July 16

Variety - Action - Quality

ARGOSY

WEEKLY

10¢

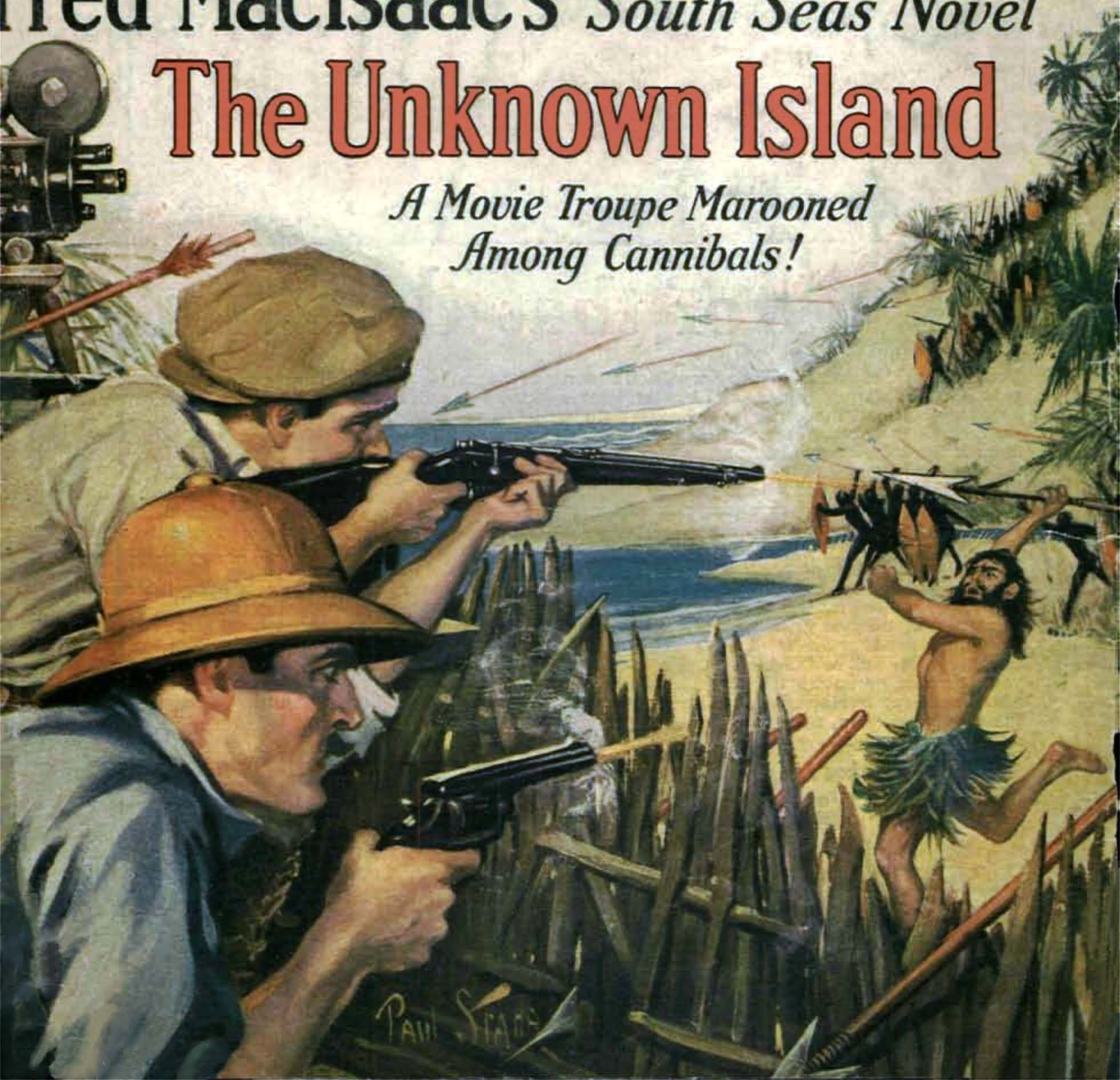
RIVER PIRATES
By Donald Barr Chidsey

THE WHITE SAVAGE
By Armand Brigaud

Fred MacIsaac's *South Seas Novel*

The Unknown Island

A Movie Troupe Marooned Among Cannibals!



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ARGOSY

Action Stories of Every Variety

VOLUME 231 | CONTENTS FOR JULY 16, 1932 | NUMBER 2

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This magazine is on sale every Tuesday throughout the United States and Canada

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President C. T. DIXON, Vice President

MESSAGERIES HACHETTE PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.,
3, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4 111 Rue Réaumur

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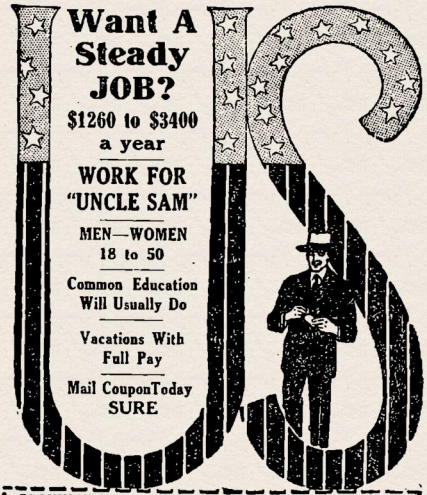

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ARGOSY

VOLUME 231 SATURDAY, JULY 16, 1932 NUMBER 2

The Unknown Island

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "Power," "The Golden Serpent," etc.

"Take us to an isolated South Seas isle," the movie people told Stephen Desmond — and thereby launched a dangerous and glamorous adventure

Desmond fell to the floor

CHAPTER I.

CAMERA MEN.

IT'S a far cry from the warm, perfumed island with its tall palms sweeping the sky like giant brooms and its great breakers zooming on the beach and its black savages lurking in the bush, to the death grapple of hostile civilizations which reached its peak at Soissons in France. A matter of ten or twelve thousand miles and thirteen years and the difference between a dirty drunken beachcomber and a smart young officer in the Intelligence Department of the A. E. F.

I was hoofing it back from the hot spot at Soissons in August, 1918. In my pocket were credentials which entitled me to transportation to corps headquarters, but I could walk faster than the various types of motor and mule transport that were moving my way.

Horse, foot and artillery were moving up and taking up most of the road. Travel away from the battle was stalled except for men on foot. A truck with a broken wheel apparently was the cause.

After I had passed it, the right side of the road was clear and I legged it at three miles an hour. By and by, I came to a Ford roadster which wasn't moving and which was occupied by two men wearing sergeant's stripes who had their noses in a French comic newspaper and were oblivious of the observations of the doughboys marching past.

"'Tenshun," I snapped.

The literary sergeants saluted in slovenly fashion and dropped their comic paper.

"Where are you men going?" I demanded.

They grinned. One, whose smile was as wide as a slice of watermelon and which caused his big ears to flop like an elephant's, replied:

"Don't seem to be going nowhere, lieutenant."

"Move over," I commanded. "Take me to corps headquarters."

"Lieutenant," stated the second sergeant, "this horse laid down and died on us."

"Out of gas?"

"Got lots of gas, sir. It's just ornery."

"Don't you idiots know how to fix a Ford?" I asked angrily.

"We're camera men, sir," replied one of them. "We ain't up on machinery."

I lifted the hood and inspected the engine. It was carburetor trouble which I settled in five minutes.

One of them leaned over my shoulder, as I worked, with the ardent interest and total lack of comprehension of a chimpanzee. The other, slouching behind the wheel, was chuckling over the pictures in the funny paper.

I jumped into the roadster and the second sergeant crawled in after me.

"If you can actually drive," I said with useless irony, "take me to corps headquarters."

The driver was an emaciated individual with an enormous mouth and a snub nose. He had a flat forehead and a receding chin. The other was so fat he was bursting his buttons. He had a broad flat face, a broken nose, three chins and teeth soiled by chewing tobacco. Both gave the impression of being of limited intelligence, but so had most army photographers I had met. For some reason, news photography seemed to draw recruits from the ranks of the uneducated and the irresponsible, and most of our army camera men came from newspapers.

We had driven a mile when the chauffeur leaned toward me confidentially, lifted his right hand from the wheel, jerked its thumb toward the other photographer and remarked, "Goofy."

Half a mile further along the fat sergeant tapped me on the shoulder and nodded solemnly toward the driver. "Nuts," he informed me.

I thought they were probably both right. The way I felt, after eight months of service, was that anybody who was in the Army voluntarily was crazy.

The name of the chauffeur was Nick

Flake, a New York photographer until the drums began to beat. The other egg was Jake Gorham. Both had the delusion that the war was a show being staged for their entertainment. If they performed any services for Uncle Sam it must have been when they were asleep.

After they drove me speedily and safely to corps headquarters I shook hands with them and sent them about their business, if any. I forgot them almost immediately and did not set eyes on either of them again for twelve years. Then I came upon both of them in Quentin's Café in Papeete, which is the chief city of Tahiti.

THE pair were sitting at a table with a bottle of wine between them. They were arrayed in spotless white drill. Nick Flake was thinner than ever and Jake was fatter. Neither seemed a day older. Time, it appears, stands still for lunatics. There was gray at my temples. I needed a shave. I was barefooted and my clothing was tattered. I was what is known as a beachcomber.

How I, Stephen Desmond, graduate of Princeton, member of an old New York family, formerly captain in the Intelligence Service of the American Expeditionary Force, had become a South Seas Islands bum, isn't important. The war had thrown me off balance, perhaps. Life wasn't exciting enough. I couldn't buckle down. I drifted. I drank too much. For three or four months I had been stranded in Tahiti and, if you think the French feel kindly toward Anglo-Saxon derelicts, you don't know our French brethren.

Perhaps I haven't impressed upon you that Nick and Jake were picturesque personalities. Having looked upon their ugly faces once, you were not likely to forget them. I, however, was an ordinary looking individual, and twelve years of loose living had left its mark on me. It was not to be expected that they would remember me and they didn't.

I had eaten no lunch and missed my dinner, and the bottle of wine between them attracted me strangely. Throwing back my shoulders I crossed the café and stopped at their table.

"'Tenshun," I snapped. Mechanically they snapped into it and then shrieked with laughter.

"The nerve of this bum!" exclaimed Jake. "Hey, Alphonse, chuck him out."

I trembled. That's the condition I was in.

"Don't you know me, boys?" I asked hopefully. "Do you remember the officer who fixed your Ford for you and made you drive him to corps headquarters back in 1918?"

"Sacred cats!" shouted Nick Flake. "Sure we do. You remember that shavetail, Jake? The one that swiped our copy of Le Rire back on the Soissons road."

"Sure," declared Nick. "Sit down, Lute, and have a glass of this. Good for what ails yer and it looks like plenty ails yer."

I seated myself to the great disapproval of the waiter and tossed off a bumper of good wine. "That's wonderful!" I exclaimed.

"You can have it," retorted Nick. "I wouldn't give a case of it for a quart of Hollywood gin. Excuse me, Lute, but you look like something that they dug out of the sand."

"I'm what they call a beachcomber," I admitted. "I've had hard luck, boys. To tell the truth I haven't eaten for twenty-four hours."

Nick and Jake exchanged glances. "Can you imagine that!" gasped Nick. "Hey, *garçon* — bring this gent — what's French for steak?"

"*Châteaubriand*," I insinuated.

"Bring him what he said, and step on it. We don't want to have the guy die on our hands."

"How long you been on the bum?" asked Jake.

"Longer than I care to confess," I replied, almost in tears because I hadn't expected such kindness. If the two irresponsibles had ordered me thrown out of the place I wouldn't have been surprised.

WHILE waiting for the steak, Nick ordered another bottle of wine but I was shrewd enough to refuse it until I had placed something more substantial than wine in my stomach.

"You fellows seem flush," I observed. "Champagne is expensive out here."

"Pin money," retorted Jake proudly. "Ain't you ever heard about us?"

"I'm afraid not."

"That's fame," said Jake with a sigh. "And our names on the screen on about every big fillum that Mammoth has put out for five years."

"Oh, you're film actors?"

"Actors," grunted Nick, who spat upon the floor. "We're camera men. Jake and me are the highest priced camera men in the business."

"I've been out of touch with civilization for a long time," I pleaded. "I certainly congratulate you."

"Oh, we're sitting pretty. Lieutenant, you're really up against it?" asked Jake.

I was attacking my steak in a manner which answered for me. Jake gave Nick the high-sign and they drew together. I was too ravenous to pay any attention to them. Presently they came out of conference.

"You slung the parlez-vous pretty well, didn't you?" asked Jake. "You had to, to be in Intelligence."

"I talk it better now," I replied. "I've been knocking round the French islands for two or three years."

Jake grasped my wrist. "Straight goods, now. Could you go off the stuff or has it got you?"

"It has me because that's all there is for me. Certainly I could cut it out if there were any reason or necessity."

"Sure he could," declared Nick. "But we got to doll him up. We'll go out and bust open one of them clothing stores as soon as he has gulped that steak."

"If you let us down," threatened Jake, "we'll beat the life out of you, Lute."

I laid down knife and fork. "What on earth are you driving at?" I demanded.

Nick grinned from ear to ear, displaying an enormous expanse of reddish purple gum.

"How'ja like fifty smackers a week and found?" he demanded.

My lip trembled. "You mean you can get me a job?" I asked in a shaking voice.

"You practically got a job," Jake informed me, "if you can get back the front you had when you commandeered our cart at Soissons. You tell him, Nick."

"Me and Jake," stated Nick, "come down here a week ago with J. Ponsomby Preudholm, the motion picture director, to get location shots and fix up everything for the company that comes in day after to-morrow. J. Ponsomby Preudholm is cockeyed. He's

been cockeyed since the day we landed and we ain't done a gol-darned thing. That guy is going to lose his job and it's a darn shame because he's a swell guy only he didn't know that this champagne was intoxicating.

"On the boat with the troupe is Moe Wiseman, the supervisor at Mammoth, and he will expect Ponsomby to be ready to shoot and all set to run off a lot of location fillum.

"Now me and Jake figgered it out that the way to save him was to get him sober by boat time and have him tell Wiseman that there ain't anything worth shooting on this lousy place, but he knows an island just like the pitcher postal cards. Get me?"

"I'm afraid I don't."

"Well, we duck out of showing location shots; Ponsomby has an alibi for falling down on the job and there we are."

"Only," said Jake, "we don't know any island."

"I could take you to ten," I replied, laughing. "I know islands so heavenly that they have been my downfall."

THE pair fell upon me, slapped me upon the back, pumped my hand and behaved as though they really were lunatics.

"The country is saved," exclaimed Jake. "And you get the job."

"Do you seriously mean that, upon my say so, you would take a motion picture company, which must be a very expensive organization, off on a wild goose chase?"

"You claim you know ten islands. One will do," said Nick. "Sure. Now, here is the dope. You turn up at the Grand Hotel at noon to-morrow. You buy yourself a tropic helmet and some shoes and some white suits and a few shirts. You tell Ponsomby that he hired you to conduct the party to this island three or four days ago. You explain that he hired you because you was a former Army officer and a high class guy who knows the South Seas backwards and talks French like you was born in a frog pond."

"But he never saw me in his life."

"J. Ponsomby never remembers what he done when he was drunk," explained Nick. "And Jake and me will tell him that we was with him when he hired you and we remember when you told Pershing how to win the war. And we point out to him that Moe Wiseman will ask what he's been doing since he got here and it would be silly to tell him he was drunk. You think up a good island and tell Ponsomby about it and, even if he thinks we're a lot of lousy liars, he'll hire you just the same and we'll swim, sail or paddle over to this island."

"The one I have in mind," I informed him, "is two weeks' sail from Papeete with favoring winds."

"Great! We love sailing because we don't have to work. What in hell's your name, Lute?"

"Steve Desmond, and I left the Army a captain."

"Great. We'll tell Ponsomby you was a colonel and you're Desperate Desmond in person."

"Not so far wrong," I said, laughing with relief. "I was desperate when I saw you two fine chaps."

"Can you go right home without taking any more drinks?"

I laughed again. "I can," I declared. "But my home is the beach. I've been sleeping out for weeks."

They looked so concerned that I shouted with laughter. "It's far better than a hotel bed in these climes," I told them, "and costs nothing at all."

Jake drew forth a thick roll of

twenty-*franc* notes and tore off half a dozen which he handed me.

"Can you buy clothes to-night?" he asked.

"I know of a dozen places that are open."

"Doll up and hire a room at the Grand. Get a good night's sleep, spruce up and talk big to J. Ponsomby. Better take some more money."

Nick forced five hundred *francs* upon me. They implored me not to fail them and I walked on air when I left the café.

For a couple of years I had been promising myself that I would go straight if I ever got another chance and I meant it. There was too much good blood in me to be content with being a beachcomber, but those who are familiar with the islands know that, once down, an opportunity to get up rarely comes one's way.

Even if the two charming lunatics failed to force me upon their fantastic employer, I had money in my pocket and would acquire a complete outfit. If I were again presentable I would be well on my way to rehabilitation and decency.

If you think I spent that money for liquor, you're crazy. Of course I had the urge, but I fought it down. I walked past a dozen attractive haunts and found a Chinese merchant who sold me linens, white drill, shoes, a pith helmet, a safety razor and a straw suitcase in which I placed shirts, collars and extra linen. Like a new man, I crossed the street to the Grand Hotel, signed my name and title upon the register and demanded a room with a bath. Incidentally I had not had the privilege of a hot fresh water bath for nine months.

I followed the porter to my room, had him run the water in the tub and stepped into it with a prayer of gratitude to the two nuts of the Soissons road.

CHAPTER II.

A STEADY JOB.

AS the two highest priced camera men in films were totally ignorant of the psychology of beachcombers, my appearance next morning, stark sober, well dressed and clear eyed, was accepted by them as a matter of course. How could they know that I had wakened in the middle of the night and fought off a dozen devils who were trying to drag me to a bar? And what did they know of the agony which I experienced when I came out of troubled slumber at ten o'clock, found money in my pocket and dared not indulge in a pick-me-up? My nerves were on edge. My fingers were twitching, but I was, for the moment, Captain Steve Desmond.

Jake looked me over. "Very snappy, general," he commented. "Ponsomby is up and partly sober and waiting to talk to you."

"Does he really believe that he hired me?" I asked.

"Well," said Nick, "he called us damned liars, but he ain't certain. And he's plenty worried. You lay it on thick about this island."

I nodded. My knees were knocking together. If this fell through, I might as well swim out to sea until exhaustion or a big fish finished me.

We walked up to the second floor and entered the state suite which was considered none too good for occupancy by Motion Picture Director J. Ponsomby Preudholm.

Nick threw open the door boisterously. "Step right in, colonel," he said enthusiastically.

I entered. Lying upon a sofa was a long lean figure in red and white striped pyjamas. A pair of sharp, if bloodshot, blue eyes gazed at me from beneath cavernous brows. Mr. Preudholm had a beard three or four days old. He had a hatchet face with enormous protruding ears. He had a long inquisitive looking nose and a hard mouth, and, when he spoke, he had an English accent.

He did not rise, but contemplated me in silence for at least a minute. I colored under the inspection, but I gave him stare for stare.

"Your name, I believe, is Colonel Stephen Desmond," he said crisply.

"Captain Desmond. Formerly in the Intelligence Department, A. E. F., sir."

He swung his long legs to the floor and, with a groan, sat up.

"Have you ever been drunk, Captain Desmond?" he asked.

"Frequently, sir."

"I've been in a fog for a week," he said with an engaging grin. "However, I'm not quite as dumb as these two fatheads suppose. Did I actually hire you while under the influence?"

"You never saw me before in your life, sir," I replied gravely.

Nick and Jake gazed at each other in consternation, but the director chuckled.

"I knew damn well I didn't," he declared. "If you had lied about it I would have kicked you out. Take a chair, captain. You two get the devil out of here."

Without a word, the camera men faded and left me alone with my fate.

"How do you happen to be looking for a job?" he asked sharply. If this man had a hangover, it wasn't affecting his speech.

"I've been flat in the islands for some time," I admitted. "I knew these boys in the army. I hope you won't—"

He laughed and stopped abruptly.

"Oh, my head!" he exclaimed. "Beachcomber?"

"Practically."

"You're cold sober, though."

"And I intend to remain so."

"Help yourself to a cigarette."

HE crossed his long legs and grinned at me. "I sort of like you," he stated. "You've not tried to put anything over on me. Don't worry about those morons. They are first class camera men and I need them. Maybe I need you. How well do you know the islands?"

"I've spent years among them."

"Talk French?"

"Fluently. I can make myself understood in a number of island dialects."

"Here's the situation," he said briskly. "I'm here to make an epic of the South Seas; a tale of the islands before they were ruined by white men. I am sent to Tahiti, which I find to be a dirty half-breed place; a filthy imitation of modern civilization. I was so disgusted that I got drunk the first night and remained drunk.

"In a few days my company arrives; also a supervisor, if you know what that is."

"I don't."

"I could tell you in picturesque Anglo-Saxon, but I won't. He has power to hire and fire. I am supposed to lead him directly to the primitive. The camera men should be ready to run off a few thousand feet of it in this room. Unfortunately, they have no brains and no initiative. Seeing me making a fool of myself, they got drunk themselves. They did nothing to cover me. I give them credit for breaking in here last night and using heroic

treatment to sober me up. Wiseman, who is the supervisor, will send me back to Hollywood in disgrace unless—"

"I hope not, sir."

"Nick told me that you knew an island which is untouched by civilization; where there is amazing scenic beauty and a sweet and simple population of guileless aborigines. Is that true?"

"Yes, sir. I know several such islands, but they are a long way from here."

"No matter. I'll ride Wiseman around Papeete; explain to him that it's impossible for us to work here and get permission to take the troupe elsewhere. You will fill him full of dope about your island—"

"I beg your pardon, but you can find about what you want upon the opposite side of Tahiti—"

"In which case, why haven't I found it? I'll make damn sure that Wiseman sees nothing but this side of the island. He's going back to California on the next boat. He will have to consent to our expedition. Will you help me put this over?"

"I'll do it on these conditions," I said boldly. "That you employ me during the time it takes to make your film and that you give me transportation back to the United States. Salary is no object."

"Done," he declared. "Don't get a notion that I am rooking my employers. They don't care if I spend a million provided I come back with a big picture. If I had stayed sober I have no doubt that I would have decided that Tahiti wouldn't do and would have made all arrangements to go elsewhere. I would have hired a competent man who knows the islands and who can talk French and native dialects. I doubt if I would have found a decent chap like you. I was in the British Flying Service, by the way."

"Delighted to hear it, sir."

"I'm turning over to you responsibility for a lot of lives and a hundred thousand dollars' worth of property. If you fall down on me, I'll fire you without ceremony. If you deliver the goods, I'll pay you what the boys claimed I agreed to pay you—fifty dollars a week—and I'll give you a bonus of a thousand and take you back to the States with us.

"There will be a big lot of studio stuff to finish off this film, particularly talking sequences, and your technical knowledge will be needed. You may be working for us for six months."

"I am not going to touch a drop while I'm on your payroll, sir."

Preudholm rose and offered me his hand.

"I was a major myself," he said, "but we don't use our titles."

"Neither do I," I responded. "The boys thought it would be a good idea to drag it out on this occasion."

"I fancy we understand each other. What's the best way to get to your island?"

"I suppose we'll have to charter a schooner with a kicker in her. No steam vessels go to Isle de Sevennes, and I doubt if we could charter one."

"Get a schooner. Bring the captain to me. How long will it take us to get there?"

"At least two weeks."

"Maybe I'll get over this head by then. I want everything ready so that we can force Wiseman to O. K. the expedition. I want him rushed. I don't want anybody to get to him and tell him how I've spent my time in Papeete. Go out and get busy."

"Regarding charter price?"

"Make the best deal you can. I don't give a damn what it costs."

I WENT downstairs so elated that I didn't realize where my feet were carrying me until I found myself leaning against the bar of the hotel.

"*Monsieur* desires?" asked the bartender.

"*Rien de tout,*" I replied firmly and walked myself out of there. As I did so I met Nick and Jake coming in.

"O. K.?" asked Nick.

"I'm a member of your company," I said joyfully. "Thanks to the best friends a fellow ever had."

"We'll open a bottle on that," declared Jake.

"You will not," I said shrilly and I left them lest I yield to their solicitations. They meant well, but they had no notion of what it takes for a hard drinker to cut himself abruptly off the stuff.

With considerable pride I entered Fanchon's restaurant and café where island skippers hung out in force and from which I had been rudely ejected less than a week before. In my new personality, no objection was made to my entrance and I saw at a corner table three schooner captains drinking island beer. They were all known to me. I had sailed with one of them, Tom Piper, as second mate three years back, despite the fact that I knew no navigation. He kicked me ashore for being drunk on watch.

Tom recognized me.

"Where did you get the regalia, ye dirty beachcomber?" he sneered.

"That lets you out," I said abruptly. "I want to hire a schooner for a voyage through the islands."

Piper bellowed with mirth, pounded the table and demanded that the other two join him in his enjoyment.

"He's a bum," he declared. "He ain't owned a *franc* since Columbus discovered America. That's wot wants to charter a schooner."

The other captains were Whipple of the Clara May and Delire of the Belle Parisienne. Whipple was a good sailor, but his craft was small and bad smelling. Delire was not well liked around the islands, but his vessel was large and unusually clean for a French island craft. Piper's little Jonquil was out of the question anyway. As times were bad, I knew that any of them would jump at a charter.

"May I have some private conversation with you, Captain Delire?" I asked politely.

"Pay no attention to him. It's a scheme to mooch drinks," asserted Piper.

Delire looked me over shrewdly. He was a big man, a brawny Frenchman who came originally from Brittany, which produces as good sailors as there are in the world. He had a scar on his forehead, a black bristling beard and a pair of small nasty black eyes, but he had a good ship.

"For a charter I am willing to buy drinks," he said. "What does *monsieur* desire?"

"No liquor. A few minutes conversation."

Delire rose, bowed to his colleagues, took my arm and led me to another table.

"That camel does not realize that an American gentleman may have been besotted and recover his self respect," he said. "I will listen with pleasure to your proposition, *monsieur.*"

"Can you put up twenty or thirty people on the Belle Parisienne?"

"I have four staterooms. Others may sling hammocks. As you know all

will prefer to sleep on deck. You say thirty people?"

"A motion picture company. I am empowered to charter a vessel for them. I know your ship. If the price is right we can do business."

Delire clapped me on the back.

"The price will be right," he declared heartily. "These are sad days for skippers, *mon ami.*"

"Let's go and call on my principal," I proposed. Amid jeers from the half drunk Tom Piper, Delire followed me from the café. An hour later we had chartered La Belle Parisienne for a voyage to the Isle de Sevennes, and Delire, no doubt, returned to the café to display ten thousand *francs* of earnest money.

CHAPTER III.

DUMPED ON THE BEACH.

THE island of Sevennes which I had sold, sight unseen, to J. Ponsomby Preudholm, lies six or seven hundred miles southeast of Tahiti and remains primitive for several reasons easily understood by those familiar with the South Seas. In the first place it is on the way to nowhere and in a region largely uncharted and full of dangerous reefs. In the next place, it is plagued by man-eating crabs and its waters are full of very large octopi which make pearl fishing exceedingly dangerous. And, in the third place, it is a large island of volcanic, not coral, origin, with high hills and impenetrable jungle in the interior.

The simple Polynesians who inhabit the island hasten into the jungle upon the approach of vessels seeking what is politely termed contract laborers to work on the French island plantations or on the guano islands where laborers do not average two or three years of life.

The reason that I happened to be acquainted with Sevennes is that Tom Piper went out of his course to put me ashore there after I had steered his schooner east instead of north for eight consecutive hours, being under the alcoholic impression that I knew the points of the compass better than the compass itself. I spent six months among the simple natives before a schooner, blown far off its course by a storm, put in for fresh water, and those months were among the most sweet and peaceful of my life since there was no hard liquor on Sevennes, no white inhabitants and no necessity of earning my bread by the sweat of my brow.

The people had been converted to Mormonism away back in the seventies before plurality of wives had ceased to be a tenet of the Mormon creed. They had adopted the religion of Brigham Young from thrift because it enabled them to save a lot of good food which they had wasted at the shrines of stone gods and because it didn't interfere with their ordinary practices in the least. When the original Mormon missionary died, no other came to replace him and they had drifted off into a pleasant sort of quasi-Paganism, adapted the old church hymns so that their writers would not have recognized them and lived as they pleased.

All these things I told to J. Ponsomby Preudholm because it was only fair to inform him of what he was going up against. If you think he was alarmed by the octopus and the man-eating crab features of the narrative you do not know the psychology of motion picture directors. By his pleased abstraction I feared he was planning to stake out the heroine where the crabs could almost get her and to compel his hero to dive

for pearls in the lair of the devilfish. In which I was not at all unjust to him.

As a matter of fact it was the man-eating crabs which clinched the enterprise with Moses Wiseman. It appeared that no expedition to the South Seas had ever filmed the giant crabs or utilized their dramatic possibilities.

When the great British steamship Arethusa steamed into the harbor of Tahiti, the whole city was agog. Several hundred tourists would be roaming round the town for a few hours, which meant business for all the bars and all the Chinese store keepers. And, as there are a number of picture theaters in the city, and as Dora Demerest was well known on the screen by the natives, the eagerness to see her and Raoul Homer in the flesh drew the entire population to the water front.

WHILE it was none of my business if J. Ponsomby Preudholm proposed to drag the whole troupe to a remote island for no other purpose than to alibi a drunk, my conscience did trouble me at the thought of forcing delicately nurtured women to voyage for weeks upon a none too sweet smelling schooner and to put up with the primitive conditions they would find upon Sevennes.

Such matters didn't bother Ponsomby. Actors had to go where they were sent and do what they were told. They were overpaid for their work and, if they wanted to quit, there were scores to take their places.

Though Dora Demerest earned, I was told, six thousand dollars a week, there was no question of consulting her regarding her preferences, nor would Raoul Homer, the leading man, be given a chance to express an opinion. After twenty-four hours on Tahiti, they would be herded aboard the Belle Parisienne and between rough seas and the smell of copra, they would be violently sick for days.

The film company came ashore upon a special tender and included three actresses, six actors and a mechanical crew of twenty. With them came freight weighing a couple of hundred tons which included a complete sound equipment, so the camera men told me.

Ponsomby was so sober when the troupe landed that it was hard to believe that he had been upon a prolonged spree. At the sight of him the sharp eyes of the shrewd little Hebrew supervisor, Mr. Wiseman, lighted with satisfaction.

Frankly, I had eyes only for the women. Film stars come up rapidly and fall as fast. I had never heard of Dora Demerest back in the United States and when I gazed upon a vividly beautiful brunette whose long hair was as black as ink, who had the perfect features of an Andalusian and great limpid dark eyes and a figure like a pagan goddess, I was overwhelmed by such loveliness.

But this was not Dora Demerest. She was a Mexican actress of note, brought down to play a Polynesian princess in the picture. She came ashore on the arm of Wiseman, emitted a shrill yelp at sight of the director, rushed up to him, threw her arms around his neck and planted kisses upon his eyes, nose and mouth. Preudholm laughed self consciously and released her grip, but the multitude of Papeeteans who had assembled to see the film actors roared with delight.

The spectacular beauty of Rosa de la Rose shadowed the loveliness of Dora Demerest who landed from the tender without fuss, shook hands with Nick and Jake cordially and permitted Preudholm to embrace her in brotherly

fashion with a short embarrassed laugh. She turned her face full in my direction when he released her and something queer happened to my pumping apparatus. Dora Demerest was the most exquisitely beautiful blond creature I had ever seen.

Her loveliness compared to the Mexican girl's was like the lily to the rose. Her eyes were great blue pools with light shining from their depths, her features were as regular as a marble profile by Canova the Venetian; her skin was fair and translucent, her figure slight, graceful and deliciously feminine.

"Get an eyeful of her, lieutenant," said Jake, grinning broadly. "The greatest actress on the screen to-day and insured by Mammoth for one million dollars."

"My eyes are full," I said reverently. "What a dream she is."

He nodded. "One swell little girl. No tantrums. No nonsense. Strictly business. She was an extra girl three years ago and she don't owe what she's got to any producer."

Raoul Homer, the leading man, was part Italian. He was amazingly handsome, slightly above middle height, slender, with a singularly pleasant smile. There were several character men, two of them elderly, and a fellow with the most offensive personality I've ever encountered. He looked as though he would pick your pocket or cut your throat. By some quirk of the camera this man was very funny on the screen and was cashing in on a rat's personality.

THERE was another man who was with the troupe but not of it, and who answered to the name of Herbert Cavendish. He was lanky, tall, with a bumpy nose and eyes like a codfish, a mouth which was used for breathing purposes because of adenoids, and a prominent Adam's apple.

It seemed that he represented the British insurance company which had an accident policy of one million dollars on Dora Demerest. When the news had reached London that the blond star was going to make a picture in the South Seas, consternation occurred. Cavendish was shipped by express steamer and air mail to Hollywood with orders to accompany the troupe and make sure that nothing happened to Miss Demerest which would cost his employers a vast sum of money.

With Miss Demerest was a hard featured, brawny woman whom I thought at first must be Miss Demerest's maid but who was an actress cast in the script as a missionary's wife. For some reason film writers do not care much for missionaries and their wives.

The actors were carried off to the hotel, after being welcomed in a short speech by the mayor of Papeete. As I was nobody of any consequence, I was not introduced to any of them. In fact I was never really introduced to any member of the company.

I left the pier in the warm glow which gazing upon Dora Demerest had lighted in me. Although there was no prospect that this celebrated star would ever be aware of my existence, I was glad that I was clean shaven and well dressed and had the liquor out of my system and had written finis to the degraded years of my life.

As Ponsomby had expected, the news that the film would be made upon a remote island to which they would proceed by schooner was accepted without much protest by the company, but the Cavendish person uttered shrill cries, called down curses upon the di-

rector's head, and, being able to make no impression, rushed to the cable office to make the people back in London unhappy.

That night there was a banquet given by the mayor of Papeete to the actors and the next day, at five o'clock, we were rowed out to the Belle Parisienne and climbed up on her decks which had been especially cleaned for the occasion.

Wiseman had said farewell at the pier and Captain Delire, having received instructions from Ponsomby via yours truly, started his gas engine and got under way before the troupe had a chance to discover how we proposed to quarter them.

"Where am I sleeping?" demanded Rosa de la Rose, who was wringing her hands and stamping both feet before J. Ponsomby, who sat smoking a pipe on a coil of rope.

"You saw your cabin," he replied coldly.

"But it smells. I will not sleep in it."

"Don't blame you," he said coolly. "I'm going to sleep on deck myself. I recommend it highly."

For two hours the tumult raged while Ponsomby smoked his pipe and the lights of Papeete faded from view. And the howls about quarters were then augmented by wails about the food. The cook of the schooner had been replaced with the best available in Tahiti but after all there are only a certain number of things you can do with fish.

Mr. Cavendish was not with us through no fault of his own. Preudholm, furious with his officiousness, refused him passage, ignored his protests and told him that if he wanted to get to Sevennes, he would have to swim there. A man doesn't get to be a famous motion picture director without having the courage of his convictions.

WHILE I have no wish to bore others with the experiences of a drunkard who has cut himself abruptly from his liquor supply, it is necessary to state here and now that I didn't take a single drink during that appalling voyage and, for the first time in my life, I was frightfully seasick. So was every one on board, including J. Ponsomby and the two camera men. Of the women we saw nothing—they hid their agonies in their cabins. The rest of us suffered in public.

Combine the aroma of copra with the fumes of oil and the frightful rolling of the schooner in a succession of heavy seas and the strongest stomach will yield. My illness lasted a week—it was coupled with a craving for liquor which I refused to satisfy. When I began to feel better I remained weak and listless and had no appetite for food. At the end of the second week most of us were on our feet, but the two young actresses remained invisible, though it was a mystery how they could endure the heat of their cabin.

You can imagine the joy of the passengers when the skipper announced, upon the fourteenth night, that we would make Sevennes before morning.

After dinner we held a jollification on deck. The girls came forth. Rosa de la Rose sang and danced. The actors told funny stories. Everybody was so eager to get ashore that the troupe was almost hysterical. Shortly before midnight the captain called me into his little cabin.

"M. Desmond," he said, "I am grateful to you for putting in my way this profitable job. I wish to drink a toast with you."

"In water," I replied. "I don't dare touch a drop of spirits."

He laughed. "Very well," he said. "In water."

He poured me a glass of water. He poured himself a glass of brandy. We touched glasses. I tossed off the contents of mine because I hadn't yet come to like the taste of water. As it gurgled down my throat, I realized that it had a peculiar flavor and I saw a devilish grin upon the face of Captain Delire.

"Damn you," I exclaimed, and I staggered to my feet and went for him with swinging fists. I felt myself falling. I crashed on the floor and knew nothing more.

When I recovered consciousness I was lying flat on my back on hot sand. Men were unloading baggage and boxes from the long boat, and the members of the company were clustered in groups on the shore. I lay there, unable to move for quite a while, wondering why the skipper had drugged me, wondering what he had given me which would have caused me to be out for many hours, and praying that Ponsomby would treat my state with charity.

I heard the oars click as the boat left the shore, and I closed my eyes. Presently I heard the chug-chug of the ship's gas engine, and I lifted myself on my elbow and saw that the schooner was moving out of a sweet little cove of emerald green.

It had been agreed that Delire was to land the company, trade around the neighboring islands and return for us in a month when the picture would be completed.

He was losing no time. On the other hand I didn't know how long I had been out. My head ached and my eyes ached and, by the glare of the sun in them, I realized that the morning was well advanced. However, I took no interest in things. I just lay there.

And then a pair of leather puttees loomed alongside of me. A voice came down to me from what seemed like the top of a tree. It was Ponsomby who was addressing me.

"Come on, you drunken bum," he said contemptuously. "A hell of a lot of use you have been. You'll get burned to a crisp if you keep on lying there. Can you get up?"

I staggered to my feet. I was sick and dizzy.

CHAPTER IV.

THE UNKNOWN ISLAND.

"I'M not drunk," I protested. "I haven't had a drop."

My remark was greeted by a burst of laughter. A number of the mechanical crew had gathered round Ponsomby.

"My boy," said the director good naturedly, "I hate a liar. You've been as drunk as a lord since last night. You passed out completely."

I stared at him. "I was drugged by Captain Delire," I protested. "Laugh all you like."

"Why should Captain Delire drug you?" asked the director scornfully. "There is no reason in the world. However, everybody slips once in a while, and you stuck it out pretty well. Go over into my tent there and sleep it off."

I looked around. Things were clearing up. I looked for Mont Jesu, the most distinguishing mark of the island, and I didn't see it. I rubbed my eyes and stared. All of a sudden I was completely normal. I ran after Ponsomby and grasped him by the arm, swinging him round.

"I'll tell you why I was drugged," I shouted. "Do you know where we are?"

"On the island of Sevennes, of course. And it comes up to your description. Cheer up, Desmond. You'll be all right—"

"We are not," I said guardedly, for sharp eyes were on us. "Mr. Preudholm, this is not the island of Sevennes. I don't know what it is. I was never here before in my life."

"You think the captain made a mistake?"

"Certainly not. This is why I was drugged. I was the only passenger who knew Sevennes. Now will you believe that I haven't been drunk?"

"Come into my tent," he said softly.

During my coma a dozen tents had been erected where the grass line joined the beach, and he led me to one of them and made me sit on the cot while he questioned me.

"Exactly what does this mean?"

I rubbed my aching head. "I don't know what it means. Delire knows Sevennes. He's been there. He landed us here deliberately."

"But what's his game?" Preudholm asked in perplexity.

"How can I tell?"

I went to the door of the tent and gazed out to sea. The schooner was picking her way through a sea flecked with white specks, and I knew they indicated reefs. As far as the eye could see there were reefs. How Delire had worked his way in through them was beyond me.

"This is an island," I said, "which is in a very dangerous part of the Pacific. Those reefs mean that vessels will give it a wide berth. I don't know his purpose, but it looks to me very much as though we had been marooned."

"Nonsense. You can't maroon thirty people."

"Why not? It's been done. Anyway, he has landed us on some unknown isle and drugged me so that I wouldn't detect the imposition. There is a mountain two thousand feet high on Sevennes. You see that the hills in back here are not very high."

"That's true. On the other hand, he has landed all our supplies and the rowboat and the little launch we brought with us."

"Because he knows you can't go far to sea in those cockleshells."

"But where in the devil are we?"

"Somewhere within a radius of a thousand miles of Tahiti. It is about the same distance as Sevennes, but whether east, west, north or south of it, I have no notion."

"We have supplies for two months," said Ponsomby. "They can't intend to starve us. What on earth is the game?"

"I don't know. Have you seen any natives?"

"Half a dozen naked ones were on the shore when we landed, but they fled. It's primitive, all right."

"I've been on a lot of isles for fresh water in my time. I may be able to identify this one later."

"I hope so. In the meantime, keep your mouth closed. This looks like a peach of a picture location. I'm going right to work. The company would go crazy if they knew about it."

"Put them on rations right away," I advised. "I'll think clearer in a little while. May I lay down on this cot?"

PONSOMBY offered me his hand. "Old man," he said, "I apologize for accusing you of being drunk. I believe every word of your story. But let the crowd suppose you were stewed.

We can't explain the drug yarn without scaring them to death."

There were tears in my eyes when I shook hands with him.

"You're a prince," I told him. "I'll stand for anything you say."

"And for Heaven's sake figure out what it's all about."

I lay on that cot for half an hour and puzzled over the situation. That we had been the victims of treachery was obvious—but why? What would it profit Captain Delire to land us upon this island instead of Sevennes?

Was there any special reason why he didn't want a motion picture troupe to land on Sevennes? If he had evil intentions, couldn't he carry them out there as well as here? Sevennes was a remote isle where a ship didn't call once in eight or ten months.

Everybody in Tahiti knew that the Belle Parisienne had been chartered to transport the company to its location and, if he failed to return with us, he would be asked questions in plenty.

I had been trying to arrive at his motive for a long time without result. As well as any man, I knew the mental processes of island captains, few of whom were in the least scrupulous. I had chosen Delire because he had the only schooner large enough to accommodate us. I could think of no reason why he should play us false. He would make as much out of this particular charter as his vessel would earn in a year of ordinary business.

I gave it up, climbed to my feet, went out of the tent and stared at the vast expanse of indigo ocean. It was then that it came upon me that nobody in the world except Captain Delire knew where we were.

Not a soul on board the Belle Parisienne knew where we were headed as Delire alone, could navigate. We had no means of communicating with the outside world. A radio broadcasting station is not included in motion picture equipment.

However, our company included famous people. Miss Demerest was insured against accident for a million dollars. Mammoth Films would certainly inquire what had become of us if we failed to return to Tahiti at our scheduled time. Captain Delire would be forced by the French authorities to tell what he knew.

What was the advantage to him of being the only person who was aware of the place where we were marooned? Penal servitude awaited him for what he had done.

On the other hand he would not have plotted this if he hadn't seen a big profit in it and he might not be alone.

Suppose the Belle Parisienne did not return to Tahiti? And that an expedition to Sevennes learned that we had never arrived there? Would not the presumption be that the schooner had foundered with all on board?

I clapped my hands together. The Belle Parisienne would not return to Tahiti. Delire could open the seacocks when in the vicinity of some island in the beaten track, sink her with her crew and escape in his launch.

It must be a conspiracy to hold the Mammoth Film troupe with its famous stars for ransom. Delire was only one of the conspirators. The plot had been concocted in Tahiti and there might be a dozen in it, French government officials, too, perhaps.

I SHOUTED to Preudholm who was superintending the disposal of the film apparatus some distance away and he joined me immediately. Excitedly I told him my theory. He laughed scornfully.

"You're not over the effects of the drug yet. It's not possible, Desmond. They'll comb these seas. They'll send the whole United States Navy in search of us. We'll be located within a month after it is learned that we did not arrive at Sevennes."

"Have you any notion of the area of what is called the South Seas?"

"I know it's pretty big."

"The islands are scattered between South America and Australia, from Hawaii to Easter Island, over an area of more than twenty million square miles—six or seven times the area of the United States. Furthermore, the search will be made in the general direction of Sevennes from Tahiti. As I was deadly sick during two-thirds of the voyage, I have no notion of our course, for the thought of treachery never entered my head. It looks to me as if those reefs might extend for forty or fifty miles in all directions which means that the existence of this island may not be known. You can be sure warships will give these waters a wide berth."

Preudholm looked very serious.

"That fool Cavendish broadcast the fact that Dora is insured for a million," he said. "I don't suppose they'd pay a nickel for the rest of us. I think you've struck upon the right explanation, but I'm blessed if I know how they expect to work it."

"How long would the insurance company hold out before paying in the case of Miss Demerest?"

"They would refuse to pay until reasonably certain of her death. Six months after our disappearance was reported, perhaps."

"Would they make a deal with somebody who claimed to be able to find her alive?"

"I fancy they would."

"Then you can depend upon it that we are to be left here for a long time. We have two months' supplies. Well, we won't starve. The ocean is full of edible fish; all sorts of fruit grow on these islands. Delire knows that we'll feed ourselves and take care of ourselves until he finds it worth his while to arrange our rescue."

Preudholm was silent for a moment. His face was very grave. Suddenly it lightened.

"I'm damn glad we have you with us," he declared. "The rest of us are babes in the woods. At least you know which fish are poisonous; you know the flora and fauna of these islands and you can talk to the natives. Maybe you can find out from them where we are."

"And what good would that do us?"

"Well, we may be near some civilized island. We might be able to send for help."

"You can depend upon it, if we actually have been marooned, that they didn't choose an island within reach of civilization. Of course you can't rig up a Marconi outfit."

"No, but we have a radio receiving set."

I laughed. "We may be able to listen in upon the hue and cry, but that won't help us."

He sighed and rose. "You and I are the only ones who know what we are up against. If a word gets out, I'll know whom to accuse."

"I'm mum, chief."

"I depend on that. I've got to get back to work. When they do find us, I'll have a great picture to show them. Suppose you snoop round and look over the lay of the land and report to me in a few hours."

After he left, I lay down for another half hour and felt a lot better. From my standpoint the situation might be

worse. I was assured of good pay and no expenses and the longer we were left here the more money I would make. That there was any intention of doing us harm I did not believe. If my theory was correct Captain Delire had done his part and would vanish out of the picture.

We would be rescued by somebody who had set out in search of us to earn the enormous reward which would be offered by those who stood to take a huge loss through the demise of the picture star. When the money was paid over, Delire would get his share, of course. Most likely the reward or ransom fund would be split half a dozen ways. It was no money out of my pocket.

I got up and gazed at myself in the small mirror which had been placed upon a washstand in the tent. I looked sort of pale and haggard but aside from that I was all right.

LEAVING the tent I stood blinking in the brilliant sunlight. The Belle Parisienne was a dot upon the horizon. On all sides was activity. The mechanical crew was breaking open huge boxes and removing weird looking machinery. I saw, some distance away, Jake and Nick with Graflex cameras taking likely shots. No members of the cast were visible; all probably snoozing in their tents. Preudholm sat upon the sand and watched the business of setting up the machines.

We were camped at the edge of a beach of sand which was black with an occasional glitter of gold. The beach was at the head of a thickly wooded cove protected from the big waves of the ocean by a long reef with a narrow opening in it.

The black sand indicated an island of volcanic origin like Sevennes but the reefs were the work of coral insects.

Our tents had been pitched upon a wide patch of moss-like grass behind which was a grove of coconut palms. Back of the palms was a thick growth of ferns of great height and the hills behind were heavily wooded.

As Preudholm had said, the island was of marvelous beauty but, to me, it had a sinister aspect; perhaps because I knew we had been marooned here. It was not possible to judge the extent of the place from the camp and I strolled out upon the point at the left to obtain a better prospect. I walked along the beach until I came to the point and from there had an unobstructed view of a long coastline of great irregularity which appeared to end some three or four miles away in cliffs of black rock which looked, from that distance, precipitous.

Against their base the sea was dashing with great fury and there seemed to be no reefs at that spot to break the force of the giant rollers.

As I turned, I espied Miss Demerest who was sitting on the sand below gazing pensively across the cove, her hands folded in her lap. She was less than thirty feet away, but I hadn't observed her because I had been looking in the opposite direction.

She was so lovely in her white dress with a wide floppy straw hat upon her thick blond hair and a background of ocean which was at once emerald green and topaz and dark sapphire that she was almost overpowering. I moved toward her.

"Miss Demerest," I said, "Until we have explored the island, I don't think it safe—"

She started, turned, scrambled to her feet, faced me and turned upon me

such an expression of loathing that I was shocked beyond measure.

"How dare you speak to me?" she demanded in a hard bitter voice. "You are unspeakable; you are disgusting!"

With that she turned her back on me and moved swiftly toward camp. I followed at a safe distance, utterly abashed. I had forgotten how they must have tossed my senseless form into a boat and dropped me upon the sand and how repulsive I must have looked as I lay there, apparently in a drunken coma.

Everybody in the company except Preudholm believed that I had been unconscious from liquor. I couldn't blame this dainty creature for despising me. And she was right enough. I had been nothing but a drunken beachcomber until Nick and Jake landed me with the film company. She might have seen me lying on South Sea beaches dead to the world on numerous occasions.

"Aw, what's the use of trying to be decent?" I asked myself as I followed in her footsteps, plainly marked upon the soft black sand. There was plenty to drink in camp. I'd open a bottle and stupefy myself in earnest. Might as well. That was my reputation, a loathsome drunkard.

CHAPTER V.

THE PARIAH.

FINDING it difficult to walk in soft sand with high heeled slippers, the girl moved upon the grass and close to thick bush and I followed her example.

Gazing at her graceful back, I saw the bushes part and a hideous face peer at the beautiful little creature with a comical expression of astonishment upon it. I gazed at him, equally astonished, and shaking with apprehension. It was a face as black as ink with a lower lip as thick as a sausage, a flat nose and ears, the lobes of which were of incredible length due to heavy bone ornaments.

He met my gaze and vanished without a sound. I closed upon the girl and reached camp only ten feet behind her. What I had seen had temporarily driven from my mind my distress at her treatment of me.

The man in the bush was a savage, but I knew there were savages upon the island; that was not it. It was that the fellow was a Melanesian, not a Polynesian, which terrified and mystified me.

As you may not know, there are two races which inhabit the South Sea Islands. Those who live in the western part of the Pacific are Polynesians, a race of good looking, reasonably gentle brown men; while the eastern groups of islands are peopled by jet black brutes, many of whom are still cannibals; all of whom are fierce and warlike and none of whom are to be trusted.

What I couldn't understand was the presence of this savage in this part of the Pacific. According to my reckoning, we could not be a thousand miles from Tahiti, which meant that we must be at least fifteen hundred miles from the nearest Melanesian island. Assuming that Delire had sailed directly east from Tahiti we must still be among Polynesian isles. The thing was not to be explained.

I sought J. Ponsomby and sat down beside him.

"Those savages who were on the shore when we landed," I demanded, "did you notice whether they were black or brown?"

"I didn't get a good look at them.

I think they were black, though. What of it?"

"Plenty. You told me you had some arms, I believe."

"A couple of cases of rifles."

"Machine guns?"

"Lord, no. The natives are peaceful."

"Plenty of ammunition?"

"I guess so. At least a hundred rounds for each rifle. And we have a dozen revolvers."

"I've just had a look at one of the savages. He was a Melanesian. If that's the sort which inhabit this island, we're up against trouble."

"Pshaw. There can't be many of them."

"It's a big island; how big I can't tell yet. There may be hundreds of them and they may be cannibals."

He laughed incredulously.

"There are no more cannibals."

"You think so? My friend, there are cannibal feasts in the interior of scores of islands in the Melanesian groups. Most of them have white settlers only on the seacoasts and many of them have hardly been explored. If this island is uncharted, as I believe, what could have occurred to change the native habits?"

"My dear fellow, according to your theory we have been dropped here for safe keeping by our friend Delire. He could hardly have chosen a cannibal isle since he needs us to collect his ransom."

"Delire," I said solemnly, "may know nothing about the interior of this island. Most likely he landed here once for fresh water and the savages did not show themselves. He may believe that it is uninhabited but we know better."

"Right," he said briskly. "What do you suggest?"

"Forget your film for a few days. Break open your cases of rifles and issue them. Some of your crew look as though they had been soldiers. Establish a military organization. I'll drill them if you like. Post sentinels, prevent everybody from leaving camp. I found Miss Demerest away over on that point and saw a black savage staring at her from the bush, almost near enough to lay hands on her. Perhaps he would have, if he hadn't spotted me."

Preudholm laughed joyfully and I gazed at him in astonishment. He clapped me on the shoulder.

'Marvelous," he declared. "Boy, I've been spoiling for action for years. We'll wipe out this nest of vipers and then make our picture."

"You may be a good aviator," said I sourly, "but you don't know much about bush fighting. A spear is as good as a rifle in the jungle and if they have poisoned darts, *they'll* make the picture."

He looked impressed.

"Furthermore," I added, "your plot, as I understand it, is that Miss Rose plays a beautiful Polynesian princess and Homer is a native pearl fisher whom she loves. You need a throng of Polynesians for background. What are you going to do with these black fellows?"

He laughed. "You don't know much about pictures, Desmond," he said. "I'll change the script to have all my principals made prisoners by cannibals."

"And that can happen, but you won't make a film of it."

"Perhaps you're right," he said ruefully.

He frowned and screwed up his face, a characteristic of his when concentrating.

"Turning this into an armed camp will require some explanation," he said at length. "And they're not going to pay any attention to orders not to stray from camp, because they don't believe there is any danger. Look at those two camera men."

He pointed to the right. Jake and Nick were half a mile up the beach. As he spoke, they whirled, dropped their cameras and came toward us, running as fast as they could and waving their arms wildly. As well as we could see, there was nothing to hurry them and there was no pursuit of them.

Preudholm was on his feet and shouting to the crew.

"Break out those rifles right away," he cried. "Drop everything. I want the guns."

I was already running to meet the fugitives, who literally fell into my arms, gibbering with fright.

"Niggers!" gasped Jake. "The woods are full of 'em."

"And they chucked spears at us," supplemented Nick. "One of 'em went right past my head."

"That settles it," declared the director, who had come up in time to hear the explanations. "Desmond, I'm going to call everybody together and tell them a few facts. You're all right, you chumps. Nobody is chasing you."

"The blackest and ugliest coons I ever seen," asserted Nick.

"You said it," corroborated Jake. "And they got spears ten feet long."

I don't mind stating that it took courage to walk at a dignified pace back to camp and I kept looking over my shoulder, but no enemy showed.

"Call everybody," commanded Preudholm to a young man named Frost, whose title was assistant director. "If they're sleeping, wake them up."

In two or three minutes the entire troupe was assembled. Rosa de la Rose was rubbing her wonderful eyes with her fists and wearing cream colored satin pyjamas. Miss Demerest was exactly as I had last seen her, looking cool and lovely. The character woman, Mrs. Wright, wore pyjamas also and had wrapped a shawl about her. Homer reported in B.V.D.'s, as did one or two of the other actors. All told, thirty-one people formed a group round the director.

"Listen, folks," he said with some embarrassment. "We have found out that a mistake has been made. We're on the wrong island."

"Oh, yeah?" drawled Homer. "And how could that happen?"

"Captain Delire made an error," declared Preudholm. "One of these islands looks like another, and his compass must have been out of order. Anyway, we're not on Sevennes. We can do our work here just as well as there. You can see that it's a marvelous spot. And when Delire discovers his error he will immediately come back for us."

"Isn't he likely to continue to assume that this is Sevennes and not discover his mistake for a month?" asked Miss Demerest shrewdly.

"Well, that may be," replied the director uncomfortably. "We know he'll come back, so that's all right."

"Oh, la, la," chirped Rosa. "One island, it is all the same as another. We do our work and go home, is it not?"

Ponsomby hesitated and made the plunge.

"That isn't exactly so," he replied. "It appears that this island is inhabited by black savages—they may be hostile—"

Homer laughed. "Snap out of it,"

he sneered. "There are no real savages any more."

Preudholm glared him down. "That's all you know about it. A few of them tried to spear our camera men a few minutes ago. Laugh that off."

There was stunned silence and a shriek from the character woman.

"I want to go home," she screamed. "I was brought here under false pretenses. You said it was perfectly safe, Mr. Preudholm."

"Did I know a fool captain would land us on the wrong island?" he retorted. "We've got to stay here until the schooner returns. Get that through your heads. And we have to take measures to protect ourselves. Fortunately we have plenty of arms and ammunition. I was an officer in the British army. Captain Desmond served with your Army in France, and so did half a dozen of our men. Desmond will be in military command of this camp under me. What he says goes. I want it distinctly understood that nobody leaves camp without permission—and try to get permission!"

"May I ask," questioned a character man named James Golden, "if you think there are enough savages on this island to endanger the camp?"

"We don't know. We hope not, but we are taking no chances."

Miss Demerest stepped forward.

"May I ask a question?"

"Certainly."

"I understood that Mr. Desmond was engaged as an expert upon these islands and that he recommended Sevennes. Why was this mistake not discovered before we left the ship? Why didn't Mr. Desmond tell the captain that he was landing us upon the wrong island?"

"Mr. Desmond was sick," said Preudholm lamely.

Thirty pairs of hostile eyes were turned upon me and I wished the sands were quicksands to swallow me.

Suddenly a man stood in front of me shaking his fist at me. It was the comic who had reminded me of a rat when I first set eyes upon him. George Kernan was his name.

"It's all your fault, you big stew," he howled. "I know all about you. I heard in Tahiti that you were nothing but a rotten beachcomber. You got us into this. If you hadn't been cockeyed we wouldn't be going to lose our lives."

"Shut up, you yellow hound," shouted Preudholm. "Nobody will lose his life. We'll handle all the savages on this island."

Kernan turned on Preudholm. "Where was this captain's latitude and longitude?" he bellowed. "Mistake my eye! It's your scheme, Preudholm. You're looking for thrills and you don't care if some of us are eaten by cannibals if you get good film. I ought to have known better than sign up with you."

"To hell with you," retorted Preudholm. "I give you my word, folks, that I'm as flabbergasted by this as you are. But I've never been responsible for any loss of life."

"How about those two men who were drowned in the Columbia River?" demanded the rat-faced one.

"Stunt men. They volunteered. They knew what they were doing," Preudholm replied coldly.

The leading man spoke up, and his tone was belligerent.

"I refuse to take any order from this man Desmond," he declared. "Miss Demerest is right in blaming him for this catastrophe. If he had been sober this morning he could have prevented our landing. That is, if he ever saw the island of Sevennes."

"All right," I cried hotly. "I was drunk. Have it your own way. I refuse any command, Mr. Preudholm. I'll be a private in the ranks."

"I agree with Mr. Homer," a character man declared. "And I think that Desmond, who is responsible for our situation, should be kept a prisoner and turned over to the authorities on our return to Tahiti."

Preudholm fastened him with a steely glare. "Have you ever had military service?" he demanded.

"I—I was too old to serve in the war."

"Well, Desmond was a captain in the United States Army and we may need every trained man we have. I'll take charge of our defense as well as going right ahead with our picture."

To my astonishment, a soft hand was laid upon my wrist. Rosa de la Rose had come up beside me.

"The poor Capitan Desmond," she said sweetly, "is not to blame. Does he know that the *capitan* of the schooner is a fool? If he drink too much liquor he is no worse than the other men, is he?"

"A good vamp on and off the screen. Better off than on," said Homer scornfully.

"For you, bah!" snapped the Mexican firebrand.

"May we return to our tents?" asked Miss Demerest, whose blue eyes were turned on me with inexplicable hostility. While I had admired her from afar during the voyage, I had not exchanged a single word with her. She acted as if she hated me, and seeing me apparently unconscious from liquor did not explain that.

With a kind smile, the Mexican actress moved gracefully to her tent, and I went to join the men who were unboxing the rifles and ammunition. The Hollywood mechanics with whom I worked didn't seem to have any animus against me, but they commented caustically upon the behavior of the character actor Kernan, whom they knew and disliked of old.

We worked fast and in short order had twenty-four rifles and the cases of cartridges unloaded. I saw to my satisfaction that there were a hundred and fifty clips of cartridges, not a hundred and fifty rounds of ammunition, for each rifle; enough to keep a thousand savages at bay for a long time. I did not think there could be a thousand warriors on the island. A hundred or two at the most was my guess.

Against them we could stack the mechanical crew, a score of strong fellows with plenty of nerve. They were carpenters, electricians, painters, designers, property men, even a plumber. They could build almost anything that the director needed, from a castle to a waterfall. They could assemble the complicated machinery of modern motion pictures. They could generate enough electricity from motors and a powerful dynamo to turn night time into daytime, and with us was a complete assortment of lights.

It occurred to me immediately that the big lights would be a potent weapon of defense, for we could use them to bathe the approaches to our camp in radiance and baffle any attempt to take us by surprise. I saw no reason why we could not take care of ourselves with a band of men like these, and I told Preudholm so when he joined us.

"What do you think of our camp site?" he asked instead of replying.

"Bad. It's too close to the jungle. I suggest we move it to the point on the right. We shall have water on three sides of us, and a narrow neck of land

to defend. We can throw up a breastwork or dig a trench and turn your search lights on an advancing enemy."

"Righto." He turned to the workmen. "Jones and Harrigan," he called. "You two shoulder rifles and patrol the space between the tents and the jungle. By Jove, fresh water!"

I was dismayed. The tents had been erected upon the beach immediately upon landing, and no stream found its way to the ocean at that point. Fresh water was indispensable, of course.

"What have you on hand?" I asked.

"Fifty cases of mineral water."

"We're all right to-night. In the morning we'll have to send out an exploring party and shift camp to a stream or a spring. There is sure to be plenty of water on this island, judging by the vegetation."

"The rest of you fellows stack the rifles and take down the tents. We're moving out to that point over there," he commanded.

No trained soldiers would have lowered tents and pulled up stakes quicker than the motion picture crew, and the bewildered actors came forth protesting. In ten minutes we had trekked to the point and were making camp again. We were perhaps a quarter of a mile from the mass of machinery, only part of which was unboxed, but Preudholm had no intention of leaving it unguarded.

"Six men will remain with the machinery to-night," he said to me. "They can sleep on the beach. It won't hurt them. I don't think savages could do much harm to the stuff, but there is no use in taking chances."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Serpents of the Sea

THERE are genuine serpents in the sea, not the terrifying monsters of sailors' tales, but a family of true snakes which make their home out in the salt water. They are found in tropical seas around the world, sometimes in considerable numbers. William Beebe, the naturalist, reports seeing them swimming literally by the hundreds through the fast tide-rip at Penang in the Straits Settlements. The sea is their natural element just as it is for the seals and sea lions, and they are clumsy, some of them almost helpless, if they find themselves on land. All species have the tail flattened to adapt it as a swimming organ. The largest of these sea snakes is ten or twelve feet in length and some are only three or four feet long.

They are brilliantly colored. An East Indian species is a bright olive green with many broad yellow cross bands. Like the seals, the young snakes are born on shore, usually in a crevice in some giant bowlder—about the only occasion these creatures ever have for visiting the land. A naturalist once found a large female in a rocky crack coiled around her family of twenty young snakes, each of them about two feet long.

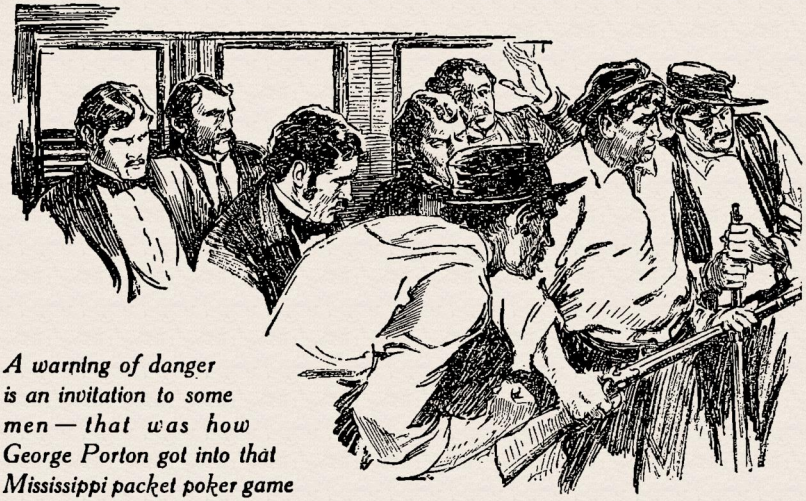
Though these sea serpents do not break any records for size, they must be treated with respect by every one who meets them, for, like many snakes found on land, they are very poisonous.

John H. Spicer.

River Pirates

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

Novelette—Complete



A warning of danger is an invitation to some men — that was how George Porton got into that Mississippi packet poker game

CHAPTER I.

MARKED CARDS.

THE Lelia Johnson was fairly large, and comfortable enough, but rather slow and old; and when she pulled out of Vicksburg one late afternoon in '57 she carried a good cargo of cotton and pig iron, but only a handful of cabin passengers.

The last of these to go aboard attracted the most attention. Grace Lexington and George Porton, who were very much in love with one another, and engaged to be married, watched him from a vantage point on the hurricane deck. He was a tall and very handsome man, perhaps forty years old, slim, firm, hard. There were streaks of gray at his temples, but his mustache and the tiny spot of beard under his lower lip were an unmitigated black.

He was dressed, and he carried himself, with easy elegance; decidedly he had an air, and the fact that he attracted so much attention as he boarded the Lelia was, obviously, a fact which did not displease him. He had but a single bag, but it was a large one and new, and no less than three Negroes brought it aboard for him, while five or six others waved and called to him from the dock.

"Good-by, Massa! Doan you go fo' t' worry yo'self! We'll take care ob de plantation, Massa! Yes, *suh!*"

He waved back at them, smiling

fondly, the perfect picture of a beloved, prosperous planter. At least, that's what Grace Lexington and George Porton, and everybody else who witnessed the scene, took him for. And that's what he wanted them to take him for, too. There was only one person aboard who would know him for what he was, and to that person he went promptly.

George picked up a chair and swung it

"Hello, Harry. Lovely weather we're having."

Clearly the pleasure of this meeting was one-sided. The barroom was otherwise empty at the time, and Harry made no secret of his nervousness.

"Hello, Paul. Whisky sour?"

"Not Paul to you, Harry. Senator Boardman this trip, please. Senator Wilbur G. Boardman of Boardman's Plantation, Jefferson County. Yes, I'll have a sour." He ignored Harry's coolness, and continued to be amiable. "Not much of a passenger list, eh? Still, there'll prob'ly be a few suckers on board, anyway. Sometimes these older boats get the best ones, I find. Which reminds me: you and I better do a little business while we've time."

He nodded toward a pile of playing cards behind the bar. "I'll go into conference with that second deck from the top, Harry, just to get things started right."

Harry hung back, shifting from one foot to the other. His gaze did not meet the passenger's.

"Now listen, Paul, you know I'd—"

"Senator Boardman, please."

"Well, Senator Boardman then."

"That's it. Might as well get used to it, eh?"

"But listen: You know I'd lose my job if it was to get out I'd let you tamper with a deck. Not only that, but I'd get a bad name along the river so's I

wouldn't be able to get another decent job anywheres."

Senator Boardman sipped his drink deliberately and asked in a quiet voice: "Are you telling me I can't take that deck? Is that what you mean?"

"Well, yes. That's about the size of it."

The passenger placed a ten dollar bill on the bar, and he leaned close to the bartender.

"Look at me, Harry."

The bartender looked directly into his face for the first time—and turned pale. Those kindly black eyes were hard as diamonds now, cold as ice. The mouth was slightly open, and under the black mustache was a splotch of scarlet lip, under that the white of perfect teeth which somehow gave a bestial aspect to the face.

Paul Rusher was a killer, and Harry knew it. Somewhere in one of his pockets Paul had a tiny double-barreled derringer, a murderous little instrument he called Betsey May. But he wouldn't use that: he had quieter methods.

"Worried about losin' your job, eh? Harry, my boy, you're going to lose a damn' sight more'n just your job if you let me down. Take your choice. It's either this for you"—he pointed to the ten dollar bill—"or else this"—and his right hand went to the silk handkerchief sticking out of the breast pocket of his coat.

HARRY knew about that handkerchief. It represented a quick, noiseless and terrible way of mutilating any man within reach. Sewn into one corner of the hem was a lead slug the size of a small pistol ball. Paul Rusher, like every card sharp, was marvelously quick with his hands.

With one swift movement of his right hand—a movement too swift to be seen—he could swish out that silk handkerchief, snap it as a whip is snapped, and with the loaded end of it put out a man's eye. So little a thing it was—but it meant so much! And Rusher was not a man to make an idle threat. Now he fingered the handkerchief, staring hard at the bartender. The bartender's face was less than a foot from the gambler's right hand.

"Make up your mind, Harry. Does Senator Boardman take those cards for a little walk?"

Harry nodded, wetting his lips. His face was covered with perspiration, and utterly cold.

"Well, reach for 'em careful, Harry. The second deck down. Don't turn your head like that. You can reach for 'em without lookin' back there. Hand 'em over slow, Harry . . . *That's* a good boy!" He pocketed the cards, and took his hand away from the handkerchief. He smiled; again he was a good-natured, soft-spoken gentleman.

"You're a smart lad, Harry. After all, what's a little thing like a job? Look at me. I never had a job in my life, but I wear diamonds." He started away. "I'll be back with these in a little while." He smiled and nodded. "That was a very acceptable sour, Harry."

In his stateroom, "Senator" Boardman—whose "slaves" had received the comparatively munificent sum of twenty-five cents each to stage that touching farewell scene at the dock—took from his bag a tiny spirit lamp and a tin drinking cup. He boiled some water, steamed the seal off the package of cards, took out the cards, and stripped the aces and kings.

It was a simple process—merely a matter of shaving a fine line off the length edge of each card with his razor. This made the aces and kings

a trifle narrower than the other cards. Nobody but an expert with super-sensitive fingers ever would be able to tell the difference in a deal; but the Senator was just such an expert.

He whistled as he worked, and made a brief job of it. When he was finished and had sealed up the cards again, you never would be able to tell they'd been opened. He had them back in the barroom, and saw them established in their previous position, before the first of the male passengers came wandering in for a few drinks before dinner.

CHAPTER II.

THE VICTIM.

GEORGE PORTON had dinner with his fiancée and his prospective mother-in-law. There was only one other woman passenger—a squat, painted little thing who simpered assiduously upon every man willing to glance at her. She sat alone. There were nine men, including Senator Boardman, who already had acquired three acquaintances, with whom he was dining.

Afterward, George Porton walked around the promenade deck with the ladies, chatting aimlessly. The twilight was brief, and the night very dark, with no moon or stars. The Lelia Johnson swished slowly through the chocolate water. The running lights, red and green, were the only ones showing forward; no other light was permitted to shine upon the water in front, for fear the pilot would not be able to detect sawyers and planters, dangerous snags, sandbars.

The pilot, a third-rater, was reluctant to steer at all on such a dark night, and among the officers on the texas deck there was even some talk of tying up for the night at one of the landing places halfway to Natchez.

The Lelia Johnson, however her passengers might feel about it, never was in a hurry. Now only smut, and very occasionally a half-hearted spark, curled from her tall, serrated stacks, and the wake waves that lapped the shores long after her passing were pretty weak spirited things.

Forward, the three strollers paused to look down over the main deck, where the roustabouts, Negro servants and white trash were lodged amid a litter of gear, lines, snubbing posts, loading carts, hooks, and short haul freight. One of the Negroes was playing a banjo, listlessly, and sometimes singing a little.

"Doan' you heah dem bells a-ringin'? Oh sweet, Ah declares! Doan' you heah dem darkies singin'? Comin' up de golden stairs."

George's valet, looking up, smiled a greeting. He was a huge, soft-spoken darky, always amiable, gentle. He and George, as boys on the Porton plantation near Natchez, had played together, heedless of the difference in their complexions; and ever since George was fourteen years old, Big Peter had attended him as a personal servant.

"Ah tol' that niggah he can't play like you, Massa George! Ah tol' him he ain't never heard a banjo played till he hears you."

George smiled and waved to him. The Lexington ladies waved; they too had known Big Peter as a pickaninny.

They were to dock at Natchez at about seven o'clock in the morning—though the Lelia Johnson's captain never was over-fussy about schedules, particularly on dark nights—and Mrs. Lexington wished to go to bed early. Grace, too, was tired, so George escorted them back to their adjoining

staterooms. But he lingered on the after deck to say good night to Grace.

"I'm not at all tired," he told her. "I'll take half a dozen turns around the deck, anyway, before I turn in."

"I hope you won't get into any gambling game, George."

"I might," he said, somewhat exasperated by her maternal manner; they had been neighbors and sweethearts since childhood, and engaged for several years, but he didn't think she had any right to act as though they were married already. "I play as good a game of poker as anybody on this boat," he reminded her stiffly.

"I don't doubt you do, dear, but I just wish you wouldn't play anyway. I don't know why, but I have a sort of funny feeling about this trip . . ." She paused, biting her lip, staring back over the churning wake.

"What kind of feeling?"

"Oh, I don't know . . . I just feel sort of uneasy, somehow."

He sniffed; for he was a very superior young man in many respects, a finished gentleman, smooth, strong, accomplished; and he believed that he was capable of handling himself alone in any situation.

She added: "Some of these professional gamblers might be on board, you know, and I hear they're very dangerous men to play with."

Until she had mentioned it, he had not even thought of playing poker. But now he was annoyed, indignant.

"They'll have to be almighty smart to get the better of me," he announced with great assurance.

He kissed her good night. He was angry, and it was a cool kiss, brief, altogether unsatisfactory.

Grace Lexington clung to him, refusing to go into her cabin after such a farewell.

"Please don't be so touchy, George! You know I wouldn't worry about things like that if I didn't love you so much. Give me a better kiss, dear, please."

He smiled, complying. And then she consented to retire.

BUT he still was angry as he walked around the deck, listening to the dulled throb of the engines and the chanting of the roustabouts. He resented this treatment. Did they think he was an unbearded youngster, a lad to be shielded from contact with the rough world? He was twenty-three years old, and he'd been in plenty of stiff poker games!

The promenade was deserted, and after the second turn around the deck he decided to step into the barroom, which was forward, for a nightcap. He told himself that he really felt like a short nightcap, that he could play poker or not play poker, just as he wished, in case there was a game. But in fact, it was Grace's warning, and his own childish resentment of that warning, which caused him to step into the barroom that night.

There were four men at the bar, where the tall planter held the floor. The planter talked in an even, low, pleasant voice, persistent and ingratiating. He bought drinks liberally. He invited George Porton to have a drink.

"Thanks," said George. He didn't wish to accept, but he didn't see how he could refuse without seeming impolite. Instinctively he disliked and distrusted this affable stranger. "Thanks. I'll have a sherry cobbler with you."

The stranger introduced himself. "Name's Boardman, sir. Senator Wilbur G. Boardman, of Boardman's Plantation, Jefferson County."

George nodded, smiling. But he was suspicious. He was tolerably familiar with all the gentlefolk of Jefferson County, and he never had heard of a Wilbur Boardman.

"Whereabouts in Jefferson County is that, Senator?"

The tall man answered easily. "Near Cole's Creek, sir. Like to have you drop in some time, sir, if you're near there."

"That's very kind of you," George murmured. He sipped his drink, wondering as he did so why anybody from the neighborhood of Cole's Creek would go all the way to Vicksburg to catch so slow a boat as the Lelia Johnson—which likely enough made a stop at or near Cole's Creek anyway.

The talk turned to other things, and George, who was not greatly interested, was finishing his drink when the tall man glanced contemptuously at a sign above the bar.

"Anybody playing games for money in this cabin does so at his own risk, eh?" He snorted. "I don't know how you gentlemen feel about it, but I've always thought these stories about professional gamblers on the river boats were greatly exaggerated. Yes, sir—greatly exaggerated. Anyway, even if there were such professionals, I'd like to see them outsmart anybody who really understood how to play poker."

Somebody asked: "You play a good game, do you, Senator?"

"Well . . ." The tall man was reasonably modest. "I don't like to boast, gentlemen, but it's mighty seldom that I lose."

"I like a little friendly game now an' then, to pass the time away," one of the men said, "but I don't like to play for high stakes."

"A good policy," the Senator agreed, "unless—" he glanced at George, whom he had long since marked as the best prospect aboard "—unless you can really afford it."

Somebody suggested: "Suppose we have a little game here now, eh?"

SENATOR BOARDMAN feigned considerable reluctance, but in the end he permitted himself to be persuaded. George Porton, too, agreed to play. George was dubious about the business—he still didn't like this tall man who called himself a Senator—but he thought it would do no harm to risk a few hands.

They bought a deck of cards—the top deck. It was decided that they should cut the first pot for this. A fifty cent limit was set, but this was soon doubled. The Senator acted as bank.

George Porton won most of the first pots he bet for, and the Senator lost. Raking in one of these pots, which he had won with an easy bluff the Senator had not called, George asked: "Is that the way they play 'em down at Cole's Creek, Senator?"

He intended it for mere banter, and the Senator, ostensibly accepting it in that spirit, laughed good-naturedly; but behind the laugh there was a snarl, and the tall man's eyes did not follow his lips in expression of amusement.

The Senator continued to lose—not much, but persistently. After an especially poor hand, with which he dropped seven dollars, he rose suddenly, apparently in a great rage, and hurled his cards through a window, across the narrow promenade, and over the rail into the Mississippi.

He was blushing with embarrassment when he returned.

"Forgive me, gentlemen. I *will* lose my temper sometimes when they're running against me. Now I've gone and broken up that deck. Well, there's

plenty more. No, no! You must let me buy it!"

Harry the bartender sold him the deck on top of the pile, and Senator Boardman opened this confidently in the presence of the others. "Maybe this will bring me better luck," he said.

Apparently it did; for the Senator began to win from that time. And George Porton began to lose.

It was George who, foolishly, suggested lifting the limit to five dollars. The Senator agreed after some hesitation.

"I'm ahead," the Senator remarked. "I suppose it's only fair."

George said sharply: "Don't put yourself out for me!"

Everybody looked up. Senator Boardman's eyes grew very hard, very bright, and Harry, watching from behind the bar, saw again that killer look. There was a strained hush. The boat's engines throbbed softly through it, and the whisky and wine glasses behind the bar clicked gently with the vibration.

Down below, in the engine room, a bell rang lazily. They could hear the musical chant of the leadsman at the bows, calling depths to the pilot; and they could hear the lone banjo still strumming on the main deck, and the darky there singing.

"Rich folk worry 'bout trouble, po' folk worry 'bout wealth. Ah doan worry 'bout nuthin'— All Ah want's mah health. 'Cause Ah'm satisfied— Oh, yes! Ah'm satisfied."

Then the Senator shrugged, and returned his attention to his cards.

"WHAT I meant, of course," he said, "was that if I'd been behind I might not want to play for quite so much, but as it is I don't care. That is, if it's all right to Mr. Porton?"

"Oh, it's all right to me," George muttered. He was rather ashamed of himself, and kept his gaze fixed upon his cards.

Senator Boardman opened, and George, with three kings going in, raised. Senator Boardman raised again, and George pushed another ten dollars' worth of chips to the center of the table. The others had dropped out by this time.

"Once more," the Senator said, pleasantly enough.

"Again," George snapped.

The Senator hesitated now, studying his hand. He gazed long and earnestly at the pile of chips at his elbow, as though seeking inspiration from them. Finally he decided to make another raise.

"Come again," said George.

Now the Senator smiled sadly. "Ah, if you can raise me *again,* Mr. Porton, then I'm afraid you've got me beat. However, I'll stay in just to protect my bet." He himself was dealing, and he picked up the cards. "How many?" he asked.

"Two."

The Senator sighed wistfully. "Then I'm afraid I'm beaten already. I need three." He dealt the cards. "But there's always the off chance," he said, sighing again.

"The off chance opened," George reminded him.

"Hm-m . . ." The Senator examined his cards, and then smiled naïvely. "Well, I've hit it! Five dollars, sir."

"Ten," said George.

"Ten more," said the Senator.

George said: "I still think you're bluffing. Up again."

"Ten more," said the Senator.

And now George knew for certain that he was being cheated. He could not understand how it had been done—

he knew he could prove nothing. But he was furious. Of course, he could afford to lose; he had plenty of money. But he hated being bilked by a professional.

"I'll call," he said. "Three husbands here."

"Three aces," the Senator announced, and showed them.

George shrugged. He was about to take his beating and quit the game, when he had a sudden hunch. He rose, grabbed a handful of cards, and with a curse threw them out the window into the Mississippi. Then he smiled sheepishly.

"I guess I'm a bit superstitious," he said apologetically. "After a hand like that I always throw the cards away. But don't worry, gentlemen. I'll buy a new deck." He went to the bar. "Give me the bottom deck, please, Harry." He turned to Senator Boardman, smiling. "Another little superstition of mine, Senator. I always like the bottom deck."

For a prosperous planter—who himself, a short while previous, had thrown a fit of childish irritability—Senator Wilbur G. Boardman of Boardman's Plantation took this act most ungraciously. He realized, now, that this whippersnapper had placed him for what he was; he realized, too, that if he were to quit, under the circumstances, it would be to give himself away, but if he were to continue it must be with unstripped cards.

He disliked George Porton intensely—had disliked him from the first moment he'd seen him—just as George instinctively had disliked the gambler. And for that very reason, more than any other, he decided to go on with the game. He'd show this dandy how to play real poker! He'd beat him fairly—as long as he had to be fair.

The other players, of course, knew nothing of this bitter, silent conflict. But Harry the bartender understood. And Harry, shoving the new cards across the bar and accepting payment, whispered: "Be careful of that man, mister."

"Bad, eh?"

"The worst there is, mister."

"Thanks."

CHAPTER III.

PIRATES!

PAUL RUSHER — no, Senator Wilbur G. Boardman—was an excellent poker player, and normally, even with a fresh deck, he could beat the best. But there is never any accounting for cards; and now, as though to punish him for his lack of confidence in her, Lady Luck turned against him.

He held hands just good enough to tempt him to enter pots, but not good enough to permit him to win. And this George Porton, he soon learned, was a hard man to bluff. George's good opinion of himself had justification. He played an intelligent, unhurried game; and when at about midnight he announced that he was prepared to quit, he was fifty-two dollars to the good.

The Senator, as bank, accepted his chips, and slowly started counting cash. He was quiet, ominously quiet. His face was very dark, a dark red; his eyes were almost closed, and his mouth was drawn tight. When he did speak, midway in the counting, it was scarcely more than a whisper—a silken, deadly whisper.

"Are you in the habit of quitting a gentlemen's game as soon as you get comfortably ahead, Mr. Porton?"

George answered without heat. "I'm

in the habit of quitting at about midnight, win or lose, when I'm obliged to get up the first thing in the morning."

"That is, you think your winning at this time was just lucky?"

"Perhaps," said George, staring at the ceiling.

Now Senator Boardman looked up sharply. He stopped counting cash, and his right hand rested near the lower left pocket of his waistcoat. It was a beautiful scarlet silk waistcoat, powdered with silver, in exquisite contrast with the Senator's blue tailcoat; but the fit was imperfect, for there was a bulge in the lower left pocket.

"Are you insinuating, sir, that—"

"I'm insinuating nothing, sir. I'm simply asking for my money. You have my chips. They represent one hundred and two dollars, I believe?"

"Hm-m . . . One hundred and two dollars won with very lucky cards, eh?"

George Porton was furious, but like the Senator, he kept his voice low.

"Well," he drawled, "at least with cards that didn't come from any plantation near Cole's Creek."

The Senator sprang to his feet, and his chair clattered to the floor. Now, unmistakably, his hand rested on the concealed derringer. The blood pounded in his face until it was almost black, and his teeth showed in a snarl under that impeccable mustache. His voice was halting, choked by anger.

"You'll apologize for that, or by the Lord, sir, I'll—"

It was at this moment that Hank Mitts boarded the Lelia Johnson.

THEY used to compare Hank Mitts with that other sensational river bully, Mike Fink, and also with cold and deadly James Murrell, the whispering murderer. And indeed, he was something of both. Murrell had not made a more impressive record of organized slaughter; and there were those who declared that if Mike Fink were still alive, and were to get into a fight with Hank Mitts, it would be just too bad for Mike, magnificent brute though he was.

Once Hank had been a Tennessee scout and Indian hunter, a crack shot even when drunk. Drifting into flatboating, he had kept his shooting eye in practice by picking off stray darkies along the bank as his craft slid quietly past. Once the owner of one of these darkies had objected, personally. Of course Hank had knocked the man down—as a matter of fact, Hank broke his jaw.

Now Hank would have given this incident no further thought, had it not been for the fact that the fellow had come up to the chalk again, properly bandaged, and accompanied by no less than three friends, all looking for trouble. One of those men survived to describe the resulting mêlée, but only because he had fled early.

Thereafter Hank found himself an outlaw, a fact which filled him with amazement. He felt that he had been sadly wronged. But he made the best of the situation, and converting his flatboat into a pirate vessel, and gathering around him a choice collection of cutthroats, he proceeded to terrorize the lower river as even the lower river never had been terrorized before.

He was a monstrous fellow, and merely the sight of him ordinarily was enough to dry the truculence out of any given group of victims. Sometimes he would swagger into a private home, or a waterfront saloon, and rob, mutilate, perhaps kill, with gleeful abandon—to be gone long before assistance had arrived.

Sometimes he would play Murrell's earlier game of waylaying horsemen back of the river, stealing their valuables, and disposing of their bodies after the manner of the master. More often he got his fun by operating from his old flatboat, loafing in some convenient bayou or under the hanging moss of an island shore, and swooping upon luckless broadhorns bound for New Orleans, or even upon small steamboats when he could manage to catch them.

He never stooped to the mere stealing of horses or slaves. Such exploits lacked excitement, and Hank Mitts craved excitement always. Besides, he was an artist, in his way. He liked to do things on the grand scale. There was nothing sneaky, at least, about Hank Mitts.

To those in the barroom of the Lelia Johnson, the first announcement of Hank's arrival came in the form of a series of terrible shrieks. This was followed by a bumping, a scraping, and then a great running around on the main deck below.

Senator Wilbur G. Boardman of Boardman's Plantation paused, his right hand on the butt of his derringer. The quarrel was suspended and everybody was still, listening to the commotion outside.

A great babble of yells and shrieks from the main deck. A banging, a thumping. One shot, and a loud splash. Then more shots, and the sound of many men ascending the forward staircase.

Senator Boardman, the others at his heels, sprang for the promenade doorway. In that doorway they stopped, peering out. The Senator had started to draw his pistol, his Betsey May, but when he saw what he saw he decided against this, prudently permitting the derringer to remain in that waistcoat pocket.

FOR Hank Mitts's men were everywhere. There were only thirteen or fourteen of them, but at first there seemed to be hundreds. They swarmed over the boat, smashing things, knocking men down, yelling, shooting, cursing wildly. They were all tolerably drunk, and ready for anything.

Two of them stamped into the pilot house and ordered the ringing of signals to stop the boat.

One pulled the captain out of bed, and at the point of a rifle marched him down to the barroom.

Four of them, without any difficulty at all, held in check the whole pack of slaves and roustabouts and deck passengers below. A panicky Negro there made a dash for the staircase, but one of Hank's men cracked his skull with a bludgeon.

The only show of resistance was on the texas deck, where an officer had been engaged in cleaning his pistol. This officer had no time to load, but he rushed out with the empty pistol just the same, thinking to frighten the pirates. Four of them fired at him, and not one missed. His body was tossed overboard without further ado.

Through all this noise and confusion stalked Hank himself, a bellowing giant, horse pistol in one hand, bowie knife in the other.

It was Hank, with several of his men behind him, whom Senator Boardman had seen from the doorway. And like most others in the presence of this outlaw, the Senator became instantly respectful. For the Senator, though he was no coward, was no fool either.

"Git back out o' there!"

They got back. Hank and his men,

blinking in the glare of the one hanging oil lamp, strode into the barroom.

"*Git up agains' that wall!*"

They lined up obediently. Hank Mitts looked them over, and his lip curled in contempt—the contempt of a man who had never met another man as strong as himself. He did not even take the trouble to search them. Perhaps the possibility did not occur to him that one of them might have a tiny derringer concealed in a waistcoat pocket; perhaps, to Hank, no weapon smaller than his own huge horse pistol could conceivably be dangerous.

He glanced at the table, the cards and the chips. "Playin' poker, eh?" He strode behind the bar and selected several bottles of the finest brandy. "Open these," he told Harry.

Then, as though missing something, he yelled at nobody in particular: "Where's the captain o' this tub?"

From the promenade came a shout: "Here he is, Hank." And the captain was thrust into the room. He stood, bewildered, frightened, in his nightshirt; and from the end of the bar Hank Mitts surveyed him.

"Where's that gold bullion?" Hank asked, finally.

"What bullion?"

Hank frowned a terrible frown. He advanced toward the perspiring captain.

"You know what bullion I mean, you yellow-bellied Yankee! Don't 'what' me! Know who I am? Well, I'm Hank Mitts!"

The captain said nothing. This information had been unnecessary. The captain, like the others, never had seen the notorious Hank before; but when they did see him they were not for an instant in doubt concerning his identity.

"I'm the greates' fighter this country's ever known," roared Hank. "The greates' the *worl's* ever known, for that matter." With two ham-like thumbs he hitched up his trousers. "When I yell it makes the trees shake," he declared. "I could break your Yankee neck with one squeeze o' this paw, y' know that? I could stamp my foot an' stamp a hole right clear through the bottom o' this tub o' yourn!"

He placed the barrel of his pistol against the captain's abdomen, and pressed.

"So answer me, you tarnation flea on a dog's back! Where's that bullion?"

The captain was pale as death. Too frightened to speak, he could only shake his head.

"*Where is it?*"

CHAPTER IV.

PLAYING WITH DEATH.

THE captain stammered at last: "I—I don't know—know what you're—talking about."

"Y' don't, eh?" Deliberately Hank Mitts cocked the pistol. But he paused, and a sudden suspicion seemed to strike him. He frowned into the captain's face.

"Listen, this is the Eclipse, ain't it?"

"No, sir," said the captain, much relieved. "This is the Lelia Johnson, Pearman and Watkington, owners."

Hank Mitts grunted in disgust. "Fer Judas's sake," he muttered feelingly.

One of his men offered: "I tol' yuh I thought this was a smaller boat."

"You shut up!" Hank roared.

And the pirate shut up.

Hank thought upon this curious state of affairs for a moment or two. Then, as though remembering some-

thing, he took a long pull on one of the brandy bottles Harry had opened. He wiped his mouth slowly, harshly, with the back of his hand. He frowned at the floor, blinking.

Then he raised his eyes again to the captain's face.

"If this ain't the Eclipse, where *is* the Eclipse?"

The captain shook his head. "Guess she must be behind us somewheres. She hadn't docked yet at Vicksburg when we pulled out, but she was expected any time then."

"Don't she usu'ly pass you up above here somewhere?"

"Usually, yes. Not always." Timidly the captain offered a suggestion. "If you'll just wait around here a little while—"

Hank grinned at him. "Oh, we'll wait aroun', all right! Only you'll wait with us."

"But this boat's due—"

"Never mind when she's due or where! We ain't lettin' you go now, to rush back an' warn 'em off. No, sir! We're goin' to stay right here with you, an' when the Eclipse comes you can jes' go alongside o' her for us. That 'll be better 'n usin' the ol' flatboat." He glared at the pirate who had appeared in the doorway. "Everything quiet?"

"Everything quiet, Hank."

"Nothin' in sight, up 'r down?"

"Not a thing."

"How near the bank are we, more or less?"

"'Bout a hundred feet. Pilot says it's pretty shoal here."

"The hell with the pilot." Hank took another deep drink, and gave a long thought to his situation. Then, abruptly, he began issuing orders right and left. One man was sent to the galley to fetch food for the chief. "Everything they got there," Hank ordered modestly.

Two men were told off to crack the safe in the boat's office—to crack it in any manner they saw fit, so long as they got it open. Another was sent to the engine room to command the chief engineer to keep his fires hot in preparation for a chase. Two others were posted on the main deck to guard against any possible revolt on the part of the crowd there. And still another pair were instructed to go to the pilot house.

"The boat we want's comin' aroun' that bend any time now. When it comes I want one o' you t' stay up there an' see the pilot rings the right bells for full speed ahead an' goes right up to this boat. The other one is t' come down here an' report to me, an' yell it aroun' on your way, too, so's the boys will all know."

WITH this bit of executive work completed, the ruffian relaxed. He took another drink. He glanced at the table and grinned.

"Poker, eh? Ain't played poker much lately." He walked to the table, pointed to the remainder of the second deck of cards—the deck Senator Boardman had stripped. "What 're these doin' here?"

The Senator, perfectly cool, watchful, answered him. "Those were left from another deck. Not complete."

"Throw 'em away then," said Hank Mitts, and swept them to the floor. He glanced up. "Who was winner?"

Senator Boardman pointed to George. "This gentleman. He was about to quit the game, he was so much ahead."

"Hm-m . . ." Hank Mitts took a drink, and stared with tiny, hot eyes at George Porton. "Smart, eh?"

"He's a mighty smart player." The Senator was all but purring now. "Beat anybody I know, I guess."

"Think so, eh?" Hank's head went up and his chest went out in a manner already familiar to those in that smoky little barroom. "Maybe he ain't as smart as he thinks he is. You never saw *me* play, did you? Well, there ain't a better player in the whole country. Maybe in the whole *worl'!*"

He motioned to the chairs, and with a hospitable wave of his arm invited the company to be seated. They accepted the invitation nervously—all except the two remaining pirates, who lounged at the end of the bar, drinking brandy and leaning on their tall Tennessee rifles.

"We'll play," Hank Mitts announced. "An' if any o' you kin beat me, why you kin keep this money an' the hell with you!"

Senator Boardman of Boardman's Plantation was careful to seat himself next to the pile of spilled cards on the floor — though nobody attached any significance to this move at the time.

The Senator produced a couple of cigars, and offered one of these to Hank Mitts, who accepted it graciously. The Senator dropped the cigar. "Oh, excuse me, Mr. Mitts! Here—let me pick it up for you." He picked it up. He picked up something else with it, but nobody noticed that.

The Senator's fingers were marvelously sensitive. Always, before a game like this, in which he intended to use stripped cards, he sandpapered his fingertips.

THE play was nervous, erratic, and except on Hank's part amazingly timid. Harry crouched behind the bar, watching with large, frightened eyes. The Hank Mitts associates, at the end of the bar, drank quietly, seriously. Most of the men at the table were afraid of angering Hank by winning from him, and the chief was permitted to take pots he did not deserve.

"Play your cards," he would roar from time to time, and glare around him. But mostly he was pleased to be gracious, for him. He lighted his cigar and puffed contentedly at it, holding it in the extreme left corner of his mouth and pointing it ceilingward. He drank a great deal, and grunted. His heavy breathing, much of the time, was the only sound in the room; for the boat was motionless, drifting in the current, and there was no vibration to click the whisky glasses together.

"You're a hell of a bunch o' players," Hank grumbled. "Can't even give me a good enough game to make it int'restin'."

George Porton dealt, and dealt himself two aces.

There were three passes, and Hank opened. George stayed in. He was afraid to raise. So long as the game was going on quietly like this, and Hank Mitts was contented to sit still and win, things were as well as could be expected. But if there were any sort of flare-up, any sort of fight, nobody could guess what might happen.

George was not afraid for himself. Already he had estimated that he could get out of the barroom and over the rail in time to save his life, if necessary; and one of the pirates had reported that the boat was only about one hundred feet from shore, an easy swim. No, he was thinking of Grace and her mother. He would not risk leaving them alone, unprotected, no matter what the provocation.

And everything hung upon Hank Mitts's highly uncertain temper. For obviously, Hank's rule was absolute.

No sheik of the desert, no ancient Scottish clan chief, ever had obtained prompter, humbler obedience. This was not a gang of pirates, really. It was Hank Mitts and some assistants, some slaves perhaps. Hanks's own men feared him as much as the boat's passengers and crew feared him, and they obeyed him for no other reason. He was magnificent, a barbarian and a tyrant.

So when Hank called for three cards, indicating that he held a pair, George, dealing, decided to throw away one of his aces. He did this, and dealt himself four cards. One of these, he observed with a sigh, was another ace.

But perhaps Hank had bettered his pair. Anyway, Hank, who had opened, bet; and George called the bet. To throw away aces and be found out, might make the pirate even angrier than he would be if he lost the pot. And Hank had a habit—to which nobody dared make objection—of examining the discards.

"Couple o' ladies," Hank announced proudly.

"Bullets," said George, and showed them.

Hank Mitts peered suspiciously at the aces. He was very drunk now, and his eyes seemed to get smaller and smaller in his enormous, bearded face.

"Tha's funny," he muttered. "I threw away an ace m'self on tha' han'. Drew down t' my ladies." Idly, he flipped over George's discards—and sat bolt upright when he saw the fourth ace. "Say, how many o' these things *are* there in this deck?" He glared at George, the dealer.

Laughing, Senator Boardman of Boardman's Plantation reached for the remaining cards; the next deal was to be his. "Only four of 'em," he said, and his tone was jocular. "'Course if there should be another one *here*, that would be different!"

He flipped over the top card. It was an ace.

CHAPTER V.

FRAMED.

GEORGE PORTON knew instantly what had happened. The gambler had picked the fifth ace from the floor—the backs were similar—and had palmed it, waiting for just this chance to use it against George. But an attempt to explain this to Hank Mitts would be a waste of breath. All Hank could understand, all he cared about, was that George had beaten him with two aces, that George was the dealer, and that there were five aces in sight. He rose.

There was something majestic in the movement. Six feet two inches in his socks—when he wore socks—and not an ounce of fat on his frame. His face was bearded almost up to the eyes, a black, coarse beard. His mouth was slobbered with tobacco juice, his big head all but rested immediately upon his shoulders, scorning the mediumship of a neck; and his arms were long and thick, his hands massive, hairy.

When he spoke his voice rattled the windows.

"So *that's* the kind o' player you are!"

The others got up from the table, moving back, away from Hank. The two pirates at the end of the bar started forward, raising their rifles, but Hank waved them off.

"I'll take care o' this skunk myself," Hank announced. To George he said: "I'm goin' to bash your nose right through your head, you gander-shanked little son of a thief! I'm goin'

to stick my arm down your throat an' haul your damn' insides right up through your mouth!"

George said nothing, only stared quietly at the giant. George was the only person in the room who remained seated.

Hank Mitts moved slowly toward him, while the others fell still further back. Hank's tiny eyes were bloodshot, and he opened and shut his hands as he walked. He walked with a cat-like tread, crouching a little; for all his size, he was light on his feet.

"If you touch me," George said, "you'll regret it."

He was far from feeling as calm as he looked. But he reasoned that the only way to treat Hank Mitts was as one might treat a wild beast. To argue would be suicide, to show fear fatal.

"Regret it! You mangy little card sharp, you! Stan' up an' git killed right! I'm goin' t' pull you t' pieces—right t' pieces with my own han's!"

He took a quick step forward, lunging wildly with his right fist. George sprang to his feet, and jumped back. The blow went over his left shoulder. He hit Hank twice, hard, in the mouth, and he jumped back again.

Hank roared, spitting blood. He was utterly mad now, a raging monster. He charged, bellowing.

Half around the room they went, George dodging, ducking, springing backward; Hank lunging, lurching, roaring. Repeatedly George punched the pirate's face with all the strength in his body, but it was like peppering a fort with pellets from a child's pea-shooter.

George knew that if he slipped, if he permitted Hank to get too close, if he did not duck in time or move his head fast enough to avoid a single blow, he was as good as dead. Nobody else in the room made the slightest attempt to stop the fight.

HANK paused suddenly, blinking, scowling. He looked like an infuriated bull, puzzled, halting to survey a tantalizing matador. He stared at George for a moment. Then he drew his knife.

"All right! If you won't stan' still I'll slice you up!"

He jumped again, slashing.

George picked up a chair and swung it; it struck Hank's knife hand, spinning the pirate half around, stopping him for an instant. George made good use of that instant. Still clinging to the chair, he scurried past Hank and out the door to the deck. He slammed the door behind him. He threw the chair into the river and stepped into the nearest stateroom.

That stateroom, fortunately, was unoccupied.

Hank Mitts came crashing through the barroom door, his followers at his heels. He yelled, and other pirates came r u n n i n g from all directions. Hank had heard the chair splash into the water.

"Git out the jacks an' light up this side! You, Joe, stan' here with some o' the other boys an' pop that skunk the secon' you see his head in th' water. Pete, run down an' unfasten that soundin' boat an' row out aroun' there with Ratface. Fast, now, before he makes the shore!"

George waited in the dark stateroom, not daring to peek through the window, scarcely daring to breathe, while the search went ahead.

Two jacks—large iron baskets filled with split Southern pine and swung between the prongs of iron forks leaning out over the water from the main deck—were ignited without delay. The

pine burned briskly, lighting the water for fifty yards around; it crackled and hissed, and drops of burning resin fell from it steadily, monotonously, into the water; the resin, still burning, was carried away by the dim stream.

The sounding boat cruised the outer rim of light. One man rowed it, another sat in the stern with a rifle across his knees.

Hank's men tramped back and forth, shouting, searching. But some of them waited at the rails, their rifles cocked.

Hank himself directed the whole business from the promenade deck just outside the barroom door. He still held the bowie knife in his right fist.

And George Porton, again and again, thanked his stars that he had thrown that chair overboard. Luckily, the chair had floated away in the current and was not found.

And eventually even Hank Mitts was obliged to admit that the yellow-bellied skunk of a card cheat must have managed to swim it. Hank returned to the barroom and resumed his drinking.

When all other noises had died, George very carefully opened the stateroom door and peered down the promenade deck. He was safe where he was, but he could not be certain that Grace Lexington was equally safe. Almost anything might happen still on the Lelia Johnson if Hank decided, for instance, to look over the women passengers. Quickly George decided on a daring scheme.

THERE was nobody in sight, so he stepped out. Quietly he ran aft. He hurried down the narrow steps to the main deck. There, unnoticed by the roustabouts, who were all talking at once, he drew aside Big Peter, his valet.

"Get me some old clothes, Peter. I'll explain later. Get me the oldest and dirtiest clothes you can find. Hurry!"

Just outside the larboard engine room he found an open can of grease, and with this he smeared his face and hands. Big Peter, from somewhere, produced a disgraceful coat, a floppety brown felt hat, a pair of trousers so big that George was able to pull them on over his wrinkleless, fawn-colored trousers.

"Lor', Massa, Ah'd nevah know you!"

"I hope not, Peter. I hope nobody else would, either. Where do you sleep?"

The Negro led him to the extreme stern, to a secluded spot among the bales of cotton. The place, besides being remote, was comparatively clean. Elsewhere on the main deck were fish heads, scraps of food, cigar butts, brown spittle . . . George was a trifle sick at the sight of this, and the smell. He had known that deck passengers were given squalid quarters, but it astounded him to see the extent of that squalor.

Here, not ten feet under all the luxury of the cabins—the tinkling prism chandeliers, Wilton carpets, rainbow skylights, gilded furniture—here was a place far more filthy than any slave quarters George ever had seen on land.

"It ain't much nice heah," Big Peter said apologetically.

"I'm not complaining," George assured him. "I'm lucky to be alive at all. Sit down, Peter. I don't want anybody to think I'm anything but another deck passenger."

The promenade, which did not go to the extreme stern, jutted over the end of the main deck like a balcony; and George Porton and Big Peter could see, from where they sat, the end of

the women's cabin. George pointed it out to the servant.

"Those two rooms in the center are where the Lexington ladies are staying, Peter."

"Yes, suh. Ah knows that, suh."

"Are they in there now?"

"Yes, suh."

"You're sure?"

"Yes, suh."

"Well, I want you to keep your eyes peeled on those two doors. If anybody tries to go into either of them—anybody who doesn't belong there—I want you to stop him—understand?"

"Yes, suh."

"Run up there now and tell Miss Grace what's happened to me. Tell her where I am and not to worry."

He watched Big Peter perform this duty, watched Grace answer the knock, saw her silhouetted in her doorway. She glanced down at him, but he made no signal of recognition: there was the chance that one of Hank's men, stationed on the texas deck, might see this and become suspicious. Grace would understand.

Big Peter returned, and the door was closed. Master and servant reclined, side by side, talking in undertones.

The dawn came reluctantly, without haste. On the main deck the passengers chatted in whispers, glancing nervously at one another. The pirates walked back and forth like sentinels. The only real noise came from the barroom, forward, where Hank was still celebrating.

GEORGE PORTON, oddly, felt something of peace in the stern, nestled against a bale of cotton, his shoulder pressing the shoulder of Big Peter. It was pleasant to feel the sense of quiet and security this place gave him. They were nearer to the river itself, here, than he was accustomed to be; they could hear the river swishing so gently against the sides of the boat, swishing caressingly.

Big Peter spoke always in that gentle, respectful voice with which George was familiar. To Big Peter, George Porton could do no wrong; and though he was frightened, to be sure, he was so pleased, so flattered, to be sitting like this with George—sitting back against a bale of cotton, under a starless sky, listening to the swish of the river—that he scarcely felt his fear.

He rolled his eyes toward the lightening sky. "Some o' them rascals goin' t' know you pretty soon, Massa George, when it gits light 'nough."

"Maybe. I've got to take that chance."

Big Peter, shifting his position, sat upright, and turned to stare toward the shore less than a hundred yards away. The Spanish moss hung there wearily, dismally, dipping into the water; underneath it the shadows were packed close, compressed like solid things.

"Them jacks is burned out now," Big Peter observed. "Ain't nobody goin' t' see yuh if yuh jes' slip ovah the side heah an' swim it, Massa George, suh."

"Can't do that, Peter. Have to stay to guard the ladies."

"Ain't no good you can do them if them rascals git nasty."

In the darkness, George smiled. "Maybe. But I must stay, anyway. That's what's called Southern chivalry, Peter."

"Yes, suh." Peter said it politely, but George, who knew him well, knew that what he *thought* was: "Seems more to me like damn' foolishness." However, Peter was a perfect servant, and understood the value of silence.

Hank Mitts came out of the barroom on an inspection trip. Or perhaps Hank merely wished to clear his head in the fresh air. He was very drunk indeed, and apparently in good spirits again. He held a wine glass in one hand, and behind him, among others, walked Harry the bartender, who carried an ice bucket containing a bottle of champagne.

Behind Hank also, and sometimes beside him, walked Senator Boardman of Boardman's Plantation. The Senator obviously had been exercising his well developed charm upon the river pirate; he fairly fawned upon Hank, laughing with him, whispering funny things to him, sometimes slapping him heartily but respectfully on the shoulder. All this attention Hank accepted as no more than his just due. There was, still, something regal, something majestic, about this ragged outlaw.

With his retinue, he paused at the stern end of the promenade, almost outside Grace Lexington's stateroom. But he did not look toward that stateroom, but out over the main deck, where the lower pasengers and roustabouts were huddled in silent, cowed groups. He grinned.

"Nigger down there's got banjo," he rumbled. "Le's go down."

He descended, not very steadily; and the others followed him. He approached the man with the banjo, who was seated near George and Big Peter.

"Play somethin', nigger."

But the owner of the banjo was too frightened to do anything but shake his head.

"Aw, the black worm don' know how t' play!" Hank kicked the seated Negro in the face, knocking him on his back, where he lay motionless, his eyes wide open, not daring even to breathe.

"Somebody else play for us," muttered Hank, when he had recovered his balance—for he had all but knocked himself over by the kick. Carefully he picked up the banjo. He looked around very slowly; things were not focusing well for Hank. He saw Big Peter and George. He thrust the banjo into George's lap. "*You* play!"

GEORGE did not dare disobey. If his hat were knocked off, if his coat were loosened, he was lost. This disguise of his had been assumed in great haste and it was far from complete. Under the disgraceful clothes were his own spotless coat, trousers and waistcoat, his Parisian cravat, his hair meticulously combed, his watch chain, his diamond stud.

He picked up the banjo, and with his head held low—ostensibly to look at the strings, actually to keep his face shadowed—he began to play. He played well. Not that Hank would have known the difference, even if the music had been poor. Hank was delighted; he cheered, and clapped, and once he even tried a few jig steps—and was saved from falling only by the prompt assistance of Senator Boardman of Boardman's Plantation.

"Um . . . Ought to have dancin'," Hank decreed. "Somebody dance . . ."

Either nobody could dance, or nobody would; and Hank was annoyed. He pointed at random to a Negro. "*You* dance!" The Negro made a pitiful attempt to obey this command, but Hank turned away in disgust.

"Keep playin'," he told George. "I'll make somebody dance . . ."

George kept his head low, bending over the banjo. His heart was beating wildly. Hank Mitts was only about two feet from him, and the bowie knife in Hank's belt was on a level with George's face.

"Want woman dance . . . Ain't there no women this boat?" Hank looked slowly around him. "No nigger wenches?"

"Not a one," said Senator Boardman, "but how would a nice white lady do, Hank? Would you like to see that, eh?"

"Umph . . . Where? White woman on this tub?"

"There's a mighty pretty one right up there on the promenade this minute," said Senator Boardman, leaning close to Hank Mitts. "Sweet, eh, Hank? Quality, that girl is!"

He pointed; and Hank Mitts looked up to the women's cabin. George stopped playing and ventured a glance in the same direction.

Grace Lexington, weary of her stateroom, had stepped outside for a breath of fresh air. Perhaps the friendly sound of the banjo had caused her to suppose that the pirates had gone and that everything was all right again. She opened her door and took a half-step out on the deck. Then, seeing so many men looking up at her, she paused, frightened.

There in the dark doorway, her hair down her back, the dull light of dawn upon her pale round face, she was as lovely as a picture in a frame. It made George Porton gasp just to look at her, and for the moment he forgot even the danger of their position.

It made Hank Mitts gasp to look at her, too. Then Hank smiled, slowly, meaningfully; he nodded, very slowly.

Grace, startled, stepped back into her stateroom and closed the door behind her. But the damage had been done. Hank Mitts, discovering a new diversion, forgot about everything else. He even forgot about his champagne, and the glass slipped from his fingers and tinkled into fragments on the deck.

"Ah . . ." murmured Hank.

"Pretty, eh?"

"I'll go up an' see her myself," said Hank. "You stay here, Sen'tor, wi' th' other boys."

He hitched up his trousers, fastened the one remaining button of his shirt, and lurched toward the stairs that led to the promenade deck.

CHAPTER VI.

BEAST OF PREY.

"*WAIT a minute!*" George Porton sprang to his feet, recklessly deserting the shadow of the cotton bale. He slipped in his excitement and fell to his knees—his hat dropped off. He rose again, heedless.

Hank Mitts wheeled to face him. Hank's mouth fell open.

"Well, if it ain't—"

Hank reached for his knife, and George used the only weapon available—the banjo. He struck Hank Mitts squarely in the face. Then he ducked, and, crouching, butted through the group, thinking to draw Hank away from his pursuit of Grace. Somebody kicked him as he went, and somebody else punched him on the side of the head, causing him to stagger for an instant. But he recovered, and dashed for the middle of the boat, bending very low, his arms over his head.

He heard a shot, and a bullet thunked into a cotton bale just in front of him. He sprang behind that bale, but he did not stop running.

He heard another shot. There was a sharp crash of glass; the window of the larboard galley had been smashed.

George gained the cover of the galley. He dashed through it, down a corridor past the larboard engine room,

through the first door he came to, up some steps. Then he doubled in his tracks and started for the stern.

He had two reasons for taking this course. The first was that the pirates would expect him to make for the bow, in order to get as far away from them as possible; so they would not, at first, look for him in the stern. The second reason was Grace Lexington. He must warn her and her mother. He must hurry them into some other stateroom —any other stateroom that was not occupied.

Below him, behind him, as he ran, there was a tramping of heavy feet. Shouts echoed up and down the passageways of the old boat, shattering the staid silence of dawn.

The passage down which he ran terminated in a door leading to the promenade deck only a short distance from the Lexington stateroom. When he reached this door he did not swing it open at once; instead, he opened it less than an inch, and peered out.

It was just at this moment that there came, to add to the confusion of sounds, a mad ringing of bells in the engine room. And from the pilot house, where the lookouts were stationed, came an over-carrying shout.

"Here she comes, Hank! Here she comes!"

GEORGE looked up, and saw the Eclipse swinging around the up-river bend. A lovely sight, the Eclipse. Going fast, because she was so late already, her daintily pointed bow ripped open the chocolate water, which danced away on either side, vastly agitated where the paddle wheels hit it.

Her green and scarlet running lights gleamed bravely in the dim, dead glow of dawn. Steam stood out at a forty-five degree angle from her 'scape pipes, and black smoke and many sparks flew gleefully from her tall, proud stacks. She fairly shone, the Eclipse, even in that light.

Her name was conspicuously painted in gold on her bright paddle boxes, and above this was an Indian's head. Her hurricane deck rail was tricked out with all manner of gauds. Her pilot's house was a mass of fancy gilded iron-work, and it was surrounded by a stiff, gilded finial which sparkled like a living thing. From the polished fretwork of iron between her stacks a blue mail flag flapped and snapped gleefully.

Such was the Eclipse, one of the fastest and one of the most beautiful boats that ever cut the waters of the lower Mississippi.

And now the Lelia Johnson, older, stodgier, seemed to awaken. The wild ringing of bells continued, in response to which signals the Lelia shuddered, shook herself. The Lelia began to shove forward; her paddles clacked and clacked, slowly at first, then faster, faster. The water at her sides, which had been rolling lazily along, sprang suddenly into action, became alarmed, leaping and dancing away from the Lelia, and breaking into a million light brown whirlpools which were pushed rudely upstream.

The Lelia Johnson was a huge amphibious beast of prey breaking a long vigil. Her engines thudded and bumped; faster and faster went her paddles; and the light brown whirlpools at her sides multiplied amazingly as she leaped forward to the challenge. Steam began to shriek through her 'scape pipes, sparks began to fly from her stacks where previously there had been but listless columns of smoke.

This was George Porton's chance to get to Grace's stateroom—to be in a

position to defend her. Quietly and warily he stepped out on the promenade and walked to her room.

Nobody saw him. The racing Eclipse commanded all eyes.

He knocked gently on the door and rattled the knob. "Grace! Grace! Open up! It's George!"

A moment later, with the door closed behind them, he was holding her in his arms, kissing her, murmuring reassurance.

An inside door connected the two staterooms. In the other one, Mrs. Lexington lay in her bunk, praying soundlessly. She was so frightened that she was sick. George tried in vain to comfort her, to get her up. He stepped back into Grace's stateroom to get her a glass of water. There his glance happened to fall on the doorknob—and he stopped in his tracks.

It was dark in the stateroom, for the lamp was not lighted and the shade was drawn over the one window. But it was not so dark that George could not see that the doorknob was moving. Somebody was trying to get in, somebody on the deck.

Grace, too, saw this. She looked at George, her eyes filled with fear. He held a forefinger over his mouth, and she nodded, pursing her lips. He motioned her into her mother's stateroom. She went without a sound, and he closed the door behind her.

Then he returned his gaze to the doorknob. It still was moving. There came a gentle rapping. George did not stir. If this were an enemy he must play for time—effect a ruse to divert attention from Grace.

A voice called very quietly: "Miss Lexington?"

Now George gasped. It was the voice of Senator Boardman of Boardman's Plantation.

"Miss Lexington! Open up for me, please. I have some important news about Mr. Porton."

George smiled grimly, but he made no sort of answer. Clearly the Senator had not forgotten how lovely Grace looked framed in the doorway there when they all had seen her from the main deck; and clearly he was taking advantage, now, of the fact that in the fuss about the Eclipse nobody was any longer paying attention to him.

The door was shaken now, shaken hard. The knob was definitely rattled. The lock was a flimsy old thing and would not hold against any real pressure.

"Miss Lexington! Open this door immediately!" A pause. Then: "Open this door, or I'll break it down!"

CHAPTER VII.

A LONG SHOT.

UP on the texas deck, Hank Mitts watched the Eclipse speeding downriver with her cargo of gold bullion. His men were posted everywhere, but mostly they lined the rail of the main deck, where they held their rifles, waiting. The Eclipse had been a quarter mile upstream when first they had seen her, but so fast was she flying that she had got a quarter mile ahead of them before the Lelia had started in full pursuit.

Hank Mitts walked into the pilot house. The pilot, covered by a pistol held by one of Hank's men, was pale, nervous. His hands moved back and forth on the wheel. His gaze was fixed straight ahead.

"Go right up to that boat," Hank ordered.

"What do you want me to do, ram her?"

"All right, ram 'er. I don't care! Only catch her, that's all!"

"She's a fourteen knotter," the pilot whimpered. "She'll walk away from us."

"All right. You jes' steer right at her, see?" They were rounding a bend, and Hank pointed to it. "Cut this corner sharp, you jackass!"

"Got to take it wide. Snags in all along there."

"I don't give a damn! Cut it, I tell you!"

The pilot, trembling, turned the wheel, and the straining Lelia Johnson crept a little closer to her prey.

Hank started for the engine room. Coming out of the pilot house he collided with Harry the bartender, who, exactly obeying an order Hank himself already had forgotten, stood there with the ice bucket and the remainder of the champagne.

"What the—"

Hank saw the champagne, and remembered. He grabbed the bottle with a grunt, drank deeply, and threw it over the rail.

On the main deck he bellowed further orders, addressing the roustabouts. He pointed to the piles of cargo.

"Overboard with this stuff. Every bit of it!"

The purser started: "But if—"

"It goes over, I say! An' if that ain't enough for us t' catch that boat, then I start kickin' all the passengers over after it, see? An' the crew too," he added, glaring at the purser. "Dump over that pig iron in the hol', too. Every scrap of it!"

HE stamped into the starboard engine room, where a worried engineer, grimy and troubled, clung to his throttle.

"We got t' go faster 'n this!"

The engineer protested. "We jus' can't. This boat won't go any faster!"

"She *will* go faster or you go to Kingdom Come, so take your choice!" Hank Mitts drew his bowie knife.

"If—if I carry any less water in the boilers she'll—"

"Well, carry less, then."

"But I only got a couple of inches there now. If I let any out she'll blow us all to pieces!"

"Let some out," said Hank Mitts. He stalked back to the center of the engine room, and his glance fell on the safety valve. "What's this dingus?"

"Safety valve."

"Don't that make more speed, when that's fastened down?"

A conscientious man after all, the engineer made a desperate stand. "If I was to fasten that down the boilers wouldn't stand the strain. The rivets wouldn't stand it. *Something* 'd go, anyway."

Hank Mitts's eyes grew very small, seemed almost to disappear into his face.

He nodded slowly, staring at the engineer.

"You mean you refuse to do it?"

The engineer nodded, wetting his lips. He was terribly pale.

"Yes, I—I refuse to do it."

Hank walked slowly toward him. The engineer retreated to a corner, and there he waited. Hank, holding his knife like a sword, came close to him—and slashed suddenly. The engineer ducked, and the knife cut open his forehead. Blood began to flow profusely.

Hank cut again, quickly, lightly, deliberately. The blade slashed the engineer's chin. More blood.

The engineer's face was wet with sweat, and his eyes were huge with terror. He slid to his knees.

"I—I'll do it! Don't kill me!"

Hank Mitts put his knife back into its sheath. "See y' do," he rumbled. "I'll have a man here watchin' you." In the doorway he paused. "I saw some barrels o' pitch out in the cargo there," he added. "Don't throw those over. Throw them in the fire. They might help."

Now he scarcely reeled at all when he walked. He went to the bow of the boat and stood there, and long and eloquently he cursed the speeding Eclipse. He fired a pistol at her—though any sane man would know that a pistol couldn't carry half that distance. But Hank was overcome with sudden rage, hot rage. He raised his knife and cursed the Eclipse. He raved, gibbered. Ranged along the rail, his men stared curiously at him; they had seen Hank in some terrible rages, but never before had they seen him so ferocious as this.

Somebody else was watching him, too. The captain of the Eclipse put down his little brass telescope and spoke to a man in buckskins.

"It's Hank, sure enough. I've seen him before."

"Can he catch us?"

"Probably. Never knew that old thing could be made to go so fast, but she's gaining on us. If I cut the bends the way she's doing I'd rip the bottom out of this boat—we're carrying a big cargo right now. And if I give her more steam we might blow up. I reckon it's up to you to try that shot. Can you make it?"

"Not with them engines shakin' like this." The frontiersman knelt, cocking his rifle. He sighted carefully, and waited. "When I raise my finger here, you signal to shut them off."

"Remember, if we do that we'll never be able to pull away from them again. We're ruined if you miss!"

The frontiersman smiled a cool, grim smile.

GEORGE PORTON stood in the center of the stateroom, silent, tense, ready to fling himself into action. The Lelia Johnson throbbed and rattled, shuddered from stem to stern. The Lelia Johnson was going faster than ever her makers had dreamed she could go. But they must have made her well, those workmen, for her old rivets held, and her overstrained boilers held too; and she tore madly through the water.

The gambler's voice came again.

"I'm going to break down this door if you don't open it."

George, biding his time, did not answer.

Then the door began to thud and bang. Senator Boardman was ramming it with his shoulder, and he was a heavy man and strong. The tiny lock creaked protestingly.

The ramming ceased, and there was a second voice. It was the gentle voice of Big Peter. George, in the stateroom, could not hear what Big Peter said, but Senator Boardman's answer was loud enough.

"I *can't* break in here, eh? Well, you better not try to stop me!"

Big Peter said something else George could not hear. Then:

"Take your black hands off me, nigger, or you've drawn your last breath of life!"

This time the Senator's voice was not so loud; it was low, passionate; it meant business. And George suddenly remembered that the gambler probably had a pistol in his waistcoat pocket—a pistol the pirates had not found. Something about the Senator's voice reminded George of this. Something about the voice made George realize

that Big Peter was about to be slaughtered. The time for action had come.

He sprang for the door and threw it open. He jumped out, knocked up the gambler's arm. There was a sharp explosion. Big Peter stiffened, swung half around, slid without a sound to his knees, crumpling, and toppled sideways.

Then George Porton went into a black rage. He lost all sense of training, of background. He knew only that he wished to kill. He saw only the smooth, handsome face of Senator Boardman of Boardman's Plantation. He leapt, slashing out with both fists.

The fury of the attack drove the gambler back. His face was cut, his nose all but broken. But he rallied, and closed in. The gambler was no stranger to rough and tumble fighting, and no coward. He knew a thousand tricks. He hit low and hard, and frequently, while George struggled to shake him away in order to get in a telling blow to the jaw.

They slipped, and both went down, rolling. Senator Boardman, though older than George, was unexpectedly quick, and very strong. He used not only his fists, but also his feet, his elbows, his knees. Once, punching for George's face, he straightened his thumb, hoping to put out George's eye; but the younger man turned his head to that blow and caught him on the temple.

They got up, separated. For three seconds they eyed one another, panting, scowling. Then George sprang in again, flaying with both fists. The Senator dropped to one knee and tried to slip under the punches and get his arms around George's waist; but an uppercut straightened him; his chin went back, and George hit again—with all his strength.

The second blow caught the Senator when his balance was poor, and it slammed him against the side rail of the deck. The rail cracked at the top, and four feet of it broke off. The Senator gasped, clutching madly at empty air, striving to recover his balance. He stared wildly, his eyes popping. His hat fell off. Then he went over the side.

George rushed to the rail, but the Mississippi took its victim swiftly, and George saw nothing in the water but a fashionable gray beaver which bobbed erratically sternward in the turbulent wake of the Lelia Johnson.

George hurried back to Big Peter, and shook the Negro.

"Speak to me, Peter! Are you all right? Speak to me, you black nigger you!"

Big Peter opened his eyes and smiled a wan smile. "Ah—" He stopped, but still smiled. ". . . Only mah shoulder," he muttered, and closed his eyes again.

George examined the wound. The derringer fired a huge slug, and undoubtedly the Negro's right shoulder was broken. But no vital spot had been touched.

Grace was beside him, and he stood, taking her in his arms.

"Are—are you all right, dear?"

He smiled and kissed her. "Everything is all right," he told her. He led her to the broken rail, and they looked toward the bow. Not merely sparks, but solid streams of flame were pouring and roaring from the Lelia Johnson's stacks. The Eclipse was coming closer all the time.

IN the very bow, shrieking, waving his arms, was the lunatic—the raving, cursing maniac—Hank Mitts of the river. In the dim light of dawn his figure seemed colossal, un-

believable. Even over the thumping of the engines they could hear his voice.

The 'scape pipes of the Eclipse shrilled forth steam with accelerated violence, and that vessel came nearer, nearer. What had happened? Had her engines broken down? Was she giving up the race? Submitting to her fate?

Scarcely a hundred and fifty yards separated the two boats. Then from the hurricane deck of the Eclipse came a smart, stiff puff of smoke—and a crack, like the cracking of a whip.

Hank Mitts had been shot directly between the eyes. That terrible animal was dead, and its roaring ceased. Some nervous reaction held the corpse for a moment, and Hank's fists flayed the air even while his body went limp. Even when he was falling, already finished, he seemed to be trying to fight.

His body hit the rail, low at this point, and rolled into the river.

Bells rang wildly, and the Lelia Johnson's engines were stopped. The shuddering ceased. The boat became uncannily quiet, and drifted through the water like a marine ghost.

Hank had been his own whole gang. The others, seeing him killed, seeing the Eclipse coming closer, went into panic. They threw away their rifles. Some of them dashed for the cover of the galley or the engine room. Most of them stripped off their shirts and dived into the water, and soon the Mississippi was alive with bobbing heads. One perfect shot had ended the whole business and had broken up the most notorious gang of desperados the river ever had known. Aboard the Eclipse a tanned, blue-eyed frontiersman was calmly cleaning his rifle.

The Lelia Johnson, still coasting, caught up to the celebrated Eclipse, and passed her a little—actually beat her to Natchez, for by now both boats had rounded a bend and the city swept into sight. The Lelia Johnson had done well. She would never be the same boat again, true. But what of that? She'd beaten the Eclipse on her own run, and what more could any steamboat ask?

George Porton held a trembling, weeping fiancée in his arms, and patted her, and whispered to her, and kissed her tenderly, smiling.

"Everything's all right, honey. See? See, here's home now. We're home already, we came so fast."

THE END.

What's in a Name?

LLANFAIRPWELLGWYNGYLLGOGERYCHWYRNDROBWILTYSILIOGOGOGOCH is the name of a little village in the island of Anglesey, North Wales, called Llanfair for short.

The name, as analyzed by Sir John Morris Jones, professor of Welsh at Bangor University, North Wales, means "Mary-church of the Pool of White Hazels rather near the swift whirlpool of the church of Tysilio of the Red Cave." The village is popular as a vacation resort.

Carlton L. Dalley.

The Gentleman and the Tigress

By BOB DAVIS

It was a mysterious and fateful package Omaha gave Lola when he went out to "face death"

"Burn this if I'm not back by ten," Omaha said

"AND I'm tellin' you, young feller," said Big Foot, slapping his sombrero at the tenuous cloud of greasewood smoke curling from the campfire, "this here readin' of books ain't no fit pastime for cowpunchers."

"Not if they can't read," answered the lad, bending over a tattered volume resting on his saddle blanket.

Big Foot, ignoring the barb from the kid, picked his teeth in dignified silence. In the manner of his kind, having no repartee on hand at the moment, he rolled a cigarette and returned to the contemplation of the stars.

A coyote yelped in the distance.

"What's the story about?" inquired Big Foot, after a spell of silence, but with no rancor in his voice. "It shore has took hold of you."

"'The Lady or the Tiger,'" responded the youth, without taking his eyes from the grimy text. "By—lemme see—" he turned to the battered cover. "—By—Frank R. Stockton."

This information, being twice as much as Big Foot sought, resulted in a long period of quiet, broken only by intermittent notes from the slinking night raider in the remote darkness.

"I didn't ax you who writ it," resumed Big Foot. "I axed you what it's about."

"Just a minute, and I'll tell you," was the breathless response of the reader, turning the last page eagerly. "I can see that hell—is—going—to—pop. Gee—whiz . . ."

Under the vast blanket of sidereal splendor that spanned the sky, the juvenile, his eyes sparkling, his whole being animated by the recital, thereupon revealed to the illiterate Big Foot how the hero of the Stockton tale approached the portal behind which was concealed—either his lady love, or—the tiger. "And damned if the author tells what the guy met up with when he opened the door," concluded the boy throwing his hands aloft in complete surrender to consummate art.

"W-ELL," said the gentleman of the large feet, after rolling and licking another cigarette, "I kin tell a better story 'en that, and not leave you up in the air." Leisurely he lit the Bull Durham.

"You ain't never been down in the Panhandle country. You ain't never been anywhere to speak of, yet. Anyhow, when the railroad throwed a branch into a new minin' district a bird shows up from Omaha and horns in on the quick money. That's before you was born—when men was males. The Omaha bucko says as how he was a gentleman, which he proves by wearin' clean shirts, writin' letters and keepin' books. Like as not you've heard about high born parties a'fallin' in love with low born females—"

"That's what they all say," answered the boy irreverently.

"—which Omaha done," said Big Foot. "The gal's name was Lola and she throwed hash in a chow factory down by the depot. Omaha assessed his supply of clean shirts, got his-self a shave regular and starts a campaign for to win Lola's affections; which he done."

"And how long did that last?" asked the bookworm, becoming interested in the plot of Big Foot's tale.

"Oh, about two months. And then Lola, one of these here now, what you might call a wild cat, says to her gentleman friend, 'You lead me to a minister,' which same he also done, bein' as how parties quick on the draw hinted was the right idear, as he had been taking up all her time. Lola moves into Omaha's es-tate and retires from the hash factory. Fair enough. Fair . . . enough."

"After that he beat her up," interrupted the boy, familiar with the conventions of human relationship, "which, as her legal man, he had a right for to do."

"Nawsir," said Big Foot, "he was a gentleman and took his medicine. I ain't sayin' how long he took it. But I will say that Omaha wasn't cut out for a home lovin' career. I'll say *that*."

"Why are you stringing this story out so long?" asked the boy, impatiently.

"Listen, Kid," retorted Big Foot, emitting twin shafts of smoke from his nostrils, "you been readin' this here 'Lady or the Tiger' fer half an hour. Did I say, 'Hurry up, Mr. Stockton, and spill it?' I did not. Remember that, and I'll git on with the drammer of Omaha and his bride. I calls it 'The Gentleman and the Tigress' which don't interfere none with Frank's yarn.

"Now get this: One day Lola's lawful, wedded husband says to her, in strict confidence, swearin' her to secrecy, 'My dear, there is somethin' in my life about which I ain't never told you.' 'Whut is it?' asks Lola. 'I'm wanted by the police,' says Omaha. 'The only evidence upon which I could be convicted is in this letter file, which I am now placin' in yore hands.'

"With that he slips Lola a flat package all wrapped up in brown paper and tied with a string. Lola asks whut is she to do with it, and Omaha tells her that he is goin' down town to see if a certain man who blowed in from Nebraska that mornin' was on his trail. 'If he is,' says Lola's husband, 'and I'm not back here by ten o'clock, put this bundle in the stove and burn it up. They can't convict me with no ashes.'

"And Lola says, 'What's the matter with burnin' it up now?' to which Omaha says, 'No. These here documents also put two other men in my power, and I don't want to de-stroy the evidence unless I am in danger myself. And another thing, Lola, I may git mixed up in a gun play. I may be shot. You can't never tell.

"If I die with my boots on and these here papers is found, my es-tate will be con-fiscated and you won't get a red cent. You can see how it is, Lola.' And Omaha takes her in his arms and tells her to be brave and hope for the best, and to do what he says at ten o'clock if he don't come home. She begs him to burn the papers then and there and not to go to what might be his doom. 'I ain't no coward,' says he, 'and must face the danger. Do as I say, Lola, and trust to yore guidin' star.' With that he gits his gun, kisses the wife good-by and goes out for to meet his fate."

BIG FOOT, who was a born dramatist, heaved some more grease-wood on the bivouac, rolled his third cigarette and eyed his impatient auditor, whose anxiety was now at fever pitch, accentuated by another yelp from the marauding coyote.

"By the time Omaha was well on his way," continued the historian, "Lola, bein' a female and in-quisitive like 'em all, went to work, untied the letter file and took a squint at the contents. She got the surprise of her life."

"Whatwasinit?" cried the boy, merging the query into one word.

Big Foot was not to be hurried. "Keep your shirt on, Kid," he replied. "Me and Mister Stockton believes in makin' 'em wait. You'll get it fast enough when the kick comes. All I got to tell you now is that Omaha had the right idear when he told Lola he might git mixed up in a gun play, and be shot up. He was."

"Who shot him?" asked the boy in a trembling, strained voice.

"Lola."

"What . . . for?"

"Be-cause," answered Big Foot, his eyes bent on Frank Stockton's patron, "be-cause in that letter file, wrapped up in newspaper, Lola found a cap and fuse stuck into a stick of dynamite."

THE END.

The Door of Destiny

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

Author of "By Thundering Fist," "The Siege of Ste. Anne," etc.

John Norman was getting close to the secret of his past in that mysterious château near Quebec—and even closer to death

"This time you will not vanish," Bedard snarled

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

WHEN John Norman, young American, passed through the front door of the house of Ovide Bedard in Quebec he was an information seeker. Within a few minutes he was fighting for his life.

As a baby, Norman had been left with a family in the Adirondack Mountains. His foster-parents, now dead, told him that a stranger had left him there. Now a young man, Norman had received a mysterious message, directing him to seek the home of Ovide Bedard in the Canadian city.

When Norman faces Bedard and asks him if he knows anything of Norman's parentage, Bedard's answer is to call in several of his servants, who overpower Norman, tie him up and take him to Bedard's château in the country.

There, Norman talks for a moment with Madelon Bedard, Ovide's distant cousin and ward, who tells him that she

This story began in the Argosy for July 9.

herself is virtually a prisoner in the château. Bedard calmly tells Norman that he must die and throws him into a dungeon of the ancient château.

An attempt to poison the prisoner is balked by Black Antoine, an old woodsman who, although he is one of Bedard's retainers, hates his master. Taking Antoine with him, Norman escapes and returns to Quebec, pursued by Bedard.

The two fugitives seek refuge in the house of Jean Moreau, Antoine's friend, a dynamiter by profession. Bedard's followers storm the isolated house and capture Antoine and Moreau.

Norman escapes and goes to the chief of police with his story. His reception is polite but cold. Ovide Bedard is a respectable citizen, he is told. He was at one time secretary to a certain David Norman, but David Norman had died, leaving his fortune to Bedard. Yes, David Norman had a son, but the son had died as an infant.

Seeing that he cannot get help in that quarter, Norman returns to Bedard's château, determined to rescue Antoine and Moreau. He enters, is told by Madelon that the two prisoners have been taken to the torture dungeon, and starts to descend. He encounters a guard, armed with a rifle. The guard is haranguing Henriette, the old cook, who is mourning the death of her grandson.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE RACK.

SUDDENLY the man halted and muttered angrily. He set his rifle against the wall and opened a door from behind which came a wailing.

"Shut up, Henriette!" he barked. "This affair is bad enough without your caterwauling!"

The bushman slammed the door he had opened, and that was the last voluntary movement he made. Norman had stepped silently forward and picked up his rifle. As the man turned the butt of his own weapon met him in the stomach. He gave one agonized grunt and doubled over to the floor.

Norman knelt and bound and gagged him as fast as his fingers could move. He used the man's own neckcloth, his belt, strips from his shirt, and in little more than a minute that one of the enemy forces was out of the fighting until some one released him.

Discarding the rifle as too awkward, Norman appropriated the revolver from the guard's belt and with a finger inside the trigger guard, he went down into the first of the cellars. Light came up from the opening where the stairs descended to the dungeon. A steady murmur of voices was going on below, with a confused sound of movement.

A deep voiced groan rose above the other sounds. Norman tried to shut out of his mind the picture of the terrible instrument he had seen down there. As yet he had no definite plan. His immediate object was to get near enough to find out exactly what was going on.

To that end he advanced noiselessly until he could look down the second stairway. None of the men in the depths were in sight, but their voices came to him distinctly now.

"Bring Moreau over here where he can see everything," said Bedard, without a hint of emotion in his voice. "I want him to understand what is going to happen to Black Antoine, and then I want him to see it when it does happen. This machine is for people who talk too

much as well as for people who talk too little!"

"If I had got my hands on you back there in the Rue Petit Champlain you wouldn't be able to talk at all now!" roared the big Moreau. "Wait until I get out of here, you cat-eyed scoundrel—"

"You aren't going to get out," said Bedard. "That bellow of yours will turn to a squeal and then you will tell me what connection you have with Antoine!"

"None!" shouted Moreau. "He came in as a friend, for shelter, and—"

"And you expect me to believe that you risked your life on that account?" interrupted Bedard, with a trace of a sneer.

"*Monsieur!*" The voice of Black Antoine broke in, thick with fear and supplication. "Have mercy! I swear I told the American nothing! He had his pistol against my ribs! I was forced to do as he told me!"

"You fool!" exclaimed Bedard. "Do you expect me to believe your drivelings? Who sent that strip of birch bark to Norman? Or did you take it to him that time when you said you must visit your sister in Maine? Is the son of David Norman buried here in Quebec or was he taken to the United States? Why did this man who calls himself Norman choose the house of Moreau to-day unless you guided him? You knew Moreau, and you knew that the door would be open!"

"I know nothing of all that!" screamed Antoine. "Nothing, I tell you! Have mercy—"

"Put him on the rack!" Bedard did not raise his voice, but it somehow triumphed over the pleadings of old Antoine. "You, Gustave and Baptiste! Swing it around so that he will face this way! That's it! Move Moreau up there so he can see. Now put the old crowbait on there! And if he dies before I find out what I want to know it will go hard with you men! Stretch him a little at a time!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE SLIDING PANEL.

WITH every muscle taut, John Norman went down a step at a time into that fearful place. A single creak from the stairs would betray him. But in this he was fortunate. Not a sound marked his movements. His head passed the level of the floor and he was able to see into the vaulted depths.

The rack and the little group around it were half hidden from him by intervening pillars and by wavering shadows, but moans and sounds of a futile struggle told Norman that they were fastening old Antoine to the rollers.

Norman reached the floor and moved from one pillar to another until he commanded a clear view of the grim picture. Bedard stood like a major devil in a scene from the infernal regions, arms folded, brows contracted as he glared down at the prostrate form of Black Antoine.

Four men were busy lashing the wrists and ankles of the old man to ropes which ran to the rollers at the head and foot of the platform. They pushed him down viciously when he heaved against their hands. If a sound came from his lips some one of them struck him in the mouth.

Jean Moreau, p a n t i n g, leaned against the gripping hands of the men who held him. They had his arms twisted painfully behind his back and only the threat of a broken elbow or a dislocated shoulder kept the giant

from plunging at the minor fiends who worked about the rack.

Bedard took a step forward and stared down into the face of his victim. If the keen knife he held, or any power of terror, or any strength of will, could drag a confession from Antoine then Ovide Bedard was going to have it. Already the old man, bleeding at the mouth, was weakening. In that moment John Norman forgave Antoine whatever evil had been done by him.

Two of the bushmen took their places at the cranks which turned the rollers. Bedard lifted his hand.

"Now!" he said.

The wooden rollers squeaked. The ropes gave forth a groaning sound. The body of old Antoine stiffened on the platform, and then he shrieked so that the torture chamber rang with the sound.

"I'll tell whatever you like! Mercy, M. Bedard! Stop them!"

This was the moment for which John Norman had waited. It was the moment of triumph for Bedard, when his complete attention was focused on his victim. Every man in the vaulted chamber except Norman was gazing at the pitiful figure stretched upon the rack. And Norman's eyes were on the broad chest of Ovide Bedard, where he intended to put a bullet if his orders were not obeyed.

"Bedard," he said, "look at me!"

OVIDE BEDARD turned instantly, but the expression of that remarkable man did not change. His eyes grew a little brighter. A slight shiver passed through his body. But his tremendous will power met the shock and held him steadfast. The bushmen remained motionless, staring. A long, whistling breath came from Black Antoine.

"Don't move, Bedard," warned Norman. "If you or one of your men moves without my orders I shall shoot you first!"

Norman had chosen his position well. His line of retreat to the stairway was clear. He could point his pistol at any man in the cellar and yet he was far enough away from the nearest so that an attempt to rush him would cost at least two or three lives.

"Cut Antoine free," said Norman. "Then stand clear of the rack! You others step away from Moreau! And you, Bedard, tell them to do as I order if they hesitate! After what I have seen I would rather enjoy shooting you!"

"Do as he orders, Baptiste," said Bedard in a low voice. "Norman, it would have been better for you if you had taken the advice of the chief of police. For before this fight is over I'll have you through your own weakness! The only way for you to win is to shoot me now! And you won't do it!"

John Norman knew that the keen, ruthless mind of Bedard had seen the truth. Unless Bedard made some hostile move, unless one of his men precipitated a battle, Norman would not fire. He could not shoot that unresisting man before him even though he knew that if he did the danger to his life might very likely dissolve like mist. The bushmen had no reward to expect if their leader died. They would rather have immunity for what they had already done than bullets.

"I fight in my own way," said Norman. "Moreau, help Antoine to stand and take him to the stairway. Be careful none of those fellows gets behind you so that he can use you for a shield!"

Moreau lifted Antoine bodily in his

arms and began to back slowly away from the tense group about the rack.

"Do you realize that you can't get away from this house?" asked Bedard. "We'll rush you as soon as you've got onto the stairs where you can't cover us with the pistol!"

"I realize that you're very cleverly giving orders to your men under cover of telling me what to expect!" exclaimed Norman. "Start fighting any time you like! Some of you will meet the devil before it's finished!"

Moreau passed out of Norman's range of vision. The shuffling of his shoepacs on the stone floor was the only sound in the cellar. Then one of those shuffling feet landed with a thud on the stairs.

Norman had waited for that sound. He moved slowly backward, keeping his pistol leveled at Bedard. He heard Moreau go up the stairs and knew that he was safe in the cellar above. Norman backed against the stairway and found the bottom tread with his foot.

Now there was a movement in the group by the rack. Bedard leaped sidewise and vanished behind a pillar. A spurt of flame came from the shadows. Norman fired and leaped up the stairs three at a time. A bullet raked his shoulder. Then he stumbled through the opening at the top of the stairway and was out of range.

NORMAN squirmed around on his stomach and emptied the revolver in the direction of the rack. Bullets whistled past him and plunked into the timbers overhead. He heard Moreau going up the second flight of stairs.

Every second was precious now. Norman scrambled up the stairway, went past Moreau, and sprang into the corridor ready for anything that he might meet. But the house was still silent except for the wailing of old Henriette. The sentry still lay bound and gagged on the floor.

Norman whirled and pulled Moreau and Antoine through the doorway. Then he slammed the door and bolted it just as a brace of shots from below splintered one of the panels.

"Upstairs!" panted Norman. "Follow me!"

They raced through the house and up the main stairway. Madelon Bedard came out of the shadows, at the pounding of their feet. She ran before them, carrying a candle. At the rear of the second floor she opened a door and went lightly up an enclosed flight of stairs.

They were in an attic, littered by odds and ends and wavering with shadows. Madelon struck down the flash light that Norman pulled out of his pocket.

"Not here!" she exclaimed. "There are windows back and front!"

She ran to one of the ends of the long attic, where the walls had no visible opening, and went behind a pile of trunks with the men at her heels. She held the candle to the wall, thrust two fingers into an innocent looking knot hole, and a panel slid back leaving an opening large enough for a man to enter.

"There's a false wall at this end of the room," she said, "and a narrow flight of steps up to the space under the peak of the roof."

"Doesn't Bedard know—" began Norman.

"No! I am the only living person who knows of this chamber above the ceiling! The other one who knew is dead! He told me that he had shared the secret only with me!"

"Who was it?" asked Norman, as

he made ready to follow Moreau and Antoine into the wall.

"Your father, M. Norman! He said I might need a hiding place some day!"

CHAPTER X.

MURDER!

JOHN NORMAN turned away from a loophole in one of the gable ends of the château. The long, triangular space under the roof was lighted only by the candle which Madelon Bedard had given him, and that was shaded so that no hint of it would show through the loophole.

Moreau and Antoine were dark blots, sitting cross legged on the floor. They talked in whispers. The bowls of their pipes glowed and the heavy fumes of homegrown tobacco weighed upon the stale air.

"We're trapped," said Norman, in a low voice. "Apparently the men who were looking for me in Quebec have got back. They're all around the house, with lanterns and torches. A cat couldn't sneak out now!"

"I've found a stick of dynamite in the pocket of my coat," said Moreau. "It's one I got ready to use yesterday, and didn't. Then I forgot all about it. If we can get those pigs into one place I'll blow them all to sausage meat!"

"That's the best news I've heard since *mademoiselle* showed us this place," Norman told him. "Don't forget again that you've got that dynamite! It may be the means of getting us out of here!"

"Why didn't you think of something like that this morning?" asked Antoine. "You could have spattered Bedard all over the cliff there in the Rue Petit Champlain!"

"They were on us before I had time to think," admitted Moreau. "*Sacré!* I was still wondering how they dared attack the house of Jean Moreau when they burst in on us! You knifed one of them! The avalanche fell! Somebody hit me on the head with the iron bar!"

"I am sorry that it was Théophile who came at me first," said Antoine, in a shaken voice. "I have done some thinking in this past hour, me! He was young! It might just as well have been one of the others. It would have been a good job if I had got my knife between the ribs of Baptiste, for example."

"Antoine," said Norman, "you've had a foot in both camps. Don't you think it's time for you to take a stand with me? Aren't you the man who handed me that piece of birch bark?"

"It is possible, *monsieur*," replied Antoine, after a moment of hesitation. "Certainly I can get no worse from Bedard if I tell you the truth!"

Norman sat down beside Black Antoine. This was a moment for which he had hoped. He could feel his heart pounding.

"Antoine," he said, leaning forward, "are you the man who took me to the house of Pete Bashaw more than twenty years ago?"

Norman waited, scarcely breathing, for a reply. Black Antoine wriggled in the darkness. His pipe guttered madly.

"Pete Bashaw was a good fellow!" he exclaimed, at last. "I knew him before he moved to the United States! He never knew where you came from! But if I go to jail there are plenty who will go with me—"

A WHISPER cut through the darkness.

"Antoine!" it said. "Come here! I want to talk with you."

"*Dieu Seigneur!*" breathed the old

man, trembling. "Who is it that calls Antoine?"

"It's from the stairway," said Norman, reaching into his pocket for the pistol.

"It is Mlle. Bedard," grunted Moreau. "Do you think you are hearing ghosts, Antoine?"

"*Mademoiselle?*" called Norman, starting to rise.

Again the voice came drifting up from the false wall.

"Antoine!" it said.

"Coming!" Black Antoine was already on his feet. He moved quickly to the opening in the floor and started downward. "Who is there? Is it you, *mademoiselle?*"

Norman went slowly forward, with the pistol in his hand. He kept assuring himself that it could not be any one but Madelon Bedard who had called Antoine.

Suddenly a broken exclamation and a choked cough came up out of the darkness. There was a faint sound of movement, and then quiet.

Instantly Norman was at the head of the stairway, with his flash light playing down the narrow inclosure. That dark heap at the foot of the stairs was Black Antoine. His face was turned upward to the garish light of the electric torch. The hilt of a knife protruded from his chest.

"Moreau!" cried Norman. "Antoine has been killed!"

Instantly the big man was beside him, muttering prayers and imprecations.

"But *mademoiselle* has tried to save us!" he cried.

"She didn't do this," said Norman. "Antoine was called in a whisper and it might have been a man's voice! The answer is that some one else knows of this chamber!"

"Ovide Bedard is a very smart man!"

"And it was not Bedard! He wanted Antoine to live long enough to tell what he knew. No, we've got another enemy that we don't know about!"

Norman descended the stairs cautiously, lifted Black Antoine in his arms, and brought him up into the chamber. He took off the old man's jacket and covered his face. There lay Norman's hopes of proving his birth. If Antoine had lived five minutes longer he would have told the story. There was, of course, the probability that Madelon Bedard knew more than she had told, but she was far too young to have been a witness to the events in which Norman was interested. He turned to Moreau.

"I'm going down into the house," he said, "to settle my account with Bedard. If I have good luck we'll both be out of here before morning. If I don't you'll still have a chance. I'll leave the pistol with you."

"You are a man of courage, *monsieur,*" said Moreau, "and I shall go with you! Me, I am ready to do my share of the fighting!"

"I know you are ready," answered Norman, gratefully. "But this is a time for strategy. Even with the dynamite, and darkness to help us, we haven't a very good chance of fighting our way out.

"But if I can get Bedard into my hands we'll go, and take *mademoiselle* with us. There's a possibility that I can do it. Wait here for a little while—fifteen or twenty minutes. Then if I don't come back, go down very carefully and see what you can find out. If you hear shots, or the sound of a fight, use your own judgment. If I get caught try to keep clear yourself."

"M. Norman!" exclaimed Moreau. "Am I Jean Moreau, of the dynamite, or am I a little mouse? It is, perhaps, that I do not have great intelligence but I know better than to desert my comrade!"

"I'm sorry!" apologized Norman, holding out his hand. "Get in to it if you want to, but give me a little time first to try to capture Bedard. I've got to move like a shadow down there!"

Norman went down the stairs again and turned off his flash light before he put his hand to the sliding panel. Slowly and without a sound it went back, revealing only a darkness which was almost as intense as that in the false wall. A little light came in at the windows from the stars and gradually Norman was able to make out the forms of the discarded articles which crowded the attic. The scurrying of a rat gave him a moment of tension. Nothing else marred the stillness.

WITH infinite care he made his way across the room and down the stairs to the upper floor of the house. Here there was light and Norman, with only a confused idea of the route he had taken on the flight with Madelon, hesitated. There were branching corridors and a multitude of doors.

While Norman considered he heard a rising sound of voices and shuffling feet. Men were coming up the main stairway from the floor below. He concealed himself around a corner, ready to retreat to the attic, if necessary, and waited. Baptiste appeared, with another of the bushmen. They stopped and knocked on a door where there was a crack of light above the threshold, shining out into the twilight of the hallway. The door opened and Ovide Bedard appeared.

"We've searched every building," said Baptiste. "I myself drove a pitchfork a hundred times into the hay in different places. It is certain that they are not about the stables, *monsieur*. And all of the horses are there."

"Have you circled the clearing, looking for tracks in the snow?"

"But no, *monsieur*. They could not travel without snowshoes!"

"But they could hide in a tree and wait for a chance to steal snowshoes or horses!" said Bedard. "I will come down and we'll go around the whole clearing. If that brings nothing we'll keep the guard posted and go over the house again. I'll smoke them out if I have to burn the château to do it! If Norman were at large alone I could handle the situation in Quebec. The *chef de police,* naturally, thinks he is either mad or a lying fortune-hunter. But if he takes Antoine and Moreau to the police, there will be trouble."

"Then you intended that Moreau should . . . not go back?" asked Baptiste.

"He has disappeared permanently," replied Bedard. "I wanted to see if he would not volunteer something. That was why I kept him until after Antoine. I'm sure the old man was a traitor, and now I want to find out what confederates he had. They'll all go to the rack when I get them!"

Bedard and the others had been moving slowly toward the main stairway as they talked. Now they vanished downstairs and their voices died away. Bedard had left the door of the lighted room open. A glimpse showed Norman that it was apparently a study. He saw books, a pair of crossed sabers on the wall, and an old fashioned secretary-desk. He listened for a moment and heard only the low purr of a fire. Then he slipped through the doorway.

For many seconds John Norman stood as though he had suddenly become an image of marble. His head was lifted. He stared at two portraits which hung above the fireplace and slowly he filled with gratitude that he had lived to see this moment.

One of the portraits was of a very beautiful young matron, dressed in a long outmoded style, and the other revealed to Norman why old Henriette had stared in such swift terror when she first saw him. It explained why Ovide Bedard had acted with relentless speed. For the second portrait was of a man who might have been John Norman himself, ten years older and more dignified. He knew that he was looking at a likeness of his father.

CHAPTER XI.

MADELON'S STORY.

NORMAN crossed the room and with a feeling akin to reverence made a close inspection of the pictures. They had been done by a skillful brush. Here in almost living likeness were the mother who had died to give him birth and the father who had mourned him as dead. This must have been his father's study and he wondered at the iron nerve which enabled Ovide Bedard to use the same room. That carved armchair looked as though it had known long usage. The books had belonged to David Norman.

The sound of a light footstep near the door brought Norman spinning around, with his pistol raised to fire. He found himself looking into the eyes of Madelon Bedard. They were tired eyes now, but they held their accustomed mocking light.

"I am sure you don't intend to shoot me!" she said.

Norman's arm went limp. But he did not put up his pistol. In that house a man needed a weapon in his hand where it could be used.

"I'm too glad to see you to shoot," he replied, trying to smile. "Tell me, do you know whether Bedard went out just now?"

"Yes, he has gone outside," answered the girl. "I have just been talking to him. And the end is at hand for all of us. If he does not find you outside he is going to search the house again. This time he says he will sound all the walls for hollow spaces. I think he suspects that there is a passage to a subterranean chamber. He's wrong, of course, but he has the right idea.

"I was just going up to tell you that you must decide soon whether you would try to fight your way out or make a stand in the attic. Either way there's only one end, as I see it. And the end has come for me, too. Ovide says he has done trifling with me. So perhaps you'll enlist me with your forces. I can handle a gun, *monsieur!*"

"Do you know how soon he'll start that search of the house?" asked Norman.

"Probably at daybreak. He'll finish the work outside by that time and he'll also be able to take some men away from the cordon around the clearing. The sentries can see to shoot if you make a break after it gets light and there won't be a need for so many. Oh, Ovide has worked it all out! He's clever! You are either to be trapped and killed inside the house or driven out of it and picked off when you try to get away!"

"That is what he thinks!" exclaimed Norman. "But I have another idea! Do you think it will be possible for me to find him alone at any time?"

"Not outside!" She shook her head. "After he comes into the house again

there is a chance. I'll help any way I can, if you like."

"Of course I like! So you have changed, at last!"

"I have not changed in the least, *monsieur*. Not in my opinion of the human race. Both you and Ovide are fighting for what you want. But I find that I prefer to die if I cannot get away. For he has told me that I am to marry him to-day! I have not been really free since I came to Ovide, who is my only relative, from the convent where I was educated. He is my guardian. I could not marry without his consent; and to escape into the world of men would be to exchange a master I knew for dangers perhaps greater. Till now he has waited. But I can cajole him no longer. Now the devil in him has burst all restraint!"

"So that's it!" murmured Norman. "Well, we are going to disappoint M. Ovide Bedard!"

"It will be the first time he has ever been disappointed!" said the girl.

Norman looked at her, at the droop of her charming mouth, at the hunted look in her scornful eyes.

"You have no faith in anything, have you?" he asked.

"No, *monsieur*."

He struggled against the disbelief that threatened to communicate itself to him. He must have faith in his own success this night.

"DO you know," he asked, prompted by a sudden thought, "how long my father has been dead?" He pointed toward the portrait above the mantel.

She showed no surprise that he claimed the man pictured there as his father.

"Not long, *monsieur*. A matter of two or three years only."

"You knew him?"

"We were fellow prisoners!" she smiled.

"Do you mean that my father was the prisoner of Bedard?" he cried.

"For a very long time. There is no reason why I should not tell you, for I believe, just as Ovide does, that you are not an impostor. You are the son of David Norman. But Ovide would have proved you to be an impostor if you had stayed in Quebec and tried to work through the law. Without some one to support your claims you would have been helpless."

"But a man cannot be kept a prisoner in his own house!" exclaimed Norman.

"You think not?" She laughed with a note of sarcasm. "Your father was a semi-recluse and partial invalid for many years after your disappearance. Ovide was his secretary, his business man, his contact with the world. It was easy for him to get affidavits that your father was mentally incompetent, to acquire legal control of your father's person and estate.

"Once immured here with these ruffians whom Ovide has gathered around him he had less chance of escape than you and I have at this moment! You saw the rack down in the cellar? Ovide showed it to your father. He signed a will dated two or three years before. I am glad for his sake that he did."

John Norman's thoughts were churning. Even yet he found it hard to believe that this enormity had been perpetrated within a few miles of a city.

"Why didn't Bedard kill my father and have done with it?" he asked. "Why bother with a complicated plot?"

"Haven't you realized yet that Ovide is clever? It might have looked

suspicious if his ward had died too soon, with a will in his favor. It was safer to let David Norman mourn his life away. Why, Ovide was even congratulated on the strength of a friendship that held him here with a man of failing mind!"

For a long moment Norman could not speak. He pictured the helpless old man, sitting perhaps in the great armchair by the hearth and staring out over the bush in the direction of his own country.

"Yes, it was there in that chair, *monsieur,*" said Madelon, as though she read his thoughts. "He spent his time in this room and it was in the chair that the end came. He never believed that you were dead, but at last he gave up hope of knowing.

"I think that Ovide was suspicious, too, that the body they buried was not that of little John Norman. Of course I never knew the plot, but I think now that Black Antoine took you away instead of killing you. Perhaps his courage failed and perhaps he had some plan of his own for making money with you later on. It may be that in a softer moment he gave your father a hint that you still lived. Old Henriette was your nurse. She may have been in the scheme. A child's body was found and buried. The story was that you fell into the river and were carried away by the current. Antoine could have got a body from some source."

"He will never tell us," said Norman slowly, when she had finished speaking. "Black Antoine was called down the stairs in the false wall and stabbed to death! A whisper came out of the darkness. He went to answer and when I found him he was dead!"

Madelon Bedard's face drained of color. She reached uncertainly for the back of the armchair.

"Stabbed!" she echoed. "Tonight? You mean that some one else knows of the attic chamber?"

"It must be," said Norman. "Some one who is an enemy both to me and to Bedard. Moreau is still there, but he's safe enough, I think." He told her of the dynamite.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DOG'S HEAD.

"ANTOINE'S death was the end of my chance to prove my identity," said Norman, when he had described, briefly, the moment of the killing. "Antoine was speaking the words of a confession when that voice called him!"

"It seems useless to give you the strange message your father left," Madelon said. "He thought you might come some time after his death, and I think he trusted me. But he dared not tell me more than a clew, for fear Bedard would get it out of me. He only told me to say to you, if ever you came and I saw you, just two words. They were, 'Ask Cicero.' We never had a servant called Cicero. I made discreet inquiries among the bushmen and found that none of them answered to that name."

"'Ask Cicero'?" repeated Norman. "Was his mind really affected?"

The girl shrugged.

"Not unless being a little childish could be called that!"

"And he added nothing to those two words?"

"He never would explain," she said. "It may have been that he feared I'd tell some one, some time. I could not blame him for distrusting the whole world after what had happened. I myself learned that lesson!"

With an effort Norman brought himself back to the present. He went to the door and listened. The house was still silent. The search Bedard intended to make outside would take a considerable time.

"There's a Cicero we've forgotten, *mademoiselle,*" said Norman.

"You mean?"

"The great Roman who stood up in the Senate and denounced Catiline, day after day, braving death for the sake of the Republic!"

"More sentiment!" she smiled. "Do you think he did it for the Roman people or for his own reputation as an orator?"

Without replying Norman went to a bookcase where a half dozen shelves of works in Latin proclaimed the scholarly tastes of his father. From a resting place between Livy and Juvenal he took a volume of Cicero's Orations.

He held the book to the light and looked down between the binding and the backs of the leaves. Then he prodded the space carefully with a pencil. There was nothing there. Nor did the covers of the book, inside or out, show any signs of having been tampered with. No slip of paper fluttered out when Norman held the volume up and shook it.

"It's too big a task for to-night," he said. "Perhaps the words contain a code. Anyhow, I may not live long enough to care!"

"Your father was not the man to do anything obvious," said Madelon. "Let me take the book, please."

She began to go through it page by page while Norman went out into the corridor again to listen. When Ovide Bedard came in that would be the moment for his great effort.

A smothered exclamation came from the study and then Madelon called.

"Look!" she cried. "I've found something, although I can't make out what it means!"

NORMAN took the book and spread it out on the writing shelf of the secretary. He saw one word of a sentence crossed out, another written in above it, and two words of the same sentence underlined. The Latin read:

"O tempora! O mores! Senatus intelligit haec, consul videt, hic tamen vivit!"

"'Oh, what times! Oh, what morals!'" translated Norman, reading aloud. "'The Senate knows this, the consul sees it, yet this man still lives!'"

"We know what Cicero thought of Catiline!" exclaimed the girl, impatiently. "But don't you see that some one has left a message there?"

"'*Senatus*' has been crossed out and '*canis,*' the word for dog, written in above it," said Norman. "And '*intelligit*' and '*haec*' have been underlined."

"Then you are to read '*Canis intelligit haec,*'" said Madelon.

"'The dog knows this,'" repeated Norman. "But that doesn't get us very far!"

"It must! *Monsieur,* that word '*canis*' is written in your father's hand!"

"Then it does mean something. But what? What dog?"

"Any dog that is remote from whatever comes into our minds first!" she exclaimed. "Don't you see that he was trying to leave a trail and at the same time cover it up from Bedard? He must have known that a son of his would manage somehow to go to school.

"Anyhow, he used Latin, which he knew Bedard did not understand.

And the dog he meant won't be a house dog for that's the first thing that I thought of!"

"A house dog might know a lot, but he couldn't tell it," said Norman. "And he would die in time. It's a stone dog, or a china dog, or somebody with 'the dog' for a nickname."

"It's in this room," said Madelon, with conviction. "Your father never went anywhere else except to his bedroom. Not after he found that he was a prisoner."

Norman swung the big chair around facing the doorway so that he could both watch and listen while he sat down to think. Madelon stood gazing at him with a faraway look in her eyes. Suddenly she flung up her hand and pointed.

"I knew there was something right before our eyes!" she cried. "Look! Look down! How often have I seen your father's hand rest on the arm of the chair just where yours is now!"

Norman followed her finger. The arms of the chair, where they appeared beyond the upholstery, were carved in the semblance of dogs' heads. The design was conventionalized and subdued so that it was not at all apparent to the casual observer. But undeniably the canine resemblance was there. Norman began to shake one of the arms and twist it.

"Try the right arm!" cried Madelon. "Your father used to rub it as though it were the head of a real dog. Don't you see how the wood is polished?"

Norman wrenched and turned and suddenly, with a snap, the wooden head came away in his hand. It had been cut off at the neck and glued in place again, but not until after a hole had been bored into the arm.

While the girl stood breathlessly leaning over him Norman ran his finger into the hole and drew out a cylinder of tightly rolled paper. On the outside of it, in the same fine characters that had formed the word "canis," was written: "For my son, John Norman. A description of him and certain birthmarks. Also my last Will and Testament."

CHAPTER XIII.

A DUEL.

JOHN NORMAN sat speechless for a moment, fingering the roll of paper. Madelon Bedard read the legend on it, leaning over his shoulder. His eyes met the eyes of the girl as he started to rise from his chair and for an instant he thought they softened as they looked into his.

Then she cried out, and stood with her hands lifted to her mouth. Norman, halfway out of his chair, remained poised with his fingers gripping the arms. For Ovide Bedard stood in the doorway, with his lambent gaze fastened upon the face of the man he had tried so hard to kill.

"This time you will not vanish," he snarled.

Norman stood up, with a glance at a pistol which Bedard held in his hand.

"I am not likely to vanish, Bedard. I came out of hiding to find you. There are three accounts to settle. One for my father, one for this girl here, and one for myself."

"I'll find a way of settling my own," said Madelon. "You are too soft hearted, M. Norman!"

Lightning flashed in the eyes of Bedard.

"I'll take care of you later on, Madelon," he said. "It's you that I want now, Norman. My thanks for leaving

your pistol on the bookshelf where I could pick it up. Get your hands up and walk ahead of me. This will be your last trip to the cellar!"

Norman was measuring the distance between himself and Bedard when suddenly the pistol spun from Bedard's hand and thumped to the floor with the wooden dog's head that Madelon had thrown.

"I aimed at his head!" she cried, and rocked with hysterical laughter.

Norman was already on his way toward the pistol. He sent it across the floor with a kick just as Bedard reached for it. At the same instant his eye fell on the crossed sabers on the wall not an arm's length from him.

He snatched one of them from its fastenings and the other came rattling down. Bedard had it almost as soon as it touched the carpet. They faced each other, on guard, but Norman knew instantly from the way Ovide Bedard held himself and his weapon that his hand was no stranger to the sword.

"Get the pistol, *mademoiselle*," said Norman, pocketing the will. "Shoot him if he gives a single call for help! Will you?"

"I'll shoot him now, if you say the word," answered Madelon, and Norman knew that she meant it.

He had parried a thrust, feinted, and worked a step nearer the door in an effort to keep Bedard in the room. Now a flurry of attack drove Norman against the wall. Bedard's point flicked his neck and he knew that an inch nearer would have reached the jugular vein.

By sheer strength Norman managed to drive the man he fought back to the center of the room. He was sure now that Bedard was his superior as a swordsman, his equal in cunning, and as quick as a panther. Only in wind and strength was Norman better than the man whom he was fighting for his life. The fury of Bedard's attack was appalling. It was as though his saber had a dozen points.

But already the pace was beginning to tell on Ovide Bedard. Sweat ran down his cheeks and dropped from his chin. His breath began to rasp. Above the slither and clash of steel and the pad of shifting feet Norman could hear that harsh breathing.

Bedard risked a long lunge, and recovered. Instantly he started a high attack that drove Norman the length of the room. Then, suddenly, Bedard's ankle turned and one leg doubled under him. The wooden dog's head rolled away from the foot it had tripped.

"You've got him!" cried Madelon, in a high, unnatural voice.

But Norman dropped his point and stepped back. Bedard came up as though on steel springs. But when Norman met a cut at his head and looked into the eye of his enemy he knew that the tide had turned.

BEDARD'S lips were drawn back from his teeth. His nostrils puffed in and out as he labored for breath. Norman attacked. Now was the moment. He summoned every reserve for an onslaught as savage as the attacks of Bedard had been.

Ovide Bedard weakened, hesitated for a moment. With a tremendous blow Norman disarmed him. His saber went clattering across the room.

Deliberately Norman raised his blade and pressed the point against the throat of Bedard.

"Back up to the wall!" he ordered, through clenched teeth.

Staggering a little, Bedard obeyed. He stood with his hands spread out against the low tiers of book shelves

while his tortured eyes sought the doorway.

"Some one's coming!" cried Madelon.

"Cover the doorway with your pistol," said Norman. "I don't dare to take my eyes off this man. Hold them off until I can make him talk to me."

"You've got a situation that's too hot to hold," panted Bedard. "Norman, you're done for. You should have killed me when you had the chance to get away from my men."

Then the great voice of Jean Moreau boomed from the doorway.

"That's what I hoped to see, *monsieur!* Shall I shoot him for you now?"

"No, not yet," answered Norman. "Have you still got that dynamite in your pocket?"

"But yes, *monsieur!*" cried Moreau with enthusiasm. "That will be even better for him than a bullet!"

"We can't waste it on him. And, anyhow, I must have a little talk with M. Bedard before anything is done with him."

A warning of danger came from belowstairs. The heavy front door banged and a confused medley of voices rose through the house. Bedard laughed.

"It isn't time to laugh," said Norman. He stepped back so that he could see the others and still keep his prisoner within reach of a thrust. "Moreau, go to the head of the stairway with a lighted candle and your dynamite. Hold those men down there in the lower hall! If they try to rush you, give them the dynamite with a short fuse. You'll know better than I do how it ought to be done. *Mademoiselle,* will you stand in the doorway and watch the corridor toward the rear?"

"Marvelous!" shouted Moreau. "I will now watch that scoundrel of a Baptiste turn yellow!"

"Sit down at the desk, Bedard, and write," ordered Norman. "I want a statement from you. In a few words I want you to tell what you did to my father and to me. I know the truth now."

"You want me to condemn myself to a hanging—" Bedard checked himself with a great intake of breath.

"Ah, so you did hire Antoine to drown me!" cried Norman. "That is what I thought. Now write, or I'll try cold steel to persuade you."

Bedard silently took up a pen, but his hand shook so from the strain of combat that he could not begin immediately. He held his wrist to steady it.

"*Monsieur!*" cried Madelon, from the doorway. "Old Henriette is coming with punch for Ovide. He lives on it when there is hard work or excitement!"

"Let her come in, then, but watch her," said Norman. He had seen too much of this house and its inmates not to fear a trick in everything. "And keep an eye on the corridor."

CHAPTER XIV.

RETRIBUTION.

THE bent form of Henriette came warily into the room. Her piercing black eyes flashed from Bedard to Norman, and back again to the face of her master. Her mustached lip curled and revealed a lonely tooth. The protruding jaw seemed to thrust itself forward as she approached Bedard and held out a silver serving tray.

Bedard took a goblet of creamy liquid from the tray and set it on the desk. But Henriette did not go. She

stood staring at him and slowly her shoulders began to heave. Norman remembered that it was her mourning he had heard when he went down into the cellars.

"We're busy, Henriette," he said.

She did not seem to hear him. Her eyes were fixed diabolically on the face of Bedard.

"Get out, you old hag!" ordered Bedard.

"I want my grandson," she said. "I want my Théophile back."

"He's dead, you fool!" exclaimed Bedard. "Dead and buried behind the stable. However, it wasn't my fault that he got killed in the Rue Petit Champlain."

"Dead and buried, but not in holy ground." The old woman wagged her head slowly from side to side. "But he'll have company, my Théophile will! There's another upstairs that's gone with him. And there'll be more this night."

"The woman is mad!" cried Bedard. "Throw her out, Norman!"

But Norman was learning something.

"Somebody stabbed Black Antoine," he said.

"I didn't think she had it in her," exclaimed Bedard.

"He killed my Théophile!" Suddenly she cackled with laughter. "There's another one going with Black Antoine pretty soon!"

At that moment there was a shot fired. For an instant Norman's attention swung to the doorway.

"It's all right," said Madelon. "Moreau has managed to hold his pistol in the hand with the dynamite. He fired."

Madelon looked back into the room and screamed. Norman saw a knife flash in the hand of old Henriette. Before he could move Bedard had caught her wrist. He wrenched the knife out of her grasp and drove it to the hilt into her neck.

With a grin of anticipated vengeance still on her face the old woman sank down. She was dead almost as soon as she settled to rest upon the floor, an uncouth heap of garments. A low moan broke from Madelon.

"If I have to kill you now," said Norman, as his grip tightened upon the saber, "I shall have no regrets."

There was no hint of remorse in the face of Bedard as he gazed down at the woman he had killed. He lifted his eyes with even a hint of unholy joy in them.

"Your old nurse!" he said. "Another witness gone! Without Black Antoine and Henriette you are going to have a battle, *monsieur!*"

BEDARD turned to the desk and lifted his punch. Mockingly he inclined his head and drained the goblet. He was frowning when he set it down, but he picked up a pen and began to write.

The shoulders of Bedard moved convulsively. His pen lifted. On the white sheet of foolscap before him were the words:

I, Ovide Bedard . . .

He turned his head and looked up at Norman. A look of vast surprise had come into his face.

"Go on!" said Norman grimly. "I'm waiting!"

The pen point, wavering a little, slid over the paper.

. . . being of sane mind and at the point of death, do hereby will and bequeath . . .

"What are you writing?" exclaimed Norman.

"Wait!" said Bedard, and he finished an uneven line:

. . . all the property of which I die possessed to my cousin, Madelon Bedard.

"I've had enough trifling!" barked Norman. "I can do without a confession. I'll take you to Quebec and dump you into a cell and fight the battle out there."

Ovide Bedard rose slowly, lifting himself by desk and chair. A horrible grin twisted the white mask of his face and now Norman realized that something was wrong with the man.

He tried to take a step and reeled blindly against the bookcases.

"The punch," he muttered thickly. "Henriette—"

Ovide Bedard fell, and lay beside the woman he had killed. His hands beat the floor and then were still.

Norman walked over to Madelon, who had kept her face resolutely turned toward the corridor.

"It's over," he said, taking the pistol from her. "Henriette saved Bedard from the hangman."

They went along the corridor toward the main stairway. Moreau was crouched in the shadows at the head of the stairs. In one hand he held the lighted candle; in the other the stick of dynamite with a mere fragment of fuse showing. The gun lay at his feet. Both hands rested on the stair rail with the wavering flame of the candle almost close enough to touch the stubby fuse. He chuckled as Norman came up beside him.

"*Voilà, monsieur!*" he cried. "Behold! If by chance one of those scoundrels acquires the courage to shoot me I shall, with my last movement, apply the flame to the fuse and drop this beautiful stick of dynamite among them!"

The lower hall was crowded with bushmen, standing with grim, windtanned faces upturned. Baptiste nursed a wounded arm.

"Baptiste, and you others," said Norman, speaking slowly for better effect, "your master Ovide Bedard is dead!"

A murmur swept the bushmen. There was a sudden relaxation. Rifles which had been held ready to fire at the first opportunity sagged.

"Black Antoine is dead," continued Norman. "Henriette is dead also."

The men shrank from those staccato announcements as though they had been bullets. The face of Baptiste filled with stark terror. There was a slow movement backward toward the front door.

"And the past is dead," said Norman. "I shall forget what I know about you men. Unless you compel me to remember it. If you do there will be a reckoning for every man in this house to-night!"

THE slow dawn of the North was coming over the bush. It touched the gray walls of the château with delicate tints of blue and lavender. John Norman and Madelon Bedard stood together on the big stone slab before the front entrance. In a moment Moreau would drive up with a pair of the best horses in the stables. Norman was going to make his second visit to the *chef de police*.

Since that tense moment when the bushmen had melted from the house Madelon had walked like one sleeping. She had spoken as though she were dwelling in some far country of the mind. Now she turned and looked at Norman. Into her eyes came a gentle light that seemed to reflect the dawn.

"Do you remember," she asked, in a small voice, "when Ovide stumbled and you could have run him through?"

"When his foot turned on the dog's head?"

"Yes."

"I remember."

"It was then, *monsieur,* that I learned to believe."

"To believe?" echoed Norman. "To believe in what?"

"In chivalry, *monsieur.*"

"Madelon!"

The pleasant music of sleigh bells came around the end of the château. The horses pranced. High on the driver's seat, muffled to the eyes, sat Jean Moreau. He cracked his whip.

"Allons, mes enfants!" he cried, chuckling. "Let's go, my children! That affair can be finished in the sleigh, for I shall have to look straight to the front while I am driving these horses!"

THE END.

A Clever Thief

A GROUP of British junior army officers, at a post in the Indian hills, were discussing the commendable traits of their native servants. One or two officers had been short certain articles of equipment, upon occasions, but their wily Pathan helpers had seen to it that the shortage did not last for long.

"So clever is my man," said one subaltern, "that he could steal the sheets from your bed as you slept—and get away with it."

A young Sandhurst graduate, but recently arrived from England, stated that no "bloomin' nigger" could get *his* sheets—and he had money to prove it, too. A bet was made, the only condition being that the new arrival should not be informed of the time or place that the event was to occur.

A few days later, the Sandhurst man returned from a tough day of exploration, and turned in for a good night of rest. In a few moments he was fast asleep. The servant whose proclivities had provoked the bet was called, and told to start something. He did. He secured a feather, and by gentle tickling, caused the sleeper to roll gradually toward the edge of his bed. The Pathan carefully folded the sheets into a small fold. Then, by the same judicious tickling, he made the officer roll back toward the other side of the bed, and *off the sheets.*

The conspirators took the bed linen, wrapped it in a package, and attached a tag calling for delivery of the amount of the bet, before the package would be released. The servant was sent back to the young subaltern's quarters, awakened the officer, and collected the bet. Later, the other officers offered to bet that the servant could even replace the sheets, or remove them again, under any circumstances at all.

Colin K. Cameron.

Novelette—Complete

The White Savage

By ARMAND BRIGAUD
Author of "The Camel Corps Rides," etc.

A warlike African tribe ruled by a white queen?—Lieutenant Harper and his black Tirailleurs must fight to find out, and then keep on fighting

CHAPTER I.

BATTLE OF THE BEASTS.

"AGO-LI. — Beware! *Sidi* lieutenant, there are totem fetishes beyond that thicket," a Tirailleur suddenly shouted.

A leader less experienced than Lieutenant Harper would have snapped an angry reprimand, for tribal superstitions are incompatible with the rigid training of the negro soldiers of Equatorial Africa. But the *sidi* lieutenant quickly reasoned that the sharp savage ears of the man had perceived some threatening sound which his civilization-dulled senses were unable to dissociate from the rustle of the breeze and the droning of a myriad insects flying through the thick vegetation of the jungle.

A supernatural explanation was impossible, of course. Perhaps it was merely the bewildering echoes of a herd of aggressive African elephants, or the muffled din of the hollow horns

Harper slashed out at the savages with his saber

and bells of native witch doctors, spurring a swarm of naked tribesmen to a surprise attack. At any rate it was something to be parried instantly; and the reprimand could wait.

Then the breeze turned, bringing with it an odd cacophony of muffled squeals and booming thumps, as if enormous weights were being bounced upon the ground, somewhere beyond the cluster of trees which the Tirailleur had pointed out.

The negro soldiers were visibly worried; their faces twitched and the narrow shoulders of their tall, lanky bodies were hunched, an unmistakable sign of nervousness. But the steely obedience to the orders of an officer which had been hammered into them by their military training rooted them to their places.

At last the frantic squeals became so discernible that they brought to wondering soldiers a new comprehension and a great relief.

"*Ud-dah!* It is a fight between rhinoceroses or elephants," said Touho, the top sergeant of the section, contemptuously. Then he scolded the soldier who had given the alarm. "Next time you mention your fool totem fetishes, you get eight days of *salle de police*, without pay."

Harper grinned, and motioned the section to proceed.

Cautiously, they entered the trees which separated them from the scene of that jungle duel, for elephants and rhinoceroses have a knack of forgetting their pachyderm quarrels to turn their rage on intruders.

Presently they beheld a very unusual sight. In the natural arena formed by a circular clearing, a bull rhinoceros and an enormous hippopotamus were engaged in a deadly combat.

Beasts of such different habits sel-

dom meet. Most likely the hippopotamus had clambered from the muddy waters of the Ubangi River, which flowed nearby, and gone inland to browse along a strip of that soft green grass of which his kin is so fond. In so doing he had suddenly loomed on the path of the rhinoceros, which had at once charged, according to the stupid rhinoceros tenet that every moving object within striking distance is a menace to be met with a smashing attack.

THE hippopotamus is not an aggressive beast; but it is an idiosyncrasy of his species that, while a mild noise sends him scurrying for cover, anything that thoroughly frightens him excites outbursts of fighting temper. Thus he had probably met the thundering charge of the rhinoceros with a crunching bite of his great trap of a mouth.

Harper thought that luck was indeed with him. The patrol he personally led and the fort under his command were in need of fresh meat; but the necessity of carrying on his tour of inspection in silence had up to that moment kept him from shooting down one of the wild pigs which thrived in that zone. The noise of rifle fire, of course, would have betrayed his presence.

Now the long fast on canned beef was at an end, for one or both of these beasts would be unable to survive that deadly struggle. He motioned his soldiers to keep as quiet as possible, in order to avoid any sound which might betray their presence and so alarm the two behemoths that they would drop their quarrel and vent their rage on the intruders.

The lumbering shapes of the two huge animals made a continuous, swift struggle impossible. Their resounding clashes were followed by moments of inaction, when they gave way and seemed to study each other from a distance. Then the rhinoceros put down his horned snout and charged. The hippopotamus, his mouth open so wide that a child could have sat comfortably inside, met that attack with the resistance of a rock. The snap of his huge jaws was as powerful as that of a concrete mixer.

The hippopotamus seemed to have suffered the most, for his clumsiness on land gave a strong advantage to the rhinoceros. But the very fact that the fight was turning against him rendered the river monster a thing of awesome fury. His protruding eyes gleamed like burning coals. In the terrific mixup he almost bit off the lower jaw of his adversary and tore an enormous chunk out of his shoulder muscles and flank hide.

With a lightning move thoroughly amazing in a short-legged beast, the hippopotamus spread out his stubby pinions. Ducking under the spearing thrust of the horn of his enemy in the latter's next charge he caught with an enormous bite one of his knotty forelegs and heaved.

The rhinoceros fell on one side, squealing at the top of his lungs. He squirmed and twisted with such might that the ground shook for several yards around the embattled couple, as if convulsed by a minor earthquake.

The hippopotamus attempted to climb upon the protruding belly of his foe, but the shortness of his legs frustrated his effort. Too spent to take full advantage of his lucky stroke, he was soon forced to gasp for air and to release his hold.

With a frenzied heave, the rhinoceros tore himself free, rolled from be-

neath his adversary, and managed to rise on three legs, for the right foreleg hung limp and helpless. A savage fury convulsed him so that he bounded and bucked on his three legs as if he had grown wings. He plunged headlong on the hippopotamus, caught him under the paunch with a great butt of his horned snout, ripped and lifted him as a horse would have reared with his rider.

DURING the next minute or two the rhinoceros stared at the last convulsive jerks of the dying hippopotamus. When all spark of life seemed to have left that massive body, he lifted his head and trumpeted challengingly.

The sun was falling fast. The western sky had assumed a scarlet hue and a damp mist arising from the nearby river was slowly closing in on the jungle. The sadness of the twilight hour, so poignant in that part of Africa, enhanced the pathetic sight of the victim of that senseless struggle, and of the battered victor, whose end was but a matter of time.

The whole scene smote Harper with an overwhelming sadness. Loathing the idea that the stricken rhinoceros should fall beneath a fusillade of his Tirailleurs, Harper motioned them to keep quiet, in order to avoid making any sound which might betray their presence and perhaps startle that wreck of a fighting beast into a tottering charge.

The shrill bleats of the rhinoceros had lost all aggressiveness now. Swaying on his three serviceable legs he turned away from the carcass of the hippopotamus, limped slowly toward a distant thicket. A soft breeze blew from the direction he had taken, so that no scent or sound of the watching humans was likely to reach him. Therefore, Lieutenant Harper thought it safe to follow.

Slowly, shaken by great tremors, hobbling on his three legs, the rhinoceros at length reached a soft stretch of ground where the grass grew thick. As far as jungles go, it was an ideal place to lie down and rest; to die in peace, if the worst came to the worst.

Harper was about to order his men to leave the stricken monster alone and to retrace their steps to the feast offered by the carcass of the dead hippopotamus, when the roaring discharge of a large caliber rifle broke the stillness of the sunset.

The rhinoceros sank within the tall grass and remained motionless.

A group of Arabs in flowing burnooses instantly sprang from a ravine, then noticed the soldiers and stopped uneasily in their tracks. Their leader, a tall, bearded man, lifted his right hand in a sign of peace.

"I did not know I was encroaching on your hunt," he said hastily. "By the sacred book of the Koran, I want no quarrel with you."

"Who are you?" Harper snapped.

"Sultani Fadel Soufan, on my way to Fort Sibout with a proposal very advantageous to the Governmenti."

HARPER gazed intently at the man. In his two years of supervision of the zone about Fort Sibout, he had ever punctually received the taxes due by Fadel Soufan. But his attempts to meet the chieftain had invariably been met with stubborn evasion, smoothed by elaborate excuses.

Fadel was one of the mysteries of that hardly tamed part of Africa. Some twenty years earlier, when the French protectorate was only nominal, he had

come from the wastes of central Sudan with a swarm of Arabian and half-breed warriors, and had conquered a group of Banda villages, hostile to the French. Soon after, he sent his lieutenants to Harper's predecessor, in the command of Fort Sibout, to proffer an allegiance which had been grudgingly accepted.

But with Fadel's advent in that part of Africa, although the Banda he had conquered apparently ceased to give any further trouble, the scourge of slave running put in an appearance. It began with the seizure of isolated tribesmen; but in time it was practiced on a larger scale, with spectacular raids which often culminated in the total destruction of the attacked villages. In every instance, the raiders seemed to swoop from nowhere, and left no traces when they departed. It was an exasperating method to cope with, and suggested the organization of a brain far shrewder than that of the average negro chieftain.

Like the lieutenant who had ruled Fort Sibout before him, Harper had felt sure all along that Fadel Soufan was behind all those troubles; but he had never succeeded in pinning the least bit of evidence on the *sultani*.

Now Fadel Soufan came to him with some proposition or other which most likely concealed a villainous scheme, and aimed to pull it through the unsuspecting meshes of the French colonial law. But the *sultani* was not aware of the fact that Harper had been waiting and hoping for a long time for just such a move—as the only means to force Fadel to reveal his hand.

Lieutenant Harper repressed his excitement and eagerness. With a wary customer like Fadel Soufan to deal with, anything more than a very mild surprise was likely to awake suspicion —and the *sultani's* proposal would become a recital of bland vagaries, followed by a hasty retreat.

"Business can wait," Harper said carelessly. "In a jungle nook a few score yards from here lies the carcass of a hippopotamus, freshly killed. Let us go and partake of his meat."

Fadel Soufan beamed. He had expected to partake of fibrous and ill-scented rhinoceros steaks; now, on the contrary, he was offered a feast of hippopotamus t i d - b i t s, as tender and savory as choice veal. "May Allah bless you seven times! For I am very hungry, and the bags of my followers hold only dried food, such as would stand the wear and tear of travel."

"*Bismillaten!*" Harper replied, to cut short the flow of Fadel's thanks.

AN hour later, a dozen or so villainous negroes of Fadel's retinue broiled on the flames of a huge camp fire great slices of pink hippopotamus meat, on the ends of green sticks.

Harper's Tirailleurs squatted on one side of the fire, and the Arabs of the bodyguard of the *sultani* on the other. Their leaders sat a few yards away, under the branches of an enormous banyan tree. They appeared to be friendly enough; but their followers were separated by a feud centuries old, betrayed now and then by menacing murmurs and baleful glances. The Arabs despised the Tirailleurs because they were negroes, sons of a race which they had defeated and oppressed in every way up to the advent of the white man in Africa. And the Tirailleurs themselves, emboldened by their modern weapons, their military schooling and the leadership of white officers, felt surging within them all the desire for revenge of a long-suffering people.

They would have welcomed the opportunity for pitched combat.

In the meantime, Harper scanned covertly the fierce personality of Fadel Soufan.

The *sultani* was a man in his late forties, but as tall and vigorous as a thorn tree. He had a great hooked nose, set off by thick black brows and enhanced by a long black beard, so that he embodied the popular conception of an Assyrian tyrant of old. His ruthless eyes continually sought the glance of the gray eyes of the white man before him, as if Fadel were trying to hypnotize the lieutenant.

The scent of the blood of the quartered hippopotamus and of the roasted meat had attracted scores of panthers, leopards, tiger cats. Their eyes shone green and luminous from the darkness of the overhanging branches, and their throaty growls kept an uninterrupted bedlam; they dared not leave the canopy of thick leaves of the surrounding jungle, because of the leaping flames of the bivouac. And the sight of so many men checked the savage dictates of their stomachs.

Harper could not help thinking how well that savage setting matched the mixture of craft and barbarity which was the character of Fadel, the beastly vigor of his body.

At length the *sultani* tackled the subject of his proposition once again.

"The Gounga tribesmen do not pay tribute. Why do you not curb them?"

The reason was plain. The Gounga country was impenetrable, a succession of precipitous cliffs and tangled jungles, and the approaches to the Gounga villages were criss-crossed by treacherous quicksands which nature had covered with innocent looking brush—quicksands the location of which was kept jealously secret by the Goungas.

As a result, a campaign of conquest would necessitate the concentration of several hundred soldiers and might mean a great loss of life. The final reward would be hardly worth the cost; for all that the French colonial government would get would be a yearly poll tax of a few hundred francs. Practically, the French authorities considered that the *travail ne valait pas la candeille.*

HARPER explained this to Fadel Soufan, who listened, sneering, then exclaimed:

"That was true when the Goungas kept to themselves. But I am informed that they plan to wage a guerrilla war against the French, and that other tribes are ready to join them. Why do you not let me try to annex the Goungas to my Sultanate? If successful, I would guarantee the payment of their poll tax."

It was not unusual to allow faithful tribes to try their mettle against rebellious ones. If they failed, the troops took care that the attacked undesirables would not become conquerors on their turn; if they succeeded the government gained new subjects and lost neither soldiers nor ammunition. It was something like pulling chestnuts from the fire with a cat's paw. However, that would entail an enlargement of Fadel's Sultanate, which was bad policy, in Harper's opinion.

The lieutenant refrained from giving an outright denial. Some premonition warned him that there were features in this case which deserved investigation; and that a disgruntled Fadel might make no end of trouble in his underhanded way. Therefore he tried to lull the Arabian into a kind of semi-confidence.

"Your proposition will be duly re-

ferred to the superior authorities. But the answer will take time."

Fadel Soufan's impenetrable countenance betrayed neither elation nor disappointment, so that Harper was unable to make out whether or not his excuse had worked.

Before long the Sultani begged his leave. He bowed ceremoniously to Harper, bringing his hand to breast and mouth, and lumbered away, followed by his rascally looking crew. In that moment instinct warned Harper that he was missing a precious chance to attack him and make him prisoner, but he knew that an arrest without provocation was too high-handed—too much against the rules of the protectorate.

The lieutenant repressed the urge to shout a command which his Tirailleurs would have heeded only too readily. Then he ordered the patrolling section back toward the fort.

THE next morning he consulted the dusty archives of Fort Sibout relating to those tribes which had remained uncontrolled for several years. The ledger concerning the Goungas referred to another one, marked confidential, which was about twenty years old.

A survey of the latter disclosed a strange African drama.

Some twenty-five years earlier a civil official of the Belgian Congo had been placed under inquiry for abuse of authority and misappropriation of funds. To evade the stiff sentence which he knew was in store for him, he crossed the border, followed by his wife, a courageous and self-sacrificing woman who had decided she would share his fate to the bitter end.

It was a mystery how the fierce beasts of the jungle and the hostile tribesmen had failed to kill them. At any rate, they finally tramped their way up into the country of the Goungas.

The Belgian was an amateur sleight-of-hand artist of notable skill. He easily established himself in the place of the recently deceased chief witch doctor of the Gounga tribe. Perhaps in order to avoid the possibility of being seized by the French and turned over to the Belgian Government, he induced his barbarous subjects to sever all relations with the white men.

From that time on, the only information concerning him and the Goungas which reached the ears of the French authorities was mere Negro hearsay, the most unreliable in the world. The less fantastic tales circulating among the neighboring tribes reported that his wife had died a few years later, while giving birth to a child.

Harper thought that it was high time to straighten out the Gounga question. He decided to enter their territory with three sections of the company, get hold of the first tribesman on whom his scouts could lay hand, and send him to the Belgian chief, or his successor, in case the white man was no longer alive, with a friendly message aiming to open a parley.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHIEFTAINESS.

THREE days later Harper's column reached the treacherous country of the Goungas. These Tirailleurs had worn the loin string of the Shari River tribesmen before military drill had made soldiers out of them. They were therefore so expert in jungle lore that one of their patrols detected and seized a snarling Gounga

so unexpectedly that the naked black had no time to swing his weapons into action.

The captive was dragged before Lieutenant Harper, who presented him with a yard of soft, gleaming copper wire. According to Equatorial African standards this was a lordly gift—the price of a marriageable woman, or a string of goats. Impressed by such generosity, the Gounga nodded time and again, like a pleased monkey. He was therefore in a receptive disposition when the lieutenant addressed him in Azande, a language he understood.

"I come as a friend of your chief," Harper began.

"Marg'te no friend of yours, though she is white, too," the Gounga plaintively muttered, as if sorry to disappoint the bountiful stranger.

"Marg'te, a white woman?—What do you mean?" demanded Harper.

"She fetish. Born of great white *hyondo* who came to rule us several moons ago, and who died all-powerful."

Harper knew that a fetish was an idol, and that a *hyondo* was a sorcerer. He knew, therefore, that this *hyondo* must be the white magician. The Belgian outlaw was no more. His daughter Marg'te, a negro distortion of Margot, French for Margaret, had succeeded him as ruler of the Goungas. The shrewd Fadel Soufan, as Harper saw, was ready to take advantage of this situation.

"Did Sultani Fadel of the Bandas ever come here?" he rasped.

"He once saw Marg'te across the boundary of our respective territories," the Gounga stammered. "Then he send many, many gifts, say he wish to marry her and unite the tribes. But Marg'te despise him—against the advice of our headmen, who grow fat on Fadel's bounty."

"The Arabian swine!" Harper exploded. The nerve of the *sultani*, who not only planned to gobble up another confederation of tribes under the very nose of the French, but also to adroitly obtain their sanction so that he might make the white woman his own, filled the lieutenant with rage.

"Which is your party? That of Marg'te or the *sultani's?*" he roared.

The primitive negro shrank away from him, awed by such an outburst. He wrinkled his low forehead, as if the problem was too much for him. Eventually he muttered:

"Marg'te is fetish. My arrows are at her service."

"Stick to Marg'te and no harm shall come to you," Harper approved. "You shall go directly to her with my gifts, and the assurance that I am her friend."

For a moment he wondered what he could send to please a white girl raised among jungle savages. Then he thought of the precious dagger he carried fastened to his belt, a memento of a marauding *caid* whom he had killed in single combat while campaigning in Morocco. The gold and ivory hilt and scabbard of the weapon were things of exquisite workmanship, a present worthy of a queen. To make a complete knock-out impression, Harper decided to send also his soft and multicolored Algerian field blankets.

The Gounga gladly shouldered the bundle, announcing that either Marg'te would send a reception party or he would return with the gifts. A few minutes later he disappeared, prancing off into the jungle like a released goat.

A WEEK later, when Harper was beginning to despair of receiving a reply to his gifts and his message, a large party of tribesmen cautiously approached his camp.

At their head walked a tall witch doctor, striped with white clay from head to foot, and burdened by a veritable mattress of necklaces. From a distance he shouted to Harper, asking Harper's promise to return to his territory as soon as he had palavered with Marg'te.

The lieutenant answered that he would abide by the decision of the fetish herself, and came to meet the bedecked Gounga with a shiny brass bell in his hand. A Tirailleur meanwhile opened to the anxious glances of the visitors a large bag of salt, a seasoning rarer than gold, and more desirable, in the eyes of the natives of Equatorial Africa.

The answer and the gifts acted like a charm. The witch doctor chortled that the white man and his warriors were welcome, and instantly discarded his gourd rattle of power for the brass bell.

Harper snapped an order. The Tirailleurs broke camp in a few minutes' time; then, led, by the Goungas, they began their march toward the *boma* of Marg'te.

Harper and Adjutant Ahur, a descendant from a princely family of Timbuktu, and the lieutenant's second in command, walked with the witch doctor in the van of the native spearmen. A few paces after them came Sergeant-Major Touho, leader of the foremost section.

Doubly observant because of his native jungle lore and skill as veteran non-com, Touho soon noticed that there was a method in the way in which the Goungas went forward. Time and again they elected to describe wide semi-circles through broken, difficult ground, in so doing giving a wide berth to green stretches of smooth prairie which lay directly in their path. At length Touho picked up a gigantic boulder and threw it at an expanse of savannah just skirted by the Gounga vanguard.

The boulder hit the grass and the crust of soil beneath with a loud splash. Almost instantly it began to sink. In a few minutes' time it was sucked neatly under the surface, and the grass closed above it.

That maneuver incensed the witch doctor, who went into a veritable tantrum. Disdaining to take notice of him, Touho strode to Harper's side.

"We know now how to recognize the Gounga quick-sands, should we retreat in a hurry," he mumbled under his breath.

"You did well, Touho," Harper commended.

The negro sergeant grinned widely and pranced back to his place. Seeing that nobody cared to argue with him, the witch doctor began to walk forward again, muttering curses and imprecations. Harper and his men followed, ready to face a sudden turn about and a charge of the savages who preceded them.

But nothing of the sort happened. Toward sunset they came in sight of a wide palisade of logs which had been built on top of a hill.

"Is that Marg'te's *boma?*" Harper asked.

The witch doctor, still surly and defiant, nodded and increased his pace.

THE sun had faded behind the western rim of the horizon when they entered the village, which was characterized by a curious mixture of negro crudity and by a certain modernity. The latter trait was especially evident in the relatively up-to-date methods of sanitation which had been introduced into the village.

Besides the usual paraphernalia of bracelets and anklets, the tribesmen wore a diminutive loin cloth, while the women were stark naked, according to the custom of that part of Africa. But the huts, Harper observed, were placed in orderly rows; they had windows near the top, in order to provide healthy drafts, and deep ditches all around them which drained into the main excavations flanking the straight, stone-paved thoroughfares. The latter were dusty, but they showed no trace of the smelly refuse so conspicuous in the average African community. All the streets converged toward a central, smooth, circular clearing around a huge log cabin. The latter was surmounted by tufted fetish poles.

This, of course, must be the building erected by the Belgian outcast, who had probably directed the improvement of the village, on the site of the original filthy Gounga hamlet. If so, it was now the house of Marg'te, who waited in front of it to receive the soldiers.

The scarlet, dancing light of a hundred torches threw an eerie glow on the black limbs and the ferocious faces of her headmen. It enhanced the tapering sharpness of the blades of their javelins, and bushy halos of feathers fastened around their heads and faces.

Marg'te was a blonde, slender, and just above the average stature of a white woman. Her exceptionally beautiful face and willowy body loomed almost ethereal against that stark, brutish background. However, the comeliness of her countenance, framed by the soft tangle of her blond curls, was marred by a scowling, suspicious glance. This was probably a remainder from the terrors of her childhood, Harper thought, when all the instincts of her white womanhood, inherited by generations of civilized ancestresses, had revolted against the terrifying savagery of her surroundings.

Harper noticed that the dagger he had sent was stuck into the belt of the girl's short apron of leopard hide. That was proof that Marg'te looked with favor on his gifts, and the lieutenant was thereby reassured of the success of his mission.

Without looking straight upon their faces, Marg'te scanned first the puttees wrapped around the calves of Harper and his men, their bare, sandaled feet, and the nailed boots worn by the white officer. Next, her glance shifted to their weapons, and the dim gleam of the blackened steel seemed to awe her for a few instants. Then, timidly, her eyes sought the comely face of the lieutenant, who had removed his cork helmet and was standing silently before her.

Harper was an American by birth, and he had been lured into the ranks of the Foreign Legion with the hope of finding adventure. After gaining promotion after promotion by deeds of conspicuous gallantry, he had finally wound up as a company commander of the black Tirailleurs of the Ubangi-Shari, and he topped their average six-foot-eight by an inch or two. He towered head and shoulders above the Goungas, who were a race of rather short savages.

His clean-cut features were not covered by the bushy whiskers grown by most French Colonial officers as a protection against the winged insect pests of Equatorial Africa. He was handsome, and the natural call of her blood for the first white man she had ever seen, except her late father, seemed to act on Marg'te like a charm. Her lips opened in a smile which disclosed a set of pearly white teeth, and a pink flush stole over her cheeks.

"I am happy to see you and your warriors," she said gravely in a soft voice.

It seemed to Harper that Marg'te meant what she said, but the majority of her headmen and witch doctors did not look as though they were wholly pleased. An ominous murmur came from their ranks. Their hands tightened on the shafts of their javelins.

HOWEVER, they apparently reconciled themselves to the wish of their chieftainess. Soon the village took on a festive, bustling appearance of gayety. Great bunches of plantains were brought from the outskirts of the village. The savory odor of half a dozen antelopes broiled whole above huge fires permeated the still air of the evening.

As a mark of distinction, Marg'te elected to eat alone with Harper, on a litter of fresh branches placed before the door of her cabin. All around them squatted the Tirailleurs, gulping down with relish the antelope, the broiled millet paste and the plantains which were served to them.

Farther along, on the hard soil of the village streets, the Goungas clustered, watching the strangers with avid curiosity.

Sure that her words could not be heard by her subjects, the timidity of the girl gradually faded. Little by little, Harper ferreted out from her a disheartening confession. Her father, the Belgian refugee, knew how to rule negroes with a fist of iron; and the least sign of his displeasure struck terror into even the most unruly members of the tribe. But Marg'te had not inherited his domineering ruthlessness. As a matter of fact, she was rather afraid of her savage subjects.

Luckily, the Goungas believed that the pitiless energy of her late sire survived in her, and they therefore respected her as a superior being. But lately her reticence to order the execution of two tribesmen who dared to balk at her orders had given a dangerous blow to her authority. Like the frogs of Æsop's fable who grew tired of a log-king and called to rule them a stork who ate them alive, the Goungas had made open overtures to Sultani Fadel Soufan, for whom Marg'te entertained a veritable hatred.

All kinds of skin diseases being rampant in Equatorial Africa, military are instructed to sleep only in huts freshly built for their own use. Two great cabins of interlaced branches had been quickly erected for the Tirailleurs during the meal.

Marg'te's private log house was considerably different from the usual native hut. Its cleanliness matched that of the girl. Her insistence that Harper should take one of her four rooms was readily agreed to by the lieutenant, who soon posted a regular turn of sentries and retired for a much needed rest.

EARLY the next morning, before dawn, the clamor of a struggle punctuated by a quick succession of rifle shots jerked him from his sleep. Hastily, he pulled on his trousers, took sword and gun, and ran out of the house.

The first sight that confronted him was that of three lifeless Goungas sprawled on the ground, close to the crouching forms of the four Tirailleurs who had been posted on sentry duty at the log house.

"They tried to sneak up on us and stab us down, so we bayoneted them," one of the soldiers explained. "Look, *sidi*," he continued, pointing toward

the alleys which converged on the opposite side of the square.

The shadows of the near-by huts rendered those thoroughfares as dark as the mouths of so many caves, so that it was impossible to perceive except dimly, the black bodies of the Goungas massed within. But the tips of their spears, which reached up to the eaves of the houses, shone like innumerable fireflies.

Before long the eerie, coarse screech of the witch doctors rent the air. As if that were a given signal, tom-toms, raucous horns and the clatter of noise-making devices made of bones tied together and rattled against each other, suddenly filled the night with a deafening clamor. Then an overwhelming negro mob, in the darkness of the night resembling a multitude of enormous black ants, sprang forward and began to hurl javelins and arrows which whistled and fell all around Harper and the Tirailleurs, imbedding themselves in the log wall of Marg'te's house with a swishing thud.

The Tirailleurs replied with a hail of bullets which brought the disorderly advance of the natives to a standstill and stirred a bedlam of ear-splitting cries.

For a moment Harper thought of ordering the four soldiers back into the building.

They could stick the muzzles of their rifles through peep-holes which might be hastily carved between the logs; and behind the shelter of the stout walls they could keep the tribesmen at bay as long as their supply of bullets lasted.

But that would practically amount to a retreat, a show of fear that would be likely to spur to the point of fighting madness the dastardly aggressiveness of the Goungas. And it was unnecessary, too. Three sections of soldiers, one hundred and fifty first class fighting men, were quartered in the thatched huts expressly built for them on the outskirts of the village. By this time the bedlam must certainly have warned Adjutant Ahur and the sergeants of what was going on. The modern weapons of the soldiers, which included a machine gun section, would soon make short work of the rebellious tribesmen, Harper knew.

MEANWHILE, the Goungas were closing in from every side, leaping above the bodies of the blacks, who were continually falling under the bullets of Harper and his handful of sentries. An arrow pierced the neck of a Tirailleur; another fell, stabbed through hip and shoulder by two quivering four-foot javelins.

While the lieutenant wondered what was delaying the arrival of the sections, the black horde let go an ear-splitting yell and rushed through the light of the approaching dawn. In a breath-taking minute they swept down upon Harper and the two surviving sentries, hurtling them against the wall of Marg'te's house.

But Harper was not only stronger than any of the Goungas who tried to pull him down; his long-muscled limbs had even surpassed the tremendous skill of the regimental *maîtres d'armes* who had schooled him in every swordsman's trick.

Punching, kicking, battering with terrific blows of the pommel of his sword, he succeeded in breaking loose from a compact group of natives which had got hold of him; then his sharp-edged saber whirled so quickly that it seemed like a huge, flashing fan, revolving its steel blades. Occasionally a sharp point darted out from this cir-

cle of shining steel, passing through the intrepid savage who dared to come too close.

With his shoulders protected by the wall, and the clumsy spears, knives and short-handled maces of the Goungas unable to pierce his defense, Harper felt that he could hold on for quite a long time—unless, growing tired of losing men in this way, the savages elected to step back for a few paces and make him a target for their hurled arrows and javelins.

But at length the glimpse of a lone soldier caused Lieutenant Harper to discard the protection of the wall and the clearing which insured his sword-play. The struggling figure of a Tirailleur had suddenly appeared among the yelling mob of Goungas. He was the last surviving sentry; a big ox-like fellow, who had succeeded in emerging from beneath a cluster of tribesmen.

The mace blow which struck the soldier from behind and sent him down galvanized Harper into action. With a hoarse shout he darted to the rescue, slashing right and left with lightning speed. Thus he sabered a way up to his man, and for a moment stood astride his prostrate form, parrying and thrusting in all directions. But at last a huge club thrown by a sinewy Gounga arm struck Harper at the base of the skull.

The savage, snarling faces and the prancing black forms of the tribesmen seemed to whirl all around him. He tottered unsteadily, and instantly the pack closed in on him from every side. With growing blackness quickly engulfing his reason he wondered why the sections were not coming. Yet his tremendous stamina and fighting grit kept him fighting frantically, while blows thudded on the left arm which he instinctively raised as a shield. Then nausea caught at his throat and he lost consciousness.

CHAPTER III.

GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY.

WHEN Harper recovered his senses the sun was already high. There was a heated argument going on a short distance from the place where he lay, trussed hand and foot. Despite the suffering of a splitting headache and his burning thirst, he endeavored to make out what was being said.

The Gounga language being a derivative of the Azande, in which he was proficient, Harper soon perceived that he was the subject of that debate. The greater number of voices, monotonous in their insistence, were asking that he be put to death—and the sooner the better. Others seemed just as stubborn in proposing that he should be allowed to leave, on promise that he would thereafter let the tribe severely alone.

Harper's mind went to the enigmatic figure of Marg'te, white woman and savage, the girl who had spoken to him of her fears; she who was the fetish of the Goungas. Had she been sincere? Or were her words but a screen before an unreasonable hatred toward all white men, a hatred such as had obsessed her outcast father during his last years?

The dull, regular beat of drums seemed to answer that query. It kept on booming monotonously, at regular intervals. Its ominous throb mixed with the sharp pain which racked Harper's skull; gradually it increased his agony so that he had to use all his self-control to restrain the moans surging to his lips.

A shade fell across his body. Twisting his neck he saw a great halo of

black feathers; feather epaulettes; a glittering apron of soft panther skin, studded with minute plaques of ivory and shiny metal. Among that barbaric panoply the white limbs of Marg'te, colored to a warm peach hue by the sun, loomed graceful and soft. Her great eyes looked at the prostrate officer with a sober, sad expression.

Without a word the girl passed out of Harper's vision. The nerve-racking drums kept on booming, with exasperating monotony. By a curious kink of the nerves, the lieutenant anticipated each booming thump, gritting his teeth when it finally rent the air.

At length a woman's screech echoed on the sultry African air. A moaning cry, deep with the power of hundreds of voices, surged in answer. The drums began to beat wildly, and a veritable tribal frenzy followed their sound.

Harper thought that this was just a prelude to the stab which would finally end his life; but of a sudden Marg'te's screech again echoed blood-curdlingly. It dominated the uproar, which gradually died out. In the unbroken silence, which seemed all the deeper after the din of a few minutes before, her voice rang out in a curious sing-song:

"*A-ee! A-ee!* I am fetish! The invisible spirit world says, 'How dare men to speak for me?'—I judge by the poison token, or the *tata* is accursed."

A querulous, brutish voice protested in a babel of words. Then another screech, a flow of imprecations from Marg'te, and silence.

THE panting breath of the surrounding tribesmen ranted clear. After a long interval Harper felt rough fingers running over his fetters. His wrists, free at last, slid from above his breast to his sides. His ankles still tied, he was propped up against a pole, in a sitting position.

The log house, he saw, was at his shoulders. The whole Gounga tribe, bedecked in the paraphernalia of war and ceremony, stood aligned on both sides of the square. Adjutant Ahur and the three sergeants who were the section commanders lay on the space between the farthest ranks of the tribesmen. Their clothing bore no stains of blood, but Harper was unable to see if they were dead or simply drugged.

The foremost figures, on which all Gounga eyes seemed focused, were those of Marg'te and a squat tribesman who was grovelling at her feet. He was a witch doctor of high rank, judging by the white chalk which smeared half his head and by the heavy tangle of armlets and anklets covering his limbs.

"You have the right to oppose the spirits' decision. But I am entitled to order your death, too," Marg'te shouted. "Make your choice before I lose my patience!"

Harper understood now. The treachery of last night had occurred without the girl's knowledge. Unable to stop the onslaught, she had no doubt managed to save him at the crucial moment. With an unexpected surge of energy she was now pitting her supposed fetish power against the murderous frenzy of her witch doctors and headmen. The latter were represented by their leader, the bedecked negro who schemed against Marg'te's authority and yet was so superstitious that he could not help lowering his face to the dust under the lash of her curses and threats.

Superstition eventually worked his complete surrender. Snarling, sobbing with rage, he at last agreed to let Marg'te have her way.

A deep murmur of disappointment

arose from the compact ranks of the Goungas, but no one dared to come forward with a new protest. At an imperious order from the girl, half a dozen warriors ran to the huts. Before long they returned with six tiny African roosters, a bowl of millet, a gourd of water and a small pouch.

"Supervise the first part of the trial," Marg'te ordered the witch doctor who had just surrendered to her wishes.

Muttering ominously, the bedecked sorcerer dug a hole in the ground, poured millet into it, then water, and mixed them together with a stick. Then he gingerly added to the mixture a pinch of the substance contained in the pouch.

The first two fowls were brought close to the mess. With the usual stupidity of all roosters, they pecked eagerly at the mash in the hole. Suddenly they stopped, stretched their necks and opened their beaks wide. The next instant they toppled to the ground, struck out convulsively with wings and claws, then remained motionless. The sorcerer had added a pinch of ground, poisonous grubs to the millet, and this had killed the fowls.

The first phase of the ceremony, necessary to prove that the poison was really virulent, had worked according to schedule.

WHILE scores of rolling savage eyes scanned her every movement, Marg'te took charge of the remainder of the operation. With her agile fingers she mixed another poisonous mixture into a second hole; then two other roosters were brought forward.

Harper gazed at them intently. He knew that his only chance to survive lay in the hope that one or both of the new fowls might escape the fate of the first two. Therefore he bit his lips nervously when he saw the roosters begin to gulp eagerly of the millet. After a few moments Marg'te shooed them away, none the worse for their experience.

But the third pair of fowls, a couple of full grown cocks, were expected to feed from that same concoction and to die. This would prove that the pair which Marg'te had driven off unharmed had been spared by the powerful magic of the omnipotent spirits; and it would also prove that the same spirits wished to save and protect the white man whom the Goungas had captured.

Harper thought that Marg'te had managed to pour her pinch of poison outside the hole the second time, in order to save his life. But as far as he had been able to detect, she had not added surreptitiously more venom to the millet before the last pair of fowls were led to the mash. No doubt the last two cocks would share the luck of the second pair; and if they did, his doom would be sealed.

But a minute or two later the unfortunate birds crowed plaintively above their millet meal, and after a short struggle, collapsed.

Marg'te smiled, shouted a quick succession of orders. A Gounga ran to cut the fetters clamped around Harper's ankles; another put a gourdful of clear water to his lips; solicitous hands helped him to regain his feet, to limp wearily toward the log house.

MARG'TE'S father had made of that rough mansion a thing of comparative luxury. It housed a real bathroom and a tub; and though there was no heating system, a cistern adjacent to the building, and scorched

by the African sun, supplied plenty of lukewarm water.

The ordeal of the previous night had left Harper battered and scarred with superficial slashes, though not really hurt. A long bath, and generous daubs of iodine from his army kit, soon restored to smooth functioning his tough sinews and muscles. He was then able to take care of Adjutant Ahur and the sergeants, who had also been carried inside the house.

As he had surmised, the non-coms had been drugged. Diluted injections of adrenalin and spoonfuls of cognac forced between their clenched teeth aroused them to life within a short time.

Sergeant Touho, the hardiest of the lot, was the first to regain his senses. Spluttering, his tongue being swollen to twice its ordinary size, he told Harper that early the previous night a party of Goungas bearing capacious pails of native beer, had visited the newly built Tirailleur cabins. This beer, as Harper knew, was a beverage of which all negroes and half-breeds of Equatorial Africa were inordinately fond. Non-coms, privates and even sentries—all had partaken of it with relish, though not to excess. A few moments after the Goungas left for the near-by village, the Tirailleurs began to topple down one after another. The drug was so powerful that in the short space of time which preceded their collapse they found themselves unable to utter a shout, to fire a round of shots which would have warned their lieutenant.

Overjoyed as he was by the comforting news that his men were only temporarily disabled, Harper realized how important it was to revive them before the Gounga faction aiming at his doom could work out some other dastardly scheme. As soon as the non-coms were able to move about, he decided to go with them to the make-shift barracks.

JUST at that moment Marg'te entered the log house. Her lovely mouth quivered. Waving away the thanks of the officer, she stammered:

"You must go within a few hours. From sunset on, I shan't be able to help you any further."

"Tell me, Marg'te, what is this new trouble?" asked Harper.

"Fadel Soufan is due before evening. I found out that the witch doctors and headmen who directed last night's outrages acted according to the instructions of the *Sultani*, who wanted you killed and your men made prisoners," the girl replied passionately. "When you fell beneath the maces of the Gounga rebels I stopped them from killing you. Thereafter I succeeded in putting the rooster test through successfully by putting the poison powder under the top layer of millet paste, so that the second pair of fowls pecked only at the upper layers of the food. This upper millet had not yet been permeated by the venom, so that the last pair of birds, when they had eaten down to the poison, were immediately killed. Thus I fooled my Goungas into believing that the jungle gods wanted your release and that of your men.

"But I shall not find them so easy to sway when Sultani Fadel comes here," she added ruefully.

"Marg'te," Harper asked, "do you prefer to remain among the Goungas as the wife of that swine Fadel, or to go to the world where you really belong, that of the white man?"

"The Goungas sold me to Fadel Soufan. They no longer deserve loyalty," Marg'te replied tremulously, repressing her tears with difficulty. "Take me with you!"

"Is your revolver loaded?" Harper asked Sergeant Touho.

"*Ya, sidi,* and the pouches of my belt are full of bullets. The Goungas did not touch them, nor my *coup-coup,*" the burly veteran replied, thumping significantly the Senegalese cutlass hanging from his waist.

"Remain here with Marg'te, defending her at the cost of your life if necessary, until I return with the sections."

"It will be done, *sidi.*"

Followed by the other non-coms, Harper left the log house. He crossed the village, paying no attention to the glares and the muttered insults of the tribesmen. When he reached the cabins of the soldiers, he saw a cluster of Goungas making off with armfuls of rifles. He scattered them with a rapid succession of well aimed kicks, retrieving the loot.

Luckily, except for that belated attempt at theft, the tribesmen had superstitiously followed the orders of their jungle spirits, as interpreted by Marg'te, and had left the Tirailleurs and their weapons alone. Most of the sturdy black soldiers were already coming to; they responded quickly to the feverish ministrations of the lieutenant and his assistants.

HALF an hour later, Harper mustered two score men who were able to bear arms, and sent them, under the command of Adjutant Ahur, to form a square around Marg'te's house.

After another hour of strenuous work, the remaining one hundred and thirty Tirailleurs tramped in full marching kit across the village. Their skins still had a grayish hue, and their step was far from steady; but the very sight of their orderly array and their bristling weapons so awed the Goungas that they hastily made way. A menacing crowd which had gathered around Adjutant Ahur's detail, surrounding the log house, hastily scurried for cover.

Harper ordered the square cleared of natives, then directed that coffee be made close to the house. When the steaming liquid was ready, every Tirailleur drank his fill, and that seemed to master definitely the last traces of the poison in their systems. Eventually the whole outfit partook of canned meat, dried dates and ration sorgho bread. Harper finally inspected them one by one, and judged them fit to tackle the long journey back to the fort.

Marg'te was ready, too. Scantily clad, and holding three javelins in her fist, she looked like an ancient Amazon warrior brought uncannily back to life. Amid the Tirailleurs, born black barbarians, who now wore a regular military uniform, she was a strange anachronism. A score of men and women of all ages, her personal household, had elected to share her fate; and each of these carried a bundle containing some of their mistress's belongings.

The news that their queen was leaving threw the whole Gounga tribe into an uproar. Especially the witch doctors and headmen, who feared the murderous wrath of Sultani Fadel when he should discover that the white woman whom he coveted had disappeared; and they were loud in their threats and denunciations. A volley fired above their heads sent them hiding into their huts.

The column left the village, wound down the hill in long rows of gleaming gun barrels and fixed bayonets. When the *tata* appeared like a huge brown block, shapeless in the distance, the Tirailleurs gave vent to their elation

with one of the extemporaneous simple-tuned songs which are the pride and joy of jungle negroes. Before long, this developed into a high-pitched chant, expressing in crude, forthright fashion a vast doubt as to the paternity and manhood of the Gounga headmen. These, the song declared, were faced by the desertion, *en masse,* of their dusky mates, whose hearts had been captured by the singers themselves. However, the departing soldiers disdained to have anything to do with such a soiled race.

Harper let them rant on at will, until they entered a twisting valley which seemed favorable to ambushes. At that point he stopped the column, regrouped the sections so that those soldiers who were in better condition, together with the machine gunners, composed the first one. After a whispered conference with Adjutant Ahur, the latter took command of that choice detail and led it up the left side of the gorge. The other two sections marched on after the first, but followed the bottom of the valley, under the personal command of the lieutenant, and with Marg'te and her retainers in the very middle of the array.

CHAPTER IV.

SUDDEN CONFLICT.

BARELY an hour had passed when the vanguard scouts ran back to the main body, reporting a large body of Arabs. Harper had just time to deploy a section on the bottom of the gorge, and another on the side of one of the adjacent ridges, when a stream of white- and tan-capped Arabs and thick-set blacks rounded the opposite bend of the valley.

At the sight of the embattled sections the villainous army stopped. Presently an Arab detached himself from their midst, waving a white cloth tied to the barrel of his rifle.

Eventually he walked up to the Tirailleurs, lay down his gun and asked for the *sidi lieutenant,* who stepped onward to confront him.

"I am Ali, Sultani Fadel's trusted sword," said the messenger.

The hawk eyes of the Arab gazed contemptuously at the stalwart figure of Harper, at the orderly ranks of the soldiers. There was an insane ecstasy on his face, such as in Africa one sees only on the countenances of fanatic Moslems and hashish smokers.

"Gounga messengers warned Fadel that you were abducting Marg'te. Surrender her to the *Sultani,* throw yourself upon his mercy, or we'll tear you limb from limb."

Harper answered that insolence.

"*Gelb*—dog!—I permitted you to come forward under a flag of truce, just to let your master know that I give him a week in which to surrender the rule of his Banda tribe and leave my jurisdiction," he snarled. "But I shall send you back striped with whip lashes if you don't check your tongue."

"*Phagh!*" the Arab sneered. "Your doom is at hand. Hundreds of men surround you upon every side. Should you escape, the long arm of the Senoussi Brotherhood, which includes Fadel and me among its members, will reach you —even within the walls of your fort."

The Senoussi—the Moslem secret society with kingly headquarters in Fezzan and undercover members all over the Moslem world, from Morocco to Afghanistan. Sure that the Paradise of Allah would instantly follow their demise, the contempt for personal danger on the part of the members of the brotherhood bordered on madness.

Suddenly alert, Harper saw the hand of Ali dart snake-like under the folds of the burnoose. His gun leaped out a fraction of a second ahead of the revolver of the fanatic; the two reports crashed almost simultaneously. Shot through the head even as he pressed the trigger of his own gun, the Arab fell backward, and his bullet went wild.

A Tirailleur jabbered excitedly, pointing at the high ridges which surrounded the gorge. Harper saw that the summits swarmed with running, white-capped figures. He brought his whistle to his lips and blew a shrill blast.

As if sprouting from the very boulders, tan Tirailleur uniforms appeared on the hill to the left. An angry clatter of machine guns rent the heavy African air. A hail of bullets swept down upon the burnoosed warriors in front of them and those on the opposite ridge-top; mowed them down by whole groups and files, until the few scattered survivors hid for safety among the hollows of the adjacent ground.

It was Adjutant Ahur's section, the ace in Harper's sleeve, which had stealthily advanced, *via* ridge tops, alongside and above the main column.

THE next attempt to riddle with bullets the Arabs and Bandas massed on the bottom of the gorge proved less successful; for a bank which sprouted at midslope prevented the machine gunners from taking direct aim. But the annihilation of their fellow partisans on the surrounding ridges, who had been expected to swoop down from above and encircle the column in a ring of iron; indeed, the very presence of that second body of soldiers; plunged the bulk of Fadel Soufan's horde into a milling chaos. The frenzied Arabs were willing to risk all on a foolhardy charge, and negro Bandas were just as eager to give way.

Harper barked an order; his soldiers began firing at top speed. From above, a couple of machine gun crews found an open angle from which they could send a spray of lead which would hit a stretch of rocky boulders on the opposite hillside and ricochet into the very midst of Fadel's warriors. Within a few minutes, between those who fell and the others who rushed toward the rear, the Arabian-Banda force was split into a number of howling, individual groups.

This was the moment to inflict the final blow. At Harper's order, a bugle sounded the charge. The Tirailleur sections on the bottom of the valley shouted deafeningly, and sprang onward with lowered bayonets. Ahur's men came leaping down from their dominating positions.

The ragged volleys of the Arabs and the flying javelins of their Banda allies exacted five or six casualties among the soldiers, then the tide of bristling bayonets engulfed the frenzied natives, stabbing down whole lines and annihilating with rapid waves the make-shift fighting squares which moved into their path. At length only a cluster of yelling Arab swordsmen and Banda chieftains contested the overwhelming advance of the Tirailleurs.

Lieutenant Harper threw squad after squad against the attackers, saw the tall bonnets of feathers and twigs worn by the Banda headman topple one after another. A last compact drive broke the much-thinned group of Fadel's warriors.

A big, burnoosed Arab tried to rally them. Fighting with the strength of

desperation, he struck down a Tirailleur with a terrific blow of his curved Turkish scimitar, leaped sideways to avoid the bayonet thrust of a corporal and succeeded in slashing him on the shoulder. Another bayonet stab, barely lifted by a new parry, jerked away the hood of his burnoose and the *chechia* from his head; and, over the milling skull-tops and headgears of a score of Bandas, Arabs and Tirailleurs who separated them, Harper recognized the hooked nose and full black beard of the *sultani*.

Lifting his sword, the lieutenant tried to tear a way up to Fadel; but the thickness of the fighting crowd resisted his efforts for a few moments. Then Harper saw a gigantic Gounga arise, brandishing a spear to the *sultani's* defense. The muscles of the enormous black glistened under the sun, but his bulk did not seem to hamper in the least his agility. With lightning lunges, he stabbed through or knocked down with blows of the heavy shaft of his lance the soldiers who had almost brought Fadel Soufan to bay; then, before other squads could close in on them, he grasped an arm of the *sultani* and led him on a run up and among a swarm of his followers.

A FEW minutes later all fighting had ceased. It appeared that the Arabs, who had been Fadel's mainstay, had been killed almost to a man. The flattened white patches marked by their flowing garments and their sprawled, swarthy limbs, dotted the landscape. In many points they lay in confused heaps. The losses of the Bandas were heavy too. The escaping black tribesmen, who were rapidly being overcome by the pursuing Tirailleurs, surrendered without the least show of resistance.

But Harper had no intention of letting his men run out of hand on a lengthy chase. Therefore he ordered the buglers to sound the rally. Laughing and shouting lustily, group after group of the Tirailleurs came back, burdened down with the rifles of the vanquished Arabs and prodding in front of them scores of prisoners.

A check-up revealed the fact that twelve soldiers had been killed and four disabled by severe wounds. A number of others reported superficial cuts, but were still fit for duty.

The prisoners confirmed Harper's surmise that only fifteen or twenty Arabs had managed to escape with their *sultani*. As for the Bandas, it was doubtful if their survivors would follow the leadership of Fadel Soufan any longer.

Like all African slave traders, Fadel gloated over the suffering of others. Whenever his clandestine raids failed to secure prisoners, he sent to the slave marts of central Sudan numbers of comely women and children of his own Banda tribe. Often, on fits of unprovoked cruelty, he subjected to abuses and tortures some one of his unfortunate black subjects, whom he picked at random. Until some obscure prompting had suggested that he oppose his wits and might with those of Lieutenant Harper, only the fear of the *sultani's* invincibility had prevented a Banda uprising.

Under the gathering dusk of the evening, the prisoners were made to dig a deep grave for the dead Tirailleurs. Much as he hated to leave the corpses of the slain Arabs and Bandas unburied, Harper was forced to leave them where they had fallen. The much-tried column of soldiers could not spare the several hours needed to bury these properly; and to collect them and place

them under shallow layers of sod and stones was utterly useless, for hyenas and buzzards would soon dig out the remains.

VICTORS and prisoners camped for the night on a dominating plateau, a few miles south of the scene of the encounter. The flames of scores of lighted fires soon crackled above the rustle of the breeze and the hushed murmurs of conversations.

Marg'te, who had gazed at the battle without any outward signs of nervousness, now seemed strangely depressed. She barely touched the concoction of canned meat and freshly plucked herbs which was placed in front of her by Harper's orderly.

Her moody silence finally vexed the lieutenant. "Do you miss your Goungas, Marg'te?"

"Never!" the girl whispered fiercely. Then her eyes opened wide, her face became enigmatic, and in her next words there was a ring of terror. "There is something dark—ominous—closing in on me!"

Harper did not hold with prophecies, curses, and the usual witch doctor's bag of tricks. But telepathy, which he knew was admitted even by science, carries uncanny warnings under the sky of Africa. With the giant euphorbias and banyans looming in the surrounding gloom like fantastic, crouching beasts, and with the moans of the wounded mingling with the soft breeze, Marg'te's words sounded decidedly eerie.

In his own practical way, the lieutenant tried to bolster Marg'te's spirits with a rosy description of the future that was in store for her, and he succeeded in so thrilling the girl that at length she forgot her fears. However, as soon as his beauteous guest had retired to the tent which had been erected for her, he redoubled the number of the sentries about the camp. Whatever the future had in store for him, it would not find him napping.

But only the howls of lurking beasts of prey, and the familiar droning curse of mosquitoes, interfered with the rest of the camp during the night. Every one being inured to these nuisances, the vivid tints of the African sunrise found them rested and fit.

After her morning ablutions at a nearby spring, Marg'te appeared before Harper, a vivid figure of unspoiled loveliness that he would never forget. Her joy at awakening among friends, and free of the nightmare of the Gounga village, gave to her naïve semi-nudity the irresistible charm of some fabulous nymph of the woods.

Before long, the column tramped on, its progress watched over on every side by numbers of scouts. The prisoners had been placed under double guard, between the second and the last sections. Determined to keep an eye on the girl all the way through, Harper made her march at his side, in the very middle of the array.

DURING the whole morning, the noon halt and the earlier part of the afternoon, their advance proved smooth and almost pleasurable. But at last they reëntered the quicksand country, and their progress was slowed exasperatingly.

Thanks to the ruse of Sergeant Touho during their original advance toward the Gounga village, they now knew how to recognize the bottomless bogs which lay under the deceiving, stoneless prairies. But even Marg'te's followers had but a hazy knowledge of trails cutting through the surrounding tangle of vegetation. Therefore they

were often forced to hack new paths through walls of thorny growths.

Toward sundown they came within sight of an enormous morass, cut by a winding vein of rocks. All around, the ground was thickly wooded; but a mile or so further on there towered a bare ridge. Harper decided to reach this ridge as soon as possible, in order to avoid the possibility that darkness would find the column scattered and out of hand among the dense thickets.

The foremost patrol of scouts ran up onto that natural bridge across the marshy, bottomless bogs, and then entered the woods. When they returned to its edge, they signalled that the way was clear.

Harper ordered the column forward. Ahur's section stretched ahead at the double quick, followed by the second one, with Marg'te and the lieutenant. Next came part of the third section, with the prisoners; and finally the remainder of the Tirailleurs. The salient of rocks was so narrow that they were forced to advance in single file, so that soon Harper was unable to see either the foremost groups of Ahur's detail, who had entered the confronting woods, or the last ranks of the rear-guard.

And in that very moment hell began popping on both ends of the column.

FROM the rapidly increasing volume of firing, it appeared that the vanguard was facing the severest odds. After a few minutes it became evident that Ahur's men were being driven back, in spite of the squads that were continually being moved up to reinforce them.

Harper realized the seriousness of the situation; the column was stretched out, a line of helpless targets. There was no place to which they could retreat, no place where they could make a camp for the night. It was vital that the confronting opposition should be smashed, and quickly, or disaster was almost certain.

Pulling out his automatic, the lieutenant ran to take command. The first thing he noticed upon entering the woods was the body of Ahur, propped in a sitting position against a tree. A corporal jabbered excitedly that Arabs and blacks had been hiding on the tree tops.

They had thus been undetected by the scouts, and had jumped as if from a clear sky upon the section which followed. Adjutant Ahur had been killed by a spear hurled from above at the beginning of the attack.

In a fleet second Harper's mind went back to his former Foreign Legion outfits. Against similar odds, the *vieux de la Legion* would have calmly proceeded to officer themselves and mop out the wood. The black Tirailleurs, on the contrary, were faithful and brave, after the fashion of automatons, the moving spring being their officers. Left to their own devices, and on the offensive, they lost fifty per cent of their efficiency.

However, a few orders instantly turned the tables. Groups of squads thrown right and left raked trees and bushes with a rapid fire, spread out into two fast-moving wings. Then Harper led the rest to a frontal attack which swept everything before its bayonets, while a following party hunted out the Arabs and the blacks who had managed to duck this charge.

The lieutenant had already concluded that his troubles were over when a bedlam of shouts and the sound of rifle fire came from the bogs. At a loss to understand what was going on, he rallied the first section and that part of

the second which had followed him and raced back with them.

HE came just in time to witness something that had been unforeseen. Long files of tribesmen recognizable as Goungas by the halos of long feathers which they wore on their heads, raced across the morass through a dozen solid paths invisible to any one lacking their knowledge of the country.

The soldiers, stretched out along the strip of rocky ground which cut the bog from end to end, fired at top speed, but their nervousness rendered their aim inaccurate. To make matters worse, the Arab prisoners were taking advantage of the situation and were turning on their guards.

The machine gunners had followed the lieutenant into the woods, then back to its edge. Harper now shouted to them to place and aim their weapons so as to enfilade the attackers, as the riflemen of the late Adjutant Ahur's section were already effectively doing.

But before that could be done, twelve streams of feathered savages poured into the thin line of Tirailleurs which confronted them. There was a jumble of naked ebony limbs, tan uniforms and flashing weapons; then the battling groups surged over the edges of the narrow, firm ground and Tirailleurs and Goungas plunged, locked together, into the bog, some of them remaining mired waist-deep.

Suddenly Harper saw Marg'te being seized and dragged away, the soldiers who tried to rescue her being speared or battered down. And as if destiny was jesting grimly, at that very moment the machine guns opened fire. The hail of bullets which a minute before would have defeated the attack, now meant instant death alike for the girl and the blacks who were abducting her.

Cursing, Harper ordered his men to stop firing. Almost insane with rage, he darted to the rescue, but struck the sucking mire of the bog. The treacherous earth closed up to his calves and defeated all his efforts to move fast. Helpless to interfere, he saw the white figure of the girl struggle against her brutish captors, grow small in the distance with them. Then a bullet opened a deep furrow on the side of his scalp, knocking him unconscious.

CHAPTER V.

TO BATTLE.

HARPER awakened, coughing on a mouthful of cognac. Sergeant Touho, who had forced the neck of the bottle between the lieutenant's clenched teeth, beamed and inhaled a full gallon of the marshy evening air, so ballooning his enormous breast.

"Do the same, *sidi*," he advised.

Instinctively, Harper complied. As the oxygen filled his lungs, understanding flowed back into his fogged brain, and with it the poignant realization that Marg'te was gone.

"A sharpshooter got the Arab who shot you down. The battle was over a few minutes after you fell unconscious into the arms of a Tirailleur who stood on a spot of firm ground near you," Touho rumbled. "Then we pulled you out, *sidi*."

"Did you send scouts to track the girl and her captors?" Harper asked weakly.

Touho motioned with a sweeping gesture at the surrounding landscape. "Where?" he muttered, shrugging his shoulders.

The justice of the remark, in all its appalling finality, disheartened Harper. The darkness of the evening made an

impenetrable nightmare of the treacherous zone where the guile of Fadel Soufan had gotten the best of him.

The lieutenant understood clearly now that the two initial attacks had been but feints to attract his attention and that of his soldiers elsewhere, while the Gounga warriors enlisted by the *sultani* strove to recapture their fetish queen. But he had no illusions about the impossible task of finding Marg'te. The Goungas would not take her back to their village. Fadel Soufan knew by now that his game as a troublesome and barely tolerated chieftain was up. Most likely he would take Marg'te away from the Goungas and escape to the north with her, toward those wastes of the central Sudan, where he would become as easy to find as the proverbial needle in the haystack.

Marg'te, so beautiful and unspoiled, and so confident while under Harper's protection, was now in the hands of the cruel *sultani*, and only a miracle could save her. Struggling against the throbbing pain of his wounded head, Harper managed to rise.

"Rally the sections," he ordered. "We must get after them. Perhaps some of Marg'te's servants can point out to us the shortest trails north . . ."

Touho shook his head in denial. "The Goungas who broke into our lines killed every one of those servants, to punish them for their defection."

Harper gritted his teeth. His voice rang clear. "Collect branches to use as torches. Be ready to use cold steel against sudden rushes coming from the darkness."

THE Tirailleurs were ready to unpack their sacks and build the fires of the bivouac. They were tired, and many of them wounded. But Harper's call galvanized them into action. It appealed to their pride that their leader should not give up after a momentary check.

It was necessary to leave a detail, under a sergeant, with those who had been severely wounded. A dozen Tirailleurs had been killed during the combat. Therefore, Harper had less than a hundred men to throw into the menacing night jungle. But his decision to risk this danger was not foolhardy. Fadel Soufan saw the necessity of escaping quickly, before Harper's messengers could spread a network of orders which would mobilize all the French forces of Equatorial Africa for the pursuit. The minor groups that Fadel would leave behind to ambush the pursuers would not fare so well without the direction of the *sultani*.

Circling the morass, which was ink black in the semi-darkness of the night, Harper struck off toward the point where the Goungas had disappeared into the jungle with Marg'te. He soon led his men under a thick canopy of parasitic growths, hanging from decaying or already dead trees. The shining eyes of prowling beasts scurried everywhere all around them. With deep growls the panthers, tiger cats and minor marauders of the night escaped from the frightening glow of the burning branches and the sight of the men who held them.

The Tirailleurs soon found a trail. The finding of broken spear shafts, of discarded javelins, brought forth from them shouts of triumph. At length those tell-tale marks became so regular that Harper grew suspicious that they had been placed there on purpose, to lead him into another trap. He was just going to call Touho and tell him to pass the word to beware, when a soldier suddenly stopped, aiming his gun at the upper branches of a tree.

Almost instantly some one called out in throaty Azande.

In a split-second Harper reasoned that enemies in ambush would throw javelins and fire rounds. Quickly he slapped down the gun barrel of the Tirailleur, so that the bullet imbedded itself in the roots.

Two long, black legs emerged from a cluster of overhanging leaves; then, with simian agility, a muscular negro slid down the trunk. When he had planted himself firmly with both feet on the ground, and when he slowly turned his head around, to gaze at the fixed bayonets of the soldiers who had formed a ring around him, Harper almost began to believe that a fever born of his wound was playing havoc with his faculties. For the black giant was unmistakably the Banda headman, the very man who had fought so bravely to save Fadel Soufan from the Tirailleurs, during the first disastrous battle waged by the *sultani*.

"I made tracks to lead you on," he announced, gazing at Harper. "Not far from here are many Bandas, ready to join you so that Fadel may die."

The whole thing somehow sounded too primitive to be born from the shrewd brain of Fadel Soufan. Harper instinctively felt that the tall Banda headman was sincere. Nevertheless he said:

"How can I believe in you? Less than two days ago I saw you fight like a lion to defend the *sultani*."

"Because I want to kill him with my own hands, the first time I find him alone," the huge black bellowed. "Four years ago, Fadel took my wife from me, killed her and my brothers and sisters when they remonstrated. He spared me only because I praised his crimes as rightful and just, not knowing that from the bottom of my heart I had sworn revenge. But I never had a chance to do what I wanted with him until now. I will lead you to Marg'te, O white leader of warriors. I shall help you to crush Fadel Soufan's power. But you must promise me that both you and your men shall leave the *sultani* to me."

Strange as it sounded, Harper believed this tale. He knew that a revenge carefully planned and nursed over long years was characteristic of the strange psychology of the negro of the Ubangi-Shari territory.

"Lead us to your Bandas," ordered the white lieutenant.

WITH the Tirailleurs following in four successive groups and ready to enter into action at the least sign of trouble, the lieutenant marched alongside the big negro and up to a clearing of the jungle. At a guttural order from the formidable Banda, scores of black forms seemed to surge from the very ground. The tips of their spears, lifted in sign of peace, glittered in the moonlight.

The tribesmen were about as many as the Tirailleurs. There was no doubt that they could have taken the soldiers by surprise. If that had happened the issue would have been a most uncertain one for both parties. Harper recalled now that the other Bandas they had captured during the first battle had raved at length about Fadel's cruelty, had refused to make the most of their chance to escape during the combat of a few hours ago, and now stood peacefully under guard, near the wounded who had been left behind by the lieutenant.

"Why did you wait for us to come to you? Why did you not come to join my men as soon as Fadel left with the Goungas?" Harper asked, convinced at

last that he could trust these unexpected allies.

"Had we done so, your sentries would have fired on us without giving us a chance to explain. And we wanted to prove to you that we could easily ambush you in the jungle, so that our failure to do your men any harm might vouch for our good will."

"Very well," Harper warned, "Sergeant Touho, my sub-chief, will follow you closely, ready to shoot you down at the least sign of betrayal.—But if you make it possible for us to save Marg'te and crush Fadel forever, I promise that you shall be the next *sultani* of your tribe."

"I only want to kill the Arab with my own hands," the Banda headman replied savagely. He gazed at the bandaged head of Harper and growled. "Can you walk fast? Fadel was so crazy as to tell me where he intended to halt until sunrise; but I don't know what he intends to do next."

"Lead on as quickly as you can," Harper snapped.

The big black took a firm hold upon his spear and darted at a jogging trot through jungle paths, which were invisible at a distance of more than a few feet. His movements seemed dictated more by some instinct which resembled that of a wild beast than by any human knowledge of the ground.

He jogged on and on, tirelessly. Luckily, Harper was a man of iron, so that exhaustion failed to overcome him. Nevertheless, he welcomed the brief halt which was granted a couple of hours later by his giant guide.

AN hour or so before dawn, they entered a maze of woods and ravines of forbidding appearance. When Harper's suspicions surged up again, the big Banda slowed to a walk.

"Fadel's camp is near," he whispered. "We must be careful."

Silent as ghosts, soldiers and Bandas crossed a last wooded hillock and a succeeding stretch of almost impenetrable jungle. Then, all of a sudden, they saw the glows of several camp fires, right in front of them.

Fadel had pitched camp in the middle of an esplanade planted in the middle of hills, which from the outer side seemed to loom unbroken. Thus he had an ideal hiding place, a spot in which he would be able to defy the pursuit of any one who did not know the peculiarities of that territory.

From a distance of a few score yards, flattened on the ground, Harper scanned the scene of the impending struggle. Droves of Goungas were squatted all around a score or so of heaps of burning branches. A few burnoosed Arabs, the very last of the once formidable bodyguard of the *sultani*, loomed conspicuously among the dark tribesmen.

Fadel and Marg'te were nowhere in sight; but there was a huge tent in the very middle of the bivouac, and Harper scowled at it as he thought that the Arab chieftain was perhaps there, with Marg'te in his power.

"We must attack running," the big Banda headman said under his breath, "Gounga scouts lie in the grass between us and the fires."

Harper envied the piercing eyes of the tribesman, which seemed to see through the darkness of the night like those of a leopard. He restrained with an imperious gesture the giant warrior, who was eager to bound forward, and quickly racked his mind to concoct quickly a plan of attack.

He had almost decided to launch the Bandas on a headlong charge and the Tirailleurs on a wide, surrounding

drive, when the slim blond figure of a woman suddenly darted out of the tent. An Arab sentry sprang to bar her way. Heavy and ruthless, Sultani Fadel emerged from under the tent flap which served as a door. With both his huge hands he grasped the blond hair of the girl and dragged her inside.

Marg'te's agonized cry brought Harper to his feet instantly. Gun in hand, he raced forward, followed by the Tirailleurs and the Bandas.

Although instantly detected, their charge was none the less so utterly unexpected that the Arab leaders of the Goungas lost their heads for a precious moment. By the time the attackers began to snap orders and fire their rifles the cordon of Gounga sentries had disappeared under the avalanche of the attack, and soldiers and Bandas were already streaming into the camp.

Under the tent, Fadel was raining blows on Marg'te, who had proved unamenable to his slightest wish. Her attitude, so different from that of the partly Arab or full-blooded negro tribeswomen of his harem, had stirred the *sultani* to a murderous frenzy. Warned by the uproar outside the tent that a rescue was at hand, he tried to drag the girl out through the tent flap. But Marg'te dug her teeth into his wrist, so forcing him to release his hold. Baffled at the last, the brutal chieftain grasped his scimitar and struck.

Lithe as a panther, the girl crouched and leaped sideways. The scimitar swished above her head, splitting the side of the tent.

MEANWHILE, Harper ran amongst the Arabs and Goungas who had as yet failed to unite on a compact front. His automatic emptied, he grabbed up the rifle of a wounded man, without diminishing his pace. Using the weapon as a club, he rained shattering blows on every one who tried to bar his way.

Smashing down all opposition, he reached the tent just at the moment when Fadel had turned about and was again charging at Marg'te, and roaring like a wild beast as he did so. The breeze threw wide the edges of the cloth which had been ripped by the first blow of the *sultani;* and dim as it was, the light of the lamp hanging from the central pole of the tent brought all things inside into sharp relief. The lieutenant was thus enabled to see Fadel Soufan's gleaming weapon as it darted all about Marg'te, who managed to avoid its stabs and slashes with a nimbleness rendered lightning-like by desperation.

But at the moment when Harper catapulted through the beaming gap, the girl became dazzled and completely lost her head. The lieutenant had no time to swing his gun in a smashing blow. Seeing that Marg'te was almost out of her mind and had slipped to one knee, waiting thus for the scimitar to slash down upon her, he brought the gun forward, lance-like, with all the strength of his brawny arms.

The rifle, which had been wrested from one of Fadel's Arabs, lacked a bayonet; but the stiff muzzle, propelled by the full weight of the weapon and by Harper's steely muscles, hit the jaw of the *sultani* with such force that it opened a ragged furrow through the bearded cheek and broke the bone beneath.

Out on his feet, Fadel Soufan stumbled backward. However, before Harper could follow his advantage, yelling Goungas jumped in upon him from every side. The tent went down in a heap, entangling the lieutenant and

the foremost savages in its heavy folds. Spear-points jabbed through the cloth, while the vegetable oil from the smashed lamp flowed to the rugs beneath and blazed up.

Then Harper heard the raucous shouts of Sergeant Touho. With his lungs filled by the acrid smoke, he struggled against the milling feet which pressed on the tent cloth and on his limbs. The impact of a huge body hurtled directly on his breast took his breath away for an instant.

Shortly afterward, however, the dead and wounded who had rapidly piled on top of him were removed by strong arms and the burning tent lifted. Solicitous hands propped him up on his feet. Half blinded and choking Harper stammered:

"Save Marg'te!—Don't let the Goungas carry her into the jungle!"

A chorus of voices, panting with the exertion of the recent struggle, rasped all around him:

"Don't fear, *sidi!* We have them cornered! Touho is after them!"

The stinging vapor which had filled the eyes of the lieutenant was dispelled by contact with the clear air of the night. All over the camp, soldiers, Bandas and Goungas were tearing at each other in chaotic, ruthless combat. Harper's searching glance soon made out a group of Arabs and blacks, shoulder close to shoulder, on a knoll. Tan uniforms of the Tirailleurs pranced all around, in a way that enabled the soldiers to avoid the thrusting lances of their foes and to carry home their bayonet strokes.

Harper saw the gleam of white limbs in the midst of the black bodies of the two defenders. Having lost his gun, he scanned the ground for another, saw the hilt of an Arabian sword sprouting from under the burnoose of a dead man. A Tirailleur who had followed his gaze quickly retrieved the weapon, proffered it to him.

Harper then darted to join those who fought to deliver Marg'te. His officer's uniform and his bandaged head focused the attention of swarms of Goungas, who stormed on him from every side. The Tirailleurs who charged at the right and left of him received the savages on the points of their bayonets. Time after time a spear struck home, and one of the soldiers fell head down on the ground.

Harper's sword was soon red up to the hilt. His uniform was slashed by countless stabs, which luckily had only pricked his skin. Splattered with his own blood and that of the tribesmen whom he cut down in his advance, he was an awesome sight.

WHEN only a few yards separated him from the crowd which struggled around Marg'te, a swarm of blacks led by an Arab engulfed his much thinned party. In a few instants, the press became so thick that he had barely room to swing his arms.

The butt of the gun of the Arabian leader struck his midriff. With the pit of his stomach racked by pain and the wind knocked out of his lungs, he slashed with a backhand stroke at the neck of his aggressor. He saw the fellow's vicious, snarling mouth contract. Then it relaxed, with that rapid change of expression which replaces the look of tenseness during the fight with the look of surprise which comes over the face of one who is mortally wounded.

The next instant Harper broke the skull of a Gounga, who catapulted headlong against him, with a terrific blow of the pommel of his sword. Then he stabbed at a hideous, naked savage

who had leaped astride a wounded Tirailleur, and in so doing he barely missed being impaled by the spear of another charging Gounga, who was quickly bayoneted by a corporal. All around him the confused figures of Goungas rolled on top of other injured soldiers and were rapidly stabbed down by squads of Tirailleurs who rushed to the rescue with lowered bayonets. Then, with one of those shifts of the whirlpool of the conflict which are peculiar to all cold steel combats, the press in front of him suddenly cleared.

Gathering all his strength, Harper ran to join Touho and his men, in the act of shattering the barrier of spears lowered to prevent him from joining Marg'te. There was a last hard impact of snaky black bodies against tan uniforms. Sergeant Touho leaped on a gigantic headman, bedecked with clanking armlets, who had clamped a sinewy arm around Marg'te's waist, in a desperate effort to carry her away. The two fell struggling on the ground, while a Tirailleur steadied the girl on her feet, two others darted to shelter her with their bodies.

These soldiers fell almost instantly, pierced by a hail of javelins; but with a thundering shout the following wave of Tirailleurs swooped all around Marg'te. Jumping on that last group of fighting Goungas, they became a whirlwind of stabbing bayonets and clubbing guns, swung by the barrel. The Goungas fell in a heap, and the soldiers pinned them to the ground with a last tempest of bayonet strokes.

After a short struggle on the ground with the Gounga headman, Touho was finally pinned down by his shoulders. Sure that the non-com was getting the worst of it, Harper darted to help, lifting high his sword. Then he saw the head of the Gounga snap back. With a last heave, Touho threw the great black body aside, arose lumberingly, brandishing his *coup-coup*, the terrible Senegalese cutlass. He grinned at the lieutenant, growling almost apologetically:

"He was hard to kill, *sidi*."

But now that all the immediate neighborhood seemed cleared of enemies, and there was no longer any danger for his faithful top-sergeant, Harper's entire attention turned to Marg'te. He opened his arms to the young woman, who ran sobbing to embrace him.

CHAPTER VI.

SUCH IS THE ARMY.

HOWEVER, the battle was far from ended. Far to the right, a confused mass of blacks against blacks gave witness to the ferocity of this fight between Harper's Tirailleurs and their Banda allies, and the large swarms of Goungas. On the left, and on the section of the camp opposite to the one from which the charge had come, other Goungas, together with a few Arabs, fought so closely mixed with Tirailleurs that it was impossible to open fire without hitting both friends and foes.

That defeated Harper's plan. Before launching his attack, he had ordered his machine gunners to stay out of the fight until Marg'te had been rescued and the danger of shooting down the girl among her captors had been eliminated. At any rate, the machine gun section rushed across the battlefield to join the party under his direct command, sure that the *sidi* lieutenant would soon find a way to utilize their services.

Harper realized that he had to extricate the bulk of his forces piecemeal

from their present predicament. Otherwise, the losses would be overwhelming. Rapidly he counted the soldiers who stood around him. They were forty, most of them bleeding from superficial wounds, yet to a man, eager to jump into the fray again.

But Harper, now that he had rescued Marg'te, had no intention of leaving her weakly protected, and exposed to another sudden Gounga charge and possible capture.

"Remain here, with thirty men and all machine guns," he ordered Touho. "If things turn against us and I'm killed, don't hesitate to fire and kill everything in sight, so that you may bring the white girl safely to Fort Sibout."

For a moment, the top sergeant scowled.

He began, "We have always fought side by side . . . Do I deserve to be left behind?" Then his eyes met the steely gaze of his superior officer. He straightened to attention. "*Sidi,* it will be done."

Harper nodded. He carefully refrained from showing that he appreciated that rugged bravery, that willingness of the veteran non-com to face a new and deadly danger side by side with him. A single friendly word would have rendered Touho's blind devotion uncontrollable.

With ten men only, Harper ran into the fray. By means of well timed rushes, collecting and keeping in hand the squads which he succeeded in extricating, he managed after a half hour or so to collect fifty-odd Tirailleurs. Whereupon the stretches of ground upon which only Goungas with a few Arabian leaders stood, appeared more clearly before him. The lieutenant quickly took advantage of such opportunities, ordering the firing of rapid volleys which routed the fighting-mad enemy so quickly that it became easy to rally still other soldiers. In the end, what remained of his section followed him in a body to the point where Marg'te and Touho waited for them. And before long the machine guns raked with their withering fire three-fourths of the battlefield, bringing everything down under their bullets.

BUT the very fact that everywhere they went the Tirailleurs under Harper seemed to sweep all opposition before their bayonets and their bullets had the effect of throwing the masses of Goungas to the right, where there were only Banda spears to oppose them. And much as he wanted to help his tribal allies, Harper knew that by rashly launching the Tirailleurs to their help, he would only mingle soldiers, Bandas and Goungas in a disorderly tangle, so enhancing what chances Fadel still had of winning the day.

Therefore, after granting his men a much needed rest, he resorted to different tactics. He sent picked men to join the Bandas by a roundabout route, to line them up and lead them so as to push the Goungas toward the middle of the camp. There the leaping flames of the camp fires would make it possible to distinguish the feather halos and armlets of the Gounga headmen from the twig bonnets of the Banda chieftains.

This presently worked as he had planned, and the swarms of Goungas thus brought into clear view were instantly cut down by well-aimed machine gun fire.

But with the Goungas growing aware of such a procedure and becoming more difficult to drive to slaughter, in the end that device proved useless.

Harper knew that he had definitely won the day, and he felt that duty forbade him to risk the loss of his victory in a final dog fight of uncertain issue. Still, even if that was unquestionably his line of conduct as an officer, he had a personal obligation to fulfill as well as a personal score to settle.

Naroo, the giant Banda headman who had led him to Marg'te and who had made her rescue and the doom of Fadel's plans possible, was now in a tight predicament. It was up to Harper to help the brave fellow pull through. Likewise, he could not allow the injured Fadel Soufan to escape. For the *sultani* was now among that last horde of embattled Goungas, proof of which lay in the fact that Harper and the Tirailleurs had failed to notice him elsewhere since the encounter in the now demolished tent.

Thus, struggling to master his weariness, Harper again left the protesting Touho in charge, repeating the instructions he had given him the first time, and at the head of a score of picked Tirailleurs went to join the Goungas.

Once in the midst of that obscure, savage struggle between tribesmen, he realized how much the Bandas had needed his help. Only the hatred of a score of years spent under the ruthless cruelty of Fadel Soufan had steeled them to hold their ground against the Goungas, though outnumbered.

The flames of the bivouac, which until now had blinded Harper to what was taking place in the zone beyond their scarlet glare, were now to his left, and comparatively distant. With eyes rapidly growing accustomed to the dim moonlight, and the semi-darkness of the thickets on his right, the lieutenant saw the scattered Bandas almost at bay before the savage onslaught of the swarming Gounga horde.

His advent and his ringing orders brought new courage to the Banda warriors who made a desperate attempt to form a compact front. Thus Harper rallied them, fighting in the first line, and under a hail of javelins. He slashed right and left, with the superiority of the skilled swordsman, and this made it easy for him to brush aside and shatter the spear shafts and to strike home, before the maces could reach him.

EVENTUALLY he succeeded in throwing his handful of Tirailleurs to the right, in a compact group. A few volleys then rolled back swarms of Goungas, who ran away, leaving the huddled corpses of their dead and their writhing wounded among the spiky growths close to the woods. Other volleys against the thickets effectually stopped a surrounding Gounga drive coming from there.

But then, when things seemed to be going fairly well, the Goungas suddenly massed against the center of the ragged Banda array and swept on, carrying everything in front of them. And among their howling swarms, Harper perceived the bulky figure of an Arab, in whom he recognized Sultani Fadel.

At the crucial moment the lieutenant mastered all his reserves of physical strength and steely will. The tangle of Bandas and Goungas was so great that the Tirailleurs were unable to fire, for fear of hitting both rebels and friendly tribesmen. Throwing all caution to the wind, Harper shouted to them to charge with lowered bayonets.

Meanwhile, a giant headman leaped from among the Banda ranks. His long spear, which had struck desperately in all directions up to that moment, darted in front of him with redoubled vigor. Smashing through the tide of the Gounga attack which was rolling

back his own people, he tore like a madman toward Fadel Soufan.

Harper's charge, coming from the right, diverted the attention of scores of the Goungas, so diminishing the numbers of those who rushed to meet the giant Naroo. Thus, with a succession of frenzied stands and terrific single-handed drives, Naroo, who in that moment saw once again in their agony the faces of his wife and sisters and brothers who had been killed by Fadel Soufan, finally came within reach of the *sultani.*

Harper, while sabering mightily, with a strangely renewed strength, a chaos of Tirailleurs and Goungas struggling at close quarters all around him, saw through the waving arms and weapons dancing in front of him that Fadel had stopped. It seemed as if with the instinct of an old cornered wolf, attacked by the fiercest fighter of his own pack, he realized that his crimes were at an end, that death finally faced him.

With a raucous cry, he leaped against the black Naroo, brandishing a javelin in one hand and a dagger in the other.

But as though anticipating the *sultani's* hope that he might galvanize the Goungas into action, Naroo jumped lightly back. Simultaneously, with a lightning move, he lifted his spear and struck.

Fadel let out a piercing cry and fell backward. Naroo retrieved his spear, charged at the nearest Goungas.

Harper and his score of Tirailleurs swept on, shouting at the top of their lungs. But the news of the *sultani's* death, quickly shouted from one end of the Gounga forces to the other, took all the fight out of them. They attempted a brief rally to a sweeping counter-attack of the Bandas; then, with the Tirailleurs breaking into their very midst, they turned about and fled.

AN hour later, both Tirailleurs and Bandas were contentedly eating reserve rations and the great sides of broiled venison which had been left by the Goungas.

The aftermath of the hardships of the last few days, together with a subtle fever due to his wounds, rendered Harper's mind slightly hazy. But he knew that his work was done, and that soothed him. With the elimination of Fadel Soufan, slave running in the territory of Fort Sibout was at an end. After their bloody lesson, the Goungas would be easy to manage. He had thus at a stroke eliminated the two most dangerous plagues of the territory which had been entrusted to his supervision.

Marg'te's voice came to him as in a dream. He had never seen a loveliness as glorious as hers. He wondered if, after a year or so of careful tutoring, the beautiful white savage could be made to conform to the customs of a modern white woman. And if, when that was over, her eyes would still turn to him with the same naïve fervor which filled them at that very moment.

The voice of Touho, the top sergeant, second in command now that Adjutant Ahur was dead, awakened him from his reverie.

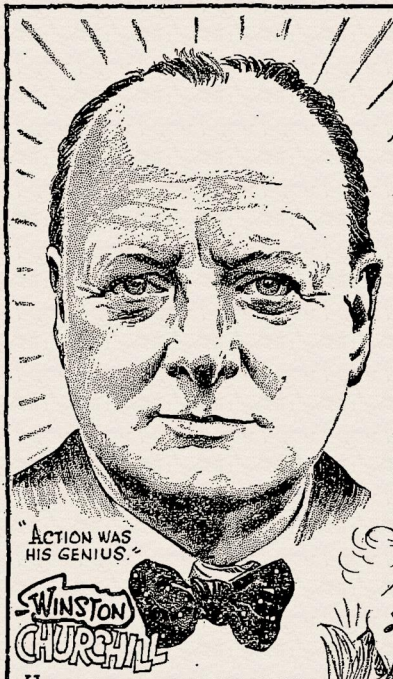
"*Sidi* lieutenant, I have already reported the names of the dead and wounded. I forgot to say that two rifles are missing. These are their serial numbers:—"

Harper smiled and failed to hear the rest—red tape. The usual cold shower following the golden flames of enthusiasm and victory. *C'etait l'Armée*—such was the army.

THE END.

MEN of DARING

By STOOKIE ALLEN



"ACTION WAS HIS GENIUS."

WINSTON CHURCHILL

HE WAS BORN IN 1874 - HIS FATHER WAS RANDOLPH CHURCHILL AN ENGLISH LORD AND FAMOUS SOLDIER. HIS MOTHER WAS JENNIE JEROME OF NEW YORK CITY...WAS EDUCATED IN THE ARMY... AT 21 HE WAS A LIEUTENANT IN ENGLAND'S FAMOUS 4TH HUSSARS CAVALRY. SEEING NO CHANCE OF HAVING A HAND IN A REAL WAR FOR ENGLAND, HE RAN AWAY TO CUBA AND FOUGHT FOR THE SPANIARDS.

HE MADE SUCH A NAME FOR HIMSELF IN THE HAND TO HAND FIGHTING THAT SPAIN AWARDED HIM THE ORDER OF MILITARY MERIT. HE ALSO SENT SUCH GRAPHIC ACCOUNTS OF THE WAR TO ENGLAND THAT THE PAPERS WERE SOON PAYING HIM UNHEARD OF PRICES FOR HIS ARTICLES

THE NEXT YEAR HE WENT TO INDIA WITH THE MALAKAND FIELD FORCE. IN THE DEFENCE OF MALAKAND PASS AGAINST THE FIERCE AFGHANS, CHURCHILL NOT ONLY DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF IN THE FIGHTING BUT AT THE END OF EACH DAY HE CARRIED HIS OWN DISPATCHES BACK TO THE TELEGRAPH STATION AT PANJKORA. THE WAY LED 20 MILES THROUGH THE ENEMY COUNTRY BUT NOT ONCE DID HE FAIL TO FIGHT HIS WAY THROUGH! HIS DISPATCHES WERE THE FIRST TO GET TO ENGLAND. HE BECAME INTERNATIONALLY FAMOUS.

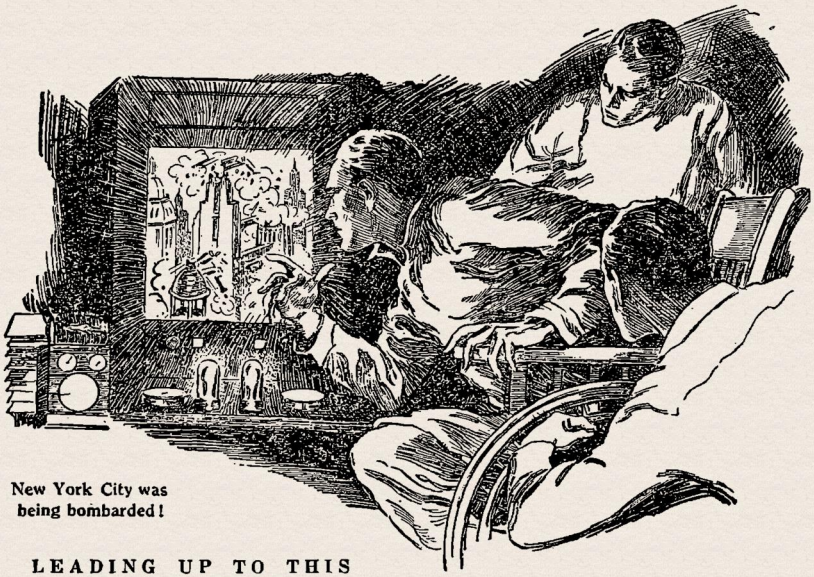
Next Week: Captain Bob Bartlett, master of men

The Radio War

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

Author of "The Radio Pirates," "Caves of the Ocean," etc.

John Pease, watching by televisiphone the attack on the great coastal cities of America, wondered how this scientific warfare of the year 2000 could end



New York City was being bombarded!

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

IT was in the year 2000 that war broke out between the United States and Soviet Siberia. It found the enemy hidden in a secret encampment in the center of Pennsylvania; and when this base seemed about to be discovered, the Siberians flew to another base in Canada, under the cover of darkness. They took with them as prisoner, Captain John Pease. Pease had been a keen student of science under Professor Ray Forrest, who is now the new Secretary of National Defense, and is thus able to observe intelligently the astounding scientific war devices which he sees in the enemy's camp. The two chief officers over the Siberians are Colonel Kachurin, the commandant, and the repulsive Major Plotnicoff.

The last-named is accompanied by his mistress, the sinister Anna Ivanovna Soodakova; but Pease observes that Major Plotnicoff's newest inter-

This story began in the Argosy for July 2.

est, to the intense jealousy of the Soodakova woman, is a beautiful girl named June Stevens, who is the daughter of the Canadian premier. Canada's place in the difficulties between the United States and Soviet Siberia is at first vague. Canadian officers claim that Canada is neutral, then say that she has joined forces with Siberia.

But it is shortly revealed that confused and forged orders have been circulated by the Siberians in order to dupe the Canadian forces in this district; and as soon as the real truth becomes known, the Canadians attack the camp of the enemy within their gates. By now, Pease knows that June Stevens, like himself, is being held prisoner by the Siberians.

The attack of the Canadians is almost useless, however. The superior anti-aircraft guns of the Siberians make attack by plane impossible; and attack from the ground is prohibited by reason of a powerful sound wave wall which surrounds the enemy's camp. So powerful is this wall that neither men nor projectiles can penetrate it. Under its protection, the Siberians fly off in their planes. June Stevens they take with them, but Pease they leave behind in the camp, with the hope that he will be able to return to the United States and that he will spread propaganda about the invincibility of the Siberian forces. As they leave, the wall of sound breaks down; there is a volley of shots from the Canadians; and Pease, who is watching, sees that June Stevens is wounded—how seriously he does not know.

The Canadians take the Soodakova woman and Major Plotnicoff prisoners, but they escape a little later. Pease they send back to the United States. He, too, has been rather seriously wounded in the encounter between Siberians and Canadians, and so he is put into a military hospital in New York City. It is from his wheel chair in the hospital that he witnesses by radio visiphone the bombardment of the very city he is in.

CHAPTER IX *(Continued)*

THE WAR GETS UNDER WAY.

THE huge city of New York was panic-stricken. Soon the news-casting televisiphones throughout America were broadcasting the news of the Soviet attack on New York.

Although American military planes scoured the seas everywhere within naval range of the city, no enemy ships could they find anywhere. In vain did the national defense authorities announce this fact; the announcement only served to accentuate the panic. No one believed the announcement; therefore every one assumed that the enemy was at their very gates, and that the authorities were attempting to conceal the true facts. Although no gas shells had fallen, gas masks and gas suits were issued to the entire civilian population, trained from childhood to wear them.

Acting on a tip from reporter Ross's interview with John Pease, the A. B. C. studios guardedly suggested that the enemy projectiles might be coming from five-inch guns, or larger, equipped with Pastoriza blast-deflectors, and carried by Siberian airplanes. The air patrols promptly reported that there was no sign of such craft anywhere.

"Another official lie," said the populace, and the panic redoubled in intensity.

The automatic airplane lifts were busily disgorging their contents onto the huge single roof of the city, as fast as the trembling plane owners, with a few hastily snatched belongings in their hands, could take their turns inserting their keys in the key holes of the controls at the tops of the lifts. The sky over New Jersey was black with west-bound fliers.

The Hudson bridges and tunnels, and all roads to the northward, were jammed with busses and departing cars.

All railroads—even the Hell Gate route—put on extra trains, to accommodate those New Yorkers who owned neither planes nor autos. All northbound moving sidewalks and subway cars were jammed with struggling humanity. New York was being evacuated, in the face of a menace the seriousness of which no one was able to predict, or even to understand.

The two United States Senators from New York State, and all the Congressmen from New York City, clamored at the doors of the White House, demanding the immediate recall of the fleet, still steaming along on its way to the Pacific, to protect the Atlantic seaboard. But to their everlasting credit President Benson and Secretary Forrest, stood firm, announcing as their policy:

"No attention will be paid to political pressure, or to the demands of menaced localities. No considerations, other than those which are purely military, will govern the disposition of the country's forces in this emergency."

Let the populace and the politicians rave; the war must be won as those in authority saw fit! Which was all very nice—but how did any one know what were the most intelligent military considerations, when no one had the slightest idea where all these shells were coming from?

MEANWHILE, the military hospital, where Pease was located, was not evacuated. Civilians first! The soldiery, even including its sick members, would stick to its posts. So it was that John Pease and a little group of convalescents and medical corps personnel, clustered in front of the screen of the newscaster of the hospital and watched and listened to the bombardment of the very city they were in, while shells continued to drop from the sky and alert A. B. C. reporters scurried about gathering details for the benefit of the far-flung patrons of screen and loud speaker.

Pease, as he sat in his wheelchair in front of the newscasting televisiphone, felt strangely detached from all the scenes of destruction, riot and flight which he saw on the screen. It hardly seemed possible that the events which he was witnessing were taking place simultaneously, only a few blocks away in the same city—under the same roof, in fact. These scenes were more like those of a war in China or some other distant country.

As he sat and watched the screen, an idea began to form in the back of his brain and to force itself into his upper consciousness. Suddenly he jumped up with a cry of "I have it!" Only to sink back with a groan, at the wrench which the movement had given to his wounded leg.

Every one in the hospital room turned his way; some with interest, some with annoyance, and some with alarm.

As soon as he recovered from his pain, Pease called one of the medical officers over to him, and requested, "Get me some one from the corps of

engineers—quick! I'm going to locate the enemy guns."

CHAPTER X.

THE NIGHT ATTACK ON NEW YORK.

SPOKE the medico soothingly, "You're not leaving this hospital, my man! You're going to stay right here, for you're in no condition to go anywhere."

"Oh, don't quibble!" urged Pease. "This is no time for stupidities. Don't be silly. Of course I'm not planning to move. We can locate those guns from right here in this hospital."

The officer gave a significant glance to two of the internes, and they began to close in upon Pease, slowly and cautiously.

But just at that moment reporter Ross entered the room.

"I've come back to photograph the dud," he announced. "It must be in some one of the rooms below here. Has any one tried to find it?"

"Ross!" exclaimed Pease. "Here's a chance for the biggest scoop ever! These medical corps men think I'm crazy—"

"Is *that* the scoop?" laughed Ross.

"Please be serious!" urged Pease. "If we can locate the dud, we can figure out, by ballistics, just where it came from."

"For heaven's sake!" exclaimed the medical officer, immediately interested. "Why didn't you say so in the first place? You'd better put through a special wave length to Washington at once.—Here, Giles, beat it to H. Q., and arrange that. Rush! And you, Briggs—by the way, Mr. Pease, why did you want the engineer?"

"To measure the angle of fall of the shell and to figure out what direction it came from. We can do that by lining up the first two holes the shell made."

"Fine! Briggs, go get the engineer officer on the house phone. Explain just what Mr. Pease wants, and ask him to send a squad of men right over with the necessary apparatus."

"Meanwhile, I'll try and locate the shell itself," cut in Ross.

"Good!" agreed Pease. "And bring it up here when you find it."

The two internes and the reporter departed on the run. Soon the private wave length connection with Washington was announced, and a cradle phone was plugged into a base plug for Pease's convenience.

First, Secretary Forrest and John Pease congratulated each other on their escapes; and then the secretary got down to business, and gave some instructions. The engineer squad was to record the angle-of-fall and the compass-direction of every dud which had fallen in the city, as well as every live shell which, by any chance, had passed through two or more walls before exploding. All unexploded shells, and even the fragments of those which had been exploded, were to be collected and shipped up to the physics laboratory of Columbia University, where also the other data were to be reported.

Pease was instructed to move up to the university if physically able, and take charge there. Meanwhile, the private wave length was to be shifted to the university laboratories, and the best ballisticians of the technical staff at Washington would stand by on the air to handle the computations.

Pease was rushed up to Morningside Heights in an army ambulance helicopter, and Ross followed him there with the first one of the dud shells, practically intact.

They found an eager group of scientists awaiting them. First, various views of the dud were sent over the air to Washington. Then the university physicists weighed and measured it, located its center of gravity, and took its various moments of inertia.

MEANWHILE, the engineer corps data came in.

Within a scant half hour after the receipt of complete figures from the university laboratory, the technical staff at Washington had computed the exact path of the flight of the shell through the air. This computation had been carried clear back to the gun, with the result that official Washington at least knew exactly where the enemy were firing from.

Yet they hesitated to announce the result, until similar computations, based on two other duds, had been made.

A squadron of scout planes was sent out from Chatham Naval Base, to investigate the supposed site of the Siberian long-range gun.

The computations having been checked, indicated that the Siberians had landed on Martha's Vineyard Island, and had established themselves on the great plains of Edgartown.

Just as this information was given out to the newscasters, word came from Chatham that one of the U. S. naval planes had been shot down over Martha's Vineyard by anti-aircraft fire. There was nothing strange about that. What was really remarkable was that another plane, flying low in an attempt to bomb the enemy position, had suddenly crumpled up and gone down in flames. Apparently, it had not even been shot at!

John Pease, the laboratory work being temporarily finished, now that the position of the enemy guns had been definitely located, happened to be watching a newscast when this information came in over the air. Instantly he realized what it meant, namely that the Soviet encampment on Martha's Vineyard, like that in Canada, was surrounded and protected by an impenetrable wall of sound.

Wheeling his chair rapidly to the radio phone which was connected with Washington, Pease informed Secretary Forrest of the significance of this latest occurrence, and urged him to warn Chatham not to risk sending other planes within the radius of the sound rays of the Siberians. This warning was at once relayed to Chatham, with the result that the planes from the naval base had to content themselves with taking telephotographs from a great height.

By using various different light-filters in taking these photographs, the Soviet position was stripped of all its camouflage, and was revealed in its hideous nakedness. Two huge cannon were revealed, pointed in the general direction of New York City, and discharging their missiles with great regularity. But for some reason there was no sound. These guns were protected by batteries of anti-aircraft guns. There was also what appeared to be a huge, oil-burning generator set, evidently the source of power for the sound barrier.

As soon as the story of the locating of the Soviet position was on the air, the Siberians gave over all attempt at concealing their camp. Huge freight submarines emerged from the ocean, and docking on the South Beach, began to unload airplanes in great numbers. American destroyers, hastening to the scene, were stood off by the two big silent cannon. However, this new development gave New York City a respite.

Yet the panic in New York was by no means alleviated, for it was evident that the bombardment was about to be followed by an air attack—possibly even a *night* air attack—and undoubtedly, with gas, which every one dreaded, in spite of familiarity with protective masks and clothing.

PEASE returned to the military hospital downtown, and the day closed uneventfully. That is to say, uneventfully so far as Pease was concerned; for the Siberians continued to land and assemble airplanes on Martha's Vineyard, and the Americans bent every effort toward strengthening the anti-aircraft defenses of New York City.

One of the men in Pease's ward of the hospital was an artillery officer, and with him Pease discussed the general popular fear of a night attack.

"Why do you suppose the government permits the newscasters to stress the dangers of a night attack?" Pease asked.

The artillery officer grinned. "Perhaps," said he, "it's because they hope thereby to induce the enemy to make exactly such an attack. It would be playing right into our hands."

"But how?" asked Pease. "In the daytime you can follow the position of the plane by sight. Light travels almost instantaneously — two hundred and eighty-six thousand miles a second—so that when you see the plane you know exactly where it is at that instant. But at night, unless you can catch and hold the enemy plane in the beam of a search light, you have to depend on *sound* locators. The newscast statements have all emphasized that point."

"Well?"

"Well, sound travels very slowly—only a bit faster than a mere thousand feet a second, if I remember correctly—so that by the time the sound reaches your instruments, the plane is somewhere other than the place where it was when it made the sound. In fact, if two of your sound locating machines are located at different distances from the plane, as they're bound to be, their data won't even tell you where the plane was when it made the sound!"

"I'm going to let you in on a secret," replied the officer. "Since you're old Forrest's assistant. Now, suppose we have an instrument that will convert the sound of an airplane into light. Result: the sound travels with the speed of light, and we can spot the plane as readily at night as in the daytime."

"Oh, but you're kidding me!"

"Why?"

"Because unless you can install your device on each enemy aircraft, which would be like the old Æsop fable about the mice belling the cat, the sound will travel as sound until it reaches your instrument. So what good will it do you to convert it into light *after* it reaches you?"

The artilleryman laughed. "Believe it or not," said he, "but we have a sound-ranging set, which will pick up the sound of an airplane motor with the speed of light. Just watch us do it, if they try to pull off any night bombing around here! Gee, but I wish I wasn't laid up! I'd give an arm to be with my battery when those Siberian fliers get the surprise of their life!"

ALL the next day the enemy landed and assembled aircraft on Martha's Vineyard, and the Americans strengthened the defenses of New York. An American field artillery battery, which succeeded in landing on the northern part of Martha's

Vineyard Island, was unable to get any shells through the sound screen which surrounded the Soviet position. Eventually the battery was shelled out by the two big noiseless cannon of the Siberians, the fire being directed by Siberian airplanes, which kept well within the protection of their own anti-aircraft guns.

By this time, practically all the civilian population of New York had succeeded in getting out of the city.

Early that evening the enemy air forces set out for New York. The greatly outnumbered air fleet from Chatham harassed their flanks, until two American planes were blown to bits by the five-inch guns carried by several of the Siberians. Thereafter, the rest of the American planes kept at a respectful distance, merely observing and reporting the enemy advance.

Several American destroyers which attempted to cast searchlight beams on the Siberian planes were promptly bombed and sunk. Even a black light search light was detected and put out of commission. The research scientists of the Soviets were familiar with black light. And so, unhindered, the enemy raiders approached New York.

Pease and the other patients of the hospital insisted on being taken up onto the city roof, so that they could see the entire battle. The night was beautiful; clear and unusually warm for mid-September. The rubber gas suits were just comfortable in such weather.

The entire eastern horizon was a criss-cross pattern of search light beams. At last, far to the eastward, there could be heard the drone of the approaching menace. It grew louder.

"They must be within the range of some of the Long Island search lights by now," said Pease, "yet not one of our lights has picked up a single ship."

"Maybe they're within the range of our search lights, but they're not yet within the range of our batteries," cryptically replied the sick artillery officer.

"Just what's the meaning of that remark?" asked Pease.

"If our lights seem to be unable to locate them," replied the other, "they will be lulled into a false sense of security. I'm willing to bet that already the sound of each of the fliers at the head of their line has been picked up, *as light,* by our sight ranging instruments, and that our guns are already trained, ready to fire at just the right instant."

Even as he spoke, there came a bright silver flash, like that of a Fourth-of-July pyrotechnic bomb, high in the Eastern sky. Another flash and yet another followed in rapid succession, stringing out in a row across the sky, with perfect spacing.

Then a burst of smoky flame as the first enemy ship to be hit plunged crazily earthward.

About this time the sharp barking note of the three-inch anti-aircraft gun that had done the damage reached the observers on the roof of New York, to be followed by the deeper *boom, boom* of the shells bursting in air amid the enemy fleet.

Then all the Long Island batteries broke loose. Rows of shell bursts, in perfect alignment, dotted the evening sky in the path of one after another of the enemy aircraft. Plane after plane hurtled flaming to earth. Several of the planes—this became known afterward—side-slipped and then dived downward to attack the American batteries, only to be put out of action by anti-aircraft machine guns, which had been awaiting just such a move. A considerable number of bombs were

loosed by the enemy fliers, but the bombers were too busy dodging shrapnel to have either time or opportunity for careful aiming.

Nevertheless, it seemed incredible that the enemy fleet as a whole could be turned back from their mission, regardless of how many individual ships were shot down.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HAMMOND AIRSHIP.

JOHN PEASE voiced his doubt by asking the artillery officer in the wheel chair beside his own, on the roof of New York, "Have we enough of these remarkable instruments which you say can interpret sound into light? I mean, have we enough of them to enable our batteries to follow every ship of the enemy fleet?"

"No," replied the officer, "but by now the Siberians are probably sufficiently demoralized so that they won't notice a few beams of black light. And eventually we'll train all the ordinary search lights on them, too. By that time, they won't feel safe, no matter which kind of ray they succeed in dodging."

And so it proved to be.

The artillery officer sent one of the hospital orderlies down to his bunk to get a pair of fluorescent field glasses out of his ditty-box, and by means of these he and Pease were able to see that several of the approaching enemy planes were illumined by the invisible beams of the black light. These planes side-slipped and dived, in order to avoid the illumination, thus showing that their pilots, too, were equipped with fluorescent glasses and thus realized the menace of the black light. Some of these planes succeeded in escaping into the protecting blackness of the surrounding night, but more often than not the beam held true until the plane was shot down.

And it seemed likely that many of those which escaped the black light were immediately picked up, unknown to themselves, by the uncanny apparatus which turned sound into sight.

Finally, as though at a prearranged signal, the waving beams of the white search lights, which during all this time had apparently been unable to locate a single enemy ship, suddenly flooded the surviving airplanes with a white glare. Simultaneously, all of the Brooklyn and some of the New York batteries got into action. Those planes which evaded these search lights were picked up by the black light; and those which avoided that were located by their sound, which was converted into light. The enemy rout was complete.

A few bombs were dropped on Brooklyn, doing considerable damage. Portions of Jamaica and other cities and towns on Long Island were set on fire by the fall of flaming enemy planes. But not a single Siberian bomber ever arrived over New York.

Finally, blocked by superior anti-aircraft fire, the survivors turned and retreated toward their base on Martha's Vineyard. Then the American air fleet got into action, pursuing and harassing the enemy all the way back. And on arriving at the western end of Martha's Vineyard the Siberian fliers were confronted with the naval aircraft from Chatham, now drawn up in line to oppose their passage. In the end, however, largely by the use of their few remaining Pastoriza five-inch guns, the Siberians fought their way through this barrier and finally reached the haven of the protection of their own ground armament.

Once more the superiority of anti-aircraft artillery over airplanes had been demonstrated. Popular hysteria had been allayed, and most of New York's civilians returned to the city.

Several days elapsed, during which the Siberians consolidated their position on Martha's Vineyard, and continued to land munitions from their huge submarine freighters. Meanwhile, the mobilization of the American army went on apace, and the American fleets sped on around South America.

Thwarted in their attempt to conquer New York from the air, the Siberians turned their attention to Boston. But here they were met by quite new and unexpected tactics. The moment that news of the approach of the enemy fliers reached the city, artificial fog began to belch from hundreds of factory chimneys. Into this fog there were rapidly raised large numbers of small balloons, each carrying a powerful charge of high explosive with a contact fuse.

Groups of these balloons at the same level were joined together by a horizontal cable, from which there hung down a large number of small ropes. Each enemy plane, on nosing into the fog which overhung the city, would sooner or later entangle its propeller in one or more of these ropes, thus drawing at least one of the aërial mines rapidly toward it. On contact with the plane, the mine would explode.

After two disastrous attacks, in which no enemy plane successfully traversed the area of fog, the Siberians let Boston strictly alone.

JOHN PEASE'S leg wound healed rapidly, and he was soon up on crutches.

Then the enemy struck from another quarter. One morning a tremendous fleet of floating ships—more than twice as many as Soviet Siberia was reputed to own—appeared off the Golden Gate and commenced the bombardment of San Francisco.

The guns of the Presidio opened fire in reply, as did also the sixteen-inch railroad artillery which had been massed on sidings up and down the coast to the north and south of the city.

A fleet of American planes swarmed out of the city, only to be met by at least an equal number of planes from the aircraft carriers of the Soviet fleet.

The theory of seacoast warfare had always been that one gun on shore was an even match for an entire warship, the major armament of which was the same size as that one gun on shore. Thus, for example, a single twelve-inch coast defense rifle was considered a match for a battleship armed with six twelve-inch guns, six ten-inch guns, four batteries of fives, and assorted minor equipment.

But in the present emergency, gun for ship, the coast defenses of San Francisco were outnumbered two to one. It was only the superior marksmanship of the American coast artillery corps that held off the enemy for any appreciable time at all. Five Soviet ships were sunk, and many others were crippled. But one by one, the shore guns were silenced. The city itself was soon in flames. The American air fleet was driven back to the protection of its own anti-aircraft batteries, which were still able to protect the city from bombing from the air.

Yet still no enemy boat could enter the Golden Gate because of the mines, and the American infantry successfully resisted all attempts at landing enemy marines. The day ended with

America thoroughly whipped locally, though still in possession of San Francisco.

WITH the attention of the world focussed on the west coast, Secretary Forrest decided to attack Martha's Vineyard. After the rank failure of the first American Field Artillery which had been landed on that island several weeks before, the country had been more cautious. Although continuing to land troops, they had been ordered to keep carefully defiladed from enemy fire, under cover of the Gay Head cliffs and Indian Hill and other prominences to the westward and northwestward, or they had been scattered under camouflage through the Tashmoo woods and other similar cover. Seaplanes from Chatham and Newport protected these landing parties from enemy air raids, but did not themselves venture within range of the anti-aircraft guns of the Siberians.

John Pease was commissioned a captain of ordnance, and—still on crutches—was sent to Gay Head, for Secretary Forrest wished to have an official representative there who would observe and report upon technical developments.

On the day after the attack on San Francisco, a strange silver-colored cigar-shaped dirigible appeared in the air over Martha's Vineyard Island. It flew an American flag, and kept high enough to be out of range of the enemy anti-aircraft armament.

Pease and the other officers of U. S. Army headquarters at Gay Head were unprepared for this development. The dirigible was unknown to them; and yet, from the flag which it flew, it was quite evidently on the American side.

Immediately, several enemy helicopters rose to investigate, and a flight of planes from Chatham hastened over to protect it.

But to the surprise of all the watchers, the dirigible promptly flung out a string of signal flags reading, "Get back to safety. Thanks for your help, but I don't need it." The message evidently being intended for the American fliers.

Pease got Washington on the air and reported the incident, only to be told: "We know all about it, but we don't dare to give you the details over the air, lest the information be intercepted. Instruct every one to stand by, ready to take advantage of any developments."

Simultaneously, there came a message from the A.B.C. studios to young Ross, who was with Pease. He was ordered to focus his teleview recording and transmitting camera on the dirigible, as the studios had received a tip that something interesting was going to happen. As Colonel Kachurin would have phrased it, "This is going to be good, you know."

The inquisitive Soviet scout planes drew nearer and nearer to the dirigible, but were unmolested. They rose and circled about it. Then one of them suddenly side slipped into range, and dived, with machine gun wide open, straight at the car of the dirigible. But nothing happened, so far as the watchers on the ground could see. The mysterious dirigible neither succumbed nor retaliated.

"Bullet-proof glass in his windows, probably," suggested Ross, momentarily switching off his newscasting instrument.

"But why doesn't he shoot back?" asked Pease.

"Perhaps he's waiting for something," suggested Ross.

"Well, if so, here it comes," Pease

replied, " for the Siberians are sending up one of their five-inch guns. I'm afraid that bullet-proof glass won't do him any good against a one-hundred-and-ten-pound shell filled with crainite."

THE enemy plane with the five-inch gun took no chances. It rose, at a safe distance away from the dirigible, until it reached a considerably higher altitude than its prospective victim. Then it cut over until it was directly above the dirigible.

Pease groaned.

" It's all up for our friend," said he lugubriously. " His own bag cuts off his view of the enemy. Oh, why doesn't he rear up and duck out? He can make altitude faster than even a helicopter."

" Look!" Ross interrupted. " The dirigible has dropped a bomb. See that little white speck in the air, just below his car? That's what I call tending strictly to business under the shadow of death."

" But it can't be a bomb," Pease objected, " for it's rising."

And so it was! The little silver speck, after falling clear of the dirigible, had suddenly shot upward around the curve of the airship, and was rising rapidly toward the enemy plane.

Meanwhile, the enemy plane, having gotten within point-blank range above and just behind the dirigible, completely masked thereby, and hovering in space with its autogyro wings, was gradually lowering its nose, to train its five-inch Pastoriza gun, so as to blow its victim into bits with one well-placed shot.

But the tiny bomb from the dirigible soared upward to meet this menace, and before the five-inch gun could be discharged, the plane suddenly crumpled with a burst of flame. At the same instant, the dirigible darted forward, so as to be clear of the falling plane.

The field radio phone rang in Gay Head Army Headquarters, and a strange voice spoke from it: " Hammond talking, from the dirigible Squamscott. Get your field pieces up on top of the Gay Head cliffs as quickly as possible. Prepare to attack. It's going to be perfectly safe to do so, in a few minutes. Now watch! Hammond, signing off."

" Who in hell is Hammond?" asked the colonel in charge.

" May I suggest, sir, that we phone Washington for confirmation?" said Pease.

Washington ordered, " Hammond is in charge of this maneuver. Do whatever he requests."

So the four-point-sevens, the range of which had been trebled since the world war during the first quarter of the century, were rushed up onto the top of the cliffs, and the colonel and his staff took up their position on the balcony of the lighthouse, from where they could just see the muzzles of the two big long-range guns of the Siberians. The infantry at Indian Hill and in the Tashmoo woods were mobilized for the attack.

MEANWHILE, the Squamscott was slowly settling lower. A puff of white smoke just below it indicated that it was almost in range of the anti-aircraft guns below. Whereupon the Squamscott promptly stopped settling, and let loose another bomb. Unlike the bomb which had destroyed the attacking plane, this one did not rise, but floated slowly groundward. A pause—then a deep, dull boom, easily distinguishable from the

staccato cracks of the anti-aircraft guns and the lower pitched explosions of their shells.

"I got one of their anti-aircraft guns," reported Hammond over the air. "Here goes for another."

A third bomb floated down from the dirigible.

But quite evidently the Siberians did not intend to sit idly by and permit the destruction of all their defensive armament. So, evidently in response to a concerted signal, all the Soviet planes which had been scouting around at a safe distance from the Squamscott, suddenly converged toward it with one accord.

With machine guns wide open, the planes swept by, riddling the bag of the dirigible with bullets, then wheeled and swept by again.

"No matter what protective armor that man Hammond may have," remarked the colonel professionally, "he can't stand that bombardment very long. They'll puncture every gas compartment, if they keep on."

Another dull crash sounded from below the Squamscott. Then, and not until then, did Hammond loose his fourth bomb. This bomb promptly sought and found one of the sweeping enemy planes.

And then bomb after bomb left the Squamscott; and each bomb flew straight to one of the planes, and brought it down. In a few moments eight planes were gone. Only three more remained in the air, and these withdrew from the attack. But a bomb followed them, deliberately sought one of them out, and destroyed it.

"I wonder why the Siberians haven't tried to drop bombs on the Squamscott," said Pease.

The artillery colonel smiled. "He's directly over their camp; that's why."

"Look!" exclaimed one of the other officers, "They are swinging the two big guns around to fire point-blank at the Squamscott. That will get him, if nothing else will."

"Quick!" spoke the colonel to his radio sergeant. "Try and get Hammond on the air, and warn him."

"He sees it, all right," announced Pease. For a bomb was hurtling down from the dirigible, straight at one of the great guns. The watchers on the Gay Head lighthouse saw it pass close to the gun's muzzle, and then a shower of débris arose.

A second bomb left the dirigible, and hurtled down. But the other great gun spoke.

"Too late! Now they've got him," groaned Pease.

"Not unless they make a direct hit," asserted the colonel, "for they have no time fuses for that sort of a gun."

EVIDENTLY the shot was a miss. But the directed bomb was a hit. Again there could be seen a shower of débris, and this time the great gun tottered and its muzzle disappeared from view.

Several more bombs left the Squamscott in quick succession, and since there were no more bursts of anti-aircraft shells below the dirigible, the airship settled lower.

Then Hammond phoned, "Please inform Chatham that it is now safe for our planes to attack. The last anti-aircraft gun is gone."

The dirigible settled lower, still dropping bombs. The air fleet from Chatham roared in and engaged the enemy planes, many more of which now rose from the Soviet encampment.

"They'd better," was Hammond's comment. "I was getting them with my bombs, where they sat."

The air battle swept off to the eastward.

Then Hammond phoned again, "You can open fire now, and order the infantry to advance. I hit the power-house, and then I sent a bomb through the spot where the sound barrage ought to have been, and it went right through without being destroyed. But please watch out that you don't hit my ship. It's out of control and settling rapidly."

"Commence firing," ordered the colonel, and the four-point-seven guns on the cliff opened up. Under cover of their fire, the infantry advance from Tashmoo began.

"June Stevens is in the enemy camp!" Pease suddenly exclaimed in horror.

And at that moment an orderly trotted up and reported, "San Francisco has fallen. The mine casemate was destroyed by gun-fire, and the enemy fleet then forced the Golden Gate. Enemy marines have landed under protection from the guns of the fleet. Transports are bringing up more enemy troops. And there has been no news from either Manila or Honolulu for twenty-four hours."

"Our own little victory isn't so much," remarked the colonel with a wry smile.

"But, sir," urged Pease, "can't something be done to rescue the daughter of the Premier of Canada? She's a prisoner in the Soviet camp."

CHAPTER XII.

THE QUEST FOR KACHURIN.

"HOW do you know that Miss Stevens is a prisoner?" asked the colonel. He seemed preoccupied, though his gaze was fixed on Pease.

"For God's sake," exclaimed Pease, "can't you call off this artillery fire?"

"Cease firing!" ordered the colonel. Then, in deprecation of the grateful expression on Pease's face, "I had to do it anyhow, for the Squamscott is settling too close for safety.—But how do you know that she's a prisoner?"

"I was in that battle in Canada, and I saw Kachurin take her away in his plane."

"Oh, were you *that* Pease? I didn't realize it. But I thought the newscasters said that she was killed."

"She may have been," replied Pease sadly, "but somehow I can't believe it. And if she is still alive, she is in that camp over there. That is, unless our shots and bombs have killed her."

"But how do you know that this is where Kachoo-whatever fled to, when he was driven out of Canada?"

"Where else could he go? He fled southeast."

By now only the top of the dirigible could be seen over the hilltops to the eastward.

"Come on down to Katama, and take over," phoned Hammond. "The Squamscott has landed, and has the situation well in hand."

A minute later, "Here comes your infantry."

"Our infantry?" exclaimed Pease. "They couldn't march all the way from Tashmoo to the Great Plains in just these few minutes."

"Mounted infantry can make ten miles easily in ten minutes on motor cycles," the colonel replied with a grin. "Let's get over there, and see the mopping up. My helicopter is ready."

"But how about me?" cut in Ross, the reporter. "The American public must have its newscast of this event. Something is needed to take their minds off San Francisco."

The colonel signalled to his adjutant. "Make out a pass for Preston Ross, good anywhere on Martha's Vineyard," said he. Then, turning to the reporter, "Have you got room enough in your apparatus plane to take along my radio sergeant and his portable field set?—Good! Then follow us. Let's go."

The colonel's private helicopter soared up from its place of concealment beneath the rainbow-hued cliffs and settled down beside the lighthouse. Pease and the colonel promptly got aboard, and were off to the eastward; Preston Ross and the staff radio sergeant following in the A. B. C. newsgathering plane.

THEY found the enemy encampment in ruins. In its midst squatted the dirigible Squamscott, intact except that its gas bag was riddled with machine gun bullets. A grimy man in officer's uniform of the air corps was puttering around the ship, assisted by three enlisted men. He saluted and introduced himself as, "Major Hammond—John Hays Hammond, the fourth, in fact, sirs, at your service."

On the beach nearby lay the wreck of a huge submarine, awash with the surf.

"The last few survivors of the Siberians tried to make a get-away in that," Hammond explained, "so I had to send one of my radio controlled air torpedoes out after it. Then the survivors ran off down the beach, toward the spit of sand which joins the next island, so I sent a torpedo after them. However, I didn't let it hit them; I merely sent it past them, and then tried to use it to herd them back. But they lay down flat in the sand and yelled until the infantry arrived and rounded them up. Look! There they come now."

Pease and the artillery colonel looked, and saw a group of about twenty dejected looking men in Siberian uniforms, marching toward them along the beach, with their hands held above their heads. They were being guarded by about twice their number of American infantry.

"Would you mind, colonel, having them brought over here?" asked Pease. "I'm devilishly anxious to see if Kachurin is among them."

The artillery colonel signalled for the prisoners to be brought over. They were an evil-looking lot, some of them more like Japs than Russians. Only a few could speak English, or at least were willing to admit that they could; and none of these few knew anything about Kachurin, except that he had been alive, unwounded and in comand, up to the very last moment.

"Then Kachurin did come here!" exclaimed Pease. "Ask them about Miss Stevens."

No, none of them had seen any lady here with their colonel. But then, most of them were fairly recent arrivals at this camp.

Pease's hopes, building on hope, immediately fell.

"She probably died before these men got here," said he lugubriously.

A search of the camp was then made for Kachurin's body, but it could not be found. However, one interesting thing did develop; the bodies of several officers and quite a number of the enlisted men wore uniforms of a slightly different color, and of quite a different design, from that of the Siberian Republic. Pease had noticed this strange uniform before, in Canada, and now remarked on it. But, although it stirred vague memories in the minds of several

of the American officers, none of them was quite able to place it.

THEN they found a wounded officer, a slant-eyed Oriental, wearing the mysterious garb. He was pretty well done for; and, as they came up, was reciting some sort of a ritual, like a funeral chant.

"*Sumera, nikuni, la, la, la!*" he was saying, "*Nippon, tekoku—*"

At the word "Nippon," the American colonel interrupted him with a sharp, "Captain, are you a Japanese? Has Japan gone into this war on the side of Soviet Siberia?"

The dying officer ceased his chant, coughed, and then said in halting English, "No, excellency, I am mere observer. Learn much military tactic for our revered emperor." Then he resumed his chant, "*Nippon, tekoku.—Banzai, banzai, ban banzai. Nippon! Nippon! Nippon!*"

And as they watched they saw that he was dying.

"I wonder—" mused the American colonel.

"Wonder what?" asked Pease.

"Whether that dead Jap was really here merely as an observer, or—"

At this moment an orderly hurriedly picked his way toward them through the débris and saluted.

"Sir," he reported, "some of the men have found what they think is an underground reinforced concrete headquarters. They are uncovering the entrance to it now. Our lieutenant said to ask you, sir, if you'd like to be there when it is forced open."

"Yes," said the colonel. "That is to say, Pease, if you can make it on your crutches. For I have an idea that if you'll come over you'll soon see your old friend, Sneezovitch, or whatever his name is, again."

"Kachurin," explained Pease. But he did not smile at the artilleryman's attempted witticism, for he was thinking quite soberly of the fate of June Stevens.

"Can you make it?" asked the colonel, more solicitously.

"I think so," Pease replied.

So, assisted by the other officer, and led by the enlisted men, Pease hobbled and hitched his way through the débris across the ruins of the Soviet encampment, to the spot where a labor battalion of American infantry were hacking at and hauling away the remains of what had once been quite a sizable building until Major Hammond's controlled aërial bombs had found it out.

As the two American officers came up, the men had just demolished a double folding trap door in the concrete ground floor of the building. One of the soldiers stepped forward and started to throw back one of the leaves of the trap door.

But the lieutenant in charge shouted, "Hi, there, Smith, let that door alone! How do you know what's back of it? Maybe it's mined!"

Smith dropped the door, stood up, and saluted sheepishly.

UNDER the direction of the infantry lieutenant, ropes stretching away in each direction were attached to the two halves of the door, and were manned by two squads of soldiers. Then another squad with hand grenades marched up and took their stand at a safe distance from the bulkhead. Every one else moved far back, and waited tensely. Ross ran some cables from his newscasting plane, and set up his sight-and-sound-transmitting apparatus at a strategic point. All was in readiness for the dénouement.

The lieutenant announced, " When I say ' three,' squads one and two heave! Squad three wait until the doors flop clear open, then toss in your pineapples. Are you ready?"

" Ready "— " Ready "— " Ready," reported the three corporals.

" One — two — three!" counted the lieutenant.

With a mighty heave of the seven men on each of the two ropes, the two iron doors opened up and fell back with a clang on either side to the concrete floor. Where they had been, there yawned a black opening. All the spectators craned forward, but nothing happened. Pease, in the excitement, dropped one of his crutches, but— steadying himself on the other—made no attempt at recovering it.

Each member of the hand grenade squad, in unison, held his bomb in his right hand beside his right leg, pulled out the safety pin with his left hand, raised his left hand palm down straight before him to steady himself, leaned back, counted " One—two—three," and then gave an overhand heave.

The grenades dropped through the black opening, and clattered deep down with a hollow sound like that made by a stone in a well. Then a roar of seven almost simultaneous explosions burst from the confined space. But nothing further happened. Every one had expected something to happen, but no one had known just what might happen. Every one relaxed his tenseness.

" Squad three—take bombs!" commanded the lieutenant. " Now, into that hole and see what's there!"

Bombs in hand, and led by their corporal, with drawn radio pistol, the seven men advanced cautiously to the opening.

" There's a flight of stone steps," the corporal announced.

" All right. Go down them, and see what's at the bottom."

THE corporal groped his way downward, followed alertly by his men. Every one else surged forward to the edge of the hole, Pease among them. Both of his crutches now lay forgotten behind him.

" Another door. An iron one," the corporal announced from the dark depths. He rattled the door. " It seems to be barred on the inside. There's no lock or handle that I can feel.—There's a woman's voice beyond the door—"

Pease's heart leaped.

But the corporal continued, " She seems to be talking some kind of funny language. I can't make out what she's saying."

Pease's eager face fell. He smoothed back the hair from his forehead with a gesture of desperation.

" It's that Soodakova woman!" said he grimly.

" Who?" asked the colonel.

" Mlle. Soodakova, Kachurin's mistress."

" Good!" the colonel exclaimed. " Then the head Bolshevik himself can't be far away. Can any one here speak Russian?"

But no one could.

" She understands a little English," said Pease.

" Just a minute," suggested Ross. " I have a microphone among my newscasting apparatus. Suppose I attach it to the inner door, and then we'll listen and get a line on who's down there."

" A bully good idea," agreed the colonel.

The reporter brought the mike, affixed it to the door at the foot of the concrete stairs, and then hitched it up to a pair of earphones, which he put on.

"Sh!" cautioned Ross, holding up one hand. Then, "She's weeping. I can hear the sobs quite distinctly. And though her words are broken, they seem to be in English.—Well, what do you know about that!"

"Just a minute," said the colonel. Then, descending into the hole, he shouted, "Open the door! We're the American Army. We'll give you five minutes in which to open the door; then we'll bomb you out."

"You can never accomplish it with hand g r e n a d e s," volunteered John Hays Hammond. "I'll send one of my directed aërial bombs. I have just one of them left."

"You don't mean to say you'd deliberately kill a woman, do you?" exclaimed Pease.

"And why not?" asked the colonel, emerging from the cellarway. "What's this Boopadova woman to you, anyhow?"

"Sh!" interjected Preston Ross, cocking his red head on one side, and listening intently into his earphones. "She's speaking. She's sobbing. She says, 'Why didn't you say so before?'—Ouch!"

He tore the phones from his head, saying, "She just slid the bolts back, and nearly split my ear drums."

Out of the darkness of the pit, there staggered a slim bedraggled feminine figure in aviation uniform, with a dirty white bandage swathed diagonally around her head, and an automatic trembling in one hand.

"June!" exclaimed John Pease, leaping forward and catching her, as she fell fainting at the top of the steps.

"Camera!" shouted the colonel.

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Preston Ross, shaking his flaming locks. "And to think that I missed catching that scene on my newscaster!"

"Never mind your radio audience," said Pease in an irritated tone. "Get a doctor. Miss Stevens is in a bad way."

"I thought you were lame," chuckled the colonel. "Where's your crutches, Captain Pease?"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

A Strange Chinese Delicacy

MANY people have heard of a Chinese dish called bird's nest soup, but few have given any credulity to it. The Chinese do have an edible bird's nest. It is the nest of a small swallow found chiefly along the rocky inlets of the Indian Archipelago. The nest is a small gelatinous mass, reddish in color and appears to have been made from the spawn of some species of fish, though some are found as far as fifty miles inland. The Chinese make soup and various other dishes from it and consider it a rare delicacy.

The nests are built in almost inaccessible places and gathering them is a hazardous business. Chinese boys are trained for it from youth. Great care must be taken to gather them at the right time of year or the hatching of the small birds will make them unfit for eating.

Earl Huntley.

Breath of the Desert*

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "Gone North," "Double Cross Ranch," etc.

Never in all Thor Underhill's hard-riding life had he fought such a gang of killers as scourged that peaceful Western range

The prisoner sat up, looking at Montana

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

LONG had Jason Underhill and his giant son, Thor, fought the Sladen outfit who owned the Hat ranch. The Underhill place was known as the Flying U—the Sladens were three: Bill and his brother Blackie, and Bill's son, Steele. Matters began to be serious when Thor took things into his own hands and hung two of the Sladen men for horse stealing. Even more serious when one day Thor came upon Bill Sladen attacking Lyndia Kolsar, daughter of a neighboring Pole. Thor, as he thought, killed Bill with a rifle shot.

It developed, however, that Thor's was not the only shot which had been responsible for Bill Sladen's death. At the very same instant, but from the

This story began in the Argosy for June 18.

other side of the victim, had come another rifle shot from a mysterious, unidentified person.

Bill's son, Steele, swears vengeance upon Thor for this death, but is afraid to do anything. Instead, he hires a famous gun fighter named Montana Ed to do the job for him. But Montana Ed fails to do anything except quarrel with several of the hard-boiled Sladen outfit and kill them. He gives every sign of a feeling of friendliness for Thor Underhill; and Steele Sladen, disgusted, yet as much afraid of Montana as he is of Thor, hires several other killers to work for him.

Thor Underhill begins to be interested in Lyndia Kolsar, the girl whom he had rescued. She is living with Thor's mother because, as she claims, her father had "sold" her to Bill Sladen, which was reason enough for not going back to her own home.

Similarly, Montana Ed is greatly interested in another girl, Nance Kayne, who is visiting her uncle, Jesse Carson, owner of the J Bar C ranch. Nance, however, distrusts Montana Ed because of his reputation as a professional gun fighter. And Montana believes that Thor is really interested in Nance.

The Sladens grow steadily worse in every way. They annoy all the women of the neighborhood, and especially Nance Kayne and Lyndia Kolsar. Several men are killed, and the Flying U horse herd is stolen and run off without leaving a trace. And the Hat outfit, under the leadership of Steele Sladen, does not even hesitate to lure both Nance and Lyndia out into lonely country and kidnap them.

The horses they have hidden in a secret valley, and to this place the two girls are also taken. The Sladens have realized by this time that their deeds have so aroused the country that they, too, will have to hide out; and so they virtually abandon the Hat ranch and hide out in the unknown valley.

Only Montana Ed, who has declared that he will do as he pleases, is not included in this plan, and he is left more or less to his own devices on the Hat ranch.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HIDE-OUT.

THE sudden and unexpected appearance of Steele Sladen bewildered Lyndia, and for an instant she sat motionless in the saddle, staring at him, vaguely wondering how he happened to be there. He seemed more formidable, more menacing than usual as he sat there. The smirk on his face showed that he was evidently enjoying her consternation.

Lyndia turned her head to search for Carter. She did not see him. A quick suspicion assailed her, and she spoke defiantly to Sladen.

"What are you doing here?"

"Just sitting here."

"Have you seen Gene Carter?"

"Sure." Sladen's smile grew.

"Where is he?" asked Lyndia.

"Look around," directed Sladen.

Lyndia turned again. Then she saw Carter sitting motionless on his horse behind her.

Carter's smile told Lyndia what she had already begun to suspect, that these men had trapped her, that the note purporting to be from her father was a forgery. For a while she sat stunned and helpless, oppressed with an overpowering sense of futility.

"So you're beginning to see things, eh? I thought you would tumble, give you time. You Polacks are too damned dumb to understand anything. Stub-

born. Bull-headed. Well, I've got you; and before I get through with you you'll be glad to talk plenty."

Lyndia looked at Carter. Her eyes were blazing with scorn.

"Gene Carter, did you know this when you gave me that note?"

Carter flushed. He did not look straight at Lyndia. He didn't answer.

"Sure," answered Steele. "Carter's working for me. He's been working for me all season. And the note is the real goods. Your dad wrote it. He's got no use for you."

LYNDIA suddenly wheeled Betty and sent the animal scurrying across the dry sand of the river bed, toward the mouth of the great cañon on the southern side of the promontory, which she remembered as the one that she and Thor had traversed to reach this place on their way to the Flying U. Betty had only traveled two or three hundred yards when Lyndia saw Sladen's big horse beside her, and on the other side, forging past her, was Carter's horse. The bridle reins were snatched from her hands by Carter. Betty swerved, stumbled, halted. The next instant Lyndia was in Steele Sladen's arms. Roughly, almost viciously, he pulled her from the saddle and held her, cursing her.

She fought him frenziedly, but Carter came to his assistance. They gagged her, blindfolded her and lifted her to Betty's back. One of them lashed her feet to the stirrups. Then they rode away, leading Betty.

Lyndia did not know how far they went. They had been riding for more than an hour it seemed to Lyndia, when suddenly they halted. She felt them unlashing her feet from the stirrups. Then she was lifted out of the saddle, by Sladen. She knew it was Sladen because of the ease with which he handled her. She was set down upon the ground. The gag and blindfold were removed, and she blinked into Steele Sladen's face, which was close to hers.

Sladen's eyes were gleaming savagely. "Well," he said, "we've got you. Take a look." He stepped away from her, watching her.

"Put her horse away, Carter. I reckon she won't need it again for a while."

Lyndia's eyes had been blindfolded so tightly that some minutes passed before she could see with any degree of clarity. And then she observed that she was standing upon a level, near a grove of trees in the center of a wild, virgin basin about a mile in diameter.

The basin was like a huge bowl. It was entirely hemmed in by a continuous circle of ragged rock walls that were perhaps a thousand feet above the level on which she stood. Upon one side—the western side, she judged, because of the fact that the sun was at her back—the bottom of the basin was almost level; and this level extended clear to the bases of the rock walls in that direction. There was a small stream of water there, and some timber. Beginning at her feet and rising at a dizzying angle was a great slope that rose to a height of several hundred feet above the floor of the valley. This slope resembled the shoulder of a mountain, for its crest was even and round, and seemed to flatten where it merged with the rock walls that towered above it.

Nowhere in the encompassing circle of mountainous walls could she see a cleft, a break or a passage through which one might enter or leave the strange and terrifying enclosure. For the first time since meeting Steele

Sladen in the cañon country she was frightened and appalled. She stood perfectly still, her pallor increasing with the conviction that she would perhaps never escape from this place.

"Nice spot, eh?" said Steele.

Lyndia did not answer him, for at the instant she had turned her head to look again toward the grove of trees on the level near her; and what she saw there held her speechless. A small log cabin, partially screened by cedars, which she had not observed at her first glance. Half a dozen cowboys were seated in a circle on the grass near the cabin, playing cards; and in the doorway of the cabin, standing there rigid and startled, was Nance Kayne.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CARDS ON THE TABLE.

JUDGING from the expression in Nance Kayne's eyes she had just at this moment appeared in the doorway, and was as startled as Lyndia.

Sladen laughed loudly. "Well," he said, "you won't be lonesome, will you?" He shoved Lyndia roughly toward the cabin. Nance threw her arms around her to draw her just inside the door, where they both stood for a time holding each other tightly.

Outside, they overheard Sladen and the card players laughing. Inside the cabin were several bunks and a table. There was one window in the rear wall, with no glass in it.

Nance Kayne was frightened, but courageous. Like Lyndia, she was a western girl. Both were accustomed to the rigors of life in the open; but both were trembling a little as they stood there holding tightly to each other.

"Steele Sladen is a terrible man," said Lyndia. "He has always been terrible, but now he is changed. The devil is in him. He is wild. I think he is crazy."

"How did he happen to bring you here, Lyndia?"

"A trick. A man named Carter brought me a note from my father. I rode back with him as far as the cañons. There was Steele Sladen. They tied me up, put a handkerchief around my eyes and brought me here.—Thor will keel Sladen for this! He would have keel him three days ago if he could have found him." She drew away and looked at Nance. "How did you come here?"

"I came here with Steele Sladen, too," answered Nance. "He came to the house early this morning. My aunt and uncle had gone to town again, and now I think that Sladen knew it. He was very polite and quiet, and he asked me to ride with him and show him where I had seen you and Thor Underhill together on the day you rode home with Thor on Thor's horse. He pretended that he must know the exact spot, so that he could determine for himself what direction you and Thor had come from. I went with him to where I had seen you and Thor. There he seized me, blindfolded me and brought me here.—Lyndia," she added, her voice quavering for the first time, "I'm afraid!"

There was a step outside and Steele Sladen appeared in the doorway, his huge form almost filling the opening. He rested his hands against the outside wall and leaned forward to peer into the semi-darkness of the cabin. His great shaggy head was tilted back as he laughed.

"Talking it over, eh?" he said. "Shy, too. Keeping to yourselves. Well, you don't need to do that. The whole place is yours, and you can gad

around as much as you please, as long as you don't go near that big rock over there.—See it?" He pointed to a mammoth bowlder at the foot of the steep slope. The bowlder was perhaps half a mile distant, and seemed to rest against the base of the great butte that formed the rim of the basin in that direction. "If you go over that way," he continued, "you'll get shot, pronto —woman or no woman. Understand that?"

"Why did you bring us here, and how long are we to stay?" asked Nance.

Sladen laughed u p r o a r i o u s l y. "That's good!" he said. "Why did I bring you here and how long are you going to stay! I'll tell you. I brought the Polack here to answer some questions. After she answers them I reckon I'll turn her over to the boys. I never did have any use for a damned Polack.—But you! The first time I saw you I liked you. Well, I still like you. That's why I brought you here.—I suppose you think our friend Montana will get you out of this, eh?"

At the startled expression of her eyes he laughed again. "You didn't think I knew that you had taken up with Montana, eh? You don't know that Carter saw Montana kill Hayes there on that ledge above the trail in the Wishbone, and that Carter saw you and Montana ride away together, leading Scott Hayes's horse, do you? Or that Carter saw Montana come back, talk with Thor Underhill for a long time, and then plant Hayes under a rim rock. Well, let me tell you that right now there's a bunch of the boys looking for that double-crossing Montana. And if they get him, you won't have a sweetheart no more.

"As for you, you white-faced Polack, I'm telling you this: Thor Underhill and his riders won't find the horse herd, because it's right here in this basin. And it's going to stay right here until we get ready to run it off somewhere. And we're going to stay right here until we get Thor and Montana. Now you know why we brought you here—you're going to stay until we get damned sick and tired of having you around."

CHAPTER XXIX.

NIGHT VIGIL.

THE girls heard Sladen walking away, and presently they heard coarse laughter again.

They sat on the edge of one of the bunks, listening. Nance was as white of face as Lyndia. Lyndia's eyes were blazing with indignation.

"The Sladens hate me," she said. "They have always hated me. Now they hate me more than ever, because I was with Beel Sladen when he was keeled."

"Who shot Bill Sladen, Lyndia?"

Lyndia shook her head. "I don't know," she answered. "Beel Sladen had hit me and knocked me down. I was unconscious when he was killed. I know only that Thor Underhill was there. If he shot Beel, I don't know it. Besides, there were two bullets in Beel. If Thor shot heem, some one else shot heem, too. I don't know who it was. But the Sladens think they are going to make me tell. I won't tell. I don't know."

"They think it was Thor," suggested Nance.

"If they think it was Thor, why don't they talk to heem about it?" said Lyndia. "Do you know why they don't go to Thor? It is because they are afraid of Thor. They are also afraid of Montana. Now that they think that

Montana will not try to keel Thor, they will try to keel Montana, too." Seeing a flush stain Nance's pale cheeks, she added quietly, "You like Montana, eh?"

"I do not know."

"He is not as bad as they think," declared Lyndia.

For a time they said nothing further, but sat on the edge of the bunk, gazing out of the doorway. The great wall of rock surrounding the basin outside loomed monstrous in size in the clear white sunlight. There was no way that its height could be judged. It appalled them.

The cabin was gloomy, the atmosphere musty. Nance got up.

"I'm going outside," she declared.

She walked out of the door, and Lyndia followed her.

"That's right, girls," came Steele Sladen's voice. "Go anywhere you like, except over by that big bowlder." His voice was hatefully, politely hypocritical. It expressed his confidence that they could not possibly escape from the basin.

The girls paid no heed to him. They went through the timber, to a level beyond it, and climbed to the top of a knoll. There they stood, scrutinizing the basin.

Far to their left, in a swale, they saw the Flying U horse herd, contentedly grazing. Near the cabin, spanning a tiny stream of water that ran through a gully, was a small corral in which were confined perhaps a dozen horses that evidently belonged to Sladen and his riders. They saw that the rock walls that hemmed them in were continuous and unbroken, rising sheer, as if cut by a giant knife.

"Lyndia," said Nance, awed by the might and majesty and the solemn silence of the place, "I'm afraid Thor and Montana will never find this place!"

THE girls spent the day in the open. Now and then they heard the voices of the men, and once they saw a rider come from around the great bowlder which they had been forbidden to approach. He loped his horse across the level and dismounted near the cabin.

"That's Blackie Sladen," said Lyndia.

It was late in the afternoon when Steele Sladen called out, saying that supper was ready. They were hungry, and they returned to the cabin, to find food on a rough table inside.

The other men could be seen at a little distance, grouped around a bench and a fire. They were eating, and Steele and Blackie Sladen were there.

The girls had been oppressed with grave apprehensions during the day, but when the dusk began to fall Nance huddled against Lyndia upon the edge of one of the bunks and sat there, trembling.

"Have you noticed?" she said to Lyndia. "There is no door, no way to close the cabin."

"A door would make no difference," Lyndia told her. "If they wanted to, they could break a door down. But I do not think they will do anything. They are afraid."

Yet in spite of her brave words and her scorn, Lyndia stayed awake, watching and listening. The men did not bother them. The girls could hear their voices, and twice Lyndia went to the door and peered out. The men were grouped around a small fire, lounging and talking; and the flickering light of the fire revealed their faces, which, to the disturbed mind of the girl, seemed utterly depraved and vicious.

Nance at last succumbed to the strain and to her bodily weariness. She leaned over against a wall of the cabin, and presently fell asleep.

Lyndia remained wide awake for a time. Then she realized that she, too, had twice been dozing, for she had failed to watch the progress of the moonbeam on the floor.

Then, yielding to a great lassitude, she went to sleep, leaning against Nance.

CHAPTER XXX.

HIDDEN RIFLEMAN.

THROUGHOUT the day Lyndia had been thinking of escape; and now, even in her sleep, she dreamed of escape. She dreamed that she was in the vicinity of the great bowlder which Steele Sladen had warned her to keep away from, when her senses were startled by a thin, dry cracking sound, such as might be produced by some one stepping upon a thick, dry twig. Then there was a dull, muffled thump.

Now she was fully awake and sitting tense and rigid on the edge of the bunk, staring into the moonlight beyond the doorway. How long she had been asleep she did not know.

Squarely in the rectangle of light, several feet out from the doorway, she saw a man. He seemed to be falling to the ground. He was in a half kneeling position, and leaning forward with his weight resting upon his hands, which were spread palms downward, upon the ground. His head was bowed, his chin was on his chest. As Lyndia watched him, he slowly pitched forward upon his face, his legs and arms doubled under him. And then he was still.

Obviously the man had been shot, and now Lyndia identified the thin dry crack that she had heard in her dream as the explosion of a border rifle, which was a rifle of small calibre having an extremely long barrel of heavy steel. She had seen many rifles of that type, for it had only been recently that they had been supplanted by the repeater type of larger calibre and shorter barrel.

But why had the man been shot, and where was his killer? No sound followed the shooting, or the man's fall. He lay there limp, dead, and complete silence reigned.

Lyndia waited—a half hour—an hour. Nobody came, and still there was no sound.

The moon dropped behind the gigantic western wall of the basin. A dense blackness stole in and blotted everything out. There was a long, dreary period during which the blackness began to change to gray, bleak and toneless. Then came a faint light, splashing higher crags of the western rock wall. Dawn had come.

Presently Lyndia heard voices—men's voices. Sladen and his riders were awake. She could hear the sounds they made as they moved here and there. The faint noises awakened Nance, who sat up, stared in bewilderment at Lyndia, and then with a realization of her surroundings.

"Oh," she said, "we are still here. I—I was dreaming, I guess. Thank heaven it is morning!"

She stared out the door, and for the first time saw the body of the man lying there. She might have screamed if she had not caught a warning sign from Lyndia.

"What happened?" she whispered.

"I think that man tried to come into the cabin during the night," said Lyndia. "I was asleep, too, and I heard a distant rifle shot. When I opened my

eyes I saw this man on his hands and knees, where he had fallen. He died there. Whoever killed him did not come near him after the shot. I think the dead man is one of Sladen's riders."

THERE came a shout from somewhere, and rapid footsteps. Then other footsteps; and suddenly all the Hat riders were grouped in front of the door of the cabin, staring down at the dead man. Steele Sladen stooped, turned the man over and exclaimed sharply:

"It's Tulerosa!—Dead!" He saw the blood on the dead man's shirt, a bullet hole in his chest, near the heart. "Killed!" said Steele.

Steele straightened, staring accusingly and suspiciously at the other men. They stood there, apparently stunned, alternately staring at him and at the face of their dead companion.

"Who in Hell did this?" shouted Sladen. No one answered, and Sladen critically examined every man's face.

"I didn't hear any shooting during the night," said one.

They all shook their heads in assent. Apparently they were all as puzzled as Sladen himself.

Blackie Sladen pushed through and stood looking down at Tulerosa. "Humph," he ejaculated. "No wonder nobody heard any shooting. If Tulerosa had been shot with a six-shooter this damned basin would have roared like a clap of thunder. Tulerosa was shot with a rifle, which didn't make any more noise than a twig snapping under your boot. Anybody got a Sharps?"

There was no rifle of small calibre in any of the saddle sheaths.

"Nobody carries a Sharps any more," the girls heard one man say.

The men returned to the body. Some of them carried it away.

Steele Sladen suddenly appeared in the cabin door and smiled crookedly at the girls.

"Hum. You ain't been in bed, eh?" he said. "Been sitting here sniveling all night, I reckon. If you wasn't asleep you must have seen Tulerosa killed. Who killed him?"

"I was asleep. Both of us were asleep," said Lyndia. "I heard a shot, and then what must have been a man falling. I don't know who killed him."

An expression of bewilderment clouded Steele's eyes.

Abruptly he left the doorway, to run into Blackie, who was approaching.

"It wasn't any of the men here," said Steele. "There's no gun in there. Somebody got into the basin last night, Blackie," he said. He raised his voice to a shout. "One of you guys ride over to the entrance and see if Leeds is all right. Ask him what he means by letting anybody slip in here!"

There was a period of confusion, during which the girls heard the prancing of horses. Then a rider raced across the level, to vanish around the giant bowlder in the distance. It seemed only an instant until he reappeared, racing back. He flashed past the cabin, his horse slid to a halt and they heard his voice:

"Leeds is dead! Some one bashed his head in. He's lying over there behind the bowlder, stiff as a ramrod!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

FLIGHT.

THE men moved away, their voices growing inaudible. For an hour or more, complete silence reigned in the vicinity of the cabin. Then a man appeared, silently

placed food upon the little table, and went out of the cabin without speaking. His face wore an anxious expression, and his eyes were thoughtful.

"They are worried," said Lyndia, after the man had departed. "They know that whoever got into the basin last night was not a friend of theirs. Their hiding place is known. Whoever killed Tulerosa and Leeds is a friend of Thor's, and the Sladens know that this friend will find Thor and tell him about the basin. Who do you think this friend is, Nance?"

"I don't know," replied the girl. "I wish, whoever it is, that he'd helped us to escape last night."

"I think that is why he came here," said Lyndia. "But something went wrong." Her voice reassured Nance. "If he was a friend last night, he will be a friend to-day and to-night. The Sladens will not dare to stay here much longer."

Later, the girls left the cabin and went out into the open, where they spent the greater part of the morning. In the grove of trees they saw the Sladens and the Hat riders lounging about under the trees. There was no card playing to-day. The girls overheard the men's voices, which were low and serious. No doubt they were making plans to desert the basin, for the place no longer afforded them the concealment and security that they had previously enjoyed.

A new guard, Lyndia noticed, had been sent over to the entrance to the basin, to take the place of Leeds.

Nothing happened. Noon came and the sun glared down from the zenith. In the blinding, shimmering light of mid-day the basin seemed like a mammoth sepulchre.

The girls sat in the shade of a gnarled juniper tree in a swale at a little distance from the cabin, watching. They had no food at noon, nor did they desire any. The men did no cooking, probably not wishing to show the smoke of their fires. They still lounged in the grove, visibly uneasy.

The afternoon seemed interminably long. There was no sound, no motion. The heat was so intense that even the horses felt it. And then the sun passed the rim of the high western wall of the basin and the animals crowded into the shade at its base.

The shadow from the western wall began to steal out across the floor of the basin. For an hour or more the dying sunlight wrought its weird and beautiful magic, and then came the bleak and colorless twilight with its monstrous hush. It was dark again.

The girls made their way back to the cabin and slipped inside, apparently unnoticed by the men. No food awaited them, but from outside there now came sounds of preparation, of movement.

"They are going to move out of this basin," whispered Lyndia. "They are puzzled and afraid. They would have gone before, but they have been waiting for the darkness. They will have to go soon, because there will be an early moon, the same as last night."

Presently, as the girls stood close together, listening, they heard the horse herd moving, heard the voices of the Hat riders cursing. There was a thunderous clatter of hoofs as the herd swept over the level, the Hat riders flanking them, trying to string them out in line. The task of driving a herd of horses at night was difficult, but in this case imperative because of the danger of discovery. It seemed to Lyndia that an hour elapsed before the clatter of hoofs died away, indicating that the last horse had gone through the entrance. Already the dense, early eve-

ning darkness was lifting, and there was a yellow tinge in it which presaged the rising moon.

SUDDENLY there was the sound of hoofs just outside the cabin door, and the voices of Steele and Blackie Sladen. They were impatient, profane.

"We've been here too damn long now," grumbled Blackie. "Whoever sneaked in here last night will sure get the news to the Underhills, and they'll be right on our heels. We may get the horses away, all right—if the damn fools will drive hell out of them until they get them over the line. It's these women that I'm scared of."

Steele Sladen laughed. "We'll take care of the women, all right."

He entered the door of the cabin. "Come here, you two," he said to the girls. "We got to hoodwink you again."

The girls submitted, and were led out, blindfolded only, and placed on their horses. There they sat, waiting. Evidently the Sladens had some task to perform before they mounted, for there was a long delay, during which the men could be heard walking about.

Then they heard Blackie's voice close to them:

"Hell! there's the damned moon!"

The Sladens had not bothered to tie the girls' hands, and now Lyndia reached up and pushed the blindfold away so that she could see.

The Sladens were standing near their horses. They were ready to mount, but something seemed to be attracting their attention. Both stood staring upward at the great rock wall to the east, where the moon was rising.

Following their gaze, Lyndia regarded the wall. The great, yellow orb of the moon was about half way over the edge of the rock rim. Its light was bright, disclosing a section of the top of the great wall and revealing a moving object there. The object was a man. He was walking close to the edge of the rim. As Lyndia watched him, amazed, wondering how he had reached the plateau above, he walked fairly into the circle of the moon.

Lyndia gasped. The figure was revealed with cameo-like sharpness. A tall, gangling figure. The girl could even see the voluminous overalls, which were much too large, and the tattered felt hat on his head. Jake Kolsar! Her own brother!

Lyndia stifled a scream. She heard Steele Sladen curse, saw him snatch his rifle from his saddle sheath, drop to one knee and take aim.

The rifle cracked. The gangling figure began to run, southward, bearing a little east, and out of sight behind a rock formation at the extreme edge of the rim.

"Missed him," cursed Steele. "It's that damned Kolsar kid! Let's get out of here."

The Sladens mounted their horses and rode toward the great bowlder, leading the horses of their captives. Presently they were out of the basin. They rode for some time, and then Steele took the blindfolds from the girls' eyes.

"It don't make any difference what you see now," he sneered. "It won't do you any good." His voice was freighted with sinister coldness. "But if one of you makes a break, I'll shoot hell out of you.—Get going!"

The moon was well up now, disclosing a wilderness country, a great upland, that neither Nance nor Lyndia recognized. They rode steadily, following Blackie, and being in turn followed by Steele. They made no effort

to escape, for they knew that such an effort would be useless.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BEHIND ADOBE WALLS.

THE long absence of the Sladens and their riders from the Hat ranch neither annoyed nor pleased Montana. He had no curiosity about them whatever, although he was tremendously interested in the little adobe house occupied by the old Mexican. The days went slowly enough for Montana, but his patience was remarkable. For example, in two days and nights he had not been a hundred feet from the foreman's shanty. In that time he had not built a fire, even to make coffee. The water he had drunk was two days old, and almost tepid. Not once had the front door of the shanty been opened, nor the windows. For the greater part of the two days, Montana had reclined on a bench in the shanty, peering out of a window. He looked between a coffee pot and a canister which he had placed on the window sill for the purpose of concealing his face from view on the outside.

The object of his vigil, the Mexican, had emerged from the adobe house but twice during that time. On those two occasions he had sat on the bench in front of the house, smoking a pipe. Each time he had emerged he had carefully closed the door after him. That precaution, Montana decided, was habitual, for Montana was almost certain that the Mexican did not suspect that any one was watching him. Montana had been careful as well as patient, for he had concealed his horse in a grassy ravine far down the river, out of sight from any of the Hat buildings. He had ridden away two days earlier, when he was certain that the Mexican was watching him and had returned during the night, stealthily.

He was determined to get into the adobe house, and he knew that there would come a time, if he waited long enough, when the Mexican would leave it unguarded. Therefore, if Montana had any preference in the matter it would be that the Sladens should stay away until he had accomplished his purpose.

To-day, in mid-afternoon, he was lying on his stomach on the bench, watching. Flies were droning in the blazing sunlight outside the open window, birds were chirping in the trees, and the slumbering peace and quiet of the place was beginning to lull Montana into a state of somnolence, when he saw the door of the adobe house slowly swing open. The Mexican appeared in the opening and stood there smoking his pipe and gazing about him.

Two or three times he gazed eastward inquiringly, as if wondering about the continued absence of the Sladens and the Hat riders. At last he seated himself upon the bench and smoked.

Montana observed that the door of the little house was open. This was the first time that the Mexican had relaxed in his habitual caution. Presently he stretched himself languidly and got up. Walking about in front of the building, he began slowly to walk down the slope to the timber that led to the river.

Montana grew suddenly active. As the Mexican went steadily but slowly down the slope, Montana leaped out into the open, ran to a point where the adobe house was between himself and the Mexican, then ran with great catlike springs.

In another instant he was inside the

adobe house. In the next he had closed the door.

THERE was a dirt floor inside the house, and two bunks were built against the rear wall. A bench, a chair, a small table, a shelf with a candle on it, an open fireplace with battered cooking utensils scattered around it, these were the only furnishings in the cabin except a heavy chain, which was attached to a great hasp in the wall. The chain ran down the wall to the floor, and up to the lower bunk, where it vanished in some bed clothing.

No! The bed clothing stirred, was thrown back and a man lifted himself out of it, swung himself sideways and sat on the edge of the bunk, looking at Montana.

There was a light of wild amazement in his eyes.

"Who—who—why—? How did you get in here? You—you?" gasped the man.

"It's all right, stranger. I'm here. The question is, what are you doing here?"

The man laughed wanly, wistfully. "I'm here," he said. "That's all."

He seemed to be about sixty years old. He was of medium height, with a rather small frame which Montana thought had never had a great deal of excess flesh upon it. He had a firm mouth, an aggressive chin, and steel gray eyes that held an indomitable, though somewhat quizzical expression. His iron gray hair was long, reaching almost to his shoulders. A stubble of several days' growth covered his face. He did not seem to be insane, for his eyes were clear and steady with comprehension and reason. The chain clanked to the floor as he turned to seat himself upon the edge of the bunk, and now his right leg was exposed to the ankle, revealing an iron bracelet around it. To this the chain was attached. A shirt and a pair of faded overalls constituted the man's attire.

It was apparent that he was laboring under intense excitement as he watched Montana. His eyes grew wide as he looked. They gleamed and glistened with emotion.

He stood up, staring into Montana's face.

"Who are you?" he cried, hoarsely. "Tell me, man! Tell me, for God's sake!" He shivered, closed his eyes.

"You—you—you are Ed Rignall! You are my son!"

There was a short, tense silence. Then Montana Ed's voice came from his throat in a hoarse, choking whisper.

"God!—Father!"

Slowly he moved forward, his eyes alight with passion and pity as he reached out his arms and folded the slight figure in his embrace.

For a time they stood there, holding tightly to each other, the elder man shuddering, murmuring incoherently, the younger man standing rigid, his hands clenched, his jaws clamped, a pallor on his cheeks.

"I knew you would find me some day," said the elder man, chokingly.

"Dad," said Montana. "I've been searching for you and mother for twenty years. Since I was ten."

"You'll take me out of here, son, won't you?"

"Yes, dad, I'll take you out."

The door behind Montana creaked, was opened. The Mexican stood in the opening.

"*Madre de Dios!*" he grunted. His right hand went to his hip. He tugged at a gun in its holster—futilely.

Turning, every muscle in his body seeming to leap and writhe, Montana faced the Mexican. Once, twice, three

times—so fast that the spurts of fire and smoke from his hip seemed to be continuous, Montana's gun roared. The Mexican went down in a huddled heap, just outside the door, while Montana stood over him, with flaming savage eyes.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

OUT OF THE PAST.

AFTER the killing of the Mexican, Montana seemed to become purposely deliberate. His eyes were cold and wanton, except when his gaze rested upon his father.

His first task was to remove the bracelet from his father's leg, by means of a hammer and a cold chisel. Then, at the ranch house, he found suitable clothing for his father.

Going down into the ravine where he had left his horse, he mounted and rode back to the ranch house. He helped his father into the saddle. Then, not knowing when the Sladens would return, he dragged the Mexican's body down the slope and buried it. He mounted behind his father, permitting the latter to take the reins while he pointed out the trail.

The elder man sat erect, drawing great, long breaths into his lungs.

"This is like old times," he said, his voice vibrant with eagerness and gratitude. "It's been a long time since I had a sniff of this."

A dozen times since they had left the Hat ranch, the elder man had turned to smile at the younger man.

"You look just like your mother, Ed," he now said. "Back there you were in the mood to do some more killing.—It's the Sladens, I reckon?"

"Yes." Montana's voice sounded thick, but it was steady.

"How did you find me, Ed? When your mother and me left you behind in Kansas with your aunt Em, at the time when I got a notion I could find gold, you were about nine years old, weren't you? I was never able to get word back, telling what had happened. How did you find me?"

"I waited a year. But I didn't hear from you and mother, and then I started out to look for you. I knew you had headed for Montana. I went there. A hundred times, I think, I traced you and mother, only to lose you again. It's a long story, dad, full of disappointments, hopes, expectations, failure." He paused. "Where's mother, dad?"

"Mother was sick, son. She died the third day after we were captured. I don't know where they buried her. They wouldn't let me out of the 'dobe house."

"The Sladens?"

"Yes. The Sladens captured us. They'd got wind somehow of the fact that there was gold in the wagon. One night, just about dusk, I saw three riders grouped at the base of a hill, watching us, and I knew then that something was going to happen. I had gold in the wagon—about half a ton of it. I had it in a wooden box, under the seat, and as soon as it got dark I stopped and buried the box in the sand. Then I drove the wagon over it. I marked the place. There's a rocky knoll there. I reckon what's left of the wagon is buried by the sand."

"No," said Montana. "What is left of the wagon is still there."

"The Sladens burned the wagon," resumed Rignall. "They were mad because they couldn't find the gold. They killed the horses, shooting them full of arrows so that if folks found them and what was left of the wagon

they'd think Indians had done it. They took mother and me to the 'dobe house at the Hat ranch. We had a baby, four months old, and it was missing. In the excitement I'd clean forgot about the baby, and before I could get a chance to ask mother about it she was dead. I could never find out what happened to the baby. You see, the Sladens dragged us both out of the wagon before we had a chance to say anything, and there were too many of them for me.

"The Sladens wouldn't believe that we had no gold. They tortured me, but soon found they would kill me before I'd tell. They swore they'd keep me chained up until I told them. But I kept hoping for you to come. I know they didn't find the gold, because if they had I could have told it by their actions. They'd have killed me then, I think.—How does it happen that you came to the Sladen ranch?"

"I WAS in Tucson last year," answered Montana. "I heard a story about the lost wagon. He'd never seen the wagon, but he had heard of it. It wasn't the only wagon that had been burned by the Indians, but I had trailed every one of them that I heard of. Several times I got into trouble while roaming around the country. Three times I had to shoot men because they interfered with my plans. I got a reputation as a killer. I'd heard about the Sladens, and it seems they'd heard of me too, for one day I got word that they wanted to see me. I'm supposed to be working for the Sladens right now. Dad, I'm taking you over to the Underhill ranch, where you can get a good long rest, and where you'll be safe from the Sladens."

The horse, carrying double, made slow progress across the desert stretch at the foot of Wishbone Valley. But in time the animal and its two riders went through the pass in the north tip of the Wishbone and into the country beyond.

Dusk had come when they rode slowly to the Flying U corral gate. Montana dismounted, helped his father down, and turned toward the ranch house. There were no Flying U riders in sight. The bunk and mess houses were dark and deserted. Only three horses were in the corral.

Mrs. Underhill suddenly appeared in the doorway of the house.

"I'm sorry to bother you, ma'am. My name is Montana. I reckon you've heard of me. I've been working for the Hat. I found my father over there. They'd had him in a 'dobe house for years, under guard. Ma'am, they let it be known to their neighbors that the prisoner in the 'dobe house was a crazy Sladen, but that prisoner was my father. They've had him in there ever since they burned his wagon, twenty years ago, out on the desert."

"Oh, mercy!" The woman seemed speechless with amazement and shock.

"Oh, how terrible! And your wife! —What became of your wife?"

Rignall told her. She turned to Montana. "So this is your father!" she exclaimed.

Montana told her the story, then asked if he might leave his father there for a few days, until he recovered his health and strength. Rignall was taken into the house, and Mrs. Underhill hurried here and there, arranging things for his comfort.

MONTANA stood near the center table in the big living room, watching.

He had noticed that there was a drawn, worried expression in Mrs. Un-

derhill's eyes. He became convinced that she had some trouble of her own, which she was silently and courageously enduring.

But it was only after Montana's father had been fed and sent to bed that Montana was permitted to know what was wrong. Standing near the center table, facing Montana, Mrs. Underhill dropped her hands to her sides with a gesture of futility and hopelessness.

"The Sladens are possessed of the devil!" she said. "They ran off with our horse herd, and killed Limpy Anderson, the wrangler. They did this thing to your father and mother.—And now Lyndia and Nance Kayne have disappeared!—I think the Sladens have got them."

Montana's face paled again. He stood rigid, staring at Mrs. Underhill, and she saw little flecks of cold fire in his eyes.

"When did this happen?" he said hoarsely.

"The horse herd was stolen about a week ago," Mrs. Underhill informed him, her voice quivering with emotion. "It has been three days since Lyndia went out, telling me she was going to take a short ride. She hasn't returned, and I'm terribly worried. Though of course she may have gone back to her own home. Yesterday Jesse Carson rode over with some of his men. He told me that Nance Kayne had disappeared the same day that Lyndia did. He was terribly alarmed. He and his men had been combing the country for her, but hadn't found her. They rode away again, to continue the search.—There are no men here. All the Flying U riders are with my husband, out searching for Lyndia.—It is all so terrible! The Sladens have got them. I feel sure of it."

"Ma'am," said Montana, "I'll be seeing you again. Please keep my father here."

He leaped from the room, crossed the porch and went out to the corral. A few minutes later he was racing furiously down the slope and into the lower country, which was just beginning to glow in a flood of moonlight.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A GHOST WITH A GUN.

GRIM elation and impotent fury seethed in Montana's brain as he rode into the night in quest of Nance and Lyndia. Montana, however, was not as familiar with the country as were Underhill and the Flying U riders or Jesse Carson and his men.

His horse was tired from the trip to the Underhill ranch with his double burden, and he did not ride fast. However, his search was thorough. He worked his way up the Wishbone Valley in the brilliant moonlight, neglecting no covert. A dozen times he crossed the valley from north to south.

Shortly after dawn, in one of the great cañons of the big Wishbone, he came upon Jesse Carson and some of his riders.

"You're the gun fighter I've heard about," said Carson. He was in a cold fury. "We ain't seen anything of the girls, so far," he said. "But we know the Sladens took them; and even if we don't find the girls, the Sladens can't hide from us forever." He glared suspiciously at Montana. "You're working for the Sladens, ain't you?" he added.

"I was," answered Montana. "I quit him yesterday when I found out that the man he'd been holding in the 'dobe house was my father."

Carson appeared dazed. "The crazy man was a Sladen, wasn't he? How could he be your father?"

Briefly, Montana told them the truth about the Sladens' prisoner.

Carson gripped Montana's hand.

"Son," he said, "that's great! That story about the Indians who attacked the wagon always sounded pretty thin to me.—So there was method in your getting a job with the Sladens, eh? Well, well! Damn their hides, I hope you're the first one to catch them!"

The men separated. Carson told him what part of the country they had covered in their search for the girls, so Montana went in a different direction. The Flying U riders, evidently, were covering the country outside the valley.

ALL that day, Montana confined his search to the head of the valley and to the various intersecting cañons. At dusk, conceding failure, he reluctantly turned back. He had decided to ride back to the Hat to wait for the Sladens to return.

By following the bed of the south fork he would ultimately reach a break in the wall which would lead him to the Hat. A few hundred feet down the river bed he came to a spot where the stream spread widely. In the sand at the edge of the water he saw numerous hoof tracks. Horses!

He stared down at them, rode here and there, following them. They ran down the river a great distance, to a gorge. There they disappeared.

Montana rode back to where he had first seen the tracks. Strangely enough, they did not lead up the river, but came, apparently, from a great cavern in the rock wall that towered above the river bed. He splashed his horse through the water and rode into the great cavern. To his astonishment he discovered that the farther end of the cavern opened into a giant cleft in the cañon walls. The cleft made a passage about a dozen feet wide. He followed it for several hundred feet; and then suddenly, after riding around a great bowlder, he found himself in a basin which was surrounded by great, frowning rock walls.

The light was still clear enough for him to see by. Riding out into the basin he finally discovered a small cabin. In one of the bunks in the cabin he found a woman's handkerchief, and he stood there, rigid, knowing that he had stumbled upon one of the Sladens' hiding places.

But the basin was now unoccupied except for himself. Where had they gone? In half an hour he was out of the basin, riding westward over the bed of the river. Wherever they now were, the Sladens would have to return to the Hat because of the prisoner they thought was still in the adobe house; and at the Hat Montana planned to meet them.

It was an hour or so before dawn when he reached the Hat ranch again. He dropped from his horse in front of the ranch house. The door was still open, as he had left it. The house, the bunk house and the mess house were deserted. The door of the adobe house in which he had found his father was ajar, and about all the buildings was an atmosphere of sinister calm, as if tragedy was close.

Montana led his horse down the slope toward the river, and again concealed him in a ravine. Returning to the adobe house, he stood before the door, in the gray, bleak light of the dawn.

He stood there, waiting, waiting—a ghost wearing a gun, his blood on fire with a lust to kill.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

The Men Who Make The Argosy

ARMAND BRIGAUD

Author of "The Camel Corps Rides," "The White Savage," etc.

THE author speaks for himself: About forty-two years ago my father, a former commissioned officer of the French Colonial Army, decided with thorough Provençal optimism to repair the ravages of a string of spendthrift ancestors by means of some spirited investments in America.

Business enterprises he built up in San Francisco worked out so well that, with my mother's consent, he decided to make his home in the great California town, where eventually I was born.

I was a pupil in the educational town of Eton on the Thames when the San Francisco earthquake wiped out our family fortunes. My father returned to his native Toulouse, where he became a school teacher. Our reduced circumstances stirred in me the fighting spirit of my ancestors, who fought in all French wars and all over the world, from the merry times of Charles the Hammer. With my savings I bought a railroad ticket for Marseilles; taking advantage of the fact that I was almost as big as I am now, I enlisted in the Foreign Legion alleging that I was nineteen years old.

Four days later the wheels set in motion by my uncle, a cavalry colonel, traced me to Oran. That put an end to my early military ambitions. But every cloud has a silver lining. My abrupt return to civilian life gave me a chance to get at a six foot Alsatian sergeant who had made things very miserable for me for forty-eight hours. We had a glorious fight in a side alley, with two djellabed natives and a howling dog as witnesses. I was thrashed soundly, of course, but I succeeded in breaking two of the sergeant's teeth.

Three years later I entered the Cadet School of St. Cyr, and in time I became a cavalry officer. Transferred to Africa on my request I held commands in the Chasseurs d'Afrique, Spahis and the Camel Corps.

In 1917, after war service in France, I went back to the Saharan country, in time to take part in the desperate struggle to stop the Senouss invasion. I was thereafter commanded to the black battalions of Lake Tchad and Equatorial Africa, to various activities connected with army duty, then back to the Legion.

I have received fourteen wounds; the last, in Riffian territory, was particularly severe and has necessitated a period of recuperation—and offered a chance to do some writing.

My hobbies in the past have been fighting, horses, and the pleasant company of charming ladies. The first two are perforce eliminated by my present stay within un-horsy civilization. The third one is very much curtailed by the fact that men near forty are generally considered as antiques by the gentler sex.

The Black Cobra

A Novelette

By Sidney Herschel Small

Kong Gai Strikes Fiendishly at a Great Bank's Guarded Millions, and Jimmy Wentworth Goes Hunting a Snake That Can Spit Death

Step by step the officers advanced into the vault of death

SORENSON, signal clerk in San Francisco's Hall of Justice, watched the tape slide smoothly through the ticker. Ten-fifteen. The captain of the guard at the Federal Reserve Bank would be reporting, "All's well," now. The captain had failed to report. Sorenson's eyes opened wide. His finger jabbed a button.

The powerful gong on the main floor began to ring. On every floor other bells were shrilling. The first riot car, siren screaming and wailing, shot out the door just as Jimmy Wentworth made the running board. General Alarm! But what could be wrong at a bank an army could not break into?

The diabolically murdered men they find tell the story. And Jimmy Wentworth takes up the trail of a snake that can spit death. Finish this thrilling novelette in next week's DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, on sale July 19.

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

CAPTAIN BRIGAUD writes of the backgrounds of his novelette, "The White Savage":

The plot is woven around several true events. I was an eye-witness to the death struggle between the rhinoceros and the hippopotamus.

During the two years I spent in the Oubanghi-Chari district I did my best, like all other *Sidi officiers*, to discourage the practice of the poison-and-fowls trial tests, as described in the novelette; but, as far as I know, the tribes still indulge on the side in that most erratic administration of justice, rooted in their savage convictions by immemorial practice.

The episode of Marg'te, daughter of white runaways and raised in the jungle, is a real one. She was discovered by a patrolling section and returned to civilization toward the beginning of the present century; however, the Marg'te of real life had nothing to do with Fadel Soufan, a slave trader and gun runner who raised quite a bit of trouble several years later, until a company of native Tirailleurs put an end to his unsavory career and his life.

The episode of Naroo, the giant black avenger, is a true one, too. Having sworn to kill with his own hands his tribal chieftain, who had slaughtered his family in a murderous whim, the original Naroo protected the high-handed object of his hatred for several years, sheltering him in battle and from the javelins of other outraged tribesmen. Finally, at the end of a disastrous combat with another tribe, he followed the wounded chieftain in his flight through the jungle, and killed him after a short struggle.

The Oubanghi-Chari zone is a part of what is commonly called darkest Africa. Its tribes are most primitive; a few of them, like degenerate groups of Bandas, still indulge secretly in cannibalistic practices.

It is a country of tangled hills and watercourses where meet the three forms of African vegetation south of the Sahara: the brush, the jungle, and the equatorial forest. It abounds with all kinds of animals, but the very conformation of the ground makes it very dangerous for amateur hunters. The diseases and germ-carrying insects which are its particular nuisances contribute to keep tourists well out from its boundaries.

ARMAND BRIGAUD.

BURROUGHS interplanetary? Coming!

Fairfield, Ala.

"The Bone Buster," by McNary, was a great story. How about trying to get at least one sport story in each issue of ARGOSY?

I was glad that Burroughs finally got back in the lineup. That guy is one real writer.

Those two new features, "Men of Daring," by Stookie Allen, and those true stories by Lowell Thomas are very good.

Oh, yes! Try and get an interplanetary story for us by Burroughs.

HAROLD R. COCKRELL.

MADE up:

Chicago, Ill.

I had to write to tell you that as long as I have been reading the ARGOSY I can only kick about one story. That is "Racing Nerve," by Thomson Burtis; but he made up for it by writing "Soldiers of the Storm."

I just finished reading "Tarzan and the City of Gold," by Edgar Rice Burroughs. I always thought that *Jimmie Cordie* and *Denis Burke* stories were the best, but since the last six weeks I have changed my mind.

GEORGE JAGER, JR.

WANTS all fiction:

Bronx, N. Y.

This is a kick, a big kick. Why in the name of all that's good did you change the policy of the magazine to such an extent as to allow true stories and pictures to appear in it? I'm conservative, and I think that if the magazine has gotten along for fifty years publishing ordinary fiction, it could go on that way for fifty years more the same way. Nobody asked for it.

I grant that some of it is interesting, and well written, but it has no place in a magazine which prides itself on printing good fiction. Another

thing, the class of science fiction published within the last three months was far below the average. "The Insect Invasion" was just a rehash of almost all of Cummings's writings in ARGOSY. Now it's "Helgvor of the Blue River." I never heard of J. H. Rosny Ainé, and it won't bother me if I never heard of him again. Still, I don't read the ARGOSY only for the science fiction it prints, but also for the many other enjoyable stories of different types, for which you deserve much praise. "The Nervous Prince" is fine even if somewhat unbelievable.

N. GREENFELD.

CAN'T get enough:

Long Beach, Calif.

More power to all your writers. You can't give me enough of *Gillian Hazeltine*, and what's happened to *Jimmie* and *Red* and all the other Chinese-chasing adventurers? I was pleased to see Burroughs come back with another *Tarzan* tale. My favorite author is Fred MacIsaac. *Mme. Storey* would be another welcome personality. Haven't seen her for quite some time. Congratulations on the addition of Sinclair Gluck to your unexcelled staff of writers. Mr. Gluck is an old favorite of mine. Couldn't you persuade A. Merritt to hurry up with his annual story?

J. K. CORRIGAN.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

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A Hard Times Item

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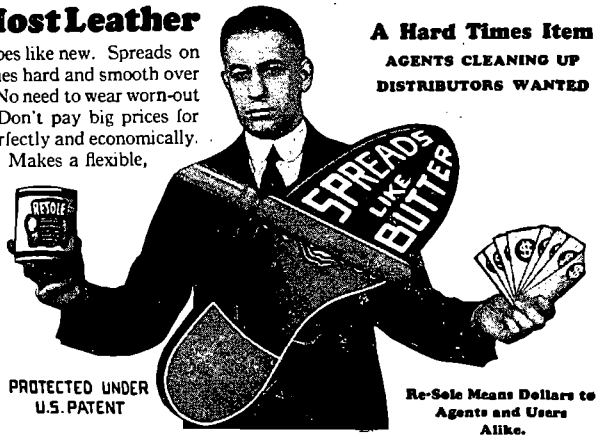

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Re-Sole Means Dollars to Agents and Users Alike.

RE-SOLE PAYS UP TO $47 A DAY

HERE'S PROOF

Schmidt of Iowa wrote as follows: **"I have been wearing Re-Soles for over a month, and there is not the slightest sign of wear. These Re-Soles are pliable and easy on the feet, yet are tough almost beyond belief. And the price is less than a shoe shine."** Lindsay of Nebr. **"Express 157 cans Re-Sole. Ship following day 104 cans and third day 200 cans—All 3 orders sold—Will be selling 600 weekly."** White of Maine: **"Received sample today and have 14 orders to deliver right away."** Gallant of Conn.: **"Sold 12 cans Re-Sole the first day."** Ball of Pa.: **"Wears better than leather soles."** Benshoof of Wyo.: **"Tested Re-Sole against leather on an emery wheel—the cows have got to grow tougher hide to make an upper last as long as Re-Sole."** Smith of Mich.: **"Filled a big hole in auto tire with Re-Sole. Drove the car 3,000 miles. The patch is still there and by the looks it will run another 3,000 miles yet."** Cooperrider of Ohio: **"Used one can to advertise among the neighbors and now they advertise it for me. Was out 3 hours among farmers and sold six cans."** Clifford of Wash.: **"Sold 7 cans first day and am enclosing a 25 can order."**

We have hundreds of letters in our files from agents making big money with Re-Sole. **Sell only the original and genuine.** Men and women wishing to make real money should write immediately while good territory is still open. Use coupon below for full particulars.

Hundreds of voluntary letters testify to big cash profits for Re-Sole sales people. Men and women making big money. Customers delighted. Wilson of Wisconsin made $76.00 one day—Blenhart handled 1182 cans first two months—Lake of Minnesota sold seven orders in three hours. Schmucher of Va. sold 6 orders first hour on seven calls. Hundreds of others. Re-Sole nationally advertised in U. S. A. and in 130 countries all over the world.

WE HELP YOU. Full co-operation given agents and simple easy sales plans enable beginners and experienced salespeople alike to double and triple income. That's why Abbe of Mass. handled over 400 orders first month.

Hundreds of Other Uses

Re-Sole is also excellent for repairing rubbers, overshoes, boots, cuts in tires, auto tops, etc. It has hundreds of other uses for renewing leather, rubber or cloth products. Tremendous sales field makes easy sales—big profits.

FULLY GUARANTEED

My 100% satisfaction money-back guarantee protects you and your customers. Re-Sole needed by every man, woman and child. No wonder distributors are making up to $47.00 a day. Be sure to mail coupon today for full details.

Nearly every home has several pairs of shoes with leaky worn-out soles and run-down heels which the shoemakers would charge several dollars to repair.

With Re-Sole you can repair them quickly for only a few cents. Flexible. Waterproof. All cracks, breaks and holes filled and covered with Re-Sole gives first class job at less than one-tenth ordinary cost.

Hard Times Necessity
Cash In Now on Re-Sole—Rush Coupon

Re-Sole is so truly uncanny in its action—it soles shoes and repairs worn spots so quickly, so easily, so perfectly and is such a genuine hard times necessity that distributors are coining money every day. Get the facts at once. A quick half minute demonstration amazes prospects and compels them to buy. Sure repeat business. Good territory still open. Rush coupon for **FREE SAMPLE** on leather and exclusive territory offer.

UNIVERSAL LABORATORIES, Inc.
431 W. RANDOLPH ST., CHICAGO, ILL.

Mail for FREE Sample

MERROLD S. JOHNSON, Pres.,
Universal Laboratories, Inc., Dept. 90
431 W. Randolph St., Chicago, Ill.

TOUGH AS ELEPHANT HIDE

Dear Mr. Johnson: Send me a Free Sample of Re-Sole applied to a small leather sole and tell me how to make up to $47.00 a day. I am not obligated.

Name_____

Address_____

Town_____ State_____

Territory Preferred_____

"LUCKIES are my standby"

CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK

Be sure to see Doug. Fairbanks Jr's. latest FIRST NATIONAL PICTURE, "IT'S TOUGH TO BE FAMOUS." Doug. has stuck to LUCKIES four years, but didn't stick the makers of LUCKIES anything for his kind words. "You're a brick, Doug."

"LUCKIES are my standby. I buy them exclusively. I've tried practically all brands but LUCKY STRIKES are kind to my throat. And that new improved Cellophane wrapper that opens with a flip of the finger is a ten strike."

Douglas Fairbanks Jr.

"It's toasted"

Your Throat Protection-against Irritation-against cough

And Moisture-Proof Cellophane Keeps that "Toasted" Flavor Ever Fresh