted please with my own money," McGuffey defended hotly. "I ain't no child to be lectured to."

"Considerin' the fact that you wouldn't have had the money to lend if it hadn't been for me, I allow I'm insulted when you use the said money to give aid an' comfort to my enemy. I'm through."
McGUFFEY, smothered in guilt, felt nevertheless that he had to stand by his guns, so to speak. "Stay through, if you feel like it," he retorted. "Where d'ye get that chatter? Ain't I free, white, an' twenty-one year old?"

Mr. Gibney was really hurt. "You poor boob," he murmured. "It's the old game o' settin' a beggar on horseback an' seein' him ride to the devil, or slippin' a gold ring in a pig's nose. An' I figured you was my friend!"

"Well, ain't I?"

"Fooy! Fooy! Don't talk to me. You'd sell out your own mother."

"Them's fightin' words, Gib."

"Shut up."

"Gib, you tryin' to pick a fight with me?"

"No, but I would if I thought I wouldn't git a footrace instead," Gibney rejoined scathingly. "Cripes, what a double-crossin' I been handed! Honest, Bart, when it come to that sort o' work Scraggs is in his infancy. You sure take the cake."

"I ain't got the heart to clout you an' make you eat them words," Mr. McGuffey declared sorrowfully.

"You mean you ain't got the guts," Mr. Gibney corrected him. "Bart, I got your number. Good-bye."

Mr. McGuffey had a wild impulse to cast himself upon the Gibney neck and weep, but his honor forbade any such weakness. So he invited Mr. Gibney to betake himself to a region several degrees hotter than the Maggie's engine room; then, because he feared to linger and develop a sentimental weakness, he turned his back abruptly and descended to the said engine room.

On his part, Adelbert P. Gibney entered the cabin and glared long and menacingly at Captain Scraggs. "I'll have my time," he growled presently. "Give it to me an' give it quick."

The very intonation of his voice warned Scraggs that the present was not a time for argument or trifling. Silently he paid Mr. Gibney the money due him; in equal silence the navigating officer went to the pilot house, unscrewed his framed certificate from the wall, packed it with his few belongings, and departed for Scab Johnny's boarding house.

"Hello," Scab Johnny saluted him at his entrance. "Quit the Maggie?"

Mr. Gibney nodded.

"Want a trip to the dark blue?"

"Lead me to it," mumbled Mr. Gibney.

"It'll cost you twenty dollars, Gib. Chief mate on the Rose of Sharon, bound for the Galapagos Islands sealing."

"I'll take it, Johnny," Mr. Gibney threw over a twenty-dollar bill, went to his room, packed all of his belongings, paid his bill to Scab Johnny, and within the hour was aboard the schooner Rose of Sharon. Two hours later they towed out with the tide.

Poor McGuffey was stunned when he heard the news that night from Scab Johnny. When he retailed the information to Scraggs next morning, Scraggs was equally perturbed. He guessed that McGuffey and Gibney had quarreled and he had the poor judgment to ask McGuffey the cause of the row. Instantly, McGuffey informed him that that was none of his dad-fetched business—and the incident was closed.

The three months that followed were the most harrowing of McGuffey's life. Captain Scraggs knew his engineer would not resign while he, Scraggs, owed him three hundred dollars; wherefore he was not too particular to put a bridle on his tongue when things appeared to go wrong. McGuffey longed to kill him, but dared not. When, eventually, the railroad had been extended sufficiently far down the coast to enable the farmers to haul their goods to the railroad in trucks, the Maggie automatically went out of the green-pea trade; simultaneously, Captain Scraggs' note to McGuffey fell due and the engineer demanded payment. Scraggs demurred, pleading poverty, but Mr. McGuffey assumed such a threatening attitude that reluctantly Scraggs paid him a hundred and fifty dollars on account, and McGuffey extended the balance one year—and quit.

"See that you got that hundred and fifty an' the interest in your jeans the next time we meet," he warned Scraggs as he went overside.

Time passed. For a month the Maggie plied regularly between Bodega Bay and San Francisco in an endeavor to work up some business in farm and dairy produce, but a gasoline schooner cut in on the run and declared a rate war, whereupon the Maggie turned her blunt nose riverward
and for a brief period essayed some towing and general freighting on the Sacramento and San Joaquin. It was unprofitable, however, and at last Captain Scraggs was forced to lay his darling little Maggie up and take a job as chief officer of the ferry steamer Encinal, plying between San Francisco and Oakland. In the meantime, Mr. McGuffey, after two barren months "on the beach," landed a job as second assistant on a Standard Oil tanker running to the West Coast, while thrifty Neils Halvorsen invested the savings of ten years in a bay scow known as the Willie and Annie, arrogated to himself the title of captain, and proceeded to freight hay, grain, and paving stones from Petaluma.

The old joyous days of the green-pea trade were gone forever, and many a night, as Captain Scraggs paced the deck of the ferryboat, watching the ferry tower loom into view, or the scattered lights along the Alameda shore, he thought longingly of the old Maggie, laid away, perhaps forever, and slowly rotting in the muddy waters of the Sacramento. And he thought of Mr. Gibney, too, away off under the tropic stars, leading the care-free life of a real sailor at last, and of Bartholomew McGuffey, imbibing "pulque" in the "cantina" of some disreputable café. Captain Scraggs never knew how badly he was going to miss them both until they were gone, and he had nobody to fight with except Mrs. Scraggs; and when Mrs. Scraggs (to quote Captain Scraggs) "slipped her cable" in her forty-third year, Captain Scraggs felt singularly lonesome and in a mood to accept eagerly any deviltry that might offer.

Upon a night, which happened to be Scraggs's night off, and when he was particularly lonely and inclined to drown his sorrows in the Bowhead saloon, he was approached by Scab Johnny, and invited to repair to the latter's dingy office for the purpose of discussing what Scab Johnny guardedly referred to as a "proposition."

Upon arrival at the office, Captain Scraggs was introduced to a small, fierce-looking gentleman of tropical appearance, who owned to the name of Don Manuel Garcia Lopez. Scab Johnny first pledged Captain Scraggs to absolute secrecy, and made him swear by the honor of his mother and the bones of his father not to divulge a word of what he was about to tell him.

Scab Johnny was short and to the point. He stated that as Captain Scraggs was doubtless aware, if he perused the daily papers at all, there was a revolution raging in Mexico. His friend, Señor Lopez, represented the under-dogs in the disturbance, and was anxious to secure a ship and a nervy sea captain to land a shipment of arms in Lower California. It appeared that at a sale of condemned army goods held at the arsenal at Benicia, Señor Lopez had, through Scab Johnny, purchased two thousand single-shot Springfield rifles that had been retired when the militia regiments took up the Krag. The Krag in turn having been replaced by the modern magazine Springfield, the old single-shot Springfields, with one hundred thousand rounds of 45-70 ball cartridges, had been sold to the highest bidder. In addition to the small arms, Lopez had at present in a warehouse three machine guns and four 3-inch breech-loading pieces of field artillery (the kind of guns generally designated as a "jackass battery," for the reason that they can be taken down and transported over rough country on mules) —together with a supply of ammunition for same.

"Now, then," Scab Johnny continued, "the job that confronts us is to get these munitions down to our friends in Mexico. You know, as well as anybody, Scraggs, that while our government makes no bones of selling a lot o' retired rifles an' ammunition, nevertheless it's goin' to develop a heap o' curiosity regardin' what we do with 'em. If we're caught sneakin' 'em into Mexico we'll spend the rest of our lives in a Federal penitentiary for bustin' the neutrality laws. All them rifles an' the ammunition is cased an' in my basement at the present moment—and the government agents knows they're there. But that ain't troubling me. I rent the saloon next door an' I'll cut a hole through the wall from my cellar into the saloon cellar, carry 'em through the saloon into the back yard, an' out into the alley half a block away. I'm watched, but I got the watcher spotted—only he don't know it. Our only trouble is a ship. How about the Maggie?"

"I'd have to spend about two thousand
dollars on her to put her in condition for the voyage," Scraggs replied.

"Can do," Scab Johnny answered him briefly, and Señor Lopez nodded acquiescence. "You discharge on a lighter at Descanso Bay about twenty miles below Ensenada. What'll it cost us?"

"Ten thousand dollars, in addition to fixin' up the Maggie. Half down and half on delivery. I'm riskin' my hide an' my ticket an' I got to be well paid for it."

Again Señor Lopez nodded. What did he care? It wasn't his money.

"I'll furnish you with our own crew just before you sail," Scab Johnny continued. "Get busy."

"Gimme a thousand for preliminary expenses," Scraggs demanded. "After that speed is my middle name."

The charming Señor Lopez produced the money in crisp new bills and, perfect gentleman that he was, demanded no receipt. As a matter of fact, Scraggs would not have given him one.

The two weeks that followed were busy ones for Captain Scraggs. The day after his interview with Scab Johnny and Don Manuel he engaged an engineer and a deck hand and went up the Sacramento to bring the Maggie down to San Francisco. Upon her arrival she was hauled out on the marine ways at Oakland creek, cleaned, caulked, and some new copper sheathing put on her bottom. She was also given a dash of black paint, her engines and boilers thoroughly overhauled and repaired, and shipped a new propeller that would add at least a knot to her speed. Also, she had her stern rebuilt. And when everything was ready, she slipped down to the Black Diamond coal bunkers and took on enough fuel to carry her to San Pedro; after which she steamed across the bay to San Francisco and tied up at Fremont Street wharf.

The cargo came down in boxes, variously labelled. There were "agricultural implements," a "cream separator," a "windmill," and half a dozen "sewing machines," in addition to a considerable number of kegs alleged to contain nails. Most of it came down after five o'clock in the afternoon after the wharfinger had left the dock, and as nothing but a disordered brain would have suspected the steamer Maggie of an attempt to break the neutrality laws, the entire cargo was gotten aboard safely and without a jot of suspicion attaching to the vessel.

When all was in readiness, Captain Scraggs incontinently "fired" his deckhand and engineer and inducted aboard a new crew, carefully selected for their filibuster virtues by Scab Johnny himself. Then while the new engineer got up steam, Captain Scraggs went up to Scab Johnny's office for his final instructions and the balance of the first installment due him.

Briefly, his instructions were as follows: Upon arrival off Point Dume on the southern California coast, he was to stand in close to Dume Cove under cover of darkness and show two green lights on the masthead. A man would come alongside presently in a small boat, and climb aboard. This man would be the supercargo and the confidential envoy of the insurrecto junta in Los Angeles. Captain Scraggs was to look to this man for orders and to obey him implicitly, as upon this depended the success of the expedition. This agent of the insurrecto forces would pay him the balance of five thousand dollars due him immediately upon discharge of the cargo at Descanso Bay. There was a body of insurrecto troops encamped at Megano ranch, a mile from the beach, and they would have a barge and small boats in readiness to lighter the cargo. Scab Johnny explained that he had promised the crew double wages and a bonus of a hundred dollars each for the trip. Don Manuel Garcia Lopez paid over the requisite amount of cash, and half an hour later the Maggie was steaming down the bay on her perilous mission.

The sun was setting as they passed out the Golden Gate and swung down the south channel, and with the wind on her beam, the aged Maggie did nine knots. Late in the afternoon of the following day she was off the Santa Barbara channel, and about midnight she ran in under the lee of Point Dume and lay to. The mate hung out the green signal lights, and in about an hour Captain Scraggs heard the sound of oars grating in rowlocks. A few minutes later a stentorian voice hailed them out of the darkness. Captain Scraggs had a Jacob's ladder slung over the side and the mate and two deckhands hung over the rail
with lanterns, lighting up the surrounding sea feebly for the benefit of the lone adventurer who sat muffled in a great coat in the stern of a small boat rowed by two men. There was a very slight sea running, and presently the men in the small boat, watching their opportunity by the ghostly light of the lanterns, ran their frail craft in under the lee of the Maggie. The figure in the stern sheets leaped on the instant, caught the Jacob's ladder, climbed nimbly over the side, and swore heartily in very good English as his feet struck the deck.

"What's the name of this floating coffin?" he demanded in a chain-locker voice. It was quite evident that even in the darkness, where her many defects were mercifully hidden, the Maggie did not suit the special envoy of the Mexican insurgents.

"American steamer Maggie," said the skipper frigidly. "Scraggs is my name, sir. And if you don't like my vessel—"

"Scraggsy!" roared the special envoy. "Scraggsy, for a thousand! And the old Maggie of all boats! Scraggsy, old tar-pot, your fin! Duke me, you dog-goned old salamander!"

"Gib, my dear boy!" shrieked Captain Scraggs and cast himself into Mr. Gibney's arms in a transport of joy. Mr. Gibney, for it was indeed he, pounded Captain Scraggs on the back with one great hand while with the other he crushed the skipper's fingers to a pulp, the while he called on all the powers of darkness to witness that never in all his life had he received such a pleasant surprise.

It was indeed a happy moment. All the old animosities and differences were swallowed up in the glad hand-clasp with which Mr. Gibney greeted his old shipmate of the green-pea trade. Scraggs took him below at once and they pledged each other's health in a steaming kettle of grog, while the Maggie, once more on her course, rolled south toward Descanso Bay.

"Well, I'll be keel-hauled and skull-dragged!" said Captain Scraggs, producing a box of two-for-a-quarter cigars and handing it to Mr. Gibney. "Gib, my dear boy, wherever have you been these last three years?"

"Everywhere," replied Mr. Gibney. "I have been all over, mostly in Panama and the Gold Coast. For two years I've been navigatin' officer on the Colombian gun-boat Bogota. When I was a young feller I did a hitch in the navy and become a first-class gunner, and then I went to sea in the merchant marine, and got my mate's license, and when I flashed my credentials on the president of the United States of Colombia he give me a job at "dos ciento pesos oro" per. That's Spanish for two hundred bucks gold a month. I've been through two wars and I got a medal for sinkin' a fishin' smack. I talk Spanish just like a native, I don't drink no more to speak of, and I've been savin' my money. Some day when I get the price together I'm goin' back to San Francisco, buy me a nice little schooner, and go tradin' in the South Seas. How they been comin' with you, Scraggsy, old kiddo?"

"Lovely," replied Scraggs. "Just simply grand. I'll pull ten thousand out of this job."

MR. GIBNEY whistled shrilly through his teeth.

"That's the ticket for soup," he said admiringly. "Tell you, Scraggsy, this soldier of fortune business may be all right, but it don't amount to much compared to being a sailor of fortune, eh, Scraggsy? Just as soon as I heard there was a revolution in Mexico I quit my job in the Colombian navy and come north for the pickin's. . . . No, I ain't been in their rotten little army. . . . D'ye think I want to go around killin' people? . . . There ain't no pleasure gettin' killed in the mere shank of a bright and prosperous life. . . . a dead hero don't gather no moss, Scraggsy. Reads all right in books, but it don't appeal none to me. I'm for peace every time, so right away as soon as I heard of the trouble, says I to myself: 'Things has been pretty quiet in Mexico for twenty years, and they're due to shift things around pretty much. What them peons need is a man with an imagination to help 'em out, and if they've got the money, Adelbert P. Gibney can supply the brains.' So I comes north to Los Angeles, shows the insurrecto junta my medal and my honourable discharges from every ship I'd ever been in, includin' the gunboat Bogota, and I talked big and swelled around and told 'em to run in some arms and get busy. I framed it all up for this filibuster trip you're on, Scraggsy, only I never did hear
that they'd picked on you. I told that coffee-colored rat of a Lopez man to hunt up Scab Johnny and he'd set him right, but if anybody had told me you had the nerve to run the Maggie in on this deal, Scraggsy, I'd a-called him a liar. Scraggsy, you're mucho-bueno—that is, you're all right. I'm so used to talkin' Spanish that I forget myself. Still, there's one end of this little deal that I ain't exactly explained to all hands. If I'd a'known they was charterin' the Maggie, I'd have blocked the game."

"Why?" demanded Captain Scraggs, instantly on the defensive.

"Not that I'm holdin' any grudge agin you, Scraggsy," said Mr. Gibney affably, "but I wouldn't a-had you no more now than I would when we was runnin' in the green-pea trade. It's because you ain't got no imagination, and the Maggie ain't big enough for my purpose. Havin' the Maggie sort of puts a crimp in my plans."

"Rot," snapped Scraggsy. "I've had the Maggie overhauled and shipped a new wheel, and she's a mighty smart little boat, I'll tell you. I'll land them arms in Descanso Bay, all right."

"I know you will," said Mr. Gibney sadly. "That's just what hurts. You see, Scraggsy, I never intended 'em for Descanso Bay in the first place. There's a nice healthy little revolution fomentin' down in the United States of Colombia, with Adelbert P. Gibney playin' both ends to the middle. And there's a dog-hole down on the Gold Coast where I intended to land this cargo, but now that Scab Johnny's gone to work and sent me a bay scow instead of a sea-goin' steamer, I'm in the nine-hole instead o' dog-hole. I can never get as far as the Gold Coast with the Maggie. She can't carry coal enough to last her."

"But I thought these guns and things was for the Mexicans," quavered Captain Scraggsy. "Scab Johnny and Lopez told me they was."

Mr. Gibney groaned and hid his face in his hands. "Scraggsy," he said sadly, "it's a cinch you ain't used the past four years to stimulate that imagination of yours. Of course they was purchased for the Mexicans, but what was to prevent me from lettin' the Mexicans pay for them, help out on the charter of the boat, and then have me divert the cargo to the United States of Colombia, where I can sell 'em at a clear profit, the cost bein' nothing to speak of? Now you got to come buttin' in with the Maggie, and what happens? Why, I got to be honest, of course. I got to make good on my bluff, and what's in it for me? Nothin' but glory. Can you hock a chunk of glory for ham and eggs, Phineas Scraggs? Not on your life. If it hadn't been for you buttin' in with your blasted, rotten hulk of a fresh-water skiff, I'd—"

MR. GIBNEY paused ominously and savagely bit the end of his cigar. As for Captain Scraggsy, every drop of blood in his body was boiling in defense of the ship he loved.

"You're a pirate," he shrilled.

"And you're just as big a hornet as you ever was," replied Mr. Gibney. "Always buzzin' around where you ain't wanted. But still, what's the use of bawlin' over spilt milk? We'll drop into San Diego for a couple of hours and take on coal, and about sunset we'll pull out and make the run down to Descanso Bay in the dark. We might as well forget the past and put this thing through as per program. Only I saw visions of a schooner all my own, Scraggsy, and—well, what's the use? What's the use? Scraggsy, you're a natural-born mar-plot. Always buttin' in, buttin' in, buttin' in, fit for nothin' but the green-pea trade. However, I guess I can turn into my old berth and get some sleep. Put the old girl under a slow bell and save your coal. We'll have to fool away four or five hours in San Diego anyhow and there ain't no sense in crowdin' the old hulk."

"Gib," said Captain Scraggsy, "was that really your lay—to steal the cargo, double-cross the insurrecto junta and sell out to furrin' country?"

"Of course it was," said Mr. Gibney pettishly. "They all do such things in the banana republics. Why should I be an exception? There's half a dozen different gangs fightin' each other and the government in Mexico, and if I don't deliver these arms, just see all the lives I'll be savin'. And after I got the cargo into Colombia and sold it, I could have peach on the rebels there, and got a reward for it, and saved a lot more lives, and come away rich and respected."
“By the Lord Harry,” said Captain Scraggs, “but you’ve got an imagination, Gib. I’ll swear to that. Gib, I take off my hat to you. You’re all tight and shipshape and no loose ends bobbin’ around you. Don’t tell me th’ scheme’s got t’ fall through, Gib. Great snakes, don’t tell me that. Ain’t there some way o’ gettin’ around it? There must be. Why, Gib, my dear boy, I never heard of such a grand lay in my life. It’s a absolute winner. Don’t give up, Gib. Oil up your imagination and find a way out. Let’s get together, Gib, and make a little money. Dang it all, Gib, I been lonesome ever since I seen you last.”

“Well,” replied Mr. Gibney, “I’ll turn in and try to scheme a way out, but I don’t hold out no hope. Not a ray of it. I’m afraid, Scraggsy, we’ve got to be honest.”

Saying which, Mr. Gibney hopped up into his berth, stretched his huge legs, and fell asleep with his clothes on. Captain Scraggs looked him over with the closest approach to affection that had ever lightened his cold gray eye, and sighing heavily, presently went on deck. As he passed up the companion-way, the first mate heard him murmur:

“Gib’s a fine lad. I’ll be dad burned if he ain’t.”

At SIX o’clock next morning the Maggie was rounding Point Loma, heading in for San Diego Bay, and Captain Scraggs went below and awakened Mr. Gibney.

“What’s for breakfast, Scraggsy, old kid?” asked Mr. Gibney.

“Fried eggs,” said Captain Scraggs, remembering Mr. Gibney’s partiality for that form of nutriment in the vanished days of the green-pea trade. “Ham an’ fried eggs an’ a sizzlin’ pot o’ coffee. Thought a way out o’ our mess, Gib?”

“Not yet,” replied Mr. Gibney as he rolled out of bed, “but eggs is always stimulatin’, and I don’t give up hope on a full stomach.”

An hour later they were tied up under the coal bunkers, and at Mr. Gibney’s suggestion some twenty tons of sacked coal were piled on top of the fo’castle head and on the main deck for’d, in case of emergency. They lay in the harbor all day until about four o’clock, when Mr. Gibney, by virtue of his authority as supercargo, ordered the lines cast off and the Maggie steamed out of the harbor. Off Point Loma they veered to the south, leaving the Coronado Islands on the starboard quarter, ten miles to the west. Mr. Gibney was below with Captain Scraggs, battling with the problem that confronted them, when the mate stuck his head down the companion-way to report a large power schooner coming out from the lee of the Coronados and standing off on a course calculated to intercept the Maggie in an hour or two.

Captain Scraggs and Mr. Gibney sprang up on the bridge at once, the latter with Scraggs’s long glass up to his eye.

“She was hove to under the lee of the island, and the minute we came out of the harbor and turned south she come nosin’ after us,” said the mate.

“Hum!” muttered Mr. Gibney. “Gasoline schooner. Two masts and baldheaded. About a hundred and twenty ton, I should say, and showin’ a pretty pair of heels. There’s somethin’ up for’d—yes—let me see—ye-e-es, there’s two more—holy sailor! it’s a gunboat! One of those doggoned gasoline coast patrol boats, and there’s the Federal flag flying at the fore.”

“Let’s put back to San Diego Bay,” quavered Captain Scraggs. “I’ll be burned if I relish the idee’ o’ losin’ the Maggie.”

“Too late,” said the philosophical Gibney. “We’re in Mexican waters now, and she can cut us off from the bay. The only thing we can do is to run for it and try to lose her after dark. Tell the engineer to crowd her to the limit. There ain’t much wind to speak of, so I guess we can manage to hold our own for a while. Nevertheless, I’ve got a hunch that we’ll be overhauled. Of course, you ain’t got no papers to show, Scraggs, and they’ll search the cargo, and confiscate us, and shoot the whole bloomin’ crowd of us. I bet a dollar to a doughnut that fellow Lopez sold us out, after the fashion of the country. I can’t help thinkin’ that that gunboat was there just a-waitin’ for us to show up.”

For several minutes Mr. Gibney continued to study the gunboat until there could no longer be any doubt that she intended to overhaul them. He made out that she had a long gun for’d, with a battery of two one-pounders on top of her house and something on her port quarter that looked like a Maxim rapid-fire gun.
About twenty men, dressed in white cloth, could be seen on her decks.

PRESENTLY Mr. Gibney was interrupted by Captain Scraggs pulling at his sleeve.

"You was a gunner once, wasn't you, Gib?" said Captain Scraggs in a trembling voice.

"You bet I was," replied Mr. Gibney. "My shootin' won the trophy three times in succession when I was on the old Kearsarge. If I had one good gun and a half-decent crew, I'd knock that gunboat silly before she knew what had hit her."

"Gib, I've got an idea," said Captain Scraggs. "Out with it," said Mr. Gibney cheerfully.

"There was four little cannon lowered into the hold the last thing before we put on the main hatch, and the ammunition to load 'em with is stowed in the after hold and very easy to get at."

Mr. Gibney turned a beaming face to the skipper, reached out his arms, and folded Captain Scraggs in an embrace that would have done credit to a grizzly bear. There were genuine tears of admiration in his eyes and in his voice when he could master his emotions sufficiently to speak.

"Scraggsy, old tarpot, you've been a long time comin' through on the imagination, but you've sure arrived with all sail set. I always thought you had about as much nerve as an oyster, but I take it all back. We'll get out them two little jackass guns and fight a naval battle, and if I don't sink that Mexican gunboat, and save the Maggie, feed me to the sharks, for I won't be worthy of the blood that's in me. Pipe all hands and lift off that main hatch. Reeve a block and tackle through that cargo gaff and stand by to heave out the guns."

But Captain Scraggs had repented of his rash suggestion almost the moment he made it. Only the dire necessity of desperate measures to save the Maggie had prompted him to put the idea into Mr. Gibney's head, and when he saw the avidity with which the latter set to work clearing for action, his terror knew no bounds.

"Oh, Gib," he wailed, "I'm afraid we better not try to lick that gunboat after all. They might sink us with all hands."

"Rats!" said Mr. Gibney, as he leaped into the hold. "Bear a light here until I can root out the wheels of these guns. Here they are, labelled 'cream separator.' Stand by with that sling to—"

"But, Gib, my dear boy," protested Captain Scraggs, "this is insanity!"

"I know it," said Mr. Gibney calmly. "Scraggsy, you're perfectly right. But I'd sooner die fightin' than let them stand me up agin a wall in Ensenada. We're filibusters, Scraggsy, and we're caught with the goods. I, for one, am going down with the steamer Maggie, but I'm going down fightin' like a bear."

"Maybe—maybe we can outrun her, Gib," half sobbed Captain Scraggs.

"No hope," replied Mr. Gibney. "Fight and die is the last resort. She's eight miles astern and gainin' every minute, and when she's within two miles she'll open fire. Of course we won't be hit unless they've got a Yankee gunner aboard."

"Let's run up the Stars and Stripes and dare 'em to fire on us," said Captain Scraggs.

"No," said Mr. Gibney firmly, "my old man died for the flag an' I've sailed under it too long to hide behind it when I'm in Dutch. We'll fight. If you was ever navigatin' officer on a Colombian gunboat, Scraggs, you'd realize what it means to run from a Mexican."

Captain Scraggs said nothing further. Perhaps he was a little ashamed of himself in the face of Mr. Gibney's simple faith in his own ability; perhaps in his veins, all unknown, there flowed a taint of the heroic blood of some forgotten seadog. Be that as it may, something did swell in his breast when Mr. Gibney spoke of the flag and his scornin' to hide behind it, and Scraggs's snaggle teeth came together with a snap.

"All right, Gib, my boy," he said solemnly, "I'm with you. Mrs. Scraggs has slipped her cable and there ain't nobody to mourn for me. But if we can't fight under the Stars and Stripes, by the tail of the Great Sacred Bull, we'll have a flag of our own," and leaving Mr. Gibney and the crew to get the guns on deck, Captain Scraggs ran below. He appeared on deck presently with a long blue burgee on which was emblazoned in white letters the single word Maggie. It was his own houseflag,
and with trembling hands he ran it to the fore and cast its wrinkled folds to the breeze of heaven.

“Good old dishcloth!” shrieked Mr. Gibney. “She never comes down.”

“Damned if she does,” said Captain Scraggs profanely.

While all this was going on a deckhand had reeved a block and tackle through the end of the cargo gaff and passed it to the winch. The two guns came out of the hold in jig time, and while Scraggs and one deckhand opened the after hold and got out ammunition for the guns, Mr. Gibney, assisted by the other deckhand, proceeded to put one of the guns together. He was shrewd enough to realize that he would have to do practically all of the work of serving the gun himself, in view of which condition one gun would have to defend the Maggie. He had never seen a mountain gun before, but he did not find it difficult to put the simple mechanism together.

“Now, then, Scraggssy,” he announced cheerfully when the gun was finally assembled on the carriage, “get a sizeable timber an’ spike it to the centre o’ the deck. I’ll run the trail spade up against that cleat an’ that’ll keep the recoil from lettin’ the gun go backward, clean through the opposite rail and overboard. Gimme a coupler gallons o’ distillate an’ some waste, somebody. This cosmoline’s got to come out o’ the tube an’ out o’ the breech mechanism before we commence shootin’.”

The enemy had approached within three miles by the time the piece was ready for action. Under Mr. Gibney’s instructions Captain Scraggs held the fuse setter in case it should be necessary to adjust with shrapnel. Mr. Gibney inserted his sights and took a preliminary squint. “A little different from gun-pointin’ in the navy, but about the same principle,” he declared. “In the army I believe they call this kind o’ shootin’ direct fire, because you sight direct on the target.” He scratched his ingenious head and examined the ammunition. “Not a high explosive shell in the lot,” he mourned. “I’ll have to use percussion fire to get the range; then I’ll drop back a little an’ spray her with shrapnel. Seems a pity to smash up a fine schooner like that one with percussion fire. I’d rather tickle ‘em up a bit with shrapnel an’ scare ‘em into runnin’ away.”

He got out the lanyard, slipped a cartridge in the breech, paused, and scratched his head again. His calm deliberation was driving Scraggs crazy. He reminded Mr. Gibney with some asperity that they were not attending a strawberry festival and for the love of heaven to get busy.

“I’m estimatin’ the range, you snipe,” Gibney retorted. “Looks to be about three miles to me. A little long, mebbe, for this gun, but—there’s nothin’ like tryin’,” and he sighted carefully. “Fire,” he bawled as the Maggie rested an instant in the trough of the sea—and a deckhand jerked the lanyard. Instantly Mr. Gibney clapped the long glass to his eye.

“Good direction—over,” he murmured. “I’ll lay on her waterline next time.” He jerked open the breech, ejected the cartridge case, and rammed another cartridge home. This shot struck the water directly under the schooner’s bow and threw water over her forecastle head. Mr. Gibney smiled, spat overboard, and winked confidently at Captain Scraggs. “Like spearin’ fish in a bath tub,” he declared. He bent over the fuse setter. “Corrector three zero,” he intoned, “four eight hundred.” He thrust a cartridge in the fuse setter, twisted it, slammed it in the gun, and fired again. The water broke into tiny waterspouts over a considerable area some two hundred yards short of the schooner, so Mr. Gibney raised his range to five thousand and tried again. “Over,” he growled.

Something whined over the Maggie and threw up a waterspout half a mile beyond her.

“Dubs,” jeered Mr. Gibney, and sighted again. This time his shrapnel burst neatly on the schooner. Almost simultaneously a shell from the schooner dropped into the sacked coal on the forecastle head of the Maggie and enveloped her in a black pall of smoke and coal dust. Captain Scraggs screamed.

“Tit for tat,” the philosophical Gibney reminded him. “We can’t expect to get away with everything, Scraggssy, old kid-do.” The words were scarcely out of his mouth before the Maggie’s mainmast and about ten feet of her ancient railing were trailing alongside. Mr. Gibney whistled.
softly through his teeth and successfully sprayed the Mexican again. "It breaks my heart to ruin that craft's canvas," he declared, and let her have it once more.

"My Maggie's tail is shot away," Captain Scraggs wailed, "an' I only rebuilt it a week ago." Three more shots from the long gun missed them, but the fourth carried away the cabin, leaving the wreck of the pilot house, with the helmsman unseathed, sticking up like a sore thumb.

"Turn her around and head straight for them," the gallant Gibney roared. "She's a smaller target comin' bows on. We're broadside to her now."

"Gib, will you ever sink that Greaser?" Captain Scraggs sobbed hysterically.

"Don't want to sink her," the supercargo retorted. "She's a nice little schooner. I'd rather capture her. Maybe we can use her in our business, Scraggsy," and he continued to shower the enemy with high bursting shrapnel. When the two vessels were less than two miles apart the one-pounders came into action. It was pretty shooting and the wicked little shells ripped through old Maggie like buckshot through a roll of butter. Mr. Gibney slid flat on the deck beside his gun and Captain Scraggs sprawled beside him.

"A feller," Mr. Gibney announced, "has got to take a beatin' while lookin' for an openin' to put over the knockout blow. If the old Maggie holds together till we're within a cable's length o' that schooner an' we ain't all killed by that time, I bet I'll make them skunks sing soft an' low."

"How?" Captain Scraggs chattered.

"With muzzle bursts," Mr. Gibney replied. "I'll set my fuse at zero an' at point-blank range I'll just rake everything off that schooner's decks. Guess I'll get half a dozen cartridges set an' ready for the big scene. Up with you, Admiral Scraggs, an' hold the fuse setter steady."

"I'm agin war," Scraggs quavered. "Gib, it's sure hell."

"Rats! It's invigoratin', Scraggsy. There ain't nothin' wrong with war, Scraggsy, unless you happen to get killed. Then it's like cholera. You can cure every case except the first one."

They had come inside the minimum range of the Mexican's long gun now, so that only the one-pounders continued to peck at the Maggie. Evidently the Mexican was as eager to get to close quarters as Mr. Gibney, for he held steadily on his course.

"Well, it's time to put over the big stuff," Mr. Gibney remarked presently. "Here's hopin' they don't pot me with rifle fire while I'm extendin' my compliments."

As the first muzzle burst raked the Mexican Captain Scraggs saw that most of the terrible blast of lead had gone too high. Nevertheless, it was effective, for to a man the crews of the one-pounders deserted their posts and tumbled below; seeing which the individual in command lost his nerve. He was satisfied now that the infernal Maggie purposed ramming him; he had marvelled that the filibuster should use shrapnel, after she had ranged with shell (he did not know it was percussion shrapnel) and in sudden panic he decided that the Maggie, mortally wounded, purposed getting close enough to sink him with shell-fire if she failed to ram him; whereupon the yellow streak came through and he waved his arms frantically above his head in token of surrender.

"She's hauled down her rag," shrieked Scraggs. "Be merciful, Gib. There's men dyin' on that boat."

"Lay alongside that craft," Mr. Gibney shouted to the helmsman. The schooner had hove to and when the Maggie also hove to some thirty yards to windward of her Mr. Gibney informed the Mexican, in atrocious Spanish well mixed with English, that if the latter so much as lifted his little finger he might expect to be sunk like a dog. "Down below, everybody but the helmsman, or I'll sweep your decks with another muzzle burst," he thundered.

The Mexican obeyed and Captain Scraggs went up in the pilot house and laid the terribly battered Maggie alongside the schooner. The instant she touched, Mr. Gibney sprang aboard, quickly followed by Captain Scraggs, who had relinquished the helm to his first mate.

Suddenly Captain Scraggs shouted, "Look, Gib, for the love of the Lord look!" and pointed with his finger. At the head of the little iron-rail companion way leading down into the engine room a man was standing. He had a monkey wrench in one hand and a greasy rag in the other.
MR. GIBNEY turned and looked at the man.

"McGuffey, for a thousand," he bellowed, and ran forward with outstretched hand. Captain Scrags was at Gibney's heels, and between them they came very nearly dislocating Bartholomew McGuffey's arm.

"McGuffey, my dear boy," said Captain Scrags. "Whatever are you a'doin' on this heathen warship?"

"Me?" ejaculated Mr. McGuffey, with his old-time deliberation. "Why, I'm the chief engineer of this craft. I had a good job, too, but I guess it's all off now, and the Mexican Government'll fire me. Say, who chicked that buckshot down into my engine room?"

"Admiral Gibney did it," said Scrags. "The old Maggie's alongside me and me and Gib's filibusters. Bear a hand, Mac, and help us clap the hatches on our prisoners."

"Thank God," said Mr. Gibney piously, "I didn't kill you. Come to look into the matter. I didn't kill anybody, though I see half a dozen Mexicans around decks more or less cut up. Where have you been all these years Mac?"

"I been chief engineer in the Mexican navy," replied McGuffey. "Have you captured us in the name of the United States or what?"

"We've captured you in the name of Adelbert P. Gibney," was the reply. "I been huntin' all my life for a ship of my own, and now I've got her. Lord, Mac, she's a beauty, ain't she? All hardwood finish, teak rail, well found, and just the ticket for the island trade. Well, well, well! I'm Captain Gibney at last."

"Where do I come in, Gib?" asked Captain Scrags modestly.

"Well, seein' as the Maggie has two holes through her hull below the waterline, and is generally nicked to pieces, you might quit askin' questions and get back aboard and put the pumps on her. You're lucky if she don't sink on you before we get to Descanso Bay. If she sinks, don't worry. I'll give you a job as my first mate. Mac, you're my engineer, but not at no fancy Mexican price. I'll pay you the union scale and not a blasted cent more or less. Is that fair?"

McGuffey said it was, and went below to tune up his engine. Mr. Gibney took the wheel of the gunboat, and sent Captain Scrags back aboard the Maggie and in a few minutes both vessels were bowling along toward Descanso Bay. They were off the bay at midnight, and while with Mr. Gibney in command of the federal gunboat Captain Scrags had nothing to fear, the rapid rise of water in the hold of the Maggie was sadly disconcerting. About daylight he made up his mind that she would sink within two hours, and without pausing to whine over his predicament, he promptly beached her. She drove far up the beach, with the slack water breaking around her scarred stern, and when the tide ebbed she lay high and dry. And the rebel soldiers came trooping down from the Megano rancho and falling upon her carcass like so many ants, quickly distributed her cargo amongst them, and disappeared.

Captain Scrags sent his crew out aboard the captured gunboat to assist Mr. Gibney in rowing his prisoners ashore and when finally he stood alone beside the wreck of the brave old Maggie, piled up at last in the port of missing ships, something snapped within his breast and the big tears rolled in quick succession down his sun-tanned cheeks. The old hulk looked peculiarly pathetic as she lay there, listed over on her beam ends.

She had served him well, but she had finished her last voyage, and with some vague idea of saving her old bones from vandal hands, Captain Scrags, sobbing audibly, scattered the contents of half a dozen cans of kerosene over her decks and in the cabin, lighted fires in three different sections of the wreck, and left her to the consuming flames. Half an hour later he stood on the battered decks of the gunboat besides Gibney and McGuffey and watched the dense clouds of smoke that heralded the passing of the Maggie.

"She was a good old hulk," said Mr. Gibney. "And now, as the special envoy of the Liberal Army of Mexico, here's a draft on Los Angeles for five thousand bucks, Scraggsy, which constitutes the balance due you on this here filibuster trip. Of course, I needn't remind' you, Scraggsy, that you'd never had earned this money if it hadn't been for Adelbert P. Gibney workin' his imagination overtime. I've made you a chunk of money, and while I
couldn’t save your ship, I did save your life. As a reward for all this, I don’t claim one cent of the money due you, as I could if I wanted to be rotten mean. I’m goin’ to keep this fine little power schooner for my share of the loot. She’s nicked up some, but that only bears evidence to what a bully good shot I am, and it won’t take much to fix her up all ship-shape again. Usin’ high bursts shrapnel ain’t very destructive. All them bumps an’ scratches can be planed down. But we’ll have to do some mendin’ on her canvas—I’ll tell the world. She’s called the Reina Maria, but I’m going to run her to Panama and change her name. She’ll be known as Maggie II, out of respect for the old girl that’s burnin’ up there on the beach.”

CAPTAIN SCRAGGS was so touched at this delicate little tribute that he turned away and burst into tears.

“Aw, shut up, Scraggsy, old hunks,” said McGuffey consolingly. “You ain’t got nothin’ to cry about. You’re a rich man. Look at me. I ain’t a-bawlin’, am I? And I don’t get so much as a bean out of this mix-up, all on account of me bein’ tied up with a lot of hounds that quits fightin’ before they’re half licked.”

“That’s so,” said Captain Scraggs, wiping his eyes with his grimy fists. “I declare you’re out in the cold, McGuffey, and it ain’t right. Gib, my boy, us three has had some stirrin’ times together and we’ve had our differences, but I ain’t a-goin’ to think of them past griefs. The sight o’ you, single-handed, meetin’ and annihilatin’ the pride of the Mexican navy, calm in th’ moment o’ despair, generous in victory and delicate as blazes to a fallen shipmate, goin’ to work an’ namin’ your vessel after him that way, is somethin’ that wipes away all sorror and welds a friendship that’s bound to endure till death us do part. If McGuffey’d been on our side, we know from past performances that he’d a fit like a tiger, wouldn’t you, Mac?” (Here Mr. McGuffey coughed slightly, as much as to say that he would have fought like ten tigers had he only been given the opportunity.)

Captain Scraggs continued: “I should say that a fair valuation of this schooner as she stands is ten thousand dollars. That belongs to Gib. Now I’m willin’ to chuck five thousand dollars into the deal, we’ll form a close corporation and as a compliment to McGuffey, elect him chief engineer in his own ship and give him say a quarter interest in our layout, as a little testimonial to an old friend, tried and true.”

“Scraggsy,” said Mr. Gibney, “your fin? We’ve fought, but we’ll let that go. We wipe the slate clean and start in all over again on the Maggie II, and I’m free to state, without fear of contradiction, that in the last embroglio you showed up like four aces and a king with the entire company standin’ pat. Scraggsy, you’re a hero, and what you propose proves that you’re considerable of a singed cat—better’n you look. We’ll go freebootin’ down on the Gold Coast. There’s war, red war, breakin’ loose down there, and we’ll sly in our horseshoe with the strongest side and pry loose a fortune somewhere. I’m for a life of wild adventure, and now that we’ve got the ship and the funds and the crew, let’s go to it. There’s a deal of fine liquor in the wardroom, and I suggest that we nominate Phineas Scraggs, late master of the battleship Maggie, now second in command of the Maggie II, to brew a kettle o’ hot grog to celebrate our victory. Mac—Scraggsy—your fins. I’m proud of you both. Shake.”

They shook, and as Captain Gibney’s eye wandered aloft, First Mate Scraggs and Chief Engineer McGuffey looked up also. From the main topmast of the Maggie II floated a long blue burgee, with white lettering on it, and as it whipped out into the breeze the old familiar name stood out against the noonday sun.

“Good old dishcloth!” murmured Mr. Gibney. “She never comes down.”

“The Maggie forever!” shrieked Scraggs.

“Hooray!” bellowed McGuffey. “An’ now, Scraggsy, if you’ve got all the enthusiasm out of your blood, kick in with a hundred an’ fifty dollars an’ interest to date. An’ don’t tell me that note’s outlawed, or I’ll feed you to the fishes.”

Captain Scraggs looked crestfallen, but produced the money.

“WELL, Scraggsy, old hunks, this is pleasant, ain’t it?” said Mr. Gibney, and spat on the deck of the Maggie II.

“Right-o,” replied Captain Scraggs
cheerily, “though when I was a young feller and first went to sea, it wasn’t considered no pleasantry to spit on a nice clean deck. You might cut that out, Gib. It’s vulgar.”

“Passin’ over the fact, Scraggs, that you ain’t got no call to jerk me up on sea etty-cat, more particular since I’m the master and managin’ owner of this here schooner, I’m free to confess, Scraggsy, that your observation does you credit. I just did that to see if you was goin’ to take as big an interest in the new Maggie as you did in the old Maggie, and the fact that you object to me expectoratin’ on the deck proves to me that you’re leavin’ behind you all them bay scow tendencies of the green-pea trade. It leads me to believe that you’ll rise to high rank and distinction in the Colombian navy. Your fin, Scraggsy. Expectoratin’ on the decks is barred, and the Maggie II goes under navy discipline from now on. Am I right?”

“Right as a right whale,” said Captain Scraggs. “And now that you’ve given that old mate of mine the course, and we’ve temporarily plugged up the holes in this here Mexican gunboat, and everything points to a safe and profitable voyage from now on, suppose you delegate me as a committee of one to brew a scuttle of grog, after which the syndicate holds a meetin’ and lays out a course for its future conduct. There’s a few questions of rank and privileges that ought to be settled once for all, so there can’t be no come-back.”

“The point is well taken and it is so ordered,” said Mr. Gibney, who had once held office in Harbour 15, Masters and Pilots Association of America, and knew a fragment or two of parliamentary law. “Rustle up the grog, call McGuffey up out of the engine room, and we’ll hold the meetin’.”

Twenty minutes later Scraggs came on deck to announce the successful concoction of a kettle of whisky punch; whereupon the three adventurers went below and sat down at the cabin table for a conference.

“I move that Gib be appointed president of the syndicate,” said Captain Scraggs.

“Second the motion,” rumbled McGuffey.

“The motion’s carried,” said Mr. Gibney, and banged the table with his hearty fist. “The meetin’ will please come to order. The chair hereby appoints Phineas Scraggs secretary of the syndicate, to keep a record of this and all future meetin’s of the board. I will now entertain propositions of any and all nature, and I invite the members of the board to knock the stopper out of their jaw tackle and go to it.”

“I move,” said Captain Scraggs, “that B. McGuffey, Esquire, be, and he is hereby appointed, chief engineer of the Maggie II at a salary not to exceed the wage schedule of the Marine Engineers’ Association of the Pacific Coast, and that he be voted a one-fourth interest in the vessel and all subsequent profits.”

“Second the motion,” said Mr. Gibney, “and not to hamper the business of the meetin’, we’ll just consider that motion carried unanimous.”

B. McGuffey, Esquire, rose, bowed his thanks, and sat down again, apparently very much confused. It was evident that he had something to say, but was having difficulty framing his thoughts in parliamentary language.

“Heave away, Mac,” said Mr. Gibney. “Cast off your lines, McGuffey,” chirped Scraggs.

Thus encouraged, McGuffey rose, bowed his thanks once more, moistened his larynx with a gulp of the punch, and spoke:

“Feller members and brothers of the syndicate: In the management of the deck department of this new craft of ours, my previous knowledge of the worthy president and the unworthy secretary leads me to believe that there’s goin’ to be trouble. A ship divided agin herself must surely go on her beam ends. Now, Scraggsy here has been master so long that the justice of authority has sorter soaked into his marrer bones. For twenty years it’s been ‘Howdy do, Captain Scraggs,’ ‘Have a drink, Captain Scraggs,’ ‘Captain Scraggs this an’ Captain Scraggs that.’ I don’t mean no offense, gentlemen, when I state that you can’t teach an old dog new tricks. No man that’s ever been a master makes a good mate. On the other hand, I realize that Gib here has been a-pantin’ and a-bellyachin’ all his life to get a ship of his own an’ have folks call him ‘Captain Gibney.’ Now that he’s gone an’ done it,
I say he's entitled to it. But the fact of the whole thing is, Gib's the natural leader of the expedition or whatever it's goin' to be, and he can't have his peace of mind wrecked and his plans disturbed a-chasin' sailors around the deck of the Maggie II. Gib is sorter what the feller calls the power behind the throne. He's too big a figger for the grade of captain. Therefore, I move you, gentlemen, that Adelbert P. Gibney be, and he is hereby nominated and appointed to the grade of commodore, in full command and supervision of all of the property of the syndicate. And I also move that Phineas Scraggs be appointed chief navigatin' officer of this packet, to retain his title of captain, and to be obeyed and respected as such by every man aboard with the exception of me and Gib. The present mate'll do the navigatin' while Scraggsy's learnin' the deep sea stuff."

"Second the motion," said Captain Scraggs briskly. "McGuffey, your argument does you a heap of credit. It's—it's dog my cats, McGuffey, it's masterly. It shows a keen appreciation of an old skipper's feelin's, and if the move is agreeable to Gib, I'm willin' to hail him as commodore and fight to maintain his office. I—I dunno, Gib, what I'd do if I didn't have a mate to order around."

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Gibney, beaming, "the motion's carried unanimous. Captain—chief—your fins. Dook me. I'm honored by the handshake. Now, regarding that crew you brought down from San Francisco on the old Maggie, Scraggs, they're a likely lot and will come in handy if times is as lively in Colombia as I figger they will be when we arrive there. Captain Scraggs, you will have your mate pipe the crew to muster and ascertain their feelin's on the subject of takin' a chance with Commodore Gibney. If they object to goin' further, we'll land 'em in Panama an' pay 'em off as agreed. If they feel like followin' the Jolly Roger we'll give 'em the coast seaman's scale for a deep-water cruise and a five per cent bonus in case we turn a big trick."

Captain Scraggs went at once on deck. Ten minutes later he returned to report that the mate and the four seamen elected to stick by the ship.

"Bully boys," said the commodore, "bully boys. I like that mate. He's a smart man and handles a gun well. While I should hesitate to take advantage of my prerogative as commodore to interfere with the normal workin's of the deck department, I trust that on this special occasion our esteemed navigatin' officer, Captain Scraggs, will not consider it beneath his dignity or an attack on his office if I suggest to him that he brew another kettle of grog for the crew."


"Anything further?" stated the president. "How about uniforms?" This from Captain Scraggs.

"We'll leave that to Gib," suggested McGuffey. "He's been in the Colombian navy and he'll know just what to get us."

"Well, there's another thing that's got to be settled," continued Captain Scraggs. "If I'm to be navigatin' officer on the flagship of a furrin' fleet, strike me pink if I'll do any more cookin' in the galley. It's degradin'. I move that we engage some enterprisin' Oriental for that job."

"Carried," said Mr. Gibney. "Any further business?"

Once more McGuffey stood up. "Gentlemen and brothers of the syndicate," he began, "I'm satisfied that the backbitin', the scrappin', the petty jealousies and general cussedness that characterized our lives on the old Maggie will not be duplicated on the Maggie II. Them vicious days is gone forever, I hope, an' from now on the motto of us three should be:"

"All for one and one for all—United we stand, divided we fall."

This earnest little speech, which came straight from the honest McGuffey's heart, brought the tears to the commodore's eyes. Under the inspiration of McGuffey's unselfish words the glasses were refilled and all three pledged their friendship anew. As for Captain Scraggs, he was naturally of a cold and selfish disposition, and McGuffey's toast appealed more to his brain than to his heart. Had he known what was to happen to him in the days to come and what that simple little motto was to mean in his particular case, it is doubtful if he would have tossed off his liquor as gaily as he did.

"There's one thing more that we mustn't neglect," warned Mr. Gibney before the
meeting broke up. "We've got to run this little vessel into some dog-hole where there's a nice beach and smooth water, and change her name. I notice that her old name Reina Maria is screwed into her bows and across her stern in raised gilt letters, contrary to law and custom. We'll nip 'em off, sandpaper every spot where there's a letter, and repaint it; after which we'll rig up a stagin' over her bows and stern, and cut her new name, Maggie II, right into her plankin'. Nobody'll ever suspect her name's been changed. I notice that the official letters and numbers cut into her main beam is F-C-P—9957. I'll change that F to an E, the C to an O, and the P to an R. A handy man with a wood chisel can do lots of things. He can change those nines to eights, the five to a six, and the seven to a nine. I've seen it done before. Then we'll rig a foretopmast and a spinnaker boom on her, and bend a fisherman's staysail. Nothing like it when you're sailing a little off the wind. Scraggs, you have the papers of the old Maggie, and we all have our licenses regular enough. Dig up the old papers, Scraggsy, and I'll doctor 'em up to fit the Maggie II. As for our armament, we'll dismount the guns and stow 'em away in the hold until we get down on the Colombian coast, and while we're lying in Panama repairing the holes where my shots went through her, and puttin' new planks in her decks where the old plankin' has been scored by shrapnel, those paraquets will think we're as peaceful as chipmunks. Better look over your supplies, McGuffey, and see if there's any paint aboard. I'd just as lief give the old girl a different dress before we drop anchor in Panama."

"Gib," said Captain Scraggs earnestly. "I'll keel-haul and skull-drag the man that says you ain't got a great head."

"By the lord," supplemented McGuffey, "you have."

The commodore smiled and tapped his frontal bone with his forefinger. "Imagination, my lads, imagination," he said, and reached for the last of the punch.

Exactly three weeks from the date of the naval battle which took place off the Coronado Islands, and whereby Mr. Gibney became commodore and managing owner of the erstwhile Mexican coast patrol schooner Reina Maria, that vessel sailed out of the harbour of Panama completely rejuvenated. Not a scar on her shapely lines gave evidence of the sanguinary engagement through which she had passed.

MR. GIBNEY had her painted a creamy white with a dark blue waterline. She had had her bottom cleaned and scraped and the copper sheathing overhauled and patched up. Her sails had been overhauled, inspected, and repaired wherever necessary, and in order to be on the safe side, Mr. Gibney, upon motion duly made by him and seconded by McGuffey (to whom the seconding of the Gibney motions had developed into a habit), purchased a extra suit of new sails. The engines were overhauled by the faithful McGuffey and a large store of distillate stored in the hold. Captain Scraggs, with his old-time aversion to expense, made a motion (which was seconded by McGuffey before he had taken time to consider its import) providing for the abolishment of the office of chief engineer while the Maggie II was under sail, at which time the chief ex-officio was to hold himself under the orders of the commodore and be transferred to the deck department if necessary. Mr. Gibney approved the measure and it went into effect. Only on entering or leaving a port, or in case of chase by an enemy, were the engines to be used, and McGuffey was warned to be extremely saving of his distillate.

Mr. Gibney had made a splendid job of changing the vessel's name, and as she chugged lazily out of Panama Bay and lifted to the long ground-swell of the Pacific, it is doubtful if even her late Mexican commander would have recognized her. She was indeed a beautiful craft, and Commodore Gibney's heart swelled with pride as stood aft, conning the man at the wheel, and looked her over. It seemed like a sacrifice now, when he reflected how he had trained the gun of the old Maggie on her that day off the Coronados, and it seemed to him now even a greater sacrifice to have brazenly planned to enter her as a privateer in the struggles of the republic of Colombia. The past tense is used advisedly, for that project was now entirely off, much to the secret delight of Captain Scraggs, who, if the hero of one naval engagement, was not anxious to take part in another. In Panama the freebooters of the Maggie II
learned that during Mr. Gibney’s absence on his filibustering trip the Colombian revolutionists had risen and struck their blow. After the fashion of a hot-headed and impetuous people, they had entered the contest absolutely untrained. As a result, the war had lasted just two weeks, the leaders had been incontinently shot, and the white-winged dove of peace had once more spread her pinions along the borders of the Gold Coast.

Commodore Gibney was disgusted beyond measure, and at a special meeting of the syndicate, called in the cabin of the Maggie II that same evening, it was finally decided that they should embark on an indefinite trading cruise in the South Seas, or until such time as it seemed their services must be required to free a downtrodden people from a tyrant’s yoke.

Captain Scraggs and McGuffey had never been in the South Seas, but they had heard that a fair margin of profit was to be wrung from trade in copra, shell, coconuts, and kindred tropical products. They so expressed themselves. To this suggestion, however, Commodore Gibney waved a deprecatory paw.

“Legitimate tradin’, boys,” he said, “is a nice, sane, healthy business, but the profits is slow. What we want is quick profits, and while it ain’t set down in black and white, one of the principal objects of this syndicate is to lead a life of wild adventure. In tradin’, there ain’t no adventure to speak of. We ought to do a little blackbirdin’, or raid some of those Jap pearl fisheries off the northern coast of Formosa.”

“But we’ll be chased by real gunboats if we do that,” objected Captain Scraggs. “Those Jap gunboats shoot to kill. Can’t you think of somethin’ else, Gib?”

“Well,” said Mr. Gibney, “for a starter, I can. Suppose we just head straight for Kandavu Island in the Fijis, and scheme around for a cargo of black coral? It’s only worth about fifty dollars a pound. Kandavu lays somewhere in latitude 22 south, longitude 178 west, and when I was there last it was fair reekin’ with cannibal savages. But there’s tons of black coral there, and nobody’s ever been able to sneak in and get away with it. Every time a boat used to land at Kandavu, the native niggers would have a white-man stew down on the beach, and it’s got so that skippers give the island a wide berth.”

“Gib, my dear boy,” chattered Captain Scraggs, “I’m a man of peace and I—I—”

“Scraggssy, old stick-in-the-mud,” said Mr. Gibney, laying an affectionate hand on the skipper’s shoulder, “you’re nothin’ of the sort. You’re a fightin’ tarantula, and nobody knows it better’n Adelbert P. Gibney. I’ve seen you in action, Scraggssy. Remember that. It’s all right for you to say you’re a man of peace and advise me and McGuffey to keep out of the track of trouble, but we know that away down low you’re goin’ around lookin’ for blood, and that once you’re up agin the enemy, you never bat an eyelash. Eh, McGuffey?”

McGUFFEY nodded; whereupon, Captain Scraggs, making but a poor effort to conceal the pleasure which Mr. Gibney’s rude compliment afforded him, turned to the rail, glanced seaward, and started to walk away to attend to some trifling detail connected with the boat falls.

“All right, Gib, my lad,” he said, affecting to resign himself to the inevitable, “have it your own way. You’re a commodore and I’m only a plain captain, but I’ll follow wherever you lead. I’ll go as far as the next man and we’ll glom that black coral if we have to slaughter every man, woman, and child on the island. Only, when we’re sizzlin’ in a pot don’t you up and say I never warned you, because I did. How d’ye propose intimidatin’ the natives, Gib?”

“Scraggssy,” said the commodore solemnly, “we’ve waged a private war agin a friendly nation, licked ‘em, and helped ourselves to their ship. We’ve changed her name and rig and her official number and letters and we’re sailin’ under bogus papers. That makes us pirates, and that old Maggie burgee floatin’ at the fore ain’t nothin’ more nor less than the Jolly Roger. All right! Let’s be pirates. Who cares? When we slip into M’galao harbour we’ll invite the king and his head men aboard for dinner. We’ll get ‘em drunk, clap ‘em in double irons, and surrender ‘em to their weepin’ subjects when they’ve filled the hold of the Maggie II with black coral. If they refuse to come aboard we’ll shell the bush with that long gun and the Maxim rapid-fire guns we’ve got below decks.
That'll scare 'em so they'll leave us alone and we can help ourselves to the coral.”

“Scrags's cold blue eyes glistened. “Lord, Gib,” he murmured, “you've got a head.”

“Like playin' post-office,” was McGuffey's comment.

The commodore smiled. “I thought you boys would see it that way. Now to-morrow I'm going ashore to buy three divin' outfits and lay in a big stock of provisions for the voyage. In the meantime, while the carpenters are gettin' the ship into shape, we'll leave the first mate in charge while we go ashore and have a good time. I've seen worse places than Panama.”

As a result of this conference, Mr. Gibney's suggestions were acted upon, and they contrived to make their brief stay in Panama very agreeable. They inspected the work on the canal, marveled at the stupendous engineering in the Culebra Cut, drank a little, gambled a little. McGuffey whipped a bartender. He was ordered arrested, and six spiggoty little policemen, sent to arrest him, were also thrashed. The reserves were called out and a riot ensued. Mr. Gibney, following the motto of the syndicate, i.e.,

All for one and one for all—

United we stand, divided we fall, mixed in the conflict and presently found himself in durance vile. Captain Scrags, luckily, forgot the motto and escaped, but inasmuch as he was on hand next morning to pay a fine of thirty pesos levied against each of the culprits, he was instantly forgiven. Mr. Gibney vowed that if the United States cruiser didn't happen to be lying in the roadstead, he would have shelled the town in retaliation.

But eventually the days passed, and the Maggie II, well found and ready for sea, shook out her sails to a fair breeze and sailed away for Kandavu. She kept well to the southwest until she swung around on her course, headed straight for her destination. It was a pleasant voyage, devoid of incident, and the health of all hands was excellent. Mr. Gibney took daily observations, and was particular to make daily entries in his log when he, Scrags, and McGuffey were not playing cribbage, a game of which all three were passionately fond.

On the afternoon of the twenty-ninth day after leaving Panama the lookout reported land. Through his glasses Mr. Gibney made out a cluster of tall palms at the southerly end of the island, and as the schooner held lazily on her course he could discern the white breakers foaming over the reefs that guarded the entrance to the harbor.

“That's Kandavu, all right,” announced the commodore. “I was there in '89 with Bull McGinty in the schooner Dashin' Wave. There's the entrance to the harbour, with the Esk reefs to the north and the Pearl reefs to the south. The channel's very narrow—not more than three cables, if it's that, but there's plenty of water and a good muddy bottom that'll hold. McGuffey, lad, better run below and tune up your engines. It's too dangerous a passage on an ebb-tide for a sailin' vessel, so we'll run in under the power. Scragsgy, stand by and when I give the word have your crew shorten sail.”

Within a few minutes a long white streak opened up in the wake of the schooner, announcing that McGuffey's engines were doing duty, and a nice breeze springing up two points aft the beam, the Maggie heeled over and fairly flew through the water. Mr. Gibney smiled an ecstatic smile as he took the wheel and guided the schooner through the channel. He rounded her up in twelve fathoms, and within five minutes every stitch of canvas was clewed down hard and fast. The sun was setting as they dropped anchor, and Mr. Gibney had lanterns hung along the rail so that it would be impossible for any craft to approach the schooner and board her without being seen. Also the watch on deck that night carried Mauser rifles, six-shooters, and cutlasses. Mr. Gibney was taking no chances.

“Now, boys,” announced Commodore Gibney, as he sat at the head of the officers' mess at breakfast next morning, “there'll be a lot of canoes paddling off to visit us within the hour, so whatever you do, don't allow more than two of these cannibals aboard the schooner at the same time. Make 'em keep their weapons in the canoes with 'em, and at the first sign of trouble shoot 'em down like dogs. It may be that these precautions ain't necessary, but when I was here
twenty years ago it was all the rage to kill a white man and eat him. Maybe times has changed, but the harbour and the coast looks just as wild and lonely as they ever did, and I didn’t see no sign of missionary when we dropped hook last night. So don’t take no chances.”

All hands promised that they would take extreme care, to the end that their precious persons might remain intact, so Mr. Gibney finished his cup of coffee at a gulp and went on deck.

The Kandavu aborigines were not long in putting in an appearance. Even as Mr. Gibney came on deck half a dozen canoes shot out from the beach. Mr. Gibney immediately piped all hands on deck, armed them, and nonchalantly awaited the approach of what might or might not turn out to be an enemy.

When the flotilla was within pistol shot of the schooner Mr. Gibney stepped to the rail and motioned them back. Immediately the natives ceased paddling, and a wild-looking fellow stood up in the forward canoe. After the manner of his kind he had all his life soused his head in limerock when making his savage toilette, and as a result his shock of black hair stood on end and bulged out like a crowded hayrick. He was naked, of course, and in his hand he held a huge war club.

“That fellar’d eat a rattlesnake,” gasped Captain Scrags. “Shoot him, Gib, if he bats an eye.”

“Shut up,” said the commodore, a trifle testily; “that’s the number-one nigger, who does the talkin’. Hello, boy.”

“Hello, cap’n,” replied the savage, and salaamed gravely. “You likee buy chicken, buy pig? Maybe you say come boat, I talk. Me very good friend white master.”

“Bless my sweet-scented soul!” gasped the commodore. “What won’t them missionaries do next? Cut off my ears if this nigger ain’t civilized!” He beckoned to the canoe and it shot alongside, and its brown crew came climbing over the rail of the Maggie II.

Mr. Gibney met the spokesman at the rail and they rubbed noses very solemnly, after the manner of salutation in Kandavu. Captain Scrags bustled forward, full of importance.

“Introduce me, Gib,” he said amiably, and then, while Mr. Gibney favoured him with a sour glance, Captain Scrags stuck out his hand and shook briskly with the native.

“Happy to make your acquaintance,” he said. “Scrags is my name, sir. Shake hands with McGuffey, our chief engineer. Hope you left all the folks at home well. What’d you say your name was?”

The islander hadn’t said his name was anything, but he grinned now and replied that it was Tabu-Tabu.

“Well, my bucko,” muttered McGuffey, who always drew the colour line, “I’m glad to hear that. But you ain’t the only thing that’s taboo around this packet. You can jest check that war club with the first mate, pendin’ our better acquaintance. Hand it over, you black beggar, or I’ll hit you a swat in the ear that’ll hurt all your relations. And hereafter, Scragsy, just keep your nigger friends to yourself. I ain’t wavin’ effusive over this savage, and it’s agin my principles ever to shake hands with a coloured man. This chap’s a damned ugly customer, and you take my word for it.”

Tabu-Tabu grinned again, walked to the rail, and tossed his war club down into the canoe.

“Me good missionary boy,” he said rather humbly.

“McGuffey, my dear boy,” protested Captain Scrags, “don’t be so doggone rude. You might hurt this poor lad’s feelin’s. Of course he’s only a simple native nigger, but even a dawg has feelin’s. You—”

“A-r-r-rl!” snarled McGuffey.

“You two belay talkin’ and snappin’ at each other,” commanded Mr. Gibney, “an’ leave all bargainin’ to me. This boy is all right and we’ll get along first rate if you two just haul ship and do somethin’ useful besides buttin’ in on your superior officer. Come along, Tabu-Tabu. Makee little eat down in cabin. You talkee captain.”

“Gib, my dear boy,” sputtered Captain Scrags, bursting with curiosity, following the commodore’s reappearance on deck, “whatever’s in the wind?”

“Money—fortune,” said Mr. Gibney solemnly.

McGUFFEY edged up and eyed the commodore seriously. “Sure there
ain't a little fightin' mixed up in it?" he asked.

"Not a bit of it," replied Mr. Gibney. "You're as safe on Kandavu as if you was in church. This Tabu kid is sort of prime minister to the king, with a heap of influence at court. The crew of a British cruiser stole him for a galley police when he was a kid, and he got civilized and learned to talk English. He was a cannibal in them days, but the chaplain aboard showed him how foolish it was to do such things, ad finally Tabu—Tabu got religion and asked as a special favour to be allowed to return to Kandavu to civilize his people, As a result of Tabu-Tabu's efforts, he tells me the king has concluded that when he eats a white man he's flying in the face of his own interests, and most generally a gunboat comes along in a few months and shells the bush, and—well, anyhow, there ain't been a barbecue on Kandavu for ten years. It's a capital crime to eat a man now, and punishable by boilin' the offender alive in palm oil."

"Well," rumbled McGuffey, "this Tabu-Tabu don't look much like a preacher, if you ask me. But how about this black coral?"

"Oh, I've ribbed up a deal with him," said Mr. Gibney. "He'll see that we get all the trade we can lug away. We're the first vessel that's touched here in two years, and they have a thunderin' lot of stuff on hand. Tabu's gone ashore to talk the king into doin' business with us. If he consents, we'll have him and Tabu-Tabu and three or four of the sub-chiefs aboard for dinner, or else he'll invite us ashore for a big feed, and we'll have to go."

"Supposin' this king don't care to have any truck with us?" inquired McGuffey anxiously.

"In that case, Mac," replied the commodore with a smile, "we'll just naturally shell him out of house and home."

"Well, then," said McGuffey, "let's get the guns ready. Somethin' tells me these people ain't to be trusted, and I'm tellin' you right now, Gib, I won't sleep well tonight unless them two quarter gallings and the Maxim-Vickers rapid-fire guns is mounted and ready for business."

"All right, Mac," replied Mr. Gibney, in the tone one uses when Humoring a baby. "Set 'em up if it'll make you feel more cheerful. Still, I don't see why you want to go actin' so foolish over nothin'."

"Well, Gib," replied the engineer, "I may be crazy, but I ain't no fool, and if there's a dead whale around the ship, I can come pretty near smellin' it. I tell you, Gib, that Tabu-Tabu nigger had a look in his eye for all the world like a cur dog lickin' a bone. I ain't takin' no chances. My old man used to say: 'Bart, whatever you do, allers have an anchor out to the windward.'"

"By the left hind leg of the Great Sacred Bull," snapped Captain Scraggs, "if you ain't enough to precipitate war."

"War," replied McGuffey, "is my long suit—particularly war with native niggers. I just naturally crave to punch the ear of anything darker than a Portugee. Remember how I cleaned out the police department of Panama?"

"Mount the guns if you're goin' to, Mac. If not, for the love of the Lord don't be demoralizin' the crew with this talk of war. All I ask is that you set the guns up after I've finished my business here with Tabu-Tabu. He's been on a war vessel, and knows what guns are, and if he saw you mountin' them it might break up our friendly relations. He'll think we don't trust him."

"Well, we don't," replied McGuffey doggedly.

"Well, we do," snapped Captain Scraggs.

There is always something connected with the use of that pronoun of kings which eats like a canker at the heart of men of the McGuffey breed. That officer now spat on the deck, in defiance of the rules of his superior officers, and glared at Captain Scraggs.

"Speak for yourself, you miserable little little wart," he roared. "If you include me on that cannibal's visiting list, and go to contradictin' me again, I'll—"

"Mac," interrupted Mr. Gibney angrily, "control yourself. It's agin the rules to have rag-chewin' and backbitin' on the Maggie II. Remember our motto: 'All for one and one for all'—"

"Here comes that sneakin' bushy-headed murderer back to the vessel," interrupted McGuffey. "I wonder what devilment he's up to now."

MR. McGUFFEY was partly right, for in a few minutes Tabu-Tabu came
alongside, climbed aboard, and salaamed. Mr. Gibney, fearful of McGuffey's inability to control his antipathy for the race, beckoned Captain Scraggs and Tabu-Tabu to follow him down into the cabin. Meanwhile, McGuffey contended himself by parading backward and forward across the fo'castle head with a Mauser rifle in the hollow of his arm and his person fairly bristling with pistols and cutlasses. Whenever one of the flotilla of canoes hove to at a respectful distance, showed signs of crossing an imaginary deadline drawn by McGuffey, he would point his rifle at them and swear horribly. He scowled at Tabu-Tabu when that individual finally emerged from the conference with Mr. Gibney and Scraggs and went over the side to his waiting canoe.

“Well, what's in the wind this time?” inquired McGuffey.

“We're invited to a big feed with the king of Kandavu,” replied Captain Scraggs, as happy as a boy. “Hop into a clean suit of ducks, Mac, and come along. Gib's goin' to broach a little keg of liquor and we'll make a night of it.”

“Good lord,” groaned McGuffey, “does the man think I'm low enough to eat with niggers?”

“Leave him to his own devices,” said Mr. Gibney indulgently. “Mac's just as Irish as if he'd been born in Dublin instead of his old man. Nobody yet overcome the prejudice of an Irishman so we'll do the honours ourself, Scraggsy, old skittles, and leave Mac in charge of the ship.”

“MIND you're both back at a seasonable hour,” warned McGuffey. “If you ain't, I'll suspect mischief and—say! Gib! Well, what's the use talkin' to a man with an imagination? Only if I have to go ashore after you two, those islanders'll date time from my visit, and don't you forget it.”

It was nearing four o'clock that afternoon when Commodore Gibney and his navigating officer, Captain Scraggs, both faultlessly arrayed in Panama hats, white ducks, white canvas shoes, cut low, showing pink silk socks, and wearing broad, black silken sashes around their waists, climbed over the side into the whaleboat and were rowed ashore in a manner befitting their rank. McGuffey stood at the rail and jeered them, for his democratic soul could take no cognizance of form or ceremony to a cannibal king, or at least a king but recently delivered from cannibalism.

Upon arrival at the beach the two adventurers were met by a contingent of frightful-looking savages bearing long spears. As the procession formed around the two guests of honor and plunged into the bush, bound for the king's warri, two island maidens marched behind the two sea-dogs, waving huge palm-leaf fans, the better to make the passage a cool and comfortable one.

“By the gods of war, Gib, my dear boy,” said the delighted Captain Scraggs, “but this is class, eh, Gib?”

“Every time,” responded the commodore. “If that chuckle-headed McGuffey only had the sense to come along he might be enjoyin' himself, too. You must be dignified, Scraggsy, old salamander. Remember that you're bigger an' better'n any king, because you're an American citizen. Be dignified, by all means. These people are sensitive and peculiar, and that's why we haven't taken any weapons with us. If they thought we doubted their hospitality they'd have the court bouncer heave us out of town before you could say Jack Robinson.”

“I'd love to see them giving the bounce to McGuffey,” said Captain Scraggs musingly. Mr. Gibney had a swift mental picture of such a proceeding and chuckled happily. Had he been permitted a glance at McGuffey at that moment he might have observed that worthy sweltering in the heat of the forward hold of the Maggie II, for he was busy getting his guns on deck. From which it will readily be deduced that B. McGuffey, Esquire, was following the advice of his paternal ancestor and getting an anchor out to windward.

One might go on at great length and describe the triumphal entry of Commodore Gibney and Captain Scraggs into the capitol of Kandavu; of how the king, an undersized, shrivelled old savage, stuck his bushy head out of the window of his bungalow when he saw the procession coming; of how a minute later he advanced into the space in the center of his warri, where in the olden days the populace was wont to gather for its cannibal orgies; how he greeted his distinguished visitors with the
most prodigious rubbing of noses seen in those parts for many a day; of the feast that followed; of the fowls and pigs that garnished the festive board, not omitting the keg of Three Star thoughtfully provided by Mr. Gibney.

Tabu-Tabu acted as interpreter and everything went swimmingly until Tabu-Tabu, his hospitality doubtless strengthened by frequent libations of the Elixir of Life, begged Mr. Gibney to invite the remainder of his crew ashore for the feast. Mr. Gibney, himself rather illuminated by this time, thought it might not be a bad idea.

“It’s a rotten shame, Scraggsy,” he said, “to think of that fool McGuffey not bein’ here to enjoy himself. I’m goin’ to send a note out to him by one of Tabu-Tabu’s boys, askin’ him once more to come ashore, or to let the first mate and one or two of the seamen come if Mac still refuses to be civil.”

“Good idea, Gib,” said Captain Scraggs, his mouth full of roast chicken and yams. So Mr. Gibney tore a leaf out of his pocket memorandum book, scrawled a note to McGuffey, and handed it to Tabu-Tabu, who at once dispatched a messenger with it to the Maggie II.

Within half an hour the messenger returned. He was wildly excited and poured a torrent of native gibberish into the attentive ears of Tabu-Tabu and the king. He pointed several times to the point of his jaw, rubbed the small of his back, and once he touched his nose; whereupon Mr. Gibney was aware that the said organ had a slight list to port, and he so informed Captain Scraggs. Neither of the gentlemen had the slightest trouble in arriving at the correct solution of the mystery. The royal messenger had been incontinently kicked overboard by B. McGuffey, Esquire.

TABU-TABU’S wild eyes glittered and grew wilder and wilder as the messenger reported the indignity thus heaped upon him. The king scowled at Captain Scraggs, and Mr. Gibney was suddenly aware that goose-flesh was breaking out on the backs of his sturdy legs. He had a haunting sensation that not only had he crawled into a hole, but he had pulled the entire aperture in after him. For the first time he began to fear that he had been too precipitate, and with the thought it occurred to the gallant commodore that he would be much safer back on the decks of the Maggie II. Always crafty and imaginative, however, Mr. Gibney came quickly to the front with an excuse for getting back to the ship. He stepped quickly toward the little group around the outraged royal ambassador, and inquired the cause of the disturbance. Quivering with rage, Tabu-Tabu informed him of what had occurred.

Mr. Gibney’s rage, of course, knew no bounds. Nevertheless, he did not have to simulate his rage, for he was truly furious. When he could control his emotions, he requested Tabu-Tabu to inform the king that he, Gibney, accompanied by Captain Scraggs, would forthwith repair to the schooner and then and there flay the offending McGuffey within an inch of his life. Suiting the action to the word, Mr. Gibney called to Captain Scraggs to follow him, and started for the beach.

As Captain Scraggs arose, a trifle unsteadily, from his seat, a black hand reached around him from the rear and closed over his mouth. Now, Captain Scraggs was well versed in the rough-and-tumble tactics of the San Francisco waterfront; hence, when he felt a long pair of arms crossing over his neck from the rear, he merely stooped and whirled his opponent over his head. In that instant his mouth was free, and clear above the shouting and the tumult rose his frenzied shriek for help. Mr. Gibney whirled with the speed and agility of a panther just in time to dodge a blow from a war club. His fist collided with the jaw of Tabu-Tabu, and down went that savage as if pole-axed.

Pandemonium broke loose at once. Captain Scraggs, after his single shriek for help, broke from the circle of savages and fled like a frightened rabbit for the beach. One of the natives hurled a rock at him. The missile took Scraggs in the back of the head, and he instantly curled up in a heap.

“Scraggsy’s dead,” thought the horrified Gibney, and sprang at the king. In that moment it came to Mr. Gibney to sell out dearly, and if he could dispose of the king, he felt that Scraggs’s death would be avenged. In an instant the commodore’s great arms had closed around the king, and with the helpless monarch in his grizzly grip Mr. Gibney backed up against the
nearest bungalow. A fringe of spears threatened him in front, but for the moment he was safe behind, and the king's body protected him. Whenever one of the savages made a jab at Mr. Gibney, Mr. Gibney gave the king a boa-constrictor squeeze, and the monarch howled.

"I'll squeeze him to death," panted Mr. Gibney to Tabu-Tabu when that individual had managed to pick himself up. "Let me go, or I'll kill your king."

The answer was an earthenware pot which crashed down on Mr. Gibney's head from a window in the bungalow behind him. He sagged forward and fell on his face with the gasping king in his arms.

On board the Maggie II B. McGuffey, Esquire, had just gotten into position the Maxim-Vickers "pom-pom" gun on top of the house. The last bolt that held it in place had just been screwed tight when clear and shrill over the tops of the jungle and across the still surface of the little bay there floated to McGuffey's ears the single word:

"Help!"

McGuffey leaned against the gun, and for the moment he was as weak as a child. "Gawd," he muttered, "that was Scraggsy and they're a-goin' to eat him up. Oh, Gib, Gib, old man, why wouldn't you listen to me? Now they've got you, and what in blazes I'm going to do to get you back, dead or alive, I dunno."

McGuffey could hear the cries and general uproar from the waris, though he could not see what was taking place. In a minute or two, however, all was once more silent, silence having descended on the scene simultaneously with the descent of the earthenware pot on Mr. Gibney's head.

"It's all over," said McGuffey sadly to the mate. "They've killed 'em both." Whereupon B. McGuffey, Esquire, sat down on the cabin ventilator, pulled out a bandana handkerchief and wept into it, for his honest Irish heart was breaking.

It was fully half an hour before poor McGuffey could pull himself together, and when he did, his grief was superseded by a fit of rage that was terrible to behold.

"Step lively, you blasted scum of the seas," he bawled to the mate, and the crew gathered around the gun. "Lug up a case of ammunition and we'll shell that bush until even a parrot won't be left alive in it."

"Aye, aye, sir," responded the crew to a man, and sprang to their task.

"I'm an old navy gunner," said the first mate quietly. "I'll handle the gun. With a 'pom-pom' gun it's just like playing a garden hose on them, only it's high-explosive shell instead of water. I can search out every nook and cranny in the coast of this island. Those guns are sighted up to 4,000 yards."

"Kill 'em all," raved McGuffey, "kill all the blasted niggers."

When Mr. Gibney fell under the impact of the earthenware pot he was only partially stunned. As he tried to struggle to his feet half a dozen hands were laid on him and in a trice he was lifted and carried back to the waris to a clear space where a dozen heavy teakwood posts stood in a row about four feet apart. Mr. Gibney was quickly stripped of his clothing and bound hand and foot to one of these posts. Three minutes later another delegation of cannibals arrived, bearing the limp, naked body of Captain Scraggs, whom they bound in similar fashion to the post beside Mr. Gibney. Scraggs was very white and bloody, but conscious, and his pale-blue eyes were flickering like a snake's.

"What's—what's—the meanin' of this, Gib?" he gasped.

"It means," replied the commodore, "that it's all off but the shouting with me and you, Scraggsy. This fellow Tabu-Tabu is a damned traitor, and his people are still cannibals. He's the decoy to get white men ashore. They schemed to treat us nice and be friendly until they could get the whole crew ashore, or enough of them to leave the ship helpless, and then—O Gawd, Scraggsy, old man, can you ever forgive me for gettin' you into this?"

CAPTAIN SCRAMPS hung his head and quivered like a hooked fish.

"Will they—eat—us?" he quavered, finally.

Mr. Gibney did not answer, only Captain Scraggs looked into his horrified eyes and read the verdict.

"Die game, Scraggsy," was all Mr. Gibney could say. "Don't show the white feather."

"D'ye think McGuffey could hear us
from here if we was to yell for help?” inquired Captain Scraggs hopefully.

“Don’t yelp, for Gawd’s sake,” implored Mr. Gibney. “We got ourselves into this, so let’s pay the fiddler ourselves. If we let out one yip and McGuffey hears it, he’ll come ashore with his crew and tackle this outfit, even if he knows he’ll get killed. And that’s just what will happen to him if he comes. Let poor Mac stay aboard. When we don’t come back, he’ll know it’s all off, and if he has time to think over it he’ll realize it would be foolish to try to do anything. But right now Mac’s mad as a wet hen, and if we holler for help—Scraggsy, please don’t holler. Die game.”

Captain Scraggs turned his terrified glance on Mr. Gibney’s tortured face. Scraggs was certainly a coward at heart, but there was something in Mr. Gibney’s unselfishness that touched a spot in his hard nature—a something he never knew he possessed. He bowed his head and two big tears stole down his weatherbeaten face.

“God bless you, Gib, my dear boy,” he said brokenly. “You’re a man.”

At this juncture the king came up and thoughtfully felt of Captain Scraggs in the short ribs, while Tabu-Tabu calculated the precise amount of luscious tissue on Mr. Gibney’s well-upholstered frame.

“Bimeby we eat white man,” said Tabu-Tabu cheerfully.

“If you eat me, you bloody-handed beggar,” snapped Captain Scraggs, “I’ll pizen you. I’ve chewed tobacco all my life, and my meat’s as bitter as wormwood.”

It was too funny to hear Scraggs jesting with death. Mr. Gibney forgot his own mental agony and roared with laughter in Tabu-Tabu’s face. The cannibal stood off a few feet and looked searchingly in the commodore’s eyes. He was not used to the brand of white man who could laugh under such circumstances, and he suspected treachery of some kind. He hurried over to join the king and the two held a hurried conversation. As a result of their conference, a huge savage was called over and given some instructions. Tabu-Tabu handed him a war club and Mr. Gibney, rightly conjecturing that this was the official executioner, bowed his head and waited for the blow.

It came sooner than he expected. The earth seemed to rise up and smite Adelbert P. Gibney across the face. There was a roar, as of an explosion in his ears, and he fell forward on his face. He had a confused notion that when he fell the post came with him.

For nearly a minute he lay there, semi-conscious, and then something warm, dripping across his face, roused him. He moved, and found that his feet were free, though his hands were still bound to the post, which lay extended along his back. He rolled over and glanced up. Captain Scraggs was shrieking. By degrees the bells quit ringing in the commodore’s ears, and this is what he heard Captain Scraggs yelling:


Mr. Gibney was now himself once more. He struggled to his feet, and as he did, something burst ten feet away and a little fleecy cloud of smoke obscured his vision for a moment. Then he understood. McGuffey had a rapid-fire gun trained on the wari, and the savages, with frightful yells, were fleeing madly from the little shells. Half a dozen of them lay dead and wounded close by.

“Hooray,” yelled Mr. Gibney, and dashed at the post which held Captain Scraggs prisoner. He struck it a powerful blow with his shoulder and Scraggs and the post crashed to the ground. In an instant Mr. Gibney was on his knees, tearing at Scraggs’s rope shackles with his teeth. Five minutes later, Captain Scraggs’s hands were free. Then Scraggs did a like service for Gibney.

All the time the shells from the Maggie II were bursting around them every second or two, and it seemed as if they must be killed before they could make their escape.

“Beat it, Scraggsy,” yelled Mr. Gibney. He stood and picked up a war club. “Arm yourself, Scraggsy. Take a spear. We may have a little fighting to do on the beach,” he yelled. Captain Scraggs helped himself to a loose spear, and side by side they raced through the jungle for the beach.

As they tore along through the jungle path Mr. Gibney’s good right eye (his left
was obscured) detected two savages crouching behind a clump of cocoa-palms. “There’s the king and Tabu-Tabu,” yelled Scraggs. “Let’s round the beggars up.”

“Sure,” responded the commodore. “We’ll need ’em for hostages if we’re to get that black coral. We’ll turn ’em over to McGuffey.”

“I’d better ease up a minute, sir,” said the mate to Mr. McGuffey. “The gun’s getting fearful hot.”

“Let her melt,” raved McGuffey, “but keep her workin’ for all she’s worth. I’ll have revenge for Gib’s death, or—sufferin’ mackerel!”

McGuffey once more sat down on the cabin ventilator. He pointed dumbly to the beach, and there, paddling off to the Maggie II, were two naked cannibals and two naked white men in a canoe. Five minutes later they came alongside. McGuffey met them at the rail, and he smiled and licked his lower lip as the trembling monarch and his prime minister, in response to a severe application of Mr. Gibney’s hands and feet, came flying over the rail. Mr. Gibney and Captain Scraggs followed.

“Im much obliged to you, Mac,” said Mr. Gibney, striving bravely to appear jaunty. “One of your first shots came between my legs and cut the rope that held me, and banged me and the post I was tied to all over the lot. A fragment of the shell appears to have taken away part of my ear, but I guess I’ll recover. We’re pretty well shook up, Mac, old socks, and a jolt of whisky would be in order after you’ve put the irons on these two cannibals.”

“You’re two nice bloody-looking villians, aren’t you?” was McGuffey’s comment, as he surveyed the late arrivals.

“Which two do you mean?” inquired Mr. Gibney, with a touch of asperity in his tones.

“I dunno,” replied McGuffey. “It’s pretty hard to distinguish between niggers and folks that goes to work an’ eats with ’em.”

“Mac,” said Captain Scraggs severely, “you’re prejudiced.”

---

COMPLETE NORTHWEST

NOVEL MAGAZINE

JAN. ISSUE FEATURES

FANGS OF THE NORTH
By HARRY SINCLAIR DRAGO

A man, four square was Jim Stannard, and he fought against man and the terror of the Northern nights, tackling a lost cause to win for himself an empire in the frozen fastnesses of the Arctic.

ALSO—DEATH FOR THE MOUNTED
By CLIFF CAMPBELL

KNUCKLEBRAINS
By SAMUEL TAYLOR

A RACE WITH DEATH
By H. GLYNN WARD

BEFORE BUYING YOUR MAGAZINE, LOOK FOR THE

DOUBLE ACTION DIAMOND!
Village of the Devil-Devil Drums

by

Will F. Jenkins

A Complete Novel of the Solomon Islands

A white man stalked by head hunters, fights primitive passions and hatreds in the village of the devil-devil drums.

Ntuvi went to sleep, sobbing, off in the bush. The sound of the devil-devil drums came monotonously through the moonlight from the village by the bay, and those devil-devil drums were being beaten on account of Ntuvi, who had committed sacrilege. But Ntuvi went to sleep, sobbing, and a fat moon gazed down on her, filtering through the pandanus leaves to limn her bare legs and body with some clarity, and to glow whitely upon a disk of pearl-shell that was hung about her neck and lay tilted upon her breast. She slept all sprawled out like a young animal—which she was—and even after she was deep in slumber she sobbed a little, softly.

The devil-devil drums throbbed on. Old Baruti, the devil-devil doctor of the village, was beating on them and invoking various demons, devils, and evil spirits to tear out the liver and other internal organs of Ntuvi. In between times he meditated on the punishments he would personally administer to her when she was caught. Ntuvi had been guilty of the unthinkable blasphemy of throwing a cooking-pot full of hot food upon him. In the morning—as all the village knew—he would announce that the devils were angry with the village and that disasters beyond imagination would come upon all its inhabitants if Ntuvi were not tracked down and delivered to him for suitable and inevitably fatal chastisement.

And in the morning, because people are religious after their fashion in the Solomons, the men would arm themselves and go reluctantly out to hunt Ntuvi down
The reluctance would not come from sympathy, of course. Ntuv was a woman, and so did not count one way or the other. And Sualaha men are not especially prone to sympathy anyhow. But she had been the daughter of Ganda, late chief of the village, and she had been permitted many privileges not usually accorded to the female sex, and in consequence she was more than usually fleet of foot and acquainted with the ways of the bush.

Their reluctance would come solely from the difficulty and the tediousness of the task before them. Baruti was not even considered severe in intending to torture Ntuv to death or having put an indignity upon him. As devil-devil doctor he was sacrosanct beyond all imaginable holiness elsewhere than the Solomon Islands. And in a place like Sualaha, where men believe that food tastes better when it is cooked alive and habitually roll live pigs in blankets of clay for roasting, the punishments being planned for Ntuv were not at all extraordinary, when the enormity of her offence was considered.

Only one person in the village looked ahead to her trailing and capture as anything more than an annoying and fatiguing necessity. Young Kavo, alone, lay awake in the Bachelor’s House and listened, shivering, to the drums. A dull and hopeless despair filled him, but rebellion against the coming edict literally did not occur to him. Baruti was the devil-doctor and utterly holy. Anyone who touched his head would shrivel up and die instantly. Nobody ever had, but all men knew the thing would happen. His word was law beyond even the thought of disobedience. To have Baruti frown at one was catastrophe past belief, an assurance of impending death unless one went humbly to him and by lavish presents persuaded him to withdraw the overhanging doom. True, he was ancient, and his hide was mangy and his teeth in a shocking state of neglect, and he stank fulsomely of particularly rancid coconut oil, but he was the devil-devil doctor, with power of life and death and damnation in the life hereafter.

So young Kavo writhed in spirit at the thought of turning the young and lithe and lissom Ntuv over to him, to be tortured for the appeasement of the devils made indignant by the flinging of a cooking-pot at Baruti’s head, but his dominant emotion was that of a passionate despair. He lay in his hammock and blubbered softly.

From the devil-devil house the noise of the drums went throbbing outward and upward. Kavo listened to them in a dull and hopeless despair. Baruti beat upon them enragedly the while he called upon the devils he possibly believed in to tear out the liver and other eternal organs of Ntuv. And in between his incantations he ran over in his mind the punishments he would give her in person for having belittled his dignity, violated his tabus, and—perhaps worst of all—spurned his proffered affection with a cooking-pot which happened to be full of something very hot.

But off in the bush Ntuv slumbered, sobbing a little, curled up like a puppy on a bed of ferns. The moonlight filtered through the pandanus leaves and limned her spare brown legs and her spare brown body, and smote whitely on the disk of pearl-shell that lay tilted upon her breast.

The white man was crawling on his hands and knees when he heard the devil-devil drums. He was scratched and torn by briars, where he had crashed through the unbroken bush before finding the jungle-path he now followed. There was a nasty cut down one side of his face, from a jagged war-club whose downward fall had not been stopped by the bullet that had killed its owner. He was breathing heavily, but he stopped breathing to listen when he heard the drums. Then he moved onward to where little speckles of moonlight filtered through the jungle-roof. He squinted upward and oriented himself by the position of the moon. The devil-devil drums were ahead of him. So was the surf, which was his only hope.

The white man swore softly and moved on, still in that painful crawl on hands and knees. The drums ahead, he believed, meant that an alarm had passed on ahead of him. In any event they meant that a village was awake and stirring. In either case they meant that he would be a dead man by morning. But with the sunrise, unless he got to the shore and a dug-out with enough start to outrange the local gaspave weapons with his revolver, he would be a dead man anyhow. He went on.

There was no apparent reason for his
peculiar crawling. He was battered and wounded, of course, but not enough to prevent his walking upright. And the path was quite clear. Beautifully clear and inviting. But the white man knew better than to follow beautifully clear and inviting paths on Sualaha without a native of that hospitable isle before him, preferably tied fast and quite close to him. Sualaha, you see, is occupied by people who do a great deal of hunting. And besides their bows and arrows and gaspipe guns and the occasional rare and priceless modern weapon, they use traps.

There will be a branch, for instance, growing innocently out into the path. In the branch there is a thorn, which when it scratches you looks exactly as if it had grown there except that if you look at it closely you will see a curious gummy substance on the thorn's tip. Or there will be a harmless-looking little vine creeping across the way, with delicate, verdant little shoots sprouting from it. Quite a pretty little thing. But the man who touches that trigger-vine or is scratched by that thorn will be very much surprised.

The white man knew about such things, and he crawled on doggedly. He had sprung at least two mantraps by touching their trigger-vines with his fingers and had heard their spears—held taut in clumsy bows—go whirring over his head. And at least once, quite recently, he had edged his way around a suspicious spot of which his fingers warned him. He did not investigate or disturb it, because it was one of the things that would hold back his pursuers. But he thought it was a hidden pit, lined with smooth stakes, armed with upright spears in its bottom, and covered over with a wattle top and delicately firmed earth.

These things he had avoided since coming upon the path after getting away into the bush from a village some miles back. Two other white men had been killed there and he had been warned of the attack made upon all three of them simultaneously only by the mooncast shadow of a war-club descending on his head. With that split second of warning, he had flung himself sidewise, the warrior detailed to dispatch him had tumbled rather ludicrously upon him, and the white man had fired into him with the muzzle of his revolver touching the black man's flesh. Then he had killed two other men getting clear into the bush.

His only hope, now, lay in getting to the surf and a dug-out. If he could get offshore with moonlight to shoot by, he could round the island and get back to the Kini.

The schooner was still untaken, he was sure, because it was anchored a good half-mile off the beach and the barbed wire was up and a double watch on deck with rifles passed out. But it was necessary to cross the island to steal a dug-out, because he was expected to try to reach the nearer beach and signal to the ship. And the white man was in no mood to commit suicide.

He crawled on, grimly. The devil-devil drums came monotonously to his ears, varying in loudness with the wind's waverings, but always persistent, always dull and hollow of tone, and always menacing. Devil-devil drums always mean mischief afoot. Often they mean death to some of those who hear them. But between their throbblings came the surging roar of surf, and that sound was a lodestone to draw the white man on.

He was probably being followed. His clothing had given him an advantage in the virgin bush, because it protected him from briars and thorns which ripped at the flesh of his pursuers. When he came to the bushtrail, he had followed it because his clothing was nearly in ribbons and the agony of barbed thorns tearing at him was maddening. But the men on his trail would actually follow more slowly along the clear path in the darkness, than through the rending thorns.

Once away from their own village, they would be in territory as hostile to them as to him. Traps are impartial affairs, anyhow, and will catch a Sualaha man as readily as any other stranger. And Sualaha folk are impartial ones who value heads as heads, whether they come from inhabitants of other villages on the island or from white men. The white man makes a finer trophy, of course. A suitably cured white man's head is worth ten black ones. But the village of the devil-devil drums would collect both white and black heads with enthusiasm and skill. So the white man's pursuers would follow slowly.

The bush-path—a tunnel of darkness
whose floor was dotted with sharply-edged flecks of brilliant moonlight—twisted a little and dipped down towards the bay. The drums sounded clearly, now, rumbling and thudding in a thunderous reverberation which had an hypnotic rhythm. But the white man heard surf, loudly, besides. And he saw that here on the hillside the undergrowth thinned. He saw sparkles, which could only be moonlight on the water.

He crawled off the path and stood erect, shaking himself. His shoulders and loins ached horribly. He felt at his revolver and moved through the trees towards the light. A good view of the village might show a chance of getting at a dug-out without being seen beforehand. He felt the earth tilt more and more beneath his feet as the slope grew steeper.

Then he came out into clear moonlight and was revealed as a scarecrow of a man. The side of his face was a gory horror. His clothes hung in shreds about him, torn cleanly by many thorns and branches. He was slashed with mud and stained with the damp humus of the path along which he had crawled. And he was grim, and savage, and his eyes burned with the sort of fire that would burn in the eyes of a man who has seen his two companions killed for the trophies their heads will make, and who has excellent reason to anticipate the same fate for himself.

Gaunt, and torn, and exhausted, the white man looked down upon the village of the devil-devil drums. The booming made the whole air throb. The village was awake. And without especial hope, the white man began to search for a route that would take him to the beached dugouts with a chance of not getting killed.

And then he heard a queer little gasp, and there was a startled movement, and Ntuvu sprang to her feet, staring. Her lithe young naked body was outlined against the vivid silver of the moonlit bay. The white man’s revolver swung upon her at her stirring. She was too frightened to run away. And the white man knew savagely that any alarm, any notice of his actual presence would bring men racing to the spot.

He advanced towards her, his eyes cold and merciless. He might bind her. He might have to kill her. In any event he would have to keep her close by him until his escape was sure.

**NTUVI** gasped in the ultimate of panic as the white man bound her arms with twisted vines. She had submitted, unnerved by his apparition, to the seizure of her arm. She had been in the same paroxysms of terror when he tripped her roughly and flung her again upon her bed of ferns. The white man’s eyes were burning like coals. If she screamed, the village of the devil-devil drums would come swarming upon him.

The moonlight, filtering down, outlined her spare young body, unmarred by tattoos or the scarifications practised by Sualaha men. Her skin was smooth as brown satin, and rounded with the delicate curves of youth. As the white man, holding her savagely, prepared to complete her helplessness, the stark horror of being left bound to be seized for Baruti and his tortures in the morning gave her voice.

“Ruana!” she sobbed—yet even then had the wit to whisper—“Nwane kwao, ruana! Kulu alua t’ma’u! Nwane toaa—”

The white man’s hand was clapped over her mouth. He crouched above her, his eyes hot, listening. Then the wild pig that had rustled the undergrowth grunted and went crashing away.

He felt her lips moving imploringly under his palm. The same moonlight that had disclosed her body now showed him her face. And it was terror-stricken and horrified, but the terror and the horror did not come from him. And suddenly the white man seemed to grasp for the first time the meaning of her gasped and sobbing plea.

“Ruana” meant “friend,” of course. And “Kulu alua t’ma’u” was “we have the same fear,” and she had been saying “men of the village”—when he stopped her mouth.

Her heart was pounding like a hare’s, beneath the soft flesh his hand touched. And she was staring up at him in an agony of entreaty, resistance abandoned in a passion of appeal.

The white man took his hand cautiously from her lips.

“Ta?” he whispered savagely, “ta ma’u’oe?”

Softly, half-strangled by terror lest he

*“What do you fear?” This is To’a Ba’ita dialect of Northern Malaita.*
disbelieve her, Ntivi gasped out her tale. Barutu, chief of devil-devil doctors, had made amorous proposals to her that day. And she had flung a cooking-pot of hot food upon him, because once when a child she had seen him drunk with palm-wine, and had touched his head and had not been blasted, wherefore she knew him to be a liar. And now the devil-devil drums were beating, and Baruti was calling down the wrath of many devils upon her, and in the morning he would order the warriors of the village to track her down and seize her, and he would put her to death with many tortures if the *nwane kwao*, the white man, left her bound.

The white man considered wearily. He was close to a dead man, anyhow. Here was a girl who was in just as bad a case. She wouldn’t scream, anyhow, and wasn’t to be feared. The two of them against the whole population of Sualaha. . . . He felt her quivering with dread beneath his hands. Ugly thoughts ran through his brain for an instant. He would probably be killed before sunrise in any event. The girl would surely be killed before many days were past. And she was young and desirable and in mortal terror, and utterly helpless before him . . .

Then he laughed shortly and stood up.

"Without fear and without reproach," he said sardonically in English, to the abysmal bush about him, trapped with poisoned spears and thorns and cunning pitfalls for the unwary traveller. "Me!" He laughed, quite mirthlessly, and added to the girl. "*Waiwaena nau, to'ana ma'ui.*"*

He turned his back on her to survey the village wearily through the vivid moonlight. The village was awake. It was not watching for him, but the devil-devil drums were thunderous. He began to try to chart a path among the houses, with a side-glance at the devil-devil house from which the throbbing of the great drums came.

A touch upon his leg made him look down. Ntivi was sitting up, staring off into the shadow of the bush. She was trembling, and the white man heard the tiniest possible crackling and rustling as someone forced a way delicately through the undergrowth towards him.

If it were a man—and it was—the white man would have to shoot him. Which would rouse the village of the devil-devil drums. Which would start a merciless pursuit again, with the white man exhausted now and unfit for the terrific effort necessary for even a chance of escape.

He watched wearily. A branch moved. A man’s glistening shoulder was outlined for an instant by speckles of moonlight. The white man raised his revolver with a weary shrug.

A native, tattooed, scarified, his hair bleached with lime to the perfection of the Solomon Islander’s idea of perfect manly beauty, stepped out into the open. He carried throwing-spear and bow and arrows. He was puzzling over the unimaginably slight traces of a trail that could be discerned in deep bush by what moonlight filtered down through the leaves. Then Ntivi cried out, in a little gasp.

* "Sister of mine, don’t be afraid."
untried warrior. Wherefore, through the instinct of young men the world over, he had tried to make himself into a mirror of fashion. His body was covered with the symmetrical scarifications which are the mode on Sualah. His hair had been plastered with gum and erected into two monstrous horns. His ear-lobes were pierced and distended. Punctures in his nostrils carried jaunty decorative pig-bones. Seen in outline, with Ntuvi’s young body close to him, Kavo looked more like one of the devils Baruti was invoking than the picture of romance. But blubbering sounds came from him, the hopeless, racked sobs of one who sees his own especial woman not only dead but damned.

And Ntuvi clung to him in that transcendent sense of well-being that comes to any woman who sees that a man has risked or ruined all he has for her sake. If Kavo were discovered here—

The white man growled impatiently. His whole scheme was full-fledged now. The growl was for Ntuvi. But it was Kavo who whirled. Blubbering, he spun about and saw a stranger. Further, he saw a white man. And in the utterly automatic reflex of a Sualah warrior he jerked back his spear to sink it in the man who was unknown to him, was consequently an enemy, and was in his possession of an untaken white man’s head a treasure.

But instead of the satisfying crunch of a spear tearing through muscle and sinew, there was a small, incisive slapping noise. Not the report of a firearm. Totally different. But Kavo went soggily backward and collapsed to the earth. A left hook to the point of the jaw was a novelty with which he was unprepared to cope.

He lay still, mutilated and uncouth to the white man, and the essence of perfection to Ntuvi. She wailed a little, helplessly, and rocked herself to and fro above him, turning terror-filled, grief-stricken eyes upon the white man.

He swore softly. He’d needed Kavo for the scheme that had sprung full-formed into his brain. The sound of the devil-devil drums eddied and swirled about him. And suddenly, from the bush, there came a faint, a distant, a horror-struck yell.

The white man’s eyes blew savagely. That was one of his pursuers. Fallen, most probably, into the pit-trap he had himself escaped. They’d been hurrying, those men, because they heard the devil-devil drums and because his trail was very fresh. They’d been hurrying to get to him before the village of the drums acquired his head.

With a snap, a twist on the original idea came to him. Ntuvi was hugging herself above Kavo’s unconscious body and uttering little sobbing wails. The white man knew that when Kavo came to life again he would have forgotten such a minor thing as romance in the paramount urge to acquire a white man’s head, which would not only make him rich, but a warrior to be respected and a statesman whose councils would have weight. But Ntuvi, being a woman, could not see past romance.

“Nia lalakwa mae,” growled the white man. “To ali-jeolao.”*

He was going through the tattered wrecks of his pockets. Matches. . . He found the box, with its contents safely waterproofed. He withdrew to deepest shadow. Ntuvi, staring, saw him disappear altogether, but the tears half-dried upon her cheeks. White men were marvellous, and could work miracles, even to killing men with a blow of their fists and then bringing them to life again if they chose. He was in the densest shadow of the tree, where not a pin-point of moonlight trickled through.

AND suddenly Ntuvi gasped; a little choked gasp. An eye stared at her from the darkness, an eye which was luminous of itself. Another eye appeared beside it, ghostly blue in colour and glowing with a flickering luminosity. Then an oblong patch of glowing fire, which remained suspended in the darkness. Another. . . .

Bit by bit, a face of cold blue flame built itself up, hanging unsupported in space. And then two hands shone out, finger by finger, then the backs and palms and wrists.

The white man slipped the match-box back into his pocket just as Kavo groaned and sat up staring wildly. And Kavo heard teeth chattering by his side, and saw Ntuvi grovelling on the earth before a disembodied face of fire and two fiery hands.

*“He won’t die. Stop the noise.”
which wavered in the air before it. And Kavo would have screamed in terror but for the hampering fact that his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth.

The white man snarled, grinning with a perverse sense of humour. The devil-devil drums were pounding steadily, maddeningly, down in the village by the bay. With that accompaniment and the ghastly sight he knew he presented, smeared as were his face and hands with match-phosphorous and with his body invisible in the blackness, he was as authentic a devil as any Sualaha man could ever hope to see.

"O mwane," he intoned in a thin voice that would carry no distance at all, "Oeri kia Suukwa'i...""

He paused. Kavo's teeth chattered and he gasped. The statement that he beheld Suukwa'i, the Strong One, evidently a particularly uncomfortable devil who would tear men in bits when they displeased him, went down unquestioned. He grovelled on the earth. So the white man gave succinct orders, waved his hands for emphasis, and vanished into thin air by the simple expedient of turning his back.

Kavo fled, with the breath sobbing in his throat. Ntuvi remained crouched on the ground, shaking. The white man came out of the darkness and touched her on the shoulder.

"Waiwaona," he said tiredly. "Sister, you didn't think I was a god, did you?"

Ntuvi shuddered and stared at him wide-eyed. Smiling, he held out his hand. Where the moonlight struck it glowed. But where there should have been shadow it glowed also. Of course. The moistened phosphorus still coated it. But Ntuvi shuddered at the sight.

And the white man, because he felt quite secure now though desperately tired, told her amusedly just how it was done. He showed her the matches. He even took the disk of pearl-shell that hung about her neck and in seconds had it glowing like his own face and hands. And Ntuvi became instantly an atheist and admirer of the white man, and giggled at the new plaything, and wanted to take all the other matches and daub herself for decoration. While the white man waited for a change in the tempo of the devil-devil drums she daubed a great smear across her forehead.

And then a man yelled shrilly not forty yards away, and there was the shattering roar of a gaspipe gun, and slugs tore the leaves over their heads. The bush was erupting painted, befrizzed, howling men from the other side of the island who had taken two heads that night and wanted a third very badly. They came racing towards the white man and Ntuvi. And the white man, very coldly, shot four of them and went tearing into the bush on Ntuvi's heels.

He had gone not more than fifty yards when he tripped over a root and went hurtling headlong, rolling down a steep declivity and fetching up with a crash against a tree-trunk. It three-quarters stunned him. He was able to stagger upright, but fell again. He heard crashings and yells in the bush behind him. His pursuers were desperately close and in a great hurry to get his head and get away before the village of the devil-devil drums came out to investigate. And the white man knew that he could not move faster than the slowest of crawls, and that they would inevitably come upon him here in the bush where his revolver would do no good.

He squatted down with his back against a tree, dazed and sick from his fall, but filled with a wild upsurging rage.

BUT they never reached him.

The white man, lying mired and dazed and exhausted in the muck of the jungle-earth, with his revolver savagely out and reloaded for five swift shots if he could get them in, and a sixth that would spoil his head for even the most painstaking of trophy-makers; the white man had forgotten one important thing. Which was that the savage mind is childish, but it is also practical. The savage religion is infantile, but it is eminently matter-of-fact. And devils are every-day matters on Sualaha.

Kavo had felt the marrow of his bones turn to water when listening to the disembodied face of cold blue fire. He had entertained no doubt that here was a devil, an authentic devil, precisely like the devils Baruti threatened his parishioners with. Kavo devoutly believed that he had been ordered by Suukwa'i, the Strong One, to go and kill Baruti and bring warriors to the bush-path to take the heads of men
who would presently come along it from the other side of the island.

But Kavo, racing with the breath sobbing in his throat to carry out those orders, had had a moment of doubt: Suukwa'i was probably a strong devil, but there were many devils. And the power and invulnerability of Baruti's domesticated evil spirits had the sanction of long usage. And also, anybody who touched Baruti's head would shrivel up and die instantly. Baruti's devils would see to that. And therefore, before offending them, it might be well to be certain that this Suukwa'i was a devil in good standing with his fellows, that he was a devil whose deviltry—as it were—would not be hindered or perhaps altogether foiled by Baruti's spiritual acquaintances.

And also, Kavo had certainly seen a white man and had tried to speak to him. And white men had devils attending them—all men said so—but nevertheless Sualaha devils, on Baruti's affirmation, knew how to take care of such interlopers. In short, Kavo began to suspect that he had been talking to a white man's devil, a foreign, an alien devil who had no business on Sualaha and would undoubtedly be torn in bits by the local devils as soon as they heard of his presence.

Wherefore Kavo, coming panting into the village, had gasped out his tale of a white man and of a devil with face and hands of blue fire who had spoken to him, and very discreetly did not say anything at all about the orders that same devil had given nor take the time or the risk Baruti's killing would imply.

So that much sooner than the white man expected, Kavo was retracing his steps, accompanied by most of the fighting force of the village, while a messenger was making bold to interrupt Baruti in his devil-devil conversation with the news that a strange devil and a white man were in the neighbourhood and it behoved Baruti to send his devils to fight this new devil while the warriors took the white man's head.

And so the white man, feeling strength come back to him with a terrible slowness, heard little rustlings to right and left of where he lay crumpled up at the base of a huge jungle-tree. And then he heard a man scream up on the hill-side where men were forcing their way down to him, and then a gaspive gun went off with a terrific racket, and then hell broke loose.

There were not many firearms in the two parties who fought in the stray speckles of moonlight that filtered down through the leaves. Mostly it was spear and club work; with yells for orchestration, and screams when a weapon got home. There were other noises, too. A battling pair of men rolled down through the prickly bush, snarling and tearing at each other—there had been no parley or defiance, because every stranger is an enemy on Sualaha—and fought to a groan of agony not ten yards from where the white man lay. Then one of them got to his feet, panting, while the other coughed horribly. But then there was a chopping sound, at which the coughing man screamed once only. And the chopping went on, and then the victor grunted in triumph and went panting up the hill-side again and back into the battle.

The white man began to crawl away. In a little while he was stronger, and staggered to his feet. The devil-devil drums still throbbed maddeningly down in the village, their tempo unchanged though the subject of Baruti's exhortations to the devils he possibly believed in had probably changed their subject. The white man heard the fighting behind him with a certain cold satisfaction. The inhabitants of the village of the devil-devil drums were wiping out the party of men who had already killed two white men that night and had crossed the island, daringly, in hopes of killing a third. The villagers outnumbered the raiders by three or four to one. They would fight mercilessly. The killing of two white men would be partly avenged by the killing of a dozen black ones.

Ntuvi was vanished; flitted into thin air at the appearance of the white man's pursuers. The white man found a bushpath, turned into it—and saw a glowing disk of pale-blue flame trying to hide. Simultaneously there was a rushing of men along the path. The white man leaned tiredly against a tree, to die. And there were howls of fright.

"O nwani," intoned the white man again, remembering the match-phosphorus that still coated his face, "I am Suukwa'i, the Strong One, and Kavo is my nwane ambu and Ntuvi kini ambu also. Go and kill."

With chattering teeth they filed past him,
while he waved his palely flaming hands vaguely in the air. Once past, they fled. But when they got into the battle they would fight like fiends—a prospect the white man regarded with tired satisfaction.

He heard a thin, almost hysterical giggle. Ntuvi stepped out into the path. Together they followed it to the village, the white man stumbling with exhaustion.

"Now," suggested Ntuvi in eager anticipation, "you will kill Baruti—"

THE white man grunted. Ntuvi skipped happily on before him. They emerged suddenly from the bush-path into the village clearing. Here the thunder of the drums was maddening. Crazy huts, perched on stilts, blotted out portions of the moonlit sky. There was excited chattering above them. But the white man stumbled again into the shadow of a house, and his glowing face and hands brought squeals of terror from above. The glowing disk of pearl-shell and the smear of phosphorescence on Ntuvi’s forehead, too, did not escape notice. Walling surrounded them as they went on, Ntuvi skipping gaily, the white man stumbling drearily after her.

The fighting was still going on up the hill-side. But it was moving swiftly, now, away from the village. The men from the other side of the island had been cut to pieces and the few survivors were fleeing in the ultimate of desperation and the inhabitants of the village of the devil-devil drums were following them eagerly, because each fleeing man bore a head on his shoulders, and heads are wealth on Sualaha.

Through the deserted village the exhausted, shaken white man stumbled, with Ntuvi dancing before him with the moonlight shining on her bare brown body. The devil-devil drums were a monstrous thunder, now, in which the wailing of the village women who had seen a devil walking behind Ntuvi was but a dim and dismal squeaking.

The noise was earth-shaking when the monster arched front of the devil-devil house loomed up. It was a colossal structure, forty feet or more from ground to top, made by planting slender tree-trunks upright in the earth and bending their tops together to form a support for palm-leaf thatch. Within it was dense blackness save where a fire glowed beside the encarmined figure of Baruti, sweating as he pounded on his drums and squawked out incantations and spells for the discomfiture of the invading devil whose presence had been reported.

Ntuvi skipped happily up to the platform before the devil-devil house. The white man climbed tiredly after her. And then Ntuvi entered the devil-devil portals. All other sacrilege was as nothing compared to that. It was death for any woman at any time. But Ntuvi danced gaily inside, and the glowing smear on her forehead and the phosphorus-covered shell disk shone out with startling distinctness in the blackness.

Baruti turned his head, perhaps warned by the giving of the pliable floor beneath his feet. The firelight dazed his eyes, because he squawked angrily:

"Nau nata ano’endo natalaa. Lai!"

And Ntuvi giggled. When one is a very young girl, and has very suddenly been let behind the scenes with gods and devils and white men, one is apt to giggle at an ancient, mangy, and evil-smiling devil-devil doctor who blinks ferociously at one and orders one away with sacerdotal authority.

Baruti saw her then, in the firelight. He gasped at the sacrilege of a woman entering the devil-devil house. And then he saw the white man. And Baruti dropped the twin thigh-bones that served as drum-sticks, and goggled and gasped for breath with which to squeal shrilly. The drumming stopped, and the silence was like a thunder-clap.

The white man stood unsteadily upon his feet, looking at Baruti in dull-eyed amusement. And Baruti saw that he was wounded and exhausted and unready, and suddenly he saw also that if he could kill this pair his past reputation of sanctity would be as nothing to his future one. It would be the faith of the village that Baruti’s private devils had dragged them here to die beneath his hand.

Baruti’s eyes flamed suddenly. His skinny arm crept out, and swept forward suddenly with a barb-studded short spear snatched from the wall—

It went slithering and scratching across the floor as the white man shot him tiredly. And then dead silence fell again.

Ntuvi giggled happily. The white man in his role of devil had announced to awed and frightened warriors on the bush-path
that Kavo was his nuane ambu, which means holy man or devil-devil doctor. And he had also announced that Ntuvi was kini ambu, which means holy woman and was a distinct novelty. And if, now, the white man vanished into thin air so that his whole appearance seemed but the manifestation of a powerful devil, Ntuvi and Kavo would be in highly desirable case.

"Iola?" asked the white man wearily.

Ntuvi led him, giggling, through the long dark lane of the devil-devil house, tripping over unseen and generally gruesome objects. She took him out of the further end and put her young strength fully into the launching of, not an iola, which is a small dug-out, but a baru which is a large one with a mat sail. And she waded out into the surf to beg of him his supply of matches for the gleaming stuff on their tips. The white man gave them to her without interest. He could rest, while the mat sail drove the canoe.

When the warriors came back from the bush-path with their various grisly trophies, triumphant and enriched by a round dozen heads, they heard a gentle, rhythmic drumming coming from the devil-devil house. It was not the drumming of Baruti. It was something altogether novel. When they entered the devil-devil house they saw the red firelight gleaming on the still-wet limbs and body of Ntuvi and they stopped, aghast. They were still more horrified when they saw the body of Baruti lying crumpled on the floor.

And Ntuvi reminded them pungently of what the disembodied head and hands had said to them in the bush-path. She called upon Kavo to relate what the devil had said to him when he found her off in the bush. And for final proof of her utter sanctity, Ntuvi waved the disk of pearl-shell at them, advancing into the darkness with the red fire behind her. A smear of pale-blue flame upon her forehead was proof conclusive.

The white man was well offshore when the devil-devil drums began to beat again. He had hoisted the mat sail and was beating to windward to round the point of the island before dawn. And he listened to the drums as the wind's wavering permitted their sound to be heard. The tempo was that of a festive occasion, celebrating the enrichment of the village by a dozen heads, as well as the installation of a new devil-devil doctor and his equally holy wife.

At about the time, next morning, that the white man ran up to the Kini and told tiredly of what had happened to the other two white men the night before, it was thoroughly accepted as an article of faith in the village of the devil-devil drums, that anybody who touched the head of either Kavo or Ntuvi would shrivel up and die, instantly. Nobody had, and nobody would, but all men knew the thing would happen.

So it is quite possible that Ntuvi lived happily ever after.

A Gangland Adventurer, Rides the Quick-Trigger Trail, While Traders in Flesh, Blaze a—

"WHITE WAY TO HELL"

The joints in Tia Juana called for more female entertainers, and the racketeers in the states answered the call. But a hot-lead welcome awaited the traders in flesh on both sides of the International Border.

A Complete Gangland Novel
by E. HOFFMAN PRICE

ALSO—DEATH HAS A DEADLINE
Novelette by Norman A. Daniels
WEB OF SMOKE
Novelette by G. T. Fleming Roberts
BACK HANDED MOP-UP
Short Story by Margie Harris

IN

DOUBLE ACTION GANG
THE SMART ONE

Fox’s hand closed on the butt of his six-shooter as he slowly shut the door.

by SAMUEL TAYLOR

Hard to beat Fox Phillips, the smartest guy in the Yukon.

The smartest man on the Koyukuk was thinking hard about three things at once, and playing poker to boot. That takes brains, but Fox Phillips had brains. Drifting into the camp at Horse Creek two years before with nothing but a ragged parka and a silver tongue, Fox Phillips now was well fixed, owned the trading post, had a dozen miners working placers on shares for him. That takes brains.

Fox sat facing the door. He always faced the door. Outside, the blizzard was beating against the walls, outlining every crack with thick frost. But Fox was warm with his back towards the pot-bellied stove, he was warm, and his shelves were full. He had a nice poke of gold in the iron safe behind the counter. He was winning, as usual, in the poker game. Yes, he was getting along, except for three things.

The door creaked open, and Fox Phillips knew that one of the three things would be resolved right away. He played out the hand and raked in the chips while Bull Adams shoved the door shut against the wind and clumped across the plank flooring. Bull Adams was a big, heavy young buck. He looked like an animated snow-man, now, with the blizzard-driven snow wedged between every hair of his caribou-hide outfit, from parka hood to the big mukluks encasing his feet. Fine snow was ground into his eyebrows and lashes, giving his blunt young face an appearance somewhat like that of a ham actor trying to look old by adopting a white wig.

“Fox, come on outside; I want to see you,” grunted Bull.

“Sure,” agreed Fox easily. He’d been expecting Bull Adams to come roaring in. Been expecting him for a couple of months. Fox was ready. Bull Adams had had too much money, anyhow, when he’d
come into camp last fall, and there’d been something about his dumbness that Juneen Welch had liked, so Fox had had to get him away, before the girl fell for him. That problem had been simple for Fox Phillips—a little matter of a salted claim had taken Bull Adams’ cash for half interest and at the same time had taken him out of camp. Fox had taken care to salt a claim thirty miles or so up the twisting ravines, high in the mountains.

Following Bull Adams out, Fox made sure his revolver was where he could get it. He noted with satisfaction that Deputy Marshal Owens was sitting there watching the poker game. Nothing like having a deputy marshal on the spot in time of trouble. Owens would be a witness that Bull Adams called Fox outside.

When the two were standing in the driven snow, Bull fumbled clumsily inside his parka. Already, Fox had his own revolver out, hidden in the folds of his fur clothing. The instant that Bull flashed a gun... "Look," Bull Adams was grunting. "Heft it, Fox! Heft it!"

There was a trembling sort of eagerness in the voice. The blunt face, shoved close in the stinging snow, had an eager grin.

Slipping the revolver away, Fox hefted the rawhide poke. It was heavy, surprisingly heavy. Fox concealed his surprise.

"Dog-gone, I worked that claim nigh onto a month ‘fore I hit the pay streak!" Bull said eagerly. "I almost figured you’d sold me half interest in a lemon, Fox. But when I hit the metal, she was like you said it was—heavy and thick. I got all this working with one steam point and a little leaky boiler. With good equipment, men to cut wood and others to mine—Fox, we’re both rich! Here, take it. I’ve got another just like it. This is yours. Fifty-fifty, of course."

"Good enough, Bull. We’ll clean up a million apiece on this, if we work it right."

"Sure, but first I want to get married and take a little honeymoon trip and a rest."

"Married?" Fox asked. "You mean—Juneen?"

"That’s right. I know old Paw Welch is mighty choice of his daughter’s company, and he told me to keep away from her. But that was because I didn’t have any-thing. Juneen has agreed to marry me just as soon as her father gives his consent. I figure when Paw Welch knows I’m half owner of a rich claim, he’ll see me a little differently."

"Congratulations!" boomed Fox heartily. "Good luck, Bull!"

"Say, that’s white of you, Fox. I know you’ve sort of had an eye on Juneen yourself."

"Sure I have. But this is a land of free competition, I always say," Fox grinned. He could spread it on when he wanted to. But his grin was genuine, for the three problems that had been worrying him snapped into place like sections of a puzzle. He knew how to get old Paw Welch out of competition, how to get Juneen, and how to settle the hash of Bull Adams. Fox Phillips was one smart guy.

Juneen’s father, old Paw Welch, was a double-barbed thorn in Fox Phillips’ side. First, Paw Welch would have nothing to do with Fox and would not allow Fox around his daughter. Next, Paw Welch had freighted supplies up in competition to Fox’s trading post. Bringing supplies up the Yukon, then onto shoal-draught steamers at Nulato for the Koyukuk journey, then to horse scows and finally after the freezeup finishing the last leg with dog teams—that was tough work, and Fox figured a profit of three hundred percent was only just and equitable. But old Paw Welch was selling stuff at half that, cutting into Fox’s staple-goods trade.

Now Fox had a way to settle Paw Welch’s hash, get the girl, and recover the half of the claim that Bull Adams owned.

He watched the young fellow’s eager figure disappear at a run into the blizzard, then Fox followed cautiously. Everything was in his favor. The wind would whip away footprints in the powdery snow almost as if you were walking in water. Fox chuckled to himself.

Reaching Paw Welch’s place, Fox very gingerly let himself in at the rear door. This was Paw Welch’s bedroom. The door beyond, opening into the front room, was ajar a crack, and a shaft of yellow lamplight came through, lighting up a snapshot of Juneen pinned to the wall. Through the crack of the door came voices as Paw Welch and Bull Adams talked and laughed.
together. Fox Phillips listened. The two were drinking a glass of whiskey on it, talking over plans for the future, both of them so happy they could hardly contain themselves. Fox knew that Juneen was up nursing a sick sourdough in his cabin. There would be no witnesses to what he planned to do.

"I'd better go get some sleep; I'm bunking with Fox tonight," Bull was saying. "That is, I'll sleep if I can sleep. Gosh, seems I can't hardly wait."

Old Paw Welch chuckled. "Never you mind; you'll be married a long time. Goodnight, Bull."

"Sure you don't want me to pick up Juneen at that sick miner's cabin and bring her home?"

"No, you sly rascal! I want Juneen to get a good night's sleep herself. I'll go bring her home, and I won't even tell her you're in camp until you show up in the morning."

"All right, dog-gone it. But, say, Paw, maybe you'd better keep this poke in your safe tonight. There'll be enough to keep me awake tonight without worrying about that?"

Fox, listening at the bedroom door, grinned. Bull Adams left. Fox could see old Paw Welch sitting there by the stove, with the poke in his lap, smiling in a way that was both happy and sad. A father hates to see his daughter go off to make a home of her own, even though she may be marrying a fine young buck like Bull Adams.

Fox opened the rear door. Paw Welch looked up at the creak of the frozen hinge. He frowned a little, his forehead wrinkling, the bald skin running back over his head remaining smooth and shiny.

"Why, hello, Fox," he said. "Why for you come in the back way?"

Then old Paw Welch stood up suddenly as he saw Fox Phillips' revolver. The old man flung up futile arms, found them beaten down by the heavy blows. He didn't make a sound.

COMING back into the trading post, Fox found the eyes of the poker players and of Deputy Marshal Owens questioningly upon him.

"Well?" Owens asked, "was there a fight?" Owens had a way of looking at you a little too directly. The deputy marshal didn't care for Fox Phillips, but that went mutual.

"Fight? You mean between me and my pardner, Bull Adams? No, there wasn't a fight. He's doing real good on that claim we own together. Real good. But, say, there might be a fight," Fox admitted, as if by an afterthought. "Bull claimed he was going down to ask Paw Welch about marrying Juneen—and you know how bull-headed Paw Welch is about that."

"You ought to know," suggested the deputy marshal, and the boys guffawed. Fox joined in. He had planted the seed, and the rest would take care of itself. Paw Welch would be found dead—and clasped in his hand was half of the snapshot of Juneen that had been pinned to the wall in the rear bedroom. That would suggest the fight had been over the girl. And to clinch things, Fox had slipped the other half of the picture into Bull Adams' sledge pack.

Smart guy, Fox Phillips. About an hour later Juneen came in, her face taut and void of color. She went directly to Deputy Marshal Owens, whispered something to him, and the two of them left.

It was getting late, and before long the trading post was empty. Fox locked it up—he was one of the few men in the North smart enough to use jocks and not trust to human nature. He ducked his head to the blizzard and headed towards his cabin. He felt pretty good. Bull would be put out of the way, and Juneen, after the shock of her father's death had worn off, would come around to liking Fox Phillips. Fox would fix that. He was smart.

A light was on in his cabin. He went in to see Bull Adams sitting there with shoulders hunched, looking at the torn piece of picture, which he held in shaking hands.

"Bull, for gosh sakes, you've got to travel," Fox advised. "The marshal's after you!"

The husky young fellow seemed dazed. His blunt face was stiff. "Huh? What for?"

"For killing Paw Welch! Here, lemme see that picture! . . . Looks like the other half of what was found in the dead man's hand. Where'd you get it?"

"Found it in my sledge pack while I was fixing up a load for the honeymoon
trip in the mornin'," admitted Bull Adams. Fox grinned inwardly. Bull wasn't even denying finding this bit of incriminating evidence.

"Somebody put it there, I reckon," Bull concluded.

"Sure, I believe you, Bull. But how can you prove that? Paw Welch is dead, and one hand is holding half of that picture——"

Fox Phillips' voice snuffed off as Bull Adams uncoiled in a ball of roaring fury. The attack was so sudden that Fox found himself taken by surprise for one of the few times in his life. He couldn't get his gun out from under his parka. Bull Adams was a big fellow, young and with muscles toughened by months of back-breaking mining with sledge and steam points. Fox fought desperately, using every dirty fighting trick he knew. He gouged thumbs at eyes, tried to ram knees into groin, clutched for a choke-hold, snapped with his white teeth. But nothing seemingly could stop Bull Adams' fury. Fox went down, felt his head beating against the floor, felt huge fists hammering him, iron muscles twisting and tearing at him. With a last desperate effort he kicked Bull off, and clawed out his gun.

Then a big boot stamped onto his wrist. With frozen surprise he saw Deputy Marshal Owens standing there.

"Leggo that gun and get up," growled the officer. "I ought to let Bull kill you, but that ain't the way the law works."

"But—you fool! Bull killed Paw Welch——!"

"Shut up," growled Owens. "Bull met Juneen coming home from the sick miner's, and they went back together to find Paw Welch killed. Juneen come and told me. Bull's story sounded straight. Anyhow, I was for giving the boy a chance. So we decided to keep the news of the murder a secret until morning. We knew if somebody come up here and accused Bull of it, that would prove that person knew of the murder—and that means he was the killer, for otherwise how would he know? And we figured the real killer would jump Bull, because the killer tried to frame him with that torn picture.

"An old trick, mister—but sometimes it takes an old trick to catch a smart Fox who knows all the new tricks."

FOX saw he was neatly trapped. But he was not called Fox for nothing. "You've got me," he admitted. "I'll go with you, Owens... ."

Then, going out the door, he jerked it shut in the deputy's face, and ran into the blizzard. Owens fired, jerked the door open and shot again. But by this time Fox had faded into the storm. He ran blindly into the hills, clutching the shoulder where the bullet had ripped through him. The fools! They couldn't follow him in the blizzard.

The storm died that night. Sunrise came clear and bitterly cold. Fox was huddled on a craggy peak of the mountains. A dozen rods down the slope three gray wolves were lying in the snow, watching him patiently, unblinkingly.

Fox crawled to the rim of the peak and looked down at the deep crevasse, drifted in the bottom with wind-blown snow. He looked back at the wolves, and chuckled. "You won't get me. And they won't get me." He felt of his mangled shoulder. "No, and this won't get me."

He jumped over the edge, hurtled downward a hundred feet. The powdery snow in the crevasse closed over him like water.

Hard to beat Fox Phillips. One smart guy.
SHANGHAIED!

by
BRIAN LOOMIS

A NOVEL OF THE BARBARY COAST

He bucked the most ruthless element of the Barbary Coast, this young southerner did, and he fought them to a bloody finish even though getting himself shanghaied was to be his only reward.

CHAPTER I

OUTSIDE the long, two-story brick building, that bore across its front the sign of William Addison & Company, Bankers, the afternoon sunlight lay yellow upon the planked pavement of Montgomery Street. Up and down the creaking sidewalks moved, slow or fast, hopeful or despondent, the tides of miners, business men, confessed drifters, of all nations and types, that made San Francisco's colorful population in May of 1855.

Inside the building, within the gloomy private office of William Addison himself, Robert Cary stood before the leathery-faced old Yankee, who stared up at his temporary employee somewhat absently.

Addison's mind was still fixed apparently upon the pile of letters brought by yesterday's steamer from the Atlantic.

"I'm finished," Robert Cary repeated patiently. "I've turned over the desk to your nephew, and he is now at work."

Addison nodded briefly. An expression slightly regretful flashed across his long, solemn face.

"I see! I see! Yes!" he assented. "So you want your pay, eh Cary?"

Robert nodded smilingly. The banker—and for that matter many things in the world—vastly amused the young Tennessean aristocrat.

"I suppose that's the logical end of our association," he agreed pleasantly. "Your
nephew is recovered from his illness, and you have no permanent place for me.”

“Yes! Yes! Surely. I’m really sorry, Cary, that I haven’t a position for you. Your work has been entirely satisfactory. Quite different from that of most young men in this mad age. Gold! Gold! That’s all the rising generation seems to think of here in San Francisco—in all California. But there’s no vacancy, so—”

He broke off to open a squat iron safe at his elbow and take from a compartment a handful of the hexagonal gold slugs, that served as legal tender.

“A hundred and twenty dollars. Is that satisfactory?”

“Quite. Now, I’ll bid you good-by, Mr. Addison.”

“Yes! Yes! Of course.”

The banker was already intent upon his letters once more.

“Ah—no position in sight, Cary?” he asked.

“Not yet, sir,” replied Robert, from the door. “But my friend, Nathaniel Evarts, is trying to find something permanent. He has applied in my name to Palmer, Cook, to W. T. Coleman, Sam Brannan and others, for the first vacancy.”

“Good! Any of them will be excellent employers; Evarts is a good agent. Bright young man; very clever attorney. Congratulations on having such a friend. Ah—good day!”

Robert nodded and stepped out upon the sidewalk. Here he halted to look undecidedly up and down, a handsome, athletic figure in brass-buttoned blue frock coat, tight gray pantaloons and varnished boots, his dark hair—worn rather long in the prevailing fashion—covered by a shiny “stove-pipe” beaver.

His indecision was more than momentary; it was index to his whole life at that moment. Since his return from the “diggings” of the interior six weeks before, he had been drifting, objectiveless, upon the turbulent sea that was pioneer San Fran-
cisco. Occasional odd jobs, such as that he had quitted this afternoon, had kept him from having to borrow of Nat Evarts, but no permanent place had opened to him in the city’s life.

As he lounged there in the yellow sunlight, jingling his gold pieces thoughtfully, a lank, somewhat shabby figure, a man three or four years Robert’s senior, stepped from the ranks of passers-by. Nat Evarts halted beside his friend, his shrewd, lantern-jawed face softened by a smile.

“Worked yourself out of a job, eh, Bobby?” he remarked, and Robert nodded.

“Just wondering where to go,” he confessed. “Lonely town for an idler, Nat.”

Two young dandies came toward them at this moment, dressed, like Robert Cary, in the height of the day’s fashion. From the opposite direction another beaver-hatted fashionable approached, and the three met abreast of Nat and Robert Cary.

“Well met!” cried a rat-faced little man. “Tompkins, it gives me pleasure to present Mr. Rafferty. Rafferty, my newly arrived friend, Mr. Tompkins, who came on yesterday’s steamer from New York to view the Land of the Golden Fleece.”

At pronunciation of the names, Nat Evarts turned to stare sharply at the group. To Robert neither name meant anything, but idly he followed Nat’s example. He saw a burly man in late twenties—he who had walked alone—shaking hands formally with one of the other pair. Nat jogged Robert’s elbow.

“Take a good look at the big man!” he whispered. “That’s ‘Mex’ Rafferty, the bully. Just in from Sacramento. Made a reputation as a killer in the diggings. I hear that he is now working for Judge Spotted. Anyway, Rafferty was made a deputy sheriff yesterday.”

Robert studied the broad-shouldered Rafferty carelessly, noting the heavy-chinned, pugnacious face, the hard, bold black eyes and florid skin. Then he shrugged indifferently. In a town so well
supplied with fire-eaters as San Francisco, addition of another seemed anything but remarkable.

"Doesn't mean anything to you, eh?" grinned Nat. "Well, Bobby," he added sententiously, "since we've decided that you're going to live here, you'll find that nothing is too small to deserve notice. As for me, being already known as a political enemy of Judge Alger Spotten, any addition to his faithful following interests me. Who can say when I shall openly offend 'is onor and—come to meet Mex Rafferty over a Colt?"

"Spotten," said Robert Cary deliberately, yet with an observable edge to his tone, "to my mind is a vastly overrated figure. To me he looks very much the blowhard; only dangerous if he's at one's back."

"Oh, ho!"

NAT was staring curiously at his friend.

"I somehow deduce a personal animus in that outburst," he commented.

"Just when did Alger Spotten tread upon your shiny boots?"

Robert smiled, watching the three young elegants move down-street together.

"You're right," he confessed. "I do bear Spotten a grudge. Happened last year. Remember little Sam Hardee, who came with us on the steamer from New Orleans? Well, Sam and I met again in I-Bet Diggings, on Deer Creek in Nevada County. We went partners. Spotten was up there at the time, with claims for sale. We bought a promising-looking stretch of creek-bed and it panned—exactly nothing. I'm morally certain that Spotten salted it—every claim in the string he sold was the same—but I can't prove it. However—I haven't forgotten! One of these days, if opportunity offers, I'll square that score!"

Nat grinned at the account, but suddenly his face went very sober.

"Don't blame you, Bobby. But—be careful! Don't underestimate our fat friend. He is bashaw of San Francisco today. Boss of the ring. Men of my position are fairly safe; we hang together, and Spotten doesn't care to force an issue with us yet. But a lone man is an entirely different case. Spotten's crooked finger can account for most men, through his organization. And if the man hits back, then Spotten gets him, legally or otherwise. You be careful! Don't shout your dislike for him from the housetops."

"Why, all right, old Solon!" laughed Robert, slipping an arm through Nat's.

"But let's walk a bit. Should be some new scandal under discussion in the Golden Horn."

CHAPTER II

ROBERT CARY and Nat Evarts occupied joint lodgings on Clay Street, getting their meals at restaurants. But they saw little of each other except of evenings, for the Maine man was already making his mark as an unusually capable attorney. His practise was growing by leaps and bounds, keeping him hurrying about the city during most of the day; often of nights as well.

They had supper together and Robert left the restaurant with his friend, but at the door they parted. Nat hurried back to his office for a conference with clients, while Robert sauntered aimlessly up Clay toward Portsmouth Square—the Plaza. Save only Nat Evarts, he had no acquaintance in all the city; the only places open to him were the saloons and gambling-hells which, though beginning to be frowned upon by the conservative citizens, still ringed the Plaza with brilliant lights.

He had nearly reached Kearny Street when he met a hurrying, stooped figure. William Addison halted to stare absentely for a moment. Then his long face split in a smile, rather to Robert's surprise.

"Good evening, Cary!" cried Addison.

"Well met! Would you—ah—do me a
slight favor? No one else I can ask at the instant. Just a little errand. Oblige me tremendously—"

"What is it?" inquired Robert, amused as always by the banker's oddities of speech and manner. "If it isn't actually criminal perhaps I can execute it."

"Criminal!" gasped the banker owlishly. "Oh, no! No! Nothing like that, I assure you! Not at all! It's just the delivery of an important packet. Was going myself, but—have a call to a conference of bank-directors. Have to go immediately. Overdue now. Packet for Judge Spotton. Would you mind taking it to his house on Stockton Street? Great favor to me. Put me under obligations and—and—all that!"

"For Spotton!" frowned Robert. "Well, that's a bit different, Mr. Addison. If it were for any one else, why, I'd do it gladly. But Spotton—"

"Why, it's just an important memorandum. Nothing to affect the carrier. Wish you would, Cary. Great favor to me."

Robert hesitated still, but old Addison had been kindly in his absent fashion, and Robert was by nature an obliging soul. So somewhat ruefully he held out his hand for the packet.

"All right, I'll take it for you. I know Spotton's house."

"Thanks! Great favor. Won't forget it, Cary. If the judge gives you an answer, you can give it to me tomorrow. I—I suppose I can't—recompense you for the trouble?"

"Certainly not!" retorted the young man stiffly. "I'm not a messenger-boy, Mr. Addison. I'll do this errand for you because of friendship, not for money."

"No offense! None meant! None at all! Thanks, greatly, Cary. Ah—good night."

Robert continued up Clay, passing the iron-fenced Plaza, and so came into Stockton Street, then beginning to fill with the mansions of the wealthy. Spotton's big brick house, one of the town's show-places, loomed vaguely in the darkness. From a lower window came a gleam of light.

Robert entered the ornamental iron gate and passed up a brick walk. Before he had touched the ker ker ker a white-jacketed Chinaman swung the door open.

"Hullo!" he said, giving the orthodox greeting of his kind. "What you want, huh?"

"Is Judge Spotton at home?"

"Judge in libaly. You go there."

Robert crossed the wide hallway and opened the door indicated. There was a cheerful fire on the hearth in the room he entered; near it, behind a broad mahogany table, lounged a massive man in plum-colored frock coat and brocaded satin waistcoat.

Robert's eyes went curiously to the broad, florid face, the twinkling little black eyes almost hidden in rolls of fat, the big, predacious nose overhanging wide, gash-thin mouth. He had never before seen Spotton, for Sam Hardee had arranged the details of the claim's purchase at I-Bet.

"Evenin' suh," Spotton greeted him formally in a husky voice that hinted of too rich living.

"I have some memoranda for you from Mr. William Addison," explained Robert.

He laid the packet on the table, and Spotton drew it toward him without removing his twinkling, inquisitive eyes from the young man's face.

"I see. Won't you be seated while I glance at them? I may wish to answer the note."

Robert took the indicated chair and began studying the portly political ruler of the city. The more he saw of Spotton, the stronger waxed his dislike. There was not a sincere, honest line the face. Treachery, cruelty, selfishness; a combination of hog and wolf, with no little of the fox, he read in the judge's features.

Robert recalled all that he had heard of Spotton: A Virginian lawyer, it was rumored that his departure from his native
State had been both hurried and from cause. After an unenviable career at the diggings as dealer in doubtful claims, gambler, saloonkeeper and in other, even shadier, occupations, he had come down to San Francisco and somehow got himself made a judge. Now there were few controlling wires in the city that did not eventually trace back to his fat, pink hands.

The hall-door opened and the Chinaman padded over to his master. He bent and whispered in Spotten's ear. The judge shot a keen glance at Robert, then hesitated momentarily.

"Tell him I'm engaged just now!" he snapped. "He'll have to wait."

The Chinaman padded noiselessly out again, closing the door behind him. Spotten finished Addison's note and laid the papers down.

"There's no answer?" Robert inquired politely.

Spotten made no reply for a moment, but stared thoughtfully at his visitor, seeming to analyze him feature by feature.

"I'm not certain," he evaded. "Ah—pardon my curiosity, but—I don't recall you face, young suh. Are you in the employ of Mr. Addison?"

"Not now," said Robert coldly. "I brought this message as a favor to him. As for my face—you've never seen it before, though you did have dealings with me once. Perhaps you recall that early last year you were selling claims on Deer Creek? I see that you do! It may be that you remember unloading one—cleverly-salted—upon two greenhorn miners; Robert Cary and—Samuel Hardee?"

"I think I do recall the names," Spotten admitted smilingly. "But, suh! You are grievously in error if you believe that the ground was salted. No, indeed! I hope I am above such petty tricks, suh!"

He looked so grandly virtuous that it seemed absurd to accuse him of such traffic, but Robert Cary only regarded him with a wearily contemptuous smile.

"The claim was salted," he asserted flatly. "Of course, I don't insinuate that you salted it. That would be ridiculous—when you could hire some one to do it so cheaply."

"Suh!" cried Spotten indignantly.

Then he shrugged with a tolerant smile. "It is natural, I suppose, that the buyeh of a barren claim should be disappointed; should feel inclined to make charges which have no foundation in fact. I am truly grieved, suh, that you were unfortunate."

"But you said you were not in Mr. Addison's employ now? Then may I inquire if you are in any one's employ?"

Robert shook his head, regarding the judge through lazily narrowed eyes.

"Suppose," said Spotten very slowly, "suppose that I should remark that young men in my employ rise—rapidly? Meteorically, I might even maintain?"

Robert stared hard at the heavy face, wondering just what crooked thoughts moved behind the gross mask. At last he shook his head, his pleasant, if somewhat haughty, face mirroring contempt. He had no desire to become one of the wily judge's tools.

"If it's a position you're hinting at so cautiously," he drawled, "then I decline beforehand. You see—'' his lazy voice held an open sneer—"I'm very particular in selecting an employer. I don't mind saying that I distrust you utterly; that I am suspicious of the honesty of any enterprise in which you may be interested."

"Suh!" blazed Spotten, his face reddening furiously.

Then apparently he recovered his self-control; the smiling mask slipped into place again. He shook his head sadly at Robert.

"I feah, young suh, that you are allowin' your misfortune of last yeah to color your thoughts of me. But I pass oveh that. I am tryin' to do you a favoh. There is
a—certain position in which I believe you would fit admirably. May I ask if you are—handy with weapons?"

Robert hesitated for an instant. So far the interview had mildly amused him. A certain youthful independence prompted him to bait the judge; he yielded to the impulse.

Turning carelessly in his chair, he looked about him. The room was lighted by tall, scented candles in silver sconces. From the side pockets of his coat Robert jerked a pair of heavy-bored, silver-mounted derringers with almost prestidigital speed. He flipped them up and pressed the triggers simultaneously. Two candles, in sconces ten feet apart, went out with nipped wicks; then Robert replaced the little pistols.

“Oh, I do fairly well, sir,” he yawned.

At the pistol-shots a silken curtain that masked a rear door moved slightly. Robert noted the curtain’s swaying; also he saw that the hall-door had opened soundlessly for two inches and remained so. Spotten, moveless in his chair, had seen the curtain only. Very slightly he shook his big head, and the curtain was still again.

Undoubtedly, reflected Robert, some of the notoriously efficient serving-men of Spotten, reported ever to hover near him, watched from behind that curtain. Spotten’s nod had been a restraining signal. Carelessly Robert moved, pushing back the skirts of his coat so that the black butt of a heavy Navy revolver showed. Spotten smiled again.

“Mr.—ah—Hardee, I think you said?” he began, and Robert did not correct him. “I am more than eveh convinced that we should talk business. I may say that in all of San Francisco you could find no more profitable employment than I offe you. How would—five hundred dollars a month suit you? With the—ah—opportunity of materially increasin’ that sum? Very materially increasin’ it, I may say.”

“No answer to Mr. Addison’s note, you said?” drawled Robert, rising. “Then I’ll be leaving, judge, since you have nothing of interest to say to me.”

As their eyes met like unsheathed blades the hall-door swung wide and both turned toward it. They faced a queer little man, slight of build, barely five feet tall, in rusty brown frock coat, who limped up to the table and stared calmly down at Spotten. The judge’s heavy features were set in new, grim lines. Pseudo-geniality had faded quite; the gross countenance was menacing as a snake’s raised head.

Robert Cary studied the little man curiously, noting the high thinker’s forehead, the towy hair, the colorless brows, the angular outline of the pallid face. He was fascinated by the man’s eyes, of an odd, light-gray shade, very wide open, steady as a hawk’s; by the firm, grim cast of the coarse-lipped mouth.


CHAPTER III

WILLIAM WALKER! Robert’s eyes widened. This Walker? This insignificant little figure the famous doctor-lawyer-editor who had set all California agog the year before with his dare-devil expedition to Lower California? This the intrepid captain who had led a handful of red-shirted adventurers the length of the peninsula, fighting step by step like wild men against overwhelming odds? The leader who dispassionately shot down his own fierce expeditionnaires for any breach of discipline? It seemed incredible. In fancy Robert Cary had always pictured Walker as a huge, bull-voiced man, belt a-bristle with revolvers, every other word a lurid oath.

“I am here tonight to give you warning, Spotten,” came the little man’s dry, precise voice. “Ever since I commenced preparation for my colonization expedition to Nicaragua, you have annoyed me in every way possible. I am well aware of the real
reason for the libels posted against my brig, the Vesta. I have never doubted whose hand moved behind the thousand petty obstacles thrown in my way by city officials. Now I am tired of these annoyances.

"Stripping the brig's sails from the masts and locking them in sheriff's store was the last straw. If those sails are not returned by ten tomorrow morning—I shall hold you personally responsible."

Not one word inflected above another; not the slightest gesture; only the unwavering regard of those luminous, round gray eyes. Yet Spotten moved uneasily in his chair. For an instant Robert thought that the judge's will would yield before the will of Walker. But in that instant came interruption.

Feet scuffled outside the curtained rear door. Muffled, angry voices; then a man hurled through the doorway, almost snatching down the curtain as he came. A bloody, dishabille figure, with boots caked with fresh mud; with face sweat-streaked and pallid; with bloodshot eyes glaring all ways at once; that rushed across the library to lean upon the table and gasp chokingly. Robert recognized the intruder as one Sullivan, a shoulder-striker of unusually unsavory record.

"I downed him!" gasped Sullivan with eyes only for Spotten. "I shot Kenton! But three of his reporters—were near. They—chased me! Shot at me! Got me in the shoulder. They're still after me! Chased me here!

"Ye got to stand by me, judge. Ye told me to kill Kenton! I hadn't nothin' against him. 'T was your doin'? Now, ye got to save me!—it! I tell ye they're outside now!"

Spotten leaped to his feet, his face putty-hued for an instant. Then the blood surged back into it. He pounded the table with a fist that shook it, raising his voice in a bull-bellow.

"Rafferty! Soulies! In here!"

BUT Robert Cary was as quick. Very well he knew what Sullivan's account meant. Kenton, the fiery little editor of the Union, was Spotten's enemy. Spotten had ordered Sullivan to murder the editor, and now proof of that had been given to outsiders. It would not be like Spotten to permit news of this assassination to get abroad. So Robert Cary whipped out his heavy Colt, menacing Spotten, but with an eye also upon that curtained rear door.

"Tell 'em to stay back!" he commanded. "First man through that door dies—with you, Spotten! Tell 'em—quick!"

With voice that shook and cracked from barely restrained fury Spotten countermanded his order. Robert Cary had stepped swiftly behind the judge, so that the portly body shielded him from the door. While Walker watched expressionlessly, Robert's hand went beneath Spotten's coat tails and brought out a Navy revolver. Then he removed from the coat pockets a brace of derringers; took another pair from pockets of the waistcoat.

"—you!" mouthed Spotten thickly. "You can't get away with this! Nor you, Walker! As for you, Sullivan—"

The glare he sent at the trembling ruffian was more deadly threat than any words. "I'll settle with you all! I'll pay you—"

"Shut up!"

A pistol-muzzle prodded Spotten's fat back.

"I'd as soon drill you here and now as not. Put your hands up! Keep 'em up! We're going out of here, Walker and I. If you drop your hands an inch, if any one moves at that door, or elsewhere—you're out!"

"Remember, Spotten," drawled Walker, turning toward the hall-door, "ten o'clock tomorrow is your limit."

He opened the door, with a hand hidden in his coat pocket while he scanned the hallway. Robert backed toward him, slipped through the door and slammed it shut. Walker was holding open the front door.
They leaped down the steps and gained the front gate.

Here a huge figure rose with the suddenness of a jack-in-the-box from the grass beside the fence. Robert flipped up his Colt with a stifled exclamation, but steely fingers closed about his wrist.

"It's Lieutenant Bryant of my force," Walker reassured him. "Well, Bryant?"

"Three hombres just sneaked through the side gate, colonel. They're a-crawlin' up the fence now. Best scoot across the street!"

They sprinted across, coming to the shelter of a black alley-mouth. The night was cloudy, and a high fog hid the moon. In the alley they paused. Bryant, gripping a long rifle, craned his neck to listen.

"You an' this younker better skip the town!" he whispered. "I'll stay behind an' bushwhack 'em."

Again Robert felt those amazingly strong fingers upon his arms, this time pushing him forward. They went gingerly down the muddy alley for perhaps fifty feet. Then the snapping report of a rifle sounded behind them, followed by a volley of pistolshots. Robert jerked free.

"I won't skulk here while some one else fights my battles!" he cried.

"Don't play the boy daredevil!" advised Walker caustically. "Bryant can handle a dozen of Spotten's shoulder-strikers. He's an old Texan plainsman, cunning as a Comanche at this sort of fighting."

"Nevertheless I'm going back to help him."

Robert dashed back toward the alley-mouth; but before he had covered a half-dozen yards a single pistol-shot sounded close ahead; then Bryant's gaunt figure appeared suddenly before him, his mocassined feet falling like shadows. Robert had heard no footfall behind him, yet there was Walker also at his elbow.

"Thet you, colonel?" grunted Bryant. "I winged two. T' other one's got no belly for my game. Gone back a-tootin'. Why'n't you skip fer town?"

"Our young friend insisted on coming to help you," explained Walker dryly.

"Sho!"

Tex Bryant chuckled amusedly.

"Why, sonny, any time ol' Tex needs help to handle thet sort o' trash he'll be a mighty puny ol' man. Not thet I blame you a bit! I like a man thet sticks to his side."

They turned back. Robert felt himself flushing. His exhibition in the judge's library even was beginning to appear a bit of youthful bravado, and Walker's tone had cut. They came out upon Dupont Street, a fairly well-lit thoroughfare. Robert and his little ally faced toward the town's center, with Bryant, a gaunt figure in fringed buckskin coat and slouch hat, sauntering some twenty yards behind. Presently the big Texan began to sing, in a clear, sweet tenor, to the tune of "Golden Slippers":

"Oh, thet brig, the Vesta.
Oh, thet brig, the Vesta.
The boat thet's goin' to carry us all away,
Ca'ly us a-way!
Give three cheers fer Walker!
Give three cheers fer Walker!
We're goin' south to Nicaragua-a-a-a!"

Before the lighted windows of a dingy little eating-house Walker halted and studied his companion keenly for a moment.

"From your accent you're a Southerner," he said thoughtfully. "Would you mind telling me whether you're Robert Cary or Samuel Hardee? I noted—you see. I eavesdropped on your entire conversation with the judge—that you didn't tell Spotten which of the partners you were, and that he jumped to the conclusion that you were Hardee."

"I am Robert Cary. Since you heard our conversation, you perhaps understand why I thought it made no difference what name Spotten knew me by."

"I see. It seems that the judge's enmity
toward us both creates a sort of bond. Will you come in and have something to eat? That is, if you don’t mind conversing with a comparative stranger.”

“You’re not exactly a stranger,” retorted Robert, his resentment at Walker’s cavalier tone fading. “In fact we’re schoolmates in a way. Like you, I graduated from the University of Nashville, though five years after your time. My people are the Bellemead Carys.”

Walker’s rare smile softened his harsh features wonderfully. Even the cold gray eyes seemed to lose their icy glint.

“A Nashville man! Then indeed we’re not strangers. If I can do anything for you you may count on me. Seriously, since we chanced upon that revelation of Spotten’s activities, we’re both marked men. Either of us may soon need all the allies we can muster. Spotten was my bitter enemy long before tonight. I came near having him unseated while I was editor of the Herald here. He has never forgiven me. But come inside!”

They found a table, oilcloth-covered and greasy, in a quiet corner. When a slouching Mexican had put food before them Tex Byrant fell to silently, while Walker and Robert Cary discussed persons and events in Tennessee, a pleasant peaceful land that seemed almost as far distant from turbulent California as Timbuktu.

Then Robert without considering his strange loquacity spoke of his ill fortune at the mines and so far in San Francisco. Walker listened intently, stirring the muddy liquid in his coffee-cup. Suddenly he raised his wide gray eyes to meet Robert’s.

“They have better coffee in Nicaragua,” he remarked with seeming irrelevance.

Robert nodded, his black brows creasing in a slight, puzzled frown.

“Indeed they have,” he agreed. “I crossed Nicaragua on my way here from New Orleans, and it seemed a fertile land. But—”

“This time next month,” Walker went on slowly, still absentely plying his spoon, “I shall be drinking my coffee in Realejo.”

His gaze seemed to take on intensity. Robert Cary, staring at the widened eyes, felt suddenly the immense magnetism of the man, which he could exercise when he chose.

“Won’t you come to Nicaragua with me, Cary, and have some of that coffee?”

There was silence for a space. Robert’s steel-blue eyes were held by the little man’s luminous gaze. Then slowly with a sigh the younger man shook his head, surprised to feel so much actual regret that his fortunes were not intertwined with those of this odd, heroic little figure.

“I think not, colonel. I’m nearly twenty-four; in the two years since leaving Bellemead I’ve done nothing but drift. It has been proved to me—” he smiled wryly at memory of Nat’s many lectures “—that unless I settle down now I’m apt to end life a drifter. I’ve given my word to be conservative hereafter—not to go chasing brilliant will-o’-wisps, but to stay here and become a staid, respectable man of affairs. A friend is trying to find me a situation now.”

“Remember Spotten!” warned Walker. “From this minute on, unless you leave the city, your life will be the price of unsleeping vigilance. Spotten is the strongest force for evil in all this strange conglomeration of good and bad called San Francisco. He and his satellites practically rule the city. The honest men are too engrossed in wealth-gathering to interfere. Besides, it requires some specific, unbearable deed to rouse your honest men, to fuse them into a corrective body—such as the Vigilantes of ’51—strong enough to overturn such an organization as Spotten has built. In the meanwhile things are as they are today.

“Remember! Tonight you and I overheard some damning evidence against Spotten. Do you think for a moment that he intends us to go freely about, telling that he ordered Kenton’s death?
“Do you want my advice? A lawyer’s counsel and a well-wisher’s? Swallow your pride; admit that you aren’t strong enough to oppose Spotten! Leave San Francisco either with me or alone. I tell you, Cary, seriously and with no exaggeration, this is not Tennessee; this is not even the United States! This is San Francisco in the year 1855! Either you will join hands with Spotten and do his dirty work, or your life is worth no more than—that fly’s!”

The stubborn Cary chin lifted slightly. Robert’s face hardened. They were stiff steel, those Tennessee Carys—as perhaps Walker knew—an old family with many brave traditions and vast pride of ancestry. This handsome, hot-headed sprig was a typical son of the house.

“Colonel,” said Robert haughtily, “Carys aren’t used to being driven! Spotten may be all that you say, but he can’t kick me out of the path like a yellow dog.”

Walker shook his head disapprovingly. He fumbled with his cup for a moment, then fell to talking. Presently Robert Cary forgot the dingy restaurant; his blue eyes glowed as he listened breathlessly. The flat, dry voice changed, became flexible, even musical. Tex Bryant shoved aside his empty plate and leaned rigidly forward, his swarthy face lit up, his Indian-like black eyes glinting metallically.

“Down at Steuart Street wharf lies the Vesta, the old brig I’ve chartered. Already aboard are fifty-six men ready to sail for Nicaragua. To avoid violation of neutrality laws we go ostensibly as colonists. But each man is well armed—an embryo soldier. Some of them are veterans of the Texas Revolution and the Mexican War, like Bryant here. A number were with me in Lower California. Fighters all!

“The Vesta is heavily libeled for debts contracted by Lamson, her owner, but eventually I’ll settle these libels and we’ll sail. Then—Realejo!”

The word was like a bugle-blast.

“To join Castellon in his war upon Fruto Chamorro and the Legitimists. Castellon is rightful ruler of Nicaragua; the only man able to bring peace to that revolution-torn country. He is a man of liberal views; such a democrat as was our own Jefferson. Chamorro seized the presidency illegally; banished Castellon and other Democrats. Castellon returned at risk of his life and the whole country—except the Legitimists, who opposed him for selfish, private reasons—acclaimed him the Liberator.

“But the Legitimists are strong. They hold three-fourths of the country by force of arms. That is why Castellon has asked me to join him with such fighting-men as I can enlist. The Democrats are anxiously awaiting us; they will receive us as fellow-crusaders. No matter what sneering enemies here may say, we fight on the side of right in Nicaragua!

“I wish you’d come with us, Cary. I’d like to have near me a fellow Tennessean, a man of my own caste and kind; one in whom I might place implicit trust.

“I can promise you sight of a fertile country, fairer than the Mohammedan’s dream of Paradise; a green, sweet, smiling land with riches untouched, waiting energetic hands—American hands. If you want adventure such as you’ve thrilled to read in old romances—come with me to Nicaragua! I promise you we’ll all carve our names in history. If you want riches and power—again, come to Nicaragua! For the lieutenants who stand beside me now, I will open doors to posts higher than they dreamed of!

“Nicaragua may well be only our beginning! Costa Rica, Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala—even Mexico! What do you say to a single great State, extending from Texas south to Panama; a State of brown people with white rulers? A strong State, such as Napoleon might have carved and governed; treating as an equal with the great empires of Europe? What would
you say to a very high post in such a State?

“There is something here, Robert Cary—” he tapped the threadbare brown coat above his heart with a simple earnestness that robbed the gesture of theatricalness “—that tells me I am fated to make my name ring round the world. It may be that I shall fail, but I promise you it will be failure without shame! Will you come with me, Robert Cary? Not in years have I said the half of this to any man. I offer you no more than a lieutenancy, but that holds opportunity such as might have been given to a lieutenant of Caesar or Napoleon. Will you come with me, Robert Cary?”

Slowly Robert came back to earth; back to the dingy eating-house on a back street in workaday San Francisco, from the far fields of the fancy in which he had wandered. His imagination had leaped with the pictures, gilding them, making of them real things already come to pass. He sighed and the sound was echoed cavernously by the gaunt frontiersman opposite.

But with return to prosaic surroundings he was once again enmeshed by their cogs; he remembered his promise to Nat Evarts to go no more a-wild-goose-chasing. There was in him, with his faults of recklessness and overtouched pride, the virtue of a bull-dog determination that made him cling to whatever road he had planned to walk. Slowly but with resolution he shook his head.

“The offer is well-nigh irresistible,” he sighed. “But—I’ve made my promise. I thank you for your confidence, colonel, but I guess I’ll stay here.”

Walker nodded imperturbably. “I think you made a mistake,” he said quietly. “But—every man must be master of his own destiny.”

They left the place, and outside Walker held out his hand with a grave smile.

“It may well be that we part here for all time. So, good-by and good luck.”

“Good-by,” Robert responded half-wistfully. “I hope your plans will materialize as you hope. Then some day I may address you as the Emperor of Central America!”

Walker’s angular face mirrored no answering smile. He stood rigid, staring into the darkness, his gray eyes widened like a crystal-gazer’s, seeming lighted from within by some mystic fire. If he saw into the future—envisioned those heroic thousands he was to command, two-thirds of whom would return to the States to demonstrate upon Civil War battle-fields, in the paths of peace, their grim training under this little empire-snatcher—he made no sign.

“You speak no more than simple truth,” he assented. “Good-by, Robert Cary.”

NAT listened frowningly as Robert described—with no glossing of his own demerits—the night’s events, at breakfast next morning. He nodded gloomily at the end.

“Walker was entirely right, young hothead! Lucky for you that he and Tex Bryant were with you. Otherwise you’d have been our ‘man for breakfast’ this morning. Well?”

“Well, yourself!” countered Robert, smiling tight-lipped. “Have you safe-and-sane counsel up your sleeve? Do you share Walker’s view that because Spotten is not my dear friend I’d best tuck my tail between my legs and fly for my life?”

“I do believe that you could find more healthful climates than that of San Francisco,” Nat assured him thoughtfully.

At sight of his friend’s woebegone expression Robert laughed outright. There was something winning about the young Tennessean; most men liked him well; he made good friends without apparent effort. Nat Evarts realized this suddenly as he studied the handsome, tanned face of his vis-à-vis. But the Cary recklessness must be curbed.

“Bobby,” he drawled, his rugged face
still rueful, but with a faint smile lurking in the depths of shrewd, green eyes, "I like you heaps and heaps. You know that. Don't know any one in the world I like as much. That was deep water and a big shark you saved me from, that day I tumbled into Lake Nicaragua off the transport steamer. That's why I'm telling you what I really think instead of what you'd prefer to hear.

"You haughty young Southerners aren't easy to advise; you all want to hoe your own row in your own way. You sort of fancy yourselves.

"Now, you're chain-lightning with handguns and all that. Which is good. But you're too blame' reckless; because you always have somehow pulled out of tight places, you think you always will. In war you're knight errant, not general. You don't give your opponent credit enough. Here you are, open enemy of the shrewdest, most unscrupulous man in California, and your sole plan of action is summed up in the words—"

"'I'll lick him—somehow!'"

"Bobby, Spotten is a dangerous man! One of these days we of the opposition will smash him, but we aren't ready yet. Now if all the decent element—such influential, prominent, brainy men as Coleman, Brannan, King of William and your humble servant—hesitate, isn't it a mite uplish of a young fellow your size to think he can down Spotten all alone?

"What I'm driving at is the urgent need for cautious walking on your part. Spotten's not a bit worried about you—except temporarily perhaps. He has too many efficient tools for just such occasions.

"Take Walker's case. Of all the men in town, not even excepting Coleman and other old 'stranglers,' I don't know of any one I'd rather have as ally. It's considered most unhealthful to annoy Walker past a certain point.

"But such considerations worry Spotten not at all. He has sicked the authorities on to Walker; hunted up creditors of the Vesta's owner and induced 'em to libel the brig for debt. He had the sheriff grab the brig's sails yesterday and lock 'em up. He talked the U. S. marshal into running the revenue cutter Marcy alongside the Vesta to see that she didn't sneak out unawares."

"Why doesn't Walker charter another vessel then?" Robert inquired idly.

"No money! He'd pawn his immortal soul today for a thousand dollars. He's operating on a flat poke. Palmer, the banker, loaned him a thousand. That, with the few dollars Walker had, went for the Vesta's charter-party. He can't beg or borrow another penny. My personal conviction is that he'll never get out."

"I doubt that!"

Robert was remembering the "Little Colonel's harsh-lined face.

"But about my recklessness, Old Faithful: You must admit that I've sobered a lot. There was Walker offering me all sorts of adventures so fascinatingly that I would have jumped at the chance but for the promise I made you to settle down here. And I refused!

"Well, I suppose you're going to be busy today—as usual?"

"Indeed yes! I've got a full forenoon's work on a land-title case; one of those—Peter Smith tangles. But I'll see you at noon."

CHAPTER IV

AT NOON Nat snatched a hasty lunch and returned to the office immediately with a rueful comment on the vast labor and small fame attaching to land-title cases in general. Left to his own devices, Robert wandered aimlessly about the streets, mingling with the throngs that seemed always to people the sand—or plank-paved thoroughfares. About him were miners in exaggeratedly uncouth garb—jeans trousers thrust into high,
mud-caked boots; red or blue flannel shirts; flopping slouch hats; belts abristle with Colts and bowie-knives. There were grinning brown Kanakas and Chilenos; bland Chinese in colorful silks; swarthy Californians of Mexican blood, picturesque in short green or red jackets, silver-decorated sombreros and loose, slashed trousers. Sober-faced merchants, doctors and lawyers rubbed shoulders democratically with all these, and with elegant youngsters like Robert Cary. An optimistic, adventurous horde, very young in the average, living ten years in one in mining-camp or metropolis alike.

For any young man without friends the busy city was a lonely place. Toward three o'clock, wearied of sauntering and more than a trifle tired of his own thoughts, Robert turned toward the Golden Horn Saloon on Kearny Street, more in search of companionship—vicarious as it would be—than a drink. Inside the long, crowded room he threaded his way to the bar and ordered, then fingered his glass idly, watching and listening.

This was a favorite resort of prominent men of all occupations. All about Robert were groups of acquaintances, discussing this or that bit of local news, or talking excitedly, with true San Franciscan grandiloquence, of huge enterprises.

Robert found no familiar face anywhere. Then a hand touched his arm, and he turned to face Alger Spotten.

Robert's face hardened instantly. He met the judge's little eyes coldly. But Spotten's broad, pink countenance was twisted into a genial semblance; one might have believed him Robert's most intimate friend.

"Afternoon!" boomed the judge heartily. "Wooin' Bacchus, eh?"

ROBERT nodded stiffly and picked up his glass. Spotten ordered and stood with brandy in hand, his lips still curved, but with eyes roving keenly over Robert's face. He drained the glass and set it down, then moved closer to Robert.

"I am wonderin'," he said in a low tone, "if a night of reflection has not induced you to altch your decision—about the employment I offered you last night."

"Not at all!" Robert assured him emphatically. "It has only hardened my determination to have nothing whatever to do with you or with anything you're connected with."

Spotten regarded him steadily. At last he seemed to understand that the young man meant just what he had said. He bent a trifle forward, the smile vanished. His little eyes were half-hidden beneath lowered lids; subtly he was become a menacing figure.

"I've given you a fair chance," he said, so low that none around them could overhear. "I shall make no more offers. I shall warn you instead. I am not a man to be trifled with! Either you join my forces, or——"

"Or?" repeated Robert Cary, staring at the heavy face with narrowed eyes.

"Or you leave the city immediately—at once!"

Suddenly Robert Cary lifted his chin and laughed full in Spotten's face. At the strained, mirthless sound men about them wheeled to stare. They were in a zone of silence instantly. But Robert Cary was heedless of all save Spotten. He thrust his face within a foot of Spotten's, his blue eyes frosty.

"So you order me to leave town!" he said deliberately, so distinctly that all might hear. "Why, you fat, yellow-livered claim-salter, do you think I'm worried by your threats? I'll stay here; I'll do and say just what I like. If you're hunting trouble, it's yours for the asking any time you please. Any way, too! Send your hired gunmen to assassinate me—as Sullivan tried to assassinate Kenton last night. Try meeting me personally.

"Spotten, it pleases me to tell you pub-
licly that you're a cheap thief! You've ruled the roost here until you think the town belongs to you. Well, I'm one man you can't bully!"

"— you!" bellowed Spotten. "I'll show you!"

His hand dropped flashingly. But before he had gripped the revolver beneath his coat; before Robert Cary had more than touched hand to pistol-but; before the breathless spectators had surged back a foot; a big, bareheaded man, with something about him that breathed "killer," leaped between them. He clapped a pistol-muzzle against each.

"None o' that, gents!" commanded the bouncer determinedly if monotonously. "No shootin' in here. House orders. Take your fight outside!"

"Am I to receive an insult," roared Spotten, "without being permitted to resent it? Remove your gun, suh, or it'll be the worse for you!"

"House orders," repeated the bouncer in singsong tone. "Streets are open to you, gents, if you want to shoot it out."

"Quite so," drawled Robert Cary, "and you're entitled to the usual method of satisfaction, Spotten. Although," he added maliciously, "it is customary for both parties to an affair of honor to be gentlemen. However, I'll waive that."

There was a sudden agitation in the packed mass surrounding the trio. Nat Evarts, grim of face, elbowed his way to the bar and stood beside Robert. He had entered just in time to overhear the challenge.

"That's right, Spotten!" he snapped. "Since you're hunting trouble, my friend and I will gladly arrange to give you a bellyful. Name a friend and let him confer with me."

Spotten's little eyes were shifting to and fro. For the victor in a dozen-odd "affairs" he seemed strangely hesitant to enter another. But there was no backing down now without public loss of caste. He searched the crowd until he found a familiar face.

"Very well, suh!" he agreed with what dignity he could muster. "I name Mr. Conway yondeh, if he will consent to act for me."

Conway came forward, a burly man with the look of a professional politician of the lower type. Nat touched Robert's arm.

"You go to the room," he whispered. "I'll arrange the details."

Robert made his way through the gaping men, who turned to eye him wonderingly as he passed. In the room he waited for a half-hour, then Nat came in and tossed his hat to the bed, sat down and looked whimsically at his friend.

"Well," he grunted, "it's all settled. Ten o'clock, day after tomorrow morning, at Laguna Merced. Navy sixes; ten yards. As challenged party, Spotten had the right to settle details, so I said to Conway—thought we might as well keep our crest up—"

"Well, Conway, when, where and with what shall my man kill yours?"

"And we settled as I’ve said. You’ve gone and done it, young gamecock! Still—don’t know but it’s best this way. If he drills you, you won’t worry, while if you get him, you’ll do it in regular fashion; none of this street-brawling. That’s what I was afraid of.

"You see, the conservative element of town is mighty fed up with that sort of lawlessness. There’s talk of organizing a committee to force the courts to prosecute—and hang, if justified—street killers. Now if Spotten should drop you in a street row his political influence would save him. If on the other hand you should kill him, no matter how just your cause might be, you’d be in mighty real danger.

"His side might string you up offhand; or if you should get to trial you’d have all the better element against you, also, willy-nilly. They’d have to help hang you for the sake of consistency. See? Now though
duels aren't so popular with us as they used to be, at least they're recognized. But—there's more need than ever for walking carefully, Bobby! Spotted has seen you shoot, and I misjudged him much if he's willing to face you at Laguna Merced—if there's a safer way out?".

Robert nodded carelessly. Only one thing worried him; that the affair was thirty-odd hours distant. Waiting was the hardest thing his impetuous nature ever found to do.

"I'll walk softly," he promised. "But wouldn't it look strange if I should be killed by an assassin, immediately after a duel had been arranged between Spotten and me?"

"Bobby," said Nat warily, "Spotted could lie himself out of anything. Can't I get that into your young skull? You go carefully until we actually face him. Now I'm gone again. I've got to get a rig and drive to the Mission. Client of mine is bedridden there, and I must see him. You'll be careful?"

Robert nodded, and Nat seized his hat. At the door he hesitated as if to emphasize his warning, but changed his mind and went out without further words.

Robert remained in the room, poring over the several pages of advertisements and the half-column of editorials in the Herald. The sun sank behind the western hills and darkness came. Eight o'clock passed, and still Nat was absent. Finally Robert got up from his cot and went to the door. At his shout the landlord's small son appeared, and Robert hired him to bring up a meal from the nearest restaurant. He ate and picked up the Herald again.

But when nine o'clock came and still Nat had not returned Robert's restlessness drove him first to pacing the floor; after a few moments he picked up his hat. He was not sleepy, and the room seemed unbearably stuffy. He looked carefully to the hang of his Colt, then went downstairs and stepped cautiously out upon Clay Street. He intended to be very circumspect; if any of Spotton's men were looking for him, they would naturally search the saloons and gambling-hells. So he would avoid them by keeping to dark streets.

For an hour he prowled about gloomy, outlying thoroughfares, dark and almost deserted canyons under the moonless, cloud-daubed sky. The few flickering gas lamps seemed only to intensify the surrounding blackness by contrast. He walked rapidly, with hatbrim lowered, eyeing each chance-met pedestrian sharply. There were few wanderers abroad, for the cheerful promise of saloons, of gambling-dens and brothels, lured most of the town's drifters.

Skirting the Plaza near the Monumental Engine House on Brenham Place, Robert halted beyond the light flung down from the upper windows. He listened half-enviously to the voices of men in the up-stairs clubroom. Then a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder and he whirled, whipping out the Colt at his hip and ramming the muzzle into his accoster's stomach.

"Whoa!" laughed the other, a brawny red-bearded viking of a man. "You're mighty hostile, old boy. Expectin' a visitor maybe?"

"I am nervous, Andy," returned Robert, putting up his weapon. "I haven't many friends in town and—quite a number of most active enemies. But I thought you were still inland?"

"Struck it rich," explained Anderson, once Robert's neighbor on Deer Creek. "Homeward bound by next week's steamer. How's it been with you, Cary?"

They moved back into the darkness and leaned upon the iron fence of the Plaza. Robert was genuinely pleased to meet the big, bluff miner, and for a moment they reminisced of the days in I-Bet. Silence came then until Anderson chuckled suddenly.
"I was thinkin' o' somethin' I just heard," he explained. "Walker's got away at last!"

"Walker! I hadn't heard."

"Seem's he's been gone less'n a quarter-hour, 't ain't surprizin' you haven't. I just had the yarn from Joe Atkins, a friend o' mine. Joe was goin' to Nicaragua with the Little Colonel, but changed his mind at the last minute an' made a pierhead jump. 'T was slick, the way Walker worked it.

"He found a friend name Crabb, who knew the Stockton fellow holdin' the biggest claim against the brig's owner. Crabb talked this man into cancelin' his libel. That left only the claims of little merchants around town, an' everybody on the Vesta guessed that Lamson—by somebody's orders—had told 'em to enter libels. Well, Walker just hinted to Lamson that fifty-six mighty wild men aboard the Vesta was all-fired anxious to sail an' that if they didn't pretty quick, they'd sure scalp one Lamson. Lamson took the hint, an' all claims was off inside an hour."

"But the sheriff had the sails," objected Robert. "Locked 'em up to secure a three-hundred-dollar claim for 'posse expenses.'"

"Yep, he had 'em, but for some reason or other Sheriff Billy Reardon saw fit to return the sails at nine-thirty this mornin'. Don't ask me why he did. But he left a dep'ty aboard to see that Walker didn't slip out without settlin' that posse bill."

He paused to laugh, slapping his hand delightedly upon his thigh.

"'T was good as a show, Joe says. Walker tolled the dep'ty into the cabin an' stood 'tween him an' the door."

"'Now, sir,' draws Walker, cooler'n a cucumber, 'there are champagne an' cigars. Here are handcuffs an' leg-irons. Pray take your choice!'"

Anderson mimicked Walker's dry, precise drawl so closely that it was evident he had some acquaintance with the Little Colonel. Robert laughed.

"Well," Anderson went on, "Friend Dep'ty chose the champagne. Meantime Walker had borrowed a workin' party from the revenue-cutter Marcy to bend on the Vesta's sails. U.S. marshal was on the dock, but s' far's he knew all claims was settled. The old tug Resolute took the brig in tow about fifteen minutes ago. She should reach the Golden Gate in an hour an' a half or so—unless the Resolute has one o' her famous breakdowns."

Robert smiled sympathetically; he was pleased that Walker had succeeded in getting clear. His smile took on width as he pictured Spotten's face when the judge received the news. But that reminded him of his own troubles. His smile gave way to an expression of sober thoughtfulness.

"Oh!" said Anderson abruptly. "Just remembered. Have you seen Sam Hardee today?"

"Hardee!" repeated Robert. "Why, I haven't seen Sam for months. He headed for the northern diggings when we lost our pile at I-Bet Camp."

"Funny! He must be in town. You remember Spotten, who sold you boys that salted claim? Well, I was just in the Golden Horn; an' there was Spotten with a couple rough customers. He was drinkin' more'n I ever saw him to before—not drunk, understand, but takin' enough to make him ugly—an' tellin' all the world that he'd protect himself against Sam Hardee. Seems that he'd had trouble with Sam lately; there's a duel arranged. But Spotten claims that Sam intends to shoot him on sight regardless, so he's amin' to shoot, too."

"The gang in the saloon all sided with Spotten. Advised him to down Hardee on sight. Haven't you heard anything about the row?"

Robert made no reply. He understood only too well that Nat's suspicion of Spotten had been well-founded. Spotten was no common barroom braggart; everything he said in public was intended to
further some definite purpose. Now by proclaiming that his life was in danger from "Hardee," Spotten would gain public sympathy in any meeting with his opponent. To try to assassinate an enemy already under challenge to a duel was so contrary to the code of gentlemen that all men must side with the judge.

"I must be going, Andy!" said Robert abruptly. "Glad to have seen you. Hope you have lots of luck hereafter. Good-by."

They shook hands, and Robert vaulted over the iron fence and crossed Portsmouth Square. He was moving toward the room. Common sense dictated avoidance of a meeting with Spotten when the judge had two shoulder-strikers at his back. Very ardently Robert was longing for sight of Nat Evarts' lanky figure and shrewd face.

He came out upon the Kearny Street sidewalk. Directly opposite him was the old Jenny Lind Theater, now the City Hall. Adjoining it on the Washington Street corner was the drab bulk of the El Dorado, California's most noted gambling-hell. From the El Dorado and kindred resorts about the Plaza came cheerful music, the sounds of gambling games, the voices of men and women.

Standing there, Robert hesitated as to which route to take. Spotten might still be in the Golden Horn a half-block distant, or he might have left that saloon for another, to stage his little act before another audience. Less than anything just then, for all his ordinary reckless disregard for odds, did Robert Cary desire to meet the judge. The moon, drifting from behind a cloud-bank, flooded the scene with white light as Robert stepped into the street and started across.

Nat Evarts at this moment was barely a block away. From an acquaintance met outside his office the Maine man had received the same account that Anderson had conveyed to Robert; had understood the situation instantly. Fearing that the reckless young Tennessean would walk unwarned into the trap, Nat went hurriedly to their room. Finding it empty, he started at once for a round of saloons and gambling-hells.

Now he hurried up Clay Street to Kearny and turned the corner in time to see Robert in mid-street, clearly outlined, though the moon had disappeared again, in the lights of the El Dorado. As Nat opened his mouth to hail, the doors of the El Dorado swung open and Spotten, with Mex Rafferty at his elbow and another man a pace behind, stepped out upon the sidewalk.

Robert Cary's head was turned alertly toward the Jenny Lind. A group of loud-voiced men had just appeared in the entrance. He heard Nat's warning yell, and instinctively his face jerked toward the sound. Then a revolver cracked and something struck his hatbrim sharply. Automatically he whirled back toward the El Dorado; without conscious thought he jerked his Colt. As it came to hip-level he had a flashing glimpse of Spotten, as if the judge stood in the foreground of a picture. Then Robert was shooting as fast as he could squeeze trigger.

Spotten's second bullet sang across the Plaza, for a heavy ball had caught him in the right breast even as he fired and spun him sidewise. He leaned far to the right for an instant, then toppled face down upon the planked walk. Mex Rafferty's Colt crashed to the planks in the same moment, for Robert's third bullet had struck it. The shoulder-striker groaned agonizedly and wrung his numbed hand.

Then Nat Evarts streaked into the street, and Robert sensed that a long-barreled revolver had appeared in his friend's hand. At sight of Nat the second follower of Spotten whirled and leaped for the El Dorado's door. A bullet from Nat's Remington, striking the wall to his right, hardened his resolution to escape.

Robert felt strong fingers encircle his arm and move him resistlessly toward the
corner of the gambling-house. Rafferty, without pausing to pick up his Colt and still holding up his gun hand with his left, had leaped toward the doorway also, shouting that Spotten had been murdered. Men surged toward the sidewalk as Robert and Nat rounded the corner of Washington Street. A sudden menacing roar, wordless yet meaningful; the blood-cry of a potential mob, sent cold chills playing along Robert Cary’s spine. For a moment his mouth went dry; panic gripped him; such blind terror as a man might feel when empty-handed he hears behind him the wolf-pack.

CHAPTER V

THEN the haze that had come with the lightning interchange of shots dissolved. His lips tightened to a white line across his whiter face. The “Cary jaw” stiffened and his eyes were like narrow bits of polished metal.

“Run!” gasped Nat, and they took to their heels, plunging instantly through a zone of inky darkness.

But only for a third of a block. Then Nat shot out a long arm and jerked his companion to a halt. There was the grate of a key in a heavy lock; Nat hauled him into a doorway, scarce blacker than the gloom of the whole street. A burst of shots came from the corner they had just quitted; again that beast-roar from many throats. Bullets whined vaguely past them; then the door swung to.

“Warehouse!” panted Nat. “Half-dozen of us rent this cubby-hole to keep our spare gear in. Lucky ‘t was here. Listen!”

Down the hollow-echoing plank sidewalk outside the door came pounding feet with accompaniment of yelping voices:

“Lynch him! Lynch the murderer!”

“Split at the corner!” bellowed a hoarse voice, which Robert Cary knew, rather than recognized, as Mex Raffert’s. “You —— fools! Split! Half go one way, half the other, on Montgomery! They can’t get away. Some o’ you watch the docks; some the Mission Road! There’ll be—— to pay if they slip us!”

“Mex has brains!” whispered Nat Evarts. “That does sort o’ block us.”

“Then we’re bottled up?” Robert’s voice had steadied now.

“Those are the only ways out of town——about. We might make a break toward the outskirts somewhere and come into the road beyond the Mission. Trouble is, by this time every ruffian in town’s circulating about; liable to run on to ‘em anywhere. Prospect of a lynching-bee’s too attractive for ‘em to pass up. Let’s see——”

“Look here, Nat!” said Robert emphatically. “This is my private row. I’ve dragged you into it far enough. We’ll slip out of here, and I’ll go one way, you another. I’ll not let you risk your life. It isn’t fair.”

“Keep quiet! I’m thinking.”

“I’ll not. This is my funeral——”

“Will you be still? I haven’t had so much fun in ages. Can you sail a boat?”

“No!” snapped Robert impatiently.

“But——”

“Well, I can! Learned on Penobscot. I’ve got a scheme. Now, Bobby, save your breath. If I hadn’t poked along at the Mission this evening, this wouldn’t have happened. So I’m going to get you out of town. That gang would string you to a lamp-post if they laid hands on you. Listen now! I’m going to open the door.”

They put their heads out cautiously, but Washington Street thereabout lay quiet as a tomb. They were midway between Kearny and Montgomery Streets, and in both directions not a light was to be seen. Nat sighed vastly; then they stepped outside, and the door was relocked.

“Across quick!” Nat commanded.

They scurried over and gained the shelter of the buildings on the opposite side.

“Now come along! If we meet the general public, act natural. But if we run on
to any of Rafferty’s crowd—well, it’ll be heels, not guns, we’d better show!”

Robert smiled. The tenseness, the danger, were as potent quickeners of the pulse as alcohol. From cavalier ancestors he derived capacity for derring-do. He felt nothing now but a pleasant tingling excitement; a sort of “before-the-battle” thrill. There came to him as they skulked along building-faces, memory of tales told by an uncle little older than himself, who had been a lieutenant in the Mexican War; tales of scouting along the Mexican front.

Robert placed his feet with careful noiselessness; capture here meant, not a bullet, but a hangman’s noose. Therefore he would not be caught.

They slipped around the corner of Montgomery Avenue and moved along the sandy track for short distance to the northwest, then angled west. There were few people on these gloomy, sand-paved streets; those who met them went by without sign of interest. Each time they stiffened with hands very near their weapons, then sighed and relaxed. Presently on the beachward slope of Russian Hill, they caught the sharp, pungent odor of the Bay, adulterated with the smell of rotting fish and garbage.

“We’re headed for Meiggs’ Wharf,” Nat explained. “Friend of mine has a sloop there. We’ll sail across to Sausalito and get a horse, then you can ride north to San Rafael and ferry across the Bay. Best scheme I can figure. You’ve got to skip!”

They moved quietly down Taylor Street, through a section of fishermen’s ramshackle huts. All these were dark, but the yellow windows of occasional sailor dives were guiding beacons.

They were nearing a huddle of shacks when three men rushed from the darkness. One, in advance of his companions, peered at them intently, then raised a triumphant yell. It was cut short instantly by Robert’s fist, but the others closed in.

There was no time to use firearms. Nat’s long arms swung like pile-drivers, and the man opposite him dropped. Robert, clinging desperately to his opponent’s right wrist, searched for the man’s chin with smashing uppercuts; found it at last and the man crumpled. Then they turned and fled.

From the ground behind them, where lay the tumbled ruffians, came a spit of orange flame and a snapping report. Robert sprawled to hands and knees, then got up and ran on.

“Hurt?” yelled Nat.


But he knew that the light bullet had lodged in the bone of his thigh. He could feel a warm trickling down his leg, plastering clothing to skin. The first sting of the wound vanished, quickly replaced by a pulsating pain like that of a neuralgic tooth. His pace slackened, but grimly he hobbled onward.

A single shack loomed ahead. Nat threw an arm around his friend’s shoulders and helped him to the wall. Robert leaned against the building, feeling his strength ebbing with the leak of blood down his leg.

Unceremoniously but with fingers deft in spite of their seeming roughness, Nat stripped down the trousers and felt the bullet-hole. His coat came off; his shirt followed. He ripped the linen garment into strips and devised a crude tourniquet and bandage.

“Can you hobble along now, Bobby?” he grunted, hiding the anxiety in his voice under a shell of gruffness.

The bruised bone throbbed maddeningly; the whole leg seemed rhythmically to expand and contract. But there was no lack of pride in the Carys; sometimes it led them into foolish tangles, but now Robert’s share dragged him upright, even brought a twisted grin.

“Of course!” he snapped tartly, moving a step to prove it.

Globules of sweat burst from his fore-
head to attest the effort's cost. There was an icy patch at his stomach-pit that revolved. He had a foolish fancy that if he laid hand upon it he would find the muscles circling like a wheel; he was gripped by the beginning of nausea. He bit his pale lips and moved forward.

"Come on!" he panted.

Nat drew Robert's arm about his neck and in this fashion they stumbled downhill and out upon the seemingly miles-long Meiggs' Wharf. Near the dock-end, bobbing on the swells within a few feet of each other, lay two sloops, dimly white in the darkness. Utter stillness gripped land and water, save that, far away toward Telegraph Hill, a dog barked shrilly and persistently, as if in warning to their enemies.

Robert swayed dizzyly upon the dock-edge, then the cool, tonic breeze smote his face revivifyingly. He clenched his hands fiercely as he watched Nat disappear over the wharf, to drop into the cockpit of the nearest craft. Then, from the shelter of a pile of merchandise, came a big man, moving silently until he stumbled upon a splintered plank. Robert wheeled mechanically, confronting the approaching figure Colt in hand.

"What you doin' in that boat?" demanded the newcomer surily.

"Friend of Jimmy Valentine," came Nat's muffled reply. "Going to take out the Sheila. Who're you?"

"Watchman. Come out o' that! That ain't the Sheila. 'S the Curlew."

"All right! Boats look alike in the dark, you know."

Deliberately the Maine man scrambled upon the wharf again. With Robert and the watchman accompanying, he moved forward to the other sloop and cast off the lines, securing the sloop by a single turn about a cleat. As Robert poised for descent, there came running feet upon the dockhead; quick, triumphant yells and a warning cry to the watchman.

"Hold 'em, Sam!"

Even through the haze that threatened momentarily to engulf him, Robert recognized the hoarse voice of Rex Rafferty. Sam, the watchman, moved like a doll upon a string. He dived at Robert with long arms outflung. But Nat Evarts, coming up from a squat in a single catapulting spring, banged his hard fists in crashing alternation against Sam's chin. The watchman crumpled to the planks without a groan and lay still.

Nat picked up Robert bodily and swung him over the dock into the cockpit. A staccato fusillade reechoed from the sandhills back of North Beach; bullets whined overhead as Nat cast off the single line and tumbled after.

Fortunately they had barely a dozen feet to cover before the Sheila cleared the dock-end and the offshore breeze took her. Nat shoved off frantically, then two-blocked the gaff in a single jerk by swinging bodily upon the mainsail halyards. Rafferty and his followers sprinted to the wharf-foot and fired a hasty volley that only dimpled the water about the sloop. Then they ran back and tumbled into the Curlew.

Nat laughed grimly as he cocked an eye at the bellying mainsail. He scrambled forward and hoisted the jib, then returned to take the tiller. Robert still lay where he had fallen. Nat dropped the tiller to scoop double handfuls of icy salt water from overside. Again and again he doused Robert until the latter sat up, spluttering.

"Curlew's got the heels of this tub ordinarily," observed Nat cheerfully, resuming the tiller. "But unless they notice the bucket I dropped over their stern, bent to the stern-painter, she won't catch the Sheila this night!"

Sure enough, the Sheila, gathering way in a steady breeze from Golden Gate, forged ahead. Then a burst of yells and the Curlew's increased speed told them that the dragging bucket had been discovered and cut free. But they had fully two hundred yards' lead now. Short of unforeseen
accident, the Curlew could hardly overtake them before reaching Sausalito on the Marin shore. Nat laughed, then broke off with a sudden oath to peer intently ahead.

Out of the thick darkness beyond them loomed a dim, silent bulk. Nothing more than some ship on her way out to the Golden Gate, but— The Sheila, going sharply to starboard to cut under the vessel’s counter, must lose way. The Curlew, under no such necessity, would cut down the lead to almost nothing—perhaps overtake them. Nat sighed resignedly and proved himself a man of action no less than a lover of peace by drawing his revolver.

“Guess we’re in for a rumpus, Bobby,” he called. “Time we pass this strolling packet they’ll be alongside.”

CHAPTER VI

OBERT turned with an effort and stared. The outbound vessel, moving deliberately at this moment of ’tween-tides, was within a few feet now. Nat held a direct course to the last possible moment, then jammed the tiller hard-a-larboard and the Sheila began to coast down the black side. The Curlew had crawled up to within fifty yards now and the gang was yelling.

“— this ballyhoo!” growled Nat. “Couldn’t pick another time to stand out.”

Save for the creak of the rigging and a muffled panting from the starboard side, that told of a tug, it might have been a fantom vessel, the Flying Dutchman itself. Robert twirled his Colt on a forefinger and stared upward lethargically. The immi-nence of what might be his final struggle had no effect on him; he felt an odd placidity, as if, while gripped by a nightmare, he could decide with some unused brain-lobe that it was only a dream.

Then with theatrical suddenness the moon sailed from behind a cloud-bank; everything on land and water leaped into brilliant relief. To westward, between the twin headlands of Diablo and Fort Point, yawned the Golden Gate, with a silvery path of moonlight through the cleft from Bay to blue Pacific. The vessel’s side was black with heads. As if in mocking salute to the moonrise a clear, high tenor voice rose:

“Oh, tht brig, the Vesta!
Oh, tht brig—”

Robert’s brain cleared magically at the sound. He stood up, clinging to the side.

“It’s—it’s Walker!” he cried, hope and incredulity blended in his voice. “Of course! The Vesta only left Steuart Street an hour or so ago, and that’s four miles back. I’d forgotten all that—”

A volley came from the Curlew. A bullet or two thudded into the brig’s side. Then a gaunt, menacing figure in buckskin coat leaped like a great cat to the bulwark, outlined sharply in the moonlight. A long arm stabbed out toward the Curlew.

“In the boat thar!” bellowed Tex Bryant. “Colonel Walker’s compliments, an’ if you fire jest once more we’ll megatrogolize you!”

Nat had jerked the tiller to starboard; brought the Sheila rasping along the Vesta’s side. He dropped the mainsail and clung to the brig’s larboard main-chains.

“Get aboard, Bobby!” he panted exultantly. “Quick! Put yourself under Walker’s protection. Don’t worry about me—”

Robert had begun a protest “—I’ll be gone before they get here. Once in town they don’t dare touch me; my friends are too powerful. Jump!”

TEX BRYANT after a swift, identifying glance downward, dropped to the outer molding of the bulwark. He clung there, extending a long arm; hauled Robert upward. Robert had forgotten his wound. He scrambled aboard and found himself surrounded by grinning, blue-
shirted men; turned and saw Nat steering the Sheila in an arc that was taking her back toward North Beach. The *Curlew* was coming alongside the *Vesta*; Nat was safe.

Walker's solitary figure stood at the after companion. Before Robert could move in that direction there was a thump from overside and a burly figure swarmed over the bulwark. Mex Rafferty leaped at Robert, but a revolver appeared in Tex Bryant's hand. Mex ran squarely into the muzzle and recoiled with a pained oath.

"Easy does it, fellow!" drawled the Texan menacingly. "Vis'tors always see the Little Colonel 'fore they start any fireworks!"

Rafferty leaped across to where Walker stood impassive, as if no strange figures had invaded his decks unheralded.

"Walker, I'm a deputy sheriff!" cried Rafferty furiously. "I'm after a murderer. If you ain't hunting trouble with the sheriff, tell that monkey yonder to step aside!"

Robert Cary felt a flask pushed into his hand.

"Take a big drink, younker!" grinned Tex Bryant. "You're white's a ghost."

Robert drank and returned the bottle, feeling almost normal again. Bryant motioned toward the companion, and Robert limped across the deck and halted near Rafferty.

"A murderer? On the *Vesta*?"

Walker's round eyes mirrored innocent amazement.

"This fellow! He shot Judge Spotted. Shot him in the back. Judge wasn't heeled."

Walker stared blankly at Robert Cary for an instant.

"Come aside with me!" he commanded, and led the way to the starboard bulwark while Rafferty watched uneasily, but refrained from following.

"Tell me everything quickly!" snapped Walker, and Robert explained briefly.

Walker listened impassively, nodded at the end and stood staring thoughtfully over the water for a moment. Then he wheeled abruptly upon Rafferty.

"Rafferty!" he said slowly, raising his voice. "As a lawyer and a law-abiding citizen I would not for any consideration shield a murderer. You may take this man!"

Rafferty's frown vanished. His lips curled in malignant triumph as he whirled upon Robert with right hand flashing toward his coat pocket.

"In the name of the law, I arrest—"

Then a ring of steel pressed his stomach.

"Bring out both your derringers, Rafferty! Keep them muzzle down. There! Now, put your hands together—slowly! Don't move now, or you'll never move again."

When he held both derringers in his left hand Robert transferred them to a coat pocket. From beneath Rafferty's cutaway he jerked a Navy revolver, then backed swiftly to the mainmast and grinned tightly upon the spectators. Walker watched imperturbably, as if viewing some thrilling drama in the theater.

"Now, Rafferty, if you want me—come get me! Bring your gang! Perhaps I'll go back, but you'll go with me, and one pine box will clothe us both. Come on!"

Rafferty's face showed almost black in the moonlight. His thick body trembled with unleashed rage. But he made no move to brave that ominous muzzle. Instead he turned savagely upon the moveless Walker.

"—you! You planned this! You—"

"Sh! Sh! Not so loud!" drawled Bryant in his ear. "There's men asleep for'ard!"

"I planned nothing!" came Walker's cold, flat denial. "Blame your own clumsiness, Rafferty. A deputy so slow with weapons is a singularly poor man to send after a murderer."

"You'll pay for this!" snarled Rafferty. "You have to get supplies from here, Walker. We'll see that you don't! We'll see if
you can buck the sheriff's office. We—"

"Softly! You disturb my thoughts. You want this man? Well, I may reasonably inquire how you plan to get him?"

"I've got a posse below. I'll bring my men up and get him—dead or kicking!"

"Not so fast. I can't accept your word that it's a posse. They may be questionable characters, and in justice to my—ah—peaceful colonists I can't take chances."

THE "Fifty-Five" looked furtively at one another. They were to gain worldwide fame as the most desperate warriors of their century; even now they grinned sardonically at their commander's words; feeling entirely capable of handling six or eight apiece of Rafferty's shoulder-strikers.

"Of course," Walker went on meditatively, "my own men might capture this fugitive and deliver him into your boat. Would that satisfy you of my law-abiding intent?"

"Sure!" beamed Rafferty, struggling with his astonishment. "You—you don't want to get in bad with the authorities. Lend me a hand, and I promise a good word for you."

Robert Cary had listened in bewilderment, scarce crediting his ears. Walker would turn him over to Rafferty's Lynchers; Walker, who had been so friendly! It was unbelievable.

Then he recalled all he had heard of the little man's unwavering determination, once his course was charted. It was said that nothing could swerve this icy leader a hair's breadth; make him lose sight of his own interest. Given an expedition to Nicaragua, reinforcements and supplies must be drawn chiefly from San Francisco. Walker might well feel very hesitant to offend local authorities who would later take revenge by cutting off supplies.

Robert's jaw tightened grimly. He raised the revolver-muzzle a trifle so that it covered Rafferty. At the first move toward him of any man he would account for the leader at least. Then a curt whisper reached his ear.

"Trust the Little Colonel," counseled Tex Bryant, "an' have another drink!"

"Now just as a matter of form," Robert heard Walker say as Tex took the flask again, "let me see your warrant."

Walker's tone was pleasant, almost genial.

"Warrant!" stammered Rafferty. "Why—I—uh—I didn't have time to get one. Don't need one in a murder case anyway, you know."

"No warrant!"

Walker's tone proclaimed, surprise, even a dawning suspicion. Rafferty caught the significance of the intonation. He smiled more widely.

"You see, colonel," he said with assumption of bluff heartiness, "we took after this fellow soon's we saw him shoot the judge. He dogged us, and we didn't catch up until just now. But it's all right. Sure! Now, if you'll have him disarmed for me—"

"No warrant!" said Walker again. "Hm! But you—know him, beyond a doubt?"

"Oh, sure! As well as if he were my brother. He'd made threats against the judge, you see. Between you and me, Spotten was nervous. Figured on asking protection from our office. Oh, I know him well enough! Seen him several times."

"And his name is—"

Rafferty hesitated. Robert stared with creased brows. There was an undercurrent here he could not fathom. What difference would Rafferty's naming him make, anyway? His frown deepened.

Then he remembered something. He waited tensely. Walker's mind, he knew, was geared for lightning calculation.

"Why, his name is—uh—Hardee! Sam Hardee."

Rafferty mopped his forehead with a relieved sigh.

"—! Thought I'd forgotten it for a minute. Remember now the judge said: "'Sam Hardee's come down from Deer
of course, you’re anxious to be gone after
the real murderer, this man—ah—Hardee.
So, good night! Bryant, show the deputy
to the side. We’re nearing the Gate.”

Rafferty would have burst out furiously
then, but a long, steely hand closed about
his arm, numbing it from shoulder to elbow.
Inexorably he was propelled to the bulwark
and helped upon it. Tex sneaked a glance
at Walker, saw that he had turned to
Robert Cary, and helped Rafferty into the
_Curlew_ with a tremendous kick.

Two men lifted Robert from where he
had sagged suddenly to the deck, fainted
now since the strain was past. Walker
motioned them toward the companion lead-
ing into the officers’ quarters.

_WHEN_ Robert Cary opened his eyes he
found himself in a narrow bunk that
was one of a tier encircling a low-ceiled,
gloomy cabin. Busy with _rearrangement_ of
bandages and scissors in a worn black case
was a melancholy-faced man, who met Rob-
ert’s questioning stare with gloomy eyes.

“T’m Dr. Alex Jones,” said this man.
“T’ll be all right—unless you take a
turn for the worse. You’re to lie quiet until
I tell you to get up—if it’s a month.”

He snapped his case shut and went out.
From overhead came the sound of running
feet upon the deck; sailor-cries and the
creak of running-rigging. The _Vesta_’s bows
climbed sharply; fell, reared up again.

Robert recognized the surge of ocean-
swells upon the bar beyond the Golden
Gate. He was faint from loss of blood, but
his brain seemed unusually clear and alert.

No premonition came of the strange,
peril-beset paths he was to tread for two
years; of the hair-breadth ’scapes to befall
him, before he set eager foot upon the soil
of his own land again. The manner of his
enlistment still amused him.

“A lieutenant of Caesar—or Napoleon—or
William Walker—willy-nilly,” he mut-
tered. Then he laughed softly.

“Oh, well——”

THE END
When Red Simpson rode up the trail from the Come Along Bar the evil brew that was his conscience must have been simmering upon the edge of a boiling whose yeasty ferment showed in the sullen brooding of his eyes and in the grim tightening of his lips.

As he rode upward past piñon and tule, manzanita bush and yucca, his roving glance continuously flashed to right and left, his face, with its hawklke nose and cruel mouth, under his Stetson, more like some predatory animal's in the merciless scrutiny of its gaze.

It was very hot, so that when he topped the rise and cantered out upon the broad table-land which stretched away to the jagged ramparts of the Mogollons, his pinto mare was in a lather. But as for Simpson himself, his forehead was dry beneath the fine sifting of the alkali dust as if in his veins the fire of the desert had filled his blood with the dryness of an intolerable thirst.

His face darkened as if at the memory of that chilling ostracism of his fellows at the Come Along, but it was more in the nature of a thwarted anticipation.
An oath escaped him as he realized that that which he sought to find was nowhere apparent upon the broad terrain of bunchgrass and chaparral which spread out before him, mile upon mile, broken only, where it fell away toward the Spanish Sinks, by the meager huddle of buildings which was the ranch of the nester, Robert Shadwell.

Simpson gazed darkly in its direction as he muttered, half aloud: "She said she'd meet me here—now, by Heaven, I got t' find her!"

But for a moment he sat his horse, irresolute. For a fleeting instant, perhaps, some obscure leaven within him fought with the rising tide of his passion as he turned the mare's head toward that island haven in the gray-green sea of prairie which was home.

But home to Red Simpson was as shifting and uncertain as the arid waste of desert that encircled the scant leagues of pasture through which he was now riding. Perhaps, at any other time, reckless as he was, he might have hesitated at the outrageous hardihood of the deed he contemplated. But the restless fire within him had come to full flame with the stinging lash of that contemptuous silence he had but lately endured.

He felt of his holsters, spun the cylinders of his guns, and urged forward the mare at a racking gallop through the high grass with a reckless disregard of possible dogholes.

As he tore through a patch of mesquite the mare suddenly bucked sharply sidewise as a dusty figure rose out of the bunch-grass almost under her feet.

Simpson jerked savagely at the bit, but the oath died abruptly on his lips as he saw what manner of man it was whom he had almost ridden down. For a moment the veins in his neck and temples throbbed with the effort of repression. Then he said, in a choked voice:

"Evenin', Padre Escobar."

The priest, a calm, almost a negligible figure in the conventional rusty black, regarded the gunman with a childlike gaze which had in it, nevertheless, something of the high look of an eagle.

"Good evening, señor," he replied gently. "You ride fast."

Simpson, impatient at the interruption, yet held, in spite of himself, by the mere presence of this man, said, with a sort of sullen eagerness which he could not quite conceal:

"Have you seen anythin'—any one—stirrin' hereabouts, Padre? I—I been a lookin' for—for—"

The priest had not moved from his first position. Now he said, with what seemed to Simpson an odd, almost an understanding look:

"Nothing stirring, señor, but I have seen—death."

Simpson stiffened in his saddle, and his eyes burned. He forebore to question further.

He laughed harshly as if the sound of his voice would break the spell which he felt upon him. Out of the ground—out of the air, the whispering wind—there came all at once a sibilant sigh—a low suspiration—which rose abruptly to a thin shriek, and then dropped as suddenly in a menacing murmur, to an accompaniment as of distant thunder. At the cassock of the priest the invisible fingers of the gust plucked as with the urgency of a message from the unseen.

For the moment it seemed as if two contending spirits—the one evil, the other good, strove for the possession of a soul midway between heaven and hell.

With an indescribable gesture of utterable regret and yet of stern acceptance of the inevitable the priest stepped to one side as the gunman, his dark face contorted to a sneering mask, tore past him in the direction of the nester's ranch.
SHADWELL was standing in the doorway of his cabin as Simpson rode up. His face was expressionless except for his glance which, like a sword of flame, met the hard stare of the gunman in a level yet impersonal challenge in which there was neither surprise nor fear.

For a moment Simpson was at a loss. He had not expected this calm acceptance of his presence. He had been prepared for anger, scorn, active hostility—the answer to which he carried in the holsters at his belt. But his passion for the woman who was another’s wife, fanned by the silent ostracism of Dry Bone to an urge of madness, had snapped the last link between caution and desire. His meeting with Padre Escobar had but added fuel to the flame.

There was something satanic in his face as he sat his horse in an ominous silence, but it was the nester who broke it, and for a brief instant, as it seemed, the thin truce between them as with a thunderclap.

“She’s gone, Simpson,” he said shortly.

His blue eyes burned into those of the gunman with an icy fire of unutterable hatred and contempt, yet he made no hostile move other than in the almost unnatural menace of his attitude.

For a brief instant something almost prophetic in the chill menace of his gaze daunted the gunman—but only for an instant. He laughed coarsely, as if in derisive unbelief. Why should he fence with this desert rat—this—this poacher—now that the bars were down and the stakes on the table, so to speak?

He was conscious of a faint feeling of surprise at the nester’s words, but he had gone too far for retreat even had he wished it. Shadwell’s words he did not believe—nor could he fathom what he was sure was simply some strange play to balk him of his purpose.

Callous as he was to impressions other than physical, he nevertheless sensed a tragedy in the air. But he knew that he had nothing physical to fear from the man before him.

A LOW-VOICED wind sang upward through the broiling heat and laid damp fingers upon his forehead—the breath of the rising norther, with the bleak tang of the ice-fields in its touch. And yet—another gust whirled off across the prairie, and a low moaning arose out of the north.

Strangely into his mind at that moment there came the image of that other—she of the snows—she that had melted in the fire of his passion—like wax in the furnace of desire. Not the first had she been to listen to the evil magicry of his tongue, not yet the last to be discarded with the vicious humor of a ruthless and sated lust.

A chuckle bubbled upward like an obscene froth as he said mockingly, yet with a savage directness of purpose:

“Pulled her freight, has she, Shadwell? Th’ hell y’ say. Y’ got t’ show me, old-timer.”

He bent forward in his saddle, his eyes boring into the nester’s with an insolent question, his mouth set in a savage sneer. But he was not prepared for Shadwell’s answer. Something in the tone, in the look of the man who faced him, as well as in the significance of the words for a space gave pause to the quick heating of his blood.

“Light down from y’ hawss, Simpson an’ I’ll show you—all th’ trail she took.”

The voice, low and expressionless, seemed nevertheless to carry a faint vibration—the pale shadow of a hard-held passion, which of its very intensity ran deep and quiet.

Simpson slid slowly from his mare, alert for any trick which the nester might be contemplating. His rage over the continued absence of his quarry had given way to a lazy, half-skeptical curiosity as to the nester’s next move. He was sure that the woman was somewhere about.

But he was abruptly conscious of a sud-
den shock of surprise as Shadwell turned, and, without further speech, approached the door of the cabin.

Warily, yet with a certain contemptuous indifference in his stride, he followed, his roving glance envisaging nothing but the bare bleakness of the shanty as the nester hesitated for a moment on the threshold. Behind him the gunman moved with the undulating, slow grace of a tiger—of a mountain cat—swift, unhurried, long-striding. His restless eyes explored to right and left as he said harshly:

"Well—what 're yuh waitin' for—next summer?"

Shadwell answered without turning his head.

"For you, Simpson," he said thickly, and with the words, stepped aside out of the doorway, gestured slightly as if in invitation.

Perhaps, even in his heart, the gunman might not have sought an excuse for murder—perhaps, if he had not been so ridden by that mistress of all the passions—lust—he might not have taken as a flimsy pretext the brief movement of the nester's hand.

But in his twisted brain at that instant hell leaped to the crooking of his trigger-finger. Flame spat from his gun—twice—and with the dull crash of the blended reports Shadwell stiffened—then slowly crumpled sidewise in a stumbling fall—stone dead. From where he lay, by some trick of the grotesque, one arm, flung outward in a stiff, clutching movement, seemed to be pointing into the desert, quivered a moment, and then dropped at his side in a final gesture as of consummation.

Sheathing his pistol, Simpson was in the cabin in two strides, but for a moment, in the comparative twilight of the interior, he was blind.

There was now no necessity for caution. Shadwell had employed no hands in the working of his ranch, and his nearest neighbor was a good ten miles to the north. "Lou," the gunman called softly. "Lou—where are you—it's me—Jack Simpson."

But there was no response. If he had not been so intent upon his quest it might have impressed him as strange that the noise of the shots had not sufficed to bring forth from her hiding-place the woman he sought. For that she was hidden somewhere about the shack he did not doubt.

He called again, in a sharp whisper, and yet he was not aware that he had not shouted the words:

"Lou—Lou—it's me—Jack—it's all right, I tell you."

It was incomprehensible, for, coarse-fibered as he was, by some telepathy of the dark he knew that he was not alone.

Entering the room he had stood with his back to the doorway, nor had he moved farther forward, in momentary expectation of the swift rush, the clinging arms, the soft lips against his of the woman who, he was supremely confident, would have counted the death of her husband none too dear a price for the fugitive happiness of his embrace.

But now, for the first time a prey to doubt, he moved forward uncertainly, blundering against a low bed in his path.

Bending forward suddenly, his groping fingers touched something cold and damp, so that, hardened as he was, he recoiled momentarily with a strangled oath. He put out his hand again—hesitated—drew back—and then stood silent, frozen into motionlessness, as the realization of the truth struck him like a blow.

For that which his exploring fingers had discovered was the waxen, dead face of the nester's wife!

The misty outlines of the room swam together, dissolved, reformed, until at length, his eyes accustomed to the gloom, he beheld the horror that he had wrought. Turning, he fled incontinently into the outer air.

So that was the trail she had taken, as Shadwell had told him. That was what the
priest had meant—that was the inexorable barrier to his purpose—a barrier which would thrust him forth, an outlaw, from the haunts of men, if, indeed, the long arm of the law might not reach into the desert spaces to haul him back to the expiation of his double crime.

“Hell!” he snarled in a mingled fury of dull rage and impotent regret.

Then, without one backward look, he flung himself into the saddle, urging the mare into that beckoning wilderness which henceforth should claim him for its own.

ON THE third day the pursuit slackened, gave out, turned, and made a weary line for home.

Simpson, from his position high up on Devil’s Butte, saw his trailers vanish over the last swell of sun-drenched mesa, and then shaped a straight course for the hogan of old Jasper, the Piegan outlaw.

Grub was cooking in the camp kettles as he rode in, dismounted, and asked for the chief with a surly frown which gave place to a hard stare of interest at the passage of an Indian girl between him and the glowing fire.

Slim and straight she was, and beautiful even by civilized standards, he thought, as she passed him with lowered lids, and yet he knew that she had seen him.

“Who is she?” he wondered.

His curiosity, always keen at the sight of a new face, was quickened by the knowledge that she was not a Piegan, nor had he seen her at his last visit to the camp, and that was but three months ago. If he thought of the past it was with a spasmodic, dull resentment rather than the faint stirrings of a remorse which he was far from feeling. His soul, like some couchant animal, but bided his opportunity, whatever it might prove, and as he waited for the chief, observing the graceful progress of the girl, and speculating as to her identity, a steer, breaking loose from its flimsy corral, charged down the village street, the girl directly in its path.

Simpson yelled, but she stood like a statue. His brain worked at lightning speed as he considered the odds.

It was not a particularly difficult shot, yet he knew that Jasper would not thank him for it, whoever the girl might be, and just then he needed his friendship, such as it was. He mounted again swiftly. It was the rope or nothing.

He leaned slightly forward in the saddle, spoke one brief word to the mare, and made his cast. It was a hazardous angle, and for an instant the effort seemed futile—the steer, with the cunning of an old campaigner, swerving in his rush as he strode to evade the loop. He was almost upon the girl when the gunman gave a quick flirt of his wrist, the flying loop went true, pinning the beast’s forelegs, the mare braced, and the steer somersaulted to earth in a plunging fall.

Simpson grinned, then as the picture broke up in the noise and confusion of the steer’s removal, leisurely rolled a cigarette, glancing out of the corner of his eye at the girl, who was gazing at him in frank admiration.

It was but a look, but it spoke volumes to the gunman, raising in him anew the evil of a possibility which prolonged the shadowy smile upon his lips. He had made the impression which he had sought, and if in his heart the memory of those others—of that other who had taken the last trail alone—obtruded, it was but a chill reflection of vanished fire.

He glanced away, to see the figure of old Jasper approaching. When he looked again the girl was gone.

The chief’s face was impassive, his eyes alone alive with that curious, quiet brightness of the Indian’s which may mean anything or nothing.

“How!” he said simply, and without waiting for the other’s reply, led the way to his teepee.
Simpson followed, and when they were seated on the brilliant Navaho blankets—for your Piegan is last of all a weaver—whisky of a mellow richness was brought to them by a soft-footed Indian girl whom the gunman immediately recognized as the one he had saved from the steer.

**DESPITE** his knowledge of Indians and their customs, Simpson's hard, black eyes took in every detail of her really attractive figure with an almost insolent scrutiny as she moved about the teepee.

The sleeping devil that was in his heart woke to the stimulus of the whisky and peeked out of his eyes with a lustful appraisal in which, nevertheless, there was a necessary element of cunning caution.

He felt the gaze of the Indian upon him—cold, inscrutable, searching his heart, and, courageous as he was, and reckless with the cold daring of his profession, as he turned to face the chief he was aware of a daunting quality in the latter's silent regard which moved him to hurried speech:

"Well, chief," he said, "I've come a long trail, an' I'd like to lay up here—you savvy?—one—two moons maybe—then I'm aimin' t' pull my freight for th' Panhandle—yuh won't see me this side o' th' line for some time after that, y' c'n gamble."

The girl had disappeared.

For a measurable interval the Indian made no reply, his face wooden in its vacuity. Then he said abruptly:

"Her my squaw."

Simpson was not altogether surprised, but the implication of menace in the words was not lost upon him. He could not afford to antagonize Jasper for any one of a number of reasons.

He had little fear for his personal safety, either from Indians or from possible pursuers, but it was to his interest to cultivate his friendship for the outlaw, who had been useful to him in the past and would be again, he felt assured.

So he said, with an assumption of bluff-heartedness:

"I'm y'r friend, chief—y' know that." He reached into the pocket of his shirt, producing some cigars, at which the chief's eyes glistened in anticipation.

The Indian accepted the diplomatic present with an inarticulate grunt, the incipient suspicion faded from his eyes, and the gunman knew that he was safely past what might have proved a dangerous shoal.

The long shadows of evening were stalking across the mesa, beneath which the camp was pitched when he rose unsteadily, yawned, bade the chief good night, and retired to the comfortable wickup provided for him at the latter's orders.

His sleep was deep and undisturbed by dreams. The memory of the past blurred to an indefinite, faint picture of discomfort—something to be forgotten in a future which, for a time at least, gave promise of brief interest.

**FOR,** in the days which followed, although he was mindful of the stern ethics of the Indian concerning a poacher's punishment, he yet found means to feed the ruling passion of his nature. He contrived to meet Neeneetahmis at odd times, in the most innocently casual manner, and she, on her part, it must be said, was not less unwilling than crafty in this contriving.

He discovered that she was three parts Spanish, and conversed with her, on the rare occasions when they were able to escape the possible espionage of the camp, in the liquid, rolling vowels which lend themselves so readily to the language of love—or lust.

Such a wooing was of necessity swift, and his tongue ran the caressing gamut of a subtle flattery which drew the woman to him as surely as the bold appraisal of his gaze fired her wayward blood.

"Neeneetahmis," he told her, "you are
like the dew—you are like the rain—and I am thirsty.”

Need it be wondered at that to her he seemed a hero—a vaquero of parts—beside whom the middle-aged tyranny of her husband became an intolerable burden, to be abandoned at the earliest opportunity available.

To his eager questioning at last she replied simply—yes—she would go with him—that very night—was he not her lord—her god?

In the shadow of the tamaracks below the spring whither he had followed her he clasped her to his heart, nor heeded the chill presence of those thin ghosts who moaned about him in the rising ululation of the wind.

The night was hot and humid when they made their start. It was black-dark, but he set their course by an unerring plains instinct which he felt certain would bring them to safety many an hour before the awakened vengeance of the camp could find them in that uncharted sea of desert and mountain.

Jasper? Why, he was only an Indian after all—clever enough in his way—but as they passed the last hogan at the edge of the prairie something moved from behind it—something which crawled on all fours with the still silence of a panther about to spring, and which, as they rode on, sprang suddenly erect behind them, and then melted into the obscurity of the nearest teepee.

And so they rode away, silently, into the black heart of the night.

They had been riding for perhaps an hour, at a steady lope, when, of a sudden, Simpson thought he heard behind them, and as yet a long way off, the faint jingle of stirrup-irons, or the clink and fall of hoof-beats upon stone.

They were passing through a wild and desolate country—a forgotten land whose denizens were pariahs, both animal and human—but it was not fear of any possible encounter with these which drove the blood in a sudden rush from his heart. On an impulse he checked their mounts, and, vaulting from the saddle, laid his ear to the ground.

Horses—and behind them!
The girl shivered in the chill air. Then she dismounted stiffly.

“What is it—what do you hear?” she asked.

But he did not answer. It seemed to him at that moment that the murmurous dark was alive with faces—with hands which beckoned—with voices which he could hear, but could not understand. Behind them the faint murmur rose to an unmistakable, swift beat of hoofs.

They mounted again, urging their horses at a faster gait.

A faint grayness usurped the velvet dark with a promise of dawn, and at the instant, out of the enveloping dusk, behind them a red flash stabbed through the murk.

There was no cover nearer than a mile, and it was useless to attempt to reach it in the face of the swift onrush of their pursuers. Simpson dismounted, made the horses lie down, and with the girl behind him, crouched in the sand, peering over the backs of the animals as he unslung his guns. By this time it was light enough to see.

The girl whimpered for a moment, and then was quiet as the oncoming riders, spurring their cayuses in a wide semicircle, yelled shrilly, discharging their guns in an uneven, staccato rattle, the bullets thudding into the sand, or whining overhead with a vicious drone.

But the gunman held his fire. His thoughts raced furiously as the circle of riders narrowed—then—as they grew bolder, converging upon their quarry with the recklessness of numbers, his pistols streamed fire, followed by yells of rage from the attackers as the bullets found their marks.
A faint hope began to grow in his heart as the firing died for a breathless interval with the coming of the dawn, but suddenly, at his side, Neeneteahmis gave a choking gasp—shuddered once against his arm—and then lay silent. A confused rush of men and horses engulfed them like a flood as he fired twice, blindly, into the surging mass. Then, unhurt, rough hands jerked him to his feet, and at the last his soul knew fear.

A long knife upturned in the rising sun—a quick wrench—the gasping cry of a soul in agony—then a gibbering wreck of man, stumbling, rising with a fury of effort—a grotesque and hideous travesty of life—he was thrust forth—to go on and on, by some strange miracle of will—of destiny—into the pitiless eye of the sun—into the vast and arid tomb of the desert.

IN THE Come Along bar the high tide of a late evening had risen to a pitch of hilarity which mounted in a steady beat of roaring noise to the smoke-grimed rafters, and out across the one short street of Dry Bone.

Every game was full, and the dance-hall at the rear quivered and shook to the incessant thunderous pounding of many feet, beside which the thin tinkle of the piano arose in a faint obligato of sound.

Women were there—let the moralist tell you about them—but there was not a man in all that gathering of punchers, sour-doughs, and hard-bitten plainsmen who did not purchase his pleasure with the easy prodigality of a simplicity which, at its worst, was less romantic than practical.

At times, it is true, they were killers upon impulse—but they knew nothing of soul-murder—they foregathered at the long bar in a rough fellowship which had for its base the ethics of the square deal, even for such women as had forfeited the consideration of a more delicate civilization.

The sheriff of the county was finishing a story, surrounded by an interested group of listeners at the end of the bar nearest the door.

"An' so he makes his getaway," he was saying, "but the woman—"

He broke off suddenly, his eyes wide, staring, filled with a fierce questioning her which his tale, dramatic as it may have been, could scarcely have furnished the inspiration.

He pointed silently as the door fell inward with a crash, and a man—a ghost rather, in the extreme meagerness of his build, lurched into the room. Under his ragged Stetson his hair, or what was left of it, was a dirty gray—he moved with the slow, uncertain step of extreme age, and yet, out of his eyes, there flamed the unquenchable fire—the daunting vision—of an unutterable agony.

As he approached the group at the bar there was that in his look which caused them, as one man, to give place before him. Once he stumbled and nearly fell, but no hand was outstretched to aid him, so that, putting out his clawlike fingers, he gripped the rail with a desperate, clutching gesture, hauling himself, hand over hand, along the polished surface of the mahogany, as, like actors in a play, the fascinated watchers retreated before his advance.

Still he came on, in a frozen silence, his forehead wet with the fury of his effort, when, of a sudden, something seemed to move in his throat. An inarticulate, animal-like whimper issued from his lips—his eyes dulled—abruptly he appeared to shrivel into a mere husk of a man. He tottered, and then collapsed sidewise on his face in the sodden sawdust.

As he fell his ancient hat pitched from his head, disclosing to the startled gaze of the onlookers the hairless poll with its thin fringe of gray—the unmistakable evidence of the scalping-knife. The wound had healed, but the deep cicatrice, indelible testimony to the deed, remained.

A sudden clamor of noise shattered the silence.
A DOZEN voices calling for whisky were followed by a swift rush of men toward the prostrate figure, where it lay under the garish lights, with glazing eyes, and tight-locked teeth, set in a savage sneer. There were slight traces of foam about the snarling mouth as the sheriff, desisting in a futile effort to administer the whisky, drew his clasp-knife, and with a steady hand, pried open the stiffening jaws.

The next instant the glass was shivered in the sawdust as the sheriff recoiled with an oath. From the silent figure on the floor there seemed to emanate the tragic murmur of a soundless curse—a faint suspension as from the body of death.

Home at the last, like a hound of sin, the face of Red Simpson stared up at them with sightless eyes, but the horror was this: he had no tongue!

SISSY STUFF?

You Think Cowboy Romances Is Sissy Stuff? Don't Be Silly!

Just take a gander at this. It was taken right out of "Love Law," a hell roaring novel of frontier days by Zane Warbridge, in the December issue of

COWBOY ROMANCES

10c

All the Action and Romance of the West

ELEVEN men came out, lined up with McKinney.

It was showdown. Law against Brad's mob. Brad was forced to admire McKinney's courage against odds of four to one. A murmur arose behind Brad. The mob didn't like this show of force from McKinney.

"McKinney," somebody shouted, "you're fixin' to get yourself strung up!"


"You can't browbeat us any longer, you stinkin' range hog!"

With that, the frenzied Merrick jerked up his gun with the abandon of a zealot. He fired at McKinney. McKinney grabbed hard for his hard-ware. A bullet hit him as he did so. He fell to one knee. Caught himself. Fired back. Brad leaped out, to stop Merrick's mad attack. He was too late. McKinney's bullet tore through Merrick's body. The little man fell backward, dying. McKinney also was on the ground.

"For God's sake, hold it!" Brad cried at his followers.

Guns already were being drawn, on both sides. Brad ran along in front of his men, holding up his hands. Neva McKinney was in front of the most belligerent of her father's hirelings. When she was sure they would not invite disaster by opening fire, she came stepping out to meet Brad. Face as white as death. But eyes afire with something that made Brad half afraid. Afraid of what, though, he could not tell. So long gone was that moment he had held her in his arms on the patio, when she almost surrendered to his love. Now his father slain by her faction; her father dying there on the ground.

"Go ahead, keep up your killings," she invited, voice low and tense. "Run your mob roughshod over this country. I suppose you'll start in to do that, now that I'm left as sole owner of the Cross Nines."

AND THERE'S LOTS MORE LIKE IT
Ride along, trail pardners—Avast there, you land lubbers—mush along, you sourdoughs. Come on and join the Rambler’s Club. This club is open to everyone in every corner of the earth. The Rambler encourages correspondence among the readers of this magazine. Just write to the Rambler at Room 635, 60 Hudson Street, New York City, and sign your name or nickname. We’ll print your letter and if you don’t want your address to appear, send it confidential to us and we will forward answers to you. Tell us what you think of the stories in this magazine and what you want to read in these pages.

So come on you ramblers from every corner of this earth, let’s hear from you in time to get your pen-pal letter in the next issue.

THE RAMBLER.

"FOND OF SPORTS"

Dear Rambler:
I hope you will print my letter in the Rambler’s Club.
I have read a lot of magazines but I consider your magazine the best because it has all sorts of stories.
I am 10 years old, 5 feet 11 inches tall, and I weigh 170 pounds.
I am very fond of all sports and I play baseball, football, handball, and baseball. I would like to exchange photos with boys and girls.
I will promise to answer all letters.

Sincerely yours,
HARRY SKEDEL.

218 Freeman St.,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

"PREFERS GIRLS"

Dear Rambler,
I walked into a newspaper store to buy a magazine and couldn’t find one I liked so I picked up a copy of “Adventure Novels” and read it. I find it one of the most interesting and exciting magazines I have ever read.
I am 17 years old, am 5 ft. 8 in. tall, weigh 150 lbs., have athletic build and am interested in hobbies such as boxing, fencing, model-building. I love swimming and almost every other sport. I will write to anyone and exchange snapshots. I prefer girls!
Your Rambler’s Pen-Pal.

ARTHUR POOLE.

122 William St.,
Englewood, New Jersey.

"BADMINTON PLAYER"

Dear Rambler,
I should very much like to become a member of your club, and have pen pals everywhere especially in the United States. I will answer all letters and exchange photographs.
I am 19 years old, dark and 5 ft. 8 ins. tall.
I am very fond of ice-skating, Badminton and all outdoor sports.

Wishing your fine magazine a great success.
Sincerely,
STUART COOPER.

20, Christchurch Avenue,
Bronx, New York.

"A ROLLICKING CHAP OF 20"

Dear Rambler,
I am a rollicking chap in search of pen pals. Am twenty-nine, five feet ten, weigh one fifty, dark, not so awful to look at.
Fond of baseball, dancing, movies, horse racing and what not. Prefer pals of twenty-five and up. Looks not essential, only sincerity.
Com’on you femmes, males, help keep my mailman busy. A prompt reply to all. Sincerely yours,
RALPH E. FREEMAN.

320 So. 11th Ave.,
Maywood, Ill.

"COLLECTS COWBOY SONGS"

Dear Rambler,
Would you please find some Pen Pals for a poor and lonely farm girl.
I am 16 years old, 5 ft. 3 in. tall, have ash blond hair, hazel eyes, and a light complexion. My hobbies are collecting old cowboy songs.
and reading stories in my favorite book The Adventure Novels Magazine.
Please won't some of you Pen Pals write to me? I'll try my very best to answer all your letters. And say, if there's any of you Pen Pals who haven't a pencil to scribble a few lines to me with, just let me know and I'll send you one. I'd especially like to hear from travelers and people in the farthest off corners of the world. So come on boys and girls and don't let me down but toss me a note or two.
Sincerely,
MERLE RALEY.
R. 1, Box 14,
Warren, Minn., U. S. A.

"LONELY BACHELOR OF 45"

Dear Rambler,
As I have read several of your Adventure magazines, I think the stories are quite interesting, especially the short stories. I will give a description of myself and hoping that my letter will appear in your next issue. Am about 45 years old, 5 ft. 8 in. in height, weigh 145 pounds, dark hair, blue eyes, clean dresser. Am a machinist by trade, have home, own single. Own and operate sawmill and threshing machine, but take time to read your magazine. Am very, very lonely. Will be very glad to hear from pals, especially ladies.
Yours truly,
THOMAS J. SMITH.
510 East St.,
Cudin, Minn.

"WILL EXCHANGE STAMPS"

Dear Rambler,
I hope you will print this in The Rambler's Club as I want to have pen pals all over the world. I am from the Philippines, five feet eight inches tall weighing one hundred and forty-five pounds and twenty-four years old. I wish to correspond those especially interested in stamp collecting and would change stamps with them.
My hobbies are stamp collecting, reading, boxing and hunting. I will answer all letters.
Sincerely yours,
GERARDO A. REGNER.
Maholo, Cebu,
Philippine Islands.

"SAYS HE IS A MALE!"

Dear Rambler,
I happened to get hold of "Adventure Novels" through a friend and read it cover to cover. It was so interesting. Hope for more good novels like Malay Guns, Legion of Hell. I also read your Ramblers Club column, and wish to put in a request for Pen Pals, for a description. I am 21 years old, 5 ft. 9 in. tall, weigh 156 pounds. Grey eyes, fairly good looking I've been told. Oh yes, light brown hair, almost blonde. I like all hobbies, interested in aviation, and collect coins. Love adventure and excitement. Am rather lonely at times. So please print my plea for pen pals. Will send snap to those that include one in their first letter, interested in opposite sex. Am a male if you haven't guessed it yet. Please forward enclosed letters if I'm accepted. Thanking you, I remain,
Faithfully yours,
HARVEY GRAY.
Pet Harvey Gray,
Co. B 165th Infantry,
68 Lexington Ave., N. Y. O.

"A FARMER’S DAUGHTER"

Dear Rambler,
I am a farmer's daughter and I would like to join the Ramblers Club and get some new friends.
My description is as follows: I weigh 122 lbs., am 5 ft. 5 in. tall, have brown curly hair, green eyes, and I am 15 years old. I would like to hear from people around my age. Sex makes no difference to me. So come on, write.
I have read the Adventure Novels Magazine for a long time. So I hope you have room for me in your next issue. I will answer all letters I receive. Please, don't let me down. I'll be waiting.

R. D. No. 6,
Bridgeport, N. J.

"ADORIS IS CALLING"

Dear Rambler:
I must say that "Adventure Novels" is truly a super-heatramagnificus publication. In common lingo, your mag is "tops."
I would like a lot to have some good Pen Pals. I am about five feet ten and one-half inches, have brown unruly hair, blue-green eyes and weigh around 140. I'd like to hear from either sex from all over the world between the age of 16 and 19. I am 17 plus myself. It'd like to hear from far places and near. I live a few miles east of the exact cen...
ter of the U. S. Hoping for many Pen Pal.
I remain, LEITH WYMAN.
Gibbon, Neb., U. S. A.

"MAN IN DISTRESS"

Dear Rambler,
Here's a call for help from the grassy prairies of Okla. Maybe its unusual for a man to be in distress instead of the time honored maiden. But anyway this is an S.O.S. for Pen Pal.
Maybe you will understand better when I tell you that I am half deaf, and as a result it is hard to find friends who enjoy being with me.
So I am taking this way out through corresponding with pen pals.
As I already know several deaf men I'd like to correspond with deaf girls if there are any in the United States near my own age.
I am 25 years old, weigh 130 pounds, I'm 5 ft. 6 inches in height. And have blond hair and blue eyes. So come on girls and fill my mail box. I promise to answer each and every letter received.
Yours till the seas dries up.
VICTOR H. WEST.
Perkins, Okla., R. R. No. 2.

"SATISFIED READER"

Dear Rambler:
I have just finished reading my first Adventure Novel and I am more than satisfied with it. I wish to become a member of the Rambler Club and get pen pals from all over the world especially outside of the U.S.A.
I am 17 years of age, 5 feet 11 inches and weigh 150 pounds.
Heres hoping that I get plenty of Pen Pals. Your truly,
VIO SCHOLZ, JR.
c/o Mr. V. F. Scholz,
3245 Abbott Ave., South Minneapolis, Minn.

"CANADIAN WRESTLER"

Dear Rambler:
I am out of your new readers but sure will be a steady one from now on. I think you have a splendid magazine. I would like very much to have some pen pals.
I am a young man 34 years of age 5 feet 8 inches tall and well built.
I am interested in all sports. Wrestling and weightlifting are my favorites. I would like to correspond with young ladies of any age. Glad to exchange snaps or views.
I would like to know if you will publish this letter in your next issue. I am,
Sincerely Yours,
SWART MIATT.
11 Wotford Ave.,
Toronto, Canada

"AGES—50—90—PLEASE WRITE"

Dear Rambler:
Guess I'm rather too old to be included in your columns, as I noticed from the July issue that all the writers are from 16 to 45 years old. Now, then, I cannot see why those so young would be lonesome or wish for pen pals—but I can understand why a woman my age could be lonely, as I do not make as many social contacts as younger people do. However, I would like to join Rambler Club if I meet a match, and ask for pals between 50 and 60 years to write me—Either sex.
I am interested in travel—Have done quite a bit myself and have driven since 1914.
Am 50 years old—large dark brown eyes—5 feet 8 inches tall and weigh about 175 pounds.

"PERSONALITY PLUS."
This is my first entry into your column and also the first Adventure Novels which I have read. I have enjoyed it very much and shall look for your next issue eagerly.
Will promise to answer all letters received.
3 Summer Ave.,
Springfield, Mass.

"LONELY NURSE IN HOLLYWOOD"

Dear Rambler:
I would like to get some good pen pal from any place, about 45 years of age, and lonely like me.
I am a nurse 45 years old. I see nothing but suffering and have no chance to meet any friends. Please, will somebody relieve my despairing loneliness.
LEONE ATCHISON.
685Q Bellaire Ave.,
North Hollywood, Cal.

"GUNS AND AVIATION"

Dear Rambler:
I have just finished a July issue of Adventure Novels which a friend gave me. Take it from me there's none better. My favorite type of story's are such as Legion of Hell, Malay Guns, and Beach Combat.
Reading the last story I happened to see the Rambler's Club, so I'm begging for entrance. I am 18 years old, black wavy hair, gray green eyes, 6 feet tall and weigh 150 pounds. My main hobbies are Guns and Aviation.
I would like pen pals from both sexes. I promise to answer all letters. Also exchange photos as soon as possible.
Patiently waiting.
WM. "BILL" COOPER.
Route 81,
Niles, Michigan.

"ATHLETIC"

Dear Rambler:
I am a regular reader of your magazine, Adventure Novels. I think your department is swell, and I would be deeply grateful if you would print my name therein.
I am a young man with plenty of brown curly hair. I am six feet tall and am a fair boxer, wrestler, and weightlifter. I have traveled extensively by train and trailer. I like dancing, swimming and the movies, and would like to swap snapshots with girls who like these things. Especially girls from Washington state.
DOYEL HAWKING.
Box 55,
Caroleen, N. C.

"HIS MAJESTY'S ROYAL AIR FORCE"

Dear Rambler:
We are two lonely airmen of 'His Majesty's Royal Air Force,' who wish to correspond with any members of the fair sex, the world over. We are interested in sports of all kinds and promise to exchange letters and snapshots to all that are interested.
Yours hopefully,
JOHN BRADLEY, (20),
ROBERT HUME, (22).
H418, No. 2 Wing, R.A.F., Henlow,
Bedfordshire, England.

"SPORTING GALS"

Dear Rambler:
We are two buddies who have just read a copy of your Adventure Novels, and do see like it? Oh, Boy! We also enjoyed the Rambler's Club letters. And of course we wish to join it.
Roberia is 5 feet 3 inches tall, has black hair, brown eyes, weighs 118 pounds, and is 18 years of age.
I am 5 feet 3 inches tall, weigh 112 pounds, have brown hair, blue eyes, and am 19 years of age.
We both like swimming, roller skating, hiking, and other outdoor sports.
We are eager to hear from boys all over the world who are our age or a few years older.
So come one, come all. We will be glad to
answer all letters and exchange photographs with those who wish.

Sincerely,

JOYCE MULKEY.

Ritter Hall, Athene, Tennessee.

ROBERTA LUNKIN.
230½ Jarrigan Ave., Chattanooga, Tenn.

"HELLO AMERICA—TRINIDAD IS CALLING"

Dear Rambler:

I have long been desirous of becoming a member of your "Rambler's Club," but so far I have lacked the temerity to write. However, having gained courage by your very cordial invitation to all readers to join, I am now asking to become a member.

Still and all I would love to have pen pals from far and wide. I hope you will help me. When my sister found out I was writing to you she said to include her in my letter as she would also like to have pen pal. We have both read your Adventure Novels and decided it is both interesting and exciting. We are looking forward for your next series with patience.

Sonia, sister, has black wavy hair, large dark eyes, 5 ft. 1 in. tall, weighs 110 lbs., likes all sports and loves to dance. She is interested in the movie stars, and is 17 years of age.

I am 5 ft. 1 in. tall also, weigh 112 lbs., have black hair, cut in a bob, large brown eyes, love to dance, and to write not only letters, but short stories. I am interested in acrobatics, and I can do a little of the acrobatic toe dance. I have lots of snapshots. I am 15 years of age.

I am a senior at high school, and intend to graduate the coming year. Sonia is also a senior. She does a little classical dancing. We promise faithfully to answer all letters and this is no fake. We are in earnest. We speak French and Spanish and read and write it also. So we wish you luck with your magazine and your club. Goodbye dear Rambler until I hear from you. We are looking forward with great eagerness for your earliest reply.

Yours truly,

CAROLINE PRESOTO.
No. 59 Nelson St.,
Port of Spain, Trinidad, R.W.I.

P.S. Please write to Sonia on the same address.

"U.S. ARMIES: ATTENTION PLEASE"

Dear Rambler:

I have just finished reading my first "Adventure Novels," and I have enjoyed every word of it, so please let me plan for a pair of girl and girl 27, with red hair and standing 5 ft. 1 in. I would like to communicate with an officer in one of the American forces, especially one from the Navy.

Yours,

MISS SIBEL AGNES.
20 Mersey Road,

"GAY CABALLERO FROM MANILA"

Dear Rambler:

I have read for the first time your "Adventure Novels" magazine, and the stories were very magnificent for words. I can assure you that your magazine will be read in my home. My favorite author is Mr. Cliff Campbell. For me the best story that he wrote was "Legion of Hell." In answer to your very kind invitation to join the Rambler's Club, I hereby apply for membership hoping I succeed.

I have Spanish and English blood in me; am a most diligent student, and a member of the B. O. T. C. unit of our University. I am 19 years old, 5 ft. 11 in. tall, dark wavy hair, sun-tanned complexion due to too much outdoor life. Hobbies are horse-back riding, soccer-football, camping, motoring, dancing, and collecting pictures of pen pals.

So come on you beautiful members of the fair sex, from 10 to 19 years old, please sling some ink on the "Gay Caballero" page, and don't forget to enclose your personal photographs, for which in return you'll get a painted card of the beautiful scenes in the Philippines, and my personal photo, if I don't get into a fix in a jiffy. Painted cards are only given to the owners of the first 15 photographs that I receive.

Before I close, good luck to the Adventure Novels magazine; it's a swell companion at all times.

Yours,

CARLOS DE LA ROSA.
University of Sto. Tomas, Espanyol, Manila, Philippines.

"WILL EXCHANGE SNAPS"

Dear Rambler:

By chance I bought one of your Adventure Novels. I am reading it now and have no difficulty in obtaining them. I am looking forward for further issues, hoping you will be spare enough to print my request. I hope to make lots of pen pals. Will exchange snaps, and will try to answer all, and I desire to become a member right now if you please. Now speaking of myself: I am 5 ft. tall, brown wavy hair, blue eyes, and am 21 years of age. Do you think you could find anyone who would like to write me? I will make myself as interesting as I can. I have no hobbies same as other Ramblers, so come on you Rambers, let's make this old world pay.

Yours truly,

SAMUEL REDGATE.
5 Willhert Road, off Cappelts Road, Arnold Nottingham, England.

"BRITISH TYPIST"

Dear Rambler:

May a reader in the old country be permitted to congratulate you on your excellent novel. Have been one who has thoroughly enjoyed reading your thrilling stories for some time. The best of luck in the world to you. Is it possible for you to put me in touch with a pen pal? Am 24 years of age, height 5 feet 8 inches, weight 110 pounds, blue eyes and light brown hair. A few months ago I left my home town to work as a shorthand typist, and naturally had to find digs. You will no doubt realize how very lonely this can be, and I should be very happy to have someone to correspond with. Have you anyone at all (of the opposite sex) who would be willing to write to a lonesome soul in England? Dancing, swimming, hiking and reading. Can you find me someone without putting my letter in print? If you can do anything for me I should be most grateful.

Sincerely,

MISS LOIS BOYCE.
44 Springwood Street, Huddersfield, Yorkshire, England.

P. S. Would be willing to send snap shots.

"GUATEMALA CALLING"

Dear Rambler:

I would like to be a member of your Rambler's Club. I like very much the "Adventure Novels" magazine and I wish to exchange letters in English or Spanish with readers from everywhere.

I'm 20 years old and weigh 125 pounds. I've green eyes and brown wavy hair. I'm intelligent and attractive. I promise to answer any letter I receive.

Come on pen pals and write to me.

Afectisimo,

AUGUSTO ARIS DE C.
5a, Avenida Sur #290, Guatemala, A. C.
DOUBLE ACTION GANG MAGAZINE

December issue, on Sale Now, Features
A SMASHING ACTION-PACKED NOVEL OF
THE TRADERS IN FLESH

"WHITE WAY TO HELL"
By E. HOFFMAN PRICE
2 ROARING NOVELETTES

"WEB OF SMOKE"
By G. T. FLEMING ROBERTS

"DEATH HAS A DEADLINE"
By Norman A. Daniels
Also—Margie Harris
Anson Hard
All Stories New!

All Stories Complete

A BANNER ISSUE!
ACTION-PACKED WESTERN

JANUARY ISSUE NOW ON SALE
FEATURES

2 GUN-SWIFT NOVELS

"BANDIT BUSTER"
By CLIFF CAMPBELL

"TEXANS DIE FOR TEXAS"
By J. E. CRINSTEAD
Also—S. Omar Backer, Ed. Earl Repp,
Robert E. Obets, Mat Rand

All Stories Complete

SPORTSMEN—DOG LOVERS
KENNEL REDUCTION

Exceedingly fine litter of thoroughbred
English Springer Spaniels—Whelped
June 15th. Liver and white in color.
Sire—Dainsby Conqueror—imported
Bench and Field Trial Champion. Dam
—Flippant of Shady Acres. Both Sire
and Dam are indomitable hunters and
marvelous household companions.
Whether you want a friend for the
children, a show dog, or a hunter that
works the heaviest cover and retrieves
from land or water, these dogs will fill
the bill. For a man who wants a point-
ing dog—a great litter of Irish Set-
ters—whelped July 28th. Grand Sire—
Champion Flornell Squire of Nilson—
Dam—Strain Higgins Red Pat. Both
the Spaniels and Setters have what it
takes and are eligible for A.K.C. The
prices are dirt cheap for quality dogs.
Write
RAY ROBRECHT
Mountain Lakes, N. J.

BIGGER AND BETTER THAN
EVER BEFORE
JANUARY ISSUE OF

SMASHING WESTERN

FEATURING
Action-Packed Stories of the Roaring West—
Stories of Men and Guns and Hard Fighting
Days—

"Law of the Six-Gun"
Action Novel by
WILL F. JENKINS

"Tangled Loops"
Great New Novel by
G. W. BARRINGTON
Also—Frederick R. Bechdolt
Edward Hunt Hoover
Cliff Campbell

All Stories Complete
TAKE YOUR CHOICE FREE!!!

WESTERN ACTION NOVELS
OR
COMPLETE NORTHWEST NOVELS

FOR ONE YEAR

Yes! You can get a free one year’s subscription to either of the above splendid magazines, if you will take advantage of our one year’s combination subscription offer to

REAL WESTERN
AND
DOUBLE ACTION WESTERN

Both for $2.25

Fill out the subscription coupon below.

WINFORD PUBLICATIONS, Inc.
Subscription Dept., 60 Hudson St., New York City.
Gentlemen: Enclosed herewith please find $2.25, for which please send me one whole year, REAL WESTERN and DOUBLE ACTION WESTERN, together with one year’s free subscription to □ WESTERN ACTION NOVEL □ COMPLETE NORTHWEST NOVEL. (Check one.)

Name .................................................................
Address ..................................................................
..................................................................................S.W.I
PICTURES OF MUSCULAR MARVELS

EARLE LIEBERMAN, P. O. Box 591, Hollywood, California

Pleasant mention DOUBLE ACTION GROUP when answering advertisements
PERFECTED ELECTRIC TUNING—JUST TOUCH BUTTONS
NO MORE DIAL TWIDDLING—ELECTRICALLY AUTOMATIC
AUTOMATICALLY STOPS "SMACK" ON THE STATION
MAGIC MOVIE SIX-CONTINENT DIAL
9 TOUCH BUTTONS BRING IN 9 STATIONS—IN A FLASH!

JUST TOUCH BUTTON—LATEST 20-TUBE MIDWEST TUNES ITSELF BY ELECTRIC MOTOR!

ONLY MIDWEST'S DIRECT-FROM-FACTORY POLICY MAKES THIS AND OTHER SENSATIONAL FEATURES POSSIBLE AT AMAZINGLY LOW PRICES!

HERE'S today's radio sensation! No more dial twiddling—no more squinting—no more stooping when you tune in a radio! Just touch an electric button (on top of radio) and its corresponding station zips in...and the dial STOPS ITSELF automatically on the station. All this happens in 3/4 second with Midwest Perfected ELECTRIC Tuning: (1) You touch button—electric motor speeds dial towards corresponding station; (2) Colorful Bull's Eye dialer across dial and locates itself behind station; (3) As dial flashes to station, it "hunts" back and forth for an instant—and stops itself and winks at exact center of resonance. Zip...Zip...Zip...you bring in 9 perfectly tuned stations in 3 seconds!

20 TUBES FOR PRICE OF 10
Why content with an ordinary 10, 12, or 14-tube set, when you can buy a 20-tube Super DeLuxe ELECTRIC TUNING Midwest for the same money! It will surprise and delight you with its brilliant world-wide reception on 6 bands. You have 50%—and get 30 days free trial in your own home—when you buy direct from the factory at wholesale prices. You are triply protected with Foreign Reception Guarantee, One-Year Warranty and Money-Back Guarantees.

TERMS AS LOW AS $1.00 A WEEK
You have a whole year to pay for your Midwest on the easiest and most convenient credit terms. Never before have you been offered so much radio for so little money—and on such easy terms!

SEND FOR FREE 40-PAGE CATALOG!
See for yourself that Midwest offers today’s greatest radio values. Write for new 1958 Factory-To-You Catalog showing 300 pages of radios, choices and features—in their natural colors. Select the one you like on 30 days Free Trial in your own home.

SERVICE MEN
Join national wide. Midwest service organization. Write for free details.

MIDWEST WORLD-WIDE RADIOS

AMAZING NEW FEATURES GIVE HUMAN PERFORMANCE
The "Magic Mystic Brain" is just one of 101 advanced features, many of them exclusive! It interprets your touch button signals and controls the electric motor. Nine contact fingers can be easily set to any stations you desire. Even a child can do it!

MAGIC MOVIE DIAL
Now, you can delight in the world's finest six continent overseas reception with a range of 12,000 and more miles (125 to 20,000 KC). Note that choice dial shows only broadcast band. Then flip 6-wave band switch, and instantly, five additional bands are projected on the dial.

MIDWEST RADIO CORPORATION
DEPT. FF-68 CINCINNATI, OHIO, U.S.A.
THEY SAID A STOVE LIKE THIS WOULD COST A LOT—BUT IT DIDN'T. I GOT IT AT THE FACTORY PRICE!

"—and I paid for it by the month"

"Take the advice of one who knows—mail the coupon today for the new FREE Kalamazoo Catalog. You'll save yourself time and money.

"I wasted days looking at all makes of stoves. They said that what I wanted would cost a lot. Then...came my Kalamazoo catalog. In ten minutes I found exactly the stove quality I wanted—and surprise of surprises—it cost less than I had expected to pay.

Nearly 200 Styles and Sizes

Mail the coupon! You'll find nearly 200 styles and sizes of Heaters, Ranges and Furnaces—many illustrated in beautiful pastel colors—actually more bargains than in 20 big stores.

As Little as 12c a Day

"You'll be amazed to find how far your pennies stretch. Some stoves cost as little as 12c a day at the FACTORY PRICE—and 18 months to pay, if you wish.

Stoves Sent on Trial—1,200,000 Users

"You'll like the way Kalamazoo does business—the same 'Factory-to-You' way they have dealt with 1,200,000 satisfied users for 37 years. 30 days trial. No urging! Service is fast—24 hour shipments. Satisfaction or money back.

New Ranges—New Heaters

"In this catalog you'll see new modern stoves of sparkling beauty—Porcelain Enamel Coal and Wood Ranges in white and delicate pastel colors—new Combination Gas, Coal and Wood Ranges—and something altogether new, a Combination Electric and Coal Range. Also new Gas Stoves—Oil Stoves—New Coal and Wood Circulating Heaters—Garage Heaters—Furnaces (free plans)—all at Kalamazoo FACTORY PRICES.

"My Suggestion is—mail the coupon AT ONCE for free catalog! Don't take my word—see it yourself. See what you save at FACTORY PRICES."

KALAMAZOO STOVE & FURNACE COMPANY
161 Rochester Avenue, Kalamazoo, Michigan

Warehouse: Utica, New York; Youngstown, Ohio; Reading, Pennsylvania; Springfield, Massachusetts


Dear Sir: Send me FREE FACTORY CATALOG. Check articles in which you are interested.

☐ Coal & Wood Heaters
☐ Oil Ranges
☐ Comb. Electric & Coal Range
☐ Gas Ranges
☐ Comb. Gas & Coal Range
☐ Furnaces

Name: ____________________________
(Please print name plainly)

Address: ____________________________

City: ____________________________ State: ____________________________